

Describe what constitutes 'empowerment, agency and anti-oppressive practices' and relate these to the role of the advocate.

This essay will be exploring the different methods of which an advocate can promote empowerment, agency and anti-oppressive practice within the individuals who require it. This essay will also be focusing on a specific advocacy role, and how that advocate would manage these responsibilities in that specific role. This essay will briefly explain and describe what empowerment, agency and anti-oppressive practice each mean, why they are so important for the clients, and how an advocate can encourage these tools within their clients. Relevant policy will also be included and will be explored to assess how these support the role of the advocate. Specifically, this essay will be exploring the role of an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, and the victims who they support. An advocate is an individual who speaks on behalf of those who are too vulnerable to do so themselves, and ensures that it is the individuals views and concerns that are put across, guaranteeing that their voice is heard (Justice Education, N.D). Although the role of an advocate may possibly misconstrued with the role of lawyer, there are massive differences, and as an advocate, one is unable to practice law or give out legal advice (Justice Education, N.D).

There are several advocate roles within today's society, helping in many different areas, ranging from working with children, to the elderly, to individuals who suffer with mental health. This essay however, will be focusing on the role of an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA), who specifically work directly with individuals who have suffered from all types of domestic abuse. It is an IDVA's role to create safety plans with the client, attending court with the clients and making requests for special measures in those situations, supporting clients to give evidence and helping them with making victim impact statements (Refuge, 2017). Quite clearly, it may be considered that the role of an IDVA is a demanding and intense one, that requires an individual who is compassionate, and the ability to work under pressure and the skills to cope with conflict and distress, to be able to fully manage the challenging task that that face (The Blue Door, 2016).

An essential part of any advocate's role is to promote empowerment within their clients, this is especially important as this can encourage self-advocacy within the clients, giving them the

chance to empower themselves and be entirely present through the decision making processes that involve them (Advocacy QPM, 2014). An example of a definition of empowerment which may be considered relevant to this topic is “the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). This definition accurately describes the meaning of empowerment, and is relevant to this particular area of advocacy. Empowerment is an essential tool that an advocate uses with their client, it has several positive effects, with one positive outcome being engagement. Engagement is crucial when working with such vulnerable individuals, by empowering individuals through providing them with the correct information that is relevant to them, this encourages engagement which is a step forward in the right direction with the guarantee that they are willingly participating (Continuous Care for Health, 2018). Victims of domestic violence are usually left feeling very vulnerable after all that they have been through, and are left feeling somewhat powerless, and have been made to feel that they have not got control over themselves. Abusers tend to have complete control over their victims, it is a tactic they use to ensure their victim is obedient and is too afraid of the consequences to ever leave their abuser (Domestic Shelters, 2019). Whether it be control over the victims finances, their children, sexual decisions or what family and friends they see, it is clearly the abuser who controls these vulnerable individuals, leaving them to feel dependent on their abuser, having no control over themselves (Domestic Shelters, 2019). Therefore, when the time comes that a survivor of domestic violence makes the decision to step forward to remove themselves from their situation, it is unlikely that they will want to be told what to do once again (Domestic Shelters, 2019). Instead, by empowering the survivors through tools such as empowerment philosophy, this is more likely to encourage survivors to get out of their current circumstances, which in fact gives them back a sense of control and independence to the survivors (Domestic Shelters, 2019). Quite clearly, empowerment is an essential and crucial tool for advocates to use to encourage survivors of domestic violence to have the ability to be able to personally remove themselves from their situation through self empowerment which leads to other positive and rewarding developments.

Another tool that is essential for advocates to use with their clients is agency, and agency is the actions and the thoughts of individuals who express their own individual power (Thought Co, 2019), and is also considered to be an intersection of power, from where it is distributed

to different directions and the hands of people (Quora, 2018). Agency is related to the term empowerment, and both attempt to portray and ultimately achieve the same goal. Some individuals believe that empowerment is split into two parts, one of them being agency (OPHI Working Paper Series, 2017). As already stated, it is highly important for advocates to promote empowerment within the survivors that they work with, as empowerment can lead to survivors feeling agentic and can encourage them to improve their self-efficacy, with the encouragement and belief that they will be able to set their own goals, which is highly important for victims of domestic violence to eventually be able to do for themselves (Domestic Shelters, 2019).

A highly important and essential tool for IDVA's is to ensure that safety plans are put in place. A safety plan is put in place to provide the individuals who are put at risk with some form of safety, knowing they have a procedure that can be put to use should they need in a time of crisis or if they are at risk (Safe Lives, 2015). Safety plans tend to always be put in place for individuals at risk, therefore victims of domestic violence most definitely need this type of security supporting them. It is the IDVA's responsibility to go through this with their client, making them aware of this procedure and ensuring that a safety plan is put into place. The IDVA will support the client while making the safety plan, discussing and assessing the clients individual situation, while acknowledging the risks that they face, and also taking into consideration the clients own emotional needs (Safe Lives, 2015). It also a requirement for the IDVA to support the client by encouraging them to work through lifestyle changes, which will possibly create positive change for the client by causing them to feel agentic through these empowering techniques (Safe Lives, 2015). The IDVA's ultimate goal in this scenario is to provide their client with a feeling of safety, giving them essential supportive guidance which is likely to cause positive change in their lives and promote empowerment, and a sense of agency within them. Knowing that as they may not have control over their abusers actions, they now have this form of control and independence, acknowledging that they have the ability and the appropriate support to remove themselves from their situation if they want to (Safe Lives, 2015).

It is often the case that victims of domestic violence are made to feel oppressed by their abusers, feeling vulnerable and trapped. A definition of oppression is "a situation in which

people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). This definition is very relevant to this topic, as it is a clear indication as to how victims of domestic violence are more than likely being made to feel. Women who suffer from domestic violence suffer from many types of oppression, and can happen for many reasons, with the possibility that it may simply be due to the fact they are a woman (Women’s Aid, 2015). Unfortunately, domestic abuse in this case is a gender focused crime, which is a consequence of the ongoing global issue of inequality between the genders, where it is the women who are the ones that are oppressed (Women’s Aid, 2015). However, it is the advocates aim to move away from the barrier that is oppression, by encouraging anti-oppressive practice, which is derived from empowerment. Anti-oppressive practice is regularly used by advocates, and is especially useful to IDVA’s, as it is another tool to use to encourage empowerment within their clients. Through anti-oppressive practice, advocates can encourage their clients to overcome barriers that are holding them back from achieving their desired goals which will eliminate and remove the ongoing issue in their lives (Open Learn, 2018). By using anti-oppressive practice with clients, this will motivate the clients to partake in the changing process with the help of their advocate, creating positive change, empowerment and control, causing them to no longer feel not in control of their lives and to feel powerless, instead, having that sense of independence once again and regaining control of their own lives and decisions (Open Learn, 2018).

As an IDVA, there are many legislations and policies that they must be fully aware of to encourage and support their clients, as an IDVA, one must be fully knowledgeable in their specific areas, in order to provide their clients with the best support and assistance in their time of need. In order to achieve this, an IDVA must go through the process of a training course, one of these courses is named Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA), which was originally created in 2005, in order for IDVA’s to obtain a legitimate qualification, and for there to be a service standards that must be achieved (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). CAADA is currently the only specialist foundation IDVA training course within the United Kingdom, and is known for being highly effective. The course provides its trainees with efficient building skills, ensuring that they are fully equipt to be able to handle situations that are classed as high risk, the skills to sufficiently support their client and to provide the best support to ensure the victims of domestic violence that they work with have

the ability to improve their situation, and eventually their lives ((European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). The course is delivered in 5 block sessions. The course has had an impressive 98% in learners saying they approve of the course, and feel more confident and positive within their role after receiving the training (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). Clearly, this specific course is an excellent course for IDVA's to have, to be officially recognised for their hard working role, and to have the legal support of this qualification behind them. This qualification gives an IDVA the appropriate training and knowledge in this area to be able to fully handle whatever high risk situation that they may be put in. This qualification also gives an IDVA the correct skills to be able to work appropriately with their client, considering they themselves are vulnerable and at risk, the IDVA has the ability to provide the best support to their client that they will most definitely be in need of (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019).

Another way of an IDVA being able to use the correct tools and appropriate and relevant methods for their clients is using Solution Focused Theory (SFT). This tool may be highly effective for IDVA's to use with their clients, as this is a certain form of therapy, which attempts to identify solutions to one's current issues in the present and by finding out one's wishes for the future, can then resolve future issues (Psychology Today, 2019). This form of therapy is a form of therapeutic intervention, and the main aim is to achieve goal setting, by discussing with the therapist what one hopes to gain from life and to achieve, the therapist is then able to help to identify solutions and a plan of action to encourage these goals (Psychology Today, 2019). SFT is commonly known to be used with a variety of individuals who are considered vulnerable, including victims of domestic violence, therefore it is a useful tool an IDVA can use to ensure that their client is receiving the best support in order for them to reach their desired goal, to encourage independence, to help them to feel empowered and to regain a form of control over their lives once again (Psychology Today, 2019).

To conclude, it is clear that the role of an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate is a challenging role, and could be considered to be an emotional too. As an IDVA, one must have the skills to be able to remain professional through difficult and conflicting situations, however must also be able to empathise and be understanding of their clients situation. Therefore, being an IDVA is no easy role. Thankfully, an IDVA receives the best form of

training to be able to handle these high risk situations, while also being able to give their clients the best support they can receive. So long as an IDVA continues to empower their clients, while also encouraging agency and anti-oppressive practice through their support, it is clear that victims of domestic violence will continue to have the best form of support they can have through an IDVA. Safety plans are an excellent way for victims of domestic violence to feel a sense of empowerment, giving them the opportunity to have the feeling of independence and control over their own lives that they undoubtedly deserve. As well as Solution Focused Theory, which is an excellent tool for IDVA's to use with their clients, as this encourages anti-oppressive practice through tools such as goal-setting, which is essential for victims of domestic violence to feel that they have hope for their future. With the IDVA's having the access to these tools, it is more than likely that they will be able to continuously affect the lives of their clients in a positive way and encourage empowerment, agency and anti-oppressive practice through these methods. One day, hopefully there will be more services made available and easier to access to support victims of domestic violence, which will then result in IDVA's possibly not having too much pressure on them in their challenging role.

Word count: 2407 words.

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