

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BILL - POLICY EVIDENCE SUMMARY 3: SPECIALIST ADVOCACY FOR DV AND SV

The information in this briefing note has been prepared to assist End Violence Against Women (EVAW) and others engaging with the UK Government's forthcoming Domestic Violence Bill. It draws on data collected for the ESRC-funded research project *Justice, Inequality and Gender-Based Violence* (Grant number: ES/M010090/1), carried out by the Universities of Bristol, West of England and Cardiff between 2016 and 2018 (PI: Professor Marianne Hester).

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<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/current/justiceinequality/>

The data in this note

Drawing on existing work, as well as new evidence from the *Justice, Inequality and Gender-Based Violence* project (*justice project*), this note summarises research evidence on the value and impact of specialist advocacy for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Specialist advocacy increases victim and children's safety and reduces violence

Successive research studies have found that specialist advocate support for domestic and sexual violence makes women and children safer:

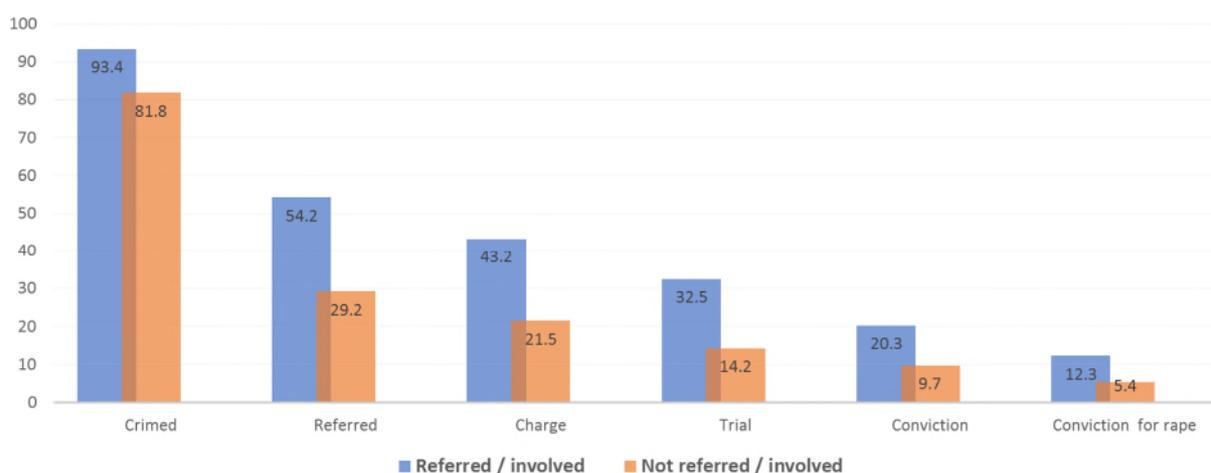
- Hester (2012) reviewed findings from three evaluation studies of Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advisors (IDVA/ISVAs) in England and Wales. The review found all three studies indicated that, at least during the period of the interventions, victim/survivors experienced reduction in violence and abuse from partners and, to a lesser extent, from ex-partners.
- The Howarth *et al* (2009) study across England and Wales found evidence that the work of IDVAs with mothers had a positive impact on the safety of their children; and the Donovan *et al* (2010) study in Gateshead/Cumbria found that mothers valued the work done by IDVAs with children.
- Donovan *et al* (2010) found a decrease in re-referrals to IDVAs as a result of their intervention, and that staff and service users reported increased perceptions of safety for the women, reduced risk, and greater confidence in seeking help.
- Howarth *et al* (2009) found that the odds of feeling safer and abuse decreasing doubled when victims accessed between 2 and 5 support interventions, and increased by 4 times where there were more than 6 different interventions.
- Howarth *et al* (2009) found a reduction in domestic violence across the period of the IDVA intervention, especially in physical abuse, with a smaller reduction in other abuse such as stalking and harassment. Monitoring data showed a clear relationship between intensity of intervention and reduction in domestic violence, with 67% of the victim/survivors receiving intensive support achieving an overall cessation in abuse compared to 44% of those victim/survivors receiving limited support.
- This picture is confirmed by latest *Insights* monitoring data published by national charity Safelives: 53% of IDVA clients reported no abuse in the past month after receiving support from an IDVA; 84% reported feeling safer, 83% that their quality of life had improved, and 89% that they felt confident to access support in the future (Safelives, 2017).

2. Specialist advocacy improves criminal justice outcomes for victims/survivors

Sexual violence

Emerging findings from the justice project reveal a significant association between the involvement of independent specialist sexual violence support services (ISSVSS) (e.g. Rape Crisis or an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA)), and criminal justice outcomes for victims/survivors (Lilley-Walker *et al*, 2018, *forthcoming*).

Analysis of 585 cases of rape reported to the police in two English forces in 2010 and 2014 shows that over one-third (36%) had support from an ISSVSS. The chart below shows that, where victims/survivors were either referred to or were already receiving support from an ISSVSS, the incident was significantly more likely to be crimed, and then significantly more likely to progress at every stage of the CJS process, including charge and conviction for rape.



Domestic violence and abuse

Similar analysis was conducted for 400 cases of domestic violence reported to the police for the same project. Incidents in which the victim/survivor was referred to /supported by a specialist domestic violence advocate (either via Victim Support, from an IDVA, or another specialist DV agency), were significantly more likely to be crimed (48% compared with 32% without such support, significant at $p < 0.001$), and there was significantly more likely to be an arrest made (44% compared with 25% without such support, significant at $p < 0.01$). These cases were slightly more likely to have a charge brought in the case (13% compared with 10% for those without specialist DV advocacy support), and for there to be a conviction (11% compared with 6%).

3. Victims say the strength of advocates is emotional and practical support, and empowerment

In successive studies, victims have reported that they most value the emotional and practical support offered by specialist advocates:

- Donovan *et al* (2010) found that emotional support provided by IDVAs was the most cited form of support accessed by domestic violence victims/survivors, and was identified by the victims/survivors interviewed as the most important type of support received.
- Hester and Lilley (2017) found that, for some victims, 'justice' or a positive outcome from reporting sexual violence can often relate to being able to move forward with their life, thus linked more to their emotional well-being and 'recovery' than a court outcome. Thus, ISVA and/or IDVA support

can lead to 'success' in terms of helping victims/survivors acquire the emotional support they need to recover, delivering an alternative or broader type of justice that goes beyond the formal criminal justice system.

- The strength of ISVAs is their flexibility and ability to target specific needs as and when required, using the skills of 'enabler', 'holder', and 'mender'. This is underpinned by ISVAs' detailed knowledge and understanding of the specific impacts of sexual violence and how sexual violence impacts individuals and families, combined with a range of skills and roles within and across services, and the possibility of quick referral between them (Hester and Lilley, 2017).
- Victims/survivors of DV and SV interviewed for the justice project reported emotional and practical support and empowerment as key to the value of advocacy:
 - "[the IDVA] accompanied me and stayed with me during that time. I couldn't have done it without her. So I mean that was absolutely vital. I know there was a major concern that depending on the outcome of the trial and even having to give evidence, because of my PTSD that I would you know end up committing suicide either during the trial or afterwards depending on the verdict. So I know that you know there was a lot of support put in place. I did have access to [sexual violence service] as well at that time. Not for counselling, but it was more you know just being able to pick up the phone" (victim/survivor 001)
 - "Oh God it was so val- ... it was validating. You know I dealt with women, there were no swabs or anything, you know it was very much after the fact. [...] you know [Rape Crisis] ... they believed me, they validated me, they sent me information about what the process was, about what I was experiencing. You know everything that I was going through was validated by them. And they heard me, they brought me in, they pushed me through quite quickly because it was ... you know I had the evidence ... well I had the statement, I needed their support at the time ... and there was something they could do with it" (victim/survivor 149)
 - "[specialist service] has helped me to regain my identity, which I had totally and completely lost. They've helped me regain my identity because I had totally forgot who I was. I stopped looking in the mirror and thinking 'Oh My God, are you really a hippo, are you really that ugly?...I now live my life for me and do things for myself. [specialist service] has helped me regain my identity'" (victim/survivor 187)
 - "through [SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE] I'd been allocated a ISVA, so she was brilliant in the lead up to it. Sort of took me through a visit to the court beforehand, sort of a few days before. Sort of went down to the police station to re-watch my video.. So yeah, I do sort of feel a bit more empowered" (victim/survivor 138)
 - "I had support from [dv service] so I had support from them, initially it was just sort of outreach stuff. ..Sort of counselling. And then they eventually ... they did a MARAC referral as well I think and they put me in touch with the solicitor that I'd then got which helped a lot. In fact [dv service] were fantastic, if I hadn't have had them, there's loads of ... I was going mad trying to find the right kind of solicitor who would know how to deal with these kind of people" (victim/survivor 033)

4. The role of institutional advocacy

Studies also show that specialist advocates play an important organisational role, in co-ordinating other services for the victim/survivor, and in joining up other services to respond to domestic and sexual violence:

- Hester (2012) found that a key element in the effectiveness of DV advocates was that they ensured multi-agency working.

Dr Lis Bates for End Violence Against Women. Drawing on Justice, Inequality and Gender-Based Violence project (ESRC-funded, Grant Number ES/M010090/1; PI Professor Marianne Hester)

- Donovan *et al* (2010) found that domestic violence victims/survivors accessing IDVA support typically received support from between 3 to 5 partner agencies, and found that multi-agency working was positively correlated with risk reduction for the victim.
- Coy and Kelly (2011) found that specialist domestic abuse advocates played an important “institutional advocacy” role in educating other agencies about the dynamics of domestic abuse.

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