

Why survivors need specialist domestic abuse services



Specialist domestic abuse services

Specialist women's domestic abuse services are specifically designed to support survivors - their **core business** is to help women and children impacted by abuse & other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

When compared with generic services, these organisations offer higher quality services, as they operate within a **framework of recognised best practice and accredited standards**, which provide benchmarks for training, quality and safeguarding.

These services don't just 'add value' to local communities, but relieve the burden of domestic abuse on public services. Run by women's organisations, they are staffed by trained experts who provide holistic support - including housing advocacy and counselling to ensure survivors can rebuild their lives.

Specialist 'by and for' services

These services are run '**by and for**' the communities they serve such as **Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women, and LGBTQ+**, whereby service users are reflected in staffing and governance structures.

While barriers to accessing support are shared across communities, some factors are exacerbated by additional needs or protected characteristics. 'By and for' services have the expertise needed to understand the **intersectional identities** of, and **tackle the barriers** faced by, women from these communities.

78% of Black and minoritised survivors who accessed 'by and for' services, feel safer, compared to 48% of Black and minoritised women who accessed another kind of service.

(Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Policy Report, 2022)

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Your service is like a blanket - when I walked through the door, I felt safe, warm and protected.

- Service user, Al-Hasaniya



Case Study

In 2008, Southall Black Sisters (SBS) took Ealing Council to the high court after Ealing Council withdraw funding arguing that cohesion could only be achieved by awarding grants to organisations providing 'services equally to all within the borough'.

However, Lord Justice Moses ruled against the council's decision to cut funding to SBS in favour of a generic service.

The judgement said that there is "no dichotomy between the promotion of equality and cohesion and the provision of specialist services to an ethnic minority."

The distinction between 'general' and 'specialist services' is explicitly recognised in international law, under Article 18 of the Istanbul Convention.

Unlike generic services, these services are **independent from the state** and have been created on an independent grassroots level **by women and for women, and children**, often in response to the particular needs of their area.



Specialist services are **needs-led** and **gender-responsive**, whose staff are equipped with an **in-depth intersectional** understanding of domestic abuse and how wider social factors drive patterns of VAWG, such as:

- Sex
- Sexuality
- Gender identity
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Class
- Religion
- Belief
- Ability

Supporting the commissioning of specialist services

Best practice commissioning

Accurately assess the level and types of domestic abuse need. And identify any gaps!



Ensure there is support available for all survivors, with appropriate provision for Black and minoritised survivors



Even the playing field for domestic abuse tenders



Home Office commissioning toolkit

"Many survivors do not report experiences of violence and abuse to statutory agencies so information from specialist organisations, including 'by and for' services, is critical to building understanding."

"Specialist services and refuges must be commissioned using the 'by and for model' that reflects the communities they're supporting."

"Avoid tenders with specific requests for a single large provider and insufficient time for the delicate work of consortia/partnership forming. Tenders that require bidders to be in a very strong financial position also limits the ability of smaller services to put in bids."

For further help and guidance, email us at: domesticabuseact@womensaid.org.uk