

Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Domestic Abuse

Written Submission from Hestia's UK SAYS NO MORE Campaign

July 2018

Summary

UK SAYS NO MORE is a national campaign launched by charity Hestia in 2016 to unite a diverse range of individuals and organisations in taking a stand against domestic abuse and sexual violence. Over 155 coalition partners from across the UK representing business, civil society and government now back the campaign. Since May 2018 they have been joined by over 125 MPs and Lords who have signed up as UK SAYS NO MORE champions.

Hestia is a charity supporting adults and children in times of crisis. UK SAYS NO MORE builds on Hestia's experience as the largest provider of domestic abuse services in London. Our domestic abuse service includes refuge accommodation, MARAC co-ordination, Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy services, floating support, community based support groups for children and peer led and facilitated support groups for women who have experienced domestic abuse. Hestia also developed the Bright Sky app in partnership with the Vodafone Foundation, creating the first free-to-download directory of all domestic abuse support services across the UK.

To mark UK SAYS NO MORE Week in May 2018, our champion MPs and Lords signed up to UK Says No More's Charter on Prevention. The Charter called for the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Bill to include:

- 1. Responsibility for education and awareness should be enshrined in the role of the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner.**

Education and awareness around healthy relationships is critical to preventing domestic abuse. This must extend beyond schools into all walks of community life from universities to places of worship. If a Domestic Abuse Commissioner is appointed, this must be a key part of their role.

- 2. Greater support for children who have experienced domestic abuse in order to break the cycle.**

The trauma of experiencing domestic abuse can have a long-term impact on children, which could continue the cycle of abuse into their adult life. Increasing opportunities for children and young people to access mental health support will have a significant impact.

- 3. Making domestic abuse everyone's business.**

Businesses are key to preventing domestic abuse, through the support and education that they can provide to their employees. The employers' 'duty of care' should be clarified to include their responsibilities with regards to domestic abuse.

The following provides previously unpublished detailed information for the Home Affairs Select Committee on the evidence and need behind the Charter on Prevention.

1. Responsibility for education and awareness should be enshrined in the role of the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

Education and awareness around healthy relationships is critical to preventing domestic abuse. This must extend beyond schools into all walks of community life from universities to places of worship. If a Domestic Abuse Commissioner is appointed, this must be a key part of their role.

25% of young people in England and Wales have witnessed at least one episode of domestic violence and abuse by the age of 18 (ONS, 2017).

- Implementation of Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education: The UK government has committed to reforming relationships education in primary school and relationships and sex education in secondary school. However this does not expand to private or faith based schools. It is also paramount that the educational tools that will be used have survivor experiences embedded into them and that educators themselves are given adequate training on the topics. There needs to be an understanding that although domestic abuse disproportionately affects women, men can be victims of domestic abuse. Sessions also need to include local specialist services.
- A whole community response: We need a whole community response to healthy relationship education. Empowering statutory agencies to respond effectively by increasing and improving training and education to these groups is good, but we need to empower everyone in our communities to respond to disclosures of domestic abuse. This can be met via projects such as the UK SAYS NO MORE ambassador programme, through the Know More Hub or via one of the campaign partner's initiatives such as Safe Partnership's *Safe Date training programme*.
- Oversight of quality: We know that schools, their governing bodies and Ofsted will regulate the delivery of SRE education and ensure that it is being delivered to a good standard. We need to ensure the same standard of information occurs outside of schools and that local awareness training programmes for professionals and those that work with children in both a paid and voluntary capacity meet the same standards. We believe that this should be central to the role of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

2. Greater support for children who have experienced domestic abuse in order to break the cycle.

The trauma of experiencing domestic abuse can have a long-term impact on children, which could continue the cycle of abuse into their adult life. Increasing opportunities for children and young people to access mental health support will have a significant impact.

950,000 children across the UK are affected by domestic abuse each year, either directly as victims of violence, or indirectly in terms of witnessing violence (BCS, 2010) and 1 in 3 adult mental health conditions relate directly to adverse childhood experiences (Kessler, 2010).

Hestia commissioned Opinionium to undertake polling in April 2018. 2003 people responded nationally and they represented UK adults (18+) and were weighted to nationally representative criteria. The results showed that 1 in 8 Brits witnessed domestic abuse in their household as a child and 55% of those who witness domestic abuse as a child also go on to later become a victim of domestic abuse themselves.

- Special waiting list status for all NHS services

The current systems of accessing therapeutic support for children must be reviewed. Provision for children who have experienced domestic abuse must be available and consistent across the UK. Consideration needs to be made for the impact of trauma, insecure tenancy, sudden changing of schools and the loss of relationship with other family members.

Children who have experienced domestic abuse need to be given a special waiting list status (protected status) for all NHS services including child and adult mental health services (CAMHS). The current system for accessing NHS services including CAMHS services differs from one primary care trust (PCT) to the next. Children who experience domestic abuse move on average three times in the first year that their parent accesses specialist domestic abuse support such as a refuge. Each time a child moves they could be faced with having to be re-assessed or re-referred to NHS services such as CAMHS. This delays and at times prevents access to vital services.

Children should not lose their place on a waiting list and have to be re-assessed in order to re-enter a waiting list in a new area, following a move due to domestic abuse. It is important to recognise that it is often not safe or victims may not be financially able to afford the transport costs to return to what is often referred to as their danger area by professionals.

- Support for children living in the community

Therapeutic support and specialist children's services must be available for those children who live in a refuge - and for those who do not, but have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse and live in the community. The Children's Commissioner's Vulnerability Report 2018 identifies over 1.5 million children who are living in families with complex needs. More than two thirds of these children will be experiencing domestic abuse and there is no recognised or consistent support structures for them. Schools and specialist domestic abuse services need to be empowered financially and through legislation to ensure that both children in refuges and those who are living in the community have access to support programmes such as Hestia's community programme in Hillingdon.

- Children recognised in the definition of domestic abuse

The current Domestic Abuse White Paper and the domestic abuse definition does not account for children, their experiences or their needs. It is important that we combine and reflect the needs of the children who live in households where domestic abuse is present with that of the parent experiencing abuse. For too long support services have been commissioned for the adult victims of abuse with little consideration for the needs of their children, which leads to a postcode lottery of support being available for children in refuges and event less support is available for children whose parents are receiving support from independent advocacy services (IDVA) and floating support services.

The language we use when discussing the experiences of children is important. We refer to children having *experienced* domestic abuse and not witnessing domestic abuse in our response. Stating that a child has witnessed domestic abuse implies detachment from the situation. We know from the lived experiences of children and those that are now adults that children, even if they are not in the same room, have a physiological and psychological reaction to what they hear. There is extensive evidence on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how these impact a child's development and adult life.

3. Making domestic abuse everyone's business.

Businesses are key to preventing domestic abuse, through the support and education that they can provide to their employees. The employers' 'duty of care' should be expanded to include their responsibilities with regards to domestic abuse.

“Domestic abuse not only impacts on the well-being of women and men, but it affects the financial strength and success of the companies for which they work. Seventy-five per cent of those experiencing domestic abuse are targeted at work and it is often possible for perpetrators to use workplace resources such as phones, email and other means to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partner” (Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence, 2012)

- Domestic abuse response part of health and safety

All employers have a duty of care and health and safety laws ensure workers have the right to work in a safe environment where risks to health and well-being are considered and dealt with efficiently.

There are four main areas of health and safety law relevant to violence at work:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996

An effective workplace policy on domestic abuse can ensure that employers are complying with these laws. (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2013).

- Embedding good practice in business

Businesses should have an HR policy that defines domestic abuse. The policy should speak to the support victims of abuse could access from their employer and specialist support services. It should refer to perpetrators being held to account and enabling them to access specialist support.

Businesses should be encouraged to invest time and resources in up-skilling their management teams in their understanding and awareness of domestic abuse. These managers should at a minimum feel comfortable discussing - without judgement - domestic abuse with an employee; feeling confident in referring them to a specialist support service, and to work with the employee and the business to make reasonable adjustments to ensure an employee is safe at work.

It is important that the business communicates with the entire staff body by using awareness and prevention campaigns such as UK SAYS NO MORE and promoting support services such as the free to download Bright Sky app. Businesses must adopt a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse.

24th July 2018.

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