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**Children and Domestic Violence in Rural Areas:
A child-focused assessment of service provision**

Helen Stalford, Helen Baker and Fiona Beveridge

The Countryside Agency

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About the authors

The Countryside Agency commissioned Save the Children to undertake this research.

Helen Stalford, Helen Baker and Fiona Beveridge conducted this research project between March and November 2002. They are all based in the Liverpool Law School, University of Liverpool. If you would like to contact the authors directly about the research, please telephone 0151 794 2816 or email them through the Law School website: www.liverpool.ac.uk/law

Forewords

The increase in reported incidents of domestic violence in recent years has improved awareness and understanding of this difficult issue and is helping to remove the cloak of secrecy surrounding the issue. However, this places greater emphasis on the response from a wide range of service providers, many of whom struggle to sustain appropriate levels of support, resources and care.

In rural areas, these problems are compounded by the difficulties many of those in need have in gaining access to help, information and support. Lack of transport, physical isolation and the ‘stigma’ associated with domestic problems can be harder to overcome in a rural area and make an unbearable situation worse. Providing necessary services is even more challenging in a rural environment and sometimes can lead to poor systems of support and care to the most vulnerable people, who are often in dangerous and damaging situations.

This pioneering research explores domestic violence from children and young people’s perspective within this rural framework and

uncovers a significant gap in the provision of care and support. It highlights the cross-cutting implications for education, health and welfare and considers the potential damage caused by failure to respond. It also demonstrates the vulnerability of rural young people, where there is evidence of higher rates of suicide and a greater likelihood of being placed on the ‘at risk’ register than many of their urban counterparts.

This report sends a timely reminder to practitioners, service providers and policy-makers at all levels to think about how policies and initiatives aimed at responding to domestic violence can best meet rural needs and circumstances, and to consider how agencies can work in partnership to respond most effectively in rural areas. Most of all, though, it emphasises the importance of listening to rural children and young people to find out exactly what they need to help them overcome the difficulties they face.

Margaret Clark
Director
The Countryside Agency

Children are often the hidden victims of domestic violence and this research aimed to change that by uncovering, from a child's perspective, the consequences of domestic violence in rural areas.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK Government in 1991, children have the right to be heard as a basic entitlement (article 12). Throughout this research we have endeavoured to make this right a reality for children living in rural areas and we feel privileged to have had the opportunity to listen to children describing experiences which have had such significance in their lives.

This report provides valuable information for policy makers and service providers alike. With the help of children and practitioners we have highlighted the necessary action that is required to ensure that domestic violence support services are developed in ways which are child-focused, joined up and responsive to the real needs of children and young people. We hope that this will provide a springboard for action to improve the current situation.

John Errington
England Programme Director
Save the Children UK

I Executive summary

Background

The Countryside Agency commissioned Save the Children to manage this research. It aims to explore the nature and extent of domestic violence support provision for children and young people living in rural areas in England, to identify examples of good practice, and to highlight implications for policy, practice and improvements in the provision of domestic violence services. It responds to an identifiable research and policy vacuum relating to domestic violence services for children and young people living in rural areas.

Aims of research

The aims of this research are:

- principally and distinctively, to enable children and young people who experience domestic violence in rural areas to identify and articulate their own specific service needs
- to evaluate the service response to these needs and identify any discernible gaps in provision
- to identify implications for policy and practice changes at local, regional and national levels.

Methodology

The research project was conducted in three principal stages over a period of approximately eight months in 2002.

Stage 1: Detailed review of the research, legal and policy framework underpinning domestic service

provision for children and young people in rural areas.

Stage 2: The distribution of a postal and email questionnaire to 300 service providers nationwide, of which 29 were returned completed. The low response rate can be attributed in part to the saturation of domestic violence services with questionnaires and is reflected in other similar research studies.

Stage 3: Consultation with 19 children and young people between the ages of 5 and 16, and 5 parents, about their experiences of domestic violence service provision in a rural context. They were accessed primarily through refuges in Warwickshire, Lancashire and Herefordshire. This stage also included consultation with 39 key service providers in Warwickshire, Lancashire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, including representatives from the refuge, health, criminal justice, education, social services, housing and non-governmental organisation (NGO) sectors.

The methodology applied for the project was heavily centred around eliciting children and young people's views of services. However, consultation with service providers was conducted prior to interviews with children and young people to identify potential gatekeepers and gain an overview of domestic violence support services for children. Access to children and young people was in general restricted by the understandable concern of gatekeepers about how the child's welfare might be affected and by the transient, often short-term, nature of refuge life.

Overview of research findings

The findings indicate that there is an acute gap in provision for children and young people in virtually every service area we examined. Our analysis considers these gaps in the context of eight key themes.

Access to and awareness of domestic violence services

Access and awareness are clearly central to the effective provision and receipt of domestic violence services. While significant strides have been made to raise public awareness of what domestic violence actually is and to facilitate access to help, these endeavours have predominantly targeted women rather than children and young people. Clearly, the launch of charitable services such as Childline has raised the profile of children's needs in this respect and they provide a vital, accessible source of help and advice. There is still, however, insufficient awareness of the range of services available to children and our study indicates a need for service providers to be more proactive in advertising and improving access to their services for children. This is a particular issue in rural areas where limited channels of information significantly restrict both awareness and physical access.

Friends, leisure and social networks

The impact of domestic violence on friendships and social integration featured most prominently in children and young people's accounts. Removal from friends (often very suddenly without an

opportunity to say goodbye or explain their reasons for leaving) was particularly distressing. The abrupt introduction to a new school and social environment makes it difficult, particularly for the older children, to make new friends quickly. The confidentiality policy, which is so essential to refuge life, coupled with a need to keep a low profile following a move, meant that many children and young people found it difficult to forge close friendships or to spend any time with other children and young people outside school hours. This, in addition to the geographical isolation of rural life (particularly if a child has been moved from an urban into a rural environment), can be particularly disengaging.

While these issues are more difficult to address in terms of specific service provision, facilitating access to social clubs, youth groups and other extra-curricular programmes is an important means of engaging children and young people with new networks and enhancing their confidence and sense of self-worth.

An area of concern was the impact of domestic violence on household pets, particularly in relation to the health and safety of pets that children had to leave behind with the perpetrator (because of refuge restrictions, for example). Small charities such as Paws for Kids were identified as fulfilling a vital role in caring for the animals of those whose lives had been disrupted as a result of domestic violence. For farming families, however, the problem is more acute since many women and young people find it impossible to flee a domestic violence situation if it means abandoning their responsibilities towards their farm animals and, indeed, their livelihood.

Refuge services

Refuges are clearly a crucial aspect of domestic violence support. They not only offer women and children a safe, supportive environment away from the perpetrator, but also are an essential gateway to other key services.

The commitment of the staff in refuges is beyond question. Many of them make significant personal sacrifices to provide residents with ongoing care and support. Problems associated with sustaining and building on resources are common to all refuges, and this impacts significantly on the level of provision available for children. The Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE) is a national umbrella organisation which supports a network of 270 refuge organisations (organisations which run one or more refuges), managing an estimated 567 safe houses in England and Wales. WAFE recommends that all refuge organisations that provide accommodation for children should have a playroom and at least two children's support workers to comply with the National Standards for under Eights Day Care, but recent research indicated that many women's refuge organisations do not have adequate funding to do so.

Most support offered to children is in the form of children's one-to-one and group play activities and trips out. These activities provide (particularly younger) children with an opportunity to build up trust with refuge staff, but also with an essential diversion from the trauma associated with domestic violence and the upheaval of moving. There is a clear gap, however, in provision addressing the specific needs of

teenagers in the refuge, whether it is an appropriate, more grown-up activity or homework space, tailored counselling or anger-management sessions. This, coupled with the lack of activities available for young people in rural areas more generally, can exacerbate their sense of social and emotional dislocation.

Education of children

Education, both formal and otherwise, is central to children's experience and understanding of domestic violence. Our snapshot of children and young people's experiences suggests a correlation between direct experience of domestic abuse and children's progress at school. This often leads to significant learning difficulties and/or behavioural problems.

Most mainstream schools have yet to equip themselves with the necessary expertise to accommodate children who are displaying educational or behavioural problems because of domestic violence. More focused measures need to be put in place, therefore, not only to assist the child, but also to improve teachers' understanding of domestic violence issues and, ultimately, their chances of identifying children who are experiencing domestic violence.

A number of respondents also reported problems of gaining initial access to schools (particularly secondary schools) when domestic violence had resulted in geographic relocation. In many cases, it could be a number of months before a school place was secured, with significant social and academic consequences for the young person.

Respondents associated many of the access problems with lengthy, over-bureaucratic procedures. Many schools have concerns about the perceived impact that taking in 'problem' children would have on exams and performance ratings, existing problems of overcrowding and the perceived likelihood of the child moving again in the near future.

Housing children and young people who experience domestic violence

Housing is a key area of concern for women and children who experience domestic violence, which so often necessitates them moving out of the home, in spite of existing legal mechanisms to remove the perpetrator. Assistance with benefits and local authority housing applications is readily available to those who move into refuge accommodation in the first instance, since refuges generally have established contacts within the housing authority and knowledge of local one-stop-shops. It is more difficult, however, for those faced with making these arrangements independently.

Efforts have been made at statutory and governmental level to improve services and raise awareness of the housing needs of those affected by domestic violence. The Homelessness Act 2002, for instance, places an obligation on local authorities to afford priority to those who have become homeless unintentionally, reinforcing pre-existing obligations in respect of those who experience housing problems as a result of domestic violence. Furthermore, the government has issued comprehensive guidelines within its

Supporting People programme as to how services can provide a more effective, co-ordinated response to providing emergency and more long-term accommodation in cases of domestic violence.

Although such developments are to be welcomed, they primarily target the situation of women, with only cursory reference to the specific housing needs of children and young people. Not surprisingly, therefore, our research reveals that women and children escaping domestic violence face continuing problems in accessing appropriate, *child-friendly* housing.

Health and welfare

This aspect of the research considered the emotional and physical health and welfare of children and young people who experience domestic violence. The findings indicate an emphasis in service provision on the physical well-being of the child, often within the remit of existing child protection policy. Furthermore, there was a widespread perception held by many mothers that social services' involvement in domestic violence situations would lead to their children being taken away. This clearly discourages many mothers from seeking help at an early stage.

Health professionals in particular, by the very remit of their work and their capacity to access vulnerable groups, provide a potentially invaluable means of reaching children and young people who are experiencing domestic violence.

Less acknowledged within these services are the needs of children who have been emotionally damaged through *witnessing* domestic violence. Much of the work in this respect is absorbed by the voluntary sector, by refuge staff, or – on a much more informal basis – by family members and friends. While youth-led support networks and counselling services such as that provided by Relate are now being promoted, the research indicated a significant gap in counselling provision for younger children between the ages of five and eleven.

Outreach services

Outreach services are an essential means of bringing domestic violence services to otherwise ‘invisible’ and inaccessible children and young people. The need is even greater in rural areas where access to and availability of domestic violence services are so limited. Our study revealed significant variations, both between different service sectors and within a given service sector, in the nature and extent of outreach provision. For instance, the availability of refuge outreach is, like so many other aspects of refuge provision, contingent upon the level of funding and staff resources available to that refuge. Much of the outreach work was therefore concerned with ex-residents’ aftercare. It was largely negotiated on an informal basis, often at the instigation of the child who would make a point of visiting the refuge on a weekly or monthly basis following his or her departure.

The varied nature of formal outreach work clearly demands effective and ongoing inter-agency

co-operation to ensure that the child’s needs are continually monitored and addressed. Indeed, an inter-agency approach to outreach is viewed as an important means of facilitating and de-stigmatising access to domestic violence support.

Specific problems experienced by teenage boys

Our research highlighted the marginalisation of teenage boys in a number of areas of domestic violence service provision. Refuges are limited in their formal capacity to assist older teenage boys as a result of admission policies and practices. While such policies are, in some cases at least, necessary, they can act as a major disincentive for many women to move into the refuge because they do not wish to be separated from their teenage sons. In cases where the mother does move into refuge accommodation, our research suggests that teenage boys frequently remain at the family home. Alternatively, they may move in with friends or relatives, with limited opportunity to visit their mother or younger siblings. This ‘policy of separation’ could raise a number of concerns in relation to, for example, the health and safety of teenage boys who remain with the perpetrator, their sense of abandonment or of isolation from their mother and other siblings, or perceptions that they might adopt the violent characteristics of the perpetrator. However, it is clear that further research is required to explore the current situation of teenage boys.

At the other end of the spectrum are teenage boys who have exhibited violent or abusive behaviour,

forcing mothers or siblings to flee the family home. We found a common reluctance of mothers to report such incidents to the police, which adds to the complex nature of this problem.

Summary of key implications for policy and practice

Access to and awareness of domestic violence services

- At a national level, strategies for tackling domestic violence should reflect the need for longer-term funding for the development of new domestic violence support services in rural areas. This should be discussed by the Inter-Departmental Group on Domestic Violence and, in turn, be acknowledged and recognised by potential funders (such as *local authorities, NGOs, primary care trusts and charitable trusts*) of domestic violence services.
- *Local authorities* should encourage and facilitate joint service provision or shared facilities (such as *local health or community centres*) as a means of improving access to domestic violence support in rural areas. *Primary care trusts* and *strategic health authorities* could play an important role in supporting and developing such provision.
- Greater use should be made of school premises, leisure centres, etc, where children and young people already go, for the provision of information, advice and support services.
- *The police, children's charities and counselling services* should consider using more innovative methods of reaching children in remote areas,

such as Internet advertising, or art, craft and drama displays in local schools, churches and youth clubs.

- *Domestic violence support services* and *relevant children's charities* (such as those which provide telephone helplines) should be encouraged to develop more innovative and proactive methods of reaching children experiencing domestic violence in rural areas. This may include developing accessible Internet gateways.

Friends, leisure and social networks

- Activities of organisations such as Paws for Kids need to be more widely advertised through the local press, veterinary surgeries and pet shops.
- Further research is needed on the correlation between school bullying and domestic violence.
- Teacher training programmes need to include more standardised and systematic awareness raising on domestic violence issues and the specific vulnerabilities of young people experiencing domestic violence.
- *Local authorities and NGOs* should develop and promote youth-led advocacy and mentoring groups as an effective means of helping young people integrate into a new environment.

Refuge services

- *The Government*, through the Inter-Departmental Group on Domestic Violence, should urgently address the need for statutory funding to enable children's services in refuges to comply with the required staffing ratios and

space standards in order to prevent children's services being reduced or closed down.

- *Schools and refuges* should liaise with one another to provide education and talks to staff and children on refuge life. Through the development of such partnerships and advertising in the media, refuges can help to promote awareness of their service and dispel many of the misconceptions surrounding refuge life.
- Collaboration and closer links should be made between *refuges and external NGOs* and other organisations (such as Relate, Connexions and local community groups) to provide adequate service provision for teenagers who live in refuges.
- *Organisations that support women's refuges* should provide more specific guidance on how to get the best out of the Supporting People policy. Women's *refuges* should also capitalise on opportunities to consult more readily with each other on this issue.
- *Local authorities* should address the needs of children experiencing domestic violence in their local preventative strategies and children's services plans. Core funding needs to be identified for all refuges, including specific support for a children's support worker in every refuge.
- *Refuges* should, wherever possible, identify adequately spaced and furnished rooms for use by young people.

Education of children

- *The Department for Education and Skills (DfES)* should work with a sample of schools to pilot child-held education records for

children experiencing domestic violence and periods of high mobility to ensure the quick exchange of information between local education authorities and schools.

- *Teacher training courses* should include awareness of domestic violence, the effects on children and young people and strategies for identifying and managing the disclosure of domestic violence.
- *Local education authorities* should endeavour to nominate a member of the teaching staff or a peripatetic representative to co-ordinate such activities in the region.
- *Local education authorities, schools and admissions forums* should strengthen communication with local refuges and other domestic violence support services and develop strategies to facilitate children's access to and progress in school.
- *Local education authorities and schools* need to ensure that children whose schooling has been temporarily interrupted as a result of domestic violence are provided with alternative educational resources.
- *Local education authorities, health authorities and social services* should consider developing protocols for sharing information as part of the local preventative strategy while developing a system for the identification, referral and tracking of children and young people.
- *Schools* should incorporate awareness of domestic violence issues more explicitly into the citizenship curriculum at junior and secondary level, both to inform children of what is appropriate behaviour at home and to encourage and support disclosure.

- Further research with children is required to explore the educational experiences of children who reside or have formerly resided in refuges.

Housing children and young people who experience domestic violence

- The *Office of the Deputy Prime Minister* should extend the criteria of the *Supporting People funding* to facilitate the resettlement of, and improve housing security for, children and young people affected by domestic violence. Implementation of the *Supporting People programme* should also be monitored to ensure that it is meeting the needs of children and young people escaping domestic violence.
- *Social services, health workers and housing authorities* should be encouraged to work together to facilitate inter-agency training and communication to raise awareness of the specific housing needs of women and children in the context of domestic violence and to ensure cases involving children are prioritised.
- *Housing authorities* need to liaise with *social services and health workers* to consider the specific needs and safety of children when making decisions about where to re-house families.
- *Housing authorities* should address the need for affordable housing for families who have experienced domestic violence, particularly where the size of families means that refuge provision can be unsuitable.
- *Housing authorities* need to implement effective and consistent mechanisms in collaboration with *social services* for monitoring the housing

needs of women and children who have been re-housed as a result of domestic violence.

Health and welfare

- *Local authority departments (including education and social services, regional health authorities and housing authorities)* need to designate a representative to regularly attend, engage with and report back on the activities of domestic violence forums.
- Specific training should be provided to *health workers* on how to detect and address sensitively cases of domestic violence.
- *Schools, social services and the media* could do much to raise public awareness about the role of social workers to dispel existing preconceptions and to foster a more positive, accessible image.
- NGOs such as Relate need to publicise youth counselling services more so that young people are aware of these services. Additional support for youth-led support and advocacy groups would enable more young people to play a more active part in promoting such services.

Outreach services

- *The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister* should extend the *Supporting People programme* to include funding for the provision of general outreach activities.
- *Police, health workers, legal practitioners, counsellors, domestic violence charities and social services* need to achieve more effective inter-agency co-operation as part of local preventative strategies and through domestic violence forums to explore methods of

providing appropriate and sensitive outreach services for children.

- *Women's refuges* should consider establishing more consistent aftercare services for former refuge residents. Instances of good practice and information on sources of funding for outreach activities should be more readily exchanged and shared between refuges.
- *Social services* should adopt a more proactive approach to tracking children following a move from the refuge or after they have fled from a domestic violence situation. This should be linked to the identification, referral and tracking system that all *local authorities* will be implementing as part of their local preventative strategies.

Specific problems experienced by teenage boys

- Further research is needed with teenage boys, families and professionals to explore the housing provision, options and needs of teenage boys who experience domestic violence.
- *Housing authorities* should ensure that suitable temporary accommodation and permanent rehousing is identified for mothers and teenage boys who are fleeing domestic violence.
- *Housing authorities and social services* should prioritise and monitor the housing needs of teenage boys who do not have access to refuges.

2 Introduction

Background

The Countryside Agency commissioned Save the Children to manage this research. The motivation to conduct an eight-month research project on service provision for children and young people who experience domestic violence in rural areas arose out of a growing awareness of the consequences of rural dwelling for both access to and availability of service provision. This was accompanied by a pragmatic need to extend research on domestic violence to a specifically rural context in order to assess adequately the nature and extent of service need. The distinct situations of rural dwellers and the range of services available to them have been subject to increasing attention in recent years, partially reversing the previous tendency to overlook rural communities in the research and policy arena. Domestic violence is no exception here – there are very few studies that are centred on rural domestic violence (the research of Turner (1997) provides a notable exception). There have been relatively few more general studies where a rural dimension is included even as a comparator. Equally, while multi-agency strategies on domestic violence have become the norm in urban areas, there are few such partnerships which focus exclusively on rural communities.

The situation of rural dwellers and the provision of services in rural communities are examined in *The State of the Countryside 2001* (Countryside Agency, 2001a) and the related regional reports (see, for example, *The State of the Countryside 2001 – the West Midlands* (Countryside Agency, 2001b)). These reports identify some of

the distinctive characteristics of rural communities. Health and educational attainment overall tend to be better than in rural areas, while crime rates are ostensibly lower. Statistics on rural crime, however, fail to reveal the incidence of domestic violence (Aust and Simmons, 2001). It is not clear, for example, whether official statistics recording lower levels of crime in rural areas specifically imply lower levels of domestic violence in these areas. National statistics indicate that domestic violence accounts for more than one quarter of all violent crime.

Access to services in rural areas is generally poorer than in urban situations, and pockets of severe social exclusion exist (NCH Action for Children, undated). Limited transport facilities in addition to scant resources mean that services routinely take a cost-effective approach or try to gain economies of scale by providing services in more populated areas to maximise use.

The starting point for this study, therefore, is the view that, while domestic violence certainly exists in rural areas, there may be specific obstacles to accessing services as a result of living in more geographically remote areas. The consequence is that, by being situated on the geographic periphery, children and young people who experience domestic violence also remain on the periphery in terms of social and service provision:

The problems of domestic violence are exacerbated by rural isolation, the negative effects impacting upon service users and providers alike. Small, scattered populations, close-knit

communities, poverty and poor access to services and transport serve to isolate victims. Groups working for women experiencing domestic violence face higher costs and difficulties in having their work accepted by self-sufficient communities. Outreach workers operating alone encounter greater personal risk and professional isolation (Hicks, 1999, p 19).

A further important motivation for the research is grounded in Save the Children's commitment to involve children more actively in research processes as a means of engaging them in evaluating policy which directly affects them. The majority of research on domestic violence, both academic and non-academic, focuses predominantly on the experiences and consequences of domestic violence among women in intimate heterosexual relationships. The direct experiences of children and young people have, in the past, been largely overlooked or recounted from an adult perspective. As McGee states:

Although research is frequently carried out on children and young people, they are not so commonly directly involved and asked for their own views of their experiences. Instead researchers approach professionals and carers to describe their perceptions of children's experiences... In order to support more effectively children who have experienced domestic violence, it is crucial that we listen to what children themselves have to say, both about their experiences and the types of intervention they believe would be most useful (2000, p 14).

Fortunately, the impact of domestic violence on children is beginning to receive more direct and focused attention at government level, prompted not least by the growing body of research in this area (for some useful examples see the work of Humphreys *et al.*, 2000; Hester, Pearson and Harwin, 2000; Melzak, 1997; Hague *et al.*, 1994; Mullender and Morley, 1994; NCH Action for Children, 1994). This has precipitated a series of governmental consultation exercises with NGOs and service providers working in this area since the late 1990s. The government publication *Living without Fear* provides a notable example of an endeavour to set out a strategic framework for government action aimed at tackling issues of domestic violence (Women's Unit, 1999). This was followed by the 1999 Home Office publication *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, which provides a comprehensive synthesis of research, policy and practice in the area of child protection. In particular, this document sets out the role of different agencies and services and explicitly pinpoints the need for inter-agency collaboration and co-ordination in tackling domestic violence and other forms of abuse and neglect.

This report has been followed by a more recent consultation with NGOs, service providers and policy-makers in 2002/3, designed to culminate in the publication of a series of proposals aimed specifically at preventing domestic violence.

The needs and interests of children and young people have been of particular concern in this process and the emphasis has again been on promoting inter-agency collaboration, the crucial

framework for which is set out in a series of unequivocal legal obligations. Most notable are provisions such as Articles 3¹ and 19² of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the UK in 1991). Also, Articles 3 and 8³ of the European Convention on Human Rights (enshrined in the Human Rights Act, 1998). Provisions of the Children Act 1989, the Family Law Act 1996 and Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴ further underpin our study by seeking to involve children directly in evaluating policy provision and in making recommendations for improvement.

At a national level the UK Government set out its commitment to children and young people with the establishment of the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) in 2000. A new Minister for Young People was appointed and a Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People's Services set up. The role of the CYPU is to support cross-government work on child poverty and youth disadvantage across the 0–19 age range, joining up policy-making and the delivery of services for children and young people across government departments. In *Tomorrow's Future: Building a strategy for children and young people* (CYPU, 2002a) the Unit sets out its foundations for developing the government's overarching strategy. This strategy informed the development of *Learning to Listen: Core principles for the involvement of children and young people* (CYPU, 2002b), which requires every government department to develop an action plan for the involvement of children and young people.

While this high-level activity and formal acknowledgement of the rights of children to be

involved in policy-making is to be welcomed, it appears that there is still some way to go to ensure a clear focus on the specific wishes and needs of children and young people nearer the ground. There is a fairly comprehensive legal framework and focused attention at government level to address the issue of domestic violence through more active consultation with service providers and with individuals who have been affected by domestic violence. The recent BBC series, *Hitting Home* (February/March 2003), provides an effective example of a campaign to raise awareness and promote more open dialogue as to how the law and services can be developed more effectively. There is still relatively modest consideration, however, of the specific needs and experiences of children and young people in this context, attributable largely to a failure to consult with them to the same extent as adults. Hague *et al.* recently produced a guide on developing more effective consultation with users of domestic violence services and how to consult with and involve women more effectively in evaluating service provision (*Professional by Experience: A guide to service user participation and consultation for domestic violence services*, 2002). The guide promises to 'enable the reader to listen more carefully to the views and voices of women experiencing domestic violence and to respond effectively'. This approach is clearly crucial but should equally be extended to engage children and young people more directly and genuinely in this process as 'professionals by experience'. This research represents a modest endeavour to contribute to this process as a means of obtaining a clearer insight into the many issues facing children and young people who experience domestic violence in rural areas.

Aims of the study

The main aims of the study can be summarised as follows:

- To fill an identifiable gap in research about the impact of domestic violence on children living specifically in rural areas.
- To explore the nature and extent of domestic violence service provision in rural areas specifically targeting children and young people.
- To determine whether or not rural dwelling impacts upon access to and awareness of service provision for children and young people who experience domestic violence.
- To identify examples of good practice in the provision of domestic violence service provision in rural areas.
- To highlight key implications for policy and practice at local, regional and national level.
- To apply and develop a ‘grounded’, participatory approach to domestic violence research involving children and young people as research participants, whose views would inform our conclusions about implications for policy and practice.

Explanation of terms

Domestic violence. There is no single official definition of domestic violence as it is not a specific statutory offence under criminal law. Many definitions (including that applied since 1999 by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary) have failed to include the experiences of children, being confined instead to physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse between current or former (adult)

partners. For the purposes of this research domestic violence is defined in accordance with Home Office guidelines as ‘controlling behaviour [including] all kinds of physical, sexual and emotional abuse within all kinds of intimate relationships’ (*Living Without Fear*, Women’s Unit, 1999). The research includes within the definition, therefore, the child who experiences physical, emotional or financial abuse directly as well as the child who sees or hears the physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse of a person with whom he or she has a domestic relationship.

Rural is defined in accordance with Countryside Agency guidelines, which include within their remit areas populated by less than 10,000 inhabitants. However, it was not possible or realistic to approach this research with any quantitative definition in mind. Respondents and interviewees made their own judgements about whether their work involved rural areas and/or was adapted to rural circumstances. Thus, for the purposes of this research ‘rural’ is determined on the basis of common sense judgements in the light of population size and geographical location.

The **services** evaluated in this research are predominantly concerned with the provision of assistance for women and children in crisis. The focus is largely, therefore, on domestic violence services offered by refuge, health, criminal justice, social services, housing and NGOs in an emergency context. Some effort has been made to consider the more general, preventative role of services such as education.

The term ‘**refuge organisations**’ refers to any organisation managing one or more refuges, as

opposed to national umbrella or network organisations such as the Women’s Aid Federation of England and who provide support and information services to affiliated refuges.

Summary of research methodology

For a detailed description of the research methodology and some of the ethical considerations involved in research of this nature, please refer to Appendix 1.

Stages

The research was conducted in three key stages.

Stage One. Literature review and service ‘mapping’ to explore the rural dimension of domestic violence and identify gaps in research and service provision

Stage Two. Distribution of 300 postal and email questionnaires to key service providers and practitioners nation-wide, of which 29 were returned.⁵ A summary report detailing the findings of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2.

Stage Three. Interviews and consultations with 19 children and young people, 5 parents and 39 service providers.

Accessing children and young people

The research initially set out to interview children and young people in rural Warwickshire.⁶ However, the geographical remit was later extended to Herefordshire, Lancashire and Worcestershire for the purpose of identifying a

greater number of potential participants. While refuge staff were generally willing to act as gatekeepers to publicise the research, when mothers and children were approached they were less willing to take part in the study, which meant that access to children and young people took longer than anticipated.⁷

Consulting with children and young people

Number of Children aged 5 to 16 Consulted	
Boys	Girls
9	10

Most of the interviews took place on a one-to-one basis and consisted of unstructured discussions, the production of artwork and the use of vignettes.⁸ Four of the children provided written feedback and chose not to be interviewed. All of the children who took part in the research received a £5 gift voucher as a ‘thank you’ for their participation. Some young people were invited to become more involved in reporting on the findings and dissemination. One teenage respondent continued to help with identifying the main issues to cover in the report.

Presentation of findings

The following sections present the research findings, together with key implications for policy and practice. The findings are presented in the context of eight principal themes.

Section 3 considers issues around access to and awareness of service provision for children who

experience domestic violence. It examines access to services in rural areas, the role of gatekeepers in enabling services to reach children in need, and the importance of inter-agency co-operation in facilitating access. This section moves on to consider the extent to which children and young people are aware of the services available to them.

Section 4 explores the impact of domestic violence on children and young people's friendships and social integration, particularly following a move to a new, unfamiliar environment. It considers in particular the specific social challenges of moving to or from a rural environment.

Section 5 evaluates refuge service provision targeting children and young people. It looks first of all at the availability of refuges, the nature of assistance they offer beyond simply providing a safe house and the extent to which they provide an important gateway to other key services. This section focuses in particular on the level of provision offered to children and young people living in refuges.

Section 6 moves on to explore the impact of domestic violence on children and young people's education. It discusses in particular how domestic violence can affect their ability to learn, to settle in at school or even to access new schools following a move. The section also considers how schools respond to domestic violence: the extent to which they provide an environment for informing children more generally about these issues and about how to access help.

Section 7 reports on the issue of housing for

women and children fleeing a domestic violence situation. It considers some of the problems they face in obtaining appropriate accommodation and the extent to which local housing authorities are fulfilling their statutory obligations in this regard.

Section 8 examines the nature and extent of health and welfare provision for children and young people who experience domestic violence. This includes an analysis of the key role played by health professionals and social workers in identifying and providing ongoing support to them. The section also considers the extent of provision to address the emotional and psychological effects of domestic violence on children and discusses the role of voluntary and other organisations in providing effective help.

Section 9 looks at outreach provision for children and young people in the specific context of refuge services and rural dwelling.

Section 10 discusses the specific challenges facing teenage boys who experience domestic violence. It reports on the impact of refuge admission and housing policies on this group of young people. It also reports on the extent to which teenage boys who are affected by domestic violence are perceived as eventual 'transmitters of violence'.

NOTES

1 This provides that 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'.

2 This provision requires all States to 'take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child

from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardians(s) or any other person who has the care of the child’.

3 These provide a general right to protection from torture or inhuman or degrading treatment and a right to respect for private and family life respectively.

4 This requires states to ‘assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’.

5 The appended methodology provides some reasons for the low response rate.

6 The Save the Children office co-ordinating the project was located in Sandwell and had already established contacts with local refuges which had expressed a willingness to act as gatekeepers. The limited time period available for the research also restricted the capacity to conduct interviews in too wide a geographical area.

7 For a more detailed discussion of the reasons for this, please refer to the appended methodology.

8 For the vignettes, the children were provided with a story of a typical domestic violence situation and asked to advise the young person in the story.

3 First steps: access to and awareness of services

I'd say, 'Go back, but try and avoid him like I've been trying to do with my dad and, if you see him, run. Run to the police station or something and say, "Look, I have to get away from this violent man, me and my mum, and he's found us again"' (Advice of one teenager for another, discussing a fictional domestic violence situation).

Often during the course of an abusive relationship women and children will approach a number of different agencies or services for help. The process of seeking help is mainly instigated by women on behalf of themselves and their children. McGee (2000) reports that this often involves contact with up to ten agencies on a number of occasions before appropriate help is finally obtained. Our research confirmed this and pointed to a high level of inter-service referrals, with many questionnaire respondents, for example, indicating that they regularly referred service users to three or more other service providers (see Appendix 2). These agencies have a vital role to play in empowering women and children to leave abusive situations and in preventing further abuse. It is crucial, therefore, to assess how accessible these services are and the extent to which children are aware of them. It is important to note that children, as much as the women themselves, may find it incredibly difficult to take even the smallest step towards seeking help.

Saunders *et al.* note:

It may seem surprising at first glance that so many children find it almost impossible to ask for help... [since] they are often... trapped in a domestic environment which is constructed around secrecy and lies. Children witness lies and secrecy as a normal part of everyday life and are

participants in that process. Constantly denying the reality of their day-to-day lives deepens for children, their sense of isolation and of being trapped. Like children who are [directly] abused, children who have disclosed violence in the home face disbelief and denial. The result can drive them further into isolation, making them increasingly sceptical about the possibility of being helped (1995, pp 54–5).

Accessing services in rural areas

Service provision, and access to services, are major issues in rural areas (Countryside Agency, 2001c). Problems of access are exacerbated by the simple lack of services in more remote areas and the lack of public transport to enable people to get to services in urban areas. Thus in the west Midlands, for example, many rural dwellers find it more difficult than urban dwellers to access basic services such as doctors' surgeries, schools, shops, banks, community centres and social services, though the gap is less marked for those with greater mobility or with private modes of transport. For those without transport choice, including the elderly and the young, disadvantage is greatest and may even be increasing (Countryside Agency, 2001b).

The solution may not lie, however, in simply establishing such services in these areas. Indeed, the research reveals a general reluctance for rural dwellers to access help in their locality because of the lack of anonymity in close-knit communities. The Countryside Agency (2002a) also notes how confidentiality can impact on the decision of women experiencing domestic violence to access services.

Refuge workers in rural Herefordshire and Lancashire observed:

Everybody knows everybody certainly. People do know – and of course there are generations of families as well, so even if somebody doesn't know someone, they will probably know someone else in that family.

In a rural area you are very limited on places you can go and sit in a room with other people with the same problem. In Birmingham, for instance, you can get on the Outer Circle and you go all round Birmingham to the other side and join a group and nobody will ever know who you are or where you come from. In [a small village] there are ten roads.

Some services, particularly those where users may feel stigmatised, may be better situated in market towns rather than small villages, so that privacy is safeguarded:

In rural areas, accessible information about domestic violence services and helplines needs to be placed in areas where women already go alone and can get to by public transport. In some areas information has been provided in a systematic way, so that women do not have to ask for it, for instance on the back of supermarket receipts or bookmarks from public libraries (ODPM, 2002a).

For similar reasons generic advice and resource services may be more effective in rural areas than specialist advice services.

Establishing new services in rural areas, however, takes time. One problem identified by the

research was that where funding had been obtained to pilot improved service provision in new, more remote locations, the service was only just beginning to be used by significant numbers when the funding expired and before a strong case could be made for long-term support.⁹ This suggests that, when developing domestic violence services in rural areas, funding criteria and applications need to reflect the timescales and levels of support required for developing and establishing effective service provision. The Countryside Agency has recently called for changes to local authority funding systems to reflect the particular needs and costs of delivering local authority services in rural areas (Countryside Agency, 2002a). This demands clearer policy guidelines on service provision in rural areas and better dissemination of good practice. In particular, the need has been recognised for a holistic approach to the particular difficulties faced by young people in rural communities, bringing together initiatives on jobs, housing, training, transport and leisure (Countryside Agency, 2002a).

Once domestic violence services do become appropriately established in rural areas, the benefits are clear. One mother interviewed, who had moved from the centre of Manchester to a quiet area of Cheshire, contrasted the level of support she had received in each:

They're very good over here the way they talk to the children. As soon as I asked for something, the health visitor was great. Over there [in Manchester] they're dealing with so much... To me, in Manchester, to stand out from the crowd you've got to be really, really hurt because so much

domestic violence goes on. Here, any domestic violence stands out from the crowd.

The children and young people we interviewed who lived in more remote areas expressed less concern with the lack of anonymity associated with rural life. Nor did they identify geographical isolation as an obstacle to accessing help from services in a crisis should they need it. Indeed, almost all of the children and young people interviewed had already worked out what they would do if they ever really needed to get help. Most children and young people said that if they needed help they would telephone a family member, the police, a social worker or a children's telephone helpline such as Childline. In fact, such helplines were viewed by many as a much more accessible, less intimidating service than the police or a social worker:

I have my mobile phone and if I need the police all I have to do is press a button and I phone the police straight away... I have Childline as well. The first time I had my phone I put them on straight away because I knew it was the most important thing to do... You have to have the most important things on your phone in case something real happens (Jamie, aged 11).

Penny similarly stated:

Q: So do you reckon that something like Childline works well for children? Would you ring them?
P: Yes, I would if my dad turned on me. I would phone the social worker or I'd phone Childline. I know [the social worker] would come round straight away [but] if my dad had have still been

there, she would have taken me off my mum and put me in care so I'd phone Childline.

Childline is one of the main helplines for children in distress and has proved hugely successful in identifying and responding to their needs.¹⁰ Some of the children and young people we interviewed suggested that such services should be more readily available, accessible and better promoted through more innovative methods of advertising such as the Internet.

[Young people] might need more help because they don't understand what's going on. There should be more advertising for how children can get help. More on the Net or somewhere kids go a lot so they can see where to get help from (Jade, aged 15).

As crucial as a helpline service is, however, it does not of itself ensure that the child will ultimately receive the help they really need. One mum describes what happened when her daughter Marie (aged 15) telephoned a children's helpline:

Her dad kept going out and coming back drunk and Marie actually phoned [a children's telephone helpline] and said, 'I'm phoning up because I don't know what to do. I'm a child but my mum is the one who's being abused'. They sent the police round and the police asked me if I was alright and I lied to them and said I didn't know what she was on about. I said it was my daughter just playing a prank. She wasn't.

For children and young people, therefore, it is not necessarily the physical location of crisis services that acts as a barrier to access. It is often more a

question of overcoming the psychological and emotional obstacles to seeking help and the actual or perceived response of their parents to them getting help.

It is clear that services such as these are hugely effective in assisting children and young people in removing the stigma attached to actually disclosing domestic violence and seeking help.

Access was problematic for children and young people and their parents in the context of social or other leisure services rather than simply 'crisis' services. Those who had moved to a rural area following domestic violence found it particularly

difficult to adapt to the social isolation of rural life.

A number of respondents talked about the difficulties they had getting access to even the most basic of services after they had moved to rural villages. One mother and daughter described, for instance, how they could only get to the shops from the refuge by taxi. Another mother commented, *'It's like having your leg chopped off without having a car'*.

In that sense, the existence of effective public transport networks is crucial, particularly for young people.

Good Practice: Use of the media in rural areas

Cotswold Victim Support collaborated with BBC Radio Gloucestershire in the late 1990s to produce two programmes on rural domestic violence. This included radio interviews with the local domestic violence unit, a person who had experienced domestic violence in a rural context, and a volunteer from Victim Support. The organisation has taken significant steps since then to raise awareness of domestic violence support services by advertising in parish magazines and local newspapers. It has also advertised helpline numbers on stickers in female toilets throughout the Cotswolds. The organisation today continues to receive regular phone calls from individuals who are experiencing domestic violence.

Good Practice: Directories

The Coventry Domestic Violence Partnership has produced and distributed comprehensive directories containing vital information on various domestic violence services. The directory is divided into clear sections with telephone numbers and addresses of key local and national service providers in relation to, for example, health, welfare benefits, legal advice, safety, education, childcare and money matters. It has been distributed for use in various places such as GP surgeries, youth clubs, cafés, schools, police stations and refuges. A similar directory would be invaluable in rural areas.

The Coventry Domestic Violence Partnership has also produced special, children's packs. These contain pull-out activity sheets which provide information on various children's services in a colourful, durable 'pop-out' format.

Good Practice: Rural transport partnerships

In order to facilitate access to transport and service providers, the Countryside Agency has established the **Rural Transport Partnership (RTP) scheme**. The RTP scheme assists community-based transport initiatives in rural areas which secure long-term improvements in access to jobs, services and social activities that enhance visitor access to the countryside. The scheme particularly encourages inter-agency collaboration through rural transport partnerships (RTPs). These projects typically include mobile services, taxi vouchers, walking, cycling and rail projects, extensions to existing bus routes, promotion and awareness-raising, and improved transport for employment, regeneration, training and education (Countryside Agency, 2003).

For smaller initiatives, the **Parish Transport Fund (PTF)** exists. This will provide young people with financial assistance to cover bus fares to school.

The **Connexions** service, which provides young people with access and advice on education, health, careers and a range of other areas, also operates a rent-a-scooter scheme in some rural parts of Warwickshire to enable young people to access educational courses and jobs.

violence strategy. Some professionals, due to their close daily contact with children or their accessibility in places where children and young people go (for example, within an educational setting), may be very well placed to serve as an access point to a wider range of services with which children and young people would not normally make contact by themselves. Geographic factors also come into play, and may be particularly important in rural areas – services may need to be provided in locations such as schools where children and young people already go. Another important factor in relation to domestic violence may be perceptions about different service providers and the issue of trust. Some young people we interviewed shared with their mothers a general distrust of social workers who might ‘take them away’, a fear which was not mentioned in relation to other adults such as refuge workers.

Some evidence was found that health visitors might be particularly effective because of the ease of access they have to families in rural as well as urban situations:

We are in a very unique position because we are probably the only professionals that go into every household with total ease... there is no stigma attached to the health visitor.

It is clear from the research that health visitors do play a significant role as gatekeepers, encouraging clients and referring them where necessary to other health professionals, social services, housing providers, self-help groups and voluntary agencies. Such approaches to work and sharing of practice were recently highlighted by The Countryside Agency in a set of principles that it considers

Gatekeepers

The important role of gatekeepers in the provision of services to children and young people must be acknowledged in any domestic

influence the development of good practice (2002a, p 17).

The support sought by health visitors may be professional (for example, specialist medical help) or very practical (Beeline, to transport clients to GP or hospital appointments). In addition, health visitors may themselves act as advocates on children's behalf since they are sometimes in a one-to-one situation with children and may be perceived as independent from other formal services with whom the child has contact (and thus easier to talk to). On the other hand, however, a child's access to a health visitor is often mediated, as with other professionals, through a parent, and this may operate as a restraint on the role the health visitor can play.

Inter-agency co-operation

Where domestic violence is present service users will often have a wide range of needs, so that effective provision depends on good inter-agency co-operation. The specific obstacles facing rural dwellers in obtaining support in cases of domestic violence (of physical access or preserving anonymity) demand a more concerted and subtle approach on the part of services. For instance, the availability of a domestic violence counsellor within a local health centre or school provides a much more accessible and discrete means of accessing support. Sharing physical resources in this way is undoubtedly more cost-effective and consequently increases the sustainability of domestic violence services.

Professionals often valued their contacts with

other agencies and the perceived benefits for their clients. Ease of access was an important issue:

It's easy when you are sitting there to say, 'Well, my colleague is sitting opposite. Will you just have a quick word?' Whereas if she had had to wait for social services to contact her, she would have had worries about it: she may have had anxieties for some time.

The existence of one-shop-shops and citizens advice bureaux in less populated areas are hugely beneficial in this regard. They provide a single, accessible meeting point for people who need to access a range of services such as housing, welfare benefits and legal advice. Some citizens advice bureaux, for instance, are now collaborating with primary care trusts to ensure more effective outreach of their advice service within local health centres. This model of joint provision could be similarly applied to domestic violence services in rural areas. Indeed, multi-agency bodies such as domestic violence forums play an invaluable role in advising rural services about how they can pool professional and physical resources for a more effective integrated approach to domestic violence. A recent WAFE report has suggested that the Home Office should work with the Department of Health to require strategic health authorities and primary care trusts to incorporate domestic violence protocols into their work (WAFE, 2002).

Another benefit of a more integrated approach was the sharing of information:

We had a client who contacted [the police officer] because she talked about criminal damage. Then when she was referred over to me as the outreach

worker, then we got another slice of the cake in terms of what was actually going on and what had triggered all this in terms of the violence. And then I referred her to [the social worker] who then got another slice of the cake in terms of what was going on with the daughter. Then when we all came together and were sharing this information, we had got a whole cake rather than just a slice.

However, while this was generally seen as a good idea, subject to appropriate confidentiality constraints, in reality it was sometimes difficult to put into operation, due to different service providers' perceptions of confidentiality, client security and legal constraints. One refuge worker, for instance, noted:

I think the police would like us to share information with them, but they are not always so ready to share with us.

Unfortunately, however, inter-agency approaches are tailored very much to the needs of adults, with little evidence of comparable one-stop-shops or signposting services for young people.

I've tried to convince our trustees that half our work is with other agencies and half of it's with young people but they just haven't got their head around that yet, that our inter-agency work is just as important. If we haven't got the agency work we can't help the youngsters. If we haven't got a trusted and reliable relationship with the housing providers, with support projects, with health authorities, you know, we can't support the youngster. Well we can but we can't do it very well (homelessness worker with young people).

For children and young people who have experienced domestic violence, it seemed that better use might be made of school premises or leisure centres as sites where information, advice and – where appropriate – support services such as counselling could be made accessible. The importance of schools in or serving rural areas generally as sites for social and peer-group contacts should also be recognised. In addition some transport issues might be addressed by further developing school premises, which young people already attend, as sites where a broad range of service, social and extra-curricular activities are located together.

From geographic confusion to joint provision?

One problem identified by the research was the difficulty, in some rural areas, of identifying where, geographically, services were available. Health, education, social work services and policing, for instance, are all organised along different geographic lines and referral across geographic boundaries was not always possible (even when it was more convenient for the service user). A service user might visit or obtain information about a service in their market town, for instance, only to find that they lived outside the geographic area covered by that service. Repeated re-referral of individuals often causes them to lose the motivation, confidence or even the opportunity to access vital help.

However, in some cases inter-agency links were good. Sometimes services worked well together out of shared centres in rural areas. The

Countryside Agency has identified potential scope for improvement in service delivery in remote areas through joint provision (Countryside Agency, 2001d; 2001e) and through better utilisation of information technology (Countryside Agency, 2001e). More recently the Agency has called for changes to local authority funding systems to reflect the particular needs and costs of delivering local authority services in rural areas (Countryside Agency, 2002b). This issue reaffirms the need for improved service delivery and for better dissemination of information about services.

More innovative ways should be developed to make information accessible to children and young people, as well as adults in rural communities. Given the acknowledged transport obstacles facing children and young people, more effort might be made to combine service provision around places where they already go, such as school premises and leisure centres. This could also serve to improve awareness of services and provide a means of anonymising service provision.

Key implications for policy and practice

- At a national level, strategies for tackling domestic violence should reflect the need for longer-term funding for the development of new domestic violence support services in rural areas. This should be discussed by the Inter-Departmental Group on Violence and in turn, be acknowledged and recognised by potential funders (such as *local authorities*, *NGOs*,

primary care trusts and charitable trusts) of domestic violence services.

- *Local authorities* should encourage and facilitate joint service provision or shared facilities (such as *local health or community centres*) as a means of improving access to domestic violence support in rural areas. *Primary care trusts* and *strategic health authorities* could play an important role in supporting and developing such provision.
- Greater use should be made of school premises, leisure centres, etc, where children and young people already go, for the provision of information, advice and support services.
- *The police, children's charities and counselling services* should consider using more innovative methods of reaching children in remote areas, such as Internet advertising, or art, craft and drama displays in local schools, churches and youth clubs.
- *Domestic violence support services* and relevant *children's charities* (such as those which provide telephone helplines) should be encouraged to develop more innovative and proactive methods of reaching children experiencing domestic violence in rural areas. This may include developing accessible Internet gateways.

NOTES

9 Effective ways of developing domestic violence support services in rural areas are discussed further in Section 9.

10 Childline is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline for children in trouble or danger. Trained volunteer counsellors comfort, advise and protect children and young people who may feel they have nowhere else to turn.

4 Friends, leisure and social networks

The impact of domestic violence on friendships and social integration, particularly following a move to a new area, featured most prominently in children and young people's accounts.

Removal from family and friends (often very suddenly with no opportunity to say goodbye or explain their reasons for leaving) was particularly distressing. Abrupt insertion into a new school and social environment makes it difficult, particularly for the older children, to make new friends quickly.

Leaving friends

Almost without exception, the children and young people interviewed talked most openly about the impact domestic violence and moving had had on their friendships. It was immensely difficult for them to leave and, more often than not, lose their social networks. Penny talked about how difficult this was for her and her sister:

It hurt me when I had to leave all my friends behind.

She was delighted when she moved from a rural refuge back into council housing in her home city as this meant she was able to go back to her old school and see all her closest friends again:

*Q: Do you think you've had more help in the city or more help when you lived in those quiet areas?
P: Since I've lived in the city because now I've got most of my friends back again... I've got to get back to school because they were the closest friends*

to me. I went to the fish shop last night and met one of them up there and said to her, 'I'm coming back on Monday' and she said, 'Good, we'll call for you.' So they're calling for me at 8 o'clock to see if I'm going back to school.

Indeed, all the children commented how hard it was to leave their friends behind, sometimes without having had the chance to say goodbye to them properly.

It was difficult also for them to leave behind leisure activities. Jack, for instance, used to play in a football team which he had to leave when he moved to a remote rural area; Jade had to give up her dance classes when she moved away from the tourist resort she lived in to a rural part of Herefordshire:

I really want to go back to be around all my friends again to make it easier... there was a big difference... Here it's small and quiet so it's really hard getting used to it here.

The Countryside Agency has identified the key role that voluntary sector agencies can play in rural areas:

The voluntary sector... plays a particularly important role in rural areas, filling gaps left by the statutory and private sectors. The rural sector tends to be small scale and fragmented, relative to the urban voluntary sector, and, with limited funding, it relies more heavily upon volunteers. Additional support for building the capacity of rural voluntary sector organisations would pay dividends (Countryside Agency, 2002b).

This is an important indication of how the integration of children and young people like Jack might be addressed. This process of integration was evidently more difficult for the children and young people we interviewed who were not living in a refuge environment since they did not have access to the ready-made set of friends living in close proximity that refuge life generally provides.

Friends and social networks in a refuge environment

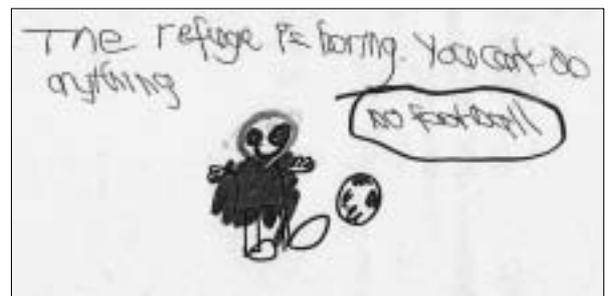
The confidentiality policy which is so essential to refuge life, coupled with a need to keep a low profile following a move, makes it difficult for many children and young people to forge close friendships or to spend any time with other young people outside school hours. This, in addition to the geographical isolation of rural life (particularly if a child has been moved from an urban into a rural environment) can be particularly disengaging.

This was a significant concern for children and young people when they made new friends in the area where the refuge was. They found it more difficult to sustain new friendships when they couldn't go out freely or invite their friends back to the refuge. For Dale (aged 12), *the most difficult thing was not being able to go out*.

Other children expressed frustration at no longer having the same sense of space to play and the fact that they were no longer surrounded by familiar things.



Sammira, aged 5



Anonymous

While these issues are more difficult to address in terms of specific service provision, facilitating access to social clubs, youth groups and other extra-curricular programmes can engage children and young people with new networks and enhance their confidence and sense of self-worth. The research therefore suggests that greater provision of and access to such youth services would provide children in rural areas with invaluable opportunities to address both their social and emotional needs.

Good Practice: Youth-led advocacy and mentoring schemes

One-to-One in Hereford is a scheme by which teenagers volunteer to befriend other teenagers. As a youth-led group it can be more appealing to the young people in the refuge who have no other means of making friends or getting to know their new surroundings.

Warwickshire Domestic Violence Support Service refers children and young people to a local **Youth Access Project**, which is run by young people between the ages of 16 and 25. They have a helpline number and an advice centre to help young people deal with a range of issues such as domestic violence, bullying and substance.

Given some of the problems that most young refuge residents experience in meeting new people, most of the friends they made were from within the refuge. Jade (aged 15), for example, did not attend school and found it particularly hard to meet new people outside the refuge environment:

It's very hard to make many friends; I've made seven and stuff because they are from out of here.

The intensity of refuge life, compounded by the lack of physical space and the very 'raw' nature of residents' experiences and feelings provide an environment in which many strong friendships are forged between mothers, children and young people alike. This young person made a close bond with two other young residents during

her time in a rural refuge and describes their emotional farewell when it came to her moving on:

When I first went [to the refuge] they weren't my friends at that time because I didn't talk to them. Then it was three weeks before I was due to leave and we became friends. So on the final day, Clare and Tanya came down to ours and helped us put the stuff in the car and everything and Clare and Tanya were crying and I was crying in the back of the car and I shouted out the window, 'I'll be back to visit.'

Then I got a mobile number off Clare so I used to phone her on the mobile before she broke it but now I keep in touch with her on the refuge phone which is a payphone. So I arrange for Clare to be at the payphone at a certain time and then I phone her and talk to her.

Naturally this kind of pressure-cooker environment can create tensions between residents. Robert (aged 12) explains:

The refuge is hard to live in 'cause of all the people here. Sometimes we fight but we soon make up.

Domestic violence and pets

The implications of domestic violence for those with animals to care for has received relatively little attention in research and campaigning but has been identified in this study as a significant factor affecting children and young people –

particularly in rural areas where household pets are common.

In a recent survey of 50 female pet-owners living in refuge accommodation, 66 per cent said that their abuser had threatened to harm their pets and 38 per cent said that he had actually harmed them (Paws for Kids, 2002).

Since domestic violence, once reported, so often precipitates a move away from the perpetrator, many children and young people are forced to leave pets behind, especially if they are going to stay in a refuge or with family or friends who may not be able to accommodate animals. This can create a particular dilemma for the children and young people if there is a fear that the perpetrator will neglect or even abuse the pet.

Eleanor (aged 7) was forced to give away her pet hamster and cat after she and her mum moved into a refuge, because her father was neglecting

Good Practice: Paws for Kids

Paws for Kids (please see Appendix 5) is a charitable organisation which fosters pets of women and children who can no longer take care of them because of domestic violence. Many see this as a crucial resource at a traumatic time for women and children. However, such services need to be more widely advertised so that responsibilities and loyalties towards pets do not need to act as a barrier to leaving the perpetrator.

them and she was unable to take them into the refuge with her.

Similarly, Jade (aged 15) had to leave her cat behind when she and her sisters moved to a refuge with their mum.

For farming families, the problem is more acute since many women and young people find it impossible to flee a domestic violence situation if it means abandoning their responsibilities towards their farm animals and, indeed, their livelihood. A number of the workers in rural refuges commented on the 'huge problems' of domestic violence in farming communities and the reluctance of women to leave these situations:

You're freer to go if you're living in a grubby old council flat somewhere (refuge worker).

Bullying

Experiences of being bullied by other children are very common among children and young people who have experienced domestic violence (Khan, 2003). Some children and young people did express concerns even before they had started their new school that they would be bullied. Stacey, for instance, said:

In Year 7 I thought everyone was going to bully me and everything. [But] I met loads of new friends.

Only two respondents, however, actually reported having been bullied. Penny describes a particularly

traumatic experience she had when she first moved to a new area:

P: Some girls tried to drown me where we used to live because we've got a brook there...

Q: Why did they try and drown you – did you know them?

P: Yes, I knew them but they weren't friends. They just pushed me in and held my head under the water and when I finally managed to break free they sat on me and pushed me back in and held my head under the water again.

Marcus also had problems with a girl at his new school that he'd eventually reported to the teachers:

[She kept] picking on me all the time and saying shut up and saying I've got scruffy writing.

These incidents are often sparked off by seemingly trivial factors such as not having the right school uniform or speaking with a different accent to the other children in the class. The financial and social marginalisation associated with domestic violence more generally can certainly exacerbate children's sense of exclusion and make them ideal bait for bullies.

Difficulties integrating at school seemed more common among older children than children of junior level:

You send a child to a strange junior and they come back at the end of the day saying, 'I've made ten friends today...' and you can remember what it's like being at high school and if you go there halfway through the term with not quite the right uniform and an accent or something... and I think it's very hard for them... It takes guts to go there (rural refugee worker).

Key implications for policy and practice

- Activities of organisations such as Paws for Kids need to be more widely advertised through the local press, veterinary surgeries and pet shops.
- Further research is needed on the correlation between school bullying and domestic violence.
- Teacher training programmes need to include more standardised and systematic awareness raising on domestic violence issues and the specific vulnerabilities of young people experiencing domestic violence.
- *Local authorities and NGOs* should develop and promote youth-led advocacy and mentoring groups as an effective means of helping young people integrate into a new environment.

5 Refuge provision

From our interviews with women, children, young people and service providers, it is clear that refuges provide a critically important service to women, children and young people. Refuges take in women and children not just from their local area but from the whole of the UK and, in rare cases, even from abroad. As this often involves women and children moving to an unfamiliar area, the support that the refuge gives in building confidence and social networks for them is essential. Indeed, the concerns of children and young people in relation to refuges centred principally on social networks and issues related to their peers as discussed in the previous section. A woman and her children fleeing domestic violence may also use refuges more than once. Six out of the nineteen children and young people interviewed had lived in a refuge at least once before. In some cases this was because they had returned with their mother to live with the perpetrator of the violence and subsequently fled again, in others because they had fled a new abusive relationship. This pattern clearly impacts in a number of ways upon the child's life and it was often the case that the refuge provided a major source of stability and structure in an otherwise turbulent and insecure life.

Almost all the children and young people interviewed were positive about the practical and emotional support they had received from the refuge workers. Particular issues which they identified as important in this context related to 'feeling safe', enjoying play and educational activities with the staff and other residents, and the loss of their own personal space and possessions.

Availability of refuges

Our research confirms previous findings that refuges provide an essential service for both women and children escaping domestic violence. The Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE)¹¹ is a national umbrella organisation which supports a network of 270 refuge organisations, managing an estimated 567 safe houses in England and Wales. This compares with 40 refuge organisations in 1975 (WAFE, 2001). A Women's Aid census held on 8 February 2000 indicated that 2,045 women and 2,745 children were living in refuge accommodation on that particular day. During 2000, an estimated total of 54,000 women and children stayed in Women's Aid refuges and over 35,000 individuals received support and advice through the National Domestic Violence Helpline.

Although the activities of WAFE have significantly enhanced the level and quality of refuge accommodation in the last 30 years there is still a concern that there is a shortage of refuges and refuge places. A survey undertaken by WAFE in 1998 found that there were 7,300 bed spaces in refuges but that 40 per cent of local housing authorities had no provision in their area. District councils were far more likely than metropolitan authorities, London boroughs or unitary authorities to have no provision (ODPM, 2002a, p 14), suggesting that the shortage may be particularly acute in rural areas.

The need for refuge spaces for women and children is also exacerbated by the general lack of temporary emergency accommodation. One housing officer stated:

Unfortunately in this area there is very little – I mean we can get them into emergency bed and breakfast to take her away on a safety issue but it's no fun in a B&B with four or five kids... They are missing their friends, their family, their school and they are all shoved in one room and that's because of the lack of refuges.

There is clearly a lack of refuge accommodation in rural areas, but opinion was divided among professionals and mothers as to whether the most appropriate way of addressing this was to simply provide more. The Countryside Agency (2002b) suggests that outreach provision may be more appropriate. A few respondents felt that the lack of anonymity in these areas was a huge barrier to providing effective safe housing.

The Government's Supporting People policy¹² reflects these concerns:

Outreach provision rather than local refuges might well be more appropriate in rural areas, since refuges may be considerably more visible, with a heightened risk of women being located by the perpetrator of the violence (ODPM, 2002a, p13).¹³

One rural refuge worker similarly commented:

You don't tend to find refuges in rural areas – the smaller the town the more problems they have with keeping their heads down... There's no point in putting anyone in a safe house if they aren't go shopping or their children don't go to school so in a rural area a lot of women [in the refuge] wouldn't be from around here.

Conversely, staff working in a recently opened rural refuge in Lancashire commented that they did not realise initially that there was a need for a refuge in such a small area until it actually opened. One worker commented that the rural refuge is actually busier than any of the urban refuges she has ever worked in and houses women and children from both within and outside the locality. As such, *perceptions* as to need are often different from the reality: once refuge accommodation is provided on their doorstep, many previously 'invisible' women and children may be more inclined to access help. Moreover, refuges in rural areas, as elsewhere, may in reality offer accommodation to women from many different geographic areas, while also acting as a base for more locally focused outreach work.

Importantly, the government unveiled plans in April 2003 to allocate £18.8 million funding to build and develop refuges in England over the following 12 months to facilitate access to emergency accommodation for women and children forced to leave their homes. Our research supports the need for this welcome initiative and it will be interesting to review the impact of this in the near future.

Service provision for children and young people

Crucially, both practical and emotional support is also provided within refuges in the form of children's play activities, counselling sessions for women and children, and day trips. There does, however, seem to be a gap in provision for teenagers in this respect. Many refuges have a

full-time dedicated children's worker, or a family support worker who may fulfil a similar role. WAFE and its affiliated refuge organisations – the main providers of refuges in England – have always recognised the need for specific services for children in their refuges, particularly because more children than women are accommodated in refuges. WAFE recommends that all refuge organisations which provide accommodation for children should have a playroom and at least two children's support workers to comply with the National Standards for under Eights Day Care. However, in a recent survey of 135 refuge organisations, 16 said they had received less than 49 per cent of the funding needed to provide children's services and 9 said they had no funding for this. This is of great concern: if refuges are unable to meet the staffing ratio and space requirements of the National Standards there is a risk that children's services may be reduced or even closed down, an outcome which would be detrimental to the lives of both children and mothers.

WAFE has produced a range of publications on this issue and has developed a resource pack, *Safe and Sound* (2002), containing guidelines on working effectively with children in refuges. This includes methods for assisting children with coming to terms with and addressing the emotional and social effects of domestic violence.

These policies and aspirations can only be put into operation through the efforts of specialist children's workers. WAFE recommends that every refuge should have a designated children's worker, whose concerns and work are valued as much as those of other workers within the refuge.

Currently, an estimated 69 per cent of WAFE-affiliated refuges in England have children's workers, and the majority also have structured play activities for children as well as programmes to involve children and young people in the running of the refuge. A 1:7 ratio of children's workers to children is recommended under the Supporting People programme (ODPM 2002a, p 30), though children's workers cannot be funded through that programme.

Good Practice: Women's refuges

Two of the refuges that participated in the research hold special children's meetings on a weekly basis where young people in the refuge both chair the meetings and take the minutes. This provides the children with formal opportunities to voice their views during their time at the refuge.

One of the refuges has put a comments box in the corridor to enable children and young people to register (anonymously) any complaints or suggestions to improve the running of the service. Such schemes are often set up and co-ordinated on the initiative of the children's worker and prove very effective in providing the children with some say in the running of the refuge.

The children and young people in this study identified the support they received from refuge workers as vital to them.¹⁴ Younger children, for example, when asked to draw a picture of the people who had most helped them since

they'd moved away from the perpetrator, commonly drew the refuge workers alongside family members.



Picture of two children's support workers by a young resident in a Warwickshire refuge

In particular, the children and young people appreciated having a children's worker dedicated to them and providing structured play sessions. Marcus (aged 8) and Esmie (aged 6) said:

Q: What about the refuge, what's it like here?

M: Good.

Q: Why is it good? What kind of stuff do you do?

M: The play area.

E: It's always nice to make things... because sometimes you could get bored playing with one friend...

And later, while looking at a picture Marcus had drawn:

Q: So this is [the refuge worker]. How has she helped you then?

M: By playing in the playroom and having lots of fun with us.

Children's workers are clearly instrumental in helping children come to terms with their experiences of violence and with the trauma involved in moving and this helped many of them to express their feelings about leaving 'home' and moving into refuge accommodation:

We moved into a refuge due to mom's boyfriend. He would really hurt mom, but still she said she loved him. Mom always told me not to love anyone who made you unhappy, so why did she stay for so long? (Tammy, aged 16).

In refuges, play sessions are often tailored with these more therapeutic aims in mind. However, scant and patchy resources can make it difficult for refuges to respond appropriately to the diverse range of emotional and practical needs of the children who enter the refuge:

In my experience it was hard because the workers were helping my mum but because I was under 16 they don't really talk to you about violence, so I think if people in refuges would talk to you it would help – even if the kids haven't been hit it doesn't mean they don't need help (Jade, aged 15).

The lack of ongoing funding to sustain dedicated children's posts is a problem shared by all refuges, necessitating relentless applications for funding

from a variety of charitable and local government sources. A refuge worker commented:

I got money from Children in Need for the children's workers, which was fantastic. That lasted for three years, I think it just comes to an end. Prior to that, the only staff we had was five women and often a lot of children each.

Good Practice: Support for Women's Aid groups in Scotland

From January 2003 until March 2004 the Scottish Executive will be providing £237,500 to fund children's support workers across Scotland. Every child residing in a Scottish refuge will have access to a worker who will be trained to provide specialist advice and support. In announcing the funding, Margaret Curran, Minister for Social Justice, credited Scottish Women's Aid for their efforts in lobbying for improvements to services, legislation, policy and practice in relation to the needs of children.

In addition to this initiative, the Scottish Executive has invested £10 million in a three-year refuge development programme to ensure that refuge provision is available in every local authority area in Scotland.

Supporting People clearly acknowledges the relationship between domestic violence and housing (ODPM, 2002a; see Section 7). It is clear, however, that a broad-based inter-agency approach is required if all aspects of refuge work (including the provision of services to children and young people) are to be addressed effectively,

as is evidenced by the history of efforts to introduce minimum standards for refuge provision. An initial consultation document that proposed the introduction of standards for refuge accommodation, services and outreach work recommended that children should be provided with a whole range of support including information, specialist support services, educational assessments, appropriate living/play space and activities (DTLR, 2001). This would have been welcomed by many of the children and parents we spoke to in our research, but unfortunately was not addressed in the Supporting People framework (ODPM, 2002a) due to fears about introducing minimum standards without the identification and provision of appropriate funding. There was also a suggestion that such services could be funded from other sources, which, as our research demonstrates, is not always the case.

At the time this research was conducted (spring/summer 2002), refuges were in the process of applying for funds under the Supporting People initiative, due to be introduced in April 2003. There was evident confusion about what would be available and concern that funding for children's workers would be difficult to obtain under Supporting People. The programme will fund any work done with the mother to support her children in the refuge to ensure that she and her children are safe and secure in the accommodation. It also recognises that access to housing-related support for the mother can be aided by providing crèche facilities for her children. However, the programme will not under any circumstances support therapeutic or direct work with children in their own right

(ODPM 2002a, p 26). Supporting People recommends that clear strategic links are established between Supporting People strategies, local children's services plans and relevant social services and health workers to make them aware of the support needs of children living in households vulnerable to domestic violence (ODPM, 2002a, p 26).

Our research points clearly to the need for a more 'joined-up' approach to domestic violence support services for children, whether refuge residents or not. Hopefully this is an issue that will be addressed locally through the development of local preventative strategies (LPS),¹⁵ which have to be established by local authorities from April 2003.

Refuge aftercare

Our research suggested that refuges play a vital role in supporting children after they have left the refuge, confirming the findings of Humphreys and Thiara (2002, pp 33–36). Seven of the young people interviewed visited a refuge on a regular basis after they had moved on. Maintaining contact with the friends they had made in the refuge was important for them, as was the ongoing support and advice offered by the refuge staff:

I still come back here and they still talk to me and ask how I was and I would still talk to people from here so that was OK (Jade, aged 15).

Eleanor also still goes back to the refuge she stayed in and to attend the Saturday Kids Club run by one of the refuge workers. Jack and his

mum, permanently re-housed after staying in a refuge, received regular support visits from the workers from their refuge:

I: Have you talked to anybody else then about things?

M: I've told [the worker] a few things.

I: Does she work for the refuge?

M: Yes.

I: Does she work in the refuge or does she work in the office?

M: In the office. She comes out to see us every Tuesday. Jack loves her to bits.

I: Does she come to the house?

M: Yes, every Tuesday.

Frazer also said:

I: Was there anyone in particular in the refuge who helped you or was nice to you?

F: Yes, I'm still in touch with them now.

Refuge aftercare was also valued by parents. For example, the refuge staff continued to offer practical help and emotional support to Amanda and her daughter Eleanor a year after they had left. They helped Amanda with setting boundaries for Eleanor's behaviour, for example, by instituting stricter bed times. Amanda still called the refuge helpline number if she felt low or in need of more support.

One refuge had developed ways to help their ex-residents to stay in touch and to make it clear that they could still call upon the refuge staff for support:

We have a children's card that we give out with our number and the times that we're in the refuge

that we give to each child as they move on – and if they're feeling anything or they want to keep in contact with us, they can. And we do get messages. We get pictures that they send back. They'll ring up the helpline for a chat, some of them who have moved on.

Physical space within refuges

One of the main problems identified by the children and young people was the lack of physical space in the refuge and the difficulties of living in a confined space with other families they did not know:

The refuge is hard to live in 'cause of all the people here. Sometimes we all fight but we soon make up. There isn't many people my age here. Hope there is soon (Ronnie, aged 12).

Significantly, issues relating to space within refuges were often affected by the availability of refuge workers to supervise children while in different areas of a refuge such as the children's playroom. In addition no refuges visited had separate spaces for teenagers, for activities such as homework. This was apparent in all of the refuges involved in our study: while all had made efforts to make a playroom or activity space available, most were equipped with small tables and chairs, games and toys and were clearly geared towards younger children. Some of the children and staff interviewed commented that the teenagers in the refuge got to the stage where they did not really want to spend time 'with the children' in the playroom and were in need of a more 'grown-up' room. Given that 42 per cent of children living in

refuges are under the age of five (WAFE, 2002) it is clear why refuges are often better equipped for younger children. While a lack of facilities for children and young people was recounted by participants in our research, this can be attributed partly to the fact that all were over five years of age.

Space was a particular issue for women with a number of children since most refuges are not designed to accommodate large families. One refuge worker stated:

[The large families] only have one single room. We have got four family rooms – a family room being, like, mum plus three and sometimes, like, four children; a whole family really, and they are in one single room.

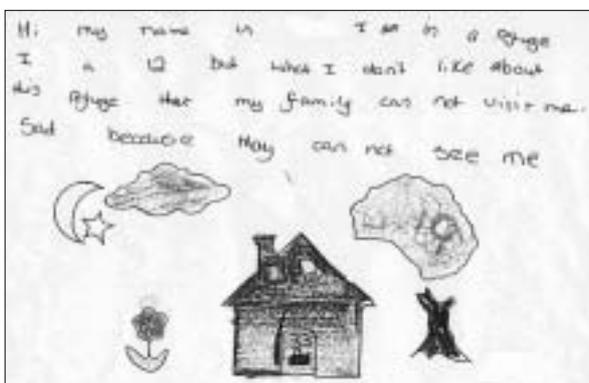
Even in a modern purpose-built refuge, there can be problems:

I think it must be stressed that when they were obviously built, our line manager at the time was given the job to develop the area and had visited refuges up and down the country to see what they had, and what they didn't, what they felt they lacked, what they felt they didn't need and we took all those issues on board so that we would have a refuge as near to perfect as we could... I mean the kids get the rough end of the deal every time. They're uprooted from their friends and all their toys and stuff and they have to come and play in probably one of the smallest rooms in the building. We have twice as many children through the door as we've had women (a refuge worker).

The ODPM found that in 1999 all refuges accommodating children had inside or outside play spaces for children while 72 per cent had both (ODPM, 2002a, p 19). Additionally, 16 per cent had separate recreational spaces for teenagers. While this may compare favourably with the situation of bed and breakfast residents or those in general homeless hostels, it is far from ideal, and should be addressed through the introduction of agreed standards and funding packages. It is recognised, however, that for many existing refuges, providing both inside and outside play space is beyond reach in the short to medium term.

Attitudes and perceptions about refuges

All but one of the children and young people interviewed who were living or had lived in refuges recounted positive experiences of refuge life. However, some talked about feeling a sense of detachment and isolation from their family and friends back home.



Peter, aged 12

A number of the children commented on the security and routine of the refuge environment, which they liked. The images drawn by some of the younger children conveyed a sense of play, happiness and security. The refuges had succeeded in an important way, in making women, children and young people feel safe.

Stacey's mum, who had moved on from a refuge to her own accommodation, said:

Put it this way, before we left [the refuge] I felt safe – more than I do here.

A number of child respondents referred to the safety and security of the refuge in the pictures they drew. Esmie (aged 7) drew a picture of the refuge that she lived in, like a well-protected castle.



Esmie, aged 7

Marcus (aged 9) also drew a picture of his refuge, which was well protected with security cameras and locks (see page 38).



Marcus, aged 9
Marcus explained that the black shape above the door is a security camera attached to the outside of the refuge



Matthew, aged 12

However, some children and young people found that the reality of living in a refuge presented them with particular difficulties. They were concerned about the stigma of living in a refuge and how this would affect their ability to make friends.

Paula (aged 11) talked about this:

When I came here for the third time I thought, 'No, not again. I'm coming here again'... but it's alright isn't it? I haven't told my friends that I live in a refuge because they might say, 'Why do you live in a refuge?' and ask me lots of questions. So I don't tell them... it's just that I feel a bit shy saying I lived in a refuge. I don't know why I do...

Hannah (aged 7) explained that she would often tell friends she had been on holiday to explain her absences from school during her time in the refuge.

One refuge worker commented:

And I think when children say, 'Where do you live?'... it's difficult, because other children will go to each other's houses and they can't have friends or take them to the refuge. I think they do feel a bit embarrassed.

One service provider commented that children in school are often 'subjected to taunts' because they live in a refuge, which is associated with poverty and with dirty, overcrowded and bleak conditions.

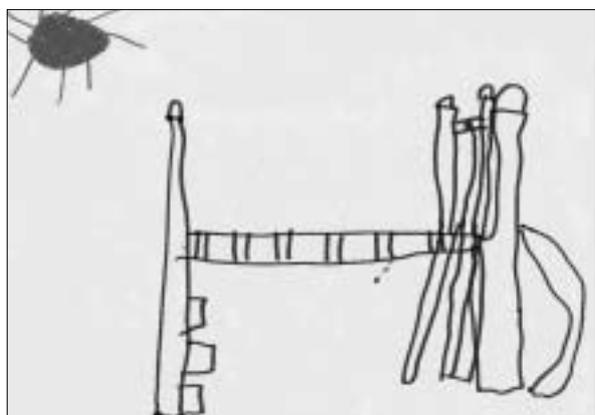
These findings reinforce the need to raise awareness about the effects of domestic violence on children and young people and the need to integrate this into the school curriculum.

Despite some negative perceptions of refuges, the children and young people interviewed generally

showed a high regard for the efforts made by staff to accommodate them and made efforts to improve it as a home. Paula (aged 11), for instance, organised a raffle to raise funds for toys for the refuge that she had moved back to on three separate occasions:

I raised loads of money you know. I had £15: I went to buy some toys for the playroom. You see all of these are new toys (shows toys).

Eleanor donated her climbing frame to the children in the refuge when she left.



Picture of climbing frame by Eleanor, aged 7

Refuges provide crucial support for children and young people, in terms of safe accommodation and emotional and practical support. This is by no means one-off provision – one-third of the children and young people in this study had been in refuges before. Providing this support is a major issue facing refuges, which have more children than adult residents. More secure funding for children’s workers based in refuges

could greatly enhance the capacity of refuges to provide this support, which remains valuable to the children after they leave.

Key implications for policy and practice

- *The Government*, through the Inter-Departmental Group on Domestic Violence, should urgently address the need for statutory funding to enable children’s services in refuges to comply with the required staffing ratios and space standards in order to prevent children’s services being reduced or closed down.
- *Schools and refuges* should liaise with one another to provide education and talks to staff and children on refuge life. Through the development of such partnerships and advertising in the media, refuges can help to promote awareness of their service and dispel many of the misconceptions surrounding refuge life.
- Collaboration and closer links should be made between *refuges and external NGOs* and other organisations (such as Relate, Connexions and local community groups) to provide adequate service provision for teenagers who live in refuges.
- *Organisations that support women’s refuges* should provide more specific guidance on how to get the best out of the Supporting People policy. Women’s refuges should also capitalise on opportunities to consult more readily with each other on this issue.
- *Local authorities* should address the needs of children experiencing domestic violence in

their local preventative strategies and children's services plans. Core funding needs to be identified for all refuges, including specific support for a children's support worker in every refuge.

- *Refuges* should, wherever possible, identify adequately spaced and furnished rooms for use by young people.

NOTES

11 WAFE does not provide direct refuge services. It is an umbrella organisation that provides a network of refuge organisations (which manage one or more refuges) with information and support.

12 The Supporting People programme is a working partnership of local government, service users and support agencies and aims to offer vulnerable people, including those experiencing domestic violence, the opportunity to improve their quality of life through

greater independence and by funding housing-related support services (ODPM, 2002b).

13 However, Supporting People funds cannot be used to support outreach work, except where this is housing-related: *'Outreach work which is not delivered in the form of a structured support plan but is delivered through irregular contact via a Helpline, a drop-in centre or out of hours from a 24-hour advice line will not be funded'* (ODPM, 2002b): see further section 9 below.

14 Similarly, Humphreys and Thiara found children very positive about outreach services provided by refuges (2002, pp 33–36).

15 Local preventative strategies (LPS) require that all local agencies with responsibilities for delivering services for children and young people agree a co-ordinated strategy for preventative services for children and young people aged up to 19. The aim of LPS is to improve outcomes for children and young people at risk of social exclusion by integrating an effective approach to prevention across all statutory, voluntary and community services for children and young people.

6 Educational provision for children who experience domestic violence

Our findings confirm those of previous and current research (Khan 2003; Elliott, 2002; McGee, 2000; Saunders *et al.*, 1995; NCH Action for Children, 1994): that education is a key area of concern for children who experience domestic violence. First of all, domestic violence often involves some degree of disruption to the child's education and, in over half of our cases, a move to a new school in a different area. This raises issues about the ease with which children and young people gain access to new schools and the extent to which their experience of domestic violence manifests itself in their school work or behaviour at school. Our analysis sought to address also the extent to which the school provides an environment for empowering young people to talk to someone about problems they may be having at home, or for educating children about domestic violence issues and the services available to them more generally.

Accessing new schools

Twelve of the young people interviewed had changed schools at least once because of domestic violence. In fact, most of these had changed schools two, three or even four times since moving away from the perpetrator.¹⁶ This was due to a number of factors, most commonly because they had moved some distance away from their old school such that transport every day was both expensive and impractical.

Paula (aged 11) comments:

I used to change schools, like, every term because my mum used to move a lot. I've been, like, to every school in [home town].

Other children were forced to change or stay off school to avoid any further contact or threat from the perpetrator:

We've got one family at the moment, they've got a school place but they can't go until they've got an injunction against the dad because the mum's just terrified that if he does find them he will just take them. He's got the passports so no way are they going to send them to school (refugee worker).

Access to a new school following a move is not guaranteed and, indeed, was a major problem, particularly for children of high school age.

Sophie, aged 14

Sophie had lived in seven different refuges over the past five years during which time she did not attend school at all. The most protracted and recent period of absence had been four months and she was still waiting to be re-integrated at the time of the interview.

She describes a mix-up between her social worker and the local school as to whether she would be going back there again. The school was apparently under the impression that, with her latest move to a rural area, she would no longer need the much-coveted space in the city comprehensive school. When she did return to the city following a brief period in rural Warwickshire, her place

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at the school was no longer available and she had to wait to be re-integrated:

[The refuge worker] phoned them up and told them to hold a place for me but the social services had told them to close up my place. So then we came to [the city] and [the social worker] and my mum were on their back and we had to go to a meeting with them but they said my name wasn't on the list... We've got the meeting tomorrow so hopefully I'll start back on Monday.

There were two separate families in which teenage boys stayed in the family home instead of moving out with their mum and siblings. The reason given for this was that the boys did not want to change schools or interrupt their education in any way.

Jack (aged 11) comments:

I've got a brother and he's 14. He lives in Birmingham with my dad but I do miss him a lot though. He only wanted to stay with my dad because he wanted to finish high school.

Contact with the new school was often delayed deliberately, either because of uncertainty over whether the child and mother would settle in the area, or because the mother wanted the child to remain at home to protect their

safety or to support her in an emotional and practical way.

Jack's mother, for instance, describes how she kept him at home for company and support in the initial period following the move to a new house:

I've got to admit I kept him at home on purpose because I needed him with me. Then I thought, 'Hang on a minute, this is not right, he's got to go,' and I had to explain to him, 'You can't just be with me, you need to be with kids of your own age.'

Jack described how he felt responsible for his mum and was torn between wanting to go to school and wanting to help take care of her:

I wanted to learn a bit but I also wanted to help my mum... At break and dinner I'd walk home to see if she was OK and then came straight back [to school] (Jack, aged 11).

Refuges generally have developed good links with local primary schools and, in some cases, with local secondary schools as well.

A refuge worker describes their procedure when mothers and children enter the refuge:

We give them a couple of days to settle in because sometimes you can get them in one day and try and arrange appointments with schools and then a few days later they say they are going back or are going elsewhere and then it's messing the schools about. You know, we feel guilty because they have done all this work and

they sort of move on. We usually contact the Education Department if we have a problem getting a child in, and they try and help out or if there are children with special needs they will help there.

Not all schools are as accommodating, however, as they struggle to reconcile ever-demanding curricular requirements with scant resources and problems of overcrowding:

All the junior schools are very good actually but the high schools are in crisis. There's no room in any of them and two of them are on special measures so they're in a bad way (rural refuge worker).

Interrupted education and 'alternative' educational measures

There were five children interviewed whose education had been significantly interrupted (that is, for a number of weeks or months) as a result of domestic violence. In none of these cases was any specific assistance or alternative educational provision made available to them while they were waiting to gain access to a new school.

Sophie's experience of moving between several different refuges highlights the need to implement stop-gap measures to tide children over until a school place is secured:

When I was in the refuge I didn't go to school. [The refuge worker] phoned them up and asked them to send me some work and they wouldn't.

Jade, aged 15

Jade's experiences also highlight the lack of educational alternatives for children caught in this educational limbo. She had only attended school for a brief period as a child and, for the most part, had been educated at home by her parents:

The school is by ours but it's kind of hard because of bullying and stuff so we study at home because it's easier... That's the good thing – we just do, like, three or four hours a day. So any time I wanted to do some work I just carried on and my dad encouraged me to do it.

Her mother had been in trouble with the educational authorities in the past for refusing to send Jade to school but no formal legal proceedings had ever been issued. Problems clearly arose, however, when Jade's parents separated because of domestic violence. Following a move to the refuge, she stopped receiving any instruction from her mum and had moved too far away from her dad to receive any education from him. There was no evidence that her educational progress had been formally monitored since her move.

The refuge staff had helped her to enrol in a local 'foyer' programme, a youth initiative for young interrupted learners. Jade describes it as follows:

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It's like where kids go that don't like school and can do activities and make a few friends.

Jade had no formal qualifications and, as she was only 15 years old, she was limited in her choices of educational or vocational alternatives. Jade, for her part, felt that not attending school had disadvantaged her, not so much in relation to her academic progress (she wanted to be a dancer and did not see formal qualifications as of any use in this respect), but more in terms of the lack of opportunities she had to meet friends her age. This problem was particularly acute for her when she moved to a refuge in a rural environment where few opportunities for mixing with other teenagers existed outside school.

A recent report, *Aiming High: Raising the achievement of minority ethnic communities* (DfES, 2003), highlights similar problems affecting mobile pupils:

More could be done by schools and LEAs to ensure that receiving schools get as much information as possible (3.28).

A suggestion, which could be extended to children escaping domestic violence, is the use of the Common Electronic Transfer document or the Red Book Scheme used by Traveller education services where parents pass a record of a child's work to teachers in the receiving school.

Good Practice: The parent-held education record book

The parent held education record book (Red Book) aims to facilitate continuity of education for Gypsy/Traveller pupils who change schools frequently. The record book makes the most of each pupil's achievements by setting weekly targets and recording progress and by:

- providing a quick and easy guide for addressing the pupil's needs
- demonstrating pupil progression
- being a photocopiable resource for school records
- saving time on unnecessary assessment
- giving the teacher and pupil a sense of achievement.

The book gives parents information on what their children have learned in school and shows each school that parents are actively seeking and supporting education.

Currently, the DfES is undertaking a second pilot study to confirm the success of the book and its popularity with parents and schools, with a view to introducing it more widely.

The problems we encountered seemed particularly unwarranted given the fixed locations of refuges, which means that the same problem is constantly recurring with the same small group of neighbouring schools. One basic step forward would be for local education authorities and admissions forums with refuges in their patch to develop strategies for accommodating the

fluctuating number of children in the refuge throughout the school year so that the availability of places ceases to be such an issue.

Domestic violence and children's educational progression

The young people interviewed, particularly those who had moved school as a result of domestic violence, referred to the disruption this caused to their education, at least in the initial stages following the move. A number of service providers made similar observations.

Of our sample of children and young people, there were five who mentioned that they had experienced difficulties either with their schoolwork or with integrating in the new environment following a move:

I think it's hard for kids when they have to move school because they move away from their friends, which can sometimes cause behaviour problems.

I think because of what violence kids see at home they pick up on it and start copying which means it will cause problems at school (Jade, aged 15).

Our research suggested a link between domestic violence and problems at school, including truancy, behavioural problems and poor concentration, all of which impact upon the child's academic performance and social integration.

There was a feeling among children and service providers alike that children who exhibited bad behaviour or learning problems at school –

regardless of whether there was a known history of domestic violence – were perceived as 'problem children' rather than 'children with problems'. In some cases, such children will be statemented (in accordance with the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and Part IV of the Education Act 1996 (DfES, 2001)) to ensure they obtain appropriate special educational needs support. Such programmes are tailored to a wide variety of needs and may not be appropriate for children who have been through the trauma of domestic violence.

David, aged 7

David was the only child we interviewed who had exhibited extreme behavioural problems, which had been directly linked to the domestic violence he had witnessed throughout his life.

His mother, Julie, had lived with her violent husband in Manchester for five years until she fled the family home in 2000 with David and his one-year-old sister. During that time, Julie had had difficulty obtaining appropriate support from the police and social services. Julie obtained a non-molestation order against her husband and had fled with her children to a quiet area of Cheshire. It was at this point that David started to have frequent and uncontrollable tantrums. He found it difficult to settle into his new school and had particular difficulties with his schoolwork.

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He was referred to an educational social worker who assessed his needs and concluded that he had special educational needs. David was subsequently statemented and had been making slow but steady progress at the time of the interview, although he was still having frequent, disturbing outbursts and was reluctant to communicate with his mother about what he had witnessed and how he felt.

After the interview, Julie phoned to tell me that David had been referred to a psychologist and was undergoing counselling, which had revealed the extent of David's abuse when they were living with Julie's husband. It was only then that a programme of treatment and counselling had been implemented to support David, as a result of which he was starting to mix much better with friends and make progress at school.

For children who move between a series of schools because of domestic violence, keeping track of their educational progress and resuming the provision of appropriate educational support can be difficult. Repeated and long absences from school, and fractured communications between schools, can all impact badly on young people's academic progress. This was evident in the experience of Sophie, who had difficulty reading and writing even to a basic level:

It's been tough because I've been missing all my friends and missing out on the work and these last two years are my most important years. I missed my SATS exams so they weren't going to let me do my GCSEs now until I've finished my SATS exams. So I said, 'Well, let me do a couple of them', which is catering and maths.

Schools provide an important arena not only for academic education, but also for social integration and personal development. In David's case described above, it was the school's identification of his special educational needs that acted as the catalyst for unearthing and addressing much more deep-rooted issues to do with his own experiences of abuse, and the anger, frustration, hurt and isolation that had been caused as a result.

A representative of South Warwickshire Relate, which piloted its anger-management counselling sessions in schools, made the following observation:

There are some cases that have been desperate cases that have materialised as behavioural problems, aggressive behaviour because of violence at home. There's a lot of violence that the children are having to cope with and these are the ones that, it's gone so far, that it has created all sorts of behavioural problems.

...they have been misbehaving because they can't read or they can't do the work so they think, 'Well, if I misbehave then I can get kicked out of the class and then I don't have to do it, and that is sometimes the reason they are doing these sort of things.

Concern was also expressed that the ‘silent’ sufferers or those who were frequently absent were more likely to be overlooked. Absenteeism, multiple moves between different schools at key points in the child’s education, as well as the trauma associated with domestic violence, all contribute to children’s ability to progress in or concentrate at school.

I do think they find it difficult to go to school because they think, ‘Well, I hope my mum’s OK’, and they can’t seem to concentrate then on the work that they have to do. I think there’s always that worry in their mind, ‘Well, what’s happening at home?’ Their mind is somewhere else and not on their work and I think sometimes the schools have to realise that. Sometimes they’re not always going to be – they’re there in their body but in their mind they’re somewhere else, they’re thinking about something else. It just needs for that to be addressed somehow (refuge worker).

It is difficult to assess the long-term effects of domestic violence on children’s education. Children living in refuges *may* experience greater difficulties at school than those who have experienced domestic violence but have not used refuges, as they may be more likely to experience the trauma of moving to a new school and being dislocated from supportive friends and family. What is clear in our research, however, is that children’s support workers and refuge organisations play a valuable role in terms of communicating a child’s needs to schools. These findings suggest that further research into the educational experience of refuge residents (and former residents) would be appropriate. Certainly,

while the short-term effects of domestic violence on children’s education are so apparent, efforts have to be made to minimise the potential long-term impact.

Talking about domestic violence in schools

For children, education is central to their day-to-day lives. Apart from family and friends, teachers have the most contact with children on a daily basis. It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that teachers are ideally placed to listen to children who wish to talk about personal problems. Saunders *et al.* have commented in this respect:

School is a very important potential source of support for all children. It is crucial that information and training on the effects of domestic violence is made available to teaching and non-teaching staff in schools. Much work has been done in past years in clarifying the school’s role in relation to child abuse and child protection. The issue of domestic violence could be very usefully included in these areas of concern (1995, p 55).

However, it is by no means straightforward for children to seek help in a school context. Only some of the young people interviewed mentioned that they had talked to teachers and they had by no means found this easy:

I spoke to my teacher because she’s, like, understandable... and the headmaster... Normally my brother’s too scared to do it so

I just went in. I was kind of brave and I went in and talked to them (Jack, aged 11).

The difficulties children may have in confiding in their teachers was also recognised by many service providers:

They [the children] could say they've got problems at home but that's it. If the mum hasn't disclosed the violence then the child won't (refuge worker).

In many instances, particularly where the child had moved to a new school following a move to a refuge, the staff informed the head teacher of the child's situation, which made it easier for the child to talk openly with them.

Children also said that they confided in other 'less formal' members of staff at the school such as the dinner ladies or school nurse:

I mean the school health authorities find they get so many children with headache, tummy ache this sort of thing really. They keep coming at break time or once or twice a week and then they just want to talk about what's happening (refuge manager).

Eleanor also described one day in school when she 'cried all day' but added, 'dinner ladies helped me.'

Teachers who were made aware of the children's background generally helped by giving practical advice and support:

...they gave me some advice about learning to stay with your mum, help her out if she's sick, stuff like that (David, aged 10).

Stacey (aged 14) had been helped in more practical ways:

The deputy head of the school, she helps me out. When mum was struggling with the school uniform ... and we just can't get money and stuff like that ... she sorted that out.

The teachers were getting on my nerves and telling me off for no reason so I told her and she sorted it all out for me... I'm alright now.

Although some schools are fortunate to have personal advisers or a member of staff dedicated to the issue of domestic violence, service providers still commented on the need for greater awareness among teachers and more effective training to deal with children affected by domestic violence.

I think the teachers ought to be more aware because I think that's sometimes a lack on their part. It's just the awareness of it really (refuge worker).

...like we had this one family in here and he was being suspended from school. We went to the meetings and they didn't understand why he was acting like this. It was all down to the violence. I don't think they have awareness of it as such and how it can affect them (social worker).

It is important to note the practical difficulties teachers experience in finding a private space to talk to children about sensitive issues: this significantly limits opportunities for disclosure. Our research suggests that policies and fears regarding children's protection – and the constant need for teachers to be seen to be acting

appropriately towards children to protect themselves from allegations – can lead to some teachers adopting a more defensive strategy. The professionals indicated that one-to-one sessions between teachers and students are generally avoided, particularly with pupils who may be regarded as more vulnerable. These issues highlight the need for a more consistent referral system or the availability of a specially trained teacher with the skills to deal with children who may want to disclose domestic violence.

While provision in this regard is patchy between schools, there is evidence of agencies – including the police, refuge staff and domestic violence support services – providing specialist training sessions for teachers. Agencies have similarly adopted schools as a forum for raising awareness among children about domestic violence, about

what is ‘acceptable behaviour’ at home, and about where to find help if they need it. The recognition which such programmes confer on the problem of domestic violence may serve also to give important emotional support to children and young people experiencing domestic violence and to tackle the stigma attached to refuges.

Good Practice: Relateen

An anger-management scheme in schools for children to attend on a voluntary basis, ‘Relateen’, was piloted in schools by nine Relate counselling centres across the country. A preliminary report issued in 2002 highlights the success of the scheme. For instance, 91.1 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the counsellor had helped them deal with their situation; 94.7 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the counsellor helped them to understand their situation; and 96.4 per cent felt able to tell the counsellor their problems (Warm, 2002). Despite the apparent value of this service, however, we have since learned that a request for funding to extend the programme has been declined.

Good Practice: Warwickshire Police; Women’s Aid Federation

The Domestic Violence Unit of Warwickshire Police has produced a training pack for awareness raising in schools. Additionally, the Women’s Aid Federation of England has offered specific training to refuge child support workers to enable them to provide awareness-raising workshops for staff and pupils in schools and to offer parenting skills training for mothers living in refuges.

Good Practice: Time 4 Us

Time 4 Us was a nine-month awareness-raising project set up by Survivors of Child Abuse Gloucestershire (SOCA) as part of the county’s community response to domestic violence. This scheme offered two therapeutic group sessions as well as teacher training in local schools exploring issues such as managing feelings and conflict in relationships. Forty-four children and young people attended these sessions and those who provided feedback on the scheme almost unanimously stated that they valued the service and that it had helped them gain confidence in themselves and in their relationships with friends and family (Wright, 2002).

These proactive schemes seem to have an important role to play in the light of our findings that children and young people are reluctant to disclose instances of domestic violence. The children we interviewed attributed their general reluctance to confide in their friends at school to their belief that the friends wouldn't really understand, that they would be teased or bullied as a result of it, or that they would be in some way betraying their mother or even the perpetrator of the violence by disclosing to an outsider details of what had happened.

Teaching about domestic violence issues as part of the school curriculum

A more focused strategy on teaching domestic violence in schools as part of the school curriculum would enhance other children's awareness of the issues surrounding domestic violence and, ultimately, make them more sensitive to the circumstances of those children that have experienced domestic violence. An ESRC study carried out in 2002 (Mullender *et al*, 2002) found that 84 per cent of secondary school children expressed a desire for lessons on the specific issue of domestic violence (quoted in Khan, 2003). Such provision could be effectively incorporated into personal, social and health education classes (PSHE) or, alternatively, into the new citizenship curriculum. For older pupils, the general studies programme can provide a similarly effective forum for such discussion.

Good Practice: Integrating domestic violence awareness into the school curriculum

The government report *Living without Fear* (Women's Unit, 1999) refers to a range of materials and information packs that have been produced by various service providers for use in an educational setting.

Welsh Women's Aid, in alliance with Save the Children, produced the *Hands Off* resource pack for teachers and youth workers to refer to when educating 11–14-year-olds about domestic violence.

A PSHE Advisory Group was established in 1998 by the Department for Education. This continues to develop proposals for a national framework for PHSE in schools, which covers an increasing spectrum of issues such as sex education, relationship studies, promoting self-respect, inclusion and equality. There are plans now for the citizenship curriculum to absorb the topics already covered by PSHE and it is hoped that domestic violence will feature more prominently in this programme in the future.

Key implications for policy and practice

- *The Department for Education and Skills (DfES)* should work with a sample of schools to pilot child-held education records for children experiencing domestic violence and periods of high mobility to ensure the quick exchange of information between local education authorities and schools.

- *Teacher training courses* should include awareness of domestic violence, the effects on children and young people and strategies for identifying and managing the disclosure of domestic violence.
- *Local education authorities* should endeavour to nominate a member of the teaching staff or a peripatetic representative to co-ordinate such activities in the region.
- *Local education authorities, schools and admissions forums* should strengthen communication with local refuges and other domestic violence support services and develop strategies to facilitate children's access to and progress in school.
- *Local education authorities and schools* need to ensure that children whose schooling has been temporarily interrupted as a result of domestic violence are provided with alternative educational resources.
- *Local education authorities, health authorities and social services* should consider developing protocols for sharing information as part of the local preventative strategy while developing a system for the identification, referral and tracking of children and young people.
- *Schools* should incorporate awareness of domestic violence issues more explicitly into the citizenship curriculum at junior and secondary level, both to inform children of what is appropriate behaviour at home and to encourage and support disclosure.
- Further research with children is required to explore the educational experiences of children who reside or have formally resided in refuges.

NOTE

16 Similar findings are reflected in the Save the Children project on Interrupted Learning (Khan, 2003).

7 Housing

Housing is a crucial issue for women and children who have experienced domestic violence. Access to appropriate and safe housing is central to the experience of women and children fleeing domestic violence (Humphreys and Thiara, 2002). There also appears to be a close connection between homelessness and domestic violence: Shelter has stated that the key factors that trigger homelessness among children are poverty, deprivation and violence. According to government figures, 16 per cent of all homeless households in 2000/01 lost their homes due to domestic violence (Diaz, 2002).

The correlation between domestic violence and homelessness is further identified by the Government in its publication, *More than a Roof* (DTLR, 2002), which emphasised the need to implement preventative strategies aimed at tackling the core social and personal problems that create and perpetuate homelessness. These recommendations have been developed by the 2002 Supporting People initiative with a view to addressing the housing needs of women and children who experience domestic violence (ODPM, 2002a). The guidelines assert that:

Many households experiencing domestic violence need housing-related support, either to make it possible for them to remain safely in their own homes or, for those who cannot safely remain at home, to enable them to access and maintain safe alternative accommodation... Some women need to move away from their local area entirely as the only way of staying safe, although others may wish to remain in order to maintain support networks and minimise disruption to their lives

and the lives of their children (ODPM, 2002a, p 7, paras 1.5.1–1.5.2).

The previous section on refuges has already discussed the Supporting People recommendations on improving access to emergency accommodation. Our research identified a number of key areas relating to the more general housing needs of children and young people, however. Above all, it was apparent that children's concerns and issues in relation to housing were different to those of the women fleeing violence. The children we spoke to, all of whom had moved due to domestic violence, were most concerned about losing social networks and the impact of suddenly moving away from home.

The trauma of moving

For children and young people, the impact of moving suddenly from their family home and away from the perpetrator affected them significantly. Often, they had to leave behind not just their home and school, but their pets, their personal belongings and their entire social network. This was something, which was reiterated throughout the interviews with children and young people. One young person (Stacey, aged 15) talked about how it felt when he found out he was moving:

When mum told me I was quite shocked. I wondered what was going on and after I'd been there and after I'd been told I understood. I was nervous because I'd never been there and I didn't feel welcome and stuff like that.

Due to the nature of domestic violence – violence from the perpetrator often escalates quickly – women are put in the situation of making a sudden decision to leave the family home. There is often not time to explain the situation clearly to children, with the result that they feel confused, insecure and angry about having to move. Jack (aged 11) described what happened to him:

It just happened all of a sudden because my dad came home one night and then – well there's more bits than this. I'm telling you – and then he got really angry... and everything so we got in a massive argument and then we just packed... well we just went.

Jade's mum left her children behind with their father, her abusive husband, for some weeks one Christmas. Jade (aged 15) and her sister subsequently joined their mum in a refuge about 200 miles away:

My mum left and then it was me and my dad and my sister living in the house... it all got too much for her and so she had to leave and then we had to leave... we had to leave our pets and stuff and clothes and personal things which we had.

It was equally difficult for children and young people when they arrived at a safe haven after fleeing. When asked to describe what their first night at the refuge or in the new house was like, they commonly used words such as 'creepy' (Alex, aged 9) or 'scary' (Eleanor, aged 7).

The 'choice' to leave or remain in the family home

Recent research suggests that 34 per cent of women who leave violent relationships are owner-occupiers, 7 per cent are private renters, and 59 per cent live in housing association accommodation (WDVSS, 2001).

Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996 offers the following specific types of order to address domestic violence and to regulate occupation of the family home.

- An occupation order can determine who has a right to remain in the home and can direct the perpetrator of the violence to move out of the home.
- A non-molestation order can, thereafter, place constraints upon the perpetrator's behaviour and actions with a view to protecting the applicant or any children.

Further legal protection is offered through the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which includes the offence of 'putting a person in fear of violence' (s. 4). Barron (2002) examined the operation of these provisions in the recently reported WAFE-funded empirical research, *Five Years On: A review of legal protection from domestic violence*. This study indicates that 65 per cent of the Women's Aid workers interviewed thought the Family Law Act, Part IV, had improved protection for women and children, and 70 per cent thought that the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 had also improved protection.

Despite the successful implementation of these legal mechanisms to remove the perpetrator from the family home and control his subsequent behaviour, women and children very often end up fleeing to temporary and emergency accommodation. For those living in rural areas, this often necessitates moving outside the area to avoid being pursued by the perpetrator. A mother and daughter we interviewed in rural Warwickshire had to go to a refuge some 13 miles away as the only local refuge was too conspicuous and less than 200 yards away from where they were living with the perpetrator:

There was a sort of risk where I used to live... you could sort of see the refuge.

Obtaining an occupation order and remaining independently in the family home is generally perceived as the best option for women and children, particularly in terms of maintaining security and routine for the child. The Supporting People guidelines (para. 2.3.2) draw attention to local housing authority provision that enables women and children to remain at home or to return home following domestic violence. This includes granting women entitlement to concurrent housing benefits in respect of both their temporary accommodation and their home, for a maximum of 52 weeks while the threat to return home persists.¹⁷ Housing authorities can also make provision for women and children's possessions to be retrieved from the house they have fled and, if necessary, put into storage. They can also, where appropriate, arrange for the installation of security devices within the home

and for the provision of other support services to assist women and children who remain at home.

It will be interesting to review the proposed benefits that the Supporting People initiative can bring, as our research findings indicate the effectiveness and availability of services that support women who wish to remain in the family home varies significantly. Our research suggests little evidence of a co-ordinated effort to improve the security of women and children who remain in the home. This is supported by previous research which suggests that:

Housing agencies can still work from the belief that women and children should leave the house – rather than exploring the options for removing the perpetrators – perhaps in partnership with other agencies (WDVSS, 2001).

Shelter has also commented that:

Those who do want to move can find it difficult because local authorities may rule that they will be 'safer' in their own homes (Birch, 1999).

Our research suggests that women and children may, on occasion, be encouraged to stay in their own home, even if this is not in their best interests, because of a lack of available accommodation in which to re-house them. One refuge worker commented, for instance:

There is just not enough space and that is why we suggest that if there is an opportunity it's much better to stay in your own home by getting rid of

him, but it does depend on what she has suffered because I mean some men are so violent and are so nasty you are better off taking them [the children] away.

The Supporting People guidelines (para. 4.2) suggest that funding will be provided to enable women and children to remain in the home or to resettle elsewhere. Measures targeted primarily at women include assistance and advice on safety, tenancy agreements, financial issues and the development of social skills and confidence. It will therefore be interesting to see the impact of the Supporting People programme on families choosing to remain in the family home in the near future.

The difficulties involved in securing alternative housing force many women and children to enter refuge accommodation in the first instance. The problems do not stop there, however. Although some refuges have good links with housing authorities, it can often take several months to find suitable, more permanent accommodation in the area. Moreover, in some cases it may be more difficult to house women and children who are already in a refuge because they tend to be forgotten about. A refuge worker comments:

From the clients I have had in the refuge, it took three times as long to get her re-housed as somebody using temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast. They tend to be forgotten.

This will clearly impact upon the availability of refuge places, already in short supply.

Statutory provisions relating to homelessness

Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to give priority to people who are unintentionally homeless (or threatened with homelessness) and in 'priority need' as a result of domestic violence. Applicants will be defined as homeless if it would be unreasonable for them to remain in their accommodation because they would be at risk of violence from a partner, ex-partner or associated person. Applicants are also defined as having a priority need if they have dependent children.

The Housing Act 1996, in force since January 1997, has made a number of major changes to public and private accommodation. Under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, local authorities are placed under a duty to re-house those persons who are homeless as a result of domestic violence. As one housing service provider stated:

In a nutshell, if a woman presents as being a victim of domestic violence we are obliged to believe what she says.

Despite these statutory guidelines, previous research has revealed that local authority responses to those who are homeless as a result of domestic violence vary widely from one area to another (Humphreys and Thiara, 2002, p 75).

A wide degree of discretion is applied when deciding on the nature and extent of support provided for 'homeless' people (Hester *et al.*, 2000, p 113). While some local authorities seem

to act in a positive and supportive way to women who request housing to escape domestic violence, others interpret their duties very narrowly. Some authorities also require quite stringent proof of domestic violence as a precondition for assistance, which not only delays procedures, but causes a considerable amount of distress to women and children (Hester *et al.*, 2000, p 113; Humphreys and Thiara, 2002, pp 76–77).

A refuge worker similarly commented:

When we refer them for housing they [the Council] have 28 days to reply and they will contact the police or the previous council and they want proof and to see those police records of violence. If there is no proof they will say you are not a priority and you can't be put on the list.

One social worker stated:

The housing authorities are not always that helpful... They don't have a great awareness of domestic violence, you know, they kind of say, 'Well, she's got a house, why doesn't she stay there?'. You know, they don't understand that he could come back and she could be put under a lot of pressure.

Thus, there are difficulties associated with being accepted onto local authority housing lists. Barron (2002) found that 52 per cent of Women's Aid workers said their housing department 'always' or 'usually' regards women who have experienced domestic violence as in 'priority need' while

17 per cent said their housing department always expects childless women to find their own alternative accommodation. Other research has suggested that local authorities may be less sympathetic to a woman who has voluntarily left a home that she owns or co-owns, and that immigrant women without leave to remain and women without children may experience particular difficulties (Humphreys and Thiara, 2002, p 76).

Issues also arise which are not directly related to domestic violence. In order to be placed on the local authority housing list women and children have to overcome a number of barriers to demonstrate their eligibility for assistance. Under the Housing Act 1996, Part VII, these are: that they are homeless, that they have a priority need, that they are not intentionally homeless, and that they have a local connection. This last barrier requiring 'a local connection' can be particularly problematic, as women and children experiencing domestic violence often have to flee their home county to be safe from the perpetrator. Current or previous voluntary residence, current employment, family association, or other special circumstances can establish a local connection. If there is no local connection, women and children can be referred to another housing authority where at least one of them does have a local connection. These requirements may simply not be realistic in the case of domestic violence.

The recent implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002 has made some changes to the rights of women and children faced with housing problems

as a result of domestic violence. The Act reinforces local authorities' obligations under the Housing Act 1996, and gives applicants the right to ask for a review of the decision that accommodation for them is suitable, without risking bringing the local authority's duties to an end. It ensures that everyone who is homeless through no fault of their own and has priority need must be given suitable short-term accommodation for as long as necessary until a settled home becomes available to them. This removes the two-year limit on the duty of local authorities to provide temporary accommodation under the Housing Act 1996. The Homelessness Act 2002 has also extended the categories of priority need (under The Housing Act 1996) with effect from July 2002. In addition, a Code of Guidance issued by the Department of the Environment and Department of Health on Parts VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 stressed the importance of recognising the needs of households experiencing domestic violence when local authorities assess whether they have a duty to accept households as statutorily homeless. Research is now required to see whether this legislation has brought about real improvement in addressing the housing needs of those made homeless by domestic violence.

Rural homelessness

Homelessness in many rural areas is increasing, but it has a much lower profile than in urban areas. Homeless people in rural areas face particular difficulties due to the lack of emergency

Good Practice: Training and awareness-raising within the housing sector

In areas where there had been some ongoing inter-agency training to raise awareness of domestic violence, women were more likely to be dealt with sympathetically and more speedily.

In 1999, the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), the Women's Unit and the Department of Health produced an information pack, *Relationship Breakdown: A guide for social landlords* (ODPM, 1999). This provides a comprehensive explanation of the legal rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants in the context of domestic violence.

The DETR has also published a series of recommendations, *Allocations and Homelessness*, to guide local housing authorities in their dealings with those affected by domestic violence (Housing Quality Network, 2001). These include a recommendation to waive any residential requirement for those who have moved into the area in order to flee domestic violence. It highlights the need to treat such cases as homeless rather than to refer them back to the local authority from whose area they have fled.

Cardiff City Council Housing Department has, in the light of these DETR recommendations, collaborated with Welsh Women's Aid to produce a policy and practice guide on dealing with domestic violence cases.

accommodation and advice. Local authority figures show low rates of homeless households in rural areas, but it is thought that the full extent of homelessness, particularly among young people, may be hidden (Countryside Agency, 2001a). Particular problems for young people include the lack of affordable rented accommodation and the generally low level of social housing provision, and poor transport in many rural areas. The rural context also poses particular challenges for housing providers: as government advice to local authorities points out, rural isolation may make it difficult to ensure that women can access support and it may be particularly difficult to prevent perpetrators of violence from tracking down former partners and family when they have been re-housed (ODPM, 2002a).

Finding appropriate housing

All the service providers and some of the women, children and young people we interviewed identified a shortage of available and appropriate local authority and privately rented properties to house women and children experiencing domestic violence.

In emergencies, when no housing is available, local authorities often place women and children in bed and breakfast accommodation. While this is clearly not ideal, particularly for children, sometimes the expense incurred by the council hastens the re-housing process. In January 2003, the Government unveiled plans under the Supporting People programme to prevent councils

from housing families with children in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than six months. In addition, the Government is encouraging councils to draw up homeless strategies for their region in consultation with all service providers (ODPM, 2003a).

Further delays sometimes entered the re-housing process where women and children had moved from one county to another to escape domestic violence, particularly for those seeking re-housing back in rural areas. This often took longer than re-housing a family in an urban setting:

There is a shortage of social housing in a lot of the villages and if that woman wishes to stay local then she can be sitting in a B&B for six months while she is waiting to be re-housed because of the shortage, so really a lot of the women tend to expand where they want to go and possibly resettle (housing officer).

Understandably, women and children from rural areas often did not wish to move away from those areas because of the vital networks of family and friends that they had built up. A refuge worker in our research commented:

I think for some of the women – I have known a few clients that did not want to move into the town area because they were country women and that could prevent them accessing housing quickly because they have felt they just couldn't fit in with a town way of life. So I can imagine for the children it must be quite similar.

In their report *Preventing Homelessness in the Countryside... What works?*, the Countryside Agency (2002a) highlights a number of measures that can be adopted to ensure that the housing needs of women fleeing domestic violence can be met, including more outreach services in rural areas for instances where women and children can be supported within their own homes. The provision of such outreach services is one way of avoiding the need for women and children to leave such vital support networks and possessions.

The specific housing needs of children and young people

The legal and policy initiatives described above, while comprehensive and potentially effective in relation to the housing needs of women who experience domestic violence, rarely take into account the specific needs of children in these circumstances. In fact, attention to children's housing needs is conspicuously absent from the Supporting People guidelines on resettlement.¹⁸ A safe physical environment, for instance, is important for children to play in, with access to public transport networks to enable them to get to school or to meet up with friends.

Almost all of the ten children interviewed who had moved on to more permanent council or private housing seemed generally happy with their new accommodation, although only three of them spoke in any detail about it. Jack (aged 11) proudly showed off his new

Good Practice: Outreach services

Women's Aid Rural Outreach Service – South Devon

The Rural Outreach Service was set up in 1994 in response to problems of isolation and stigma. In addition to helping women to access refuges nationally through WAFE, the project works with women to help find local solutions which remove the need to leave the family home through the provision of support, help and advice with developing strategies for tackling domestic violence (Countryside Agency, 2002a).

The Rural Supported Housing Programme

The Rural Supported Housing Programme was funded jointly by the Housing Associations Charitable Trust, the Countryside Agency and the Housing Corporation for a period of three years from 1997. It aimed to fund 20 voluntary sector projects to develop innovative solutions for helping people with support needs to live in their own homes. Two projects aimed at helping women suffering domestic violence were funded: the Women's Aid Strategy and the Penzance Project, which were highlighted as models of good practice and recommended for duplication. Both projects developed outreach services by providing helpline support, information and multi-agency approaches to tackling issues faced by women (Countryside Agency, 2002b).

bedroom and described his plans for redecorating. He was also delighted to have a garden with fruit trees in it. He and his

mum had been on the local authority waiting list for three months:

When I came home one day... I saw the living room and the house – it was just completely different. Me and my mum thought we were going to get a little flat and when mum heard that we were going to get a house... oh God!

Penny (aged 14) was similarly delighted with her new council house although it was in a more populated, run-down district and was extremely basic. In her case, she seemed to appreciate the security, stability and sense of personal space that the house represented after living in a series of refuges over the previous five years.

Jade (aged 15) was the only young person interviewed who had moved into independent housing with a group of young women:

It's where 16–25-year-olds who haven't got nowhere to live can go and stay until they are older so that they get used to living on their own.

While Jade seemed relatively settled in this environment, she did, however, visit her former refuge on a regular basis and lived in close proximity to her mum.

The effects of homelessness and/or losing a home have been referred to by Hague and Malos as being particularly detrimental to children and young people:

The disastrous effects on children of being homeless and of living for long periods in various types of temporary accommodation have been

well documented... Children's lives are totally disrupted by becoming homeless. They lose their home, their friends and sometimes their family and relatives. They often lose all their possessions. They lose their school or playgroup, their security, their social circle – everything. In the case of domestic violence, they generally also lose their father. In other words, the fabric of their lives can be destroyed by the homeless experience. For the children of abused women, this change can happen quickly – with little or no warning – and often as a result of a highly distressing incidence of violence to their mothers so that extreme shock, fear, and sometimes terror are added to the experience (in Mullender and Morley (eds.) 1994, p 124).

Hence, leaving an abusive situation can be just as traumatic for children and young people as it is for adults and, indeed, raises a number of specific challenges for them. The practical upheaval created by moving home, feeling detached from friends and family, difficulties in accessing a new school or travelling to the old one, and a lack of safe social facilities for children and young people can exacerbate their sense of dislocation and isolation. The following service provider stated:

I think housing needs to be a lot more proactive where children are involved, you know, by either getting the woman out or re-housing her quickly because children, really, you know, they are losing their home, their network, the whole... works and their views are not taken into account. To put a woman and her children in a B&B is not always the best thing. It's not good for the kids and it's not good for the woman.

This has been recognised by the Government in their plans to reduce the numbers of families staying in bed and breakfast accommodation, as mentioned earlier.

Therefore, for children and young people experiencing domestic violence, housing is a key issue. In addition, children and young people are particularly affected by the experience of suddenly having to move home and the related loss of the social, educational and family networks that they have established. Particularly painful is the loss of pets and treasured items. Often there is not time for children to be told of the move in advance by their mothers, as it is often sudden in cases of domestic violence.

Remaining in the family home may eliminate problems relating to changing schools, moving away from support networks and friends, and loss of belongings, but it is not always safe or desirable. Our research confirms other recent studies suggesting that, despite the statutory provisions in place, local authorities do not always respond appropriately to women and children who are homeless due to domestic violence. In particular, availability of and access to appropriate 'family' accommodation from local authorities is often lacking, resulting in families staying in bed and breakfast accommodation or hostels. This may change with the Government's new recommendations that families should not be housed in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than six months.

Given the problems which have clearly existed in this area, there is an evident need for close monitoring and review of the implementation of

existing and new policies which seek to address the housing needs of women and children who have experienced domestic violence. Easing the transition to the new Supporting People regime in 2003 is an immediate concern, but not the only one. Within this process of monitoring and review, particular attention should be devoted to the situation of children and young people, whose needs and wishes cannot be assumed to be identical to those of their mothers.

Key implications for policy and practice

- The *Office of the Deputy Prime Minister* should extend the criteria of the *Supporting People funding* to facilitate the resettlement of, and improve housing security for, children and young people affected by domestic violence. Implementation of the Supporting People programme should also be monitored to ensure that it is meeting the needs of children and young people escaping domestic violence.
- *Social services, health workers and housing authorities* should be encouraged to work together to facilitate inter-agency training and communication to raise awareness of the specific housing needs of women and children in the context of domestic violence and to ensure cases involving children are prioritised.
- *Housing authorities* need to liaise with *social services and health workers* to consider the specific needs and safety of children when making decisions about where to re-house families.

- *Housing authorities* should address the need for affordable housing for families who have experienced domestic violence, particularly where the size of families means that refuge provision can be unsuitable.
- *Housing authorities* need to implement effective and consistent mechanisms in collaboration with *social services* for monitoring the housing needs of women and children who have been re-housed as a result of domestic violence.

NOTES

17 The Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987 specify that actual violence need not have occurred and that the claimant need only show that fear of violence occurring is preventing her from returning home.

18 There is some reference to the needs of children accommodated within refuges (paras. 3.1.21–3.1.25) but, as the section on refuges highlights, improvements in this regard are outside the funding remit of Supporting People.

8 Health and welfare

The role of health professionals in detecting domestic violence and providing support to children and young people

Our research indicated that health professionals may be in a unique position to detect and support those who are experiencing domestic violence, due to their universal presence, the relationship of trust they tend to build up with patients/clients, and their close collaboration with a range of other services (see also Humphreys and Thiara, 2002). They may also be particularly effective as gatekeepers to other services (see also Section 3).

One mother described the dramatic changes initiated by her health visitor:

When I came here [a rural area] I went and registered with the GP and the health visitor wanted to come and meet us and greet us to the community and she'd been given my background and got a copy of my report. So she came here with the doctor, which I thought was nice. They asked me a few questions, worked out what I'd been through and then said, 'Right, this is what I suggest. I suggest that I come and see you once a month and see what services you need.'

She said 'I don't want you to come here and get lost in the system. I want to be your contact. If you need any services I will get you them. I will liaise with the school so the school can be aware of what is going through'. They put us in touch with the GP and with the family support unit and she's been brilliant.

I think a lot of it [the help received] is down to the health visitor.

All of the refuges involved in our study received regular visits from a health worker. In most cases, the health worker would carry out a routine examination on any new residents, particularly those with babies, and would continue to monitor the progress of the family throughout their time in the refuge. Less consistent, however, are procedures for monitoring the health of women and children once they have left the refuge.

The involvement of health services in domestic violence forums, and the inclusion of domestic violence issues in local health plans, may be an effective way to maximise the potential of health professionals outside a refuge environment. However, health professionals may be constrained by lack of awareness or training about specific domestic violence issues or ineffective communication procedures with other agencies:

I know that there is a domestic violence forum and we do have a health visitor that attends, but we don't seem to get feedback from that (worker with domestic violence support services).

Also, health professionals are usually accessed by parents rather than young people, and there may be no direct contact with the young person except in the presence of the mother.

Specialist child protection nurses appear to have a particularly effective capacity to follow children on the move because of domestic violence and to engage the support of other professionals. They

have relatively easy access to children, whom they can support and refer to other services very effectively. One child protection nurse who covered a refuge provided valuable support to families even after they had moved out of the refuge:

I go to visit them and I tell them who the local GP is, help them register with the GP and then ... I go round there with the new health visitor and introduce her to them... I always make sure there is another health visitor involved with the family before I stop seeing them.

A child who has ‘witnessed’ rather than ‘directly experienced’ domestic violence, however, is less likely to fall within child protection procedures. In such cases, the health visitor will have more limited access to the child, in much the same way as social workers working outside their child protection remit.

School nurses are ideally placed to offer support to children since they are so accessible. Usually they are available at set times during the week and children can go and see them without having to reveal to anyone else the real reason behind their visit. Additionally, the anxiety and trauma created by domestic violence often means that a child is frequently sick during school hours. Regular trips to the school nurse enable a relationship of trust to be built up with that child which, in turn, makes disclosure of domestic violence easier.

Health visitors and midwives in particular have an established presence in many rural areas, not least

because of their home-visiting activities, but also because many are based in GP practices or work in ‘satellite’ clinics in rural communities, sometimes in conjunction with other service providers.

Factors which seem to strengthen the position of health professionals generally in assisting those who have experienced domestic violence is the lack of stigma attached to approaching them for help compared to some other service providers. They are perceived by women and young people alike as ‘safe’ to confide in, often because they have already had an opportunity to build up a relationship of trust with them through more general and routine health consultation sessions.

Additional training is still required for health workers on how to detect cases of domestic violence and address them sensitively (for example in the context of post-natal care), to ensure that this vital resource is fully and effectively utilised.

Good Practice: Comprehensive practice guidelines

The British Medical Association has produced detailed practice guidelines, *Domestic Violence: A health care issue?* (BMA, 1998). This publication outlines the role of healthcare professionals in identifying and dealing with domestic violence, with a particular focus on the crucial role played by nurses, midwives, psychiatrists, obstetricians, gynaecologists and accident and emergency teams.

The role of social workers in assisting children who have experienced domestic violence

Social services, as the lead agency in relation to child protection, fulfils a vital function in supporting children and young people who experience domestic violence. Procedures have been put in place to intervene in suspected cases of direct child abuse. Less consistent and clear in our research is the role that social workers can play in supporting children who are *witnessing* domestic violence. However, the extension of the definition of 'significant harm' in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to include 'seeing or hearing ill-treatment' will hopefully lead to greater clarity and support.

Research completed in August 2000 (Humphreys *et al.*, 2000) revealed that:

Provision of domestic violence services by social services departments is geographically patchy. Although some areas of the United Kingdom provide a comprehensive range of domestic violence support services, in others (20 per cent) social services departments do not fund services for domestic violence survivors (including children)...

This research also revealed inadequate monitoring and training procedures in relation to domestic violence. Only 14 per cent of social services departments were reported as recording and collating data on domestic violence cases and almost one-third of all areas fail to offer any

training on domestic violence issues. Humphreys *et al.* go on to report:

Although the numbers of social services departments participating in domestic violence forums was very encouraging (90 per cent), many areas (47 per cent) did not have a designated member of staff responsible for policies or practice in relation to domestic violence.

The children and young people in our research talked about the level and type of support offered by social workers in terms of both practical help and emotional support. Sophia (aged 14), for instance, talked about how she depended on her social worker to buy her toiletries, while Stacey (aged 13) relied heavily on her social worker for lifts to school and to visit her father while she was living in the refuge:

Most people would need a social worker or someone like that to come and help... The social worker took me twice a week for an hour at school and I caught up on my tests and things like that... then I'd go round to my dad's for an hour. The social worker would come and collect me from my dad's.

Stacey also had a one-hour session twice a week with her social worker to talk about how she was feeling and particularly about any difficulties she was having getting along with her mum:

S: We just talk about things... they really helped me. Telling me what we had to do and what things were like and about feeling uncomfortable... and about domestic violence...

Q: Do you think it has been good having a social worker to talk to?

S: Yes, because I was going through everything that upset me and she sorts it out. Say if me and mum are arguing I tell her what's been going on and she'll speak to my mum and she'll try and stop us arguing. She sorted it out between us... and then it was OK from then on.

Only a few of the children in our sample, however, had regular contact with a social worker and this generally occurred when they had

Andrew, aged 9

Andrew moved into the refuge with his mum and older brother about nine months previously. He was still having regular contact with his father, the perpetrator of the violence, even though his older brother no longer had any contact with him:

A: I still go and see him but I hate him... my mum forced me.

Q: Did you ever tell your social worker about it?

A: No, I tried to tell her but she wouldn't listen to me. Nobody listens to me.

Although the issue of contact raises a number of complex issues and opinions are divided among those working in the area of domestic violence, Andrew's case highlights how frustrated and disenfranchised children can feel when their opinions are not adequately taken into account by social workers and other adults.¹⁹

experienced direct physical abuse from the perpetrator and hence came within the scope of child protection services. The research indicated that social workers may be less inclined, however, to become involved in the (more common) cases where a child has witnessed domestic violence.

The research suggests that the reluctance of many mothers to involve social workers more readily in helping them and their children cope with the effects of domestic violence is due in part to an underlying scepticism – and indeed fear – as to the impact this will have. Two out of the five mothers, as well as a number of the service providers, interviewed expressed the prevailing perception that social workers will 'take your children away'. This clearly continues to dissuade many mothers from actively seeking available help for themselves and their children. Similar preconceptions about social workers' intervention were held by some of the children and young people we talked to. Penny (aged 14), whose mother was still being pursued by her violent partner, commented:

If my dad turned on me, I would phone the social worker or Childline. I know [the social worker] would come round straight away but if my dad had have still been here, she would have taken me off my mum and put me in care.

Youth-targeted counselling services

The research indicated a clear lack of counselling provision specifically tailored to children and young people who have experienced domestic violence. For example, one service provider

who worked with homeless young people commented:

If you look at counselling services, which are really for mental health and depression and all that stuff, there's very few for young people. I mean it's a nightmare to get any youngster any sort of 'psychiatric help', you know, counselling help or referral to the mental health team... quite often they're shoved into adult services and perhaps into some sort of group thing... and they've nothing in common with the rest of the group.

While there are some welcome developments in youth counselling services, awareness of them was low among children and young people involved in our research.

For the children and young people who indicated they were aware of counselling there was sometimes a reluctance to take advantage of this kind of help, even if it was offered to them. Jade (aged 15) commented, for example:

Well, a while ago, I got asked to talk to a counsellor, but it wasn't for me – I didn't really want to. It's a bit strange talking to a stranger. It is easier talking to my sister because she has been through kind of the same things so can relate to things better.

On the other hand, children such as Jack (aged 11) would have welcomed the opportunity to talk to someone about his experiences but was never asked about counselling. Indeed, he relished being interviewed for the research since it provided him with the chance to talk about what he'd been through:

Good Practice: Youth-targeted counselling services

Connexions provides general youth counselling services through local NGOs such as Fusion and Sycamore. One youth worker comments:

I do try to recommend that to them that they want to go and talk to someone about their problems and maybe that will help, you know, about what they have been through, then they are actually very good so we can refer them. Most organisations will accept our referrals and the waiting time isn't too bad. It may be only about a week before they can see them.

Relate, the relationship-counselling organisation, have extended their remit in recent years beyond 'couple counselling' to more general family and relationship counselling. This includes specific provision for one-to-one or family counselling with children and young people who experience domestic violence.

Q: So how did you hear about this project then?

J: [The domestic violence support services volunteer] gave my mum a leaflet and then... she gave it to me and I read it and I said, 'Oh, that's OK, at least I can explain something to someone.'

Q: Why did you want to explain something to someone?

J: I don't know. It's just I can't really explain it to a teacher or I can't explain it to my mum. I can, but she already knows so I wanted to explain something and get some ideas off someone to help me through it.

These examples illustrate the patchy nature of health and welfare provision for children and young people, particularly in relation to counselling services. These services need to be more readily available to children in everyday settings such as schools and youth clubs. Agencies therefore need to be more proactive in taking their services to young people in these environments. Children and young people themselves could be involved to a greater degree in promoting use of such services as a means of removing the stigma attached to receiving 'counselling' and making them more accessible.

Key implications for policy and practice

- *Local authority departments (including education and social services, regional health authorities and housing authorities)* need to designate a representative to regularly attend, engage with and report back on the activities of domestic violence forums.

- Specific training should be provided to *health workers* on how to detect and address sensitively cases of domestic violence.
- *Schools, social services and the media* could do much to raise public awareness about the role of social workers to dispel existing preconceptions and to foster a more positive, accessible image.
- NGOs such as Relate need to publicise youth counselling services more so that young people are aware of these services. Additional support for youth-led support and advocacy groups would enable more young people to play a more active part in promoting such services.

NOTE

19 The Lord Chancellor's Department funded some research in 2002 addressing this issue. See Aris *et al.*, 2002). See also recent WAFE statistics indicating the prevalence of ongoing domestic violence in post-separation contact with the perpetrator (*Domestic Violence Factsheet 2002* available at <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/dv/dvfactsh2002.htm>).

9 ‘Moving on’: outreach service provision

The interviews with service providers, children and their mothers explored the nature and extent of outreach services for young people affected by domestic violence. By ‘outreach services’ we are referring to advice and information, safety planning and crisis management as well as legal and welfare advocacy and assistance, consistent with the definition provided by Humphreys (2000). It was clear, however, that different services use this term differently, depending on the context in which they operate.

Refuge outreach

Outreach provision, particularly for those who have moved on from refuge accommodation, varies considerably in its availability and its form. A recent study indicated that 71 per cent of refuges in England had some form of outreach provision, though much of this was unfunded (Humphreys and Thiara, 2002, p 5). A broad range of services was being offered both to former residents and to women who had never used a refuge.

Almost all of the refuges involved in the study made a point of keeping in contact with residents following their departure, although not all had a formal mechanism or the resources to do this. Most outreach activity was conducted on an informal basis, with an open invitation to mothers and children to visit the refuge when they wanted to or to attend parties or other organised events. The children and young people interviewed were generally keen and took the initiative to stay in touch with the refuge. Many of the young people

we spoke to were still visiting the staff and their friends in the refuge, often several times a week in the months following their move. This provides an invaluable source of ongoing support to young people who have so often established friendships and built up a relationship of trust with other residents and staff in the refuge.

Others made use of more formal services, such as the refuge helpline, the regional domestic violence support services, or the children’s Saturday club. Some, but not all, refuges had specific outreach staff to liaise with social services to oversee resettlement of the mother and child after they had left the refuge. Typically this involves a number of home visits once the family have moved into more permanent housing and assistance with negotiating tenancy agreements.

Refuges without the resources to fund outreach staff in some cases referred the mother and child to youth groups and other support networks – such as Lighthouse (in Birmingham), the Youth Access Project (Rugby), community education centres, and the Homeless at Risk Project (Rugby) – when they left the refuge. Such services are clearly less accessible for children who have moved to rural areas where the lack of transport, distance and cost may present problems of access.

Transport is a problem for us... One of the reasons I did some sort of outreach work was just to get to know the area. The community centre was really keen for us to go there because there are a lot of women who wouldn't even have the bus fare to be able to come into town... and this often goes alongside childcare issues (a refuge worker).

As noted above (Section 5), the introduction of Supporting People in April 2003 has caused some anxiety for refuges and other service providers concerning the funding of outreach work. While outreach may be acknowledged in some respects to be more appropriate in rural areas than refuge provision, it can only be funded through Supporting People if it is accommodation-related:

Housing-related support delivered as an outreach service is likely to be fundable as long as it is delivered via a support plan which is agreed between the support provider and service user, with agreed objectives, timescales and review periods... [However, outreach work] delivered through irregular contact via a helpline, a drop-in centre or out of hours from a 24-hour advice line will not be funded (ODPM, 2002a).

Similarly, work directly in support of children rather than their mothers is not fundable (see Section 5). These policy developments clearly leave children's outreach work vulnerable to funding shortfalls until new arrangements are properly negotiated and secured. This would seem to be a matter of concern and one that could be addressed through local preventative strategies. Humphreys and Thiara (2002) have highlighted that:

The development of children's outreach services should be prioritised. To date, children's needs in this area have been marginalised.

One issue of concern which follows on from the observation that outreach varies enormously from place to place, is the need to set in place effective follow-up mechanisms for children and young

people who have spent some time in a refuge. Earlier sections of this report have showed that these children may experience dislocation, interruption of their education and other problems. While further research is needed to identify the extent of these problems, basic tracking procedures should be put in place. One new development in this area is the establishment of identification, referral and tracking (IRT) systems, to identify, develop and disseminate best practice solutions for local authorities. All local authorities are being asked to establish effective IRT systems from autumn 2003 for children at risk. The objective of the IRTs is to ensure that every child at risk is identified, assessed and referred to appropriate services and that every child's progress is tracked, between and within agencies.

Rural outreach provision

There is a clear need for greater use of outreach services in more remote rural regions, although our study showed some signs of positive developments in this respect. Warwickshire Victim Support had tried to address this problem by running a drop-in centre in Atherstone, a rural area in the north of the county:

The amount of 'drop-ins', if you like, didn't justify the expense of having the centre. Therefore, the outreach that we have is very much focused on the volunteers we have who actually live in the wider communities, and if we have referrals in [rural] areas then we would ask the volunteers who live in those areas to actually be making the contact, rather than expecting the victim to travel

into a main centre of population or indeed ask the volunteers in Nuneaton to travel out. It is a much more cost-effective way of doing it. It's difficult to identify as to why it didn't work. Whether or not it needed more promotion – which would have been quite difficult because we have limited resources – or whether or not it was a question of people not wanting to identify themselves as going into a drop-in centre, it's difficult to say, but so far as us ceasing to do it, it was something which we were just unable to sustain, basically.

Warwickshire Domestic Violence Support Services has recently established an outreach service to the Stratford region. This has provided a more effective means of engaging directly with children and young people who have never lived in a refuge and who would otherwise remain 'invisible'.

One police officer welcomed this type of outreach service, specifically tailored to domestic violence issues:

Thankfully, one good thing with having Stratford Outreach Project is that they are specifically set up to look at domestic violence in rural areas, and that had been an absolute godsend really, because they have their own specific areas and they will go out and they will do domestic violence talks. They put leaflets out, they put posters out, and they will go out and see the victim if they need any help with getting to solicitors, and they will help them sort that out. It's great because there is only so much that I can actually do, because what I would normally do is give them the advice and once the conversation is

actually finished, you know, you refer them on to other agencies. If that wasn't there, it would make things a lot more difficult. I don't think we would get as many referrals as we have now, or people would stop following through with their actions if it wasn't for having them there, purely because they are concentrating on the rural side of things.

Connexions has made similar efforts to extend its service to young people in more remote areas, and has funded transport to enable them to access services, employment and other youth activities in more central regions. Connexions and other service providers referred to the importance of effective inter-agency co-operation to improve and facilitate rural outreach services. Drop-in centres, while effective in providing general advice and support or an environment in which young people can interact with one another, are perhaps less appropriate for the provision of domestic violence-related services. Choosing appropriate, discreet premises, raising awareness, and ensuring anonymity are just some of the obstacles to ensuring effective outreach.

Key implications for policy and practice

- *The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister* should extend the Supporting People programme to include funding for the provision of general outreach activities.
- *Police, health workers, legal practitioners, counsellors, domestic violence charities and social services* need to achieve more effective inter-agency co-operation as part of local preventative strategies and through domestic

violence forums to explore methods of providing appropriate and sensitive outreach services for children.

- *Women's refuges* should consider establishing more consistent aftercare services for former refuge residents. Instances of good practice and information on sources of funding for outreach activities should be more readily exchanged and shared between refuges.
- *Social services* should adopt a more proactive approach to tracking children following a move from the refuge or after they have fled from a domestic violence situation. This should be linked to the identification, referral and tracking system that all *local authorities* will be implementing as part of their local preventative strategies.

10 Specific issues facing teenage boys

It is estimated that a woman will suffer an average of 35 beatings or other abusive incidents before she contacts a single service provider. Police figures suggest that women will have contacted up to ten other agencies before seeking their intervention. The majority (an estimated 88 per cent) never seek any formal help at all. While these estimates only reveal part of the picture, they do provide us with some indication as to the number of young people who have grown up in an abusive environment. The literature and previous research on domestic violence suggests, however, that teenagers experience a relative paucity of service provision (Hague *et al.*, 1994, p 49). This is partly because the traditional emphasis on therapeutic and practical services for women has meant that many children affected by domestic violence at some point in their lives have slipped through the service provision net.

Our findings suggest also that the culture of silence surrounding domestic violence makes it difficult for many service providers to identify, never mind cater for, teenagers.

Refuge admission policies on teenage boys

The capacity of refuges to assist this group of young people is affected by the simple fact that the majority of children entering a refuge are of pre-school age. Despite the predominance of younger children, however, refuges generally do their utmost to accommodate the needs of any resident teenagers, but teenage boys pose particular problems in the provision of this

service. The main concern raised in our research is that policies on admitting teenage boys are inconsistent between refuges across the country. In its Code of Practice issued in 2002, WAFE states that residents should not bring males over the age of 16 into refuges, but that boys may be accommodated up to the age of 18 in recognition of the level of dependence that some young people have on their mothers – or are forced into by the benefits system. However, age limits which allow or exclude boys from being accommodated are applied at the discretion of local refuge organisations and our research indicates that such discretion is often applied.

These policies are based primarily upon concerns about the impact of the presence of ‘young men’ on the general atmosphere and feeling of security within the refuge:

In the majority of the refuges that I am aware of, they do implement that, the reason being that... you could have a boy of 13 or 14 really who looks like a young man of 18 (refuge worker).

A particular concern expressed at one refuge was that teenage boys and girls may form relationships with each other and that, related to this, there was a lack of 24-hour supervision within the refuge. Refuge workers commented upon their experiences in this respect:

If you have got a girl of, say, 14 it's not very healthy for the refuge if, you know, a relationship goes on there... I think the important thing is that this isn't manned 24 hours a day and so it

can create problems, you know, if you have got young boys coming here and there.

These concerns were not expressed in other refuges we visited. Another refuge worker stated:

It varies really [between refuges]. I mean, we accept boys up to 16 actually – all women’s refuges can make their own choices. And I have to say, if you are going to stop at 12 you’d really better have some good alternatives to offer.

This raises questions as to where teenage boys can be accommodated if they are not admitted to refuges, and the possible effects of being separated from their mother and other siblings.

The effects of refuge admission policies on the housing of teenage boys

Teenage boys with nowhere else to go often rely on the goodwill of friends and relatives, commonly grandparents. This can place a significant financial burden on these family members, as they do not receive any extra financial help to offset the cost of accommodating another person. Furthermore, if they are living with friends or family, they may not be classed as a ‘priority’ case for re-housing.

The research indicated that some teenage boys over the age of 16 who have exhausted these social networks may end up in a flat on their own with limited contact with their mother and siblings. Others remain in the family home or

face the prospect of homelessness. It is only when they reach the age of 16 that they are entitled to go onto the local authority’s housing list in their own right to seek more permanent accommodation.

None of the teenage boys asked wanted to be interviewed for this research. However, the specific problems they face are highlighted in the interviews with their mothers and younger siblings.

One mother we interviewed had three teenage children – two daughters and one son. Her 17-year-old son had to move in with friends when his mother and sisters moved into refuge accommodation. His mother explained:

When I left [her partner] he went to stop at a friend’s. He’s got his own flat round the corner now but he comes round for his tea every night and he stopped on my sofa last night...

She described how difficult it was to organise contact with him while they were living in the refuge and how a friend she had made in the town had offered to put her son up to enable them to see one another:

I used to phone [my son] up every night and he would say, ‘Mum, I want to come

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down and stop with you,' and I was telling [my friend] and she said, 'Well, I've got a spare room. You can live [in the refuge] and your son can live here with me.'

He had not managed to find a job and had been getting into trouble with the police. His mum described a recent incident:

He pinched a car and he can't even drive – he'd been drinking and he got into somebody's car and got done.

Although it is difficult to attribute this behaviour solely to the domestic violence, the separation from his family, in addition to the trauma of being abused and receiving little formal support to help him come to terms with what had happened, no doubt contributed to his behaviour and sense of social isolation.

Two other young people interviewed had older brothers who had remained in the family home. This had created a considerable amount of tension between the sons 'left behind' and their mothers.

Jack

Jack's mum and dad had been married for 21 years before Jack and his mum finally left six months ago after enduring four years of abuse. Jack's 14-year-old brother, Sebastian, decided to stay with his father so that he could remain in the same school. Jack and his mum had stayed with relatives before moving into council housing in rural Warwickshire. They had only seen Sebastian on a few occasions since they had left home though. The mum explains:

There's a hole here because Sebastian is not here. He's been up a few times but, my God, he hasn't half changed... It was a good two months before I saw him, and having been used to looking after a child – and I'm not exaggerating by saying this: every second from the day he was born to the day he was 14 he never left my side; he never had anything to do with his dad... he never took them to school, doctors, hospital appointments, anywhere; no sociable places, football matches; it was always me all the time – when you're used to... doing that with two children... every week, every month, every year, and when you haven't got that person, it's like someone's torn half your heart out. But... he's still my Sebastian – he's just a typical raring, grubby 14-year-old.

Although Sebastian had witnessed his dad abusing his mum and had 'begged and

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begged his mum to leave, his mum commented, *'apparently he was very angry with me for leaving...'*

Jack, in particular, really misses his brother and still confides in him about the domestic violence and his parents' separation.

These cases illustrate a number of issues. Firstly, contact is restricted not only because the son cannot visit his family in the refuge, but also because mothers and siblings who have fled an abusive partner are reluctant to return to the family home to visit the son.

Often, the lack of safe alternatives available for teenage sons, and the reluctance to leave them alone with the perpetrator or in independent housing, place women in an unenviable dilemma: their only other options are to remain in the abusive situation or to make do with inappropriate accommodation in order to keep the family together.

It's probably quite a big decision for a woman to come – whether to come with your family but having to leave your son behind who may be 17 or whatever. A lot of women... that's their family and they want to go as a family...

It could be the difference between staying in that difficult situation or leaving and having to leave your son behind or leave your son with people that he doesn't necessarily want to be with (refuge worker).

Teenage boys as perpetrators and 'cycle of violence' theories

One problem evident in our research was that teenage boys sometimes suffer in the provision of domestic violence services compared to teenage girls because of a perception that the teenage boys of an abusive man will begin to exhibit or copy the violence they witnessed.

Hester, Pearson and Harwin comment:

According to this belief in the 'inter-generational transmission of violence', it is presumed that girls will identify with their mothers and boys with their fathers. This implies that boys will copy their father's violent behaviour and adopt externalised responses (such as aggression, disobedience and bullying) while girls will become 'victims' and learn internalised responses (such as anxiety and depression) (2000, p 52).

A number of the service providers interviewed felt that, in their experience, this theory was well founded:

You have only got to listen to a lot of perpetrators' stories and you will find that the majority of them have grown up with domestic violence and have been hit or abused somewhere along the line. That is then their behaviour so when they go out into the world it starts again. It can also be the same with women (refuge worker).

This led to a view that teenage boys might jeopardise the security of refuges:

I mean, you get a boy of that age who has been used to seeing violence anyway and is coming

Good Practice: South Ribble Key

South Ribble Borough Council established Key as part of the South Ribble Domestic Abuse Forum. It was set up in 1994, and is a registered charity working with young people with housing-related problems, aged 16 to 25.

Since the project started, giving information, advice and support to young people who are homeless or who have housing problems, Key has gradually developed to assist young people with a range of issues related to housing. These problems include emotional, medical and general health problems, family breakdown, learning difficulties, and issues relating to drugs and alcohol.

Key networks closely with a range of agencies, both statutory and voluntary, which may be directly or indirectly involved with any young person. This involves both referrals and advocacy with agencies such as South Ribble Borough Council, the homelessness officer, housing associations, landlords,

families and friends. Key has close connections with SLEAP, an emergency accommodation project. It is also part of the South Ribble Domestic Abuse Agency Directory 2002 produced by the South Ribble Domestic Abuse Forum.

Key operates as a one-stop-shop, including a drop-in service, for young people with housing problems. Services include information on housing, benefits and money. Practical support is given in the form of food parcels, a café, kitchen and bathroom facilities, one-to-one counselling, life skills training, and home visits in tenancies. Young people can access the Prince's Trust Volunteers and a sexual health clinic, which operate in the same building.

Key workers deal with up to 100 individual young people a month, of whom 36 per cent are experiencing housing problems as a result of family breakdown, and 4 per cent of these young people come from a violent home situation.

away from violence. Sometimes they will inflict that on other people so you are not really safeguarding the other residents by bringing [in] a boy – I mean you can get very large-built boys of 14 (refuge worker).

'Cycle of violence' theories have, however, been challenged, not least because of the lack of empirical evidence on this subject. As Hester, Pearson and Harwin comment:

While domestic violence can clearly have adverse effects on both boys and girls, it would be wrong

to assume that responses can be presumed to follow some 'given' or 'pre-determined' gender pattern (2000, p 52).

Thus, it is not necessarily a 'given' that teenage boys become violent, although some do, and the very labelling of boys in this way – rather than taking more positive action to address the impact of domestic violence on boys – can have a detrimental effect:

I think it all depends on educating that person to making their life better rather than re-doing

what has happened. There are people out there and you do get parents who say, 'well he's just the same as his dad, you know, his dad used to do that to me.' They feel they have to live up to that (refuge worker).

We did, however, find some examples of teenage boys being violent to their mothers, most often as a result of witnessing this violence upon their mothers by an adult perpetrator:

I have just thought of one in particular, he is definitely shady – and I thought he thought the world of his mum, which he does, but I have noticed, like, tendencies now and I had to, like, say, 'Do you recognise that, you know, domestic violence – is it not on a par with domestic violence?' And she was, like, 'Oh God, yes.'... he was manipulating her emotionally. Not actually using violence, but there again he would be... (refuge worker).

Another refuge worker, who was a colleague of the worker quoted above, commented upon a similar situation she had come across while working with a woman experiencing domestic violence:

Yes, not my client but another one. He was very abusive, particularly abusive to his mother. This one was only about six, wasn't he? (refuge worker).

Refuge workers also commented on what they felt could be done to remedy this situation for mothers of abusive teenage boys:

To work with the mother, to educate the mother on what domestic violence is, so that if I said to

her, 'Are you noticing, can you see the similarities in what you suffered from your partner to what your son is trying to do?' and she went, 'Yes,' I would say, 'Put a stop to it, try and put a stop to it now and you know, try and be more assertive, because I think it is important to try and keep the family together.'

They also talked about how they would try to help the teenage boy:

If I was in a family situation and I was working with the mother and I had noticed a child was – you know, various sorts of things – then I could perhaps have a word with him...

Workers at one refuge talked about anger-management sessions that they run for the children and young people in their care.

Q: Do you find that a lot of the kids need some sort of anger management?

Refuge worker: A lot of them do and then occasionally the kids will say, 'Can we do something with our anger?' They get to the point where everybody just sees them as negative then, and no one wants anything to do with them. That's why they'll say, 'How can I deal with it, because it's making me feel really down? It's kind of brainstorming with them, like what's making them angry and how they can deal with that then. So turn it into a positive thing instead.'

The same refuge also had provision for one-to-one counselling for teenagers both within the refuge and after they had moved on elsewhere:

We do have the counselling here and when they move on, as long as they're staying in the area then they can continue on with that counselling.

A health worker commented on the importance of having male counsellors who teenage boys could relate to, and on the general shortage of counsellors:

I think one of the biggest issues we have had around teenagers is that we don't have male workers, so for most young teenage boys they don't want to go to someone who reminds them of their mum or who they view as being quite old in views and again it's a woman. I think if we actually had youth male workers within the service that would be far more productive and lads would be far more comfortable in talking in that environment than they do with women.

A shortage of counselling services has been identified in other studies as a major stumbling block to providing effective responses to domestic violence for young people (WDVSS, 2001, p 12).

Our findings reiterate this, identifying a specific need for swift referral and subsequent counselling for teenagers. Educating teenagers as to what is appropriate behaviour with their mothers is also vital. Programmes such as Sure Start are assisting some women who have experienced domestic violence to re-educate their children about appropriate behaviour.

In conclusion, the needs of teenage boys are sometimes overlooked in relation to domestic

violence. Refuges are an important resource for women and children fleeing domestic violence, but not all of them accept teenage boys. This can lead to problems relating to housing of the teenage boy, or of finding alternative accommodation where the whole family could live. If the family is split up, this is often painful for other younger siblings there may be in the family. There is a need to ensure that adequate support mechanisms are put in place for teenage boys, some of whom may demonstrate learned behaviour from the perpetrator of domestic violence. However, 'cycle of violence' theories need to be treated with some caution, as not every boy who witnesses domestic violence will become violent. Above all, further research seems necessary to explore further the needs of teenage boys who have experienced domestic violence.

Key implications for policy and practice

- Further research is needed with teenage boys, families and professionals to explore the housing provision, options and needs of teenage boys who experience domestic violence.
- *Housing authorities* should ensure that suitable temporary accommodation and permanent rehousing is identified for mothers and teenage boys who are fleeing domestic violence.
- *Housing authorities and social services* should prioritise and monitor the housing needs of teenage boys who do not have access to refuges.

11 Conclusion

This study has aimed to address two distinct gaps in domestic violence research and service provision. Firstly, it has sought to identify and explore service provision targeting the specific needs of children and young people. This has demanded direct consultation with children and young people about what *they* think are the gaps in provision based on *their own direct experiences*. Secondly, the research has explored whether there is anything distinctive about the quality or availability of service provision for children and young people *in rural areas* who experience domestic violence. There has, up to now, been virtually no investigation into this issue, yet this research confirms that there is a clear correlation between geographical isolation and service poverty.

Our research was of an exploratory nature and conducted on a small scale. It is important to note, without undermining the impact of domestic violence, the optimism and courage with which most children and young people coped with their situation. Most of our respondents were highly sensitive to the needs and vulnerability of their mother or siblings and assumed a supportive and very practical domestic role. Their very pragmatic ‘I just get on with it...’ approach, however, made it difficult in some cases to assess their individual needs or the extent to which they had been affected by their experiences. Nevertheless, a number of key issues have been identified by the children and young people interviewed that are undoubtedly common to many who experience domestic violence. For them, the most significant issue was the sense of social and emotional dislocation created by domestic violence. Problems were clearly most

acute for those who had to move to a new area since this almost invariably meant leaving behind friends and withdrawing from the social networks they had built up. The process of making new friends and integrating within a new school and social environment was particularly difficult for some of the older children interviewed.

Children who move into refuge accommodation are among some of the most extreme cases of domestic violence and are likely to receive greatest access to additional support services. This is largely attributable to the extensive contacts most refuges have built up with local schools, youth groups, social services, counsellors and health workers. Less fortunate in terms of service provision are those children who move in with friends or family or who remain at home. At best, they will only be the indirect beneficiaries of any service provision their mother obtains, except where the children themselves are seen as ‘at risk’ of direct violence.

Indeed, all of the children relied almost exclusively on the initiative of their mother or on the formal intervention of statutory services to obtain help in the first instance. While most children identified the police, social services or children’s helpline services as potential sources of emergency help, few had actually initiated this support.

It is apparent, therefore, that unless children and young people fall within the child protection process, little statutory provision is available to address their specific needs directly. There is currently a heavy reliance on charitable organisations and refuges to plug this gap.

Securing ongoing funding for even the most basic aspects of these services, however, is a common and widespread problem. Consequently, services for young people are often the first to be sacrificed when lack of funding demands prioritisation of other services.

Obtaining long-term funding is an ongoing problem for the voluntary sector, supporting the case for maximising the potential of mainstream, non-crisis services such as education and health in the campaign against domestic violence. The findings have illustrated how the school, in particular, provides a fertile environment in which to forge greater understanding and sensitivity as to the effects of domestic violence.

In its Rural White Paper *Our Countryside: The future – A fair deal for rural England* (DETR and MAFF, 2000), the Government committed itself to ‘rural proofing’ all policy-making. This requires all government departments to evaluate the potential impact of policies and decisions in rural areas, taking into account the needs of those who live and work in the countryside. While evidence shows that all departments have done the minimum required to introduce rural proofing, only half have actually done more (Countryside Agency, 2002a). This research has tried to highlight the extent to which rural dwelling impacts upon children and young people’s experiences of domestic violence, not least in relation to the availability and effectiveness of services. It is evident that many service providers have no clearly defined rural strategy in place to address the very distinct needs of the rural community. Organisations such as The Countryside Agency have identified potential

scope for improvement in service delivery in remote areas through *joint provision* and better utilisation of information technology.

Our research has highlighted the value of this joint provisioning strategy. The findings demonstrate that many of the children and young people (and their parents) who had experienced domestic violence had multiple contacts with a wide range of services. The benefits which multi-disciplinary teams have to offer (better liaison, ease of access) in urban contexts may be multiplied in rural areas where isolation and practical issues such as transport are heightened for service providers and service users alike.

Paradoxically, while both adults and children who have experienced domestic violence in rural areas are in many cases *invisible* to service providers and policy-makers, they often fear being highly *visible* in their local community. Joint provision of health and social services (through sharing accommodation and information on cases ‘in need’) can be seen as a way of anonymising and hence de-stigmatising domestic violence services. Furthermore, schools, leisure centres and youth centres, where there is more concentrated youth activity, could be adopted as sites for more effective information exchange, advice and, where appropriate, the provision of counselling.

The findings presented in this report are by no means exhaustive and we have identified our awareness of the limitations of our sample in terms of geographical location, range of experiences, ethnic distribution and sample size. However, we have endeavoured to provide, at very least, an incisive snapshot of the needs of children

and young people who experience and overcome domestic violence in more remote areas. Aside from considering substantive policy issues, however, the research has aimed to highlight the need to develop and extend mechanisms for engaging young people in consultations about rural service provision, both at the general democratic level and in relation to particular policy issues. This demands more focused and innovative efforts to involve children and young people in empirical research.

Our methodology section (Appendix 1) describes many of the challenges inherent in this process: the culture of silence surrounding domestic violence in the first instance means that many children and young people are reluctant to talk to anyone, least of all a researcher, about their own experiences and needs; the many practice

protocols involved in working with vulnerable children in these circumstances demand a highly protectionist approach from any responsible service provider, such that few are willing to act as gatekeepers to potential respondents; and finally, the research process itself is generally constrained by financial, time and geographical factors which limit researchers' capacity to invest in building up a relationship of trust and confidence with any willing respondents, or to apply a wider range of research techniques. These challenges are not, however, insurmountable. With appropriate funding, careful and sensitive research planning, and close collaboration and consultation with key academics and service providers working in the field, significant strides can be made to engage children and young people more directly and genuinely as 'professionals by experience' in the process of service evaluation and improvement.

Appendix I

Detailed research methodology

Structure of the research

The research was conducted in three key stages.

Stage One involved an in-depth literature review of the principal areas of domestic violence service provision and of the research involving children and young people who experience domestic violence. This literature review also explored the rural dimension of domestic violence and enabled the team to identify specific gaps in research as well as service provision in this specific context.

Stage Two involved the distribution of a questionnaire by email and post to 300 service providers and practitioners nation-wide, to assist with identifying and evaluating any services specifically targeting children and young people within the different sectors. In total 29 completed questionnaires were returned. This low rate of return is not untypical for surveys of this sort and probably reflects the work pressures experienced by many practitioners, elements of consultation fatigue in some cases, and the general difficulty in gaining non-stakeholder participation in research. Despite the limited number of returns the questionnaires produced relevant and significant information about the practices, perceptions and concerns of service providers, which has informed this report.

Stage Three provided the crux of the research and involved interviews and consultation with 19 children and young people and with 5 mothers. There was no specific age limit for child respondents, although all of those interviewed were between the ages of 5 and 16. The postal questionnaire was complemented by 21 in-depth

interviews and consultation sessions with a total of 39 individual service providers based primarily in Warwickshire, Lancashire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The main services targeted for both consultation and the postal questionnaire were in the criminal justice, housing, legal, health, education, welfare and NGO sectors.

The case for involving young people in domestic violence research

It is clearly important, in any study of domestic violence experiences and service provision, to acknowledge the impact of such incidents on the welfare of children, whether they witness domestic violence against their mother or siblings or experience direct abuse themselves. However, correlation between the welfare and needs of the child and those of the mother has routinely been used as a reason to defer to adult perceptions of children's experiences, rather than consult with children and young people directly. Comparatively little attention has been afforded to children and young people's distinct perceptions of domestic violence and, accordingly, little attention has been paid to their individual service needs.

The protectionist objection to engaging children in research, which in the past has dominated disciplines such as the social sciences, law and psychology, remains very apparent in the context of domestic violence research. The prevailing assumption remains that children in such circumstances are inherently vulnerable and

should not be expected to withstand the additional trauma of relaying their experiences to adults simply for the purposes of research. Such an assertion clearly merits some consideration, particularly if a child has already endured a series of detailed and traumatic ‘interviews’ with social workers, legal practitioners, the police, health workers or counsellors. These objections are often founded on gatekeepers’ and other practitioners’ well-founded fears of jeopardising the progress they may already have made with the child or young person in their care rather than on the direct and explicit refusal of the child themselves.

A further justification for failing to consult with children about domestic violence issues relates to perceptions as to their inability to articulate how they really feel about their own experiences, or indeed to talk more generally and objectively about the issues. Such assumptions relating to the child’s competence actually to participate in the research are, however, clearly contingent on the adult’s competence in assessing and eliciting children’s needs and views.

Moves within the children’s rights movement and, indeed, within research more generally, particularly since the early 1990s, to consult actively with children on issues that directly affect them is a particularly welcomed development. That is not to ignore, however, the specific challenges and responsibilities that arise when conducting empirical research on this highly sensitive issue. Obtaining access to a sample of willing respondents, for instance, provides one of the most significant challenges in this respect. This issue necessitates a heavy reliance on practitioners or gatekeepers who work directly

with children and young people affected by domestic violence. Research of this nature also demands a greater and more flexible range of interviewing and research techniques to access and accommodate what is a potentially vulnerable, transient, stigmatised and ‘invisible’ community.

Applying a participatory model

The methodology applied for the rural domestic violence research was heavily centred on eliciting children and young people’s views of services. The challenges identified above demanded a considerable investment of time and energy in building up links with potential gatekeepers. The first stage of the empirical research, however, involved general consultation with key service providers in each of the sectors identified. This provided a general overview of the range, extent and availability of services for those who experience domestic violence within each of the sectors identified above.

Consultation with service providers

Consultation with service providers was achieved through the distribution of a postal/email questionnaire, one-to-one interviews and afternoon consultation meetings with a core group of practitioners.

The postal/email questionnaire

The questionnaire sought to elicit some basic information about the respondents’ work with young people who had experienced domestic

violence, about their contacts with other agencies, and about gaps in service provision and/or examples of good practice.²⁰ It sought to retain a balance between the desire to obtain good, qualitative data and the need to keep the questionnaire short and simple to complete, to maximise returns. Some quantitative and some qualitative data was obtained; in addition, many of the respondents indicated a willingness to be contacted further by telephone to follow up the comments they had made. Around 300 questionnaires were sent out by post or by email or handed over in the course of interviews with service providers, for distribution within their organisation. Twenty-nine were returned and analysed using Nud*ist 4 software.²¹

The low response rate to our questionnaire has been reflected in other comparable studies, which have also recorded a similarly poor response rate (see, for instance, the findings of research conducted by the Coventry Domestic Violence Partnership (Hendessi, 1997). This may be due in part to the saturation of domestic violence services with questionnaires from various funders and service providers. When followed up, the practitioners targeted openly admitted to being less inclined to respond to questionnaires purely aimed at research and to prioritising other aspects of their work. The poor response rate, therefore, is less symptomatic of a lack of interest or willingness to assist with the research, but more an indication of the extent to which most staff working in these sectors are overstretched. Also, many of these services – particularly refuges and other voluntary agencies – do not have access to Internet/email resources to facilitate rapid response to such enquiries.

Despite the limited number of returns, the questionnaires produced relevant and significant information about the practices, perceptions and concerns of service providers, which has informed this report. The findings of the postal questionnaire are summarised in Appendix 2.

Interviews with service providers

The research included 21 group and individual interviews with 39 service providers in Warwickshire, Lancashire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, as the following table indicates.

Sector	Number of Respondents
Voluntary (Victim Support)	3
Police	1
Refuge/DV Support Service	20
Social Services	2
Health	3
Education	6
Youth Services	3
Housing	1

These exploratory interviews provided an important insight into how the particular service responded to the needs of children and young people who experienced domestic violence. They also provided opportunities to distribute the postal questionnaire.

The above figures indicate a predominance of 'crisis' services, and particularly refuge staff,

within the interview sample. This is because one-to-one contact with refuge staff in the first instance was a crucial step in identifying and accessing potential respondents among children and young people. Indeed, the refuges and domestic violence support networks within which they operated provided the principal means of engaging children and young people directly in the research.

Consultation network

The research team also consulted with a small network of practitioners working in the legal, refuge, education and social services sectors at the initial and closing stages of the study. This network provided valuable advice and information on how best to engage children and young people in the work, gave feedback on the research literature we had designed for parents and children, and advised on how best to present the findings of the research (in terms of both content and style).

Accessing children and young people

For pragmatic reasons, the research initially set out to interview children and young people within the defined geographical remit of rural Warwickshire.²²

Potential gatekeepers were identified through the exploratory interviews described above. After an initial meeting, gatekeepers (mainly refuge staff) were provided with a written summary of the project, and a letter to parents and a children's

leaflet to pass on to refuge residents. They were then asked to approach children and young people on our behalf about being involved in the study. This process in some cases took up to two months with little or no response at first from many of the resident families approached by refuge staff.

In an attempt to attract respondents from outside the refuge service, fifty posters were sent to GP surgeries in rural Warwickshire, with a letter asking them to advertise the research in the surgery, but we did not receive any responses to this campaign.

The net was subsequently cast further to other rural counties: Herefordshire, Lancashire and Worcestershire. Social services and the YWCA were contacted and asked if they would distribute leaflets and a letter on our behalf to their database of clients in rural areas, with an offer that Save the Children would meet any additional administration costs. The representatives in each case, while willing to assist in principle, were unable to obtain the appropriate authorisation.

The number of service providers we consulted, and the extended geographical remit of the study, provides some indication of the problems experienced in gaining access to a sample of young respondents. While most refuge staff we approached were more than willing to act as gatekeepers and to publicise the research to their young residents, many found that, when approached, mothers and children alike were not willing to take part in the study. This may have been because the necessary protocols accompanying the research process adds to the

formality of the process and can intimidate those who have already been through a series of traumatic interviews with police, solicitors, refuge staff, welfare and benefits agencies, head teachers, etc.

There was a strong sense (expressed by mothers in particular) that the child had already suffered enough upheaval and trauma through their experiences of the domestic violence, fleeing the family home, adapting to the refuge environment or other temporary accommodation and starting a new school. They felt, quite understandably, that the child needed some respite from recounting the trauma of events even though it was made clear in our introductory leaflet that we did not wish them to reveal details of the domestic violence itself, but to talk more about the type of help they received or wanted.

The transient nature of the refuge community, in addition to the rural location, exacerbated many of these problems of gaining access: some children and young people agreed initially to be interviewed but moved away from the refuge without notice before an interview could be scheduled.²³

Consulting with children and young people

In total, 19 children and young people were consulted for the research: 10 from Warwickshire, 6 from Herefordshire and 3 from Lancashire. Ages ranged from 5 to 16 years old. There were 10 girls and 9 boys. Eight young people were still living in the refuge at the time of the interview whereas the

remaining 11 were former residents or had never lived in refuge accommodation.

Most of the interviews took place on a one-to-one basis and were largely unstructured discussions about what kind of help the children and young people had received from different services. There was a large degree of flexibility in terms of the environment in which the interview took place: some young people were interviewed in the presence of their mothers and some were interviewed as part of a group, with a friend or other relative, or in the presence of the refuge worker.

In some cases, the children were asked to draw pictures of the refuge they lived in, of their school or of the people who had helped them since they left home. On other occasions, the child was presented with a little story or 'vignette' about a typical domestic violence situation and was asked to advise the young person depicted in the story. Both of these methods were particularly useful in objectifying or externalising the child's experience of domestic violence and empowering them to act as advisor to a third person rather than as the 'victim' themselves.

As mentioned above, the research focused initially on domestic violence service provision in rural Warwickshire, but the sample was subsequently extended to Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Lancashire where good links were established with gatekeepers. The majority of child respondents and their mothers were accessed through rural refuge accommodation in these areas. We also interviewed staff and obtained written feedback from four children and young people (who chose

not to be interviewed) in one urban refuge in Birmingham as a means of comparing and contrasting experiences of domestic violence service provision.

All of the young people involved in the research received a £5 gift voucher as a ‘thank you’ for their participation. Respondents were not made aware of this before they agreed to participate in the research, to ensure that the token was not used as a means of enticing them into participating.

Some young people were invited to become more involved in reporting on the findings and dissemination. One teenage respondent continued to help with identifying the main issues to cover in the report.

NOTES

20 The term ‘good practice’ is applied generally throughout this report as a means of highlighting potentially positive practice as well as practice that has been formally evaluated. Research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and conducted by Humphreys *et al.* (2000) developed a series of good practice indicators to enable organisations to check and evaluate their domestic violence support services.

21 An acronym for ‘Non-numerical unstructured data indexing searching and theory-building’.

22 The Save the Children office co-ordinating the project was located in Sandwell and had already established contacts with local refuges which had expressed a willingness to act as gatekeepers. The limited time period available for the research also restricted the capacity to conduct interviews in too wide a geographical area.

23 Problems of obtaining access to respondents is a common feature of domestic violence research involving children, and was explicitly identified as an issue in the Interrupted Learners research conducted nationally by Save the Children in 2002.

Appendix 2

Summary report on postal and email questionnaires

Introduction

The interviews with service providers were supplemented with a questionnaire, which sought to elicit some basic information about the respondents' work with young people who had experienced domestic violence, about their contacts with other agencies, and about gaps in service provision and/or examples of good practice. The questionnaire sought to retain a balance between the desire to obtain good, qualitative data and the need to keep the questionnaire short and simple to complete, to maximise returns. Some quantitative and some qualitative data was obtained; in addition, many of the respondents indicated a willingness to be contacted further by telephone to follow up the comments they had made (though this has not been done, due to time restraints).

Collection of data

Around 300 questionnaires were sent out by post or by email or handed over in the course of interviews with service providers for distribution. Twenty-nine were returned and analysed using Nud*ist software.

Findings

The questionnaire returns are summarised below, following the format of the questionnaire.

I. About you and your organisation

SERVICE SECTOR

A good cross-sample of service providers was reached. Respondents identified themselves by **service area** as follows:

Service Sector	Responses
Education	6
Social Services	5
Health	5
Policing	1
Housing	6
Refuges	3
Legal	1
Other (included Homestart, Young Person's Advisory Service, Relate, County Council Welfare Rights Service, Domestic Abuse Forum, NGO working with young women, Victim Support)	12

AGE RANGE

Few of the respondents worked exclusively with children: only 6 worked '*almost all with children*' (2) or '*mostly with children*' (4), while 11 worked

either *'almost all with adults'* (4) or *'mostly with adults'* (7), and 10 reported their work as *'mixed'* (adults and children). This was also reflected in the age-range of the children with whom respondents worked:

Age Range	Service Providers
Pre-school	8
5-10	10
11-15	14
16-18	19

URBAN/RURAL

The sample contacted 7 respondents whose work was work was *'almost all'* (5) or *'mostly'* (2) rural and 6 whose work was *'almost all'* (5) or *'mostly'* (1) urban; 15 respondents said their work was *'mixed'* (urban and rural).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, YOUNG PEOPLE AND RURAL AREAS

Asked how often their work concerned service provision to young people in rural areas who had experienced domestic violence, 13 respondents reported that they dealt with this *'quite often'* (4), *'regularly'* (4) or *'constantly'* (5). A further 12 responded that they dealt with this *'occasionally'*. Only 3 respondents *'never'* dealt with this issue.

2. About the service you offer

ACCESSING SERVICES

Fifteen respondents indicated that young people who had experienced domestic violence might access their service directly: 22 indicated that

initial contact might come about by referral from another agency: 2 respondents had no direct contact with young people. It was common for respondents to identify three or more possible sources of referrals, indicating a strong pattern of multi-access routes (including self-referral) in many service areas.

PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

Respondents were asked to identify the services they made available to the children and young people who had experienced domestic violence with whom they came into contact. Reflecting the wide range of organisations included in the sample, a **wide range** of services was identified by respondents, many of whom provided a **range** of services. **Fifteen** respondents identified **support or counselling** as a service they made available. Some respondents indicated that a wide package or menu of **therapeutic services** was on offer within their organisation to young people who had experienced domestic violence; eg, in one case *'counselling, informal support, groupwork, confidence-building, anger management, drop-in, substance misuse support, personal development project'*. Others acted more through **signposting or referrals**, directing children and young people on to other agencies (social services, Connexions, Homestart, family centre). Some provided specific **practical help** such as *'reintegration into education'* or *'emergency accommodation'*.

Respondents were *'usually'* (10) or *'quite often'* (7) able to provide or promote the services they thought appropriate to each child or young person. However, 6 responded that they could do this *'occasionally'* and 1 *'never'*.

Respondents were then asked to identify the factors that prevented them being able to provide or promote the service they thought appropriate. Almost all respondents offered some examples. A wide range of difficulties was reported, from parental opposition to resources.

A number of respondents identified **domestic violence** itself as an issue, citing *'threat of reprisal for the family or (service provider)'*, *'perpetrator at home'*, *'parental opposition'* or *'mother not recognising their needs'*.

A number of respondents felt that young people's or children's **needs** were **not recognised**, either by other service providers, or within the wider community. Some pointed to operational limits on their own or other services; eg, other agencies *'not accepting referrals'*, or *'never able to accommodate our children'*, or an agency being unable to deal with children's longer-term special needs (*'not within our expertise'*).

There were also perceived **gaps in services**; eg, *'lack of local agencies offering the services appropriate'*, *'long waiting list for counselling'*, *'non-existent therapeutic services'*, *'lack of appropriate support services for young people'*. **Three** respondents pointed to a gap for the **16+ age group**; in addition, some adult services lacked a young persons protocol to accommodate older children.

Accommodation shortage was cited as a problem in a number of responses, including shortages both of refuges and of suitable accommodation for young people generally, and for young men in particular: *'very little safe, appropriate, direct*

access to emergency accommodation, especially for young men'.

Finally, **lack of resources** was a big issue for many respondents. **Twelve** specifically referred to **funding** or **staffing** issues within their own organisation, including the short-term nature of some funding: *'short-term funding projects are not ideal'*, *'funding is not guaranteed or on-going'*.

3. About your organisation

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of **studies and reports** examining the services of their own organisation relating to domestic violence and about internal **service monitoring**. It was clear from the responses that many organisations have examined this issue and/or monitored their own performance. **Ten** respondents reported that **change was planned** in their organisation, as opposed to **17** where no change was reported. Despite this level of activity and attention to the issue, **15** respondents thought there were **gaps in their organisation's provision** as opposed to **10** who said no gaps existed.

Asked about **attention to services for young people**, **14** respondents felt their organisation gave enough attention to this issue but **12** did not.

Finally, a high number of respondents (**17**) indicated that their organisation **tailored its services** to reflect the different needs of **urban** and **rural** situations, as opposed to **9** who said their organisation did not. Of **12** respondents who gave details, **6** referred to **outreach** as a part of their organisation's approach to rural provision, while **2** referred specifically to **transport** issues and

I referred specifically to **rural isolation**. A number indicated that their organisation was well aware of the rural issues and had tailored its provision accordingly; eg, *‘the demographic make up of the area is well-researched and needs tailored appropriately’*.

4. About other service providers

Respondents were asked to indicate **which other services** they had contact with in their work with children and young people who have experienced domestic violence. Nearly all the respondents indicated that they have contacts as follows:

Service Sector	Links with Other Services
Education	25
Social Services	24
Health	20
Policing	18
Housing	17
Refuges	20
Legal	14
Others (included voluntary sector organisations – including church groups, helplines, Women’s Aid, CAB, Relate; local domestic violence services; drug and alcohol services; Homestart; employment counselling)	12

As is clear from the figures, many respondents mentioned dealings with several other service providers, indicating, as with referrals, a **high level**

of inter-agency contact. There was also a **significant degree of contact with a wide range of voluntary sector organisations**.

This seems to support the view that closer **inter-agency collaboration** can be both **efficient and appropriate** in the domestic violence field, and that it might bring about **improvements in service provision** for children and young people (and others) who have experienced domestic violence. It would also seem to support the case for **joint provision** of services, where appropriate.

Good practice

Respondents were asked to give examples of good practice in their own or other services, relating to children and domestic violence in rural areas. Eighteen respondents gave examples, in most cases referring to their own service. Examples included:

- a good county domestic violence **protocol**
- effective **team-work** in a multi-agency team; regular meetings of domestic violence forum
- specific **training** (for a group of health workers) in domestic violence
- *‘a holistic service, including person-centred counselling, group work, motivation, self-esteem building, anger management. We have a young person-friendly environment and young people can use our service without being labelled.’*
- **signposting/referral**
- telephone **helpline** for children and young people
- provision of **counselling** to children who have witnessed domestic violence
- *‘in-home counselling by WDVSS. Sensitivity in dealing with the issue where families can be*

highly visible in rural areas. Provision of services for children. Direct work in the home and at the family centre for children.'

- **outreach** work for transport.

The **key themes** here seem to be: good inter-agency collaboration/multi-agency working/holistic approaches; provision of services specifically for children and young

people; provision of counselling for children and young people. **Access** issues might be seen to underlie some examples; eg, non-labelling, telephone helpline, outreach/transport. In terms of best practice for **rural areas**, one respondent identified the possible role of the Domestic Violence Forum (undeveloped) and programmes such as South Ribble Key, but few referred specifically to the rural aspect.

Appendix 3

Interview vignettes

Sarah (or other name), your best friend at school, has been a bit quiet lately – not her usual jokey self.

One day, you find her crying in the toilets at school and you ask her what's wrong. She tells you that her dad and mum have been arguing a lot lately and that she had seen her dad really shouting at her mum and hitting and kicking her really hard.

Her mum hasn't talked to Sarah about it but instead just stays in her bedroom all the time and cries a lot.

Sarah kind of still loves her dad but she thinks he might keep on hurting her mum. She doesn't really know what to do but wants to talk to someone about it.

- **What would you tell Sarah to do if she asked for your help?**
- **Is there anyone you think she should talk to?**

John and his mum left home a while ago and went to live in a refuge. This was because his mum's ex-boyfriend, Dave, had been beating him and his mum up and they were afraid of him.

John has had to move to a different school in (name place) and move away from a lot of his friends. He's finding it really hard and is having trouble settling in. He feels a bit lonely and doesn't have anyone to talk to. He wants to move back to his old school and live near his old friends.

- **What advice would you give him if you knew him?**

Gina and her mum were living in the refuge because of problems with Gina's step-dad, James. After three months, Gina and her mum leave the refuge and move to a new house in (name place). Things are going fine but James keeps coming round to their new house and wants them to move back in with him. Gina doesn't want to go back as this would mean moving schools again and she doesn't really trust James anyway. She's worried that James will hurt her but is finding it difficult to talk to her mum about it.

- **Gina asks for your help. What would you do to try and help her?**

Appendix 4

Project literature

Rural Domestic Violence Research Project

Save the Children are asking children and young people to take part in a project about experiences of violence at home.

We want to find out what support there is or should be for children and young people who have had to move away from home because of domestic violence.

Could you take part?

Being interviewed

Being interviewed takes about an hour. You could choose to be interviewed on your own, with a friend or parent or even a group of young people. You will be asked about how violence at home has affected your life, for example moving school, moving to a different area, or having to make new friends. We want to know what are the main issues that affect children and we would also like your ideas on how the services already available can be improved.

You won't have to talk about anything upsetting unless you feel comfortable. The things that you say will be treated as confidential – this means that people won't be able to identify you from what you've said.

You could also help us to write the report on the main issues.

To find out more call me, Helen Stalford, on 0151 794 2822, or look at the website www.rightsbase.org.uk/violence/rdv

www.rightsbase.org.uk/violence/rdv

Dear Parent,

I am writing on behalf of Save the Children to ask if you and your son/daughter would like to be involved in a research project. The project looks at the effects of domestic violence on children and young people in rural areas and involves talking to you both about your experiences. In particular we would like to know how effective different services (such as teachers, social workers, solicitors, the police and refuge staff) were at helping you.

Your involvement would mean agreeing to talk to either myself or another researcher, Helen Baker, for about an hour. We hope then to make a series of recommendations to policy-makers and service-providers as to how services can be improved for those who have similar experiences.

The purpose of the research is **not** specifically to ask you or your child to provide personal accounts of domestic violence but should you decide to share such experiences, we will be able to deal sensitively and responsibly with any issues raised. Of course, anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence unless you or your child reveals something which we feel places them at risk in any way.

I have enclosed a separate information leaflet about the project for your child. If either or both of you would like to talk to us about your experiences, I would be grateful if you would complete and sign the attached consent form and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Best wishes,

Helen Stalford



I (print name) would like to take part in the Save the Children research project.

I consent/do not consent* to my son/daughter* taking part in the Save the Children research project (delete as appropriate).

We can be contacted as follows:

Tel/Address:

At the following times:

Please tear off and return using the stamped addressed envelope provided

Appendix 5

Useful addresses

Childline

Childline is the free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK.

Studd Street
London
N1 0QW

Tel: 020 7239 1000
Fax: 020 7239 1001
Childline helpline: 0800 1111
Website: www.childline.org.uk

The Countryside Agency

John Dower House
Crescent Place
Cheltenham
GL50 3RA

Tel: 01242 521381
Website: www.countryside.gov.uk

Kidscape

Kidscape is a national charity dedicated to preventing bullying and child sexual abuse.

Kidscape
2 Grosvenor Gardens
London
SW1W 0DH

Tel: 020 7730 3300
Fax: 020 7730 7081
Website: www.kidscape.org.uk

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

NSPCC is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

Weston House
42 Curtain Road
London
EC2A 3NH

Tel: 020 7825 2500
Fax: 020 7825 2525
Child protection helpline: 0808 800 5000
Website: www.nspcc.org.uk

Parentline Plus

Parentline Plus is a national charity that recognises and values the different types of family that exist and works to shape and expand the services available to them.

24-hour helpline: 0808 800 2222
Text phone: 0800 783 6783

YoungMinds

YoungMinds is the national charity committed to improving the mental health of all children and young people.

102–108 Clerkenwell Road
London
EC1M 5SA

Tel: 020 7336 8445
Fax: 020 7336 8446
Parents' Information Service: 0800 018 2138
Email: enquiries@youngminds.org.uk
Website: www.youngminds.org.uk

Paws for Kids

Paws for Kids is a unique charity in the UK which fosters the pet animals of women and children escaping domestic violence.

PO Box 329
Bolton
BL6 5FT

Email: pawsforkids@freenetname.co.uk
Website: www.pawsforkids.org.uk

Relate

Relate is the UK's largest and most experienced relationship counselling organisation.

Herbert Gray College
Little Church Street
Rugby
Warwickshire
CV21 3AP

Tel: (lo-call) 0845 456 1310 or 01788 573241
Fax: 01788 535007
Press Office: 020 7387 3127 or 01788 563856
Website: www.relate.org.uk

Save the Children

17 Grove Lane
London
SE5 8RD

Tel: 020 7703 5400
Fax: 020 7716 2101
Website: www.savethechildren.org.uk

Women's Aid Federation of England

Women's Aid Federation of England (Women's Aid) is the national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children.

PO Box 391
Bristol
BS99 7WS
England

Tel (administration): 0117 944 4411
Tel (training): 0117 983 7126
Fax: 0117 924 1703
National Domestic Violence 24-Hour Helpline:
08457 023 468
Email: info@womensaid.org.uk

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