CHAPTER THREE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE *Claire Houghton*

Introduction

> *"I just watched me ma getting it done. I couldnae do anything about it in case he hurt me. He'd just keep hitting her and every time I'd go to do something he always lifted his hand."* (boy, 15, in Scottish Women's Aid's *Listen Louder Film*)

Perpetrators of domestic abuse give children no choice in making them participants in the situation of domestic abuse. Despite the best efforts of the non abusing mother, children are aware of what is going on, are witness to and involved in domestic abuse and are often directly abused: within that situation children make complex decisions in order to survive, protect themselves and others, intervene, and where possible get on with their lives. Literature from children's perspectives reveals that children see themselves as "integrally involved and as more than mere witnesses" (Irwin, 2006, p.21) and furthermore the centrality of domestic abuse to their lives means that it influences "their interactions and relationships with others in all spheres of their lives" (ibid). Listening to children themselves renders previous constructions of children living with domestic abuse - as spectators or witnesses; hidden, silent or passive victims; disconnected from abuse 'between adults' - obsolete.

Mullender *et al.* (2002), in their groundbreaking book on children's perspectives, state that "children's active participation" (p.121) is crucial to their ability to cope with the experience of domestic abuse. This is defined as

> *"Being listened to and taken seriously as participants in the domestic violence situation; and being able to be actively involved in finding solutions and helping make decisions."* (ibid.)

These key tenets, derived from what children view as most important, are used to set the boundaries of this section of the literature review. The review will focus on the domestic abuse literature wherein children are 'active participants' - their own views are listened to and taken seriously, their own decision making and their involvement or lack of involvement in adult/family decision making is explored *with* them, their views on involvement in finding 'solutions' for their own family are explored and respected. In some studies, children and young people also give their views on collective or future 'solutions' for improving policy and practice, and therefore the lives of many children, reflecting their competency and expertise.

In this emergent domestic abuse literature children and young people are not subjects or even objects on which to test adult assumptions/hypotheses (as in much of the developmental psychological literature on children exposed to domestic abuse), nor is the literature *about* children from an adult perspective (such as maternal reports and observations in the psychological literature and mothers views on children's experiences and needs in qualitative research). Instead the literature reflects developments in key areas of research, practice and

policy: in the 'sociology of childhood' literature where children are seen as 'social actors' with valid views and as experts in their own lives (see for example James *et al.*, 1998); in the feminist and children's rights approach to work with children affected by domestic abuse (primarily through Women's Aid); and latterly government commitment to children's participation in individual and collective decisions that affect them (see, for example, *The Children (Scotland) Act 1995*, *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989*).

Borland *et al.*, (2001, see pp19-21) in their guidelines for the Scottish Parliament describe the general literature on consulting children and young people as having three overlapping parts (the authors then relate these to Hart's 'ladder of participation' (1992)[4]):

> i) "research on children" that "seeks children's views in order to pursue adult aims ulterior to those views"
>
> ii) "research with children" aiming to create "shared meanings" (Woodhead and Faulkener, 2000) and increase adults understanding of children's experience, finding ways to enable the voices to be heard, sometimes in order to take them into account when planning policy (rung 5 on the ladder of participation)
>
> iii) "empowering approaches to children" which shares the emphasis on working *with* children, and furthermore "children are to have genuine influence in areas that concern them, but their decisions are to be shared with adults" (rung 6 on the ladder of participation).

The children's domestic abuse research studies reviewed here have found innovative ways of enabling the voices of children experiencing domestic abuse to be heard - falling within the second category in the main: it could be argued that recent literature, approaches and reports from Scotland could be placed in the third category through empowering children to achieve political influence (Scottish Women's Aid's *Listen Louder Campaign* summarised in Houghton, 2006 and two projects relating to the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Group - Smith *et al.*, 2008; Houghton, 2008). Children's "access to those in power" in recent years - one key condition of empowerment according to Hodgson (1995) - has enabled some children experiencing domestic abuse in Scotland to become not only social but 'political actors' (Houghton, 2006), a step which breaks new ground internationally.

In summary, this review will concentrate on recent literature and reports depicting children with experience of domestic abuse as being actively involved in finding solutions in their own lives, and solutions that will improve the lives of others. Children have commented on their family, community and national spheres, with their main objective reflected in one boy's reason for taking part in Scotland's 'Making a Difference' project - to "help others and, hopefully, make a difference and change the future" (M, male, aged 17 in Houghton, 2008, p.25). The two main sections are:

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[4] Hart proposes that 1)manipulation 2)decoration and 3)tokenism are the first three rungs of the ladder and are *not* participation which starts at 4)children assigned but informed, 5)children consulted and informed, 6)adult initiated: shared decisions with children, 7)child-initiated: shared decisions with adults, with the pinnacle 8)child-initiated and directed. There are various critiques of this but Borland *et al*. 2001 argue that it is useful in relation to clarifying the extent as to which children have a say.

- Children's perspectives on domestic abuse and their "domestically violent fathers"
- Children's perspectives on what helps and doesn't help, and *their* solutions

The review will conclude with a short discussion on children's participation in Scotland's national and local policy making, including children's perspectives from recent Scottish work. Where possible the voices of Scotland's children will be raised above others, including where their views in smaller studies, reports and productions reflect and reinforce common themes and perspectives of the wider, often more robust research studies in the UK (see Table 2.1); with findings from the (few) international qualitative studies involving children included where additional perspectives are discovered (for example Irwin *et al.*, 2002; Peled, 1998; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Directions for good practice emanating from this chapter will take the form of recommendations at the end, echoing children's own priorities for Ministers (Houghton, 2008).

Table 2.1 Summary of key UK studies with details of the children involved

Author/s and year: focus of study : country	**Sampling details available**
Mullender *et al.*, 2002: children's perspectives on living with domestic violence (dv), coping with dv, the help they need, barriers of racism, ethnicity and culture, influence of dv on relationships (mothers and fathers especially), advice to other children: England	54 children, aged 8-16 (half 11 or under), 24 girls, 21 boys, over half from ethnic minorities, with perspectives of South Asian sub sample (14) explored in detail, 7 disabled children, urban/rural mix, no more than half came through refuge. Details of exposure to domestic abuse given, a fifth living with DV for year or less, third between 1-7 years, most for substantial part of childhood. Also interviewed 24 mothers (of the 25 families involved) and 20 professionals. Children's voices raised above others and elements of interweaving mothers and children's perspectives, children 'tracked' for up to 18 months.
McGee, 2000: what it means to experience dv including types of violence and impacts of dv, agency responses, obstacles: England and Wales.	54 children, aged 5-17 years, gender not recorded, 13% black, 13% disability, 27% cities, 20% rural, involved with range of agencies particularly statutory. Details of exposure to domestic abuse given including average length of time children exposed which was 6 years. Also interviewed 48 mothers, equal space to children and mothers views.
Stafford *et al.*, 2007: children's views of moving home because of domestic abuse and their support needs: Scotland	30 young people, aged 10-16 years, 21 female, 9 male, ethnicity not recorded, rural/urban mix, 26 accessed through Women's Aid, 4 other organisations, though children involved with many agencies. In-depth innovative interviews with children only.
Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003: women and children's experiences, preferences and priorities for refuge provision: Scotland	57 children, aged 4-17 (36 children were 5-12), gender not recorded (boys and girls were included) nor was ethnicity recorded (small number of bme children included), all but one child had experience of living in refuge. Focus groups with 56 women survivors (not necessarily the mothers) and 22 Women's Aid workers also, equal voice to women and children, children's opinions reflected strongly in recommendations.
Houghton, forthcoming (two stages- Listen Louder research summarised in Houghton 2006, Making a Difference project Houghton, 2008): children's views on services, good practice, national policy, participation in policy change:	50 children involved in research 2004-8, aged 7 – 20, (mainly under 18) with latter stage 6 young people (15-20) advising Ministers on priorities (2008): third male, two thirds female, quarter black/minority ethnic, no major visible disabilities, rural/urban mix. Contact mainly through Women's Aid – outreach service as well as refuge/follow on, most children involved with many agencies. Children's views only, through

Scotland	multi-methodological participative approach including film.
Stalford *et al.*, 2003 : children's views on rural issues and housing : England	19 children and young people, 5-16, 10 girls 9 boys, ethnicity not recorded, accessed mainly through refuges, rural areas, interviews and written feedback, 5 parents interviewed.

Notes to table

1. The table is of recent key qualitative studies reflecting the approach of children *with experience of domestic abuse* as *active participants*.
2. Studies not from children's perspectives, whilst referred to at times, are considered more fully in the other chapters of the literature review.
3. Other UK reports (including parts of studies that elicit views of children affected by domestic abuse, and unpublished studies) that are relevant and innovative are also reviewed and cited, including Alexander *et al.*'s 2004 study that distinguishes pupils that have and haven't experienced domestic abuse, Barron's 2007 'Kidspeak' online consultation with around 60 young contributors, Smith *et al.*'s 2008 consultation with 33 children on government priorities, Women's Aid groundbreaking reports and productions of children's voices, Morrison's exploratory study on children's perceptions of contact with fathers, forthcoming.
4. Research from other countries involving children as social actors are reviewed, however the search found very few studies from children's perspectives, notable exceptions include Irwin *et al.*, 2002 - Australia, Peled, 1998 – USA.
5. Mullender *et al.* are the only authors to assign ethnicity to each quote. Although other studies are predominantly white it is known that all the Scottish studies included a small proportion of children from black and minority ethnic groups, and McGee included 13% black children, therefore it is not correct to presume other quotes are white children only.
6. Mullender *et al.* and Irwin's qualitative studies from the perspectives of children living with domestic abuse are part of wider studies, Mullender *et al.* also surveyed 1395 school pupils about domestic abuse.
7. Full references are in the bibliography. The author is keen to hear of other studies reflecting the participative approach with children affected by domestic abuse, including 'grey literature', not accessed through this search.

The unique perspective of children with experience of domestic abuse

Young people with experience of domestic abuse discussed why it was important for adults to listen to young people in the recent project for Scotland's National Domestic Abuse Delivery Group – *Making a Difference: Young People Speak to Scottish Ministers about their Priorities* … (Houghton, 2008):

> *"J: I think they should listen because an adults point of view isn't always a child's perspective, so they should listen just to get a child's point of view.*
> *M: Yeah, getting the view from a child is probably more clearly than getting it from an adult as well, cos the child knows.*
> *J: Knows it directly, not like from a parent that's sort of taken it for what they think that the child would think.*
> *M: That way you're getting the child's feelings as well about it all."*
> (J, female, aged 15 and M, male, aged 17)

The recent research that has sought the voices of children and their views, often as well as their mothers views, highlights the unique perspective, views and knowledge that the young people describe. Qualitative social research where women and children's views have been sought (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002) and 'quantitative' research which includes children's self-reports as well as women's reports on children using versions of psychometric tests to measure exposure, behaviour, depression, trauma, attachment (see Edleson *et al.*, 2007; Skopp *et al.*, 2005; Sternberg *et al.*, 2006; Kitzmann *et al.*, 2003; Jarvis *et al.*, 2005), reveal differences between maternal and child 'reports' in relation to the child's experiences of domestic abuse. This supports the young people's view that their perspective is different and adults do not know

what they think and feel. That is not to say that mothers views are not insightful or to be ignored – after all children say their mum is the most important person to them, often the one person they *can* speak to (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Humphreys and Thiara, 2002), "In a way I can rely on her and speak to her 'cause she knows how it is, but my friend don't" (11 year old boy in Humphreys and Thiara, 2002, p.35). In relation to the experience of domestic abuse, both the qualitative and quantitative literature reveal that

- children's awareness of domestic abuse and extent of that abuse is often greater than many women thought (and hoped) (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Hester and Radford, 1996; Edleson *et al.*, 2007; Barron, 2007)
- the action children take to protect themselves or their siblings, or intervene in the abuse can be hidden or unknown to the mother (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Jarvis *et al.*, 2005)
- women and children can perceive the effect on children's behaviour and outcomes differently (Kitzmann *et al.*, 2003; Sternberg *et al.*, 2006)
- siblings experiences are different, but mothers [and others] may think that the experience of siblings is more similar than siblings do themselves (Skopp *et al.*, 2005; Mullender *et al.*, 2002)
- children's perceptions, 'appraisals', and the meanings children attach to domestic abuse incidents can be different than or unknown to their mothers and others (Fosco *et al.*, 2007; Skopp *et al.*, 2005; Edleson *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002)
- the mother may not know of the direct abuse (including sexual abuse) that the child is suffering (McGee, 2000)

Just as mothers aren't necessarily aware of the reality of the child's experiences, neither is the child fully aware of the reality for the mother. In Mullender *et al.* (2002) and McGee (2000), interviews with women and views/frustrations expressed by children reveal what children may not know: the extent or severity of the abuse of their mum (though they will know domestic abuse is happening); the reasons for parenting decisions or protective behaviours that women use (for example, that may seem weak or punitive to them); the reasons for action or inaction (including not leaving or going back/not going back home) and reasons why women haven't spoken with or made plans with the child (also see Stafford *et al.*, 2007).

Therefore the recent inclusion and involvement of children in various research studies has resulted in an emerging consensus that "children alone are able to provide first hand information about the awareness of their parent's conflict and the meaning they attach to it" (Skopp *et al.*, 2005, p.331), children are "agents of their own lives" (Moss, 2002, p.6) sharing their own knowledge of the situation and exploring their own "nuanced and contextual decision-making processes" (Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.100). Mullender *et al.* (2002) describe their process of "weaving" mothers and children's stories together to give a picture of the realities of domestic abuse, importantly *supplementing* children's views with insights from their mothers (p.202). For domestic abuse research where children *and* their mothers both live through and (hopefully) survive abuse from the same man, this multi-informant approach (also recommended in Sternberg *et al.*, 2006) is an important consideration, though not a necessity I would argue. An important question is whether such research can retain the integrity of children's voices by

raising their views higher than adults who purport to talk for them (Alderson, 1995) or about them. Crucially if "children need to hear their mother's perspective in order to make sense of what happened" (McGee, 2000, p.84) then is it not important that researchers and certainly practitioners do too?

Children's 'exposure' to domestic abuse

There are various critiques of describing children experiencing domestic abuse as 'witnesses', 'exposed to violence' or even more passively 'hidden' or even 'silent' victims of domestic abuse (see for example Edleson, 2007; Irwin *et al.*, 2006; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Now that children are 'active participants' in research, they eloquently and graphically describe the myriad of ways that the perpetrator forces them to be involved in domestic abuse, and the ways in which they act to intervene, protect, cope and make decisions. Early work in Scotland, such as Scottish Women's Aid's *Young People Say* (1997), highlighted children's voices and their experiences of domestic abuse in their own words. Children's perspectives research is now further increasing our understanding of the intertwined and deliberately manipulated experiences of women and children (as advocated by Kelly, 1994), illuminating the "range of ways that 'simultaneous abuse' of women and children occurs" (Kelly, 1994, p.47). In the literature children do not separate women and children's abuse, but speak of the fear and many facets of abuse inflicted on the family by the father/father figure/mum's boyfriend (hereon-in the review will use 'father'). Therefore the following summary is of children's depictions of the mental, physical and sexual abuse women *and* children are subjected to. It is sourced from the first two robust UK research studies on this subject - McGee (2000) and Mullender *et al.* (2002), that also lead the field internationally, drawing on these key references throughout.

Mental abuse of women and children

Although children often began their descriptions of domestic abuse as 'parents' arguing and fighting, the picture of who is perpetrating the abuse soon emerged in the majority of accounts, when dad is shouting and mum is screaming/crying : "I saw them arguing, shouting at each other and hitting each other. My dad used to do the hitting" (10 year old South Asian boy in Mullender *et al.*, p.93). Children give numerous examples of women being mentally and emotionally abused, being shouted at, called names, being humiliated and also being named a bad mother and undermined in front of them. The majority of children were present at incidents (sometimes forced to be present by the father), many overheard this abuse, and were frightened by the abuse. A 16 year old South Asian girl described how it felt to them "constantly being shouted at, frightened, living in fear" and for her, and others in the studies, the fear that their mother and the children would be killed was real, "thinking that every day could be your last day" (Mullender *et al.*, p.94). One 9 year old watched scared whilst his older sibling intervened "He was grabbing her by the hair and trying to push her down the stairs… I was scared…N [12 years old] was there and tried to stop my dad from smacking my mum" (South Asian boy in Mullender *et al.*, p.183). For other children, not knowing or seeing what was happening (but knowing that their mother was being hurt) was worse:

> *"He could have stuck a knife in her for all I know, with the door shut. And the worst thing for me was actually not knowing what was going to happen next, not knowing what was happening then and not knowing what was going to happen next. That was the most frightening thing for me."* (Regina, aged 9, in McGee, 2000, p.107)

Children and young people also described mental abuse directed at them in particular, the perpetrator being cruel to their pets in front of them, being locked in or out, lying, threatening them with anything from burning their bikes if mum left, to killing them all. Many children talked of the controlling and intimidating behaviour of the abusive father, regimenting a child's behaviour, play, movements, who they spoke to; silencing children, not allowing them to speak to mothers and others, keeping them apart from those they loved, ensuring they kept quiet at all times, staring, glaring at them, stalking them, being horrible in front of friends.

Physical abuse of women and children

Children had witnessed their mothers being hurt in many ways: being punched, slapped, kicked, shoved, grabbed; being grabbed by the throat; having bleach/hot water poured over her/them; attempted murder;

> *"He was just hitting her with his hand and shouting and swearing at her- saying that she's horrible, she's wicked and that she's not a very good mummy. Just saying all horrible things to her and really hurting her, making her cry, and Mum couldn't do anything. I just called the police."* (12 year old white girl in Mullender *et al.*, p.183)

Women were commonly attacked when pregnant ("he just wanted to boot the baby out of me" Marianne in McGee, 2000, p.43), when holding small children, or physically sheltering children from him, or intervening in an attack on the child. Children themselves spoke of being subjected to severe physical assaults, being hit, children being thrown, hit with flying objects or with weapons, being threatened with being hit when trying to stop an assault on their mother, being dragging and pushed, siblings being hurt, dangling children over stairs or windows, and the father being just horrible and violent to them all, "He was lashing out at everyone for no reason. He's hit me before… He was using his fists on me." (12 year old African boy in Mullender *et al.*, p.186)

Sexual abuse of women and children

None of the mothers or children in the two studies were directly asked about sexual abuse. Yet in McGee's interviews six children spoke of being sexually abused themselves and fifteen women spoke of being raped – conceiving through rape, raped whilst pregnant, children intervening during a sexual assault, the man threatening to rape the child as a means of controlling movements, and in Mullender *et al.* two women spoke of being raped with children present. For children the fact that their father was violent made it more difficult to talk about their own sexual abuse - the abuser would make further threats (of violence, being put in care, separation from mum, to kill mother) or lie, for example, by saying the mother knew or told him to do it - it took

them a long time to tell (McGee, 2000). This is reinforced by a larger study that asked 164 young people (7-19 years old) at a sexual abuse clinic about domestic abuse (Kellogg and Menard, 2003) - over half the children reported living with violence, 58% of child sex offenders lived at their home and physically abused the child's mother - the significant difference for children who also suffered domestic abuse was that they were more likely to delay disclosure because of fear of the sexual/domestic abuse offender. Furthermore, children in McGee (2000) and Mullender *et al.* (2002) gave examples of the sexual degradation of women and girls in the family and the father's possessiveness and control especially about the woman's and sometimes girls behaviour (e.g. going out with friends): "He said he knew what I was up to - I was a ****, I had taken after my mother, I was sleeping around…he hit me hard on my head…" (16 year old South Asian girl in Mullender *et al.*, p.185), with another girl in the same study fearing her father would use his control to force her into 'marriage'.

In relation to the mental, physical and sexual abuse women and children suffer, it can be said that children and young people's lives are commonly marked by fear. There is a huge diversity in each child's individual experience of domestic abuse, each child's reaction and the effects on their lives, even within the same family, but for all "it is a horrible experience" (girl in Scottish Women's Aid's *Listen Louder Film*). The children's *perspectives* literature to date does not produce any *conclusive* evidence or findings in relation to differences in children's experiences of domestic abuse in relation to age, gender, ethnic background, ability. However there are some emergent themes worthy of further qualitative exploration, for example in relation to: different experiences, reasoning and coping strategies of younger and older children including siblings; older children being more able to identify who is responsible than younger; additional barriers and support for ethnic minority children; issues of identity for boys, girls, black and minority ethnic children including and perhaps in particular mixed race children; the effects of longer exposure and children's changing perspectives over time. Where these issues have begun to be discussed these are integrated into the literature review and gaps, for example in relation to younger children, noted in the recommendations. What is clear from all of the children, across all of the studies reviewed, is that they are telling us they are frightened, hurt, and severely detrimentally affected by the actions of the "domestically violent father" (Harne, 2006).

Children's perspectives on "Domestically Violent Fathers"

The literature on children's perspectives of "domestically violent fathers" is limited. Perhaps this is symptomatic of the absence of domestic abuse perpetrators as violent fathers in children services, child protection and domestic abuse agendas (see Chapter Four: Protection), but also it reflects to an extent adult imposed limits in setting parameters for children (Qvortup, 1994). Mullender *et al.* (2002) decided not to directly ask children about their feelings towards their father/father figure "in view of the particular sensitivity of the question" (p.182), instead focussing on "what had happened, who they thought was responsible and whether they still saw the man now", and also used mothers accounts to "fill out the picture" (ibid); McGee (2000) decided to ask only teenagers about their relationships with their fathers; Peled (1998) gained some insights from her study about living with violence (14 'preadolescents' aged 10-13, 7 boys 7 girls) when asking children about their relationships with fathers through a series of interviews; as did Irwin *et al.* (2002) who found a similar age of children (8-13) less able to articulate their

feelings about their fathers than young people (13-18); an exciting exploratory study in Scotland with a small group of children (11 children aged 9-13) focuses explicitly on perspectives on contact with fathers who perpetrate domestic abuse (Morrison, forthcoming). Morrison's study successfully uses innovative participatory methods to enable children to talk eloquently and directly about their feelings about their dad.

Whether children themselves feel there should be a 'limit' to what they are asked about is unknown, though a small group of young people (in Houghton, forthcoming) held an insightful discussion about what was appropriate to ask children affected by domestic abuse. They did feel that questions about dads were the most sensitive and most likely to distress children. However, they agreed that not naming and asking questions about fathers wasn't right, he was "after all, the one who has caused all this" (girl, aged 15). They decided on a method reflecting Morrison's research that felt "safer" - a vignette, agree/disagree statements (with no compunction to discuss) and a secret box for written comments. So perhaps the question is not 'whether to' but 'how to': children *can* speak clearly about their father and the effect of his domestic abuse on them and their families. This section will therefore focus on children's views of domestically violent fathers drawn from the literature, sharing rich insights into the father/child 'relationship' from a child's perspective. It will explore children's feelings and the impact of his abuse, and situate the effects with the cause – retaining *children's* focus on the abuser.

Feelings about fathers

In these qualitative studies that tackle children's perspectives on fathers there is a great deal of commonality. The most overwhelming feelings children had about their father was fear, being frightened of him and also feeling sad; commonly children spoke of the abuse he had inflicted and of being scared – for many the violence filled their perspective of their dad (Morrison, 2007; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Children revealed complex emotions, almost all negative, of sadness, anger, loss and of missing him, including the extremes of emotion – hate, and (far less commonly in children's accounts) love (Morrison, 2007; McGee, 2000; Alexander *et al.*, 2004; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Peled, 1998; Irwin *et al.*, 2002). Mullender *et al.* (2002) write about children speaking of 'early' love, in terms of younger children but more commonly of the father's violence killing the feelings children have for him over time: reflected also in Irwin *et al.*'s study (2002):

> *"I started losing respect for him gradually. As I say I've got absolutely no respect for him now. Cause he's not worthy of any respect."* (14 year old male, p.118)

A couple of teenagers in Mullender *et al.*'s (2002) study illustrate more complex feelings - that you can love and not respect, love and still be frightened at the same time, but more children spoke of hate, and even more sadness and fear. Peled (1998) writes more strongly of children being caught between the two emotions and the conflict of loyalties. Children have problems dealing with the contradictory 'sides' of their fathers (what children often name the 'good' and 'bad' dad – see Scottish Women's Aid publications also) and Peled suggests children either choose to see their fathers as bad or find ways of excusing or reframing his abusive behaviour. Young people in Bagshaw *et al.* (2000) felt that it was helpful for professionals to validate their

feelings, including "normalising contradictory feelings and feelings of disloyalty" (p.82). Peled warns that we need to acknowledge children's positive perceptions of their fathers too, and also their changing perceptions once there is intervention to help name the abuse and whose responsibility it is. For example, groupwork enabling children to name the father as responsible (not themselves or their mother) will bring a range of emotions to those children who are struggling to maintain a positive image of their father (Peled, 2000; Peled, 1998; Peled and Edleson, 1992).

His fault

Mullender *et al.*'s study (2002) asked children whose fault the abuse was (in light of Peled's points it is noted that these children were in receipt of support). The majority of children were very clear that the violence was his fault, though some said they did not realise this 'at first' or when they were younger "I know it was my dads fault. I know my mum did not want to fight." (9 year old Asian girl, p.191). However, when the child got in the middle (their pocket money being the cause of an argument, they didn't do or say what dad told them, their father blamed them) some children blamed themselves, and a very small minority of children felt mums and even siblings may be somewhat responsible. McGee (2000) argues that older children were much clearer that their father's behaviour was irrational and unreasonable whereas young children may look for a reason/cause; Irwin *et al.* (2002) found that children (8-13) struggled to articulate how they felt about their father, but young people (13-18) were able to articulate how they felt and were extremely negative about his behaviour. Of note is the sub-sample of South Asian children in Mullender *et al.* (2002), all of whom were very clear that it was the adult's fault, and who seemed more able to take an 'objective perception' of their situation and personalise it less than the white Western children (p.149). In a Scottish school study children who had experienced domestic abuse were more likely than other pupils to point out that abuse was always wrong: "you don't have any right to abuse women" (pupil in Alexander *et al.*, 2004, p.12). Mullender *et al.* (2002) write about a clear picture of children's sense of fair play emerging – their dad is wrong to be hurting them, violence is wrong: "should have talked it over instead of hitting, shouting. He was unfair. The person who hits is in the wrong."(14 year old South Asian boy in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.192)

If we leave will we be safe?

Children are very afraid of their father further abusing them all; this fear does not stop when and if they leave – children's fears are then compounded by fear of the abuser finding them, of seeing him again, further abuse, escalating abuse against their mother and them, being abducted and the abuse of their mother at 'handover' points (Morrison, forthcoming; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Peled, 1998; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Children in Morrison's study for example spoke clearly of the fear of being held hostage, being 'stolen' or not given back to their mother. All children were unequivocal in that they wanted the abuse to stop (Morrison, forthcoming; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Barron, 2007). At least a third of children in Mullender *et al.* (2002) felt they could only be safe if the father didn't find them. It is unsurprising that across the

studies children talk of resentment, anger and fear when their dad pursues contact, reflected in the *Kidspeak* on-line consultation with children:

> *"I am very scared and frightened of my daddy. I am mad with my daddy for hurting my mummy and me and my sisters and brother, I want my daddy to stay out of my life but he is taking it to court to see us... I am very scared in case noone listens to me, I want to be heard what if they don't listen?? I don't want to be made to see my dad please help me and my family."* (Tara, 8 years old, in Barron, 2007, p.23)

Mullender *et al.* (2002) concluded that children felt most clearly that it was no longer possible to live as a family, Irwin *et al.* (2002) that children felt separation had a positive effect on the life of their family: it would be difficult to find a child's account where the opposite was true. In Morrison's study (forthcoming), all children thought their fathers were poor parents *because* they were violent fathers. However, a very small minority of children also talk of having good parents, and others don't want to be disloyal to their father (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Irwin *et al.*, 2002). Children said that they were happier away from him - even when they were sad they missed him, were confused and had mixed feelings about seeing him - though some children were quite clear that seeing him was fear, not seeing him relief and safety (Morrison, forthcoming; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Irwin *et al.*, 2002).

> *"I kind of missed my dad when my mum and dad split up. But I kind of didn't cos of all the evil things he did. Once they get in contact with you, you just act all weird. Cos like you're happy and sad at the same time. You go depressed." (young person in Morrison, forthcoming)*

Safe contact?

Once children had left there were a range of views about contact, for example, of the children in Morrison's study, one child wanted contact, six were unsure and four definitely not, for these children and many others there was often little choice and contact/fear of contact was a reality in their lives. In both Morrison (forthcoming) and Mullender *et al.* (2002) children report feelings of loss and confusion, of hating the violence but wanting to see him

> *"He hurt my mum, so I don't know what makes me want to keep seeing him and stopping me from harming him like he harmed my mum."* (child in Morrison, forthcoming)

Another child stated that though he's "an ********" she did "kind of love him too – because he's my father" (15 year old white girl in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.198). In some cases children just missed having 'a dad', this ranged from in the here and now so they were not stigmatised as a single parent or problem family, to events in the future such as marriage, or when reflecting on how they had wanted a dad (even the abusive dad) as a younger child (Morrison, forthcoming; Irwin *et al.*, 2002):

> *"I was a kid, I needed my dad as well. I was 5. I started to say to Mum, I miss Dad and all that, bring him back. And then she brang him back. Now it's better off if he dies or he was never born."* (14 year old male in Irwin *et al.*, 2002, p.118)

Many were unambiguous and very clear that they hated him and did not want to see him ever again: "He is horrible and disgraceful and I'm ashamed to know him" (child in Morrison, forthcoming), "Can't stand him at all. I'm scared though because, he's, he's everywhere." (Mona, aged 17 in McGee, 2000, p. 84; feelings also reflected by children in Barron, 2007).

Children feel strongly that the violence should stop for there to be contact and that they should be safe, and many children were very sceptical about violent fathers ever changing (Smith *et al.*, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Morrison, forthcoming). Children in Morrison said fathers lied about changing to get what they wanted (for example, so as not to be charged) or that he could change if he "had the will power" but doesn't want to – some children were clear that he gets something out of it: "If you've always been violent you can't just stop, cos that makes you feel good it makes you feel big and strong" (child in Morrison), with others saying he won't stop because he gets away with it and goes unpunished (Alexander *et al.*, 2004; McGee, 2000). Morrison reports that children felt "if the child was afraid of a parent or if one parent was afraid of the other parent, then contact was not appropriate". Children's accounts across studies showed the manipulation and abuse of both women and children through contact

> *"Because if you're scared, they might scare you over the phone like say I'm coming to get you. And if you say you don't want to go they might say I'm going to get your mum arrested and say it's her that's been hitting you. They might tell the child to tell their mum stuff to scare their mum. I phoned the polis and that. Sometimes he'd tell my sister to tell my mum stuff to scare her."* (child in Morrison, forthcoming)

Some children were very clear that they did not want contact, they hated him or/and were still frightened of him, they couldn't forgive him, they were angry at him for hurting their mother, they were happier now, (unwanted) contact gave them nightmares or was a nightmare and abusive in itself (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Barron, 2007; Morrison, forthcoming). Some children were concerned that the abuse would get worse (Mullender *et al.*, 2002) or that he would be angry at the child and abuse be more directed at the children now "he might start hitting the son" (child in Morrison, forthcoming). For many children their biggest fear was their father finding them or seeing him in the street, describing vividly a range of effects such as freezing, hiding, stress, protective behaviours, for example, not sleeping in case he smashed the door in (Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Children's accounts relating to *future* contact are full of anxiety and fear. Children's accounts of *actual* contact include examples of abusive contact, distressing effects of contact calls, visits, centres, including the father not turning up and being, as one child puts it, "pumped for info" (girl aged 12 in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.198) about their mother and her movements (see also Humphreys and Thiara, 2002). Crucially, children felt that not only should they have a say and be listened to about whether they wanted contact or not (and how it should happen), but that it should be *their* decision (Morrison, forthcoming; Mullender *et al.*, 2002).

Feeling horrible inside and like we're losing everything

Children's accounts reveal common psychological impacts and their use of words and expressions reflect much of the psychological literature on depression, anxiety, anger and post-traumatic trauma. They say that they feel like they're going mad, their minds are too full, too many feelings inside, are frozen or even bleeding inside, unable to sleep, having nightmares, feeling they're living a nightmare, feeling sick, too scared to do things or go places, in terror, have panic attacks, feel anger, have flashbacks, depression, feel overwhelming sadness, they self- harm (Scottish Women's Aid, 1997; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Alexander *et al.*, 2004; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, forthcoming), with some children saying they are suicidal or like their life "was not worth living" (pupil in Alexander *et al.*, 2004; also young people in Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000).

Mullender *et al.* (2002) argue, however, that *the* major issues that dominate children's accounts of the costs and consequences of domestic abuse are *not* the psychological impacts but i) safety and ii) the loss of the familiar.

> *"He made me leave my home. He made me leave all my best friends. He made me leave all my things behind."* (9 year old white girl, p.108)

Losing their home (as the vast majority of children did across all studies) was a significant loss, a cause of much resentment that wrought mixed feelings, including relief at leaving the violence:

> "*I wanted to move but I didnae. Because I widnae be able to see my pals any more. But I wanted to move to get away from the violence in the house."* (girl, 11, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.33)

Important to consider here is the effect of the initial move, usually precipitated by what Stafford *et al.* (2007) name "the incident". Children describe a catalogue of terrifying incidents - including hiding inside or outside the house, witnessing severe life threatening assaults, or indeed their mum witnessing assaults on them- often still causing terror and flashbacks: this is coupled with the trauma of leaving 'all that is familiar' very suddenly, and most often with no idea of what is happening that culminates in children's accounts as a significantly traumatic experience (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Barron, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002).

All children spoke about the loss of people close to them. In a number of the studies a few of the children were separated from their siblings which is particularly disturbing against a background of accounts of siblings protecting each other, hiding together, talking with each other, comforting each other (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008). Another major loss would often be wider family, with some children mentioning grandparents – who could also be their 'bolthole' (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007). Losing friends was especially hard for children (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Barron, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000) and this could continue when 'new friends' were lost through further moves (Stafford *et al.*, 2007). Financial losses and the economic impact was felt strongly by children (also in Morrison, forthcoming; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008), one child said that their father should "tell me he's sorry and help my mum with money" (child in Morrison,

forthcoming). Of huge significance to children is the loss of possessions, if their father had not already wrecked them (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Stalford *et al.*, 2003) and for some children losing their comfort and friend (and other potential victim) – their pet (Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Paws for Kids, 2002).

Advice to fathers

Children in some studies were asked what would be their advice to fathers or what would they like to say to him, what is marked here is their anger towards their fathers (Alexander *et al.*, 2004; Morrison, forthcoming). Alexander *et al.* (2004) state that the most common answer was to call him insulting names, the next ask why he did it, the next that he should suffer like he'd made others (with the child often wishing they were involved in carrying out the threat): "I wish I could drive a screwdriver through your heart" (Scottish school pupil with experience of domestic abuse, Alexander *et al.*, 2004, p.12), "you deserve stringing up" (boy aged 17, Houghton, forthcoming). In Morrison's study (forthcoming) children were asked if fathers could do or say anything to make them feel better about the domestic abuse they had experienced - whether and how violent fathers could be part of children's 'healing process' whilst maintaining the safety of women and children is a dilemma of progressive perpetrator work at present (see, for example, Scotland's Caledonian Perpetrator Programme Model, forthcoming and Peled, 2000) - this question elicited three clear messages from children: *nothing he could do, stop being abusive, apologise for what he had done and be sincere in his apology*. For other children, talking to him was futile, "What difference would saying anything make?" (pupil in Alexander *et al.*, 2004, p.12), reflecting many children's feelings of extreme powerlessness that they couldn't help, couldn't stop him, he wouldn't listen or take any notice (McGee, 2000; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000; Irwin *et al.*, 2002).

Too scared of him to be safe: too scared to tell?

Children's 'headline message' is that they want to be safe and to be listened to (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; echoing the headline messages of children's postcards to the new Scottish Parliament in 1999, Scottish Women's Aid). The threat to their safety (and sometimes their lives) is the domestically violent father: the most common reason that children cite for not talking to anyone is fear of their father finding out and the backlash - hurting them or their mother especially, but others too (McGee, 2000; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000).

> *"RES: He threatened to kill me if I told anybody… I kept it quiet to every single person...*
> *INT: What was it like not being able to tell?*
> *RES: I just felt angry and half sad.*" (Boy, 10 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p. 38)

Men's accountability and responsibility for their children living in fear needs to be named and children's perspectives on the abuse the family suffer at the hands of their fathers do this, children describe clearly the horror of life as "children of abusive fathers" (term suggested by Peled, 2000). Despite the domestically violent father building a wall of fear and abuse in their lives, many children, with their mothers, brothers and sisters actively seek a new life. The next

section discusses children's perspectives on what helps and doesn't help in this perilous journey. Children have told us that their perspectives of violent fathers change through this journey. They, like women, go through a process, one that helping adults must acknowledge and explore with them. An important point from Peled (2000) is that children's images of their fathers can become partially based on the reactions of professionals to the violence and the perpetrator. It is important that helping adults do not collude with abusive men's perspectives of their abuse of their family - Hearn writes that almost all violent men studied "… did not appear to see violence towards women as child abuse, or vice versa" (Hearn, 1998, p.93).

Children's perspectives on what helps

Most of all children want to be safe and have someone to talk to (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Scottish Women's Aid, 1999). The most important person they want to talk with is their mothers (but for many not just their mothers) and their siblings, whilst also valuing their wider family and their friends, in fact for McGee (2000) friends were the main source of support with the *possible* exception of mothers. Talking to all of these people has difficulties and limits in what children feel they can say, discuss, reveal. Very few children place their trust in professionals or feel they will or do respond appropriately (see Irwin *et al.*, 2006 and additional fears of discrimination and stereotyping for children from ethnic minority families in Thiara and Breslin, 2006), with the exception of specialist domestic abuse children's support workers in Women's Aid (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Houghton, 2008). There is remarkable consistency across the literature in what children have said helps, doesn't help and would help. For some groups of children these same issues can be compounded, and there may also be additional or different issues.

In relation to the latter, where some children have spoken potential issues will be drawn out, but it must be noted that there is a remarkable lack of literature from the perspectives of: black and minority ethnic children (except for fourteen South Asian children in Mullender *et al.*, 2002; also discussed in Imam with Akhtar, 2005; Thiara and Breslin, 2006); children from (or indeed moving to) rural areas (Stalford *et al.*, 2003; also discussed in Baker, 2005); disabled children (with a few insights in Mullender *et al.*, 2002) or children with a disabled mother – perhaps 'young carers'; children living with domestic abuse *and* substance misuse *or/and* mental health problems (see Gorin, 2004 for an overview of children's perspectives on *each* of these); looked after children and young people with experience of domestic abuse; as well as plenty of scope to explore issues for different age groups including younger children and young adults, or changing issues as children go through it and hopefully get over it - through a longitudinal look at the issue. This next section will summarise children's perspectives on what and who helps and doesn't, and includes children's advice on what would and does help.

Children helping themselves and advice to other children going through it

Children make decisions constantly about how to be safe, how to protect themselves, their mum their siblings, whether or not to intervene and how. Mullender *et al.* (2002) argues that we don't yet know enough about the impact a child intervening has on the perpetrator, mother and child (notably for some young people "finding their voice and expressing anger" appeared to help

build a foundation for their determination to build different relationships in the future, p.100) and we must be careful to explore with children the meanings they attach to intervention and their feelings of safety. McGee (2000) argues that safety planning (which includes the plan not to intervene) is important to give children a sense of control over the powerlessness they feel in a situation. Children's accounts tell us that a significant number (for example, half in Mullender *et al.*'s sample) of children do intervene (perhaps more older than younger children), and for some children this does 'help' them/how they feel or/and help stop the abuse at that time (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Irwin *et al.*, 2002; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Most commonly they shout, they might just 'be there' hoping their presence calms it down or lessens the severity, try to get in between parents, pull/shove the abuser off their mother. The way they feel about their intervention, and the acknowledgement of their actions, can be important to how they cope in the short and long term (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Irwin *et al.*, 2006).

A striking picture across the literature is children's depictions of the way that they feel inside, the many complex and awful feelings they have running around inside their head, bodies, hearts: a most striking message from children to others going through it is to 'get those feelings out' - what could be named one of children's 'psychological strategies' (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Houghton, forthcoming). This involves trying to get rid of *sadness* by crying and getting comfort (from teddies, pets as well as mums) e.g. "Staying with my mum makes me feel safe. A big hug from her makes me feel better." (child in Barron, 2007, p.16). It involves trying to get rid of *anger* by getting your anger out (e.g. punching teddies, shouting at dad) or/and managing your anger ("count to ten then count to ten again" girl in Houghton, forthcoming) – many children spoke of being angry, one boy saying it was "obvious" you'd have anger problems that you should get help with (Houghton, forthcoming). It involves trying to get rid of all your feelings by writing or talking about your feelings or doing other stuff that fills your mind and distracts you and is a way of escaping - like school, being with friends, doing sport, partying with friends, going to a park (Houghton, forthcoming; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Barron, 2007; Irwin *et al.*, 2002). Children say all are vital to coping and surviving.

The most common and important advice from children to other children is "don't bottle it up, talk to someone" (girl in Houghton, forthcoming), as "…keeping stuff to yourself is no good." so "Don't suffer in silence." (boys in *Listen Louder Film* and Houghton forthcoming) (SWA *Listen Louder Film*; Houghton, forthcoming; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Irwin *et al.*, 2002). It is unsurprising that the most common message to other children in order to help yourself is to talk to someone: "Try to tell someone you trust!" (girl, 12 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007; also reflecting key message of Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Houghton, forthcoming; Irwin *et al.*, 2002; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000) even when many children acknowledge it's hard to trust again (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Barron, 2007; Houghton, 2008; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). This appeal for children to talk to someone is often coupled with the other key need – to be safe:

> "*I think feeling safe is being able to be relaxed at all times. You wouldn't have things running through your mind like am I moving soon or should I expect to be treated aggressively today. Also I would feel safe if there is somebody for me to talk to if I have a concern about something.*" (Marcus, 17, in Barron, 2007, p.16)

Many children want to give other children positive messages (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008; Houghton, forthcoming). In Scotland's *Listen Louder* research and film a group of 44 children chose to direct their film at other children (and not adults as expected). The main themes were that you need to talk to someone, it is possible to get help and to be safe, "You can get through it" (girl in *Listen Louder Film*, Scottish Women's Aid). Children felt it was vital to reassure *and inform* children about the help that is out there, which is reflected in other key studies also:

- *"…just keep remembering that there are people out there that are like going to help you..."* (girl, 13, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.50)
- *"I got help and now I am happy"* (girl in *Listen Louder Film* and Houghton, forthcoming)
- *"Life's not been any more difficult and I'm quite happy that I blurted it out 'cos otherwise I'd probably be depressed all the time"* (girl in *Listen Louder Film* and Houghton, forthcoming)
- *"Sometimes it's better to talk to someone your own age, but it's also better if you can talk to an adult as well"* (girl, 13, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.51)

Children involved in Women's Aid felt it was very important that children knew what Women's Aid was. Unsolicited, children felt it very important that other children were reassured that they could be safe, wouldn't be found and the address of refuges was confidential:

- "*if you've been hurt or sexually abused call Women's Aid no 1 can find you*" (Hamida in Barron, 2007, p.16)
- "*it's OK bein in a refuge cause u can make a lot of new mates nd u can feel really safe when yr in here*" (Waheed in Barron, 2007, p.16)

Children in the Listen Louder film (Scottish Women's Aid, 2004; Houghton, forthcoming) also wanted other children to know about their positive experiences of Women's Aid - they would have fun, meet others their own age that have been through it, that seeing someone else going through it helps you get through it and be strong:

- *"The Women's Aid is not just for women it's for children too, and young people"* (boy)
- *"It was good 'cos they helped us all.*"(girl)
- *"..took me millions of places. It makes you look on the bright side of everything, it's nice to know that you've got someone there that you can talk to and they won't judge you in any way possible."* (girl)

Children in a number of studies encouraged others to talk to someone and start to get through it and get over it, saying that there was light at the end of the tunnel:

- *“When you do tell somebody, it feels good; you feel better because somebody else knows what you’ve gone through.”* (girl, 13 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.50)
- *“You do get happier and if you just tell someone that’s what will happen.”* (girl in *Listen Louder Film*, Houghton, forthcoming)
- *“Try and get over it as much as you can, and just try to stop thinking about it.”* (Ray, aged 10, in McGee, 2000, p.105)
- *“Be strong and you’ll get through it…There are people out there who can help you...”* (girl, 13, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.53)
- *“To all those going through domestic violence you can come through it for the better.”* (Jessica, 15, in Barron, 2007, p.14)

We know that getting away from the violence and being safe is key to children, but although children tell other children to temporarily get away (e.g. hiding, going to someone else’s house, escaping activities), what is key in their messages is to get *others* (adults) to get the abuse to stop and get away from the abuse. They also feel it important to let others (children and adults) know how getting away will make them feel better and happier: “I feel better now ‘cos there’s no violence or anything in the house anymore” (boy 15, in film and Houghton, forthcoming). It is important for the non abusing members of the family to “support each other” (girl 12 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.51) and also, crucially, important (and difficult) to talk to mum:

> *“If your mum does not want to move or is scared, speak to her and let her know how you’re feeling and how affected you are by the violence”* (anonymous in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.53)

Children are able and want to talk and to be informed about what is going on; they do not want to be excluded from decision making (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Irwin, 2006; Stafford *et al.*, 2007) and want to make plans to leave.

One piece of advice to a child - “Don’t be like that when you’re older” (mixed race 13 year old child in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.228) - reflects what the authors call the ‘spectre’ of the ‘cycle of violence’/intergenerational transmission theory - an extremely flawed and incorrect theory (see Chapter Five) – but a real fear for a few children and some mothers, and even more pupils and agencies (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Baker, 2005; Bagshaw and Chung, 2001):

> *“It just gets me so muddled up. I’m frightened I’ll be like it when I grow up. I know what she’s going through and I want to help her.*” (8 year old mixed race boy in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p. 96)

Though the majority of children did not speak about this, just as the majority did not see it as their fault, it’s important that children hear key messages to allay such fears– that the majority of child survivors will not grow up be violent, that it’s OK to be angry and get help with that anger, that it’s not your fault, that it’s not OK to be violent. What’s even more important is that the public education that young people advocate for (Bagshaw and Chung, 2001; Houghton, 2008),

support for mothers and training of agencies challenges this theory so children do not hear this from others. What is more, children's achievements, advocacy against violence and violence free lives as they grow up stand testimony to the fact that children who have experienced domestic abuse often become the strongest advocates against violence (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000; Houghton, 2008; Barron, 2007). Perhaps a longitudinal study from children/young people's perspectives could study longer term effects from the viewpoint of young people and explore the complexity in relation to the effects of domestic abuse and other factors on their lives.

Mullender *et al.*'s (2002) summary of children's 'outward looking' strategies in their research also in effect summarises other findings (Stafford *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Houghton, forthcoming; and to some extent Barron, 2007): "talking to someone, having a haven to go to, finding a safe private space, seeking help and getting adults to take responsibility, supporting mothers and siblings, being active and involved in making decisions" (see pp.126-129). Stafford *et al.* (2007) argue that agencies must pull in the same direction as children's *own* strategies and ways of coping.

Children's perspectives on their mums helping them

Children recognise their mothers as almost always their main source of support, and, for some, their only source of support (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Irwin *et al.*, 2002):

> *"My mum has helped me the most. No one else really talked about it very much apart from my mum. I can't really think of anyone else who has helped me apart from my mum. All the help was from my mum, she explained everything."* (13 year old South Asian boy in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.211)

Their main criticism is that mums don't talk to them about it, and mums need to get away (with them). Children know it's hard to talk - they also often choose not to talk about it to protect mum (Houghton, 2008), just as their mothers feel they will protect their child by not talking. Whilst they are still living with domestic abuse it seems that in most families mothers and children don't really talk about it, most children are too scared (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002), and in families where they do talk it is mainly children that initiate conversations about what's happening (McGee, 2000). A group discussion in Mullender *et al.* (2002) succinctly summarises the literature on children's advice to mums:

> *"Go to the police. Don't put up with it.*
> *It won't get any better, even though you think it will.*
> *Get out as soon as you can*
> *Don't wait*
> *Go to a refuge. They'll help you there*
> *Try and make a new life- you can do it*
> *Don't see him again*
> *Don't go back to him*
> *Try and be strong*
> *If you have a relationship, have your own house because you can be safe then*

> *Talk to us more about it."* (Children in group interview, p. 239)

Children's insights and insider knowledge, though difficult, are important for women to hear. Most mums do not know what their child has witnessed or the full extent of their awareness of the abuse (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002), nor that they need to talk and know what is going on, and they want to leave - "leave earlier" was a message that came up again and again. Children knew some hard things needed to be done – like moving house: "it's a horrible thing but you dae it to get away from it" (girl, 13 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.52) – but their main message is to get them away from the abuse, to be safe, to talk:

> *"Grown ups think they should hide it and shouldn't tell us, but we want to know. We want to be involved and we want our mums to talk with us about what they are going to do – we could help make decisions."* (group interview in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p. 129)

That many children can begin to talk about and get over things once they are safe is another important message for mothers (for example, bedwetting and anxiety symptoms can disappear rapidly) (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Children will need to hear from their mother's point of view to understand and perhaps to help them not be angry or blame mum for stuff and vitally to move on - frequently they are only able to talk to mum about the abuse they have suffered themselves once they have left (McGee, 2000; Scottish Women's Aid, 1995). It could be important for mothers to hear that some children feel that their relationships are stronger for getting through it, "I am proud of how we mended the hole in our family unit," (child in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.35) and that the child recognises how hard it is to get away because they have shared that experience, "I was proud of my mum for getting away from him" (girl, 13 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.35). Mothers are often the child's non-violent and strong role model (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Peled, 1998). Some children also spoke about their mum helping them to get other help (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Houghton, 2008; Houghton, forthcoming) because children need someone else to talk to as well. This can be because they don't want to keep on upsetting their mum (Houghton, 2008), or there's new stuff like contact coming up (McGee, 2000), or just because children get over it in their own time, their own pace. That children love hearing mums laugh again, and seeing them smile again, is surely a very strong message for mums that their children want them to be safe and happy (Scottish Women's Aid, 1997 and 1999; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002).

Children's perspectives on siblings helping each other

Children mainly speak of siblings in the context of the incidents of domestic abuse – being together or protecting each other or one intervening the other watching – and also of crying, talking, being together (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). For many children, their brother or sister must be the only person who knows what they have experienced, and knows how they feel, though some siblings (half in Mullender *et al.*, 2002) don't talk about it whilst it's going on. Children's accounts depict the perpetrators deliberately treating children differently at times (through different forms of abuse, favouritism or scapegoating, treating biological and non-biological children differently) and often try to isolate children from even this source of support

(McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Unfortunately, almost every study includes a few children who have siblings they are separated from, either who have stayed with the father or are in care (Stalford *et al.*, 2003; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, forthcoming). However, most often, children's accounts show siblings going to great lengths to protect each other and be together, helping each other through, "Yeah me and my sister, we used to lay awake at night talking about it all the time" (Marilyn, aged 15 in McGee, 2000, p.203), cuddling, talking, staying in the same room or bed (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002) "You stick together. We did…We're a team! We help each other" (9 year old white boy with a younger brother and sister in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.211). Of course children also may try to protect each other by *not* talking, perhaps hoping the brother/sister doesn't realise what's going on because they're younger or disabled, but they do. For example, a girls with Downs Syndrome recounts vividly her experience of domestic abuse and the effects whereas her sister believed she didn't understand (Mullender *et al.*, 2002). For a minority they may reach for sibling support but the other child cannot give it at that time:

> *"I went to talk to her [my older sister] about it. She said no. And I said why and she said because it's too sad."* (Paul, aged 6, in McGee, 2000, p.204)

For many children, their siblings are their greatest support and when they're safe perhaps siblings could be encouraged to be an even greater support for each other (Mullender *et al.*, 2002).

Children's perspectives on wider family support

The wider family, particularly grandparents, and then aunts and uncles, could also be a crucial form of help to children. For some children their relatives is their 'bolt hole' during their abuse (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002), and when escaping abuse - lots of children stay with relatives when they leave if they don't go to a refuge (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008):

> *"My nan's house was my safe house. That was the one place I could go and I knew, 'cause I was with my uncles and aunties, I knew that I was safe there. He couldn't trouble me there… I don't know why, I just classed that as my safe house*." (Mona, aged 17, in McGee, 2000, p.203)

Children hoped adults in their family most of all would help them get away and stop the abuse (McGee, 2000) or at least mediate and talk to their parents. Relatives were an important source of support and help, *if* children could talk to them about it, and *if* children got an appropriate response (i.e. were believed, taken seriously, were not shouted at for saying 'such a thing'), though some children were scared their family would get hurt (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000). South Asian children's expectations from the family may be higher, with children expecting both families to intervene and stop the abuse; some children spoke of, for example, uncles helping, whilst others spoke about being ostracised and feeling isolated in the community.

> *"Mum's family. They could have supported us more and told Mum, 'If you break up with him we will look after you.' But, this didn't happen. One uncle really helped and looked after us. They were there for her and for us. We would get love and attention – no violence."* (14 year old South Asian boy in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.136)

Losing previous positive contact with wider family is a significant loss for all children, and one to be nurtured if at all safe. It must be noted that for some black and minority ethnic children in particular they are losing the place wherein they are most helped in developing a positive sense of self, and in dealing with racism (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Imam with Akhtar, 2005). The fear of racism from others and from agencies when escaping from domestic abuse would accentuate this loss (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Thiara and Breslin, 2006; Imam with Akhtar, 2005). Family can therefore be "both a source of support and abuse for children from ethnic minorities. Positive family contact can help children cope but its absence leads to greater isolation" (Thiara and Breslin, 2006, p.32). A positive, believing response to *all* children from their wider family can be vital to their safety and in helping them to cope and move on.

Children's perspectives of help from friends

> *"I feel more happier when I talk about it, than keeping it inside. It helps because they know what I've been through and they know what me mum's been through and it helps a lot."* (Kara, age 10, talking about her friends in McGee, 2000, p.204)

For children, friends can be their best support and often a different support than adults. McGee (2000) suggests that children are clear that their friends can meet their emotional needs, it is for the adults to sort out the problem and give practical help. However, many children are scared to talk to their friends, either as part of their overwhelming fear of their father and what he will do if he finds out they have been talking (to the child, friend, mother), or very commonly because they are afraid of their friends reactions - "I just get, like, embarrassed … in case they judge me." (Girl, 13 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.39) – in particular that they will be labelled or judged (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008; McGee, 2000). The other major concern was that friends wouldn't keep it confidential: "Just like trying to tell somebody you think you can trust – who willnae go about spreading it. Talk to them" (Girl, 13 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.50). Children's advice to friends in Houghton (forthcoming) focussed on being a good friend - listening, helping you to get help but of equal importance was helping you to 'get your mind off it', going to a park, a party, having good times and making good memories, making you laugh and smile (also see Irwin *et al.*, 2002).

Some had friends who had been through it and that helped (McGee, 2000; Houghton, 2008; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000), though Irwin *et al.* (2002) warns that for some children (perhaps who only speak to a friend) this may 'normalise' it. Others lost friends because of their father's actions including abuse, threats or fear of repercussions (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002), or weren't able to see them because of refuge rules (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Stalford *et al.*, 2003). In situations where there were opportunities to build new friendships with others who had been through it - such as in refuges or groups for children affected by domestic abuse - this helped enormously (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Barron, 2007; Houghton, 2008). Stafford *et al.* (2007) talk of the new and quickly formed bonds of children in refuge: "I was more closer to the ones here because they knew more about me" (girl, 14 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.43; also reflected by children in Barron, 2007). For many children it is a relief that they have the experience of domestic abuse in common therefore there is no stigma attached, and they no longer feel alone. Marilyn, aged 15, explains this fully: "It was good because then you knew

what they were going through and they knew what you were going through…". She explained how they'd sit together draw and talk about what they'd been through, she spoke about being angry and shouting for it to stop and how she could talk about it with the other children:

> *"…then I could talk about it with all the other kids and they would say how they were angry and how they were feeling, I didn't feel out of place. Because when there is no one to talk it makes you feel like I'm the only one. But when I started talking to them I knew there was more, and I just wanted to help my mum more."* (Marilyn, aged 15, in McGee, 2000, p.166)

Children, particularly those who went to refuges, spoke of a reality wherein "I gained friends and I lost friends" (Mandi in Barron, 2007, p.17). Considering the importance of friends to children it is vital that helping adults do their best to help children maintain their friends, new and old, throughout their journey (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Barron, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, forthcoming).

Children's views on the lack of professional help and the help that is needed

As children in the main do not trust in agencies to respond appropriately (Irwin *et al.*, 2006; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Houghton, 2008; Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007), it seems appropriate to review the literature in terms of what adults need to hear from children in order to improve their response. Although different professions are spoken about in some of the key studies, there is a lack of in-depth study of each agency's (or the multi-agency) response from a child's standpoint. There are, however, clear common messages from children that relate to *all* professionals that work with children (and therefore children affected by domestic abuse) or will come into contact with children through domestic abuse incidents/follow up. What is more some children do not differentiate between agencies (Mullender *et al.*, 2002), or don't care who it is as long as they're good (Houghton, 2008). The exceptions in terms of who has helped - mainly children's support workers in Women's Aid and a few individual shining lights in each profession - provide good practice examples of what does help. Scotland's *Making A Difference…* report provides a group of young people's own priorities, which are drawn from as they reflect key findings of the literature review, and, after all,

> *"We've had the support. We've seen what's right and what's wrong, so we would have the best perception of how to improve it."* (SC, male, aged 20, in Houghton, 2008, p.29)

Being safe

The challenge for professionals is to rival the domestically violent father's power over children and women's lives, and to tackle his behaviour (see Chapter Four: Protection). This is extremely relevant to children's overwhelming need to be safe and, for many, a prerequisite to speaking out and getting support. The knowledge they have shared is mainly about fear of their father, fear of contact and further abuse -"It's better for my dad not to know where we live, to keep us safety" (boy in *Listen Louder Film* and in Houghton, forthcoming) - and fear of repercussions if they tell

anyone (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Children can't be and feel safe without moving (very few talk of staying at home) and without the abuser stopping hurting them and their mum. One consultation which asked children about staying in their own house whilst excluding the abuser found that whilst most children would like to stay, they were all sceptical that they could be safe there (Smith *et al.*, 2008). Children most often mention being safe when speaking about being in a refuge (where security measures are very important to them, see Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003), where they can't be found (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Barron, 2007):

> *"… if you went somewhere else it's easy to find you, it's easier for a person to find you. I felt safer here…if somebody came they couldn't get in, but if it was other places then they'd knock the door down"* (14 year old girl in Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003, p.56)

Very, very, few children speak about feeling safe because the perpetrator has been stopped or because of protective measures – very few children feel protected (especially in their own home). Although it's possible to elicit the views of some children on the police or/and social worker response, and particular concerns about contact, there is very little on children's perspectives of court experience (a noticeable gap in relation to domestic abuse court evaluations), perpetrator programmes, high risk strategies (such as MARAC – Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences), Children's Hearings and protective orders/measures.

We do know that children want the abuse to stop and to stop being afraid of their father (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Barron, 2007; Morrison, forthcoming; Smith *et al.*, 2008). Some children talked about the police not stopping abuse or letting another incident happen by not doing anything the first time, or worse being useless, or that calling them meant a worse attack when they'd gone (McGee, 2000; Barron, 2007; Houghton, 2008; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). What children wanted was for them to 'do' something:

> *"you're here to protect people, what are you doing just stood there saying 'Oh we can't do this and we can't do that'. So I thought, well you can't do anything."* (Hannah aged 15 in McGee, 2000, p.140)

The best way of doing 'something' was to arrest him and take him away, and give support and help to mums and children – remembering to talk with children and explain what's happening (McGee, 2000; Houghton, 2008; Barron, 2007).

> *"I think the reason that they did it so well was because they weren't taken aback by the fact that "Oh no there's domestic abuse kind of thing going on here". They just treated as an assault, and the way an assault should be treated, and I think that's why it worked so well - just that he's, there's an assault happened here, what you would normally do was remove that person from the situation, away from the situation, that's why it worked so well."* (L, female, aged 16, in Houghton, 2008, p.20)

In relation to courts by far the concern most expressed by children was in relation to safe contact, having to go to court and not being listened to about contact decisions and therefore being at risk (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Barron, 2007). There were no longitudinal studies

tracking the case and involvement from a child's perspective, although literature on mother's perceptions of harm (see Radford, Sayer and AMICA, 1999; Hester and Radford, 1996) or refuge staff's perspectives (see Saunders with Barron, 2003) or child death reviews (see Saunders, 2004), alongside children's web messages to the *Kidspeak* e-democracy consultation (Barron, 2007), show that children's fears in relation to future contact often become realised.

Some children felt that involving the authorities made things worse (Barron, 2007; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000) and most were sceptical about help or stopping the abuser (Houghton, 2008; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Smith *et al.*, 2008). Some children felt let down when 'protective' court orders didn't work - "My father received a court order that he wasn't allowed near us. He came back the next day anyway" (S, male, 20, in Houghton, 2008, p.20; also children in Barron, 2007) - or he went to court and was unpunished (McGee, 2000; Barron, 2007), or when they told police and social work and the cases didn't go to court (McGee, 2000). This was most apparent in the children who had suffered sexual abuse (McGee, 2000), perhaps reflecting the lack of exploration of the involvement of children in court issues relating to domestic abuse (for example, children were not part of Glasgow's specialist domestic abuse court evaluation). A small group of Australian children said they did not feel free of the abuse, even if separated from the abuser, until the court case was over, and that they needed support throughout this long process (Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Although there is scant exploration of court, legal and child protection issues from a child's perspective to date, the feeling that abusers will 'get away with it' and the injustice of it all was felt by some children throughout the literature - action to stop him and keep him away was imperative to children (Alexander *et al.*, 2004; Houghton, 2008 and forthcoming; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Morrison, forthcoming).

Finding someone to trust, or someone to trust finding them

Finding someone to trust was of immense importance to children across the studies (Houghton, 2008; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Barron, 2007; Irwin *et al.*, 2006; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). One boy (17) described this as " a 1-2-1 person who could talk to you, where you can trust on both sides… they trust you and you trust them" (Houghton, 2008, p.9). It was especially difficult to trust someone when a trusted adult – their dad/father figure – had already hurt them and frightened them, also children may have tried to talk and not got the response they wanted from others (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, 2008; Barron, 2007; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). This can be compounded if the child has also suffered sexual abuse (McGee, 2000). This trust usually would take a while to build up and children don't necessarily want, or feel able, to speak about the domestic abuse at first, and until that person had earned their trust:

> *"What I had from Women's Aid was like talking to a friend. It was very one-to-one but you didn't have to talk about anything, any of your difficulties... as it went on you'd trust the person more and more".* (SC, male, 20 in Houghton, 2008, p.8)

A key question for children is how do they know *who* they can trust, and for adults how can we let children know that they can talk to us and we will listen? Children want to be listened to, taken seriously, believed (Barron, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000; Irwin *et al.*, 2002) but it is often potential adult helpers that are hidden in children's eyes:

"Sometimes kids will open up if they trust someone. But if noone's talking to them and no one's saying that they're here for you, they're not going to say anything. No-one told me that they would listen. I'm sure some of the teachers knew what was going on. They'd have to, they'd be stupid not to. They kind of didn't want to know about it. It's easier to pretend something's not happening. If a kid comes up and says they're being hurt then they've got to do something." (Tara, 18 in Irwin *et al.*, 2002, p.123)

Irwin *et al.*'s (2002) study of 17 Australian children's perspectives (aged 8-18) reminds us that children feel that practitioners, especially education staff, need to respond to *cues* that children and young people give (also in Houghton, 2008). It is trusted adults that need to find the children, otherwise some children won't get any help:

"Most kids who are being bashed have a very low self confidence, esteem and all that so they will not go looking for help. They'll wait for it to come to them which it never will." (Ben, 15 in Irwin *et al.*, 2002, p.123)

Confidentiality

Stafford *et al.* (2007) write that children who had moved home due to domestic abuse are "notably more sensitive about confidentiality than young interviewees in other studies" (p.38): confidentiality *is* of paramount importance in children's view (Smith *et al.*, 2008; Houghton, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). These are children who have had to keep a secret, even within the family, are frightened of telling about domestic abuse in case of repercussions, are scared of the father finding them or hurting their mum and themselves, are frightened of the person they tell being hurt (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Confidentiality can be particularly important for children in ethnic minority communities (Mullender *et al.*, 2002) or children in close rural communities (Stalford *et al.*, 2003). It is marked in children's accounts that they usually couple someone to talk to with someone who will keep your confidence - "you can talk to [children's worker] and she willnae go about telling everybody and that" (girl, 13, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.46). It seems that if handled sensitively *with* the child, at their pace, that *some* children can understand that others may need to get involved to help and keep them safe – here young people summarise good practice:

"M: They'd understand it all, with all the responsibilities and that, they'd keep it all confidential and if they think it's really serious they would speak to you about it, and see if you wanted to speak to someone about it or if you wanted them to do it on your behalf.

J: That's a really good thing to have isn't it.

J: I think that it's good 'cos the child might not know how far it's sort of dangerous for them, they may not have, like, they may not know what to do, so if it's really serious the worker will know what to do – ask them to tell someone or tell them themselves."
(M, male, aged 17, J, female, aged 15, in Houghton, 2008, p.9)

Stigma and shame

It is not only fear of the perpetrator that prevents children from talking; the majority of the children fear being judged, labelled, branded by people (and have examples of that happening with professionals and peers), they feel embarrassed, humiliated, ashamed (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, 2008), and some feel that it is private and their business (McGee, 2000):

> *"Now children and young people don't always have to identify themselves, or don't want to identify themselves, as experiencing domestic abuse and that's something where the outreach workers greatly help, they keep everything confidential, everything you say to them it's just to a friend, you trust them - that's what I'm trying to say it's really important... there's a great stigma attached to people experiencing domestic abuse, or who have lost their home, or who are in a refuge, and that extra trust really makes a difference."* (SC, male, aged 20, in Houghton, 2008, p.12)

For black and minority ethnic children these fears can be accentuated by the fear of racism and insensitive responses from anyone they talk to, and for some children cultural beliefs can add to the pressure and silencing effect. South Asian children in Mullender *et al.* (2002) highlight the concepts of *izzat* (honour, reputation) and *badnamni* (get a bad name) and their fear of bringing shame, or being seen to bring shame, on the family:

> *"If you speak to adults make sure they understand about your family and religion and they don't take things the wrong way. Like, sometimes, goray [white people] will not know about izzat and shame and they can make you do things that bring shame on the family. You are left without any help or support from the community, if they feel you have gone against the religion. I don't say it is always right, but sometimes we have to sort things out in our own way – white people can never really do things in the same way if they don't understand."* (16 year old South Asian girl in Mullender *et al.*, p.138)

Knowledge, understanding and ability

Many children felt that quite simply adults did not *know* about domestic abuse and how it affects children, or how to deal with domestic abuse. The need to address the lack of professional training on domestic abuse (in relation to Scotland see Hurley *et al.*, 2007; *Domestic Abuse: A National Training Strategy*, Scottish Executive, 2004) is self-evident and urgent to children affected by domestic abuse. Comments such as "make sure they know how domestic abuse affects children" (girl, 15, in Houghton, 2008, p.8), "more like they know what it's like to deal with domestic abuse" (boy, 17, in Houghton, 2008, p.8), reflect children's views across the studies relating to practitioners lack of understanding about what it's like to live with domestic abuse (see Irwin *et al.*, 2002; Irwin *et al.*, 2006; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Children had very little faith in professionals' ability to help them particularly those they were in regular contact with – teachers, and for some other children their social workers (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Irwin *et al.*, 2002; Irwin *et al.*, 2006; Houghton, 2008; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Young people speaking to Scottish Ministers agreed with Ministers that systematic training for teachers was really important. They felt that if

all agencies (such as the Children's Panel) didn't get training then they would 'miss' domestic abuse, as it's not easy to talk about, and importantly the adults would not have the skills to pick up what children were going through.

> *"M: I've always said that if you're gonna go into work like that, it's not just about going to uni or college or anything, its actually having some knowledge about the whole thing, such as the social worker me dad's got she doesn't really understand it all, so if you're going to go into it make sure you understand.*
> *J: So that they're sensitive to it, not expecting too much of children to speak about it."* (M, male, aged 17, J, female, aged 15 in Houghton, 2008, p.11)

Fear of statutory agencies and being taken into care

Children are afraid of being taken into care if they tell, which can echo their mothers fears and threats from their father (Alexander *et al.*, 2003; Barron, 2007; Stafford *et al.*, 2007). Many children see telling a professional (especially social work but any statutory agency it seems) as risking being taken into care:

> *"It's like if social workers get involved, and then me, my brothers, would get taken off my mum and she'd be all on her 'ain, so you cannae speak to, like teachers about it.*" (Girl, 13 in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.48)

Young people across studies feared telling would make things worse. Young people in Australia (Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000) said that children knew that professionals, particularly teachers, were now required by law to notify the authorities, and were now less likely to tell:

> *"With mandatory notifiers sometimes this makes the situation worse. You need to trust this person not to tell, unless it won't make things worse …You need to be in control of who else gets told."* (Young person in focus group, p.84)

Reassuring children and their mothers that the optimum outcome is for them to be safe and together, and that professionals will be allies of the non-abusing members of the family, is a shared challenge for all professionals. Despite this, some children do experience the care system as a result of domestic abuse; their views on this have not been researched and there is no data on numbers of families for whom this happens.

Accessing support and ways of communicating

To access support a child has to be able to talk about the domestic abuse, and some children tell us how difficult it is to find the right language to talk about it – for example one child in McGee (2000) can see that 'rowing' doesn't quite describe it but struggles with what does; another child doesn't understand the words that others including mums are using. Children aged 8-13 in Irwin *et al.*'s study (2002) are more likely to name domestic abuse as 'fighting' (even when it's extreme abuse), a 'normal' part of family life, whilst wanting the fighting to stop; whereas young people (13-18) can articulate what is happening and who is responsible more easily, are more

likely to talk to people outside the family, and want to escape. McGee (2000) in particular writes about children not having the language skills to talk of domestic abuse: this could translate as adults not finding the words to help children, and educators not giving a language.

Many children do not know what help is out there (McGee, 2000; Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2008), and this needs addressing in a way that uses their own channels of communication, recognising these are limited in rural areas (Stalford *et al.*, 2003). It must also allow children not to identify themselves. One of the young people advising Ministers in Scotland summarises this issue succinctly:

> *"It's about getting it out, let people know that the help is there, and it can be accessed through schools and other organisations. Not a lot of children and young people that go through domestic abuse know where the help is and how to access it, and you need to let them know. Some that don't go through domestic abuse but know someone that is going through it might want to seek help so that they could help their friend so therefore they could get as much information as possible and so they could pass it on*." (M, male,17 in Houghton, 2008, pp.20-21)

The help that *is* out there needs to be where children go and want to be, and also where children cannot be identified (Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2008). It needs to be easy to contact them "like you know who they are and you know how you would get in contact with them" (M, female, aged 19 in Houghton, 2008, p.11). This young person was particularly worried about help for children who had never been in refuge, the largest gap in specialist support across the UK. The flexible support and counselling that many children rate highly – at homes, school, outreach – is still out of reach for many children and a particular need in rural areas (Stalford *et al.*, 2003). The majority of children affected by domestic abuse do not come to refuges which is why outreach children's support workers ('outreach' support in Scotland is for children who have not been to refuge) for children in the community recently became a priority development in Scotland, where each Women's Aid group now has one outreach children's worker to begin to develop the outreach service, as well as two refuge/resettlement key workers (evaluation of this children's service is due 2008).

Campaigns and the advertising of support need careful consideration too, including: maintaining anonymity - from children being able to subtly memorise details of support agencies to when children are accessing help (Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2008); the 'message' given – for example the young advisors to Ministers complained that campaigns shouldn't be dark but should be associating ending abuse and getting help (Houghton, 2008); using a language that children understand *and can use*. Children recommended to Ministers the development of child-friendly advertising in places where children go (virtual and real) and crucially giving children as many different ways of communicating as possible by providing different types of support. This included web information accompanied by web based support – 1:1 support by email especially, helplines and text lines, all preferably set up with or by young people (Houghton, 2008). It's important to note the 'digital divide' in access to the internet for less affluent families (see *Growing Up in Scotland*, Scottish Government, 2008), and children's note of caution in relation to the need for free, confidential access to telephones and the internet for this to work (Smith *et al.*, 2008).

There is little evaluation of web-based and helpline support from the perspective of children affected by domestic abuse. However, children's perspectives in the evaluation of NSPCC's There4Me website (Waldman and Storey, 2004) which is for any young person with a worry (providing 1:1 synchronous live 'chat' with an adviser, private inbox for emails to and from an adviser, message board, agony aunt), seems to tackle many of the 'difficulties' that children experiencing domestic abuse raise in the literature. Children reveal that it provides: a way of communicating hard stuff without having to speak; anonymity and complete confidentiality; named 1:1 counsellors for live chat and/or private email and support and also message boards for peer support (Waldman and Storey, 2004). Interestingly for some this was the first step in speaking to an adult - talking through how to speak about stuff and who to talk to was key - and also maybe a step to speaking to the associated ChildLine. A few of the children in some of the domestic abuse studies used ChildLine (Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Some children did not feel ChildLine was for them, either because they weren't 'abused' or because it was their whole family being abused – mum needed help too, nor was Scotland's Domestic Abuse Helpline for them as it was for adults (Houghton 2008, Houghton forthcoming). In relation to a helpline there was some reticence in speaking to strangers (Smith *et al.*, 2008; Houghton, 2008). A strong opinion was that any such central support should link children to local support including face-to-face support and also being able to email or phone a *named* worker (Smith *et al.*, 2008; Houghton, 2008). There has been little robust investigation into these options but such ideas do correspond with all the literature in agreeing that a named trusted support worker is seen as most help to children, after the more 'informal' support of friends and family (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Houghton, 2008; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Barron, 2007; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000).

One-to-one support: a specialist support worker

> *"Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP): You spoke about feeling more confident once you got to know your child support worker. How did you feel before your support worker came into your life?*
> *'Mags'(age 14): I did not know what to do. I had no-one to talk to. All my feelings just crammed up inside me, and sometimes they got the better of me. I do not know what I would do if I did not have a support worker."*
> (Scottish Parliament Public Petition Committee 2002, col 2433)

Children and young people in Scottish Women's Aid's *Listen Louder Campaign* (2002-4, see Houghton, 2006 for an overview) ensured that children's need for support workers was recognised by the Scottish Parliament. It resulted in a gradual increase of Women's Aid support from the beginning of their campaign, to the current minimum standard of three full-time children's support workers in each of the local Women's Aid groups in Scotland (covering every local authority area). Young people have now asked Ministers for an increase in outreach support to match population and need (Houghton, 2008; reflecting Stafford's findings in the mapping of services, 2003). There are still many children without access to specialist support including counselling, with particular gaps in 'in depth' mental health support (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000).

For those that have received support there are many examples of what this trusted adult should be, children speak consistently highly of support received from Women's Aid children's support workers, and there are further good practice examples relating to individuals in other professions such as youth work, social work and teaching (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Houghton, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Irwin *et al.*, 2006). It cannot be underestimated that children need someone other than their family to speak to, indeed they need to speak *about* their mum/family (Houghton, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000) and may need help in speaking with their mum (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Houghton, 2008; Stalford *et al.*, 2003). One child in Stafford *et al.* (2007) said that getting a support worker was a matter of life or death, another that it was a "bit late" to start helping someone when she'd been ignored when disclosing abuse and since turned to crime, prostitution, drugs, "I was off the rockers by then." (16 year old female in Irwin *et al.*, 2002, p.117). Many children wished such support had been available earlier (Houghton, 2008; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Irwin *et al.*, 2002):

> *"I always felt like I wanted somebody to speak to because I was feeling like I was just piling and piling it all on myself …I always felt that I wanted somebody to speak to, to help me unload some of the things off myself. I couldn't really talk to my mum about things, no matter how close we were, because it was her that I was trying to protect, it was all to do wi' her that I was wanting to talk to somebody about."* (L, female, aged 16, in Houghton, 2008, p.10)

What children appreciate is getting to know someone, crucially *one named* person, in a relaxed atmosphere, is that "you're not sitting there talking to someone about what's going on at home, you're relaxed, in a relaxed atmosphere " (L, female, aged 16, in Houghton, 2008, p.42), where children set the pace and content. Innovative ways of communicating are a help, including computer work, talking about whatever's important to the child or about 'anything but', going out, eating out, drawing, writing (Houghton, 2008; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). McGee writes that the timing and how children *see* the service is crucial, and *where* it is is also important (McGee, 2000; also reflecting in Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2008). In relation to timing, children in a number of studies wanted support at times they needed it with more flexibility in terms of support within school-time, after school, evenings and weekends (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000). In relation to place it should be in places where children already go, especially school and also youth and leisure areas (Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2008) and also should not be merely associated with the place you live, e.g. refuge, but follow you through all the changes (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007). In relation to how children *see* the support this seemed especially important in two ways: i) the reason *why* children were accessing or referred for support, and ii) where it is and what type of support it is, especially when it's psychological help (Houghton, 2008 and forthcoming; McGee, 2000; Stalford *et al.*, 2003).

Stalford *et al.* (2003) write about children being seen as 'problem children' instead of 'children with problems' and children speak about having or being told they need help/punishment because of behaviour problems (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002) rather than the domestic abuse they have suffered:

> *"MG: Counselling is kinda branding that there's something wrong with you, but there's no nothing wrong with you, you've just been through an ordeal.*
> *SC: Yeah, it's everything else that's wrong, but you…*
> *MG: It's like, "Tell me what's wrong with you and I will help" – NO!…*
> *MG: OK, you do suffer domestic abuse but you're not like branded, like you "This is what happened to you – you need medication" or whatever."* (MG, female, 19 and SC, male, 20, in Houghton, 2008, p.11)

For these children going for mental health 'counselling' felt like they were being branded, just as a couple of children in McGee didn't want to go in because it was a 'psychiatric' service. However, children did feel that a support worker needed to know "…how it affects kids psychologically." (J, female, 15, in Houghton, 2008, p.11) and that consequences of not having support for children's mental health were stark:

> *"Before I go on about support workers, I'm going to put down that everybody needs one, well not everyone but somebody that needs one, they need support workers to go on about issues such as everyone gets through it differently, some people self harm i.e. myself, some people get through it without even using it as an excuse, some people don't get through it at all and live in their adulthoods, some people don't get through it and don't get a chance to, because they take their life."* (M, male, 17, in Houghton, 2008, p.9)

There are positive reports of counselling: "I found that it does help, eh, because it's like me, it's making me like open up a little bit more and that" (girl, 13, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.46), "He's the only man I trust" (boy, aged 8, about his counsellor in McGee, p.172) (see McGee, 2000; Irwin *et al.*, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007 for examples). There are a few strong examples of social workers giving good support through listening and taking children's views seriously, believing them, keeping them informed with regular contact and direct support, which contrasted with some negative views of children's involvement in 'child protection' procedures. For example, one child had twice weekly hour sessions with her social worker that really helped:

> *"We just talk about things… they really helped me, telling me what we had to do and what things were like and about feeling uncomfortable…and about domestic violence"* (S in Stalford *et al.*, 2003, p.65)

Women's Aid workers also of course use counselling and therapeutic techniques. It's how adults *brand* the support so as not to brand children that seems the important consideration here. Stalford *et al.* (2003) write that a multiagency response and advertising will decrease the stigma and increase access to domestic abuse 'support' workers (from whatever agency) for children.

A very important part of support offered by Women's Aid that all children rated very highly was activities, fun, sport, chill out time and space with their peers (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, forthcoming; Humphreys and Thiara, 2002). These were important ways of children feeling better mentally and physically both with others that have been through domestic abuse and with people their own age in their area, helping to build confidence, networks and self esteem (Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, forthcoming).

Groupwork with other children that have been through domestic abuse

> *"I think it'll be better than one-to-ones, 'cos then it's like, then I really know that it's not just me, d'you know what I mean? 'Cos, like, when other people say "I'm like this because this happened" and I'll go "Well that happened to me as well" or "I know where you're coming from". D'you know what I mean?"* (Girl, 14, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.43)

Children's accounts of being involved in groupwork are positive (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, forthcoming and 2008), although it must be said that some children will choose not to or are not ready: "depends on the person, I think, cos obviously not everybody, no many people want to go to a group and make it be identified" (girl, 19 in Houghton, 2008, p.12, also reflected in Smith *et al.*, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). On top of this, structured groupwork programmes often 'select' with many children deemed to benefit more from individual work, and children still living with the abuser excluded (Loosley, 2006; Mullender *et al.*, 2002).

The one UK evaluation report on a structured groupwork programme (based on the Canadian programme – Loosley, 2006), is based on a small sample and has limits, however it does share children's perspectives on the benefits. Debbonaire's (2007) summary is helpful (see pp21-22), and is slightly abbreviated here. Children said they liked: the fun aspects "it made me happy again" and making friends; the staff; being able to talk "to say things that might hurt my mum's feelings"; understanding more about what happened "it made me understand more" and dealing with anger "it helped me get my anger out" "helped me deal with my feelings towards my dad". Children said that they learnt: the nature of domestic abuse "that there are different sorts of abuse"; the fact that it is wrong and not their fault - "that what my dad was doing was wrong", "that it's not right to fight", "that it wasn't my fault"; being able to communicate better in general and their experiences in particular - "I learnt how to communicate better", "I learnt that it's OK to talk", "I learnt how to control my anger and see things from other people's point of view"; learning they weren't the only ones - "I learned I was not alone" and how to deal with their feelings "how to calm down when alarmed" "to be strong" "how to control my anger". This demonstrates a tool that is successful in tackling so many of the issues and barriers that children speak of in the literature that a Scottish pilot with a thorough evaluation including children's perspectives from beginning to end is an exciting prospect. Another interesting perspective to explore is children's views on concurrent programmes of support for mums and children that sometimes include elements of joint work (this could actually apply to groupwork or linked individual support), and the impact of this on children's relationships with their mum.

Young people in the *Making A Difference…* (Houghton, 2008) report agreed that there could be stages of support – including from individual to group, but also from a very structured programme to less formal. In the end one can imagine the support worker disappearing:

> *"An 'after support groupwork session' - it would take a number of individuals who have been experiencing support after domestic abuse and we'd meet together and just have a good time kinda like a club – but we'd be able to talk serious if we needed to and you ended up trusting this group of people too and that really helped, being able to go out and*

do extra curricula activities but having this group of trusting friends really helps you get on the right track after such a low point in your life." (SC, male, 20, in Houghton, 2008, p.14)

Home and school: places of safety and support?

The places that children talk about most are home/s and school, though it could be said that the street and community have not been fully explored with this group of children. Therefore the final section relating to professional help will relate some key points from children that are situated in the two key places where children feel that they should be safe and receive support (Houghton, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007). It could be said that homes (including refuges and rehousing) have been explored to some extent in Scotland and children's views have *begun* to be acted upon (see Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2006; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008). There has been particular progress in relation to children's recommendations for support workers but it must be said that children's strong views in relation to the poor quality of communal refuge buildings have had limited impact. Serious efforts to tackle the responsibility of schools for the welfare of these children has also been seriously lacking to date (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008; Stalford *et al.*, 2003): "school's, like, an important part of children's life so there should be support there" (girl aged 15 in Houghton, 2008, p.17). Two recommendations from young people to Scottish Ministers (Houghton, 2008) help frame this section

- "make moving house and refuge life better…it would make the situation a whole lot better if it can be done smoothly." (J, female, 15, p.41)
- "making more help available at school as well as outside school" (M, male, 17, p.17)

Making moving home smoother

The two major Scottish reports including children's perspectives on refuges and moving home make recommendations that would do just this if implemented in full (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007). There is little evidence in relation to children staying in their own home safely, though children in every study were sad to leave everything but the abuse behind and this option should be explored further through pilots and children's involvement in evaluation. It is worth striking a note of caution here that some children may not want to stay, we may not allay their fears even if the multi-agency effort manages to protect the family. One girl who did stay in her house for a while, after the abuser had left, describes how:

> *"I never got a good night's sleep until the night we moved out of that house. About a year later we had to sell the house. We couldn't leave until it was sold and every room had a bad memory. So I just sort of had no safe place."* (16 year old female in Irwin *et al.*, 2002, p.116)

All the literature reviewed would agree that children need "a home of their own to start their lives over" (J, female, aged 15, in Houghton, 2008), whether their own home free from the abuser or more commonly at present a new home. For some older young people it is important

to recognise that ultimately they may move out on their own: "the only viable option which they saw for living without violence was to leave the family home" (Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000, p.81, in relation to a focus group of 16-22 year old young people). Through this journey children need explanations and information about what is happening and where they are going (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Irwin *et al.*, 2002). Being excluded from decision-making, and not being informed, is a major criticism of professionals (and adults, including mums) involved in their journey (Irwin *et al.*, 2006; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; McGee, 2000). To address children's fears and trauma of their *first* move as described earlier (Stafford *et al.*, 2007), it seems doubly important that children are welcomed immediately (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003) to the refuge, or new house, and are informed about what's going on.

Children's problems with refuge provision are similar in every report. First to be tackled though must be children's preconceptions about refuges, that are a lot worse than reality, with children often being relieved when they get there (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). There seems to be no reason why all children shouldn't know the *style* of local refuges. The common problem children have is of sharing in the old style communal refuges - Scotland's 2003 (Fitzpatrick *et al.*) report recommended a new model and the phasing out of these refuges. Children in 2007 (Houghton, 2008 and forthcoming) were disappointed to hear that two thirds of refuges were still communal, despite "60 odd" children saying it should change previously:

> *S: "I believe that all refuges should be up to the same high standard such as the new refuge in Stirling. This refuge has your own apartment in it and your own shower, kitchen, etc. and you have separate rooms for children and for young people 'cos they'll have different interests. Other refuges don't have such luxuries as they all have to share the same bath and cook in the same kitchen... There are still lots of underprivileged refuges all over Scotland."* (S, male, aged 16, in Houghton, 2008, also involved in refuge research, 2003, p.15)

Children's preferences in relation to flexibility and access to children's areas and support workers became conditions of the government grant for children's support. However problems relating to loneliness, losing friends and not having children around that are your own age (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; McGee, 2000; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008; Mullender *et al.*, 2002) are less easy to assuage. Perhaps the expansion in the range and capacity of support services can lead to children meeting others of their own age more readily in groups and activities, whether they are in refuge or have moved on or are living in the wider community.

Moving to a new area (whether in refuge or a new house) is a huge disruption and Stalford *et al.* (2003) recommend a young mentor to help find out about a new place (also in Humphreys and Thiara, 2002) and mixing quickly with local youth/child services especially for those moving to rural areas or from rural to urban. It must be noted here that black and minority ethnic children may experience what Mullender *et al.* (2002) name as the exchange of one type of violence for another through being subject to racism and racial harassment in the new area, house or school (also see Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Humphreys, 2000) - "…we were picked on, people call you names, we had to move house because of this" (10 year old boy in Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003, p.63). Stafford *et al.* (2007) found that children's attitude to moves was affected by "the contrast

between the quality of the house and situation they had left and the quality of the house and situation they moved to" (p.33), with some children describing this as being doubly 'punished' due to being 'dumped' in one room in a refuge (Houghton, forthcoming) whilst their father was in their nice middle class house. For many children there were a disturbing number of moves that should be minimised (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, 2008; Humphreys and Thiara, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007). Although Stafford notes that consequent moves are not as traumatic as previous and often children are involved and informed at these stages, the consequences of multiple moves could be explored further with children, including many children who have visited refuges multiple times (Stalford *et al.*, 2003; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, forthcoming).

Children would "rather have their own workers" (10 year old in Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003, p.63) "all the way through" as "it's not a good idea to change workers when you know and like the person" (15 year old boy in Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003, p.63, also reflected in Humphreys, 2000). For those leaving refuge, the previous practice of losing support immediately was a real loss to children "I would like a worker to come spend time with you when you've gone. Miss it." (9 year old girl in Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003, p.63). There are steps in Scotland to provide a key named worker approach for children who have used refuges and moved on, an approach that children would like throughout their moves (whether or not they include refuge) (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Houghton, 2008).

> *"Some of the children and young people feel they still need their children's supporters to talk to after they have left the refuge. Follow on groups lets the children meet their children's supporters weekly so that the children supporters can see if the kids are coping with moving on and they can be there to offer the kids support and advice that they may not want to seek from their parents." (*S, male, 16, in Houghton, 2008, p.16)

The importance to children of their possessions and toys is a major issue in many of the key reports (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Stalford *et al.*, 2003; McGee, 2000; Houghton, 2008), "the little things that mean so much to you" (L, female, 16, in Houghton, 2008, p.48), which supports Stafford *et al.*'s (2007) recommendation that ways should be found of replacing (or bringing and storing) children and young people's possessions and toys.

Making more help available at school

Accessing support in schools is uncommon but would make a huge difference to children experiencing domestic abuse (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Houghton, 2008; Stalford *et al.*, 2003). McGee writes that children spoke of three things affecting their educational achievement – aggression in school, lack of concentration, school refusal. Some children were scared to even go to school whilst living with domestic abuse, with some missing chunks of time (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002):

> *"Because I was scared in case. Like, he battered her and she went away and then I went hame and she wasnae there and it was just me left and him. Ye ken what I mean? So I was scared."* (girl, 13, who had missed a lot of school, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.43)

Homework was also a major problem whether still living with abuse - "I used to sit there and just cry and shake because I couldn't do my homework" (girl aged 19 in McGee, 2000, p.80) - or finding space to do it when staying in refuges (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003; Stafford *et al.*, 2007) or with relatives (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; McGee, 2000; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008). Others found it easier to concentrate when away from the abuse (Barron, 2007; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Many children did not feel that teachers were accepting of this or making allowances (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, 2008 and forthcoming). Children across the key studies spoke of their schoolwork suffering whilst living with abuse:

> "*I went from a straight 'A' student to failing every class because I was concentrating on what was going on at home*." (L, female, 16, in Houghton, 2008, p.17)

However for children moving homes, Stafford *et al.* (2007) found their 'troubles' were less around educational attainment and more about peer and friendship difficulties. Other children speak of the stigma of being new to the school, and one suggestion was for the new kid to have a 'popular' pupil as a mentor (M, male, 17 Houghton, 2008). There was a real need to teach students more about domestic abuse as well as teachers (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, 2008; McGee, 2000; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000), with some young people recommending 'peer educators' (see Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). Young people advised Ministers that there should be trained support available in school - "someone who does know" (M, male, 17, in Houghton, 2008, p.18), "somebody in the school that can actually help" (J, female, 15, in Houghton, 2008, p.17) - who they felt could also help teach the teachers (Houghton, 2008) as children had very little faith in teachers ability to understand what they were going through and help them (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, 2008; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000).

The few children that mentioned positive support from the teacher spoke about – the teacher being nice, making a cuppa, dealing with any problems at school straight away "because of what we've been through" (girl, 14, in Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.47), or offering to have a "special five minutes" (boy, aged 7, in McGee, 2000, p.145). McGee wrote about fifteen families where children had spoken to teachers with the result that only four teachers spoke to mums, five children felt supported but maybe wanted more practical help, and for the rest no support was offered for the child or mother. When teachers gave some comfort and support it wasn't enough without help, and importantly children see help as not just for the child but for mum as well.

> *"I used to tell teachers and my friends at school what he was like and they, I could see they believed me but they couldn't do anything about it. … it didn't really help me a lot because they didn't really help me help my mum"* she concluded they need to *"know how to treat children who have that in the home."* (Jackie, aged 19, in McGee, p.145)

Where there were specialist staff in school or visiting the school this was seen as a help. Many children felt that schools were *the* place where you could (and should) learn about help available and begin to access support (Houghton, 2008; Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, forthcoming; Bagshaw *et al.*, 2000). For example, one ten year old girl had a special childworker once a week in the school; "She speaks to people and sort of just checks out how you are feeling." (Stafford *et al.*, 2007, p.47). Young people in Scotland have been enthusiastic about the approach and in some areas Women's Aid outreach workers give support sessions in schools (Houghton,

forthcoming and evaluation of Women's Aid children's services, due 2008). Furthermore, Mullender *et al.* (2002) recommended that "children who have known violence in their own lives would be a rich source of information and advice to other children, both those who are facing specific risks and those who have a general need to learn more" (Mullender *et al.*, 2002, p.90). Children with experience of domestic abuse could also teach teachers, who could (and need to) learn a great deal from listening to children's perspectives (Houghton, 2008; Houghton, forthcoming).

Children's participation in research, practice and policy development

In conclusion, this review of children's perspectives literature shows that children's 'active participation' is crucial to our knowledge and understanding of the reality of their experience. It results in "significant knowledge gains" (Woodhead and Faulkener, 2000, p.31) for research, practice and policy purposes; young respondents raise "a different range of issues from those raised by adults" (Baker, 2005, p.283). Children have a right to participate in decisions which affect their lives (*UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989*; *Children (Scotland) Act 1995*) and children are clear that this is extremely important when experiencing domestic abuse, and affects their ability to cope (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; reflected in other studies reviewed). What's more, many children want to be involved in decisions that affect children experiencing domestic abuse collectively, so as to make things better for children in the future (Stafford *et al.*, 2007; Houghton, 2008; Houghton, forthcoming; Mullender *et al.*, 2002).

Their evidence suggests that children are very comfortable with being experts in their own lives, and in reflecting on the services they have or have not received:

> *"Perhaps it is unethical to overprotect children from research, not only because this excludes them (Alderson, 1995) but because we will then end up intervening in their lives in ways which adults have established to be best, without understanding how children and young people perceive or experience these well-intentioned but perhaps misguided efforts."*
> (Mullender, 2002, p.9)

Children would remove the word 'perhaps' from this sentence, twice – for from children's perspectives it has been evidenced that our interventions and efforts are far from reaching the mark. It is vital that Scotland continues to deliberately solicit children's active participation in the research process and to ensure that "children's perspectives, views and feelings are accepted as genuine, valid evidence" (Woodhead and Faulkener, 2000, p.31), not least to address this "paucity of effective service provision" (Baker, 2005, p.281). Children have demonstrated ably that they can be asked, using innovative skills and techniques, about domestic abuse. What is vital is that Scotland's commitment to children's participation in the delivery plan ensures that we are not only innovative in *asking* children but we retain the "…ability to do something meaningful with what we find, making appropriate links with research findings, policy and practice." (Roberts, 2003, p.32).

The implementation and further development of Scotland's children's 'domestic abuse delivery plan' over the next three years (2008-11) is an unprecedented opportunity to be at the forefront

of children's participation in research, practice and policy. Since the inauguration of The Scottish Parliament, Scotland has been cited a world-leader in the participation of children affected by domestic abuse in the highest level of policy-making :

- a young person representing children's 'Listen Louder' appeal for more help was praised as 'as good a petitioner as we have seen' by a Scottish Parliament Committee (2002, col 2432), beginning the process of children becoming acknowledged expert witnesses in the public policy arena
- children and young people gained access to those in power, Scottish Ministers, through the groundbreaking Scottish Women's Aid's *Listen Louder Campaign*, impacting on resource distribution for services (2002-4 summarised in Houghton, 2006).

This has continued through the direct involvement of children in the process of developing a national delivery plan to improve outcomes for children affected by domestic abuse: young people have given evidence to the delivery group; independently advised new Ministers of children's priorities for the plan *in their view* (Houghton, 2008) and given their views on priority action areas (Smith *et al.*, 2008). This is unprecedented in the review of worldwide research as far as can be established, challenging the dominant view that "…represents children and young people as lacking the knowledge or competence to be participants in policy debate." (Edwards *et al.*, 2004, p.104). Furthermore children have achieved influence in the development of support services in Scotland over recent years. Current Ministers assured Parliament that "their priorities and views have shaped the development of the delivery plan" (Scottish Parliament 2007 Col 3471) and because of this experience "are now working to increase involvement of children in that work" (ibid). Ministers then announced the investment of £40 million over three years to improve the lives of children and young people who experience domestic abuse and to tackle the wider issues of male violence against women.

> "*That's a lot of money that they are planning but as long as it helps change the future I am happy*." (M, male, 17, in Houghton, 2008, p.35)

The challenge to Scotland is to maintain and develop children's participation: to increase the number and diversity of children we hear from in the analytical and participation programme; to find and test innovative ways for children/young people to communicate their views including 'e-democracy' (see Barron, 2007); to ensure that children are *agents* of every step of the plan (monitoring, evaluating, training, researching, advising, producing, developing) and not 'just' recipients.

> *"MG: 'Cos everybody's got different opinions and views and experiences, so they should really listen and take on board what we've to say, and if they're gonna change it, <u>how</u> they're gonna change it. We're giving them ideas as well, so it's not just them plotting 'what we're going to do'. We're saying to them we think you should do this, to take it all on board, we're giving you ideas that you may find helpful to use, so it's helping them as well.*
> *L: Yeah.*
> *L: Yeah, we're helping them."*
> (MG, female, 19 and L, female, 16, in Houghton, 2008, p.28)

A crucial part of this is to address the invisibility of children affected by domestic abuse in certain areas, whether in relation to prevalence figures, certain policy areas (e.g. justice, schools, mental health), or indeed local authority areas particularly in light of the move to local outcome agreements. A national research project exploring the prevalence, nature and experience of domestic abuse of children and young people in Scotland is urgently needed. This could be undertaken through schools (see Cashmore, 2006), linked to prevention education and *essentially* have support attached for children (unlike other surveys for example Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Vitally, it could address children's gaps in knowledge about domestic abuse and the help available, provide learning for key practitioners – teachers, whilst informing policy makers and practitioners about the reality and prevalence of domestic abuse from the perspectives of children in Scotland.

It is a challenge to continue to develop a participation structure where young people are inside the mainstream of political decision-making with commitment and channels for action (as opposed to the usual in Borland *et al.*, 2001, p.36); whilst maintaining children's belief and tackling scepticism that things will change and they will be listened to (Houghton, 2008; Barron, 2007). To enable a group of young people (following the best practice example of the 'Making A Difference…' project) to continue to 'quality assure' the delivery plan by maintaining direct access to Ministers and relaying *children's* priorities, would be impressive:

> "… *if they're in charge of the government, they should want to make the country the best place that they possibly can, so they should listen to children and young people."* (J, female,15, in Houghton, 2008, p.27)

To do this effectively and inclusively the young people would need to remain in touch with a far wider range of children across Scotland who are living the experience now - living the developments/services/systems within the plan – to ensure that all constituents are heard, Ministers' information is current, and to avoid the exclusion of other viewpoints (warned about in Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2000).

Current projects and studies in the literature review give examples of best and cutting edge practice in the participation of children and young people: particular consideration of the experience of domestic abuse proves *essential* to this endeavour. Such examples include: Mullender *et al.*'s (2002) 18 month long study that was able to track children's changing feelings/experiences, employing researchers with skills to listen (and respond) and with shared ethnicity that children appreciated; Stafford *et al.*'s (2007) interview journey "practically giving children space and time to reflect, think and decide what to talk about, in their own time, their own way" (p.21); the same project co-steered by Scottish Women's Aid young research advisors (SWA, forthcoming); *Listen Louder*'s (2002-4) multi-method and staged approach from friendship groups to mixed group filmmaking, through to national campaigns and events (see Houghton, 2006 and forthcoming); Morrison's (forthcoming) use of innovative participatory techniques on a most difficult subject. The author also shares the hope that "the use of participatory techniques allows age as a construct of children's ability to participate to be minimised" (O'Kane, 2000 p.140 citing Solberg, 1996) so that we can hear from younger children on this subject. These developments are all made possible through closer links with good practice, skills, techniques and values (Thomas and O'Kane, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Houghton, 2006), particularly the rich experience and expertise of Women's Aid children's

support workers with whom the government and researchers should develop a "culture of partnership" (Orme, 2000).

It is the authors belief that not only can we work to ensure that participation "does no further harm" (Alderson, 1995) to children affected by domestic abuse, with particular reference to Mullender *et al.*'s (2000) three C's (consent, confidentiality, child protection) and three D's (disclosure, distress, danger), but that we can further explore ways in which participation is part of all agencies' responsibility to work to "undo the harm to children" (Pence and Shepard, 1999). By asking children's views on the *processes of involvement* we can ensure that three E's are added to children's participation - empowerment, emancipation, and enjoyment (Houghton, forthcoming):

> *"Yeah I thought it went really well. The Ministers felt really interested on what we were saying it was great…I felt they were really keen on listening to what we had to say which was a really good feeling."* (M, female, 19, in Houghton, 2008, p.32)

Summary

Children's active participation in decisions that affect their lives is crucial to them. Their active participation in research, practice and policy development is crucial to adults in order to improve the current inadequate response. Key points emerge from this chapter

- ***Perpetrators of domestic abuse ensure that domestic abuse is an integral part of children's lives, children are not mere witnesses***
- ***Children speak of the emotional, physical and sometimes sexual abuse that the father/father figure inflicts on the family – themselves, their mothers and siblings***
- ***Children perspectives and fear in relation to their violent fathers should be taken more seriously, children need to be safe from him and for the abuse to stop.***
- ***Professionals should hold the perpetrator accountable as an abusive father***
- ***Young people themselves feel that adults need to listen to them more, so that adults can better understand the reality of domestic abuse for children***
- ***Children want to actively participate in major decisions about their lives, individually and collectively***
- ***Mums, family and friends are most important to children***
- ***A trusted, 'confidential', one-to-one, named support worker is crucial to children, with options for group support important too***
- ***Children do not trust professionals, do not feel they understand about domestic abuse and have little faith that they will respond appropriately***
- ***Home and school are the key places for support according to children, teachers' response is seriously lacking at present***
- ***Children can and should participate in developing more effective practice, in training professionals and addressing gaps in knowledge that remain***
- ***Children participation in research and policy development can be effective and influential, and results in significant knowledge gains to improve the response of adults, practitioners and policy makers***

Directions for good practice – participation

Scotland's approach to domestic abuse where children are involved

1. Language used in policy-making and practice development should reflect an understanding of the reality of domestic abuse for children and their perspectives:
    - children are active participants (not passive, hidden or witnesses) in the domestic abuse situation
    - children experience emotional, physical and sometimes sexual abuse directed at their mum and them
    - it is not an issue 'between adults' from which children can be disconnected
    - children distinguish between the parent they are in fear of and the parent that is being abused, the generic term of 'parents' is not useful

2. Children have a right to participate in decisions that affect them, particularly as they tell us that active participation - being listened to and taken seriously, being involved in solutions and decisions – helps children experiencing domestic abuse to cope. Children's active participation should be encouraged:
    - in work with mothers about their relationship with their child
    - in services involved with children and families
    - in legal and child protection systems
    - through funded opportunities for participation in the policy-making field

3. Development of policy and practice needs to take on board children's perspectives of their domestically violent father (/father figure/mum's boyfriend), the effects of his abuse on their family and their overwhelming need to be safe:
    - action to tackle and remove the perpetrator and protect women and children from him is *the* priority for helping agencies
    - a review of protective measures should include children's perspectives on safety

4. A review of the effectiveness of the *Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006* amendment to the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* in relation to safe contact is urgent, as from children's perspectives contact is the biggest threat to theirs and their mothers safety once they leave/separate:

    - children's fears in relation to contact should be recognised

- children need to participate in decisions about contact, preferably through or with someone they trust and can speak to
- many children do not want contact and in that case it should not be awarded
- if children and women are put at risk or do not feel safe because of contact then it should not be awarded or should be reviewed urgently if previously granted
- it must be recognised that some children want time to recover and be convinced they are safe before contact
- for children who may want contact, every effort must be made to manage a dangerous situation and allow opt out and reviews at any stage should the child be frightened or upset or hurt

5. Children say their mothers are their most important support, and their mum's safety and protection is vital to children. The alliance between women and children should be strengthened by:
    - an assessment of the availability of support to women - as survivors and as mothers
    - a programme of development work in supporting the mother/child relationship and joint work with women and children where appropriate – learning from Women's Aid and funding of pilot projects could help develop good practice
    - the development of sensitive information for mums from children's perspectives – what would help them (such as talking about it, children are aware, want to leave, need to know what mums think to make sense of it, work through it and get over it etc.)
    - recognition (by all adults) that children are participants in domestic abuse, where at all possible it's important that children have information about what is going on and what will happen next, and that they give their views and are involved in making decisions about their lives

Children's access to support and information

6. Develop a public and schools education campaign targeted at *all* children and young people in Scotland. Ensure this:
    - addresses the severe lack in children's knowledge about what to do when there's domestic abuse, how to talk about it, who to talk to, what help is available
    - directly tackles stigma
    - helps children 'be a good friend'
    - gives opportunities for children to learn about help available without being identified (e.g. all children in class accessing website etc.)

7. Involve children with experience of domestic abuse in the development of this campaign, through their participation in creating:
    - a range of information (web/materials/leaflets) for children from a child's perspective about what helps (using age appropriate language and media)
    - materials/curricula for prevention education in schools or/and community programmes targeted at children and young people
    - national campaigns linked to local campaigns, using their media and role models/hero's and peers to motivate *all* children to get behind the campaign against domestic abuse
    - adverts targeted at children and young people that do not scare them and are associated with ending domestic abuse

8. Develop a national central confidential resource *with strong links* to local named specialist support workers (giving children access to as many different forms of communication as possible):
    - develop with children a national website and support service (not information only) using different means of communication such as email and web based support
    - develop helpline support nationally and locally including text options (in consultation with children)
    - link this to clear information about and ways of contacting local support (including names of workers and contacts, type of refuges, support for mum) – local information could be developed locally with children

9. Continue to develop the professional resource that children evaluate most highly – specialist children's support workers, someone to talk to and trust – usually through Women's Aid (though children don't mind as long as they're good):
    - through current evaluation ensure that children who use refuges receive the range of flexible, regular support that they recommended: in particular review current funding levels to reflect numbers/spaces if each child does not have a named worker "theirs all the way through" from refuge and when resettling
    - review and expand outreach specialist support to *all* children affected by domestic abuse in communities and specifically through schools, and other places children and young people go, including youth groups/nursery etc.- reflecting population and need
    - share (and thereby increase) skills and resources between sectors through joint work, e.g. with youth workers, increasing access to helping, knowledgeable adults
    - increase links with and availability of mental health and 'in-depth' support without branding children or ignoring the cause of domestic abuse

10. Take action to improve the moving home experience for children:

- all agencies recognise the initial move especially will be traumatic for children: welcome, explain, talk about the 'incident' that preceded it
- all refuges should be the high standard recommended by children (own flat, age specific space) - phase out the two thirds of refuges in Scotland that are still the old style communal refuges *urgently*, children hate them
- provide practical and cash support to replace possessions and toys, for storage, transport, uniforms etc.
- consider young 'mentors' for children who've moved to a new area (especially if rural to/from urban or between countries)
- give child-friendly housing options that don't make the experience even worse or put children under threat
- take steps to ensure women and children are safe in their homes/new homes in order to reduce the number of moves
- through pilots seek children's perspectives on exclusion orders and how they would feel about staying in their own homes

11. Improve children's opportunities to get peer support from friends, new friends, new children and young people in their lives – recognise that friends are more important than adults to children:

- Facilitate children keeping in touch with and having contact with friends, including new friends made through domestic abuse services
- Very importantly provide opportunities for children to meet other children that have been through domestic abuse (if they want to)
- Provide structured groupwork to work through the experience of domestic abuse
- Improve free access to child/youth activities including leisure/arts etc, mixing with people your own age (not necessarily having been through domestic abuse)
- Consider participation projects about domestic abuse with mixed groups of children
- Improve informal opportunities including chill out space in refuges or centres

12. Schools are key to children affected by domestic abuse and education must take a greater role in their support:

- make more help available at school and ensure there is someone to speak to there
- find ways of specialist support being available at school (including outreach workers using schools space or even being based at schools)

- teach teachers better, as a matter of urgency ensure teachers have the skills to deal appropriately with domestic abuse and that they receive training using materials from children's perspectives
- teach students about domestic abuse and to not judge but help (see prevention section) and thereby give children a language to speak about it
- consider young befrienders or mentors for children new to a school

13. Develop a major training initiative to address the serious lack of knowledge and ability that children experience in professionals they come into contact with (including education staff, social workers, police, health workers, children's panel, solicitors):
    - equip all professionals that children come into contact with to respond appropriately (including responding to 'cues')
    - utilise children's expertise about what can help
    - develop messages to reach children that there are people who can help (perhaps in the interim naming local professionals who *are* equipped to respond)
    - let children know that professionals are receiving/have completed training to increase confidence in their ability to help

14. Involve children in the national training programme developments:
    - in development of accessible and innovative national training materials for all professionals and specific agencies, including pre and post qualification training
    - in practice manuals/toolkits including protocols for information sharing, communication between agencies, confidentiality
    - in working with specific agencies and multi-agency groups to develop information for children about agencies
    - in producing information that should debunk myths about agencies (e.g. taking children away, running refuges like crack houses) as well as domestic abuse

15. Scotland's public education campaign targeted at adults should consider raising the public's awareness of what children say will help them, through participation of children/young people in developing the campaign:
    - as family (especially mums) and friends are most important to children, a campaign similar but different to the Canadian 'neighbours, family, friends' should be considered
    - public should be aware what help is out there and be reassured of the approach (that agencies want to stop the abuse and take measures to protect them and tackle perpetrators, help the women and children be safe, keep women and children together whenever possible, get support for mums and someone for the child to talk to).

Children's continuing involvement in Scotland's policy development

16. Scotland's unique policy of enabling children and young people with experience of domestic abuse to have direct access to Ministers should be maintained. The participation process should be developed and include:
    - setting up a young people's advisory group with a remit to continue to inform Ministers of *children's* current priorities and problems, as quality assurance for the delivery plan: this role should be undertaken through connections to (and advising on) a wider programme of children's participation projects connected to the plan
    - a variety of children's projects/evaluations across Scotland to implement and evaluate the plan's priorities and current practice (children of different ages, experiences, ethnicity, background)
    - central funding and levers should be considered to encourage local participation projects, reflecting the shift to local outcome agreements and the need for children to participate in local service development, accessing those in power locally. Young people could be involved in the national fund development, encouraging the highest levels of participation with child-initiated and partnership projects ('Listen Louder Locally'?)
    - funding for short term discrete projects that would benefit children and Scotland - encouraging children's productions, developing skills with adults/other young people such as art, film, music etc and enabling outcomes (and pride) in their own time
    - yearly (or at appropriate review times of the plan) opportunity for all children involved (not just the advisory group) to be involved in national events with Ministers, the Parliament and Delivery Group
    - investigating and developing e-democracy and consultation
    - a commitment to involve children in all policy areas (particularly where it may be seen traditionally as a more 'adult' or 'sensitive' subject, e.g. absence of views of legal systems, advertising)

Children's participation in research, consultation and knowledge sharing

17. A major national study should be undertaken *with* children and young people to establish the prevalence and reality of experience of domestic abuse in Scotland. The use of school-based surveys and research activity should be the main component part of this, with a *prerequisite* that children involved in the study have support available afterwards (unlike other surveys). There is potential for coordination with prevention education work/campaigning

18. A qualitative research programme with specific groups of children and young people and those with specific experiences will increase our understanding where literature is limited or has excluded children. This research programme should include a study of the perspectives of:

    - younger children using innovative participative techniques
    - young people - young adults
    - black and minority ethnic children
    - children from rural areas including islands
    - disabled children
    - children also in other vulnerable groups such as looked after children, young carers, children of substance misusing parents
    - children with specific experiences such as of the criminal and civil court/system experiences (including specialist courts), the Children's Panel, specific agency response such as that of education or/and the local multi-agency approach

19. The analytical programme for the delivery plan provides an opportunity to use different and innovative ways of working with children, including consideration of young people as research advisors and researchers

20. A national longitudinal study following children's lives and the impact of domestic abuse over the years on short, mid and long term outcomes for children from *their* perspectives would an innovative endeavour to bring greater understanding of the complexity of this area, and challenge labelling/pathologising of children

21. Evaluations relating to domestic abuse policy and practice development, pathfinders and pilots should include children's perspectives and tracking outcomes for children

22. Data collection by agencies should be enhanced considerably and collated centrally to enable a national picture on children (including age groups) and women's experiences and use of services

23. Guidance should be issued (and reissued alongside developments in the field) on good practice in engagement of children with experience of domestic abuse, not only to ensure that participation does not cause further harm but that it can be part of the commitment to undo the harm to children

24. Findings from children's perspectives literature should be centrally available and accessible to all working to improve things for children, and updated regularly with new research and evaluation

25. The sharing of national learning locally and vice versa should be encouraged through a central resource/use of web and consideration of a programme of events/training relating to children's perspectives and involvement of children experiencing domestic abuse in developing practice and policy

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