



Women's Aid Briefing for the Backbench Business Debate on International Women's Day

Thursday 9th March 2023

Women's Aid encourages MPs to attend the Backbench Business Debate on International Women's Day on Thursday 9th March and to raise the following issues in the debate:

1. **Inefficient spending on tackling domestic abuse means that survivors needs are not being met and specialist women's domestic abuse services are facing a funding crisis.**
2. **The social and economic cost of domestic abuse in England is £78 billion in 2022.** To fund all specialist domestic abuse services for women and children in England in line with need would cost the Government a minimum of **£427 million per year.**
3. New economic analysis from Women's Aid and ResPublica shows that **for every £1 invested in specialist domestic abuse service provision, there will be a saving to the public purse of at least £9.** ¹
4. Tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a top priority for voters across the country: **14% of UK adults selected this as one of the top three issues that should be prioritised by the UK Government over the next 12 months, rising to 33% for women aged 16-24.** ²

If you would like further information or would like to arrange a meeting to discuss our research, please contact Zainab Gulamali, Public Affairs Manager – z.gulamali@womensaid.org.uk

Context

- Domestic abuse is devastatingly prevalent in the UK. The ONS estimates that **1.6 million women aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse** in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020, ³ and Women's Aid's research suggests that 46% of women have experienced at least one form of abusive behaviour in an intimate relationship in their lifetime.
- Domestic abuse continues to be a gendered crime, with **94% of perpetrators between April 2021 and March 2022 being male**, and 73% were a partner or ex-partner of the victim. In 2021-21, specialist refuge services supported an estimated 10,502 women and 12,602 children, and all specialist community-

¹ Women's Aid. (2023) Investing to save: the economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support. Bristol: Women's Aid

² Women's Aid. (2022) Come Together to End Domestic Abuse: a survey of UK attitudes to domestic abuse. Bristol: Women's Aid

³ [The lasting impact of violence against women and girls](#), Office for National Statistics, November 2021

based services supported an estimated 131,094 women and 170,422 children in England.⁴

- The specialist domestic abuse sector is in a state of endemic funding crisis, as a result of chronic underfunding and exacerbated by the current cost of living increases. This means many services are not able to support all women and children who are referred to them for support, creating failure demand and subsequent strain on the public sector. Women's Aid's annual audit in 2023 found that between April 2021 and March 2022, **61.6% of referrals to refuge spaces were declined**, despite an increase in the number of refuge spaces.
- The number of refuge spaces available in England still falls short of the number recommended by the Council of Europe by 1,311. 71.1% of refuge services and 72.5% of community-based services were commissioned by their local authority in 2021-22, but this funding often does not cover the full costs of service delivery and service providers need to make up the shortfall through additional fundraising or by drawing on their reserves. 44.0% of specialist services responding to Women's Aid's Annual Survey in 2022 confirmed they had been running an area of their service without any dedicated funding at all.⁵

Cost of domestic abuse

- In 2019, the Home Office estimated that the economic and social cost of domestic abuse was a staggering £66 billion per year.⁶ Women's Aid's latest research with ResPublica found that in 2022, **this cost has risen to just under £78 billion.**
- This research has also calculated that the investment needed to fund specialist services at a level which would allow services to provide holistic, wraparound support to women and children in England is **£427 million per year, just 0.04% of total government spending in 2020-21.**⁷ This relatively small investment would drastically improve outcomes for women and children, reduce victimisation and improve health and wellbeing.
- It will also bring **considerable savings to the public purse**, by means of reducing the strain on public services' time and resources.

ResPublica's analysis shows a benefit-to-cost ratio of £9.14:£1 for investment in the specialist domestic abuse support sector in England at the minimum level recommended by Women's Aid.⁸

This is a significantly greater saving to the public purse than approved recent infrastructure projects like High Speed Rail 2 and the Elizabeth Line. Investment in specialist domestic abuse services must form part of England's critical national infrastructure too.

⁴ Women's Aid. (2023) The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit, Bristol: Women's Aid.

⁵ Women's Aid. (2023) The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit, Bristol: Women's Aid.

⁶ [The economic and social costs of domestic abuse](#), Home Office, January 2019

⁷ Women's Aid. (2023) The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit, Bristol: Women's Aid.

⁸ Women's Aid. (2023) The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit, Bristol: Women's Aid.

Getting the right support

- Women's Aid and ResPublica carried out a "pathways analysis", looking at the difference in costs to the public purse when a survivor of domestic abuse is able to access specialist domestic abuse support services, compared to when she is not able to do so, based on the real experiences of one woman, Tracy.
- Tracy's journey came at **a cost of over £180,000 to the public purse** due to her being referred to services which were not skilled in supporting her.
- If a needs-led approach had been taken, involving both specialist community-based and refuge support, **the cost of this journey to the public purse could have been £23,966 – a saving of £159,407 for just one survivor.**
- If a needs-led approach was taken for the 141,596 women accessing support in refuge or the community in 2021-22, depending on their experiences, this could have potentially **saved over £20 billion.**⁹

This analysis also shows which public services could save money if specialist domestic abuse services were properly funded, with **the largest saving going to the NHS.** In Tracy's case, over £150,000 was spent on visits to A&E, hospital treatment and appointments with GPs and other professionals. Timely access to support for Tracey would have also saved the police nearly £4,000 and the local authority £6,000 in costs for temporary accommodation.

Recommendations

Women's Aid calls on the UK Government to:

- **Commit to a minimum funding settlement of £427 million annually for specialist domestic abuse services in England**, with £189 million ring-fenced for refuge services from the funding through the Statutory Duty to provide safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act. A minimum of £238 million for community-based services should be committed to within the Victims' Bill.
- Include in the funding settlement **ring-fenced funding for services provided 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, d/Deaf and disabled women, those with no recourse to public funds and LGBT+ survivors**, to ensure minoritised groups can access the support they need.
- **Review funding commitments annually in light of inflationary increases** and distribute funding in accordance with national needs assessments.
- **Create a robust oversight mechanism**, with clear and timely interventions where local authorities are not adhering to the statutory guidance, and **mandatory, regular specialist training** for commissioners in how to commission survivor-centred specialist support.

⁹ Women's Aid. (2023) Investing to save: the economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support. Bristol: Women's Aid