

C. THE NATURE AND IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

The UK Home Office defines domestic abuse as:

any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.¹

Abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- physical
- psychological
- emotional
- sexual
- financial
- property
- spiritual

Domestic abuse occurs in relationships where one individual holds power over another and uses that power to harm. It consists of the violation of another person's human rights. Essentially, domestic abuse is terrorism. Webster's Dictionary defines terrorism as 'the calculated use of violence (or threat of violence) against civilians in order to attain goals . . . through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear.' Trauma specialist Dr Judith Herman has identified major commonalities between the experience of survivors of domestic violence and prisoners of war. She compares, 'the survivors of vast concentration camps created by tyrants who rule nations and the survivors of small, hidden concentration camps created by tyrants who rule their homes' (Dr Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery, p3).

1. Who are the Victims?

Domestic abuse occurs across all of society, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth or geography. In the UK, women are more likely than men to be survivors of domestic violence. While estimates on the prevalence of female on male incidences of domestic abuse vary from organisation to organisation, The Crime Survey for England and Wales March 2017 reported that for every three survivors of domestic abuse, two will be female, one will be male. One in four women and one in six to seven men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime. On average two women are killed by their partner or ex-partner every week in England and Wales.² Accurate figures will always be impossible to ascertain because domestic abuse is vastly underreported. For men, such reluctance to report is compounded by the stigma and shame attached to perceptions of weakness from society in general. Research indicates that men are more than two times less likely to report incidences of abuse, although men are reporting domestic abuse in increasing numbers. The paucity of funding and provisions to address male survivors of abuse is indicative of a lack of political will to recognize the problem.

There is a general assumption within the Church that male survivors of abuse among Christians are few and far between. However, the most extensive research on domestic abuse within the Adventist church shows a different picture. Research conducted by Dr René Drumm among 49 Adventist churches in the United States indicated that 90% of abusers were active church members who included, pastors, elders, deacons, chaplain, conference secretary, university professor, pathfinder leader and other church leaders. The study indicated that women in the Church are just as likely to be abused by their husbands as women in the general population. Even more surprising was the finding that men are more likely to be abused by their wives than those in the general population.³ As previously noted, large disparities between male and female incidences occur when homicides, sexual assaults,

¹<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-violence-and-abuse#domestic-violence-and-abuse-new-definition>

²<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusefindingsfromthecrimesurveyforenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017>

³ <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/effects-of-intimate-partner-violence-among-seventh-day-adventist-church-attendees>

severity of injury and frequency of attacks are factored in.⁴ While male on female abuse will remain the primary focus of programming and provision, the suffering of male survivors must also be recognized and addressed. The Seventh-day Adventist Church views all forms of abuse as antithetical to Christian values.

a) Children and Young People

Children are also profoundly affected by domestic abuse and are at serious risk in abuse situations. In addition to the risk of physical harm, witnessing domestic violence can result in long-term emotional and psychological trauma across the life-span. Research has also indicated a strong connection between domestic violence and child abuse. This highlights the importance of a **Safeguarding policy**, and of always knowing and respecting the limits on confidentiality when a child is at risk. Where domestic abuse is perpetrated in a family context, it is recommended that church leaders work in close liaison with designated safeguarding officers.

The changes to the definition of domestic abuse in 2013, to include 16 and 17-year-olds was a recognition that those in the age group 16-24 are those most at risk of domestic abuse. During the teenage years, young people are influenced by a huge array of factors, which can increase vulnerability and risk. These can include; puberty and hormonal changes, wanting increased autonomy from family, peer pressure, body image and self-esteem issues and the influence of the media.

Domestic abuse is still a 'hidden' issue in our society; and it is even more so for teenagers. This is exacerbated by the fact that adolescents can be more accepting of, and dismissive about, this form of behaviour than adults. It is important to be aware that cases involving under 18-year-olds may include features of domestic abuse, sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and street gang-related sexual and other violence.

Although some features of teenage relationship abuse are similar to adult domestic abuse, the forms and experience of this issue, as well as the challenges in seeking and providing services, make many of the issues faced by teenagers unique. There are also certain barriers relating to young people's ability to access services. Simply because of their age many young people are unable to access the same levels of support as those over 18.

Many young people will be experiencing multiple risk factors. However, as with abuse in adult relationships, teenage relationship abuse occurs across diverse groups and cultures. Teenage relationship abuse can occur in various forms, including verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, and financial, and the experience may have both immediate and long-term effects on young people. It is sometimes the case that there are unclear parameters between survivor and perpetrator which adds to the complexity of cases.

An NSPCC report on Partner Exploitation and Violence in Teenage Intimate relationships reveals that:

- 33% of girls and 16% of boys reported some form of sexual abuse within their relationship
 - 25% of girls (the same proportion as adult women) and 18% of boys reported some form of physical relationship abuse
 - 75% of girls and 50% of boys reported some form of emotional relationship abuse
1. Young women who are being or have been abused are 4 to 6 times more likely than their non-abused peers to become pregnant during their teenage years.
 2. As many as two-thirds of young women who become pregnant as adolescents were sexually and/or physically abused at some point in their lives – either as children, in their current relationships, or both.⁵

⁴ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/domestic-abuse-is-a-gendered-crime/>

⁵ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/partner-exploitation-violence-teenage-intimate-relationships-report.pdf>

b) Parents

It is important to recognise that child or adolescent to parent abuse is likely to involve a *pattern of behaviour*. Abusive behaviours can encompass, but are not limited to, physical violence, humiliating language and threats, belittling a parent, damage to property and stealing from a parent and even heightened sexualised behaviours. Abuse can occur together or separately.

Domestic abuse is notoriously difficult to identify when it occurs within the family home. This can become even harder if the abuse is child or adolescent to parent abuse. Like other forms of domestic abuse, child to parent abuse is very likely to be under-reported. Many of these families may be facing multiple issues such as substance abuse, mental health issues and domestic violence. The lack of recognition of this issue means that many families may not recognise that they need support and may feel unable to ask for help due to feeling stigma and shame. There are also often issues of lack of awareness of existing support (notably family support groups); parents not seeing themselves as legitimate recipients of support; lack of knowledge on drugs, alcohol and their effects; an 'it'll never happen to us' mind-set; and a lack of consensus on the best course of action within couples.

It is important to recognise the effects that child or adolescent to parent abuse may have on both the parent and the young person and to establish trust and support for both. It is also important that a young person using abusive behaviour against a parent receives a safeguarding response.

Responding to disclosures of child to adult abuse:

Do

- Remember this is domestic abuse (and general domestic abuse considerations apply);
- Show understanding; consult with a Designated Safeguarding Officer, who will consider whether other referrals need to be made, for example to:
 - Public protection specialists or local policing staff: they may have existing knowledge;
 - Are other children at risk in the house? If so, you will need to make a referral to children's services.

Don't

- Assume that this is a parenting issue – the parent is the survivor in this situation;
- Joke or make light of the situation;
- Underestimate how difficult it is for the parent to report the incident and for the young person to accept responsibility;
- Wait until something more serious happens before acting.

c) Elder Abuse

Abuse of older people is a hidden, and often ignored, problem in society. While the profile of child abuse has been raised in recent years a number of organisations and bodies have been responsible for reminding us of the particular needs and problems that can be associated with older people.

No standard definition of elder abuse applies within the UK public sector. In 1993 Action on Elder Abuse established the following definition of elder abuse as 'A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person'. It has at its heart the 'expectation of trust' that an older person may rightly establish with another person, but which is subsequently violated.

Both older men and women can be at risk of being abused. People can be abused in different ways. These include: physical abuse; psychological abuse; financial abuse; sexual abuse; spiritual abuse; neglect; inappropriate use of medication. Elder abuse can occur anywhere: for instance, in someone's own home; a carer's home; day care;

residential care; a nursing home; hospital. The perpetrator is usually well-known to the person being abused. They may be: a partner, child or relative; a friend or neighbour; a paid or volunteer care worker; a health or social worker, or other professional. Older people may also be abused by a person they care for.

There are many reasons why elder abuse occurs and these may vary with each incident. Elder abuse may range from a spontaneous act of frustration to systematic premeditated assaults on an older person. At home some of the causes would appear to include: poor-quality long-term relationships; a carer's inability to provide the level of care required; or a carer with mental or physical health problems. In other settings, abuse may be a symptom of a poorly run establishment. It is likely to occur when staff are: inadequately trained; poorly supervised; have little support from management; or work in isolation.

If you become aware or concerned about someone you know, it is important that you refer the case to your local Domestic Abuse agencies. Since domestic violence (DV) does not always meet the threshold for intervention in adult social care, DV services are always the best option in addition to whatever support services Adult Social Care can offer. Cases of alleged Elder Abuse are assessed at a local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). The Domestic Violence MARAC is a meeting where agencies talk about the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and draw up an action plan to help manage that risk. You should be aware that, despite your concern, any older person has the right to decline assistance. However, a statutory obligation exists if the person is an 'adult at risk' (see Section G, p13).

d) LGBT

The official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on matters regarding LGBT does not absolve the Church of a duty of care where individuals within the Church community who either identify as LGBT or have a homosexual orientation are victims of domestic abuse. It is estimated that about 25% of LGBT people experience domestic abuse, a figure similar to women in opposite-gendered relationships. Underreporting of abuse in LGBT relationships is often compounded by the fear of sexual orientation being revealed. Perpetrators may threaten to 'out' the victim to friends, family, religious communities, co-workers, and others as a method of control. The often-secretive nature of homosexual relationships can create an environment in which abuse thrives and victims are reluctant to seek help.

LGBT victims of abuse may blame the abuse on being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, however abuse is always the fault of the abuser whatever the circumstance. In seeking to support LGBT victims of abuse, it is vital that pastoral carers do so with a non-judgemental attitude. The primary objective of support in such instances is the safety of the individual not seeking to set them straight about biblical theology and sexual orientation.