

Equalities Participation Network – 25 April 2024

Present: Myshela Haywood (GREC), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Linzi Harrow (ACC), Fay Morrison, Bertha Yakuba (African Women's Group), Flora Kovacs (GREC), Lucy Simpson (ACC), Naima.

Apologies: Carol Hannaford, Ells Mchaffie, Marion McLaughlin, Mary Rasmussen, John Whitfield.

Speaker: Lucy Simpson, Aberdeen Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP)

- Lucy is a development officer with a focus on domestic abuse, alcohol and drugs.
- She coordinates the **Violence Against Women Partnership**, which includes representatives from the police, the NHS, the courts, Aberdeen City Council, social work, and third-sector partners like Rape Crisis Grampian, Grampian Women's Aid, Cyrenians, GREC, etc.
- The partnership follows the Scottish Government/COSLA **Equally Safe** strategy, which aims to eliminate violence against women and girls (also called gender based violence). Its main work is awareness raising, promoting gender equality, and working to **make Aberdeen a safer place for women and girls**.

The partnership generally focuses on **domestic abuse**:

- Perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner
- Includes **psychological, physical, sexual and financial abuse**, in the context of a current or former relationship, and other forms of **coercive control and isolation**.
- Also includes **online abuse** like tracking, monitoring and harassing someone online.
- It's mostly women who are victims and men who are perpetrators – but the definition acknowledges male victims, female perpetrators and those in same sex relationships.
- Domestic abuse relates to gender inequalities and other forms of inequality in society, and **abusers often use other characteristics** to make the abuse more painful.

Some statistics:

- In 2022-23, there were 61,934 domestic incidents reported across in Scotland, including 2,488 in Aberdeen.
- Domestic abuse accounts for 24% of all violent crime in Scotland, and 20% of all police visits.
- Over the last two years there has been a decline in recorded incidents – but we know that incidents are massively underreported. Part of how we know is that **demand for local services is much greater than what is reported to police**.
- Many people don't want to report for a range of reasons: fear, threats, issues with children. It's a long process and it can be re-traumatising, and many people understand that it has a very low conviction rate.
- 80% of incidents have a female victim and male perpetrator. 16% have a male victim and female perpetrator. 2% each are men and women in same sex relationships.

There are additional barriers to reporting for people from vulnerable groups:

- 1 in 3 **LGBT+ people** and 80% of **trans people** have experienced domestic abuse.
- Victims **aged 61+** are much more likely to experience abuse from a family member or current partner, and are less likely to leave or to report the abuse. Old stereotypes can contribute to coercive control, making it harder to recognise and seek help.
- **Older people** are more likely to have a physical disability – if their abuser is their carer, it makes it harder to leave them.
- **Disabled women** are twice as likely to experience abuse, and they wait longer before seeking support. This is exacerbated by the stereotype of disabled people not being able to speak for themselves.
- For **ethnic minority** people, there are cultural barriers, including the norms in their home country, visa issues add additional barriers, social isolation and honour based violence.
- Many victims calculate that the risks associated with leaving outweigh the risks of staying.
- **Not everyone wants to leave the relationship. Some just want support.**

Sources of support:

- **The ACC domestic abuse team is open to anyone – including people with No Recourse To Public Funds (NRPF).**
- **Fairway Scotland** can help with lawyers, etc.
- **Fearfree** (part of Sacro) support LGBTQ+ people and men.
- Unfortunately, Aberdeen has nothing specific for ethnic minority people anymore due to funding. But **Shakti Women's Aid** and **Amina** are available over the phone.
- **Scottish Women's Aid** Has a 24 hour helpline.
- And **Aberdeen City Council** has set up a **website** with all the available local resources: aberdeencity.gov.uk/Aberdeen-Protects/reducing-violence-and-abuse

Discussion

Bertha – so many obstacles for migrant women – cultural, religious, being in a new place. With new opportunities, husbands can struggle with watching their wives grow wings. Or, when serious abuse is perpetrated by a Scottish husband, people assume the authorities will side with him.

With NRPF, it's difficult to get accommodation and legal support is not adequate. The African Women's Group has referred women to Grampian Women's Aid, but they never made an effort to understand the ethnic minority perspective. It's difficult to open up – there needs to be an intimate knowledge and trust.

There is research from the Central Belt, but nothing from Aberdeen. There are no Muslim or African women in the VAWP – not enough representation.

Lucy – it would be really positive if someone from the African Women's Group would join the VAWP – or, Lucy could go to the group to listen and find out what's been happening. Everything is based on statistics – the more we can find out about an issue, the more we can justify funding to deal with it. **Lucy to contact Bertha by email to organise further discussion.**

Linzi – reporting can be invasive and traumatic – has the process changed at all to make it smoother or safer, more empowering?

Lucy – depends on the officer who attends the call. Some areas have specialist teams, but not Aberdeen – all officers are supposed to be trained in dealing with domestic abuse cases, but this doesn't happen in practice. Changes have come since the Domestic Abuse Support Act (2019) – previously the perpetrator was not charged specifically with domestic abuse. Now the offence covers coercive control and cumulative impact – this accounts for 5% of DA prosecutions.

Fay – most folk aren't believed, then it never goes further. Believing them is the most important thing. The challenge is to dispel the stereotype that it's 'just a domestic.' Too many people still think that a wife is property.

Linzi – domestic abuse increased a lot during lockdown.

Lucy – it was already increasing before – the lockdowns exacerbated the pattern, didn't cause it. People being stuck at home with their abuser led to more reporting. Support services were overwhelmed – had to close waiting lists for months. There's been a reduction post lockdown, but it's still higher than 2019.

Linzi – other issues must be having an effect – cost of living, poor jobs, pressure makes everything worse.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 30 May, 4:00-5:00pm
Topic: BSL strategy