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Creating a safe space?

Alan Clarke and Sarah Wydall explore options enabling victims of domestic violence to remain in their own home

Having to flee the family home as a result of domestic violence and move into temporary accommodation can be a distressing and unsettling experience for women and children. Furthermore, victims can feel a sense of injustice at having to move (effectively making themselves homeless) in order to escape the violent and abusive behaviour of a partner. Consequently, any policy measures or initiatives that enable victims to remain in their own homes, while at the same time prioritising their safety, need to be given serious consideration. In 2003, the 'Sanctuary' model, which is an example of such a scheme, was introduced in England (Netto et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2010).

More recently, the *Crime and Security Act 2010* made provision for Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders (DVPNs and DVPOs), which are similar to what are termed removal orders or 'go' orders in some European jurisdictions. These allow for perpetrators to be removed from a household and prevented from returning for a period of up to 28 days. In a study of the piloting of this new civil justice remedy, the majority of victim-survivors interviewed reported that they felt much safer as a result of the introduction of these measures (Kelly et al., 2013).

While DVPNs and DVPOs clearly have a role to play in protecting victim-survivors of domestic violence, they offer only a short-term solution. Victims of domestic violence need safe and secure accommodation, not only in the immediate aftermath of a violent incident, but also to help facilitate recovery in the longer term. The recovery process can be made more challenging when women and

children are forced to seek alternative accommodation in a new area, which may be some distance from relatives and friends who form part of an existing, informal social support network. In addition, the situation can be exacerbated when children are required to move schools.

Consequently, enabling victims to remain in the family home not only has the potential to facilitate recovery but also allows for expanded 'space for action' (Stark, 2007), and promotes a sense of justice in so far as it is the wrongdoer, and not the victim, who leaves the family home.

Making Safe

The Making Safe Scheme, which operates in North Yorkshire, is a multi-agency initiative designed to provide a coordinated response to domestic violence. A unique feature of this innovative approach is that it enables some victims to stay in their own homes by finding alternative accommodation for perpetrators. Re-housing can be for a period of up to two years. During this time, adult victims and children receive advocacy and counselling support via the Domestic Abuse Services, while male perpetrators are assigned a key worker and may undergo the Building Better Relationships programme designed to reduce reoffending. In 2008, Making Safe received the Butler Trust Public Protection Award for its innovative work with victims and those sanctioned by the criminal justice system.

The emphasis placed on the home is particularly important. As

Malos and Hague (1997) maintain, given that the home occupies such a central place in women's lives, its loss is a major contributing factor to the level of trauma experienced by women when they leave violent households. In a general sense, the home has been described as a potential source of ontological security: a place '(w)here people feel in control of their environment, free from surveillance, free to be themselves and at ease, in the deepest psychological sense, in a world that might at times be experienced as threatening and uncontrollable' (Saunders, 1990). The reverse is true where domestic violence occurs.

The coercive and controlling

The presence of security-enhanced measures can produce a sense of being imprisoned in one's own home

behaviour characteristic of perpetrators means victims not only feel under constant surveillance in their own homes but are also subjected to 'actual or

threatened physical, emotional, psychological, sexual or financial abuse' (Welsh Women's Aid, 2014). In circumstances such as these, the home is anything but a secure haven for nurturing a self-identity and promoting the wellbeing of family members.

Preventing homelessness

Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness (Netto et al., 2009) and DVPNs and DVPOs, Sanctuary Schemes and the Making Safe Scheme are all initiatives which, in different ways, help prevent homelessness. Domestic Violence Protection Notices can be authorised by a police superintendent where the police are unable to place any enforceable restrictions on the perpetrator, but feel there are reasonable grounds to believe the victim-survivor is still at risk. These notices are active for 48 hours and give the police time to apply to a Magistrates' Court for a DVPO. The order can require a perpetrator to leave the family home for a period of between 14 and 28 days. Removing

the perpetrator from the household for a short period of time means the victim-survivor and her children are not made homeless by having to flee the home following a violent assault.

Sanctuary measures

Sanctuary Schemes involve installing enhanced security measures to provide a safer and more secure physical environment for women and their children who are at risk of domestic violence. This can include creating 'sanctuary rooms', where a specially reinforced door is fixed to one room in the house (usually the bedroom). While research suggests sanctuary measures have their benefits, the onus is placed on victims to protect themselves (Netto et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2010). Furthermore, the presence of security-enhanced measures, such as reinforced internal doors, can produce a sense of being imprisoned in one's own home.

Our study of the Making Safe Scheme shows how, in addition to preventing homelessness, removing the wrongdoer can empower victim-survivors by both increasing their capacity for independent decision-making and creating opportunities to engage in recovery work (Clarke and Wydall, 2013). Where victims feel either isolated or distanced from social support networks due to enforced homelessness, this can have an adverse effect on the healing process. Thus, Making Safe may, for a proportion of victims, offer them the choice of remaining in the family home, which constitutes a significant step in helping them to regain control of their lives.

Gaining autonomy

Providing alternative accommodation for perpetrators and assigning them a key worker is an important feature of the scheme that produces a number of benefits. As far as victim-survivors are concerned, knowing that the perpetrator has been re-housed, and therefore less likely to visit the family home, means that victims experience a greater sense of autonomy and

feel better placed to seek help from formal support services. Furthermore, for those victims who are undecided as to the future of the relationship, the period of support offered by Making Safe provides time and space for them to make informed choices. In some circumstances this can be an empowering experience, in so far as it has the potential to produce a change in the balance of power between victim and perpetrator.

This is illustrated in the following comment from a female service user:

...having to stand on his own two feet for once made him think about his behaviour...grow up in a sense, learn a bit of self-control. He began to turn himself around ... and he really wanted us [the relationship] to work, but now I was saying 'Well...if you deal with the drink, we may try again'. Putting him in there [re-housing] gave me more control...he had to behave if he wanted his family back. I felt so much more able to say things I hadn't dared to before.

From the perpetrators' perspective, having stable accommodation and a key worker helps with encouraging motivation to change and gaining access to, and engaging with, specialist domestic violence intervention programmes and substance misuse services. As one perpetrator reflected:

People always said 'You're no good'. I felt 'What is the point'. [The key worker] says 'It is never too late to change' and I feel he is right now. So it's given me the space, and everyone says there is a difference [in me], for the better you know.

Tackling domestic violence requires a coordinated community response that incorporates preventive measures and legal sanctions. Although the options discussed above have an important contribution to make, there is still a

need for the provision of refuges as places of safety.

Remaining in the family home is not a safe or realistic option for some of the most vulnerable women and their children. In just over one half of female homicides the victims are killed (in many cases in their own homes) by a current or former partner. Where women are at extreme risk of serious violence or murder, refuges have a vital role to play. Whatever choices are available to victim-survivors, prime consideration needs to be given to their personal safety. ■

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