

Jo – Written evidence (PSC0044)

I currently work for a domestic abuse charity as an Administrator and Project Lead for a project that supports women on their healing journey after completing our psycho-educational programmes. My background is in the media, having previously worked for a big corporation. In November 2015, I walked through the doors of a domestic abuse charity after six and a half years of being in a domestically abusive relationship, and as they say the rest is history.

To this day, it still amazes me how many people within public services saw me and were never curious about the person that sat before them. In January 2012 I had a mental breakdown due to the abuse and visited my GP. At this time, I did not realise I was the victim of domestic abuse, however, when the doctor asked what had caused the depression, I answered it was my boyfriend. His reply was that "I needed to sort it" plus a prescription for anti-depressants and that was it. In a follow-up appointment, he asked if I had "sorted it" to which I replied, I was "in the process". In October 2012, I was diagnosed with IBS. There was no correlation between the depression or the IBS or what I had said earlier in the year about my boyfriend. Interestingly, the symptoms disappeared once I left the relationship. The whole process took me to buy a house and have a baby with him before it was "sorted".

The abuse escalated once I fell pregnant at the end of 2014. During my first midwife appointment, I was questioned about domestic abuse. It was asked as a routine question whilst my partner was in the room with me, it was never mentioned again.

During the pregnancy I suffered from fluid leaks and had to go to the hospital whenever it happened to ensure it wasn't amniotic fluid. On one occasion it was 3am in the morning and I went to the hospital on my own, other women were there with their partners, no-one questioned why I was alone. The same happened on another occasion, this time it was about 5pm and I arrived alone and had low blood sugar as I hadn't eaten. Again, no questions asked.

On the day my baby was born, I was left in hospital alone with my newborn baby from 1pm, so he could go home and sleep, in reality it was to drink. At 2.30pm I was providing technical support for the testing of a live relay...from my hospital bed, with my baby who was struggling to feed...and guess what? No-one asked any questions. I was alone in hospital for about 21 hours...plenty of time for a midwife to be curious.

When I went to register the birth of the child, I was asked in front of my partner if I was happy with her surname, I wasn't and so my child's

surname has been registered under duress and I have no recourse over this.

The above is just a snapshot of my life, to highlight the missed opportunities from public services.

So, in my opinion and based on my own experiences, public services fall very short in addressing vulnerable children and victims of domestic abuse. There is a lack of funding to enable the number of staff required in tackling the issue, and there is a lack of training. There is also a lack of consistency and information sharing across the services. I also believe that there is a failure to understand that the people undertaking these jobs enter their roles with their own pre-conceptions and opinions and this can impact massively on the service provided, which is why training, refresher courses and supervision are imperative.

Due to my own experiences, I have always felt that more funding needs to be input into midwives and health visitors, these are your early intervention people. Domestic abuse is always present with a perpetrator, but it does intensify when a woman falls pregnant, and so midwives and health visitors, with the right staffing numbers and training have the potential to identify cases earlier.

However, once identified, where do they go? Domestic abuse charities are not all properly funded and yet provide that vital work needed to educate and heal. Our belief, at the charity where I work, is that if we can educate one woman, she can go on to educate many more through family and friends, and if we could spend less time worrying about writing bids, we could spend more time educating women and children. In turn this would decrease the pressure on public services as through education comes empowerment.

I would ask that my evidence is anonymous due to my job and due to the fact that my ex has never been charged. My comments could be perceived as defamation, and even though it has been over 5 years since I left, he still uses the court system to try to regain power and control, and I do not want anything to jeopardise my current case.

Thank you for taking the time to read my evidence.

May 2021