

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE



What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour characterised by the exercise of control and misuse of power and includes any violent or abusive behaviour by a partner, ex-partner or close family member.

This abuse can take many forms: -

- Physical violence, including assaults;
- Sexual violence including forcing someone to do something against their will
- Emotional or mental abuse
- Threats, intimidation and bullying
- Controlling behaviour and isolating from family and friends

Unlike other type of crime, domestic abuse is significantly underreported and has the highest level of repeat victimisation of crime. Here are just some of the facts: -

- Less than 25 per cent of domestic abuse is reported.
- 60 per cent of reports to the Police are by repeat victims
- 98 per cent of domestic abuse occurs against women.
- 50 per cent of all rape is carried out by husbands or male partners.
- 33 per cent of all suicide attempts by women are linked to their experience of abuse.
- Women endure an average of 35 violent assaults before reporting to the police.
- On average a woman will suffer domestic abuse for 7 years before leaving home.
- 36 men a year die from domestic abuse
- 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives.
- Two women are killed every week by a current or former partner
- Around 3,000 forced marriages take place each year
- 66,000 women in the UK have been subjected to genital mutilation
- Each year, domestic violence costs society more than £40bn.
- At least 750,000 children a year witness domestic abuse
- Children are present or in the next room in 90 per cent of domestic abuse incidents

Who is affected by domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is, widespread and has no boundaries, affecting anyone regardless of age, sex, culture, gender or lifestyle. The impact can be profound and far-reaching resulting in risk to life and limb and even death. It can lead to serious mental health issues, stress and homelessness.

Domestic abuse is strongly linked to child abuse with the existence of one form of abuse being an indicator of the other. Children living with domestic abuse suffer significant stress, and are often used as a tool to coerce partners into reconciliation or in participating in the abuse. The long-term affects are profound leading some children to become the next generation of perpetrators and victims.

Who are the abusers?

Abusers can be men, women and in some cases children although statistically in excess of 90 per cent of cases are perpetrated by men. Techniques used by abusers can be subtle and include violence and coercion. Much of the abuse takes place in private, behind closed doors, and often others, including professionals, regard the abuser as a model person even when confronted with evidence to the contrary.

Abusers will attempt to justify their behaviour as being caused by stress, substance misuse, low self-esteem, unemployment, over work or insecurity. However the real reason is the desire to exercise power and control.

Local context?

The situation in Plymouth is similar to the national profile. Based on local information here is some of what we know: -

- Plymouth Domestic Abuse Service receives approximately 2500 referrals each year mainly from the Police, however less than 25 per cent of incidents are reported to the Police so the actual extent of abuse in the city is significantly higher.
- Domestic abuse accounts for 27 per cent of all recorded *violent* crime and 6 per cent of *all* recorded crime. However once again we know less than 25 per cent of domestic violence is reported to the Police.
- Consistently, over 27 per cent of women seeking support from our domestic abuse service have children under the age of 18.
- Domestic abuse is a significant factor in relation to child protection, accounting for 33 per cent of children on the child protection register (September 2008).
- Approximately 6 per cent of Health Visitors caseloads are related to domestic abuse, although this differs according to neighbourhood with as many as 21 per cent of caseloads in Devonport being associated with violence in the family.

Local Area Agreement Stretch Targets:

The Plymouth Domestic Abuse Partnership has responsibility for the delivery of an LAA stretch target, achievement of which potentially attracts a reward grant £635,000.

The first component of the target is to increase the percentage of cases resulting in a successful brought to justice outcome (OBTJ) by securing a conviction at court or other recordable sanction such as a formal caution. The second component of the target is to increase the number of domestic violence incidents recorded by the Police.

Currently we are achieving the OBTJ target, however the levels of incidents recorded by the Police are decreasing and we are not on target. To address this, the partnership has developed a comprehensive improvement plan. To view the latest performance data use the following hyperlink.

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/communityandliving/csu/domesticabuse.htm>

What are we doing to address domestic abuse?

Our key objectives and targets for action are set out within the Plymouth Multi-Agency Strategy For Tackling Domestic Abuse 2007-2009, which can be found using the following hyperlink.

http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/domestic_abuse_strategy.pdf

Key Objectives

- Improve agencies responses to families affected by domestic abuse
- Ensuring appropriate access to services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse
- Developing targeted prevention initiatives
- Ensuring appropriate civil and criminal justice response to domestic abuse incidents
- Developing appropriate accommodation options
- Establishing appropriate access to services for people with diverse needs

Progress so far:

Improve agencies responses to families affected by domestic abuse:

- We have commissioned a new service, combining the Plymouth Refuge, and Plymouth Women's Aid under one non-gender specific contract.
- A multi agency protocol has been developed which allows us to share information in relation to repeat victims and high-risk cases.

- Domestic abuse has now been included with the Plymouth 'Hidden Harm Strategy', 'Teenage Pregnancy Strategy' and 'Family Support Strategies.'

Ensuring appropriate access to services for children and young people:

- Work is ongoing with our new service provider to identify funding to increase the availability of specialist support for children and young people.
- A free training package for agencies within Plymouth has been developed in conjunction with the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board.

Developing targeted prevention initiatives:

- Plans have been developed to ensure the continuation of a community based perpetrator programme.
- A Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) has been established fortnightly to review ongoing high and very high-risk cases.

Ensuring appropriate civil and criminal justice response to domestic abuse incidents:

- A Specialist Domestic Violence Court has been introduced to ensure. This has been the subject of external inspection and is achieving the national target of a 70 per cent conviction rate.

Developing appropriate accommodation options:

- A range of options are now available for victims of domestic abuse in addition to the refuge, including 13 dispersed houses across the city and a sanctuary scheme designed to provide support for victims within their own home.
- Plymouth has signed the Devon protocol in relation to housing advice and is providing appropriate information on housing options to its clients.

Establishing appropriate access to services for people with diverse needs:

- A task group has commenced consultation with BME women to help inform our strategy.
- The new contract commissioned in May 2008 is non-gender specific and currently the domestic abuse service provider is putting into place new working practices to accept referral from men in collaboration with the DYN¹ Project from South Wales.

Other initiatives:

- A comprehensive communication plan has been introduced aimed at raising awareness of domestic abuse across the city.
- Directory of domestic abuse services has been produced.
- Partnership website has been refreshed and updated.
- Survivor's forum (SEEDS) has been established.
- Civil advocacy support pilot scheme is in place offering legal advice and support to those who wish to seek civil legal remedies by way of an injunction.

Next steps:

Over this next period a programme of consultation will be undertaken to enable us to refresh our strategy and action plans by March 2009.

Feedback received from the CDRP stakeholder event in September 2008 will be incorporated into this process. This suggested the following: -

- Produce a profile of domestic abuse in Plymouth.
- Continue initiatives to address underreporting
- Introduce services specific to the needs of LGBT communities
- Seek to extend the membership of MARAC

¹ DYN – Welsh for 'mankind'

- Undertake an analysis of the extend of elder domestic abuse
- Resource translation services
- Address the lack of access to public funds by asylum seekers and refugees

For further information about Domestic abuse, including details of local and national services visit Plymouth City Council website using the following hyperlink.

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/communityandliving/csu/domesticabuse.htm>