



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid

Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf
Putting Women & Children First

State of the Sector

Report on the state of violence against
women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
specialist services in Wales, 2017



Our membership comprises of 27 third sector Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales, with whom we have national partnership agreements to ensure our work is coordinated and integrated.

As the national umbrella organisation for VAWDASV specialist services in Wales, Welsh Women's Aid would also like to sincerely thank all of the specialist services that contributed to the *Report to the National Task and Finish Group to inform the development of a Model for Sustainable Funding for VAWDASV Specialist Services in Wales* (currently not available across Wales) provided to the Welsh Government.

This *State of the Sector* report summarises the findings and recommendations of that more substantive report, and also draws on additional material produced since its publication in September 2017.

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For more information about Welsh Women's Aid, please go to www.welshwomensaid.org.uk

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* All survivor names have been changed.

Introduction

This report is informed by the experience of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services, and by survivors and their children in Wales.

It follows Welsh Women's Aid's *Save Refuges, Save Lives* report in 2016, on the impact of funding cuts on specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence services across Wales. This highlighted stark concerns in the sector about the sustainability of funding for the majority of refuge services. That report helped inform the subsequent commitment made by Welsh Government in the *National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence 2016-2021*¹ to deliver sustainable funding for the national network of VAWDASV specialist services in Wales.

This year, Welsh Women's Aid also conducted a more substantial national resources mapping exercise in collaboration with the VAWDASV specialist services sector in Wales, *Report to the National Task and Finish Group to inform the development of a Model for Sustainable Funding for VAWDASV Specialist Services in Wales* provided to the Welsh Government.

This collated data on the range of funding going into specialist services and the types of provision delivered as a result, the challenges services face to attain sustainability, and recommendations for Government and commissioners in Wales to inform development of Welsh Government commissioning guidance and a sustainable funding model.

This *State of the Sector* report summarises the findings and recommendations of that more substantive report, and also draws on additional material produced since its publication in September. Its purpose is to highlight trends and display the current funding climate and the challenges that still need to be overcome so that sustainable funding of the sector can safeguard the expertise and lifesaving work that these organisations provide for survivors of abuse and violence in Wales every day.

About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the umbrella membership organisation in Wales that supports and provides national representation for 27 independent third sector VAWDASV specialist services.²

These specialist services deliver life-saving and life-changing support and preventative work in response to violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence, as part of a network of UK provision. Some services are small local specialist providers and others are regional and national in their scope. The support provided includes delivery of refuge-based support and community and outreach support for women, children and young people, and men across all communities in Wales, including for Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, survivors who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT), disabled, older and of many religions and beliefs.

Support is provided in the form of advice and information, practical help, advocacy, counselling and therapeutic support, individual and group support. The aim of these specialist services is to meet needs associated with domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence, forced marriage, so-called 'honour' based violence, sexual exploitation, harassment and stalking, female genital mutilation (FGM) and trafficking/modern day slavery.

Our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women, and ensure high quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender responsive and holistic. Nationally, Welsh Women's Aid provides advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements across governments, public, private and third sector services and in communities, for the benefit of survivors. This includes advising and supporting commissioners and strategic leads in their development of VAWDASV needs assessments and strategic plans, promoting evidence for innovative new service models, and supporting research into the prevention of abuse. We also deliver direct services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline; a National Training Service partnership; the National Quality Service Standards for domestic abuse services, and are piloting a survivor engagement project to help improve agencies' responses to abuse (Survivors Empowering and Educating Services, SEEdS).

VAWDASV in Wales

IN 2016/17:

- 14,129 women, men, children and young people were provided with refuge and community based advocacy and support by Welsh Women's Aid member services³
- 500 survivors (456 - 90% were women) were unable to be supported in refuge because of a lack of service resources or capacity^{4 5}
- 249 survivors of domestic abuse could not be accommodated by refuges in Wales because there was no space available in the service contacted when they needed help⁶
- There were 30,036 calls, webchats and emails to the Live Fear Free Helpline in Wales and 14,088 individuals were supported, including 13,505 survivors, as well as 583 friends and family members⁷
- Between 1 January - 31 December 2016, at least 13 women are known or suspected to have been killed by men. On average, this is one woman killed every 28 days⁸
- There were 251 rape prosecutions in Wales, with a conviction rate of 55.4%. This rate is below the average across England and Wales, at 57.6%.⁹ In the same year, there were 792 prosecutions for sexual assault, with a conviction rate of 79.2%, comparable to the average across England and Wales at 79.5%¹⁰
- Welsh police forces recorded a total of 58,709 domestic abuse incidents and crimes¹¹

IN ADDITION:

- An estimated 137,000 women and girls are living with the consequences of FGM in England and Wales.¹² Research suggests that while rates vary between rural and urban areas an estimated 1,270 women are currently living with FGM in Cardiff alone¹³
- The Office for National Statistics estimates that over one in four women (27%) in Wales and England, and 13% of men, experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. This amounts to around 353,080 women in Wales¹⁴

COST TO SOCIETY:

- Domestic violence costs Wales £303.5m annually: £202.6m in service costs and £100.9m to lost economic output.¹⁵ These figures do not include any element of human and emotional costs, which the research estimates costs Wales an additional £522.9m
- UK Government figures estimate that each adult rape costs society over £96,000 in its emotional and physical impact on the survivor, lost economic output due to convalescence, treatment costs to health services and cost incurred in the Criminal Justice System, with sexual violence costing society in England and Wales an estimated £8.5bn¹⁶

WHAT ARE VAWDASV SPECIALIST SERVICES?

The accepted definition of VAWDASV specialist services in Wales is:

Organisations/services that are delivered independently from the state (i.e. third sector) and whose core business it is to support survivors and/or perpetrators and/or children and young people impacted by any form of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (i.e. rape and sexual assault including child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, forced marriage, FGM, sexual exploitation including through the sex industry, trafficking and modern day slavery and so-called 'honour' based violence).

VAWDASV specialist services' delivery is needs-led and gender-responsive, recognising the continuum of violence against women and ensuring interventions and prevention work connects VAWDASV to wider patterns of sex and other intersectional inequalities, including ethnicity, class, gender identity, age, ability, sexuality, religion and belief.

VAWDASV specialist services' understanding and delivery is informed by analysis of VAWDASV being gendered and a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men, which intersects with factors such as ethnicity, age, class, sexuality and disability to impact on experiences of abuse and routes to recovery.¹⁷ VAWDASV specialist services recognise that these forms of violence are entirely preventable, they happen to women and girls disproportionately because they are women and girls as a means of social control, which maintains and reproduces unequal power relations and presents an obstacle to achieving equality and human rights for women and girls.

These VAWDASV specialist services differ from 'general support' services in that the organisations/services have a gender and culturally responsive and holistic service delivery model, in accordance with the UK quality standards frameworks for such services, and are run by and for the communities they serve. In doing so they offer a uniquely empowering experience particularly to women and children and to BME communities, as the client group is reflected in staffing, management and governance structures of these organisations.

State of the Sector



27%

The Office for National Statistics estimates that over one in four women (27%) in Wales and England, and 13% of men, experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

This amounts to around 353,080 women in Wales.



55.4%

conviction rate
OF RAPE PROSECUTIONS

There were 251 rape prosecutions in Wales, with a conviction rate of 55.4%



2,848 people
SUPPORTED IN REFUGES

In 2016/17, 1,596 women, 1,221 children and young people and 31 men were supported in refuges last year.



24%

24% of survivors accepted into refuges identified as BME in 2016/17.



500 survivors
COULD NOT BE ACCOMMODATED

500 survivors were unable to be supported in refuge because of a lack of resources or capacity.



61%
WITH MENTAL
HEALTH ISSUE

61% of survivors accessing refuge based support in Wales during 2016/17 identified that they had a mental health issue (such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other mental health issues).



25%
SUBSTANCE
MISUSE

25% of survivors accessing refuge based support said they had substance misuse issues, which includes use of illegal drugs, prescription drugs, legal highs and alcohol misuse.



11%
WITH A
DISABILITY

11% of survivors accessing refuge had a physical or mental disability.

Key Findings of this Report

The funding landscape

The VAWDASV specialist sector in Wales faces continued uncertainty as it attempts to maintain year-on-year funding, facing a 'postcode lottery' dependent on whether local commissioners prioritise them, while continuing to feel the impact of accumulative funding cuts.

The Supporting People Programme is by far the largest contributor to VAWDASV specialist services¹⁸ in the third sector in Wales, and even a small reduction in this funding represents a risk to services. In September 2017 the Welsh Government made a commitment to maintain this grant at its current level for the next two years, however the recently published Welsh Government draft budget has proposed the merging of the Supporting People grant and VAWDASV Services Grant with a broad range of funding in 2019/20. This will effectively remove the ring-fence for this funding, leaving prioritisation of funding for these services at the discretion of local authorities.

It is also proposed that there will be no safeguard for the proportion of Supporting People funding received by VAWDASV services; while the overall funding for Supporting People was maintained in 2017/18, there was a 4% decrease in total funding for VAWDASV services from the Supporting People grant.¹⁹

This could further decrease in 2019/20 with the proposed integration of the Supporting People budget (£124.4m) and the local authority element of the VAWDASV Services Grant (£2.4m) proposed to be integrated into a new single grant (Early Intervention Prevention and Support grant), without any proposals to ring-fence an allocation for VAWDASV expenditure.²⁰

Last year Welsh Women's Aid's report *Save Refuges, Save Lives* highlighted that specialist services were over-stretched and under-resourced, having experienced cuts to their children, housing, counselling and refuge services in recent years.²¹ In 2017/18, funding cuts across Wales from council grants and contracts in housing/homelessness, children or Families First, community safety and a decrease in private funding and donations has contributed to further reduced capacity across the VAWDASV sector.²² Cuts lead to continued pay reductions for specialist staff, fewer support hours in refuge services, decreases in capacity across whole organisations and services being unable to take on new staff or retain the expertise of long-serving staff, forced to look for work elsewhere.

Many services have continued uncertain and unconfirmed funding beyond 2017/18, which often makes it impossible to adequately plan for the future of these services due to reliance on annual local authority funding and additional short term grants.²³

Summary of funding changes, reductions and redirections

There has been an overall loss of up to 5% of funding for the VAWDASV specialist sector in Wales.

Changes to funding include:

- Across Wales services have seen a 14% reduction in funding from local authority children's services and Families First grant programmes. Some specialist providers do not receive any funding specifically for support for children²⁴
- Specialist services in the last year alone have suffered the loss of 30% of funding from Housing and Homeless prevention grants from local authorities²⁵
- 20% of National Offender Management Service Cymru / Integrated Offender Management Cymru Board funding has been redirected²⁶

- Home Office funding previously available for IDVA and ISVA²⁷ services has been redirected into the Home Office VAWG Service Transformation Fund. The shortfall in provision has not always been met by other funders as was anticipated
- The level of donations & other income generation for specialist services has reduced by 6%²⁸
- No funding was received by specialist VAWDASV services from Public Health Wales in 2016/17, while a very small amount was received the year before (amounting to just £1,500)²⁹

Funding from council grants and contracts has reduced significantly for 2017/18, with the largest reduction from councils being seen in funding from Community Safety Partnerships at a 55% reduction.³⁰ The reductions to overall funding levels between 2016/17 and 2017/18 are a cause for grave concern for VAWDASV specialist services.

Concerns for the future

In 2018/19, the *Full Flexibility Pathfinder*³¹ project proposes to remove the VAWDASV Services Grant and Supporting People ring-fence – this means that this funding is not guaranteed to be spent on VAWDASV issues or on Supporting People related priorities in these areas: Bridgend, Cardiff, Conwy, Newport, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen. In 2019/20, the lack of a distinct budget line for VAWDASV and Supporting People grants to local authorities gives no assurances that the funding will be protected to be spent in these areas from 2019/20.

This removal of the ring-fence for these grants could have devastating consequences for VAWDASV specialist services across Wales. For example, since the removal of the ring-fence of the Supporting People grant in England in 2009, which has accompanied a period of parallel austerity measures, between 2010-14 England lost 17% of specialist refuges and a third of all referrals to refuges were turned away, normally due to a lack of available space.³² Specialist services that support survivors of sexual violence and those led by and for Black and minority ethnic (BME) women are particularly at risk³³, and reports in November 2017 suggest council spending on domestic violence refuges across 33 local authorities in one region of England has fallen by up to 75% since 2010.³⁴

The proposed loss of ring-fenced funding for VAWDASV services in Wales comes at a time when Wales-based specialist services have already experienced incremental funding cuts year on year, whilst it is expected that demand for services will continue to rise.^{35 36}

By removing this ring-fence, the Welsh Government hands over control of the money formerly dedicated to the Supporting People grant to local authorities to meet a wider range of priorities, which could feasibly see some of the Supporting People fund absorbed into other priority areas at the expense of the 60,000 most vulnerable people in Wales who currently benefit from it. Supporting People currently provides at least 36.5% of the total VAWDASV specialist services funding for domestic violence services in Wales.³⁷

The Welsh Government has stated that with a larger single grant, individual smaller grant constraints could be lifted and funds could be used to meet locally determined needs in a way that makes sense at a local level.³⁸

However, Welsh Women's Aid examined all 19 Public Service Board draft Assessments of Local Well-Being published in 2017 and found concerns in relation to their understanding and recognition of VAWDASV.³⁹

Removal of ring-fencing of these grants not only means that the funds might be spent on other work areas, it also means we may not clearly know how much is being spent on VAWDASV work, or on homelessness and housing related support services in Wales.

Further to these changes, the UK Government has recently announced plans to entirely remove short-term supported housing cost funding from the welfare system.⁴⁰ This means refuges will be funded on a provision basis, rather than funding them via the housing benefits system attached to the individual accessing the service (as in the past). The proposed funding for short-term accommodation will cover all housing costs – both rent and eligible service charges – that were previously met from housing benefits.

The UK Government have also announced that they will devolve funding for this to the Welsh Government, who will determine the model of funding for Wales for implementation from April 2020 onwards. The UK Government will provide the Welsh Government with the level of funding in 2020/21 equivalent to that which would otherwise have been available through the welfare system. This raises concerns that the funding will be set at current projections and not be flexible to actual need.

The new model will also have to work in conjunction with other funding mechanisms for refuge in Wales, namely the administration of the Supporting People and VAWDASV funds mentioned above. The proposal to merge Supporting People and part of the VAWDASV Services Grant into a new single grant, without any proposals to ring-fence this for VAWDASV expenditure in 2019/20, could also impact on how a new model could be administered.

The risk is that, as the Welsh Government devolves all Supporting People and VAWDASV funds to local areas and loses the ring-fence on this, the allocation of funding for supported housing from the previous housing benefit pot in Wales will also go into a local non-ring-fenced pot. If this is the case, refuges in Wales would be at risk of losing all their funding, not just the support element.

Trends and Implications on Provision

The following areas have been identified as significant trends in the data analysed for 2016/17:

Sexual violence provision

Sexual violence services have received a significant reduction in funding levels between 2016/17 and 2017/18, while demand has continued to increase. One sexual violence specialist service in Wales has seen an increase in demand of 78% for one service area over a three year period.⁴¹

"I was totally isolated – he broke me with mental and sexual abuse, I'm left with no self-esteem, no self-worth, no confidence."

Debora*

Welsh Women's Aid's survey of specialist services for this period showed a reduction of 20.2% of funding with the loss of Home Office funds, which was not picked up by local commissioners (as had been expected by the Home Office). Further reductions in contracts with the Welsh Government from the Department of Health and Social Services also impacted these services, with a 60% funding reduction from all departments combined.⁴²

Services by and for BME women

From the data provided by the VAWDASV sector in Wales, 24% of survivors accepted into refuge identified as BME in 2016/17.⁴⁵

In 2016/17, 21 survivors were referred to VAWDASV community/outreach services in Wales who, because of their insecure immigration status, had 'no recourse to public funds' (NRTPF); of these, 16 survivors (76%) without recourse to public funds were supported.⁴⁶

Specialist BME VAWDASV services largely rely on funding at a national level for their core management and infrastructure costs, as well as for some project delivery in the regions.⁴⁷ Only around 50% of their funding from March 2018 is likely to continue beyond this date.⁴⁸ When coupled with a lack of effective regional needs assessments that highlight the needs of VAWDASV survivors from BME communities, and the already inconsistent availability of specialist BME VAWDASV services, there is a significant risk to the continuation of these services from 2018.

Sexual violence specialist services funding is reducing. In particular, the loss of Home Office funding has contributed to a 49% reduction in funding allocated to ISVA⁴³ (see footnote 27 for IDVA and ISVA definitions) services in the third sector.

LUCY'S⁴⁴ STORY

Lucy's experience of sexual violence happened when she was a child. The impact of this sexual violence, combined with domestic abuse, mental health issues and teenage years spent mainly in foster care. Lucy needs specific support for the anxiety she experiences. She has lived with close family members who have mental health issues and has witnessed, as well as been subject to, domestic abuse.

Through counselling, Lucy started to concentrate on separating out her survival and coping behaviours necessary to survive domestic abuse and sexual violence, and when they would be helpful, or not, in her daily life. She has reported how useful she finds it to know that once a week there is someone she can work with who she doesn't feel judged by and isn't easily shocked. In her last few sessions in counselling, Lucy worked solely on her self-esteem, challenging her belief that she is unlovable and helping to build her confidence in herself.

"Women survive violence then have to survive on peanuts, we have nothing, no furniture, no food, no recourse to public funds, we need money to live on, otherwise we are either destitute or die. The 'no recourse' and immigration rules don't help... Does the Government in Wales understand that we are living on nothing?"

Priya⁴⁹

The smallest proportion of designated funding for service types is to female genital mutilation (FGM) service provision (0.18%) and forced marriage (0.20%). Not only is there only 0.38% of funding directed towards forced marriage and so-called 'honour' based violence services and FGM services, but data also shows these services are currently not available across all of Wales.⁵⁰ There has been a reduction in funding allocated to women and girls at risk of FGM. This is a service area only available in South Wales, but we know this is an issue across Wales.⁵¹

“Without them I don’t think I would be here, that’s the honest truth. It was a godsend, it meant everything to me – they gave me my life back, it changed every aspect of my life.”

Linda*

Domestic abuse provision

Refuge offers physical and emotional safety and a place of recovery through accommodation-based support for survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women. Refuge services form part of a national and UK network of provision that enable families to have 24-hour access to refuges and move between them if needed.

The service is led by the needs of survivors and their children and is delivered by support workers (including dedicated support workers for children and young people) trained and experienced in VAWDASV in an environment which empowers women and children and promotes their autonomy and self-determination.

In 2016/17, 54% of adult survivors referred were accommodated and supported in refuges. However, 796 women and 51 men were turned away from accessing refuge-based support, while a further 311 women turned down the refuge-based support that they were offered, in 44% of cases this was due to the survivor changing her mind.⁵²

Of those who were turned away, one third of survivors – 249 adults – were turned away because the refuge-based support they wanted to access was full at the time they needed it. Looking at this separately for women and men, 213 women and 36 men were turned away due to refuges being full. 13% of women were turned away due to risks around the location of refuges or perpetrator behaviour, for example that the perpetrator knew their location. 12% of women were turned away because the service was at maximum capacity for high/complex needs and the staff available to support them – so could not safely accommodate them.⁵³

The turn-away rate highlights that 2016/17 provision of specialist services was not adequate in meeting demands, and with increased awareness and referrals predicted as a direct result of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, investment into a sustainable specialist sector is gravely needed.

There are also concerns that commissioning practices may not match the standards for VAWDASV specialist support set out in the Istanbul Convention, which strongly advocates for specialist services over generic provision to ensure appropriate support.⁴¹

In some areas of Wales, there has been a move to this more generic commissioning of services, which can come at the expense of local specialist services, risking the loss of decades of experience to one generic provider delivering all services (for example a non-specialist housing provider delivering a VAWDASV refuge).⁵⁴ VAWDASV specialist services are concerned about the impact this could have:

“Specialist services should refer to those services that offer a focused intervention with identified quality standards by suitably qualified staff that cannot be provided by frontline statutory services or by services that offer ‘general support’.”⁵⁵

Finding space for new referrals can also be difficult due to the lack of appropriate move-on housing available to those leaving refuge. This can be exacerbated for survivors aged between 18-21 years old, who under new benefit changes, are no longer eligible for access to the housing element of Universal Credit unless they “prove” that they were abused. This means that the pressure is once again being placed on the survivor not the perpetrator. The housing benefit cap placed on under 35 year olds at rates that allow for renting in shared accommodation is also likely to be inappropriate for the recovery of survivors of abuse and certainly places restrictions on their freedoms and process of regaining independence.

LINDA'S*⁵⁶ STORY

Linda was 55 when she entered a refuge, after a decade of emotional and financial abuse in which she was not allowed to work or access money and was cut off from her friends and family. At first, Linda was extremely reluctant to visit the refuge, let alone stay, because of the associated stigma. On her first visit, however, she did not want to leave.

For Linda, refuge changed her life completely. Staff helped her to set up a bank account, pay bills and sort the debt that had been accrued in her name. From the safe base of the refuge, they helped build her confidence so that she finally felt comfortable going out on her own. They helped her to meet with housing services and apply for rehousing, and they provided accompanied viewings for every property that was offered until Linda found a suitable flat that she moved into after eight months of support from staff and other survivors in the refuge. Without refuge-based support, Linda does not think she would have accessed services such as health or housing, or be living an independent, happy life now.

“Everyone needs to have the same chance. We were the children. That wasn’t our fault. If we didn’t get to the specialist support we wouldn’t know that.”

Ava*, Young Survivor

Services for children and young people

Tackling Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is a Welsh Government priority, yet current provision and instability of funding has left children and young people affected by adversity, such as domestic abuse, at the mercy of a ‘postcode lottery’.

In order to fully mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences, reliable funding needs to be ring-fenced for vulnerable children and adults to receive appropriate, therapeutic, specialist support wherever they live in Wales.

- On average, 47% of survivors residing in refuge had children. Of those, 68% of children were in refuge with their parents and 32% were staying somewhere else. In 2016/17, 1,221 children or young people were supported in refuge, however, not all children who were accommodated in refuge received dedicated support as a result of the lack of Children and Young People workers due to reduced funding⁵⁷
- 3,113 children or young people were supported by VAWDASV community/outreach services.⁵⁸ Just 5.6% of all funding for VAWDASV specialist services in Wales is allocated to domestic abuse outreach, advocacy and support for children and young people in the community⁵⁹

Services for disabled survivors

Evidence suggests that disabled women are more likely to experience domestic abuse (which includes physical, psychological, sexual or financial abuse), compared to the wider population, as they are perceived by perpetrators as less capable and an easier target.⁶¹

Disabled women experiencing domestic abuse may be more likely to require multi-disciplinary care packages and face multiple barriers when trying to access support.

- 10.9% of women and 16.0% men accessing refuge had a physical or mental disability⁶²
- 11 women were turned away from refuge support due to no disabled facilities being available⁶³

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOGETHER (CHAT) PROJECT, SWANSEA WOMEN'S AID JODIE'S*⁶⁰ STORY

The CHAT project offers support to young people aged 11-18 who have been affected by domestic abuse and are using unhealthy behaviours in their relationships. Jodie* was referred to the CHAT project because her mother was unable to enforce any boundaries and was fearful of her daughter's abusive outbursts. Jodie would smash up her bedroom and physically assault her mother if she tried to stop her from leaving the family home. Jodie blamed her mother for the abuse the family experienced.

Jodie learned the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, was made aware of the different types of domestic abuse, and what prevents victims from leaving, helping her to empathise with her mother. Jodie was able to talk about her feelings and learned different coping strategies to use when she was feeling sad or angry. Jodie is now able to communicate her feelings calmly to her mother. Both mother and daughter have reported that incidences of abuse and control have reduced.

It is paramount that a wide range of information for survivors with mental and physical disabilities is available in a variety of formats, and that if help is sought, specialist services have the resources to accommodate the needs of each survivor.

“I’m older, I’m vulnerable, I suffer from ill health and I’m disabled, but I don’t even have a social worker. The outreach health clinic had to stop coming around my house because he’s so dangerous. But they expect me to live there, and expect me to turn him away when he shows up at my door.”

Mary*⁶⁴

Provision for survivors experiencing severe & multiple disadvantage

Almost two-thirds of women in refuge-based support in Wales last year had mental health issues, while a quarter experience substance misuse and almost a third identified financial difficulties.⁶⁵

However, each year many survivors are turned away from refuge and the second most common reason is that services were unable to meet their specific needs or had no further capacity to support survivors with assessed complex or multiple needs. This was the case for 208 survivors in Wales last year.⁶⁶

The impacts of austerity measures on statutory and generic service provision such as mental health, substance misuse, and sexual health services are impacting on survivors' access to relevant and timely support. This has led to reports from VAWDASV specialist services that they are picking up additional and often complex support needs caused by gaps in public services.⁶⁷

Survivors are accessing specialist services with increasingly high-levels of support needs as a result of their experience of abuse, which intersects with living with severe and multiple disadvantage. Many services do not always have sufficient resources or capacity to deliver the level of sustained intensive support needed in these cases.

"I was diagnosed with PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and depression and I've got really bad anxiety. But their waiting list is long... it's been a year since I've been told that and nothing... I've been taking medication and it's had such a bad effect on me... there are some days I can't leave the house, I think if I had better help from mental health services I could be a better mum."

Elwen*⁶⁸

61.5% of women and 47.6% of men accessing refuge-based support in Wales during 2016/17 identified that they had a mental health issue (such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other mental health issues).⁶⁹

Recent research into services for women experiencing multiple disadvantage identified support specifically for women experiencing mental distress in only five Welsh local authorities.⁷⁰

Across Wales and England, 55.1% of services specifically for women are mental health midwives; perinatal mental health services and mother and baby units - unfortunately this is the only area where Health defines women-specific services as being necessary.⁷¹

"Having a women-only space in the drugs service means we're more likely to get the help we need, and more likely to open up and share what we've been through"

Julie*⁷²

Much of the VAWDASV specialist service provision enables positive impacts on health and well-being of adults and children who face adverse experiences in childhood, or as adults. However, VAWDASV specialist services in Wales do not benefit from health service/health commissioner investment nationally or regionally, compared with other services in the UK.⁷³

Specialist therapeutic support for survivors is paramount to recovery, as it puts into context the experiences of survivors and the behaviour of abusers.⁷⁴ It can break down the shame and patterns of self-blame that survivors often feel about the abuse they've endured, by offering support in an informed, holistic way, which empowers each survivor and meets their individual needs and those of their children.

"I was in hospital having taken alcohol and drugs because of the abuse; it was because of the way my husband abused me yet they took my children into care while I was in hospital. I was told by social services I was an addict, which I wasn't... It was all emotional abuse and control."

Jessica*⁷⁵

VAWDASV specialist services across Wales have raised concerns that specific therapeutic support is often not directly funded, despite being essential for women and children accessing their services. There is a 'postcode lottery' in terms of this therapeutic support across Wales, and it is particularly acute for BME women and survivors accessing sexual violence services. There is also increased pressure on specialist services to compete for grants, putting local services into competition with larger generic providers, with funders often looking to support innovation rather than evidenced and established life-changing counselling and group work.

25.6% of women and 17.5% of men accessing refuge said they had substance misuse issues, which includes use of illegal drugs, prescription drugs, legal highs and alcohol misuse.⁷⁶

Research into services for women experiencing multiple disadvantage identified five local authorities in Wales who report substance misuse support specifically for women. It also found that in Wales, the most common form of support specifically for women is a substance misuse midwife.⁷⁷ Survivors with substance misuse issues have told us that they want women-only provision for general substance misuse services, not just those linked with pregnancy.

Conclusion

For forty years the VAWDASV specialist sector has offered holistic, needs-led and trauma informed support that has saved the lives of thousands of survivors of violence and abuse.

The evidence from VAWDASV specialist services in Wales is that there is a lot of uncertainty of the funding landscape moving forward, with proposed changes to Supporting People and other VAWDASV grants from the Welsh Government, and continuing competition for ever more limited funding pots. This is all occurring in a context of increasing need for specialist support for survivors of sexual violence and domestic abuse, as well as other forms of violence against women. A corresponding increase in the presentation of complex needs and multiple disadvantage means some specialist services are struggling under the strain of a lack of capacity. For specialist BME, children and young people and disability services, this adds an extra level of pressure to their services to ensure need is properly evidenced and accepted for these groups.

Two and a half years since the implementation of the landmark Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, now is the time for the specialist VAWDASV sector and the Welsh Government to work together to achieve a model for sustainable funding for the specialist sector, as outlined by Welsh Government in their National Strategy, and in order to realise the objectives of the ground-breaking piece of legislation.

Women-only specialist services offer survivors of VAWDASV safe spaces for themselves and for their children to begin to mitigate the effects of their experiences of violence and abuse and to begin their recoveries, and these need to be protected and prioritised by commissioners. Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is everyone's business: from the wide-scale human and economic cost to the personal relationships that we have with those around us every day.

Welsh Women's Aid would once again like to acknowledge the work of all VAWDASV specialist services in Wales, survivors, children and young people who contributed to this report. It is the responsibility of all public services to protect survivors, both financing adequate public services and working in partnership with specialist VAWDASV services to offer adequate referral pathways and to encourage increased understanding, prevention and early intervention. Fundamental inequalities within our institutions and across society need to be addressed and remedied across Wales in order for a more equal Wales where violence against women can be prevented and ultimately eradicated.

“Women’s drop-in sessions are simple but invaluable, if the building and environment feels safe, you can take another woman along with you for a coffee, and you don’t always have to see a support worker, it’s just having that space to get out, see others who understand, and it helps you grow in confidence. Women’s drop-ins and women’s centres are really helpful”.

Gwyneth*78

PLEASE REFER TO WELSH WOMEN'S AID'S WEBSITE FOR THE FOOTNOTES.

welshwomensaid.org.uk