

Safeguarding the family when responding to domestic violence: Innovative approaches to integrating services



Public Summary

Domestic abuse is a major public health issue with harmful long-term impacts on affected adults and children. Whilst social care response to domestic abuse is primarily directed at affected children, family safeguarding needs to include support for the adult victim of abuse and challenge the perpetrator. It is widely recognised that a multi-agency response is needed to address this complex problem.

In phase 1 of the project, we undertook a systematic review of the literature that focused on service response to families affected by domestic abuse. We included 29 unique studies undertaken in six countries involving 1049 participants across statutory and voluntary services. Findings indicated that family-focused approaches to domestic abuse need to be resourced via longer term funding and a corresponding commissioning of services.

In phase 2 of the project, we undertook three case studies to explore the mechanisms local authorities used to implement 'family

safeguarding' approaches in the context of domestic abuse across the social care system.

Qualitative data were collected via video conferencing from 53 interviewees who held strategic, managerial, operational and practitioner roles. Findings indicated that outcomes for families were most effective when care plans for adult victims, affected children and perpetrators were coordinated across agencies with a focus on linking prevention and response mechanisms.

Phase 3 of the project focuses on developing a toolkit that aims to support strategic managers and service leads to implement new practice approaches when responding to families affected by domestic abuse.



Public and Community Involvement

In phase 1 of the study a person with lived experience and three senior social workers supported the systematic review of the literature.

In phase 2, social work professionals (n=6) and people with lived experience of domestic abuse (n=3) ranked potential case studies for inclusion in the project. Ahead of conducting interviews across the 3 sites a person with lived experience provided feedback on the proposed interview questions. After initial data analysis, the researchers discussed study findings with a group of people with lived experience (n=5) to highlight what they thought the most important findings were, and to draw out nuances. In phase 3 of the project (still current) we held a co-production workshop for strategic leads and senior service leads (n=4), and for practitioners (n=8) to inform the development of the toolkit. Participants' suggestions were rooted in their practice and made a welcome contribution to toolkit focus and design.

Dissemination

McGovern, National Priority Programme, Adult Social Care and Social Work (1st April 2025)

McGovern, West Midlands Social work Teaching Partnership (5th June 2025)

Impact and Implementation

We expect the publication of study findings in subject-specific journals to stimulate wider discussion on implementing innovative approaches to family safeguarding in the context of domestic abuse. The recommended linking of prevention and response mechanisms in social care to support affected adults and children, as well as the perpetrator, will contribute to improving the health, mental health and overall wellbeing of both adults and children in families affected by domestic abuse.

In addition, the toolkit provides a step-by-step guide for local authorities to support strategic managers and service leads to plan, embed and monitor/review the implementation of new practice approaches to responding to families affected by domestic abuse. This will influence debate, strategy and, in the longer term, policy regarding family safeguarding in the context of domestic abuse.

Publications

[What are the Factors Influencing Service Provider Response to Working with Families Affected by Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse? A Qualitative Systematic Review of the Literature](#)

[Implementing family safeguarding in the context of domestic violence and abuse: A case study of a local authority in England](#)

1 paper currently under review