



THE
BUCHANAN
INSTITUTE

Shadow Pandemic

The impact of COVID-19 on domestic abuse in Scotland

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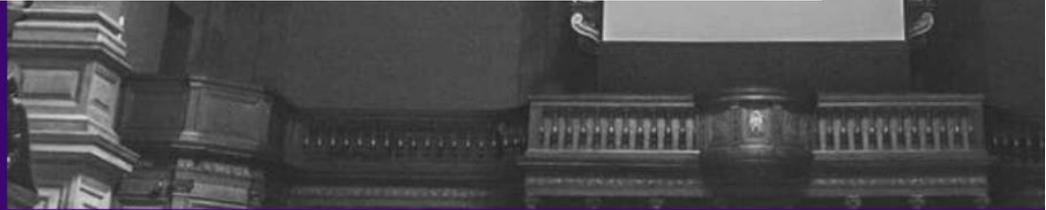


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Executive Summary

Between 2018 and 2019, the police recorded 60,641 instances of domestic abuse in Scotland, where almost three-quarters of those reporting were women (Scottish Government). Prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic there existed an abundance of issues within current Scottish domestic abuse legislation, such as a dearth of migrant-specific aid policies, and a lack of available and accessible housing support. The pandemic has further exacerbated these problems.

Despite the introduction of Scotland's Domestic Abuse Act 2018, and the attention towards Westminster's proposed introduction of the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-21, the lack of governmental response to the recent domestic abuse escalation has meant that, for survivors, reaching the point of reporting has become extremely difficult. The allocation of £4.25 million to domestic abuse resources has created no substantial improvement and lacks diversity; indeed, support services are no better-off financially. Moreover, the Equally Safe strategy has not adapted well to the pandemic, in no way meaningfully increasing survivors' access to resources.

The Government's response has been insufficient for two principal reasons. First, support for domestic abuse survivors was in crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite policy reform, more needs to be done to ensure equal support for all. Furthermore, the pandemic has only aggravated the problem: a UK-wide survey from August 2020 found that for 61% of women living with their abuser, the abuse had worsened (Women's Aid). Emergency funding and support from the Government has failed to consider the complexities of the current crisis. For example, Women's Aid has seen a dramatic increase in use of their services, and at later hours.

This paper proposes the Scottish Government take on a four-fold approach:

1. Reach out to survivors: those who are without technology or who don't speak English should not be excluded from getting help. The Government should also reduce the burden on survivors to seek help by providing discrete points-of-contact in accessible spaces, especially with changing COVID-19 guidelines.
2. Implementation of subsidised shelters and refuges to reduce the strain on understaffed and overwhelmed services who provide accommodation to survivors.
3. Comprehensive funding for support services that is consistent and long term. The allocation of funds should be presented clearly in transparent reports that are easily accessible as a 'checks and balances' measure.



4. Efficient and equity-based financial support for survivors. This can be achieved through establishing clear and precise arrangements of how funds are passed from the top level down to the survivors.

We think it is important that all of these policies are informed by an intersectional perspective — a guiding principle in our discussion and suggestions.





Introduction

It is widely recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic has had serious impacts across the world, from changes in our everyday lives to global economic crises. However, what has been omitted from much of the popular discourse is the serious rise in domestic violence cases as a result of the pandemic. With the advice to ‘stay at home’ comes the increased potential for harm within the home, and far less opportunity to escape to safety. Within the first month of the pandemic, Scottish domestic abuse charity Refuge reported a 700% increase in calls to their helpline (Townsend, 2020). Whilst it is clear that domestic abuse occurred before the pandemic, and will continue long after, we believe that this increase must be used to highlight the extant problem, as well as the insufficient level of government support that has only been further demonstrated during the pandemic.

This report will propose a number of policy suggestions that will help fill gaps in the currently insufficient safety nets, with an aim to curb the rise in domestic abuse cases as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe that the networks currently in place to support survivors of domestic abuse are not sufficient given the extreme circumstances currently being faced as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, we will strive to maintain a guiding focus on intersectionality, as it is those in the most marginalised communities that are likely to bear the most serious consequences, and often slip through the gaps in government policy. We aim to help support services for survivors of domestic abuse become widely accessible and equal for all women throughout Scotland, regardless of age, sexuality, race or religion.



Research Methods

Secondary Research

Current system (Legislature, schemes, orders and helplines):

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)

DVDS sets out procedures for the police to use in relation to disclosure of information to protect an individual whose current partner has a history of domestic violence and abuse.

Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs)

DVPN is the initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence. It is authorised by a police superintendent and leads to effective prohibition preventing the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's house.

Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs)

DVPOs are civil orders that provide protection to victims by enabling the police and magistrates' courts to put in place proactive measures in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence incident.

Domestic violence remedy order

- Non-molestation order: Prohibits particular behaviour or general molestation by someone who has previously been violent towards the applicant
- Occupation order: Define or regulate right of occupation of home by the parties involved

Presence of National Domestic Abuse Helpline



Reports and surveys tracking the rise of domestic abuse due to COVID-19:

June Survivor Survey by Women's Aid England

- 52% of survivors felt that the pandemic had a negative effect on their mental health, and they were less able to cope with the abuse
- 91% said the pandemic had impacted their experiences of abuse in one or more ways
- Where 58% said they had no one to turn to for help
- 52% felt more afraid and 51% reported that the violence and or abuse had worsened
- The 58% of refuge services and 80% of the community-based services reported increase in demand. Similarly, 91% of online support services and 81% of telephone support services reported an increase in demand.

Helpline data by National Domestic Abuse Helpline

- The 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge Helpline logged a total of 40,397 calls and contact on its database, a 65% increase compared with the first three months of 2020.
- Also saw a 700% increase in the number of visits to its helpline website.

Response to the rise of domestic abuse due to COVID-19:

Codeword scheme

In a situation of abuse, survivors can seek immediate help by asking for 'ANI' in a participating pharmacy. 'ANI' stands for Action Needed Immediately which also phonetically sounds like the name Annie. The pharmacy in turn will offer a private space, a phone and ask if the person needs support from police or other domestic abuse support services.

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)

A centre where non-judgemental medical, practical, and emotional support is offered to anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted.



The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) coronavirus related welfare benefits

Help survivors open new Universal Credit claims where they can apply for advance payment.

National domestic abuse helpline chat feature

Refuge introduced a live chat service in May 2020, so women trapped at home with their perpetrators during lockdown had a way of communicating with them.



Discussion

Key Findings

COVID-19 has not only been a global health emergency but has also led to a significant amount of social, economic, and psychological distress in people's lives. As the pandemic intensified, countries started adopting measures to slow down the virus's spread by announcing social distancing and isolation as the central public health strategy. Social isolation exacerbated vulnerabilities while limiting familiar support options for survivors (van Gelder et al., 2020). This resulted in many unforeseen social and economic consequences which became the catalyst of stress and led to an increase in domestic violence globally. Many countries, including the United Kingdom, saw an increase in the use of domestic violence services: The National Domestic Abuse Hotline registered a 25% increase in calls since the stay-at-home measures were first implemented in March of 2020 (Kelly & Morgan 2020). It has been a year since the first lockdown measures were implemented and there is still fear and uncertainty associated with the pandemic. This creates an enabling environment for abuse to take place, which is easily hidden behind closed doors.

Impact of COVID-19 on Survivors' Access to Services and Help

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected survivors' access to services and help. According to a Woman's Aid survey, 67.7% of respondents — who are women living with their abuser during lockdown — said they felt they had no one to turn to during lockdown (Women's Aid, 2020: 10).

Conventional ways of seeking help such as support centres and hotlines are overwhelmed due to the sharp increase in domestic abuse cases during the pandemic. Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, states that some days the increase in the number of calls to UK domestic abuse services is 120%, while other days it is even higher, since the 'stay at home' guidance was issued (UK Parliament, 2020).

In addition, the pandemic has made it harder for survivors to navigate the process of seeking help and accessing services. Not every survivor has access to a safe environment in order to utilise



telephone services. Under the lockdown, they may be unable to find a private space away from their abuser to call support services.

Furthermore, not every survivor is comfortable with using virtual services such as online help chat services. In an open letter to the Prime Minister from 22 organisations working to address Violence Against Women and Girls, Baljit Banga says that BAME women ‘often preferred to access services in person or via community routes.’ The social distancing guidelines then leads to a drop in self-referrals to services due to the reduced number of in-person services available.

Shelters for Domestic Abuse Survivors

Shelters and refuges are central to the support and protection of women who have survived domestic abuse. Their important role goes beyond providing a roof over survivors’ heads: ‘In a refuge women and their children receive the kind of support which enables them to deal with their traumatic experiences, to end the violence, to regain their self-esteem, and to lay the foundations for a self-determined and independent life’ (WAVE, 2004: 18). Furthermore, they provide an environment that actively works against the abuse they have experienced — most often at the hands of men — and advocates on their behalf, never judging or questioning the validity of their experiences; indeed, supporting self-determination is fundamental to re-empowerment (WAVE, 2004: 21). It must also be understood that homeless shelters and other mixed-gender accommodations are not appropriate for survivors of domestic abuse; many women have reported feeling unsafe and experiencing harassment in such spaces (Lopez and Smith, 2019: 40). The level of protection and personal support that women’s shelters provide is also extremely vital because survivors are more likely to be killed after leaving their abusive partners (Robinson et al., 2020: 82).

Women’s Homelessness in Scotland:

Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness amongst women in Scotland (CIH, 2020). In the year 2019/2020, 45% of homeless people in Scotland were female (14,032) (Scottish Government, 2020b). Almost 50% of those women made the application with children (Shelter Scotland, 2020). Homelessness is often seen as a problem that afflicts only men; it is not. In fact, homelessness amongst women is higher in younger age groups: 28% female versus 20% male for under 25s (Scottish Government, 2020b). It is also important to note that in that year, while overall homelessness decreased, with a majority of applicants being white, the ethnic category ‘other’ saw an increase from 1% to 6% (Scottish Government, 2020b). Despite the Scottish Government publishing these statistics, women’s homelessness goes largely unseen, and there is a persistent lack of gendered analysis on the topic (Engender, 2020: 15). Moreover, the



Government's statistics also evidence the need for a more intersectional understanding of women's homelessness. For example, transgender people experience some of the highest rates of abusive relationships in Scotland, with 80% of the community reporting having experienced abuse from a partner (Homeless Network Scotland, 2020: 13) — in Scotland the majority of transgender people are transgender women (Scottish Transgender Alliance, 2008). Limited surveying has shown that transgender people experience homelessness at a higher rate than the Scottish average (Communities Analytical Services, 2013), but, unfortunately, little is published about the extent to which transgender women who have survived domestic abuse experience homelessness in Scotland.

Homelessness amongst women is a symptom of gender discrimination at a societal level, and poor access to housing and accommodation is a violation of their human rights. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights sees safe and stable accommodation as directly impacting women's lived experiences: 'without control over housing, land or property, women enjoy little personal or economic autonomy and are more vulnerable to abuse within the family' (OHCHR, 2014: 18). For survivors of domestic abuse, high levels of homelessness demonstrate the unjust reality of a system that favours abusers (CIH, 2020: 14).

Homeless women's access to suitable short-term shelter and medium-term transitional housing services is shaped by the lack of a gendered approach and a severe lack of gender competency among housing providers. (Engender, 2020: 17)

Women who have experienced domestic abuse and are left without a home represent some of the most vulnerable. They are more likely than men to take drastic measures to avoid rough sleeping and the dangers of the street — one such way is returning to the home of their abuser (Engender, 2020: 15). This not only affects women who have made the choice to leave their abuser's home, but also those looking for an escape, where fear of homelessness compels them to remain in abusive relationships (OHCHR, 2014: 18). Furthermore, homeless women's use of both public and semi-private spaces means that the traditional perception of being 'homeless' (rough sleeping) is not always the most effective term for considering women's unstable living situations. As a result, this further isolates survivors from receiving support and accessing shelters and refuges (Moss and Singh, 2016: 48).

Another contributing factor to women's homelessness is ill-equipped local authorities. Engender has found that local authority staff, who are not trained to deal with or to understand the complex needs of domestic abuse survivors, question the validity of these women's requests for accommodation (2020: 17). But the burden should not be on survivors: providing personal evidence to support a request for housing can be very traumatic, it is therefore essential that all



women who have experienced domestic abuse are automatically considered as having a priority need for resettlement (Coyle and Blackman, 2020).

The European Standard:

The Istanbul Convention (2011) is The Council of Europe's most significant treaty on the prevention of violence against women and domestic abuse. Scotland signed this treaty and yet has not met its standards.

Article 23 of the Istanbul Convention, regarding shelters, states that:

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims, especially women and their children.

The Council of Europe defines sufficient shelter space as one per every 10,000 inhabitants (Council of Europe, 2008: 18). According to the data published by the Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) Report, Scotland has 36 shelters for women, including 481 beds, meaning spaces are lacking by 12% (2019: 22).

Furthermore, The Council of Europe sees shelters and refuges as also providing access to outreach, advocacy, advice, counselling, self-help, resettlement, and support for children (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 18). The core philosophy of shelters for women who have experienced domestic abuse is to support them and empower them. The Council of Europe therefore upholds the standard that the running of shelters should not be influenced by the state, political parties or faith-based organisations; indeed, NGOs and specialist support services are those best equipped to provide women with the support they need (Council of Europe, 2008: 18).

Access to Accommodation:

Shelter provision was in crisis before the pandemic. In 2019, Women's Aid services were unable to accommodate 58% of women who requested refuge accommodation, due to lack of space. Scottish Women's Aid subsequently calculates that just 1 in 6 women seeking refuge as a result



of domestic abuse will be able to get the space when they need it (SWA, 2020a: 20). Underfunding and the UK Government's austerity policy since 2010 is one of the reasons for this lack of space. Despite Scotland's efforts to counteract the 'Bedroom Tax', the UN's special rapporteur on violence against women reported that the scrapping of the Spare Room Subsidy reduced women's ability to find rental properties due to the unavailability of suitably sized accommodation (Manjoo, 2014). This also contributed to bottlenecks in shelters, as women were unable to find accommodation to move on to.

Another reason for the lack of shelters and refuges is that women's support services rely heavily on the social sector, who provide 61% of all temporary accommodation used in Scotland. Placements in women's refuges are on average 117 days long which is above the overall average, but less than the 231 days spent in Housing Association accommodation (for all homeless applications) (Scottish Government, 2020b). The negative effect of this dependence has only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Scottish Women's Aid has reported that many social landlords are freezing allocations to vacant homes during the crisis, further reducing access to refuges that are already full, and disabling survivors from moving into more stable accommodation (SWA, 2020b).

Currently, social distancing measures are dramatically reducing available space in shelters and frequently changing rules have left support workers concerned about the health and safety of the women using these spaces (SWA, 2020a).

Women who have experienced domestic abuse and are left subsequently homeless have complex needs. It is important, therefore, that when providing temporary accommodation, survivors' needs are understood on a case-by-case and intersectional basis. Women with children, women from diverse cultures or religions, and LGBTQ+ women will all require accommodation that suits their differing individual needs. For example, research by an Islamic charity found that Muslim women were likely to avoid the use of shelters if alcohol or drugs were at all present (Moss & Singh, 2016: 53). In the social sector, the Unsuitable Accommodation Order is designed to prevent, to an extent, against substandard provision (Scottish Government, 2020a). However, in the case of domestic abuse survivors, it may be breached in order to ensure their safety and wellbeing if rapid rehousing is required. Because of this, there were 500 breaches of unsuitable accommodation legislation in Scotland in the year 2019/2020 (Scottish Government, 2020a).

The uniqueness and complexity of survivor's needs has been further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to services (support, medical, childcare), proximity to local shops and schools, and distance from family/friends are all factors that must be taken into consideration when providing accommodation. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures have meant access



to such things has been made all the more difficult, and so too the suitability of accommodation for domestic abuse survivors (SWA, 2020a). CIH in their report from December 2020 have recommended that a government review of specialist refuge provision would remove the need for the Unsuitable Accommodation Order exemption and ultimately provide better accommodation for survivors (CIH, 2020: 11).

Funding for Shelters:

The European feminist organisation WAVE sees the government as having a duty to provide funding for the provision of women's shelters and refuges: 'The state is obliged to afford protection from all forms of violence in private and public contexts' (2004: 31). Because shelters and refuges perform an important social function, they should be funded as any other essential social service would. Moreover, this right to financial support should be enshrined in legislation (WAVE, 2004: 31).

In Scotland, this is not the reality. While the majority of support services do not own the properties used for providing refuges, renting them from local authorities and housing associations, they rely on just housing benefit to cover the cost (SWA, 2020a: 11). SWA's assessment of COVID-19's impact on their members found that the majority had lost income from housing benefit, yet no funding programme is in place to mitigate this impact (2020a: 11).

Current Policy:

While the Scottish Government has no current policy regarding the provision of shelters and refuges for survivors of domestic abuse, legislation is currently passing through parliament that seeks to give authorities and landlords the power to remove abusers from the home.

Domestic Abuse Protection (Scotland) Bill:

The Domestic Abuse Protection (Scotland) Bill, which is currently under review at the Scottish Parliament, is Holyrood's most recent response to the need for further protecting housing access for women who have experienced domestic abuse. The proposed bill seeks to introduce two new types of protection notices and orders: domestic abuse protection notices (DAPNs) and domestic abuse protection orders (DAPOs). The protection offered by such orders and notices is as stated by the Scottish Parliament (Domestic Abuse Protection Scotland Bill, 2021):



DAPNs can be made by senior members of the police. They are a very short-term way to offer immediate protection from domestic abuse until a DAPO can be made by a court.

A DAPO can last for up to 2 months and can be extended by another month. A DAPN does not need to be in place to ask the court for a DAPO.

The Bill lists all of the things a DAPN can do. This includes stopping an abuser from entering the home of the person they have abused.

A DAPO can do anything a DAPN can, or anything else the court thinks is needed to protect someone from abuse by their partner or ex-partner.

The Bill also adds a new reason for ending a Scottish secure tenancy when a tenant has been abusive to their partner or ex-partner. The landlord can only seek to end the tenancy if they plan to let the person who has been abused continue to live in the house. The person who has been abused must also wish to continue to live in the house

CIH supports the implementation of these legal protections but also recognises a need to extend the Order beyond the proposed three months, for example, if combined with the powers to end a joint social tenancy in part two of the legislation (Cih.org, 2021). They worry that three months is an insufficient period to allow the Court to consider the evidence for ending the joint tenancy. It is relevant to note that this policy is only now in accordance with article 52 of the Istanbul Convention (Emergency barring orders). Again, this policy does not tackle the lack of funding for shelter and refuge provision, however, it is an important step in legally recognising the woman's right to housing — which is traditionally male-orientated — and places the domestic environment directly under the protection of the law (Paglione, 2006).

Funding: Government Aid

In March 2020, during the first month of the pandemic, the Scottish Government pledged £350 million to Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland, to be provided over a period of 6 months (Scottish Government, 2020). Whilst this is certainly a beneficial donation for many, it further emphasises the fact the Government is not taking a diverse and intersectional approach to funding.



BAME women face specific barriers to accessing support that are not always taken into account by more mainstream organisations such as Women's Aid. These barriers include limited access to translators, misunderstanding of culture, religious practices not being acknowledged, as well as prejudice and assumptions about one's ethnicity (Women's Grid, 2020). The Revive Project, a UK rehousing scheme, reinforced the idea that specialist care is needed for BAME individuals, stating:

‘one applicant struggled to leave her husband, because she was six when they were introduced and he was 21, she felt like he owned him. In her country of origin, you remain married despite physical abuse. Specialist training had to be given to non-BAME staff to be respectful and understanding in these circumstances’ (Women's Grid, 2020).

Financial Support for Survivors

According to the charity Surviving Economic Abuse, financial abuse is ‘designed to reinforce or create economic instability. In this way it limits women's choices and ability to access safety.’ Financial abuse is, inevitably, a significant factor in survivor's inability to leave abusive situations. In the Women's Aid Domestic Abuse Report 2019, it was found that, of the survivors surveyed, 31.9% said their access to money during the relationship was controlled by the perpetrator. Furthermore, a third of respondents had to give up their home as a result of the abuse or leaving the relationship. (The Domestic Abuse Report 2019 - Women's Aid). It is therefore essential that survivors of abuse have easy and clear access to financial support, independent of their abuser.

There are currently several avenues available for securing government supported funding. Survivors needing to leave their current living situations may be eligible for a crisis grant from the Scottish Welfare Fund. Crisis grants are provided for immediate financial assistance following an emergency or disaster that threatens serious risk or damage to the health and safety of the survivor and their family. Potentially harmful situations include: a lack of living expenses due to a breakdown in a relationship, perhaps involving domestic violence, leading to a lack of accommodation. The grant covers living expenses including food, essential heating costs, nappies and toiletries, and costs for accommodation in a hostel. There is no maximum award under the crisis grant for items, however there is a maximum grant for living expenses, depending on the survivor's situation. Under the Scottish Welfare Fund, there is additionally potential access to community care grants, intended to support living expenses to keep families together in situations including relationship breakdown. These grants however are discretionary and depend on the local council's current budget.



Survivors of domestic abuse may further be eligible to receive emergency financial aid from their local council's social work department under a Section 12 Payment, or, if the applicant has children, under a Section 22 Payment. Under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, Local Authorities have a duty to promote welfare in their area, including the provision of assistance to a person 'in need, requiring assistance in kind or, in exceptional circumstances constituting an emergency, in cash.' Applicants under S12 must be aged 16 years or older and have a legitimate Community Care need. They must additionally satisfy the Adult Social Work Team that they have no other sources of assistance. An S12 can only be provided for items such as food, fuel, essential sanitary supplies, and essential travel. Councils note that S12 applications are to be used as a last resort, and cannot aim to cover extensive financial needs, such as accommodation.

In the longer-term, survivors may be able to apply for emergency funds under domestic abuse provisions, within more widely available benefit schemes. Housing benefits may be available under a special provision for circumstances in which the applicant is temporarily absent from their home through fear of domestic violence and abuse. This support will be paid for up to 52 weeks within England, Scotland and Wales. An application can further be made for amendment to the usual requirements of Jobseeker's Allowance, and Employment and Support Allowance, providing financial support in situations in which the applicant has taken a break from job seeking and work preparations requirements for up to 13 weeks due to domestic abuse. Additionally, if a survivor experiences domestic abuse while receiving Universal Credit, they will not be asked to take on any work-related requirements for 13 weeks, with the possibility of an extension. Further support may be accessed through a budgeting loan, or a budgeting advance (applicable if the applicant is receiving universal credit. Repayable from subsequent benefits), through Discretionary Housing Payments under the DWP, and, if the applicant has a child, through the Child Maintenance Service.

Throughout the pandemic, the DWP has continued to keep job centres open for survivors of domestic abuse, and at most centres, private rooms will be available for consultations with a work coach on sensitive issues. Work coaches are present to assist survivors in making Universal Credit claims as a single claimant, allowing the process to be confidential and kept private from the abuser. Jobcentres also aim to make a same-day decision on whether to provide rapid advances of up to 100% of the applicant's expected monthly entitlement.

Support is further provided to women who do not have settled immigration status in the UK. If the survivor's relationship with a British citizen has broken down as a result of domestic abuse, they may be eligible to apply for settlement as a survivor of domestic abuse, allowing further access to government provided aid. The destitution domestic violence concession provides assistance if the survivor is in the UK under a temporary visa as a partner of a UK national, or if, as a result of a relationship breakdown, they have no means of supporting themselves. This



concession offers survivors 3 months' leave outside the immigration rules, and the ability to apply for access to public funds.



Policy Recommendations

(i) Reach out to Survivors: Addressing Intersectional Barriers and Creating Points-of-Contact

Addressing Intersectional Barriers:

The Scottish Government needs to recognise that domestic abuse survivors are not a monolith, and different aspects of their identity might affect the extent of their abuse as well as their access to domestic abuse services.

This recognition should be combined with the addressing of intersectional barriers. This would mean the Government should fund the bridging of language barriers by providing domestic abuse support services in different languages, which would entail giving the staff intersectionality training, including signposting them to other, more suitable services if needed.

The Government should also fund and work with LGBTQ+-specific support services such as Galop. This is especially crucial as LGBTQ+ people might not be comfortable using non-LGBTQ+-specific support services due to worries of discrimination.

Other intersectional barriers such as technological barriers should also be addressed. This can be achieved through establishing more accessible points-of-contact for survivors, which will be expanded on below.

Creating Points-of-Contact:

The Scottish Government should establish accessible and discrete points-of-contact for domestic abuse survivors to report their abuse. This will help lighten the immense burden that is inexorably placed on the survivors to report their own abuse, for it provides a pathway for survivors to seek help without attracting too much attention from their abusers.



Such points-of-contact should be located in places that are often visited by people, such as clinics and supermarkets. The Government should work with private companies to establish these points-of-contact.

There should be signs in places such as women's bathrooms instructing subtle ways survivors can indicate their abuse. For example, a picture of a simple and deliberate hand gesture can be printed on the aforementioned signs.

The Government should provide training for the staff on location. This would teach them the skills needed to spot the signs of domestic abuse and also the standard procedures to take after recognising such cases, such as physically separating the survivor and the abuser in a discreet manner.

(ii) Implementation of Subsidised Shelters and Refuges

The Scottish Government must immediately implement a funding programme for women's shelters and refuges across Scotland. Stable and consistent funding would dramatically reduce the financial burden support services are facing due to poor policy and exacerbated further by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We believe that a relationship led by women's support services and supported by the Government's infrastructure could rapidly resolve the lack of shelter space in Scotland. It is essential, as per the guidance of the Istanbul Convention, that the Government prioritises the knowledge and expertise of support services, and in no way discriminates, through funding, against any demographic of survivors. The creation of shelter space should be reviewed from a practical and intersectional point of view. Support services should advise on the type and location of shelter spaces so that no survivor is left with unsuitable accommodation. Again, a cross public-non-profit relationship could also help remedy the stresses caused by the pandemic, with clearer dissemination of health and safety information as Scotland moves out of full lockdown. As CIH has identified in their 2020 report, COSLA and the Government must also ensure that current emergency policy for access to public funding does not mean that the Unsuitable Accommodation Order exemption becomes standard practice.

We believe that the guidance for government funding of women's shelters and refuges found in WAVE's 2004 report is a framework which the Scottish Government should adopt and move forward with (30-31):



- Women's refuges should be run by professional women's NGOs.
- The financing of refuges should be enshrined in legislation.
- If women's refuges, helplines and other support organisations are to operate properly, they need long-term or unlimited contracts with the public authorities guaranteeing payment of the envisaged funding. Constant battling for money uses up a great deal of time and energy which is taken from the actual work with women and children. Financial insecurity and the dependence of the refuge have a contra-productive impact on the goal of providing women with security and independence.
- The funding contract should cover all of the services provided and not be split up into individual contracts.
- The funding must be adequate and comprehensive: it should also include public relations and awareness raising work.
- The contract should include recognition of the services' professional independence and the formulation of the professional standards to be met.
- The funding should be sufficient to guarantee the maintenance of professional standards.
- Staying in a refuge should be free of charge for abused women and their children.
- Each woman must be able to go to a refuge of her choice independent of funding regulations. Only the woman concerned is able to judge if she is safe in the nearest refuge or in a refuge that is further away. The level of funding must not place constraints on this freedom of choice.
- Refuges should not be forced to finance the services they provide themselves; they should be expected to contribute only a small percentage of their overall budget through their own fund-raising activities.
- Private sponsoring should be used only for specific and supplementary acquisitions like children's playground equipment, a TV set or PCs for training purposes, not to cover the regular running costs of the refuge.
- The funding contracts should also state that any funds raised through private sponsorship should not have an impact on the level of state funding, which would mean that the state withdrew from its responsibilities.



(iii) Comprehensive Funding for Support Services

In order to maximise effectiveness, the Government must diversify its funding, and focus on applying an intersectional lens to the provision of financial support for domestic abuse organisations. We believe that organisations with specialist knowledge and facilities to support women of different races, religions, languages and social situations require such funding. These organisations are crucial for supporting women who may fall at intersections that make seeking support significantly more challenging. We believe that the Government should continue to approach domestic abuse support with intersectionality beyond the pandemic; although the pandemic has highlighted the increased instances of abuse, it will not disappear when lockdown is lifted.

Furthermore, the Government must continue to offer financial aid beyond the initial grant offered in the first month of the pandemic. The 6 months of payments announced in March 2020 is insufficient given that a year later, the nation is still in lockdown and thus the risk for domestic abuse survivors remains large. Without a commitment to consistent funding, organisations will struggle to make decisions about the allocation and spending of government aid. Long term financial support will allow these organisations to implement long term solutions that will support survivors beyond the bounds of national lockdown.

(iv) Efficient and Equity-Based Financial Support for Survivors

Government-funded aid for survivors of domestic abuse is available, and potentially substantial. However, there are many flaws in the application processes and methods of accessing these grants that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

There is a lack of immediately accessible financial support with clear application instructions. Most seriously, the methods of support available, though created for situations of domestic abuse, often fail to take into account limitations placed on the survivors as a result of economic abuse.

These failings have been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic, and as explored elsewhere in the report, there has been a lack of alteration to the application processes in light of these new circumstances. Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis grants, a primary financial resource for survivors in Scotland, only support hostel accommodation. This provision relies on the health of the survivor, meaning in practice, they must not be at significant risk from COVID-19 in order to make safe use of the stipulated accommodation.



Although many of the avenues available provide assistance with travel expenses, such as the Section 12, this too relies on the survivor's ability to travel without compromising their own or their children's health. The funding listed above therefore ultimately rests on the survivor's COVID risk status, or their ability to wait in a potentially dangerous domestic situation, until the pandemic has sufficiently lessened.



Next Steps

Moving forward, we are seeking to further communicate with stakeholders both local to Edinburgh and nationally in order to discuss our proposals and their potential impacts, and to begin strategizing the lobbying of our policy suggestions at governmental level, with the Scottish Parliament being the principal gatekeeper.

Being students at the University of Edinburgh, we also see scope to lobby our proposals at the university level in order to positively impact the student community. Each policy proposal could be very well adapted for this goal through: bettering the Student Support services training for domestic abuse; improving community awareness and creating points-of-contact for students wanting to reach out and get help; repurposing empty university-owned accommodation for rapid rehousing of student-survivors; and, finally, setting up financial support, much like we saw with hardship payments at the beginning of the pandemic. Key gatekeepers that we feel could help us manifest such changes are: Edinburgh University Student Association, the Feminist Society, and Girl Up Edinburgh.

Ultimately, we recognise that the impacts of the pandemic on survivors are likely to persist. Our goal is to help combat them now, and mitigate against their reoccurrence in any similar, future health crises.



Conclusion

The statistics discussed above point to an overwhelmingly pressing need to better existing and establish new policies to tackle domestic abuse cases. Despite legislation such as the Domestic Abuse Act (Scotland) 2018, domestic abuse cases are still prevalent, and the actions taken against them are slow and inefficient.

The root causes of domestic abuse are well-researched. The inertia presented by the Government is not from a lack of understanding of domestic abuse, but rather from a lack of dedication towards solving the problem. The Government needs to view tackling domestic abuse cases as a priority. The ramifications of this are exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated the existing problems within current legislation.

Throughout the pandemic, the UK and Scottish Governments have failed to make essential changes to survivor support systems. Improvements must be made in order to counterbalance the lack of mobility and financial resources, and the increase in contact with abusers that survivors have faced as a result of consecutive lockdowns.

Our policy suggestions are designed to tackle specific parts of the issue of domestic abuse that have been highlighted and worsened by the pandemic. The increase in funding from the Government will aid in the improvement of support services, the availability and provision of subsidised shelters, and of financial support for survivors. We hope that provision for domestic abuse support will be further improved by addressing intersectional barriers, and creating readily available points-of-contact, eliminating the need for complex and often inaccessible emotional and financial support processes.



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