

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment

**Prepared by Nina Page, Team Manager, Domestic
Abuse Service**

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Executive Summary

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires local authorities, with assistance from their Local Partnership Boards (LPB), to conduct a local needs assessment every three years, to determine the level of support required within safe accommodation in their area.

This needs assessment seeks to understand the barriers that prevent victims/survivors with diverse needs from accessing support within safe accommodation, including those who share relevant protected characteristics or socio-economic factors such as household composition, education level and the varying levels of support needs and risk. Data from a wide range of services that support victims/survivors of domestic abuse, insight from professionals working with local services and a survey to understand victims/survivors' experiences has helped to build a picture of these barriers.

Key Findings and Emerging Themes

A summary of the key findings and themes that have emerged from the needs assessment are as follows:

- Domestic Abuse has a devastating impact on victims, survivors, families and communities across Central Bedfordshire. There is no single person or agency that has the sole responsibility to address domestic abuse, each organisation needs to be able to respond appropriately and consistently, both as an individual organisation and in partnership with others, to be able to offer the right support and interventions for both victims/survivors and those that harm others.
- In 2022 across Central Bedfordshire there were 2,238 incidents of domestic abuse reported to Bedfordshire Police, in adults aged between 16-74 years.
- In the same year, Central Bedfordshire Homeless Intervention Services provided short-term support, long-term support or refuge accommodation to 586 victims/survivors in Bedfordshire.
- There is a good overall provision of services and response to domestic abuse in Central Bedfordshire. However, more can be done to embed appropriate specialist services in community-based settings enabling residents to access the support they need without having to disclose their experiences to statutory services in order to access help.
- Gaps are evident in support for families that are considered 'affluent,' for example, who work full time and own their own homes and for individuals without recourse to public funds.
- Information on and access to domestic abuse support services by young persons, minority communities and disabled people need to be better understood and specialist provision explored where appropriate.
- Individuals from LGBTQ+, gypsy and travellers, older people and ethnic minority communities are not accessing the services at the level expected and there are barriers, needs and dynamics that affect this.

- There are significant benefits in drawing on the strong, versatile partnership arrangements that already exist within Bedfordshire. This will enable the maximising of resources to address domestic abuse in Central Bedfordshire.
- There are emerging opportunities to implement a coordinated community response, to develop and build stronger connections and pathways between statutory, third sector and broader communities. Raising awareness of domestic abuse and the role all individuals and communities have in supporting those experiencing it.
- A range of victim/survivor voices are being captured through the Central Bedfordshire Authentic Voice Panel (AVP) and are essential to responding to the diversity of domestic abuse needs and interventions across Central Bedfordshire.
- Further consideration is to be given to the collection of data across all partner agencies with an intersectional approach. This may inform our assessment or need and can be incorporated within Equality Impact Assessment.

Purpose and Scope of the Needs Assessment

The purpose of the Needs Assessment is to assist Central Bedfordshire Council with its ongoing response to domestic violence and abuse.

This Needs Assessment seeks to understand the barriers that prevent victims/survivors with diverse needs, including those who share relevant protected characteristics or socio-economic factors. The Needs Assessment is focused primarily on those aged 16 and over. However, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 states that children under the age of 16 years, living with Domestic Abuse are considered victims/survivors in their own right and consequently their experiences and needs are considered as part of Central Bedfordshire Council's domestic abuse response.

This needs assessment will ultimately inform a Domestic Abuse Strategy that will outline the Council's overall and holistic approach to delivering, with partners a rounded offer of support to victims/survivors in safe accommodation.

1.1 Definition of Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines "domestic abuse" for the purposes of this Act.

Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if—

A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive. Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following.

- a) Physical or sexual abuse;
- b) Violent or threatening behaviour;
- c) Controlling or coercive behaviour;
- d) Economic abuse;
- e) Psychological, emotional or other abuse;

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

Housing Act and Domestic Abuse

Local housing authorities owe duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to victims/survivors of domestic abuse who are eligible and homeless. If the household is homeless as a result of being a victims/survivors of domestic abuse, they will have priority need for accommodation secured by the local authority. This means that local housing authorities must provide temporary accommodation until the duty can be discharged through provision of settled accommodation. The temporary accommodation must be suitable in line with the requirements of the Housing Act.

Part 4: Domestic Abuse Act – Accommodation-based support

Part 4 of the 2021 Act details duties on relevant local authorities to assess the need for accommodation-based support and prepare strategies to provide such support for victims/survivors.

The 2021 Act is clear that children of domestic abuse victims/survivors who have seen, heard, or experienced the effect of that abuse are victims/survivors in their own right.

Part 4, and this guidance, includes the words ‘victims and their children’ to ensure that support is provided to any child staying with a victim/survivor in safe accommodation, including in those rare situations where the child does not fall within that definition.

1.2 The Impact of Domestic Abuse

It is hard to over-state the impact of domestic abuse - for many victims/survivors and children, the impact will be life-long. The consequences of domestic abuse are distressing, wide ranging and may include mental, emotional, physical, social, and financial impact. Affecting not just the individual victim/survivor but also their family and children. It is worth remembering that there can be both short and long-term consequences and that abuse can continue long after the relationship has ended.

Ultimately, there is a risk of fatality from domestic abuse through homicide or suicide. Physical impacts may include all body injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, chronic health conditions such as nervous system disorders, gastrointestinal disorders or chronic pain syndromes. There is an increased risk of serious conditions and long-term health implications for those who have been the victim of non-fatal strangulations.

The emotional impact of domestic abuse, also called psychological harm or mental health impact, can cause long term issues that last for much longer than the immediate distress and anxiety caused by abuse. This may include suicidal ideation, self-harm, increased risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and insomnia.

The nature of domestic abuse can lead to significant impacts on an individual’s living situation. Domestic abuse can lead to homelessness or threats of homelessness and victims/survivors sleeping rough to escape violence. It can impact employment and result in time having to be taken by survivors from paid employment and caring responsibilities.

In a Home Office report published in January 2019, the economic and social costs of domestic abuse, the cost of emotional and physical harm, the cost to Health services,

the cost as a consequence of time off work (time lost) and reduced productivity were looked at. The housing and homelessness services, charity expenditure and domestic abuse practitioners, as well as cost to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) costs were all considered. It also looked at the cost to Police, the cost of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC's), the cost to the legal system including Magistrates Court and Crown Court as well as the Civil legal system.

The report concluded the total cost of Domestic Abuse in England and Wales for 2016/2017 to amount to around £66 billion¹

Living in a home where domestic abuse happens can have a serious impact on a child or young person's mental and physical wellbeing, as well as their behaviour. This can continue after the adults' relationship has come to an end, and we often find that post-separation abuse and coercive controlling behaviours continue to remain a factor in the child's life. Living with domestic abuse is considered to be an Adverse Childhood Experience and children who witness domestic abuse are at risk of physical and mental health problems. Every child will be affected differently by the trauma of domestic abuse and the impact can last into adulthood.

Gangs often prey on young and other vulnerable people, coercing them to become involved with crime. Some gang members enter into relationships with women and girls who they control, coerce and subject to domestic abuse. The women and girls may be sexually assaulted, threatened with sexual assault and prostituted for sexual favours in payment for drugs.

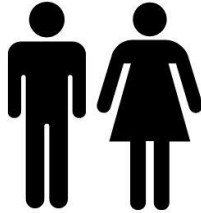
Victims and survivors of domestic abuse living within rural areas are often found to be more physically and geographically isolated and may experience abuse for longer due to their isolation. The nearest specialist service can be a journey away from their home. Perpetrators can control access to a vehicle, check mileage, or demand an explanation every time they leave home, that distance can mean a victim/survivor is simply unable to access the support they need to safely escape from their relationship.

¹ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f637b8f8fa8f5106d15642a/horr107.pdf>

2. National Overview of Domestic Abuse Prevalence

Year Ending March 2022

Domestic abuse was experienced by



2.4 million adults

1.7 million women
(also more likely to experience
high-risk/severe domestic abuse)

699,000 men

1,500,369 domestic abuse
related crimes were recorded
by police, 39.3% of these
concluded as no crime
having been committed



17.1% of all crimes recorded by police
were domestic abuse related, with
76.4% of prosecutions successfully
securing a conviction

10.3% of those who
experienced domestic abuse
had disabilities



Domestic abuse was most prevalent
in the 20-24 age category (10.2%)



The Crime Survey for England & Wales
reported victim ethnicity as:

8.7% mixed heritage

5.9% Black or Black British

5% white

3.9% Asian or British Asian



Approximately one in
five adults had
experienced domestic
abuse since
the age of 16 years

Data sourced from Crime Survey for England & Wales, March
2022 and Police National Statistics, March 2022

3. Local Overview of Domestic Abuse

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated 2.1 million people aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2023, equating to a prevalence rate of 4.4% or approximately 1 in 20 people. Using the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) model the estimated prevalence of domestic abuse in Central Bedfordshire is worked out in Table 1 below.

Central Bedfordshire Population	Estimated 4.4% prevalence of Domestic Abuse	Actual number of residents who received support for Domestic Abuse	% prevalence of Domestic Abuse
294,300	12,949 residents	3,671	1.25%

Table 1. Estimated Prevalence of Domestic Abuse in Central Bedfordshire in 2022

During the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, Central Bedfordshire Council provided short-term support, long-term support and/or refuge accommodation to 3,671 individuals which is approximately 1.24% of residents, with 181 women, 4 men and 179 children receiving support in safe accommodation.

This is below the 4.4% prevalence rate and evidence that whilst service provision is good in Central Bedfordshire it is reaching approximately one quarter of residents that may be experiencing domestic abuse.

Bedfordshire Police recorded 2,238 incidents of domestic abuse in 2022. Table 2 below highlights how this compares to overall crime across Bedfordshire.

Total incidents of domestic abuse reported to Bedfordshire Police	% of incidents reported to the police	% of total crime in Bedfordshire
2,238	17.3%	16%

Table 2. Incidents of Domestic Abuse reported to Bedfordshire Police 2022.²

Domestic abuse is often a hidden crime that is not reported to the police. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimates that 1 in 5 incidents are not reported to the police. Therefore, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of domestic abuse experienced³.

- Roughly 28.3% or almost a third of the estimated need for domestic abuse services is currently being met.
- There were 303 high risk cases of domestic abuse discuss at Central Bedfordshire Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) in the year ending March 2023. Which is about 13.5% of all reported incidents of domestic abuse.

² Community Intelligence Report by Nicola Stokes

³ [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#), ONS.

- There were 3 Domestic Homicides in Central Bedfordshire in the year ending March 2023

4. Local Evidence

Central Bedfordshire Council has sought views of residents, survivors and the expertise of local specialist services to identify and understand the level and types of needs of victims/survivors, including the needs of children. This has been gathered through:

- Voice of victims/survivors has been sought through an online and paper-based survey
- Survivor stories from the Authentic Voice Panel (AVP) and their feedback to the Local Partnership Board (LPB)
- Quarterly Commissioning meetings
- Interviews with partners
- Performance Board reports for Local Partnership Boards (LPB), collating data from statutory agencies and multi-agency approaches
- Annual data collection and reporting to the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities

All personal data has been collected and reported in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 to prevent identification of victims/survivors. Any mapping or reporting of figures has been done in such a way as to avoid identification of individuals, therefore where less than five people are recorded in a category, these figures have been suppressed in charts, tables and the narrative.

Data Sources

Demographic data has been collected from a wide range of service including the following to understand the profile of domestic abuse victims/survivors accessing services:

- Residents Survey
- Authentic Voice Panel (AVP)
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA)
- Women's Refuges
- Bedfordshire Police
- Central Bedfordshire Council
 - Homeless Intervention Service
 - Children's Services
 - Adult Services

4.1 Local Needs Assessment

Survivor Engagement - Personal Experiences of Support

Domestic abuse victim/survivor survey results

Local residents were encouraged to comment on their experiences of domestic abuse by completing a short online survey. Paper response forms were also provided on request. The survey ran for a period of 8 weeks from 5 April 2023 and closed on 31 May 2023.

Promotional activities included:

- E-mail bulletin
- Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP) social media
- Central Bedfordshire Council social media
- Promoted on Central Bedfordshire Council website
- Staff Central
- Housing Matters
- Promoted on the Dunstable Promotional Screen
- Poster promotion

In total, 356 responses were received for this survey. Most people, 80% (267) heard about the survey through either the e-mail from Central Bedfordshire Council 49% (173) the Central Bedfordshire Council website 21% (74) or social media from Central Bedfordshire Council.

Of the total responses, 66% were from people that had experienced domestic abuse.

In summary, the survey found, the most selected types of domestic abuse that respondents experienced (as they were asked to select every relevant option) was that of controlling or coercive behaviour this was very close in numbers to psychological, emotional abuse. This was followed by violent, threatening behaviour and physical abuse. The majority of respondents had experienced multiple forms of domestic abuse.

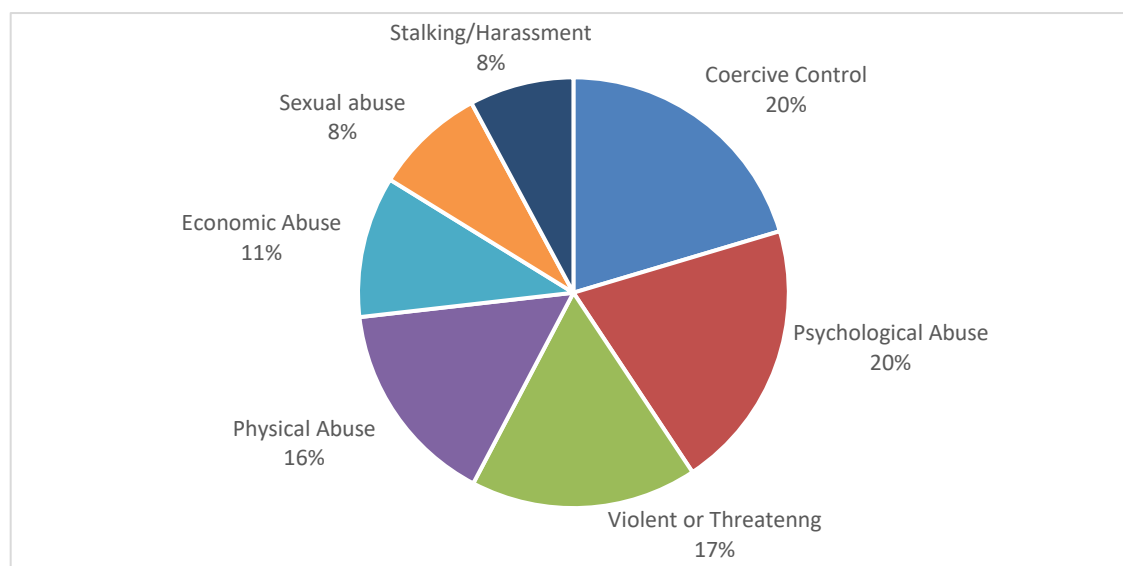


Figure 1. Type of abuse experienced by survey respondents.

The survey captured a strong and powerful sense of the voice and experiences of those living with domestic abuse:

'My ex-partner has now been charged with assault by beating, NFS (non-fatal strangulation) and criminal damage

In short, I was beaten regularly, separated entirely from my friends and family (no one could come to the house, ever)'

....My Dad would pick on any weakness you have, he would tease and say anything that he knew would hurt... I would not leave my own children with him - I couldn't bear the teasing... his need to make you cry....he wasn't happy until he got his way and made you cry'

Out of the total number of residents that experienced domestic abuse just over half, 55% (127) sought help and support. Of those that did seek help, 65% (82) contacted the police due to the level and severity of the abuse and 33% (42) sought help and advice from their GP.

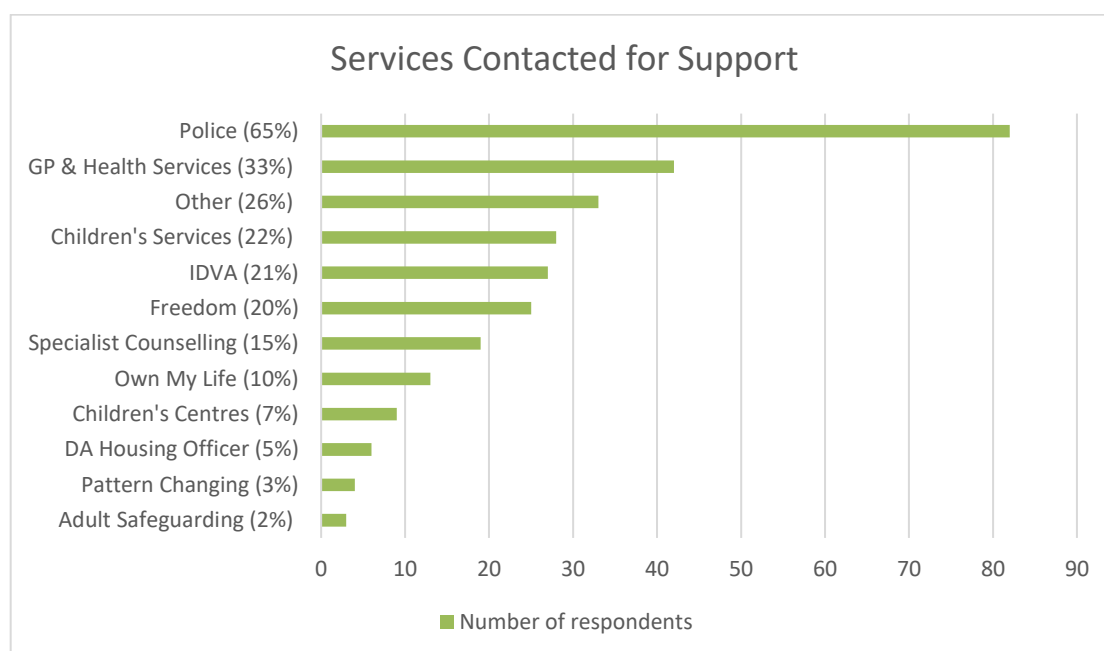


Figure 2. Services contacted for support following domestic abuse.

Feedback reflected that respondents did not access any services or receive any help at all. This is consistent with existing research which tells us the majority of people that experience domestic abuse do not come to the attention of statutory or voluntary services.

The experiences of residents in Central Bedfordshire are similar to those reported by the Domestic Commissioners Office in the 2021 Patchwork of Provision report. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC) undertook research with victims/survivors of domestic abuse to better understand what support people would like to access and to map provision of support in England and Wales. The research heard from 4274 victims/survivors, 619 service providers and 154 local commissioners and offer both local and national comparators for domestic abuse service provision.

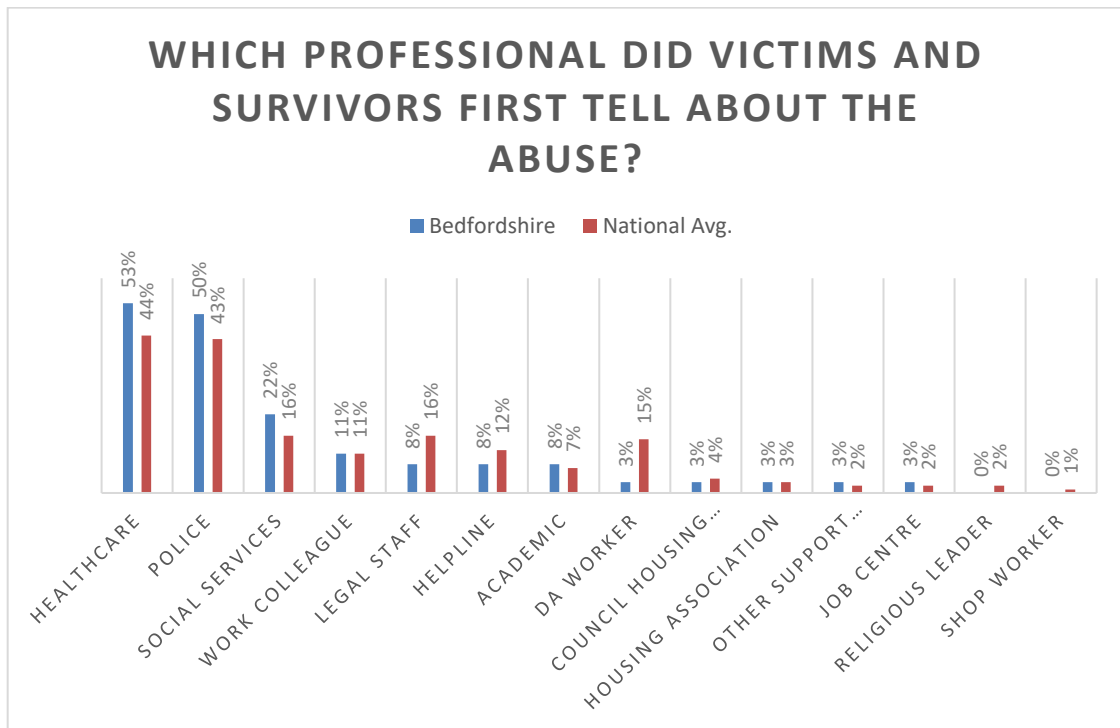


Figure 3. Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC): A Patchwork of Provision findings⁴

The Patchwork of Provision report highlights that 44% of respondents accessed support via their healthcare setting compared to 33% in Central Bedfordshire. The large difference in support accessed via police, 43% nationally and 65% in Central Bedfordshire could indicate that residents in Central Bedfordshire are not as aware of how to access help and support until the domestic abuse they are experiencing reaches a level requiring police intervention.

Respondents’ expectations for services were clearly themed across two distinct pathways. Expectations of Police included criminal justice outcomes and support with criminal orders. Expectations for other statutory services including Children’s Services, Adult Safeguarding and Housing included safeguarding and housing duties.

For other services, particularly Health, Children’s Centres and specialist Domestic Abuse Support programs, respondents’ expectations were more focused on their welfare and the longer-term support needed to move to safety. These included service like counselling, other therapeutic interventions, referrals to specialist services and more general advice and support.

Further evidence that residents would like to access long-term support through non statutory service routes was provided when asking respondents where they would like to access support for domestic abuse.

⁴ Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s (DAC) Mapping Report: A Patchwork of Provision (2021)

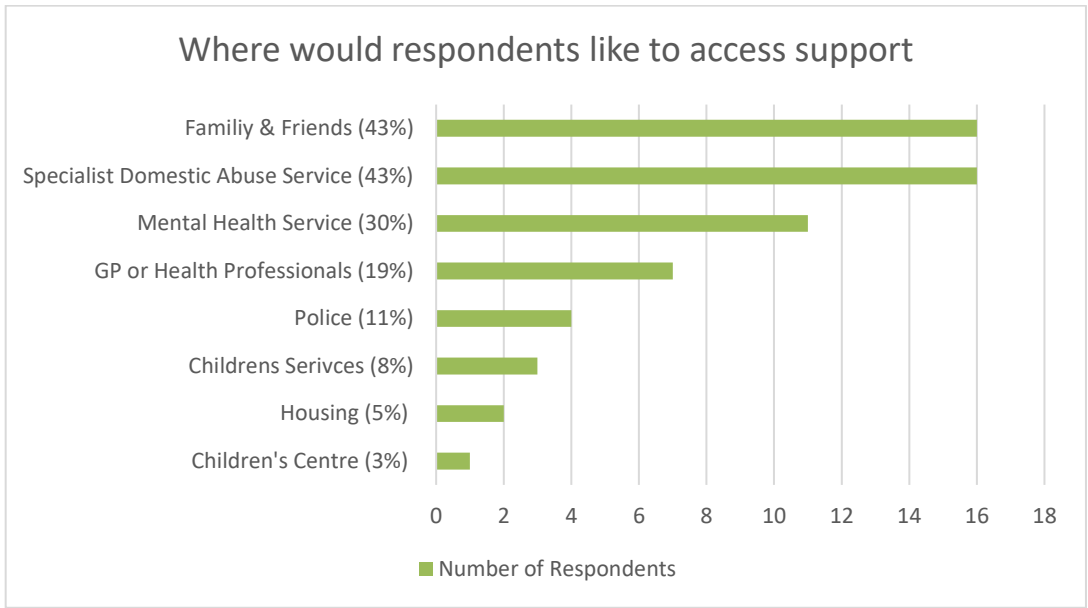


Figure 4: Where residents would most like to access support from.

Residents require support from statutory services for the crisis point in their journey, for safeguarding measures and criminal justice outcomes. But they would prefer to access the support and therapeutic interventions they need to move to safety, from wider specialist and community-based settings.

When asked how services could improve their response to domestic abuse respondents consistently highlighted the need for consistency and a great awareness and understanding of impact of domestic abuse.

The Patchwork of Provision report tells us that in the main residents in Bedfordshire do manage to access the help and support they require.

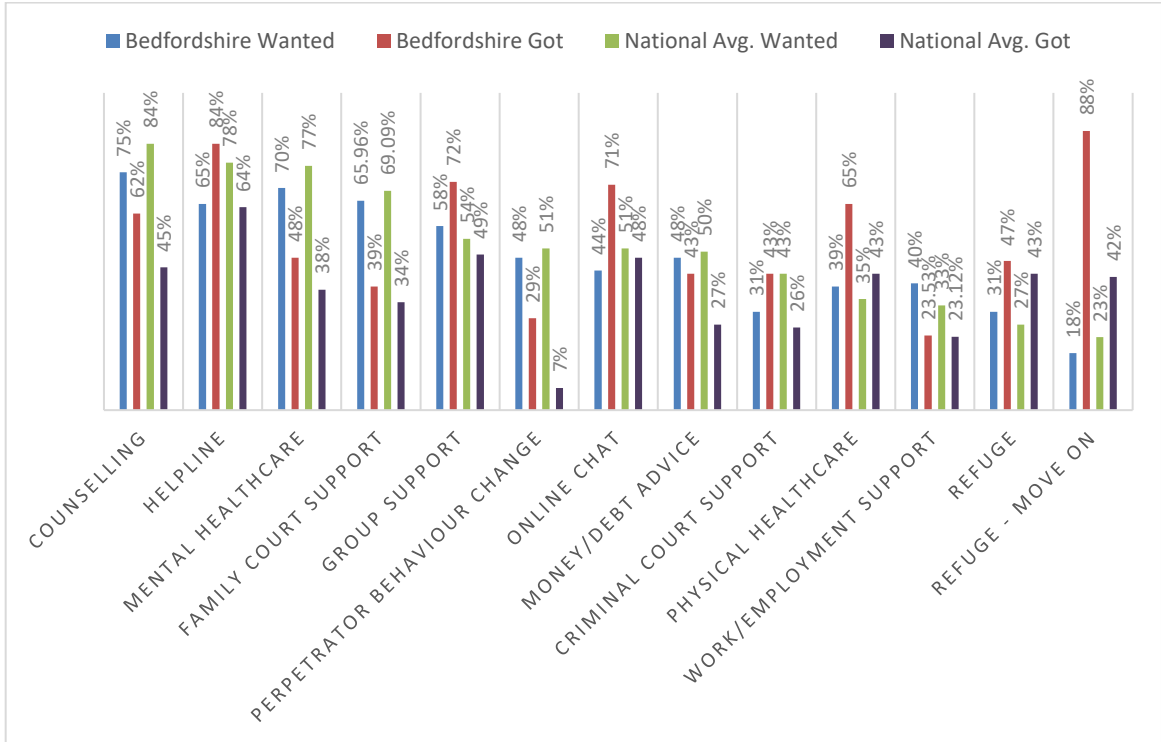


Figure 5: What help not provided by an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) did victims and survivors want and get?

The report reflects that in Bedfordshire, residents are more likely to receive counselling, mental health support and group support than the national average.

There remains work to be done to improve awareness and access, but it highlights the right services being in place.

When asked about barriers to accessing help and support respondents reported a mixture of experiences.

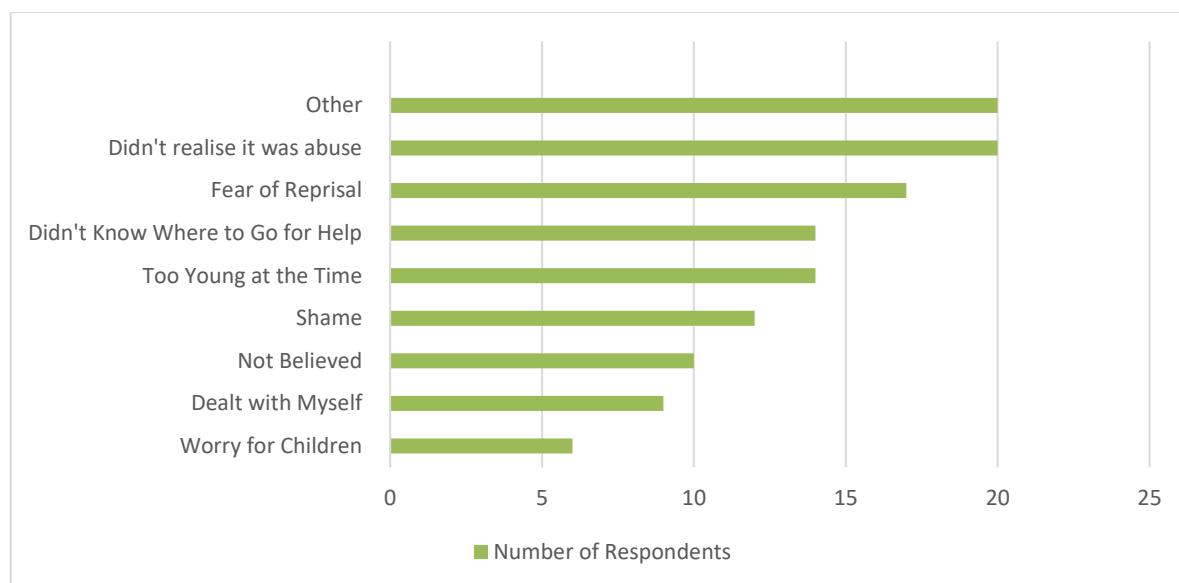


Figure 6: Barriers to accessing help and support.

A significant number of respondents did not access help and support due to lack of awareness about the abuse they were experiencing, where they could go for support available and a strong sense of shame about their experiences. These responses accounted for 37% of all responses.

Fear of reprisal accounted for 15% of all responses and highlights the importance of including the risk posed by domestic abuse in all safeguarding plans and the need for a robust, consistent, effective statutory response to domestic abuse.

‘I didn’t realise it was abuse until after I’d left him, then I sought help through my G.P.’

‘At the time, I was completely isolated from my friends and family and had no idea who to go to for help’

‘I thought it would make it worse for me, my mum and my brother - I was worried how angry my dad would be if he found out. My mum also denied it ever happened.’

Respondents were asked specifically, if they had ever tried to access any services but found it difficult because of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, religion, or disability.



Figure 7: Respondents to Needs Assessment survey on whether or not it was difficult to access services based on a protected characteristic.

85% (35) of the respondents said that they had not found it difficult to access services due to their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, religion or disability.

Of those that said yes comments highlighted the following;

'Numbers provided are not manned and just go on answering machine; pointless really.'

'Well I briefly spoke to my pastoral officer. They assumed my partner was a dude, so they kept using he/him pronouns, asking what "his mates" were like. When I disclosed that it was a girl, they treated it like it was a "friendship" problem. It wasn't :('

The demographics of the survey respondents were as follows:

- 93% of respondents were female, 7% were male;
- 16% or 23 out of 147 respondents considered themselves to have a disability, of those 87% (or 20 out of 23) said their disability limited their activities;
- The majority of respondents (64%) were aged between 30 and 60 years old. 25% of respondents were under 30 years old. Only 9% of respondents were aged 60 or over; and
- The majority of respondents (85%) identified themselves as being white British, with 6% black British, 5% mixed ethnicity and 3% Asian or Asian British. These are representative of the local demographic data

4.2 Housing and Safe Accommodation for victims/survivors of domestic abuse

Service	Provider	Number	Details
Refuge provision for women and children fleeing domestic abuse	Stonewater	22	Two refuges in Central Bedfordshire provide 22 units of accommodation for women fleeing domestic abuse
Transitional Accommodation with additional Support	Central Bedfordshire Council	139	Dispersed accommodation
Transitional Accommodation with additional Support	Central Bedfordshire Council	127	Hostel accommodation

Table 3. Housing and Safe Accommodation provision for those experiencing domestic abuse within Central Bedfordshire.

Neighbouring authorities' refuge provision includes Women's Aid in Luton, Stonewater Asian Women's Refuge, Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) and Bedford Women's Refuge (Butterfly House)

The Bobby Scheme can provide support to residents across Bedfordshire. The Domestic Abuse Resettlement Team (DART) provide advice and support to any resident that needs to move as a result of Domestic Abuse.

Demand for Safe Accommodation is much greater than the current Refuge provision. This forms part of the Homeless Intervention Service Priorities. Work with Housing partners continues to identify the best way to support residents to escape from domestic abuse safely.

5 Profile of domestic abuse victims/survivors

5.1 Age

The age profile in Table 4 below shows that the biggest age group for adult domestic abuse victims/survivors recorded by these services is 30-39 followed by 18–29-year-olds.

The age profile across these datasets is consistent over the last three years.

Source	18-39	40-59	60+
Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) cases	73%	22%	5%
Adult safeguarding cases	45%	22%	33%
Housing approaches	69%	29%	2%
Police incidents	61%	30%	9%

Table 4. Age of adult victim/survivor recorded by Central Bedfordshire.

Older age groups (45+) are underrepresented in the refuge (12%) and to a lesser extent in TA (20%). Also, older people are more likely to have a disability or long-term illness which limits access to the refuge and to a lesser extent Safe Accommodation. This can also mean their care and support needs may not be able to be met in these settings. Women with male children over the age of 14 are unable to access the refuge.

Most services providing domestic abuse related housing support, advocacy and group support services are available for people aged 16+. There are however specific advocacy services for child victims/survivors living in Central Bedfordshire, which are:

- Kids Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (KIDVA) service provided by Embrace;
- TOKKO Youth Space Counselling project provided by TOKKO Ltd in partnership with Sorted Counselling;
- Fortis counselling provided by Sorted; and

- The Freedom Programme delivered within schools for children aged 7-10 by Children's Services.

Further details of these services are set out in [Appendix B](#).

A comparison with national data shows that there is likely to be under-reporting in Central Bedfordshire of domestic abuse among those aged under 19. Further exploration of accommodation provision for adults over the age of 65 is needed.

5.2 Gender

The gender profile of domestic abuse referrals across all services shows that, in line with national figures, women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse in Central Bedfordshire for example in the year 2022/23.

- 97% of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referrals were in relation to women and 3% in relation to men.
- 74% of police reports were in relation to women and 26% in relation to men.
- Out of the total number of approaches to the Homeless Intervention Service as a result of domestic abuse 89% were made by women. The remaining 11% were made by men.

There are a range of services able to support male victims/survivors of domestic abuse. In addition to this, Victim Support provide a male Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and Talk for Men provided by the Early Childhood Partnership delivers group work in a safe setting, and there are also men-only group sessions delivered by the Mindfulness Support Service.

All services commissioned by Central Bedfordshire Council support both women and men, these include:

- Specialist counselling provision
- Domestic Abuse Resettlement Team (DART)
- Flexi Fund
- Community and High Risk Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service

Further details of these services and those that support women are set out in [Appendix B](#).

Whilst this majority of victims/survivors are women, there is provision of services for both women and men. It is likely that domestic abuse against men is under reported and there is no refuge support for men in Central Bedfordshire.

5.3 Sexual identity

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service and Housing Options record the sexuality of clients. The data shows that where the sexuality was known, the vast majority are heterosexual. More bisexual people than gay/lesbian people were recorded as victims/survivors of domestic abuse by these services. However, the numbers recorded are so low it could make individuals identifiable and so specific information relating to data is not contained in this report. What we know from national research is that;

- Certain sub-groups within the LGBT+ community are more likely to experience domestic abuse compared with others. These include trans people; non-binary people; bisexual and pansexual people.
- Young LGBT+ people, are more likely than other LGBT+ people to experience domestic abuse from family members ⁵
- LGBT+ victim/survivors are much more likely rely on informal networks such as friends and family for support, than to speak to professionals. Very few respondents had been in contact with specialist domestic abuse services or police.
- LGBT+ people in the Safelives and GALOP ⁶ reports do not feel safe to be their genuine selves and do not feel able to approach specialist services for support and are re not accessing services at the same rate as others in the population.⁷

There are currently LGBTQ+ workers embedded in the voluntary sector specialist provision.

There is limited information regarding the needs of LGBTQ+ residents in Central Bedfordshire There are LGBTQ+ workers embedded in specialist services providing domestic abuse support.

5.4 Disability

According to the 2021 Census 15.5% of Central Bedfordshire residents were disabled.

In the year ending June 2023 the prevalence of disability among individuals referred to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) was 13.5% so broadly in line with that of the general Central Bedfordshire population. The prevalence increases again for individuals supported by the high risk Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service, which reported a peak of 38% of self-reported mental health needs in the first quarter of 2023/24.

A higher proportion of victims/survivors with a disability seek support through the homelessness route or are referred to adult safeguarding. In the year ending March 2023 3 households had been denied access to the refuge due to disability.

Mental ill health is more prevalent in the oldest and youngest age groups. Nearly half of all domestic abuse homeless approaches aged 55-64 had mental ill health (13 people). Whereas 38% (27) of all 19–24-year-olds had mental ill health.

Refuge can provide mental health support for those that do not have complex needs and two units within the refuges are on ground floor level and accessible to those with mobility problems.

There are a number of group programmes in place that provide mental health and well-being support for people that have experience domestic abuse, which includes:

- Early Childhood Partnership’s Play Therapy for children.

⁵ [Galop A4 IsolatedPlace Report 2023 Final.pdf](#)

⁶ [Free to be safe web.pdf \(safelives.org.uk\)](#)

- Young people’s counselling services provided by TOKKO and Fortis.
- Early Childhood Partnership’s Talk for Men group work.
- Home-Starts’ trauma informed approach to group work through the Own my Life programme.
- Specialist counselling services provided by Bedfordshire Talking Therapies.
- Stepping Stones offer one to one or group support for women who are victims of domestic abuse and/or substance misuse.
- Living Your Life provide counselling, coaching and workshops for men and women who have been affected by trauma, including sexual trauma, domestic abuse, and violence.
- The Rebuild Programme delivered by Children’s Centres across Central Bedfordshire.

Further details of these services are set out in [Appendix B](#)

There is limited provision of accessible accommodation within the refuges and a small number of women have been denied access to the refuge because of their mobility issues. There is no safe accommodation suitable for those with complex needs in Central Bedfordshire and an acknowledged shortage across the UK.

5.5 Ethnic group, culture, and religion

The ethnicity profile outlined in Figure 8 shows that the vast majority of domestic abuse service users are white and that this is in keeping with the overall population demographics for Central Bedfordshire more widely.

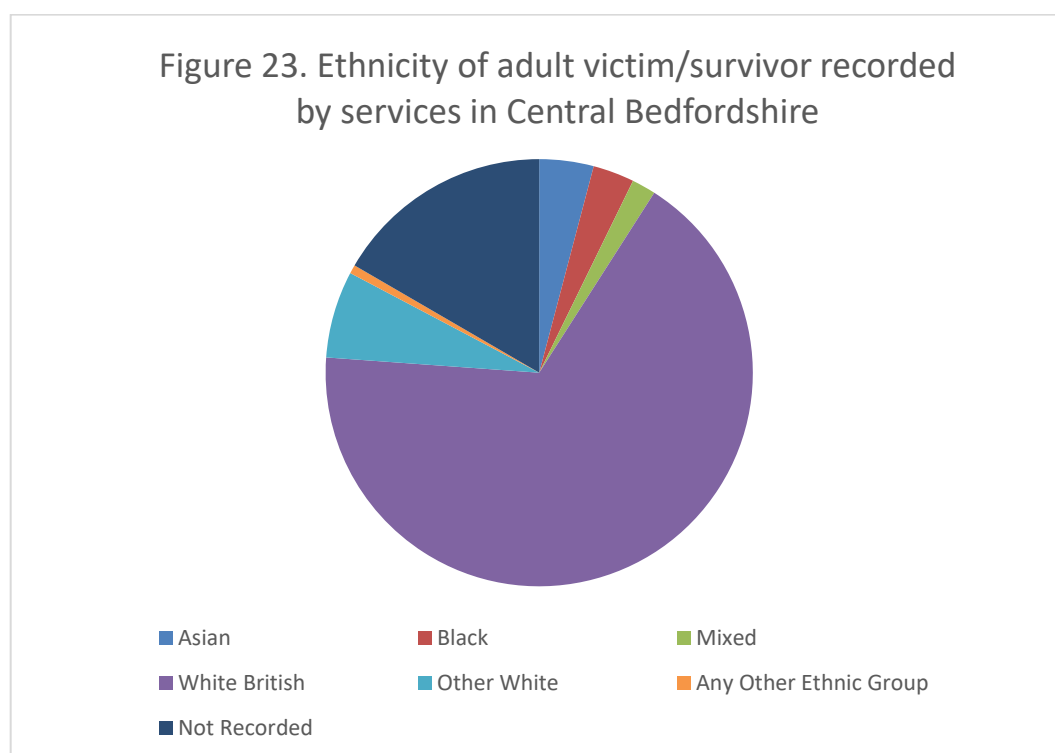


Figure 8. Ethnicity of adult victim/survivor recorded by services in Central Bedfordshire.

The below table shows the ethnicity of adult victim/survivors recorded by services in Central Bedfordshire in comparison to the general population data recorded by Census 2021:

Ethnicity	2021 Census, aged 18+	Service Approaches
Asian	4%	4%
Black	2%	3%
Mixed	2%	2%
White British	85%	67%
Other White	7%	7%
Any Other Ethnic Group	1%	1%
Not Recorded	N/A	17%

Table 5. Ethnicity recorded by services in Central Bedfordshire compared to general population data.

In contrast to this, a higher proportion, 56% of Black and minority ethnic women accessed Refuge accommodation between 2022/23. The majority of women, 76% accessing Central Bedfordshire Refuge came from outside the area.

No Gypsy, Roma or Traveller victims/survivors accessed refuges however a small number were supported to access Safe Accommodation in Central Bedfordshire and move to safety out of the area. This was due to the family's being supported having larger sibling groups that Refuge were unable to accommodate.

Over the course of the last year, 5 women have been refused Refuge accommodation due to having No Recourse to Public Funds.

Luton All Women's Centre delivers services for those who have and are experiencing harmful practices such as honour-based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation which disproportionately affects Asian and Black victims/survivors.

The Domestic Abuse Resettlement Project has funding to support those with No Recourse to Public Funds.

The Ebonista Project offers emotional and practical support to women and children who have been subjected to domestic abuse and have a strong focus on reaching women from the Black African and Caribbean community.

Bedford Women's Refuge - Butterfly House provide accommodation and support to women and their children fleeing domestic abuse.

The Refugee and Migrant Services Helpline provided by The King's Arms Project provides signposting and short or long-term case work refugees and vulnerable migrants, such as those with No Recourse to Public Funds.

Victims/survivors with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) struggle to access support and accommodation and as a result remain invisible to statutory services. The lack of face to face translation services can make a disclosure even more difficult for the victim/survivor.

5.5 Economic Profile of households

Central Bedfordshire is considered an affluent area with pockets of deprivation across both urban and rural areas. The defined household group categorised by the Experian Mosaic tool 'Budgeting and New families' have been the biggest groups for Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) cases since 2018, accounting for 21% of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) cases whilst making up 6% of all Central Bedfordshire households.

Modelled data shows that most households are likely to be from 'deprived' groups. Most localities also had higher levels of activity among the 'middle' Experian Mosaic groups (i.e. not deprived or affluent) than the Central Bedfordshire profile.

There is a lack of engagement with affluent families in both statutory and voluntary sector organisations. There are barriers to access Safe Accommodation for homeowners due to housing and financial pressures.

The Domestic Abuse Resettlement Team (DART), delivered by IMPAKT provide information about local funds, foodbanks and charities to support individuals experiencing financial hardship.

The Flexi Fund, also delivered by IMPAKT, has provided £34,097 of items supporting 44 applicants. The most requested item was furniture and furnishings.

Victim Support provides support through a national Barclays Victim Support fund to help victims/survivors and reported seeing a continued impact of the financial crisis with their clients. For the six months of this financial year, to date having spent £9745, leaving the Bedfordshire service just over £5000 for the remaining six months.

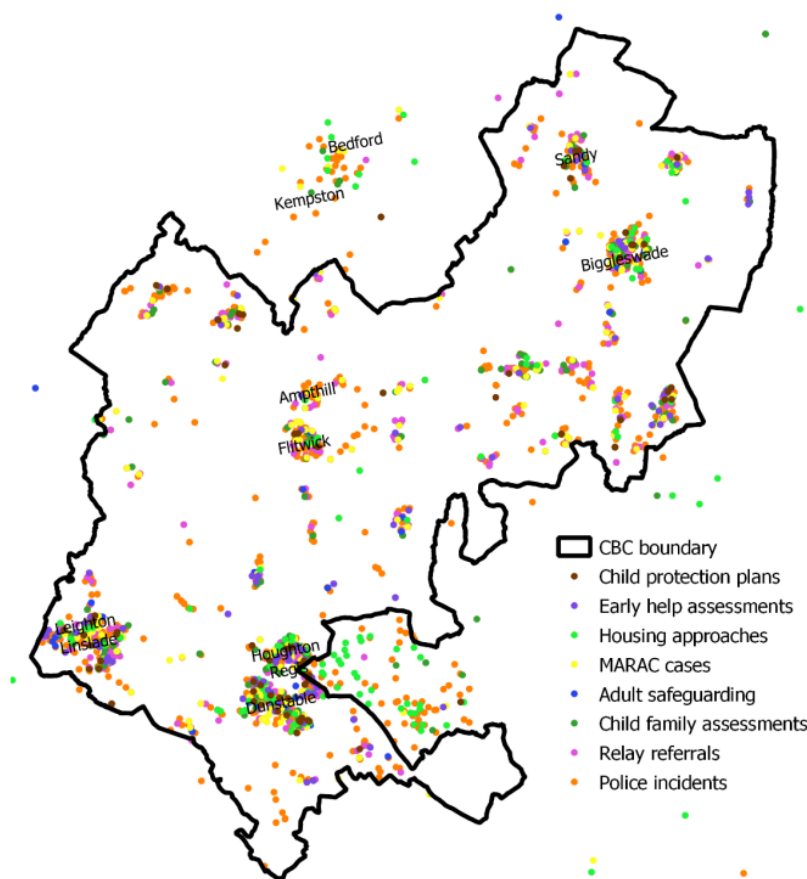
Grab bags (funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) are also available and provide emergency supplies for someone fleeing domestic abuse with items such as vouchers and a mobile phone.

Further details of these services are set out in [Appendix B](#).

The financial crisis continues to impact individuals experiencing domestic abuse, exacerbating financial hardship and barriers to leaving. There is a cohort of victims/survivors who do not meet the thresholds for financial support for services and accommodation but equally cannot afford the support or accommodation. Some homeowners have limited accommodation options due to existing housing costs for the home they lived in with their perpetrator.

5.6 Location of victims and survivors

There is a consistent geographical spread of reported domestic abuse across Central Bedfordshire with the highest prevalence areas being in urban areas that are also areas of deprivation. It is likely that prevalence is consistent across the county, but these individuals and families are more likely to come to the attention of statutory service in the first instance. This is evidenced in the illustration and table below.



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Figure 9. Most prevalent areas for domestic abuse victims/survivors recorded by services in Central Bedfordshire (see [Appendix B](#) for details).

It should be noted that there are relationships between each of these activities, so some of the cases for different services will be focusing on the same families.

Over the 3 years April 2020 – March 2023, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) saw the most victim/survivor activity in the following areas.

Areas of Highest Prevalence	Total Victim/Survivors	Approx. Population (% of Central Beds total)	Area of Deprivation
Dunstable	21%	40,000 (14%)	Yes
Houghton Regis	12%	19,600 (7%)	Yes
Leighton Buzzard	13%	42,700 (15%)	Yes
Biggleswade	10%	22,500 (8%)	No
Sandy	4%	12,100 (4%)	Yes
Shefford	0.5%	7,000 (2%)	No

Table 6. Key facts on areas with the highest prevalence of domestic abuse.

It should be noted that only 2% of victim/survivors heard at Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) during this period did not have an address on file.

Those fleeing to Central Bedfordshire from outside the area are predominantly from neighbouring authorities such as Luton, Hertfordshire and Bedford respectively.

Data shows that a large percentage of Safe Accommodation in Central Bedfordshire is utilised by women from out of area, the majority from neighbouring authorities.

There is evidence that domestic abuse occurs across all localities and areas of Central Bedfordshire but is most likely to be reported in urban areas of deprivation where there is an overall increase in statutory sector agency involvement with family's. The large geographical spread of domestic abuse presents an ongoing challenge when it comes to embedding consistent service response across Central Bedfordshire.

6. Domestic abuse homicides

Date	Nationally	Central Bedfordshire	Norfolk	Luton
31/03/2022	134	1	7	0
31/03/2023	-	4		2

Table 7. Domestic Homicide figures.

Sadly, there have been 5 Domestic Homicides in Central Bedfordshire in the last 2 years. This followed Home Office guidance to include incidents of suicide into the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) criteria and 3 of the 5 Domestic Homicides were as a result of a resident taking their own life.

Ahead of the published learning and recommendations from the Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) there has been extensive work with the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) Suicide Prevention board. This work will continue and once published the recommendations from all the Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) will be considered and implemented wherever possible.

7. Next Steps and Recommendations

The findings of this needs assessment will inform the Domestic Abuse Strategy that will be developed in accordance with Government guidelines.

Recommendations to be taken forward from this Needs Assessment and considered in the refreshed Domestic Abuse Strategy include;

Recommendation	Outcome
Training	Continued focus on joined up approach and a partnership approach to delivery with wider partners.

Joint working with Health partners	Continuation of specialist services currently being delivered. Improve access to services through health-based services
Targeted comms and awareness raising	Improved awareness in communities about services available to support individuals experiencing domestic abuse.
Continue to focus on multi agency statutory response	Improve consistency in response across Council and wider partners.
Update Equality Impact Assessment	Improve understanding of barriers to residents from minoritized communities to improve response and provision of services.
Focus on Safe Accommodation provision for specific groups of residents	Residents under the age 19 and over the age of 65 Male residents Individuals with complex needs Individuals classed as 'affluent'
Improve access to face-to-face translation services	Improve access to services for residents whose first language is not English.
Develop access to community-based services through commissioned services and Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP) Support Hubs	Improve access to community-based services for residents experiencing domestic abuse.

Table 8. Recommendations for consideration in the Domestic Abuse Strategy refresh.

8. Local Overview of Domestic Abuse Prevalence

In Central Bedfordshire

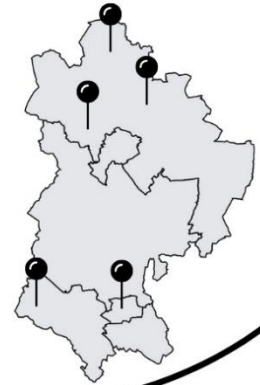
There are 294,300 residents in Central Bedfordshire according to Census 2021 data



3,671 residents received support for domestic abuse
2,238 cases were reported to police, accounting for 16% of total crime in Bedfordshire

Across Central Bedfordshire, the highest areas of prevalence for victim/survivors were:

21% in Dunstable
13% in Leighton Buzzard
12% in Houghton Regis
10% in Biggleswade
4% in Sandy
0.5% in Shefford



In the Needs

Assessment survey, the most prevalent forms of domestic abuse people had experienced were:

Coercive control, 20%
Psychological abuse, 20%
Violent/threatening behaviour, 17%
Physical abuse, 16%
Economic abuse, 11%
Sexual abuse, 8%
Stalking/harassment, 8%



Domestic abuse was most prevalent in the 18-39 age category across Adult Safeguarding, police incidents, Housing approaches and MARAC



Adult victim ethnicity



Supported by services	Census 2021 population
2% mixed heritage	2% mixed heritage
3% Black or Black British	2% Black or Black British
74% white	92% white
4% Asian or British Asian	4% Asian or British Asian
1% from another Ethnic Group	1% from another Ethnic Group
17% were not recorded	

In our survey, the services most people reported having contacted for support were the police (65%) and GP/health services (33%) This is reflected nationally in the DA Commissioner's report, with 44% of people nationally telling a healthcare worker and 43% telling the police



Data sourced from report provided to Local Partnership Board for year ending 2023, Needs Assessment survey results and Domestic Abuse Commissioner's A Patchwork of Provision report

Appendix A

Appendix B: Services for Victims/Survivors of Domestic Abuse, Living in Central Bedfordshire

Service	Provider	Details
Refuge provision for women and children fleeing domestic abuse	Stonewater	Two refuges in Central Bedfordshire provide 22 units of accommodation for women fleeing domestic abuse
Transitional Accommodation with additional Support	Central Bedfordshire Council	Dispersed accommodation
Transitional Accommodation with additional Support	Central Bedfordshire Council	Hostel accommodation
Domestic Abuse Resettlement Team (DART) Flexi Fund	IMPAKT	Bedfordshire wide provision for anyone needing to be rehoused either within Bedfordshire or another local authority area and supports any male or female (aged 16 plus), with or without children escaping domestic abuse to find either temporary or long term safe housing solutions. They also oversee the 'Flexi-Fund' in Central Bedfordshire, which is funding used to overcome any barrier preventing access to secure housing.
Domestic Abuse Counselling and Therapeutic Support Bedfordshire Talking Therapies	East London Foundation Trust	Specialist service provision for those 18 years plus. Qualified, trauma-informed counsellors will provide 1:1 and group therapy to all adults on an outreach basis. Bedfordshire Talking Therapies also provide a range of free and confidential talking therapies and specialist support.
Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service Barclays Victim Support Fund	Victim Support	Offer advice, advocacy and support to victim/survivors. This can be through their high-risk service for those heard at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), the community service or at either of the Bedfordshire hospitals. They offer specialist provision for male victim/survivors and those experiencing stalking.
The Rebuild Programme	Central Bedfordshire Council	A 12- week group programme looking at relationships which has replaced the Freedom Programme in Central Bedfordshire. Designed for women living

		with domestic abuse and is run from the Children's Centres (including online programmes). Currently for women only.
Own my Life Pattern Changing	Home-Start	Voluntary Sector Provider <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services are for those who have and are experiencing domestic abuse.
Bedfordshire Victim Care Services telephone advice line Grab bags	Bedfordshire PCC	Grant funded by the Office of the PCC Rolling annual provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telephone helpline for all victims/survivors of crime, irrespective if they wish to report to the Police or not.
One to one case work Own my Life Freedom Forever Solicitor Advice Surgery Counselling Service	Luton All Women's Centre	Provision for women only Voluntary Sector provider <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services are for those who have and are experiencing domestic abuse Services are for those who have and are experiencing harmful practices (honour-based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation).
One to one support Counselling Service Beyond Trauma Group programme Understanding Anger Group programme Freedom Programme Freedom Forever Shine Offending rehabilitation	Stepping Stones	Provision for women only Voluntary Sector provider <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services are for those who have and are experiencing domestic abuse Services are for those who have offended or who are re-offending Have a creche facility for service users.
Therapeutic life story work Counselling for adults Self-esteem workshops All Women's Group Talk:4M Men's Group Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) provision Play Therapy	Early Childhood Partnership	Provision for families Voluntary Sector Provider <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services are for those who have and are experiencing domestic abuse Have a creche facility for service users.
Living Your Life	Living Your Life	Support women and men across Bedfordshire affected by trauma -especially sexual or domestic abuse and violence. Their work with male victims/survivors has

		been nationally recognised. Experienced with criminal court processes, they offer pre-trial therapy. Services include counselling, coaching and workshops (e.g. self-esteem).
Kids Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (KIDVA)	Embrace	Provide support to children who have been witness to or assaulted/abused by a parent or close family member.
Freedom Programme	TOKKO	Offer Freedom for Teenagers and Freedom for Women to young people, they can also work with perpetrators.
FORTIS Project	Sorted Counselling	The Fortis Project is offered by Sorted Counselling Service and offers counselling to children and young people (ages 5-18) who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse.
Freedom for Children	Central Bedfordshire Council	Run within schools in Central Bedfordshire.
Mindfulness Support Service	Mindfulness Support Service	Deliver separate groups for female and male victims/survivors of domestic abuse.
Helpline Outreach work Freedom Programme Freedom Forever Freedom for Children/Teenagers Recovery Toolkit (including Sexual Violence and Child programmes) Own My Life Freedom Programme for Men	The Ebonista Project	Run a variety of programmes to educate, raise awareness and empower women who have faced trauma, with a strong focus on reaching women from the Black African and Caribbean community. They also offer Freedom for Men for those concerned about their own behaviours and want help to change these behaviours.
Refugee and Migrant Advice Service	The King's Arms Project	Help people understand their immigration options and make decisions about their next steps. Access to legal advice is delivered in a trauma-informed way which maximises client-choice and engagement.
Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP) Support Hubs	Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP)	This scheme promotes places within local communities that can offer a safe space for someone who needs to access support, allowing them to contact a service for help to safely end an abusive/controlling relationship
Other Local Services	Please see the Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP) Support Services Directory .	

Central Bedfordshire in contact

Find us online: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Email: customers@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Write to: Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House,
Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5TQ