



Survivors  
Empowering  
Educating  
Domestic abuse  
services

Helping to improve services  
for abused women and  
children in Devon

## **2008 Consultation project with female survivors of domestic abuse in Devon**

*'What happened to me can happen to anyone. With the right level of support, no matter how bad things are at the time, women can recover. But they can't do it alone' (respondent 2008)*

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## **Background**

ADVA (the Against Domestic Violence and Abuse in Devon partnership) funded an evaluation of survivor views of services across Devon in the spring of 2005. Philippa Chapman co-ordinated this study, having previously worked on a similar project with survivors in South Somerset. The findings were then presented at a conference arranged by ADVA in November 2005. Issues were raised for local service providers and actions were promised by agencies to improve policy and practice.

In September 2006 the agencies returned to report back on changes and improvements they had made. This included housing who launched their new Devon-wide code of good practice which is to ensure that Local Authority Homelessness Departments across Devon are working consistently and to the same set of principles. It had been highlighted in the study that there was a great deal of inconsistency in service delivery for survivors of domestic abuse.

S.E.E.D.S Devon (Survivors Empowering and Educating Domestic abuse Services) evolved from the original conference. A group of female survivors of domestic abuse began to meet regularly, received formal training in domestic violence issues and presentation skills. This was funded by ADVA and the group was facilitated by Philippa Chapman and an ADVA co-ordinator.

S.E.E.D.S. Devon now hold their own funding (from ADVA), with a treasurer, secretary and co-ordinator appointed from within their membership. They have been involved with training new police officers, magistrate and court workers training and the specialist domestic violence court in Exeter. Part of the Service Level Agreement with ADVA is to consult with survivors and report back the findings to the partnership.

## **Methodology**

The questionnaire from the 2005 study was adapted to include new areas of service provision for survivors such as the specialist domestic violence courts, M.A.R.A.C. s (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) and I.D.V.A. s (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors) and also to specifically ask about disability issues. Some questions from 2005, which had produced little or duplicated data from survivors were omitted.

Questionnaire for 2008 in the appendix

The questionnaire was emailed to all of the voluntary and statutory agencies that are members of the ADVA partnership. It was available online and promoted on an internet domestic abuse support message board. S.E.E.D.S. members also distributed it amongst their own personal contacts. The period used for this study is 2006-2008, i.e. experiences of services due to domestic abuse during this time. Respondents had used services in Devon but also included are some from Plymouth. Although Plymouth is a unitary authority some agencies such as police include this area in their services. Agencies were requested to ask the ADVA office for copies of the questionnaire and pre-paid envelopes for their return. The returned questionnaires went to the Exeter Women's Aid refuge post office box.

The original closing date was 18<sup>th</sup> April 2008. However, there was a very poor response and this might have been due to the school Easter holidays and two week spring holiday. The Pattern Changing course only runs during term time and outreach workers see fewer women in school holiday time. These were some of the largest access points to survivors. Therefore the date was extended for two weeks. South Devon Women's Aid returned some questionnaires by this date and finally in late May some were returned from North Devon Women's Aid, however there were still none from the North Devon or East Devon refuges.

## The respondents

68 women returned questionnaires compared with 89 in 2005. The lower number of respondents may be due to the lack of any responses from the North and East Devon refuges.

### Age of respondents

Age	2008	2005
18-25	5	9
26-40	35	49
41-60	27	31
61+	1	0

The majority of respondents, 93%, were white British. Other nationalities include, White Irish, Zambian/African, Arabic, Portuguese and Philippino

6 women considered themselves to have a disability, one of these stating that the disability had been caused by the perpetrator of her domestic abuse. In 3 cases the perpetrator was their main carer.

59 respondents, 87%, were no longer in their abusive relationship. This compares to 95% in 2005. (The lower figures being possibly due to the higher percentage of women responding via the refuges in 2005.) 9 women were still in the abusive relationship in 2008 compared with just 4 in 2005.

### Continued abuse

Of the 59 women who had left the relationship, 40, (68%), reported continuing abuse from the perpetrator. In 2005 this figure was slightly lower at 61%.

One respondent stated that the perpetrator was still trying to intimidate and control her even though they had been separated for three years

For the majority of these women the continued abuse was less physical and sexual than it had been during their relationship. However for the Arabic respondent the danger has increased since leaving the relationship as the perpetrator has since threatened to kill her as an honour killing. The respondent from the Philippines has suffered from more intimidation and threats via her family and the internet since leaving.

Examples of the types of abuse suffered by the respondents after they had left the relationship are as follows;

- Threats of physical violence, emotional and psychological abuse
- Threats to any future partner.
- Trying to force sex
- Financial abuse, with holding child support payments
- Harassment
- Verbal abuse in the street
- Interrogation

- Attending her home, kicking door, turning up at any time of the day/night
- Using the children to try to control the survivor

Quotes from respondents

*'Anger and violent outbursts at my property, shouting threats to kill me-or himself'*

*' turns up when he wants, abuse with the kids hasn't stopped'*

*'banging at the door at all hours, verbal abuse in the street (from his car),even though charges have been brought against him , it has not stopped'*

In 94% of the cases the perpetrator was the spouse/partner or former spouse/partner. For the other 6% the perpetrators were close family members with one respondent recording being abused by both her husband and her parents.

All of the women recorded a combination of types of domestic abuse

Physical	51	75%
psychological	60	88%
Emotional	66	97%
Financial	41	60%
Isolation	49	72%
Sexual	34	50%
forced marriage	1	
racial/cultural	2	

One woman reported being forced into prostitution by the perpetrator. Another was pressured by her family to marry in order to avoid being homeless. Racial verbal abuse was experienced by two women from minority ethnic backgrounds.

53 of the 68 women in this study had children under the age of 18, 105 children in total. 47 women stated their children were living with them. Of the others, only one stated where her child was living, in this case the child had been fostered due to the domestic violence.

### **Leaving the relationship**

- 60% of the women in this study had left the family home (compared to 73% in 2005)
- 11 of these women, ( 34% )returned home, the perpetrator having left.
- 3, (7%) returned to the perpetrator
- 26, (38%) had to leave their home permanently
- 78% of the women who left their home had children under the age of 18
- 53% of the women with children under the age of 18 had to leave the family home permanently.

One woman described how the trauma of what happened had caused her to suffer from panic and anxiety attacks and therefore she was unable to return home even though the perpetrator had left.

The table below shows where women went on leaving the abusive relationship.

	<b>No. of women</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>Refuge</b>	10	24%	34%
<b>Family</b>	13	32%	14%
<b>Friends</b>	7	17%	11%
<b>Rented elsewhere</b>	4	10%	11%
<b>Re-housed by council</b>	2	5%	11%
<b>Homeless</b>	1	10%	
<b>Not stated</b>	4		

Only 15% of the women in this survey had lived in a refuge in Devon at some time during the last two years. This compares to 42% in the 2005 SEEDS study the large difference being likely due to the sources of respondents as mentioned previously. These figures may seem inconsistent with the table above, which is due to the way the questionnaire was worded. Although experiences of services recorded by the respondents are during the last two years and in Devon, the question regarding where women went when they left the abusive relationship did not suggest this was to be within the time scale. Hence, women recorded leaving and going to live in a refuge, even when this was more than two years ago or the refuge was outside Devon. However, their experiences recorded in this study are only those within Devon during the last two years.

### **Perpetrator Occupation**

	<b>Number of perpetrators (2008)</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>unskilled manual</b>	9	13%	7%
<b>skilled manual</b>	13	19%	9%
<b>Unemployed</b>	11	16%	11%
<b>Professional</b>	6	9%	16%
<b>Driver</b>	7	10%	12%
<b>Retired</b>	1		
<b>Managerial</b>	3		
<b>Forces</b>	2		
<b>catering/hospitality</b>	4		
<b>sales rep</b>	1		
<b>Student</b>	1		
<b>self employed</b>	3		
<b>Police</b>	1		
<b>not stated</b>	6		

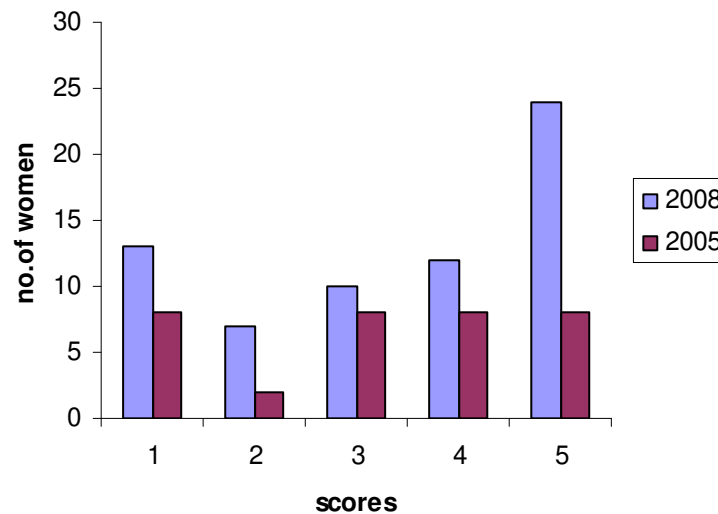
One of the unemployed perpetrators was a voluntary worker in a charity shop. The occupations of the perpetrator varied a great deal, they include company surveyor, college student, Big Issue seller, senior fisheries inspector, financial consultant, chef and police officer.

## Health Services

### G.P.

19 women reported being asked about domestic abuse by their G.P. Only three scored this experience as less than satisfactory.

34 women gave scores for their overall experiences with G.P.s in Devon, as shown in the graph below comparing with scores from the 2005 study



( 5=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied)

The respondents appreciated being believed, supported and being given appropriate signposting. Quotes below give examples their experiences.

*'was very supportive'*

*'asked directly about sexual abuse, kind and supportive'*

*'brought the fact there was abuse in my relationship to my attention'*

*'gave me a referral to Outreach'*

However, almost a third of women scored their experiences as less than satisfactory.

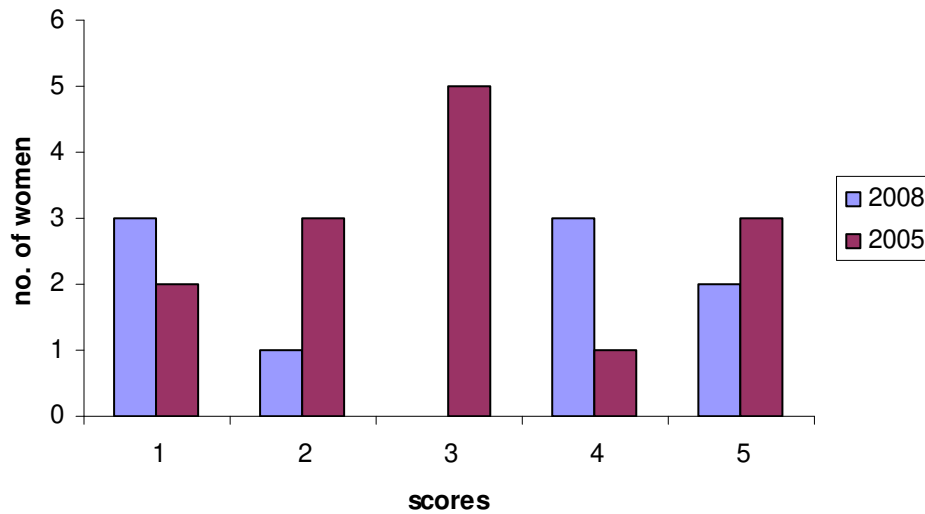
*'not their problem'*

*'seemed sacred to ask' (about domestic abuse)*

It appears that when G.P.s are aware of the issue of domestic abuse and ask about it, the survivor experiences a much better service generally. However, when the survivor is the one who raises the issue there are twice as many scores of a less than satisfactory experience. This indicates that where G.P.s have training and knowledge of such abuse they are able to offer a better service to survivors.

## Accident and Emergency Departments

9 women gave scores for their experience with A&E departments in Devon. The chart below compares the overall scores with those from the 2005 study



( 5=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied)

Almost half of the women using accident and emergency departments due to domestic abuse in the 2008 study experienced a less than satisfactory experience one third scoring very low satisfaction.

*'poor service for self-harmers'*

In research with survivors in Dorset in 2006, (Raising the Survivor voice in Dorset 2006 by Philippa Chapman) the average score for experiences with Accident and Emergency Departments was 4.

Improvements to service provision in Devon might be made by considering the way in which these departments in Dorset react to and treat survivors of domestic abuse when they present themselves.

## Health Visitors.

18 respondents had pre- school aged children and 9 had been in contact with their health visitor due to domestic abuse. Only 4 women had been asked directly about domestic abuse by their health visitor. 9 respondents did not score for their overall experience with their health visitor, nor did they report having been asked about domestic abuse by their health visitor.

The protocol for 'asking the question' should have shown that all 18 women had been asked, however, only 4 recorded this as having happened.

Of the 9 women recording scores for their experiences, 7 scored satisfactory or above the other two as very low satisfaction.

*'my hero. After years of talking to people she saw it through my eyes'*

3 health visitors offered help for the respondents' children, which is encouraging, since in 2005 almost all offers of help for children came from Women's Aid.

## Midwives

Domestic abuse increases up to eight fold during pregnancy. Statistics from Women's Aid, below, show how important the role of midwives can be for pregnant women and their unborn children.

### **30% of domestic violence starts in pregnancy**

### **Domestic violence has been identified as a prime cause of miscarriage or still-birth**

Six women reported contact with a midwife and in four of these cases they had been asked about domestic violence. Where the question was asked, 2 women recorded low levels of satisfaction and two very high levels.



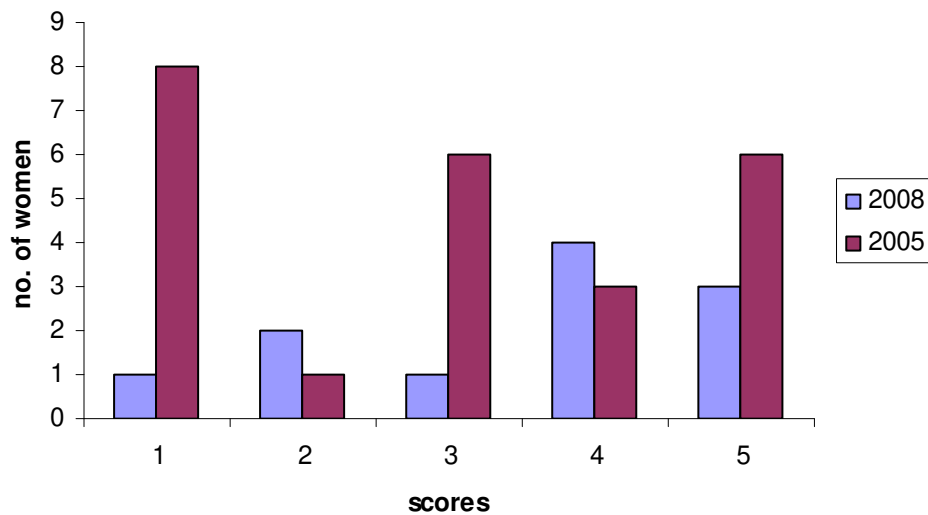
Whilst the percentage of women being asked about domestic abuse is higher than with health visitors, it is notable that this is still not in 100% of cases.

4 of the 5 respondents giving scores for their overall experience with their midwife rated the service as satisfactory or better.

Another concern recently brought to the attention of SEEDS Devon is that, in East Devon at least, midwives are still asking women about domestic abuse in front of their husbands/partners. Obviously this is inappropriate and this issue needs to be addressed.

## Mental Health

Ten respondents gave scores for their experiences with mental health services in Devon. The satisfaction scores are below compared with those from the 2005 study (5=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied)



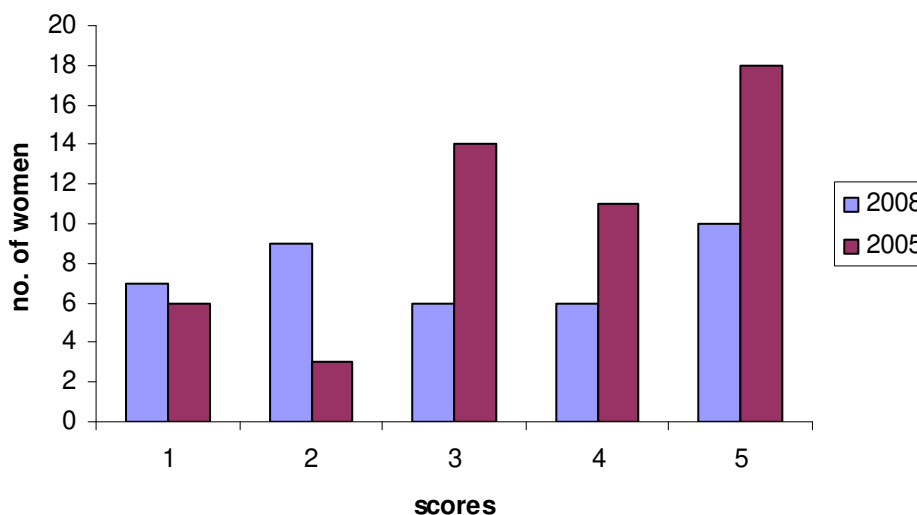
Only 30% rated their experience as less than satisfactory.

One respondent stated that her counsellor had brought to her attention the fact that her relationship was abusive and this led to her seeking help to escape the situation.

## Police Services

### Police

38 respondents (59%) gave satisfaction scores for their experiences with the police a similar percentage to the 2005 study (58%). These scores are shown in the chart below and compared with the scores given in the 2005 study



(5= very satisfied 1= very dissatisfied)

42% of the women rated their experience as less than satisfactory, (compared to only 17% in 2005)

In South Devon the figure was 58% and in Exeter 43%.

In North Devon only 22% rated their experience as less than satisfactory.

These figures show a lack of consistency in the service received by victims of domestic abuse in Devon.

There were some positive comments when police officers had been supportive, informative and had believed the victim.

*'very supportive, asked direct questions, helpful and informative'*

*'very helpful on the first months'*

*'police here in Devon seem to be more aware and willing to step in. In Manchester back then, they didn't want to know'*

*'arresting officer-brilliant support'*

*'escorts to and from court and support in court on one occasion'*

*'protected (us) efficiently'*

There were also some very negative comments from respondents about their experiences particularly when women felt disbelieved, unsupported and attending officers were unsympathetic to their situation.

*'they didn't attend my 999 call when my daughter was being physically assaulted by her father' (the child had to attend accident and emergency department for her injury)*

*'local police were unsympathetic, refused to believe we were at risk'*

*'I didn't feel supported, had to make a complaint'*

*'didn't explain everything that was happening'*

*'perpetrator of the violence was cautioned 2 months after the offence'*

*'very UN helpful. Didn't believe me-felt laughed at and set up by collaboration of boyfriend and the police. I'm utterly appalled at the lack of support from the police. This really could have been lethal and they didn't care or believe me or take it seriously.... DISGUSTED!'*

*'they made me feel a fool'*

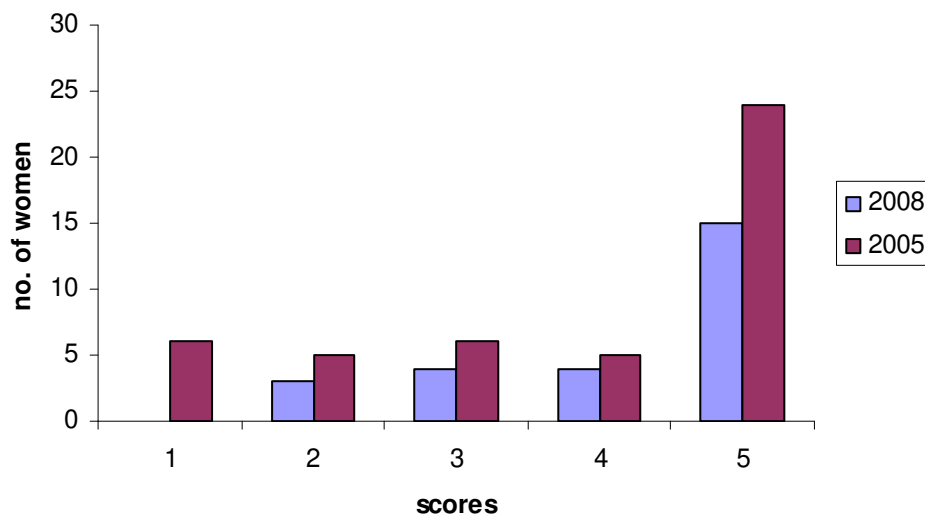
*'I will never call the police again'*

One woman highlighted a problem between the actions of the police and the work of her solicitor. She found that the bail conditions given by the police cancelled out work/restriction orders obtained via her solicitor. Then once the bail conditions were dropped neither she nor her solicitor were notified and she was left with no protection.

A number of police officers are still demonstrating a lack of empathy and understanding about domestic abuse and the affect it has on victims

### Domestic Abuse Officers

31 women rated their experiences with domestic abuse officers as shown in the chart below (compared with the scores from the 2005 study)



(5=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied)

As would be expected from this specialised service there was a high amount of satisfaction with 74% of the respondents rating their experiences as satisfactory or above, a similar figure to that in the 2005 SEEDS study.

The very low satisfaction scores came from different areas of the county, therefore there is no suggestion of a problem in a particular district.

There were only a few comments made by the respondents regarding these experiences and they are as follows;

*'very supportive in the court process'*

*'always there, kept it real'*

*'didn't take me seriously'*

## Victim Support

Only eight respondents reported contact with Victim Support Devon. Of these 5 recorded scores for their experience as satisfactory or above. However, three women rated their experience as very dissatisfied. The reasons they gave for this are as follows;

*'never got back to me'*  
*'just referred me on'*  
*'no one covers Honiton'*

These issues can be addressed quite easily. Obviously, a lack of volunteers working in a particular area cannot be helped at times and Victim Support may well already have managed to recruit people to cover this area.

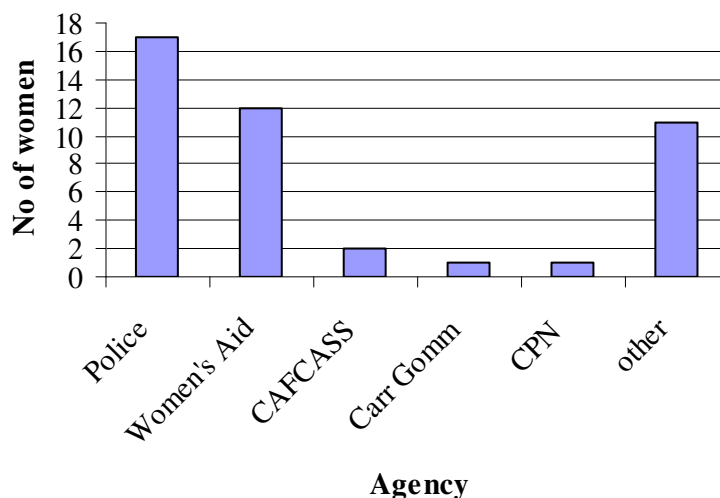
One problem seems to be that Victim Support does not support police domestic violence referrals which have been assessed as high or very high risk. Victims are told by attending police officers that victim support will contact them, unless the victim requests that this does not happen. The practice however is that victim support contacts domestic abuse officers to ascertain the risk level of the client. If this has been assessed as high or very high, then no contact is made. Whilst this means the client is to receive a more specialised support from an IDVA and avoids duplication of service it also means that victims are left waiting for contact from Victim Support which will not happen.

This issue can be addressed by a courtesy call from Victim Support to inform the victim of the situation. With regard to 'just referring' clients to other agencies, there needs to be an explanation for this referring and even discussion with the client as to whether they want support from another agency. In some cases women, for a variety of reasons, do not wish to have support from /contact with Women's Aid and can therefore be left with no support.

## Risk Assessment/M.A.R.A.C.

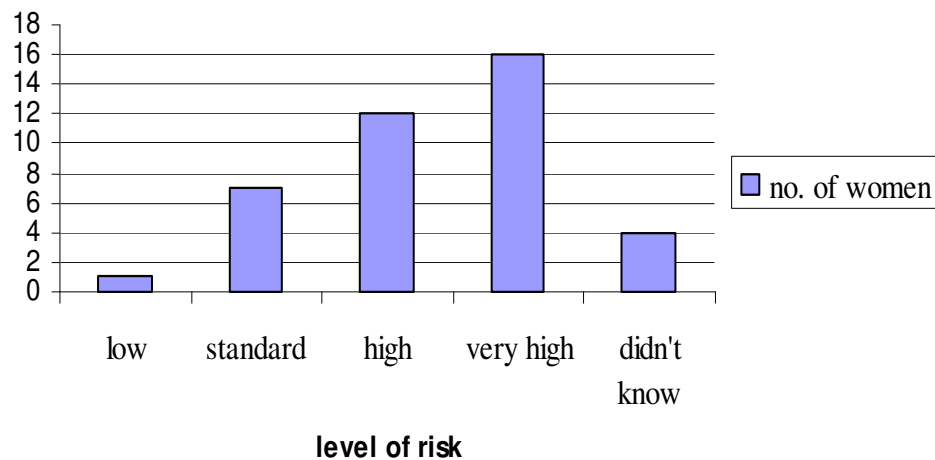
59% of the respondents (40) recorded having been risk assessed, 19% stated they had not and 15% did not know whether a risk assessment had been done for their situation.

The chart below shows which agency made the risk assessment. Although there are only 40 respondents, these figures show 44 as several women were assessed by more than one agency.



The majority of the assessments were made by the police, then Women's Aid. The agencies in the 'other' category were not specified by the respondents

The chart below shows the number of women assessed in each risk category



Of those assessed as,

- standard risk , 1 stated she had been supported by an IDVA,
  - high risk, 2 had received such support,
  - very high risk 5 had received such support
- and
- 2 of the women who did not know their level of risk stated they had been supported by an IDVA..

Less than a third of very high risk clients knew they had been supported by an IDVA which could be an area for concern especially since these victims will not be supported by victim support. However, there is the possibility that the respondents were unaware that their support was coming from an IDVA.

75%, (12), of the very high risk cases were referred to MARAC. Of the others, one respondent stated her case had not been referred, the others did not know. In 7 of these cases the risk assessment had been undertaken by the police.

50%, (6), of the high risk cases had been referred to MARAC, of these half had been risk assessed by the police.

Out of the total of 18 cases referred to MARAC, the procedure was explained to the victim by the police in only 3 cases despite 10 of these cases being where the police had made the risk assessment which lead to the case going to MARAC.. In 11 cases this explanation came from Women's Aid.

There appear to be cases where different agencies assess a situation at different levels of risk.

Where agencies other than the police assessed respondents as very high risk the cases were not always referred on to MARAC. However, there seemed to be more consistency in referrals where the police were the agency assessing the risk. This might be because there is not a standard risk assessment being used across the county by all agencies involved with this procedure. It might also be an indication that some agencies are not aware of the MARAC referral system and do not know how to refer a client into this process.

## Criminal Justice System

Five respondents rated their experiences with the criminal courts. Of these two scored their experience as less than satisfactory. This might have been due to the result of the case in court.

15 women stated that the perpetrator of their abuse had been charged with an offence and the case was going/had gone to court.

The outcomes of these cases are as follows;

- 7 found guilty
- 1 pleaded guilty
- 2 found not guilty
- 2 had not yet been to court
- 3 outcome not stated

8 women had scored for their satisfaction with their experiences with the Crown Prosecution Service. 50% rated their experience as less than satisfactory

### Quotes from respondents about their experiences with the criminal courts:

*'I felt the perpetrator had all the support!!! Probation, IDAP, counselling, etc. which empowered him more to tell me how damaged I was'*

*'He pleaded guilty, I was told I would get a restraining order. Court rang me on my way home to say he had not been given the order they promised'*

*'It was agreed he would get a restraining order and then we were told by the CPS that he just got a conditional discharge, even though he had admitted the assault on me'*

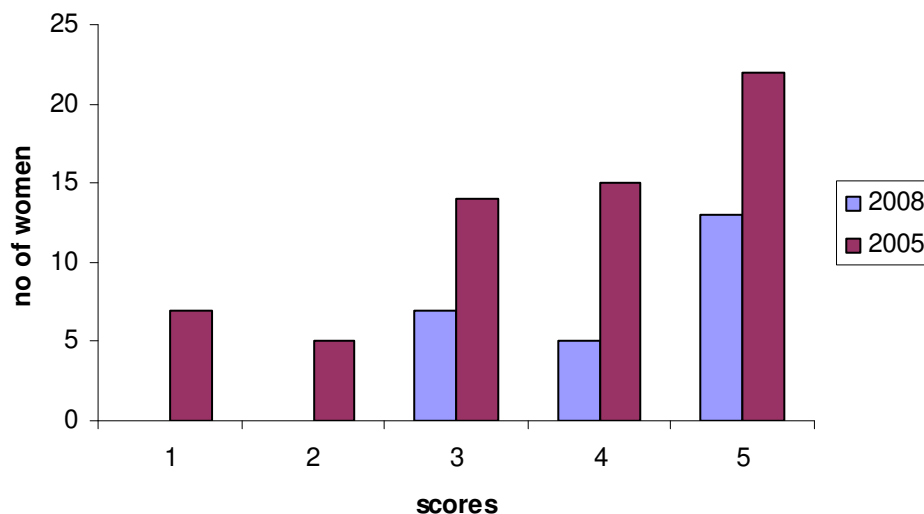
*'no separate smoking area for victims'*

*'screens were applied for and not given. I did get an interpreter and a warrant to get to court'*

*I was given a pre court visit, transport to court, separate waiting rooms and screens'*

## Solicitors

Twenty-five women gave scores for the experiences with their solicitors. The chart below compares the scores with those from the 2005 study



(5=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied)

None of these experiences were rated as less than satisfactory in this study compared to the 2005 study where 20% of the respondents rated their experiences as less than satisfactory.

Quotes from respondents

*'she was amazing'*

*'very supportive through court'*

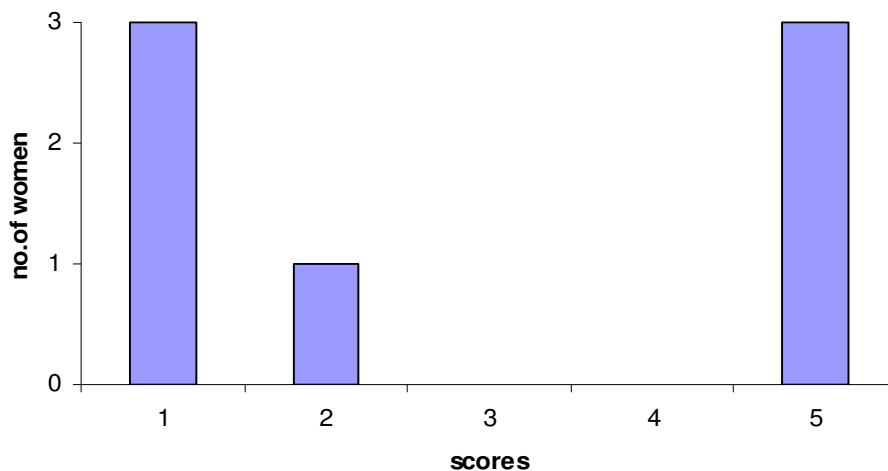
*'ok-don't think they really understand'*

*'very supportive, kept it real and picked me up'*

## CAFCASS/ Family Court

### CAFCASS

7 women reported experiences with CAFCASS. Their scores for their satisfaction with this service are as follows where 5=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied



It was encouraging to find that there were levels of very high satisfaction since CAFCASS has, both locally and nationally, been criticised for a poor service particularly for victims of domestic abuse and their children. It is also notable that one respondent had been able to challenge her CAFCASS report and have the issues investigated and mistakes rectified. A children's guardian took over the case, looked at the original court reporters notes and discovered discrepancies between the notes and the final report.

Quotes from the respondents

*'wrote a false report-children's guardian, CAFCASS has now taken over-she's good and I received an apology for the last report'*

*'Amazing, Got all the issues recognised-that all my concerns were real and they agreed. Put my worries forward appropriately at court'*

*'Why don't you understand about domestic abuse?'*

Although there have been some positive comments there is still room for improvement. There need to be more consistency in practice and *all* practitioners need to understand the dynamics of abusive relationships, the dangers for children and male charm syndrome.

## Family Court

8 women (12%) had experience of the family courts in this study compared to 23% in the 2005 study. The scores for this service indicated a wide range of satisfaction. This might be due to the outcomes of the cases heard in the court and there was only one comment to give any further insight into the situation.

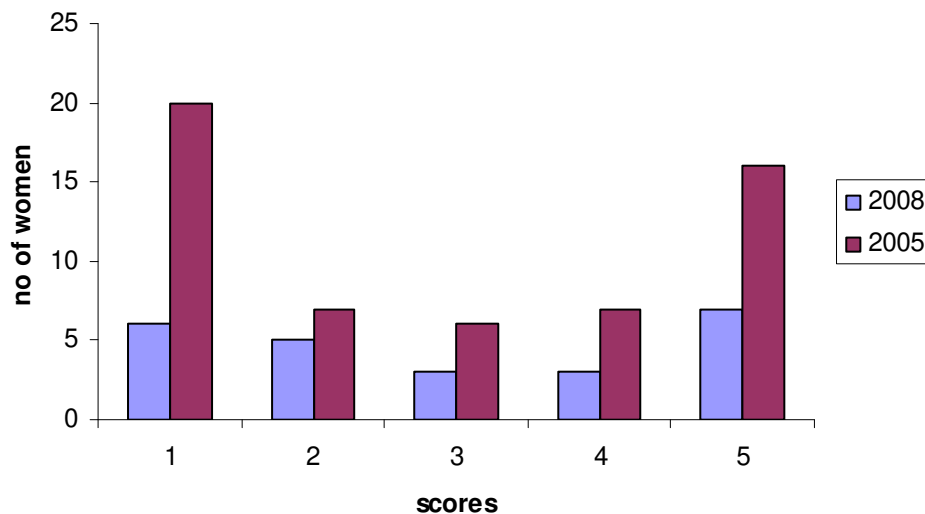
*'You shouldn't have to sit opposite them (the perpetrator) and be cross examined by their barrister when you have done nothing wrong'*

## Housing

21 respondents gave scores for their overall satisfaction with housing services. 52% rated their experience as less than satisfactory compared to 54% in the 2005 study.

East Devon showed a little improvement although the scores were still only indifferent or less than satisfactory. In 2005 *all* of the scores were very dissatisfied.

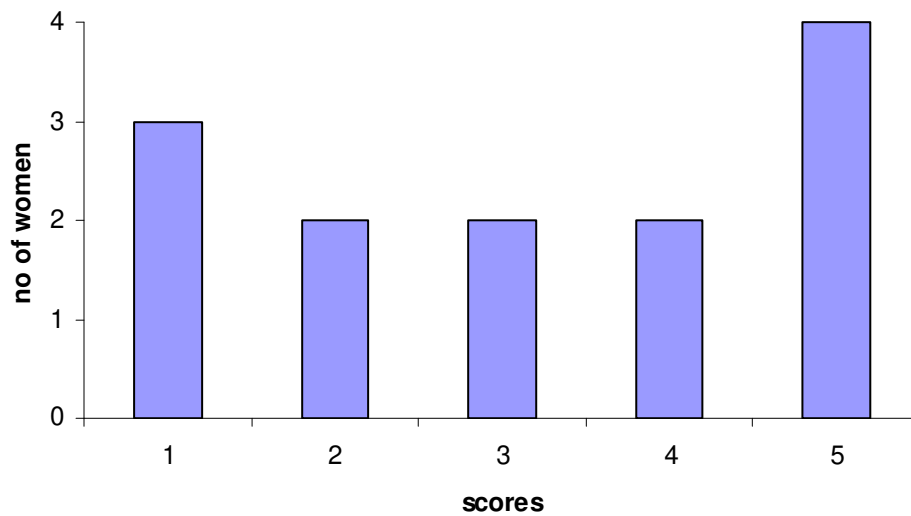
The scores for the respondents are as follows compared with those from the 2005 study where 5=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied



The majority of the very high scores came from the Exeter area, (3), then 2 in South Devon, another from North Devon, and one did not state the district.



12 women stated that they had been asked about domestic abuse by a housing service. The scores rating this experience are as follows, where 1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied.



Once again the respondents greatly appreciated understanding of domestic abuse issues, empathy and information from housing services. Where satisfaction was low respondents had not been listened to, their situation had not been understood and the systems had not been explained.

#### Quotes from respondents

*'went through all the options available to me and helped me to make the right choice'*

*'Carr Gomm /Exeter Homeless department-very understanding.'* (Carr Gomm also supported this respondent through her court case)

*'I returned home. Perpetrator didn't live there but had a key and council refused to change my locks as I had given him the key' (when we were together)*

*'Can't be re-housed near my mum-only family who will and can help as council say it isn't safe'* At present this respondent is living in the same town as the perpetrator's family and within half a mile of the perpetrator in Sidmouth, her mother lives in Honiton.

*'very poor. Didn't understand why I had to leave' (my home)*

*'Difficult,- very confusing. The process wasn't explained'*

*'very incompetent and dismissive'*

*Would have been helpful if better systems were in place and I hadn't been housed next door to a dv situation'*

## Education

45 women in this study had school aged children. Three respondents stated that someone at the school their child/ren attended asked them about domestic abuse. In addition 3 schools offered help for the children without the respondent having asked for it. Although these figures are low it is still encouraging that the question is being asked and that support is being offered for children by an agency other than Women's Aid.

There is still a need for more schools to take up domestic abuse training, particularly those nearest the refuges in Devon and their feeder/move on schools.

5 respondents gave scores rating their experiences with the education system. All of these were satisfactory or above.

Quotes from respondents about their experiences.

*'school has been amazing'*

*'told the children who they could talk to if they needed to'*

*'school doesn't want to get involved, refused to give information to the court, guardian struggling to get information. Fear of putting themselves in a difficult legal position'*

*'School threatened me with fast track to prosecution for leaving my home to stay safe and home educating my daughter during this period'*

\* More information about the problems children are experiencing at school under the following section

## Children

53 women in this study had children, 105 children in total. Of these 6 women were not living with their children (14 children).

36% of the women who had their children living with them reported that their children were experiencing problems at school due to their experiences of domestic abuse. These problems include;

- Aggression – mainly in male children often in the 5-10 years age bracket
- Not wanting to go to school  
*'doesn't like going to school and finds things hard'* (aged 11-16)
- Fear of the teachers  
*'my son has shut himself into a bubble, his teacher frightens him (but school a great support)'* (aged 5-10)
- Psychosomatic pain leading to not wanting to attend school  
*'Due to his (perpetrator's) questions and grilling, my son has developed chronic back pain and in under our G.P. He does not want to go to school'* (aged 11-16)
- Anger
- Agoraphobia leading to having to be home tutored  
*'my daughter had a phobia about going out and had to have home education'* (aged 11-16)
- Lack of concentration

- Difficulties adjusting to new schools  
*'daughter found it difficult adjusting to new schools'* (aged 11-16)
- Bullying/ being bullied  
*'he is being bullied by another child'* (aged 5-10)
- Lack of confidence  
*'lack of confidence, now having play therapy'* (aged 5-10)
- Poor social skills

Apart from these problems at school there were also reports of other ways that domestic abuse had impacted on the children.

- One respondent's pre school child had been taken into foster care as a result of the domestic abuse
- One child (11-16 years), had taken an overdose and had self-harmed
- Two children (5-10 years) had been self-harming
- One respondent's daughter had been stealing, damaging property. Using abusive language and trespassing
- Depression had been reported in children in the 5-10 years age bracket and the 17-18 years age bracket.
- Many respondents reported that their children had very low self-esteem.
- *'My daughter cannot bring her friends home and cannot say where she lives'* (staying in a refuge)

In this study 38% of women with children were *offered* support compared with 29% in 2005.

In this study help for children was *offered* by a greater variety of agencies, an improvement on the situation in 2005. The table below shows which agencies offered support.

2008 study

<b>Women's Aid</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Health visitor</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Health</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CYPS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CAFCASS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>School</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Police</b>	<b>1</b>

In the 2005 study the only agencies to offer any kind of support for children were Women's Aid, Victim Support, schools and CYPS.

The respondents had *asked* for help from a variety of agencies and received mixed responses. The table below shows the agencies approached by the respondents.

<b>Women's Aid</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Health visitor</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Health</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CYPS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Schools</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Police</b>	<b>2</b>

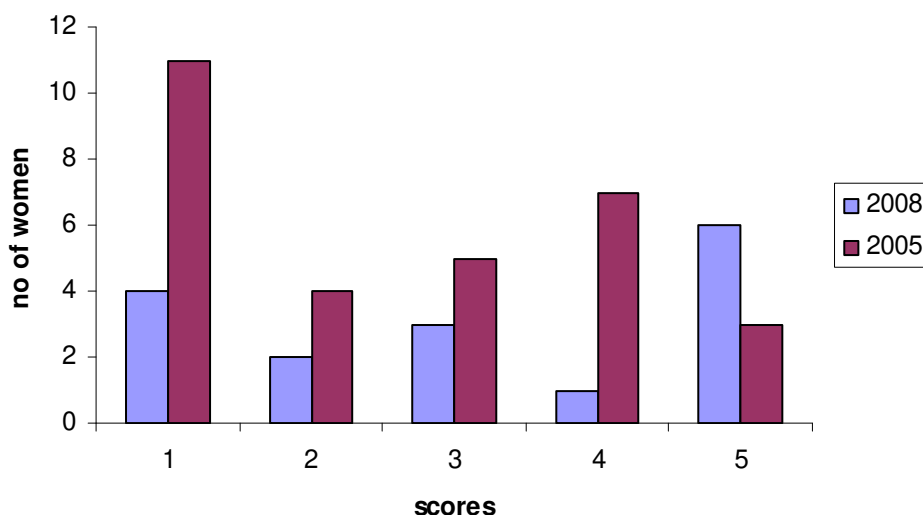
Health and education services have an important role in providing support for children suffering the effects of domestic abuse. These agencies often have regular contact with the children and are also often the agencies the respondents felt able to contact about the situation.

There were some problems experienced by the respondents after approaching agencies for help.

There was a long wait for counselling for children and in one case once the respondent had been referred for family therapy she was then refused in. In two cases the Children’s and Young People’s Services did not recognise any risk and refused any support for the children. In one of these cases the child had been physically assaulted in the street by her father resulting in treatment at the local Accident and Emergency department.

### Children and Young People’s Services

16 respondents gave scores for their experiences with CYPS. These are shown in the graph below and compared with the scores from the 2005 study where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied



The scores with low and very low satisfaction were often where CYPS did not recognise the risks that the respondents were concerned about. These include cases where other agencies had recognised risks. The respondents felt disbelieved or that they were judged as over reacting to their situations. Victims of domestic abuse tend to minimise the abuse rather than exaggerate the situation. Many women fear seeking help from CYPS in case their children are then put into care. Therefore if a woman contacts an agency concerned about risks to their children this should be taken seriously. It is important to remember the link between domestic abuse and child abuse and that domestic abuse is now a safeguarding children issue.

There were some positive comments made by respondents.

*‘referred by the school to social services. Helped me and my kids repair with support’*

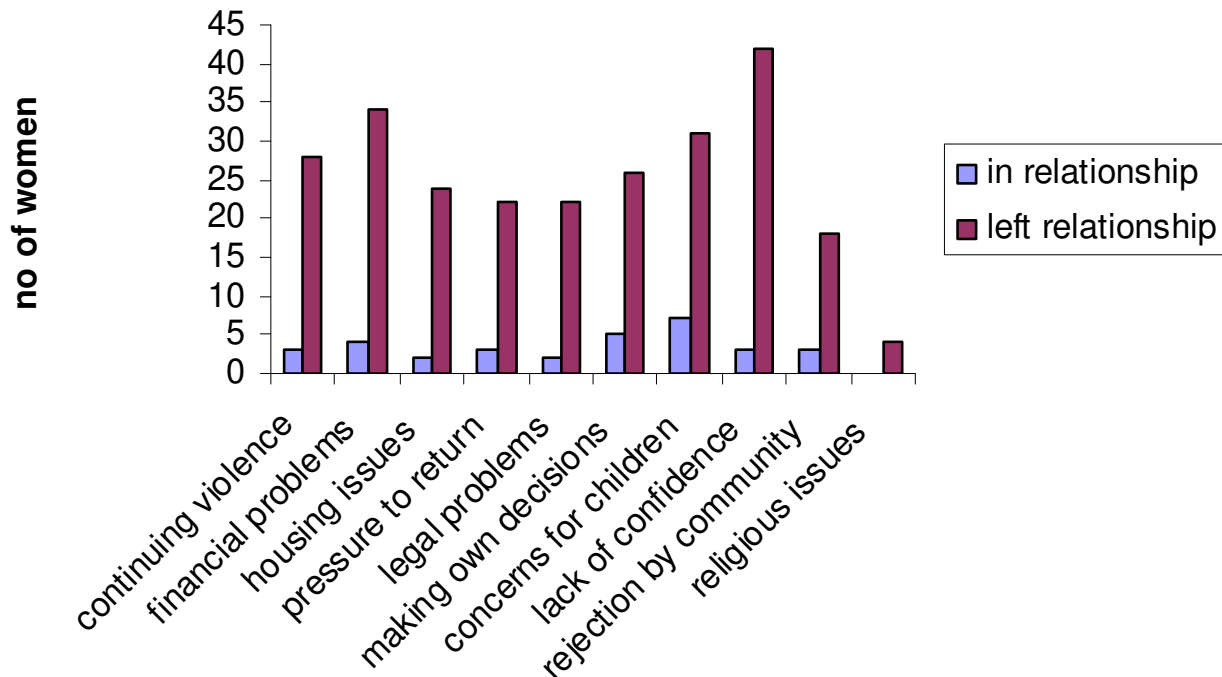
*‘JACAT met with me and my children’*

*‘Brilliant. Social worker I had was supportive and helped me and my children stay together’*

*‘Helped get the children’s father to take on a bit more of the childcare’-(This respondent has a disability)*

## Moving on issues

The chart below shows some of the concerns that the respondents had for the future and moving on with their lives.



The women also added some other problems they were facing for the future. These were racism from the perpetrator, health problems and having to live away from family support, being able to prove what was happening and repercussions for taking action against the abuse.

The figures for continued violence are lower than those reporting the abuse continuing after leaving the relationship. This is likely due to the wording of the questionnaire. This question asked about continued 'violence' whereas previously it was worded as continuing 'abuse'. Violence may have been considered just physical but the word 'abuse' tends to be thought of as including other kinds of abuse as well.

The number of women stating children as an area of concern shows a very high level of response since not all women in this survey had children. 72% women with children had concerns for their children.

Quotes from women regarding moving on issues.

*'It is taking me a lot longer to rebuild my life than I thought ... the damage this abuse causes goes very deep'*

*'At present I feel like all who know me are against me and judging me for taking action'*

*'staying indoors and avoiding public places where I might run into him'*

*'endlessly having to repeat the situation that has so traumatised you, to everyone until you no longer want to do so and shut down'*

*'violent outbursts at my property and shouting threats to kill me- or himself and blame for accusing him.'*

## What helped most

The respondents indicated what helped them most in leaving/surviving the abusive relationship. These were not categories described in the questionnaire, this was an open question. Some of the women included more than one factor. Women's Aid's Pattern Changing course was specifically mentioned by some respondents, others may have included this under the category of Women's Aid.

<b>Women's Aid</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Pattern Changing</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Contact with other survivors</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>moving away</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>time alone</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>counselling</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>friends/family support</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>validation of abuse</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>IDAP</b>	<b>1</b>

As in the 2005 study the services provided by Women's Aid, in particular the Pattern Changing course were rated very highly.

Contact with other survivors, women who shared similar experiences was mentioned by a number of respondents. This contact had been through the Pattern Changing course, Women's Aid drop-in groups and also an internet support group.

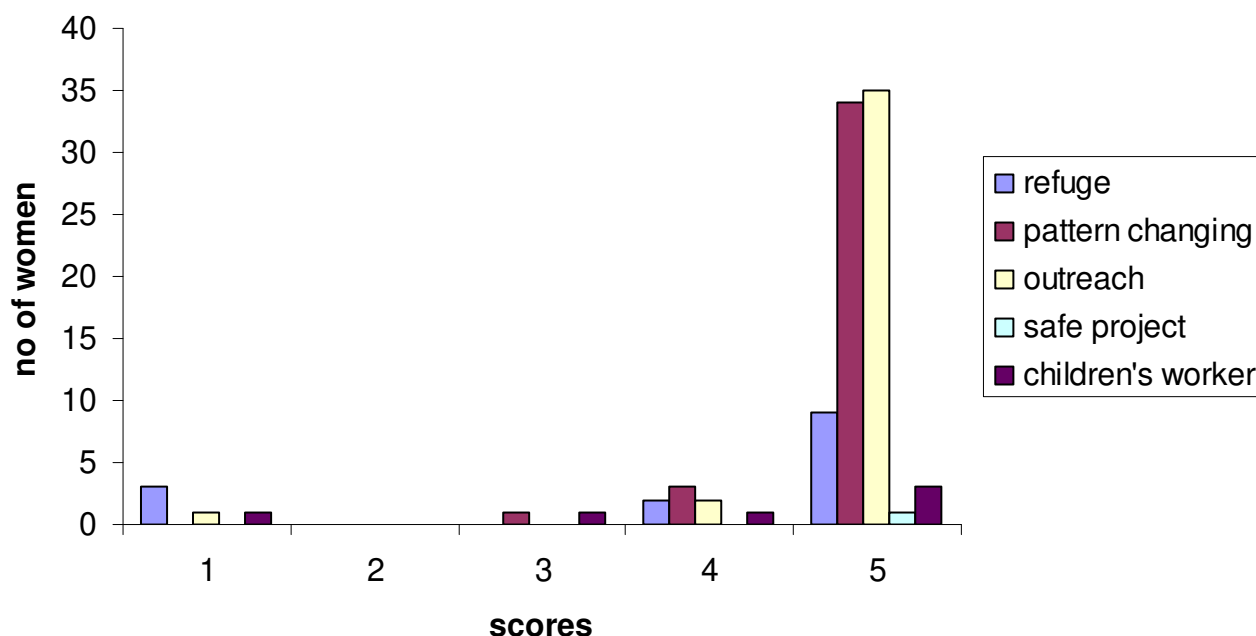
One respondent received support from her employer.

*'if it wasn't for the helping hand of my employer of two weeks, where he noticed the potentially abusive situation, I would still be up there with no other way out'*

## Women's Aid

As in 2005, Devon's Women's Aid services were rated with consistent high levels of satisfaction which should be expected from such specialised services. There were only a few cases where the respondents rated their experiences as less than satisfactory. By far the majority rated their experiences with high or very high levels of satisfaction.

The table below shows the scores given by the respondents for overall satisfaction for the services they received from Women's Aid, where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied.



The 3 score for Pattern Changing had the comment 'so far' with it as she had only recently started the course.

The score of 1 for the children's worker was changed to very high satisfaction as the situation changed and her concerns were addressed.

The only service with several respondents rating their experience as very dissatisfied was the refuge however this was only 3 of the 14 respondents who had used this service

Reasons were given for these low scores are as follows;

One respondent was unhappy about the length of time she and her daughter had to stay at the refuge. Her daughter was depressed, unable to have friends come home and having to keep where she lived a secret was a strain.

Other respondents commented;

*'Left me and my daughter sat in the service station all night and never got back to me, knowing we had nowhere to go. They said they had no room but, would ring back with a bed and breakfast address somewhere. They did not get back to me'*

*'Refused to take me in near my mum'*

There were many positive comments made by the respondents.

*'Without the support I have had from your services I would not have survived. All these services are amazing ( Exeter Women's Aid, Outreach and Pattern Changing)'*

*'thankyou for the support course and Women's Aid helpers /refuge'*

*'children's worker in the refuge – my children found her friendly and I found her helpful with issues regarding the children'*

*'Outreach were the only ones who understood exactly what I was going through'*

*'Women's Aid finally helped me to really acknowledge it (the abuse) and deal with how this acceptance made me feel'*

There was just one negative response about Women's Aid

*'sent letters for appointments to my home address which I had fled (they had been told that I had left). I didn't get them until I had returned home'*

### **Pattern Changing**

This course has, as in 2005, been very well received by women. It has helped them to change their lives for the better and supported them to move forward in their lives.

The only negative comment was from a respondent who had been told she could not access the course as the perpetrator of the abuse was not a partner but a family member.

### **Quotes from respondents**

*'Best thing, saved my life'*

*'informative and supportive, made friends too'*

*'speaking, -even laughing- with other women has been wonderful and I got that via South Devon Women's Aid'*

*'Pattern Changing course has been a revelation to me. I've realised that for all my adult life I lived with this emotional damage that wasn't actually my fault. Also that my patterns of behaviour were normal to my experience'*

*'helps me believe in myself'*

*'I now view situations or confrontations differently and feel more calm and collected in all areas'*  
*'amazing, Life changing'*

### **Safe project**

Only one respondent had experience of the Safe project, which she rated with very high satisfaction.

*'Helpful advice, support and guidance. I'm very grateful to have had her help'*



## Conclusions

As in previous studies women appreciated being believed, being shown empathy and being signposted to appropriate agencies for support. Asking women about domestic abuse needs to be done with sensitivity and with regard to the victim's safety, e.g. by not asking such questions with their partner/husband present. Although these conclusions might seem quite obvious there are indications that professionals across Devon are still not managing to take all these things into consideration in their daily practice. Examples of this are the attitudes of police officers attending incidents particularly in South Devon and in one very badly handled case in the Ivybridge area. There have also been several instances made known to SEEDS Devon where midwives in the East Devon area have asked pregnant women about domestic abuse with their partner present.

Where routine enquiry has been in place for a number of years, for example, with midwives and health visitors, it was disappointing to find that women in this study were stating that they had not been asked about domestic abuse. Although the number of women used for this study is quite small, there was a high enough percentage of women who had not been asked to make this a concern.

Practitioners not only need to raise the issue of abuse but also be prepared to hear that it *is* happening and be able to signpost appropriately and support the clients disclosing such information. As with all agencies involved with victims of abuse, it is important to engage with the victim when they disclose, since a negative experience with a practitioner can lead to the victim refusing to seek help in the future and at worst this can lead to serious injury or even death.

Housing has a vital role for women in abusive situations, especially when the results from this study show that the majority of women leaving the family home have children under the age of 18 living with them. In comparison to the 2005 study, scores for housing services in East Devon did show some improvement. However, there is still room for further improvement. There are professionals who are not showing an understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on survivors and why they wish to leave their home even though the perpetrator may have moved out. The length of time women, particularly those with children, have to stay at a refuge before accommodation can be found seems to vary between refuges-SEEDS have been told the average stay is 4 months in East Devon refuge and twice that in the Exeter refuge. Of course available housing for these women will differ between districts and much will depend on where the areas to which the survivors want to move are. These may not be in Devon.

Services offering support for children were often found to be lacking as in 2005. However, this study shows an increase in the agencies other than Women's Aid who have started to offer some kind of support for children in these situations. This is encouraging and hopefully with more multi agency working, more agencies will become involved with these children and be able to offer the much needed support. CAFCASS have achieved better scores in this study than in the past. This is a particularly encouraging result given the history of the agency with regard to domestic abuse, both locally and nationally over the last few years. Practitioners, in some cases, are showing an understanding of domestic abuse issues, undertaking risk assessments and have been willing to accept challenges to their practice and afford the client a way to have the problem addressed. There is of course a long way to go in order to make this very good practice standard and to avoid errors in reports. It is important to recognise the distress caused to a victim of abuse having to challenge poor practice when there is the fear that any kind of 'upset' could lead to their children being put at risk of further damage from the perpetrator. CAFCASS are in a very powerful position.

As in 2005 Women's Aid received many very positive comments and the pattern changing course has been invaluable to women in enabling them to move forward with their lives in a positive way and to break away from their abusers.

There have been several examples in this study, where slight adjustments to policy or procedure within agencies dealing with domestic abuse clients, could be made to improve their service delivery. Overall there have been some examples of very good practice from agencies across Devon and the fact that this report has been requested indicates that there is a willingness to build on this good practice and address issues arising from consultation with local domestic abuse survivors.

Finally a quote from a survivor from this study, who moved to Devon because of domestic violence.

*'I moved from Buckinghamshire to Devon in 2006. Devon services are efficient and caring... In my old town I didn't receive this support even though I asked for it...The efficiency, care and time that people put into life is beautiful, a quality I have not seen in London.'*

# Appendix 1

## SEEDS Devon questionnaire 2008

### Section One

1) In which city/town/village did you live in when you had contact with services due to your domestic abuse?

2) How old are you? Please tick box

18-25

26-40

41-60

61+

3) What is your ethnic group?

Please circle one section from **A-E** and then tick to indicate your cultural background.

#### **A White**

British

Irish

Other-please specify

#### **B Mixed Heritage**

White and Black Caribbean

White and Black African

White and Asian

Any other mixed background -please specify

#### **C Asian or Asian British**

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Any other Asian background –please specify

#### **D Black or Black British**

Caribbean

African

Any other Black background –please specify

#### **E Chinese or other ethnic group**

Chinese

Any other –please specify

4) Is English your first language?

Yes

No

5) Do you consider yourself to have a disability? Yes  No

6) Have you lived in a refuge or safe house in Devon in the last two years? Yes  No

7) Do you have any children aged under 18 years ? Yes  No

7.1) If yes, please indicate the number, ages and sex of your children and whether they live with you

Age	No of children	Male / female	Live with you yes/no
0-4 yrs			
5-10 yrs			
11-16 yrs			
17-18 yrs			

8) What is /was the occupation of the perpetrator of your domestic abuse?

9) What is /was the relationship of the perpetrator to you? E.g. spouse, partner (including same sex partner), other family member-please specify. If you wish to add more information about this please do so.

9.1) If you answered yes to Question 5, was/is the perpetrator also your carer?

yes  no

9.2) What kind/s of domestic abuse have you experienced in this relationship? Please circle all that apply

emotional    psychological    sexual    financial    isolation    physical

forced marriage other-please specify

10) Are you still in the abusive relationship? Yes  No

10.1) If no, has the abuse continued after separation? Yes  No

10.2) If yes, has the type of abuse changed and how?

## **Section two**

11) Did anyone ask you whether you were experiencing domestic abuse? If so who and how helpful were they? Please indicate in the table below and give a score between 1 and 5 where 1 = very unhelpful and 5 = extremely helpful. There is space for any additional services

	In Devon (excl. Plymouth and Torbay)	Outside Devon (incl. Plymouth and Torbay)	Score
GP			
Health visitor			
Midwife			
Police			
Social services			
Women's Aid			
Housing			
Employer			
Teacher			

Any comments

**12)** Have you had contact with any of the following services in Devon, during the last two years due to domestic violence /abuse? If so please score how satisfied you were with your **OVERALL** experience of these services where 1= very unhelpful and 5 = extremely helpful

<b>Services</b>	<b>Score 1-5</b>	<b>Comments</b>
G.P.		
Health Visitor		
Midwife		
Police		
Police domestic violence officer		
<b>Women's Aid</b>		
• Refuge/safe house		
• Outreach		
• Pattern Changing		
• Children's worker		
• Safe Project		
IDVA		
MARAC		
Social Services		
Housing		
Solicitor		
Family Court		
CAFCASS		
Court for criminal proceedings		
Crown Prosecution Service		
Victim Support		
Mental Health Services (for you or perpetrator)		

Accident and Emergency Dept		
		Continued on next page
Education		
Other-please specify		

Any other comments

**13)** Has there been a risk assessment done for your case?

Yes  No  Don't know

**13.1)** If yes, which agency did the assessment? Police  other agency   
Please specify

**13.2)** Was your risk assessed as low  standard  high  very high  ?

**13.3)** Was your case referred to MARAC? (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference)?

Yes  No  Don't know

**13.4)** If yes, was this process explained to you and by whom?

**14)** Have you been supported by and IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor)?

Yes  No  Don't know

**15)** Have charges been brought against the perpetrator of your domestic abuse?

Yes                      No                      If no please go on to question 18

**15.1)** Was this by you or the police?

**15.2)** Did you feel supported throughout the case? If so by whom?

If not, what would have helped you?

**16)** If you have had to attend court as a witness due to your domestic abuse, were you able to have special measures put in place?

Please tick all that apply

Pre court visit	
Transport to court	
Separate waiting rooms	
Screens	
Support on the day from ;	
Independent Domestic Violence Advisor	
Police domestic violence officer	
Witness Service	
Support worker	
Other please specify	

**16.1)** Did you feel these were adequate and helpful?    Yes     No   
Any comments

**17)** Was the perpetrator of the abuse convicted /found guilty?    Yes     No

If you do not have children under 18 years of age please go on to question **21**

**18)** Have you ever been *offered* any support /help for your children *without* having asked for it?  
Yes                       No

**18.1)** If yes, by whom and what happened?



**19)** Have you ever *asked* for any support /help for your children?

Yes  No

**19.1)** If yes, who did you ask and what happened?

**20)** Have there been any particular difficulties for your children at school /college? If yes, please specify

**21)** Did you have to leave your family home as a result of the domestic abuse?

Yes  No  If no please go on to question **23**

**21.1)** Where did you go?

**21.2)** Were you able to return home eventually? Yes  No

**21.3)** If you returned home did you return to the perpetrator or had s/he moved out?

**22)** What worries you about rebuilding your life?

Please tick all that apply, there is space to add more concerns.

If you are still in the abusive relationship please use this column		If you have left the abusive relationship please use this column
	Violence continuing after separation	
	Financial hardship	
	Housing issues	
	Pressure to return	
	Legal problems	
	Making your own decisions	
	Concerns about the children	
	Lack of confidence	
	Rejection by community	
	Religious convictions	

Any comments

**23)** What do you feel has helped you most in dealing with your situation?

**24)** Is there anything else you would like to say?

Please use this sheet for any additional comments about your experiences.

## Appendix 2

## More quotes from respondents

### Police

*'left me in tears like I had been the one committing the crime' ( call had been made because her ex husband and his family were outside her home in breach of a non-molestation order)*

*'local police officer told me the abuse was history, my ex is ok now'*

*'police won't help because my ex is saying it is a custody issue, not domestic violence'*

*'they never took any action'*

*'No one helped until I was pushed so far that I slapped him (the perpetrator), and he reported me to the police who were at first very heavy handed. I then was referred to a domestic violence officer and Women's Aid. I was actually cautioned, even though I had suffered years of mental abuse. The police fell into his controlling trap'*

### Criminal Justice System

*'CPS absolutely useless, unsupportive'*

*'I dropped the case due to insufficient evidence-re sexual abuse'*

### Moving on issues

*'I just wish I was strong enough to give evidence for a finding of fact so he was made to face his responsibilities or even pay for his crimes. He's done so much damage'*

*'I have used my life, I brought up a child the way HE wanted very controlled and only just become aware of it- too late now-daughter a young adult. I feel he's won...'*

*'when I am home I am constantly checking the front window to see that he has no arrived'*

*'Living in fear for years. NO protection from the police, NO follow up to evidence found...'*

*'I have had to move 12 times'*

*'We will have to move house. He (the perpetrator) has been awarded a share. I am sure he will try to cause more problems'*

### Women's Aid

*'Amazing, I felt supported and still do'*

*'Women's Aid is a fantastic organisation'*

### Pattern Changing

*'fantastic course'*

*'excellent information. Helps with understanding and getting back to reality'*

*'I left my (abusive) partner through pattern changing'*

*'Pattern Changing course has been brilliant'*

