

# Suicide must not appear to be the only escape for some victims of abuse, warns new study

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In one of the largest studies of its kind, and the first in the UK, experts from Refuge and the University of Warwick School of Law looked at the experiences of more than 3500 of Refuge's clients with the aim of informing policy and practice in relation to victims of abuse who are at an increased risk of suicide.

The report found:

- 83 percent of clients came to Refuge's services feeling despairing or hopeless – a key determinant for suicidality
- At least 24 percent had felt suicidal at one time or another; 18 percent had made plans to end their life; 3 percent had made a suicide attempt
- 49 percent of the suicidal group scored within the 'severe' range on a measure of psychological distress

The level of support for survivors from professionals and external agencies was seen as crucial: the research found that long delays in obtaining support had the potential to exacerbate difficulties, victims needed adequate time to disclose the full impact of their abuse and a suitable environment to 'tell their story' at their own pace.

The report calls for a commitment to sufficient, specialist services, both outreach and refuge, for the survivors of abuse, and greater recognition of the risk of suicide among victims of domestic abuse.

Professor Vanessa Munro, Head of Warwick Law School and one of the authors of the report, said: "This study exposes the profound psychological harm that can be, and often is, inflicted by perpetrators of domestic abuse upon their victims.

"In recent years, there has been much attention on the risk of domestic homicide, but remarkably little on the risk that victims may take their own lives as a result of the abuse that they endure.

"In exposing the scale of suicidality amongst Refuge's client base, and exploring some of the challenges in supporting suicidal clients to safety and recovery, our findings can improve laws, policies and practice."

Although the research does not explore the impact of having a suicidal parent, the authors recognise the harm that living with domestic abuse can have upon children, particularly when the abused parent is suicidal. The authors highlight the need for specialist services for children impacted by domestic violence, especially those bereaved in this context.

Refuge offers specialist support services to men, women and children victims of abuse and believes all are entitled to a compassionate and appropriate response, particularly those who are so distressed that they have considered suicide.

However, the gender split in Refuge's sample broadly reflected national and international trends in domestic [abuse](#) perpetration and victimisation—a phenomenon in which women are overwhelmingly the [victims](#) and males the perpetrators. As such, the researchers appeal to all agencies to recognise [domestic abuse](#) as a gendered issue and a gendered crime.

**More information:** The report is available online:  
[www.refuge.org.uk/wp-content/u ... warwick-july2018.pdf](http://www.refuge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/refuge-warwick-july2018.pdf)

Provided by University of Warwick

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