

MARAC Survivor Interviews

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BRIEF SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

by **Alice Woods**, Exeter IDVA

The interviews were carried out with six randomly chosen survivors. The interviews were lengthy and covered nine areas to get in-depth qualitative information. However, it is important to remember that six cases is a small percentage of the total number of cases monitored in the MARAC system over the last two years and may not accurately represent the experiences of all survivors.

Much of the information gathered from these questions mirrors the comments I get during my daily meetings with survivors in my role as an IDVA with the possible exception of the issue of Child Contact.

One respondent stressed the need for agencies to listen to survivors – this seems vital to ensure we are providing appropriate services.

SECTION 1

Survivors' perceptions of the multi agency approach in Devon

The responses were varied and although three survivors said they knew what MARAC was, two of these needed prompting before remembering.

Further questions revealed that all six respondents had vague and patchy understanding about roles and actions taken by individual agencies, but nonetheless most agreed that a multi agency approach was positive as they understood the focus to be their safety.

The interviews revealed that immediately after an incident, when survivors are first contacted, they are at crisis point and unable to remember clearly what was happening and who contacted them.

Individual response Police Officers were heavily criticised by three survivors, but two of these said that they also had positive support from other Response Officers.

RECOMMENDATION:

DV Awareness Training by all Response Officers.

The DVO's support was universally appreciated as were Women's Aid IDVA and Outreach Services.

A lack of support services for children and young people affected by domestic violence was highlighted – this is a recurring theme.

RECOMMENDATION:

To improve support services for children and young people affected by domestic violence and abuse.

SECTION 2

Relationships

All but one survivor reported that they were no longer in a relationship with the abuser. The survivor still in a relationship with the accused is currently attending Pattern Changing and her partner attends REPAIR and says as a result there have been positive changes in their relationship.

Encouragingly four women had started new relationships that they said were going well. Sadly in one case since the interview there has been violence in the new relationship. This survivor has ended that relationship and feels able to report any future incidents to police.

Two survivors have remained single and say they are happy with this arrangement.

SECTION 3

Issues around additional violence

Three reported experiencing no further violence. Three who stated they had experienced further threats and violence said that once reported the matter was dealt with by police and courts.

Not surprisingly threats and violence have had a negative affect on relationships both on the abusive relationship which in most cases ended and on new relationships because survivors remain cautious and have difficulties over issues of trust.

When asked about the affects on children only one survivor acknowledged that her children had been badly affected by witnessing violence.

One woman interviewed has no children. One did not answer and two said that there had been no impact. This was qualified in one case by the survivor saying that the abuser did not leave them, however it was also made clear that her child had witnessed an assault. In the other case the woman qualified it by saying that the child was safe now.

RECOMMENDATION:

Emphasis of the impact of domestic violence and abuse on children and young people.

SECTION 4

Emotional Abuse

All respondents stated that they no longer experience emotional abuse, in four cases because there is no contact.

Two moved, one with a change of name and one with the added protection of a restraining order.

SECTION 5

Victim Quality of Life

All reported an improvement in quality of life, but despite this they had suffered or experienced physical and emotional health problems.

When asked about feelings of safety and security they revealed that they felt safer, less frightened, but that they retained a level of anxiety fearing that the positive changes in their lives would not be permanent – for example – that they would be found by the abuser or that the positive change in partner doing Repair would not be sustained over time.

When asked if they had felt supported four women said yes.

Women's Aid Services in particular had a positive mention – these were the IDVAs, Pattern Changing, Outreach and the Safety Worker attached to Repair. Also the DVOs and in one case the support of a good GP was cited.

RECOMMENDATION:

The importance of engaging with a multi-agency approach where possible.

SECTION 6

'How are your Children?'

Five respondents have children – four stated that their children are fine now, but qualified this by saying they are still affected at times. One stated that her children had been badly affected and described them as 'damaged'.

When further questions were asked it was noted that four women noticed that their children's welfare had improved and measured this by observing calmer behaviour and better school performance. Only one woman said that she saw no difference in her children's behaviour and well being.

The experiences of the individual respondents differ greatly as do the children's responses to separation from the abuser however all stated that their children had coped with this effectively.

The last question in this section asked about child contact. Only one woman noted that there were issues related to this, one woman was using a child contact centre, another had no contact and another noted that the abuser was not the children's father.

This section of the questionnaire does not reflect the daily experience of the women I support in my role as an IDVA. Conflict over child contact is an enormous concern in a high percentage of cases in MARAC.

RECOMMENDATION:

To highlight that conflict over child contact is an enormous concern in a high percentage of cases in MARAC.

SECTION 7

Significant Events in the Past 12 months

Here the responses were equally divided between positive and negative experiences. The positives stated things such as *'I have moved; I have my life back; My daughter is with me now; I passed GCSE Maths and English'*. This was balanced against negatives saying that, *'I was stalked; had a knife held against my throat.'* One woman perceived the way her case was handled by the police as a significant negative event.

SECTION 8

Victims' View of Circumstances

All respondents appeared to be in a positive situation for differing reasons – for example, *'Realising how much better I am without him.'* *'I feel as though I am in a positive situation because of the support that both myself and my husband have received. I feel that the dual approach that has been applied is essential.'*

Three women confirmed that they were able to get multi-agency support to alleviate problems associated with the perpetrator, e.g. restraining order and house move.

The agencies, women said that they had had contact with were the following:- Women's Aid (Outreach and IDVAs), DVOs, Police, GP Hospital, Solicitor, Victim Support, Court IDVA, CYPS, Housing Officer, Nurse, Physiotherapist, benefits agencies and I expect there are others that have been overlooked.

When asked which agencies had been the most helpful three said Women's Aid and one said Women's Aid said alongside DVO – I perhaps need to note that interviews were carried out by Women's Aid workers.

Areas of support that need strengthening as highlighted by four survivors were: Information and updating about the CJS, more support with young people and better promotion of the Repair programme.

Three women felt adequately supported and protected, however one was not told when the abuser was released from police custody.

The after court support was not so positive – two said they remained happy with the support, two who were disappointed stated that this was due to sentence outcomes and not being kept informed – at time of interview two cases still had to go to court.

When asked specifically what support they would have liked but did not receive one woman stated help for her daughter, another support for the family.

Two highlighted feeling unsafe and unprotected because of the long time it took the police to find and arrest the abuser following breaches of bail cons and RO.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Areas of support that need strengthening: information and updating about the CJS, more support with young people, more support with family and better promotion of the Repair programme. Reduce time taken, where possible, to find and arrest the abuser following breaches of bail conditions and RO.