

Domestic abuse doesn't stop for Christmas

For many, spending quality time with family and friends is a key part of the Christmas season. But for some this is not something to look forward to as it means spending more time with those who make their lives miserable.

Domestic abuse can be experienced by anyone. It can occur between family members or those who have been intimate partners. It can happen to any generation and between generations, and can take many forms. In December, incidents of domestic abuse increase, though victims often wait until after the holidays to seek help.

Domestic abuse affects certain groups disproportionately. More women report abuse¹ than men, and this is more likely to be high risk or severe². People with disabilities are more than twice as likely to experience domestic abuse than those with no long-standing illness or disability³. They are also more likely to report abuse from multiple perpetrators: one in five (19%) compared with one in twenty (6%)⁴.

During Christmas, the consumption of alcohol can increase the severity and frequency of instances of domestic abuse. It is not the cause of domestic abuse, but can exacerbate the likelihood of a perpetrator committing an offence, as they may become more aggressive or violent.

Domestic abuse can affect the mental health of not only the intended victims but also of those who witness it, including children. Studies indicate that 1 in 3 adult mental health conditions relate directly to adverse childhood experiences⁵. It can be a cycle of abuse - social workers and IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors) in Sutton report that many of the victims and perpetrators they encounter come from homes where domestic abuse was present. Several studies confirm this correlation⁶, though it is not always inevitable.

Domestic abuse is not always obvious but there are signs to be aware of and look out for including:

- a partner (or carer / adult child / other) always accompanying someone, seeming overly protective, or not letting them speak with professionals alone
- missed appointments
- Changes in mood / behaviour
- Financial difficulties
- Visible physical injuries, or wearing excessive clothing which might be hiding these
- A noticeable lack of contact with friends or family

This list isn't exhaustive. People may try to hide what is happening to them, or may be in denial that they are experiencing abuse.

If you become aware of domestic abuse, for information and advice, including referral contacts, see www.notaloneinsutton.org.uk. Help stop the cycle of violence.

¹ According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, in the year ending March 2017 an estimated 1.9 million adults aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year (1.2 million women, 713,000 men)

² SafeLives (2015), Insights Idva National Dataset 2013-14. Bristol: SafeLives. SafeLives (2014), Marac national dataset 2014. Bristol: SafeLives

³ In the year to March 2015 the Crime Survey for England and Wales reported that women and men with a long standing illness or disability were more than twice as likely to experience some form of domestic abuse than women and men with no long standing illness or disability.

⁴ Safelives Spotlight Report Disabled Survivors Too: Disabled people and domestic abuse
<http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Disabled%20Survivors%20Too%20CORRECTED.pdf>

⁵ Kessler RC, McLaughlin KA, Green JG, Gruber MJ, Sampson NA, Zaslavsky AM et al (2010) Childhood adversities and adult psychopathology in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys. Br J Psychiatry 197(5):378–385

⁶ World Health Organization, 'World Report on Violence and Health', ed. By Krug, Etienne G., et al., Geneva, 2002; James, M., 'Domestic Violence as a Form of Child Abuse: Identification and Prevention', Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, 1994; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Calverton, MD, ORC Macro, 'Reproductive, Maternal and Child Health in Eastern Europe and Eurasia: A Comparative Report', Atlanta, GA 2003; Indermaur, David, 'Young Australians and Domestic Violence', Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, No. 195, Canberra, 2001. Quoted in this Unicef report: <https://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>