



Not in front of the children

Domestic Violence Consultation

Executive Summary

July 2003

Devon Domestic Violence Partnership

Background and Rationale

The 'Not in Front of the Children' domestic violence consultation was commissioned by the Devon Domestic Violence Partnership, funded by the Devon Children's Fund and co-ordinated by Devon Youth Association. The main aim of the consultation was:

"To better understand the scale and impact of domestic violence on children living with domestic violence and to inform the design and delivery of appropriate services across the county of Devon".

The consultation was seen to be of crucial importance to the overall implementation of Devon Domestic Violence Strategy which is seeking to tackle the problems of all those it impacts. The strategy recognises that some children are adversely affected by living with domestic violence and that attitudes to the issue need to be changed amongst the next generation if the cycle of violence is to be broken and tolerance of the abuse ended.

From Devon Police statistics we know that in 2002/3 of the 6958 recorded incidents of domestic violence there were 2755 children within the households affected. It is of critical importance that we hear the voice of these children and others so that services and interventions reflect their needs.

To achieve a holistic consultation a partnership was developed to steer the project and draw on the specialist expertise of the agencies involved which was broken down into three specialised areas of work:

- **Devon Youth Association (DYA)** - DYA took responsibility for co-ordinating the whole consultation and also consulting with large groups of young people across Devon. This aspect of the work drew on DYA experience in group work with children and young people to gain opinions and ideas on definitions of domestic violence, who domestic violence affects and ideas for making services better in the future. DYA worked with nearly 90 young people across Devon from the age of 11-18.
- **The Children's Society** - The Children's Society took responsibility for working with children and young people who had direct experience of domestic violence. This involved; face to face interviews with young people who had accessed services following incidents of domestic violence; a file review of past cases to see how many may have had unacknowledged experience of domestic violence; and a questionnaire to their existing database of 70 young people who are all looked after by the Local Authority.
- **Jenny Archard** - Jenny was responsible for collating a literature review to support the findings of the primary research. Jenny's main objectives were to look at relevant national, local and international material including statutory frameworks, relevant published research, national and local policy.

To supplement the main consultation Exeter Safe Project and North Devon Women's Aid gave support, specialist advice and knowledge throughout the whole process.

"In 90 per cent of domestic assaults on women which occur in the home, children are in the same or an adjacent room"

Mayhew P., Aye Maung N., & Mirlees-Black, C. (1993) The British Crime Survey. Home Office Research Study No 132. London, HMSO

Main Findings and Recommendations

The following are the collated findings and recommendations from each of the three specialised areas of work.

Devon Youth Association

- There needs to be more information and publicity about existing services and where young people can get support, advice and information, including creation of young person friendly leaflets videos and internet provision.
- More education needs to be set up for young people to become aware of the issue of domestic violence and how to get help if needed. This should take place in schools and other youth settings.
- Education and counselling for perpetrators should be provided so that they can reduce the chances of re-offending.
- Training needs to be developed for adults and professionals on how domestic violence impacts children and young people. The young people saw supportive adults with whom they had an existing relationship as those they would first turn to. Hence teachers, youth services and other staff in Education should have training to deal with domestic violence as it impacts children and young people, and an awareness of where to refer for more specialist help.
- Healthy relationship training for victims of domestic violence should be developed to make people aware of what is and is not acceptable in a healthy relationship and ensure the cycle is not repeated.
- For those children and young people looked after by the local authority the services they receive and alternative care provided after leaving a domestic violence situation is not always meeting their needs. The main recommendation from this aspect of the project was that carers should receive training on how to look after young people, including how to make them feel safe and happy.
- In the long term to reduce the problem of domestic violence preventive strategies need to be developed including, handling conflict, building emotional confidence and parenting skills for young people.
- Young people who are facing domestic violence would like the support of others in similar situations so that they feel less isolated. Support groups should be set up for young people to access this kind of support, whether through existing services or chat rooms etc.
- A strong theme to come out was that the subject of domestic violence remains taboo. Through peer education style sessions and discussions the stigma of domestic violence could be broken down so that young people feel they can talk more easily about the issue and its consequences.
- Young people should be involved in writing a charter and policy on confidentiality within domestic violence services. Young people expressed a strong view that organisations should have effective confidentiality policies. These should be advertised, signed up to and promoted well before they access services.
- Young people should be involved in the design and delivery of services, whether this is volunteering in advice centres, helping to write awareness and peer education training or supporting the creation of services that are young person friendly.
- Long term the only way that all of the above recommendations can be put in place and be successful is if organisations both funding and carrying out the work begin to show a willingness to work hard at changing services. To do this by strategically involving children and young and being prepared to make changes which eradicate barriers and campaign for sustainable funding.

The Children's Society

The Children's Society confined its comments to the services that young people accessed or stated they would wish to access.

- A majority (56%) of young people who said they had experienced domestic violence said that they did not do anything in response to witnessing domestic violence as they did not know what to do or who they could talk to.
- Many young people expressed feelings of powerlessness and helplessness– not knowing what to do or where to go for help.
- The evidence from the research shows that almost all the young people who had experienced the involvement of social services after incidents of domestic violence, reported that they found this helpful, even though they may have been critical of the way in which help was offered.
- For the majority of young people domestic violence in their homes had been going on for a considerable time before any help was offered by professionals.
- Another factor that prevented young people from seeking help was their fear for themselves and for their parent or carers and siblings.
- Young people expressed enormous loyalty to parents and ambivalence / confusion about the situation – just wanting someone to help sort it out.
- The importance of informal networks of friends and relatives nearby is significant and often they are the first port of call for children. It is children who are more isolated who are most in need of help and services.
- Several young people were critical of the lack of choice and information in relation to their foster placements.
- Several young people commented that they had no information or guidance about social services procedures – they didn't know what was going on.
- Young people found being on the child protection register to be stigmatising and unhelpful (with one exception).

The Children's Society Recommendations

- Children and young people who have themselves experienced domestic violence should be directly involved in helping with the design and organisation of services and support, both informal and otherwise, which aim to help other children in this situation. A planning or advisory group of young people should be set up for this purpose.
- There is an urgent need for more information and a culture of openness in schools and other places where young people meet in relation to issues such as domestic violence.
- Services which aim to support young people should be user friendly and designed specifically with the needs of children and young people in mind.
- There needs to be an awareness raising campaign aimed at young people informing them of services and support available to them if they are experiencing domestic violence.
- There needs to be a greater awareness amongst professionals of the specific needs of children and young people who have witnessed domestic violence.

Jenny Archard Literature and Background Research

As an outcome of this review and research, some recommendations can be made; these have been broken up under five broad headings. These need to be tempered by what the primary research shows that young people and children in Devon say they want.

Provide more direct services for children and young people

The research has shown that what children and young people really want is to be listened to. Informal networks are the first place that young people go for this help. Further issues identified were the need for:

- More education and publicity about the issues to a wide audience, including work in schools.
- Formal support, e.g. group counselling sessions and one-to-one work, is useful for some children and young people. These services need to be safe, accessible and child friendly.
- Development of existing or new Peer Education projects that include sessions on domestic violence.
- Providing continued support and development for Women's Refuges and existing Outreach projects.

Provide training for those who work with children and young people

Training is already part of the Domestic Violence Strategy and it seems that more of this is needed. All those working with young people who were spoken to would be very keen to have training on domestic violence issues.

- All youth workers need to be able to point children and young people at appropriate services. Youth work training needs to include a specific section on domestic violence, its impact and ways of supporting those who have experienced it. This should include Connexions, statutory and voluntary youth services.
- Work with Family Centres, Sure Starts and other children's projects to train staff in domestic violence issues and enable sharing of good practice.
- There is a need to include work on ethnicity and culture in training for helping professionals such as Social Workers.
- Work with schools, so that domestic violence awareness can fit into PSHE and other parts of curriculum.

continued overleaf

"Over a third of children of domestic violence survivors are aware of the abuse"

British Crime Survey 1996

Incorporating domestic violence awareness in organisations 'child protection' policies

- The Domestic Violence Partnership could provide model policies and guidance on including domestic violence issues in child protection policies.
- Use examples from other areas in the UK.

Further useful research

- Establish accurate baselines of current service provision, so that any new services can be evaluated effectively.
- Make use of research that has been carried out in other places , partly by creating a domestic violence source library for people working in the field so that the latest research is easily accessed.

Publicity and Education

Domestic violence is still a hidden problem and it needs to be talked about and aired, brought out from behind closed doors.

- Work with schools and youth services on awareness raising campaigns across the county.

“Child abuse by a male parent is 15 times more likely to occur in a home where domestic violence is present”

McKiernan & McKay 1994

A full copy of the research can be accessed from www.devon.gov.uk/domesticviolence

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Schools and clubs	St James High School, Exeter Southbrook School, Exeter Axminster 6th Form Totnes Young Carers Exmouth Youth Centre Newton Abbot Young Assessors St Peters High School, Exeter Axminster Youth Group Exmouth Youth Advice Centre
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Definition* of Domestic Violence

The term domestic violence shall be understood to mean the misuse of power and the exercise of control by one person over another within the context of any intimate or close relationship. Such abuse may manifest itself in a variety of ways including physical violence, emotional or psychological abuse, sexual violence and abuse, financial control and abuse and the imposition of social isolation or movement deprivation.

*Devon Network multi-agency definition