

This rationale and portfolio of evidence will be identifying what exactly advocacy is, what an advocates role is and how an independent advocate should support their client in order to ensure that the client's voice is heard, tying together with theory, policy and practice. Specifically, this rationale will be focusing on the issue of domestic abuse in all of its forms, it's victims, and the ways in which an independent advocate would provide support for the victims. This rationale will be identifying and exploring the role of an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA), a specific type of advocate that is particularly assigned to support victims of domestic violence, and the local organisations that support and raise awareness for this particular group. This rationale will also be pinpointing what legislations and policies in England and Wales have recently been put in place to support and decrease the major issue that is domestic violence.

Advocacy is a practice that is becoming more well known, with advocates now being needed in several areas than ever before. The core principle of advocacy is ensuring that individuals who are considered vulnerable have their voice heard and are able to get across issues that they feel are important to them, and that they are present and involved in all decisions that are made in regards to them. An advocate is an individual whose role is to provide the correct advocacy support and ensuring clients have access to the correct services available to them, and to always defend and promote their rights (SEAP advocacy, 2019). As an advocate, there as a specific set of guidelines and rules one must follow. This portfolio includes the QPM Advocacy Code of Practice (Appendix 1 p. 7, 8 and 11) which states several guidelines that an advocate must follow, and what their purpose is, and is written in fairly simple terms making it easy to read and to understand, specific and straight to the point. It states that an advocate must always be clear to their client in regards to the nature of their role and what it entails, understanding the boundaries. It is also the advocates role to always promote empowerment with their clients, to ensure that the clients have a full understanding of their current circumstances and are involved in the process. An advocate needs to be promoting self-advocacy within the clients, and promoting their rights in decision making situations that involve the clients own care and support. It is also important for the advocate and client to agree on methods of advocacy representation, so that the client is comfortable and has the ability to instruct the advocate appropriately to make certain that the clients have a say in their own lives and are able to access relevant services (Advocacy QPM, 2014).

Another Code of Practice has been published in regards to advocacy, which can be seen under section 145 part 10 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (Appendix 2, p.10). This specific Code of Practice goes into far more depth in comparison to the QPM's code of practice for advocacy, including a range of sections that go into great detail.

Although both code of practices are different, both include similar outlines on what the role of an advocate should be. In comparison to the QPM's code of practice, it is written a lot differently, very formal using a lot of jargon and written like a piece of legislation. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Part 10 Code of Practice Advocacy, continues to explain why Advocacy is important, and emphasises on the importance of safeguarding vulnerable individuals and empowering them, similar to QPM's Code of Practice for Advocacy (Welsh Government, 2015).

Moving on to the issue that will be covered throughout this rationale which is domestic abuse, which is unfortunately a continuous ongoing issue worldwide, where in this modern day and age it really should not still be a problem, however, it very much still is. What exactly is domestic abuse? Domestic abuse is when an individual exercises their control over another individual. Presenting coercive controlling behaviour, it is often within a close family relationship or an intimate relationship, and the abuse is usually that of a sexual, financial, physical, psychological or emotional nature, and also includes harassment and stalking. There is often a pattern of behaviour, and it can happen to anyone. Their age, sex, class, disability, ethnicity or religion play no part. Although, the victims gender and the perpetrators gender do in fact have influence and have a large effect over the harm, risk and severity that is caused (Welsh Women's Aid, 2019).

In relation to the issue of domestic abuse, the Office for National Statistics did a Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) which was completed by March 2016. The individuals who took part in the survey were between the ages of 16 to 59. The surveys focal point is the experience of emotional, financial and physical abuse by intimate partners or by their family members, and it also looked at sexual assaults and stalking by any individual, meaning they do not have to be a family relation. The findings were quite substantial and alarming, and they include that the CSEW estimated that 7.7% of women and 4.4% of men

have experienced any type of domestic abuse during the year the survey was made, and these percentages are equivalent to an estimated 1.3 million female victims and 716,000 male victims. Another point states that 26% of women and 14% of men had unfortunately experienced some form of domestic abuse from the age of 16, equivalent to an estimated 4.3 million female victims and 2.2 million male victims. Another statistic the CSEW also found was that it was more probable that women experienced all types of intimate violence in comparison to men, except for family abuse (non-sexual). Finally, one of the largest differences between men and women was sexual assault, where women were highly more likely to have experienced this specific form of abuse, astonishingly almost 5 times more probable than men, which in percentages is 3.2% in comparison with 0.7%. It also revealed that women had experienced remarkably more intimate violence, from the ages of 16 than men had at the same age (Office for National Statistics, 2017). These statistics are a clear indication that the ongoing issue of domestic abuse is still present and persistent within England and Wales, and does not seem to be decreasing anytime soon. They also demonstrate the keen need for change, and for the services and organisations that are available for victims of domestic abuse to be made more well known in the public eye .

Although the issue is very much evident, there are certain organisations and charities who are truly making attempts to fight and decrease domestic abuse throughout Britain. Focusing on Wales, there is Welsh Women's Aid, an organisation in Wales who are tackling and fighting the issue of domestic violence, attempting to bring it to an end, and to ultimately stop violence against women. Although Welsh Women's Aid do not directly support the victims, what they do is campaign on behalf of the cause and raise awareness of violence against women. However they do offer a helpline, Live Fear Free, which is a 24 hour live chat service for the victims to use either by phone call or text, and get to speak with an experienced member of the team, who offer support by providing information and help, or to simply talk through any current concerns. They also are able to help and provide relevant information to one's specific needs, some of which include areas such as emergency accommodation, counselling, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC), Perpetrator programmes and local support services (Welsh Women's Aid, 2019). Women's Aid also branch out into different regions of Wales, where sufferers of domestic abuse are then able to reach out to their most local organisation for support.

Focusing on Swansea Women's Aid (Appendix 3), they are a women-only organisation who support any and all women who have been affected by domestic abuse. Swansea Women's Aid provide several services which are made available to the victims, some of which include supported housing service, which is a temporary, emergency accommodation for women and their children. There is also the DAISE (Domestic Abuse Information, Support and Empowerment) Project (Appendix 4) which provides the users with the opportunity to have 1-2-1 appointments, crisis intervention. The DAISE project also offers a supplementary service for the victims, such as a free Counselling service, Homeopathy, The Recovery Toolkit and the Freedom Programme (Appendix 5). Swansea Women's Aid also have a new project (Appendix 6) with the aim to give a voice to women, young people and children who have been affected by domestic violence. This project, 'Your Opinion Matters', offers the opportunity for women and young people to become Domestic Abuse representatives, which ensures that there are more people who going to be working in this field to continue tackling this issue. (Swansea Women's Aid, n.d). With an organisation such as this and what they have to offer, there is definitely a sense of hope for the victims, knowing that within their region there is an organisation who cares and will provide the support and services that are needed to get away from the situation that they are in.

There is also the Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Services charity organisation (Appendix 7.a), formally known as Carmarthens Women's Aid, and is run by women to support women, with the aim to empower and promote equality, and to support domestic abuse victims and to provide sufficient services. Some of these services include drop-in sessions where they are able to receive support, a free confidential counselling service, support for children and young people in the form of group and play sessions, or even on a one to one basis, training programmes and being provided the opportunity to go to a refuge. There is also a service that the Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Service provide named BE BETTER AT BUDGETING (Appendix 7.b), and this service provides a Money Coach to the users of the service who are in financial crisis due to their current circumstances, who ensures that the victims are claiming the benefits they are entitled to, and working through effective methods to help budget bills and outgoing. All of the services provided will greatly help the victims to

eventually get back on their feet financially and independently through the ongoing empowerment and support of this organisation.

In particular, as an advocate, it is a Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (Appendix 8), and they are trained specialist's who have the ability to offer direct support to the victims of domestic abuse, and speak up and on behalf of the victims in situations where they may feel vulnerable, such as court settings and meetings that include decisions about them. An IDVA also has the ability to provide advice when it is needed, assist in making safety plans and ensures that the victims are fully aware of all the options that are available to them, including legal and non-legal services and participate in multi-agency work in order to keep the victims and children safe. If an incident of domestic abuse has been reported to the police, it is their job to make the correct referral to an IDVA, who also work closely with Women's Aid. (North Wales Police, 2019). It is so important and essential that there are IDVA's being made available to specifically advocate in the area of domestic violence, as they are specialist's in that area, with the ability and knowledge of specific legislations that can apply to the victims situation and know exactly what organisations and services are available to them.

In recent years, there has been more legislations put in place in attempts to reduce domestic abuse and putting the victims in uncomfortable and unnecessary situations in the United Kingdom. As recent as January 2019, a domestic abuse draft bill has been published to ban family court cross-examination of domestic violence victims (Appendix 9, p.1 and 2), who are cross-examined by their ex-partners who have potentially been abusive, and it will bring forward the first statutory definition of domestic abuse which includes controlling and manipulative non-physical abuse, and economic abuse. This bill will most definitely help victims feel empowered and more in control of their current situation when going through court situations knowing they do not have the burden of being cross-examined by the perpetrator, avoiding further mental abuse and torment (The Law Society, 2019).

Another form of legislation that supports and enforces to diminish the issue of domestic abuse in Wales is the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (Appendix 10, p.1 and 2). This particular Act is only relevant to Wales, and only became an official Act on the 29th April 2015. The Welsh Government have stated that

the initial purpose and aim of the Act is to raise awareness, to prevent, protect and ensure that support is given to victims of sexual violence, gender-based violence and domestic abuse. Not only to raise awareness within the public audience, but through the agencies who work in this sector and the statutory bodies, to ensure they are able to give the victims the best support possible. This specific Act, although it has not been in effect for a particularly long time, is most definitely helping to tackle domestic abuse in Wales and offering sufficient support to the victims, through funding services such as a 24 hour All-Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence helpline which provides emergency support and advice if needed. The Welsh Government have also helped to fund services to support and work directly with the victims, such as Domestic Abuse Coordinators and Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, which are greatly needed (Welsh Government, 2019). The advocate can certainly use this Act to support the victims in a court hearing and legal meeting. Through this Act, a lot of welcomed change is coming to promote the ongoing issue of domestic abuse, and in hopes of diminishing the issue all together.

Reflecting on all of the above, it is clear that domestic abuse is unfortunately still very present, not just within the United Kingdom, but on a global scale. Focusing on Britain, even in this modern day and age, domestic abuse in all of its forms is still evident and does not seem to be decreasing. However, there have thankfully been certain services, organisations and legislations that have been put into practice and put in place to prevent further negative outcomes from the issue of domestic abuse, and to hopefully one day entirely diminish it. The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, will most definitely help to back up the victims in a legal situation, and is helping to increase awareness amongst public services in Wales by training all employers in the correct way, ensuring the victims are receiving the best form of support possible. In a court setting, with the domestic abuse draft Bill to ban family court-cross examination, this will most likely encourage empowerment within the victims to regain self control and not have to be put in a situation, that is already uncomfortable as it is, where they are potentially made to feel victimised even further by the perpetrator. This Bill is a massive triumph and a move in the right direction in tackling domestic abuse and encouraging empowerment within the victims. With the ongoing support from organisations such as Welsh Womens Aid, and specifically, Swansea Women's Aid and Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Services, and IDVA's, those who

are suffering from domestic abuse in these areas will always have a place to turn to should they need it, and be offered a variety of services in relation to their circumstances. These organisations are really attempting to tackle the issue head on, providing the victims with a safety net and ensuring that they will in fact have a future abuse and violence free, knowing they have someone to fight on their behalf when they are in such a vulnerable state. Although there is still a very long way to go to hopefully reach a domestic abuse free Britain, it is thanks to these legislations, organisations and the support of IDVA's, that there is a chance that maybe one day, there will be a major decrease in domestic abuse in Britain.

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