

Press release: Prevention and repair essential in domestic abuse cases

Domestic abuse is an endemic but not inevitable problem, inspectors said today (Tuesday 19 September).

[A report on the response for children living with domestic abuse](#) finds that social workers, the police, health professionals and other agencies such as youth offending teams and probation services are often doing a good job to protect victims. But too little is being done to prevent domestic abuse in the first place, and to repair the damage it causes afterwards.

Inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, and HM Inspectorate of Probation carried out joint inspections of 6 areas in England, to evaluate the multi-agency response to cases of domestic abuse. Today's report highlights that:

- Professionals have made progress in responding to the large volume of cases of domestic abuse. However, domestic abuse is a widespread public health issue that needs a long-term strategy to reduce its prevalence.
- While much good work is being done to protect children and victims, far too little is being done to prevent domestic abuse and repair the damage that it causes.
- Work with families that we saw on inspection was often in reaction to individual crises. Keeping children safe over time takes long-term resolutions.
- The focus on the immediate crisis leads agencies to consider only those people and children at immediate risk. Agencies are not always looking at the right things and, in particular, not focusing enough on the perpetrator.
- There is still a lack of clarity about how to navigate the complexities of information sharing.
- There needs to be greater consistency in the definition of harm, and in the understanding of whose rights to prioritise.

Eleanor Schooling, Ofsted National Director for Social Care, said:

There is a lot of good work being done to protect victims of

domestic violence – emergency services are particularly effective. But we're not so good when it comes to helping victims deal with the aftermath and get on with their lives. The justice system must play a role, but there is work to do to stop it happening in the first place.

That's why schools have an essential role in educating children about domestic abuse. Teaching children about healthy relationships is already part of the curriculum, but it is often not prioritised by schools.

It is a sad truth that the sheer scale of domestic abuse means that it can be all too easy for police, health professionals and social workers to focus on short term responses to incidents. But the best teams are able to see the bigger picture.

I want to see a new approach to tackling domestic abuse – one which focuses more on prevention and repairing long term damage to child victims. Agencies can address these complex challenges but due to the endemic nature of domestic abuse they cannot do it alone. A widespread public service message is needed to shift behaviour on a wide scale.

Professor Steve Field, Chief Inspector of General Practice at the Care Quality Commission, said:

When children and young people are at risk of, suffering from, or rebuilding their lives after domestic violence, a number of services have the opportunity to intervene or help. Fortunately, we have seen evidence of services understanding the unique position they each have to start important conversations and work together to support individuals and families, such as delicate screening tools for midwives talking to expectant mothers.

This is encouraging but there is still work to be done. We commend the efforts we saw to protect victims after abuse has occurred, but this is an endemic issue that has its roots before individual acts and can spread beyond. Services have to listen to and learn from those who have been at risk. We need to explore every opportunity to safeguard and support those affected, from prevention through to the provision of comprehensive aftercare, including access to CAMHS services.

Wendy Williams, HM Inspector of Constabulary, said:

This inspection found that the police – who are often the first respondents to domestic abuse incidents – act quickly and decisively to protect victims, including children, and to remove them from dangerous situations. We also found that senior leaders

within the police have a strong commitment to reducing domestic abuse and protecting those children exposed to it and have worked to build effective partnerships to support victims. However, when the police become involved in this way, in one sense it is often too late: an offence has been committed, and a person or family become a victim or victims of domestic abuse, with all the harm this brings.

HMICFRS has constantly underlined the fact that the police cannot address domestic abuse on their own – and this inspection has found many examples of how close working with other agencies is crucial to supporting and protecting victims. However, today we are also calling for recognition that all of society, not just the agencies we inspect, needs to work together if we are truly to reduce the devastating harm caused by domestic abuse. There needs to be a sea change in the approach, with an equal emphasis on placed on preventing it happening in the first place, or from it reoccurring, as there is on protecting victims when it has happened.

Dame Glenys Stacey, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

To reduce the extent of domestic abuse the probation sector needs to deliver effective work with those adults who have been convicted and also those where we have concerns about possible domestic abuse in the households, but no conviction. There are many skilled practitioners who can change perpetrators' behaviour but services need to be resourced and well organised to reach the right people.

Probation providers also have to look beyond the adults under their supervision to the families and ensure they are vigilant and swift to respond where they see signs of domestic abuse. They can only achieve this by well-trained staff working closely with local services for children.

Domestic abuse has a profound effect on children, completely changing their lives. To move from a broken home to a refuge and a new school can be upsetting.

One adult survivor said:

We are the ones who have to leave our homes, leave our families. We are the ones that have to change our lives completely and everything we do every day. We have to come and live in a house with other people. Your whole life is completely changed.

These inspections highlight the positive impact of the inspectorates working together.

Hounslow Council stated that:

The joint targeted area inspection has enabled a deeper, shared understanding of our joint service offer and practice. It shone a light on the good and some excellent services the partnership is providing and offered insight into areas where joint working can be enhanced to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Partners fed back recently that they found the process of joint inspection and the development of the joint action plan a constructive and positive experience which has enhanced communication channels, professional understanding and collective commitment to a common improvement in services for children and young people and their families.

Domestic abuse is a massive problem, accounting for about one in 10 of all crimes committed in England in 2015/16. It claims the lives of 2 women each week and there are more than 6.5 million victims.

1. The report is based on inspections of Bradford, Hampshire, Hounslow, Lincolnshire, Salford and Wiltshire. [The report and the individual inspection reports are online.](#)
2. Ofsted has also published [a blog about the findings of the report.](#)