

Safe at Home: Homelessness and domestic abuse



May 2018

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About SafeLives



We are a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for good. We combine insight from services, survivors and statistics to support people to become safe, well and rebuild their lives. Since 2005, SafeLives has worked with organisations across the country to transform the response to domestic abuse. Last year over 60,000 victims at highest risk of murder or serious harm received co-ordinated support from interventions created by SafeLives.

No one should live in fear. It is not acceptable, not inevitable, and together – we can make it stop.

Every year, two million people experience domestic abuse. There are 100,000 people at risk of being murdered or seriously harmed; 130,000 children live in those households. At all levels of risk, over 2 million people had an experience of domestic abuse last year. For every person being abused, there is someone else responsible for that abuse: the perpetrator. And all too often, children are in the home and living with the impact.

Domestic abuse affects us all; it thrives on being hidden behind closed doors. We must make it everybody's business.

We want what you would want for your best friend

- ✔ Help made available wherever it's needed – whether from the police, GP or hospital, or where they live
- ✔ Early, consistent and tailored support that makes them safe and meets their needs
- ✔ The choice to stay safely in their own home and community
- ✔ The perpetrator challenged to change and held to account
- ✔ A response that reflects the fundamental connection between the experience of adults and their children
- ✔ Agencies work together to meet the practical needs that people have, providing help on areas such as housing, money and access to justice

We want this for each and every person living with abuse. Wherever they live, whoever they are.



What we do

- Place people with lived experience at the heart of all we do and amplify their voices
- Test innovative projects and replicate effective approaches that make more people safe and well
- Combine data, research and frontline expertise to help services improve and to influence policy makers (locally and nationally)
- Offer support, knowledge and tools to frontline workers and professionals

How we do it

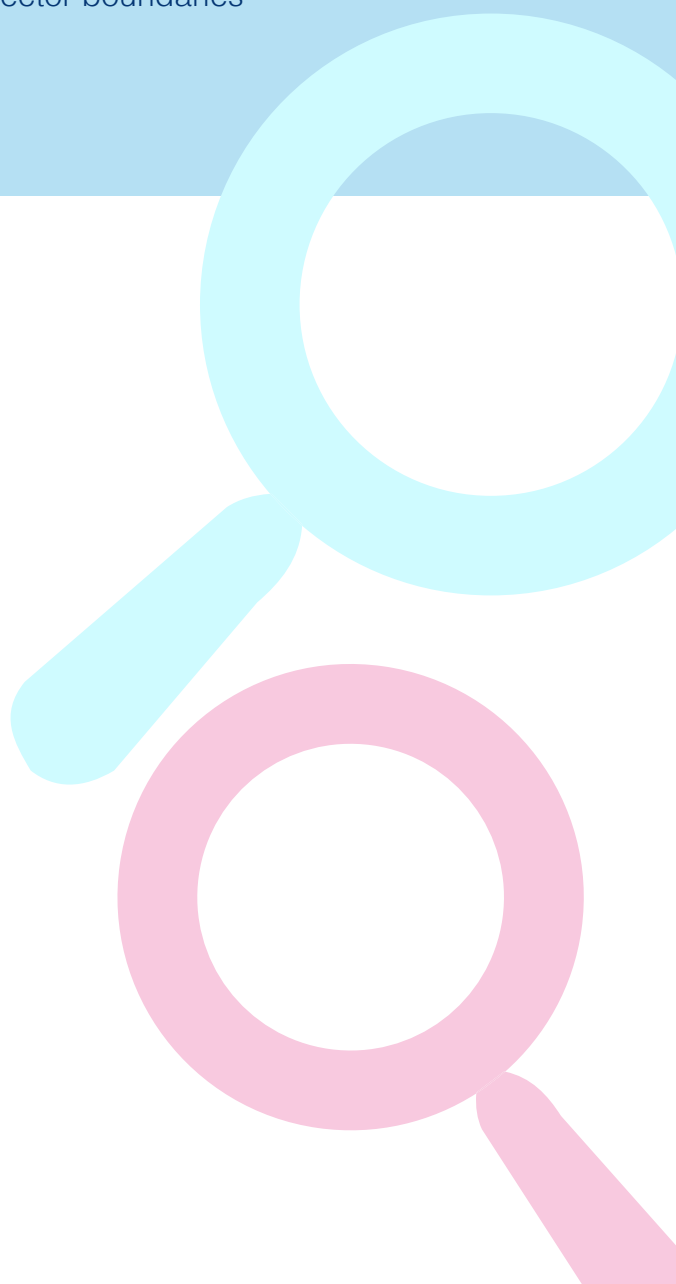
- We are independent
- We focus on the practical: we believe in showing people what they can do, not telling them they should do
- We save time and money for local areas by solving common problems once and sharing the solutions
- We are informed by evidence of what really works
- We learn from local provision and respect local circumstances, but show how national replication can be achieved
- We work across organisational and sector boundaries

About SafeLives' Insights service

Insights is a 'whole family' outcomes measurement programme specifically designed for specialist domestic abuse services supporting adults and children who have experience or are experiencing domestic abuse, both as victims/survivors and as perpetrators.

Insights enables services to understand who is accessing their service and identify gaps, to tailor interventions and support to meet the needs of their clients and to evidence the impact of their work on improving safety and wellbeing. Frontline practitioners collect information about the people they support and submit it to SafeLives for analysis and benchmarking against national comparators.

You can find out more about Insights [here](#).



About this report

This report will discuss domestic abuse and its link to homelessness, with a particular focus on survivors of domestic abuse who are chronically homeless. By homeless we do not only mean those who are rough sleeping, but anyone who does not have a safe or secure place to live (see definitions section). The report is part of our Spotlight series which focuses on 'hidden' groups of domestic abuse victims and survivors or those with unmet needs, and proposes recommendations for both practitioners and policy makers. It is the fifth report in the series. Previous reports can be found at <http://www.safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights>.

We would like to thank all the practitioners, professionals and academics who participated in this Spotlight, and particularly Crisis, our expert partner for the project.



Most of all, we would like to thank the survivors who spoke so honestly and bravely about their experiences. Without your insight, this report would not be possible.

Contact

For queries about this report please contact REA@safelives.org.uk

Definitions

Domestic Abuse (DA)

In England and Wales the cross Government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.”

In Scotland, the definition of domestic abuse as set out by the Scottish Government is:

“Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse), can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family or friends).”

Homelessness

Under the Housing Act 1996, ‘homelessness’ does not solely mean the lack of a home. A person should be treated as homeless if they have no housing that it is reasonable or safe for them to continue to occupy. The housing charity Shelter¹ explains that you are homeless if you are:

- Staying with friends or family
- Staying in a hostel, night shelter or B&B
- Squatting (because you have no legal right to stay)
- At risk of violence or abuse in your home
- Living in poor conditions that affect your health
- Living apart from your family because you don’t have a place to live together

Rough sleeping

Rough sleepers are defined by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government² (for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates) as follows:

“People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/ in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments), people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or ‘bashes’).

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers.”

Statutory homeless

Statutory Homeless is a term used by governments in England, Wales and Scotland in relation to their duty to provide housing. It is defined by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government³ as follows:

“A statutorily homeless household is one that is unintentionally homeless and in a priority need category (such as having dependent children). Unintentionally homeless, priority need households are owed a main duty by their local authority to secure settled accommodation, and to ensure suitable accommodation is provided until settled accommodation becomes available.”

Chronic homelessness

For the purpose of this report, chronic homelessness will be defined as follows: “People who are chronically homeless have experienced homelessness for at least a year – or repeatedly – while struggling with a disabling condition such as a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability.”⁴

Executive Summary

'Escaping a perpetrator of domestic violence can take months of precision planning, like an army exercise. Imagine making your escape, only to find yourself homeless. You have left behind your entire home, your belongings and a part of yourself.'

Tee Falcone, survivor and ambassador for the Woman's Trust and St Mungo's

Our fifth Spotlight report focuses on homeless victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and the cycle of homelessness and abuse that can often develop. Being homeless does not simply mean sleeping on the streets; homeless people may be staying with friends, in hostels or other temporary accommodation, squatting or living somewhere unsafe or uninhabitable.

If you're living with an abusive partner, the home that should be a place of safety becomes a place of fear. No one should have to put their key in the front door and dread what's waiting for them on the other side. And no one should be forced to live with an abusive partner, simply because there is nowhere else for them to go.

We know from government statistics in England, Wales and Scotland that domestic abuse accounts for at least one in ten people who require local authority support for homelessness.⁵ We know these figures are likely to be much higher, especially for women, who are both disproportionately affected by domestic abuse and often 'hidden' from official homelessness statistics. Homelessness charity St. Mungo's report that 32% of the women they work with, and 8% of men, said domestic abuse contributed to their homelessness⁶.

'I felt as though I was going through a thick, impenetrable fog every day. Having to trust those advising me even though I understood little of what they were saying to me. My children were terrified of being homeless and having to send our pets to the RSPCA – they still have nightmares about it now'

Margi Isaac, domestic abuse survivor and founding member of the charity VOICES

For those made homeless by domestic abuse, the path to stable accommodation is not easy, and often depends on the variable response of local housing teams. In many cases the survivor must significantly disrupt their life in order to secure a safe place to live. Our Insights data shows that over 10% of those supported with re-housing by a domestic abuse service were moved out of their local authority area. For those who need to access emergency accommodation this will be much higher. Data from Women's Aid's Annual Survey in 2017 shows that over two thirds of women (68.4%) in refuge had crossed local authority boundaries to access this accommodation.⁷

For someone who has had their self-worth and autonomy systematically eroded by a perpetrator of abuse, and who has had power and control over their own life taken away from them, navigating the complex world of housing can be extremely difficult. This can lead to survivors slipping through the cracks in the system, with no safety net to catch them.

Once homelessness begins, whether as the result of domestic abuse or otherwise, it becomes increasingly difficult to escape. In a Crisis survey (2016) repeat homelessness was found to be common amongst homeless women, with nearly half stating they had previously been homeless at least once.⁸ Homeless women are also vulnerable to multiple forms of gender-based violence, creating a cycle of homelessness and abuse.

Research shows that women with extensive experience of physical and sexual violence are far more likely to experience disadvantage in many other areas of their lives; homelessness is one area of disadvantage, but others include disability and ill health, substance dependence, poverty, debt and discrimination. All of these can be a further barrier to gaining secure accommodation and ending the cycle. Research by Homeless Link finds that women experiencing complex trauma will often have trouble maintaining stable relationships, engaging in support and navigating non-clinical services.⁹

'You're away from the perpetrator – he doesn't know where you are. But you're then putting another set of problems onto it, you know – drugs, violence. And you don't want that. I just wanted peace.'

Survivor, as quoted in Finding the Costs of Freedom¹⁰

Despite the well documented complex and interrelated needs of women experiencing domestic abuse and homelessness, services are not always equipped to meet these needs. Crisis found that the most vulnerable women were facing difficulties meeting their complex needs because of active exclusion from services, with over 40% having been excluded from a service. As well as this, Dr. Lucy Allwright from AVA talks in her Spotlights podcast about the need for gender responsive environments. Homeless women have often experienced extensive violence and relationship violation, leaving them feeling unsafe in mixed gender environments such as hostels, but limited gender-specific provision is available.

To better support homeless survivors of domestic abuse, the nature of support and the way that services engage with clients both need to change. Programmes based on the Housing First model offer examples that are proving effective.

But more than this, we must get better at identifying domestic abuse earlier and keeping survivors safe in their own homes. Housing providers are well positioned to be able to identify domestic abuse and prevent escalation through offering support and guidance to residents. A number of housing providers have taken steps to identify domestic abuse by training frontline staff and housing officers. Domestic Abuse services can help too, by actively involving housing providers in their work and recognising the intrinsic link between homelessness and domestic abuse. And finally, we must ensure that for those who are chronically homeless, who may not even have a safe home to begin with, there is a way to access support and escape the cycle.

Key findings and recommendations

1 Domestic abuse is a significant cause of homelessness, but the true extent of the issue is unknown

1.1 Local Authorities should review their needs assessment processes in relation to housing to ensure they fully account for 'hidden' and marginalised groups. Needs assessments should:

- Involve local providers and multi-agency partners
- Reflect survivors voices
- Be informed by good quality local and national data

1.2 Governments in England, Wales and Scotland should increase the scale and quality of homelessness data to better identify factors that contribute to homelessness, and those who have nowhere safe to live but do not qualify as statutory homeless. This data will assist local authorities in conducting accurate needs assessments.

1.3 Governments in England, Wales and Scotland and **local authorities** should ensure homeless, domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategies are linked at a local and national level.

2 Survivors of domestic abuse who become homeless face multiple barriers to gaining a safe and secure place to live

- 2.1 **UK government** should extend priority need status to all survivors of domestic abuse in England, to mirror the access to housing available to survivors in Wales and Scotland.
- 2.2 **Local Authority Housing services** should provide priority support to those seeking to leave an abusive partner, ex-partner or family member at the first instance they approach the team for help. This should consider the option of re-housing the perpetrator rather than the victim wherever possible.
- 2.3 **Local Authorities**, working with refuges, should aim to assess and allocate accommodation appropriate for the client within the first two weeks of entering refuge.
- 2.4 **Local Authorities** and **Maracs** should monitor the engagement of housing representatives within the Marac process as a required core agency, and promote improved engagement.

3 Chronically homeless women experience multiple forms of disadvantage, which creates a cycle of abuse and homelessness

- 3.1 **Homeless services** and **domestic abuse services** should work together to ensure they are survivor-centred and accessible to the most marginalised, for instance those who misuse substances or alcohol and people with mental ill-health. This might require an innovate approach to support alongside traditional provision; The Nelson Trust's Women's programme¹¹ provides an example of the difference such support can make.
- 3.2 **Local Commissioners** should fund specialist provision for homeless people with multiple and complex needs, including those for whom refuge accommodation is not appropriate. Alternative models of housing provision are discussed in Sections 5 and 6, including Housing First, Places of Safety and Shared Lives Plus.

4 Responses to chronically homeless women must be gender responsive and trauma informed

4.1 Local Commissioners should fund women-only homelessness provision.

4.2 Homelessness services should assess whether their provision is gender responsive, and consider appointing a women's worker to understand and advocate for the specific needs of homeless women.

5 Housing is a basic need that must be met before other disadvantages can be addressed

5.1 Central and local governments across the UK should consider how to make funding available for new Housing First models for survivors of domestic abuse. This might include co-funding between central and local government and philanthropic sources, and identifying where this type of support would be an effective and efficient use of existing funding streams.

6 Housing providers play a vital role in the response to domestic abuse

- 6.1 Governments in England, Scotland and Wales** should consider implementing country-wide housing reciprocal initiatives for survivors of domestic abuse.
- 6.2 Housing providers** should ensure their training programmes for front-line staff address the issue of domestic abuse. This should include distinguishing domestic abuse from anti-social behaviour, and direct actions staff can take to help manage risk, such as timescales around repairs. We would encourage all housing providers to work towards DAHA accreditation.
- 6.3 Policy makers and funders** should invest in the expansion of rigorous, safe, programmes that identify and address abusive behaviour and challenge the perpetrator to change, increasing levels of innovation and provision for those causing harm in the first place. This should include attention to housing issues raised in this report.
- 6.4 Perpetrator programmes** should assess the housing needs of service users and consider whether support with housing for the perpetrator would disrupt the abusive behaviour. This should be carefully managed alongside safeguarding processes for the victim/survivor, and child protection procedures if children are involved in the case.

Introduction

Homelessness and domestic abuse are problems that often coexist, and each can perpetuate the other creating a chronic cycle of abuse and homelessness.

SafeLives Insights data shows that 22% of people accessing support from a domestic abuse service were living with the perpetrator when they entered the service. However, it is an even wider group whose accommodation is destabilised by abuse; whether or not they were living with the perpetrator, over half (52%) needed support to secure new accommodation or stay safe in their own home. Without receiving this support at the right time, survivors of domestic abuse can easily become homeless.

Regardless of the reason they become homeless, homeless people are vulnerable to multiple forms of violence and abuse. According to a survey by Crisis (2016), 80% of people sleeping on the streets have suffered violence, abuse or anti-social behaviour in the past year¹². Many homeless people will not be rough sleeping; but even in less dangerous situations housing problems can lead to a survivor of abuse feeling they have little choice but to return to the perpetrator.¹³ After receiving support survivors of domestic abuse are unlikely to be living in sustainable housing, with 87% of women leaving refuges for continued temporary accommodation according to research by Solace Women's Aid.¹⁴


'Escaping a perpetrator of domestic violence can take months of precision planning, like an army exercise. Imagine making your escape, only to find yourself homeless.'

Tee Falcone, survivor and ambassador for the Woman's Trust and St Mungo's

This report will use SafeLives' Insights national dataset and wider evidence to help demonstrate the cyclical nature of domestic abuse and homelessness. Our Insights dataset is collected by specialist domestic abuse services who support people aged 16 and over.

The report will particularly focus on chronically homeless women, which our Spotlight reveals to be one of the most hidden groups. It will draw on evidence from the Spotlight and other research to help understand the experiences of homeless survivors of domestic abuse, and the support that they need. This includes evidence from practitioners, experts and, most importantly, the views of domestic abuse survivors who have become homeless or have been at risk of homelessness.

Due to the wide scope of the topic this report will focus on six key findings that arise from the evidence contributed to our Spotlight. We have used this evidence to make recommendations for change.



Policy context: housing rights for survivors of domestic abuse

Local Authorities throughout the UK have a duty to provide assistance with housing for those who need it, including those who leave their homes to escape abuse. But access to support can vary; in 2014 Crisis assessed provision in England using ‘mystery shoppers’ and found that responses from local authorities varied widely¹⁵. In many cases the mystery shopper was not adequately assisted. Those fleeing home to escape domestic abuse will not always be able to secure the help they are entitled to, and more needs to be done to allow victims to stay safe in their own home.

Access to temporary accommodation

When making an application for assistance with housing, you can choose to apply to your own or another Local Authority. The Local Authority will then assess whether you have a local connection to that area. If they cannot see a local connection they can transfer you to another authority. However, they cannot transfer you to an area where you are at risk of domestic abuse or violence. The type of assistance available varies depending on the applicant's circumstances and region of the UK, but in some cases immediate access to temporary accommodation should be made available.

In England and Wales if a housing authority has reason to believe that an applicant may be eligible for assistance, homeless and have a ‘priority need’, the authority will have an immediate duty to ensure that suitable accommodation is available for them and their household. This is until completion of the authority’s inquiries and its decision as to what duty, if any, is owed to the applicant. In Scotland the same duty applies to all those who are eligible and homeless, regardless of priority need. If the Local Authority is referring you to another area on the basis of local connection they must continue to provide emergency housing if you qualify for it until the other council accepts the referral.

There are circumstances in which victims and survivors of domestic abuse may not meet these criteria. For some, their immigration status will fail the eligibility criteria, as explored through our previous Spotlight on so called 'honour'-based violence. In England, some survivors of domestic abuse will not meet the category of 'priority need': while in Wales a victim of domestic abuse is automatically considered to be in priority need (and there is no such test in Scotland), in England it is only in cases where the applicant is considered more vulnerable than 'the ordinary person made homeless.'ⁱ This can leave the guidance open to interpretation by housing officers. Many domestic abuse victims will fall into other categories of priority need, such as pregnancy or dependent children, but this leaves a particular difficulty for women who do not meet one of these other criteria.

Access to secure accommodation

Before receiving more permanent ('secure') accommodation in any area of the UK, two additional tests are applied:

- The applicant must not be 'intentionally homeless' (i.e. they have acted or deliberately omitted to act in a way that caused their homelessness.)
- If all other conditions are met and they haven't already done so, the local authority may make inquiries as to whether a homeless applicant has a local connection with another housing authority in England, Wales or Scotland, and refer them to another local authority.

Both of these criteria are subject to guidance about domestic abuse. An applicant cannot be found intentionally homeless if they left their home to escape abuse, or threats of abuse. And applicants cannot be referred to another housing authority if they, or any person who might reasonably be expected to live with them, would be at risk of violence in that area. However, as Crisis found in their mystery shopper experiment, many other barriers exist, such as not being given the opportunity to make an application, or being required to 'prove' they were entitled to support. The level of basic customer service can also be a barrier, with applicants required to discuss their reasons for becoming homeless in a busy public environment, which can be particularly difficult for survivors of domestic abuse.

Preventing homelessness before it occurs

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness (APPGEH) has highlighted that actions are needed to broaden housing options for domestic abuse survivors in order to prevent homelessness before it occurs. This includes addressing the tenancy and transfer rules and policies adopted by housing providers which make it difficult for survivors to leave their accommodation for alternatives or to have perpetrators safely removed.

ⁱ Legislation does not provide a statutory definition of 'vulnerability'. Subsequent case law has helped to define the meaning of the term in reference to the housing duty; the most recent definition was established in a landmark Supreme Court ruling of three cases that were heard together, *Hotak v Southwark, Kanu v Southwark and Johnson v Solihull* (2015).

In April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force in England, which aims to refocus local authority efforts on the prevention of homelessness. For instance, it introduces new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need, intentionality and local connection. It also aims to improve the advice and information about homelessness, and encourage public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness. It is vital that these new preventative steps are fully embedded to stop people entering the cycle of homelessness and abuse that this report will explore.

Key Findings

1 Domestic abuse is a significant cause of homelessness, but the true extent of the issue is unknown

In 2016/17 11% of people accepted as homeless by local authorities in England and Wales had become homeless because of a violent relationship breakdown.¹⁶ In Scotland this information is reported for all homelessness applications (not just acceptances) but the figure is similar: 12% had become homeless because of domestic abuse.¹⁷

This evidence alone highlights that domestic abuse is a substantial cause of homelessness. Wider evidence suggests that the true numbers are much higher than these figures, particularly for women.

Research by the homelessness charity St Mungo's found that 32% of the women they worked with in 2013 said domestic abuse was a factor contributing to their homelessness, compared to 8% of men. The report also found that 35% of women who have slept rough left home to escape violence.¹⁸

In many other cases domestic abuse may not be considered the direct cause of homelessness but is still present. Crisis' Nations Apart research (2014) found that 61% of homeless women and 16% of homeless men had experienced abuse from a partner.¹⁹ Many of our Spotlights contributors who provide support for homeless women found that although domestic abuse was not a referral criteria for their programme, the overwhelming majority of those referred had this experience in common. It may be only after receiving support in other areas that this experience comes to light.

'I would never have named domestic violence as something I was experiencing. It was my support worker who started exploring this with me.'

Young person supported by 1625 Independent People, South Gloucestershire

While women are disproportionately affected, it is important to remember that domestic abuse does not only lead to homelessness among women. SafeLives consultant and previous homeless support worker, Annabel, recalls that during her time working in the homeless sector domestic abuse was present in a range of cases, including young men experiencing abuse from family members:

As part of my work with rough sleepers I advocated for clients when they approached the local authority for assistance. The response to domestic abuse varied hugely, between local authorities, individual housing officers and the profile of abuse. Housing offers frequently had a very limited understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse when it came to familial abuse and male victims. It is important to not simply blame housing officers for their responses but to understand why it was so poor in the first place and support them to improve.

Annabel Edmonds, SafeLives consultant

The extent of homelessness itself is largely unseen. Research by Crisis (2011) found that 62% of single homeless people were 'hidden homeless'²⁰. This means they were hidden from both services and statistics.

It is thought that women who are rough sleepers are particularly likely to be 'hidden homeless'. In 2016 official statistics found that 12% of rough sleepers were women²¹, while Homeless Link estimate that 28% of those accessing homelessness support are female²². In her Spotlights bog, Lisa Raftery at Homeless Link explains 'women sleep rough differently to men and will often be in "hidden" homeless situations, and therefore will not show up on official statistics.' Dr. Lucy Allright at Against Violence and Abuse (AVA) agrees in her podcast: 'they tend to go into shops, takeaways, A & E, police stations, so things like street outreach teams will go out and they will count people who are bedded down.' Joan Coulton from Basis (a charity working with adult women who are sex working) explains in her Spotlights podcast that many homeless women become involved in prostitution as it is seen as a less dangerous option compared to being on the street or in a mixed hostel.

There is no doubt among practitioners that housing is an important issue for survivors of domestic abuse. The SafeLives Practitioner survey (2017) found that, after specialist services, housing was the issue raised most frequently as a challenge for survivors (19%), and housing options was also mentioned in a substantial proportion of responses (9%) on what would make the biggest difference to services.²³

'Housing is the biggest issue to survivors, as after making the tough decisions they often have nowhere to live.'

Domestic abuse practitioner responding to SafeLives practitioner survey

The need for housing services is clear and the number of domestic abuse survivors who encounter housing difficulties highlights the need to intervene earlier and prevent people becoming homeless.

Crisis (2011) also point out that although research on homelessness is not explicitly gendered, it is "inadvertently dominated by the experiences and views of homeless men".²⁴ In order to tackle this problem, more understanding is needed of the experience of homeless women, and the reasons behind their situation.

'Women's homelessness is so often invisible. I have no contact with my family – I had a very traumatic childhood and don't want to see them. I did a lot of sofa surfing after I left my violent partner. But then I ran out of friends and became homeless.'

St Mungo's Client, as quoted in Rebuilding Shattered Lives²⁵

Recommendations:

- 1.1 Local Authorities** should review their needs assessment processes in relation to housing to ensure they fully account for 'hidden' and marginalised groups. Needs assessments should:
 - Involve local providers and multi-agency partners
 - Reflect survivors voices
 - Be informed by good quality local and national data
- 1.2 Governments in England, Wales and Scotland** should increase the scale and quality of homelessness data to better identify factors that contribute to homelessness, and those who have nowhere safe to live but do not qualify as statutory homeless. This data will assist local authorities in conducting accurate needs assessments.
- 1.3 Governments in England, Wales and Scotland and local authorities** should ensure homeless, domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategies are linked at a local and national level.

2 Survivors of domestic abuse who become homeless face multiple barriers to gaining a safe and secure place to live

Survivors of domestic abuse who leave their home in crisis are often initially housed by a refuge. But according to Women's Aid, refuge provision in the UK falls short of recommended levels stated by the Council of Europe, by 1,793 spaces²⁶. Women's Aid's research identifies additional barriers facing women seeking refuge, including the five most common:

- having four or more children
- No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)
- requiring an accessible refuge space
- having mental health support needs
- being tied to a particular region due to support needs

Research by AVA in 2014 found significant barriers to women with complex needs accessing refuge services.²⁷ The report found many refuges operating partial (and in some cases complete) exclusion policies around certain types of substance use and mental ill health. This is despite funding agreements commonly stating that services should not operate blanket exclusion policies.

There are many more reasons that refuge might not be a viable option. For instance, in our Spotlight on older people Mel, an Adult Social Care representative at Marac, recalled the following case in which the client was physically disabled:

'The property she was living in had been adapted there was a lot of equipment in there but we persuaded her that there were options to move out. Unfortunately, those options were very limited and it meant that rather than us accessing somewhere like a refuge or any independent housing it was residential care, and that's a massive thing for people.'

Mel, Adult Social Care representative at Marac

Whether or not refuge is provided as a short-term solution, the path to stable accommodation is much more difficult as outlined in the policy section of this report. Kelly Henderson, Business Manager (Domestic Abuse) at Gentoo Group housing association spoke to SafeLives about the experiences of survivors she interviewed as part of her PhD research at Durham University. She told us that some survivors felt it was important to stay in their current home and community, where they could access the support of family and friends, but housing services were not always respectful of their views:

Sally was offered a move by her housing provider but felt this could potentially place her in more danger. In response to her decision to stay, the housing provider stated “if it was that bad you would move”.

Kelly Henderson, Gentoo Group

Insights data shows that over 10% of people supported with housing by a domestic abuse service were moved out of their local authority area; this is a high number considering it is the perpetrator who should be held accountable. Where there are children involved, this can cause significant disruption to their education because of the need to move schools. Others cannot access even this option, particularly if social housing is not available to them. Margi Isaac explains in her Spotlights blog that many survivors of domestic abuse will have poor credit history due to the impact of financial abuse, which makes it extremely difficult to secure a private tenancy.

‘The reality of refusing and saying ‘NO!’ to our abuser about money and loans was just too horrific to contemplate. So we agree and sign on the dotted line.’

Margi Isaac, survivor and founding members of VOICES

Insights data shows that in only 3% of cases where the client needed support with housing was the perpetrator evicted. While in some cases this option will not have been available or necessary, it is a much smaller percentage compared to the number of cases where the victim was required to relocate. As well as the 12% of cases in which the client was moved out of their local area, a further 17% were re-housed locally and 10% moved to a refuge. We must make it easier for those survivors of domestic abuse who do leave their home to find secure accommodation but, more importantly, place the requirement to move on the perpetrator of abuse. This will rely on the housing, domestic abuse and law enforcement sectors working closely together. As such it is particularly important that housing officials are always represented at Marac.

'And then when I built up the courage to finally leave, all the housing kept saying to me was 'go home, you've got a house that's suitable for you and your family'. And I was like well take him out. And they were saying we can't do that, it's his tenancy, go home. And I spent a year and a half fighting them.'

Survivor, as quoted in Finding the Costs of Freedom²⁸

Recommendations:

- 2.1 UK government** should extend priority need status to all survivors of domestic abuse in England, to mirror the access to housing available to survivors in Wales and Scotland.
- 2.2 Local Authority Housing services** should provide priority support to those seeking to leave an abusive partner, ex-partner or family member at the first instance they approach the team for help. This should consider the option of re-housing the perpetrator rather than the victim wherever possible.
- 2.3 Local Authorities, working with refuges**, should aim to assess and allocate accommodation appropriate for the client within the first two weeks of entering refuge.
- 2.4 Local Authorities and Maracs** should monitor the engagement of housing representatives within the Marac process as a required core agency, and promote improved engagement.

3 Chronically homeless women experience multiple forms of disadvantage, which creates a cycle of abuse and homelessness

Domestic abuse, even when present, is not always the cause of homelessness; it is often experienced alongside other forms of disadvantage that may all contribute to homelessness. Domestic abuse can also be experienced by those who are already homeless. Dr. Lucy Allwright explains in her Spotlights podcast that some homeless women find they are more likely to experience violence and harassment without the 'protection' of a partner. Even if this partner is abusive, they might consider the known risk to be less dangerous. Research by Moss and Singh (2016) found that of the 32 homeless women interviewed in the UK, 60% worried about violence on the street and 31% said they had been pushed, grabbed, had things thrown at them, been beaten up or raped whilst living on the street²⁹.

Research by Agenda (2016) found that one in five women (21%) with experience of extensive physical and sexual violence have been homeless³⁰. It found that these women are also far more likely to experience disadvantage in other areas of their lives, including disability and ill health, substance dependence, poverty, debt and discrimination. While the type of abuse in this study is not limited to domestic abuse and this research does not prove a causal link, many of our Spotlights contributors discussed how these multiple forms of disadvantage can connect and even perpetuate each other.

In her interview Amanda Bloxsome, Services Manager for Threshold's Housing First, notes that every one of the women accessing her homelessness service for female offenders had experienced domestic abuse. As well as offending, homelessness and domestic abuse, these women experienced multiple other complex needs such as substance or alcohol misuse. Bloxsome explains that these problems all combine to create difficulties in securing and maintaining tenancies; for example in meeting requirements relating to a history of rent arrears and anti-social behaviour. (often mistakenly ascribed to a woman who has actually been living in an abusive situation). In other words, these wider disadvantages perpetuate the experience of homelessness, which can in turn put women at risk of further violence and abuse.

For women, a common thread within this cycle is motherhood and the removal of children. At Threshold Housing First all 33 women supported have had children removed. Katherine Sacks-Jones, Director of Agenda, speaks about this issue in her Spotlights blog and notes that half of the "single homeless" women St. Mungo's works with are in fact mothers, and more than three quarters (79%) of these have had children taken into care. This can create a catch-22 situation:

'They [homeless women] need a home to be able to look after their children. Social services are unlikely to return children to their mothers without one – but without children, they are not a priority for local authority housing assistance.'

Katherine Sacks-Jones, Direct of Agenda, Alliance for Women and Girls at Risk

Another gender-specific theme is sex work. A survey by Moss & Singh found 32% of women rough sleepers interviewed in the UK said sex work was relevant to them.³¹ Furthermore, a survey of female sex workers in three major UK cities found 81% of those working outdoors and 48% of those working indoors had been subject to violence by their clients including beatings, rape, robbery, strangulation and violent threats³². Like other forms of disadvantage, involvement in sex working can make it even more difficult to engage with services that may help break the cycle. Smith explains that in some cases the woman's tenancy is threatened because their behaviour is deemed 'risky'. If she is evicted because of risky behaviour she can be considered 'intentionally homeless', and therefore not eligible for local authority housing support.

Some homeless women may not consider themselves sex workers but find themselves in a similar situation in order secure housing. A 2018 BBC Three documentary revealed the 'Rent for Sex' problem within the UK.³³ Journalist Ellie Flynn explains: "When I log on to a popular classified adverts website, almost immediately I find dozens of ads offering rooms in exchange for "adult arrangements".³⁴ In the documentary, Flynn speaks to a woman who had entered a 'rent for sex' arrangement when she was 20; she didn't realise what the arrangement was until she moved into the property and found she would be sharing a bed with the landlord. Reflecting on the experience this survivor explains:

'He didn't force himself on me, so in a sense I am kind of grateful that he didn't do that... I found myself apologising for not sleeping with him... the idea of consent gets kind of smashed up.'

Survivor, interviewed by Ellie Flynn, BBC Three

In her blog for Spotlights Anna Smith, CEO of charity One25, talks about how the dangers of street homelessness and even mixed-gender hostels can lead to women to feel that a 'home' where there is sexual exploitation and domestic abuse is the safest option.

'I can think of one woman who is being pimped by her partner. Men are coming to her home to have sex with her against her will, but she is stuck there in order to keep a roof over her head.'

Anna Smith is CEO for One25

The cyclical relationship between homelessness and domestic abuse has been evidenced in various studies. In a Crisis survey (2016) repeat homelessness was found to be common amongst women, with nearly half stating they had previously been homeless at least once.³⁵ A survey by Women's Aid among women in refuges found 41% had left their abusive partner at least once before their first admission to a refuge.³⁶ This cycle can only be broken if services and housing providers are able to engage with women in a way that considers the additional needs that accompany the complex trauma they have experienced, and the circumstances under which they are living.

Recommendations:

- 3.1 Homeless services and domestic abuse services** should work together to ensure they are survivor-centred and accessible to the most marginalised, for instance those who misuse substances or alcohol and people with mental ill-health. This might require an innovate approach to support alongside traditional provision; The Nelson Trust's Women's programme³⁷ provides an example of the difference such support can make.
- 3.2 Local Commissioners** should fund specialist provision for homeless people with multiple and complex needs, including those for whom refuge accommodation is not appropriate. Alternative models of housing provision are discussed in Sections 5 and 6, including Housing First, Places of Safety and Shared Lives Plus.

4 Responses to chronically homeless women must be gender responsive and trauma informed

Research by Homeless Link finds that women experiencing complex trauma will often have trouble maintaining stable relationships, engaging in support and navigating non-clinical services.³⁸ Despite the well documented complex and interrelated needs of women experiencing domestic abuse and homelessness, services are not always equipped to meet these needs.

'I needed an emergency bed but the council suggested I had not been rough sleeping long enough. I had some possible appointments in the following weeks but it was difficult to stay in touch and keep on top of it. You go back to just finding ways to survive and eat, and turn to coping mechanisms such as drugs and finding other people in the same situation to feel safe'

St Mungo's Client, as quoted in Rebuilding Shattered Lives³⁹

The Women's Aid 'Nowhere to Turn' report highlighted how women facing difficulties getting a refuge space often faced barriers specifically due to their complex needs, with very few refuges having specialist workers in areas such as drug misuse or mental health.⁴⁰ A survey of 144 homeless women carried out by Crisis (2006)⁴¹ found they often wanted help with the multiple disadvantage they were facing but were unable to find it, including 40% of those surveyed who experienced domestic abuse and wanted assistance with this experience.

Crisis found that the most vulnerable women were facing difficulties because of active exclusion from services, with over 40% having been excluded from a service. The available services were often too disjointed and specialised to address an individual's complex situation. This was a common theme discussed by contributors to our Spotlight, who explained that the exclusion from services is not intentional but because homeless women are not able to engage with the service in the way that the service requires them to.

'We could refer them to the local domestic violence services that were brilliant but these women sometimes don't have phones, they can't turn up for appointments because their lives are very difficult and chaotic.'

Lucy Watson, Fulfilling Lives

An example of trauma informed support is Fulfilling Lives, which works with people who are experiencing unmet needs in the areas of homelessness, substance misuse, mental health and offending behaviour, and often others. Lucy Watson explains in her Spotlights podcast that the Fulfilling Lives intervention centres around making sure people know that they can get support when they want it, even if they have not been engaging with appointments or safety planning.

Contributors to the Spotlight discussed the importance of meeting homeless people's needs in a gender responsive environment. A 2016 UK study on women rough sleepers found a top concern for those interviewed was that shelters and refuges were commonly mixed gender.⁴² This deterred women from using them, who sometimes choose to rough sleep instead. Dr. Lucy Allwright from AVA explains in her podcast that homelessness services have traditionally been designed for men, and women accessing them are seeing worse outcomes. Allwright talks about the extensive violence and relationship violation that can be experienced by homeless women, and how this sometimes follows domestic abuse in the home and extends to harassment from men in hostels. This does not only have an impact on the type of accommodation that women feel safe accessing, but the type of support they need.

'It might be that they present with a substance use issue, it might be that they present with a mental health breakdown but I think the experience of trauma, the experience of violated relationships is one that is really prominent.'

Dr. Lucy Allwright, Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)

As well as providing the option for women-only services, Allwright suggests services need to offer women a trauma informed approach. Trauma informed means that support services recognise and respond to how an individual's experiences of trauma can impact the way that they approach support. Some ways that a service can provide a trauma informed approach is by prioritising building an honest and collaborative relationship with the service user that puts their strengths and priorities at the centre. Homeless Link's report (2016) found despite the recognised need for women-only services, only 11% of homeless accommodation projects offer women-only provision.⁴³

'I was living in [another hostel] and ended up in a court case after I was attacked by a man. It got nowhere, there was no DNA on clothes or nothing, just my word against his...I feel safer here with just women. I used to live somewhere else four years ago and always felt vulnerable, too many men, they were always drunk and trying to chat me up.'

St Mungo's Client, as quoted in Rebuilding Shattered Lives⁴⁴

Recommendations:

- 4.1 **Local Commissioners** should fund women only homelessness provision.
- 4.2 **Homelessness services** should assess whether their provision is gender responsive, and consider appointing a women's worker to understand and advocate for the specific needs of homeless women.

5 Housing is a basic need that must be met before other disadvantages can be addressed

For women who are homeless, the most pressing concern is often to meet basic daily needs such as food, water, clothing and washing. Research by Crisis (2006) highlights that whilst needs and aspirations such as finding employment, addressing alcohol and drug dependencies, and being reunited with children were of the utmost importance to many homeless women, it was the more mundane everyday needs that often dominated their daily lives.⁴⁵ This challenge of meeting basic needs was primarily associated with those women sleeping rough, but it was also present for women living in temporary accommodation, staying with friends/family and squatting.

This is particularly relevant to the design of interventions for homeless women. In her Spotlights interview, Louisa Steele from Standing Together Against Domestic Violence explains that there is often a 'tiered approach' to services. In this approach, clients must make initial improvements in other areas such as substance misuse before they are given access to secure, long term accommodation. But for some people this approach doesn't provide an environment in which they can address these initial problems, and this can perpetuate the cycle of homelessness.

'They gave me accommodation because of my drinking and vulnerability on the street, but then they kicked me out for the same reason.'

Claire, interviewed by Expertlink⁴⁶

Steele, as well as many other Spotlights contributors, champions the Housing First model. Housing First is an intervention for homeless people with multiple and complex needs. The principles of the model state 'there are no conditions around 'housing readiness' before providing someone with a home; rather, secure housing is viewed as a stable platform from which other issues can be addressed.'⁴⁷ This is combined with intensive and flexible support, which is possible because of the low caseloads that Housing First workers carry. An evaluation of the Housing First programme found that the average caseload was 10, compared to 25 to 30 in other homelessness services.⁴⁸ While this is cost intensive, the evaluation also found that 'it may be significantly less per year than the costs of long-term and recurrent homelessness'.

Where there are children in the family, secure housing should also be seen as the basic foundation to children's wellbeing and social development. Aly Vernon, a specialist who supports children affected by domestic abuse spoke in her Spotlights interview about the effect of temporary accommodation such as refuge on children's development and wellbeing. For example, sharing a room with a parent or several younger siblings as a teenager can have an impact on sleep. There is also an impact on social development for children who are not able to invite friends home or who have moved far away from friends.

'It's disrupted them enough, that you ripped them [children] out of their home and you end up in a refuge, with none of their belongings. And then you get housing saying you're not a DV victim, and go back to him, and you just think, what is the point of this?'

St Mungo's Client, as quoted in Rebuilding Shattered Lives

The combination of living in a household with domestic abuse and becoming homeless can have a particularly adverse effect on children's educational progress, because of added problems around accessing school.⁵⁰ A survey by Shelter on homeless children in temporary accommodation⁵¹ found they missed an average of 55 school days (quarter of the school year) due to the disruption of moving in between temporary accommodation. Although families with children are considered to be in 'priority need' for housing, government statistics for England and Wales reveal that between July and September 2017 there were 121,360 children staying in temporary accommodation while they waited for the local authority to secure permanent housing. This included 1,110 children who had been staying in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than 6 weeks.⁵² It is important to acknowledge that meeting duties toward homeless families relies on Local Authorities having the resources to meet the demand for local housing. Research by the Local Government Association (LGA) estimates that councils are facing a funding gap of £5.8 billion by 2019/20, which is a key barrier in addressing the national housing shortage.⁵³

To improve the lives of families affected by domestic abuse, housing assistance must be provided at the earliest opportunity. Research by Hestia found that many survivors of domestic abuse had negative experiences of seeking support with housing from Local Authorities.⁵⁴ Less than half (44%) of the women surveyed felt that their housing options had been explained clearly and a third (34%) felt they had been given no choice.

Recommendations:

- 5.1 Central and local governments across the UK** should consider how to make funding available for new Housing First models for survivors of domestic abuse. This might include co-funding between central and local government and philanthropic sources, and identifying where this type of support would be an effective and efficient use of existing funding streams.

6 Housing providers play a vital role in the response to domestic abuse

Housing providers are in a unique position to be able to identify domestic abuse and prevent escalation through offering support and guidance to residents. Several housing providers have taken steps to identify domestic abuse by training frontline staff and housing officers. The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) was set up in 2014 by Gentoo, Standing Together and Peabody to transform the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through developing a set of standards and accreditation. Speaking to SafeLives as part of this Spotlight, Aisha Sharif from Standing Together Against Domestic Violence explains:

'Often the police or health services get involved with people when things have reached crisis point... With housing the proximity, the close proximity that most housing providers have with their residents means that they're in such a brilliant position to offer support and identify a lot earlier on.'

Aisha Sharif, Standing Together Against Domestic Violence

Regardless of whether they offer in-house support, an awareness of domestic abuse among housing providers can help keep residents safer. For instance, Aisha explains that repairing a damaged door is a lengthy process, requiring evidence from police reports before the repair takes place. In cases where the damage was the result of a perpetrator forcing entry, leaving the property unsecure can put the victim at further risk. By encouraging staff to understand why the door has been damaged and if there are risks to the victim in delaying the repair, housing providers can ensure emergency repairs happen sooner and residents are kept safer. This may require a change of policy to enable staff to respond in this way.

For housing providers there is also a financial incentive to addressing domestic abuse. Gentoo commissioned SafeLives to consider the business case for housing providers to provide specialist domestic abuse support. The research found that approximately 13% of all repairs jobs and 21% of all repair costs at Gentoo were potentially related to domestic abuse. In the housing sector as a whole, costs associated with evicting tenants who may be hidden victims of domestic abuse and re-letting the property were found to be up to £5,700 per eviction. Preventing domestic abuse can not only keep residents safe but mitigate some of these costs. Further, Sharif explains that as a result of Standing Together's work to support residents, staff members have also felt confident enough to disclose their own experiences of abuse to their employer.

Another important initiative from the housing sector is the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal⁵⁵; a voluntary collaboration between local authorities and registered housing providers in London. It aims to prevent homelessness in cases of domestic abuse and other forms of violence, where the victim needs to move to a safe area of London. This process ensures that victims of domestic abuse do not lose their tenancies and also makes better use of housing stock within the participating areas.

Since January 2017 (as at March 2018) a total of 263 property requests have been circulated via the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal (and re-circulated fortnightly). In response there have been 178 properties offered, many of which are currently arranging viewings and 43 of which applicants have now accepted or moved into. The number circulated each month is increasing steadily, with the highest monthly circulation being 31 in January 2018. The majority of households referred were fleeing domestic abuse; however, many households were fleeing multiple intersecting forms of violence, abuse or exploitation.

New and innovative forms of housing provision are beginning to be developed in collaboration with the domestic abuse sector. For instance, Shared Lives Plus offers an alternative and highly flexible form of accommodation and/or care, for people with a variety of needs. In this model an adult (and sometimes a 16/17 year old) moves in with or regularly visits an approved Shared Lives carer, after they have been matched for compatibility. SafeLives is currently working in partnership with Shared Lives Plus to develop an offer for people (aged 18+) experiencing domestic abuse.

Another example featured in our Spotlight is Places of Safety, run by the domestic abuse service Splitz. This service provides homes in the community which offer different and complimentary options to traditional refuges; for instance the provision can cater for those with complex needs, and a client's son who is over 16 can remain with the family. The project's specialist 'Housing Idva', Claire Karlake, explains in her spotlights blog that she works closely with the Housing Options team, to advocate for clients and ensure homeless applications are activated promptly. A vital part of this is providing training for the Housing Options team.

'My advice to housing providers is when a survivor of domestic abuse is sat in front of you remember they are 'not just a roof... We need to move forward from looking at bed spaces to supporting and caring about the individual in order to affect change for the better.'

Claire Karlake, Housing Idva, Splitz

'He [housing officer] was my absolute saving grace; he was mortified by everything that had happened and I said 'Well thank goodness for somebody like yourself who's got a conscience because those other people sit behind their desks ticking boxes and it annoys me they say they're listening to your story but they're not.' There are posters up everywhere saying they support DV but they couldn't give a stuff'

Survivor, as quoted in Finding the Costs of Freedom ⁵⁶

Programmes that identify and address the behaviour of perpetrators of abuse also have a vital role to play in changing the situation we have described in this report. The Drive Project⁵⁷ run by SafeLives in partnership with Respect and Social Finance, has since 2016 been seeking to challenge and disrupt the behaviour of high-harm perpetrators in pilot sites in England and Wales. Independent evaluation of the first year of operation of Drive found that housing was a material issue for many perpetrators referred to the programme. Based on analysis of cases that had closed by April 2017, 68% of service users had housing issues. It is also clear that some criminal justice processes are taking little account of the risk domestic abuse perpetrators pose, for example in the emphasis on greater use of home curfews, and in the those exiting prison to be allowed to return to a family home. Taken together these instances show how little organisations are considering the safety and wellbeing of victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children, which requires a more extensive and innovative set of practice with those who perpetrate harm.

As part of this Spotlight we spoke to Drive case workers about how housing support for the perpetrator can reduce risk for the victim/survivor. There were a wide range of circumstances in which this could help. In some cases the service user had difficulty securing housing, for instance due to mental health problems, and as a result would visit the home of the victim/survivor when they needed shelter. In other cases the location of housing exacerbated alcohol misuse. Housing could also be used as part of the control over the victim; for instance the perpetrator using their need for housing to manipulate the victim/survivor financially. In many cases addressing the housing issue was a way to disrupt the perpetrator's behaviour, or remove the need for them to attend or reside at the victim/survivors home, thus reducing the risk. This was always carefully managed alongside safeguarding processes for the victim, including child protection proceedings where necessary.

Housing providers and all multi-agency partners must start placing the expectation to move or change on the perpetrator of abuse, expanding and innovating current practice and provision so this is a realistic and safe possibility.

Recommendations:

- 6.1 Governments in England, Scotland and Wales** should consider implementing country-wide housing reciprocal initiatives for survivors of domestic abuse.
- 6.2 Housing providers** should ensure their training programmes for front-line staff address the issue of domestic abuse. This should include distinguishing domestic abuse from anti-social behaviour, and direct actions staff can take to help manage risk, such as timescales around repairs. We would encourage all housing providers to work towards DAHA accreditation.
- 6.3 Policy makers and funders** should invest in the expansion of rigorous, safe, programmes that identify and address abusive behaviour and challenge the perpetrator to change, increasing levels of innovation and provision for those causing harm in the first place. This should include attention to housing issues raised in this report.
- 6.4 Perpetrator programmes** should assess the housing needs of service users and consider whether support with housing for the perpetrator would disrupt the abusive behaviour. This should be carefully managed alongside safeguarding processes for the victim/survivor, and child protection procedures if children are involved in the case.



Conclusion

In order to tackle the connected problems of homelessness and domestic abuse, we need a much greater understanding of the experience of homeless women, who are far more likely than men to become homeless because of domestic abuse, or to experience this abuse while homeless. This is not to diminish the importance of ensuring that when a man is made homeless by domestic abuse this is properly understood. Currently too many survivors are 'hidden', not only from help and support services, but from the official statistics that should evidence where and for whom support is needed.

The cyclical relationship between homelessness and domestic abuse can only be broken if services and housing providers are able to engage with people in a way that considers their additional needs. These are needs which often come as a result of the multiple traumas they have experienced and are still experiencing. Many contributors to our Spotlight shared their best practice advice and highlight three key considerations when designing homelessness support:

- Housing is a basic need that must be addressed before a person can focus on more complex issues such as drug and alcohol addiction.
- The overwhelming majority of homeless women have experienced multiple forms of trauma, very often domestic abuse or another form of gender based violence being among them. Support must be trauma informed and adapt to clients who find it difficult to fit into standard safety planning responses.
- The needs of homeless women differ to men, and mixed gender provision can be seen as a dangerous place by many women; support must be gender responsive.

Access to support and accommodation for homeless survivors of domestic abuse is often not good enough. More needs to be done to expand on the success of programmes such as Housing First and initiatives such as the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal. Where local initiatives such as this do not exist, domestic abuse services can help by actively involving housing providers in their work.

We must make it easier for those survivors of domestic abuse who do leave their home to find secure accommodation and ensure that those who have been repeatedly homeless, or may never have had a stable home to leave, have a clear way out of this cycle. But more importantly we must place the expectation to change on the perpetrator of abuse. Therefore this problem cannot be resolved without all agencies, whichever member of the family they are working with, focusing on the changes needed from the perpetrator of abuse and holding them to account.

'I will be 68 in 2018 and again face homelessness – all because I finally left domestic abuse.'

Margi Isaac, survivor and founding members of VOICES

Appendix: about the data

The method of data collection places a number of limitations on the conclusions we can draw from Insights data, as set out below. Care has been taken to use this data alongside other sources of information when producing the findings set out in this report.

Sample Size

The dataset used within this report represents 8,837 people exiting services, 4,589 of whom need support to stay safely in their own home or move to new accommodation.

Cases

Insights data is collected from victims at the point at which they are accessing services. This means it is not representative of victims who are not accessing services.

Data collection

Data collection is completed at two points on the client journey within a support service: intake and exit. Data is anonymous and only collected from people who consent to their data being used for monitoring and research purposes.

The Insights data used in this report is collected by 33 services using the SafeLives Insights tool during the reporting period (12 months to April 2017). This means that the nature (eg support offered) and location of services will not be representative of all domestic abuse services nationally.

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