

RESPONSE TO UK PARLIAMENT INQUIRY CALL FOR EVIDENCE:
TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

**Violence Against Women,
Domestic Abuse, and Sexual
Violence Research Network
Wales**

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Summary

This paper includes evidence compiled from the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Research Network for Wales. It highlights what is working well (intersectional approach, VAWG is everybody's business, the inclusion of suicide as a result of DA in the homicide figures, the multi-agency approach, recognition of by and for services, the prominence of survivor voice, and examples of good practice in Wales). It then considers challenges (conflicts between devolved and not devolved policy, the availability of nuanced data, the barriers to reporting, terminology that excludes, a punitive approach, a lack of training for professionals, inconsistent and short-term funding, a lack of understanding of intersecting identities). Finally, the paper includes two case studies from services in Wales, Bawso, which supports survivors from racialised communities, and Dewis Choice, which supports older survivors.

Background

This paper is prepared by the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Research Network for Wales (the Network) in response to the UK Parliament Call for Evidence on Tackling Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG).

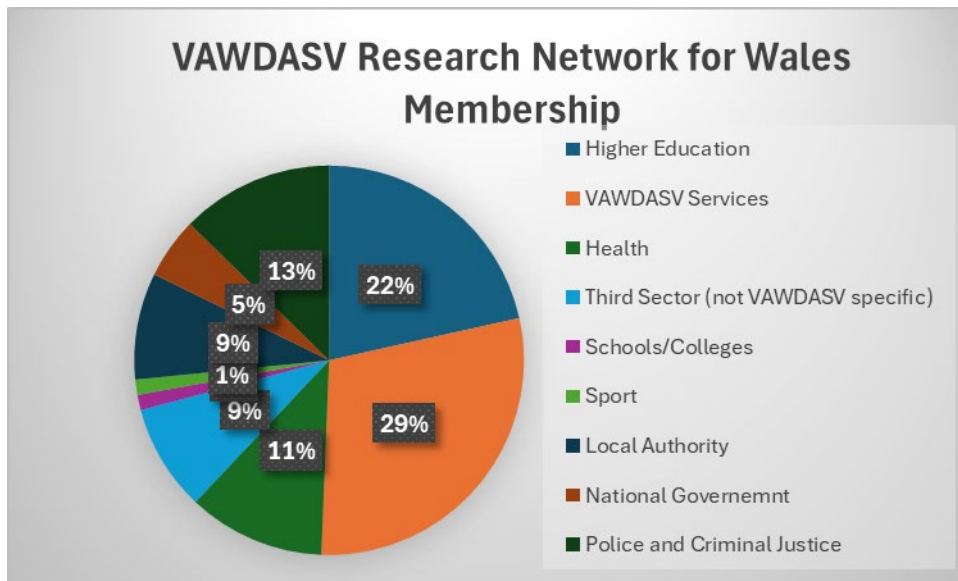
We have prepared this response with reference to certain key policies and documents from both UK Parliament and Welsh Government, e.g. Tackling Domestic Abuse Place Command Paper 639, Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Violence Against Women and Girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: Strategy 2022 to 2026.

This response includes a general background on the Network, high level overarching areas of success and concern, and specific case studies from Network members highlighting the current challenges being faced, particularly for those who are taking an intersectional approach or working with those with particular protected characteristics.

The VAWDASV Research Network Wales

The VAWDASV Research Network for Wales is an inclusive research community for Wales that provides a safe, open forum to bring together those who are working towards an end to VAWDASV. Our focus is on research and collaboration that works towards the elimination of VAWDASV. We recognise that anyone can experience VAWDASV regardless of race, class, disability, gender, age, sexuality, or other protected characteristics, and hope that by working together we will make Wales a safer place for us all. The network, which was formed in 2021, brings together over 200 members representing organisations across health, social care, government, local authority, education, the third sector, policing and justice, and academia in Wales and beyond.¹ Organisations who are currently represented within the network include those from: specialist VAWDASV services, higher education (HE), police and criminal justice, health, local authorities, the third sector, national government, schools and colleges, and sport.

¹ For a full list of organisations represented within the VAWDASV Research Network Wales see appendix 1.



Methods

This paper was prepared by Prof Emily Underwood-Lee and Dr Sarah Wallace, VAWDASV Research Network Wales Co-Chairs, with contributions from Dr Sophia Kier-Byfield (University of South Wales), Mark Prescott (University of South Wales), Nancy Lidubwi (Bawso), Elize Freeman (Dewis Choice), Matt Girdlestone (Workforce Development Trust), Andrea Cooper (Office of the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales), and Lara Snowdon (Violence Prevention Unit, Public Health Wales), following consultation with Network members. A call for input was circulated by email to all Network members. From this, a Working Group comprised of 16 representatives from the Network was formed.² An initial group discussion to consider evidence shared by Network members was held on Teams with 6 members of the Working Group present. A draft paper was then circulated to the Working Group for further input. A second draft paper was created following input from members of the Working Group, which was circulated to all Network members for comment, before this final paper was created.

What is Working Well

The current UK Government approach to VAWG is working well in a variety of aspects. We particularly applaud the focus on an intersectional approach, the philosophy that VAWG is everybody’s business,

² The Working Group included: Prof Emily Underwood-Lee (University of South Wales), Dr Sarah Wallace (University of South Wales), Dr Sophia Kier-Byfield (University of South Wales), Mark Prescott (University of South Wales), Nancy Lidubwi (Bawso), Elize Freeman (Dewis Choice), Matt Girdlestone (Workforce Development Trust), Andrea Cooper (Office of the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales), Michelle Wheelan (Calan DVS), Matthew Taylor (Welsh Government), Nicola Cowan (Welsh Government), Prof Roiyah Saltus (University of South Wales), Samina Ali (Cwmpas), Prof Fiona Brookman (University of South Wales), Sarah-Jane Lewis (Victim Support).

and that it is for perpetrators to change their behaviour rather than victims/survivors (i.e. not victim blaming).

It is gratifying to see the commitment to the inclusion of suicide as a result of DA in the homicide figures.

We welcome the UK Government's focus on prevention, on a multi-agency approach and the recognition of the need for 'by and for' services. These are key areas in which we see opportunity for further development. The inclusion of survivor voice as a key element of planning in relation to VAWG is of central importance and, going forward, we would like to see significant exploration of how those who might be excluded from traditional government consultations (e.g. the most marginalised in our society, those who are digitally excluded, older people, and people with learning and other disabilities, survivors who have not engaged with the criminal justice system, etc.). In our view, the focus on prevention is key, and we hope that this will continue in any future planning.

We would like to highlight several areas of good practice in Wales which we would like to see replicated across UK Government policy:

- The whole system approach in Wales, where all statutory services have a responsibility to reduce VAWDASV as outlined in the Violence Against Women and Girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.³
- The National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People in Wales 2024.⁴
- The Welsh Government VAWDASV Blueprint Approach, while a relatively recent development, appears to be working well to ensure that various stakeholders, including specialist services and survivors, have a meaningful say in practice and policy in Wales.⁵
- The Wales Without Violence shared framework for preventing violence among children and young people is a guide for the primary prevention and early intervention strategies to end violence among children and young people as part of a whole system, public health approach.⁶

Challenges

Devolved policy

Wales is a devolved nation. As such, key areas in relation to VAWG are within the control of Welsh Government (e.g. health, education) while crime and justice are not. This leads to significant complexity for services within Wales who are often caught between systems, funding streams, and

³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/3/contents>

⁴ : <https://www.gov.wales/national-action-plan-prevent-abuse-older-people-html>

⁵ <https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-strategy-2022-2026-html>

⁶ <https://waleswithoutviolence.com/> (this could also be referenced in the prevention section as framework for primary prevention and early intervention).

responsibilities. One example of this is the Serious Violence Duty UK legislation which impacts on violence prevention policy in Wales.⁷ We need coordinated action across government and across the devolved and non-devolved landscape (see below case studies for further examples).

Consistent and Nuanced Data

Consistent, research led policy and practice informed by survivor experience is essential in reducing VAWG. Without nuanced data, this is not possible in any meaningful way. Disaggregated data on VAWG in Wales is not currently available within the ONS data. We would like to see greater concern for the devolved context of Wales within future UK Government planning and a commitment to providing Wales specific data through the ONS. Our members have also expressed concern that certain protected characteristics are not reported, e.g. disability is presented as a unified category. It would be more helpful to include learning disability as a specific category distinct from physical or sensory disability as the limited research available shows that people with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable to VAWG. Similarly, data collection and disaggregation is not representative of the intersections of older victims, e.g. disaggregation by age ends at 75 years with victims aged 75 years and over, represented as one group.

Reporting through the Criminal Justice System

The current UK Government Tackling Domestic Abuse Place Command Paper 639 notes that “The Home Office will work with the National Police Chiefs’ Council to identify and audit police forces which record the highest rates of domestic homicide and serious domestic abuse crimes. The Home Office will work with these forces to improve their domestic abuse metrics and identify challenges they are facing”. We would like to see a greater nuance in this approach. Our concern is that high levels of reporting may not indicate a failure or “challenge” but could be linked to people being more able to disclose and seek help. This may also disincentivise forces from tackling and removing barriers to reporting and help seeking.

We are concerned that people who have not engaged with the criminal justice system, e.g. those with limited access to justice such as older people, ethnic and migrant communities, young people, LGBTQ+, etc., may not have been included in the data gathering in respect of “survivor voice”. The current inclusion criteria for the UK Government places a significant emphasis on engaging with organisations (“A domestic abuse or specialist organisation supported the victim and survivor to submit a survey response / An independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) supported the victim and survivor”) or having an understanding of specific language and terminology (“Domestic abuse was specifically mentioned in the open text questions”), which may mean that those who struggle/face barriers to engaging with VAWG services were not represented in the consultation. More needs to be done to ensure inclusiveness in consultation and policy.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-duty>

A Whole System Approach

VAWG policy currently exists in isolation. Austerity measures, housing legislation, education, immigration policy etc. all have a significant impact on the ability of services to fulfil their roles (see below case studies). As a key example, we note that immigration policy and ‘No Recourse to Public Funds’ is in direct contradiction with the aim to support all victims regardless of their immigration status. We would like to see UK Government place a requirement on policy in all areas (i.e. not just VAWG) to include consideration on the impact that it may have for survivors of VAWG.

Terminology

VAWG as a term may exclude some. While we do not wish to diminish the gendered aspects of VAWG, we would like to see widespread consultation on the terminology used. Our experience has been that the Welsh terminology, while not perfect, is more inclusive, e.g. VAWDASV centres women but also includes domestic abuse and sexual violence as distinct categories of harm, which anyone might be a victim of. Many of our members have also expressed a preference for terms such as “healthy relationships”, which focus on positive language rather than harms.

Prevention, Education and a Punitive Approach

The current UK government policy documents take a highly punitive approach with a focus on ‘pursuing perpetrators’. This is at odds with the stated desire to prevent VAWG before harm has occurred. Research shows that engaging with potential perpetrators without shaming or stigmatising them has a significant impact, and we highlight here the Welsh Government Sound Campaign as an example of good practice in this respect.⁸

We would also like to see greater emphasis within UK Government policy and plans on supporting perpetrators to be held to account and change their behaviour through research informed interventions that focus on preventing future harm.

Alarmingly, members of the network have reported that they are aware of people identifying their own risk of causing harm to others and seeking help but finding no resources available to them because they have not yet committed an offence. We would like to see consistent and wide-spread support available for those seeking help before they have committed harm.

We are glad to see the focus on prevention through education initiatives in UK Government policy and plans but would welcome more detail on how teachers are to be supported to deliver this training. We were also unable to find specific information on how those who may not be engaged with formal education (e.g. school refusers, home-schooled young people, transient populations, care leavers etc.) will be encouraged to learn about healthy relationships and to be engaged in preventative education programmes. We would welcome education and prevention programmes that engage across the life course and specifically consider marginalised communities alongside general population work.

⁸ <https://www.gov.wales/sound>

Training for Professionals

Our members have reported a lack of a consistent offering in terms of VAWG competency training for professionals, especially those in the critical areas of criminal justice and policing. A competency framework could be a highly useful intervention. An example of good practice highlighted by our members is the Social Care Wales Safeguarding Standards.⁹

Long Term, Consistent Funding

Long term consistent funding to services that are effective and up to date is essential (see below case studies for specific examples of how short-term and precarious funding has impacted service delivery). In particular, our members have highlighted the complexity of housing funding as having a significant impact on the provision of safe accommodation, a lack of ringfenced funding for VAWG, the need to seek additional funding from trusts and foundations, long waiting lists causing survivors and perpetrators to be unable to access specialist mental health support, and a lack of funding for specialist services with those services that provide for people with particular needs particularly under-resourced (i.e. a lack of services and resources for e.g. people with precarious immigration status, those disengaged from statutory services, or people with protected or intersecting characteristics).

The precarity found in funding to services is similarly impacting research. In particular, UKRI and HE research funding is disproportionately low in Wales, meaning that less research has a Wales specific focus. Similarly, the lack of funding for longitudinal studies of VAWG means that we cannot fully understand or measure the long-term impacts of interventions.

Intersecting Identities and Protected Characteristics

Specialist 'by and for' provision is gaining recognition within policy and planning from UK Government, which we are pleased to see. However, many marginalised groups are still under-served with specialist provision over-subscribed and under-resourced (see below case studies). A key example here is older people, who are often excluded from accessing VAWG services as professionals do not recognise DA in this population or there are specific barriers to accessing support, e.g. isolation, shame, mobility, digital exclusion etc. Similarly, those under 16 are excluded (under the UK definition of domestic abuse) from many VAWG services and yet research tells us that this group is highly vulnerable to VAWG. People with learning disabilities are also frequently excluded; research indicates a very low level of awareness of mainstream support services and women's refuges in this population, together with minimal specialist refuge provision (one specialist UK refuge, located in London). We would like to see consideration given to VAWG across intersecting identities and across the life course.

⁹ <https://socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/safeguarding-list/national-safeguarding-training-learning-and-development-standards>

Case Study 1: Bawso

Bawso is an All Wales registered charity that provides specialist support, accommodation and protection to women and children victims of domestic abuse and violence. We cover all the four regions of Wales and have been in existence for the last 29 years, during which we have supported just over a quarter of a million women and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

We have witnessed an expansion of our services that enables us to support up to 7000 people from ethnic minority backgrounds annually. We receive ringfenced grants from both the UK government and Welsh Government towards the provision of safe refuge accommodation and community based (floating) support provided to persons at risk of homelessness.

We have responded in this case study to the four main pillars of the UK Government plan to address domestic abuse.

Prevention – to deliver long -term cultural and societal change

As a big organisation that provides specialist services among minoritised victims of abuse and violence and working in the community, we do not receive funding for prevention, yet we know well that it pays to stop violence from taking place in the first place. There are huge, long term economic and societal benefits for victims, communities and the government to be gained from preventing VAWG before it occurs.

We have been left to source funds for prevention from trusts and foundations, and this doesn't always bring in the much-needed funds.

What we need: Government commitment to a public health approach in addressing VAWG through financial commitment, that is long term and not simply a stop gap measure, that doesn't amount to realistic outcomes. We receive short term funding from South Wales PCC towards a children and young people worker in one region, Cardiff. We need funds to raise awareness in the community, build the capacity of community advocates to engage with the community to challenge stereotypes, misogyny, male dominance culture within minoritised communities, and challenge harmful cultures and religious beliefs that create environments for imbalanced power relations.

The service users we have supported always tell us that if they had access to information on VAWG, they would have left the abusive relationship a long time before they did and recommend prevention work to 'rescue' victims from abuse.

Supporting victims – to increase support for victims and survivors including providing support services that are run by and for the communities they serve.

We receive Housing Support grants from Welsh Government via Local Authorities, which contribute towards refuge accommodation for victims of abuse and violence. This financial support can provide accommodation for up to 30 units. Our units are full to capacity all year round. This means any victim coming through our doors will have to be supported from alternative accommodation units that are not always safe and suitable for victims.

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Victims also experience other barriers and challenges, including language, lack of knowledge of why they have been removed from their homes (mostly by the police after an incident has been reported), and cultural and religious beliefs that impact on the nature of support they are able to receive.

Victims present complex support needs that are often interlinked, e.g. complex mental health issues, physical abuse marks, language barriers, spousal immigration visas that are cancelled once they leave their partners, and irregular immigration status. Abuse is often carried out by multiple perpetrators who continue to perpetrate abuse even when victims have exited their homes and victims are at risk of being hunted down and taken back to their homes which, in turn, increases their risk for further abuse, threats, and honour based abuse.

To provide a service that meets the needs of victims, there is a need for all support agencies including the police, health, social services, education, and Criminal Justice to understand the complexities surrounding a single victim.

“I am not going back to my husband; you need to provide me with support”

Bawso Service User

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF): The Home Office Support for Migrant Victims (SMV) pilot project managed by Southall Black Sisters has been a lifeline for victims with no recourse to public funds. This grant was topped up by the Welsh Government in 2024. The grant has enabled us to support up to 90 women and their children in a year. Service users under this program cannot access safe refuge accommodation because the refuge is publicly funded accommodation. As a result, women and children are accommodated in temporary, non-specialist accommodation, e.g. Airbnb's, hotels, and hostels. These accommodation alternatives are not safe spaces for vulnerable women and their children. They are public spaces with uncontrolled traffic and no safeguarding measures in place. They lack cooking facilities, families are confined in small rooms, women with children do not have easy access to washing facilities, and there are no safe spaces for children to play. Victims need safe spaces, that are ‘home away from home’. Confined spaces trigger anxiety and increase mental health problems and can be a reminder of confined spaces and confined engagement they have experienced in abusive homes.

SMV funding does not meet the demand we experience. From December 2024, we have reduced the number of victims we support at any one time from 23 to only 2 due to a shortage of funds. Victims are being turned away. We don't know where victims go once they fail to access support. Going back to perpetrators increases their risk of further violence.

“There was another problem waiting for me, that now my spouse visa got cancelled, there was no place for me to go in England, not a single refuge wanted to accept me” Bawso Service User

Migrant Victim of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) Act 2024: The Home Office outlined new measures to provide short term relief to victims of domestic abuse who hold migrant visas, or international student visas. Although the legislation was hailed as a move in the right direction, it has failed victims. MVDAC does not work for victims. We received only two women victims of abuse coming through the MVDAC route and after three months proceeded to apply for asylum. The rest of the victims go back to perpetrators when they learn of the prohibitive restrictions attached to support under MVDAC.

What we need: Victims need assurance that they are safe when they leave abusive relationships. Lack of that assurance takes away their confidence to reach out and seek for support or report incidents. There are significant numbers of victims of abuse who cannot escape violence due to prohibitive legislation. There is a need for the government to standardise legislation around migrants and no recourse to public funds and allow victims to access support without making it harder for them to seek help.

"I am scared to sleep in the night he will rape me again tonight please give me help" Bawso Service User

Victims and Prisoners Act 2024: The government needs to make amendments to the above Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 to include 'putting a firewall on victim data' to stop agencies from sharing victims' data with the Home Office Immigration enforcement department, to encourage victims to come forward and report incidents and access support.

The impact of Welsh Government's Renting Homes Act 2016: The interpretation of the Act minimum room size requirement means that the number of survivors that can be accommodated in a property has been reduced. Where a two bedroom accommodation unit would previously have accommodated two single women, it is now only possible to accommodate one person in a two bedroomed flat. This has financial repercussions on charities such as Bawso. The Renting Homes Act should be reviewed and VAWG charities exempted from its implementation.

Ringfenced funding for VAWG: There is a need to make available adequate funds towards protection and support services. Provision should include adequate safe accommodation units, and provision of mental health support and counselling as and when needed (currently, victims are placed on a waiting list for 18 months once survivors have exited support services). Ringfenced funding should also allow charities to purchase refuge accommodation instead of relying on rental units.

"For the many months I lived in the Refuge I learnt a lot, how to keep safe, and protect my children, you help me with my visa I was scared he will send me back home to be killed by his family I was afraid every night but you changed my story"
Bawso Service User

"I thought my life was going to end in that house" Bawso Service User

"I thought there was no help for me" Bawso Service User

"You help me get my son back from my husband, I thought I wouldn't see him again when no one believed me including my family Bawso believe me always. Now I can live my life, I can wear make-up and cover my hair when I want to, I have my life back" Bawso Service User

Lack of data, and disaggregated data: There is lack of updated data on the actual cases we deal with, which causes complications when planning for services. There is a need to have accurate data from the Home Office that covers UK devolved nations, e.g. data on forced marriage and female genital mutilation Protection Orders does not provide the number of FMPOs and FGMPOs as separate data and doesn't provide data for Wales. Domestic abuse data does not highlight the number of incidents according to ethnicity, hence, a lack of understanding of the kind of magnitude we are dealing with.

Pursuing perpetrators – to transform the criminal justice response to ensure all perpetrators of offences against women are brought to justice.

Victims from minoritised communities are still disadvantaged in the criminal justice courts. The CJS has let down victims who spend years without hearing from the courts. Victims tend to pull out of court proceedings when there is lack of feedback on their cases.

When cases have gone to court, victims are pitted against well-spoken, eloquent perpetrators who understand the criminal justice system and know how to navigate it. There have been cases where perpetrators have 'played a victim card' or accused victims of having unstable mental health which prevents them from being able to support their children, and unfortunately, judges have tended to listen to perpetrators. However, with adequate support, there have been some cases that have successfully gone through the courts.

"I am afraid of him I don't want to go to court on my own he intimidates me please attend court with me" Bawso Service User

There is a need for judges to fully understand the background to cases and especially those submitted by minoritised victims, who experience additional challenges including threats from perpetrators against them, their children, and their families, that can deter victims from pursuing justice in courts. There is a need for the CJS and prosecution services to undergo training in adjudicating over cases.

There is also an urgent need for funding towards working with families (whole society approach) in reducing cases of domestic abuse. A whole society approach targets 'would be' perpetrators and works with them before the abuse escalates. It helps to change a perpetrator's behaviour, recognising that their actions amount to abuse and violence, and they can change.

Building a stronger system – working with multiple government departments to develop a joined-up system across health, justice, law enforcement, housing, social care and education.

We have established a good working relationship with other service providers in Wales. However, we must admit that there are still improvements to be made to be able to provide a service that is survivor-led and timely. We still experience challenges with seeking justice for victims as elucidated above.

Housing remains our biggest challenge currently. Housing problems, affecting most parts of the UK, have a negative impact on our services. Women are staying longer in refuge, some up to a year, when refuge is meant to be a temporary safe place for them. This means that we cannot support victims coming through our doors due to bed blocking. It has a triple effect on survivors and their children who not only become dependent on our support workers, but are unable to settle down in their new accommodation once a property is available. Lack of housing forces us to accommodate victims in hotels.

It is not safe to evict perpetrators and leave victims in family homes. This increases risk for the victims and can easily escalate into honour-based violence. Victims should be removed from family properties and accommodated far from the vicinity. Depending on risk, they should be accommodated in other counties to avoid the risk of being located and subjected to further abuse.

“I see my husband family in town please I don’t feel safe in Cardiff they will kill me, and my children please give me another refuge far away “ Bawso Service User

There is need for local authority and social housing to work closely with charities to develop a solution-based program to the housing crisis. There are adequate private landlords who can provide accommodation to allow for a speedy move-on and the creation of space for the next victim of abuse.

“I never felt scared at the Refuge because you were always there, my mental state became stable because you gave me hope, safety and support. I will never forget you Bawso” Bawso Service User

Case Study 2: Dewis Choice

Dewis Choice is a Welsh Initiative based at the Centre for Age, Gender and Social Justice at Aberystwyth University. Dewis Choice is the first longitudinal prospective study globally to examine the decision-making processes of older victim-survivors as they seek help and access to justice. Dewis Choice has highlighted the diverse 'lived experiences' of over 200 women and men aged 60 years and over who have experienced abuse from intimate partners and/or adult family members.

Established in 2015, the Initiative uniquely combines a co-produced service with research on domestic abuse in later life. The bespoke service has been designed by and for older victim-survivors (aged 60 years and above) of abuse, offering long-term intensive support for up to three years. As such, it represents a response to the gap in service provision for this age group. However, due to funding constraints the support is via referral only and limited to one local authority area, Carmarthenshire.

Dewis Choice service client demographic

- 69% of victims referred to Dewis Choice are older females
- Two thirds of referrals to Dewis Choice are for victims aged 75 years and over (the eldest female victim-survivor was aged 93 years and experiencing physical, emotional, and financial abuse from her adult son)
- 44% of referrals to Dewis Choice involve abuse from a current intimate partner and 40% abuse from an adult family member (a small number involve both)
- Over 50% of victims referred to Dewis Choice have one or more disability, including: limited mobility; hearing impairment; sight impairment.
- Dementia is a feature in over 20% of referrals, affecting either the victim or perpetrator, or both

Complexity of needs

Victims-survivors referred to Dewis Choice for support have various complex needs including high rates of age-related disability and ill-health; physical and mental health impacts from long-term abuse and trauma over the life course, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and PTSD; higher rates of care dynamics and interdependency between victims-survivors and perpetrators; reduced mental capacity as a consequence of dementia; lack of awareness of rights, entitlements and knowledge of services; and limited opportunity to 'start again', for example, rebuild finances.

Older people experience increased rates of victimisation perpetrated by adult family members and complexities

Complexities identified in Dewis Choice referrals in cases of adult family perpetrators include high rates of substance use; mental ill-health; homelessness; and unemployment.

Most older victim-survivors referred to Dewis Choice for support are living with the perpetrator at the point of referral. Misconceptions of domestic abuse in later life suggest that older victims-survivors will choose to stay in a relationship with the perpetrator. We have found that this is not the case, and many older victims-survivors do decide to leave. However, it is important to consider the duration of the relationship between victims-survivors and perpetrators, together with the impacts of prolonged exposure, sometimes decades, of abuse on the victim. For example, one older female was supported to leave a marriage of 63 years, where she had experienced coercive control throughout the relationship. Similarly, when older victims-survivors of abuse perpetrated by adult family members do make the difficult decisions to put boundaries in place with the perpetrator, it often involves taking steps to remove the adult family member from the victims-survivor home. Prolonged experiences of intimate partner abuse, the complexity of adult family abuse, combined with the age-related complexities highlighted above, demonstrate the need for specialist long-term intensive prevention, protection, and support for older victim-survivors.

Lack of data, and disaggregated data Wales

The lack of a consistent VAWDASV data collection framework in Wales, disaggregated to provide data on protected characteristics, contributes to failures to identify older victims-survivors of domestic abuse who have poor visibility in service provision and the justice system. Consequently, there is limited evidence base to support the commissioning of specialist services for older victims-survivors who may face multiple barriers to accessing protection and support. This is despite being aware that older people experience significant challenges when trying to access suitable services and support.¹⁰

ONS data (Crime Survey for England and Wales)

The upper age limit for data collection has now been removed for domestic abuse data collection (from 59 years to 74 years in 2017 and from 74 years to no upper age limit in 2021). However, this has still not achieved parity for older victim-survivors in comparison with younger groups. Data collection for victim-survivors aged 60 years and above is disaggregated in two age ranges, each spanning >15 years, whereas the largest age range for younger victim-survivors is 10 years.

Lack of specialist service provision for older victims of domestic abuse

Older people have low visibility in domestic abuse service provision, including Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). There are a limited number of domestic abuse services in Wales who have a dedicated specialist older persons worker. These posts are supported through short term funding and often cease at the end of commissioning funding cycles. Dewis Choice is currently the

¹⁰ <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Accommodation-Workshop-Report-1.pdf>
<https://olderpeople.wales/news/more-tailored-support-services-needed-to-ensure-older-people-being-abused-can-get-the-help-and-support-they-need/>

only dedicated specialist service offering intensive long-term support to older (aged 60 years and above) victim-survivors of abuse from intimate partners and adult family members, but this is limited to one local authority area in Wales.

The statutory guidance accompanying the VAWDASV Act Wales, advises that local authorities ensure service provision meets the needs of those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is currently no “statutory duty” to commission specialist services designed to meet the specific needs of older victims-survivors of domestic abuse. The progress achieved by “by and for” services in raising awareness and advocating for the needs of victim-survivors with specific protected characteristics is without parallel for older victim-survivors.

Lack of emergency accommodation for older victims -survivors of domestic abuse

The lack of emergency accommodation particularly impacts on older victims-survivors. Consequently, older victim-survivors accessing Dewis Choice have been placed at increased risk, with no other than option but to remain living with their perpetrator for prolonged periods, due to the lack of provision of emergency, and follow on, accommodation designed to meet their needs. This is particularly the case for needs of older victim-survivors, particularly older victims-survivors with disabilities and care and support needs.

Recommendations

Data collection and disaggregation: The implementation of a domestic abuse data collection framework, accompanied with guidance, to ensure consistency of data collection and disaggregation. Data collection and disaggregation to capture intersections of protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act (England and Wales) 2010 and the identification of multiple intersections in later life, including: age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, with intimate/ex-intimate partner abuse, and adult family abuse as two distinct categories.

Development of the response to adult family abuse: Further research is needed into the complexity of, and specific barriers faced by, older victims of abuse perpetrated by adult family members. This is needed to provide an evidence base to support the development of the identification of and responses to older victims of adult family abuse, and the development of responses to adult family perpetrators.

Ring Fenced funding for specialist provision: The allocation of ring-fenced, sustainable funding, built into commissioning, for specialist support tailored to meet the needs of older victim-survivors, in each local authority area. This includes Including ring-fenced allocation of funding for accessible emergency accommodation that is equipped to meet the needs of older victim-survivors, including older adults with care and support needs.

Appendix 1 – Organisations represented within the VAWDASV Research Network Wales

- Aberystwyth University - Dewis Choice
- ACE Hub Wales
- Arts Care Gofal Celf
- Assia Suite BCBC
- Atal y Fro
- Autistic UK
- Bangor University
- Bawso Ltd
- Calan DVS
- Cardiff and Vale College
- Cardiff City FC Community Foundation
- Cardiff Council
- Cardiff Metropolitan University
- Cardiff University
- City and County of Swansea Child and Family Services
- Disability Wales
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office
- Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Commissioner
- Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales
- Forensic Psychology Services, HMPPS in Wales
- Glyndwr University
- Gwent Police
- Gwent VAWDASV Regional Team
- Hafan Cymru
- Hywel Dda University Health Board
- Imperial College London
- IRISi
- MWW Regional VAWDASV Partnership
- New Pathways
- Newport City Council
- NHS
- NHS Executives
- North Wales Clinical Psychology Programme, Bangor University
- North Wales Regional VAWDASV team
- NSPCC Cymru
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys
- Older People's Commissioner for Wales
- Our Streets Now
- Pembrokeshire County Council
- Police Liaison Unit
- Policing in Wales
- Public Health Wales NHS Trust
- RASAC
- RCN Wales
- Relate
- Resolve it! CIC
- Rhondda Cynon Taf Council

- Royal College of Nursing Wales
- Safeguarding Animal & Human Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Abuse
- SafeLives
- Safer Wales
- Senedd Cymru
- South Wales Police
- South Wales Police & Crime Commissioner
- South Wales Victim Focus Team (Victim Support)
- Stepping Stones
- Stori
- Swansea Bay university health board
- Swansea Council
- Swansea University
- The Childrens Society
- The Open University
- The Survivors Trust
- Thrive Women's Aid
- Ulster University
- University of Brighton
- University of Bristol
- University of East Anglia
- University of Leicester
- University of South Wales
- University of Wales Trinity Saint Davids
- Victim Support
- Wales Safer Communities Network
- Wales Violence Prevention Unit- Public Health Wales
- Welsh Government
- Welsh Women's Aid
- Womankind
- Women Connect First
- Wrexham Glyndwr University