

01 Background

The 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 psycho-logical, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse'**. Women in the UK are much more likely than men to be the victims of high risk or severe domestic abuse with 28.3% of women and 14.7% of men experiencing abuse at some point in their lives. 30% of domestic abuse starts in pregnancy, and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth.

Why it matters:

Domestic abuse can affect anyone from any background. Whilst the majority of cases are male on female violence there has been an increase of female on male violence and violence in same sex relationships. In 90% of cases children are in the same or the next room when the incident occurs. They may be emotionally distressed witnessing abuse, or physically harmed themselves.

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What to do?

Ask direct questions about domestic abuse - research shows that a substantial number of women would disclose domestic abuse **if they were asked**. Consider historical incidents when assessing risk. Keep records up to date. Share information.

Questions to consider:

Has the abusive partner been included in the assessment & planning? Can the victim of abuse realistically be relied upon to act for their own or their children's protection? Is there any evidence that the controlling behaviour has continued after separation?

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Information: The context of coercion and control may present significant barriers to women disclosing either their own or their children's suffering, particularly in situations where the offending partner is present. Women need repeated opportunities to disclose, and a safe, trusted environment within which they can voice their concerns.

Professionals should always be cautious in accepting assurances from a mother that a known violent partner does not present any risks to her children, or that circumstances have changed. While individuals may indeed change, such change is probably the exception rather than the rule, takes time, and may be difficult to have complete assurance about. Practitioners should also be alert to the fact that control typically continues following separation, often extending to issues around contact with the children.



Information:

The Crime Survey for England & Wales found that young people aged 16 to 19 were more likely to suffer partner abuse than any other age range

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