



Solihull Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Conference 2009

On the 28th September 2009 the Local Safeguarding Children Board's annual conference was held at the Bridge in Shirley. The theme of the conference was domestic abuse. The aim of the conference was to increase awareness of domestic abuse and the impact on woman, children and young people.

The conference was planned in conjunction with representatives from Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid alongside other professionals from key partner agencies. Around 180 local professionals from a range of agencies attended. Keynote speakers included:

- Dr Ravi Thiara, Warwickshire University,
- Christine Barter ,Bristol University
- Bec Bayliss, Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid
- Wendy Bird, West Midlands Police

There was also a production from Loudmouth a local theatre and drama company and delegates had the opportunity to hear via Women's' Aid the views of children and young people who live/have lived in households with domestic abuse. Various workshops were held and topics included the mother/child relationship, family support, the role of the MARAC process in Solihull as well as working with offenders.

A number of key messages emerged from the conference including the negative impact that domestic abuse has on women and children, both short and long term, and the need to support women and children following their abusive experiences. The conference also allowed professionals to identify local resources to support women and children

A post conference meeting was subsequently held to consider the what further work needed to be undertaken locally around domestic ways forward . A report was presented to the Safer Communities Strategic group and the LSCB included the issue of domestic abuse in its response to the Children and Young People's Plan Consultation.

Domestic Abuse-Research overview

Information contained in this research overview is derived from the PowerPoint presentations delivered at the conference and Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid. Information has also been taken from the DSCF publication 'Understanding Serious Case Reviews and their Impact': A Biennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews 2005-2007. Information has also been provided Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid.

National and local picture

National and international research has consistently shown that domestic abuse will affect 1 in 4 women at some point in their lives. Locally this means that around 25,000 women in Solihull have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse. As

elsewhere much domestic abuse in Solihull goes unreported to agencies, however in 2008/9, the police received 2,450 calls in relation to domestic abuse. A comparison with 2006/7 when calls totalled 1506 highlights the increase in local reporting to the police.

Domestic Violence is considered a gendered issue and in the past there has been a limited recognition on the part of the impact of violence towards mothers on children and young people. Historically, there has been a trend to urge women to stay for the children or to blame them for a 'failure to protect'. There have been recent legal developments around domestic abuse including the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Children and Adoption Act 2002 which amended the *definition of significant harm to include "impairment suffered from seeing to hearing the ill treatment of another"*.

750,000 – 1 million children are reported to be living with domestic violence in England and Wales. Children and young people have their own experiences of the abuse and in recent times there has been recognition of the need to move away from women being seen as passive victims to a conceptualisation of domestic violence as an attack on the mother-child relationship

Impact on children and young people

Research in respect of domestic abuse suggested that where domestic abuse was taking place, 87% children witnessed or overheard the violence (NCH 1994), 75%-90% of children were in the same or adjoining rooms (Flitcraft 1994, Jaffe et al 1990), and in one study of 2,869 children/young people, 26% witnessed violence between their parents; for 5% the violence was frequent and chronic (Cawson 2000).

Presence of domestic violence is considered a powerful indicator of child abuse. Research has shown that in 40-60% of cases children were also abused, 10% witnessed sexual assault and 66% of children and young people on child protection register (now child protection plans) were living with domestic abuse

The impact of domestic abuse on children is now well documented and it is recognised that children / young people witnessing domestic abuse are *at risk of significant harm*. There are higher rates of depression, anxiety and symptoms of trauma in those who witness domestic violence and they have significantly worse psycho-social outcomes. Children and young people physically abused and witnessing domestic abuse are the most at risk. Children do not recover once away from the domestic abuse if left in hostile contact arrangements and separation is the most dangerous times - 76% of London murders involved separated women being tracked through child contact arrangements.

Drugs and alcohol are considered to be compounding factors. One study highlighted that 60-80% of women receiving support for substance use suffered domestic violence and 50% of men receiving alcohol services perpetrated domestic violence

Black and Minority Ethnic children / young people are considered to be more vulnerable if forced to leave supportive networks and this can be compounded by

experiences of racism. They are at greater risk of abduction or forced marriage and Asian women have higher rates of suicide/self harm.

There is increased awareness of the harm to the mother-child relationship including the disabling of mother's ability to protect her child from abuse and disabling the mother mentally and emotionally - 38%-83% of abused women suffer depression. Children / young people recover when they are no longer subject to exposure of domestic violence and children and young people have a varying degree of resilience and protective factors. Children are most likely to draw on informal help/support as well as support offered through local including direct work - group work and counselling are very positive in helping children to talk about experiences, feel they are not the only ones, and deal with issues of self blame (Mullender 2006).

It is now recognised that there is a need to move beyond 'mother blaming' and away from the tendency to ignore or make invisible the perpetrator and the process of recovery needs to include support for the mother-child relationship. Children have spoken of wanting to feel safe, having someone to listen to them and support services playing a crucial role in this. No one organisation is responsible for keeping children safe and there is also a need to focus on intervention with perpetrators. A critical message is that the protection of children is separate but linked to the protection of women.

Teenage Partner violence

In 2009 NSPCC conducted research with the aim of exploring with young people their experiences of physical, emotional and sexual forms of partner violence. 1,353 young people aged 13-17 years were involved in the research.

16% of the total sample and an equal number of boys and girls, stated their friends were aggressive in their relationships and as age increased so did reports of aggression. There is an association between experiencing family violence and having a peer group characterised by intimidation.

Experience of family violence is a significant factor. These young people were more likely to report a relationship experience of partner violence and young people who experience family violence are more likely to have experienced a relationship at an earlier age. Young women who have experienced family violence have an increased likelihood of having an older partner whilst young people with a same-sex partner are more likely to have experienced family violence (5% of sample).

The group at highest risk was girls with a much older partner. A 70% incidence rate of physical violence was found amongst girls with a much older male partner, whilst 80% of girls with a much older partner reported sexual violence.

Girls in the study were considered to be twice as likely to experience physical and sexual partner violence where there was a history of family violence.

An aggressive peer group was a stronger indicator for male instigation of partner violence than family violence.

Learning mentors, education/career aspirations, support after family violence and a positive peer group were considered to be protective factors for young people in the study.

Lessons from Serious Case Reviews

A detailed study of 40 Serious Case Reviews (2005-2007) revealed that almost half (45%) of the families were highly mobile and living in poor conditions. Nearly three quarters of the children lived with *past or present domestic violence* and / or past or present parental mental ill health, and / or past or present parental substance misuse. Although the evidence of domestic violence from the database notification reports was limited, and certainly an underestimate, the mention of domestic violence **permeated all types of Serious Case Reviews concerning babies, children and adolescents**. As previous studies of serious case reviews have found, domestic violence often coexists with other aspects of problematic parenting and is closely associated with all types of abuse and neglect. Domestic violence was also known to be a feature of most of the small number of cases where the child's father murdered their mother (and sometimes the child as well). The environment in which the child lives is crucial to his or her health, safety and well being. Living with adversity compromises the life chances of a child.

Fleeing domestic violence was given as a reason for some children being continually on the move.

Local responses

Strategic Approach

Since 2002, the **Solihull Domestic Abuse Strategy Group** has brought together key voluntary and statutory agencies to facilitate a co-ordinated approach to the development of services for women and children affected by domestic abuse. The Strategy Group's main aim is "to reduce the number of victims of domestic abuse in Solihull and work towards a sustained and improved quality of life for all" (Solihull Domestic Abuse Strategy 2009-2012). The **Domestic Abuse Practice and Information Group** sits beneath the Strategic Group and works to identify gaps in provision and highlight issues which might need to be taken up strategically.

Multi-agency initiatives

Since 2005, Solihull has held monthly **Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences** with the aim of promoting the safety of those victims of domestic abuse deemed as high risk. Agencies share information and discuss possible avenues of support and additional safety measures for victims. Over the last year, Solihull has instigated a pilot to screen cases of domestic abuse reported to the police where children are present. Representatives from the Police, Health and Children's Services meet three times a week to risk assess and co-ordinate responses to these cases. Currently, the Triage System is being evaluated. National research led by the NSPCC would suggest this model is an effective way to respond to children's needs

Local Domestic Abuse Specialist Services

Solihull has a number of specialist services for women and children affected by domestic abuse. These include refuge accommodation, Floating Support, Helpline, support group, schools work, psychology service for under fives, Visual Evidence for Victims, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor . The specialist agencies delivering these services are:

Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid (BSWA) provides refuge accommodation for 11 women and their children at any one time. As well as offering emotional and practical support to women, BSWA's Children and Family Support Workers provide support and activities for children, parenting and family support services and support in gaining access to key services e.g. schools, health etc.

BSWA's Floating Support Service provides support and advocacy to women affected by domestic abuse who are living in the community, including women leaving refuge or other accommodation and taking up a new tenancy.

BSWA also provides **counselling, family support services and help line** to women living in Solihull.

MABL Trust (Make a Better Life) was established to support those affected by domestic abuse through the provision of services. Current services include:

- a help line offering support and guidance to anyone affected by domestic abuse in Solihull,
- support groups with childcare facilities,
- the Freedom Programme to help victims gain self esteem,
- a psychology service for children under five and their non-abusing parents.

Victim Support West Midlands employs a dedicated domestic abuse caseworker who provides advice and support including advice on Criminal Injuries Compensation. The **Witness Service** provides support to victims before, during and after court hearings.

Visual Evidence for Victims gives people who have injuries resulting from domestic violence the opportunity to have photographs taken which might be used in court at a later date. Photographs are only released to the courts with the permission of the victim. A number of agencies provide this service including Victim Support, MIND and BSWA.

The Children's Society in Solihull devised and continues to deliver the **Keep Cool** programme in schools. This is a 6 week programme delivered to small groups of children looking at healthy and unhealthy relationships in the home. The Children's Society is currently training workers and partner agencies to roll the programme out across the borough.

A number of other voluntary sector agencies, including **MIND** and **Aquarius**, work closely with the specialist agencies, and offer support to women affected by domestic abuse who may have other issues, often related to their experience of abuse.

Statutory Agencies

All statutory agencies in the borough will be working with victims of domestic abuse. More details about their responses to domestic abuse can be found in the Solihull Domestic Abuse Strategy. Both Police and Probation also work with the perpetrators of abuse and again more details can be found in the Domestic Abuse Strategy.

Further Information

For more information in respect of the Domestic Abuse Strategy please contact Charlotte Ford, Domestic Violence Co-ordinator on tel. 0121 704 6709 or email. cford@solihull.gov.uk

For more information in respect of LSCB training please contact Christine Stait on tel. 0121 788 4478 or email. cstait@solihull.gov.uk

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21st January 2010