

THE DOMESTIC ABUSE REPORT 2020

THE HIDDEN HOUSING CRISIS



women's aid
until women & children are safe

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With support from Women's Aid staff

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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.

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Foreword



Little did we know, when we spoke to domestic abuse survivors for this report, that when it would be published the world would have changed in such a dramatic way. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed life beyond recognition, and for many survivors it has meant the increased danger of being isolated in lockdown with an abuser. The constant message for the majority of lockdown has been “Stay Safe! Stay home!” but, for many of the survivors whose stories are told in this report, home was far from a place of safety. Survivors told us about living in an environment of fear and control that, for some of those who had managed to leave, had continued after the relationship had ended, with the perpetrator targeting them (and sometimes also their friends and family) in their new homes.

When reading the stories in this report, what stays with me is the awful dilemmas that survivors are having to weigh up in their minds. Whether to stay in a home with an abusive partner or whether to leave for another potentially unsafe housing situation. Whether to stay with friends and family and risk the perpetrator knowing where they are, or whether to completely uproot their lives for the safety of a refuge space in another area of the country. These are decisions women should never be forced to make, but they often are because of a man’s abusive behaviour.

The reality is that women (and their children) need safe and suitable housing options to escape and recover from men’s violence and abuse. These options must include: accessible and available refuge spaces as well as specialist support in the community for women not in refuges; private rental homes where landlords do not discriminate against benefits recipients;

practical help from the local authority and housing associations; and safe housing options for women denied recourse to public funds.

After we had finished writing this report, but before publication, the government announced its intention to ensure (through the domestic abuse bill) that all domestic abuse survivors get priority need status when going to their local authority for help with housing. This is a very welcome announcement that comes after years of campaigning by Women’s Aid and other voluntary sector organisations. Once this becomes law, it will mean that survivors in England will be given automatic priority for housing and this will align with the current practice in Wales and Scotland. It is crucial that all survivors are included within this, particularly survivors with no recourse to public funds, and that the housing provided or sourced by local authorities is both safe and appropriate for survivors and their children.

Housing is a crucial part of the domestic abuse bill currently going through parliament, and of our nation’s response to domestic abuse. We must listen to what survivors are telling us and we must make their needs our priority.

Nicki Norman
Acting Chief Executive
Women’s Aid

June 2020

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 were as follows:

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:

”

“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.

Introduction and background



The housing crisis

This report examines the housing experiences of survivors of domestic abuse using evidence from Women's Aid Survivor Voice Survey 2019. We also use findings from case study interviews with survivors and a caseworker from Women's Aid's No Woman Turned Away team. These survivor experiences take place within the context of what is often called England's "housing crisis"¹. The "housing crisis" refers to various widespread housing issues including:

- ▶ a shortage of affordable and social housing stock²;
- ▶ the high cost of private renting which is prohibitive to many³;
- ▶ long waiting lists for social homes⁴; and
- ▶ rising numbers of people who are homeless⁵ and people sleeping rough⁶.

Domestic abuse and other forms of male violence against women; supported housing; rough sleeping; and homelessness are often treated as distinct issues in public policy and government strategy. However, they are usually interlinked and joining up policy and strategy on these issues at both local and national levels is crucial.

Domestic abuse: a housing issue

Domestic abuse is by its very nature a housing issue. The perpetration of domestic abuse creates a context of fear and curtailed freedom; usually in the places where women and their children should feel the safest, namely their homes. Every survivor's experience is different, but housing is often a critical factor in being able to escape an abuser or abusers.

- 1 See http://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns_/why_we_campaign/the_housing_crisis_3
- 2 Between March 2017 and March 2018 "...social and affordable rented stock decreased by 1,000 dwellings and the other public sector stock decreased by 13,000 dwellings." (MHCLG, May 2019) From Shelter blog, January 2020: "...in 2018/19 only 6,287 new social rent homes were delivered. In the same time period, sales and demolitions of social housing totalled 23,740 homes. Assuming the homes lost were previously let at social rents, this is a net loss of at least 17,000 social homes in a single year – and this is even before we account for social rent homes converted to less affordable forms of renting."
- 3 Private rents rose 60% faster than wages across England between 2011-2017. During this time, rents increased by 16% whereas wages only rose by 10%. (Shelter web site - *Rentquake: Change in private rents from 2011 to 2017*, accessed February 2020)
- 4 The charity Shelter reported in June 2018 that there were 1.15m households on waiting lists for social housing.
- 5 The charity Shelter found that 280,000 people are recorded as homeless in England, an increase of 23,000 since 2016. (Shelter, December 2019)
- 6 4,677 people were found sleeping rough in England on a single night in autumn 2018 (figures from local authorities' street counts and estimates). This is down by 74 (2%) from autumn 2017 and up by 2,909 (165%) from the autumn 2010. (MHCLG, February 2019)

For many women, including the most vulnerable and those at crisis point, the only way to escape an abuser(s) is to leave their home and find a place in a refuge service. A refuge service offers a safe place to stay run by specialist domestic abuse staff. The address of the refuge service will not be publicly available to keep the women who are living there safe. Residents receive a planned programme of therapeutic practical support from staff and access peer support from other residents. Once they are ready to leave the refuge service, women then need to be able to find suitable, stable housing that enables them to move on and rebuild their lives. For women recovering from trauma, it is particularly important that they live somewhere they feel safe, with access to the support and facilities that they need for long-term recovery for themselves and their children.⁷

For those survivors who, for a variety of reasons, are not able to or do not want to go to a refuge service⁸, it is equally critical that they are able to find safe and suitable housing. This may mean staying in their own home with relevant support from specialist domestic abuse organisations based in the community, or moving to a new home. Survivors may need support with home security measures and civil injunctions or protection orders in the face of ongoing abuse from the perpetrator(s). They may need to stay in temporary accommodation at first - this might be emergency accommodation arranged by their local authority or staying with family or friends. Moving elsewhere depends on being able to either buy a new place, secure social housing or access housing in the private rental sector. Survivors also need to be able to

access specialist domestic abuse support in the community to help them (and their children) in their recovery from trauma and move towards independence. For survivors with no recourse to public funds because of their immigration status, options are further limited by not being eligible for state assistance with emergency housing or for housing-related state benefits.

Previous Women's Aid research

Research from Women's Aid's No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project shows, in stark terms, how domestic abuse is a housing issue. NWTa provides dedicated support to women who face barriers in accessing a refuge space, through a team of specialist domestic abuse practitioners. Between January 2018 and January 2019, 22 out of the 264 women supported by the NWTa team had slept rough while waiting for a refuge space⁹; and almost half (44.0%) had sofa-surfed with family, friends and even strangers while waiting for a refuge place (Women's Aid, 2019C).

Last year's report, *The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: Economics of Abuse*, presented the findings of our Survivor Voice Survey 2018¹⁰ (Women's Aid, 2019A). The findings showed how economic abuse and lack of access to economic resources put up barriers to leaving an abuser and provide challenges to moving on post-separation. A third of respondents had needed to give up their home as a result of leaving their abusive partner, and nine had found themselves homeless as a result of leaving. Respondents told us about housing shortages, the high cost of rents, and the impact welfare reforms had on their ability to find housing, both relating to leaving the abuser

7 For more information on the work of refuge services see *The Domestic Abuse Report 2020: The Annual Audit* (Women's Aid, 2020)

8 For example, there may not be a suitable space available in a refuge or she may not know about refuge options. She may not be eligible for state benefits because of her immigration status and therefore few refuge spaces are accessible to her (the housing element of refuge services is usually funded by housing-related state benefits). The perpetrator may be threatening her or stopping her from leaving or she is too afraid of him committing violence against her or her family if she tries to leave. Going to a refuge is a big and often difficult decision to make. It usually means moving away from your home area in order to not be found by the perpetrator (as that would put the survivor and the rest of the residents in the refuge at risk). Many survivors understandably do not want to uproot their lives and their children's lives (including leaving any paid employment, changing schools, leaving support networks of family and friends).

9 Research conducted by Crisis found that 61% of homeless women in Great Britain had experienced abuse from a partner (Mackie & Thomas, 2014).

10 72 women that responded to the survey questions on economic resources.

and in finding move-on accommodation after staying in a refuge service.

The whole housing approach

Women's Aid is part of the national domestic abuse and housing policy and practice group, convened by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA), which is calling for a "whole housing approach" to domestic abuse¹¹. The whole housing approach represents a move away from a siloed approach, recognising that survivors of domestic abuse need access to a range of housing options and specialist advice to ensure that they can make informed

choices about their ability to stay safely in their own homes or what to do next. This approach is currently being piloted in three areas of England.¹² Refuge services underpin a whole housing approach as they offer crisis support to the most vulnerable women and children. In 2018-19, refuge services in England supported an estimated 11,489 women and 13,787 child survivors (Women's Aid, 2020). However refuge services are very stretched and often cannot meet the high demand for their support. 64.1% of referrals to refuge in 2018-19 were declined (Women's Aid, 2020).

Other components of the whole housing model are shown in the diagram below.

Whole Housing Approach Programme (2019)

The Whole Housing Toolkit can be found at:
www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/whole-housing-approach/whole-housing-toolkit



¹¹ See <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/whole-housing-approach/>

¹² See <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/whole-housing-approach/whole-housing-approach-pilot-project/>

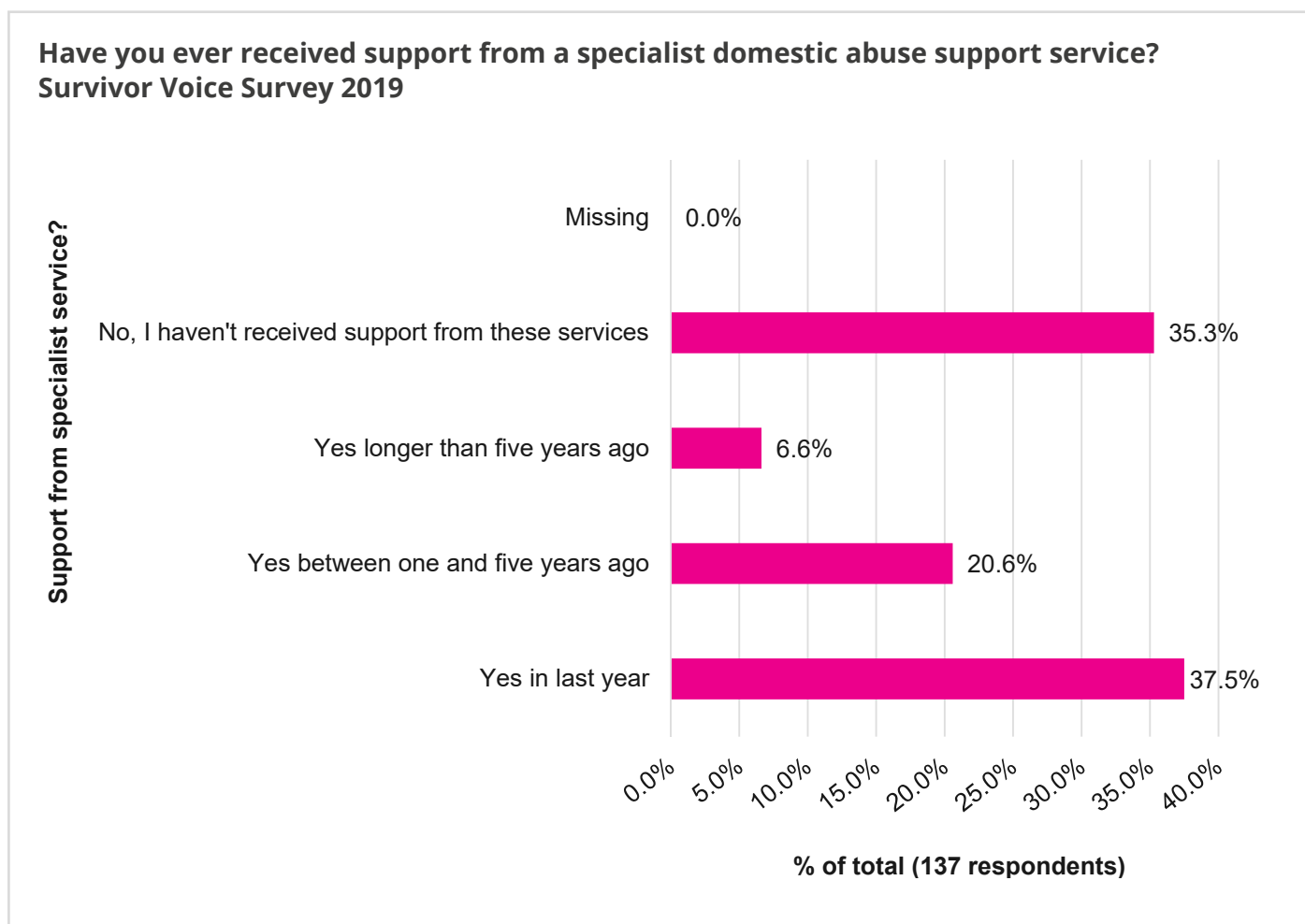
The Survivor Voice Survey

In this report we present findings from the Women’s Aid Survivor Voice Survey 2019, a survey of women who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse from a partner or ex-partner. The survey was posted online on the Women’s Aid Survivors’ Forum¹³ in June 2019 and respondents were self-selecting.

There were 136 female respondents to our survey; 98 women had moved on from the relationship referenced in responses, and 38 were still in the relationship with an abusive partner. 64.7% of respondents had received support from a specialist domestic abuse support service and therefore 35.3% had never received support from these specialist services. See the **Appendix** for more information on the respondents to the survey.

The survey was semi-structured and was analysed using Microsoft Excel. Open-text questions were categorised according to common themes. We made follow-up phone interviews with three survivors who had completed the survey and had indicated that they were interested in providing a case study. We also held a face-to-face interview with a caseworker from Women’s Aid’s NWT team about the housing experiences of survivors seeking a refuge space or another place of safety.

All the data presented in this report are from our Survivor Voice Survey 2019 or the case study interviews, unless otherwise indicated. All names and identifying features used in the report have been changed or removed to protect survivors’ anonymity.



13 The Survivors’ Forum is a safe, anonymous, online space for women (over 18) who have been affected by domestic abuse to share their experiences and support one another. <https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk>



A SURVIVOR'S STORY: SASKIA

Saskia* is a migrant to the UK from another country. She is currently living with her small children in rented accommodation after leaving an abusive partner. They used to live with her partner in a jointly owned home; he still lives there and the property is still in both his and Saskia's names.

Saskia finds it hard to describe the abuse she experienced from her ex-partner. She says,

“When it is something that sort of has seeped into all parts of every day and then you try to kind of give an overview, it is very difficult to describe it.”

Her ex-partner was very controlling towards her, including controlling her access to finances, closely monitoring her daily activities, isolating her from friends and family, intimidating her and belittling her. He stopped her from visiting family in her country of origin by hiding their children's passports. She felt fearful of him.

When Saskia left her partner, her parents paid for temporary accommodation for her and her children to stay in through the online property rental marketplace. Saskia had thought about going into a refuge, but she was worried about the impact on her children of moving to another part of the country.

Saskia found it was very difficult to register for a GP and other services with only a temporary address.

“Being able to access the normal things was difficult at that time. I had no money, I had about £300 when we left and that was it. My parents helped and everything. I had to move into a house on my own with [small children] and it was just empty when we got there.”

Saskia is eligible for housing benefit. She also approached her local authority to ask for support with her housing situation. The local

authority said she qualified for a grant to be used as a deposit (one month's rent paid in advance) on a rental property, but it was her responsibility to find that property. She approached over 40 estate agents, but none of them had properties with landlords who were willing to accept housing benefit. She was unable to find anywhere she could rent. She said:

“It just seems to be like a standard footnote on the ads – no pets, no children, no housing benefit...It just feels a bit degrading.”

In the end, her father offered to pay all of the rent on a property and, in order for Saskia to be allowed to rent the property, he is officially a co-tenant, although in reality he doesn't live there. However, he cannot continue to pay the rent indefinitely. Saskia feels that with small children to care for and while she is still recovering from the abuse she experienced, she is unable to get a job to cover the rent.

“I don't feel ready to work yet...I don't feel strong enough.”

She would like to no longer rely on the financial help of her father and pay the rent through housing benefit. However, the landlord has made derogatory comments to her about “people on benefits”, so she is concerned that he will not let her be the sole tenant of the property.

Reflecting on her housing situation, Saskia said that:

“It just feels a bit like the odds are stacked against you. I am really lucky that my parents are able to access some money to help us... the housing benefit system and the private rental system just seems like not workable.”

* Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Section 1

“I tried to leave a few times...”

This section explores how housing concerns and lack of access to housing are barriers to leaving a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

Losing their home and facing homelessness are major concerns for survivors, and these fears were clear in the responses to the Survivor Voice Survey 2019. Of those 38 respondents who were still in a relationship with an abusive partner, 68.4% indicated that their housing situation, or concerns about future housing options, made it difficult for them to leave their partner.¹⁴

Access to money

Findings in the *Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Economics of Abuse* report last year showed that a key barrier to moving on for many survivors was their lack of access to money, whether or not they had resources on paper (Women’s Aid, 2019A). These findings were mirrored in this year’s responses; a lack of access to money presents a barrier to finding housing for many of the survey respondents. Survivors wrote about not having enough money to afford rent, an upfront deposit or other necessary expenses associated with housing (for example, utility bills, council tax) if they left the relationship. Some stated that they were not in paid employment, so their access to money was very limited. The reasons for not being in employment were not always made clear in the responses, but they may include having taken time out of employment to take on childcare responsibilities, because of ill health caused by abuse or because their abusive partner would not allow them to work (see Women’s Aid, 2019A, for commentary on employment sabotage).

One respondent commented, “I have no money, so even if the council found my child and myself new accommodation, I would not have the funds to furnish it or buy food, gas, electricity, water and pay council tax.” Another survivor wrote about concerns about her joint tenancy, for which a relative is a guarantor: “...I can’t risk leaving and him not paying the rent...”

Some wrote specifically about their financial dependence on their partner being a major barrier to leaving. A number of respondents detailed how their partners are economically abusive, controlling their access to money and other economic resources and in some cases explicitly threatening them with financial hardship or homelessness if they left. One respondent wrote, “My partner controls any money – asks for receipts – and I have no money of my own for a deposit.”

Fear of homelessness and unsuitable housing

Survivors described their fears of homelessness, economic hardship or the prospect of living in unsuitable housing. One respondent summed up her current living arrangements as, “Horrible living in fear with an abuser but safer with one than on the streets...” We know that homelessness is a reality for many survivors escaping an abusive partner. Of the 68,170 households who were owed a homelessness duty by their local authority in April to June 2019, 9% had experience of or were at risk of domestic abuse (MHCLG, December 2019).

14 5.3% ticked that they were “not sure” and 26.3% ticked “no”. There were no missing data.

HOUSING AS A BARRIER TO LEAVING



“[Housing is] everything. Why I’m still with him. I don’t have children so face street homelessness if I leave.”

“...far too insecure being a lodger – you can be evicted with very little notice. Living with a stranger (even if female, could have male guests) too frightening for domestic violence victim with PTSD. Especially for someone who’s been in a very long-term relationship and isolated.”

“I am not working and worry about where I will live and how will I be able to pay bills, rent, buy food etc.”

Respondents to the Survivor Voice Survey 2019

Twenty-two (7.1% out of 309 women) of the women supported by the NWTAs caseworkers from January 2018 to January 2019 slept rough while waiting for a refuge space to become available; this includes sleeping in their car or in 24-hour homeless shelters (Women’s Aid, 2019C). In a study of black and minoritised survivors accessing a specialist housing support service in London, 52% (out of 69 housing cases between July 2018 and July 2019) had been homeless or threatened with homelessness due to gender-based violence (LAWA et al, 2019).

For some survivors, living with an abusive, controlling partner who isolated them from friends and support had left them without the self-confidence they felt they needed to move home. Some wrote of their fear of potentially having to live in shared accommodation, sharing a living space with strangers, when they were emotionally exhausted, mentally unwell and recovering from the trauma of experiencing domestic abuse. This included fear of the possibility of having to share housing with men after leaving a relationship with a violent man. One survivor wrote:

“I don’t see being scared and unable to do sharing with strangers, potentially men, violent people, in very poor state of repair housing as something that can be resolved by counselling...I have probable PTSD but also just don’t need to leave one risky person to live with many risky people. It’s about balancing the risk.”

Accessing help from the local authority

Survivors described difficulties in getting help from their local authority housing team or through state benefits related to housing. Two respondents (who were still with an abusive partner) commented on how not having any dependent children meant they were not regarded as in priority need by the local statutory housing team.

Private rental sector

Even with access to state benefits, some survivors find that many private landlords do not rent to recipients of state benefits. One respondent wrote:

“I tried to leave a few times but even when I had a little bit of savings private landlords wouldn’t consider me. Now it’s worse as universal credit had made even more landlords turn low-income people away. Not surprising as benefits frequently no longer cover rents.”

Saskia’s story (on page 12) highlights how survivors receiving benefits can find barriers to accessing the private rental sector. When Saskia left her abusive partner she approached over 40 estate agents, but none of them had any private rental homes with landlords who were willing to accept state benefits. This is part

of what the charity Shelter has termed “DSS discrimination”.¹⁵ A YouGov survey of almost 4,000 private renters found that almost a third of people receiving housing benefits reported not being able to rent a home due to a “No benefits” policy in the last five years (Beales, August 2018).

It is also worth noting the high cost of renting privately and how this creates a barrier for women leaving and moving on from a relationship with an abusive partner. A recent report found that there is no region in England where private rented housing is affordable on women’s median earnings, whereas men can afford to rent a median home (median private sector rental cost) in all regions except London (Reis, 2019).



HOUSING AS A BARRIER TO LEAVING

“If you leave an abuser it’s to be safer. If you’re leaving for a life different but equally bad and unsafe, you might as well stay.”

“I do not have the self-confidence to cope on my own. I need a temporary safe place with others till I become confident to look after myself. In return I would support others and help them.”

“I don’t have a job, he restricts my access to money, he’s high net worth and has said he would hammer me into the ground financially if I left.”

Respondents to the Survivor Voice Survey 2019

Immigration-related concerns

Although this was not an issue raised by respondents to our survey who were still with an abusive partner, immigration-related concerns are a major barrier to leaving and migrant women - who may lack support networks - often have no safe alternative housing options at all. In one study, 13% of survivors (out of 84) reported that immigration-related concerns were a barrier to leaving an abuser (Solace Women’s Aid, 2019).

Migrant women with no access to public funds are refused housing assistance from the local authority, state benefits to cover housing costs, and often a place in a refuge service.¹⁶ (See **Section 2** in this report on “...the price I paid for getting out of the terrible relationship” for further explanations and caseworker Kristen’s story on page 22). A migrant woman may also be concerned that her right to reside in the UK is dependent on her relationship with the perpetrator. The perpetrator may also be using the woman’s immigration status as a means of controlling her, threatening her with deportation if she leaves him (see Thiara & Roy, 2012, and the Step Up Migrant Women campaign, LAWRS).

15 The Shelter blog notes: “Go onto any housing website now and you will see it. ‘No DSS’. The Department for Social Security (DSS) was renamed years ago, but the meaning of ‘No DSS’ is still known to all. It means we will not rent this property to you if you are ‘on benefits’.” (Beales, August 2018)

16 This is because the housing element of the refuge support is usually paid for by state benefits.

A SURVIVOR'S STORY: LESLEY



Lesley* used to own a home jointly with her partner. When she was living with him, she often felt that she was trapped and he would even say to her that she couldn't leave because of the children and the joint mortgage.

When she did separate from her partner, Lesley did not go to her local authority for any help with housing. She felt that she would not have been seen as a victim of domestic abuse because she had never called the police about the abuse and there had been no physical violence, although there had been threats of violence, and emotional and economic abuse. **"I didn't think that I 'fitted a thing' to go along [to the housing team]..."**

When they separated, her ex-partner wanted to come off the mortgage quickly. Lesley, who was living with their children, could not afford the mortgage on her own. They went through mediation as part of the divorce. When meeting with the mediator on her own, Lesley disclosed the abuse she had experienced from her ex-partner. The mediator did not stop the mediation process, as would have been best practice, but instead just asked if Lesley was still willing to have mediation with her ex. Lesley agreed to this, partly because she was afraid of upsetting her ex by refusing.

Lesley had not been in paid employment for quite a few years. Although at the time of the separation she had returned to work part time, the mortgage repayments would have been too much for her to manage alone. She sold the house she owned with her ex and is now renting privately. The money she gained from the house sale was not enough to buy another home.

Lesley found it difficult to make decisions about future housing at a time when she was also coming to terms with leaving an abusive partner. She had been made dependent on her partner through his controlling behaviour, and **"thinking for yourself long-term is all new."** She thinks it would have been helpful to have someone who

could have gone through the housing options with her and help guide her decision-making. She says:

"I think at the time I was...you're just coming out of [an] abusive, a long, a very long controlling relationship, you are not in a place to think about long-term plans sort of thing."

Friends had cautioned Lesley against selling the house, and had been worried about her losing her financial security. Lesley felt the most important thing was getting away from her ex, and that couldn't happen without selling their joint home. She acknowledges that this means less financial security for her future.

"People were like 'don't sell the house' and all this, again I would have still been connected to him...the house would still have been half his. In my mind I don't know how I would have coped with that. I don't think I could have coped with it. People said to me at the time 'that's your security' and I do think that now...I haven't got any, but it's what you kind of have to do, to get away, to cut all contact but it shouldn't be like that."

Lesley's rent payments are high and this means there has not been much money to spend on other things, which has had an impact on her children (although they have been very accepting of this). She says, **"It has been a bit difficult for us all financially."**

She considered looking for somewhere less expensive to rent, but decided against this as it would have meant a lot of upheaval for her children and possibly moving away from their school and friends.

"It [housing] is such a big thing - especially when you've got children, that's your home."

* Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Section 2

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

This section explores the housing experiences of survivors after separation from an abusive partner.

The majority (98) of the 136 respondents to our survey were no longer in a relationship with an abusive partner.¹⁷ Some of these respondents wrote of the positive experiences they had had of housing after leaving their ex-partner. These included being able to find a refuge space, and suitable settled accommodation, positive experiences of being supported by friends and family, and feeling free and safe away from the control, violence and abuse of their ex-partners. One respondent wrote, “It was good living in a refuge and feeling safe.” Another noted, “I could do what I wanted in my privately rented house.” One survivor had been provided with emergency accommodation by her local housing team and then allocated a permanent home, she described this as a “...good experience really although at the time felt very stressful but it could have been a lot worse.”

However, it was clear that there was usually a “price to pay” for leaving that relationship in terms of housing. Survivors responding to the survey wrote about this “price to pay” in terms of:

- ▶ upheaval and disruption;
- ▶ challenging housing conditions and homelessness;
- ▶ ongoing abuse; and
- ▶ financial burden.

Upheaval and disruption

As noted in other studies, the end of the relationship can often mean much disruption and economic hardship for the survivor of abuse, and any children she may have (see Bowstead, 2015; Kelly et al, 2014; Solace Women’s Aid, 2019; Walker and Hester, 2019). Kelly et al, 2014, notes that this disruption particularly impacts the survivor and not the perpetrator of abuse. Bowstead, 2015, found large internal migration patterns within England as a result of domestic abuse. There were 10,161 migration journeys in 2008-2009 across local authority boundaries to access services in England because of domestic abuse. A recent report by Solace Women’s Aid (2019) found that the majority of women in their study (59% of 103 women) moved at least twice after fleeing, with 18% having moved four or more times.

Several respondents to our survey had to move home several times after separation from an abuser, and endure the obvious disruption this caused them (and any children) at an emotionally very difficult time. Lesley’s story, on page 16, shows how she found it difficult to make housing decisions at a time when she was also trying to recover from a relationship with an abusive partner. Survivors’ experiences included using temporary housing arrangements, such as “sofa surfing” at the homes of different people they

17 74 of these had been living with their ex-partner; 13 had been living with their ex-partner some of the time.

knew, temporarily living with family or friends, or living in temporary accommodation (such as holiday rentals or hotels). Some respondents had to move more than once because their whereabouts had been discovered by the perpetrator and he was continuing his abuse against them (see the paragraphs later on “Ongoing abuse”).

Of those respondents who were no longer in a relationship with the perpetrator, where the relationship had ended over a year ago and who had answered this question (n=46):

- ▶ over half had moved home at least once in the first year post-separation;
- ▶ over a third had moved home twice or more in the first year; and
- ▶ about one fifth had moved three times or more in the first year.

One survivor had moved seven times just in that first year after separation.

Nineteen survivors (where the relationship ended over a year ago) had not moved in the first year since separation. Some of them

wrote about the ongoing abuse they had experienced from their ex-partners and the need to have security features fitted to their homes. (See the discussion later in this section on “Ongoing abuse”).

Challenging, unsafe and unsuitable housing conditions and homelessness

A number of respondents had lived in sub-standard, sometimes overcrowded, housing conditions since leaving an abusive partner. Some found themselves homeless after leaving, meaning they were “sofa surfing” or temporarily living with friends or family. One survivor had lived in different forms of temporary accommodation after the end of the relationship with an abusive partner and wrote of the ordeal of having to live with her children in properties that were unclean, and having to share living spaces with men. While living in a hotel she wrote, “...we were too scared to get breakfast because of all the men.”

Cramped housing conditions were often mentioned. One survivor wrote, “I am in social housing and very overcrowded.”

How many times did you move home/change accommodation in the first year after the relationship with an abusive partner ended? Survivor Voice Survey 2019

No. of times moved in the first year post-separation	Number of respondents	% of 46 respondents (who had left over a year ago)
0	19	41.3%
1	9	19.6%
2	9	19.6%
3	5	10.9%
4	2	4.3%
5	1	2.2%
6	0	0.0%
7	1	2.2%
Total	46	100.0%

46 survivors responded to this question.

Another described having to move into a one-bedroomed property with her two children and one of their children subsequently becoming ill because of damp and mould in this property. Another described living in accommodation with family as, "...to say it is overcrowded is an understatement. It has affected every family member's mental health significantly."

Two respondents wrote about having to live in neighbourhoods where they felt unsafe, because of illegal drug use in that area, anti-social behaviour, or experiencing harassment or abuse by people living nearby. One survivor slept with her children in her car at times because of feeling unsafe in her temporary home. Another described living in her new social housing as "...difficult because of ASB [anti-social behaviour] in the neighbourhood area of economic deprivation. Really difficult at times."

Some expressed sadness about having to leave suitable accommodation (that they had shared with an abusive partner), and sometimes their possessions in that property, to move into sub-standard living conditions. One survivor wrote, "...I had to move out of our shared home, leaving all my possessions and into an empty and dirty house and sort it out whilst I was very ill having left my partner..." Another wrote of her "...deep sorrow of losing the life I had built and having to return to scratch of living in a room at my mother's place."

Survivors had to endure these conditions at the same time as trying to recover from the trauma of domestic abuse. One survivor summed up the impact of her living conditions as, "My life is truly shit and has been lost, I have no idea who I am anymore or what purpose I have."

Ongoing abuse

For many women, the end of the relationship does not mean the end of the abuse, indeed

abuse often continues or even escalates post-separation (see discussions on post-separation abuse in Birchall & Choudhry, 2018; Kelly et al, 2014; Toews & Bermea, 2017; Walker & Hester, 2019; Women's Aid, 2016). There were many examples of ongoing abuse in the survey responses from survivors no longer in a relationship with an abuser. Some of these related to ongoing ties with the perpetrator that allowed him to continue to enact abuse, for example through joint mortgages/tenancies or through child contact. Walker and Hester, 2019, also note the impact of post-separation abuse on housing, including the safety and financial consequences of having joint mortgages or tenancies with the abuser, stemming from the fact that both survivor and perpetrator are then seen as a single legal entity.

There were examples in the survey responses of perpetrators attempting to control and punish the survivor financially through protracted legal proceedings and refusal to sell jointly owned property. One survivor wrote, "My ex used our joint ownership of our house to try to keep controlling and affecting me by forcing a legal battle, refusing to allow the house to be sold in a variety of ways." Another survivor found out that her ex had registered a "notice of home rights"¹⁸ with the Land Registry and therefore she could not sell her home until he signed a form to remove this. This was despite the fact that she had owned the property she lived in for a long time before meeting her ex and the property was in her name only. Another survivor's ex-partner had threatened legal action to sue for financial compensation for the time he had lived in the property that she owned.

Some of the survivors (who had stayed in the home that they were living in during the relationship or who went to live with family) wrote about the perpetrator knowing their whereabouts and using this knowledge to continue their abuse. Examples of this

18 The government website describes a notice of home rights as a "form to apply to register a notice protecting your rights to occupy the matrimonial or civil partnership home." <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notice-of-home-rights-registration-hr1> [HM Government, accessed January 2020]

continued abuse included stalking, harassment, causing damage to possessions, and breaking into property. One perpetrator had abducted a child from the survivor's new temporary home. Some survivors had had security features fitted to their property and security checks made by the police or the local authority to help deter the perpetrator. This included changing locks and fitting security cameras.

Several survey respondents described living in fear that the perpetrator would find them, and enduring the upheaval of having to move more than once because the perpetrator had tracked them down. One survivor avoided being at home because her ex-partner had been spotted at her address after he came out of prison. Another survivor wrote of the isolation and restrictions that marked her everyday life because of the long-lasting fear of being found by the perpetrator:

“I went and lived with family [after leaving]. Positive aspects were that I felt safe and not alone. However this made it easier for my ex-partner to stalk me and I felt as if I was a prisoner in my family’s home as he often waited outside. After that I moved into social housing where I have a lovely home and nice neighbours well out of the area I come from. The downside is I keep my circle very small. I do not tell people where I live through fear he will find me years on. Which in turn has resulted in further isolation. Unfortunately, the grips of isolation once felt in an abusive relationship take another form in trying to protect myself and my children from being found.”

These stories of ongoing abuse show how perpetrators continue to narrow women's personal freedoms, their “space for action” (Kelly, 2003), after the relationship has ended. These stories also show why some women, in order to be safe, will have to leave and uproot their lives to move to a refuge service outside their local area.

Financial burden

The financial “price to pay” of leaving an abuser (a theme explored in *The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Economics of Abuse*, Women's Aid, 2019A) and the impact this has on housing options was a common theme in survey responses.

Many respondents to our survey wrote about the stress of living with housing-related debt and/or much reduced financial resources (see Lesley's story on page 16). One survivor wrote about the “Huge financial stress to meet rent and bills as market rent is incredibly high in my city...” This financial stress is compounded by her immigration status which means she is not entitled to any housing assistance from the state: “Not entitled to any housing assistance as no recourse to public funds although work full time and pay taxes and NI [National Insurance].”

As noted previously (and discussed in Walker and Hester, 2019), two people on a joint mortgage are regarded as a single legal entity. In the case of domestic abuse, this often means that any arrears or repairs outstanding can fall on the survivor should the perpetrator refuse to take responsibility. Some respondents to our survey were having to pay the housing costs for two homes (the one the perpetrator was still in, but was also in the survivor's name, and one where the survivor was currently living). One survivor had moved into an unfurnished private rental property “...but still paid mortgage on ‘marital home’ that he [the perpetrator] lived in – he insisted as I was main breadwinner. My finances were pretty tight!”

Some also wrote about their ex blocking them from accessing the money they had tied up in jointly owned property, and therefore not being able to afford to buy a new home. One survivor described how her ex-partner stopped making the mortgage repayments on their family home despite him being on a high salary and as a result their house is due to be repossessed by the bank. After repossession and sale, the money the survivor had put into the home will be lost.

Last year's *The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Economics of Abuse* highlighted the contrast between having economic resources on paper (such as owning a property) and having money to access for everyday living (Women's Aid, 2019A). There were also examples of this from the 2019 survey. One survivor responding to this survey wrote that she is not entitled to legal aid to fund representation in the family court because she owns a home with her ex-partner. However, he is preventing her from accessing the assets tied up in the property and she cannot afford to buy his share of the property, so "...in order to ensure appropriate arrangements for the children I'm having to cripple myself financially."

For survivors starting over in a new home, this also sometimes meant leaving their possessions behind, including furniture, and having to pay for new items for their new home (or relying on the generosity of family or friends). For disabled women, this may mean leaving a home that has been adapted to make it accessible and functional for her (see caseworker Kristen's story on page 22, where she talks about the difficulties she has finding suitable safe accommodation for disabled survivors). Some survivors wrote about the difficulty of finding a private rental property where the landlord would accept payment by state benefits (see Saskia's story on page 12 and Patricia's story on page 30), or state benefits not covering the cost of private rental properties.

FINANCIAL BURDEN AFTER LEAVING



"... years later I am still fighting through a solicitor to get my name off the joint mortgage (he remained in the property) and to get my share of equity. Only when this happens will I be able to buy a property in my own name – until then my money is wasted on rent when it could be paying off mortgage towards owning my own home."

"I still own my home jointly with my ex-partner but I chose to leave so that he wouldn't know where I was. As a result I pay my half of the mortgage and rent on top until our house can be sold. I find things very difficult financially."

"Legal issues relating to the former marital home; I still own half of it but will have to forfeit this due to legal aid surrounding divorce, child custody suits etc."

Respondents to the Survivor Voice Survey 2019

A CASEWORKER'S STORY: KRISTEN



Kristen* works as a caseworker in Women's Aid's No Woman Turned Away team, providing telephone-based advocacy for survivors of domestic abuse. Women who are encountering barriers that are preventing them from finding a refuge space are referred to the project, and she helps them to find a place of safety either in a refuge service or in other suitable, safe accommodation.

Barriers to finding a suitable refuge space

Kristen says refuge spaces are in high demand, making the search for an available space very difficult.

"...refuge is very hard to get anyway. The additional barriers women face are having money for transport, having money for living there while they are waiting for their benefits to change or come through. For an awful lot of women it is very, very daunting to travel to somewhere out of their area, especially if they have young children and luggage in tow."

She says that finding a refuge space for a woman who is denied recourse to public funds (because of her immigration status or lack of clarity on her immigration status) is very difficult. Most refuge services won't accept a referral from a woman with no eligibility for state benefits (which pay for the housing element of refuge support) unless alternative funding has first been secured. A survivor with no recourse to public funds will also not qualify for housing assistance from her local housing team. In these circumstances, Kristen would contact social services to enquire whether they could fund a refuge place, but this is only a possibility if the woman has dependent children and, even then, funding is not guaranteed.

Kristen often faces barriers in finding a refuge space for a disabled woman. Not only must a suitable and accessible refuge space be found, but a way to travel to that refuge must be organised. In addition, the refuge has to have accessible connections to other amenities in the area, such as shops and a GP.

"My experience has been, if she is living with the perpetrator as her 'carer' she has to make additional arrangements to get out of the house which can often be quite convoluted. Just using public transport to the refuge is often a nightmare. Then we have to find a suitable room, a suitable disabled room, and once again there is a total lack of those."

Kristen notes that there are fewer dedicated refuge services for black and minoritised women now and these tend to be oversubscribed. Support services run by and for black and minoritised women are a vital part of the response to domestic abuse. These services hold expert understanding of the barriers black and minoritised survivors face in accessing appropriate support and justice and have the expertise to meet the support needs of these survivors.

Variation in responses from local housing teams

In Kristen's experience, survivors face many barriers to receiving assistance from local housing teams when fleeing an abuser. She notes that there is a "postcode lottery" at work, with different responses from different housing teams. She acknowledges that housing teams are often very busy and overwhelmed with the number of people coming to them for help, also there is a severe lack of suitable housing available to place people in.

* Names have been changed to protect anonymity.



She has some good practice examples from housing teams, including:

“I remember speaking to a housing officer who deliberately went to find a female officer to ... ask the questions. The woman was given a private space and time to do so and it was a very successful outcome. There was total understanding of why it was so important.”

She also has some bad practice examples, including housing teams using a male officer to interview a woman about domestic abuse and being surprised when she did not disclose sexual abuse to him. She also talks about cases where survivors were interviewed in the middle of a public waiting room with their children, and asked questions about domestic abuse (including details of sexual violence) in front of everyone. Another example of poor practice was when a teenage daughter was expected to translate for her mother as she detailed her experiences of abuse.

Gatekeeping

Kristen says it is quite often difficult to just get an appointment with the housing team. She has seen a lot of “gatekeeping” by local housing teams; for example, Kristen has had cases where a woman has been given the following responses:

- ▶ She can't be seen for two weeks.

- ▶ She needs to come back later while they assess her situation (where she should be offered temporary accommodation while her circumstances are under investigation).¹⁹
- ▶ She is just experiencing a relationship breakdown (and not abuse), and she is completely turned away from housing support.
- ▶ She is sent away to get evidence of the abuse (when actually evidence is not required²⁰), including getting a police report even though she may have deliberately not reported to the police because the perpetrator has connections with them.
- ▶ If she has moved to another area of the country, she is told to go back to her own area, even when the perpetrator is still residing there, therefore it is unsafe to do so. (In fact “local connection” procedures should not apply for women who have moved in order to flee a domestic abuser, but Kristen says that this happens quite frequently.²¹)

Kristen knows of several cases where the housing team have said they will contact the perpetrator to ask him for evidence, and to ask if he has thrown her out of the home. This clearly is a very unsafe thing to do and may put the woman in further danger.²²

She has also experienced cases of disagreements between different boroughs or different counties. She says:

.....

19 Under S188 of the Housing Act 1996, a local authority must provide interim accommodation while it makes inquiries if it has reason to believe that a person may be homeless, eligible for assistance, and in priority need. See https://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/homelessness_applications/homelessness_duties/accommodation_duties2/interim_duty_to_accommodate

20 “Housing authorities should not have a blanket approach toward domestic abuse which requires corroborative or police evidence to be provided.” (HM Government, Chapter 21, February 2018)

21 “A housing authority cannot refer an applicant to another housing authority where they have a local connection if that person or any person who might reasonably be expected to reside with them would be at risk of violence and abuse in that other district.” (HM Government, Chapter 10, February 2018)

22 “It is essential that inquiries do not provoke further violence and abuse. Housing authorities **should not approach the alleged perpetrator**, since this could generate further violence and abuse.” (HM Government, Chapter 21, February 2018 – emphasis in original)

“It seems to be happening more often these days, if a space cannot be found for a woman in her local area, and the local authority then puts her into temporary accommodation in another borough. We are finding that both boroughs are then after a while denying any responsibility for her. So, the original borough is saying ‘she is no longer our responsibility because she is not in our area’ and the new borough saying ‘she is not ours because you put her here’. So she is not getting the services she needs for social services or someone looking for permanent accommodation for her.”

Priority need

Women supported by the No Woman Turned Away team who have no dependent children often face difficulties in being accepted by local housing teams as in priority need.

“The difficulty is if you don’t have children...you have to be able to prove that you are more vulnerable if you become homeless than someone else who is homeless, another single person. So, effectively you have to prove you have mental health difficulties or another reason why you need rehoming.”

Kristen has even been told by certain housing officers that if a woman has left the abuser and is no longer in a home with him then she is out of a dangerous situation and no longer vulnerable, therefore not in priority need. Such an argument clearly misunderstands how abuse often continues or even escalates post-separation.



Challenges with temporary accommodation

Kristen also talks about the problem with survivors being placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation, sometimes for long periods of time:

“We have heard of cases where women are in temporary accommodation for five years.”

She describes temporary accommodation as:

“quite often unsuitable, because there will be men in the property, drug users, that’s not suitable for a traumatised woman and her children.”

She also talks of the experiences of survivors and children placed temporarily in hotel rooms.

“I’ve heard of quite a lot of women who end up with children in a hotel room and they’ve got no cooking facilities. I’ve even heard of social workers handing them stuff and them saying, ‘But I haven’t even got a can opener let alone something to heat it on, you know!’ So, putting a family in a hotel because they [the housing team] haven’t got anything else. Yes, she’s got a safe roof over her head but it is not helping the family, you know, in any other way.”

Reflecting on the responses from local housing teams to survivors of domestic abuse, Kristen says,

“I would like to see housing officers trained in the law so they are aware of women’s rights because we very often find ourselves [caseworkers] having to send them information on what the law actually says.”

Section 3

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

This section explores the experiences of survivors in asking for emergency housing assistance from their local authority and highlights the relevant legislation.

Help from the local authority

Housing authorities have a legal duty to secure accommodation for people who are:

- ▶ unintentionally homeless (people should be considered “unintentionally homeless” if they have been forced to leave their home because of domestic abuse)²³;
- ▶ eligible for state assistance (because they are British citizens or their right to reside in the UK gives them access to public funds);
- ▶ have a local connection - however, “A housing authority cannot refer an applicant to another housing authority where they have a local connection if that person or any person who might reasonably be expected to reside with them would be at risk of violence and abuse in that other district.” (HM Government, Chapter 21, February 2018); and
- ▶ are assessed as in priority need.

Housing legislation sets out the categories of people who must be seen as in priority need for housing.²⁴ These are broadly:

- ▶ pregnant women;
- ▶ households with dependent children;
- ▶ 16 and 17 year olds;
- ▶ 18 to 20 year olds;
- ▶ any person who has lost their accommodation as a result of an emergency (for example, due to a flood or fire); and
- ▶ any person who is vulnerable, including because of old age, mental illness, or disability, or because they have had to leave their accommodation as a result of violence or threats of violence.²⁵

In order to be considered in priority need for assistance with housing by the local authority, it is not sufficient for a survivor to show that she is fleeing domestic abuse. She must also show

23 “Section 177(1) of the 1996 Act provides that it is not reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation if it is probable that this will lead to domestic violence or other violence against: (a) the applicant; (b) a person who normally resides as a member of the applicant’s family; or, (c) any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant.” (HM Government, Chapter 21, February 2018)

24 Relevant legislation: The Housing Act 1996 – Section 188 and Section 189; Article 6, Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002.

25 For more information: https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/rules/priority_need

that she is homeless as a result (this will usually mean showing that she has no other housing options, including staying with friends or family) and that she is more vulnerable than the average person facing homelessness as a result. The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017, which came into force in April 2018, places new legal duties on local authorities with the aim that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as they are eligible for assistance.²⁶ Under S188 of the Housing Act 1996, a local authority must provide interim accommodation while it makes inquiries if it has reason to believe that a person may be homeless, eligible for assistance, and in priority need.²⁷

Although fleeing domestic abuse is classified as a “vulnerability” under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002, in reality domestic abuse in isolation is rarely considered to qualify someone as in priority need if they do not have an additional vulnerability, such as being pregnant, having dependent children or being vulnerable as a result of mental illness or disability.²⁸ A recent report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (APPGEH) noted:

“Experiences show that domestic abuse in isolation is rarely considered to qualify someone as in priority need. In 2017, only 2% of people were found to be in priority need and made an offer of settled housing because they were vulnerable as a result of domestic abuse.”

(APPGEH, 2019, citing MHCLG, Live Tables 773 and 774)

The APPGEH has reported that there is evidence of local authorities failing to provide people fleeing from domestic abuse with an offer of accommodation, and that the ‘vulnerability test’ is being used as a gatekeeping tool.

The APPGEH estimates that if automatic priority need were extended to everyone who is homeless as a result of fleeing domestic abuse (as is currently the case under Welsh homelessness legislation) an additional 1,960 households a year in England could be owed the main homelessness duty by their local authorities (i.e. their local authorities would be required to provide them with an offer of permanent accommodation) (APPGEH, 2019).

A report into the housing experiences of black and minoritised survivors in London also found evidence of local housing team “gatekeeping” practices, and that inconsistent testing of vulnerability prevented women from accessing safe, emergency housing. The report highlighted:

“Poor vulnerability assessments, carried out on a discretionary basis and failing to properly take account of the vulnerability caused by domestic violence and Black and minoritised women’s intersecting needs and oppressions.”

(LAWA et al, 2019)

26 See https://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/homelessness_applications/introduction_to_homelessness

27 See https://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/homelessness_applications/homelessness_duties/accommodation_duties2/interim_duty_to_accommodate

28 The meaning of “vulnerability” in homeless priority decisions is based on the Supreme Court decision in *Hotak (Appellant) v London Borough of Southwark (Respondent)* (13 May 2015) which found that “...“vulnerable” in section 189(1)(c) connotes that the applicant must be significantly more vulnerable than an ordinary person who happened to be in need of accommodation.” (Taken from the press summary.)

No recourse to public funds

For survivors with no recourse to public funds, finding housing is often a major challenge when escaping an abuser (see LAWA et al, 2019; Women's Aid, 2018 and 2019C). Housing assistance from a local authority is not available for survivors who cannot access public funds because of their immigration status. There are also few refuge services that will consider accepting a referral from a survivor with no recourse to public funds. This is because the housing element of refuge services is usually paid for by state benefits. In 2018-19, only 5.4% of all vacancies listed in England would consider referrals from women who had no recourse to public funds, and in many cases this was conditional on another agency (such as social services) sourcing funding for her stay (Women's Aid, 2020). A significant proportion of the women supported by Women's Aid's No Woman Turned Away project face barriers to finding a refuge space because they are assessed as ineligible for public funds (19.4% out of 309 women supported between January 2018 and January 2019) (Women's Aid, 2019C). Kristen's experience as a caseworker (see her story on page 22) also highlights these difficulties.

Survivors can apply for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK under the domestic abuse rule if they have leave to remain in the UK as a spouse, civil partner, unmarried or same-sex partner of a British citizen, or of a person with indefinite leave to remain (ILR), refugee leave or humanitarian protection and their relationship with their partner breaks down due to domestic abuse. If a survivor is destitute she can first apply for leave under the destitute domestic violence (DDV) concession. The DDV concession grants survivors leave to remain with access to public funds for a limited

period of three months. The DDV concession is designed to ensure survivors have access to safe accommodation and support, enabling them to leave the perpetrator and apply for ILR. If the ILR application is submitted before the three months of leave to remain under the concession expires, the person's leave to remain under the concession (including their right to access public funds) will continue until the Home Office make a decision on their application for ILR. However, women who have leave as a fiancée, student or worker, or are European Economic Area nationals from outside the UK cannot apply for this concession (see Home Office, 2019).

Mixed responses from housing teams

Twenty-five of the 136 respondents to the Women's Aid Survivor Voice Survey 2019 had, at some point, asked the housing services at their local authority for emergency accommodation because of domestic abuse.²⁹ These 25 survivors had received mixed responses from the housing teams. Six of them were still in a relationship with the abuser at the time of the survey.³⁰ Under half of these survivors (n=11) had been considered as being in priority need (11 were not considered in priority need and three were not sure).³¹

When asked to rate their experiences with their local housing team, the responses from these 25 survivors were again varied, ranging from "terrible" (nine respondents ticked this) to "excellent" (five respondents) – see the table on page 29.

The comments in response to these questions on local housing teams were largely negative, although there were some positive experiences noted. For example, one local housing team representative moved a survivor straight away

.....

29 Or someone had asked on their behalf.

30 Five of the survivors who had left the abuser and had asked their housing team for emergency accommodation also indicated that the relationship had ended over five years ago when guidance and practice around assessing priority need may have been different.

31 In figures from No Woman Turned Away cases in January 2017 – January 2018, 52 out of 97 survivors who had approached their local housing team had been prevented from making a valid homeless application (53.6%). This meant that they were refused assistance with emergency accommodation. (Women's Aid, 2018)

when her abuser called her while she was in the housing team's offices. Two respondents noted that they did receive useful help from their local housing team, but only after third parties got involved (a social worker and a charity advocate).

Examples of negative responses (that demonstrated victim-blaming and survivors not being taken seriously) included survivors who were:

- ▶ not seen as in priority need because of a lack of available evidence: "I didn't have a crime reference number so it didn't matter that the NHS safeguarding team said I was high risk and my case should be heard at MARAC."³²;
- ▶ not seen as a priority because there are no dependent children (see the discussion later on "No dependent children");
- ▶ refused housing assistance until the cost for repairs for damage to the property caused by the perpetrator were paid; and
- ▶ told that, if she left the perpetrator, she would be making herself intentionally homeless.

No dependent children

Several survivors felt that they weren't seen as vulnerable, and therefore not in priority need, because they had no dependent children. Eight of the 11 survivors who were assessed as in priority need had children (the other three did not have children). Five of the 11 survivors who were not seen as in priority need also had children.³³

For one survivor who wants to have children, but doesn't have any, being seen as a lesser priority for this reason was particularly difficult emotionally:

"...acutely painful being childless, and being stuck between domestic violence or street homelessness emphasises how worthless you are seen as childless. I wish there was genuine domestic violence protection for victims in addition to child protection. Vulnerable adults (all domestic violence victims) deserve help too, especially given many are survivors of childhood domestic violence."

ACCESSING EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

"It was very difficult to get housed in emergency accommodation. I had police reports, crime numbers, letters from solicitor and a social worker and support officer that attended meetings with me. I eventually got emergency accommodation in a one-bedroom flat for myself and two children."

"Include all women survivors as priority need for housing, not just those with dependent children."

Respondents to the Survivor Voice Survey 2019

32 A report published by the APPGEH in 2017 stated that: "Providing evidence to prove vulnerability in order to be accepted as being in priority need can be traumatic and near impossible for people who have experienced domestic violence. We heard at our inquiry that local authorities are consistently failing to provide people fleeing from domestic violence with the help they need."

33 Five of the survivors who were not assessed as in priority need did not have children and one survivor indicated that her partner had children, but she did not. In order to calculate this we looked at answers about children by those still in the relationship and answers from those no longer in the relationship about whether they did have dependent children when with their ex (making the assumption that they sought help from the housing team when the relationship ended).

Another survivor wrote that she didn't think domestic abuse (in the absence of any dependent children) was seen as a vulnerability by local housing teams (right).

See Kristen's story on page 22 for a caseworker's perspective on the response to domestic abuse by local housing teams.

“Reality is ‘priority need’ irrelevant whether domestic violence or any other vulnerability, i.e. health, etc. Simply down to whether dependent children or not. Unintentional or intentional homelessness also only relevant on paper. With children under 18 you will be housed. If intentional homeless, less likely long-term social housing admittedly. Domestic violence means nothing to housing in England.”

Were you treated by the housing team (or emergency duty/homelessness team) as being “in priority need”?

Survivor Voice Survey 2019

Response	No. of respondents
No	11
Not sure	3
Yes	11
Total	25

There were no missing data. (25 respondents had applied to their local housing team for emergency accommodation because of domestic abuse.)

How would you describe your experience of going to the housing team (or emergency duty/homelessness team)?

Survivor Voice Survey 2019

Rating	Number of respondents
1. Terrible	9
2. Bad	3
3. Neither good or bad	2
4. Good	6
5. Excellent	5
Total	25

There were no missing data. (25 respondents had applied to their local housing team for emergency accommodation because of domestic abuse.)

A SURVIVOR'S STORY: PATRICIA



When Patricia* left her abusive ex-partner, she moved in with an elderly family member as her temporary home and has to share a bed with her child. Her ex-partner had used emotional, psychological and economic abuse towards her, and she describes this abuse as having **"tipped over into violence"**. Patricia still has contact with her ex through child contact arrangements and the emotional abuse continues, including manipulating their child against her. For Patricia, it is this aspect of the abuse that is most difficult to cope with:

"For me it is the pure emotional abuse that is the worst and hardest to deal with, without a doubt. I can deal with being pushed because that kind of comes to an end when I am away from him."

Patricia was told by the social housing team that she was technically homeless and that she could register for social housing. However, she could only register for the area where she was temporarily living with her relative. Patricia was concerned that the only accommodation on offer in this area was in deprived areas where she would not feel safe living, and she was concerned about her child attending school there. Living in an area that feels safe may be particularly important for survivors of domestic abuse, who are still recovering from the trauma of being abused and living in a home environment of threats and intimidation.

Patricia tried to put in an application for another area a little further away, but she was told she needed to show she had a local connection there (family or friends to support her there). Some friends she knew who were living in that area agreed for their names to be used in her application, but she was told these friends did not meet the criteria to be her support in this region (one had not lived there long enough and there were other reasons). She did tell the social housing team that she was escaping domestic abuse, but this didn't seem to be regarded as very relevant to her application:

"She [social housing representative] just said you can put it in your application and that was it."

Patricia looked into private renting but found that many landlords will not rent to benefits recipients. Patricia commented:

"So I then found myself in the position of saying I would be making an application for housing benefit and I have a [pet] and that pool [of available homes] just emptied really...I kind of realised it is one of those situations now where you are kind of dependent on a friend or a friend of a friend who knows someone who can get you into some housing, you know, rather than going through a letting agency. So I kind of gave that one up."

* Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Patricia describes her current living arrangements (living with an elderly family member) as overcrowded:

“It has affected everyone’s mental health, mine, my family member, my [child’s]...we are all in a temporary making-do situation, in fact it is a stuck situation, you know.”

She says that their cramped living conditions have been difficult for her child who at times has been very angry and shown some challenging behaviour. Patricia says:

“We can’t get in that position where we have a normal life. We can’t have friends over for tea, sleepovers, do those sort of things.”

Reflecting on her housing experiences and those of other survivors she has had contact with, Patricia says:

“I think it’s [housing] a massive issue for women, it is a really big part of it, if they [survivors] had somewhere to go, if they had the help to set up again or more help to get him out, I think we could put an end to it a lot sooner. So I think it is so important this issue [housing]... It is a very desperate place to be.”

“

ACCESSING EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

”

“You can’t privately rent, as they don’t want DSS and pets as well...”

“...I ended up moving home to [relative]. I had nowhere else to go as I was now homeless. While it could have been worse, I lost my entire life I had built by reporting him, he got to keep it all.”

“Staying with family unsure what our future holds, [support organisation] advised I wouldn’t get housing.”

Respondents to the Survivor Voice Survey 2019

Section 4

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

This section explores the role of family and friends in survivors' experiences of housing.

“It’s a struggle and my parents have been really helpful. I couldn’t have done it without their support.”

(Respondent – Survivor Voice Survey 2019)

Many survivors reported relying heavily on the support of friends or family. We have also explored the importance of this support in our previous reports, *The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Economics of Abuse* (Women’s Aid, 2019A) and *Nowhere to Turn, 2019* (Women’s Aid, 2019C). Friends and family had provided survivors with a temporary place to stay, financial help with private rental costs (either as a gift or a loan) or with the costs of furniture for a new home (see Patricia’s story on page 30 and Saskia’s story on page 12).

Some respondents were still living in temporary arrangements with friends or family and were unsure when these arrangements would end. Although survivors expressed gratitude for the kindness shown to them by family or friends, some also found that there were negative aspects to staying with them, including:

- ▶ living in overcrowded conditions, with not every member of the family able to have their own bed;
- ▶ their relative’s or friend’s address being known to the perpetrator who could easily find them in order to continue his abuse; and
- ▶ the negative impact on self-esteem and confidence of having no choice but to go to live with family, which some felt was a backwards step.

HELP FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

“If my parents hadn’t paid the deposit for my current flat and bought me second-hand furniture I wouldn’t have been able to get a private rent.”

“I am very lucky to have a very supportive family and I am currently sleeping on a fold-out mattress in the spare room at my parents’ house.”

“I lived for a short while in a privately rented room as a lodger after I left my abuser, but could not afford the rent as my full time employment was lowly paid. This led directly to my having to quit the job and move across the country to move back in with my parents. It was a massive blow to my confidence, having only just got away from an abuser who told me that I could not cope with work and that I could not afford to live without him.”

Respondents to the Survivor Voice Survey 2019

Many of the survivors who had left an abusive partner in our survey had been able to rely on friends or family for housing support. However, it is important to note that this will not be an option for many other survivors, including those survivors who:

- ▶ have been isolated from friends and relatives by the perpetrator and feel they cannot now turn to them for help;
- ▶ do not have a network of family or friends nearby or even in this country;
- ▶ do not know anyone with the financial means to help them; and
- ▶ have family or friends who are colluding with or supporting the perpetrator.

The latest report from the No Woman Turned Away project highlights the strain that staying with friends and family puts on relationships and the potential for further abuse, with some survivors experiencing violence and exploitation from friends or relatives. Ongoing abuse from the perpetrator post-separation is also frightening for the friends or relatives the survivor is staying with (Women's Aid, 2019C).

HELP FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY



“I was lucky enough that my parents were able to help me buy a new home for me and my children.”

“I am temporarily living with my parents however I will soon be moving into a private rental – I have had to borrow from family and friends to pay the deposit and buy furniture as well as have my [relative] act as a guarantor ... I have received no help with these costs from any government agency – they were happy to simply tick a box saying I live with family and leave me to it.”

“Friend housed me in her home...until I was able to afford rent and deposit on my own flat. I also had to find work during this time so was fully supported financially by her. I imagine I would have moved in with family if my friend hadn't been so kind.”

Respondents to the Survivor Voice Survey 2019

Conclusion



These survivor stories take place against a backdrop of a national housing crisis, where housing is often unaffordable and recorded homelessness has risen (Shelter, 'Rentquake' webpage, accessed Feb 2020, and Shelter, Dec 2019). This crisis is having a significant impact on the availability of housing for women waiting to move on after spending time in refuge services or women fleeing their homes as a result of domestic abuse and looking for a place of safety.

The findings in this report go some way to answering the often asked question, "why doesn't she just leave?" Over two thirds of respondents who were in a relationship with an abusive partner had concerns about future housing options which created a significant barrier to leaving. Some women faced the prospect of leaving a home shared with an abusive partner for another unsafe situation due to a lack of housing options. Some women face additional housing-related barriers to leaving, including migrant women who are not able to access benefits or state assistance with housing, and disabled women who need accessible housing options.

In our survey findings, those survivors who had left the relationship found they faced upheaval and disruption, for themselves and their children, as a result of challenges in finding suitable housing. For them, this became a "price to pay" for leaving and included having to accept sub-standard housing conditions and incurring housing-related debt. One survivor told us that she had to move seven times in the first year after leaving. Others talked about challenging housing conditions and homelessness, including one woman who slept in her car with her children rather than in her temporary accommodation as she felt unsafe there.

Refuge services and other domestic abuse support provision play a vital role in recovery for women fleeing domestic abuse. These life-saving services provide survivors with the practical and therapeutic support needed to

find freedom from abuse. They help expand survivors' "space for action" (Kelly, 2003) and recovery. This support extends to after the survivor has left the relationship. Our research shows survivors often experienced ongoing abuse after separation relating to housing, for example perpetrators used joint mortgages to continue control, or harassed and intimidated survivors while they stayed with family.

Survivors experienced varied responses from local authorities to their requests for emergency accommodation and sometimes found that "gatekeeping" practices prevented them from finding the housing they needed. There are significant barriers to accessing housing for survivors with no dependent children, meaning that "single women" have few safe options. Survivors responding to our survey with no dependent children felt they were seen as a lesser priority.

Survivors seeking accommodation in the private rental sector reported experiencing discrimination from landlords if they were claiming benefits. One survivor told us she went to over 40 letting agents but found no landlords willing to accept benefits.

What needs to happen?

To overcome the barriers that survivors face we need to see a sustainable domestic abuse support sector, access to move-on accommodation and a consistent understanding (from all those working in the housing sector and on housing policy) of what a good, safe housing journey looks like. All survivors need to be able to access safe, suitable housing so that they can safely move on and achieve independence and freedom from abuse. This includes those without dependent children and women without access to benefits and ineligible for support from their local housing team. For this to happen we need the following recommendations to be implemented.

✔ **SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR SPECIALIST REFUGE SERVICES**

Women’s Aid welcomes the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s commitment to establish a legal duty on local authorities to deliver support to survivors of domestic abuse in refuge services and other forms of safe accommodation (see HM Government, March 2020B). The following reforms are needed to ensure this duty delivers a secure future of specialist refuge services who have the expertise to support women and children:

- ▶ There must be clarity that local areas will fund specialist refuge services, not generic accommodation provision which can be unsafe, unsuitable and does not provide the holistic support and safety that survivors and their children need when fleeing abuse.
- ▶ There must be rigorous national oversight to ensure the national network of refuges

can operate safely, accepting referrals from women and children who need to escape across local authority boundaries.

- ▶ Specific safeguards, including ring-fenced funding, must be in place to ensure the sustainability of highly specialised services, including those led ‘by and for’ black and minoritised women.
- ▶ Services must be sustainably resourced to meet the needs of all survivors and their children. Women’s Aid forecasts that the government should invest £173.8 million annually, in ring-fenced funding, to ensure a safe and sustainable national network of refuges (Women’s Aid, 2019D). This is a small fraction of the £66billion that domestic abuse costs our society each year (Oliver et al, 2019).

✔ **PROTECT THE HOUSING RIGHTS OF SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Individuals fleeing domestic abuse should be automatically assumed to be in priority need by their local authority housing team, without the additional postcode lottery of the “vulnerability” test. There should also be a statutory ban on local authorities imposing inappropriate ‘local connection restrictions’ on survivors’ access to refuge services and other forms of housing.

Any existing or future policies on homelessness reduction, and the provision of accommodation,

should be assessed to ensure that they are inclusive of women experiencing domestic abuse, including those with no recourse to public funds.

Temporary accommodation and housing placements must be safe and suitable for survivors, taking into account the impact of trauma, physical safety, additional support needs and the importance of providing women-only spaces.

✔ **IMPROVED RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE PRIVATE RENTAL SECTOR**

Ending discrimination against housing benefits claimants is essential for ensuring survivors are able to practically access the private-rental sector after leaving an abuser. Large numbers of

properties being advertised as “No DSS” or “No benefits” mean that finding somewhere to rent can be very difficult or impossible for a survivor trying to escape an abusive partner.³⁴

.....

34 See Shelter’s campaign “Stopping DSS discrimination” https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/dss

✔ **WELFARE REFORMS ASSESSED FOR THEIR IMPACT ON SURVIVORS**

We recommend the domestic abuse bill 2020³⁵ places a duty on the government to assess all

welfare reforms for their impact on women’s ability to escape domestic abuse.

✔ **A WHOLE HOUSING APPROACH**

Housing, homelessness and domestic abuse are inextricably linked and collaborative working between the sectors is vital. The continued development of a “whole housing approach” to tackling domestic abuse (see DAHA website) must be supported; with a secure funding future for the national network of refuge services at

the core. This approach aims to deliver secure pathways to safe housing for a wide range of survivors and their children. It ensures access to a full suite of housing options, availability of suitable move-on accommodation, and incentives for agencies and organisations to work together more collaboratively.

✔ **CONSISTENT TRAINING AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR HOUSING TEAMS AND STATUTORY AGENCIES**

This training should be led by specialist domestic abuse organisations and include:

- ▶ the gendered nature and impact of domestic abuse;
- ▶ the links between housing, homelessness and domestic abuse;
- ▶ key duties and legislation in relation to housing, homelessness and domestic abuse;
- ▶ the prevalence of ongoing and escalating abuse after separation;

- ▶ the potential risks posed to the survivor and friends/family post-separation, where the survivor is staying with them;
- ▶ effective and safe practice when responding to survivors and perpetrators; and
- ▶ the additional structural barriers facing Black and minoritised women, disabled women and women who do not have access to public funds as a result of their immigration status.

It is vital that the housing policies and practices of local authorities and central government recognise that domestic abuse is a housing issue. Government (local and central) housing policies and strategies must prioritise the needs

of survivors and their children and give survivors suitable and safe housing options. Without these, as one woman told us, survivors can find themselves in “...a very desperate place to be.”

.....
35 Introduced in the House of Commons on 5 March 2020.

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Appendix

Survivor Voice Survey 2019: The respondents

136 survivors responded to the Women's Aid Survivor Voice Survey 2019

Sex/gender of respondents

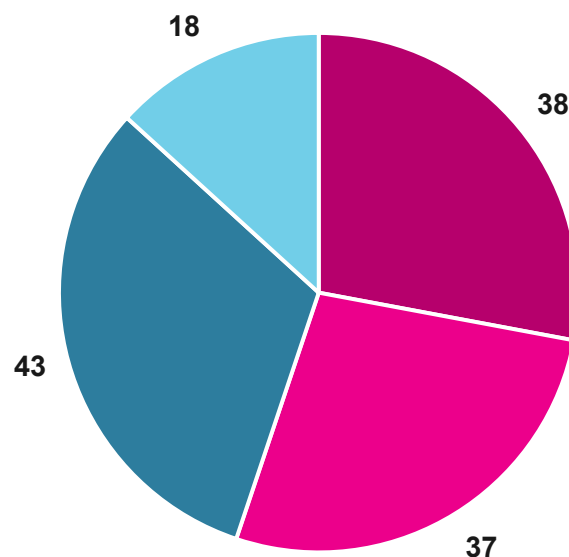
135 out of the 136 respondents told us that they would describe themselves as a woman, one respondent did not answer this question. As the survey was promoted on a women-only forum as a survey for female survivors of domestic abuse we have assumed that all respondents were women.

No one identified as trans/transgender or as having a trans history, although two respondents did not answer this question.

Relationship status

98 of the 136 respondents were no longer in a relationship with an abusive partner and, as shown in the chart below, there were variations in when the relationship had ended. 38 respondents were still in an intimate relationship with an abuser. There were no missing data for this question.

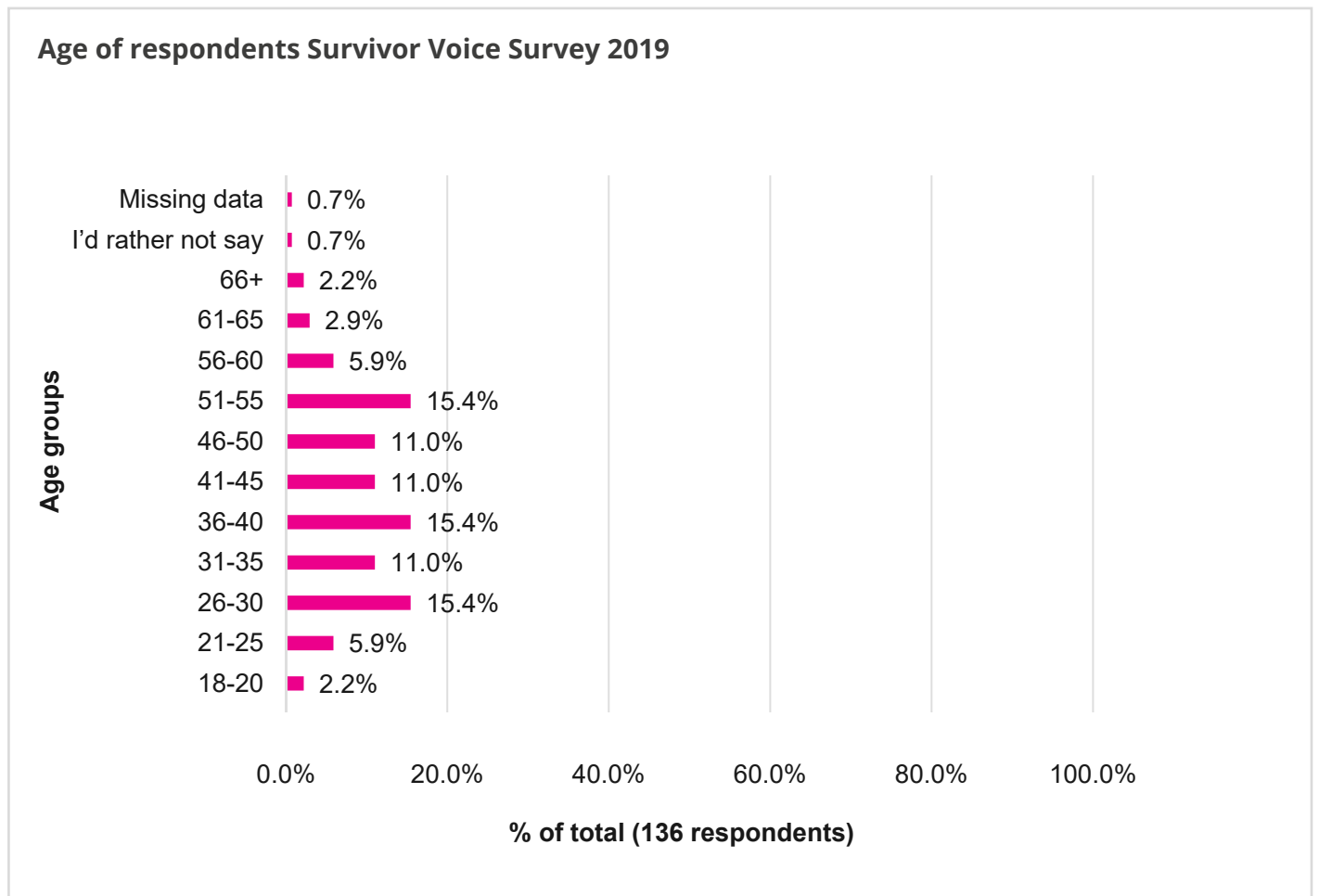
Are you are still in a relationship with an abusive partner? Survivor Voice Survey 2019



- I am still in a relationship with an abusive partner
- The relationship with an abusive partner ended less than a year ago
- The relationship with an abusive partner ended one to five years ago
- The relationship with an abusive partner ended longer than five years ago

Age

Respondents were from a range of age groups, from 18-20 years to 66+ years, as shown in the chart below.



Disability/long-term health issue

3.7% of our sample described themselves as having a disability, 19.9% as having a long-term health issue and a further 7.4% as having both a disability and long-term health issue. See the table below.

Disability or long-term health issue - Survivor Voice Survey 2019		
	Responses	% of total
Yes, I have a disability	5	3.7%
Yes, I have a long-term health issue	27	19.9%
Yes, I have a disability and a long-term health issue	10	7.4%
No, neither	92	67.6%
Prefer not to say	2	1.5%
Missing data	0	0.0%
Total	136	100.0%

Sexual orientation

The majority of respondents (86.8%) described themselves as heterosexual/straight, 10 respondents identified as bisexual, four respondents as asexual and two respondents as lesbian (or homosexual/a gay woman). See the table below.

Sexual orientation of respondents - Survivor Voice Survey 2019		
	Responses	% of total
Asexual	4	2.9%
Bisexual	10	7.4%
Homosexual/gay man	0	0.0%
Homosexual/gay woman/lesbian	2	1.5%
Heterosexual/straight	118	86.8%
Pansexual	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	2	1.5%
Other (please specify)	0	0.0%
Missing data	0	0.0%
Total	136	100.0%

Ethnicity

The majority of respondents were from a White English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British ethnic background (79.4%), with 91.8% respondents being from any White ethnic group. 1.4% of respondents were from any Asian/Asian British background, 0.7% were from any Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British background and 5.2% were from any Mixed/multiple ethnic group.¹ See the table below.

We are concerned that our self-selecting sample does not reflect the ethnic diversity of domestic abuse survivors in England and, in particular, we may not be able to adequately identify the housing issues and barriers facing Black and minoritised women from our survey responses. Where possible, in our discussion of survey findings we have introduced research from other sources that explores some of the experiences of Black and minoritised survivors.

Ethnicity of respondents - Survivor Voice Survey 2019		
	Responses	% of total
Asian/ Asian British Bangladeshi	1	0.7%
Asian/ Asian British Chinese	0	0.0%
Asian/ Asian British Indian	0	0.0%
Asian/ Asian British Pakistani	1	0.7%
Any other Asian/Asian British background	0	0.0%
Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British African	1	0.7%
Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British Caribbean	0	0.0%
Any other Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British background	0	0.0%
Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups White and Asian	2	1.5%
Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups White and Black Caribbean	0	0.0%
Any other Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups background	5	3.7%
White English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British	108	79.4%
White Irish	4	2.9%
White Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1	0.7%
Any other White background	12	8.8%
Other ethnic group - Arab	0	0.0%
Any other ethnic group	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%
Missing data	1	0.7%
Total	136	100.0%

1 0.7% were missing data. Due to rounding errors, these percentages of combined groups will not quite add up to 100%.

Sex/gender of perpetrators

The majority of women responding to our survey had experienced domestic abuse perpetrated by men. 86.0% told us that the perpetrator of abuse was a man; a further 3.7% told us that they had experienced intimate partner abuse from multiple perpetrators, all male. For details, see the table below.

Sex/gender of perpetrators - Survivor Voice Survey 2019		
	Responses	% of total
A man	117	86.0%
A woman	4	2.9%
Other (non-binary/not male or female)	0	0.0%
Multiple abusers (all male)	5	3.7%
Multiple abusers (all female)	0	0.0%
Multiple abusers (male and female)	9	6.6%
Do not wish to say	0	0.0%
Other	0	0.0%
Missing data	1	0.7%
Total	136	100.0%

Multiple abusers

36.0% of respondents told us that they also experienced abuse from anyone other than their partners or ex-partners. See the table below. The comments from those who had experienced abuse from multiple perpetrators included remarks on being abused by previous intimate partners, from their own families including their parents (some indicated that this was during childhood) and their own children, their ex/partner's families, friends (their ex/partners' friends or their own friends), organisations that were victim-blaming and healthcare professionals.

Did you also experience abuse from anyone other than your partner/ex-partner? - Survivor Voice Survey 2019		
	Responses	% of total
Yes	49	36.0%
No	87	64.0%
Missing data	0	0.0%
Total	136	100.0%

Children

Just over half (48.5%, n=66) of all survey respondents currently have children. Just under half (n=45) of respondents who were no longer in a relationship with an abusive partner currently have children (42 of them had children living with them, for three respondents their children were not living with them). Twenty-one of the 38 respondents who are still in a relationship with an abusive partner had children; all but one had their children living with them.

Do you currently have children?

(Responses from survivors no longer in relationship with abusive partner, n=98)

Survivor Voice Survey 2019

	Responses	% of 98 survivors no longer in relationship with abusive partner
No - I don't have children under 18	48	49.0%
Other	3	3.1%
Prefer not to say	2	2.0%
Yes - living with me	42	42.9%
Yes - not living with me	3	3.1%
Missing data	0	0.0%
Total	98	100.0%

Do you currently have children?

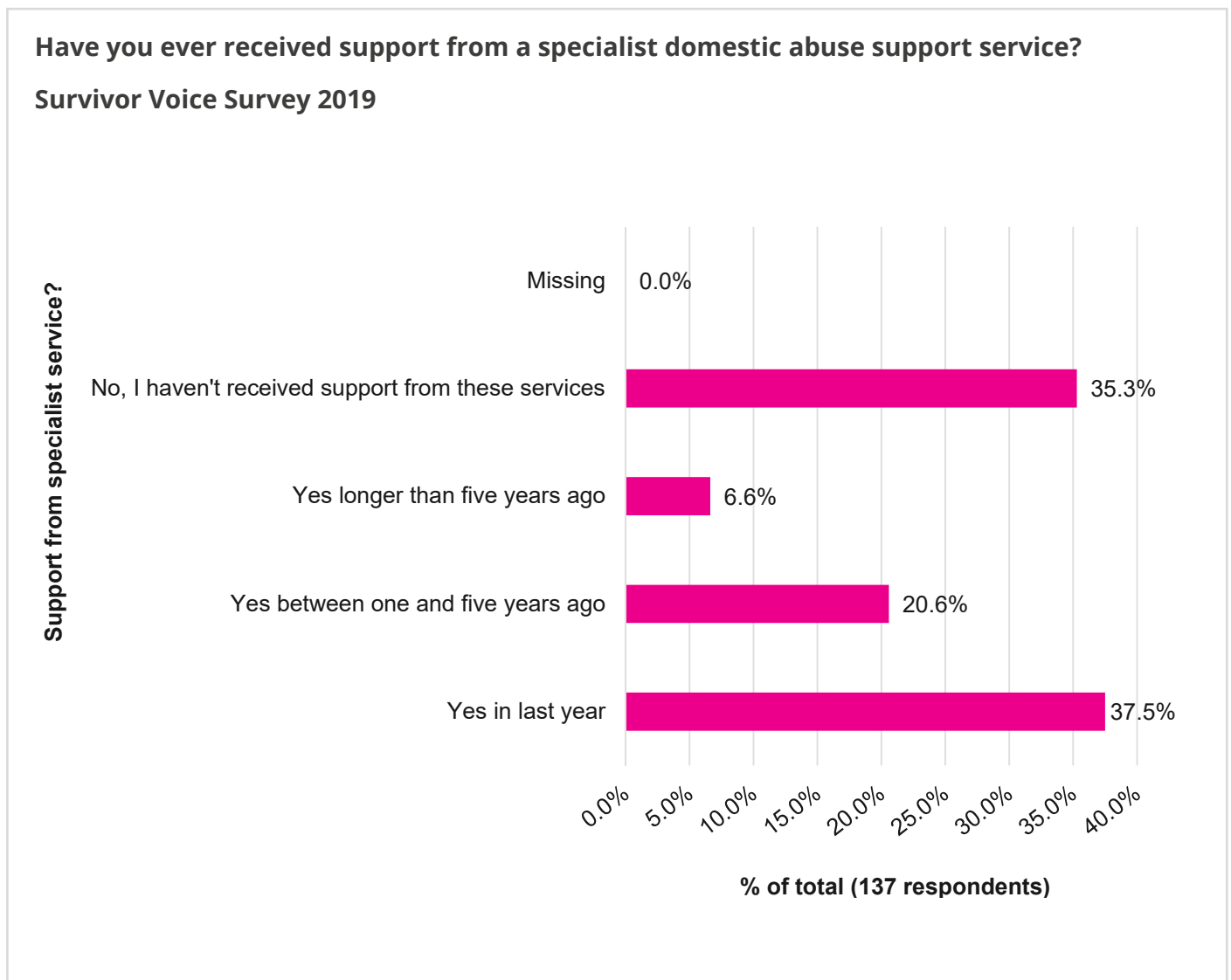
(Responses from survivors who are in a relationship with abusive partner, n=38)

Survivor Voice Survey 2019

	Responses	% of 38 survivors still in a relationship with an abusive partner		Responses	% of 21 survivors still in a relationship with an abusive partner who had children
	Do you currently have children?			Do your children live with you?	
No	17	44.7%	No	1	4.8%
Yes	21	55.3%	Yes	20	95.2%
Missing data	0	0.0%	Missing data	0	0.0%
Total	38	100.0%	Total	21	100.0%

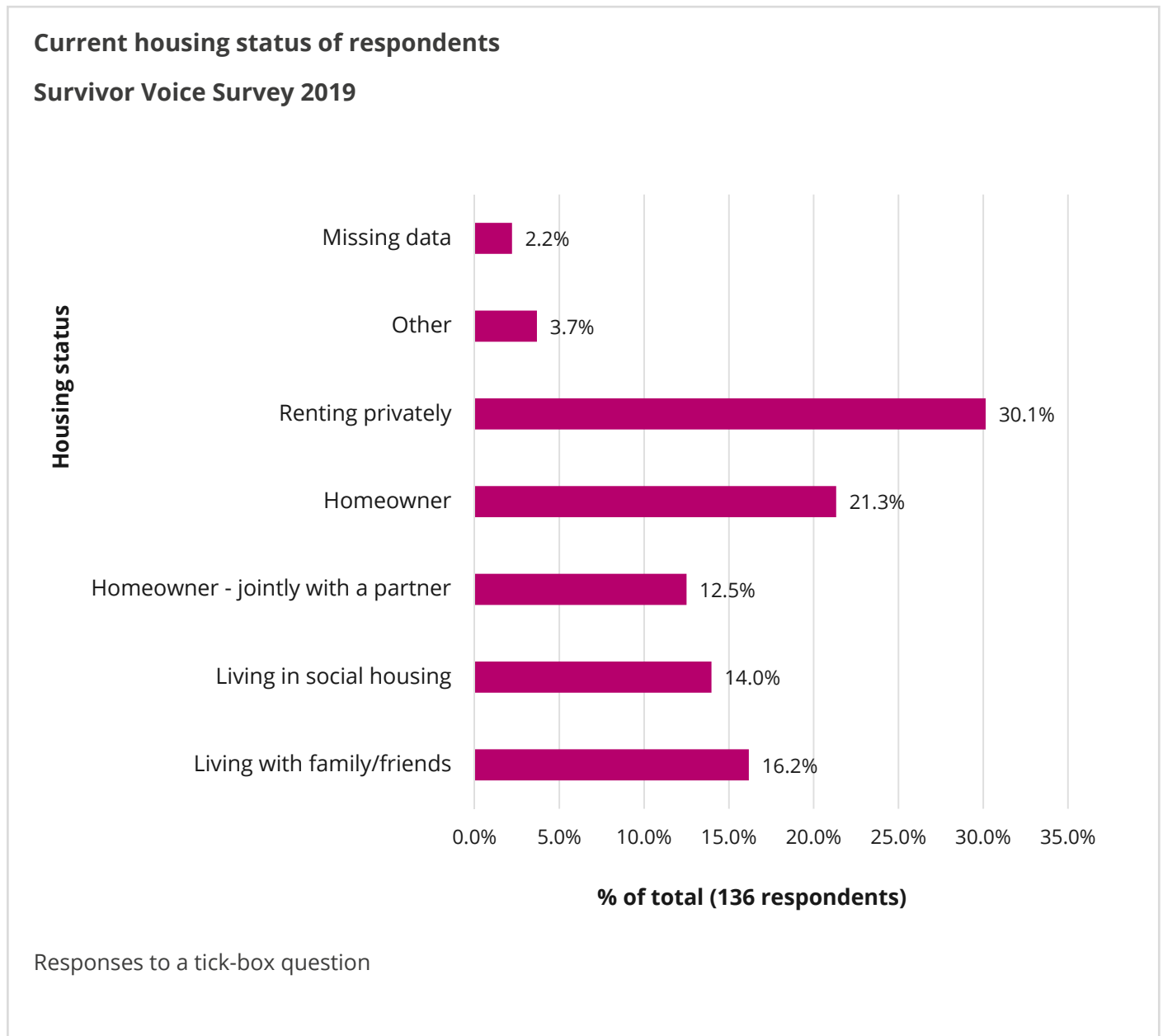
Accessing specialist domestic abuse support services

64.7% of respondents had received support from a specialist domestic abuse support service (see chart below for when this support was accessed). 35.3% had never received support from these specialist services.



Current housing status

As shown in the chart below, the current housing status of respondents was varied. The most popular option chosen was “renting privately” (30.1%).



The Domestic Abuse Report 2020: The Hidden Housing Crisis

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