

Respect

Stopping Domestic Abuse

The Respect Manifesto

June 2024

An introduction from CEO, Jo Todd CBE



Domestic abuse is one of the key societal problems for the new government to grapple with. It is an issue of high volume: 2.1 million adults experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales in 2023 alone¹ and 20% of children in the UK have lived with an adult perpetrating domestic abuse².

It is also an issue of high harm: one in five killings is a domestic homicide³ and the number of suspected suicides following domestic abuse has recently overtaken the number of intimate partner homicides for the first time⁴.

Behind every single victim is a perpetrator – sometimes multiple perpetrators.

Who are the perpetrators of domestic abuse?

They are a large and diverse group. The majority are men abusing women, but some are women abusing men, and some are in same sex relationships. They come from all backgrounds, ages, religions, social classes and ethnicities. They include perpetrators of intimate partner abuse and of abuse against parents, siblings and other family members.

Many abuse the same victim for years without consequence, many move from partner to partner, family to family, creating new victims each time. Some perpetrators are beginning to become abusive, others are entrenched in years, even decades of violent, abusive, controlling behaviour. Many cause high levels of harm with severe impacts, including femicide, homicide and suicide.

Some are totally resistant to admitting and taking responsibility for their behaviour, others seek help and are determined to change. Some are in plain sight and well known to agencies, others are invisible and yet to be identified. All require a response which is safe, which prioritises the wellbeing of survivors, and which stops them from causing further harm.

When perpetrators know that they will not be held to account and their behaviour will not be challenged, they become emboldened, and their abuse worsens. Supporting victims is essential, however, we also have to stop perpetrators.

For everyone harmed there is a personal cost: trauma, injury, financial hardship, loss. These are serious and lasting impacts that adult and child survivors experience. But the costs are not just personal, there is also a fiscal cost to the state and ultimately the tax-payer. The government's latest estimate is that domestic abuse costs £78bn every year⁵: giving a clear economic, as well as moral, imperative to addressing this issue.

The state response

The UK government has made commitments through international treaties such as the Istanbul Convention⁶ on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which it has yet to deliver. For many decades the state response has been fragmented, uncoordinated and chronically underfunded.

1. Office of National Statistics, accessed 12 February 2024.

2. NSPCC (2019), [Child abuse and neglect in the UK today](#)

3. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) (2022), [Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides 2021-2022 Year 2 Report](#)

4. NPCC (2024) Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme ([VKPP Domestic homicides and suspected victim suicides 2020-2023](#))

5. HM Government (2023): "A Patchwork of Provision: how to meet the needs of survivors across England and Wales", government response, accessed 31 May 2024.

6. [Council of Europe \(2011\) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (CETS No. 210), accessed 14 March 2024.

A problem that costs billions cannot be solved with millions. But if we address the cause as well as the consequence of domestic abuse, in the long run we will save money, save individuals from harm and save lives.

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State leadership and accountability is at the heart of an effective, national response to the perpetration of domestic abuse. Commitment at the highest level across all departments and agencies, through clear and accountable mechanisms, will ensure strategic aims and delivery goals are met, and failings are identified and rectified quickly. This means including stakeholders, particularly survivors, in decision making at both a national and local level.

We call on the new government to:

- Make a clear pledge - to stop perpetrators, hold them to account and prevent them from causing further harm
- Raise its ambition and demonstrate bold leadership, making “stopping domestic abuse” a key cross-government priority
- Radically scale up funding for both statutory agency responses and the specialist voluntary sector, that matches the size of the problem

Our key asks of the new government

1

Fund specialist service provision in every local area

- Fund the full range of specialist perpetrator services including early intervention, work with young people who are causing harm, behaviour change programmes, and work to stop those causing high levels of harm
- End the “postcode lottery” so that perpetrators can access a specialist response wherever they are in the country
- Overhaul commissioning practice to ensure adherence to nationally agreed standards

2

Prioritise data and evidence

- Invest in joined up data collection and analysis across all statutory agencies and state funded services
- Develop a comprehensive evidence base
- Require all statutory sector and state funded responses to perpetrators to adhere to nationally agreed standards, be subject to regular, robust inspections, and take urgent action to address failings

3

Make justice work

- Create a justice system which is fit for purpose, puts the safety and wellbeing of victims first and holds perpetrators to account
- Overhaul justice processes and systems, ensuring agencies have sufficient staffing and capacity to do their jobs
- Reinstate a DAPP pathway for the family courts

4

Focus on prevention

- Move towards a cross-departmental, whole-system approach, with all agencies equipped to identify and respond to perpetrators and manage the risk they pose
- Shift the approach to the perpetration of domestic abuse from a purely criminal justice lens to a wider, multi-agency response with prevention at its heart
- Invest in work to change social attitudes, to reduce tolerance of domestic abuse and ensure perpetrators are held to account

Fund specialist service provision in every local area

The specialist voluntary sector – Respect and our members and partners – have been pioneers in developing safe, effective and accountable responses to perpetrators of domestic abuse. Collectively, we have led the call for perpetrators to be held to account in government policy, legislation and service provision.

Despite our longstanding commitment, specialist responses to perpetrators across the UK are alarmingly piecemeal, with some areas of the country, offering no or scant provision. In 2022 research from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office for England and Wales found that only 7% of survivors who wanted their perpetrator to receive support to change their behaviour were able to get it.⁷

Specialist responses to perpetrators across the UK are alarmingly piecemeal

Hardly any services have provision tailored to meet the needs of those from marginalised or minoritised groups and there is a particular gap in meeting the needs of children and young people who cause harm.

Funding for the specialist sector is precarious and insufficient, and commissioning practice is variable. Our members tell us that many commissioners do not adhere to the Respect Standard - which has been endorsed by the Home Office, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and experts from academia and the VAWG sector⁸ - or to the Home Office Standard. This raises serious concerns about the safety and effectiveness of what they fund.

Most commissioners issue short term contracts of one or two years. This means services are in a constant state of uncertainty, spending time that could be spent on strategy development on fundraising, bid-writing and trying to ensure organisational sustainability. Short term contracts do not allow service providers to develop their workforce, retain staff or properly embed and develop service provision.

We call on the new government to:

- Fund the full range of specialist perpetrator services including early intervention, work with young people who are causing harm, behaviour change programmes, and work to stop those causing high levels of harm
- End the “postcode lottery” so that perpetrators can access a specialist response wherever they are in the country
- Overhaul commissioning practice to ensure adherence to nationally agreed standards
- Invest in the voluntary sector through funding contracts that last a minimum of three years

7. Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2022) [Early Findings from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Mapping of Domestic Abuse Services across England & Wales](#)
8. Respect Standard and endorsements 2022 <https://www.respect.org.uk/pages/respect-standard> accessed 3 June 2024

The government collects minimal data specifically on the perpetrators of domestic abuse. This has implications for practice, but also for policy-making, funding and commissioning of services. With no national data set to tell us how many perpetrators there are, it is impossible to know what level of service provision is needed. This leaves us having to extrapolate from other data sources, such as ONS reports of numbers of victims, which is unreliable and problematic. We know that more funding is needed, however without certainty of the number of perpetrators, we cannot provide accurate figures.

We need clearer data on the actual level of perpetration of VAWG and domestic abuse, given that less than 24% of domestic abuse crime is reported to the police⁹ and the majority of perpetrators will never enter the criminal justice system.

There is a knowledge gap on the number of perpetrators that are known to or are in contact with statutory agencies, because most do not collect that data. We cannot know if agency responses are effective or not – and we don't know if what they do is safe, or whether it actually increases risk and makes things worse.

There is no funding for data collection across specialist voluntary sector services. While most services collect their own data, it is not collated to provide a national picture of provision or impact.

A lack of clear data hampers us from fully understanding the true scale of domestic abuse perpetration, who perpetrators are and what works to stop them, to inform not just practice and service provision, but also commissioning, strategy and public policy.

Most of the evidence base we have in the UK has been pioneered by the voluntary sector and independent academics and is focused on evaluation of voluntary sector programmes and models. There has been very little focus on public sector responses to perpetrators. We have seen some useful scrutiny where inspectorates including HMIP¹⁰, HMICFRS¹¹ and the JTAI¹² (Joint Targeted Area Inspection) have carried out important thematic reviews. These have found considerable state failings which have not yet been fully addressed. This is not good enough. There need to be clear structures of accountability across all statutory agencies for delivering on the recommendations of these reviews.

There is no agreed definition of child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse (CAPVA) making it impossible to collect data which means that there is no clarity on its prevalence. The Home Office has recently begun a consultation on this matter which has been paused due to the general election and needs to be resumed by the new government.

We call on the new government to:

- Invest in joined up data collection and analysis across all statutory agencies and state funded services
- Develop a comprehensive evidence base in partnership with the sector
- Require all statutory, sector, and state-funded responses to perpetrators to adhere to nationally agreed standards, be subject to regular, robust inspections, and take urgent action to address failings

9. Refuge, [A thematic inspection of work undertaken, and progress made, by the Probation Service to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](#)

10. [The police response to domestic abuse: An update report \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](#)

11. [The multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

12. [The multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Well-functioning criminal, civil and family justice systems are a critical part of the state response to domestic abuse. They provide justice and protection for victims, and punishment, accountability and rehabilitation of perpetrators.

Knowing that our justice systems are robust acts as a deterrent for perpetrators and gives victims confidence that they will be taken seriously, be protected and receive justice. Weak justice systems do the opposite: they embolden perpetrators and deter victims, sometimes with lethal consequences.

Recent indications that our justice systems are failing include the early release from prison scheme and a pause on so-called 'non-priority' arrests, in order to "ease the pressure within the criminal justice system"¹³. Despite reassurances that perpetrators of domestic and sexual abuse would be excluded, we have seen reports to the contrary.

In the family courts, a pathway for perpetrators to attend Respect accredited or Probation accredited Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programmes (DAPPs) was removed in 2022 and has still not been reinstated, creating a gap in provision for adult and child survivors in the family court arena. DAPPs played a critical role in assessing whether an abusive parent is capable of making and sustaining changes to their behaviours and whether or not contact would be safe for the child and non-abusing parent.¹⁴ The current situation has been described by one parent as 'the wild west' where she and her children are not protected.

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We are concerned that the commitments we welcomed – for example to put domestic abuse on the same footing as terrorism – have not been realised in practice.

We call on the new government to:

- Create a justice system which is fit for purpose, puts the safety and wellbeing of victims first and holds perpetrators to account
- Overhaul justice processes and systems, ensuring agencies have sufficient staffing and capacity to do their jobs
- Reinstatement of a DAPP pathway for the family courts

13. BBC News 22 May 2024 [Police urged to consider making fewer arrests over prison space](#) - BBC News accessed 31 May 2024.

14. Respect, July 2022 <https://www.respect.uk.net/articles/respect-raises-concerns-around-removal-of-referral-pathway>

Across many decades the government has prioritised criminal justice solutions with not enough emphasis on prevention or the need to take a multi-agency approach. Although a robust criminal justice system is a critical element of what is needed (see Make Justice Work, above), it is not sufficient on its own. Domestic abuse is not just a criminal justice issue, it is also a human rights issue, a public health crisis and an equalities issue. It requires wholesale engagement and systems change from every government department and statutory agency.

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There needs to be a change from a reactive response towards proactive prevention, beginning in schools but including programmes of work to change social attitudes.

Social tolerance of domestic abuse remains persistently high. Recent research from Women's Aid Federation of England found that the UK public perception of domestic abuse is largely framed by the so-called "behaviour" of the victim. Whilst 84% of the UK public believe that domestic abuse is a common occurrence, they largely place the responsibility to stop the abuse on the victim, and not on the perpetrator.¹⁵

These attitudes underpin not only how individuals think and behave in relation to domestic abuse, but also how our systems and agencies respond. A key element of stopping domestic abuse is changing these deeply embedded social attitudes. This a huge undertaking. There is currently very little social change work happening regarding the perpetration of domestic abuse, or indeed men's violence against women.

We call on the new government to:

- Move towards a cross-departmental, multi-agency, whole-system approach, with all agencies equipped to identify and respond to perpetrators and manage the risk they pose
- Shift the approach to the perpetration of domestic abuse from a purely criminal justice lens to a wider, multi-agency response with prevention at its heart
- Invest in work to change social attitudes, to reduce tolerance of domestic abuse and ensure perpetrators are held to account

15. Women's Aid (2022) Come Together to End Domestic Abuse: a survey of UK attitudes to domestic abuse 2022 [13](#). BBC News 22 May 2024 [Police urged to consider making fewer arrests over prison space - BBC News accessed 31 May 2024](#).

Support our manifesto

We invite our members, partners, allies and supporters to join us in calling upon the next government to adopt the recommendations in our manifesto. Only by taking these radical steps together can we stop perpetrators, so that survivors can live safe and free from harm.

[Pledge your support here](#), and share the manifesto on social media.

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 [UKRespect](#)  [@respect_uk](#)

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About us

Respect is the UK charity stopping perpetrators of domestic abuse. We want a world where everyone is free from domestic abuse. Where it is never ok to control, harm or cause fear. Where those who perpetrate domestic abuse are stopped, held to account and given the chance to change. We will not stop, until domestic abuse stops.