

XI XII I

X II

# IX Time for change III

An Assessment of Services for Domestic  
Abuse Perpetrators in Bristol.

VIII *Executive Summary* IV

VII VI V

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Chapter One – Introduction and Research Methods**

- The response to domestic violence in the UK and elsewhere has been to situate the victim and any children at the heart of interventions. This has been important to ensure the safety of the victim and her children and this has been the focus of most research. However, a sole focus on the victim and children cannot in itself reduce domestic violence substantially over time. This is because the end of a relationship is unlikely to mean an end to the perpetration of domestic abuse (perpetrators may continue to abuse the same partner after a relationship has ended and/or may abuse a new partner). Any region seriously committed to *reducing* domestic abuse cannot afford to ignore perpetrators.
- Evaluations indicate that perpetrator programmes can have a positive impact and result in change for some men. However, research on perpetrators is in its infancy and there are many as yet unanswered questions. The largest, most robust evaluation to date took place in the USA and found that the majority of men (80%) reached sustained non-violence, with around 20 per cent continuing to reassault (Gondolf, 2004). The evaluation also found that the strongest and most consistent predictor of reassault was the woman's perceptions (i.e. likelihood of reassault) and that a programmes' success was dependant on the wider intervention system of which the programme was just one part. Hence, rather than a voluntary perpetrator programme being an alternative to the criminal justice system, it is vital that it works as part of a coordinated approach to tackling domestic abuse.
- The remit of this research was to: provide a review of relevant literature; develop profiles of domestic violence perpetrators in Bristol; map current work with perpetrators in Bristol; estimate the scale of the problem; provide a needs assessment and; discover potential referral routes and suggest relevant programme 'advertising'.
- This research used an 'action research' framework and used a multi-method approach to address the research aims, including: interviews with forum members; analysis of police data; interviews with statutory and voluntary sector organisations; a survey of women survivors; and participant observation at meetings and workshops.
- A total of 76 statutory and voluntary sector organisations were approached to take part in the study, which resulted in 28 interviews (a response rate of 37%). The most frequent explanation for not taking part in the research was that it was not relevant to their organisation because they did not work with perpetrators of domestic abuse. However, it was also clear that many of these organisations *would* come into contact with perpetrators – in some cases on a day-to-day basis. This suggests either a lack of awareness about what constitutes domestic abuse or a lack of inclination and active avoidance of working with perpetrators.

### **Chapter Two – Perpetrator Profiles**

- Analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of perpetrators reported to the police shows that they are most likely to be male, aged between 25 and 44 years old, the same age or older

than the victim, white, abusing a victim of the same ethnic group as themselves. Analysis of the police incident data shows that incidents are most likely to take place within the home, on a weekend night between 18.00 and 02.00.

- Perpetrators were unlikely to have their actions sanctioned through the criminal justice system. Incidents reported to the police dropped sharply out of the criminal justice system at each stage – arrest, charge, prosecution, conviction and sentence - culminating in a conviction rate of just one in 21 incidents (i.e. 4% of incidents reported to the police resulted in a criminal conviction). Only 3% of incidents resulted in a medium (community) or high (custodial) tariff sentence.
- This means that the vast majority of perpetrators of domestic abuse are not receiving any criminal justice sanction for their behaviour, in turn meaning there is an increased need for some form of non-criminal justice intervention.
- Just over 14 incidents are reported to the police per day in Bristol - more than one every two hours. Taking under-reporting into consideration, the true frequency of domestic abuse in Bristol can be estimated to be 26,195 incidents per annum, 70 per day, or nearly three every hour.

### **Chapter Three – Analysis of Current Practice**

- Organisations in Bristol were doing different forms of work with perpetrators. A small minority were doing direct work, in that they were doing work with perpetrators who were identified as such. Most, however, were working indirectly with perpetrators and their primary concern was not the domestic abuse.
- Tracking the referral routes made by different organisations proved to be a very complex exercise, and it became obvious that there were no clear patterns. Perpetrators currently appear to be referred randomly to different organisations, generally ending up somewhere in the healthcare system. Most organisations pointed out that there is no dedicated place to refer perpetrators to.

### **Chapter Four – Needs Assessment**

- The vast majority of respondents to the needs assessment said there were not enough services for perpetrators of domestic abuse in Bristol (79%, 22 out of 28) and the other respondents said that they did not know whether there were enough services. Hence, no one thought that there *were* enough services. Most of the responses centred on the lack of services for men who had not been convicted of a criminal offence.
- There was evidence of enormous support for the development of a voluntary programme for domestic abuse perpetrators in Bristol, both from statutory sector organisations, voluntary sector organisations and from women survivors. At present, inappropriate and unsafe referrals are being made because of the lack of service provision for perpetrators (e.g. referring

perpetrators into mental health services can serve to reinforce their belief that domestic violence is not their fault).

- However, most of the women survivors (9 out of 13) said that their ex/partners did not acknowledge that their behaviour was wrong and therefore would not have volunteered to attend a perpetrators programme. This suggests that the posters/leaflets advertising the programme may also need to raise awareness about types of behaviour that are abusive.
- Most of the organisations interviewed said that they would advertise a perpetrators programme and signpost/make referrals when appropriate. Nearly all of the women (10 out of 13) said that the programme should be advertised in pubs. In addition, GP surgeries, public toilets, public transport and betting shops were suggested by three or more women.

## **Chapter Five – Recommendations**

- A voluntary perpetrator programme should be set up in Bristol. Nationally, most major cities have services of this nature and Bristol is an exception. To ensure safety and professional practice this programme should adhere to Respect's Statement of Principles and Minimum Standards of Practice for Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes and Associated Women's Services. The Respect Principles place the safety of women and children as central to the work of perpetrator programmes. Therefore, perpetrator programmes should never be run in isolation – the provision of a specialist, pro-active women's service to accompany the programme should be treated as a core component and not an optional extra.
- It is probably the case that perpetrators do not necessarily fit some organisations' stereotypes of them, and awareness raising and training should be offered to all organisations not just those that offer specialist domestic abuse services.
- An evaluation of effectiveness should be incorporated into the funding and operation of a programme. Effectiveness should be based on pre-defined criteria and should include measures of changes in safety for women and children as well as change for men.
- Further investigation should be conducted into why such a large proportion of domestic abuse perpetrators who are given a community sentence are not being sent on the IDAP as part of the sentence. Magistrates may need updated training about sentencing options available to them. The use of cautions in domestic abuse incidents should also continue to be monitored.
- Although the perpetrator programme will be held outside of the criminal justice system, some major steps forward by the criminal justice system are needed in order to ensure its success. It is not only time for perpetrators to change; it is time for change in Bristol.

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The full report is available at: [www.bris.ac.uk/sps/research/fpcw/completed.shtml](http://www.bris.ac.uk/sps/research/fpcw/completed.shtml)