

## Information Sheet 3: Domestic Abuse

### **What is domestic abuse?**

Domestic abuse can take many different forms, including physical and sexual violence, emotional and psychological abuse, spiritual abuse, financial abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of age, class, sexual orientation, ability, race, gender or religion.

In Scotland, legally, domestic abuse is restricted to abuse between partners or ex partners although we sometimes find abusive patterns of behaviour in other family relationships.

We define domestic abuse as a persistent pattern of coercive and abusive behaviour which is intended to exercise power and control over one partner in a relationship and which causes physical, sexual or emotional harm.

We agree with the Scottish and UK governments, the United Nations and the World Health Organisation that domestic abuse is a form of gender based violence as, in the majority of cases, it is experienced by women and children and is perpetrated by men. In Scotland last year, 79% of all reported domestic abuse incidents were inflicted on women by men. 18% of incidents were perpetrated by women on men, 2% were in male same sex relationships and 1% were in female same sex relationships. This means that 80% of victims of domestic abuse incidents are women. When we look at patterns of abuse, where there are multiple incidents over a period of time women are victims in almost 90% of cases.

**We recognise that men and women experience domestic abuse differently and therefore we recognise that our responses to domestic abuse need to be gendered in order to support all survivors effectively.**

### **What is the difference between Domestic Abuse and Family Violence?**

Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling behaviour, distinct from either violence used as self-defence or from what some sociologists call 'family violence'. Family violence is perpetrated more equally by men and women and refers to one-off, sometimes extreme, sometimes low level, acts of violence in response to a conflict in a relationship.

While this is unhealthy and unacceptable in any relationship, this form of violence is not considered to be gendered. It is not part of a pattern of other controlling behaviours that we define as domestic abuse.

**Through working on violence against women, girls and children, we want to create a gender just church where healthy, positive relationships are enjoyed by everyone and where no one experiences unhealthy relationship behaviours or domestic abuse.**

## Children, Young People and Domestic Abuse

Children growing up in abusive households are affected by seeing, hearing and experiencing domestic abuse, even if it is not directed specifically at them. Abusive behaviour directed towards children and young people is usually considered separately under child abuse or neglect provisions. However, the law in Scotland now recognises that witnessing domestic abuse is an aggravated form of domestic abuse and can have a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Teenagers and young people can also experience domestic or sexual abuse in their own relationships.

**We are committed to offering our best possible pastoral care to everyone who has experienced domestic abuse, regardless of age or gender, and to help them access any support or resources they may need.**