

Written evidence submitted by the Violence Abuse and Mental Health Network (VAMHN) (DAB37)

Domestic Abuse Bill:

Briefing prepared for the Public Bill Committee

Introduction

1. The Violence Abuse and Mental Health Network (VAMHN – www.vamhn.co.uk) is an interdisciplinary research network that aims to understand, prevent, and reduce the impact of domestic and sexual violence and abuse on mental health. We are funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).
2. We bring together experts with different ways of thinking about violence, abuse, and mental health – some with lived experience of these issues, others with expertise from the work they do – through the provision of engagement, capacity building, and funding opportunities.
3. We have almost 700 members drawn from academic, healthcare and other statutory services, the third sector, and policy.
4. This briefing has been prepared by the VAMHN leadership team. A list of signatory members is enclosed at the end of the briefing.

Proposed amendments to the Bill

Action to address the under-provision of services for adult and child victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

1. We recommend extending the provisions in the Bill to address the current under-provision of services for adult and child victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.
2. We note that children who live with domestic abuse are victims in their own right, who may experience the consequences of abuse throughout their whole lives. Research highlights, for example, that experiencing domestic abuse in childhood is common¹ and is associated with a wide range of negative outcomes including post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety and

¹ A UK survey conducted by the NSPCC in 2009 found that 12% of under 11s and 17.5% of 11-17 year-olds had been exposed to domestic abuse: Radford et al (2013). The Prevalence and impact of child maltreatment and other types of victimization in the UK: Findings from a population survey of caregivers, children and young people and young adults. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 37(10), 801-813.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.02.004>

behavioural problems in childhood and adolescence² and into adulthood³. Child victims of domestic abuse may need specialist help to recover from their experiences, and it is critical that effective help is made available, particularly in community settings, where most children are living (as opposed to refuges). We wish to see clearer recognition within the Bill of the impact of domestic abuse on children, and stronger directives on protecting children and ensuring access to appropriate support.

3. We endorse the view of Safe Lives⁴ that the proposed statutory duty on Local Authorities (part 4 section 53(2)) should not only address the provision of domestic abuse support through accommodation-based services but also be widened to encompass a wider range of specialist services. We support the amendment prepared by Barnardo's⁵ to introduce a full statutory duty on public bodies to commission and fund specialist domestic abuse services for all victims and children regardless of whether they live in refuges or in the family home and regardless of immigration status, with the ambition of keeping more families safe at home.
4. With regards to the funding of specialist domestic abuse services for victims and children, we consider that:
 - a. Ring fenced funding should be provided for specialist Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations. We note that although there are many commonalities in the ways in which abuse is experienced by all survivors, the intersectional location of Black and minoritised women create a specificity must be recognised⁶. The inadequacy of existing mainstream responses to this group has been extensively highlighted. Specialist 'by and for' BME services have crafted support interventions that are highly valued by black and minoritised women. This includes holistic wraparound trauma-informed support, provided in safe intersectional spaces, with insight and knowledge about women's intersectional experiences and which is offered by organisations and workers that reflect the backgrounds of Black and minoritised women.
 - b. Ring fenced funding should be provided for specialist support organised and delivered by survivor-led organisations. Survivor-led organisations are uniquely

² For example, Evans et al (2008) Exposure to domestic violence: A meta-analysis of child and adolescent outcomes. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 13, 131–140. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2008.02.005>; Russell et al (2010). Witnessing domestic abuse in childhood as an independent risk factor for depressive symptoms in young adulthood. *Child Abuse Negl*, 34(6), 448–453. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.10.004>

³ Kessler et al (2010). Childhood adversities and adult psychopathology in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 197, 378–85. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.110.080499>

⁴https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/SafeLives%20Briefing%20for%20Second%20Reading%20of%20DA%20Bill%2028.04.20_0.pdf

⁵<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Barnardo%E2%80%99s%20briefing%20on%20the%20Domestic%20Abuse%20Bill%20Second%20Reading%20Debate%20%28HoC%29%2028%20April.pdf>

⁶Thiara & Roy (2020). *Reclaiming Voice: Sexual Violence and Minoritised Women*. Imkaan, London. https://829ef90d-0745-49b2-b404-cbea85f15fda.filesusr.com/ugd/f98049_1a6181417c89482cb8749dbcd562e909.pdf

placed to provide mutual peer support based on shared understanding of experiences and impacts of violence and abuse⁷.

5. We further call for a full statutory duty on public bodies to commission and evaluate specialist services for perpetrators of domestic abuse.
6. We consider that specialist services include (but are not limited to): protective measures and actions taken to protect persons against domestic abuse; residential accommodation including refuge services, counselling and other support, advocacy services including that provided by Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs); access to welfare benefits; financial support; legal support; helplines; perpetrator programmes; services designed to meet the particular needs of a group that shares status to ensure appropriate and effective service provision, including separate or single-sex services; and child-focused services, including those that are delivered directly to children, and those that aim to improve the quality of the caregiving environment.
7. We also support the amendments put forward by Southall Black Sisters to ensure that adequate measures for the protection of abused migrant women are included in the Domestic Abuse Bill, including (i) the extension of eligibility under the Domestic Violence Rule and the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) to protect all abused women with insecure immigration status; (ii) extension of the time period for which the DDVC is provided from three months to at least six months⁸.

Clearer recognition of the mental health impacts of domestic abuse and the role of mental health services in identifying and responding to abuse.

1. Domestic abuse has serious health consequences for adult and child victims, and costs health services £2.3bn each year⁹. We would like to see greater recognition of the health implications of domestic abuse in the Bill and its supporting documents. In particular, we wish to see greater recognition of and provision for the mental health impacts of domestic abuse: domestic abuse causes harms to mental health and people with mental health problems are disproportionately victimised by domestic abuse¹⁰.
2. Part 2 Section 11 of the Bill makes provision for the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to be supported by an Advisory Board, to include at least one person representing the interests of persons who provide, or have functions relating, to healthcare services in England. We

⁷ See our recent report into survivor research priorities on violence abuse and mental health, which identified research into sustainable funding models for survivor-led organisations as a key priority:

https://www.vamhn.co.uk/uploads/1/2/2/7/122741688/consultation_report_on_website.pdf

⁸ <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/DA-Bill-Briefing-Paper-2.pdf>

⁹ Oliver et al (2019). The economic and social costs of domestic abuse. Research Report 107. Home Office, London.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772180/horr107.pdf

¹⁰ Oram et al (2017). Violence against women and mental health. Lancet Psychiatry 4(2):159-170.

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(16\)30261-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(16)30261-9/fulltext)

endorse the Royal College of Psychiatrists call for a statutory requirement for at least one person representing the interests and functions of mental healthcare services to be appointed to the Advisory Board.

3. Part 4 Section 54 of the Bill requires Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Boards to include representation of at least one person representing the interests of persons who provide, or have functions relating to, healthcare services in England. We recommend that the Bill also requires the appointment of at least one person representing the interests and functions of local mental healthcare services to Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Boards.

Improved measurement of domestic abuse

1. Efforts to reduce and prevent domestic abuse and to evaluate the impact of interventions are hampered by the lack of agreement on the concept and definition of domestic abuse and its scale and distribution over time and in different contexts. Public authorities and, where possible, third sector services should utilise a common framework for measuring domestic abuse such that comparable data are consistently collected across all services and organisations. A common measurement framework should incorporate the following key information: prevalence of victimisation, prevalence of perpetration; number of events; sex of the victim, sex of the perpetrator; and relationship between perpetrator and victim¹¹.
2. We recommend that Part Section 6 (General Function of the Commissioner) be amended to include that the Commissioner must encourage good practice in the measurement of domestic abuse, including the collection, analysis, and presentation of sex-disaggregated data.

Greater recognition of technology-enabled abuse

1. Technology is not only a means of potentially tackling domestic abuse (for example, electronic monitoring) but also, and more profoundly, a means of facilitating physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and economic abuse and controlling and coercive behaviour¹². In recent years, various forms of online harassment and sexual abuse have emerged, enabled by information and communication technologies (ICT). These ICT-supported abuses range from cyber-stalking to online behavioural control.
2. Although the Government had previously stated that the Bill would be “future-proofed” to encompass technology-enabled abuse¹³, we cannot see evidence of this. The Bill should

¹¹ Walby et al (2017). *The Concept and Measurement of Violence against Women and Men*. Bristol, Policy Press.

¹² (i) <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/steapp/research/digital-technologies-policy-laboratory/gender-and-iot>;

(ii) Parkin et al (2019). Usability analysis of shared device ecosystem security: Informing support for survivors of IoT-facilitated tech-abuse. *Proceedings of the New Security Paradigms Workshop*, 1–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3368860.3368861>;

(iii) Tanczer et al (2018). *Gender and IoT (G-IoT) Research Report: The rise of the Internet of Things and implications for technology-facilitated abuse* (pp. 1–9). University College London.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/steapp/sites/steapp/files/giot-report.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/enhanced-domestic-abuse-bill-introduced-to-parliament>

include acknowledgement of emerging technologies such as 'smart', Internet-connected devices ("Internet of Things") as well as the Government's ambition to fill in gaps in the protection and support of victims¹⁴.

3. We recommend that Section 1 of the Bill (definition of domestic abuse) includes explicit recognition of the role that technology can play in facilitating and exacerbating domestic abuse.
4. We further recommend that domestic violence protection orders (Part 3 Sections 19-23) and domestic violence protection notices (Part 3 Sections 24-52) explicitly account for the ways in which perpetrators can use technology to breach violence protection orders and notices.

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¹⁴ Tanczer (2019). The Government published its draft domestic abuse bill, but risks ignoring the growing threat of tech abuse. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/policy-postings/the-government-published-its-draft-domestic-abuse-bill-but-risks-ignoring-the-growing-threat-of-368a6fb70a14>

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