

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Background

The *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2000) attained united parliamentary agreement for its approach and its wide ranging actions. It states that:

“Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse) can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threat, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends...

...In accepting this definition, it must be recognised that children are witness to and subjected to much of this abuse and there is a significant correlation between domestic abuse and the mental, physical and sexual abuse of children.” (p.5)

The strategy’s action plan is now being reviewed and progressed in the context of a violence against women strategy for Scotland (forthcoming, 2008). A crucial part of this, and equally a part of the reform of children’s services in Scotland, is the development and implementation of a delivery plan focussed on better outcomes for children and young people affected by domestic abuse. This literature review aims to provide a current evidence base for Scotland’s delivery plan (2008-11) and inform the development of all services involved in improving children’s lives where there is domestic abuse. It takes on board international and Scottish evidence to support directions for good practice and builds on Scotland’s commitment to listen to the voices of children themselves.

The implementation of *Getting it Right for Every Child in Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2006a) where ‘every child gets the help they need when they need it’ - raises the question of what does this involve for children affected by domestic abuse? The development of a clear understanding of the needs of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse was a priority in *The National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse* (Scottish Executive, 2000). The rights of children and young people to identify their needs, have their needs addressed and participate in developing services in the future were also recognised. Significant steps have been made through children’s involvement in developing refuge provision (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003), and through the Scottish Women’s Aid *Listen Louder* campaign, in which young people advocated for the development of specific support services (see, for example, Scottish Parliament, 2002, Houghton, 2006). The award of £6 million (2006-8) to ensure a minimum standard of refuge/follow-on (resettlement) and outreach support, monitored and evaluated according to outcomes set by children, were tangible results of this activity. Funding for these services is being continued 2008-11, linked to a national evaluation.

It was recognised that the wider needs of children living in households with domestic abuse should be a priority for local interagency planning (Scottish Executive, 2002) and this is reflected in the *Guidance Note for Planners: Children and Young People Experiencing Domestic Abuse* (Scottish Executive, 2004). The indicator that ‘appropriate support services are available for children affected by domestic abuse’ in the *Quality Improvement Framework* for local authorities integrated children’s services planning provided recognition and legitimacy for this strand of service development (Scottish Executive, 2006b). However, the introduction of Single Outcome Agreements between the Scottish Government and individual councils in Scotland has overtaken this framework, without a violence against women national indicator (Scottish Government, 2007). It is too early to assess the impact of these new policy developments but concerns have been raised about whether the legitimacy and accountability for services in this area will remain.

The Scottish child protection and audit review identified domestic abuse as a feature of at least one third of child protection cases (Scottish Executive, 2002). However, the growing awareness of the impact of domestic abuse on children by a wide range of agencies had not necessarily led to an ‘appropriate, proportionate and timely’ response to their needs. The audit (Scottish Executive, 2002) raised concerns that:

“although agencies were to be commended for recognising that domestic abuse constitutes emotional abuse of children, and that children are also at risk of being physically and sexually injured themselves, the response to date has been haphazard.” (p.154)

It specifically stated that current policies of treating every domestic abuse case involving children as a child protection matter or as a matter for automatic referral to the reporter were not helpful. It recommended that:

“agencies and professionals need to exercise better levels of judgement, in consultation with others, about the best approach to securing a child’s welfare and recognise that protecting the mother may be the best way to protect the children” and that a “more comprehensive and unified approach to meeting children’s needs should remove the need for automatic referral” (Scottish Executive, 2002, p.155).

It is recognised that police recognition of domestic abuse as affecting children is the key factor in the recent significant increase in non-offence referrals to the Children’s Reporter in Scotland.

Through a multi-agency group/the Delivery Group, and a Ministerial Task Force, there has been work to tackle this issue in two ways:

i) The establishment of the National Getting it Right for Every Child Domestic Abuse Pathfinder (2006-8)

Four local pilot areas have been identified to test and implement practice change to achieve better outcomes for all children, focusing initially on removing the need for automatic referral where a child is experiencing domestic abuse. The child’s needs, interests and views are central, as is joint working. Crucially the protection, needs and views of the non abusing parent, and measures taken to address the actions of the perpetrator, are an integral part of assessing, recording and planning for the child. (see

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/childrenservices/girfec> for further information)

ii) *A model 'referral framework'*

Developed nationally in the meantime for dealing with cases where there is concern about a child, including sharing and assessing information amongst agencies before deciding whether it is appropriate to make a referral to the reporter (Scottish Executive letter to Chief Executives, 2007).

Despite steps forward in recent years, it is recognised that in a country of over 5 million people, where the Scottish Crime Survey in 2003/4 suggested almost 1 in 10 (9%) of women experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives (Davidson *et al.*, 2007), and where approximately half the incidents of reported domestic abuse involve children (ACPOS snapshot report, 2007), there are undoubtedly a large number of children for whom outcomes could be improved¹. To tackle this it is recognised that cross government and cross agency action can and must improve.

The National Domestic Abuse Delivery Group

Ministers set up the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Group to achieve this task through the appointment of 32 senior officials from all departments of the government and outside agencies. The Group's remit is:

- i) to develop and implement a three year strategic delivery plan (2008-11).
- ii) to oversee the *National Getting it Right for Every Child Domestic Abuse Pathfinder* (2006-8).

The international team of authors for this literature review have worked collaboratively with the Delivery Group and its sub groups to provide evidence for their work in developing the plan. This review draws from international and Scottish literature, including evidence from children and young people's perspectives, to give directions for good practice for the continuing process of improving the lives of children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

The Delivery Group has ensured that Scotland is building on its reputation as a lead in relation to children's participation agenda in this field (see Houghton, 2006; Smith, 2008; Houghton, 2008), ensuring children's participation in policy and practice development at the highest level. Ministers have recognised that there is a fourth P – Participation, to the three P's of Protection, Provision and Prevention of the *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse* (see Scottish Parliament, 2007), reflecting the decisions of delivery group members. The structure of the literature review reflects this:

¹ The England and Wales estimate that 29% of women experience domestic abuse at some points in their lives (Coleman *et al.*, 2007) more closely resembles international prevalence statistics, as does the one robust local prevalence study in Scotland (general sample of 951 women) where a third of women had experienced domestic abuse at some point in their lives (Donaldson and Marshall, 2005).

- The next chapter reviews the research evidence on children, young people and domestic abuse
(Humphreys and Houghton)
- The Participation Chapter provides evidence from children and young people themselves, their perspectives on domestic abuse, what helps or does not help, and *their* solutions
(Houghton)
- The Protection Chapter provides evidence that for children to be safe there needs to be: multiagency collaboration; a focus on intervention with perpetrators; linked but separate protection of children and their mothers
(Humphreys and Houghton)
- The Provision Chapter covers the need for services: for pregnant women and infants; to strengthen the mother/child relationship; for informal, individual and group support – reviewing wider literature to compliment children’s perspectives on support
(Humphreys and Houghton)
- The Primary Prevention through Education Chapter discusses action to ensure all children and young people are equal, respected and responsible - to prevent abuse in the future and in their own young relationships
(Ellis)

The authors provide directions for good practice at the end of each chapter. Their recommendations are relevant to all audiences in Scotland’s quest to improve the lives of children affected by domestic abuse.

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