

NRCN

National Rural Crime Network



REPORT 2019

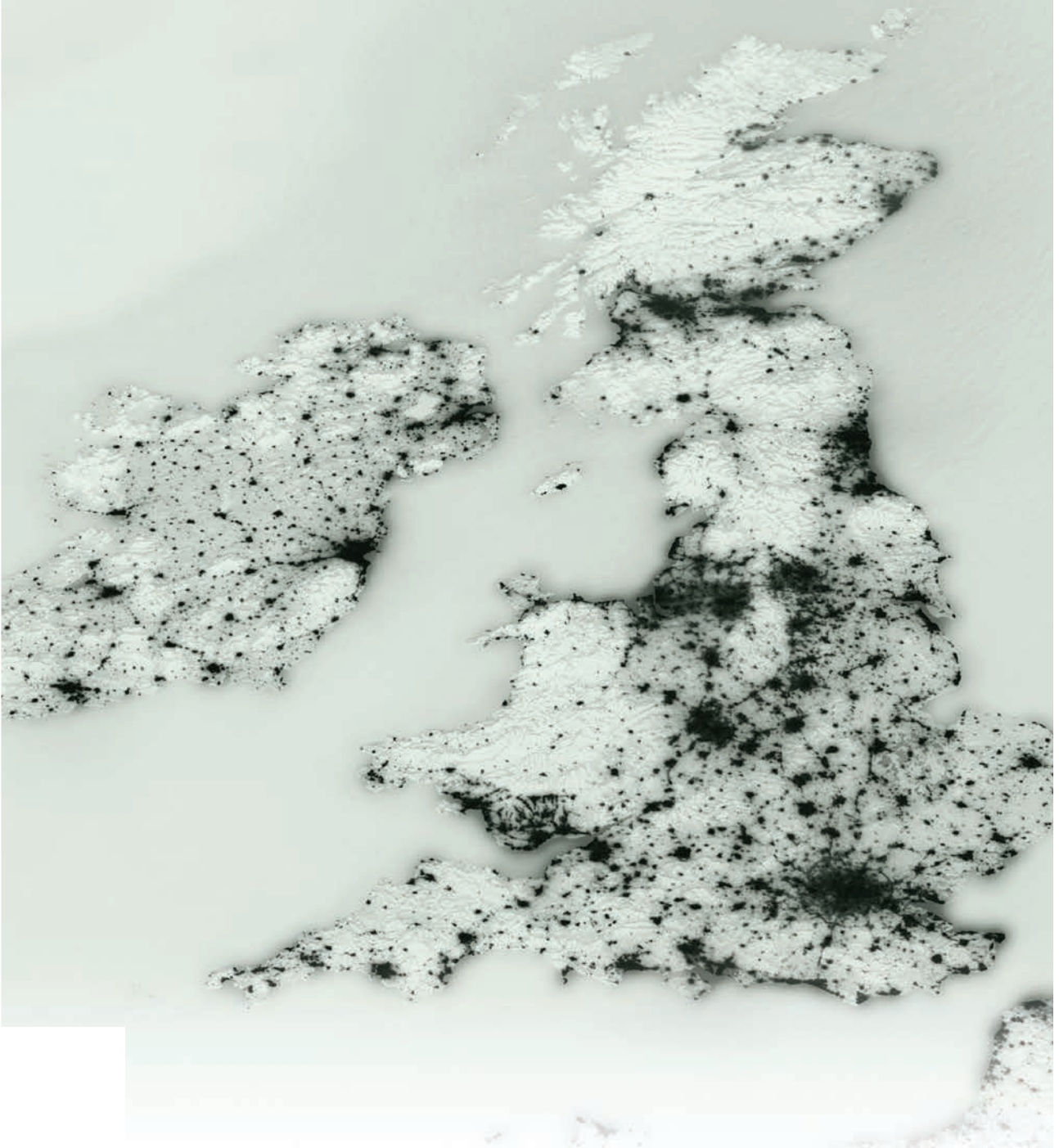
Captive & Controlled

Domestic Abuse in Rural Areas

- isolated, unsupported and unprotected,
victims failed by the system,
services and those around them



“We need to take a fresh look at the map. At the white spaces where ‘nothing’ happens, because domestic abuse is there, secreted in the underbelly of our countryside.”



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Domestic Abuse in Rural Areas

– isolated, unsupported and unprotected, victims failed by the system, services and those around them.

Findings of a major research project across seven police force areas in England

Commissioned by the National Rural Crime Network and Police and Crime Commissioners of:

- Durham
- Derbyshire
- Devon and Cornwall
- Dorset
- Lincolnshire
- North Yorkshire
- Nottinghamshire



About the National Rural Crime Network

The National Rural Crime Network is working to see greater recognition and understanding of the problems and impact of crime in rural areas so more can be done to keep people safe and make them feel safe too.

Established in July 2014, the Network is supported by 30 Police and Crime Commissioners and police forces across England and Wales. In addition to PCCs and the police, the Network is supported by a wide range of other bodies with a deep interest in community safety and rural affairs.

Together, these members and supporters represent millions of people and as such the Network is uniquely placed to champion the needs of rural communities.

Our Vision

A thriving rural community – all those who live, work or enjoy the countryside – that feels safe, understood and is secure.

Our Mission

Based on an in depth understanding of the needs, concerns and threats to rural communities, make substantive policy and practice improvements.

Our Objectives

1. Give rural communities a voice
2. Act as a multi-agency think tank on rural policing and criminal justice policy and practice, to ensure the needs of rural communities and victims are better served nationally and locally
3. Protect the rural economy by influencing and improving policy regarding rural policing and community safety, actively seeking to change legislation where necessary
4. Become a central hub for practitioners, encouraging national and regional outlets for discussions on rural crime issues between relevant rural partners, watch groups and appropriate national organisations, proactively sharing best practice
5. Increase reporting of rural crime and wider community safety issues.



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*Julia Mulligan
Chair of the National Rural Crime Network
and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire*

‘Domestic abuse – the hidden underbelly of rural communities’

Too often, rural communities and people play second fiddle to the clamour of urban demands. We see this in all sort of ways, from access to broadband and public transport, to the per person funding by government, and not least, the gulf in policing satisfaction and confidence between rural and urban communities set out by the most recent National Rural Crime Survey. But these are arguably the obvious and tangible differences, and certainly issues rural dwellers experience every day.

This research examines a different problem. We have uncovered a deeply hidden and disturbing side to rural life. Far from the peaceful idyll most people have in their mind when conjuring up the countryside, this report bears the souls and scars of domestic abuse victims, who all too often are lost to support, policing and criminal justice services.

Hidden under our noses. Hidden by abusers who like to keep it that way. A scale of abuse hitherto unseen.

This report has been over a year in the making. During that time, I have spoken to many people about the emerging themes. Everyone has nodded and said, yes we know there is domestic abuse in rural areas, yes we know there are problems for victims. But now, with the publication of this report – the first ever to look at domestic abuse specifically through the lens of rurality – its scale and nature is starkly exposed for the first time. Nodding and promising to carry on much as we do now is not good enough.

All parties with a duty to help victims; the police, support services, charities, Police and Crime Commissioners, health services, and many others, need to understand that we have missed this. We have let victims and survivors down. We have collectively failed. We need to put that right. And for all of that, let me be the first to apologise to those we have failed.

This report must surely be a catalyst to help us better protect the women, children and men in rural communities who suffer daily at the hands of calculating, manipulating, controlling and violent abusers.

For the first time, we have a comprehensive examination of the impact of rurality on domestic abuse victims and services, the commonalities and differences between rural and urban experiences.

- Rural victims are half as likely to report their abuse to others.
- Rural victims’ abuse goes on significantly longer.
- Rural victims cannot readily access support services.
- Rural victims live in a society that defacto protects the perpetrators.
- Rural victims are isolated, unsupported and unprotected in a rural hell, which is purposefully ‘normalised’.

We need to challenge the societal constructs that abusers deliberately exploit. Bucolic rural life, characterised by gentle living, tradition and close-knit communities has a dark side. It fosters a strong sense of male entitlement, which goes comparatively unchecked, flourishing alongside endemic ignorance about domestic abuse, deliberate or otherwise. It is taboo, with people deliberately turning their backs on victims, who are left physically and socially isolated, feeling deeply ashamed. Many of us care very much about the rural way of life, and appreciate its benefits, but we must also be disturbed and disgusted by the patriarchy it fosters and the abuse it clearly facilitates, along with the profound consequences.

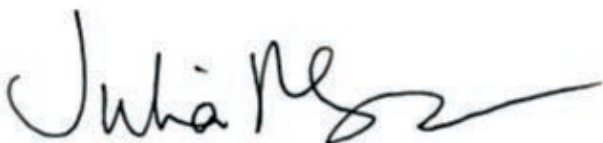
We have heard the truly harrowing, in-depth testimonies of 67 victims from seven different areas of England. We have interviewed commissioners in the seven areas and understood the challenges faced by rural frontline support workers on a daily basis. There are undoubtedly some superb services available, along with a truly inspiring commitment to supporting victims. However, overall the problem is systemically underestimated, poorly understood; the response disjointed and out of focus, as well as woefully under resourced.

Anyone with responsibility for supporting victims in rural communities needs to pause and put themselves in the shoes of the victim. We are particularly concerned about the way perpetrators isolate and control their victims, which can lead to violence and murder. In a climate where resources continue to be allocated on a historical volume demand basis, this threatens to widen gap between rural and urban victims, driving even more abuse underground and failing more victims.

In the first instance, we need to acknowledge there is a significant, hidden problem and understand its specific complexities, because by continuing to gloss over the reality we are inadvertently supporting the perpetrators who often employ rurality as a weapon in their abuse.

We need to take a fresh look at the map. At the white spaces where 'nothing' happens, because abuse is there, secreted in the underbelly of our countryside. We must innovate, to find ways to overcome the specific barriers rural victims face, so they get the support they deserve, and we can deal with the perpetrators.

Revealing the truth was the easy bit. Acting on it is hard but acting on it is what we have to do. We need to do it positively, we need to look forward and work together to improve the service we offer to victim and survivors of domestic abuse in rural areas, and we need to do it now.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julia Meyer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.





Introduction

This report tells the previously untold story of Domestic Abuse in rural areas; how it manifests, progresses and ends, and how it can be distinctly different from abuse in urban settings. Untold because there is little to no research on the impact rural geography has on abuse, which in turn has affected how little that abuse is understood, how badly it is addressed and how sparingly victims can access the tailored support necessary to exit abusive relationships and rebuild their lives.

This research began in 2017 when Police and Crime Commissioner members of the National Rural Crime Network became increasingly concerned about the feedback they were receiving from 'rural' victims of abuse. There were similarities up and down the country, of stories repeated, services missing and a lack of understanding of the unique and insidious nature of domestic abuse in a specifically rural environment.

Working with the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for rural crime at the time, the Network assessed the evidence available from national surveys and data from a sample of police forces. Concern developed quickly and endured.

This initial data analysis resulted in Commissioners being sufficiently concerned to fund an independent study, to truly understand domestic abuse in rural areas. It included seven policing areas across the South, Midlands and North, focussing on in-depth one-to-one interviews with victims of abuse, local support services and commissioning managers. The findings from these interviews were then tested via a survey which compared the experiences of rural and urban domestic abuse victims. Full details of the methodology and findings can be found in the main report, or through the National Rural Crime Network's website.

Taken together, the results are stark, alarming and require serious attention. The problem is now laid bare and cannot be ignored.

Our thanks go to the brave women and men who told us their stories. They spoke out so that others would not have to go through what they did. We would be letting them down, and indeed letting every rural community down, if we did not now act in their name.



Key Findings

1. Abuse lasts, on average, 25% longer in the most rural areas

Exiting abuse is harder, takes longer and is more complex for rural victims as there are significant additional barriers in rural communities compared to urban areas. Whereas an urban victim may be able to move within a local authority area, keep their children in school and retain their job, all of these are more challenging for rural victims. There may also be animals to care for, they might have skills that are difficult to employ in a new life, especially in an urban area. Services are also much harder to access and societal structures make escape less likely resulting in rural victims being half as likely to report their abuse.

2. The policing response is largely inadequate

Whilst the service provided by the police is improving, feedback from victims shows the response in rural areas is not as good as that in urban areas. Some of this is due to a lack of female police officers being available in rural areas, as well as fewer officers with appropriate domestic abuse training. And the further the victim from a visible police presence (i.e. building) the less likely they are to call the police. Additionally, as in urban areas, policing can increase immediate risk, but the visibility of a policing intervention in a rural community can be all the greater.

3. The more rural the setting, the higher the risk of harm

Given a rural victim of domestic abuse will live with their abuse for almost 25 per cent longer than their urban counterparts, and that the pattern and escalation of abuse seems to be replicated, it is inevitable rural victims suffer more harm, be it emotional or physical. The more rurally you live, the harder it is to get support, the less effective that support is, and therefore the greater risk and harm sits in the most isolated settings.

4. Rurality and isolation are deliberately used as weapons by abusers

Financial control, removal from friends, isolation from family are all well understood tools of abuse. However, we now have clear evidence that abusers specifically move victims to rural settings to further isolate them, or systematically use the isolation to their advantage should they already be there. The more rural the greater the impact of this isolation, which is now geographic and tangible, sitting alongside financial and social isolation. It not only facilitates abusers controlling their victims whilst in the relationship, but makes it harder for victims to escape that abuse. Physical isolation is the arguably the best weapon an abuser has; and has a profound impact on making the victim feel quite literally captive.

5. Close-knit rural communities facilitate abuse

Strong community spirit is one of the joys of rural life, but it can be equally powerful in keeping domestic abuse hidden and in facilitating abuse – not knowingly, not willingly, but by virtue of the way communities are in rural Britain. It is almost impossible for a victim to seek help without it being known to others, call the police without further community questioning or even share their fears with others in confidence. Without knowing it, the community is facilitating the abuse, allowing the abuser to act almost with impunity. There is also evidence that abusers deliberately 'recruit' the community to their cause, which unwittingly becomes a mechanism for controlling and isolating the victim yet further. This can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the response provided to victims..





6 Traditional, patriarchal communities control and subjugate women

In depth interviews with victims and survivors revealed a consistent and telling reality – that rural communities are still dominated by men and follow a set of age-old, protected and unwritten principles. Men tend to hold the rural positions of power – head of the household, land owner, landlord, policeman, farmer. This patriarchal society makes women more vulnerable to coercion and control, prevented from speaking out and accessing support. Whilst there is evidence that this is changing slowly, it needs to be understood, confronted and challenged.

7 Support services are scarce – less available, less visible and less effective

Victims were clear that domestic abuse support services are much harder to find and much harder to engage with than in an urban setting. These services are also less effective in supporting rural victims and survivors once they manage to make contact, specifically because there is less understanding of abuse as it manifests in rural areas compared to urban (for example, the significantly more complex needs around starting a new life). Refuges are not always the safety net they can be in urban settings, as the nature of rural domestic abuse results in victims not needing crisis support in the same way, as their abuse is longer, slower and has a less 'urgent' profile. Their needs are very different and should be distinctly understood by commissioners and others.

8 Retreating rural resources make help and escape harder

The availability of public services in rural areas more generally is on the decline, limiting the support networks and escape routes available to victims. A recently evidenced reduction in rural GP practices and challenges of effective broadband are good examples. This equally extends to services like buses and trains, whereby it remains very difficult (and getting worse) to travel within rural areas without a private vehicle. Abusers use this to limit victims' movements, rendering already inaccessible services all but impossible to contact. This decline in services has built up over time and reflects evidence already in the public domain around less public pound spent per person in rural areas compared to urban, the consequences of which may not have been fully understood.

9 The short-term, often hand-to-mouth funding model has created competing and fragmented service provision

Clearly commissioners, policing and support services set out to do their best for victims, but this sometimes isn't enough. Some of this stems from a lack of understanding of the abuse and the scale of it, but in most places, we saw a fragmented landscape of service provision, which meant service providers are spending a disproportionate amount of time chasing funding, rather than supporting victims, or developing their services. In some areas, commissioners were not working effectively together, with overlapping services and inefficient use of precious resources.

10 An endemic data bias against rural communities leads to serious gaps in response and support

Rural victims are half as likely as urban victims to report their abuse. This under-reporting means much less is known about the needs of rural victims, of what good interventions are, or how to effectively prevent rural domestic abuse. It also means demand-led services, like policing and domestic abuse support, are gearing their service towards urban areas and urban victims. This in turn leads to fewer services in place to support rural victims, and those victims therefore further subjugated and less likely to report. So the cycle continues. In the modern world data is everything, and there is simply less data on rural victims, resulting in less being done to address the problem effectively. The same is true for rural communities in the most general sense, with vast swathes of data and decision-making being based on an urban clientele.

Recommendations

These key findings from 'Captive and Controlled' lead the National Rural Crime Network to make the following recommendations:

FOR GOVERNMENT:

1 ■ Government must apply its 'rural proofing' policy to domestic abuse, strengthening its commitment with a new duty on policy makers, commissioners and service providers to account for the specific needs of victims and survivors in rural communities

The rural proofing policy developed by DEFRA sets out guidance for government policy makers and analysts to mitigate impact in rural areas. There is now clear evidence that rural victims are half as likely to report abuse as their urban counterparts and to stay in an abusive relationship on average 25 per cent longer. Government needs to ensure rurality is specifically considered when developing policy and legislation, and that service providers and commissioners locally and nationally proactively consider the hidden demand and hidden risk before delivering a service. The Domestic Abuse Bill should be 'rural proofed' and also provides a vehicle for such guidance.

FOR THE POLICE:

2 ■ Chief Constables need to urgently assess and improve their service provision in rural areas

Despite tangible improvements in the police response to domestic abuse in general, this improvement is less visible for rural victims. Resourcing needs to change to reflect the hidden demand in rural communities and the nuanced needs of rural victims need to be better understood, including the gender of the response officer, training of rural officers and whether or not the officer is known to the victim and alleged perpetrator. As many victims are not coming forward, or indeed see themselves as victims, the police need to consider a more pro-active, intelligence-led approach, rather than relying on responding to reports. Importantly, much more needs to be done to ensure that police officers understand the rural context of abuse, such as the impact of physical isolation, the rural characteristics of coercive control, the potential role of the community in abuse, and the patriarchal power structure.

FOR SUPPORT SERVICES AND CHARITIES:

3 ■ Support services must improve their offer to rural victims and survivors

National and local service providers and commissioners need to use the evidence from this report to demonstrably improve the service they offer rural victims of domestic abuse. Whilst demand is hidden, the needs of victims are now better understood, and it is incumbent on support services to improve their reach into rural areas, facilitating the exiting of abusive relationships and doing more to understand the true demand in the areas they work within. Refuges are part of the solution, but innovation is required as rural domestic abuse victims are one of the most 'hard to reach' groups in our society. Services and commissioners must also analyse demand by postcode in future, using a common definition of rurality to develop a meaningful dataset, ensuring prevention and intervention work is also targeted at areas where there is apparently little demand – this report proves there will be demand, just hidden.

FOR COMMISSIONERS:

4 ■ Commissioners (in all their forms) need to collaborate more and provide simpler, more secure and longer-term funding

Nationally there is now more done than ever to stabilise domestic abuse funding, but this is not always the case locally. Too often services are fragmented, commissioned on a short-term footing, too often there is duplication or confusion and too much service provider time is spent looking for funding, rather than supporting victims. Those providing funding need to work together more, and to allow providers the time and space to develop their services. Commissioners should specifically consider rurality in their service specifications and hold providers to account for *Recommendation 3*, ensuring delivery better reflects the needs of rural victims and survivors.



FOR THE SECTOR:

5 Government, policing and service providers must collectively commit to redressing the urban bias

Too often and for too long public policy has been based on mass evidence and understanding drawn from a largely urban base. A significant minority of the public live in rural areas (as classified by the Office for National Statistics) and have very specific needs.

The government and local agencies such as Police and Crime Commissioners, criminal justice partners and Local Authorities must ensure their policies and services are 'rural proofed', no longer based solely on demand, but on need. This requires a deliberate strategy to ensure research, data and analysis is not skewed towards urban demands and is fully inclusive of rural communities.

Academics too have a role to play. The literature review undertaken as part of this study shows there is a gaping hole of understanding around victims of abuse in rural settings. There is concern this spreads further than domestic abuse, but also exploitation of children, human slavery, and other forms of abuse. It is incumbent on others to now critically assess this study, develop understanding further and ensure policy makers and service providers make as informed a decision as possible

FOR SOCIETY:

6 Challenge the status quo and societal 'norms' in rural communities to redress inequality between men and women

Whilst it may be uncomfortable for some, and obvious to others, we need to collectively seek to address the underlying societal structures and stigmas that facilitate this abuse. Our countryside has a huge amount to celebrate, nurture and contribute, but we must not turn away from the challenges set out in this report. We have revealed a traditional society where women (and it is mostly women) are subjugated, abused and controlled, not just by an individual abuser, but defacto, by very the communities in which they live, too often left unsupported and unprotected. This is not at all unique to rural areas, but it is very significant, and change is slow. We hope that the scale and nature of the abuse described by the many people involved in this study will focus minds on the complex needs of people in rural areas and galvanise all of us into action.



1. Background to the report

Domestic abuse is prevalent and pervasive across the country, as much in our rural areas as in our urban areas. Given that one in four people have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse¹, it is clear that this is a broad-based societal issue. However, previous statistics relying on known demand mean that the scale and nature of domestic abuse in rural areas has remained largely hidden and little understood. The impact is that our collective response to, and provision for, victims and survivors of domestic abuse in our rural communities is inadequate. Immediate action is required if we are to meet the needs of these vulnerable people.

Over recent years our understanding of domestic abuse, its causes, symptoms or warning signs and legacy impact, has significantly improved. Patterns of domestic abuse, intimate partner violence and femicide are acknowledged to be consistent across our fractured society. Correlations with socio-economic status, with mental or other health issues, and with the role of alcohol or other drug dependencies are better understood and agreed.

In the last five years, legislation has been following this development, as has the approach of the police and other agencies, and there is no doubt that we are doing more and better to protect people than before. However, this legislative progress has been fractured, with different approaches taken in different parts of the country, as the timeline below demonstrates.



The current consultation appears to be narrowly focused only on domestic violence and criminal justice responses. There are some suggestions to be welcomed such as creating a more robust domestic abuse protection order where a breach is a criminal offence, the possibilities of a domestic violence offenders' register and widening the financial abuse category to economic abuse. The real strength of the Istanbul Convention though is its focus on much greater government accountability over the provision of support services, it supports the need for proportionate women-only and other specialist service provisions, and it affirms that services need to be open to all women within the jurisdiction and not dependent on immigration status. It is perhaps disappointing that these points hardly feature in the bill consultation.

Moreover, the apparently comprehensive understanding that has developed has missed a significant aspect: rurality. It is clear that the role of rurality has not been understood to date, and a myth that our rural society is somehow immune from the impacts of Domestic Abuse has seemingly arisen from a lack of statistical information. The National Rural Crime Network (NRCN) has been concerned about this dearth of information for some time, and in 2016 undertook an initial review of published research into domestic abuse within a rural setting to try and ascertain whether there was any best practice in this area that might be developed. This turned up relatively few or recent findings, and so the NRCN commissioned a series of pieces of research to investigate the scale of abuse in rural areas and the impact of rurality on the severity of abuse and access to support and services.

The initial review and discussion with NRCN member police services had shown that there was no existing analysis or urban/rural comparison of incidence reporting or of whether there are as many domestic abuse incidents per person in rural areas compared to urban areas. Indeed, there was a clear gap in considering rural domestic abuse in isolation or as a discreet category, by academics, policing or support services, and this was to become a recurring theme throughout the research.

The first stage of the NRCN's research therefore investigated the scale of abuse in rural areas in comparison to urban areas. An initial analysis of Police recorded statistics was carried out by Dyfed Powys Police.

Police reported domestic incident data for 2016 from eleven different police services throughout the UK was used to calculate the domestic incident rate in rural versus urban areas. The final robust dataset represented a total of 229,593 Domestic incident reports from 2,864 ward areas (1,230 rural, 1,634 urban) in the UK. The results showed that the reporting of Domestic Abuse incidents in rural areas was half what it was in urban areas.

Table 1: Analysis by Dyfed Powys 2016

Classification	DA Rate per 1000	Number of reported incidents	Total Population
Rural	9.23	36,907	3,999,063
Urban	17.92	192,686	10,753,077

There are two possible conclusions we were able to draw from this analysis:

1. Rural communities are indeed much safer places in relation to domestic abuse, and lessons need to be learned as to why; and/or
2. Domestic abuse is happening as frequently in rural communities as it is in urban, but the reporting rates are much lower for reasons unknown.

Further evidence was required to reach a definitive conclusion and so the second stage of research commissioned by the NRCN was to try and understand whether domestic abuse rates actually are so different in rural areas, by comparing police reported incidence with other reporting data.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW 2017) is a useful comparator being based on self-reported data. It also classifies its data by rural and urban areas using postcodes as a reference point. Analysis showed that across all the relevant classifications of Domestic Abuse the incidence rate was similar in rural and urban areas (see Table 2).

Table 2: CSEW 2017 figures for Domestic abuse split by Rural: Urban classification

Appendix Table 9: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year among adults aged 16 to 59, by household and area characteristics and sex, year ending March 2017 CSEW ^{1,2}

Area Type	Any domestic abuse		Partner abuse (non-sexual)		Family abuse (non-sexual)		Domestic abuse (non-sexual)		Domestic sexual abuse		Domestic Stalking		Unweighted base	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Urban	4.3	7.7	2.7	5.3	1.5	1.9	4.1	7.1	0.1	0.5	0.7	1.7	7,776	8,919
Rural	4.3	6.4	3.2	4.9	1.2	1.1	4.3	5.8	0.0	0.4	0.6	1.7	1,719	2,164

Our second conclusion seems to be vindicated. Clear questions emerge, that if incident rates are similar between rural and urban areas, why are reported incidents half that in rural areas? Are victims being failed? How are services aligned against this apparently over-looked need? Do rural victims of domestic abuse have a higher threat of risk or harm than we had ever thought previously?

Note:

Since the project started the latest CSEW figures appear to indicate some changes in the 'Any Domestic Abuse' where incidence rates for men and women in rural areas both fell slightly. However this is on a reduced base (due to a boost in sample numbers for 2017), so simple comparisons are more complicated to make. For example, though much smaller in incidence the figures appear to show an increase in more serious Domestic Abuse crimes like those involving sexual assault for rural areas.

Table 3: CSEW 2018 figures for Domestic Abuse split by Rural: Urban classification

Table 9: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year among adults aged 16 to 59, by household and area characteristics and sex, year ending March 2017 CSEW ^{1,2}

Area Type	Any domestic abuse		Partner abuse (non-sexual)		Family abuse (non-sexual)		Domestic abuse (non-sexual)		Domestic sexual abuse		Domestic Stalking		Unweighted base - number of adults ⁴	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Urban	4.3	8.4	2.5	5.9	1.7	2.1	4.0	7.7	0.1	0.4	0.7	2.0	3,750	4,321
Rural	3.9	5.8	2.0	4.4	2.1	1.1	3.5	5.3	0.2	0.7	0.6	1.1	897	1,078

This project was initiated on the basis of the significant difference between police-reported data and incidence rates for rural and urban areas of England and Wales in 2017 and that situation does not appear to have changed substantially through the period of the project.

The NRCN, therefore, commissioned the third stage of research, of which this report is the culmination, to investigate why reporting rates are so significantly lower in rural areas with a call to any Police and Crime Commissioner or police service which had concerns over the support they were providing to their rural communities to be involved. The ambition was to provide a robust investigation of the barriers that rural victims of Domestic Abuse face which mean they are much less likely to report an incident or seek support in comparison to their urban counterparts.

The Network considered an important part of scoping the required primary research in an effective way required a more comprehensive review of research previously undertaken into Domestic Abuse, specifically within a rural setting. An in-depth literature review was undertaken with the assistance of Dr Nathan Kerrigan Centre for Advances in Behavioural Science, Coventry University, UK.

It should be noted that, aside from some recent and significant papers related to the experiences of the victims², much of the body of academic study draws from geographies where the differences between rural and urban are far more extreme than is the case for England and Wales. It is also relevant to note that academic research into the increasing social problems of Domestic Abuse is most often within the context of individuals' lives and very often exhibits a bias toward urban areas. It was, therefore, an early concern of the project team that any policy influencing research from the past has an inherent focus on and bias to urban catchments.

It should also be noted that rurality is not a tightly defined state – there are very different forms and characteristics of rurality within England and Wales and inherently this has different impacts on the nature and extent of domestic abuse and the response to that. For example, we are contrasting deeply rural areas with a history of large estates and land ownership and the social hierarchy that accompanies these areas, such as rural North Yorkshire, with rural areas which are effectively by-products of small scale industrialisation such as coal mining in County Durham and North Nottinghamshire, which are entirely different in character. Both defined as rural areas, they are sharp contrasts both socially and historically. Other rural areas are effectively 'tied' to larger urban areas and have a population of retirees or commuters with access to and values derived from a more urban lifestyle.

We found a focus in the literature on specific aspects of abuse and most commonly from the female perspective. The emergent work we have referenced, specifically introduces themes and language such as Intimate Terrorism and Refugee Journeys, which are perhaps a more accurate descriptor of what life is like for the victims of Domestic Abuse who live in fear of the next assault or how partner behaviour is escalating in risk and the impact of acting to leave the relationship and effectively escape. What follows with a search for safety, a place to live and a need to recover is remarkably similar to the experiences of refugees in war-torn or blighted parts of the world we see through the lens of television and the internet.

The focus of all the published work we reviewed was a triumvirate of the victim; police response and ongoing support services – very little focus was dedicated to the planning or strategy behind commissioning such services.

The review also underlined the fact that rural situations have an array of additional barriers which stand between a victim of domestic abuse and the help they need to remove that threat. However, it also raised

2. Bowstead, J. (2015). *Why women's domestic violence refuges are not local services*. *Critical Social Policy*, 327-349.

Bowstead, J. (2017). *Changing journeys into journeyscapes: enhancing women's control over their domestic violence mobility*. *Mobile and Temporary Domesticities 1600-2017*. London.

Little, J. (2013). *Understanding Domestic Violence in Rural Space: A research Agenda*. Exeter University.





the issue that rurality is far less uniform than urban areas, in terms of social culture and structures and the fact that rural society has a number of other features which could result in assistance being harder to find or act on. The issues around rural society became far more salient to the researchers in this project than they may have been without the literature review.

We suggest that the relative lack of evidential work in academic literature related to issues of isolation, social marginalisation and in providing health, mental health and also support to victims of domestic abuse in rural areas may warrant additional academic attention. Similarly, the lived experiences of survivors (of all ages and genders) in a rural context after leaving the relationship needs to be understood in much more detail. Evidence suggests that the life changes following domestic abuse for families in rural areas represents a longer term and greater degree of upheaval and emotional cost due to the difficulties in trying to rebuild lives away from the community they have known so well.

This study has attempted to look at the issue of Domestic Abuse in totality. The sheer complexity and the myriad ways in which abuse can be classified and analysed have focused the research team on trying to unravel strands of behaviour and responses in order to isolate component contributors to the problem and significantly where they are different between rural and urban situations. This has exposed some issues in the way rural society functions, the lack of acknowledgement to the scale of the problem, the response from commissioning agencies and the service providers they work with. By unravelling the complexity of the problem, specifically in rural areas, it is hoped that specific initiatives may be identified that will start to impact the help and resourcing required by victims and survivors. If nothing else, the historic reliance on a demand-led provision and resource-poor support agencies will be seen as part of the problem and not part of the solution.

So the key questions for which this project was tasked were:

- **Is the nature of Domestic Abuse in rural areas different to urban areas?**
- **If it is, how is it different and what contributes to these differences?**
- **What are the implications for the way support is thought about, defined and provided for rural areas?**
- **What other learnings can we derive from this level of interaction with victims?**

Note:

While many of the references in this report are based on women as a victim and men as a perpetrator it should be noted that male victims were included in the sample of interviews both as same-sex and mixed partnerships, we have also discovered abuse over many years in older age groups and abuse of parents by teenage children. These cases underline the complexity and growing diversity of domestic abuse as a crime in England and Wales. The overwhelming majority of cases covered here remains 90% + as female victims, under 60 and in a relationship with a male of similar age or older.

Similarly, we typically refer to victims of domestic abuse throughout the narrative of this report. Due to the methodology we used a more accurate term may be survivors or clients, as we deliberately focused where we could on retrospective accounts. We chose to stay with the term 'victim' throughout as a reminder, that even where criminal charges have not been brought or are still to be proven, these individuals are victims of crime.

1.1 Methodology

The approach in terms of methodology had to be consistent as far as we could make it for the individual areas who had agreed to participate in this partnership approach. Following the Literature review, the project explored the issues around rural domestic abuse with a corresponding focus on urban areas to ensure the comparative aspect behind the study was maintained. So, for example, similar numbers of cases which originated in a rurally defined context were compared with those from an urban context to allow full and proper comparisons to be drawn.

Specifically, the following perspectives were sought in each police area:



Figure 1: Comprehensive and Consistent Approach

So very quickly a holistic approach to the project was agreed which took a more systematic and whole system review, starting with commissioning decision makers and ending with victims and survivors.

In-depth Interviews were conducted with Commissioning Managers or Planners; Domestic Abuse Support Service (DASS) Managers responsible for implementing the contract; Caseworkers who had daily contact with victims and, through their selection, detailed interviews with victims themselves.

A final quantitative stage sought to obtain data in the form of a self-selecting, opt-in to an online survey, conducted in each area.

As far as we are aware this is the most comprehensive approach to looking at domestic abuse in a rural context that has been published in the UK. The approach allows us to better judge how aligned commissioning strategy is with the needs of rural (and urban) victims of Domestic Abuse.

In terms of scale and sample the following outlines what was achieved over the life of this project:

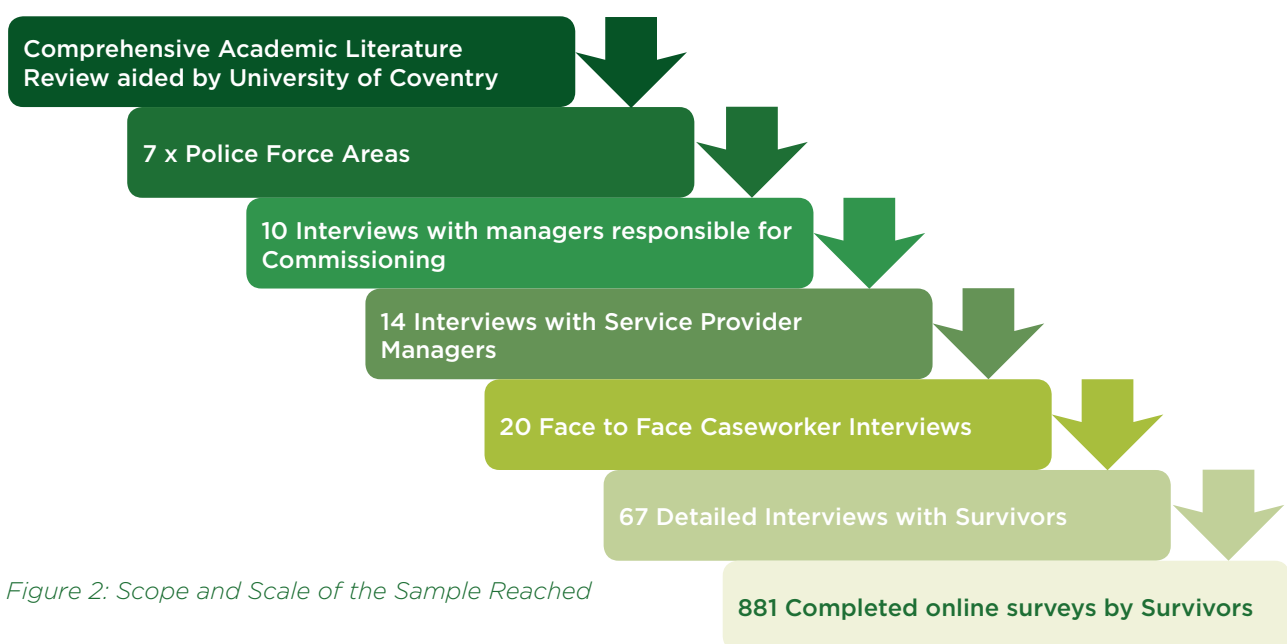


Figure 2: Scope and Scale of the Sample Reached

Of the 67 depth interviews we conducted; 5 included male victims of which 3 were same sex perpetrators. Of the sample of 881 victims responses, 57 were from men (6.5%).

2. The nature of Domestic Abuse in rural areas

An important aspect of the research conducted was to establish whether the nature and patterns of domestic abuse were different for victims in rural areas by contrast to urban areas. We wanted to understand whether the nature or drivers of abuse was a factor in victims being less willing to report or act. We wanted to understand whether domestic abuse in rural areas held a greater risk of harm to the victim beyond simply hypothesising it must do due to their relative remoteness or other factors related to rural locations.

2 Existing Knowledge of Urban v Rural Domestic Abuse

In conducting the literature review we have identified the potential differences between rural and urban reporting of domestic abuse and Figure 3 below shows the picture that we have developed. We have deliberately simplified the key differences between urban and rural areas to set up a blueprint for the subsequent primary research stages to assess. Please note we are not claiming that such stark differences are evident, but the reviews we have studied have a deliberate focus on rural Domestic Abuse and this tends to set up an equal and opposite conclusion for urban areas.

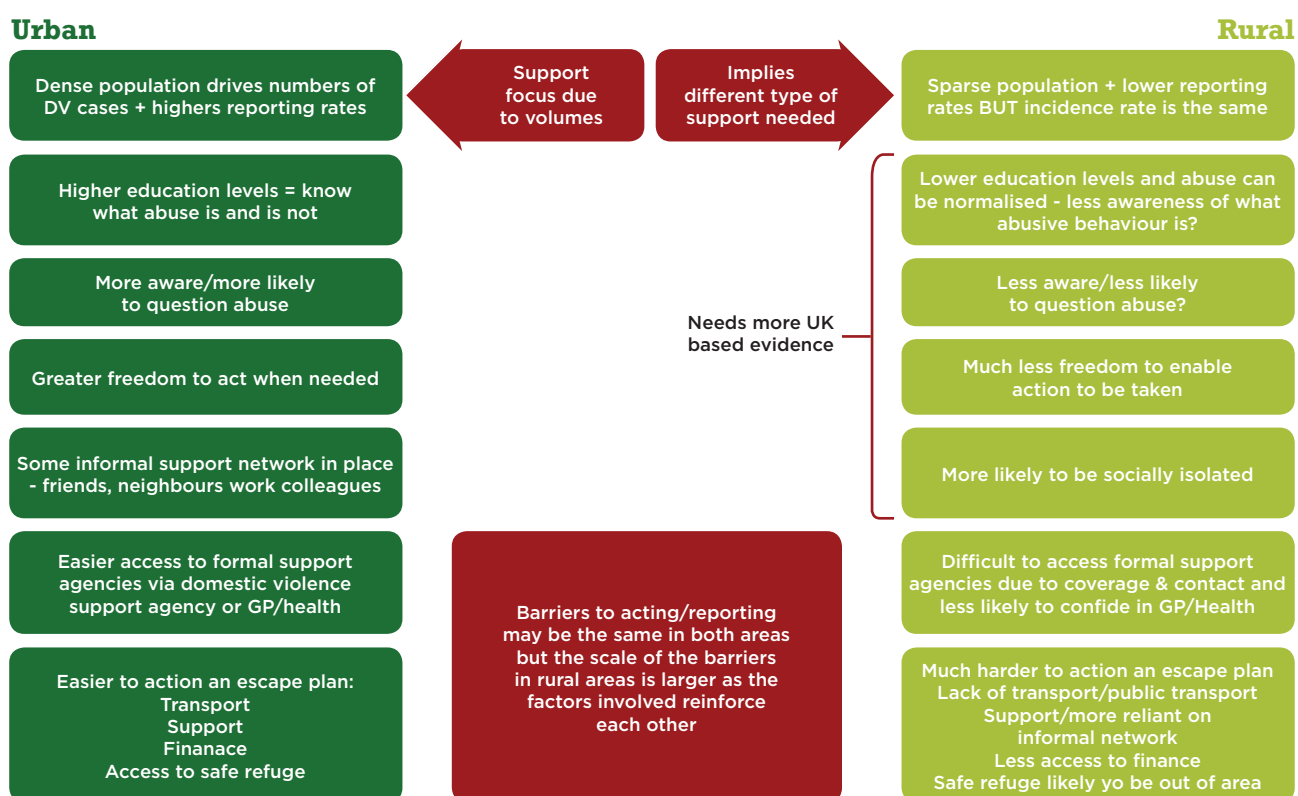


Figure 3: Differences noted between Urban and Rural areas for Domestic Abuse

In England and Wales specialist support is most often provided through a Partnership Model (whereby support is commissioned through localised specialist and usually third sector organisations) and with the development of economically efficient provision it is unsurprising to find that support is therefore focused where need (absolute number of known cases/number of victims helped) is most concentrated.

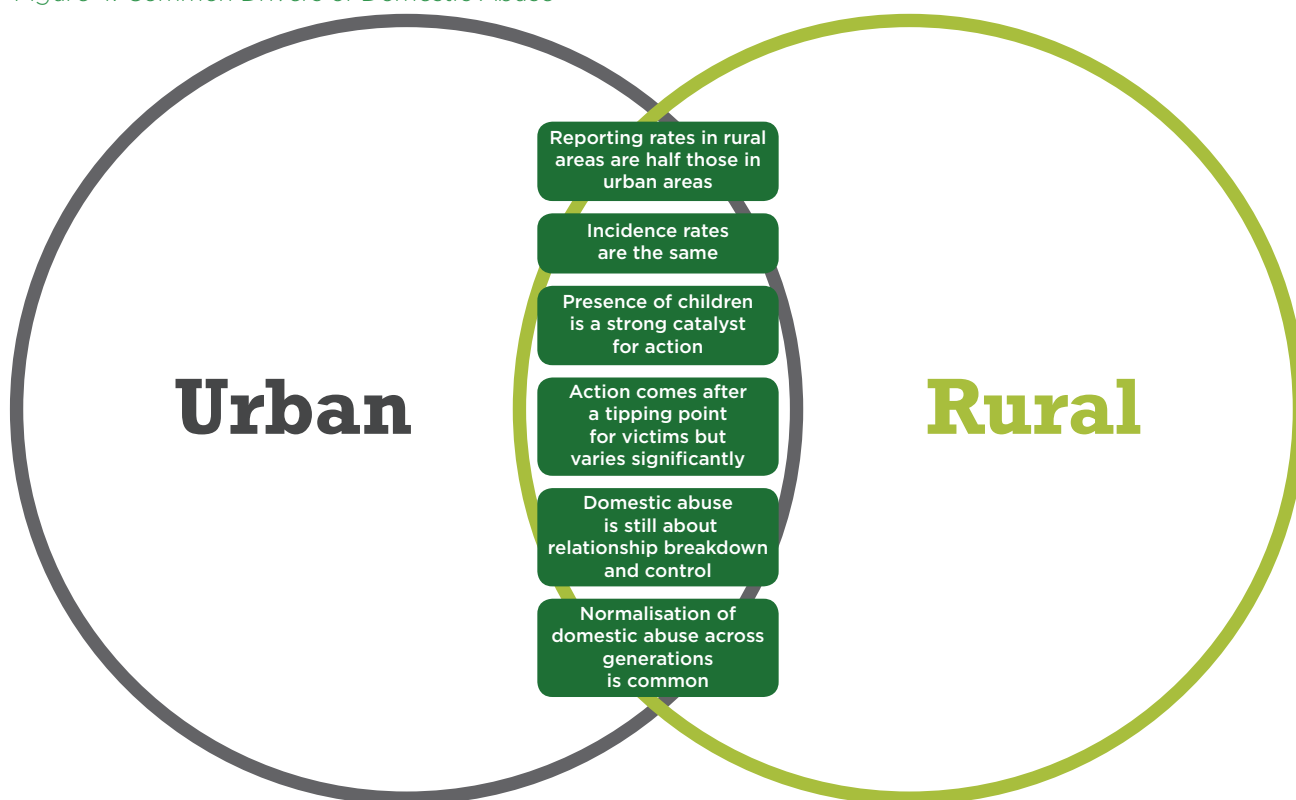
One aspect of this project is that while incidence rates per '000 of population are the same between urban and rural areas, thereby supporting the current strategy, the reporting rates are significantly lower in rural areas. **This suggests that either, a different model for service provision may need to be developed and one that is less tied to reported need and economic efficiency, or a greater awareness of issues which are more prevalent or peculiar to rural areas is required.**

The literature review suggests that educational attainment and awareness levels around abuse and what constitutes abuse appears to be higher in urban areas³. The context for this is set by the geography of the USA and Australia, where remote and isolated communities are much less connected to mainstream society and media access. The same may be said of social isolation and access to informal support networks. It was felt this should be tested further in the subsequent stages.

There are similarities in the drivers of domestic abuse and some of the personal and psychological barriers facing victims in both urban and rural areas. **However, the review of the published research and academic papers also leads us to conclude that for rural areas, the scale of the barriers faced is significantly greater than for urban victims. In rural areas a range of additional impacts stemming from geographic, cultural and social differences and isolation have an impact which makes reporting abuse a much harder thing to do for rural victims, therefore superimposing themselves to the extent they may delay or inhibit reporting altogether.**

But, to firstly look at what rural and urban domestic victims have in common:

Figure 4: Common Drivers of Domestic Abuse



If we start at the bottom finding and work up to our known conclusions – the literature review makes it clear that to some extent, in both rural and urban areas, domestic abuse is normalised and repeated across generations⁴. While there is evidence to say that this normalisation may be more established in rural areas, the reference points for this conclusion are from outside the UK and may not apply to the same extent here.

Above any other external influence such as financial hardship, stress and anxiety, domestic abuse is about relationship breakdown through control and the use of fear and intimate terrorism⁵ to exert and reinforce control.

The decision to act against abuse is commonly made after some form of a tipping point is reached. Where this point lies may be very different in individual situations and is influenced by inertia, fear of reprisal and the scale of the task involved. However, one consistent finding across our literature review and later amongst our own interviews, is that where children are involved, and they witness or are subject to the abuse taking place, this is an almost universal catalyst for some form of action to ensue.

3. Qualitative Differences Among Rural and Urban Intimate Violence Victimization Experiences and Consequences *Journal of Family Violence* (2003)

4. Intimate Partner Violence and Social Isolation across the Rural/Urban Divide *Christine Lanier and Michael O Maume (Journal of Violence against Women* (15/11)

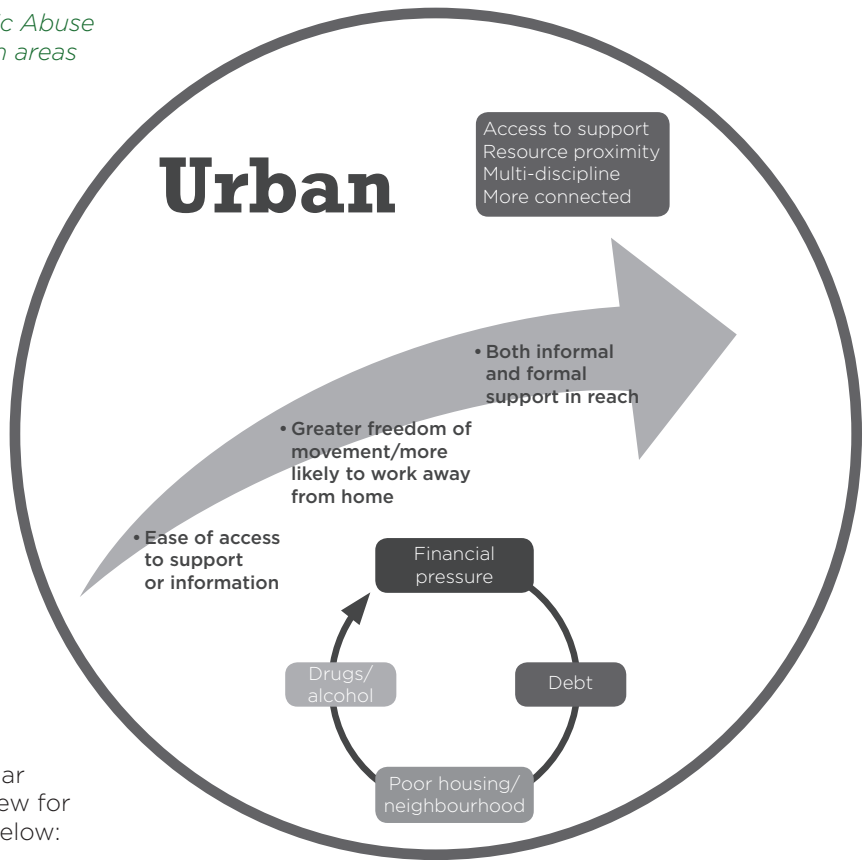
5. Little, J. (2013). *Understanding Domestic Violence in Rural Space: A research Agenda*. Exeter University



We have summarised the differences between urban and rural areas in terms of situational context and how that builds barriers to action. Firstly, for urban areas:

Figure 5: Factors impacting Domestic Abuse rates and Barriers to action for urban areas

The factors seen to be more relevant to domestic abuse cases in urban areas are based around an increase in stress and anxiety or the role of the male as the main income earner. Financial pressure relating to unemployment or issues of debt can lead to abuse in the home. However, compared to rural areas the victims have access to information regarding what to do, greater freedom of movement to act on this and the opportunity to engage with both formal support agencies or police or act independently with support from friends or family.



We need to contrast this with a similar summary analysis based on this review for rural areas which is shown in Fig 6 below:

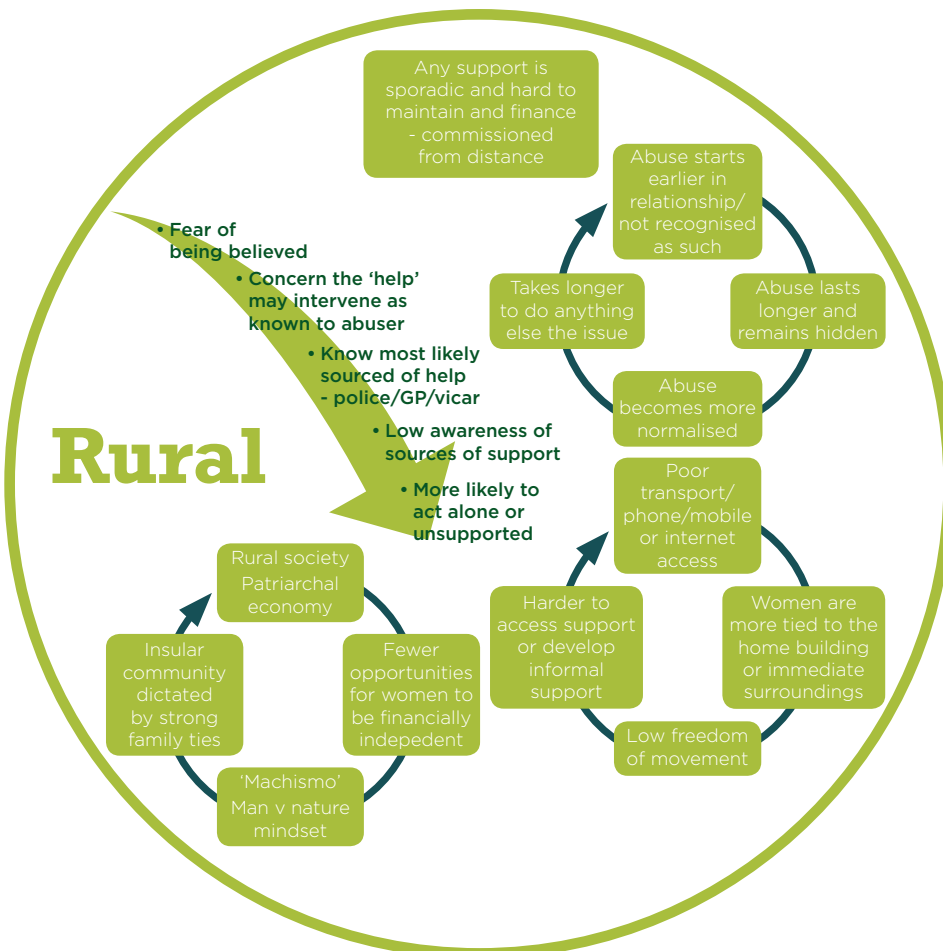


Figure 6: Factors impacting Domestic Abuse rates and Barriers to action for rural areas

In this model, a series of inter-related and reinforcing sets of barriers are acting to effectively suppress the ability of a victim of domestic abuse in rural areas to act. Clearly, not all these factors are relevant in every case, but the point is that they compound the impact and more effectively suppress any response. Overlaying these sets of barriers are circumstances which are more prevalent in rural areas – the fear of being believed, knowing the potential sources of help and the lack of available support agencies which could mean a stark choice of acting alone or not acting at all.

When we see the compound picture painted by this review the issues facing rural victims becomes stark:

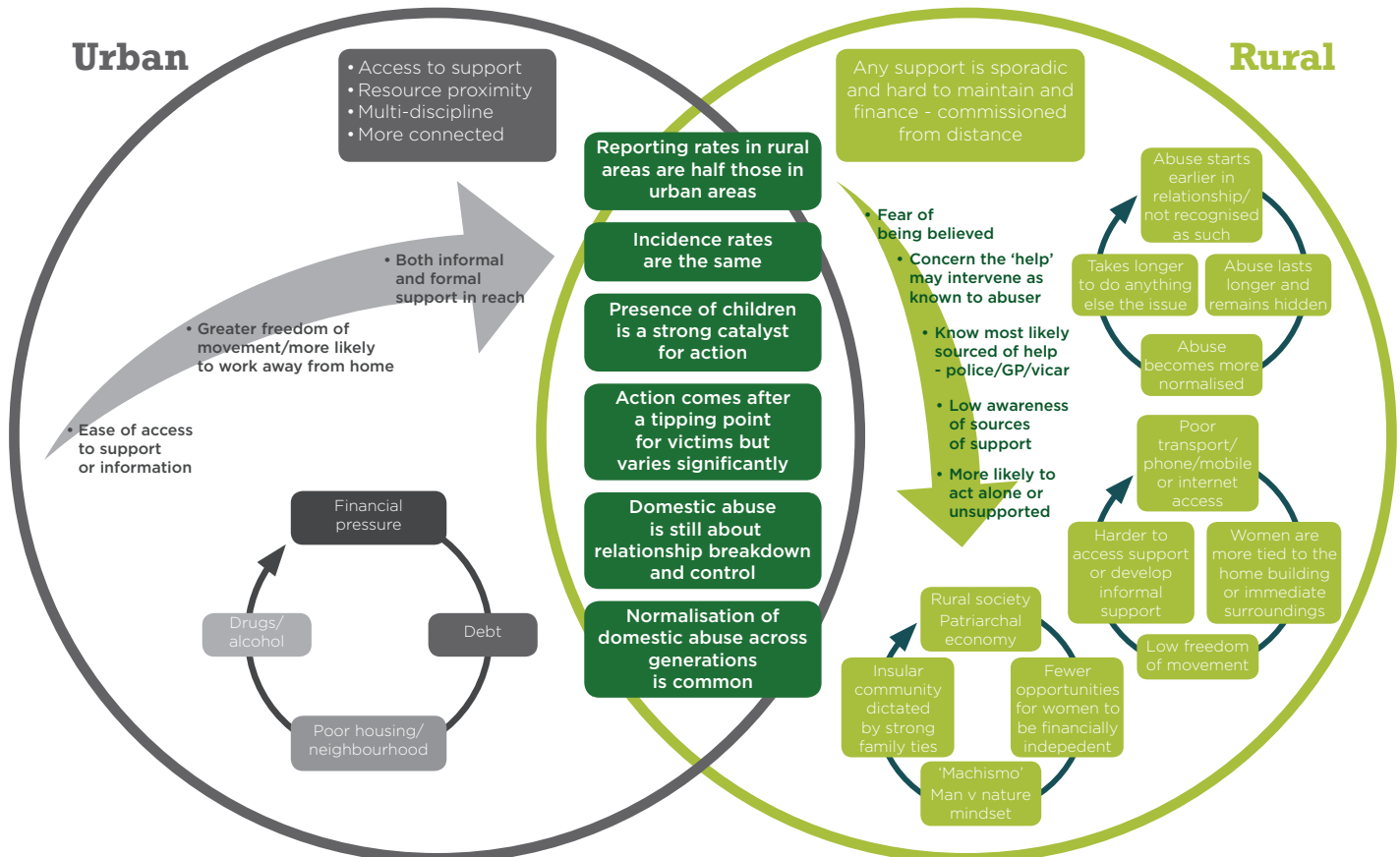


Figure 7: Composite View of Urban v rural issues based on Literature Review

While the drivers of Domestic Abuse may have many similarities between rural and urban spaces, the complexity and overlapping nature of the barriers to action in rural areas appears to be far more complicated and inhibiting. Access to support is the principle way the differences are manifested: in rural areas it seems likely victims do not know where to go to for the type of support required; it is harder to co-ordinate or access and the fear of any approaches becoming known is higher.

The nature of domestic abuse is remarkably similar

It is important to acknowledge the consistency we found in the way abuse starts, escalates and becomes harmful and ultimately criminal, which appears to be the same irrespective of the locale of the abuse and reflects the findings of most published research.

Our role in this report is to try and not repeat other established findings. However, one of the things that struck our team is the paradox between victims who said they did not see the relationship as abusive and the clear identification of established patterns in perpetrator behaviour that indicates when the abuse starts, and which may be seen more clearly by others outside of the relationship. So what is seen to be normal from within a deteriorating relationship is anything but from the perspective of those with professional knowledge or not who view the same traits knowing the consistency and escalating patterns which define abuse.

The common use of the 'Power and Control' wheel⁶ (next page) by support workers, was viewed by many victims as the point at which they grasped the extent of the abusive nature of their partner. If the escalation of Power and Control is so recognisable then perhaps it should be seen more widely within appropriate settings such as schools; health centres and in the community.

Many victims despite recognising or suspecting the warning signs chose to ignore them, see them as a short term issue only or were persuaded by their partner that they were wrong. This factor alone means that many women are simply unaware of, or choose to ignore, the early signs of abuse. Staying in a relationship where abuse is typically an escalating factor, which gets worse over time, means it is harder to leave the relationship and endanger themselves further – fear becomes the principal barrier to action.

6. Originally developed by Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs in Duluth, Minnesota, USA

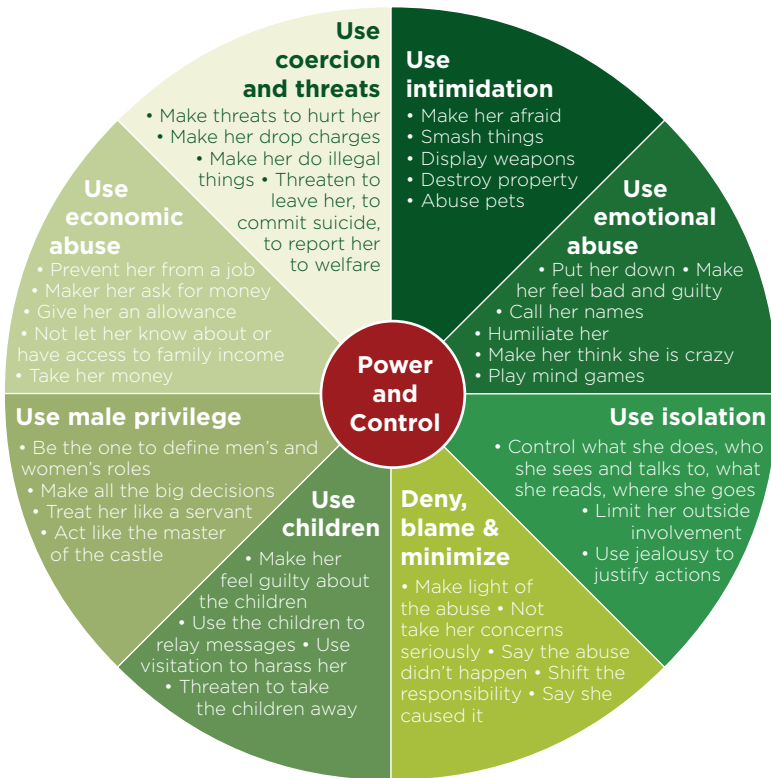


Figure 8: Power & Control Wheel

The recent publicity given to the recognition of 'coercive control' as a crime may help in this regard in recognising the earliest indicators that the relationship has changed or needs to be challenged.

Across the many interviews with victims from both rural and urban settings – the common theme was not understanding what abuse was and yet when reference was made to the Power and Control Wheel or other similar visual aids the recognition that more than one of these factors was present in the relationship was also consistent.

Below (figure 9.) are some verbatim comments that underline the similarities between rural (green) and urban (dark-green) victims in this regard:

I just felt this was how we were. I didn't see it as abuse – just everyday agro between two people getting through life

The point I didn't get was the fact that I always felt it was my fault. But that was because he was saying it – 'you have no confidence that's why you think I am after other women'.

Was he controlling?
Yes.
Would he ask me to do things I didn't want to?
Yes.
Did I see this as abusive?
No – not really.

In the early days he always apologised after an argument or a fight. Then he just stopped doing that – it was actually my fault, I started it or I made him do it.

I still remember when I met my support worker for the first time and she made me look at this wheel thing. It was like the penny dropped. I was being abused!

Looking back I am almost embarrassed that I did not see it for what it was. Only when I saw how many parts of the wheel I was subjected to did I realise how far I had let it go.

Every couple has its fights I thought. It was when they always ended up physical that I thought hang on a minute ... this is not right

I worshipped him really. That was the problem – they say love is blind. I didn't even acknowledge it when I saw the wheel thing – I wouldn't even admit it to the lady trying to help me!

Figure 9: Victim Interviews highlighting the nature of abuse and recognition of it as such is similar between rural and urban-based victims

The damaging role of drugs and alcohol is as prevalent in rural areas as in urban areas

It became clear in both our face to face interviews and from the survey results that the impact within cases where relationships degenerate into abuse was so often fuelled by drugs and/or alcohol. Typically the use of drugs or alcohol was worse for the perpetrator, but very often this was admitted as a shared habit. While the incidence reported in our survey data is higher in urban areas, the differences between urban and rural areas are not significant and the availability of drugs within rural areas is evidenced here (see Table 4). However, in rural areas, only 7% of victims claimed to be taking drugs compared to 20% in urban areas.

Table 4: Role of drugs or alcohol

Did drugs or regular/excessive alcohol consumption play any part in your relationship with your abusive partner? Column %	Urban	Rural
Yes, drugs	24	20
Yes, regular/excessive drinking	47	40
No, neither	45	51

Base: All survey participants; n=838; 385 urban; 453 rural

The normalisation of abuse within relationships

While also common to both rural and urban areas as far as this study concludes the issue of abuse being in some way a normal part of a relationship dynamic is a really strong factor in explaining why people do not act sooner and why abuse can extend and worsen over time.

One thing which appeared to be noticeable from the interviews was the repeat nature of rural victims moving from an experience of domestic abuse witnessed as a child or moving as an adult from one abusive relationship to another. Again there is a paradox at play here to external readers – if you have experienced it before surely you would recognise the signs and act sooner. The paradox is that experiencing violence in an intimate relationship and then repeating that builds a belief that this is how relationships work.

We have suggested already that only when confronted with a visual or verbal set of prompts about what a bad relationship looks like do victims start to acknowledge that their relationship is an abusive one. Recognition, not of signs of abuse per se but that they should not be present in a relationship, is a subtle but significant difference that for many victims we spoke to is the pivot point at which they realise they need to act. Most often that manifests itself through contact with caseworkers from specialist support agencies, but it can be triggered by police intervention or by family/friends.

The witnessing of abuse as a child is one of those things that often explains why the need for signs of love and affection are so sought after by some victims and why the making up after an incident is described as the best times by them. The desperate need for affection following on from a parental separation seems to build a level of tolerance to abuse for several victims.

‘My father used to abuse my mum verbally and emotionally all the time. I used to hate it but it became part of home life for me as a kid and then a teenager. So when we had rows it was to me a sign that the relationship mattered, but also I used to crave the affection or small bits of kindness that meant to me everything was alright.’

‘I just seem to attract bad men. I have been from one bad relationship to another. It makes me wonder whether there is something about me that is like an invisible sign. I was abused physically and sexually by my stepfather growing up, so any sign of kindness or affection really gets to me.’

‘When it goes on for a long time like it did with me – 13 years – you just accept it as part of every day. You learn how to minimise the impact, how not to upset him or how to take the heat out of the moment before you get hit and then it goes back to what is normal for me.’

‘It becomes routine. I used to be so finely tuned that I could know when I was in for a bashing by the way he entered the house. Bang. Car keys get thrown down. Heavy footsteps. Door opens quickly – so I make sure I have a cup of tea ready and get him to sit down first. Those first few minutes are so tense for me – if I get it wrong it will be bad all night.’

‘You find you are adapting your mood and behaviour all the time to try and keep things peaceful and relatively calm. I just accepted that was what I had to do and before I knew it 7 years had gone by and we had three kids And I was still doing it while looking after them!’



Responses to our survey show that around half of our sample had experienced and/or witnessed abuse in their lives before. The proportions experiencing abuse as an adult, amongst those who were recent victims of abuse in rural areas, is not significantly different from their urban counterparts. However, the experience of abuse compared to witnessing abuse in rural areas appears to be higher, particularly for male victims.

The cyclical nature of abuse which crosses generations and was so often referred to in the academic literature is a feature in these figures yet again with **1 in 2 victims of abuse having seen or experienced it before in their lives.**

Table 5.1: Previous experience of abuse

Prior to the recent abuse you suffered, had you experienced or witnessed abuse in a home environment before? Column %	Urban		Rural	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Yes, I'd experience abuse before as an adult	20	17	23	29 ⁷
Yes, I'd experience abuse before, when I was a child	26	22	24	18
Yes, I witnessed abuse before as an adult	6	17	5	3
Yes, I witnessed abuse before, when I was a child	20	17	14	6
No, none of the above	52	57	51	56

Base: All survey participants; n=876

We believe that tied to normalisation, which is widely understood, is the confused state of mind many victims referred to in their interviews. The length of time and the escalating nature of domestic abuse takes its toll on mental health and with it the need to supplement the coping mechanisms which may involve drinking and/or prescription and other drugs. Mentally, victims are in stress or exhausted or both. They are unable to think in any kind of focused way and are so easily confused and confounded by the subsequent actions of their partners who when they fear they may have gone too far, so often turn on the charm again to smooth things over in the short term.

The following extract from one of the caseworkers we interviewed explains this point graphically:

‘One thing I had to deal with in my own mind is why these poor women stay in a relationship like this. I very quickly came to realise that many of them are in such a stressful situation they have shut down from any kind of rational thinking. It’s like all their effort goes into survival mode or protection for the kids. This becomes their normal way of life, their routine, their way of getting through each day. The longer it goes on the less likely they are to see the dangers.’ - (Caseworker in Co Durham)

‘I often say to my clients no-one understands what it is like to live with abuse when you don’t see it as that. I know from my own experience what it is like to suddenly realise that everything you have dealt with or coped with by adapting your behaviour and your life to fit with his, is not how relationships should be. The problem is it becomes your world, the world you live with and you make it work and that becomes your life then.’ - (Caseworker in Cornwall)

7. Although the proportion of male rural victims who had experienced abuse before as an adult appears higher - it is not statistically significant at this level. The specific issue around male generational abuse may require further inspection.

Their Story

Evidence: E's Story - 'Abuse is normal isn't it?'

E had really experienced a lifetime of abuse and had come to accept it as a fundamental part of any relationship she had with a man. Sexually abused as a teenager, she left school and went through a series of relationships each one of which was abusive in some shape or form. She finally formed a relationship with an Asian partner who became abusive too to the point where he had been arrested for assault and was being prosecuted. He had arranged for 3 friends to damage E's property as intimidation to try and get her to drop the charges. Her partner was prosecuted and she was advised by the police to go to a refuge.

In the refuge, she met another man and started a relationship with him which ultimately led to a move to the South West where his family were based and she felt able to bring her teenage child with her. This partner became controlling when they moved to a more remote property. He isolated her from the rest of her family and effectively they lived in one room in the house. She found out that he was on probation for a previous kidnap and torture.

They moved in together with her child and while the relationship was volatile they chose to stick together. His control and exploitation of her anxiety became worse and involved him locking her in the property when he decided her anxiety was flaring up again.

She then found out from a neighbour that he had been sexually abusing her 15-year-old child for 6 months and so she involved the police. This made her really distraught because of her own childhood experience.

'He had always made things better for me after they got bad and after everything else I had been through I clung onto those moments - I have had to accept that this is what my life is like.'



Some victims also show remarkable resilience and ability to manage within an abusive relationship for relatively long periods. Across our sample of 67 interviews, we saw 15 cases where victims had lived within the same abusive relationship for over 10 years. The coping strategies and ability to maintain some form of family life is remarkable and in many respects means that trying to understand the stages or development of an abusive relationship will always showcase anomalies through circumstance or a drive to provide some form of normality to dependent children.

While we acknowledge the huge spectrum that is domestic abuse, the variability in cases we witnessed and were told about underlines the need to take a stance on abuse that starts with the first signs of a bad relationship or controlling behaviour. While there may be patterns in relationships over a large sample it is also very clear to our research team that there is no way of predicting how abuse can escalate and over what time period. For victims who take on the mantle of normalisation, there has to be continued and better access to know and interpret the warning signals around abuse and control.



2.1 Findings

KEY FINDING: Retreating rural resources make help and escape harder

The availability of public services in rural areas more generally is on the decline, limiting the support networks and escape routes available to victims. A recently evidenced reduction in rural GP practices and challenges of effective broadband are good examples. This equally extends to services like buses and trains, whereby it remains very difficult (and getting worse) to travel within rural areas without a private vehicle. Abusers use this to limit victims' movements, rendering already inaccessible services all but impossible to contact. This decline in services has built up over time and reflects evidence already in the public domain around less public pound spent per person in rural areas compared to urban, the consequences of which may not have been fully understood.

Where transport links and broadband/internet connectivity are weak or sporadic it not only reinforces a sense of isolation to anyone living in fear but also makes anyone reliant on public transport highly visible and vulnerable, when seeking help or connecting to support services. We heard accounts from victims who could not make a trip to a solicitors appointment for example as the early bus left prior to school opening and the last bus returned before the time of the appointment. Such factors become far more significant when your life becomes dependent on such things working.

As rural transport becomes ever more under financial pressure, those victims with no alternative or who have access to cars regulated and controlled by their partners are much more at risk through the additional barriers faced in trying to escape a violent relationship. In areas where support agencies are based in rural hubs, the severe problems in relying on rural transport make them hard for victims to reach securely and independently. The overwhelming need is for support workers to go to the victim, something hard pressed agencies continue to do but which require them to conduct their own individual risk assessment before a home visit can be undertaken. The alternative is to find a more neutral meeting point and cafes, coffee shops and libraries are often used but still require a journey to be made. In some cases the safest alternative was to meet (as if by chance) in open countryside, which for many caseworkers was a viable, though last resort.

KEY FINDING: An endemic data bias against rural communities leads to serious gaps in response and support

Rural victims are half as likely as urban victims to report their abuse. This under-reporting means much less is known about the needs of rural victims, of what good interventions are, or how to effectively prevent rural domestic abuse. It also means demand-led services, like policing and domestic abuse support, are gearing their service towards urban areas and urban victims. This in turn leads to fewer services in place to support rural victims, and those victims therefore further subjugated and less likely to report. So the cycle continues. In the modern world data is everything, and there is simply less data on rural victims, resulting in less being done to address the problem effectively. The same is true for rural communities in the most general sense, with vast swathes of data and decision-making being based on an urban clientele.

Rural areas can be very different from each other

It is important to understand that while we are focused on a rural v urban assessment in this project, the very nature of rurality is not uniform at all. It has in many ways a greater degree of individuality than urban areas many of which share social characteristics or historical development. In our research across very different regions, we have been to areas classed as rural in North Nottinghamshire and County Durham which are distinctly different from hamlets and villages in the Yorkshire Dales, Lincolnshire and Dorset.

The former has many old mining villages where traditional working class values dominate and there is a corresponding lack of trust of the police or other authority and institutional organisations. Here the way of dealing with abuse cases saw police contact as a last resort, more often families dealt with known abuse themselves and could be seen to use social exclusion as a control mechanism. Calling for police help was seen as almost disloyal to the community and for victims in this situation was only ever used as a last resort. Similarly, these communities had a fear of abuse impacting the assessment of them as a parent and a mother's greatest fear was that Social Services would intervene - we saw several instances where being judged by others as a bad mum had led directly to staying in an abusive relationship for longer.

Rural villages which are part of traditional owned and managed large farms or country estates have a very different character. It is here where the social structures built over many years show themselves in a far more patriarchal society where men are seen as the workers, labourers and income earners and there is often a deep and embedded sense of man and nature working together. Not surprising that in situations like this the stereo-typed values of 'a woman's place is in the home' were far more commonly observed. When we interviewed women who had lived or moved into such enclaves their lives had adapted to the routines and values of their partner.

In between these two distinctive types of rurality, we find the villages and small towns where the society mirrors in a more intimate way that of the nearest larger town or city, where retail and leisure facilities are concentrated and where a more commuter style of life develops. Those larger villages and small market towns which have some services for their own community and where police may still have a base act more like the larger urban centres. In these places, we find a greater level of informal support may be given to victims from concerned neighbours or friends, GP's or religious groups which is simply not there in the smaller or more remote settlements.

There is an underlying exploitation of weakness that is consistent but simultaneously unique in every case.

One of the things our research team were particularly mindful of was taking great care and sensitivity in talking to victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse – our cases differed in complexity, circumstance, type of location, nature of relationship and severity of the impact and trauma that follows. While research looks for patterns and themes in behaviours and attitude one thing which struck us hard when getting together to compare and work on analysis is that while these underlying patterns exist, every case is at the same time truly individual. Just as each relationship has a different flow and pattern to it so it is with abuse. Perpetrators seek out weakness and exploit it but that weakness can vary infinitely from previous abusive experiences as we have seen, to low self-esteem and protection of children, pets or even livestock. The nature of abuse is to exploit weakness and make it work to the perpetrator's advantage – that is probably the single most defining feature that unites all our cases.





3 Rurality as a weapon

In the context of Domestic Abuse, rurality provides the perpetrator with an additional set of weapons to use. This only struck our research team as they put together different accounts from victims in some of the most isolated locations in our sample. This level of isolation within an already sparsely populated geography was found in isolated barn conversions, along gated roads; in estate cottages or in places where the neighbouring properties are predominantly holiday lettings.

To the perpetrator, a rural setting provides an easier way to exert control and to the victim, rurality increases the level of risk they face:

1. Through physical isolation and lack of any real social contact
2. Through the inherent permission and sense of entitlement perceived by perpetrators to behave in a controlling manner
3. To extend and continue abuse behind the veil of stigma and shame felt by partners in a rural context to disclose the nature of their plight.

Isolation is an aid to control sought out by perpetrators and increases the risk to their victims

Isolation, as we have seen from the Power and Control Wheel, is a key part of the perpetrator's armoury. The opportunity to physically isolate as well as mentally isolate a victim is uniquely provided by a rural location and we uncovered a number of cases where partners used a move to the countryside for this purpose. Indeed a few interviews highlighted discrete movements which re-located the family into increasingly remote locations with relatively frequent subsequent moves.

This same tactic appears in an impactful description we found in the book *Operation Lighthouse* written by Luke and Ryan Hart whose abusive father tragically took the lives of his wife, Claire and daughter, Charlotte before he killed himself in rural Lincolnshire in July 2016. As a testimony to the boy's total lack of awareness of their situation, this extract is particularly relevant:

'Our reality was only articulated to us as we sat in the police station only a couple of days after 19 July. Behind us, we saw a poster highlighting coercive control and discovered that it was a crime. The following characteristics were detailed on the poster:

Isolation from family/friends and restricting an independent social life.

'Every time we had moved house it was an act of purposeful severance of our mothers' relationships. Our father had forbidden social media access and controlled our mother's use of the internet. Her daily movements had to follow a strict and regular schedule. He would never clean the house, fill the car with petrol or do any grocery shopping to ensure our mother was busy with chores during her days off work and therefore couldn't spend any time with others.'⁸

The fact the poster was on display inside a police station is an irony in itself when we consider the fact that for many victims this is a catalyst to understanding the true nature of the relationship they are in.

8. *Operation Lighthouse* by Luke and Ryan Hart published by Seven Dials/Orion Publishing Group

This account also mirrors several experiences we heard about directly where the isolation of a victim is made worse through relocation:

Their Story

Evidence: A's Story

- 'A deliberate isolation in a rural location'

A had been married for over 10 years and the family moved to the south-west from a large south coast city to provide a better life for her two kids. Her husband had chosen a very isolated spot to live. No contact with any services, home-schooled the children and I kept the kids outside as much as possible as the relationship had changed to be a hostile one. I was learning to cope by reading the signals and adapting my behaviour. We had an elderly neighbour and a holiday home close by but that was it. No doctor, no post office, no support services, nothing.

It is like a brainwashing thing – I had to follow his ideologies to keep the peace, and it went on from there. I suffered all levels of abuse – didn't report it or talk about it – I was in denial – could not rock the boat.

His behaviour got worse and because we worked from home and he didn't drive I did everything. Everything he did was to break me down – it was all mental abuse. I had no income or benefits because he would not claim benefits, I was a mile away from the nearest person.

Eventually, my parent moved in with us to help us financially but that was just the cover story, knowing that his behaviour had to change. As expected he moved out from this situation and took everything to do with the business with him but he said he could come back at any time as his name was on the tenancy and that terrified me, being here and effectively alone with no-one around.

The isolation became suffocating and that was when the messages and emails started. Then I heard he had moved back. We moved on again to a farm this time with nothing but fields around us. I became so anxious and frightened I was shutting down, but I could not call the police and so I reached out to the support service because I needed women, not men. From then it has taken 3 years to start to get my life back.



It seems like a glaringly obvious statement to say that rural areas are more isolating, but this physical isolation is of course reinforced in many other ways. Poor broadband or mobile telephony means that communicating or exploring avenues of help are effectively removed for many rural victims.

Transport links are now so infrequent that it makes anyone reliant on public transport both vulnerable and highly visible. The scheduling of scarce services frequently make them inaccessible to victims who need to travel to the nearest town to access services or meet support workers but are unable to as the timing of bus services does not allow a return journey in the time they have available.

That sense of isolation is clear from some of our interview extracts:

'You think that the community in villages like the one I lived in would be a source of support but in reality, no-one wants to get involved in another person's personal life. In my case, because he played for the village cricket team he had the support of everyone and this made me feel even more isolated. It was like no-one would ever take my side over his, so I just retreated into my work at home and over time I suppose I became a bit of a recluse.'

'I didn't realise it at the time of course but he actually went out of his way to project this image of the friendly guy who would always lend a hand – you know he got involved in the choir and the village fete committee – but I knew he wasn't really like that, he was totally manipulative of the situation.'

Their Story

Evidence: B's Story - 'Small moves underline isolation'

B had lived with her partner for almost 10 years and had suffered escalating abuse to the point where at the time of our interview she had changed her identity and moved outside of the area completely under police protection. Her partner had served in the armed forces and had difficulties in any relationships with his children, his former partner and her parents as well as any authority figures.

The couple initially lived on the south coast and for short periods the two sets of children and the couple functioned well. Under the surface however abuse was constant, mental, physical and sexual with a constant threat of severe violence. *'I lost count of the number of times he said he would kill me, but he has shown me the knife he bought for the job and I had a feeling he had a gun somewhere too.'*

Unexpectedly he announced one day that he had bought a house on an island off the south coast and we were to move there. Looking back B knew it was because she had started to make some friends through work and close by the house they lived in. When they moved it wasn't too isolated but somehow the fact they were on an island with only one road in and out made B feel uneasy. It made contact with her friends harder to maintain and they lost touch.

Within two years they had moved again, still on the island but this time to a house at the end of a track from the main road and with no immediate neighbours. *'As soon as I saw that house I thought that's the place I am going to die. I hated it, I felt scared whenever I was on my own, I found myself using my own children as a kind of barrier to protect myself so I wouldn't let them go out much and life just disintegrated until the night he attacked me.'*



'I found it so hard to find anyone in the village to talk to. They are all perfectly nice people on the surface, but after he shouted at me in the pub that night it was like everyone took a step back from me. He was in there most nights and so they all seemed to be on his side. Maybe that was just me thinking that way, by then his constant criticism of me left me feeling a bit paranoid, to be honest.'

'I had two or three friends in the next village but no way I could reach them without walking there. We lived in the valley and had a really non-existent mobile signal and my partner removed the telephone from the house because he said I didn't need it.'

'My partner used to deliberately drive off to work with the kids car seats in his car which meant I could not go anywhere safely because I was stuck in the cottage with the kids – I tackled him about this once and he said it was better to leave them in his car which was safer and if we needed to go anywhere he would drive. At the time you don't think about it, but on top of everything else I have learned it was just another way he isolated me and kept me from interacting with anyone else.'

'I suppose I always felt like an outsider – you know someone who had to make an effort to be accepted. I felt like I belonged to him like property he could show to his mates in the pub and I am sure his mates knew what he was like with his moods and when he had a drink but because I didn't say anything they assumed that I was just OK with that.'

'One of the only ways I made it through the experience was a chance encounter with an older lady who spent a lot of time in her garden and started to talk to me a bit. One day she asked me in for a cup of tea and said – 'is everything alright dear?' I just burst into tears and told her all the problems. It turns out she had been married to an abusive man and she said she had seen something in my eyes that reminded her of her own bad times. I still thank God for Rachel every day – she was the only person who saw through me.'

In Dorset, the support agency had secured some funding to reach out and engage with communities. The Butterfly badge was a bit like the Alzheimer's Friend badge and designed to enable a conversation to start up around abuse. The team tried hard to get local people within rural communities to support the cause and they approached publicans, post office managers, hairdressers and shopkeepers as a way of targeting rural hubs. Sadly they found that the take-up rate they had hoped for fell a long way short because unlike Alzheimer's which has some outward signs, Domestic Abuse is seen to be hidden or considered something which should be sorted out by the couple involved. Once the badge was explained the outreach workers said it was like 'oh no that is not something I would want to have a conversation about with anyone'. The consequence was that the approach was re-directed to Health Care Professionals, District nurses and other support agency workers and so the planned expansion of sources in rural areas to which victims could turn to did not really materialise.

This finding demonstrates in a very visual way the societal problem at the very heart of domestic abuse that it is all too easy to ignore. Only people who have experienced the nature of control and abuse can possibly recognise the signs in someone else. However even when more visible signs emerge of abuse having taken place – public arguments, signs of injury, or signs of withdrawal from interaction with others in the community – it appears from our rural victims that people prefer not to get involved (and let them sort it out) rather than offer any form of support. In this context, the thought of reporting such incidences to the police was seen as overstepping the mark and being considered as 'interfering' or a 'busy-body'.

Some of the rural communities we visited to speak to victims also had a longstanding distrust of the police, going back many years – areas in County Durham and Nottinghamshire and people with traveller roots would see the police as going way beyond the last resort. In these areas, there was an implicit inference that abusers would be 'taken care of.'

'If we have a problem with anyone treating their woman badly and we know about it, we tend to have our own code to sort out issues like that. No-one would think of asking the police into our community – we wouldn't trust them to do their job. Nothing would get resolved. The police are all the same, too much paperwork to do. They leave well alone round here.'

There is little wonder that many victims we spoke to felt (or had been made to feel) they were responsible for the problems they faced and as part of the problem they had to continue to deal with it. Mental health issues were common amongst our interviewees, many of the problems beginning as a direct result of the abusive relationship, although several victims were clearly vulnerable due to their mental health conditions from the start of their relationship with their perpetrator.

'One of the reasons I found myself withdrawing was that I was constantly being told by him that it was all my fault. I didn't know anyone because I had no self-esteem. No-one he knew would want to get to know me, because of the way I was or because I had some mental health problems then. You see the entire thing as your fault, your issue to deal with, but you can't! It is a downward spiral that I found I couldn't fight. I have never felt as alone as when I was in that relationship – it was like everyone else was out of reach and it was just me and my kids in the house. Even the house wasn't a safe place for us though – so where do you go to? I had no idea and so you find ways to cope with it.'

'Over the three years I was with him I know now I became a different person. I withdrew into myself, I believed everything he was telling me. I was depressed, no fun to be around, I drank to block things out, I took pills to feel numb and I drifted from one day to the next. I had one period where I don't think I left the house for a month. I started to think everyone saw me as a weirdo.'

We found a number of ways victims described being isolated and effectively this removes them from sources of help, they stop looking because they don't see any immediate solutions and their lives become a short term, day to day driven survival.

- 1. Perpetrator Enforced Physical Isolation:** where the perpetrator has deliberately sought to take their victim into an area or surroundings where physical isolation is a way to underline and enforce further control. In urban areas, this can involve isolation within the home and separation from friendship groups or support. In rural areas this is accomplished in a single act of finding a remote place to live – the edge of a village or small town; off the main road or down a track/bridleway; farm buildings or barn conversions where neighbours are some distance from the property.
- 2. Perpetrator Enforced Mental/Social Isolation:** found in the vast majority of cases we explored. This is an inherent part of controlling the partner. Dominate their social interaction to drive friends or family away; erode the ego through constant criticism or denigration. Within rural locations, we found this was almost by definition easier. Rural communities are tight, defined by involvement and outreach or participation in shared activity or history. For people who are brought into such a community, but effectively controlled in terms of any type of integration or it is limited to situations where the perpetrator retains control it is extremely hard to build any relationships. The lack of social interaction, of course, builds up the dependence on the partner and reinforces the control he feels or the isolation felt by the victim – they are two faces of the same coin.



- 3. Financial Isolation:** we found a less commonly referred to issue, but implicit in the way victims talked about the control they had experienced at the hands of their partner, was the domination of any income or earning potential for the female partner. Those who had jobs were made to hand over their money into the communal pot. At the beginning of relationships, this may have appeared innocent in that there is a joint account or kitty, but the person with access to this or who knows its whereabouts in the home was often the person most in control.
- 4. Isolation from previous friends and support:** many victims referred to the way that over time and it may be several years their old friends were effectively removed as any form of contact was taken away. One example quoted here shows the extent of the control exerted in isolating a partner from former friendship groups.

'He did buy me things from time to time. Once I came in and he had wrapped up a new phone for me which he handed over saying this is how much I love you, babe. When I opened it up it had all been set up for me but all the pictures from my old phone and my friend's numbers weren't on there. Like none of them. When I asked for my old phone to transfer them over he said he had destroyed it because everything I needed was on the new phone. I literally had all my old pictures from my life before on the old phone and they had been replaced by pictures of him and the kids only. I was massively upset because it was like he had removed my former life – just wiped it clean. Only now have I started to pick up the pieces with people from back then – they just assumed I had chosen to move on with my life and had no way to track me down as no-one knew my new number.'

Looking at the evidence we have gained during our interviews with rural victims especially, it is very clear that the isolation naturally afforded by rural locations reinforces and enables the isolation of partners to be far more effective. As dependence on digital and mobile connections becomes the way of communicating for so many people there is a danger that relying on this form of communication has an inherent vulnerability in areas where mobile signal is sporadic or hard to find and where broadband based connectivity can be simply opted out from if needed.

For these reasons, we believe that the isolation of victims of Domestic Abuse in rural locations goes beyond the obvious connection and understanding of physical isolation. That is relatively rare, but the marginalisation used by so many perpetrators is reinforced in rural locations in so many other ways that it becomes not just a weapon in the armoury of the abuser, but also a significant barrier to anyone seeking a way out.

The unseen impact of rural society

One of the most interesting aspects to emerge from this research is less about the individual nature of abuse but how we found the changes in rural society impacted the victims of domestic abuse we spoke to.

There is no doubt that rural society is undergoing a significant change. In today's rural England and Wales suicide rates for farmers and farm workers have now reached more than one a week; rural society is getting older and resident populations are becoming more sparse as privileged owners buy up property for holiday rentals. The traditional and highly structured parts of rural society, such as large estates and farms, are fighting to remain relevant and yet they still continue to exert a significant power base within their locality.

It is a complex picture: rural areas that are undergoing the influence of urbanisation can influence experiences of domestic violence both positively and negatively. Some rural communities are large enough centres to allow some access to enhanced services, therefore enabling victims a greater opportunity to report. Some clearly show far less social interaction, which manifested in the fact that people are far less likely to become involved in other people's daily lives thereby increasing the risk of domestic abuse remaining largely invisible.

What is clear from many of the individuals we spoke to is the fact they were aware of an informal form of social control. In a period of change, it is the people who remain fixed and constant who often stand out as all around them changes. So it is true in many rural communities. However, we also found that places or institutions within rural communities may take on a similar status. We had constant references to local sports (football and cricket mainly) and of course the village pub, which for many places remains a last bastion of the community outside the church which is likely to open its doors far less frequently than the pub.

Many of the cases we have collated reference the use of the pub not simply as a place to get alcohol which may relate directly to episodes of abuse, but this is where the inherent male or patriarchal bias in rural communities is rooted. It is where men gather to interact, chat and reinforce a set of values that are in many ways unlike an urban counterpart, where gatherings are much more dispersed around work, gym, clubs, community centred activity etc.

In rural society many of the positions of significant influence, respect or authority lie within the male domain: landowner, farmer, butcher, gamekeeper, priest, GP, vet, shopkeeper, post office manager etc.

While there is no doubt that women are playing an increasingly important role in rural society as additional sources of income are sought, they remain far more tied to the home or the village and individual cliques which consequently develop.

To an outsider, the impression of a close-knit society actually peels back to reveal a society which functions in the same way it has for decades or even centuries, with the same family groups continuing to influence or lead. Within this society, a male perpetrator can find a set of values that reinforce their own. A natural perspective that places the man as the dominant player in a family unit with a sense of entitlement over their partner. The sense of entitlement is the worrying thing as, in the context of the type of rural societies where this is found, it is seen as a natural order of how things are and how they always have been.

We spoke to one woman who had lived exactly this kind of life, where her partner had an overwhelming sense of entitlement over her. This extract shows how such entitlement in a relationship can function for many years:

'I was married for 32 years before I finally decided I had an opportunity to live my life for me and not for the exclusive benefit of someone else. Why did I stay for so long? That is what everyone asks but it is just a way of life really. 'H' wasn't necessarily a bad man or uncaring, it is how he is.

My role in our marriage was to provide. I had to provide meals, a tidy house, labour when it was needed, decorate, and the ongoing care and management of our children, and sex. I had to provide sex like I would an evening meal. He just didn't see life any other way, he worked hard all day and mostly for a minimum of 6 days a week. It is hard work with little reward financially but we had a house and a place in the village – he played for the village cricket team which was his day off during the summer. He would go to the pub 3 or 4 times a week and if I was good I had an invite too, but it was a case of listening to him talk to the men about work or cricket or who was doing what to who in the village. Meals had to be provided within 15 minutes of him coming through the door, but I could do that and didn't think anything of it – we ate together but I can't say there was a lot of conversation between us – I saw meals as a time to catch up with what the kids were doing at school.

Early on in our marriage, I understood what happened when I failed to provide what was expected. It started with a row, angry words really and then a crushing silence. Later this escalated to more consistent violence but never when the children were around. He would twist my arm or pull my hair and kind of whisper that I wasn't treating him properly. Only once did he actually strike me hard – it was a punch to my stomach which really knocked the wind out of me. So I learnt that to avoid that kind of thing all I had to do was perform in my role and I did. Was I happy? (At this point the interviewee became upset) I don't think I have ever really known what being happy was until the day I decided to leave.

Once the kids had got to an age where they were independent I simply planned things over a couple of years. I just left one day and moved away, I found a job and a flat and I have found some really good friends now – I didn't have them before, I just knew people. I found the support worker through looking online in the library and seeing an organisation for women who felt they might be in an abusive relationship. It was only when I saw the things listed there which were signs of abuse that I thought actually that is what my life is like. I suppose it was like a light bulb going off, realising that I could make a change. My kids have been so supportive (interview suspended) only when I left him did they talk to me about how they had felt about their dad because they were comparing what they had at home to their friends. They said it was the lack of conversation or laughter they found most shocking. That hurts me.

I would probably have still been there if it hadn't been for the agency and 'S' who showed me that my life didn't have to be like this if I wanted to change it. She gave me the strength to think about being more independent because I had simply lived a habitual and routine sort of life with someone who didn't really care for me, but I don't think would have harmed me. The damage has been in all the things I could have done over the last 30 years but I don't think like that now. I think there are hundreds of women who live this sort of life in the country – it is just the accepted role for lots of women as it was for me – I just woke up and decided to change.

I saw my ex-husband a year ago at a wedding and asked how he was. He has started living with another woman from the village who lost her husband a few years ago, so everyone has rallied around him because I was the mad woman who walked out on him!

Their Story

Evidence: C's Story 'The Role Rural Society plays'

C is a highly educated lady who started a new relationship after leaving a previously abusive marriage. Her new partner was a very established medical professional. The first year of 'courting' he was charming, but after she moved in & worked in the business he became controlling/isolating. C had no access to phone, cars, friends, family, money but was expected to keep the house tidy (it was inspected for cleanliness) work in his business, accompany him to clients. She was not left on her own at all. He also monitored the computer & phones. He persuaded her to not take her prescription and instead mediated her himself, as well as withholding letters from the hospital. This was a further level of control and she started to believe that 'everything was her fault' then she became isolated from family, then she started to fear him, but behaved herself to avoid his behaviour & to protect her children.

He became physically violent... bruises on her arms... but no one would believe her as he was a professional in the community (even the police she felt did not believe her totally). She was emotionally isolated & did not know anyone in the local community. Her partner was so influential in the local community & highly regarded so no one knew or suspected she was a victim of abuse. She did go to the local doctor but did not mention the bruises on her arms (despite having blood pressure taken) and believed that the GP would not believe her anyway as her partner was well known to the GP.

'We weren't in the village for generations but he was so well known in the area... he was highly professional and had so much influence with people who matter in those circles. After I moved out even the butcher would not serve me because he had heard about the allegations - even though it was never reported, the word gets around because these people all know each other. He even intimidated the police I think because he had access to the best legal team when I brought the allegations against him.'



The way that rural society impacts on a victim's ability to act or report is significant because any such action is instantly visible and far more so than it would be in a different setting like a large town or city. Our interviews with caseworkers have highlighted how in planning any early visits to a potential victim's home a detailed and comprehensive risk assessment is undertaken. If the caseworker has lived rurally they implicitly know that a strange car on the streets will be noted. If anything is noted, it is potentially at risk of getting back to the perpetrator. So commonly caseworkers will leave their vehicle in a discrete location.

'I have used my dog as cover many times - it is so much less obtrusive to casually meet on a walk with a client. It just appears that we have struck up a casual conversation. It stops the gossip which is so rife in village life.' - (Caseworker in Devon)

'I make a point of using the back door or side door whenever it is possible - there is nothing so obvious as knocking at the front door - it makes it more obvious you are some form of official.' - (Caseworker in Notts)

'You have to be so careful because you can virtually hear the curtains twitching as you drive through. Villages, particularly small ones do have a strong sense of protection when it comes to property and potential theft. This sadly doesn't really extend to victims of domestic violence - in those situations they would rather not get involved at all.' - (Caseworker in Cornwall)

Their Story

Evidence: D's Story - 'How could I say anything against such a respected member of the community'

D had remarried after several years of seeing her partner. They lived in a large village where her husband was seen as a respected member of village life. He was heavily involved in the local sports club and their social life, after getting married, revolved around the club and the pub. Her partner had a respected job locally and his brother who also lived close by had a successful business that employed a number of people locally. The relationship turned violent soon after they got married and at the time of interview her partner was being tried for GBH charges for an attack on D with an iron bar.

Despite the violence which led to several hospital visits, D did not feel she could make this public, due to his position and status in village life and the fact that she was new to the village – she knew people would automatically take her partner's side. She deliberately attended different hospitals after his attacks so that questions would not be asked. The GBH attack was reported to the police by the hospital staff not D and it was in A&E where she confided to an IDVA the true extent of the violence she had experienced.

The police who dealt with her case fell short of acceptable standards – the first officer had implied she was 'silly and neurotic' (he subsequently faced disciplinary action). It took nearly two years for her case to come to court and during that time she was befriended by another officer. However the relationship turned toxic, he took advantage of the situation and also became controlling & monitored her movements. This officer was also a prominent member of the local community and shared mutual friends with her ex-husband. D finished her interview saying: *'the public, particularly in villages don't want to get involved ... although gossip goes on. If everyone in the village knows him, they will turn against you and make you leave. I have lost everything I owned because I have had to leave and yet I am the victim - village life is not as peaceful as it may seem.'*



Rural villages and communities have a way of acting together to protect the sense of rurality they aspire to. They may make reference to the people who have lived there all their lives to any visitors as though this is some preserve that conveys a special quality to the surroundings. This passive reinforcement of community is what people tend to observe when they visit or holiday in rural areas and in many ways it becomes the attraction of country life to many casual observers e.g.

'That's Old Bill – he has lived in the village all his life you know. He has a seat at the bar in the pub and nearly everyone will buy him a drink or ask the landlord to keep one in for him.'

In the context of domestic abuse and especially if it is by 'one of our own' or someone with stronger links to the community than the victim, this passive form of protecting the 'idyllisation' of rural life becomes strong. It is often too strong for victims to fight against, particularly those weakened and eroded by months or years of abuse. It is why we commonly heard that 'I had to leave' or 'I felt no-one would listen to me or believe me'.

Compared to other aspects of abuse against a partner this seems like a relatively mild barrier to action, however, it appears to be a common factor in preventing many of our rural victims from speaking out – the fear of not being believed or accusing someone known to the community is clearly daunting.

To observers and those who are not aware of or who have no experience of life in rural areas, there is a real paradox in some of the aspects of rural society. Small close-knit communities are meant to look out for each other. Yet these same communities appear to be remarkably stony-faced when a case of domestic abuse is exposed. Some of the interviews we conducted suggest that people are aware of when this sort of thing goes on, but rarely get involved in any way.



‘I suspected the barmaid in the pub we used to go to knew what was happening - you know when you just pick that up through a glance or a look. In 4 years she never actually said anything to me about it or even tried to broach the subject.

‘I know our neighbours could hear some of the arguments - it would be hard not to, but the next day you might see them and they casually ask if you are ok, like they would any day of the week - like are you ok - but don’t tell me if you’re not because I don’t really want to know.

‘I have addressed WI or women’s groups in places across the county and you can see it on their faces - they see it as a problem from somewhere else. These are the same people who would never believe the extent of the drug problem we have here. I once heard two lovely older ladies say at the end of the meeting - “you do such worthwhile work, but we don’t have any of that sort of thing here - it is too pretty” ’ - (Caseworker in Devon)

The stigma and shame of Domestic Abuse

The inherent way that rural society passively protects its idealised way of life may also be responsible for another key barrier we found around the stigma of Domestic Abuse. While present in both rural and urban areas the overriding sense from our interviews with rural victims was the feeling of shame they felt by admitting to the small world they lived in that they were a victim; for our urban victims there was a stigma and guilt (typically inferred by the perpetrator) but much less mention of shame.

Within rural areas, this is about the embarrassment and a sense of being publicly disgraced for having brought something like abuse out into the open. Our survey results underline the fact that rural victims are twice as likely to feel embarrassment and shame compared to urban victims.

Table 6: The three biggest reasons for not seeking help

Column n Column %	Urban 256	Rural 212
Fear	44	41
Impact on children/family	29	32
Ebarassment/shame	17	33
Thought he could change/I loved him	23	22
Unsure I’d be believed	17	16
Financial/home	14	12
Didn’t realise it was abuse	11	8
Didn’t know where to go for help	8	10
In denial	5	6
Guilt	1	1
Being alone/unwanted	1	0

Base: Women who sought help; n=468

Nothing underlines the fact that we have a different social context more than this stark truth. Social stigma is inhibiting rural victims far more than their urban counterparts.

3.1 Findings

KEY FINDING: Rurality and isolation are used as a weapon by abusers

Financial control, removal from friends, isolation from family are all well understood tools of abuse. However, we now have clear evidence that abusers specifically move victims to rural settings to further isolate them, or systematically use the isolation to their advantage should they already be there. The more rural the greater the impact of this isolation, which is now geographic and tangible, sitting alongside financial and social isolation. It not only facilitates abusers controlling their victims whilst in the relationship, but makes it harder for victims to escape that abuse. Physical isolation is the arguably the best weapon an abuser has; and has a profound impact on making the victim feel quite literally captive.

It also means longer response times from any kind of public service, but notably the police. The time taken to get to isolated victims without accounting for the fact that at busy times police resource is often tied up in town centres, means that the perpetrator has more time for the abuse to escalate.

Isolation from other human interaction, family and friends, social networks and in some cases a closed and inward facing community is more powerful in underlining the isolation to the victim. Victims talked about the incessant routine that is built up day to day when there is little other human interaction. It is not that victims always choose to be remote from their community, but their continued absence makes them appear uninvolved to others so they become more naturally excluded as the local society/cliqume assumes they want to keep to themselves. Over short periods this can build some really significant barriers when help is needed or the victim does not know what to do or who to approach. More often than not we found the perpetrator controlled this situation overtly by not allowing any contact, usually with threats, or by attending any such interactions with the victims and ensuring there was little interaction possible.

KEY FINDING: Close-knit rural communities facilitate abuse

Strong community spirit is one of the joys of rural life, but it can be equally powerful in keeping domestic abuse hidden and in facilitating abuse – not knowingly, not willingly, but by virtue of the way communities are in rural Britain. It is almost impossible for a victim to seek help without it being known to others, call the police without further community questioning or even share their fears with others in confidence. Without knowing it, the community is facilitating the abuse, allowing the abuser to act almost with impunity. There is also evidence that abusers deliberately ‘recruit’ the community to their cause, which unwittingly becomes a mechanism for controlling and isolating the victim yet further. This can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the response provided to victims.

KEY FINDING: Traditional, patriarchal communities control and subjugate women

In depth interviews with victims and survivors revealed a consistent and telling reality – that rural communities are still dominated by men and follow a set of age-old, protected and unwritten principles. Men tend to hold the rural positions of power – head of the household, land owner, landlord, policeman, farmer. This patriarchal society makes women more vulnerable to coercion and control, prevented from speaking out and accessing support. Whilst there is evidence that this is changing slowly, it needs to be understood, confronted and challenged.





4. Accessing Support for Victims

Once a victim starts to suspect the relationship is becoming unhealthy or abusive they typically take some time to come to terms with this realisation and face up to the possibility of acting. It is at this point that access to support in whatever form it may take becomes crucial. Often the nature of that first point of contact determines not only the next steps and choice for the victim but also their level of confidence in getting the help they need. While there may be a reticence to ask the police to get involved, often this decision is taken out of the victims' hands by concerned neighbours or the escalation of violence. In rural areas, the reticence in getting the police involved is seen in the level of under-reporting which initiated this project. We have also seen the level of shame and stigma a police visit can cause the victim. However, if the response is not available when it is needed, or it shows itself as inadequate or inappropriate the confidence the victim has is eroded further and their situation worsens.

One of the suspicions we had before starting this research was that in rural areas the time taken between recognising signs of abuse and acting would be significantly longer. The results to our survey provide no clear evidence of this other than in one specific area: County Durham. The time taken between the stages of recognising the relationship is not right : to abuse : to acting is relatively constant:

Table 7: Comparison of the average times between stages in relationship breakdown

Average in years	NET Urban	NET Rural
How long into your relationship with your abuser were you before you suspected the relationship was not right?	2.0	2.2
And how long into your relationship with your abuser were you before you suspected the relationship had become an abusive one?	2.8	2.6
After the abuse had started, how long was it before you decided to act or seek help?	2.6	3.0
Column n	439	351

Base: Female survey participants; n=790

Table 7 shows that on average it takes about 2 years for a relationship to show signs of breaking down and a further 7-8 months before that turns to abuse. Most people completing our survey as past victims reached out for help in some form within 3 years, irrespective of their location.

Individual cases will always show exceptions but in such a volatile situation the implication is that there may be distinct stages in an abusive relationship. For rural victims, the pattern of living with abuse is more established and for those in small villages or isolated locations, the gap between recognising abuse and acting is wider still at 3.2 years (not shown in table).

Figures from our survey showed that around 3 in 5 of those responding to the survey had some contact with the police service and that figures are comparable between rural and urban areas at the total level. However when we look outside of rural towns and those on the fringe of rurality to smaller villages the proportions drop away significantly. In rural villages, only 1 in 2 victims had police contact.

Table 7b: Did you have any contact with the police either calling them yourself or them being alerted by others?

Column n Column %	NET Urban 416	NET Rural 340	City & Suburbs 100	Town 316	Rural Town & Fringe 174	Rural Village 127	Hamlets & Isolated 39
Yes	61	65	61	60	70	54	67
No	39	35	39	40	28	46	33

Base: Women accessing support; n=469

This would reflect the findings we heard from our more rurally remote victims who understood the lack of resource, response times and the fact that any action from the police may involve their partner being taken a long distance to the nearest functioning custody suite. For them, it was a decision of putting up with the situation and hoping it would calm down – although the way it was communicated typically is shown from the quotes below:

‘You don’t really have a choice – the police are at least an hour away and if it happens on a Friday or Saturday night, which it always did, they are busy dealing with other things. I never really considered calling the police – what’s the point? By that time I had been hit, slapped or punched anyway.’

‘I didn’t want the police at my house – everyone would know what was going on then, what good can they do? They wouldn’t believe me or would take his point of view – you just get treated like shit. I don’t trust the police to do anything for people like me.’

While police may be viewed as a last resort for some, this is clearly not the case for the majority of victims. However, our survey results also show that a wide number of other sources of help are used:

Table 8: Did you approach any of the following to seek help or discuss your situation with?

Column n Column %	Urban 385	Rural 320
Doctor/GP	31	37
Domestic Abuse/IDVA Service	31	35
Other charity e.g. (Women’s Aid)	21	18
Social Services	13	9
Nurse/Healthcare worker	7	9
School teachers or head teacher	7	9
Citizens Advice Bureau	5	6
Church/Religious group	3	7
Group or society (e.g. WI)	1	2

Base: Female survey participants; n=705

Clearly, GP’s are an important source of help and strong links between GP’s and the IDVA service are likely to help the majority of cases according to these results. Amongst rural victims, the church or religious groups are also seen to be a more important source of help in rural areas.

We also asked who else gave support and as can be seen in Table 9 the church is again a significant source of help for rural victims and the role of a neighbour emerges as a support for some, but more rural victims seek help from friends from outside the area.

Table 9: Who else gave you support?

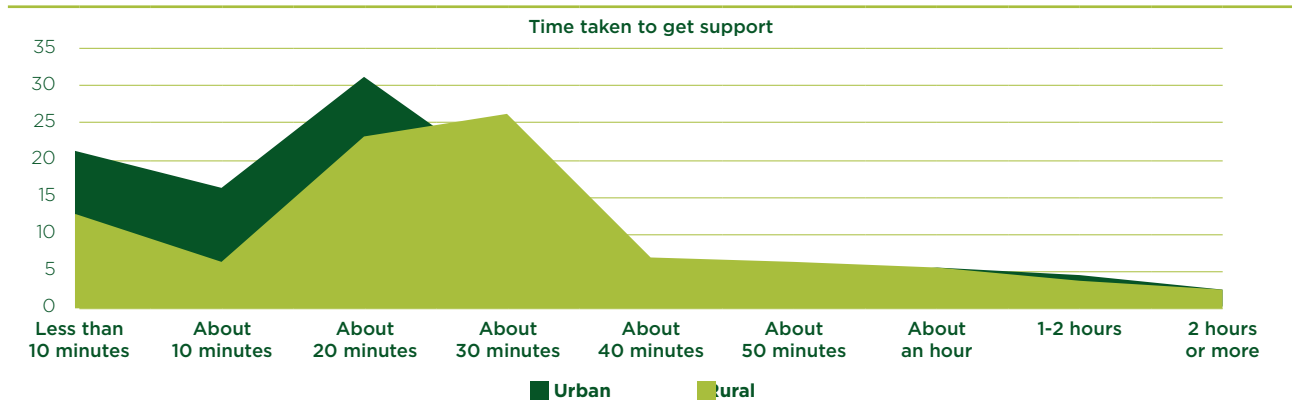
Column n Column %	Urban 241	Rural 209
Friend (lived locally)	63	60
Family member (parent or sibling)	63	59
Friend (outside the area you lived in)	32	42
Health worker/GP	25	25
Police	26	25
Neighbour	9	19
Church/Religious group	2	9

Base: Women getting support from other sources; n=450



From a victims perspective the average travelling times from our survey results show the differences faced by a significant proportion of rural dwellers:

Table 10: Time taken to attend a support service meeting - Urban v Rural victims

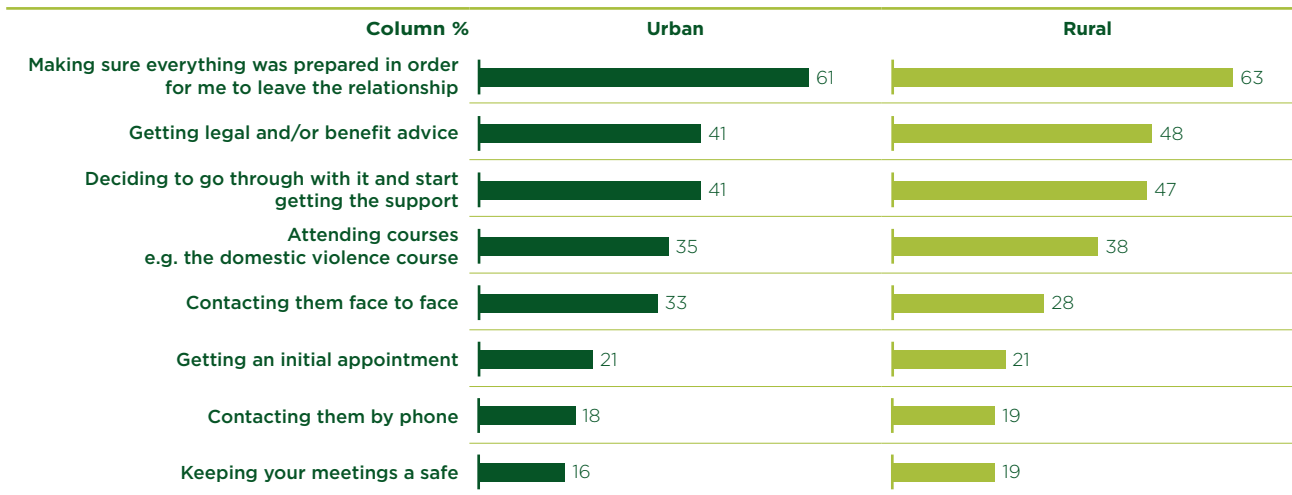


Base: Those accessing a support service; n=354; 190 Urban; 155 Rural

A significant proportion of rural victims appear to have been able to attend a meeting in less than 30 minutes which suggests that opportunities to access support are easier than we suspected. However such figures, of course, hide the additional effort, risk and subterfuge we heard about in our interviews in trying to ensure discretion. This analysis would appear to suggest that the efforts made by support services to locate caseworkers at access points closer to rural areas should be maintained and expanded in areas that don't currently operate in this way.

The aspects victims found hardest in their dealings with support services are highlighted below and underline the need for the specialist support most agencies provide around the point of leaving the relationship. Aside from the difficulties we have outlined in making contact discretely, the emphasis on preparation and legal support are paramount to the relationship victims have with their caseworker.

Table 11: Thinking about your interactions with the support service you used/are using how hard were each of the following?



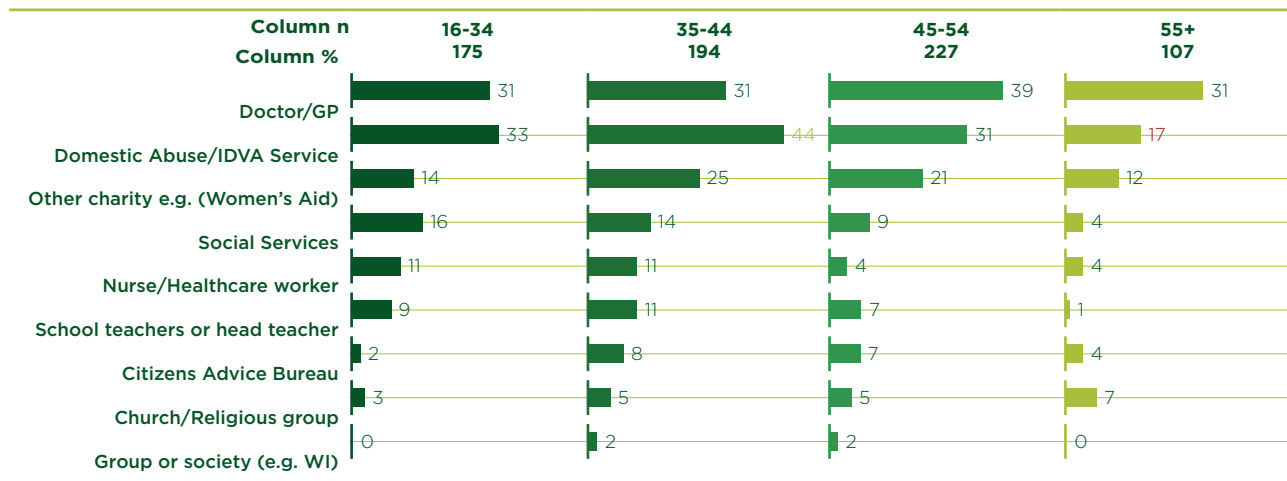
Base: Women accessing support; n=160-418 depending on applicability

The difficulty of arranging and keeping those important first contact meetings are key to moving towards a successful outcome for many victims. By contrast to the interactions with police which may trigger a move on to subsequent support, the nature of the meeting is entirely different. Many victims admitted that the first realisation regarding the nature of their relationship was as a result of being taken through the signs of coercive control and how this pattern of behaviour can escalate to a risk of serious harm.

Those living in the most rural of locations found the decision to leave or finding support to do so, the hardest of any of our rural classifications - 60% living in hamlets and small villages compared to 47% for all rural areas. The additional barriers around isolation and the practicalities of making contact are concentrated in these types of locations. For the same reasons 30% of people in rural villages and hamlets found keeping meetings safe hard to do compared to the 19% for all rural areas.

Before we move on to focus on the perspectives and challenges facing providers, one other potentially significant finding highlights how older rural victims seek help. Table 12 looks purely at rural victims and highlights that amongst the 16% of the rural sample responding to our survey aged over 55, significantly fewer had approached any of the sources we listed. This age group appears from this data to be dealing with the situation on their own. The CSEW has only just started looking at Domestic Abuse data for the over 60's but the implication here is for an unmet need within this age group who are far more likely than their younger counterparts to realise their situation on their own:

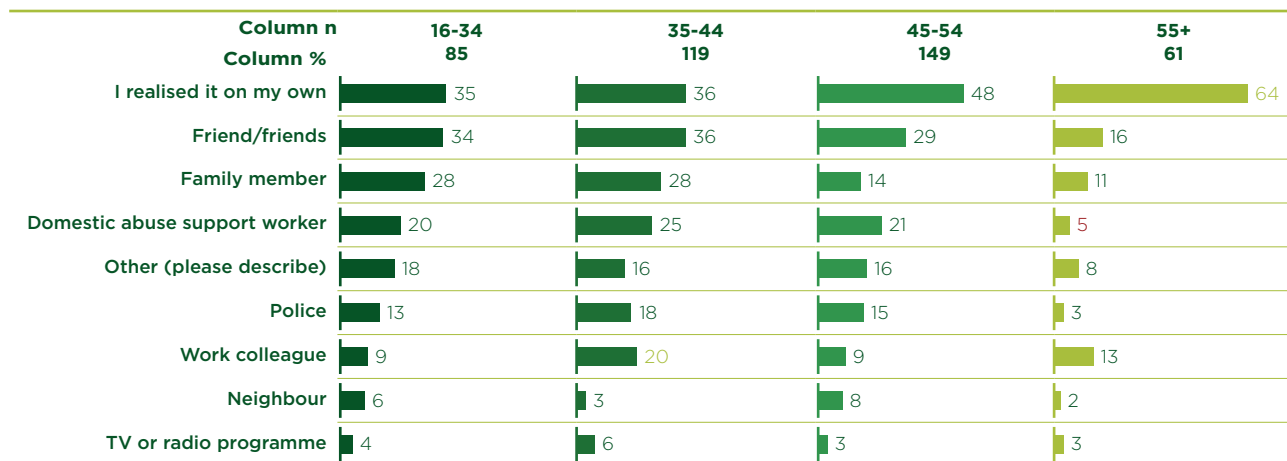
Table 12: Sources of help x Age of the victim



Base: Female survey participants giving their age; n=703

Table 13 highlights how older women in our sample were far more likely to have eventually realised on their own that their relationship was not right. While the evidence is difficult to produce on this demographic aspect, we believe that the level of under-reporting may be even higher amongst an older and rural demographic. Potentially this has some implications for targeting support for domestic abuse at an older audience.

Table 13: Who, if any, of these, helped you come to the realisation that the relationship was not right in some way?



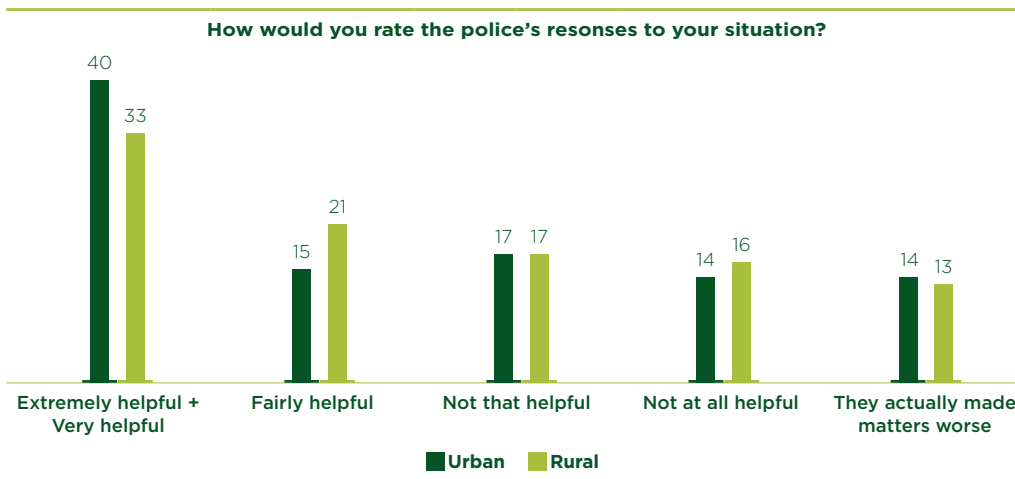
Base: Female rural survey participants giving their age; n=414

The role of the police

Domestic Abuse is a crime – at least it is when there is the ability to gather evidence to the fact. The simple truth is that evidence is often hard to build because the victim denies it to the police who respond first. This can happen at the time, or subsequently when cases are dismissed at the request of a victim who has been ‘persuaded’ not to proceed. Little wonder that the typical and now more historical response of the police was to attend a ‘domestic’ with a more negative attitude about its outcome than any real concern about the victim.

From our research it would appear that those days are fading away, although we have still seen and heard lots of examples when a police intervention made things significantly worse for the victim, showed a complete lack of empathy for the victim or even support for the protagonist. Specifically, the relationship between the police and DASS described by caseworkers is far closer than it used to be a few years ago and so the hope for a more joined up handling of individual cases has potential. However, within the context of this study, there is still sufficient inconsistency to be of concern.

Table 14: How would you rate the police's response to your situation?



Base: All those who had dealings with the police; n=508; 225 urban; 283 rural

While the rating of police response is seen as slightly less helpful in rural areas it is broadly comparable – more than half the victims considered it was a helpful intervention (55-54%). However, the inconsistency referred to is underlined by the 1 in 3 who found it unhelpful and the additional 13-14% who claimed it had made things worse (in the context of Domestic Abuse where this may be a more common response than for other crimes).

While trained officers and the presence of female officers remains more common in urban areas, this is much less likely to be the case in rural incidents where officers are less prepared and able to provide the support required.

On a positive note those who found police intervention a helpful experience detailed incidents such as:

‘Helped me collect things from the house so we could go to safety. They believed me. When I had to call them 6 months later when an order had been potentially breached they were amazing. A policeman came to the house and took a statement and believed me (he’d grown up in similar circumstances) and told me about EMDR, which changed my life. He and a colleague then came to my children’s school fayre the next day in case my husband turned up again and made out they were just ‘dropping in’ as community police and chatted to my children etc.’

‘Came to see me, followed up with me, and explained the process well. Referred me to a Domestic Abuse Counsellor.’

‘They were at the house immediately and their follow up response and checking on me was excellent but I know a lot of that was encouraged by the IDVA I had due to her concern for my safety.’

‘Pursued a charge with CPS when they declined to charge with assault the detective in charge persuaded them to charge with harassment with fear of violence and he was subsequently imprisoned.’

‘Helped me realise that I was a victim of domestic abuse. Helped me see that it wasn’t normal or acceptable behaviour. Referred me to Harbour support services who changed my life.’

‘Whilst living in Scarborough, someone alerted the police to the abuse I was getting, despite my then partner being abusive to the officer he took me to one side and helped me realise that I didn’t deserve to be treated like this and it was wrong.’

Their Story

Evidence: F's Story - 'Police response is getting better'

F worked in IT and had been married for 20 years with two children. Her relationship had always been difficult, but she had always found a way to try and make it work. Her partner was very jealous. Only by confiding in a work colleague who then gave her a national helpline number did she realise how abusive the relationship had become.

One night after coming home from drinks with friends she called a friend and then her husband held a knife to her throat. The call was connected so her friend could hear what was going on and she called the police. The police were 'fantastic' that night. She was very frightened and they were very reassuring & protective of her and the children. They contacted IDAS the local support agency who helped her enormously in leaving the relationship. However, despite the knife incident, F did not progress with charges against her husband because:

- She didn't want the children to have a father with a police record
- She didn't want the public stigma attached to police involvement
- It was a small community & everyone knows your business
- She didn't want to be talked about 'she felt ashamed'
- She felt it was her fault... her responsibility... not strong enough to fight it
- She was frightened of any repercussions on family/ex-husband/children.



Reflecting on the way the police responded F believed it had not only saved her life but the smooth transition into support made leaving the relationship so much easier than she had anticipated in contemplating this decision many times previously. She has had coordinated support from a housing association, food banks, social services and IDAS throughout. Although she suffers from flashbacks she is now in a new relationship and feels she is moving on.

This example shows an ideal intervention outcome and it appears that the transition between police and DASS is improving in many areas. It is clear from our interviews that the occasions which prove harder for this kind of support to follow on are those where there is no immediate evidence or 'live' situation which clarifies the evidential position the police face.

It seems that in situations where there is some concern that abuse is taking place a follow-up visit when the perpetrator is not around is often undertaken. In this situation, the subject of Domestic Abuse support can be introduced and information passed over.

Cases, where the abuse is more emotional and controlling, are much harder to intervene in and the police response is often to do nothing.

'Analysis of the reasons why police may have made things worse in rural situations certainly points to a lack of understanding or appreciation of what they were dealing with. Specifically, two types of incident were highlighted in answers to this question – when the victim is male and the perpetrator is female and when the type of abuse is emotional, coercive and typically non-violent (effectively no evidence and processed as one person's word against another). These specific incidents appear to be where additional training support may be required.'

They told me that they WOULD NOT investigate psychological and emotional abuse because it 'could not be proven'. They dismissed photos of my flat smashed up and an 11-minute recording of her verbally abusing me. I had a photo of a bite mark on my hand which my abuser said I'd bitten myself and the police sided with her. They accused me of harassment when I called her to move her things and I couldn't bring myself to speak to her so put down the phone. They had no concept of the complexities of abuse.'

The police 100% took her side with every incident. My children witnessed the physical abuse I suffered but the police didn't care. I was the 'man' and in the end, every interaction with the police resulted in a no comment response from me as the first time I explained what had happened I was charged and cautioned. They just did not care. I have suffered at the hands of the police ever since and feel labelled as an abuser that got away with 'it'.

First response officer explained that it was domestic abuse. I had no idea beforehand. She kept me informed of what was going on and was regularly in touch.

They arrested him the first time I reported him. The second time, they were useless, a female officer literally patted me on the head and told me to go get a cup of tea and get to bed after my husband had threatened to kill me and trash and burn our house down, her duty of care to me was appalling. Overall the Police were good, although several times they failed to action what they had promised and deemed necessary. A mixed bag really. Could be greatly improved.'

Their Story

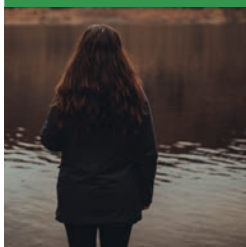
Evidence: G's Story 'Police should have plan for special cases'

G came from a traveller background and ran away to join her partner who was also a traveller. At first, the relationship was normal and although she felt his family interfered a lot after she fell pregnant he began drinking and partying a lot, which G disagreed with because of her faith. She went back to join her family, who found a caravan for her to live in, but her partner started to stalk her then along with his extended family.

Separation is not usual amongst travellers and a woman on her own is very much looked down on. Her partner has continued to harass and stalk her and she has become increasingly anxious. G had to move to a refuge for her safety but since being in the refuge, she has felt more stressed out. Even though she gets a lot of help from her caseworker, she doesn't see anyone and she feels socially isolated and doesn't know if social services has been involved yet. Being in a refuge as a traveller is hard but she believes she is 'off the grid' - unable to be discovered by the traveller community she sees as being on her partners side. If someone from the travelling community sees her out in a different city they will question her reasons for being there and she has to be cautious.

The support from the police has been poor - she has been told that the case is not strong enough to get a restraining order in place as though she had to be injured before they could do anything. The policeman said that it would take longer for them to get to her because they wouldn't go onto a traveller's site without 2 police cars. G would have liked the police to have a plan for what could be done, whether that was a restraining order or arresting him.

If the police had been more proactive looking for him then she wouldn't have felt compelled to move into the refuge. She is consequently very upset with the police. *'When I first went to the police the officer was just laughing at me. He made me feel that stupid and that embarrassed...he made me feel like an idiot.'*



The perspective of the Support Services

Our work with rurally focused caseworkers contrasted markedly with their more urban-focused co-workers. In a climate where high-risk cases dominate caseloads, the more rurally focused caseworkers had responsibility for the 'outreach' aspects of the support service in addition to managing their own cases. The extended travel and complexity of arranging discrete meetings with their clients led to an often compromised service where it was harder to achieve concrete results in the time available.

The most common tactic for rural caseworkers was to establish close working relationships with local police, healthcare professionals and social workers in order to develop a more networked approach. In particular, the closer co-operation between police and DASS was seen by most rurally based workers to have improved as a result of better empathy, training and a need for earlier intervention from DASS by the police.

We found in every area that commissioned services are awarded based on meeting levels of total demand for services – this reflected a natural bias towards urban victims and also reflected the fact that logistically it was often hard to visit more than two or three rural victims in a day.

A final element of the survey we provided for victims to opt into asked about how the support they had received had impacted their lives. One of the important elements of having both qualitative interviews supported by some simple quantitative assessment is the balance and perspective which can be achieved. Thus, we had many recollections of how the intervention of IDVA support, occasionally the actions of perceptive and well-trained police officers, and above all the coordination required to effectively leave an abusive relationship had transformed the lives of victims. However, we have to balance this feedback against the rural perspective too.

Table 15: Which of these describes the role the support service has played in your life?

Column n Column %	Urban 255	Rural 214
Changed my life completely for the better	38	29
Changed my situation around	31	28
Totally supported me while I rebuilt me life	32	26
Saved my life	21	20
None of the above	25	38

Base: Women accessing support; n=469

Table 15 is based on women who had accessed support services and shows that for victims in urban areas the impact is significantly different and more positive than the impact amongst our rural sample.

The implication here is that the effectiveness of the support services delivered across our sample areas is much lower for rural areas. Everything that we share in this section of the report provides supporting evidence as to why this should be. It seems clear that in spite of the best efforts of service providers, they cannot be as effective in supporting their rural clients – the service support for rural victims does not work in the way it needs to currently.

We found that a natural hierarchy develops within DASS teams which we have simplified as:

1. Deal with new high-risk cases
2. Then deal with ongoing high-risk cases
3. Then review and triage any additional cases or follow-ups with other agencies
4. Then review ongoing cases
5. Then look at outreach, which is more often relevant in rural areas.

The difficulties faced by Domestic Abuse Support Service (DASS) providers (including IDVA support where provided separately) are in common with most service providers, struggling to deliver service to victims or require teams to perform in ways which escalate the levels of stress and pressure amongst their caseworker teams. However, they are also worthy of repetition here as the 'on the ground' impact of stretched services is felt most in rural areas which tended to be resourced by specific caseworkers based in an urban location, rural hub or in one or two cases working from within a rural catchment. Once again the findings shown in Table 15 underline the fact that this is no longer good enough.

Many of the organisations originate from the Third Sector as charitable providers and share the issues across this sector of increasing demand as the state provided services have been consistently cut back through a lack of central or local government funding over successive years. Not surprisingly the most commonly



expressed issue was the combination of increasing demand for their services and a corresponding fixed or relatively fixed budget. Where the tender term had passed the halfway stage a significant increase in pressure was being felt as concerns over future funding added to the pressure for managers, already juggling full caseloads with a mix of flexible or part-time workers

By contrast, where extended term tenders had been agreed, there was a significantly different attitude in place and a greater willingness to try new approaches and ideas – because in the setup phase of a new tender award the ability to try new things is easier to sanction.

Indicative of the third sector we found pressure on simple resources like infrastructure – office and IT resources which added to the difficulty in maintaining an operation which had to cope with increasing demand. The teams are reliant on a workforce which, while highly motivated also works on part-time or flexible working which requires the constant coordination of providing cover to vulnerable cases across patterns of working.

Many of the managers of teams have spent many years in this kind of service or have transferred over from other social and healthcare services with a mentality and style which may be more conservative than enlightened.

Note:

We found a number of additional pressure points which to a greater or lesser extent are apparent within support services:

- Where contracts are relatively short term or mid-term, the uncertainty created causes a range of issues related to investment in new approaches, engagement activity and the focus becomes more entrenched on responses to high-risk cases – the pressures of short-termism, were seen to be acute
- Performance is assessed using outcomes-based reporting to commissioners and with a focus on the agreed response times to high-risk MARAC reported cases the inevitable outcome is that the medium and lower risk cases are dealt with in a secondary way
- All the managers we spoke to recognised the benefits of what was typically called ‘Outreach’ activity to try and reduce the flow of new cases entering as medium/high risk assessed cases. Priorities on risk, however, meant that they could report little impact derived from the outreach approaches they had used
- Extending or maintaining contracts was seen to depend upon developing successful initiatives or new ideas often outlined at the tender stage and therefore contracted but which subsequently had little opportunity to be fully tested. The exceptions to this rule were in areas with extended term contracts or where funding had been increased specifically to test such ideas (Cornwall and Lincolnshire were notable examples of the latter)
- Caseworkers are recognised by their managers to be under extreme pressure and typically have very little resource to cover and provide for their own HR/mental welfare needs
- Caseworkers also become the central point of contact for coordinating other aspects of multi-agency support such as:
 - o Legal Support – is a key area with many rural-based courts closing or having restricted access
 - o Counselling or psychological support
 - o Refuge or Housing needs both short terms and ongoing
 - o Rehabilitation including into the Job market
 - o Children’s Services & Schools
 - o Attendance at court
 - o Ongoing support through things like Freedom Courses – one of the most commonly referred to aspects of the recovery process from our survivor interviews
- The caseworker dedication to the victim was very noticeable in all interviews with managers, caseworkers and victims. So, at a human level, the relationship between victim and caseworker becomes a very dependent one, very quickly. This leads to a clear sense of ‘When is a case closed?’ The legacy of support continues and aggregates over time thereby adding to the workload but is a very difficult aspect of the job to manage or intervene in.

With these very consistent issues being faced by DASS it is perhaps inevitable that any strategy for dealing with rurality if it existed at all becomes conflicted. Specifically, we found that the contract specified is for the geographic area dependent on who the commissioning body is but is typically defined by a local council or police force area. If the tender does not make specific reference to rurality then the expectation is that all cases will be covered. Commissioners typically cover any lack of clarity by referring to the total geography and rarely made any specific reference to rural areas being treated differently.

Our interviews with support service providers painted a very clear picture of the constant battle they have in resourcing and meeting need. When this extends to large rural areas the logistics and costs involved in providing any kind of outreach service needs to be assessed carefully and is having to be balanced against a finite budget and a growing demand. The implication of demand led commissioning builds on this situation by pulling resources into high-risk cases, MARAC meetings and a bias towards more urban centres. Inevitably the combination of the difficulty in reaching more remote rural areas and a focus on responding to urban-based demand and risk places service providers in a compromising situation. Without clear information and statistics to work from, the justification for maintaining a level of support for rural areas becomes a value judgement or a requirement to be met, written into commissioning tenders without any real understanding of the ramifications this places on service providers.

How can we expect already stretched and high-risk case committed services to provide a level of service to rural areas unless it is in response to known cases or referrals from police and other agencies? For every area, we spoke to we found that the vast majority of referrals originated from police forces, typically generated following a specific incident or response.

We suspect that as the police become better at dealing with Domestic Abuse this is largely interpreted as referring cases to their DASS agency in a more effective way than they had previously. While clearly a good result in terms of the total support provided to victims, this also has the effect of placing more pressure on the resource available.

The following extracts from interviews with caseworkers and managers illustrate the pressures at work:

Our clients are frightened to act not just because of the ramifications from their perpetrator but also the fear of children's services stepping in and the guilt they feel over exposing their kids to this. We are so often not just dealing with the victim in isolation but their family situation and that means dealing with a host of other agencies and partners to secure ongoing support.

'One thing that people don't always see is that the principle point of contact is the caseworker who has made the initial contact with the client and that means they become the single source or 'go-to' source for everything as far as the client is concerned. I can find myself interacting with any or all of – legal services/CJS; Courts; housing; Children's services; mental health, Social Services; schools liaison officers and the police for a single case. With the extra pressure on many of these services the ability to coordinate any kind of cohesive service just becomes fraught with difficulty. Add to this the fact that our clients have often reached a position where they cannot cope and the burden is well and truly borne by us.

They (my cases) are almost always mentally exhausted, paralysed through inaction or worn down by the abuse. This makes our job one of almost coaxing a realisation out of them about their partner and what will be best for them in the future. It really is a gentle process of quietly pointing out all the things that are wrong and where this is leading. Like any kind of trauma, this is life-changing and should only be rushed where protection is required. After that job is done you then head into a whole different type of chaos in aligning services to give your client what they need to make a fresh start.

I think in our job it is sometimes hard to remember that we are not the only agency under pressure. When you put in a request and don't hear anything for 2 weeks it is not that you are being ignored, it's just that whatever agency is involved in getting you an answer is also pushing a stone uphill, against the wind and under the same pressure as you feel. (Laughs) It is a good job the reward comes when you finally pull it all together for someone – that is when it feels worthwhile! ...and then you start again with the next case.'



The perspective from Commissioners

Although our methodology started with interviews with Commissioning Managers, we have left the reporting of the perspectives from this important strategic and policy setting decision makers to the end of the report. Partly, this is because the findings from this research should focus on the actual situations we have uncovered which impact the victim's lives and ensure they are understood by the reader. We hope this is a more appropriate way to understand the context and areas of disconnect found when looking at the way commissioning of DASS is approached.

Historically, multiple providers of support were commissioned based on a geographic reach or specialism in specific aspects of support like refuge provision, counselling or working with families. This amalgamated approach to meeting support needs has led to a fragmented and disjointed delivery and it appears that there is a new trend emerging which seeks to bring together different budget sources from unitary or local authorities combined with PCC or Public Health to provide a budget sufficient to allow a longer term or extendable provision.

This summary shows the degree of variance across the seven participating areas and this may cover all of the potential commissioning approaches for England and Wales or merely a percentage of them. Commissioning variability with little or no reference to practice outside of the area provides little opportunity to develop best practice approaches.

Note:

Across the areas sampled for this study, we have real diversity in the way support is commissioned as shown here:

- Budgets separated between City and County authorities (Nottinghamshire) and the combining of City and County authorities (North Yorkshire)
- Principle stakeholders comprising either Public Health, PCC, or Council Officers
- Police Forces internally managing IDVA services for serious or high-risk cases (Dorset)
- Splits between separate refuge only support and combined refuge and victim support services
- Multiple service providers for some areas which can number 5 or 6 providers including different refuge providers to single providers with specialist support add-ons
- The approaches taken to the rural context differed significantly from taking a universal view to the area to be covered irrespective of urban or rural areas; to providing some arbitrary and relatively token recognition of travel times for DASS in more remote rural areas; to actually analysing differences between rural and urban areas in terms of reporting rates and then directing service support accordingly
- Basing demand forecasts only on historic information and patterns of demand, versus using postcode and forensic analysis to try and forecast where hidden demand may lie
- The universal challenge in coordinating with mental health services to provide any kind of effective support outside of high-risk cases
- Using ONS postcode classifications to base commissioning strategy around Derbyshire and Lincolnshire were the only areas using this resource to accurately identify rurality in the same way as the CSEW and this report. Other approaches subjectively categorised rurality by how the place 'felt'.

Access to Refuge

Refuge provision is most often found under separate Local Authority or Housing Association control. The perils of having assets like this under Local Authority control in a climate of continuous cutbacks was made clear in the 2018 Annual Report from Refuge:

“The outlook for women and children escaping violence and abuse is bleak. No country, no matter how developed its response to domestic violence, has ever removed the need for refuges.

Under the Government’s proposals, housing benefit for a stay in a refuge will no longer be available to abused women but will be paid to the local council to fund services. Under these plans, there would be no requirement for local authorities to fund refuge provision at all.

Over the past few years, we have seen local authorities, whose budgets have been eroded, increasingly turning to cheaper hostel-style accommodation to provide emergency housing support.

This ‘generic’ provision is not appropriate for women and children escaping domestic violence. More than 50% of refuge funding comes from housing benefit, with further funds provided by local authorities under contract. Plans announced by the Government last October would take away an essential source of income for refuges, removing refuges and other temporary supported housing from the welfare system and essentially preventing women from paying their rent with housing benefit. Specialist refuges offer more than just a bed for the night: they are a highly specialised, national network of safety and support services for women and children. If the Government goes ahead with these proposals, refuges will have to close or reduce the number of beds they offer.

Anyone fleeing violence will need to relocate a considerable distance away from the perpetrator of that violence - if it were safe to remain in the local area, most people would stay at home. But the reality is, in order to stay safe, many women need to move. Indeed, more than 80% of all women given places in Refuge’s safe accommodation during the year were referred from outside of their existing local authority area. Yet, increasingly, local authorities are only willing to fund services for women from their area. This means that local women must remain in the area, putting them in danger⁹.

There have been a number of calls recently for refuge provision to be better coordinated and for some, this is a national problem where the need to leave an area becomes so important that the blurring of local boundaries has to happen. In the absence of a nationally co-ordinated refuge service, models which might embrace refuge provision as well as support services and the coordination needed to move survivors on into independent living as soon as possible should be considered.

Calls for and evidence of a change in commissioning strategy

When asked questions about future provision it was clear that there is at least some disquiet amongst managers with responsibility for commissioning Domestic Abuse Support. On their wish list is a need for far greater collaboration, outside of multi-agency case environment, an ability to reduce the numbers of high-risk cases on the caseload via outreach or community-based schemes. This aspect was seen to apply particularly to rural outreach where a number of initiatives that had been tried had been less effective than hoped. The default option for many was to fall back to the provision of telephone helplines for victims and potential victims to make contact through. However, as we have seen from our own victim interviews the awareness of where to go for support remains very low in rural areas.

9. Refuge Annual Report March 2018

There was also a call for commissioning models to have greater experimentation and testing of new ideas, rather than the current conservatism which stems from historic, demand patterns and forecasts. As the categorisation of abuse offences broadens the burden on support services is likely to grow further and many services are described by commissioners as 'struggling to cope'. Why does anyone in commissioning believe that by re-tendering, this is going to substantially change? As one manager we spoke to stated:

'As there's a lot of grant funding, there are a lot of short-term applications for grants from central government. The grants can be sizeable but it's only short term, therefore there's always uncertainty whether the grant will be given again. With this uncertainty comes a lot of worry whether the implemented services will have enough funding to run in the long-term. There's also a delay in applications and obtaining the net grant and different information is required for different applications, making it extremely time and energy consuming to get these grants together. It is a real challenge to find funding. A lot of the problems are around funding and worrying about where they are going to get it from. You do feel very responsible for trying to get the money together.'

In Cornwall, five separate contracts were amalgamated into one and the contract period extended to 7 years for the successful tenderer – First Light. For Devon which shares the same police force now the specification of service support is entirely different because the funding comes from Devon County Council. This has led to cross border policies being written to try and ensure continuity. From our work with the service providers in each county, the differences of this additional security of contract were significant.

While the support service providers in Devon were concerned about their ability to continue to offer some services and coverage as it passed the mid-term of their contract and were trying to obtain additional sources of funding by dedicating a full-time equivalent to apply and find potential sources of additional funding, leading to a short term and more reactive approach, working alongside their overall service provision. In Cornwall, the ability to plan and coordinate a whole of county approach had led to the decision to deploy IDVA's across the county to be closer to rural areas and with more detailed local knowledge. They had also decided to take the initial 12 months to fully assess their planned approaches and challenge some of their assumptions against evidence emerging from reviews, knowing that they had a further 3-4 years to build and refine before they needed to start the process of re-tendering.

The contrast between the two approaches was stark in terms of frontline attitude and optimism and we make this reference, not because of any critical assessment of one approach over the other but because in neighbouring areas, apparently part of the same consolidated Police Service we saw such a stark contrast.

Co-Commissioning Model

The groundswell of opinion amongst the Commissioning Managers we interviewed clearly leaned toward a favouring of longer-term and extendable contracts for providers to have some certainty and room to develop and experiment with new ideas. In North Yorkshire, this has taken significant effort and diplomacy to bring together three separate budget sources to deploy extended services and build the governance required to ensure a set of single reporting mechanisms across the county.

With greater governance should come a greater reliance on systematic and accurate reporting. We hope this will indeed materialise, as information is critical with the scale of the problem and the fact that estimates of costs to police and health services in reporting domestic abuse are as much as £30,000¹⁰.

¹⁰ North Yorkshire and City of York Domestic Abuse Strategy 2018-2022



Urgent need for better measurement and data analysis

One factor which our research team felt was particularly significant is the relative lack of any examples of research or data analysis in planning strategy and future provision outside of historic patterns of demand. With a specific focus on rurality this report would commend the work in Lincolnshire and Derbyshire where postcode analysis shows patterns of demand and in the context of known under-reporting, Lincolnshire suggested that they assess the white spaces in their analysis as the potential danger areas where the lack of any reporting could indicate victims at risk.

Should the analysis by rurality be adopted in a significant way by the commissioners of DASS and shared across rural police force areas, it would provide a valuable dataset for highlighting reported incidents and better targeting of outreach and community awareness generation around Domestic Abuse. In a climate which will continue to be driven by better value and efficient resource allocation, this has to be a more sensible way to approach future specification of service.

While a movement to outcomes related measurement such as that led by Women's Aid is to be welcomed, in the specific context of rurality only a small minority in this sample examined incidence data using any formal classification of rurality. The main reason this work was undertaken was precisely because of the lack of data evidence available through police criminal databases or incident reporting. We have clearly demonstrated the scale of under-reporting of domestic abuse in rural areas and the many and complex reasons this occurs. We, therefore, need data evidence if any substantive change and improvement is to be made to the way domestic abuse services are commissioned and reach victims in need of help in rural areas.

We recommend that to understand the full impact of rurality and resourcing this is a minimal step to implement on a national basis and allow for aggregated analysis. Rurality classification is available as a variable through the CSEW although this is not headlined. So mirroring with the same postcode based classification based on the location of the incident provides a vital data set, currently overlooked as Domestic Abuse is seen at a single geographic and total level for most commissioners.

Risk-based service delivery

With pressure on financial support continuing to be squeezed in real terms and the classification of Domestic Abuse broadening to include things like Coercive Control and stalking there has been an almost universal movement to focus on Risk as the determinant of support action and response. High-risk cases receive multi-agency responses thanks to the consistent implementation of MARAC referred cases. While this is hard to argue against if rural victims face a higher risk due to rural isolation and this additional risk is not being adequately assessed currently. Rural areas are typically addressed in strategy terms by awareness and outreach activity which the evidence of our work here would suggest has limited success.

The focus on risk is hard to dispute but is also leading to a two-tier response which is being driven by commissioners through their specification. One of the Support Service Managers we spoke to summarised this point based on her 8+ years' experience:

'I wouldn't say there is too much emphasis on risk but it is appropriate to allocate service based on risk. The issue is it leads to a two-tier service of High-Risk MARAC led cases which all agencies are aware of and then medium and low risk which are lumped together and many rural cases fall into that second group. The reason for this is that it is forced by the commissioners because at the end of the day we are firefighting and they are frightened, so risk becomes unquestioned. It is natural that the most dangerous cases we know about get our attention. The ones where the ex-partner continues to threaten and hassle when they have child contact and the person who is raped and strangled repeatedly by their partner seem obvious differences. If you look at the domestic homicide reporting over the last few years none of them are known to services, none of them are flagged as high risk. Now those who commission would say that is because the high-risk cases get the support, but the real reason is that is the nature of the crime. You never know when it is going to blow.'



We suggest that rurality and isolation specifically is a significant enough risk factor to be automatically included in the DASH assessments undertaken currently. It also enables a proper and full assessment of 'need' to be undertaken which is the missing balance to pure risk assessed response. There is a very big needs based difference between someone in a village who will speak to their GP, get their father or brother to change their locks and has a good relationship with their neighbour and someone with drug dependency and known mental health problems who have effectively withdrawn into their home and sees no-one.

The evidence we have found in this work would suggest that cases, where rural isolation adds to the level of risk, should have their risk assessment based on measures which incorporate this factor in a more tangible way.

Potentially changes to DASH or MARAC assessment should include rurality as a risk factor. Indicators are factors such as the strength of mobile reception, the proximity of the nearest neighbour, likely response time for police attendance, access to motor vehicle etc. are all specific rural based factors which directly impact the level of risk, threat or harm. These are understanding the needs and potential support an individual has in place and is the type of approach which most caseworkers adopt as part of their own case assessment. In making this case we would also highlight the evidence from the College of Policing own research project in 2016¹¹ which concluded:

- There was widespread support for risk assessment from both police and partners
- The DASH risk tool was not applied consistently at the frontline
- Officers sometimes used discretion not to submit a form, specific questions were altered or omitted, and information was sometimes recorded in an inconsistent or incomplete way
- Police officers and staff appeared to prioritise criminal offences and especially physical violence and injury at the current incident at both the initial and secondary stages of risk assessment
- An evidence-based approach to risk-led policing is needed
- An understanding of coercive control needs to be embedded within a risk-led approach
- A revised risk tool for frontline officers should place a greater emphasis on patterns of abusive behaviour
- A more thorough risk/needs assessment is best undertaken by those with specialist training.

Perhaps with closer co-working between police and support providers a better use of an enhanced DASH approach may more accurately reflect the risk to rural victims of domestic abuse.

Does this mean an increase in budget and resource is required? Very likely, as rural based support has a naturally higher cost per case ratio due to travel time and therefore the numbers of cases which can be dealt with by one caseworker. However, we believe that better strategy in commissioning and more freedom in designing delivery solutions can help to reduce any increase in resource, which is so obviously needed.

The alternative is to continue to under-provide support services for rural victims and put their lives at harm for longer periods than is necessary.

11. Risk-led policing of domestic abuse and the use of the DASH model by Amanda L. Robinson, Andy Myhill, Julia Wire, Jo Roberts and Nick Tilley: https://www.college.police.uk/News/College-news/Documents/Risk-led_policing_of_domestic_abuse_and_the_DASH_risk_model.pdf





4.1 Findings

When we looked at access to services and sources of help we saw some of the starkest differences between urban and rural areas merge. This is significant because it strikes at the heart of any sense of equal provision of support for rural victims of Domestic Abuse. Some of the same impacts are seen in terms of an inherent and in-built bias towards urban areas based on a demand-led basis for commissioning of services. This is compounded by the proven fact that there is inherent under-reporting in rural areas, further emphasising the apparent lower level of demand for service provision and understandably used as a justification for the relative balance of commissioned support. This research again challenges the basis for the commonly held practice of commissioning demand-led service support and particularly when there is clear evidence that incidence rates are broadly the same between rural and urban areas.

The last section of our report saw evidence that a significant barrier to reporting in rural areas is the social stigma inherent in a society which has some strong patriarchal influence. It also set out clear evidence that rurality is used as a weapon to increase control and dominance over a partner and that isolation in and of itself increases the level of risk for rural victims significantly. If this increase in risk is acknowledged by commissioners of services, then even by their own current reference points around risk led commissioning they need to question their current and historic thinking and strategy when it comes to providing appropriate levels of support to rurally located victims.

KEY FINDING: Abuse lasts, on average, 25 per cent longer in the most rural areas

Exiting abuse is harder, takes longer and is more complex for rural victims as there are significant additional barriers in rural communities compared to urban areas. Whereas an urban victim may be able to move within a local authority area, keep their children in school and retain their job, all of these are more challenging for rural victims. There may also be animals to care for, they might have skills that are difficult to employ in a new life, especially in an urban area. Services are also much harder to access and societal structures make escape less likely resulting in rural victims being half as likely to report their abuse.

KEY FINDING: The more rural the setting, the higher the risk of harm

Given a rural victim of domestic abuse will live with their abuse for almost 25 per cent longer than their urban counterparts, and that the pattern and escalation of abuse seems to be replicated, it is inevitable rural victims suffer more harm, be it emotional or physical. The more rurally you live, the harder it is to get support, the less effective that support is, and therefore the greater risk and harm sits in the most isolated settings.

KEY FINDING: The policing response is largely inadequate

Whilst the service provided by the police is improving, feedback from victims shows the response in rural areas is not as good as that in urban areas. Some of this is due to a lack of female police officers being available in rural areas, as well as fewer officers with appropriate domestic abuse training. And the further the victim from a visible police presence (i.e. building) the less likely they are to call the police. Additionally, as in urban areas, policing can increase immediate risk, but the visibility of a policing intervention in a rural community can be all the greater.

Overall the findings indicate that the response of police in general to Domestic Abuse cases is getting better with a greater level of interaction and shared working with qualified IDVA and DASS partners. However, there is still significant variability from the victims perspective with only a slight majority finding their intervention helpful. We also found a significant proportion 13-14% who felt their intervention had made things worse.

Victims in rural and more remote areas are less likely to call the police anyway as they are aware of the response times involved. Rural response is less likely to involve a female officer or a trained Domestic Abuse officer and inevitably it is more likely to get the same officer attending subsequent calls over time and more likely that either victim or perpetrator is known to that officer.

The reduction in policing within rural areas has been well documented and has been accompanied by significant cutbacks to other parts of the Criminal Justice System which imposes additional hardship on rural victims having to attend hearings which involve a significantly longer journey. The impact of rural policing response to cases involving domestic abuse or violence is key. It establishes the fact that there is a potential risk tied to an address and as such the location of a victim is identified. Across our study the intervention of the police was typically judged to be helpful for exactly this reason – for the victim, it represents visibility in a legitimate way.

It is significant that in rural areas the most frequent calls on police are in rural towns and fringe locations which is where police stations tend to still have some presence (72% of victims living in these locations called the police). In rural villages and more remote locations, the calls made for police intervention drop off significantly (only 54% called the police). In urban areas, we found 61% of victims had called the police.

KEY FINDING: Support services are scarce – less available, less visible and less effective

Victims were clear that domestic abuse support services are much harder to find and much harder to engage with than in an urban setting. These services are also less effective in supporting rural victims and survivors once they manage to make contact, specifically because there is less understanding of abuse as it manifests in rural areas compared to urban (for example, the significantly more complex needs around starting a new life). Refuges are not always the safety net they can be in urban settings, as the nature of rural domestic abuse results in victims not needing crisis support in the same way, as their abuse is longer, slower and has a less 'urgent' profile. Their needs are very different and should be distinctly understood by commissioners and others.

We know it takes longer for rural victims to attend support meetings (between 30 minutes to 2 hours) compared to an average of 25 minutes for urban victims. We have also demonstrated that those victims in more remote and rural locations take longer to act in any way against their perpetrator – 3.2 years in such areas compared to 2.6 years as an average in urban areas. Similarly, only 1 in 2 victims had contacted the police from such areas – 54% of victims in rural villages compared to 61% in urban areas.

There is a cohort of older victims of Domestic Abuse in rural areas (over 55's) who have been left with little or no contact from support services. Of the 16% of our total rural victim sample who fell into this age group only 17% had approached a Domestic Abuse or IDVA source of help – 18 people out of 107 who responded to the survey.

However perhaps the most impactful finding was the fact that a significantly lower proportion of those victims who had experienced support from a DASS agency in more rural locations considered it to have been effective compared to their urban counterparts. Thus 62% of rural victims said their DASS provider had played a significant role for them compared to 75% of urban victims.

While a police response is typically framed by assessing the threat, risk and harm by contrast, contact with support agencies can be made without involvement or knowledge of the perpetrator and has a focus on helping the victim understand behaviours which are abusive and how multiple abusive behaviour traits are not normal. Through conversation and active listening, support workers provide an invaluable service in helping a victim come to terms with what they are facing and possible actions and strategies to engage.

Handovers, between police who attend incidents they suspect, are abusive or borderline but not evidential, and the IDVA or support worker appear commonplace and are seen to becoming more effective. Once again it is in rural areas, where the availability and pressure on police time and the coverage and availability of rural support workers means that such handovers are more disjointed and less effective with significant time delays where safeguarding issues need to be looked into.

Access to support workers remains a more significant issue in rural areas for two main reasons:

1. Commissioning and contractual obligations are strangling the work of support services in areas outside of responding to high risk cases. The way KPI's and reporting are stipulated inevitably steers delivery towards those cases and away from any initiatives which might seek to help medium or low risk cases.
2. Practicality – When faced with the need for discretion, it is very hard to find neutral locations and home visits are made difficult by the level of stigma felt by victims in small communities where a strange car in the village is so noticeable. The ingenuity and innovative ways caseworkers have found to circumvent such difficulties are to be applauded and the level of care and risk assessment which goes on at an almost informal level just to reach victims justifies being shared across organisations as a way to share best practice.

We would go further and suggest that the approach and dedication of caseworkers could be more effectively championed, harnessed and used at a national level to build a more effective service across rural areas. Their practical, front-line solutions to overcoming problems on a weekly basis could build some significant best practice approaches and initiatives if able to be shared at scale.

KEY FINDING: The short-term, often hand-to-mouth funding model has created competing and fragmented service provision

Clearly commissioners, policing and support services set out to do their best for victims, but this sometimes isn't enough. Some of this stems from a lack of understanding of the abuse and the scale of it, but in most places, we saw a fragmented landscape of service provision, which meant service providers are spending a disproportionate amount of time chasing funding, rather than supporting victims, or developing their services. In some areas, commissioners were not working effectively together, with overlapping services and inefficient use of precious resources.

We have found a tendency to focus commissioning strategy on a similar basis to previous contract reviews and a cycle of demand led provision based on risk and assessed by police led MARAC meetings. There is an inevitable bias involved in using the same basis for planning support based on historic demand and



forecasts. Returning to the same data sources across subsequent years provides little opportunity to look beyond the response to historic demand and is, of course, reflective of actual reporting.

While there is little debate on prioritising response based on the level of risk and the role of MARAC's in supporting this strategy has been shown to be effective – 97% of MARAC participants stated they were effective at improving outcomes and the lives of victims of domestic abuse in the local area (Home Office, 2011). However, as Domestic Abuse continues to rise the ability to see beyond High Risk and attempt to stem the rising tide becomes increasingly frustrated due to lack of resource and budget available to deploy elsewhere.

Most notable from our discussions with Commissioning Managers was an absence of any new data led assessment of need within rural areas. With the proven scale of under-reporting and the barriers which underlie this fact now laid open there has to be a review of how Domestic Abuse services are commissioned and targeted. The data sources are now available via ONS for an overlay of rurality which will allow a more data-led and intelligent approach to be applied. Why this available tool is not more widely used is a real point of concern as it could provide the justification upon which to build a more strategic provision and resourcing of rural support services for any commissioning agency.

Only 2 out of 7 commissioners looked at intelligence outside of this and at data split by a rural v urban classification. If rural domestic abuse is such a different situation to support as these findings indicate, then there is an inherent need to measure and record incident data on an urban v rural basis.

The fact remains that Domestic Abuse is generally acknowledged to be an escalating situation where abuse becomes progressively worse and risk to the victim can unpredictably become high. It is dynamic and can escalate very quickly, meaning a victim could go from low or medium risk to extreme danger in a matter of moments or as one victim put it 'a half a bottle of Vodka and saying the wrong thing at the wrong time'. MARACs remain outside the scope of this report – the key point here is that the justification for the focus on high risk remains justifiable only until the next unexpected death or serious injury. More significant is the call to ensure need is being represented as well as risk.

We believe there needs to be a fundamental re-think around the commissioning approach and strategy across PCC and police force areas to refresh and challenge accepted ways of thinking and acting. Most importantly, far more rigour in the analysis which precedes setting strategy is needed. In a climate of continued budget regulation surely a more systematic approach will deliver efficiencies or at the very least the ability to measure more accurately on the effectiveness of the support solutions provided. Further if more commissioners used the same approach to planning and reflected the rural urban divide the ability to share data and practice between rural based forces must drive improvements for rural victims.

Victims face great losses if they leave – support needs to extend beyond escape

One inescapable issue raised from our victim interviews is the burden placed on the victim who typically is left with very little in terms of financial, domestic or economic means following any action on their part to leave their partner. According to the Women's Aid Refuge Survey services supported an estimated 13,414 women in refuge services and 154,306 women in community-based services throughout the year 2016 – 2017¹². In so many respects a victim transforms from a citizen to a refugee by simply acting to preserve their safety and that of their children.

The same report highlighted that 60% of referrals in 2016/17 to refuge services were declined, one in five of all referrals were declined due to lack of space in the refuge. However refuge is only a part of the solution and a temporary one, by far the bigger issue is the provision of adequate housing solutions required by survivors to enable them to rebuild their lives. To the rural victim contemplating the upheaval of a significant relocation for themselves or their children, this is a sizeable barrier and was often seen to be a real barrier to action and a reason for delaying any escape decision.

Refuges under such pressure can often do little more than provide the most basic of services. The needs of rural victims who are more likely to want to stay in the same area, maintain links with their children's friendship groups would consider alternative solutions to achieve this and yet refuges from our experience in this project treat all their residents in a very homogenous way.

5. Conclusions

Rurality has a significant impact on domestic abuse at all stages, an impact and significance that, to date, has been overlooked and ignored by all involved. The nature of domestic abuse itself is similar across rural and urban areas and the factors that drive it are similar. However, rurality is a weapon that increases isolation, stigma and shame in small, often closed communities, and which creates barriers that, without pro-active intervention, will prevent many victims accessing support.

From understanding the vulnerability and demand in rural areas, to responding to the sensitivities of rural culture and communities, to ensuring our services are accessible to all, to supporting victims and survivors to escape and rebuild their lives, in rural areas domestic abuse and the needs of its victims and survivors have remained a hidden and harmful fact.

The implications of this are serious. Victims and survivors are being let down, and are lacking support that could mean the difference between life and death. There is an urgent need for change, which needs to be considered seriously by policymakers and commissioners, and by frontline agencies and services in rural communities.

Recommendations

These key findings from 'Captive and Controlled' lead the National Rural Crime Network to make the following recommendations:

FOR GOVERNMENT:

1 Government must apply its 'rural proofing' policy to domestic abuse, strengthening its commitment with a new duty on policy makers, commissioners and service providers to account for the specific needs of victims and survivors in rural communities

The rural proofing policy developed by DEFRA sets out guidance for government policy makers and analysts to mitigate impact in rural areas. There is now clear evidence that rural victims are half as likely to report abuse as their urban counterparts and to stay in an abusive relationship on average 25 per cent longer. Government needs to ensure rurality is specifically considered when developing policy and legislation, and that service providers and commissioners locally and nationally proactively consider the hidden demand and hidden risk before delivering a service. The Domestic Abuse Bill should be 'rural proofed' and also provides a vehicle for such guidance.

FOR THE POLICE:

2 Chief Constables need to urgently assess and improve their service provision in rural areas

Despite tangible improvements in the police response to domestic abuse in general, this improvement is less visible for rural victims. Resourcing needs to change to reflect the hidden demand in rural communities and the nuanced needs of rural victims need to be better understood, including the gender of the response officer, training of rural officers and whether or not the officer is known to the victim and alleged perpetrator. As many victims are not coming forward, or indeed see themselves as victims, the police need to consider a more pro-active, intelligence-led approach, rather than relying on responding to reports. Importantly, much more needs to be done to ensure that police officers understand the rural context of abuse, such as the impact of physical isolation, the rural characteristics of coercive control, the potential role of the community in abuse, and the patriarchal power structure.

FOR SUPPORT SERVICES AND CHARITIES:

3 Support services must improve their offer to rural victims and survivors

National and local service providers and commissioners need to use the evidence from this report to demonstrably improve the service they offer rural victims of domestic abuse. Whilst demand is hidden, the needs of victims are now better understood, and it is incumbent on support services to improve their reach into rural areas, facilitating the exiting of abusive relationships and doing more to understand the true demand in the areas they work within. Refuges are part of the solution, but innovation is required as rural domestic abuse victims are one of the most 'hard to reach' groups in our society. Services and commissioners must also analyse demand by postcode in future, using a common definition of rurality to develop a meaningful dataset, ensuring prevention and intervention work is also targeted at areas where there is apparently little demand – this report proves there will be demand, just hidden.



FOR COMMISSIONERS:

4 Commissioners (in all their forms) need to collaborate more and provide simpler, more secure and longer-term funding

■ Nationally there is now more done than ever to stabilise domestic abuse funding, but this is not always the case locally. Too often services are fragmented, commissioned on a short-term footing, too often there is duplication or confusion and too much service provider time is spent looking for funding, rather than supporting victims. Those providing funding need to work together more, and to allow providers the time and space to develop their services. Commissioners should specifically consider rurality in their service specifications and hold providers to account for *Recommendation 3*, ensuring delivery better reflects the needs of rural victims and survivors.

FOR THE SECTOR:

5 Government, policing and service providers must collectively commit to redressing the urban bias

■ Too often and for too long public policy has been based on mass evidence and understanding drawn from a largely urban base. A significant minority of the public live in rural areas (as classified by the Office for National Statistics) and have very specific needs.

The government and local agencies such as Police and Crime Commissioners, criminal justice partners and Local Authorities must ensure their policies and services are 'rural proofed', no longer based solely on demand, but on need. This requires a deliberate strategy to ensure research, data and analysis is not skewed towards urban demands and is fully inclusive of rural communities.

Academics too have a role to play. The literature review undertaken as part of this study shows there is a gaping hole of understanding around victims of abuse in rural settings. There is concern this spreads further than domestic abuse, but also exploitation of children, human slavery, and other forms of abuse. It is incumbent on others to now critically assess this study, develop understanding further and ensure policy makers and service providers make as informed a decision as possible

FOR SOCIETY:

6 Challenge the status quo and societal 'norms' to improve equality between men and women

■ Whilst it may be uncomfortable for some, and obvious to others, we need to collectively seek to address the underlying societal structures and stigmas that facilitate this abuse. Our countryside has a huge amount to celebrate, nurture and contribute, but we must not turn away from the challenges set out in this report. We have revealed a traditional society where women (and it is mostly women) are subjugated, abused and controlled, not just by an individual abuser, but defacto, by very the communities in which they live, too often left unsupported and unprotected. This is not at all unique to rural areas, but it is very significant, and change is slow. We hope that the scale and nature of the abuse described by the many people involved in this study will focus minds on the complex needs of people in rural areas and galvanise all of us into action.



5.2 Service Improvement - Detailed Actions

The risk of rurality must be recognised in Response and Commissioning priorities

FINDING: Most commissioners interviewed in this study provide what is effectively a two-tier approach. The focus of this approach is driven by risk-based assessments: High-Risk cases referred by police or MARAC achieve the most immediate response from commissioned service providers. Medium and Low risk are known but receive a secondary response. There is a correspondingly low level of resource assigned to what is typically referred to as outreach campaigns which involve reaching out to those potential victims who are not known about.

FINDING: The strong implication from this study is that these unknown cases are over-represented in rural areas.

FINDING: Rurality increases the risk factor for victims of Domestic Abuse significantly through remoteness and isolation; a lack of immediate local support; the fact that many perpetrators are using rural living as a tangible reinforcement of control.

CONCLUSION: Not only are rural victims less visible through not being recorded, but they are also potentially facing a greater level of risk because rurality is not considered a risk factor in any assessment currently.

ACTION NEEDED: Rural knowledge and classification should be added to the DASH assessment as a known risk factor to reflect the enhanced risk profile highlighted by this research.

Domestic Abuse Service Commissioners need to proactively consider servicing rural communities

FINDING: Incidence rates for domestic abuse are the same between rural and urban areas as evidenced by the CSEW

FINDING : Reporting rates of domestic abuse incidents from rural areas are half what they are in urban areas shown by Dyfed Powys analysis and supported from other sources like the NRCN Rural Crime Survey

FINDING : Most commissioners examined in this study use an urban biased demand-led data set showing where demand is centred based on police-reported incidents with a forecast of future demand to provide an assessment of demand for the future based on a total police force area. Only a minority of forces (2 out of 7 sampled) placed any form of emphasis on rural areas in terms of planning.

CONCLUSION: rural areas are inevitably under-represented when it comes to the strategic planning of service provision.

ACTION NEEDED: Commissioners have an obligation to take a data-led approach to plan service provision, but for Commissioners with significant rural areas there must also be an obligation to ensure that data adequately represents the potential for domestic abuse cases in rural areas. ONS provides a way to categorise rurality based on postcodes to allow a geographic classification to be drawn. With the knowledge that rural victims are half as likely to report incidents, outreach activity should be directed at low incidence or no incidence areas.

There is best-practice that can be learnt from in Lincolnshire, where the Council took over responsibility for Domestic Abuse Support from Public Health. With a very apparent lack of data to work on the current Commissioning Manager has focused on evidence led commissioning and has analysts in the team who provide deep dives into police data to sense check and highlight emergent trends. They are looking as much at where reporting of any abuse is not happening as where it is! There are very low incidences in some areas for no apparent reason and where the demographics and deprivation indices would suggest there should be more incidents.

The analysis team plots postcodes to deprivation indices and the source of self-referrers as well as police generated leads and the resultant patterns can be mapped to show the 'white spaces' on the map where domestic abuse reports would be expected but have not been recorded yet. These white spaces allow targeted outreach activity to be coordinated. The new service has also consolidated from three separate providers to a single county-wide consolidated service with increased funding provision to look after children and young people and to fund outreach activity to try and reduce the number of cases escalated to high risk.

If this is considered hard to coordinate, then there is a role for the NRCN to take anonymised incidence reports detailing the category of crime or abuse and a postcode of the incident. Profiling the data by rurality using the same reference as the National Rural Crime Survey will identify patterns in the data and an aggregated analysis which can be provided back to commissioners for their consideration and implementation in strategy.



Education and outreach must be prioritised and must focus on symptoms and patterns of abuse

There are two key barriers which are implicit and more relevant within rural areas and which have an implication on effective outreach activity. One is the extent to which domestic abuse is normalised by victims and the other is the way some rural societies ignore or refuse to accept domestic abuse could exist on their patch.

FINDING: Many caseworkers referenced the need to help victims come to terms with the fact that their partner's behaviour was in fact abuse and that the cumulative or aggregated patterns of behaviour were in fact, part of the same controlling process. The realisation was often quite hard for victims to come to terms with and only through the patient and prolonged conversations usually over at least two meetings did the realisation land.

FINDING: This work has highlighted the informal social control present within many rural communities and operating at a subliminal level. This shows itself in the significantly different proportions attitude admitting to the shame and stigma involved in domestic abuse between rural and urban areas. It is simply a reaction to the kind of societal climate they are living in.

FINDING: Cyclical patterns of abuse are commonplace in both urban and rural locations – just under 1 in 2 of our survey respondents had either witnessed or experienced abuse before. In rural areas where we know abuse is hidden more by both society and victims themselves, the ability to look for previous instances of abuse is significant indicator.

CONCLUSION: Greater education and awareness is needed in rural areas regarding the warning signs of domestic abuse and the ability to act or help a victim to act. GPs and religious groups like church communities are the most likely allies in rural areas.

Patterns of previous abusive behaviour should be reviewed for both victim and perpetrator. Where there is evidence of previous abusive experience the likelihood is 2:1 that behaviour will be repeated or accepted.

ACTION NEEDED: Access and reference to Clare's Law, the right to ask, needs to be made more public in rural areas so that victims know they have an option to revert to.

Resources need to be freed up to allow an effective awareness campaign to be provided to rural communities which target the recognition of behaviours symptomatic of domestic abuse. We believe that bringing symptoms into the spotlight is more effective than talk about domestic abuse per se.

Provide better access to refuge and safe houses for rural catchments

FINDING: Refuges are only one part of the solution for individual cases of victims fleeing an abusive relationship and the evidence is overwhelming that as a resource base they are struggling to meet demand. By virtue of this, they are a very short term solution and typically struggle to provide a suitable environment for children

FINDING: One of the key differences between rural and urban refugees is the need for rural victims to stay more local to their former home due to the ties they feel they have with children's schools and the immediate area. By contrast, urban victims can more easily relocate in other parts of a city. The need for some continuity of a former life in the area victims are living in, is key to their ability to move on. Where it is deemed safe to do so a rural relocation should be made available.

ACTION NEEDED: While acknowledging the difficulty we believe that refuges and particularly the options for safe houses should be planned, financed and maintained regionally more than locally where there may be more likely to cuts as budgets continue to be squeezed. Partnerships with Housing Associations for refuge or safe houses may prove a more viable alternative and allow for distribution across rural as well as urban fringe locations. Local control of housing supply should continue to ensure the primary selection of victims and particularly those with children to rehome.

Pro-active sharing of best practice must be organised to drive innovation and improvement

FINDING: There are two broad camps when it comes to commissioning services for Domestic Abuse. Legacy approaches reflect a number of funding sources and responsibility for planning commissions split between the council, or public health and PCC's. An emergent approach seeks to pool resources and budgets across organisations such as Local and Unitary Authorities in order to plan a longer-term contract period and allow for some opportunity to test different approaches or specialist partnerships for enhanced services.

Likewise, no-one knows the practical issues of working with victims of Domestic Abuse better than the caseworkers involved day to day. We have found that their ingenuity and ability to find a way through in the most difficult of circumstances, together with on-the-ground knowledge of the context of rural locations, local to them is the best way to deliver workable solutions and means of escaping potentially threatening relationships.

FINDING: The sentiment amongst commissioners appears to be for the latter approach and is driven by a need for greater collaboration outside of the MARAC environment and the need to drive down the numbers of high-risk cases through earlier interventions. There is a real concern that the legacy approach is struggling to cope and being forced into the response to high-risk cases at the expense of medium and low-risk cases. It should be noted that the majority of Legacy driven models are approaching Domestic Abuse at a total area level with very little scope for rural-focused initiatives.

FINDING: Due to the fragmented nature of different organisations being commissioned, sometimes in adjoining jurisdictions, there is little opportunity to share knowledge beyond immediate team members. If we are putting the needs of the victims first then best practice sharing methods have to be escalated across organisations and the primary focus of this shared knowledge should be applied to the most difficult victims to reach which are found in rural areas.

CONCLUSION: Legacy driven models of commissioning may no longer be fit for purpose as they reinforce a clear inequality between rural and urban spaces.

Invaluable frontline experience is not being used to drive best operational practice, build learnings and make victim contact more effective.

ACTION NEEDED: Careful review of emergent models such as North Yorkshire and Cornwall to review results achieved and strategies for better access to support for rural areas. Those legacy models seeking to change must be allowed access to managers of Emergent models to shorten the process involved and release aspects of bureaucracy and budget control issues.

A lead body should seize the initiative for sharing practice and learnings as emergent models are tested between PCC's. We suggest the set up and facilitation of a secure online forum to share experiences, best practice and idea generation across a national online panel of IDVA's and caseworkers which would cross provider boundaries and build a learning platform for better practice.

Longer-term support must be provided for survivors

FINDING: Much of the focus for DASS is on preparing and helping the victim to leave the abusive relationship. We found widespread acceptance of the need for support after this step from survivors as well as caseworkers, and yet such support is relatively inconsistent for the post-exit period, compared to outreach or contact.

ACTION NEEDED: Initiatives like the Freedom Course, which was made available across a number of the police force areas covered by this work, is highly valued by those really seeking to move on with their lives and come to terms with the nature of the abuse they have been subjected to. It is an example of initiatives developed by people who have very direct experience of work in the perpetrator: victim space.

While the logistics of running courses for rural victims is more difficult, the alternative is a continued dependency on their IDVA or caseworker. This is another example where a review of commissioning strategy to redress the imbalance between rural and urban areas could result in concrete initiatives like the Freedom Course being more accessible to rural victims.



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NRCN and the PCC's of all the involved Police Force Areas for organising and funding the study:

Commissioning Managers for Cornwall; County Durham; Derbyshire; Devon; Dorset; Lincolnshire; North Yorkshire; Nottinghamshire

Domestic Abuse Support Service providers in each area but notably, those who not only allowed us access to talk to their caseworkers and IDVA workers but arranged for us to meet with their clients and supported the efforts to maximise the response to our online survey:

- First Light (Cornwall) and Splitz (Devon)
- The Elm Foundation; Crossroads Derbyshire;
- Harbour and Detective Inspectors responsible for Safeguarding in County Durham
- BCHA in Bournemouth and You Trust and Sargeant Simon Cramp of Dorset Police
- EDAS in Lincolnshire; Womens Aid in Lincolnshire; East Lincolnshire DAS
- IDAS in North Yorkshire
- Womens Aid in Nottinghamshire

Most significantly the 62 women and 5 men who re-told their stories to our research team with honesty, integrity and bravery and shared with us a time in their lives which is so emotionally chaotic and challenging. Your experiences have formed the basis of these findings and hopefully, we have enabled the opportunity to change support for people like you in rural isolation and urban centres.

Specifically, I need to thank my colleagues in this work who refused to give in when it seemed like it might be impossible to achieve what we set out to do under this commission:

Sue Hudson – who worked across County Durham; Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire

Lorna Heslington – who supported the project in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

Jill Farrell – who supported us all in building rapport for the project and securing the opportunities to reach out to people across a whole range of remote locations

This study has become much bigger than a simple research investigation to everyone involved. The stories we shared have made each of us grateful for the security we have at home but determined to stand up for the people who briefly touched our lives with their testimony.



Detailed Methodology

From the outset, The Buzzz felt that a holistic approach was required to provide a whole of process view from commissioning to after-care support.

In each police force area the following approach was used:

1. Interviews with Commissioning Partners or Agency Decision Makers – detailed and in-depth interviews to explore the strategy, approach and constraints faced in setting out the basis for commissioning Domestic Abuse Support across both rural and urban catchments. Interviews were conducted face to face and via telephone and lasted between 1 - 2 hours.

AIM: To understand the strategy, basis and provision currently defining service commissioning within our sample police force areas.

2. Interviews with Service Delivery Managers in a number of commissioned services focused on supporting victims of domestic abuse both from a refuge provision and on-going support role. Once again we used face to face interviews on-site at service providers to try and understand their ability to respond, their work methods and environment and their delivery to the terms set by commissioners.

AIM: To understand the pain points and areas of friction as well as the operational difficulties being faced by providers.

3. Interviews with caseworkers and support staff with direct contact with victims and survivors across the same service providers to provide an overview of how they perceive the challenges faced in delivering an equivalent level of service to victims in urban and rural areas. These were predominantly face to face interviews lasting 60 minutes.

AIM: To understand the practical and logistic pressures in providing or extending service to rural-based victims of domestic abuse. To learn what tactics are being used to overcome these difficulties and gain a balanced overview of where service is meeting the needs of victims and where it struggles to do so.

4. Interviews with victims referred to us by case-workers and assessed as being capable of discussing their stories with our researchers. This first-hand account was fundamental in understanding the impact of early access to support and the difference this could make to the survival aftermath. The emotional context of such accounts is inevitably diminished in the reporting of them but as a team of researchers, we have had a graphic, moving and detailed set of accounts as a dataset to analyse and assess as a whole. Interviews were predominantly face-to-face and held in a range of locations including homes; safe/neutral locations; refuges and support service offices

AIM: To understand the emotional and psychological context within a rural setting. How different is it and what type of support is available to draw on relative to urban areas.

5. An open survey aimed at victims of domestic abuse across the areas involved in this project. The survey was designed to assess how well the support available was meeting need and to try and contrast that between rural and urban areas. An opt-in survey circulated by support services using direct contact and social media

AIM: To provide some measurement and statistics to what was conceived as a largely qualitative led project.

Analysis Techniques

Our team of researchers met three times during the study to assess emergent themes; build up core codes and references to look out for in future interviews. We followed a broad-based Grounded Theory Approach commonly used in social research projects which consisted of initial open coding - a process aimed at identifying concepts or key ideas that are hidden within textual data, which are potentially related to the phenomenon of interest. In this case, a good example was the identification of informal social control in rural societal settings. Our literature review had suggested this may be a hidden theme and our initial analysis session found a number of evidential aspects which supported a theory, notably the role played by male-oriented social groups such as the local sports team or pub regulars and the underlying traditional and male-dominated values around family and domestic chores.

We started to build some higher level categorical ideas which are reflected in the key findings sections of this report and running through the introductory summary. So themes like normalisation, intergenerational abuse, isolation as an additional weapon over and above control all emerged as higher order themes, present in the rural interviews but less obvious or referenced in interviews with urban victims.

Our final analysis session looked to validate the higher level ideas by reference again to individual interviews where references were grouped under headings in order to look at commonality and frequency. The language and phrases referred to by victims and the fact that every case was in many respects an individualised situation made this stage complex and time consuming but with sufficient support to say with confidence that the major themes highlighted in this report are robust and evidenced by the content of interviews undertaken.

We have provided throughout this report verbatim, anonymised comments and storylines which case note the themes a play and this constant comparison approach are further evidence of the base themes being adequately identified.

Quantitative Survey

The original approach envisaged for the online opt-in survey was for invites to be originated within DASS to clients with known interaction and support. However, the timing of this stage (December 2018) and the difficulty we found in motivating many of the DASS providers to approach it in this way led to a change of approach implemented in January-February 2019. The survey link was effectively and widely published using DASS Twitter, Facebook and web-sites across a number of participating regions but unfortunately not in a systematic and uniform approach. Our response rates, therefore, varied as shown in the table below:

Table 16: Which of these counties did you live in at the time of the abuse?

	%	n
Derbyshire	4	35
Devon & Cornwall	5	44
Dorset	14	124
County Durham	13	117
Lincolnshire	9	75
Nottinghamshire	3	30
North Yorkshire	26	233
Other	25	223
NET	100	881

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 881

Three areas contributed over half the sample - (North Yorkshire; Dorset and County Durham). We also achieved response from 223 respondents who had moved to our sample areas but had been victims of abuse in different parts of the country, highlighting the widescale displacement of lives and families as a result of Domestic Abuse.

The split between urban and rural respondents is also important to bear in mind:

According to the respondents own classification of where they lived at the time of the abuse the overall sample was split 54% rural to 46% urban but with some significant bias observed by area - notably Dorset where rural victims outnumbered urban by a factor of 2:1 and County Durham where the distribution was the opposite.



We also looked at postcode capture as a more accurate source of classifying rural v urban – the challenge is that on a self-completion survey of this nature only 58% of the sample returned a full postcode and a further 22% a partially complete postcode for analysis.

For the analysis we used a combination of postcode and partial postcode (where taken) and self classification (where no postcode taken) to get to a Rural Urban Classification for each respondent. The final distribution was as follows:

Table 17: Allocated Rural:Urban Classification via postcode

Classification	%
NET Urban	55%
NET Rural	45%
City and Suburbs	14%
Town	41%
Rural Town & Fringe	22%
Rural Village	16%
Hamlets & Isolated	6%

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 880; total n = 881; 1 missing

Table 18: Split in response x Area based on Rural Urban Classification (RUC)

Row %	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Derbyshire	57	43
Devon & Cornwall	50	50
Dorset	44	56
Durham	64	36
Lincolnshire	53	47
Nottinghamshire	60	40
North Yorkshire	44	56
Other	68	32

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 881

For this overall report the opportunity to report at a total level with a base size which is comparable for urban and rural areas has been fortunate. We have reported where we are confident in a statistically robust outcome but one point we would amplify is the need for greater control and commitment from sponsors to ensuring a more even and controlled distribution of surveys should this work be repeated in the future.

QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A - INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in our survey.

First we would like to get some details about you and your current situation.

NEXT PAGE

SC

A1a Which gender do you identify with?

- Female 1
- Male 2
- Other 3
- Prefer not to say 4

ASK IF OTHER AT A1a

SC

A1b Do you identify with any of these gender descriptions?

- Transgender female
- Transgender male
- Gender fluid
- Gender neutral
- Prefer not to say

COLLECT ACTUAL AGE AND CODE

OE + SC

A2 How old are you?

- Under 16 1
- 16-24 2
- 25-34 3
- 35-44 4
- 45-54 5
- 55-64 6
- 65-74 7
- 75+ 8
- Prefer not to say 9

SC

A3a Do you have children?

- Yes 1
- No 2

ASK IF YES AT A3a

DROPDOWN FOR EACH GROUP



A3b Aged

- 0-4 1
- 5-10 2
- 11-15 3
- 16-19 4
- Over 19 5

SC

A5 Which of these best describes your working status at the time of the abuse?

- Working full time
- Working part time
- Full time home maker
- Full time carer
- Not working – looking for work
- Not working – unable to work (e.g. through sickness or other disability)
- Not working – retired
- Not working – (any other reason)
- Prefer not to say

SC

A6 Which of these best describes your housing situation at the time of the abuse?

- Privately owned house
- Private rented
- Housing association or council rented
- Farm/landowner tenant
- Other

OE POSTCODE BOX

INCLUDE PREFER NOT TO SAY

A7 What was your postcode at the time of your abuse?

We need your postcode so that we can identify which part of the country you live in, which Police Force serves your area and what type of area you live in.

SC

A8 Which of these best describes the type of area you lived in at the time of the abuse?

- City
- Suburb of city
- Large town
- Small town that's not in a rural area
- Small town or market town in a rural area
- Large village (with pub/shop or post office)
- Small village (with no shops or services)
- Isolated dwelling or farm in countryside

SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS ABOVE

ASK IF RURAL (CODES 5-8) AT A8

SC

A9 Had you lived in a rural area before this?

- Yes, I'd grown up in that area
- Yes, I grew up in a rural area, although not that one
- Yes, I had lived in a rural area before
- No

ASK IF 2 OR 3 AT A9

A10 How did the area you lived in when the abuse happened compare to the area you had lived in previously?

- It was a similar type of area to the area I'd lived in before
- It was different to the rural area I had lived in before

ASK IF DIFFERENT AT A10

OE

A11 What was different about it?

ASK IF RURAL (CODES 5-8) AT A8

SC

A12 Still thinking about the area where the abuse happened. How much did you fit in or feel part of the community?

- Felt part of the community and mixed well with friends and neighbours
- Knew a few people only
- Hardly knew anyone and felt like an outsider

SC

A13 Are you still living in the area in which the abuse happened?

- Yes..... 1
- No 2

MC



A14 Prior to the recent abuse you suffered, had you experienced or witnessed abuse in a home environment before?

Please select all that apply to you or 'none of the above'

Yes, I'd experience abuse before as an adult

Yes, I'd experience abuse before, when I was a child

Yes, I witnessed abuse before as an adult

Yes, I witnessed abuse before, when I was a child

No, none of the above

SC

A15 Which of the following best describes your current situation?

I have left the abusive relationship behind me and have a new life to focus on now and a new relationship

I have left the abusive relationship behind me and have a new life to focus on now without a partner of any kind

I have left the abusive relationship and yet am struggling to cope with the impact it had on me

I have returned to the relationship but am coping better now

I have returned to the relationship but remain concerned

I never left the relationship but am coping better now

I never left the relationship but remain concerned

SECTION B - CATEGORISING THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

This next section goes into a little more detail about the abuse you suffered and what you ended up doing as a result of it

NEXT PAGE

MC

B1 Which of the following do you now recognise as present in the abusive relationship you had or still have?

Please select all that apply

Controlling your finances/access to money

Controlling your access to family/friends

Controlling your access to transport / personal freedom

Controlling your access to mobile or internet

Controlling your access to study or work

Keeping you mentally or emotionally isolated from friends and family

Threatening behaviour to you

Threatening behaviour to your children

Threatening behaviour to pets or animals

Stalking – during or after the relationship

Physical Assault involving injury

Sexual activity you did not want or welcome

Psychological abuse / Constant Criticism or humiliation

Criminal damage to the home or your property

Causing a nuisance or being rowdy in public/with neighbours etc.

Something else (please write in)

2 DROPDOWNS

B2 How long into your relationship with your abuser were you before you suspected the relationship was not right?

.....Years

..... Months

2 DROPDOWNS

SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS ABOVE

B3 And how long into your relationship with your abuser were you before you suspected the relationship had become an abusive one?

.....Years

..... Months

2 DROPDOWNS

SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS ABOVE

B4 And how long into your relationship with your abuser were you before you decided to act or seek help?

.....Years

..... Months



MC

B5 Who, if any, of these helped you come to the realisation that the relationship was not right in some way?

You may select more than one

- Family member
- Friend/friends
- Neighbour
- Work colleague
- Police
- Domestic Abuse Support worker
- TV or radio programme
- Other (please describe)
- I realised it on my own

SC

B6 Did drugs or regular/excessive alcohol consumption play any part in your relationship with your abusive partner?

You may select more than one

- Yes, drugs
- Yes, regular/excessive drinking
- No, neither

ASK IF DRINK AT B6

SC

B7 Which of you regularly drank or drank excessively in the relationship?

- Partner
- Me
- Both of us

ASK IF DRUGS AT B6

SC

B8 Which of you took drugs in the relationship?

- Partner 1
- Me 2
- Both of us 3

ASK IF PARTNER DRUGS OR DRINK AT B7

SC

B9a How did the abuse change when drugs and/or excessive alcohol were being used?

- It got much worse
- It got a little worse
- It stayed the same
- If anything it got better

ASK IF VICTIM DRUGS OR DRINK AT B6

SC

B9b Did your use of drugs and/or excessive alcohol any impact on the abuse you suffered?

- It got much worse
- It got a little worse
- It stayed the same
- It made things more manageable/helped me cope

SC

B10 Did you or your abuser have any mental health issues at the time of the abuse?

- Yes, my partner
- Yes, me
- Both of us

SC

B11 Did you or your partner seek any help for the mental health issues?

- Yes..... 1
- No 2

ASK IF YES AT B11

SC

B12 How easy was it to get help for the mental health issues?

- Very easy
- Fairly easy
- Not that easy
- Not at all easy
- Not applicable

OE

B13 Why wasn't it easy?

SC

B14 Did you have any contact with the police either calling them yourself or them being alerted by others?

- Yes..... 1
- No 2

ASK IF YES AT B14

SC

B15 How would you rate the police's response to your situation?

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Fairly helpful
- Not that helpful
- Not at all helpful
- They actually made matters worse

SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS B15

OE

**B16 Why do you say that?****SECTION C – ACCESS TO HELP**

This next section is all about the type of help that you sought and what you think about this help.

NEXT PAGE

OE X3

C1 We know from speaking to other people in similar situations that there is usually a gap between the realisation that you are in an abusive relationship and taking some kind of action or seeking help.

What were the 3 biggest reasons for not seeking help earlier?

Please write in one per box starting with the biggest.

MC

RANDOMISE

C2 Still thinking about those reasons for not seeking help earlier. Which (if any) of these describe the reasons you've just outlined?

Select all that apply

Partner promising to change

Worrying that people would not believe me

Worrying what people might think of me/feeling ashamed

Worrying what people might say about my partner or family

Felt it was partly my own fault

Fear of moving from a familiar area

Fear of moving because it would affect children's schooling or friendships

Fear of leaving rural community to move to a busy town

Fear of leaving animals/livestock e.g. dogs, horses etc

Concern for my children and what would happen to them

Not knowing what I could do or where I might end up

Feeling I had to act alone / no-one to help me

Not knowing where to go for help

Scared of partner

Other

OE/SC

C3 What was the main reason for you eventually seeking help/taking action to stop the abuse?

I didn't, someone else called the police

MC

RANDOMISE

C4 Did you approach any of the following to seek help or discuss your situation with?

Doctor/GP

Nurse / Healthcare worker

School teachers or head teacher

Social Services

Citizens Advice Bureau

Church/Religious group

- Group or society (e.g. WI)
- Domestic Abuse/IDVA Service
- Other Charity (e.g. Women's Aid)
- None of the above/other (write in)

SC

C5 Did you receive any support or help from anyone outside of the Domestic Abuse Support Service/ Charity/IDVA? (E.g. from friends, family, neighbours, other professionals)

- Yes1
- No2

ASK IF YES AT C5

SC

C6 Who else gave you support?

- You may select more than one
- Friend (outside the area you lived in)
- Friend (lived locally)
- Family member (Parent or sibling)
- Neighbour
- Police
- Church/Religious group
- Health Worker / GP
- Other (please specify)

SC

C7 How did you hear about the Domestic Abuse Support Service who have helped you?

- Word of mouth
- Police
- Social Services
- Housing association
- School
- Poster
- Local Radio
- Met a Support worker
- Religious group
- Community worker
- Other

SC

C8a Thinking about your interactions with the support service you used/are using. How easy were each of the following?

- Getting an initial appointment
- Deciding to go through with it and start getting the support
- Contacting them by phone



- Contacting them face to face
- Attending courses e.g. the domestic violence course
- Getting legal and/or benefit advice
- Keeping your meetings a safe
- Making sure everything was prepared in order for me to leave the relationship
- Very easy 1
- Fairly easy 2
- Not that easy 3
- Not at all easy 4
- Not applicable..... 5

ASK FOR ANY NOT EASY AT C8a

SC

C8b Why wasn't it easy to [INSERT FROM C8a]?

DROPDOWN IN QUARTER HOURS

C9 Roughly how long did it take you to travel to the place where you could access the support service?

Support worker travelled to me

OE

C10 What did they do that helped you the most?

MC

C11 Which of these describe the role they have played in your life?

You may select more than one or 'none of the above'

- Changed my life completely for the better 1
- Changed my situation around..... 2
- Saved my life 3
- Totally supported me while I rebuilt my life.... 4
- None of the above 5

SECTION D - AFTER LEAVING THE RELATIONSHIP

This section is all about moving on with your life.

NEXT PAGE

ASK IF 1-5 AT A15

SC

D1a Where did you go immediately after leaving the relationship?

- Refuge accommodation in same county..... 1
- Refuge accommodation outside the county.. 2
- Stayed with family/ relatives..... 3
- Stayed with friends..... 4
- Found emergency housing..... 5
- Slept rough / Homeless 6
- Private rented accommodation..... 7
- Nowhere, I didn't move - my abuser did 8
- Other (write in)..... 9

ASK IF REFUGE AT D1

DROPDOWN MONTHS AND WEEKS

D1b How long did you stay in the refuge?

SHOW ON SAME PAGE SCREEN AS ABOVE

SC

D2 Was your abuser prosecuted by the police?

- Yes, successfully 1
- Yes but unsuccessfully 2
- No 3

SC

D3 Did you attempt to enforce any protection yourself (or with the help of a support service) such as a non-molestation order or occupation order?

- Yes..... 1
- No 2

ASK IF YES AT D3

SC

D4 Were you successful in your attempt?

- Yes..... 1
- No 2

ASK IF YES AT D4

MC



D5 Which of these were you able to get?

- Select all
- Non-molestation order1
- Occupation order2
- Both.....3

SC

D6 Do you now feel that the law has provided an appropriate level of protection for you?

- Yes.....1
- No2

SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS ABOVE

OE

D7 Why do you say that?

OE

D8 Looking back and thinking about the support you have had to date. Which part has had the most significant positive impact for you?

This may have been from the Police, the Criminal Justice or Court service or a charity

OE

D9 What if anything would you want to see changed / improved for other people in your situation?

OE

D10 Is there anything you would like to say about the organisation that has helped you most?

Some further questions about you to help in our analysis.

SC

E1 Which of these best describes the highest level of education you have attained?

- Degree or equivalent
- Higher education
- A Level or equivalent
- GCSEs grades A*-C
- Other qualifications
- No qualification
- Prefer not to say

E2 Which of these best describe your religion?

1. No religion
2. Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
3. Buddhist
4. Hindu
5. Jewish
6. Muslim
7. Sikh
8. Other (SPECIFY)
9. Prefer not to say

E3 Which of these options best describes how you think of yourself?

1. Prefer not to say
2. Heterosexual / Straight
3. Gay / Lesbian
4. Bisexual
5. Other

E4 Which group do you consider you belong to?

1. White - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
2. White - Irish
3. White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
4. White - Any other White background
5. Mixed - White and Black Caribbean
6. Mixed - White and Black African
7. Mixed - White and Asian
8. Mixed - Any other Mixed / multiple ethnic background
9. Asian/Asian British - Indian
10. Asian/Asian British - Pakistani
11. Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi
12. Asian/Asian British - Chinese
13. Asian/Asian British - Any other Asian background



14. Black - African
15. Black - Caribbean
16. Black - Any other Black / African / Caribbean background
17. Arab
18. Any other ethnic group
19. Prefer not to say
20. Don't know

That's everything we need. Thank you for being a voice and responding to our survey. We hope to publish the results soon and will be using the combined results from 7 different counties to influence the provision of support services to people like you in the future.

If anything is troubling you after completing this survey then do not hesitate to ask for help.

NRCN

National Rural Crime Network

www.nationalruralcrimenetwork.net