

**Key points to raise in the debate:**

- Child victims of domestic abuse **suffer short and long-term effects** on their health, safety and education.
- We welcome the Government's amendment to the definition of domestic abuse within the Bill which **recognises that children are victims** and not just witnesses. We welcome references to the impact on children in the draft statutory guidance<sup>1</sup>.
- **However, the Bill does not ensure that all child victims will receive the vital support they need to recover from trauma and achieve a positive future.**
- As currently drafted the **Bill risks creating a two tier system** in which victims including children who live in refuge will be able to access statutory support, but the **majority of victims, including hundreds of thousands of children, who remain at home could miss out.** BAME communities and disabled victims are amongst those most likely to stay in their homes.
- Research shows that help from **specialist children's services reduces the impact of domestic abuse** and improves children's outcomes.<sup>2</sup> To break the cycle of abuse we need support for the whole family - children, adult victims, and perpetrators as well.
- **We are therefore calling on the Government to introduce a statutory duty on relevant public authorities to commission support for all persons affected by domestic abuse – child victims, adult victims and perpetrators – no matter where they live ([NC23](#)).**

**The impact of domestic abuse on children and young people**

- It is estimated that **up to 30% of children in the UK live in households with domestic abuse.**<sup>3</sup>
- Domestic abuse is a factor in **50%** of social worker assessments for children in need of support from the local authority, **over half** of serious case reviews and **two-thirds** of child contact applications from 2017-2018.<sup>4</sup>
- We welcome the draft statutory guidance accompanying the Bill<sup>5</sup> in referencing the impact of domestic abuse on children, recognising that it is an **adverse childhood experience** which can have **lifelong effects** on children's wellbeing and behaviour.
- **Growing up in a household** where there is domestic abuse **normalises harmful behaviours and warps a child's understanding of healthy relationships.** Not only does it affect their development and their wellbeing, but it can also lead children to having **abusive intimate relationships.**
- These children are also at **greater risk of substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and criminal behaviour** than those raised in homes without domestic abuse. Evidence suggests that **60%** of children who were exposed to domestic abuse experienced **behavioural problems** and **52%** experienced **problems with social development and relationships.**<sup>6</sup>

- **Young people are the group most likely to be in an abusive intimate relationship** - 72% of girls and 51% of boys between the ages of 13 to 17 had experienced some form of emotional partner abuse.<sup>7</sup>
- However, research shows that the right support can reduce the proportion of children who have experienced domestic abuse who later demonstrate abusive behaviour from **24% to 7%**.<sup>8</sup>

### **The case for a statutory duty on public authorities to provide community-based support**

- As it stands, the **Bill still risks creating a two tier system for victims, including children**. Part 4 Clause 54 introduces a duty on local authorities to provide support for those who have had to flee their home and move into refuge. But, as the Justice Secretary said at Second Reading<sup>9</sup>, the reality is the **vast majority of victims never step foot in a refuge** and remain at home.
- Children living in homes with domestic abuse are at serious risk. **85,000** children at the highest risk of serious harm or murder are supported by community-based services.<sup>10</sup>
- Whilst the Domestic Abuse Commissioner is to undertake a review of community-based services this is estimated to take **'some 12 months'**.<sup>11</sup>
- Additionally, though the draft statutory guidance recognises that children should be offered support based on their individual needs, with a range of intervention, so that each child is able to access the specialised help they require<sup>12</sup>, this **doesn't guarantee that specialist services for children will be commissioned**.
- **For children at home, existing services are few and far** between:
  - Action for Children found that children faced barriers to access support in **two-thirds** of the local authorities in England and Wales, and **over 10%** of these had no specialist support services available for children at all.<sup>13</sup>
  - The Children's Society found **77%** of local authorities do not have a policy or protocol in place for responding to under 16s experiencing teenage relationship abuse, with just **39%** of local authorities providing a specialist support service for under 16s and **26** local authorities providing no specialist support nor any additional support for this age group.<sup>14</sup>
- As covid-19 continues to shake the world and with calls to domestic abuse support lines increasing, **children are being trapped in unsafe homes** with limited ability to be seen, heard and reached.
  - Since the lockdown, **57%** of Barnardo's frontline staff are concerned about an increase in family conflict and stress, while **45%** report a decrease in referrals due to families having less contact with services.<sup>15</sup>
  - A SafeLives survey of domestic abuse services found that **42% were not able to effectively support child victims of domestic abuse at this time**.
- With the majority of children struggling to access support already, **we share the concern of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner** who told the Bill Committee:

*"What I have always thought is **missing from the Bill** and would greatly support the services sector is the **inclusion of community-based services in the statutory duty**...if we go ahead with the statutory duty for refuge-based or accommodation-based services, **local authorities that are cash-strapped or concerned about budgets will prioritise that duty**, and the unintended consequence would be that these **community-based services are curtailed or cut**."<sup>16</sup>*

- Domestic abuse services are not only commissioned by local authorities. They are often funded by other public authorities, and whilst the draft statutory guidance emphasises that tackling domestic abuse requires a multi-agency approach, without a statutory duty on a wider group of public authorities to provide community-based services, there is no legal obligation for these services to be provided.
- In effect it disincentives early intervention and prevention. As Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the Local Government Association Safer and Stronger Communities Board, told the Bill Committee:

*"Funding for domestic abuse services comes from the Government to the third sector, Police and Crime Commissioners, health, local authorities we need to think about whether **the duty should apply to those authorities** as well, but in broad terms LGA welcomes the duty. But they want to see **early intervention and prevention and community services being given as much weight as accommodation based services.**"<sup>17</sup>*

**We are therefore calling on the Government to introduce a statutory duty on relevant public authorities to commission support for all persons affected by domestic abuse– child victims, adult victims and perpetrators – no matter where they live ([NC23](#)).**

#### **Opening Closed Doors, Barnardo's Domestic Abuse Service, Cymru**

Opening Closed Doors takes a holistic approach to tackling domestic abuse by offering a whole family intervention which includes: integrated women's support (IWS), safety trust and respect programme for children and young people (STAR), and domestic abuse perpetrator programme (DAPP). Working across 5 local authorities in South East Wales the service is a new approach to support families affected by domestic abuse to recover and build sustainable change in their lives.

Home Office funded, the service was evaluated in February 2020. From March 2019 to November 2019 the service had received 256 referrals, representing 576 individuals. The service supported families with complex issues and high levels of need, including 92 with a care and support plan, 105 on child protection register and 33 children in care. Of the files analysed:

- 48% of children had been de-escalated from child protection to care and support plan, or care and support plan to nothing, by the end of the intervention.
- 95% of children had reported improved emotional health and wellbeing.
- 70.5% of those on the IWS and 80% DAPP programmes reported that domestic abuse had reduced or stopped.

***'The whole family approach was considered by all as a key critical success factor as it makes it possible to tailor interventions to individual needs without losing sight of the whole family...For practitioners being able to share information across the different interventions was essential to build a more complete picture of family need...In the areas where the programme has been piloted it is valued highly...demonstrates key aspects of good practice and could be **recommended as a model that is worth investing in and that could be rolled out in other areas.***** – Institute of Public Care

**For more information or to arrange a meeting contact Claire Stewart on 07584 347 308 or [claire.stewart@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:claire.stewart@barnardos.org.uk)**

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- <sup>1</sup> Home Office, July 2020. [Draft Statutory Guidance Framework: Domestic abuse.](#)
  - <sup>2</sup> Home Office, July 2020. [Draft Statutory Guidance Framework: Domestic abuse.](#)
  - <sup>3</sup> Oliver et al., [The Economic and Social Cost of Domestic Abuse](#), 2019
  - <sup>4</sup> [Department for Education](#)
  - <sup>5</sup> Home Office, July 2020. [Draft Statutory Guidance Framework: Domestic abuse.](#)
  - <sup>6</sup> SafeLives, Children's Insights England and Wales dataset 2015-18
  - <sup>7</sup> NSPCC, 2009. [Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships.](#)
  - <sup>8</sup> Home Office, July 2020. [Draft Statutory Guidance Framework: Domestic abuse.](#)
  - <sup>9</sup> Hansard, 28 April. [Domestic Abuse Bill Second Reading.](#)
  - <sup>10</sup> SafeLives, 2020. New Domestic Abuse Bill. 4 BBC, April 2020. Coronavirus: Domestic abuse call
  - <sup>11</sup> Minister for Safeguarding gave details regarding the timescale of the review (HC 20 May, [W43470](#))
  - <sup>12</sup> Home Office, July 2020. [Draft Statutory Guidance Framework: Domestic abuse.](#)
  - <sup>13</sup> Action for Children, 2019. [Patchy, piecemeal and precarious: support for children affected by domestic abuse.](#)
  - <sup>14</sup> The Children's Society submitted an FOI in December 2019 to all local authorities in England (excluding City of London and the Isles of Scilly) regarding their strategic response to teenage relationship abuse and the availability of services to young victims and perpetrators of teenage relationship abuse, there were 98 full or partial responses generating a response rate of 66% - the full findings are due to be published shortly.
  - <sup>15</sup> Barnardo's, April 2020. Quarterly Practitioners Survey.
  - <sup>16</sup> Parliamentary Debates, Public Bill Committee, June 2020. [Domestic Abuse Bill First Sitting.](#)
  - <sup>17</sup> Parliamentary Debates, Public Bill Committee, June 2020. [Domestic Abuse Bill: Second Sitting.](#)