

Respect position statement: Categories of clients using or experiencing intimate partner violence April 2009

1. Purposes of this position statement

1. To provide a clear statement of Respect's position, based on available research and practice experience, of the different categories of adults who have or are using violence and/or abusive behaviour or other force in their intimate relationships;
2. To provide a clear statement of the different ways in which clients may present or be referred to domestic violence services;
3. To provide the basis for developing a position statement on evidence based practice with adults using or experiencing intimate partner violence;
4. To provide a framework for assessing and responding appropriately to clients who are using intimate partner violence, in order to guide our practice and research.

2. Scope of the position statement

The position statement is to aid assessment and identification of clients who are using or experiencing intimate partner violence only, not other forms of domestic violence or abuse as defined by the government definition (see next section for a glossary of terms). This latter definition includes violence from any adult family member as well as from partners and ex-partners. The research and practice information is less well developed for guiding assessments of violence and abusive behaviour and other forms of force from family members other than partners and ex-partners. When such research and practice evidence becomes available Respect will update or add to this position statement or create a new one to cover these relationships.

3. Glossary of terms

Abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, financial, verbal or other forms of behaviour which are part of a pattern of controlling behaviour, causing fear, injury or control in the person experiencing them and carried out habitually through assumptions of entitlement by the person using them.

Coercive control: patterns of behaviour from one partner in an intimate relationship against the other which have the effect of controlling the behaviour, decisions, feelings and other aspects of the life of the person against whom it is used. This may be without any current or overt threat of physical violence, yet create a context in which one person is almost constantly fearful of the actions and reactions of their partner and therefore modifying their behaviour according to the other partner's wishes, often without being explicitly told to do so, as a result of the fear they live with.

Domestic violence: is the government definition of domestic violence, which includes physical, sexual, emotional, financial and other forms of abuse by an adult against a partner or ex-partner or other family member.



Force: includes physical and non physical forms of violence, whether they are used as forms of control by an abuser/perpetrator or as forms of self defence or resistance by a victim/survivor. This is a useful distinction in particular when used to describe behaviour used by a victim in the context of being under coercive control and fearful, when the same behaviour used by the perpetrator would be called abuse, as it would be used to control the partner and would create fear.

Intimate partner violence: is the use of violence, threats, coercion, emotional abuse and other forms of behaviour by one partner to control their intimate partner or ex-partner, creating a pattern of coercive control and fear in the person against whom it is used. This term is used to indicate only domestic violence in the context of an intimate relationship, not within another family relationship.

Self defence: This has a legal meaning and does not mean all acts of retaliatory violence. Acts of self-defence must be in order to protect life and limb of the self or of another vulnerable person and must be in proportion to the danger presented by the other person.

Violence: physical or sexual behaviour likely to or intended to cause fear, injury or control in the person receiving them or to stop other things from happening, such as other violence.

Violent resistance: The use of violence in resistance to domestic violence and abuse, which may be after many years or incidents of abuse, out of a feeling that there is no other option or in reaction to feelings that there is nothing that will ever stop the person using abuse.

4. Background

In our work as practitioners, researchers and policy makers we have all come across the difficulties which are sometimes present in responding to people who are referred to us as victims or as perpetrators but who we come to believe, through our interaction with them and the information available to us through assessments are wrongly categorised or are minimising their own use of abuse. Practitioners carrying out assessments or group work with men who have used violence against their partners are familiar with the assertions some men make that they have been abused too. The ability to keep a clear and strong line that all abuse is unacceptable can sometimes be a difficult task if a practitioner feels that the victim has used self defence, or that the violence is a form of resistance.

Statutory agencies increasingly report dealing with what they describe as “violent couples” or “violent families”. Victims in refuges and other services report being arrested as the perpetrator when they have tried to defend themselves. Other victims report that they have been reported to the police as perpetrators when they have never used violence but may have stated their intention to leave the relationship or to report the abuser to the police. Child protection workers similarly come across situations in which they state they are unable to be clear about who is the abuser and who the victim, particularly if they have been trained to adopt a believing response to clients who present as victims. Various phrases have been developed by researchers and others and subsequently used by some practitioners, often not in the way they were intended and unsupported by research evidence, as a way of categorising families or couples where there is or is alleged to be violence from both parties, regardless of other circumstances such as history of abuse from one to the other. Debates in practice and research have explored this theme in recent years yet



practitioners in the mainstream and sometimes also in the specialist domestic violence sectors remain unsure of how to respond.

Finally, the preparation of resources within the Respect helplines and of the Male Victims' Toolkit, as well as the development of the REDAMOS client information management database (©Respect 2009) have presented us with an immediate need for a well thought through organisational position on categories of clients. This paper has attempted to document the processes of assessment already present in domestic violence work. The system of assessment was piloted with the Men's Advice Line in December 2008 – January 2009 and is being further tested at the moment.

Practitioners with significant amounts of experience of working with people who use domestic violence are usually skilled in assessing when an individual's assertion that they have been abused is in fact a description of a perpetrator whose victim who has resisted or used violence to defend themselves or when someone's description of themselves as a perpetrator in fact indicates a victim who has used violent retaliation or self defence. Non specialists are less able to make such distinctions and are more likely to identify both partners as abusive or worse still, identify the victim as the abuser. This position statement therefore aims to guide and inform the work of specialists and non-specialists in responding to clients who present or are referred as victims or perpetrators or as mutually violent.

If someone is a perpetrator who has also experienced violence from their partner or vice versa there is risk to both adults and to children which will vary in context depending on whether they are the perpetrator or the victim. In order to protect children as well as the adults it is important to assess, monitor and manage risk with as much knowledge as possible about the context.

Case, risk and treatment management, group work with perpetrators and support work with victims are all safer when they are informed and underpinned by as clear an understanding as possible of who is at risk from whom and in what context. This requires an identification and if necessary re-assessment of who is the person using intimate partner violence and who is the person experiencing it. This understanding helps specialist and generic practitioners to protect women and men, whether they are victims or perpetrators and to protect their children. It also helps them to advise those who are not in fact either perpetrators or victims.

5. Controlling and unkind behaviour in non-abusive relationships

It is also important to recognise that no relationship is entirely free from behaviour which could be classified as potentially controlling or abusive. This happens particularly but not only at times of relationship breakdown. Practitioners need to be guided by clear understanding that the distinction between an unhappy relationship and an abusive one is the presence or absence of fear and coercive control.

In a non-abusive relationship, one person may call the other names or use guilt or manipulation against the other, but as there is no pattern of coercive control, no history of abuse or fear, the other partner will have the choice to respond as they wish without fear of violence or abuse as a consequence. In a relationship where there is intimate partner violence and a pattern of coercive



control, when one partner uses verbal abuse or controlling behaviour, the other partner will not be able to respond or consider ending the relationship without fearing for their safety or that of their children or other violent or abusive consequences.

Someone in a non abusive relationship may have used or experienced or be using or experiencing verbal abuse or controlling behaviour but not as a pattern of coercive control and fear. They may be experiencing other difficulties in their relationship which may include the possibility of the relationship ending. They may be very fearful of that future, without the other person, or bitter or angry about the relationship ending, all of which may mean that they present or are referred to a domestic violence service or identified as involved in domestic violence.

6. The purpose and value of assessing clients correctly

Women and men can use violence, threats, emotionally abusive behaviour or other forms of physical and non-physical force in intimate relationships. Very often someone is described or describes themselves as a perpetrator, primary perpetrator or one half of a mutually violent relationship if they have used any form of physical or non physical force at all, particularly physical violence, when they are in fact the victim/survivor or less powerful person in the relationship. They may then not be protected and be placed at further or increased risk. They also suffer guilt and also labelling by other agencies who should be protecting them if they are wrongly categorised as perpetrators or using “mutual violence” or “common couple violence”.

Perpetrators in turn can be wrongly classified as victims or can describe themselves as victims or as part of a relationship in which both are equally violent, if their actual victim uses self defence or violent resistance. This will affect risk assessment, monitoring and management of both parties. Correct classification therefore aids risk monitoring and management to protect everyone in the family from further harm, including the adults and the children.

7. Gender

This position statement is written in gender neutral language as Respect recognises both men and women can be victims and perpetrators. However, it should be read in conjunction with the Respect position statement on gender, which identifies a substantial body of research and practice evidence to demonstrate that gender is the strongest risk indicator. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UK Gender Equality Duty guidance and other policy instruments recognise that violence against women is both a cause of and a consequence of discrimination against women and gender inequality.

8. Categories of clients using or experiencing domestic violence

These terms are not ideal and for all of them there are challenges of meaning and emotional impact.

1. **Victim/survivor:** someone who is or has recently been experiencing violence, abuse, fear, force, threats and/coercive control from an intimate partner or ex-partner.
2. **Perpetrator:** someone who is or has recently been using violence, abuse, fear, force, threats and/coercive control to an intimate partner or ex-partner.
3. **Victim who has used force:** a victim, as defined above in (1), who has used or is using force occasionally for defending themselves or their children or as a means of resistance against or expressing frustration with the patterns of coercive control and fear being used against them.
4. **Perpetrator whose victim has used some force:** perpetrator, as defined above in (2), whose victim has used or is using force to defend themselves or their children or as a means of resistance against or frustration with the patterns of coercive control and fear the client is using against them.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | <i>IN coercive control OVER partner/ex, because of own use of violence, abuse, controlling behaviour, threats etc</i> | <i>UNDER coercive control FROM partner/ex use of violence, abuse, controlling behaviour, threats etc</i> |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| <i>Uses or has used physical or non physical force against partner/ex</i> → | perpetrator | Victim who has used some form of violent resistance |
| <i>Experienced or experiencing physical or non physical force from partner/ex</i> → | Perpetrator whose victim has used some form of violent resistance | victim |

9. Ways clients may present or be referred to services

Clients may well be referred to or present at a service, either a generic service or a specialist domestic violence service, in a variety of other ways. It is important as a worker to be aware that anyone, male or female, may present as victim, perpetrator or as being in a relationship in which both are violent.

One or two people in a relationship who are both using or have used violence: when referred to or presenting at a service, one or both people are sometimes described or describe themselves as both being violent. Professionals and the clients may well infer from this that they are both equally violent. This often takes place when one or both clients are also experiencing compounding problems such as substance misuse or mental ill-health.

It is very rare to find someone who is both using and experiencing violence and abuse of equal severity, risk and consequences to and from an intimate partner or ex-partner. If the client is presenting or being described in this way, this indicates the need for more detailed assessment, using if possible a range of sources of information from the client, their partner or other agency working with their partner, other agencies and professional judgement if the worker is skilled and experienced at specialist work responding to intimate partner violence.

Perpetrator who is actually a victim: this can happen if the victim has used violence in resistance, self defence, retaliation or to defend children or others. This can be further strengthened if the person concerned does not want to identify themselves as a victim.

Victim who is actually a perpetrator: this can happen if the person using intimate partner violence has experienced force used by their victim as self defence, defence of children, resistance or retaliation. In these cases the perpetrator may have used this incident or incidents to distract attention away from their own abusive behaviour, or other agencies may have identified them as “both as bad as each other”.

If the client does not wish to agree with the assessment this does not have to matter for case management and risk assessment. It may be part of a longer process to help, for example, a person using intimate partner violence to be able to recognise that they are the one in coercive control and causing fear. It may also be part of a longer process of support to help someone experiencing intimate partner violence to recognise this or it may be that this feels disempowering and unnecessary for their protection. Agencies can record a client as a victim or survivor of domestic violence and also write in their case notes that the client does not agree with this identification.

10. Evidence base for assessment and conclusions

Evidence for whether someone is a perpetrator or victim or something else will not be static and hopefully at some point clients involved in intimate partner violence will no longer be affected by or using it.

Sometimes a professional can't assess thoroughly or come to a clear conclusion, particularly if they only have contact with one person. In these circumstances it is important not to attempt to come to a conclusion for which there is insufficient evidence. It is sometimes tempting to record these clients as "mutually violent/abusive", if both are suspected to have used violence or controlling behaviour. The conclusion of the assessment in these cases is that the status is not known and that more evidence is needed. This should be clearly recorded.

Professionals can use recognised assessment tools such as the violent behaviour and controlling behaviour inventories developed by Russell and Rebecca Dobash or amended versions of these. They may also use more informal methods of gathering information, such as asking questions about recent incidents, feelings of control and fear, feelings of entitlement

Assume that whatever the possible perpetrator says about their use of violence it is almost certainly the minimum.

The following sections propose an assessment process to help practitioners to identify who is a perpetrator, who is a victim and whether or not violent resistance is also involved.

You should record evidence which supports a particular statement, evidence which contradicts a particular statement and lack of evidence.

Bear in mind that you may not be able to come to a conclusion, due to lack of evidence or contradictory evidence. This should indicate that you record "no conclusion" and continue with assessment and evidence gathering.

11. Assessing whether client is perpetrator or victim

Ideally information should be gathered from the client, from the referring or other key agencies such as police and combining this if possible with information from the client's partner or ex-partner, if they are using another part of the same service and using your own clinical judgement if you are an experienced domestic violence worker, you should now systematically work through what you know in order to identify, if possible, which category the client comes into.

Record all those statements for which you have some evidence that they are either true or false, whether this is from the client or from the referring agency or from another source. Initial indications of possible conclusions are contained in column 4. There is more detailed information included below this table in section 11.

| Evidence type | Evidence this is TRUE | Evidence this is FALSE | Lack of evidence either way |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Client has experienced incidents of violent or abusive behaviour from partner or other | | | |
| 2. Client has been injured or needed medical attention as result of partner's behaviour | | | |
| 3. Client is in fear of violence to self or child | | | |
| 4. There is a pattern of coercive control – e.g. client feels controlled and can't make decisions | | | |
| 5. Client fear of violence at separation or separation violence already taken place | | | |
| 6. Client is NOT using violence or threats | | | |
| 7. Authentic descriptions of incidents, injuries, fear, control etc. | | | |
| 8. Client has made some use of violence as self defence during attack or to prevent attack from partner/ex | | | |
| 9. Client has made some use of violence to protect children from partner/ex | | | |
| Evidence type | Evidence | Evidence | Lack of |

| | this is TRUE | this is FALSE | evidence either way |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 10. Client has made some use of violence in retaliation to violence from partner/other | | | |
| 11. No injuries to client or child | | | |
| 12. Client is NOT afraid of partner/other | | | |
| 13. No pattern of coercive control in either direction | | | |
| 14. Client's descriptions of violence from partner/ex are inauthentic | | | |
| 15. Client has used violence against partner/ex and NOT as self defence or resistance | | | |
| 16. Client's partner/other been injured/needed medical treatment as result of client | | | |
| 17. Client's child has sustained injuries as result of something client did | | | |
| 18. Client's partner/ex has NOT used violence or only in self defence | | | |
| 19. Client's partner/ex is afraid of client | | | |
| 20. Pattern of coercive control in which client is controlling partner | | | |
| 21. Client has threatened partner/other person or child | | | |
| 22. Client has used coercion/threats/violence to gain sexual access to partner/child | | | |
| 23. No clear evidence or unclear patterns of evidence, such as evidence mixed throughout this list. | | | |

12. Analysis and coming to conclusions



This tool is intended to record information systematically to guide as professional's judgement, not to produce exact answers in every case. Professionals who are skilled and experienced in working with responses to intimate partner violence will be able to use their experience, clinical judgement and sense of authenticity, as well as the number of ticks in each row or section to come to a conclusion. Those without specialist skills will need to rely more on the ticks and on collecting verifiable evidence.

Victim of domestic violence

If there is evidence that the statements in rows 1 – 7 are true and evidence that rows 14 – 22 are NOT true, this is likely to indicate that the client is the victim of domestic violence. If there are any in rows 14 – 22, check that they are not actually violent resistance or self defence (which should be recorded in rows 8 – 10). Clarifying questions about the incidents will help to provide more information, as will other information from other sources.

Perpetrator of domestic violence

If there is evidence that the statements in rows 14 – 22 are true and evidence that rows 1 – 7 are NOT true, this is likely to indicate that the client is the perpetrator of domestic violence, particularly if there are several and there is evidence that the statements in rows 1 – 7 are NOT true (i.e. evidence in the second column).

Victim who is also using or has used violent resistance

If there is evidence that some of the statements in rows 1 – 7 are true but also some evidence that the statements in rows 8, 9 or 10 are true and evidence that the statements in rows 11 – 22 are NOT TRUE this is likely to indicate a victim who is also using or has used violent resistance.

Perpetrator whose victim has used or is using violent resistance

If there is evidence that some statements in rows 14 – 22 are true, some evidence that statements 1 and 2 are true and evidence that the statements in rows 3 – 7 are NOT TRUE it is likely that the client is a perpetrator whose victim has used or is using violent resistance.

Unhappy relationship or not clear

If there is evidence that rows 11 – 13 are true, it is possible that there is no domestic violence in this relationship but that the client is unhappy in the relationship and has identified some behaviour as abusive. If there is evidence that rows 1 – 10 are true it is possible that the client is a victim of domestic violence. However, if there is little evidence in rows 1 – 10, particularly if there is evidence that rows 1 and 2 are NOT true, this is likely not to be a victim of domestic violence. If there are also ticks in rows 14 – 22 it is likely that the client is a perpetrator. More information will be needed to be clearer about this.

Unclear evidence – no conclusion yet

In some cases there will be insufficient evidence to form even a tentative conclusion. In these situations it is important not to reach a false conclusion and to record instead that there is no conclusion and carry out further assessment if possible.

13. Reviewing status and risk



Dynamic

The status of client should ideally be dynamic – if services are working properly, clients will not remain as perpetrators or victims. Risk will also therefore change.

Risk

Professionals should complete a CAADA risk identification form for each client, using the information gathered above and if necessary supplementing this with additional questions. This should be reviewed and amended regularly, particularly at key risk points such as separation.



14. What to do next

Once it has been established which category the client belongs to, this section can be used to guide the responses. If it is not clear which category the client is in, it may be helpful to combine elements of different responses initially whilst further evidence is gathered. A specialist domestic violence service will be helpful for further assessment. Professionals may wish to call the Respect Phoneline for assistance with clarifying if someone is a perpetrator or a victim of intimate partner violence or other domestic violence and abuse.

| Category and possible features of presentation | Your next steps |
|---|--|
| <p>Victim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client has been hurt, controlled, threatened but may not have a history known to agencies • If client has used violence then it is purely to defend self or child and the violence was proportionate to the immediate threat • May have injuries, likely to be fearful and feel controlled | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss level of risk & concern with client & outline options • Refuge space, outreach and other specialist dv services • Safety planning which could include panic button, alarm etc • Legal options & Specialist DV Solicitors • Expert Risk Assessors re Contact • Report writing if & when necessary • Onward referral to specialist agencies if needed eg alcohol, drugs, mental health • Specialist referral for children • Referral to Parenting/Family Support/Sure Start • Explore alternative housing options • If refuge is appropriate explain the implications of this • Advocacy inc attending court • High Risk case referred to MARAC • Ensure child protection work does not place responsibility on the victim • On-going emotional support/counselling • Career or education advice • Work on self esteem |

| Category and possible features of presentation | Your next steps |
|--|---|
| <p>Victim but has used violence in self defence or resistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have been arrested on one occasion for minor offence • Likely to be very ashamed of own use of violence • May feel that the arrest was unjustified- due to unreasonable provocation or similar • Is experiencing more violence than using • May be quite angry at first as expecting to be treated as perpetrator but will calm down after as conversation develops | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of the above-if appropriate • Discuss level of risk & concern with victim & outline options; • Focus on protection and safety for victim and children, which may include physical safety assistance such as changing locks, alarms etc • Stress that using violence likely to increase danger to self and others and emphasise other safety plans, including if necessary, doing or saying whatever is necessary to calm situation down enough to be able to get out safely • Legal options for protection, housing • Ensure any child protection work is informed by clear understanding of asymmetry in the violence and of the client's status as victim using resistance |
| <p>Perpetrator but victim may have used violence in self defence or resistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have a known history of violence towards partner • If used violence to defend it was DISPROPORTIONATE to the threat faced and may have caused injuries to partner • Partner may have used violence • Client is causing more injury than inflicting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral to either community perpetrator programme or Respect Phoneline 0845 122 8609 • Safety planning • Information on alternative accommodation • Substance misuse agency if appropriate • Pass details of concerns for partner to either Women's Aid or Women's Support Service Worker or Victim Support or other service • Contact/Referral to Child Protection Team and ensure any child protection work is informed by clear understanding of asymmetry in the violence and of the client's status as perpetrator |
| Category and possible features of | Your next steps |

| presentation | |
|---|---|
| <p>Perpetrator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known (or alleged) history of violence and abuse towards partner • Partner (and children) is facing significant amounts of violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral to either community perpetrator programme or Respect Phoneline 0845 122 8609 • Safety Planning • Pass details of concerns for partner to either Women's Aid or Women's Support Service Worker or local refuge if appropriate and safe • Substance misuse agency if appropriate • Contact/Referral to Child Protection Team and ensure any child protection work holds perpetrator responsible for violence and does not place responsibility on victim |
| <p>High Risk Perpetrator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known history of using domestic violence; completion of CAADA risk identification shows high risk • Evidence from other agencies, MARAC etc to confirm high risk • Partner (and children) facing significant amounts of violence and danger | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral to either community perpetrator programme or Respect Phoneline 0845 122 8609 • Refer to MARAC, if possible carry out CAADA risk identification first • Pass details of concerns for partner to either Women's Aid or Women's Support Service Worker or local refuge or liaise with them to carry out thorough risk assessment • Substance misuse agency referral if appropriate • Contact/Referral to Child Protection Team |

15. Responses to clients who are not victims or perpetrators

Some clients who have been referred to or present at a service may not be any of the above categories and instead simply be in an unhappy relationship but not one which includes intimate partner violence.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Unhappy relationship but no abuse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client may identify as being abused but there is no violence, fear, control, threats, patterns of coercive control and no history of injuries • May be depressed or anxious about impending separation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to Relate or other counselling or couples work • Refer to Citizen's Advice for financial information • Refer to lawyer if separation indicated • Explain purpose of this service and that you cannot support them but can put them in touch with someone else who can, if that's appropriate (bear in mind it may not always be appropriate) |
|---|---|

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