



Domestic abuse interventions in Wales

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic

This work was commissioned and completed before the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, but given the evidence of increased domestic abuse during lockdown it is clear that successfully tackling violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence, remains as important as ever.

Assessing support for survivors

In 2015, Wales passed the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Act. The legislation made a number of changes aimed at improving prevention, protection and support for those affected; including through harmonising services and through better leadership and collaboration.

We worked with Welsh Government, stakeholders and representatives of the sector to assess what works in tackling VAWDASV, what is currently working, and where the focus should be to improve services further.



Safe refuge is important

Refuge provision plays a major role in tackling VAWDASV and should remain a priority intervention.

Refuges offer a range of services. In addition to short-term emergency housing, they might offer services including individual support and a range of legal and technical advice. Many will also provide assistance in securing 'move-on' accommodation.

Service users and stakeholders both see refuge provision as an essential part of tackling VAWDASV and, although it is difficult to evaluate their effectiveness robustly, it is clear that they play an important role for those seeking to escape abuse. Demand for refuge spaces has outstripped supply, indicating that capacity may be an issue. This may have been exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic.

At the same time, it should be recognised that refuges represent an extreme intervention, requiring women to leave their homes and lives, and some groups of people are less likely to engage with them.

The right mix of interventions

Independent advocacy, including IDVAs (independent domestic violence advisors) are increasingly common. These programmes provide trained individuals who act as the primary contact for survivors, able to navigate

the various services and stakeholders involved. Evidence, and the testimony of stakeholders, suggest that these are valuable.

Perpetrator interventions, which aim to stop abuse by working with those who carry it out, have been extensively tested and show promise. These are currently in their infancy in Wales and resourcing these interventions could help reduce rates of abuse.

Commissioning is still often done on a lowest-price model, in spite of guidance, but some organisations feel that survivor safety is threatened by the prices offered for some services.

Stakeholders were clear that there is no ‘magic bullet’ and a mix of different interventions will be needed at any one time. In particular, care should be taken to ensure that all groups affected by VAWDASV are properly supported, including children and families.

The impact of the legislation

Awareness of VAWDASV has increased and regional bodies have had some successes in bringing together service providers, commissioners and other stakeholders.

Regional and partnership working in general has increased, but co-operation and ‘buy-in’ from leadership across the public sector is still patchy. The recent publication of National Indicators has been seen as a positive step.

Regional working and collaboration need to be strengthened if the goals of the legislation are to be achieved.

Greater national oversight and support would aid the spread of good practice and could focus attention on areas where collaboration needs to

be strengthened. Stakeholders felt the National Advisers could play a stronger and more proactive role in this.

Harmonising commissioning

Guidance on commissioning has been welcomed by the sector. This aims to ensure greater consistency in identifying need and ensuring adequate provision to respond to that need. On the ground, however, there is still a very fragmented system of commissioning and implementation of the guidance differs across the regions.

A lack of consistent cross-regional standards increases the cost for organisations to bid to provide services, as well as causing potential inefficiencies in provision. Differences in data collection requirements, and in data standards, also increase cost as well as making it difficult to compare statistics across regions.



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Better regional working and a stronger role for National Advisers could assist in improving commissioning practice and harmonising standards.

Resourcing the sector

Funding is complex and difficult to untangle. Providers and stakeholders (including the Wales

Audit Office) have previously found it difficult to map different funding sources, although there has been recent progress on this front.

The current funding model largely runs on a year-to-year basis which does not allow for long-term planning or certainty, with consequent impacts on services. While this reflects the broader public service landscape, some signalling or indication of future funding levels could allow for a multi-year approach. This would particularly benefit refugees, which appear to suffer from year-to-year funding.

Funding pots often come with specific conditions attached or are required to be used for certain interventions, which may not meet the needs of local areas and may duplicate existing

resources. Funding for innovative services is often on a short-term, trial basis, making it difficult to continue successful programmes.

While we were not asked, and have not sought, to assess whether levels of funding are sufficient, there are indications that the sector is under-resourced. Demand continues to outstrip supply for refuge provision, and funding appears to have been cut in real terms since 2011/12. In addition, more people are now reporting domestic abuse to the police, indicating that there is further demand for engaging services. Additional funding since the pandemic may address some of these issues but will need to be continued in the longer term to have a lasting impact.

Find out more

For the full report see Price, J, Quarmby, S, Johnson, C and Bristow, D. (2020). **Domestic abuse intervention in Wales**. Wales Centre for Public Policy.

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