

# Written evidence submitted by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (DAB30)

## Submission to the Domestic Abuse Bill Committee

### Proposed amendment: Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Advisory Board amendment

Clause **11**, page **7** after line **21** insert:

(g) at least one person appearing to the Commissioner to represent the interests of persons who provide, or have functions relating to, mental health care services in England

#### **Explanatory statement**

This amendment would ensure that at least one person on the Advisory Board would represent mental health services.

The Bill as it stands does not recognise that mental illness and domestic abuse are often tragically interlinked. Nor does it take account the important role that mental health services can play in identifying and supporting victims of domestic abuse; or that the most effective interventions to prevent domestic abuse are those that take account of possible mental health issues.

The Bill makes provision for a Domestic Abuse commissioner, to be supported by an Advisory Board. The Bill says this Board must have at least one person representing the health sector, amongst other sectors (e.g. justice, social care). We would like to see mental health represented on that Board.

Mental health services can play an important role in combating domestic abuse and having someone with experience of this sector on the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Advisory Board would ensure that these issues are considered.

### The link between mental illness and domestic abuse

Mental health problems are a common consequence of both directly being a victim of domestic abuse and of the trauma associated with children witnessing it. Having a mental health issue also means that someone can be much more vulnerable to abuse. We also know that interventions aimed at targeting violent behaviour are less likely to be effective if the mental health needs of the perpetrators are ignored.

- Recent research in the British Journal of Psychiatry found that women who suffer domestic abuse are three times more likely to develop a mental illness, including severe disorders like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.<sup>1</sup>
- Data from Safe Lives domestic abuse services found that 42% of people accessing support from a domestic abuse service had mental health problems in the past 12 months, and 17% had planned or attempted suicide.
- Their data also showed that people who accessed their services with mental health needs were more likely to have experienced physical abuse, jealousy and control, harassment and stalking and particularly sexual abuse<sup>2</sup>.
- One UK study found 16% of men visiting their GP with symptoms of anxiety or/and depression demonstrated behaviours linked to abusive behaviour<sup>3</sup>
- Over one in five children and young people on Safe Lives domestic abuse records were experiencing anxiety or depression

## The role mental health services can play in tackling domestic abuse

Having a mental health representative on the advisory board would not only mean the Commissioner considers mental health policy it will also mean that the representative can act as a champion for tackling domestic abuse within the mental health sector.

Mental health services are an opportunity for identifying people experiencing abuse and signposting them to domestic abuse support, as well as offering effective interventions to help their mental health recover in the aftermath of abuse. We know that opportunities are being missed to pick victims, survivors and perpetrators up in mental health services, primary care and other health services.

One significant issue is a lack of training for mental health staff. The Royal College of Psychiatrists believe there should be mandatory training for front-line staff and suggest that this be covered within the existing mandatory training on safeguarding vulnerable adults.

*May 2020*

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<sup>1</sup> Female survivors of intimate partner violence and risk of depression, anxiety and serious mental illness, BJPsych (June 2019)

<sup>2</sup> <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Spotlight%207%20-20Mental%20health%20and%20domestic%20abuse.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Hester, M., Ferrari, G., Jones, S., Williamson, E., Bacchus, L., Peters, T., & Feder, G. (2015) Occurrence and impact of negative behaviour, including domestic violence and abuse, in men attending UK primary care health clinics: a cross-sectional survey. BMJ Open 5:e007141. DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2014-007141