

Women speak out about experiences of domestic violence and abuse to help others

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A new resource designed to support [women experiencing domestic violence and abuse](#) has been launched on the healthtalk.org charity website today.

The resource, developed by researchers from the Universities of Bristol and Oxford with funding from the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Programme, includes over 30 video- and audio-recorded interviews with women who describe a range of abuse, including physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse, and coercive and controlling behaviour, which became a criminal offence in 2015.

The women's accounts reveal that domestic abuse is not just about being 'battered' but can be about being subjected to coercive and controlling behaviour, such as threats of harm to the woman or other members of the family, if she does not comply with her partner's demands. Women stressed the importance of making safety plans when preparing to leave an abusive relationship.

Dr Emma Williamson, Head of the Centre for Gender & Violence Research, School for Policy Studies, who co-led the project, said: "Personal stories open a 'window' into real-life experiences, providing insight to others. We are extremely grateful to the women who chose to speak out about their experiences of domestic violence and abuse. Although speaking about these experiences can be difficult, the women wanted to help others in similar situations and to let friends, family and professionals know how best to help if they think a woman is being abused."

Professor Gene Feder, a GP who leads domestic violence research at the Centre for Academic Primary Care said: "Domestic violence and abuse can happen to anyone. We hope that this resource helps women and those who are concerned about them to recognise this and find the right help and support."

The lady said to me, "I think you need to speak to Women's Aid," I thought, "But I haven't been beaten up. I'm not a battered woman. I'm not black, I'm not blue. Why would I need to go to Women's Aid for?" And then when I went there and actually started learning and listening to things, I thought, "I can't believe I've been living all these years like this." Ella

The interviews are with women aged between 20 and 62 years from a range of cultural backgrounds, including some first-generation migrants. They had experienced between one and 33 years in an abusive relationship, 11 years on average. Half of them had experienced abuse from more than one person, either previous partners or a family member, sometimes in childhood. Most of the women were free of abuse at the time of their interview and they talked about how they got help and, over time, took back control of their lives from their abusive partners.

“Although it’s really, really hard, now when I look back at it, it’s been three years since I’ve left the domestic violence relationship and the change has been absolutely incredible. Just to be able to go out when I want to go out, just to be able to go shopping when I want to go shopping... and not be made to feel guilty that tea’s not on the table or you haven’t done the washing or you haven’t done this. You just take so much control of your life back.” - Jane

Dr Williamson added: “The safety of the women who took part in the interviews and those who use the website for information, advice and support is our top priority. For their own safety, three women who took part decided not to include their interviews on the website, and many others preferred to remain anonymous, so some of their words are read by actors and some are in audio rather than video format. For those using the website, we have protections in place, including the ability to quickly exit the site and cover your tracks online at one click.”

The website also contains information on other resources and support available to women. It is hoped that, as well as being used by women, their friends and families, it will be used by health and other professionals, such as GPs, counsellors and therapists, and the police, to help them identify, support and refer women experiencing domestic violence and abuse to appropriate services.

Domestic violence can be experienced or perpetrated by men, women or transgender people in straight, gay or lesbian relationships. Globally, direct experience of being subjected to domestic violence is greater among women than among men. In the UK, 27% of women and 13% of men have experienced some form of domestic abuse in their lifetime.

[Visit the Domestic Violence and Abuse resource to see the video interviews.](#)