



# Domestic Violence: Implementation of JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession – Small Scale Qualitative Research

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## Research aims and context

In April 2012, two policies were introduced to support victims of domestic violence (DV):

- The Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement (JSA DV Easement) – which provides a period of easement from job seeking conditionality for claimants who are victims of domestic violence; and
- The Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession) – which seeks to ensure migrant victims of DV can access income-related benefits when granted 'limited leave to remain outside the immigration rules status'.

The study explored the level of awareness and implementation of both policies among Jobcentre Plus staff and stakeholders, and the additional services provided by Jobcentre Plus offices to help victims of DV engage with the labour market.

## Research methodology

The study featured case study visits to five Jobcentre Plus offices, and interviews with 35 local office and district representatives, including managers and front-line staff. The study also featured consultations with DV policy stakeholders, with fieldwork taking place between mid-February and early March 2013.

## Key findings

### JSA DV Easement

#### Awareness and understanding

The majority of Jobcentre Plus staff were aware of the JSA DV Easement, and considered it a useful additional tool to support DV victims. Most interviewees considered the policy straightforward to understand and implement, and the guidance concise and fit for purpose.

Methods for introducing the policies across the Jobcentre Plus offices varied, from guidance being emailed to staff to more proactive and detailed team briefings. The extent to which more proactive measures were undertaken influenced levels of awareness and buy-in. However, many staff considered that the policy had received limited promotion, resulting in variable awareness of it, both internally and externally.

#### Delivery

The number of Easement cases varied considerably between the Jobcentre Plus offices, and while implementation structures varied, the guidance on delivery appeared to be being followed. Most interviewees reported that the process for the four-week easement ran smoothly, and that the easement criteria worked well.

In some offices 'DV leads' had been established, and in these cases there was evidence of more coordinated and proactive activities that helped support staff identify and support DV claimants.

The Jobcentre Plus staff described how DV claimants faced particular challenges, primarily around low confidence, but also including issues such as: poor work history; not being settled in one place; lack of qualifications and not wanting to leave children in childcare due to concerns about safety.

While implementation was running smoothly in most cases, Jobcentre Plus staff reported that limited access to management information (MI) at the Jobcentre and district levels meant there was no mechanism for reviewing throughput against expectation. The main perceived issue was the low number of individuals disclosing to advisers, raising questions of whether the Jobcentre Plus office was the 'location of choice' to disclose and the amount of time advisers have to spend with claimants to establish trust.

## **DDV Concession**

### **Awareness and understanding**

Awareness and understanding of the DDV Concession was limited among the Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed, and practical experience of implementation confined to just one of the five offices visited. While most interviewees expressed an awareness of the DDV Concession and its general policy intent, many had either not read or did not recall reading the guidance, and few demonstrated a detailed understanding of it. Several interviewees felt that the policy had received less emphasis than the JSA DV Easement.

While some Jobcentre Plus staff considered the DDV Concession guidance to be more complicated overall, the majority who had read it found it to be clear, comprehensive and easy

to access. Across the five Jobcentre Plus offices the view emerged that the DDV Concession guidance would be used as and when a relevant case arose.

### **Delivery**

Experience of delivery was confined to just one Jobcentre Plus office, where two cases were reported, both of which had been problematic.

Where Jobcentre Plus offices had established DV leads, front line staff were described as being able to go to them for advice or for referring on any DDV claimants. The potential to refer cases on to a DV lead was highlighted as important by several interviewees, as the DDV Concession follows a more complex model and cases are rare.

Advisers and managers highlighted a number of issues affecting the actual or potential implementation of the DDV Concession. These included: language barriers and limited resources for interpretation services; limited local links with specialist migrant support/DV agencies; and limited awareness of the policy among local support agencies.

## **Good practice identified in the study**

The study identified a range of good practice examples, including:

- Taking a proactive approach to introducing the policies (e.g. through team meetings and face-to-face briefings), and maintaining awareness of them, particularly if case numbers are low, through 'refresher sessions'.
- Establishing a 'DV lead' for each office to: raise the profile of DV support; act as an internal DV 'expert' and a first point of contact for staff and partners; and liaising with partners to raise awareness of the Jobcentre Plus role.

- Establishing external links to: raise and maintain awareness of the Jobcentre Plus 'offer'; establish trust and credibility; develop a good working knowledge of local services for DV victims; and encourage active referral and signposting.
- Keeping in touch through the Easement period – for example by offering ongoing access to Jobcentre Plus support; and contacting DV claimants prior to their return.
- Holding meetings with DV victims on completion of the Easement period, offering tailored support to return to the labour market, but recognising that victims of DV may also face a range of associated challenges.

## **Findings from the voluntary and community stakeholder consultations**

The stakeholders interviewed welcomed the introduction of the two policies, but highlighted a number of potential issues affecting overall implementation:

- Low levels of awareness among Jobcentre Plus staff, particularly among frontline staff and at assistant adviser level, and among the 'mainstream' support network, such as local authority teams and the police but also wider stakeholders.
- Reluctance to disclose DV by claimants in a Jobcentre Plus context, a key barrier being concerns over confidentiality.
- Variable understandings of the delivery process, for example, victims being asked for additional paperwork relating to the DDV Concession, and limited access to interpreter services.

## **Recommendations**

A series of recommendations were developed for DWP Corporate Centre and for Operations.

### **Recommendations for DWP Corporate Centre**

Here recommendations included:

- Refreshing/re-introducing the DDV Concession to Jobcentre Plus staff through more 'active' dissemination approaches, and encouraging periodic 'refresher/reminder' sessions to maintain awareness of both policies.
- Supporting the replication of good practice where relevant and useful such as considering the benefits of establishing 'DV leads'/single points of contact at Jobcentre Plus or district levels.
- Improving the provision of MI for the JSA DV Easement at Jobcentre and district levels – to allow for better monitoring of local implementation.
- Building on efforts with UK Border Agency (UKBA) to introduce a comprehensive monitoring approach for the DDV Concession.

### **Recommendations for DWP Operations**

- Ensuring that the DDV Concession is re-introduced to all staff using active dissemination methods, and refresher sessions held to maintain awareness of both policies.
- Promoting the support that Jobcentre Plus can provide for victims of DV externally, for example by distributing posters and flyers in community settings.
- Providing an environment where victims of domestic violence are comfortable in disclosing – e.g. making rooms available for one-to-one discussions.

- Replicating good practice where relevant and useful such as considering the benefits of establishing 'DV leads'/single points of contact at Jobcentre or district levels.
- Making better use of opportunities for additional adviser training – where available through local multi-agency partnerships.

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You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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