

Is everything OK



...really?



Rutland

**A report on domestic abuse
2016**

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Summary

The aim of 'Is everything OK?' is to be part of the general discussion about domestic abuse, how to raise awareness, tackle and prevent it. Unfortunately, domestic abuse is widespread throughout our society; it is even deemed acceptable in some areas. In this report we outline the history of changing attitudes to such abuse with the increasing protective legislation, culminating in the present working definition, and how Citizens Advice can help.

Domestic abuse needs to be addressed not only because of the harm done to the individual and their friends and family, but also the cost to society as a whole. Citizens Advice is contributing in two ways. Firstly, it is initiating the national civil society campaign *Talk about Abuse*. This is directed at family and friends of victims providing a framework in which they can engage. Secondly, Citizens Advice has set up the *ASK* project where advisers are trained to ask clients routinely about past and present domestic abuse. This enables better advice and information to be given.

Citizens Advice Rutland has started to undertake domestic abuse awareness training. Recorded cases of domestic abuse have risen dramatically. Advice is given to victims, friends and family on a range of relevant issues and

specialist referrals can be made as necessary.

Introduction

Domestic abuse is difficult to define; what appears to be normal and acceptable to some, is intolerable to others. Studies of opinions of young people particularly have found greater proportions consider physical violence to be acceptable in some circumstances, such as infidelity. Criminal abuse is, therefore, hard to identify. A clear definition is required so that victims and their friends and families feel able, and know when, to speak out, and for government and service and support providers to be able to react in an appropriate and consistent manner.

History

Attitudes towards violence and abuse within an intimate domestic relationship have changed over the years, in this country at least. Anecdotally a British judge in 1857 is reputed to have agreed that a man might legitimately beat his wife as long as the "rod is not thicker than his thumb". The 1860 Law of Coverture stated that on marriage a husband became responsible for the actions of his wife. He could thereafter justifiably use any means, including physical and verbal abuse, to control her behaviour. However, some restrictions were imposed. In 1895 a City of London

byelaw introduced a curfew on wife beating; none was allowed between 10.00pm and 7.00am to avoid the noise disturbing the neighbours.

Fortunately, from the latter part of the twentieth century understanding and help for victims of domestic abuse gradually started to materialise. In 1971 the first safe house was set up in Chiswick for women and children fleeing domestic abuse. In 1975 the government select committee on violence in marriage recommended a minimum of one family place in a refuge per 10,000 of population. Legislation in 1976 gave new rights to survivors, including civil protection orders, and in 1977 those at risk were acknowledged as homeless. Shockingly it was not until 1991 that the concept of marital rape was recognised and criminalised; until that time it was deemed that marriage implied continuous consent to sexual intercourse, so a husband's demands could never be denied. From March 2014, Domestic Violence Protection Orders have been implemented across England and Wales. These enable police and magistrates to provide protection for victims in the immediate aftermath of an abusive incident. A perpetrator can be banned from returning to the home and from contacting the victim for up to 28 days, allowing time for the victim to obtain the

necessary support. On 29 December 2015 legislation was enacted criminalising coercive and controlling behaviour within a relationship and imposing a maximum sentence of 5 years in prison, indicating the seriousness with which this offence is viewed.



As a result, the present 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 behaviours. Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for

independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is an act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten the victim.

Incidence

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, class, age or disability. It can occur between current and former partners, within heterosexual or same sex relationships. Some groups are more at risk than others, with some shocking statistics. For example, 45% of female homicide victims are killed by partners or former partners compared to less than 4% male homicide victims. In 2001 it was reported that 30% of domestic abuse started in pregnancy and 2013 research indicated that those with mental health issues were three times more likely to be victims of abuse than those without. There has been little research into abuse in same sex relationships and results have differed widely.

The numbers of victims are also horrifying. The England and Wales Crime Survey of 2013/14 reported that more than 1.5m people experienced domestic abuse in one year alone. An Inspectorate of Constabulary report released in December 2015 announced a 31%

increase in domestic abuse cases reported to the police over the previous two years. This appeared to be the result of both better logging of incidents and an increase in the number of victims coming forward. Police record an incident of domestic violence every 75 seconds on average. One woman in 12 is a victim of domestic violence and she suffers an average of 50 attacks before alerting the authorities, according to the charity Safelives.

Tackling Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse needs to be tackled because of the harm it causes to individuals and to society as a whole. It can cause deep and lasting physical and psychological harm to victims during the relationship and can continue after partners separate. It can affect other family members and friends. 20% of children living in abusive households are thought to have witnessed domestic abuse which may impinge on their mental health and subsequent behaviour. The cost to society is huge, and has been calculated at £4bn per annum for health, police, housing services etc. NHS costs are put at £1.9bn/year with victims requiring more GP visits, operative surgery, hospital stays and mental health consultations than the average throughout their lives. The economy is also affected adversely as days at work are missed, resulting in losses of up to

£2bn/year.

Even with a more inclusive definition from government and understanding that it needs to be tackled, domestic abuse can still be difficult to identify, challenge and prevent. Recognition is particularly problematic when the abuse is not the stereotypical male violence towards female victim. In a Citizens Advice survey only 33% of respondents were confident that they would detect domestic abuse and only 20% thought it was easy to tell what constituted abuse. Even victims may not recognise abuse as such. 17% of sufferers did not label “pushing, slapping or grabbing” a partner as both domestic abuse and a crime. There is even less clarity with non-violent abuse; for example, less than 39% of survey respondents knew that domestic abuse included financial abuse.

Acknowledgement of abuse can be made harder by skilled manipulation on the part of the perpetrator. This may include social isolation of the victim and the imposition of emotional, financial and physical barriers to leaving. Fans of Radio 4’s ‘The Archers’ may recognise some of these issues in the relationship between Helen and Rob Titchener. Was Rob the



loving considerate, protective husband of mentally fragile, pregnant Helen or a manipulative, controlling abuser? Her parents thought he was wonderful but he alienated her friends, stopped her driving and working and took control of her finances. Should someone have intervened and how would they have done it?

Role of Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice welcomes the increasing national and practical focus on domestic abuse with the new laws, reviews of policy practice and funding. In March 2016 Citizens Advice said that it was good news that the £80m of funding pledged by the government for the next four years will help tackle domestic abuse earlier and ensure that those in need will have access to emergency accommodation, including refuges.

Citizens Advice is present to give help, advice and support to victims of domestic abuse and their friends and families. Clients can also be referred on to specialist domestic abuse organisations and advocates. However, in addition Citizens Advice now seeks to play a positive role in reducing the impact of domestic abuse by increasing awareness amongst victims, friends, family and frontline staff and facilitating engagement between them and support services. This will be done

primarily in two ways, the civil society campaign *Talk about Abuse* and, within Citizens Advice offices, the *ASK* initiative.

The *Talk about Abuse* campaign aims to address the friends, family and local community of the domestic abuse sufferer, giving them the confidence and framework within which to engage. These informal networks are encouraged to look for and recognise the warning signs of domestic abuse in all its myriad forms, to have the courage to ask, to have the knowledge to offer appropriate support and the wherewithal to refer to specialist services. Early intervention may prevent escalation to levels where profound harm is caused and costly state intervention is required. The *Talk about Abuse* campaign hopes to harness the will and resources of local civil society rather than necessitating more funding and government input. Citizens Advice has developed a set of campaign materials which will be displayed across our 2500 community locations. These tools will be freely available and it is hoped that others, including shops, faith groups, charities and MPs, will choose to take advantage of these and spread the message.

The *ASK* project aims to screen clients approaching Citizens Advice for Gender Based Violence and

Abuse (GVA). The pilot project included only clients who came initially with debt, housing and benefits problems and those who were unaccompanied, the latter for obvious reasons. This pilot concluded at the end of 2013. Between September 2014 and summer 2015 some local Citizens Advice offices volunteered to be early adopters of the *ASK* routine enquiry (*ASKRE*) rollout. In March 2015 there were 45 local offices involved. The disclosure rate of abuse was 24% from 705 clients, a little down on the pilot level of 27%; 5.5% were currently experiencing GVA. Citizens Advice considers that the advice given to such clients is improved as the root cause of the problems can be clarified. Adviser training is required to ensure that clients are asked the questions sensitively and that there is awareness of local resources to which referrals can be made.

Citizens Advice is now instituting a three year phase to train and support all Citizens Advice offices to use routine enquiries about the experience of GVA in all face to face unaccompanied debt, benefit and housing advice sessions.

Citizens Advice Rutland

We were not one of the early adopters of *ASKRE*, but since October 2015 our advisers have been given domestic abuse awareness training.

Case Study

Charles, 48, came to Citizens Advice Rutland for information on separation. He had been married for 24 years and he and his wife had two grown-up children. He wanted to leave his wife but didn't know how to begin.

He said that finding a place to rent was difficult as he had no money for a deposit or rent in advance. His wife was sole owner of the marital home, which she had inherited. He had been made redundant 4 years ago and as his wife was earning in excess of £35K she had suggested that he did not seek work and instead remained at home; there was plenty for him to do and she said he was too unskilled to get a good job.

She then controlled all the family finances as she told him he was hopeless with money, and she started to discourage his friendships. His own family were not nearby as they had moved to this area to follow her employment, and she made excuses to prevent relatives visiting. He now felt very isolated and was getting very depressed.

Once these issues were discussed the adviser raised the issue of domestic abuse and Charles could see that he was being controlled by his wife emotionally and financially; he thus recognised his situation as abusive. It enabled Charles to discuss options related to his financial, relationship and housing situations. The advice given regarding the relationship and housing issues was specific to situations where domestic abuse is an issue. His rights are greater regarding homelessness and help is available because of the domestic abuse.

Since being more aware and able to recognise domestic abuse, in all its forms, our advisers have recognised abuse situations and subsequently our domestic abuse related statistics have increased dramatically. In the third quarter of 2014/15 three clients were recorded as having suffered such abuse. In the corresponding period of 2015/16, this number rose to 26. People living in Rutland experience the same

problems as those elsewhere in the country. Domestic abuse affects all sectors of Rutland society regardless of age, health, wealth or sexual orientation.

Clients may come to Citizens Advice Rutland initially with queries about issues such as debt or benefits, but the root cause of the problem may well be the underlying domestic abuse.

Case Study

Mary, 82, came to us with her son to ask about her benefit entitlement. Her son said that his mother suffered from severe arthritis and that he lived with her and had to do a lot for her. The client was very quiet and allowed the son to do all the talking. The adviser noticed that the client's face had bruises and when this was raised with the client the son said that she had fallen the previous week.



The adviser dealt with the benefit advice as presented, and this resulted in the client getting a considerable increase in her benefits.

However, shortly after the increased benefits were in payment, the client returned to us by herself asking for a Foodbank voucher which her son had told her that she should be able to get. This time the adviser noticed that the client had bruises on her wrists. The adviser could not understand why Mary did not have enough money since her benefits had increased so dramatically but her outgoings had not changed.

Further discussion revealed that Mary's son 'needed' her to give him money as he felt that his benefit income was 'pathetic'. She felt she had to give him money as he repeatedly told her how reliant she was on him. He also got cross and physically hurt her if she refused.

On the revelation of the domestic abuse by the son, the adviser was able to discuss several options for the client to think about;

- *referral to Social Services under safeguarding issues*
- *referral to the police in relation to the criminal aspect of the violence*
- *referral to specialist support group (United Against Violence and Abuse, UAVA)*
- *possibility of evicting her son from her home*
- *referral to local solicitor for help with an exclusion order against her son, using legal aid.*

Citizens Advice Rutland gives advice and information on a wide range of issues, including benefits, debts, housing and employment, empowering clients to improve their situations. These issues

obviously affect those struggling with domestic abuse and our advisers can tailor the advice to allow for the extra needs of sufferers, such as urgency, and the extra rights they are afforded,

such as access to civil legal aid and vulnerability under homelessness legislation. We can signpost or refer victims on to specialist services. Help with debt management from a free reputable agency, such as Stepchange, may be required. Citizens Advice Rutland can also make referrals to a specialist

family law solicitor who gives a free 30 minute appointment at our office. The solicitor may be able to help with such things as exclusion orders to prevent contact from the abuse perpetrator or to protect interest in the family home. Civil legal aid is still available to victims of domestic abuse for family matters.



Case Study

Mark, 54, contacted us for help to deal with debts. He was working fulltime earning £40Kpa, while his partner Peter remained at home. Mark said he had recently been off work sick and found a letter from the mortgage provider stating that he had mortgage arrears of c. £5000; then someone from a debt collection agency had called regarding a credit card debt of £20,000.

He had no idea that these debts existed as he paid all his salary into a joint account with Peter, who managed all their finances. When he tried to talk with Peter about this, Peter told Mark that there was not just enough money to pay all the bills and that Mark needed to find a way of increasing his earnings. Mark was very concerned that he would lose his home and was also wondering what had happened to all his income.

The adviser discussed the issue of financial and emotional abuse and Mark then recognised and acknowledged the situation. It enabled Mark to discuss ways forward by which he could change his situation. These included:

- Discussion with the mortgage provider to arrange a re-payment scheme to secure his house*
- Discussion of debt management procedures around bankruptcy/ referral to Stepchange (a free telephone-based debt management company)*
- Encouragement to make and maintain his own financial decisions*
- Discussion regarding the relationship between Mark and Peter and whether he should/should not end the relationship.*

The Citizens Advice adviser, by being open and talking about domestic abuse, enabled Mark to start making his own decisions.

Specialist domestic abuse services are provided in Rutland and Leicestershire by UAVA (United Against Violence and Abuse), a consortium organisation consisting of Women's Aid Leics. Ltd., Free From Violence and Abuse and Living Without Abuse. A free helpline number provides confidential support, information, safety advice, risk assessment and access to all UAVA services to those in the local area. Services include the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) service, which gives short term intensive support and advocacy focusing on risk and managing risk, the Safe Home and Refuge service to help with transfer to a safe refuge or support to live safely at home, and the Engagement and Recovery Team who provide emotional and therapeutic support and counselling to help victims take back control. There is also a centre providing interventions to help perpetrators stop exhibiting abusive behaviour. Citizens Advice Rutland can refer clients to UAVA for continuing help and support.

Confidentiality

Citizens Advice Rutland advisers may be helping clients identify abusive, criminal behaviours, but client confidentiality is still a crucial issue. Confidentiality will only be breached in extreme cases, after the most careful consideration at several levels and with authorisation from



Citizens Advice Head Office. Such exceptional cases could include those where a client is at risk, that is, when there is danger to the health, safety or well being of any person, the danger is imminent and urgent medical or police intervention is required.

Case Study

Sarah, 36, a single parent of three, came to Citizens Advice Rutland ostensibly for a Foodbank Voucher, but it was clear that she was worried by her eldest daughter's behaviour and she did not know what to do. She said that money had started being taken from her purse about a year ago. She eventually discovered that the culprit was her 17 year old daughter. Her daughter was not in education or training and had no money at all and seemed to believe that she was entitled to money from her mother. She had recently started assaulting her mother if no money was forthcoming.



Sarah was so ashamed that she had not told anyone else about the situation. However, the other children were now suffering as the client was unable to pay for sufficient electricity, or even at times to buy food for them. She feared that the eldest daughter was using the money to fund a drugs habit.

The discussion with the adviser about domestic abuse resulted in

- *An enormous feeling of relief that the secret could be talked about*
- *The start of Sarah being able to address the issues arising from domestic abuse with a growing sense of self-confidence*
- *A consideration of:*
 - *Involving the police regarding*
 - *the daughters theft of her mother's money*
 - *the daughter's suspected drug habit*
 - *asking the daughter to move out and consideration of housing/care provision for the daughter through Social Services*
 - *Referral to UAVA for support and counselling.*

Conclusion

Citizens Advice is playing its part in raising awareness of domestic abuse in its *Talk about Abuse* campaign, and identifying, and so helping more efficiently, more victims via the *ASK* routine enquiry rollout.

Citizens Advice Rutland is participating by being more aware of domestic abuse and how to deal with it in a sensitive way, emphasising that physical violence is not the only manifestation of abuse. Clients who then recognise their own situation as being abusive can be helped by Citizens Advice Rutland both in the “normal” way and by having their additional rights and available services explained to them.

Where specialist services such as those supplied by UAVA or family law solicitors are required, referrals can be made.

It is to be hoped that by bringing the frequency and variety of domestic abuse to the notice of the general public, victims will not have to suffer in silence for so long. They will not feel so isolated, culpable or ashamed, but will feel free to discuss the issues with friends and family without fear of disparagement or disbelief. They may then also know where to get the help and support they require and deserve.

References:

- Parker, Imogen (2015), *A link in the chain*. Citizens Advice report.
Home Office (2015), *Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship*
www.gov.uk
Radio 4 Today programme, 14/12/15 and 29/12/15
Sunday Times, 6/3/16

Citizens Advice Rutland

Free, confidential advice. Whoever you are.

We help people find a way forward with their problems and campaign on big issues when their voices need to be heard.

We value diversity, champion equality and challenge discrimination and harassment. We're here for everyone.

Opening Times:

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