

THE DOMESTIC ABUSE REPORT 2020

THE HIDDEN HOUSING CRISIS

REPORT SUMMARY



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With support from Women's Aid staff

Acknowledgements

We are so grateful to all the survivors who shared their stories with us in the Survivor Voice Survey 2019 and in phone interviews.

Thank you to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for its funding contribution to Routes to Support (the UK violence against women and girls service directory run in partnership between Women's Aid Federation of England, Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland, Scottish Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid), and the Women's Aid Annual Survey, and for its full funding of the No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project. This report was independently researched and written by Women's Aid.

Thanks also go to the staff at Women's Aid for all their support and to Rebecca Vagi, Housing Manager at Standing Together, for giving comments on a draft of this report before publication. Thank you to Hannah Gousy (Head of Policy and Campaigns, Crisis) and to Ruth Ehrlich (Policy Officer, Shelter) for giving comments on draft parts of this report.

Published by: Women's Aid Federation of England, a registered charity in England & Wales (1054154) and a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales (3171880)
PO Box 3245, Bristol, BS2 2EH

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For help and support, you can access Women's Aid's direct services, including our **Live Chat**, the **Survivors' Forum** and the **Survivor's Handbook**, at www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. Over the past 45 years, Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic abuse through practice, research and policy. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and for women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs.

We are a federation of nearly 180 organisations which provide just under 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services, and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards. We hold the largest national dataset on domestic abuse, and use research and evidence to inform all of our work. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated.

Our support services, which include our Live Chat Helpline, the Survivors' Forum, the No Woman Turned Away Project, the Survivor's Handbook, Love Respect (our dedicated website for young people in their first relationships), the national Domestic Abuse Directory and our advocacy projects, help thousands of women and children every year.

Summary of key findings

The Domestic Abuse Report 2020: The Hidden Housing Crisis examines the housing experiences of survivors of domestic abuse. It draws on evidence from the Women's Aid Survivor Voice Survey 2019 and case study interviews with survivors and a caseworker from Women's Aid's No Woman Turned Away team. The Women's Aid Survivor Voice Survey 2019 was an online survey for women who are experiencing or have experienced domestic

abuse from a partner or ex-partner. There were 136 female respondents: 98 women had moved on from the relationship referenced in responses and 38 were still in the relationship with an abusive partner.

Key findings from this research are outlined here. For the full report visit: www.womensaid.org.uk/research-and-publications/the-domestic-abuse-report.

1. Housing concerns represent a significant barrier to leaving an abusive partner

“I tried to leave a few times...”

Concerns about their current housing situation or future housing options make it difficult for women experiencing domestic abuse to leave their partners. We found that survivors are sometimes weighing up staying in a home shared with an abusive partner or leaving for another potentially unsafe situation due to a lack of housing options.

Survivors who are not eligible for public funds (because of their immigration status) have even fewer housing options, as they are not entitled to housing-related benefits or for housing help from their local authority.

Of those 38 respondents who were still in a relationship with an abusive partner, 68.4% indicated that concerns around future housing were a barrier to leaving, highlighting challenges that included:

- ▶ a lack of access to money to cover the costs of a new home (including paying the rent, upfront deposit and necessary bills) – for some survivors this was because of their financial dependence on a controlling partner;
- ▶ fears of homelessness and being forced to live in unsuitable or unsafe housing;
- ▶ being denied help from their local housing team; and
- ▶ experiencing difficulties in finding a landlord who would accept rent paid by state benefits.

One survivor had approached over 40 estate agents, but none of them had properties with landlords who were willing to accept housing benefit.

2. Those survivors who were no longer in a relationship with an abuser often felt that the impact of leaving in terms of housing was:

“...the price I paid for getting out of the terrible relationship.”

”

This “price to pay” included enduring upheaval (including having to move several times), challenging housing conditions, ongoing abuse, and financial burdens. Private renting was often very difficult or impossible for those survivors claiming housing-related benefits because of the ‘no benefits’ policy adopted by many private landlords. All this was at a time when survivors were trying to recover from the trauma of experiencing domestic abuse.

Survivors wrote about this “price to pay” in terms of:

- ▶ Upheaval and disruption. Of those respondents who were no longer in a relationship with a perpetrator, where the relationship had ended over a year ago and who had answered this question (n=46):
 - 58.7% had moved home at least once in the first year post-separation;
 - 39.1% had moved twice or more in the first year;
 - 19.6% had moved three times or more in the first year.
 - One survivor had moved seven times just in that first year after separation.
- ▶ Challenging housing conditions and homelessness. These included living in overcrowded and/or substandard accommodation.
- ▶ Ongoing abuse. For those survivors who were living with friends and family, the perpetrator was easily able to locate them to continue the abuse. Some survivors had moved more than once to try to escape the abuse and the ongoing abuse made them feel unsafe in their homes.
- ▶ Financial burden. Survivors were living with reduced finances and debt. Some were continuing to pay the costs on two homes (the one they used to share with the perpetrator where he still lived, and the one where they now resided). Some survivors were experiencing difficulties because they had joint mortgages with the abuser; for example, the perpetrator refusing to sell the house and release the equity held in it, or not paying his share of the mortgage on jointly owned property post-separation.

3. Survivors received mixed responses from local housing teams, with some finding that:

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“It was very difficult to get housed in emergency accommodation.”

Those survivors who had asked their local housing team for emergency accommodation (because of domestic abuse) had received mixed responses. Survivors without dependent children felt that they were seen as a lesser priority.

Twenty-five of the 136 respondents to our survey had (at any point) asked their local housing team for emergency accommodation because of domestic abuse. These 25 survivors

had had mixed experiences in their dealings with housing teams.

- ▶ Under half of these survivors (n=11) had been considered as being in priority need for housing; eight of them had children. Five of the 11 survivors who were not seen as in priority need also had children.
- ▶ Their ratings of the responses from their housing teams varied, ranging from ‘terrible’ (n=9) to ‘excellent’ (n=5).

4. Friends or family often played a key role in helping survivors with housing:

”

“I am very lucky to have a very supportive family...”

Many survivors had or were still relying heavily on the support of friends or family in terms of a temporary place to stay and/or help with rent or other costs associated with setting up a new

home. Survivors living temporarily with friends or family were very grateful for their help, but encountered difficulties including overcrowding and ongoing abuse.

*The Domestic Abuse Report 2020: The Hidden Housing Crisis
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www.womensaid.org.uk
www.loverespect.co.uk

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