

Domestic Abuse

Headlines

[Domestic abuse](#) is a complex social problem which is often under-reported or disclosed. Its consequences are unacceptable. It harms the whole of society. It damages families and the education of children. It affects businesses and employers. It increases the demand for housing. It has a dramatic effect on individual health and wellbeing and can seriously affect whole life experience. Domestic abuse costs society £36.7bn a year¹. Kirklees costs are estimated at £43m a year in service, criminal justice costs and lost economic output². However, there is evidence that intervention has significant social return^{3,4}.

Why is this issue important?

There are many theories on the causes of domestic abuse. These include: biological factors, individual personality traits or disorders, family and partner dynamics, learned behaviour, and underlying power imbalances in society, particularly between men and women. It is widely accepted that much domestic abuse is about power and control. There is little chance of addressing domestic abuse whilst public attitudes and institutions tolerate it⁵.

In England and Wales, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men between 16 and 59 years' experience domestic abuse in their lifetime⁶. In 2011/12, there were over 6,000 incidences of domestic abuse reported to the Police in Kirklees. This involved over 4,000 individual victims. Overall rates of police reporting in the last five years remain constant with little variation⁷. Perpetrators are more likely to be men but perpetrators come from all backgrounds: any ethnic group, religion, class or neighbourhood, or any age. Repeat victimisation is common. No other type of crime has a rate of repeat victimisation as high⁸.

In England and Wales, at least 950,000 children a year witness domestic abuse⁶. In Kirklees the police make an average of 85 referrals a week to the Safeguarding Children team, as a direct result of domestic abuse incidents⁹. Children are affected by domestic abuse as witnesses or as victims. This affects health and wellbeing and future life chances⁸.

Domestic abuse affects both physical and emotional health of victims and children. In victims, this can include general poor health, self-harming behaviour, bruising, broken bones, recurrent sexually transmitted infections, burn or stab wounds, [chronic pain](#), poor

nutrition, tiredness, miscarriage, maternal death, babies with low birth weight/stillbirth, injury, fear, increased likelihood of using [drugs](#) and [alcohol](#) or prescribed anti-depressants, depression and [poor mental health](#), suicide or suicidal thoughts, sleep disturbances, post-traumatic stress, anger, guilt, loss of self-confidence, feelings of dependency, loss of hope, feelings of isolation, low self-worth, panic or anxiety, and eating disorders¹⁰. It can also lead to a range of social issues such as homelessness, poor education, and social isolation.

What significant factors are affecting this issue?

Risk factors for perpetrating domestic abuse include a history of violent behaviour, anti-social behaviours and attitudes, relationship instability, employment instability, mental health problems and personality disorder, an abusive childhood, low self-esteem, and hostile attitudes towards women. Other factors include distorted thinking about relationships and male and female roles within relationships, emotional mismanagement, social skills deficits, impulsiveness and alcohol¹¹. Poverty and social isolation are also key contributors¹².

Domestic abuse is rarely an isolated incident. Severity increases over time. Those most at risk of severe damage are those who face barriers to seeking help to stop the cycle of abuse.

In Kirklees, the following local assets will help to reduce the risk and impacts of domestic abuse:

- A range of integrated voluntary and statutory service provision including one to one, group and peer support, referral routes into other agencies such as alcohol and substance use services, housing advice and a sanctuary scheme to keep people safe in their own homes.
- Continuing to intervene in families at the earliest opportunity.
- Community networks, volunteering and time banking.
- Community grant investment to reduce social isolation and peer networks.

Which groups are most affected by this issue?

Research in England and Wales suggests victims and perpetrators can be from any group or community. Some groups are affected more and the reasons are complex.

Children and young people

Significant numbers of children are affected as victims and as witnesses. This has a profound impact on their lives⁸. Abuse is common in teenage relationships, both for males and females. This is a significant child welfare issue¹³.

Women

Women are more likely to be victims than men. They are more at risk of homicide and repeat victimisation. Highest levels are reported by those under 30 years but there may be under-reporting in older women due to embarrassment, fear of losing their home, support and independence. [Pregnancy](#) is a risk factor^{8,14}. Women with a disability are more likely to be victims than those without a disability but there may be under-reporting due to vulnerability, isolation and attitudes to disability¹⁵. Women offenders are more likely to have experienced domestic and sexual violence than the general female population and are less likely to seek help or use mainstream community service provision. Women are less likely to be perpetrators than men^{8,16}.

Men

Men are more likely to be perpetrators than women and are less likely to be victims than women⁸.

LGBT

Domestic abuse occurs in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender relationships. Fear of getting an unsympathetic response and failure to define or recognise experiences as domestic abuse may act as barriers to reporting and service uptake¹⁷.

BME communities

Domestic abuse occurs across all ethnic groups. However, survivors from black and other minority ethnic communities are less likely to access statutory services based on cultural barriers. In some BME communities, abuse may be perpetrated by extended family members and may include forced marriage or female genital mutilation. Women from black or minority communities may also be more isolated, or have to overcome religious or cultural pressures. They may be afraid of bringing shame onto their “family honour”¹⁸.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

- Implement the Domestic Abuse Strategy to challenge public attitudes and improve awareness, help remove barriers to reporting and accessing services.
- Implement the Community Safety Strategy to tackle domestic abuse as a crime.

- Implement the Reducing Reoffending Strategy to protect the public, prevent re-offending, and reduce the number of local victims.
- We need a focus on prevention where we can change attitudes and work hard for earlier intervention.
- We have to work towards ensuring that appropriate provision is in place so that adequate support is available where abuse does occur.
- We have to focus on protection with increased confidence in reporting, so that we reduce the risk to women (and men) and children, bringing perpetrators to justice. We have to work towards eliminating gender inequality.

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