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Post legislative inquiry into the Violence against Women,  
Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Ymateb gan: Cymorth I Ferched Cymru

Response from: Welsh Women's Aid

# Saving Services to Save Lives

*Report on the State of the  
Specialist Domestic Abuse Sector in Wales, 2016*



**Cymorth i Ferched Cymru**  
**Welsh Women's Aid**  
Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf  
Putting Women & Children First

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# Introduction

Secure, long-term funding is essential if specialist domestic abuse services across Wales are to be sustainable and can deliver needs-led support and grow to meet demand. These specialist services offer a vital lifeline to survivors in Wales (women, children and men affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence), they operate as centres of excellence in local communities, and contribute to the prevention of violence and abuse in every area of Wales.

This report documents the findings from a survey with Welsh Women's Aid member organisations about the state of their funding and current risks and challenges they face.

Over the years many of these services have been asked to provide more for less or risk losing contracts to generic service providers, which provide cheaper services but without the expertise of the specialist sector. In many cases, specialist services have already suffered direct cuts to grants or have experienced years of standstill funding which does not cover the full cost of service delivery to meet the needs of survivors of abuse.

These specialist services are now at risk of losing further funding, indeed many tell us they are at risk of closure, at a time when the demand for their services is increasing. The lack of adequate long-term funding from commissioners, accompanied by the risk of refuge rents being subject to a housing benefit cap to local housing allowance levels, combine to present serious concerns for the future sustainability of specialist services across Wales.

# Summary of findings and recommendations

Welsh Women's Aid's state of the sector survey is informed by the experience of 23 specialist services (which constitute our membership) and our own direct services. We found that:

- **46% (11) services received cuts to their funding in 2016/17.** The lack of adequate funding for specialist children and young people's domestic abuse support services was cited as a particular concern for many organisations.
- This year's funding cuts come on top of previous cuts: **58% (14) services had their funding cut in 2015/16.** Of these, 50% (7) went on to receive cuts again this year (2016/17).
- **79% (19) services said that a cap to housing benefit levels would have significant consequences for their services, including reduced service levels and reduced staffing; of these, 69% refugees said they would have to close** if the cap was introduced.
- **Overall, only 33% (8) services were confident that their funding at current service levels would continue from April 2017.** Of the remaining services, six have less than 35% of their total income secured.
- **92% (22) services said that funding and service continuation was the main challenge facing their organisation this year.**

This is against a backdrop of high demand for these services. In 2015/16 in Wales:

- **11,512 women, men, children and young people were provided with refuge and community based advocacy and support** by Welsh Women's Aid member services.
- **388 survivors of domestic abuse in Wales could not be accommodated by refuges in Wales** because there was no space available in the service contacted when they needed help.
- **There were 28,392 calls to the Live Fear Free Helpline in Wales, and 14,612 survivors were supported by the service.**

Following the introduction of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, public services will be required to train all professionals who work with the public to have a better understanding of violence and abuse, and to 'Ask and Act' – that is, to proactively identify and respond to anyone experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence, which includes making referrals for help and support to specialist services.

It is critically important that specialist services that support survivors of violence and abuse have the capacity and resources to respond to any increase in demand for support, to ensure the services being offered are safe.

## Recommendations

### ***UK Government commits to:***

- Exempt refugees from the housing benefit cap for supported housing and collaborate with Welsh Government, Welsh Women's Aid and specialist services, to deliver an effective and sustainable funding model for the national network of refugees.

### ***Welsh Government commits to:***

- National and local recognition of the role and value of specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence services that provide a unique model of provision, delivering prevention, protection and support and added value to local communities.
- Establishing a long-term sustainable funding model in order to secure the national network of lifesaving and preventative violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services so that they can meet demand.
- Central funding for second-tier organisations which supports specialist services around sustainability and skills development, quality assurance frameworks, impact, consistency and providing local services with a voice nationally.
- Cross-departmental investment into prevention, protection and provision of support in response to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- Statutory guidance that delivers collaborative commissioning and pooled resources by local government, health and the justice system, to ensure delivery of specialist services in every area, so that survivors do not face a post-code lottery when seeking help and support.

### ***Local authorities, health and police and crime commissioners commit to:***

- Collaboratively funding high-quality, independent, specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence services to meet the needs of survivors, families and communities in every area of Wales, as part of a national network of provision.

# Background information

## About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women<sup>1</sup> and ensure high-quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender-responsive and holistic.

Established in 1978, we are an umbrella organisation that supports a national federation of 23 local independent charities delivering specialist domestic abuse and violence against women prevention services in Wales, as part of a UK network of provision. These specialist services constitute our core membership and they provide lifesaving refuges, outreach, and community advocacy and support to survivors of violence and abuse - women, men, children, families - and deliver innovative preventative work in local communities. We also deliver direct services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline; a National Training Service; refuge and advocacy services in Colwyn Bay and Wrexham; and the national Children Matter project which supports local services to help children and young people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative STAR group work in every local authority in Wales.

We have been at the forefront of shaping coordinated community responses and practice in Wales, by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families and communities. As a national federation, our policy work, consultancy, training and advocacy is all grounded in the experience of local specialist services and service users. Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.

## About our member organisations: independent specialist services in Wales

Welsh Women's Aid membership of specialist services across Wales is diverse, but all identify their core business as being to provide **independent, specialist services that offer dedicated support for women and children survivors of domestic abuse and/or other forms of violence against women**, working in partnership with other specialist services for survivors in order to foster collaboration, solidarity and leadership in the sector.

Dedicated specialist support may include a diverse range of provision including refuge-based support, advice and outreach, women-only spaces, health, legal or therapeutic services, and women's empowerment groups.

Specialist services across Wales have been providing life-saving support for thousands of families affected by domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women for decades. They were often started by women who fled abuse themselves and staff have expert knowledge on the complex and often multifaceted issues that face survivors of abuse. Several research studies shows that survivors highly value the independence of specialist services from statutory provision like local authorities, health and the criminal justice system.

These services developed around refuge provision that offers emergency accommodation and a package of needs-led support for women and children escaping domestic abuse. Many of these services also deliver

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<sup>1</sup> Domestic abuse is the exercise of control by one person, over another, within an intimate or close family relationship; the abuse can be sexual, physical, financial, emotional or psychological. Violence against women is violence directed at women because they are women or that affects women disproportionately, and includes domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation including through trafficking and the sex-industry, so-called 'honour-based violence' and sexual harassment.

community-based outreach and floating support services for survivors of abuse and undertake early help and prevention work in local communities. Support may include helping survivors cope with the impacts of abuse, addressing ongoing safety concerns, providing safety and support with housing, health and legal matters, and helping them recover from the effects of coercive controlling behaviour and to achieve independence.

This national network of specialist services aim to meet survivors' needs irrespective of levels of assessed risk. They provide a package of needs-led support for survivors and their families escaping domestic abuse that build on and nurture the internal and external resources available to survivors, reducing their longer-term need to draw on public resources.

## Violence against women in Wales

Wales was noted as a leader in violence against women prevention in 2014 when the UN Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women visited Cardiff.<sup>2</sup> However, despite progress that has been made, research studies continue to find alarming and persistently high levels of violence against women and girls in Wales and the UK.

Violence against women is a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men, and a violation of human rights. This includes (but is not limited to) domestic abuse, rape and sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation (FGM), so called 'honour' based violence and forced marriage, stalking and harassment.

Whilst women and girls suffer disproportionately from these crime types, men and boys can also be victims.<sup>3</sup>

### Research bears this out:

- 1.4 million women and 700,000 men aged 16-59 report experiencing incidents of domestic abuse in the past year, in England and Wales.<sup>4</sup>
- At least 127 UK women are known or suspected to have been killed by men in 2015. 127 women dead in 365 days is one woman dead every 2.9 days.<sup>5</sup>
- 137,000 girls and women are living with consequences of FGM in the UK<sup>6</sup> and 60,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of FGM in the UK.<sup>7</sup> It is estimated that there are 140 victims of FGM per year in Wales.
- 82% of cases dealt with by the Forced Marriage Unit involved female victims; 18% involved male victims. It is estimated there are up to 100 victims of forced marriage a year in Wales.<sup>8</sup>
- In a study of young people in intimate relationships by the NSPCC, 25% of the girls and 18% of the boys experienced physical abuse; 75% of the girls and 14% of the boys experienced emotional abuse, and 33% of the girls and 16% of the boys experienced sexual abuse. It found that not only do girls experience more abuse, but they also experience more severe abuse more frequently, and suffer more negative impacts on their welfare, compared with boys.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Special Rapporteur on violence against women finalizes country mission to the United Kingdom and calls for urgent action to address the accountability deficit and also the adverse impacts of changes in funding and services' (April 2014):

[http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/images/Final\\_press\\_statment\\_UK\\_15\\_Apr\\_VAW.pdf](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/images/Final_press_statment_UK_15_Apr_VAW.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Violence against Women and Girls Crime Report (2013-2014) [https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps\\_vawg\\_report\\_2014.pdf](https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps_vawg_report_2014.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (2015), citing the Homicide index from the Home Office.

<sup>5</sup> <http://kareningalasmith.com/counting-dead-women/2015-2/>

<sup>6</sup> Genital Mutilation in England and Wales: Updated statistical estimates of the numbers of affected women living in England and Wales and girls at risk - Interim report on provisional estimates.

<sup>7</sup> [www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fgm/](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fgm/)

<sup>8</sup> Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office – Forced Marriage Units stats Jan-Dec 2013.

<sup>9</sup> NSPCC - Radford, L. et al (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today.



## Alleviating the cost of violence against women and promoting the well-being of future generations in Wales

Violence against women costs Wales millions of pounds per year, and has a significant impact on the well-being of families, communities and future generations. Each domestic abuse homicide is estimated to cost public services in the region of £1.1 million.

Investing in specialist services across Wales would help ensure many of the 'Wellbeing Goals' set out in The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which aim to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

### • A more prosperous Wales.

Domestic violence costs Wales £303.5m annually: £202.6m in service costs and £100.9m to lost economic output.<sup>10</sup> These figures do not include any element of human and emotional costs, which the research estimates costs Wales an additional £522.9m. In addition, those who experience violence will be adversely affected in both education and work. Each year, one in ten victims of partner abuse takes time off work as a result of the abuse. By incorporating approaches to prevent violence against women, Wales will be more prosperous both with regard to public spending, and also in terms of personal ability to earn, learn and succeed.

### • A Wales of cohesive communities.

Violence against women and cohesive communities are interlinked. Tackling violence against women will lead to safer communities. In addition, violence against women can result in the further social exclusion of already marginalised groups, for example Black and minority communities, refugees, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) communities. Tackling violence against women will challenge social stigma, which will promote inclusiveness and better community ties.

### • A healthier, more equal Wales.

This includes a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances. Inequality between women and men is a cause and consequence of violence against women.<sup>11</sup> As such, tackling violence against women, through funding specialist services that help prevent abuse, will lead to greater equality between men and women in Wales. The Act also sets out the goal for a healthy Wales; a society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood. The World Health Organisation has stated that violence against women is a 'global health problem of epidemic proportions'.<sup>12</sup> By funding services that prevent violence against women, Wales will see a positive increase to the nations' physical and mental health, reduction in problematic substance use, as well as improved resilience and recovery from trauma associated with violence against women and adverse childhood experiences.

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<sup>10</sup> Walby, S., The Cost of Domestic Violence: Update 2009

<sup>11</sup> UN Women: virtual knowledge centre to end violence against women and girls:  
<http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/300-causes-protective-and-risk-factors-.html>

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organisation Media Centre:  
[http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/violence\\_against\\_women\\_20130620/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/violence_against_women_20130620/en/)

# Funding specialist services in Wales

Specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence services across Wales, like most charities, get their funding from various sources. This can range from Westminster and Welsh Government grants and contracts, local authority grants and contracts, Supporting People and other partnership funding, Police and Crime Commissioners, as well as individual donations, funds from charitable trusts and foundations, and other sources.

In Wales, refuge-based services for survivors of domestic abuse rely heavily on local Supporting People grants to meet support and advocacy costs. They also rely on rental income charged to residents to recover housing management and individual service charge costs (rent which is often payable to individuals through housing benefit). As such, refuge-based services in particular risk an uncertain future because they are reliant on local commissioning decisions and survivors' eligibility for welfare benefits/public funds to meet the core costs of their service delivery. These funding sources do not always include support for children and young people and often do not meet the full costs of providing timely, needs-led support.

Should any further cuts be made to **Supporting People** budgets in a locality then the capacity to meet needs locally, but also of the refuge network nationally, will be impacted. Similarly, should the UK Government's proposals to cap housing benefit at local housing allowance levels proceed without an exemption for refuges, many refuges will likely be financially unviable and be forced to close.

## Understanding what specialist services deliver

Given the intersecting ways in which violence against women has a negative impact on many areas of life, due regard needs to be given to how we understand and value the provision of specialist domestic abuse and violence against women services.

Specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence support services for survivors (delivered through 'floating support' or community outreach services, rape crisis, counselling, advocacy or 'one stop shop' women's centres) are needs-led, strengths-based, gender responsive, trauma informed services established to protect, support and empower survivors and their children and to prevent violence and abuse from starting and escalating.

These services are provided by specialised staff with in-depth knowledge of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

### The types of support services delivered by specialist services include:

- **Provision of a refuge service** which offers physical and emotional safety and a place of recovery through accommodation-based support for survivors. Refuge services form part of a national and UK network of provision that enables families to have 24-hour access to refuges and move between refuges if needed. The service is designed to meet, and is led by, the needs of survivors and their children, and is delivered by support workers (including dedicated support workers for children and young people) trained and experienced in violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, in an environment which empowers women and children and promotes their autonomy and self-determination. Residents receive a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support, above and beyond a safe place to stay, and access to peer support from other residents. This includes 24-hour access, information and practical help, individual and group support, safety planning, counselling, support and advocacy with housing, finances including benefits/debt, health and well-being, parenting, immigration, legal, criminal and family justice systems, education and employment.

Resettlement support helps survivors move on from the refuge to rebuild their lives and establish themselves in local communities.

- **Provision of advocacy, protection and support for survivors in local communities** through helpline support and information; short and long-term psychological counselling; information and practical help, individual and group support, and safety planning; peer support groups; support and advocacy with housing and sustaining tenancies, finances including benefits/debt, health and well-being, parenting, immigration, legal issues, education and employment; advocacy and support for survivors accessing specialist domestic violence courts, criminal and family justice systems; advocacy and education to support survivors using primary care, maternity and urgent treatment health services (e.g. IRIS in GP practices); and advocacy, support and counselling for survivors accessing Sexual Assault Referral Centres.

- **Provision of behaviour change and risk management programmes and individual interventions for perpetrators**, which includes domestic violence perpetrator programmes and parallel women's safety and support services.

- **Partnership working** including institutional advocacy, training, provision of expert advice and upskilling professionals, services and partnerships to better identify, respond to, and prevent violence and abuse, and providing referral pathways from public services for survivors to access specialist support.

- **Prevention work in local communities** through community engagement and supporting champions or ambassadors to speak out against violence; education of children, young people and adults; supporting survivors to engage in service improvement; delivering empowerment programmes and challenging inequality between men and women and intersectional discrimination<sup>13</sup> which is the predominant cause and consequence of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

- **Promotion of equality and human rights**, which includes developing and delivering services that are led by and for women and led by and for Black and minority ethnic (BME) women. Safe separate provision for men and women, women-only and BME-only services enable specialist services to operate from a framework of empowerment and self-determination. Services not only provide physical, psychological and emotional safety and support, but also empower women who see and hear that their experiences of sexism, racism or homophobia are not isolated, and help women find mutual support and self-determination. The provision of tailored support to survivors from BME communities and to survivors who are women, by support workers who understand the particular risks and dynamics of violence experienced by women and experienced in different communities, and the barriers to approaching mainstream services, is highly valued by survivors.

Specialist services operate within a framework of accredited quality service standards (National Quality Service Standards in Wales) which provide benchmarks for service providers, funders and commissioners about the extent and mix of services that should be available, who should provide them, and the principles and practice base from which they should operate.

Specialist services are distinguished from general services that provide support, because the latter are not designed exclusively for survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and therefore may not address adequately or thoroughly survivors' needs and trauma. General services cater to a range of needs regardless of gender, age or support needs – for example all victims of crime, people with mental health problems or homeless people. While survivors access general services, their specific needs are not systematically addressed or supported. General services include homeless shelters, family shelters, mother and child homes,

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<sup>13</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/files/intersectionality.pdf>

general advice centres and helplines. They do not address the discriminatory nature of violence against women or provide women with the gender-specific or BME-specific environment they need.

## The value of specialist services

The sustainability of specialist services in Wales is vital for a wide range of Government legislative and policy duties, especially as evidence shows that most women do not report abuse to the police or disclose to public services. We also know, from the nature of coercive control and other forms of abuse, that women are less likely to demand support or to disclose and seek help, compared with other groups who make demands on public services.

The case for specialist services in Wales is evident:

- Any **education and community preventative work** must make sure that the capacity is maximised within specialist services, to support adult and child survivors referred to services for help and support.
- The **'ask and act'** policy framework requires referral pathways to specialist services which need to have the capacity to meet survivors' needs.
- There is evidence that co-location of support workers employed by independent specialist services, to enable **early identification in health and social care settings**, improves disclosure of and engagement with support by survivors who have additional barriers in accessing support.
- Reducing the impact of **adverse childhood experiences** associated with the coexistence of e.g. domestic abuse, mental ill-health, substance abuse and offending, is a policy priority in Wales. Research highlights the importance of targeted direct support for children and young people, which should entail a combination of individual and groupwork, play therapy, recreational and educational activities, support during legal or other proceedings, and age-appropriate advocacy.
- There is compelling evidence that early access to independent advocacy and support can decrease violence and increase quality of life for survivors. Women who are at **high risk of harm** need safe accommodation because the law is not capable of providing complete protection against violence. Some women cannot or do not wish to remain in their home, for example, because they have no legal right to remain, because of its association with trauma or its proximity to abusers. European research shows refuges continue to be necessary even when effective legislative protection against violence exists.<sup>14</sup>

***"A conservative estimate of the value generated by one year of delivering one refuge service providing a combination of refuge, outreach and advocacy services: the social value was in the region of £33m to the state. The overall social return on investment identified that a refuge service model is economically efficient at creating positive outcomes, and that for every £1 spent, an average of £3.54 social value was created through a combination of safety, health and criminal justice outcomes."***

***New Economics Foundation, 2013***

<sup>14</sup> WAVE (2014) Country report into specialised support services' WAVE

- The more holistic, needs-led support that is available through specialist services, the better women recover and achieve independence and freedom from abuse. An overview of several evaluations provides evidence that specialist services improve women's **access to community resources** and engagement in public life, through reduced rates of domestic abuse, improved safety, decreased depression, reduced stress, improved parenting and well-being of children.<sup>15</sup>

- Delivery of **work with perpetrators** requires sufficient capacity in specialist services to provide associated partner support services. The case for commissioning and delivering community-based perpetrator programmes has been set out by the largest UK research into programme effectiveness<sup>16</sup> and specialist services in Wales are developing accredited perpetrator interventions as part of their holistic response in local communities.

The consequences of failing to provide essential specialist services include:

- resources being wasted by not responding to need;
- continuing reliance on high-cost state interventions accompanied by inequality between women and men and rising levels of homelessness, offending, poverty and disadvantage associated with abuse;
- continued risk of serious or fatal violence for citizens;
- a failure to effectively implement national legislative and policy commitments, and the well-being of future generations being compromised whilst they continue to draw on scarce resources.

Investing in specialist services that deliver needs-led primary, secondary and tertiary prevention in response to violence against women, therefore, is a cost effective approach. Even a small increase in the cost of providing specialist services is outweighed by the decrease in the costs to public services, lost economic output and the decrease in the human and emotional costs.<sup>17</sup>

## National and European context

The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 places increasing responsibility on public authorities to identify and refer survivors to specialist services. It introduces a national framework to encourage more agencies to 'ask and act' and will increase awareness of and demand for specialist support. Accompanying statutory guidance on training and a whole education approach will also encourage local public services, schools and youth services to refer survivors, including children and young people, to specialist services in local communities.

Other positive steps have been taken by the Welsh Government to tackle violence against women and better support those who experience abuse, including the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2015, which ensures better protection for survivors of domestic abuse who are living in rented accommodation, the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Welsh Government has also supported the development of several significant pieces of work, including for example:

- Delivery of Welsh Women's Aid National Quality Service Standards: an accreditation framework for specialist services that aligns with other UK frameworks and evidences the quality of local provision. These are currently

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<sup>15</sup> NICE (2013) Review of Interventions to Identify, Prevent, Reduce and Respond to Domestic Violence prepared by the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/criva/ProjectMirabalexecutivesummary.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Walby, S. (2009) The Cost of Domestic Violence: Update 2009. Lancaster: Lancaster University.

being rolled-out across specialist services from 2016.

- Development of an early intervention and preventative service model to achieve ‘change that lasts’, which will deliver needs-led, strengths based and trauma informed service models that places survivors and specialist services at the centre of a community approach to deliver early intervention and prevention.

The European Directive on Victims’ Rights, came in to effect in the UK from November 2015. It includes obligations for states to ensure the provision of specialist services for victims of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women. Although the UK has now voted to leave the European Union, states remain legally bound by parts of this EU Directive that has been written into UK legislation and guidance, such as the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime.

The Council of Europe’s Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), which the UK has signed, also remains relevant. This convention requires the UK to provide “an adequate geographical distribution [of] immediate, short- and long-term specialist support services to any victim subjected to any of the acts of violence covered by this Convention [including] ... specialist women’s support services to all women victims of violence and their children.”<sup>18</sup>

These initiatives aim to support the development of a network of effective and quality specialist services. However for these to have long term impact there needs to be a sustainable funding commitment to ensure they have the capacity to deliver quality needs-led support to survivors.

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/STANDARDSETTING/EQUALITY/03themes/violence-against-women/Conv\\_VAW\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/STANDARDSETTING/EQUALITY/03themes/violence-against-women/Conv_VAW_en.pdf)



# Key findings:

## The state of specialist domestic abuse sector in Wales

### Funding: 2016-17

#### 46% (11) of services received cuts to their 2016/17 funding

Specialist services across Wales have experienced cuts to their children, housing, counselling and refuge services. These cuts have deeply worrying implications for the sustainability of services that offer a lifeline to women, children and families across Wales.

#### Feedback on the impact of cuts from individual specialist services included:

- Local authority cuts to a services' One Stop Shop means they have to consider reducing their opening hours, which would result in a reduction in service provision.
- One service which has lost 10% of their funding has been forced to reduce their drop-in hours by half and reduce the number of staff running this service. This has meant a significant reduction in service for survivors, increased waiting times and increased pressure on the remaining staff to meet demand.
- One service lost £41,000 for their counselling service for adult survivors of childhood abuse. Half their staff left due to the insecurity caused by the funding risks. As a result of this funding cut they have not been replaced and there has been a loss of expertise and capacity. They are managing this cut by increasing the number of volunteer counsellors but over 70 survivors are now on a waiting list to access this service.
- Another service received a cut to their Housing Strategy Grant, which equated to 5.5% of their total funding; the funding was used to provide outreach support and counselling. The need for these services is increasing so they are currently using the charity's dwindling reserves to deliver the service in the short term. This is not sustainable and they are looking for donations to fill this gap.
- One service noted that they "were given very short notice and there was no needs assessment, notice or alternative arrangements made" for the funding cut they received from their local authority. The service reported that this creates uncertainty, not just for staff but for the survivors who depend on these services and who cannot be certain that services will be there throughout the course of their recovery, to help ensure they achieve independence and a life free from violence.

**It is worth noting that there are still very real concerns around the provision of funding for those services that did not receive any cuts to their funding this year**, highlighted by the 95% of respondents to our survey who said they are trying desperately to diversify their funding, at times with very little capacity to do so.

One service noted that although they have not received any cut this year, 9% of their total income was cut between 2013-15 and they are now "doing more for less, [with] very limited capacity" because there is an expectation to deliver services as they were under the old tariff scheme. Another service commented that

although they did not receive any funding cuts in 2016/17, they are currently in a tender process for their core services. If they lose this tender it could mean there is no 24 hour crisis advocacy services in the community or refuge delivered by a local specialist service.

***“Worthy of note is the threat of 20% cut [to Supporting People Grant] which means in the very worst scenario the loss of 2 staff and the end of our Specialist Floating Support Service which would have had a dangerous impact on our service users.”***

***Specialist service***

## **Funding for children and young people’s service**

***“[OUR] children and young people funding (Families First and Flying Start) ended (approximately £55,000) resulting in no specialist domestic abuse children and young people’s service in [our area]. This cut constitutes approx. 10% of the organisation’s annual income. Financially, the organisation has mitigated this funding loss by reducing staff members, cutting service provision, attracting grant funding to support core costs...Lack of services has been noted in local MARAC meetings, as the partnership has on several occasions been unable to put services in place for children and young people [at high risk].”***

***Specialist service***

For 45% services which had cuts to their funding, these cuts impacted projects that support children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

- One service, for example, lost £16,480 of Families First funding, which equated to 27.5% of that project.
- Another service noted a 12% cut to their child work project. They noted that any further cuts would force them to withdraw from the delivery of the project.

Funding for children’s work is also a concern for services that did not receive funding cuts. There is significant inconsistency across Wales when it comes to available funding for dedicated domestic abuse support services for children and young people.

- One service noted that although they did not receive any cuts to their 2016-17 funding, they do not receive any funding for supporting the children of adult survivors who use their services.
- Another service commented that although their public sector funding was not cut this year, a number of other charitable trust grant funding had ended and they were unable to reapply because the maximum grant had been awarded. This means they no longer receive £30,000 per year for education and prevention services, which was the only funding they received for directly supporting children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

Research shows that domestic abuse has a long lasting impact on children, including a significant risk of harm to the child’s physical, emotional and social development.<sup>19</sup> Without secure funding, the specialist services that are best placed to understand the impact of domestic abuse on children, and how to effectively and appropriately support children to recover, will be unable to deliver their critically important support.

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<sup>19</sup> UNICEF (2006) Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children. Accessed: <http://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>



## Funding: 2015-16

**58% (14) services had their funding cut in 2015/16. Of these, 50% (7) went on to receive cuts this year (2016/17)**

This means that many services are still trying to recover from years of insecure and unstable funding and some are facing year-on-year funding cuts, resulting in over-stretched and under-resourced services. It has meant reduced salaries, reduced support hours in refuge services, a reduction in capacity across whole organisations and services being unable to take on new staff.

*“In 2014-15 we endured a 5% cut as well as being required to double our support hours for refuge and increase support hours for floating support. This had a double whammy effect and has carried forward [into this year].”*

*Specialist service*

## Housing benefit cap and potential risks

**79% (19) services said that a cap to housing benefit would have significant consequences for their services, including reduced service levels and staffing; 69% refuge services said they would have to close**

This means that many services are still trying to recover from years of insecure and unstable funding and some are facing year-on-year funding cuts, resulting in over-stretched and under-resourced services. It has meant reduced salaries, reduced support hours in refuge services, a reduction in capacity across whole organisations and services being unable to take on new staff.

*“We wouldn't be able to sustain [the] loss and we would be looking at closure unless further funding was given. From April we have made many cost savings as it is, therefore it would be near impossible to cover this. Another alternative would be to downsize considerably and make redundancies. This would have an impact on service delivery in relation to safe working, practicalities, support, training and so on.”*

*Specialist service*

*“This would be a complete disaster. We are barely breaking even across all our refuge sites with higher costs being charged by building owners/housing associations... we would literally have to close refuges.”*

*Specialist service*

A cap to housing benefit would devastate specialist services across Wales. Our survey revealed that housing benefit provides, on average, 91% of weekly housing costs and 55% of total yearly income. If the cap goes ahead, the average refuge faces a shortfall of 67% in their weekly income. Ultimately, a cap would force 69% of them to close their doors.

***“We will not be able to provide services such as bedding, laundry facilities, cleaning, replacing furniture, decorating, and all of those little basic things that make a huge difference. We will not be able to fund a refuge manager and will not have night workers in post to provide additional security.”***

***Specialist service***

For those services that might not close, there would still be drastic and unprecedented changes. No service would be able to continue with their current level of provision. A cap to housing benefit for supported housing like refuges will mean job losses and a reduction in the hours being covered in refuge, at a time when the needs of women entering refuge are becoming more complex and require staff in refuges for longer periods of time, including evenings and weekends.

***“We would probably close – it would be catastrophic for refuge services.”***

***Specialist service***

***“Should these changes take effect we would seriously have to consider if we were still in a position to provide refuge or if it would be unsafe to do so.”***

***Specialist service***

***“Generally speaking, women don’t come into refuge if they have another option so the women coming here have the least support in the community and least family support and there is not much else for them so it’s the most vulnerable women who tend to come into refuge and it would be those women affected.”***

***Specialist service***

#### **Other predicted consequences include:**

- An increase in referrals to already stretched community outreach support and advocacy services because many women would not be able to afford to meet the shortfall in rent. This would stretch community resources and present women with a stark choice of continuing to live with the abuser or face destitution.
- Services being unable to provide overnight or 24-hour support during the week, potentially increasing barriers to accessing refuge support services for women with complex needs.
- Refuges being financially unviable to continue delivering support.

One service commented that a cap would equate to a “total loss to organization of £414,752, equivalent to 19% of turnover or 69% of rental income (based on one bedroom rate). Refuges could become unviable as no funds to maintain building and replace furnishings, loss of staff funding for housing management, health and safety, finance.”

## Funding: 2017-18 onwards

**Overall, only 33% (8) services were confident that their funding would continue from April 2017. Of the remaining services, 6 have less than 35% of their total income secured**

Across Wales, uncertainty remains around the provision of services and only 33% (8) services are confident or very confident that their funding will continue. It is worth noting, however, that two of these services have 0% of their income actually confirmed. Another service, despite being confident that funding will continue, has no funding confirmed from their local authority and stated that they have a lot of questions around their contracts and local plans to renew, extend or tender for services.

Of the remaining services which reported having little or no confidence that current funding will continue, six services have less than 35% of their total income secured for 2017/18. This includes two services that have nothing confirmed, one service that has less than 10% confirmed, and two services that have less than 25% confirmed.

Overall, 25% (6) services stated that they face being recommissioned through competitive tendering, or expressed concerns about this as a possibility. Two services said that funding from local authorities, local health boards and Police and Crime Commissioners was due to end in 2017.

***“In theory we have the protection of the three year contract. But budget cuts are frequently spoken about, as the internal [council] Supporting People team is largely financed from the Supporting People Grant... the Council continues to absorb much of the grant for its own running purposes.”***

***Specialist service***

Long-term funding is essential if services across Wales are to be sustainable and grow to meet demand. Without this, women and children across Wales are at risk of not getting the support they need to achieve independence and live free from violence.

Following the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, it is anticipated that improvements to identifying violence against women by public services will lead to increased demand on specialist services in Wales. It is deeply worrying that this might happen at a time when lifesaving services may be left without funding to protect and support the most vulnerable women and children in Wales.

## The biggest challenge facing specialist services

**92% (22) of services said that funding was the main challenge facing their organisation**

Particular concerns were raised around uncertainty with regards to commissioning and tendering processes. Concerns were also raised around funding for survivors with complex needs, children and young people's

services, and continued funding for domestic abuse mental health workers and specialist counsellors. The capping of housing benefit and staff capacity were also highlighted, especially in light of expected increase in demand for services following implementation of the 'ask and act' policy framework.

When asked what the most challenging issue was facing their organisation, responses included:

***“The ability to plan/ adopt a strategic approach for longer than the existing 1 year commissioning process... uncertainty; significant differences in approach by local authorities; frustration.”***

***“Too little money coming in and too little staff time. We work ridiculous overtime hours and these go unclaimed. We don't receive funding for issues that are pertinent to supporting the safe transit of women from County to County. Taxi fees, public transport costs etc. all come from donated income. [The council] has dramatically increased the Car Parking tolls, which has made courses less attractive to women car drivers who have to travel from rural areas. It has also affected the pockets of staff and as there was no consultation for this change, means that we underestimated travel fees for a stakeholder engagement project.”***

***“The requirement (from Supporting People) for us to provide weekend staff, at the refuge, with no extra funding...”***

It is worrying that services have seen a reduction in staff and capacity at a time when they are also having to negate the impact of funding cuts. For many this is coupled with a loss of expertise due to an inability to retain staff because of funding decisions and uncertainty. This has long-lasting and potentially devastating implications for the sustainability of services and the provision of support for women and children across Wales when they need it the most.

# Conclusion and recommendations

Positive steps have been taken by the Welsh Government to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and to better support those who experience abuse. However, many services have faced year-on-year funding cuts, with perhaps more cuts to follow from 2017 onwards. The commissioning process has, for many, created a climate of uncertainty, only exacerbated by the potential capping of housing benefit which would devastate refuge services across the country.

Last year we know of at least 388 survivors of abuse who could not access refuges in Wales because there was no space when they needed help. We do not want to repeat the mistakes made in England, where local commissioning decisions has resulted in the closure of 17% of specialist domestic abuse refuges since 2010, caused by slashed budgets and competitive tendering processes that have favoured generic providers over specialist services.

It is against this backdrop that we recommend:

## ***UK Government commits to:***

- Exempt refuges from the housing benefit cap for supported housing and collaborate with Welsh Government, Welsh Women's Aid and specialist services, to deliver an effective and sustainable funding model for the national network of refuges.

## ***Welsh Government commits to:***

- National and local recognition of the role and value of specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence services that provide a unique model of provision, delivering prevention, protection and support and added value to local communities.
- Establishing a long-term sustainable funding model in order to secure the national network of lifesaving and preventative violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services so that they can meet demand.
- Central funding for second-tier organisations which support specialist services around sustainability and skills development, quality assurance frameworks, impact, consistency and providing local services with a voice nationally.
- Cross-departmental investment into prevention, protection and provision of support in response to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- Statutory guidance that delivers collaborative commissioning and pooled resources by local government, health and the justice system, to ensure delivery of specialist services in every area, so that survivors do not face a post-code lottery when seeking help and support.

## ***Local authorities, health and police and crime commissioners commit to:***

- Collaboratively funding high-quality, independent, specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence services to meet the needs of survivors, families and communities in every area of Wales, as part of a national network of provision.



**Cymorth i Ferched Cymru**  
**Welsh Women's Aid**

Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf  
Putting Women & Children First

[www.welshwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)

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