

Domestic Violence/Violence Against Women and Girls: Factsheet

Tower Hamlets Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2010-2011

Executive Summary

This factsheet considers domestic violence and more specifically violence against women and girls. The Coalition Government has recently published its report 'Call to End Violence against women and girls: Action Plan' which provides an update on the previous government's national Violence against women and girls strategy. The action plan focuses on four key areas: prevention, provision, partnership working and protection. A local strategy is currently being developed, following a public consultation, to mirror the national strategy and consider local priorities. Domestic violence in Tower Hamlets has been tackled through a local multi-agency, partnership approach and it is important that this works continues to be embedded into the work of cross cutting agencies, including the maintenance of a co-ordinated response.

In 2009/10 a total of 3432 reports of domestic violence were made in Tower Hamlets, of these 1604 were then criminal offences. Safeguarding those at risk of serious harm is a key part of Tower Hamlets approach to addressing violence against women and girls and there are provisions in place to ensure that this happens. Tower Hamlets has successfully seen an increase in the number of reported incidents of domestic violence to the police as well as a drop in the length of time before help seeking and the number of high risk cases being identified/referred within the borough has been increasing. Service user satisfaction surveys suggest that largely users not only feel satisfied with the service that they receive, but also that they feel safer as a consequence of using the service.

More work needs to be done locally in order to understand the extent of sexual assault and more culturally specific abuse, such as female genital mutilation, within the borough as we currently have limited knowledge in these areas.

Emerging Priorities

It is important to note that this is a very changing climate for the local authority and in amongst that the Domestic Violence team. The key insights of this fact sheet have ascertained that the priorities for improvement should be:

- Implementing the Violence against women and girls strategy and ensuring that all strategic partners are engaged and involved in the process for local delivery.
- Using the data and information available more appropriately to understand the profile of clients reporting domestic violence cases/accessing services, needs and potential gaps. E.g. the understanding of the potential burden of cultural/sexual abuse.
- Continue improving on the identification of women at highest risk of repeat victimisation, including through raising professional awareness and improving referrals received to the Domestic Violence team.
- Improving the ways in which and the settings within which women are given information e.g. through mosques, children's centres, colleges, ESOL classes.

The emerging priorities have been taken from the Tower Hamlets Violence against women and girls consultation

document (the strategy is currently being written and should be available shortly):

Long-term support – Respondents highlighted the importance of providing long-term support for women and children not just whilst in a relationship but afterwards to help them recover and rebuild their lives.

Developing women’s capacity/ independence – Many respondents pointed to the need to provide opportunities to increase women’s confidence and independence and empower them to rebuild their lives after abuse. Respondents suggested providing courses to increase women’s independence, transition programmes and places where women can speak about their experiences and gain self-confidence.

Culturally specific services – Some respondents highlighted the need for culturally specific services and for services to be available in different languages. The Somali women spoken to particularly highlighted that having a Somali worker that they trusted would make them more likely to access local services.

Raising awareness amongst professionals – Respondents highlighted the importance of training staff across a wide range of services to ensure that they understood violence against women issues and were sensitive to those reporting abuse. Some suggested that training should be mandatory and that organisations should commit to releasing staff to attend training.

Providing information to women – Respondents highlighted the need to provide women with information at places they attend e.g. through mosques, children’s centres, colleges, ESOL classes.

Work with survivors of domestic violence – Respondents felt that more work should be done with survivors of violence against women. They felt that giving a stronger voice to survivors of abuse would help to let other women know that abuse can be stopped and help is available.

1. What is Domestic Violence/Violence Against Women and Girls?

Domestic violence (DV) is defined as: any incident of violence or abuse (whether financial, psychological, physical or sexual) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender, ethnicity or sexuality¹. According to the British Crime Survey, 68% of domestic violence cases resulted in physical injury and in 12% of cases the victim sought some form of medical attention².

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is defined as: “any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”³. Violence against women and girls incorporates a broad range of issues, including sexual violence, forced marriage, honour based violence, female genital mutilation, sexually exploitative practices, such as trafficking, stalking and harassment.

Women experiencing domestic violence are up to fifteen times more likely to misuse alcohol and nine times more likely to misuse drugs than women generally⁴. Violence against women and girls is also strongly linked to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide and self-harm amongst women. Of women who had been subject to serious sexual assault (including rape) since the age of 16, 52% had suffered depression and 5% had attempted suicide⁵.

¹ Home Office

² British Crime Survey, Home Office

³ The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, United Nations General Assembly, 1993

⁴ Stark E and Flitcraft A (1996)

⁵ Walby, S and Allen, J (2004) *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*, Home Office

Children are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, with an estimated 750,000 children a year witnessing domestic violence. Children affected are also more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse themselves, as well as suffer a range of detrimental health, education and welfare impacts⁶.

2. What is the local picture?

An estimated 27% of women will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives and 7% are estimated to have experienced domestic abuse within the last 12 months⁷. This would mean that in Tower Hamlets around 5000 women are currently experiencing domestic violence and over 20,000 women are living with the legacy of past domestic violence⁸.

Locally we have between 3000-4000 incidents of domestic violence reported to police every year (last year this figure was 3432), with domestic violence accounting for 30% of violent crime in Tower Hamlets⁹. There are children living in the household of about 70-80% of the domestic abuse cases reported to the police and domestic violence was a feature in over 600 referrals made to Children's Social Care in 2010¹⁰. Domestic violence offences correlate with most deprived areas in the local area, particularly LAP1 and LAP7¹¹; this is consistent with risk factors and increased levels of domestic violence.

Local data profiles the following¹²:

- Local domestic violence referrals tend to match the ethnic profile of the borough. Analysis of local DV1¹³ monitoring forms in 2010/11 (450) highlighted that 209 described their ethnicity as Bangladeshi which is 46% of the total caseload.
- The majority of victims and perpetrators are aged 21-40.
- In approximately 20% of local cases monitored by the domestic violence team, there was an identification of an interpretation need for the victim.
- The majority of reported cases are violence against women, although it important to acknowledge that there are a small number of reported incidents of domestic violence where victims are male. Last year of all cases discussed at the MARAC¹⁴ 95% were female victims and 5% male victims.

3. What are the effective interventions?

The effective interventions and approaches for tackling domestic violence have been highlighted in a Home Office report¹⁵, which describes the following as key target areas for improving domestic violence:

- Supporting women who have been subject to repeat victimisation, and who are actively seeking help
- Supporting women who are experiencing domestic violence but not actively seeking help
- Reducing repeat victimisation

⁶ Saunders, 1995; Department of Health, 2002; National Children's Home Action for Children, 2002; McGee, 2000

⁷ British Crime Survey, Home Office

⁸ Tower Hamlets VAWG consultation document (draft) 2011

⁹ Tower Hamlets Police Incident Reports

¹⁰ Tower Hamlets DV1 monitoring forms

¹¹ Police data on offences in Tower Hamlets, 2008

¹² Data analysis of Tower Hamlets DV1 monitoring forms

¹³ Local monitoring system

¹⁴ Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference

¹⁵ Tackling Domestic Violence: effective interventions and approaches <http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk/research/Tackling%20DV%20effective%20interventions%20and%20approaches.pdf>

- Supporting women to report to the police
- Identifying areas for further research and evaluation.

The Coalition Government has recently published its report 'Call to End Violence against women and girls: Action Plan' which provides an update on the previous government's national Violence against women and girls strategy. The action plan focuses on four key areas: prevention, provision, partnership working and protection. The emphasis of the Coalition's statement is very much on local prioritisation of issues and the delivery of services at a local level. The principles of this vision are to:

1. prevent violence from happening by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it
2. provide adequate support where violence does occur
3. work in partnership to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families
4. take action to reduce the risk to women and girls who are victims of these crimes and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice¹⁶

Some of the measures proposed in the action plan to be implemented within the coming year include:

- Launching/ developing a cross-government communication strategy
- Implementing section 9 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act on domestic homicide reviews
- Bringing the public sector equality duty into force
- Reviewing specialist domestic violence courts and MARACs

The action plan identifies the specific actions and timescales to which the government is working to in order to meet their vision, including which government department are responsible for each action.

¹⁶ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/call-end-violence-women-girls/vawg-action-plan?view=Binary>

4. What is being done locally to address this issue?

Following on from the national strategy on Violence against women and girls a local strategy and action plan is being developed which focuses around the main strands which were identified in the national strategy and will also encompass Domestic Violence. A consultation was carried out by the Domestic Violence team at the Borough recently and the full strategy should be available soon.

Violence against women and girls issues form part of our local partnership approach to improving safety in the borough. Our partnership response to tackling domestic violence is overseen by the Tower Hamlets Domestic Violence Forum (attended by a range of statutory and voluntary organisations) and is an umbrella body for organisations working with families experiencing domestic violence in the borough. The Forum is responsible for the annual Domestic Violence Action Plan which sets out our commitment to address four key objectives:

- Safe choices for adult victims of domestic violence
- Improving safety of children affected by domestic violence
- Holding perpetrators accountable
- Challenging social tolerance to domestic violence

A co-ordinated response has meant that a common framework has been introduced for assessing the victim's needs for protection and support, helping to ensure that referrals to relevant agencies are made and that incidents are consistently recorded. The DV1 monitoring and referral form is received from a range of agencies including the Tower Hamlets Police Community Safety Unit and LBTH Domestic Violence Team¹⁷.

Domestic Abuse No Excuse campaign – In order to challenge the attitudes and behaviours which foster domestic violence, the Tower Hamlets 'Domestic Abuse No Excuse' campaign promotes local support services for victims and communicates the message that domestic violence is not acceptable to the wider community. In 2009/10 over 5000 residents and partners were reached through campaign/ communication activity and community stalls.

Tower Hamlets women's wheel – The women's wheel was launched by the PCT in September 2010 and aims to raise awareness with women through health and children's services about services available in the borough to support women, including sexual health services and domestic violence services. This supports the strategic objective of providing adequate support where violence does occur.

There are currently a range of services commissioned to support the needs of those suffering from domestic violence in Tower Hamlets, including for the perpetrator. There has been provision of advocacy, therapeutic interventions, housing based support (e.g. refuge, floating support, sanctuary). However, it is important to note the current changing provision of these services within the current financial climate.

A number of services are being delivered in the borough which has focused on supporting abused women to deal with their experience of violence. Safeguarding those at risk of serious harm or domestic homicide is a key part of Tower Hamlets approach to addressing violence against women and girls. Key initiatives include:

- **Multi-agency risk management arrangements** – the borough has in place multi-agency arrangements for managing risks presented by perpetrators of violence and serious sexual offences.
- **Multi-agency risk assessment** – a common risk assessment tool (the DASH) supports professionals to

¹⁷ Tower Hamlets Multi-Agency Response to Victims of Domestic violence in LBTH, July 2009 *A Report on Service User's Experience*

consider risks to adults and children in domestic violence cases. This tool has also been expanded to include specific questions relating to the risks to children and guidance has been developed for multi-agency use when assessing the risks and needs of children living with domestic abuse.

- **Ugly mugs scheme** – the Safe Exits forum provides information to women working in both on-street and off-street prostitution aimed at protecting women involved in prostitution. Women who experience violence from punters can write a report to help other women avoid these individuals.

5. What evidence is there that we are making a difference?

There has been a long term fall in domestic violence incidents reported to the police mirroring national trends where since 1995 there has been a 70% decrease in domestic violence incidents.

Financial Year	Number of CRIS ¹⁸ Reports with DV Flag	Domestic Violence Offences
2004/05	4225	2271
2005/06	4118	2380
2006/07	3891	2255
2007/08	3702	2181
2008/09	3343	1804
2009/10	3432	1604

Source: Police Incident Reporting

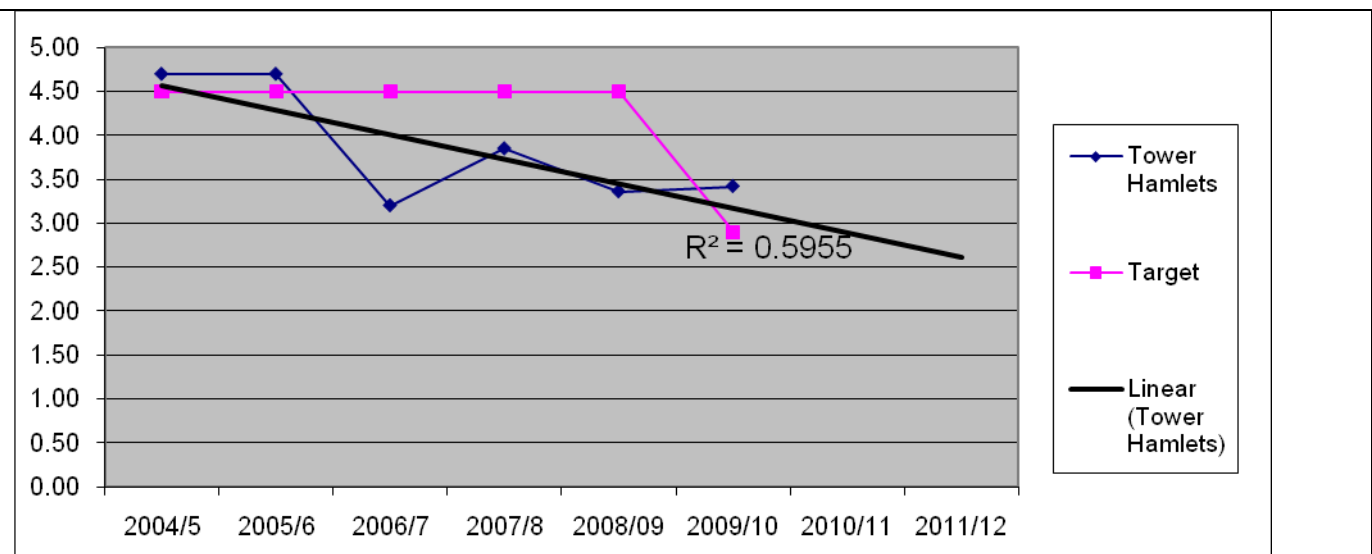
Over the last few years the numbers of actual Domestic Violence cases reported has steadily decreased along with the number of recorded criminal offences. As a percentage of the numbers being recorded of the numbers reported, this has also decreased slightly between 2004/5 and 2009/10 (54%v47%).

Tower Hamlets has seen a small increase in reported incidents of domestic violence during 2010. In the first 6 months of 2010, 1763 incidents were recorded compared to 1646 incidents in the first 6 months of 2009. This could be attributed to variable factors; one plausible explanation could be the economic downturn as there is sound evidence to demonstrate that these environments see a marked increase in domestic violence cases¹⁹, or it could simply be put down to population growth.

The length of time before help seeking has dropped from 2004/5 when it was 4.70 years to 2009/10 when it was recorded on average as 3.42 years. The downward trend is shown below and only slightly off target:

¹⁸ Crime Report Information System

¹⁹ Mathers & Schofield: 1998, Smith: 1987, Wilson & Walker: 1993, Dooley et al 1996, Hammarstrom 1994



Source: Domestic Violence Team , LBTH

The number of high risk cases identified in the borough has been increasing, indicating success of awareness raising with local agencies. There was an overall 31% increase of referrals this year compared to the last year (2009-2010). The range of services that are now making referrals (including high risk referrals) is very broad ranging, demand for local services such as the advocacy service have seen in increase in uptake and there has been in an increase in the number of cases going to court²⁰.

6. What is the perspective of the public on support available to them?

The Domestic Violence team undertakes an annual survey for service users and there was also much work carried out recently as part of the Violence against women and girls strategy consultation, both of these asked service users their perspectives on services for domestic violence within the borough.

The public consultation on Violence against women and girls explored women's feelings of safety within the borough and reported that: 45% of the victims were very satisfied with the service they have received; 37% satisfied; 9% quite satisfied; 6% dissatisfied and 3% of the victims reported of being very dissatisfied. This means that overall 82% of service users said they were satisfied with the service they received²¹.

The majority of those consulted with expressed some concerns about their safety when out and about e.g. on the streets or on public transport. This supports previous consultations that have been undertaken with local women. For example, out of 100 women surveyed through the Warrior Women personal safety course in 2009/10:

- About 40% of respondents were fearful of being a victim of crime
- Whilst only 12% felt unsafe or very unsafe on the street during the day, 51% felt unsafe or very unsafe on the street at night time
- 28% of respondents felt unsafe in their local park
- A quarter felt unsafe on public transport

²⁰ Tower Hamlets VAWG consultation document (draft) 2011

²¹ Tower Hamlets Multi-Agency Response to Victims of Domestic violence in LBTH, July 2009 *A Report on Service User's Experience*

Victims of domestic violence reported feeling safer if they had support (ranging from housing support to an injunction against their partner) from local services. According to the telephone survey conducted with domestic violence victims 66% felt safe or very safe at the point they were accessing support and none felt unsafe²².

7. What more do we need to know?

- What is the size of the issue surrounding culturally specific abuse cases (forced marriage, honor based violence and female genital mutilation) in Tower Hamlets; including consideration of whether we have appropriate and adequate services in place?
- What proportion of all the Domestic Violence cases are sexual assault? Is this routinely being recorded and if not how can we ensure that it is?
- Is the benchmarking of available data against statistical neighbours a useful exercise?

8. What are the priorities for improvement over the next 5 years?

It is important to note that this is a very changing climate for the local authority and in amongst that the DV team. The key insights of this fact sheet are that:

- Implementing the Violence against women and girls strategy and ensuring that all strategic partners are engaged and involved in the process for local delivery.
- Using the data and information available more appropriately to understand the profile of clients reporting domestic violence cases/accessing services, needs and potential gaps. E.g. the understanding of the potential burden of cultural/sexual abuse.
- Continue improving on the identification of women at highest risk of repeat victimisation, including through raising professional awareness and improving referrals received to the Domestic Violence team.
- Improving the ways in which and the settings within which women are given information e.g. through mosques, children's centres, colleges, ESOL classes.

9. Key Contacts

For general JSNA queries email: JSNA@towerhamlets.gov.uk

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Date signed off by Senior JSNA Leads:	<i>Date factsheet signed off by senior JSNA leads from Public Health and</i>	Signed off by (Public Health Lead):	<i>e.g. Director or Associate Director</i>	Date signed off by Strategic	<i>Date factsheet signed off by Strategic</i>	Sign off by Strategic Group:	<i>Name the relevant Strategic Group</i>
		Signed off by	<i>e.g. Director</i>				

²² Tower Hamlets VAWG consultation document (draft) 2011

	<i>LBTH</i>	(LBTH Lead):	<i>of Adults/CFS</i>	Group:	<i>Group</i>		
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