

Tackling Domestic Violence: providing advocacy and support to survivors of domestic violence

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Tackling Domestic Violence: providing advocacy and support to survivors of domestic violence

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The aim of this report is to provide concise guidance to those practitioners who directly work with female victims of domestic violence; whose role is to provide information, advice and support to help enable women to access a range of legal and non-legal services and resources, and ultimately to help them and their children, to move safely towards living violence-free lives. These specialist practitioners are sometimes referred to as 'advocates'; 'support workers'; 'victim workers'; 'outreach workers'; or 'navigators'.

This report draws upon the independent evaluations of a number of multi-agency projects which aimed to support female victims of domestic violence, and which were funded under the remit of the Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) Violence Against Women Initiative (VAWI). More information about the evidence base for this guidance is detailed at the end of this report.

Readers should refer to a related report called: *Tackling Domestic Violence: providing advocacy and support to survivors from Black and other minority communities* (2005) also by Alpa Parmar, Alice Sampson and Alana Diamond for specific good practice guidance on supporting survivors from different minority ethnic groups.

Introduction

Research has shown that domestic violence is a problem in society. Findings from the 2001 national British Crime Survey (BCS) self-completion module on domestic violence indicated that one in five (21%) women and one in ten (10%) men have experienced at least one incident of non-sexual domestic threat or force since they were 16. If financial abuse is included, then 26 per cent of women and 17 per cent of men had experienced domestic violence since the age of 16 (Walby and Allen, 2004).

Domestic violence affects all sections of society, regardless of age, gender, wealth, sexuality and geography. However, it is mainly women who suffer. The presence of children in the household is associated with nearly double the risk of domestic violence for women (Walby and Allen, 2004).

Intervention projects can assist women to access information and advice either to help them through the situation or to take legal action, and/or leave their partner. Projects can also help women who are in a violent

relationship and do not wish to leave their partner or take legal action.

This report draws upon the evidence from a number of evaluated projects, which provided support solely to female victims. Hence the findings and recommendations that are presented here are relevant just to female victims.

What is domestic violence?

- Domestic violence can be physical, psychological, emotional, sexual or financial.
- Domestic violence can be inflicted by an intimate partner or ex-partner e.g. current or former husband or boyfriend and/or extended family, e.g. mother-in-law.
- Domestic violence is often not an isolated problem for the woman. There are usually other issues that are linked to domestic violence. For example, there can be financial difficulties; housing problems; issues that affect the woman's children; immigration uncertainty; issues concerning forced marriage.

Home Office Development and Practice Reports draw out from research the messages for practice development, implementation and operation. They are intended as guidance for practitioners in specific fields. The recommendations explain how and why changes could be made, based on the findings from research, which would lead to better practice.

What are advocacy and support?

Advocacy

'Advocacy' is a term that was used by most of the projects, which were funded and evaluated under the CRP VAWI, to describe the work they did. Others commonly called themselves 'support workers' or 'outreach workers'.

For some, 'advocacy' was representing the interests of women, and negotiating on their behalf in a legal setting (criminal and/or civil); for others it was supporting and empowering women to secure their rights in a community context. It is the emphasis on rights and entitlements which distinguishes advocacy from other forms of support (Kelly and Humphreys, 2000).

Among the CRP VAWI projects the type of advocacy provided was usually a mixture of all of the above; this broad definition encapsulates the work which generally comes under the banner of advocacy within a domestic violence context.

Advocacy can also be a way of taking issues forward with the purpose of making legislative and policy changes. However, this form of advocacy was not so common among those projects which were evaluated.

Support

For some projects, support meant providing information and advice, safety planning and an occasional listening ear. This work tended to be short-term, and was often provided in response to a crisis or a specific incident. However, for other projects, support was about the provision of tailored, proactive and often intensive individual work with women. This type of support, which incorporated the provision of emotional support, was usually provided on a medium to long-term basis. The aim was to build and establish a relationship of trust with the woman to help enable complex fears to be unlocked; to help enable the woman to make decisions and take steps that could lead to a violence-free life.

In practice, the work of domestic violence practitioners was not so clearly defined, and was usually a mixture of advocacy, and both general and tailored emotional support.

Findings from the CRP VAWI evaluations suggest that it was the combination of both advocacy and tailored individual work with women, which included emotional support, that had the most positive impact on women. This combination of advocacy and support not only enabled them to access legal remedies, services and resources but also empowered them to 'move on' with their lives and ultimately to live violence-free lives (Hester and Westmarland, 2005).

What advocacy and support can involve

Providing advocacy and support will often mean dealing with a number of issues at the same time, and it is this skill which is an integral part of the job.

The box below details some of the tasks which may be included in the work of advocates and support workers.

Examples of tasks carried out by advocates and support workers

- Raising awareness of the issue of domestic violence in the local community.
- Raising awareness of the project amongst both statutory and voluntary agencies and committees. This can involve running regular workshops to agencies such as: the police, health visitors, GPs, midwives, social services, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), housing, solicitors, etc.
- Liaising with partner agencies and building good relationships with individuals who work in those agencies; to understand how they work and to enable women to gain access to a wide range of services.
- Building up a consistent and open relationship with the woman so that a feeling of trust is established.
- Conducting accurate risk assessments, and in response provide practical safety planning advice, ensuring that the immediate safety needs of the woman and her children are met.
- Understanding how assisting a woman's children is important and that responses need to be appropriate according to their age.
- Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a woman's legal case and understanding how best to assist a woman within the criminal justice system.
- Understanding complex fears which the woman has developed.
- Encouraging women at times to reflect on their situation and, if necessary, challenge women's understandings of their situation.
- Provide practical and emotional support concurrently and allow time to build a rapport with women.
- Assist women with developing vital life-skills, for example, household financial management.
- Being proactive when assisting and supporting women. For example: maintaining regular contact by making phone calls to women, regardless of whether they are routinely accessing the service or not.
- Adhering to, and promoting, equal opportunities and the interests of women from all cultural and racial backgrounds (see *Tackling Domestic Violence: providing advocacy and support to survivors from Black and other minority ethnic communities* (2005) by Alpa Parmar, Alice Sampson and Alana Diamond for specific good practice on how to provide appropriate support to survivors from different ethnic groups).

Where can advocacy and support work take place?

Whilst advocates and support workers should be **independent and act on behalf of women and for their benefit**, they can be located in different places depending on the *aims and intentions* of their work. They can work from:

- a 'one-stop-shop';
- a police station;
- a voluntary organisation;
- a community centre;
- a court.

Research interviews suggest that survivors of domestic violence really appreciated the main sources of support and advice to be in the one place, for example a 'one-stop-shop' (Hester and Westmarland, 2005).

Non-centre based advocacy and support

Outreach is a way of providing individual advocacy and support to a range of women who may have difficulties in accessing centre-based resources and services. Outreach is particularly suitable for those who live in rural or isolated areas, or for women who may be hard to reach, e.g. ethnic minority communities, survivors with physical or mental impairments, or those with mental health problems. Outreach workers support women in their own homes and communities and aim to provide accessible support and advocacy.

Models of advocacy and support

The projects that were evaluated adopted different approaches to assisting women experiencing domestic violence. Interviews with the women suggested that they preferred **longer-term support from an advocate or support worker rather than short-term crisis intervention**, whereby the worker would support a woman for a limited period and then refer her to other agencies. The evaluations indicated that the provision of longer-term support enabled relationships of trust to develop between the woman and the worker, and more positive legal outcomes were also achieved via this method.

Women also stated that part of what they liked about a long-term service was the consistent help and advice, and not having to repeat a story several times. It also reduced the feelings of loneliness and isolation a woman may experience when leaving her partner or taking legal action.

Seeing the whole picture

Research showed that many aspects or achievements obtained by advocates and support workers were not recorded or recognised in databases or monitoring

exercises but were clear if individual cases were looked at in depth. Seeing a woman's situation from the beginning and understanding her trajectory to an end gave a better insight into what an advocate actually did to support a woman and the multi-faceted nature of the job. One of the main skills of advocacy and support work is for the practitioner to be able to recognise the individual needs of a woman and to respond to these accordingly. In a sense, **the worker needs to tailor their approach according to the woman's situation, readiness to change and feelings.**

Supporting women to pursue a legal case

Advocates and support workers can play a key role to:

- increase the number of women who report incidents of domestic violence to the police; and
- increase the number of women who pursue legal options to the end.

Supporting women to report incidents to the police

Domestic violence is a crime, which usually occurs behind closed doors and most of the incidents do not come to the attention of the police. Indeed, only a minority (23%) of the worst cases of domestic violence, which were experienced by women, were reported to police (Walby and Allen, 2004).

The projects which were successful at increasing reports to the police were the ones which had close links with the police. For example, where workers were based within a police station e.g. within a Community Safety Unit (CSU), or where police were co-located with workers within a 'one-stop-shop'. In addition to having strong links with the police, those projects which provided legal advocacy – where advocates were specifically trained in legal processes – and supported and encouraged women to report incidents, were more likely to increase the number of women who reported incidents to the police. These projects were also more likely to have higher level of referrals from the police, and where reports were made to the police, these were more likely to result in an arrest (Hester and Westmarland, 2005).

Supporting women through courts

Courts can be confusing and intimidating places for many people; however, for survivors of domestic violence the process of pursuing a legal remedy can be a frightening and daunting process.

Survivors of domestic violence may:

- have fears about suffering from further violence from the perpetrator perhaps even being murdered;
- have low self-confidence and self-esteem after suffering from years of violence;
- fear for their children's safety;

- have reservations about taking the father of their children to court;
- not be able to afford to engage a solicitor; and
- have very little faith in the ability of the courts to pass an appropriate sentence or that the process, tariff or injunction will stop the violence.

Understandably, many women do not pursue a legal case, and among those that do, most withdraw from the Criminal Justice System (CJS) process (Hester and Westmarland, 2005).

Those projects which were more successful at increasing the number of women that pursued civil remedies were those projects with close links with family law solicitors, had a legal worker attached to the project or had police officers co-located within the project.

The provision of advice on legal issues by legal advocates, and tailored individual support, which were often provided on an intensive and proactive basis, were more likely to reduce the number of women who withdrew from the CJS. A quote from one of the evaluated CRP VAWI projects illustrates the need for support.

I've been in the same situation before [going to court] and I've always just backed down and weakened but the Centre gave me that boost and helped me because I knew that there was always somebody there for me...whereas, before I knew about the Centre, I just thought I was on my own.

(CRP VAWI Project user)

Research interviews with women indicated that they appreciated being accompanied at court and to their solicitors. They also wanted to be kept informed of CJS and legal processes, decisions and outcomes (Hester and Westmarland, 2005).

Tailoring support to meet the individual needs of survivors

As has been suggested above, a huge part of advocacy and support is dealing with many issues at the same time for one woman. The following case study examples illustrate this point and they also show how different women need varied forms of assistance. The names have been changed in order to protect confidentiality.

Case Study One: Sarah

Sarah was suffering physical abuse from her husband and he had threatened to kill her. Sarah was referred to the project by the police, and she was seeking emotional support in particular. The advocate was able to provide a 'listening ear' to Sarah and she would

drop in regularly for chats. In addition to listening to Sarah, the advocate wrote a letter to the Homeless Persons Unit, advised Sarah to apply for Income Support and arranged for her children to be picked up and brought back from school whilst these issues were being pursued, as Sarah was so fearful for their safety. Sarah was given a personal alarm and a safety plan was drawn up. After Sarah had been re-housed, the advocate advised her not to disclose her address to her husband, helped her to complete various forms such as tenancy agreements, set up the electricity account, arranged for maintenance works to be carried out and contacted the local college for a course for Sarah to attend. The advocate also taught Sarah how to budget and feel in control of her finances. The advocate also arranged an appointment for Sarah to visit her GP regarding her depression. Alongside the practical support, the advocate provided Sarah with general emotional support and usually discussed various options as to how best to address how 'lost and confused' Sarah was feeling. One important response from the advocate was to listen to Sarah and respond to her emotional problems by suggesting practical alternatives. For example, the college course was arranged to provide Sarah with something to focus on and also take her mind off the issues with her husband. The college course also had the effect of increasing Sarah's confidence and she made friends at the college which enabled her to feel less isolated.

Case Study Two: Samira

Samira, a Bengali woman was suffering physical, sexual and emotional abuse from her husband. He was also very controlling towards her. Samira was referred to the project by the police. Samira's advocate was able to assist her by going to the police station with her to make further reports. She also arranged and attended a solicitor's appointment with her and subsequent court dates. Samira obtained an injunction against her husband and the advocate arranged for the husband to meet the children at a contact centre. Samira was still considering whether to make criminal charges against her husband as well, although she was afraid of the backlash in her community if she did this. She also feared that a criminal record would make her husband angrier. The advocate was emotionally supportive to Samira and understood her fears. Samira was re-housed and the advocate arranged a Community Care Grant for furniture. The advocate attended court with Samira as she did not understand the legal process or options available to her before coming to the project.

The box below summarises the key good practice points for providing advocacy and support to survivors of domestic violence.



Good practice points

- **A tailored, proactive and intensive approach**

In-depth research into case files showed that those women who the practitioner worked with intensively (i.e. many meetings or phone calls, and the worker assisting a woman with a number of issues concurrently) felt the most satisfied with the progress of their case. They were also more likely to report incidents to the police, and to pursue legal remedies (both criminal and civil) to an outcome. Also key to this was bolstering the emotional support with practical assistance and advice so that the woman did not feel isolated.

- **A relationship built on trust and empathy**

Workers who had built a relationship of trust with the woman and showed empathy towards her situation were more likely to enable a woman to pursue her case to an end – whether it was legal or situational in circumstance.

- **Understanding agencies' structures, ways of working and developing close working links with key agencies**

Workers who adopted a specific style of working with other agencies and who showed understanding of their structures and policies, rather than resistance to them, were more likely to achieve better co-operation from statutory agencies and consequently a positive outcome in their client's cases. These workers were also more able to persuade and challenge agencies to work in the best interests of a woman.

Wherever advocates or support workers work, they face ambiguities in their day-to-day roles and tasks. The box below highlights some of the ambiguities advocates and support workers identified with and some possible principles which could guide other practitioners in this field.

Key principles for advocates and support workers

- It is important for advocates and support workers to provide a balance between encouraging women to take legal action and not cajoling them into doing something they may not be comfortable with, or indeed, not ready to do.
- There is no robust evidence to support whether taking legal action reduces incidents of domestic violence. However, research does show that women who take legal action may have different consequences according to which route they choose. Civil action has usually resulted in a more immediate, but often short-term, solution to domestic violence.

- Criminal action tends to result in long-term solutions but also involves a lengthy process for the woman.
- Consequently, advocates or support workers can help a woman by being able to recognise accurately which option is most appropriate for her and any children, and also by assessing whether a woman is ready to take legal action at all. This is important because a woman should always:
 - understand the process and all the choices available to her;
 - feel in control of the whole process and not pushed into a situation;
 - have her safety, and that of her children prioritised – sometimes legal action can increase violence in the short-term; and
 - have the final decision.
- When women disclose information about their circumstances, child protection can become an issue. For practitioners whose role is to support women, this can be a problem where there is child abuse and neglect by women. In these situations workers are faced with issues of confidentiality and require many skills, and managerial support, to respond to the situation. (See Douglas *et al.* (2004) for further guidance on information sharing in the context of domestic violence.)

Training

Research interviews suggested that advocacy is a demanding role and training is essential. Training should not be seen as something which occurs at the start of the job, but instead should be viewed as an ongoing process, with training and refresher courses throughout the life of the job. Training courses can enable advocates to feel confident about the service they offer. The role is also about gaining transferable skills so that advocates can provide the best and creative options to women. The box below provides a brief overview of issues which should be included in training programmes.

Training: suggestions for inclusion to enable good practice

- Domestic violence and violence against women issues; good practices and cultural issues.
- Basic legal training: criminal and civil law.
- Working knowledge of the criminal and civil justice systems, and understanding of how advocates can work within the system to assist women secure a better outcome.
- Training which makes explicit the structures and systems of the local statutory and voluntary agencies which advocates and support workers will have to work with.
- Negotiation skills to use with women and partner agencies.

- Short counselling courses and courses in providing emotional support.
- Training on how to recognise mental health issues.
- Child protection issues.
- Lawful information sharing for both adults and children.
- Training on how to complete accurate risk assessments and produce appropriate safety plans for women and children.
- Training on how to use databases and systems for monitoring performance, which can feed into improving practices.
- Time management.

Limits to advocacy and support

Advocacy and support work is not a panacea. Some of the limitations are as follows.

- Projects can only have a broader influence on policies and procedures after they have been running for a long time, and have become well established and embedded in the local community and local agencies. This is a lengthy and gradual process.
- Sometimes a woman's situation is too complex for an advocate to solve, for example, women with long-standing mental health issues, and women who are unresponsive to services offered.
- Sometimes there are some circumstances surrounding domestic violence incidents which advocates and support workers cannot influence.
- It is also difficult for workers to be effective in situations where the project is not supported by partner agencies. For example, many domestic violence projects are reliant on the police to refer women to them. However, some police practices mean that consistent referrals are sometimes not made. Hence, making it difficult for an advocate or support worker to be successful in assisting a woman.
- Workers are often reliant on other agencies to carry out their roles effectively and this ideal is not always achievable.
- Skilful advocates and support workers tread a fine line between listening, understanding and respecting choices women make and guiding them towards decisions and actions which have the potential to lead to violence-free lives. Research suggests that if women are cajoled too much they may leave the project and also that if workers are too detached, changes in a woman's circumstances are less likely to occur.

Conclusions: a model of advocacy and support

The following model summarises the path an advocate or support worker could follow to assist a woman. It provides a holistic overview of the range of advocacy and support that could be provided. In this model, the aim of the advocacy and support is to enable a woman to make decisions, and take steps that will improve her economic and social independence thereby making it easier for her to leave a violent partner, as well as giving her a sense of achievement and pride. Advocacy and support are more successful at achieving this when they:

- enable a woman to unlock her complex fears that make it difficult for her to make decisions by building trust and emotional support;
- enable a woman to access a range of information, advice, services and resources from a range of statutory and voluntary agencies, including access to criminal and civil systems;
- assist a woman to end her emotional attachment to the violent partner by nurturing a supportive and empathetic relationship with the woman; and
- encourage a woman to acquire new life skills, by supporting the woman and encouraging her to invest her emotional energies into her 'new' life, and to 'move on'.

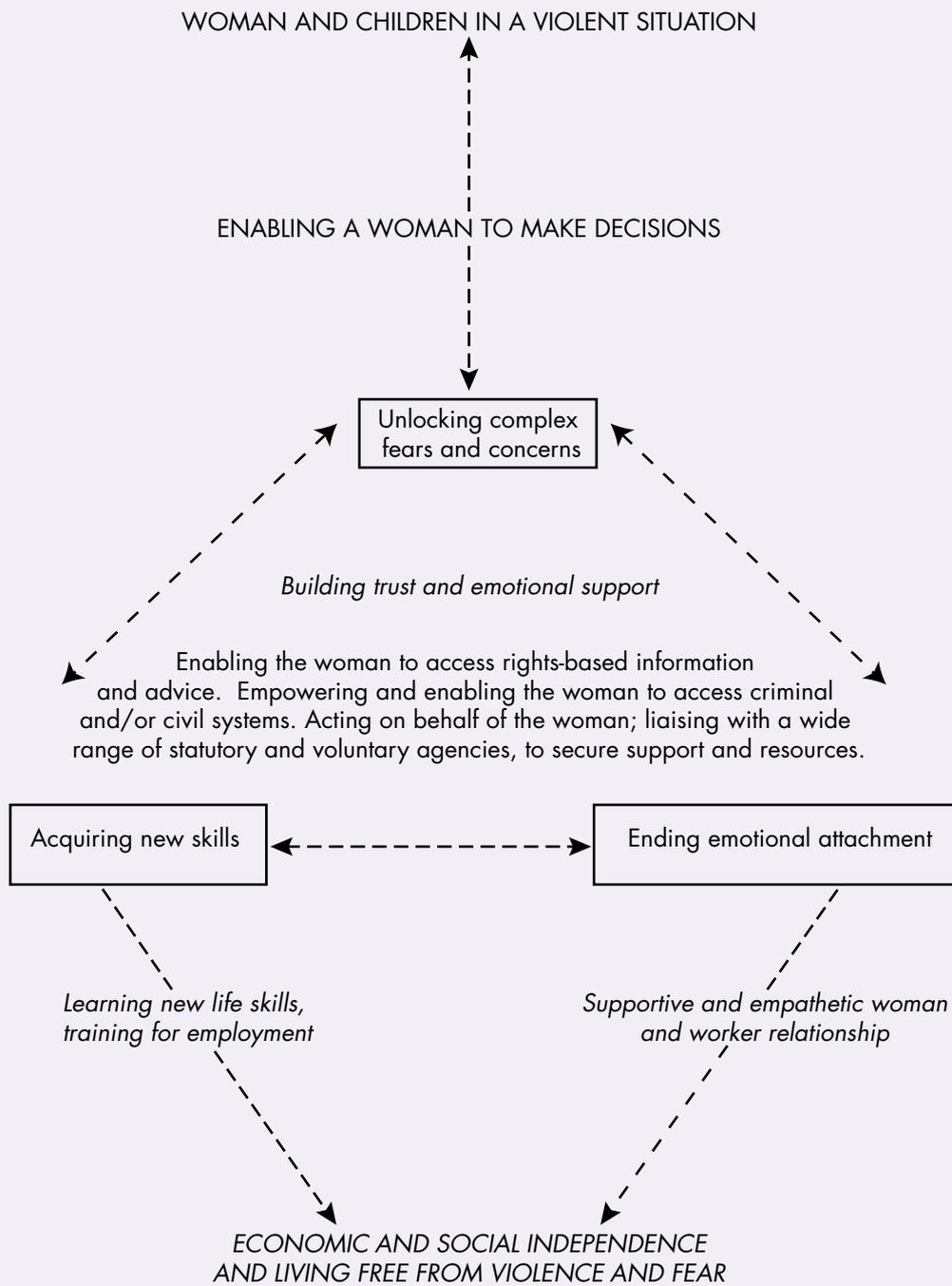
This advocacy model is more likely to reduce domestic violence when the work of the advocates is supported by strategies which raise awareness of domestic violence in local communities and amongst agencies and community groups, in order to increase reporting. This in turn is likely to increase the proportion of reports which become referrals, and therefore the number of referrals, which are then worked with by advocates.

Raising awareness of domestic violence is more effective when it:

- educates all residents and workers that domestic violence is a crime by using many different mediums of publicity, and by advocates visiting community groups and agencies;
- develops empathy for women survivors and creates understandings between agencies about the problem of domestic violence;
- reaches Black and other minority ethnic communities, and vulnerable groups, with the intention of breaking down cultural barriers and taboos; and
- pools funds from a range of agencies and institutions because this increases the budget for a campaign and increases commitment to the initiative.

The achievements of an advocate are assisted when a project has a clear image, a high profile and is in an accessible location.

A model of advocacy and support



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Resources

Support and advice for those who have experienced domestic violence

BAWSO (Welsh organisation for Black women who are victims of domestic violence)
029 2043 7390

Broken Rainbow (Pan-London Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual And Transgender Domestic Violence Forum)
0781 2644914
<http://www.lgbt-dv.org/html/rainbow.htm>

Careline (Counselling services)
020 8514 1177

Community Legal Service Directory Line
0845 608 1122
<http://www.justask.org.uk/index.jsp>

Foreign & Commonwealth Office (Advice on forced marriage)
020 7008 0135/0230

Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate (Advice on Immigration and nationality issues)
0870 6067766
<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk>.

Language Line
Translations: tel: 0800 917 6564
Face-to-face interpreting: 0845 310 9900

National Child Protection Helpline (NSPCC)
0800 800 500
<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/nspcc/helpline>

National 24-hour Domestic Violence Helpline
0808 2000 247 (minicom available)

Support, help and information, wherever you are in the country. Run jointly by Women's Aid and Refuge, the new Freephone helpline provides access to 24-hour emergency information to thousands of women who suffer at the hands of an abusive partner. It builds on the charities' support services for women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Information and guidance on funding for domestic violence services via the Supporting People programme)

<http://www.spkweb.org.uk>

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_027994.hcsp

Rape Crisis (For information about rape and sexual abuse, and details about rape crisis support groups)

<http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk>

Refuge (Refuge operates a network of safe houses and provides outreach services for women)

<http://www.refuge.org.uk/>

Reunite (UK charity specialising in international parental child abduction)

0016 2556 234

Shelterline - National 24-hour Housing Helpline

0808 800 4444

<http://www.shelter.org.uk/housingadvice/shelterline/index.asp>

Southall Black Sisters (Advice and support for women from Black and minority ethnic communities)

020 8571 9595

The Samaritans

0345 90 90 90

<http://www.samaritans.org/>

Victim Support

0845 30 30 900

<http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>

Welsh Women's Aid

029 20 39 0874

<http://www.welshwomensaid.org/>

Women's Aid

0117 944 4411

<http://www.womensaid.org.uk>

It is a good idea to remind women that they need to be cautious when accessing any of the above websites from a computer that their abuser has access to. The Women's Aid website contains information on action that women can take to minimise the chance of an abuser detecting that they have accessed a site.

Crime Reduction Programme: Violence Against Women Initiative – other reports in the series

Domestic Violence

Douglas N., Lilley S.J., Kooper L. and Diamond A. (2004) *Safety and Justice: sharing personal information in the context of domestic violence - an overview*, Home Office Development and Practice Report No.30. London: Home Office.

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Rape and Sexual Assault

Kelly, L., Lovett, J. and Regan, L. (2005) *A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases*. Home Office Research Study No. 293. London: Home Office.

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Evidence base for this report

The Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) Violence Against Women Initiative (VAWI) was an evidence-led programme, which aimed to find out which approaches and practices were effective in supporting victims and tackling domestic violence, rape and sexual assault. In July 2000, 34 multi-agency victim-focused pilot projects were funded, and they developed a range of interventions in various settings and among different population groups. This report is specifically based upon the findings from the independent evaluation of three projects, which were all funded under the CRP VAWI. Although all three employed advocates to advise, support and enable women to move towards living violence-free lives they all had a different emphasis and operated in varying contexts. The report also draws upon the data from the other domestic violence projects, which were funded and evaluated under the CRP VAWI, and the key findings are presented in an overview report called: *Tackling Domestic Violence: effective interventions and approaches*. Hester, M. and Westmarland, N. (2005). Home Office Research Study No. 290. London: Home Office.

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