



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

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

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June 2013

## Research Report No 843

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# Summary

This report presents the findings of a small scale qualitative research study that explored the awareness, understanding and implementation of the Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence (JSA DV) Easement and the Destitute Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession. Introduced in April 2012, these two policies form part of DWP's wider social justice agenda.

The research involved interviews with DWP staff at district and Jobcentre Plus office levels including managers and advisers as well as a consultation with a small sample of Domestic Violence stakeholders. A number of challenges to, and good practice for, identifying and supporting DV claimants through the JSA DV Easement and the DDV Concession were identified, which are presented in the report. A number of areas of good practice were identified including engaging with local specialist support organisations and taking a holistic and tailored approach to the support of Domestic Violence claimants.

The report also provides a series of practical recommendations for the DWP Corporate Centre and for Operations as well as a call for the need for further research that draws on a larger sample of Jobcentre Plus offices and Districts and a wider set of stakeholders.

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	8
The Authors .....	9
Abbreviations and glossary of terms .....	10
Executive summary .....	12
Findings from the Jobcentre Plus Interviews.....	15
JSA DV Easement.....	15
DDV Concession .....	16
Good practice identified in the study .....	17
Findings from the Voluntary and Community Stakeholder Consultations.....	19
Recommendations.....	19
Recommendations for DWP Corporate Centre .....	19
Recommendations for DWP Operations .....	20
Recommendations for further research.....	20
1 Introduction and context .....	21
1.1 Introduction.....	21
1.2 Study methodology.....	21
1.3 Report structure.....	22
2 Study context and stakeholder consultations .....	23
2.1 Study context.....	23
2.1.1 The working definition of domestic violence .....	23
2.1.2 The scale, cost and nature of domestic violence .....	24
2.1.3 The government response to domestic violence .....	25
2.2 Introducing the two DWP DV policies.....	25
2.2.1 JSA DV Easement .....	26
2.2.2 DDV Concession.....	26
2.2.3 Number of JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession cases in the UK...	26

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

2.3	Findings from the voluntary and community stakeholder consultations .....	27
2.3.1	The policy intention is welcomed .....	27
2.3.2	Efforts are being made to disseminate information to claimants and to professionals via networks and training .....	28
2.3.3	There are a number of perceived barriers to implementation .....	29
2.3.4	Little evidence from the three interviewees of delivering collaborative employment support with Jobcentre Plus offices .....	30
3	JSA Domestic Violence Easement .....	31
3.1	Awareness and understanding .....	31
3.1.1	Jobcentre Plus staff – managers and advisers .....	31
3.1.2	District level staff .....	33
3.1.3	Views on wider awareness .....	33
3.2	Introducing the JSA DV Easement .....	34
3.2.1	Introducing the JSA DV Easement .....	34
3.2.2	Views on the guidance materials .....	35
3.3	Implementing the JSA DV Easement .....	36
3.3.1	Delivery structure .....	36
3.3.2	Delivery process and adherence to the guidance .....	37
3.3.3	Abilities and confidence of staff to support DV victims .....	39
3.3.4	Role of Benefit Delivery Centres .....	41
3.4	Key issues .....	41
3.4.1	Lack of awareness of pre-promotion and limited ongoing promotion .....	41
3.4.2	Limited availability of MI at the individual Jobcentre Plus office and district level .....	41
3.4.3	Identifying DV claimants and prompting disclosure is challenging .....	42
3.4.4	Problems with the additional nine-week easement .....	42
3.5	Recommendations from Jobcentre Plus staff for improvements .....	43
3.5.1	Promote the easement more widely and proactively both internally and externally .....	43
3.5.2	Consider ways to help encourage the identification of DV victims earlier and to better support them .....	43

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

3.5.3	Review the purpose and practicalities of the four and 13-week threshold.....	44
3.5.4	Review the easement period .....	44
4	Destitute Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession .....	45
4.1	Awareness and understanding .....	45
4.1.1	Jobcentre Plus staff – managers and advisers .....	45
4.1.2	District representatives .....	46
4.1.3	Jobcentre Plus staff views on wider awareness .....	46
4.2	Introducing the DDV Concession .....	46
4.2.1	Introducing the DDV Concession.....	46
4.2.2	Views on the guidance materials .....	47
4.3	Implementing the DDV Concession .....	47
4.3.1	Delivery structure .....	47
4.3.2	Delivery process and adherence to the guidance.....	47
4.4	Implementation issues.....	48
4.5	Recommendations from Jobcentre Plus Staff for improvements .....	49
5	Good practice and helping victims return to the labour market .....	50
5.1	Communicating the policies .....	50
5.1.1	Introduction and initial awareness raising .....	50
5.1.2	Maintaining awareness and understanding .....	51
5.2	The role of the domestic violence lead .....	51
5.3	Partnership relations and joint working .....	52
5.4	Supporting delivery.....	53
5.5	Additional staff training .....	54
5.6	Additional support to help victims towards the labour market .....	55
5.6.1	Jobcentre Plus provision.....	55
5.6.2	Referrals and signposting .....	56

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

6	Conclusions and recommendations .....	57
6.1	Conclusions.....	57
6.1.1	JSA DV Easement .....	58
6.1.2	DDV Concession.....	60
6.2	Recommendations .....	61
6.2.1	For the DWP Corporate Centre .....	61
6.2.2	For DWP Operations.....	61
6.2.3	Recommendations for further research .....	63
Appendix A	Jobcentre Plus interviewees .....	64
Appendix B	Topic guides .....	65
Appendix C	References .....	74

### **List of tables**

Table 2.1	Number of JSA DV Easement cases, UK, April 2012 – 29 March 2013 .....	27
Table A.1	Interviewee job roles .....	64

### **List of figures**

Figure 1	Overview of the DV policies and uptake rates .....	14
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This report was prepared by Richard Lloyd and Dr Kath Mulraney of GHK Consulting Ltd.

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other government department.



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# Abbreviations and glossary of terms

<b>ATM</b>	Adviser Team Manager
<b>BME</b>	Black and Minority Ethnic
<b>BCS</b>	British Crime Survey
<b>BDC</b>	Benefit Delivery Centre
<b>CSOM</b>	Customer Services Operations Manager
<b>DDV Concession</b>	Destitute Domestic Violence Concession
<b>DV</b>	Domestic Violence, used synonymously with domestic abuse
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions
<b>ESA</b>	Employment and Support Allowance
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>IDVA</b>	Independent DV advocates
<b>ILR</b>	Indefinite Leave to Remain
<b>IS</b>	Income Support
<b>JSA</b>	Jobseeker's Allowance
<b>JSA DV Easement</b>	Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement
<b>LLR</b>	Limited Leave to Remain
<b>LMS</b>	Labour Market System
<b>MARAC</b>	Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference
<b>MI</b>	Management Information
<b>UKBA</b>	UK Border Agency
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence Against Women and Girls
<b>VCO</b>	Voluntary and Community Organisation
<b>VCS</b>	Voluntary and Community Sector

# Executive summary

## Introduction

This report presents findings from a small-scale research study conducted by ICF GHK Consulting to explore the Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement (JSA DV Easement) and the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession). The study had four aims, namely to:

- gain an understanding of the level of awareness of the JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession policies among Jobcentre Plus staff and stakeholders;
- learn what is working well and less well in implementing the policies from a Jobcentre Plus staff perspective, and from the victims' perspective via proxy through stakeholders;
- understand how communications and processes can be improved; and
- learn more about what activities Jobcentre Plus areas undertake with domestic violence victims to help facilitate their engagement with the labour market.

## Study methodology

The study took place between January and March 2013, with the fieldwork taking place between mid-February and early March 2013. It followed a qualitative methodology, and featured a programme of interviews with staff in five Jobcentre Plus offices and district office representatives. The study also included attendance at a meeting of stakeholders with specific interests in domestic violence, and follow-up telephone interviews with three of the individuals attending.

The Jobcentre Plus office interviews included staff with management responsibilities (including Jobcentre Plus Managers, Customer Service Managers and Adviser Team Managers) as well as assistant and more senior advisers. The composition of the interview groups in each Jobcentre Plus office reflected local staffing structures and the involvement of the individuals interviewed in implementing the two policies. The numbers and composition of those interviewed are provided in Appendix A of the main report, but in total 35 Jobcentre Plus and district staff were interviewed for the study.

Due to limited time and budgetary constraints, and therefore, a decision to focus on the face-to-face customer contact operation of Jobcentre Plus, staff in the Benefit Delivery Centres (BDCs) and Contact Centres were not interviewed in this study. While Jobcentre Plus staff were questioned on their experiences of working with the BDCs, this is recognised as a gap in the research, not least given the Centres' role in administering the DDV Concession.

## Study context

The currently used cross-government definition for domestic violence (DV) is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (which may be psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between those aged 16 or over<sup>1</sup> who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This includes so-called 'honour-based violence', female genital mutilation and forced marriage.<sup>2</sup>

Data from the British Crime Survey (BCS)<sup>3</sup> shows that 30 per cent of women and 17 per cent of men have been victims of DV at least once since the age of 16, and that seven per cent of women and five per cent of men aged 16 to 59 were victims of domestic abuse in the past year. Data from Women's Aid shows that 18,170 women and 19,100 children stayed in refuge accommodation across England during the year 2010/11.<sup>4</sup> The cost of DV has been estimated at £15.7billion, including the human and emotional costs of DV.<sup>5</sup> We also know from official statistics<sup>6</sup> that:

- women are far more likely to be victims of DV than men;
- younger rather than older women are more at risk;
- survivors frequently report experience of repeat victimisation; the data for 2010/11 shows that 73 per cent of all incidents of DV were experienced by repeat victims;
- although the causal link is not clear, unemployed people, the long-term ill and those looking after family experience higher rates of DV;
- unemployed people are over four times more likely to be victims of DV than those in employment; and
- both 'white' and 'non-white' groups suffer similar risks of experiencing DV.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The new cross-government definition of DV announced in September 2012 came into line with the existing DWP definition and has served to increase awareness that 16 to 19-year-olds are most likely to suffer abuse from a partner.

<sup>2</sup> Home Office (2012b) *New Definition of Domestic Violence*: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/domestic-violence-definition>

<sup>3</sup> The BCS is the most robust data for estimating the scale of DV. It is a large and independently conducted survey of over 40,000 people commissioned annually by the Home Office. It can provide a better reflection of crime rates than police-recorded statistics, because it includes crimes that go unreported to the police. Indeed, figures from the BCS suggest that only 16 per cent of incidents of partner abuse are reported to the police, see Home Office (2011a): <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb0111/>

<sup>4</sup> Women's Aid (2011) *Annual Survey of Domestic Violence Services 2010-11*. Women's Aid Federation of England.

<sup>5</sup> Walby, S. (2009) *The Costs of Domestic Violence: Up-date 2009*.

<sup>6</sup> Source: *The British Crime Survey* (2010).

<sup>7</sup> However, this survey may under-represent the true scale of the problem among BME groups due to the self completion format required for this part of the survey that necessitates a good understanding of English.

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

While evidence is limited on the true rate of DV experienced among ethnic minority communities, we know that the needs of women among these groups can be particularly complex, due to cultural issues and extreme pressure from families to remain in abusive relationships.

### Introducing the two domestic violence policies

As part of the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP's) contribution to the wider 2010 cross-government strategy Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), two policy measures were introduced from April 2012: the JSA DV Easement and the DDV Concession. Both these policies are implemented through local Jobcentre Plus offices, and sit alongside other support available to DV victim claimants, including additional help through Housing Benefit, plans to change how child maintenance payments are made, and signposting and partnership working with local voluntary and community support groups.

A DWP guidance note on both new policies was provided to all Jobcentre Plus offices in April 2012. See Figure 1 for a descriptive overview of the policies with latest available information for 2012 to 2013 on uptake levels.

**Figure 1 Overview of the DV policies and uptake rates**

#### **The JSA DV Easement**

From 23 April 2012, DWP introduced a specific easement from job seeking conditions for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who are victims of actual or threatened DV. This means an exemption from job seeking conditions and requirements to be actively looking for employment for an initial four-week period providing certain conditions are met, which can extend to a total of 13 weeks where relevant evidence is provided. This period is intended to provide those who have been affected by DV with time to focus on priorities like organising new accommodation or arranging alternative schooling for dependent children without having to also focus on meeting their jobseeking conditions.

**Latest available national data show that between April 2012 and 29 March 2013 there were 338 cases of the four-week easement and 115 cases of the full 13-week easement.**

#### **The Destitute Domestic Violence Concession**

From 1 April 2012, DWP have been working with officials in the Home Office and UK Border Agency (UKBA) to ensure migrant spouse victims of DV who have been granted leave to remain outside the immigration rules under the 'DDV Concession' are able to access eligible income-related benefits.

**Latest available data from the UKBA suggests that they have been accepting approximately 50 applications per month under the DDV Concession since its introduction in April 2012.<sup>8</sup> However, it is not currently possible to establish the level of take-up of eligible DWP benefits under the DDV Concession, or the frequency with which applications are made currently, although a data match exercise is currently being undertaken between DWP and UKBA to provide such information.**

<sup>8</sup> Information provided by DWP.

## Findings from the Jobcentre Plus Interviews

### JSA DV Easement

#### Awareness and understanding

The vast majority of Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers in most of the Jobcentre Plus offices visited were aware of the JSA DV Easement and recognised that the easement was a right and not discretionary. There were no examples from any of the offices where an adviser had opted to not inform a DV claimant about the easement. Overall, and in comparison to broader changes within the benefits system, most interviewees viewed this policy change as straightforward, with the guidance being considered as concise and fit for purpose. This contrasted with two Jobcentre Plus offices which displayed relatively low levels of awareness; unsurprisingly, those Jobcentre Plus offices with higher awareness levels were in districts where managers recognised and took ownership of the policy.

#### Delivery

Methods for introducing the policies to staff across Jobcentre Plus offices varied, from guidance being simply 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.

There were also different examples of delivery structures, with some offices having established DV leads. Where this was the case, there was evidence of more coordinated and proactive activities that helped support staff in identifying and supporting DV claimants.

In terms of implementing the JSA DV Easement, most reported that the criteria worked well and that the initial procedure for four-week easement ran smoothly. However, some examples were given in a Jobcentre Plus office with a high take up rate of claimants not meeting the criteria, most commonly as they were still living with the perpetrator, or because they had used up their allowance for the year although still a victim of DV.<sup>9</sup>

There were also some examples where the guidance had not been followed explicitly, but these were few and far between and indicative of where low awareness levels and few cases had been processed.

Overall, across the Jobcentre Plus offices, there was a general recognition that DV claimants faced a particular set of challenges and that they needed more support than most. All advisers expressed a duty of care to their claimants and cited low confidence as one of the key challenges faced by DV claimants, along with a range of other 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.

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<sup>9</sup> One of the eligibility criteria for the JSA DV Easement is that the claimant has not previously had a period of domestic violence easement within the last 12 months. However, DWP does provide additional support in the case of a domestic emergency.

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

Advisers and managers raised a number of issues affecting implementation:

- lack of awareness of the pre- and ongoing promotion of the easement internally and externally;
- limited availability of management information (MI) at the Jobcentre Plus office and district levels meaning there is no mechanism for systematically reviewing throughput against expected numbers;
- identifying claimants and prompting disclosure is challenging, with specific points made about the absence of a question/prompt on DV at the initial Contact Centre/on-line form stage; the environment of Jobcentre Plus offices not being conducive to disclosure and the lack of time for advisers to spend with claimants; and
- there were some issues experienced with extending the easement for a further 9 weeks in terms of claimants not turning up to the four-week appointment and having little scope for following this up with them. Although advice on this is provided in the guidance, interviewees explained how it was this experience that emphasised to them the importance of booking the four-week appointment at the start of the easement and to ensure they get mobile numbers from all DV claimants.

## **DDV Concession**

### **Awareness and understanding**

Overall, awareness and understanding of the DDV Concession was limited, and practical experience of implementation confined to just one of the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited. Compared with the JSA DV Easement, while most interviewees expressed an awareness of the DDV Concession and its general policy intent, a large number had either not read or did not recall reading this part of the guidance, and relatively few demonstrated a detailed understanding of it. This was generally the case for advisers, managers and district staff.

### **Delivery**

While the general process of dissemination among the individual Jobcentre Plus offices and staff was the same as for the JSA DV Easement, several interviewees felt that the JSA DV Easement had been emphasised to staff more than the DDV Concession. Certainly subsequent recollection of the DDV Concession and guidance was some way below that for the JSA DV Easement.

In terms of the guidance, although some found the DDV Concession guidance to be more complicated overall, it was generally found 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 came up and, as such, had been accessed infrequently in line with the number of cases reported.

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 ability to refer cases on to a DV lead was highlighted as important by several interviewees, given that the DDV Concession follows a more complex model and cases are rare.

Experience of the delivery of the DDV Concession was confined to just one of the Jobcentre Plus offices visited, where two cases were reported. Difficulties were experienced in both cases, mainly to do with lack of background information relating to the claimant and lack of awareness on the part of the adviser about the Concession.

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

Advisers and managers highlighted a number of issues affecting the actual or potential implementation of the DDV Concession:

- language barriers and limited resources for interpretation services, with Jobcentre Plus staff reporting that they no longer have access to face-to-face interpreters<sup>10</sup>. Translation for non-English speakers is done either via phone translators, 'Google translate' or unofficial translators attending the appointment with the claimant;
- lack of links with specialist migrant support/DV agencies, with perceived levels of awareness on the DDV Concession seen as particularly low; and,
- specific training needs, but the lack of time to engage.

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

Examples of good practice identified in the study included:

- Awareness and understanding of the policies was greatest in the Jobcentre Plus offices where a proactive approach had been taken to introducing the policies, rather than simply circulating an email with the guidance materials attached. The introduction of the policies at weekly team meetings and through face-to-face briefings, on an 'office-wide' basis to ensure all staff received a common message, represented good practice.
- It was clear that where the number of JSA DV Easement claims taken by the office was high, staff awareness and understanding of the easement was strongest – with familiarity being linked to practical experience. Given the absence of DDV Concession cases across four of the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited, it is likely that the reverse position applied, with any initial briefing received being forgotten among other changes introduced subsequently and awareness of the Concession diminishing, among frontline staff at least.
- Good practice in maintaining awareness among staff included: continuing to include references to, and discussion of, both policies in team meetings; holding specific 'refresher sessions' for staff on the policies; providing briefings to new staff, or staff whose roles had changed; and, in common with the approach to introduction, ensuring that staff at all levels are included in any ongoing awareness raising/'refresher' sessions.
- Establishing a DV lead represented good practice, and offered the following benefits:
  - providing leadership on the issue of DV across the office – helping establish and maintain the profile of DV support needs generally and the DV policies specifically;
  - leading on initial awareness raising for staff and maintaining awareness, particularly when case numbers were low;
  - acting as an internal DV 'expert' and providing a first point of contact for staff with questions or queries on the policies;

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<sup>10</sup> This referred to staff in the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited. If a claimant cannot provide their own interpreter, then DWP will try and use an interpretation service.



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

- helping oversee and encourage additional training for staff, including the cascading of learning to other ‘team DV leads’; and,
- contributing to raising awareness of the role Jobcentre Plus can play in supporting victims of DV and establishing links and credibility with external partners.
- Often built on a history of joint working and the efforts of a number of committed individuals, external links were important and served to:
  - raise awareness of the Jobcentre Plus ‘offer’ – developing a shared understanding of the ‘offer’ and establishing trust and credibility;
  - develop a good working knowledge of the services available for DV victims within their local areas;
  - encourage referral and signposting – both in terms of cases into and out of Jobcentre Plus offices; and
  - help with the early identification of DV claimants via multi-agency meetings.
- Skills and approaches that are considered to be important in supporting DV claimants include: knowing when to refer DV claimants on to an appropriate adviser; good interviewing skills; building trust with the claimant; taking a holistic approach; information sharing with colleagues; and a regular staff forum for raising issues/concerns.
- The vast majority of interviewees expressed a duty of care to their claimants, with many showing an awareness of the common issues faced by DV victims. Nevertheless, in a few cases advisers expressed concerns about working with this group and suggested that specific training in dealing with DV victims would be helpful. There was one example of good practice, where staff in one of the Jobcentre Plus offices attended half-day training sessions provided by the local authority DV team on raising awareness of DV and dealing with victims. A mix of assistant advisers and advisers had attended the training, which was considered to have raised their capability to support both victims and the other staff working with them. In addition, attendance was considered to have allowed relationships to develop with partners beyond the DV lead and further establish credibility with partners by demonstrating the active commitment of Jobcentre Plus to the DV agenda.
- Claimants returning from the easement period, or those who had disclosed an incident of DV but not taken up the easement offer, were routinely offered access to mainstream Jobcentre Plus support (through the Jobcentre Plus ‘offer’). There were some examples of advisers offering ongoing support and contact during the easement period, and all offered a meeting with DV victims on completion. At this appointment all DV claimants are offered tailored support with their return to the labour market as part of the package of support offered to all claimants, but recognising that victims of DV may also face a range of associated challenges. Support can include: training to raise confidence and self-esteem; support for money management; training to develop basic and wider skills to enable the return to work; and support with job search (such as help on CV development, advising on where to send CVs and using the universal job match database).

## **Findings from the Voluntary and Community Stakeholder Consultations**

The DV policy stakeholders interviewed for this study welcomed the introduction of, and policy intent behind, the two policies and gave examples of how their organisations had been taking steps to disseminate information on these policies to their member organisations, DV claimants and wider stakeholders.

However, they highlighted a number of key issues affecting overall implementation:

- Low levels of awareness among Jobcentre Plus office staff, particularly among frontline staff and at assistant adviser level; but less so at management level. This means that much time is needed from specialist providers to support DV claimants in taking up the Easement or Concession. This was seen to be the main issue by all three interviewees.
- Low levels of awareness 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 was a lack of confidence that the information disclosed would remain confidential.
- An apparent misunderstanding of process, for example DV victims for the DDV Concession were asked by Jobcentre Plus staff for additional paperwork over and above the UKBA form.
- Migrant DV claimants were not provided with, nor had access to, face-to-face interpreters. Support workers often had to step into this role, which was very resource intensive for the support organisations.
- Another issue raised more broadly about the receipt of benefits for DV claimants was the delay in receiving payments with or without the easement and particularly when claimants did not have a National Insurance number.

## **Recommendations**

A series of recommendations were developed on the basis of the study findings and areas for improvement suggested by Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed. These are set out in relation to recommendations for DWP Corporate Centre and for Operations and are detailed in the final section of the report.

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

- Refreshing/re-introducing the DDV Concession to Jobcentre Plus staff and encouraging more ‘active’ dissemination approaches.
- Encouraging periodic ‘refresher/reminder’ sessions to ensure that awareness of the JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession policies is maintained.
- 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.

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

- Taking steps to improve the provision of MI for the JSA DV Easement at Jobcentre Plus office and district levels – to allow for better monitoring of local implementation.
- Exploring opportunities for providing sub-district level data on concentrations/hot-spots of DV activity, to allow more effective targeting and resource deployment.
- Building further on the work currently underway between UKBA and DWP to share data to help monitor the number of DDV Concession claimants nationally to also ensure that, once available, information is shared at Jobcentre and district levels.

## **Recommendations for DWP Operations**

- Ensuring that at district and individual Jobcentre Plus levels the DDV Concession is re-introduced to all staff using active dissemination methods.
- Encouraging the provision of periodic ‘refreshers’ on both policies to ensure that awareness is maintained.
- Promoting the role that Jobcentre Plus can play in supporting victims of DV, both within the Jobcentre Plus offices and also through the provision of information more widely for example through the distribution of posters and flyers in community settings.
- Providing an environment where potential 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.
- Replicating other ‘good practice’ approaches identified in the study, such as developing contact lists for local DV support agencies.

## **Recommendations for further research**

Finally, we have emphasised throughout this report that our findings are based on fieldwork with a small sample of Jobcentre Plus and district office staff, which may or may not be reflective of experiences and practice more widely. Consequently we recommend that further research could usefully be undertaken with a larger sample of Jobcentre Plus offices and districts once better data is available, and also following any actions taken following this report. This could explore awareness, understanding and implementation issues across a larger range of stakeholders including: local support providers and partners; BDCs and Contact Centres; and victims of DV (including those that have disclosed and engaged with the policies, and those that have not disclosed). Specific topics which could usefully be explored include:

- wider levels of awareness and understanding of the two policies and the relationship between adviser awareness and the levels of take-up reported;
- relationships with, and collaborative activity between, Jobcentre Plus, and local interest and support providers from the statutory and voluntary sectors; and
- levels of take up against expectation and, if low, such research could usefully explore the reasons for this.

# 1 Introduction and context

## 1.1 Introduction

ICF GHK Consulting Ltd was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to undertake a short study to explore the awareness, understanding and implementation by Jobcentre Plus staff of two policies targeting victims of domestic violence – the Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement (JSA DV Easement) and the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession) – both of which were introduced in April 2012. The study took place between January and March 2013 and had four specific aims:

- To gain an understanding of the level of awareness of the JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession policies among Jobcentre Plus staff and stakeholders.
- To learn what is working well and less well in implementing the policies from a Jobcentre Plus staff perspective, and from the victims' perspective via proxy through stakeholders.
- To understand how communications and processes can be improved.
- To learn more about what activities Jobcentre Plus areas undertake with domestic violence victims to help facilitate their engagement with the labour market.

## 1.2 Study methodology

The methodology followed was developed to address the aims of the study, and comprised four stages as summarised below:

- Stage 1 featured a series of preparatory tasks, including the review of guidance materials and other documentation of relevance to the two policies, the development of checklists for use in the qualitative interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff and stakeholders, and the agreement of the sample of Jobcentre Plus offices to be visited.<sup>11</sup>
- Stage 2 featured visits to five Jobcentre Plus offices in four districts across England and interviews with staff including:
  - Jobcentre Plus managers and other staff with management responsibilities, including Customer Service Managers (CSOMs) and Adviser Team Managers (ATMs); and
  - Adviser/front line staff, including assistant advisers and advisers.
  - The composition of the interviewees at each Jobcentre Plus office was dependent on the local staffing structure and individuals' specific roles/level of involvement with the implementation of the two policies.
  - This stage also featured interviews with district office representatives in three of the four districts included in the research. The interviewees are listed by role in Appendix A.

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<sup>11</sup> Using available data on JSA DV Easement, we selected a range of Jobcentres to include those with high and low numbers of take-up. We also included Jobcentres in places with higher migrant populations in order to allow us to capture some element of DDV activity.

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

- Stage 3 featured consultations with policy stakeholders in two modes:
  - attendance at a meeting convened by the Department for organisations with an interest and involvement in supporting victims of DV, where issues of awareness and understanding of the policies among Jobcentre Plus staff were discussed; and
  - follow-up telephone conversations with representatives of three support organisations attending the meeting.
- Stage 4 featured an initial presentation of the fieldwork findings to the study steering group, the analysis of the information collected and the production of draft and final project reports.

The individual interviews were undertaken on a confidential basis and on the understanding that no reference would be made in the final report to individuals or Jobcentre Plus offices by name. Copies of all the topic guides used in this study can be found at Appendix B.

Given that the study focused on practice in just five Jobcentre Plus offices, the findings of the study should be treated as indicative, although efforts were made to explore the position at the district level through the interviews with district office representatives.

In addition, the study focused on awareness, understanding and practice in the five Jobcentre Plus offices, and did not include any primary research with the BDCs or Contact Centres (the former taking a central role with the DDV Concession). However, the experience of the individuals interviewed of working with these centres was explored where relevant.

### **1.3 Report structure**

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 sets the context within which the study is set and provides the findings from the stakeholder consultations;
- Section 3 provides the study findings on the JSA DV Easement, including levels of awareness and understanding, delivery and the key issues identified;
- Section 4 provides the study findings regarding the DDV Concession, again reporting on awareness, understanding, implementation and key issues;
- Section 5 reviews the promising/good practice identified within the Jobcentre Plus offices visited, and describes additional approaches followed to help DV victims return to the labour market;
- Section 6 provides the study conclusions and recommendations.

The report also includes three Annexes: Appendix A, which sets out the individuals interviewed in each Jobcentre Plus office by role; Appendix B which includes the topic guides used in the study; and Appendix C which lists the references for this report.

## 2 Study context and stakeholder consultations

This section describes the two policies and the context within which they are set, and provides the findings from the stakeholder consultations.

### 2.1 Study context

#### 2.1.1 The working definition of domestic violence

The currently used cross-government definition for domestic violence (DV) is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (which may be psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between those aged 16 or over<sup>12</sup> who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This includes so-called ‘honour-based violence’, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.<sup>13</sup>

Domestic violence is defined as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse which may be:

- Physical – which can include: shaking, smacking, punching, kicking, presence of finger or bite marks, bruising, starving, tying up, stabbing, suffocation, throwing things, using objects as weapons, genital mutilation, ‘honour violence’. Physical effects are often in areas of the body that are covered and hidden (i.e. breasts, legs and stomach).
- Sexual – such as: forced sex, forced prostitution, ignoring religious prohibitions about sex, refusal to practise safe sex, sexual insults, passing on sexually transmitted diseases, preventing breastfeeding.
- Psychological – including: intimidation, insulting, isolating the person from friends and family, criticising, denying the abuse, treating the person as an inferior, threatening to harm or take away children, forced marriage.
- Financial – such as: not letting the person work, undermining efforts to find work or study, refusing to give money, asking for an explanation of how money is spent, making the person beg for money, gambling, not paying bills.
- Emotional – including: swearing, undermining confidence, making racist, sexist or other derogatory remarks, making the person feel unattractive, calling the person stupid or useless, eroding the person’s independence.

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<sup>12</sup> The new cross-government definition of DV announced in September 2012 came into line with the existing DWP definition and has served to increase awareness that 16 to 19-year-olds are most likely to suffer abuse from a partner.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/domestic-violence-definition>

### **2.1.2 The scale, cost and nature of domestic violence**

In terms of scale, we know from the latest available British Crime Survey (BCS)<sup>14</sup> that 30 per cent of women and 17 per cent of men have been victims of DV at least once since the age of 16, and that seven per cent of women and five per cent of men aged 16 to 59 were victims of domestic abuse in the past year.

Data from Women's Aid shows that 18,170 women and 19,100 children stayed in refuge accommodation across England during the year 2010/11.<sup>15</sup>

Domestically, the cost of providing public services (including health, legal and social services) to victims and the lost economic output of women affected runs to billions of pounds. The cost of DV has been estimated at £15.7billion, including the human and emotional costs of DV.<sup>16</sup>

We also know from official statistics<sup>17</sup> that:

- women are far more likely to be victims of DV than men;
- younger rather than older women are more at risk;
- survivors frequently report experience of repeat victimisation; the data for 2010/11 shows that 73 per cent of all incidents of DV were experienced by repeat victims;
- although the causal link is not clear unemployed people, the long-term ill and those looking after family experience higher rates of DV;
- unemployed people are over four times more likely to be victims of DV than those in employment; and,
- both 'white' and 'non-white' groups suffer similar risks of experiencing DV.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The name of the BCS changed to the Crime Survey for England and Wales for the July 2012 release. Data for domestic violence is not currently available for 2012, and so 'BCS' data is referred to here. The BCS is the most robust data for estimating the scale of DV. It is a large and independently conducted survey of over 40,000 people commissioned annually by the Home Office. It can provide a better reflection of crime rates than police-recorded statistics, because it includes crimes that go unreported to the police. Indeed, figures from the BCS suggest that only 16 per cent of incidents of partner abuse are reported to the police, see: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb0111/>

<sup>15</sup> Women's Aid (2011) *Annual Survey of Domestic Violence Services 2010-11*. Women's Aid Federation of England.

<sup>16</sup> Walby, S. (2009) *The Costs of Domestic Violence: Up-date 2009*.

<sup>17</sup> The British Crime Survey (2010).

<sup>18</sup> However, this survey may under-represent the true scale of the problem among Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups due to the self-completion format required for this part of the survey that necessitates a good understanding of English.

While evidence is limited on the true rate of DV experienced among ethnic minority communities, we know that the needs of women among these groups can be particularly complex due to cultural issues and extreme pressure from families to remain in abusive relationships. Indeed, there are a number of perceived barriers to accessing support including fear of other family members, fear of drawing attention to family members with insecure immigration status, fear of bringing shame onto the family, fear of being sent home or being killed by family members, mistrust of outside agencies (specifically the police), and ignorance that there are support services available.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.1.3 The government response to domestic violence**

In 2010, the Coalition Government published a strategy entitled *Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)*.<sup>20</sup> As part of this a VAWG inter-ministerial group has been set up to monitor progress of the delivery of the strategy, and address cross-government issues related to this, resulting in a number of published action plans, most recently in April 2013.<sup>21</sup>

The coalition strategy builds on the previous government strategy<sup>22</sup> by including the three central components of prevention, provision and protection, but adding a further focus on partnership working and greater decentralisation to set local priorities. The latest action plan published in April 2013 reports on progress against the 100 actions set out in March 2012, which also highlighted the role of Health and Well-being Boards, and the police and crime commissioners, for supporting partnership working in this area.<sup>23</sup>

## **2.2 Introducing the two DWP DV policies**

As part of the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) contribution to the cross Government 'Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan', two policy measures were introduced from April 2012: the Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement (JSA DV Easement) and the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession). Both of these measures are implemented through local Jobcentre Plus offices, and sit alongside other support available to DV victim claimants, including additional help through Housing Benefit, plans to change how child maintenance payments are made, and signposting and partnership working with local voluntary and community support groups. A DWP guidance note on both the policies was provided to all Jobcentre Plus offices in April 2012.

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<sup>19</sup> Refuge (2010) *Forced Marriage in the UK: A scoping study on the experience of women from Middle Eastern and North East African Communities*. Refuge; Anitha, S 2008, 'Neither safety nor justice: the UK government response to domestic violence against immigrant women', *Journal Of Social Welfare & Family Law*, 30, 3, pp. 189-202, Violence & Abuse Abstracts.

<sup>20</sup> Home Office (2010). *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls*.

<sup>21</sup> Home Office (2011). *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan*; Home Office (2012). *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls. Taking Action – the next chapter*. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/call-end-violence-women-girls/action-plan-new-chapter?view=Binary> and Home Office (2013) *A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls Action Plan 2013*.

<sup>22</sup> Home Office (2009). *Together we can end violence against women and girls: A strategy*.

<sup>23</sup> Home Office (2013) *A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls Action Plan 2013*



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

These policy measures sit within a broader set of changes to the benefits system, such as the new sanctions regime for JSA, the rollout of Universal Job Match, and the forthcoming Universal Credit. The two DV policies are introduced below.

### **2.2.1 JSA DV Easement**

The JSA DV Easement, introduced on 23 April 2012, provides a specific easement from job seeking conditionality under Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for claimants who are victims of actual or threatened DV. Following disclosure of actual or threatened DV by an existing or new JSA claimant, Jobcentre Plus staff are required to check a number of conditions. If all the criteria are met, JSA claimants experiencing DV have the right to an initial four-week exemption from job seeking conditionality, which is intended to offer claimants time to focus on activities such as finding new accommodation, new schools for children and taking legal advice. This four-week easement can be followed by a further nine-week exemption if suitable written evidence is provided by the claimant to the Personal Adviser from appropriate support agencies such as the police, GPs, social workers or Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) support organisations. This policy measure is in addition to, rather than a substitute for, existing discretionary 'domestic emergency' provisions to support victims of DV provided by Jobcentre Plus.

### **2.2.2 DDV Concession**

The DWP has been working with the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and the Home Office to implement the second measure, the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession). Introduced on 1 April 2012, the DDV Concession seeks to ensure that migrant spouses who are victims of DV can access eligible income-related benefits when granted 'limited leave to remain outside the immigration rules status'. In such circumstances, if the UKBA is satisfied that a number of conditions are met, they issue the individual with official documentation including a letter to the DWP confirming their entitlement to apply for financial support.

### **2.2.3 Number of JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession cases in the UK**

At the time of writing, latest available national data showing the level of take up of the JSA DV Easement is provided in Table 2.1. In the context of what we know about the level of DV experienced nationally, and in particular the potential high levels of DV experienced among the unemployed,<sup>24</sup> the numbers of victims taking a four or 13-week easement could be perceived as being some way below what might be expected.

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<sup>24</sup> Source: British Crime Survey (2010). See Section 2.1.2.

**Table 2.1      Number of JSA DV Easement cases, UK, April 2012 – 29 March 2013**

	Number of cases
4-week easement	338
Full 13-week easement	115

Source: DWP 2013

As Section 3 describes, reports from the Jobcentre Plus offices visited and their respective districts reflect this pattern, with take-up appearing low overall and ranging from one case a month to just one case over the entire year in the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited.

Data provided by the UKBA suggest that they have been accepting approximately 50 applications per month under the DDV Concession since its introduction in April 2012.<sup>25</sup> However, it is not currently possible to establish the level of take-up of eligible DWP benefits under the DDV Concession, or the frequency with which applications are made currently, although a data match exercise is currently being developed between DWP and UKBA to provide information.

The fieldwork with Jobcentre Plus offices undertaken as part of this study found few examples of the DDV Concession being implemented in practice. Just one of the five Jobcentre Plus offices had direct experience of the Concession, with two cases being described, although in both cases the correct processes appeared not to have been followed.

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

While Sections 3 and 4 of this report explore the experience of, and barriers to, implementation of both these policies among Jobcentre Plus staff, this section first sets out key issues as highlighted by national and local voluntary and community organisations (VCO) representing the interests of, and supporting, DV victims.

### **2.3.1 The policy intention is welcomed**

The national and local stakeholders consulted for this study unanimously welcomed the introduction of these two policies, with some having taken an active role in campaigning for these measures over a number of years. The aspects most particularly welcomed across both policies included:

- the recognition of the particular needs of this vulnerable group in mainstream provision;
- the attempt to provide a mechanism for helping DV victims to organise their lives by enabling them to access benefits (in respect of the DDV Concession), and also providing a period of easement from JSA conditionality (in respect to the JSA DV Easement).

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<sup>25</sup> Information provided by DWP.

### 2.3.2 Efforts are being made to disseminate information to claimants and to professionals via networks and training

It is not possible within the confines of this study to establish the extent to which the wider VCO and statutory sector supporting DV victims are aware of and actively disseminating information on either of these policies. The organisations consulted for this study were accessed via the DWP stakeholder group and, therefore, unsurprisingly demonstrated a high level of awareness and understanding of both policies. Two of the organisations that have direct links with DV victims reported routinely informing their clients and wider professional networks about the two policies – as described below.<sup>26</sup>

#### Examples of dissemination activities

**Example 1:** This organisation offers direct support to DV victims in a local context with a focus on BME groups. They routinely inform clients through their case work of the two policies; as well as provide information on them through their national telephone helpline. Through their case work they are able to follow through and support their clients in claiming support under the two policies by attending Jobcentre Plus offices with them and supporting any appeal processes. They also head up a UK-wide network of over 30 women's organisations many of whom have their own membership networks. They disseminate information on the policies through this network and have produced their own leaflets on the policy measures for this purpose. They also run seminars across the UK inviting DWP, Home Office and UKBA officials to present and promote the policies. The audience is mainly VCOs.

**Example 2:** This organisation is a national campaigning organisation with some funded project delivery. They inform victims of the policies through their project work, but this is fairly localised. Instead, they focus more on wider capacity building activities among stakeholder organisations, including training events/workshops mainly on the DDV Concession. They also constantly field queries on both policies from wider stakeholders and have developed a simple chart of the two policies which they send out to all those who make contact. Stakeholders include VCOs, but also the police service, local authorities and in one case a Jobcentre Plus representative. Their workshops cover the technicalities of the two policies, but also the wider needs and issues of the client group.

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<sup>26</sup> The third organisation interviewed is a second-tier, human rights membership organisation dedicated to addressing violence against women and girls, and does not provide direct delivery support to DV victims.

### **2.3.3 There are a number of perceived barriers to implementation**

While the broad principles underpinning both policies were welcomed by the interviewees and efforts were being made to disseminate information on them to their clients, they all highlighted a number of issues in terms of how they saw the policies were being implemented. The issues that were raised as part of the stakeholder consultation also reflect emerging findings from a monitoring project currently being conducted by one of the organisations interviewed.<sup>27</sup> These were:

- **Low levels of awareness among Jobcentre Plus staff**, particularly among frontline/ assistant adviser levels; less so at management level. This means that much time is needed from support providers to visit Jobcentre Plus offices with their claimants. This was seen to be the main issue by all three interviewees. One organisation reported how when they consulted with DV support organisations most reported that Jobcentre Plus staff were not aware of DDV Concession or of the JSA DV Easement. This was reinforced by the experiences of another of the organisations interviewed which delivers case work support to claimants. They reported from direct experience that the Jobcentre Plus staff either did not know about the measures or did not tell the claimants about them. They gave one example of a claimant requesting JSA DV Easement with the initial adviser who was not aware of it, but when checked with their manager confirmed it was available. (Another organisation at the stakeholder meeting also raised the question about whether the call centre, which is the first point of contact for most claimants, may be a blockage).
- **Low levels of awareness among the ‘mainstream’ support network**, such as local authority teams and the police. Two of the organisations interviewed also explained that levels of awareness among wider stakeholders were low on the whole, although gradually increasing. They gave examples of still receiving emails from professionals demonstrating no knowledge of the two policy measures, e.g. one recently from a DV police lead. Given that the focus of both these organisations is on the DDV Concession, most queries tend to be about this. Two interviewees felt that there is less awareness overall of the JSA DV Easement. At dissemination events for one of the organisations, participants tend to express surprise when informed that there is a broader JSA DV Easement that applies to all victims of DV (not just migrant spouses).
- **Reluctance to disclose DV by claimants in a Jobcentre Plus context**. Interviewees raised a number of barriers to disclosure such as lack of confidence that the information will remain confidential; this is a significant issue in some Jobcentre Plus offices, where family relations may work.
- **Perceived insensitive treatment of DV claimants by Jobcentre Plus staff**. All three organisations raised this as an issue from both direct experiences in supporting their claimants, and from consultation with their member organisations. However, they were not able to provide detailed information about the nature and scale of this.

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<sup>27</sup> One of the organisations interviewed for the study is currently conducting a monitoring project, funded by a trust funder, into the implementation of the DDV Concession. The report is expected to be published by the end of summer 2013.

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

- **An apparent misunderstanding of process**, for example DV victims for the DDV Concession are asked by Jobcentre Plus staff for additional paperwork such as National Insurance numbers, passports, and/or proof of address, over and above the required UKBA form. All three interviewees highlighted this as an issue. Getting the UKBA form itself does not appear to be the issue. Another organisation gave a specific example of how they are currently supporting a DV claimant to appeal against a Jobcentre Plus decision not to provide the claimant with the DDV Concession. Although the claimant had the referral letter from the UKBA and the evidence to support that they were a victim of DV, the Jobcentre Plus adviser claimed the application did not satisfy the 'labour condition' and that the claimant was still required to look for work. At the time of the interview they were awaiting the decision, which they had been told would take up to 21 days; in the meantime the claimant was receiving no payments.<sup>28</sup>
- **Migrant DV claimants are not provided with, nor have access to, face-to-face interpreters.** According to the stakeholders interviewed, migrant DV claimants are not provided with face-to-face interpreters. Support workers often have to step into this role, which is very resource intensive for the support organisations.
- **Another issue raised more broadly about the receipt of benefits for DV claimants was the delay in receiving payments** with or without the easement and particularly when claimants do not have a National Insurance number. It was estimated by one interviewee that the average time to receive JSA payment once the application is processed is between two and six weeks. This also reflects the experience of the two other organisations interviewed for this study. In the view of one organisation, some of the delays in payments are caused by the new Home Office/UKBA biometric requirements – a particular challenge for those migrants who are only on short-term visas. In the meantime, their organisation has to fill this gap and support them financially or provide refuge taking payment in arrears. The other organisation also made the point that other options, such as crisis loans, were not being routinely offered.

### 2.3.4 Little evidence from the three interviewees of delivering collaborative employment support with Jobcentre Plus offices

While we saw in our fieldwork some evidence of wider collaborative efforts to support victims' return to work between the Jobcentre Plus offices visited and local specialist partners, the interviews with the three voluntary and community stakeholders did not uncover any specific examples of practice in this area. None of the interviewees were able to provide examples of working with local Jobcentre Plus offices to deliver wider employment support to their DV claimants, despite two of the organisations offering employment support independently, which included CVs and interview preparation and English language courses.

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<sup>28</sup> It is worth highlighting that DDV Concession claimants can access any of DWP's eligible income-related benefits – this could be Income Support (IS), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or JSA. If their current situation determines they are a JSA claimant then they can access the JSA DV Easement if appropriate.

## 3 JSA Domestic Violence Easement

This section sets out the findings of the study regarding the Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement (JSA DV Easement), exploring the levels of awareness and understanding of the policy amongst the Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed, the implementation approach followed and the key issues identified.

### 3.1 Awareness and understanding

Here we examine levels of awareness and understanding of the JSA DV Easement among Jobcentre Plus staff in the five local offices and at district level. We also explore views on wider awareness among their stakeholders where relevant.

#### 3.1.1 Jobcentre Plus staff – managers and advisers

With the exception of two Jobcentre Plus offices, awareness of the JSA DV Easement was generally high, particularly among staff with management responsibilities, who displayed a detailed understanding of the policy and expressed confidence that the easement had become embedded in the mind-set of their staff.

The intent and aims of the JSA DV Easement were on the whole understood and 'bought into'. It has, in the main, proved popular among advisers in terms of providing them with a supportive tool for a vulnerable group in the face of what is perceived by many as increasing conditionality demands. Most cited the aim of the easement as about providing much needed respite from conditionality requirements, allowing time for the claimant to 'sort out' their lives. One adviser, typical of many we interviewed, demonstrated a clear understanding of the easement – neatly summarised as '*helping customers get through a traumatic period in their lives*' while keeping an eye on progression into work. They considered it to be '*a very helpful policy for working with victims*'. Elsewhere, one adviser praised the effectiveness of the easement in supporting a DV victim who was at '*rock bottom*', and who, following the full 13-week easement, progressed from being in care to getting support, finding a home and, after six months, securing her first job interview. The release from conditionality had, in the adviser's view, been instrumental to the progress the claimant had been able to make.

Jobcentre Plus managers echoed this sentiment, with many explaining how the easement was the necessary response to the increasing conditionality for JSA claimants, and that it served to release DV victims from these requirements – '*it allows us to take a step back*'. Secondly, the easement was seen as enabling Jobcentre Plus to be more proactive and to say '*what can we do to help people*'.

Some advisers also recognised that the JSA DV Easement was about providing safety for the claimant and allowing them space to stay at home and away from the perpetrator. In the words of one adviser:

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

*'It was very satisfying for me to say, don't worry about coming in to sign, because that was one of her fears that he would find out where she was and stake out the Jobcentre. It took some of the pressure away from her; she was having all kinds of problems with her children. It was good for that period to be able to say, don't worry about this, go sort the other things out and at least you'll still get your money.'*

Overall, and in comparison to broader changes within the benefits system, most interviewees viewed this policy change as straightforward, with the guidance being considered as concise and fit for purpose. A number of interviewees in one Jobcentre Plus office for example explained how they have changes introduced to them 'every week' and that this particular policy is less complicated than most.

As would be expected, where detailed understanding was more limited this tended to be at the assistant adviser level, and in such instances while they were generally aware and supportive of the easement, they rightly saw their primary role as referring DV claimants onto Personal Advisers.

In the case of the two Jobcentre Plus offices showing relatively low levels of awareness, staff on the whole did not know about the purpose and content of the easement. In one of the Jobcentre Plus offices, for example, only one adviser was aware of the JSA DV Easement policy. It was generally felt by the interviewees in this office that DV was not an issue in their area, and that they did not knowingly work with DV claimants. Another adviser interviewed explained that they were only informed about the easement ahead of the interview for this study, with others describing how they support DV claimants that was not in line with the prescribed policy. For example, one adviser explained that she was not aware of the easement and that that if a claimant disclosed they were a victim of DV, *'I would find out her barriers and tackle them while gently reminding her that she needs to be actively seeking employment'*. Another adviser explained that *'Most JSA claimants are on and off, and our aim is to get them in work ASAP, [DV] is something that may not come up. We expect them to be off JSA after 13 weeks.'*

In the other Jobcentre Plus office a recently appointed DV lead explained that:

*'January [2013] was the first customer I know of that claimed the easement. Although I know that the guidance came out in April 2012 – I don't think that was communicated in a meeting or highlighted that we may be getting people with that type of need. It is only since January we have had three customers that I know of.'*

A manager from the same office talked about options of support as an alternative to the JSA DV Easement, suggesting he viewed it, incorrectly, as discretionary rather than as a right<sup>29</sup>:

*'If an official easement wasn't applied then advisers would take a lighter or softer approach with these customers [...] There are different things – we can't excuse signing as such, but it can be the types of things we ask the customers to do. Generally they will be required to do a certain number of actions to look for work so you could ease that off, and appointment times can be made to make peoples' life easier.'*

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that the domestic emergency is discretionary however.

### **3.1.2 District level staff**

For one of the districts there was a high level of awareness and ownership of the JSA DV Easement at this level. In this instance, they described the policy as core to the overall Jobcentre Plus mission and the wider social justice agenda, i.e. to move disadvantaged or vulnerable claimants into or closer to work, with a view to making them more independent and prosperous. One district representative interviewed was able to give a detailed assessment of the extent to which different Jobcentre Plus offices in his district were aware of and engaging with the easement.

However, in the remaining two districts there was little evidence of strategic leadership or ownership around the JSA DV Easement, with one District Manager describing DV as a '*small niche area*' and reporting no prior knowledge of the policy. For these districts there were no dedicated 'DV leads' or forums for discussing or reviewing DV measures at the district level across Jobcentre Plus offices. Primary responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the easement was seen as being with the individual Jobcentre Plus offices.

### **3.1.3 Views on wider awareness**

Most interviewees from across all the Jobcentre Plus offices visited, including one where a DV lead had proactively taken steps to inform local partners, had a sense that levels of awareness of the JSA DV Easement among wider local stakeholders were variable, but most commonly low. While there were a few examples cited where DV claimants had come into the Jobcentre Plus office with support from a specialist agency seeking a JSA DV Easement, on the whole the experience of front line staff and advisers suggested that DV claimants have no prior knowledge of the easement. Indeed, one adviser reported how, when contacting local support organisations, they often knew little about the broader JSA conditionality framework in the first place, let alone the significance and function of an easement.

In those Jobcentre Plus offices where awareness and take up of the policies were relatively low, there was correspondingly limited knowledge expressed by advisers and managers of any specialist services in their local area, and in turn little evidence of any links having been made with them. Some advisers noted that they did not receive any referrals from the police service and felt that perhaps this was a key gap.

In the case of the Jobcentre Plus office where a DV lead had promoted the JSA DV Easement among local DV support agencies and networks, she explained that even though most local stakeholders were now aware of it she still received calls from some organisations that were not – '*No matter how hard I try, the message does not always get through.*' Without her efforts, however, and in the absence of any broader promotional work on the part of the Jobcentre Plus office or Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), she considered that awareness of the policies among local agencies would be extremely limited: '*it would have been pot luck if they had found information [on the easement] on the internet.*'



## **3.2 Introducing the JSA DV Easement**

In this section we set out how the easement was introduced to Jobcentre Plus staff, and views on the guidance received.

### **3.2.1 Introducing the JSA DV Easement**

DWP produced a guidance document that included reference to both the easement and the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession). It set out the background and the process for its implementation, including the eligibility criteria to be applied. This was included as a link in an email sent initially to the district offices, which was then cascaded through their 'Change Teams' to Jobcentre Plus managers. There was also a series of pre-promotion activities, including communication via various channels and the production of factsheets to ensure that Jobcentre Plus offices, claimants and external stakeholders were informed.

#### **District level**

In one of the districts included in this study, when a policy change is introduced it is common practice to seek nominations from each office to 'lead' on the policy/change in question. The guidance and supporting information is sent initially to this lead person, who is then responsible for cascading the information to all staff within the office who need to be aware of it. The leads are also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the policy – a process which was followed in the case of the JSA DV Easement.

In the other districts, emails with the link to the guidance were sent to Jobcentre Plus managers either by the change team or in another case from their District Manager, with information on the new easement also being made available via the 'online managers update' system. Most district representatives felt this was sufficient given that the new easement was not viewed as particularly complex.

#### **Jobcentre Plus office level**

Once the initial communication had been received by managers in each local Jobcentre Plus office, the ways in which this information was disseminated to internal staff varied. In the main, standard procedures using email notification were followed, with no additional support materials or DV training provided. As well as being shared by email, the guidance was also described to staff as being readily available on-line. As with the manager interviews, not all staff welcomed the fact that the information was sent only by email:

*'I don't like emails, where you then are told to go and read up on it yourself, I would like it in a group environment, and then for me to decide if it affects my job.'*

(Assistant Adviser)

In two of the Jobcentre Plus offices where the uptake of the easement has been very low, managers explained how the easement was introduced to them '*most likely via email*'. In their view this was not an effective means of communication because it was highly likely that the policies were introduced as one of a '*plethora of changes*' and therefore missed. They felt this was due to the high volume of communications received about policy updates; in this context the DV policy was not seen as impacting significantly on their everyday work and therefore not prioritised.

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

One of the managers in a Jobcentre Plus office where the number of easement cases was higher, however, made the point that even if the easement may have got side-lined, where staff are more broadly aware of DV issues she was confident that they could still recognise when it would need to be introduced:

*‘There is a huge raft of changes all the time; [this easement] may have got parked but advisers are able to recognise the triggers.’*

There were some examples of more ‘proactive’ approaches to introducing the easement, including the guidance being discussed at weekly team meetings. For example, in one office, an adviser explained that there had been a ‘big push office-wide’ with the easement being discussed at their team meetings – *‘It was explained to us that ‘it was a right’ and will change how we relate to DV claimants’*.

For another office the DV lead explained that she took steps to ensure all staff were aware of the easement, following and delivering a ‘trickle down’ approach on a face-to-face basis. Overall, she felt that while the Easement had not been promoted well nationally – *‘felt like being left to find the detail on the intranet’*, she hoped her efforts had meant a better introduction to staff in the offices. Given the described high turnover and change in roles of Jobcentre Plus staff, the DV lead in this office routinely does a refresh and reminds staff at team meetings of the JSA DV Easement.

While other examples of the JSA DV Easement being discussed at team meetings were also identified, these did not necessarily include all staff. In one Jobcentre Plus office for example assistant advisers had not been part of these team discussions, and felt they would have benefited from this.

### 3.2.2 Views on the guidance materials

The overall message received from the majority of staff interviewed was that the easement is seen as straightforward (notably in comparison to wider changes within the benefits system), and that the guidance was correspondingly straightforward, clear to understand and so fit for purpose. The majority found the guidance comprehensive and easy to access, with some noting that the fact sheets produced by DWP were particularly useful. In the words of a District Manager: *‘short and bite size works, and this ticks that box’*.

One of the Jobcentre Plus offices had produced additional tailored guidance to complement the main document. The DV lead had drafted an additional email with links to the two JSA forms, including a simple summary and tailored guidance for the different assistant and adviser roles. None of the other Jobcentre Plus offices had produced additional guidance, and felt that none was required.

In practice, for many the guidance is referred to as and when a case comes up. In the words of an Adviser Team Manager for example: *‘if the situation arises we find the correct info we need to ensure we are applying the correct process.’* Given this, managers in a number of offices have encouraged advisers and other staff to have links to the guidance on their desktops. However, one adviser noted that:

*‘When you have a customer – you really don’t have time to go looking for guidance and look at it. The minute it comes out it needs to be communicated in team meetings – i.e. this has come out, this is the procedure and process, we will send you a link and then you are more aware. You cannot be looking at everything – you can’t know the ins and outs of everything.’*

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

Some minor issues were, however, raised by different interviewees about the content of the guidance. One manager for example noted that the guidance does not address '*the crux of the issue*' i.e. identifying victims of DV in the first place. She thought the guidance could offer more on how to overcome barriers to disclosure.

### **3.3 Implementing the JSA DV Easement**

As Section 2 described, the level of take-up of the JSA DV Easement policy, with 338 four week easements and 115 13-week easements nationally to date, appears to be some way below what would be expected given the level of DV within the general population. In addition, staff in each of the Jobcentre Plus and district offices consulted reported a lack of clarity on the number of cases within their offices/districts – in part due to the way in which individuals are recorded on the Department's management information systems – and which hindered their ability to provide reliable performance data at both levels.

Nevertheless, the estimates of take-up of the four and 13-week easements provided by interviewees were still felt to be some way below their own expectations. The advisers interviewed in the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited reported the following levels of take-up based on their knowledge of the number of cases dealt with by the office, or through their own personal caseloads:

- Jobcentre Plus office 1 – 18 cases, vast majority taking full 13 weeks;
- Jobcentre Plus office 2 – 12 cases, vast majority taking full 13 weeks. The manager for this office interviewed explained that on average they receive one DV claimant per month.
- Jobcentre Plus office 3 – three cases all of which taking full 13 weeks.
- Jobcentre Plus office 4 – one case which was the four-weeks easement only – claimant transferred onto ESA.
- Jobcentre Plus office 5 – three cases though no information on whether they took full 13 weeks as they had only been applied immediately prior to the research visit.

In essence, the Jobcentre Plus office sample can be seen as comprising two groups– those where experience of implementing the JSA DV Easement was between 12 and 18 cases in the last year and a second where experience was limited to between one and three cases.

Once a DV claimant had been identified we found that, overall, the guidance was generally being followed with few issues with its implementation reported. However, the small number of cases that had been processed means that the experience of the easement, and so ability to comment on its implementation, was limited. Perhaps understandably, it would appear that the levels of activity link to corresponding levels of awareness and understanding among staff.

#### **3.3.1 Delivery structure**

Overall, the Jobcentre Plus offices followed the intended delivery model, with front line staff/ assistant advisers being responsible for referring victims of DV to advisers for a longer and more detailed consultation. In three of the offices an individual adviser had been allocated lead responsibility for DV, although the duration, nature and coverage of this role varied.

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

In the first office, a formal DV lead had been established for some time prior to the introduction of the easement. This role has allowed strong relationships to develop between the Jobcentre Plus office and a wide range of local stakeholders, including the local authority domestic violence team, the police and the local refuge. The lead also attends local multi-agency partnership meetings, and MARAC<sup>30</sup> sessions where DV cases are reviewed, allowing victims among existing and new claimants to be identified and recorded on the Labour Market System (LMS).<sup>31</sup> Her role was recognised by all the interviewees, who clearly value her support and call on her for advice in instances over and above those linked to the JSA DV Easement. The lead had also accessed additional DV training for other advisers through local partnership arrangements and while retaining a 'lead' role had shared her learning and experience across the other advisers.

In another office, there was an informal DV lead, but only within his particular team. According to one of the managers *'There is usually a 'champion' within each adviser team that will spearhead a new policy or change in guidance in terms of testing it out and supporting other advisers.'* In the case of the JSA DV Easement, the unofficial DV lead explained how he volunteered to be the contact point in dealing with the preliminary DV cases to road test the policy. Following the first five cases the adviser shared his experience and learning with colleagues. Currently, he still describes himself as the DV lead in his team, i.e. if something comes up at the new claims desk, they are referred to him. It means the case is acted upon quickly which he felt was important. There were three advisers overall who could also process DV claims.

In the third office an individual had recently been made office DV lead, with individual 'leads' being established for each adviser team. These arrangements were put in place just prior to the research visit, therefore, limiting our ability to assess their effectiveness.

### 3.3.2 Delivery process and adherence to the guidance

Although based on limited throughput numbers in each office, advisers and managers described the processing of JSA DV Easement claims as running relatively smoothly, with a good understanding by staff of eligibility criteria for the easement.

#### The claimant pathway

Across most of the Jobcentre Plus offices, the claimant pathway was broadly in line with the guidance, with the disclosure of DV by the claimant being the main trigger for implementation:

- If DV is disclosed to, or identified by, front line staff/assistant advisers, the claimant is referred immediately to an adviser for interview (where in place, this tended to be either lead advisers or their colleagues).
- Where the four-week easement is agreed, the adviser completes a form and sends it to the Benefits Delivery Centre (BDC) to ensure payment is issued during the easement period.

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<sup>30</sup> Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference.

<sup>31</sup> The computer system used by Jobcentre Plus offices.

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

- The adviser typically sets a three-week reminder for a meeting with the claimant at four weeks, to review the easement and to discuss any need to extend to the full 13 weeks. At this meeting the adviser completes another form which requires supporting written evidence from appropriate support organisations. The completed form is sent to the BDC to ensure payment continues during the extended easement period.

There were, of course, some cases where the guidance was not followed fully, notably where awareness levels were low and there had been a limited number of easements processed. For example:

- One adviser explained that she had applied the JSA DV Easement to a DV claimant – but had to seek advice from her manager about how to implement it: *‘my manager told me to go on the intranet and look for the policy’*. She spoke of the four-week easement but did not seem to know about the potential to extend it for the full 13 weeks.
- An adviser in a second office described how in one case he had experienced reluctance from one Voluntary and Community Organisation (VCO) support agency to provide written evidence and, in order to process the nine week extension, felt it necessary to take verbal evidence instead.

Indeed, it is important to note that JSA is not necessarily the main benefit route for victims disclosing DV, with some advisers referring DV claimants onto Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) instead. For example, an adviser in an office with just one easement case explained that she tends to put victims of DV straight onto ESA because they are not viewed as fit to look for work. She gave two examples: in the first, the claimant was given the four-week JSA DV Easement but was then referred onto ESA because she was depressed and unable to look for work; and the second was in relation to a claimant who had a broken arm as a result of DV; and instead of JSA the adviser set up an ESA claim.

### The disclosure route

DV disclosures typically come later in the benefit claim process. Once a claimant is assigned to an adviser, they will conduct a diagnostic interview and this – together with any behaviour patterns observed subsequently by assistant advisers during signing appointments – is when DV is most commonly identified. Often this was the result of probing by the adviser into issues such as consistently being late for signing sessions, or limited job search activity, which resulted in a disclosure.

Once DV has been identified the adviser is expected to introduce the easement to the claimant as part of a conversation about helping them to address ongoing issues. One DV lead explained how she advises her colleagues not to use the term ‘easement’, but rather *‘a little break from job search to help get things sorted out’*, which has helped encourage victims to take up the easement. At this stage, there were many examples of advisers signposting DV claimants onto local support organisations.

### Meeting the easement criteria

With the exception of the example provided in Section 3.1.1 above, there were no examples where discretion had been exercised to **not** offer the easement; most advisers that had dealt with DV claimants understood that the easement was a right as long as the required criteria were met. Overall, advisers did not perceive the easement criteria as being an issue or barrier for their claimants.

However, in one Jobcentre Plus office with a comparatively high caseload of DV claimants, staff reported some instances where DV claimants did not meet the criteria for the easement – most commonly because the victim was still living with the perpetrator. For others, they had used up their allowance for that year despite still being a DV victim.<sup>32</sup>

There were also cases where DV claimants simply did not wish to partake in the easement, preferring to job hunt straightaway. For example, one victim chose not to take the easement and was referred for training provision, and is currently taking a basic skills course at the local college with a view to returning to work in catering.

### **On-going support**

There were some examples of advisers offering ongoing support and contact during the easement period, with all offering a meeting on completion. At this appointment all DV claimants are offered tailored support with their return to the labour market as part of the general package of support offered to all claimants. This can include: confidence training; help with CV development; skills in looking for work; advice on various outlets for sending out CVs; and searching on the universal job match database. There was no evidence of any additional support packages specifically for DV claimants. (See Section 5 for more detail on additional return to work support).

### **3.3.3 Abilities and confidence of staff to support DV victims**

Across the Jobcentre Plus offices, there was general recognition that DV claimants faced a particular set of challenges, with an overall view that they needed more support than most. All advisers expressed a duty of care to their claimants and cited low confidence as one of the key challenges faced by DV claimants along with a range of other 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.

Most interviewees also recognised that both proactively encouraging initial disclosure and responding to a disclosure requires time, sensitivity and skill. In the words of a New Claims Adviser, for example:

*‘You need to have empathy as an adviser and understanding – it is not easy to do due to the time frame you have with people. It can take longer to work with victims of DV and you need time to support them.’*

Indeed, as highlighted above, the point at which most disclosures tend to take place is later in the process. Interviewees noted that disclosures typically occur once a claimant has been assigned to an adviser, a degree of trust has been established and they are discussing support needs. An adviser often needs to probe for any issues and be mindful of, and observe any signs of, DV such as erratic behaviour or poor timekeeping.

Views expressed from across the board implied that inevitably some advisers were more comfortable than others in dealing with and supporting DV claimants. Some interviewees wondered whether the gender of the adviser might be an issue.

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<sup>32</sup> One of the eligibility criteria for the JSA DV Easement is that the claimant has not previously had a period of domestic violence easement within the last 12 months. However, DWP does provide additional support in the case of a domestic emergency.

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

One interviewee noted that ‘practice’ helps make one feel more confident. While dealing with vulnerable claimants forms part of the training received by all Jobcentre Plus advisers, the training is generic and does not include specific reference to DV. While for many interviewees, and their managers, this generic training was felt to be sufficient in helping them to identify and address issues for vulnerable claimants, including DV victims, many would also welcome DV training.

In one of the Jobcentre Plus offices, the DV lead recognised that ‘*some [advisers] are more comfortable than others ...*’, and described taking steps to ensure all staff are aware of the support and advice available to them. She also arranges attendance for staff at a half-day training course on DV provided by the local authority DV team. So far a mix of advisers and assistant advisers has attended, so extending those able to provide DV advice across the office.

A manager in another of the Jobcentre Plus offices, however, explained that they did not think that there was a particular training need in this area:

*[Advisers] are not counsellors, they are there to signpost people to the right services ... I don't think it's feasible to expect staff to be experts in all the issues they can come across in the social spectrum.'*

Elsewhere, managers noted that when the guidance was rolled out and staff read it, questions were raised about the actual process of dealing with DV victims ‘*this is an emotive issue that does promote healthy debate.*’ In this case, the manager explained that any emerging issues linked to DV can be brought up at the weekly team meetings.

In one of the Jobcentre Plus offices where levels of awareness and take up of the easement were low, advisers expressed a lack of confidence in knowing how to deal with a DV claimant. For example:

*'What would you do when people tell you? Would you record it, where would you pass the info onto as they may not want to do anything about it, but you have an obligation towards care, especially if it is to do with abuse, sexual abuse and there are children involved? It would be good to know what to do and where your responsibility ends.'*

Similarly, in another office, where levels of awareness and take up are low, the manager stated that while an initial briefing had been helpful ‘*... it got people thinking about it, but if there was an opportunity to do more in depth training that would be good.*’

However, the newly appointed DV lead in this office explained the challenges of organising briefings for staff, particularly front line staff:

*'It is very difficult on the front line to release staff, as we are seeing customers that are booked in two weeks beforehand – if I was to take away two to three people their diaries would need to be covered and sometimes we are short staffed. You don't have the resource to get 20 people on each diary covered.'*

### **3.3.4 Role of Benefit Delivery Centres**

In the vast majority of cases, interviewees did not see a significant role for the BDC in the processing of the easement. The Jobcentre Plus office was seen as having responsibility for decision making and for ensuring that the correct paperwork is sent to the BDC to ensure payments are continued in the easement period.

Overall, managers and advisers were not aware of any problems here in terms of delayed payments. However, in the case of one Jobcentre Plus office, an adviser provided a couple of examples of where DV claimants who had been given an easement had not got paid due to delays at the BDC. In another Jobcentre Plus office, the newly appointed DV lead explained that in the one easement case she had so far led on, the BDC did not have prior awareness of the easement.

## **3.4 Key issues**

Each of the interviewees was asked for their views on the main issues associated with the implementation of the JSA DV Easement. Although as described above, the actual easement process was found to be operating smoothly in the majority of cases, issues raised (and potential areas for improvement) included the perceived lack of promotion of the easement, limited availability of management information (MI) data at Jobcentre Plus office and district level, and the challenge faced in promoting disclosure.

### **3.4.1 Lack of awareness of pre-promotion and limited ongoing promotion**

All of the Jobcentre Plus office interviewees spoke of being first introduced to the policies in April. While the DWP had made efforts to promote the JSA DV Easement to key audiences, including Jobcentre Plus offices prior to the launch, there was an apparent lack of awareness of any pre-promotion activities within their office. While in some offices, as described above, there had been some form of team briefing to accompany the guidance, most received the guidance in the form of an email with no further introduction or discussion. In addition to this, the provision of updates or 'refreshers' on the easement was rare – and where briefing had been by email only, and no refreshers provided, lower levels of staff awareness were identified.

Efforts to promote the JSA DV Easement externally were also considered to have been limited nationally, with efforts being made to varying degrees by the Jobcentre Plus offices to inform local support providers and others with an interest in the DV agenda.

### **3.4.2 Limited availability of MI at the individual Jobcentre Plus office and district level**

Although data is collected on the number and nature of JSA DV Easements nationally, this data cannot easily be accessed at the district and Jobcentre Plus office levels. While Jobcentre Plus offices do have a marker within the LMS system which collates data nationally, findings from the fieldwork that has been carried out shows that local offices would benefit from collating their own data rather than relying on either anecdotal evidence or clerical measurement.



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

Consequently there is no mechanism for systematically reviewing throughput against expected numbers – setting expectations itself being a challenge given the absence of data on DV incidents at the district and Jobcentre Plus office levels (although one Jobcentre Plus office had developed close working links with their local police to allow particular ‘hot spots’ to be identified). The absence of data more widely also led to very different perceptions of the levels of DV in different Jobcentre Plus office areas – in one Jobcentre Plus office, for example, management staff suggested that DV was not a significant issue locally, whereas the assistant advisers interviewed had heard that they had one of the highest rates of DV in the country.

### **3.4.3 Identifying DV claimants and prompting disclosure is challenging**

For the majority of interviewees, the apparently low number of JSA DV Easement cases was due, at least in part, to the reluctance of victims to disclose their experiences, which was commonly cited as the main barrier to providing support. One Jobcentre Plus office manager echoed the views of many interviewees when he asked *‘Is the Jobcentre a place where victims would readily disclose?’*

Key barriers noted by the Jobcentre Plus office and district interviewees included:

- The absence of any questions on DV in the original Contact Centre interview script or on the on-line form – with claimants in both cases being asked if they are looking for work (a negative answer means that they are not eligible) without also asking the reasons for this (such as being a victim of DV). While the guidance states that call centre staff are specifically not allowed to inform claimants about the easement, several staff considered that this could fuel an initial reluctance to disclose any barriers to job search activities.
- The environment within Jobcentre Plus offices – which are open plan and often very busy, and with private interview space not always being readily available for signing visits (although this was less often the case with any subsequent adviser interviews).
- The lack of time available for frontline advisers to spend with claimants – as described above, disclosure often results from probing on issues of conditionality (such as being late for meetings, poor reporting of job search, generally lethargic/depressed behaviour), which are more challenging to facilitate within the short time available to them.

### **3.4.4 Problems with the additional nine-week easement**

The Jobcentre Plus staff interviews found that in the majority of cases the process of claiming the additional nine-week easement was straightforward. While in one case, described previously, an adviser described how one Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) support provider was reluctant to provide written evidence, this appeared to be an isolated incident.

One Jobcentre Plus office did, however, describe experiencing problems in this area, primarily concerning claimants who failed to attend their appointment at the end of a four-week easement and whose claims had been closed as a result. The advisers in this office routinely attempt to contact the claimant at the three-week stage of their easement to remind them of their appointment, although it was not uncommon to be unable to establish contact with an individual. While some claimants may have written documentation with them in the first interview (such as a police statement), most do not, and once a claim is closed there

is no mechanism for any follow up. Although advice on this is provided in the guidance, interviewees explained how it was this experience that emphasised to them the importance of booking the four-week appointment at the start of the easement and to ensure they get mobile numbers from all DV claimants.

In another case, one of the DV leads reported that she commonly receives questions from staff on which ‘professional bodies’ are classified as appropriate for providing supporting evidence for the extra nine weeks easement even though information on this is provided in the guidance.

### **3.5 Recommendations from Jobcentre Plus staff for improvements**

Finally, the Jobcentre Plus and district staff interviewed suggested a series of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the JSA DV Easement. These are set out below.

#### **3.5.1 Promote the easement more widely and proactively both internally and externally**

A number of advisers raised this as an area for improvement, with the most common practical suggestions including:

- Raising the profile of DV as an issue on a par with drugs and alcohol victims, particularly in Jobcentre Plus offices serving known DV hotspots.
- Providing specific awareness raising/familiarisation training on DV, either through talks from outside agencies or events, or through specific internal briefings on DV – and make this available for all staff members rather than just senior advisers.
- Establishing ‘DV leads’ in each Jobcentre Plus office, to provide specific knowledge and expertise, act as a single point of contact both within and outside of the Jobcentre Plus office, and provide support for their colleagues.
- Promoting the sharing of information on local support organisations within the Jobcentre Plus office, to help advisers ensure more informed signposting.
- Displaying posters within the Jobcentre Plus office explaining that support is available for victims of DV, and communicating the role that Jobcentre Plus can play proactively in key local community settings (such as schools and GP’s surgeries) and among DV support agencies.

#### **3.5.2 Consider ways to help encourage the identification of DV victims earlier and to better support them**

Here additional recommendations from staff at the management and adviser level included:

- Including a specific question on DV at the first stage of the claim process (i.e. at the Contact Centre/on-line form stage) – to allow disclosure in the context of discussing their availability for work.

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

- Where possible ensuring that private room/space is available within Jobcentre Plus offices to provide DV claimants with a confidential and safe environment in which to disclose – and seeking to allocate time to adviser interviews to give claimants time to disclose.
- Allowing advisers/DV lead advisers time to establish solid working relationships with local agencies with an involvement and interest in DV, establishing credibility and trust, and attending periodic meetings to ensure their knowledge is maintained and deepened.

### 3.5.3 Review the purpose and practicalities of the four and 13-week threshold

Mixed views were expressed on the purpose and function of the four-week threshold – including advisers who suggested that a full 13-week easement should be granted from the outset (on the basis that the full 13 weeks may be needed to find somewhere to live and settle their children into a new school). This approach would allow written evidence to be provided from the outset, removing the need for the extension process, although there was a recognition that victims may wish to take a four-week easement and ‘bank’ their remaining allocation for later in the year.<sup>33</sup>

Conversely, several managers welcomed the four-week threshold and considered it important in terms of protecting Jobcentre Plus. While having another step in the process had resource implications, the four-week threshold acts as a filter and allows written evidence to be collected to help prevent fraud. Similarly, one adviser thought that the four-week threshold was a useful stopgap/point at which both they and the claimant can decide whether an additional nine weeks is needed – *‘it gives time to appraise the situation.’*

### 3.5.4 Review the easement period

Finally, while there is no scope to amend the easement itself, questions were raised about some aspects of the easement criteria:

- One adviser highlighted how incidences of DV commonly happen on multiple occasions, either by the same perpetrator or by other family members. Indeed, as set out in Section 2.1.2 of this report, official statistics show that over 70 per cent of all DV incidents were experienced by repeat victims. In this context, the interviewee questioned why DV claimants were only allowed one spell of easement per year. In practice, the easement period can be split over the year so providing some flexibility to the claimant.
- In a similar vein, a second adviser wondered whether the option for a discretionary extension of the easement beyond 13 weeks in specific circumstances might be useful, although acknowledging that if a claimant was still not job ready at this point perhaps other benefits such as ESA would be more appropriate. Although the interviewee did not express awareness of this, the DWP does provide for additional support in the case of a domestic emergency., i.e. for those claimants who need extra time, the 13-week period may be combined, in appropriate circumstances, with the four deferral periods (totalling four or 11 weeks depending on whether they have childcare responsibilities) which are available for domestic emergencies at the discretion of Jobcentre Plus staff.

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<sup>33</sup> The initial four-week period runs continuously to allow the claimant to focus on stabilising their situation, as well as obtaining evidence if appropriate. If evidence is provided before the end of the four-week period, the easement will be extended to the full 13 weeks less any time already taken.

## 4 Destitute Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession

This section sets out the findings of the study regarding the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession). However, and in comparison to the Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement (JSA DV Easement), overall awareness and understanding of the DDV Concession was limited, and practical experience of implementation was limited to just one of the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited<sup>34</sup>. Consequently, this section focuses on the level of awareness of the DDV Concession among the staff interviewed, examples where cases were identified, and actual and potential issues with implementation.

### 4.1 Awareness and understanding

Here we examine levels of awareness and understanding of the DDV Concession among Jobcentre Plus staff in the five local offices and at district level. We also explore views on wider awareness among their stakeholders where relevant.

#### 4.1.1 Jobcentre Plus staff – managers and advisers

Compared with the JSA DV Easement, while most interviewees expressed an awareness of the DDV Concession and its general policy intent, a large number had either not read or did not recall reading this part of the guidance, and relatively few demonstrated a detailed understanding of it.

In two of the Jobcentre Plus offices, managers showed a good level of understanding of the DDV Concession, with understanding among advisers and assistant advisers being more variable. The DV lead in one of these offices explained that: *'I know the basics [of the DDV Concession], I know where to find the information ... I have it all here, but it's not something we have had anyone ask us about'*. Consequently, other advisers had little or no working knowledge of the DDV Concession in these offices, although the frontline and assistant adviser staff interviewed highlighted that should a DDV case arise, they would know to refer them on and who to refer them onto.

In two of the other Jobcentre Plus offices, neither managers nor advisers expressed any detailed awareness of the DDV Concession, and in some cases had no awareness of the Concession at all. In the final Jobcentre Plus office, while most staff interviewed were aware of the Concession, for many this was only a recent development in light of having just received an office briefing on both the policies.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> As subsequent sections describe, this Jobcentre had dealt with two cases under the DDV Concession, both of which were problematic.

<sup>35</sup> The briefing took place shortly prior to the fieldwork visit.

### **4.1.2 District representatives**

At the district level, two of the representatives interviewed were aware of the DDV Concession, but had limited or no working knowledge of its implementation. One in particular felt that while awareness of the JSA DV Easement among Jobcentre Plus offices was strong in his area, this was less the case for the DDV Concession. He would expect more awareness/take up of DDV in areas with a heightened migrant population. The third district manager interviewed had no knowledge of the DDV Concession or of any DDV cases in his area.

### **4.1.3 Jobcentre Plus staff views on wider awareness**

Though relatively few views on the DDV Concession were expressed, interviewees tended to think that, as with the JSA DV Easement, awareness of the DDV Concession among wider stakeholders such as the police, medical staff, and specialist support agencies was low.

For one of the two DDV cases dealt with in one of the Jobcentre Plus offices, the claimant had arrived at the Jobcentre Plus office accompanied by a support worker who had prior knowledge of the DDV Concession. Another adviser from the same office explained that her contact within a local Asian support network was aware of both the DDV Concession and JSA DV Easement policies.

## **4.2 Introducing the DDV Concession**

In this section we set out how the policy was introduced to Jobcentre Plus office staff, and views on the guidance received.

### **4.2.1 Introducing the DDV Concession**

As explained in the previous chapter, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) produced a guidance document that included reference to both the DDV Concession and the JSA DV Easement. It set out the background and the process for implementing it, including the eligibility criteria to be applied. Again this was included as a link in an email sent initially to the district offices, who then through their 'Change Teams' cascaded this information to Jobcentre Plus managers. As with the easement, there was also a series of pre-promotion activities, including communication via various channels and the production of factsheets to ensure that Jobcentre Plus offices, claimants and external stakeholders were informed.

While the general process of dissemination among the individual Jobcentre Plus offices and staff was the same as for the JSA DV Easement, several interviewees felt that the JSA DV Easement had been emphasised to staff more than the DDV Concession. Certainly subsequent recollection of the DDV Concession and guidance was some way below that for the JSA DV Easement. This was even the case in one Jobcentre Plus office, where the DV lead included specific reference to the DDV Concession in her briefing on the two policies, and made staff aware of specific migrant DV issues such as forced marriage and honour abuse. However, as no DDV Concession cases have arisen in the Jobcentre Plus office, the lead described how she would not expect assistant advisers to have a working knowledge of the DDV Concession, although all the staff interviewed knew where to find the guidance or to turn to her, or her adviser colleagues, for advice should a case arise.

## **4.2.2 Views on the guidance materials**

Where aware of them, staff were asked for their views on the guidance materials provided for the DDV Concession. As the guidance on the DDV Concession was part of the guidance that also included the JSA DV Easement, many of the points highlighted in Section 3 are also relevant here, i.e. that although some found the DDV guidance to be more complicated overall, it was generally found to be clear, comprehensive and easy to access via the intranet. However, in the experience of one adviser the DDV guidance was less accessible:

*‘The guidance isn’t clear cut – I don’t find it an easy read. When you look for domestic violence the JSA Easement comes up – but when you look for the DDV, you need to scroll and scroll.’*

(Adviser)

Across the five Jobcentre Plus offices the view emerged that the DDV Concession guidance would be used as and when a relevant case came up, but had been accessed infrequently, in line with the number of cases reported. Consequently, there were no examples across the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited of additional guidance materials being produced by the Jobcentres themselves specifically to support the DDV Concession. However, factsheets were produced by the Department to support implementation.

## **4.3 Implementing the DDV Concession**

### **4.3.1 Delivery structure**

As the previous chapter described, two of the Jobcentre Plus offices had established DV leads in place with a third having recently established an individual to lead on DV. In such cases, front line staff were described as being able to go to these leads for advice or for referring on any DDV claimants. The ability to refer cases on to a DV lead was highlighted as important by several interviewees, given that the DDV Concession follows a more complex model and cases are rare. In the remaining Jobcentre Plus offices responsibility for dealing with DV cases, including those under the DDV Concession, was distributed among advisers.

In the case of migrant claimants in particular, a number of advisers interviewed tended to see the responsibility for identifying eligible claimants for DDV as falling with the New Claims Team. The adviser there would need to know and record that they have leave to remain status – and it was assumed that any DV issues would be identified as part of this.

### **4.3.2 Delivery process and adherence to the guidance**

In four of the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited, there were no examples of any cases that had taken up the DDV measure.<sup>36</sup> This was commonly considered to be due to local migrant populations being small, and elsewhere that few if any cases had been forthcoming. A New Claims Adviser in one Jobcentre Plus office, for example, explained that she has not dealt with any migrant DV claimants since April 2012. While she noted that they have started to get more migrant claimants recently, particularly from Eastern Europe, there had been no cases of claimants bringing a UK Border Agency (UKBA) letter and applying for the Concession.

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<sup>36</sup> In one of these, an adviser was aware that a colleague may have processed a DDV claim, but had no details on this.

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

Experience of the delivery of the DDV Concession was confined to just one of the Jobcentre Plus offices visited, where two cases were reported. However, difficulties were experienced in both these cases, mainly as a result of a lack of background information relating to the claimant and a lack of prior awareness about the Concession, making it difficult to draw on these cases to explore implementation and good practice.

While BDCs have more of a role to play in processing the DDV Concession, the limited DDV Concession activity in the Jobcentres visited meant that no specific issues were identified.

### 4.4 Implementation issues

As described previously, experience of implementing the DDV Concession was limited to just one of the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited, where the approach followed had deviated from the prescribed guidance. Discussions consequently focused on the potential reasons for the low numbers of DDV Concession cases identified, in addition to the view expressed in some cases that the numbers of migrants in the local population was small. Several of the issues raised would apply equally to migrant claimants more widely.

The barriers to disclosure of DV, for example, were seen as particularly accentuated for migrant claimants, most notably in terms of:

- Language barriers and limited resources for face-to-face interpreters. Jobcentre Plus staff no longer have access to face-to-face interpreters (perceived reason for this as expressed by a number of advisers was that it was *'too expensive'*)<sup>37</sup>. Translation for non-English speakers has to be done three way over the phone referred to by one Jobcentre Plus office as 'Big Word' or using 'Google translate'; *'not ideal'* according to one adviser, but seen as *'working well'* by a Customer Services Operations Manager (CSOM) in another office. Claimants also tend to bring someone with them to translate, but these are not necessarily equipped to deal with technical language and Jobcentre Plus staff have no way of knowing whether they are translating correctly.
- Lack of links with specialist migrant support/DV agencies. One of the advisers made the point that if front line support agencies for migrant DV victims are not informing them about either the JSA DV Easement or the DDV Concession (i.e. police/medical staff) then this will prevent referrals to/disclosing at the Jobcentre.
- Specific training needs, but lack of time to engage: one assistant adviser for example explained that: *'If I come across many [DDV Concession] people I will be willing to learn – but if you don't, then there is no need. There are so many other things to do – like today I have 25 interviews, and I won't get 10 minutes.'*

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<sup>37</sup> This referred to staff in the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited. If a claimant cannot provide their own interpreter, then DWP will try and use an interpretation service.

## **4.5 Recommendations from Jobcentre Plus Staff for improvements**

Overall, awareness and experiences of the DDV Concession were extremely limited with just one Jobcentre Plus office having undertaken two DDV cases, both of which had been problematic. In the absence of practical experience, interviewees did not feel in a position to make suggestions for any improvements to the Concession.



## 5 Good practice and helping victims return to the labour market

This section consolidates the findings on what worked well to present examples of good practice, and describes the additional approaches followed in the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited to help victims of domestic violence (DV) return to the labour market. It draws mainly on experiences of implementing the Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement (JSA DV Easement), although many of the good practice points are applicable across both policies.

### 5.1 Communicating the policies

The study has identified that awareness of the JSA DV Easement and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession) policies were variable between the Jobcentre Plus offices visited, and between staff within individual offices. However, where awareness was greatest the processes followed to introduce the policies initially and maintain awareness of them when case numbers were low, were found to be key.

#### 5.1.1 Introduction and initial awareness raising

Awareness and understanding of the JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession was greatest in the Jobcentre Plus offices where a proactive approach had been taken to introducing them, rather than simply circulating an email with the guidance materials attached. The introduction of the policies at weekly team meetings and through face-to-face briefings, on an 'office-wide' basis to ensure all staff received a common message, represented good practice.

Such team briefings allowed the policy and guidance to be discussed, and questions and issues raised by staff. These briefings helped embed awareness of the policies among staff. For example: in one office, an adviser explained that there had been a '*big push office-wide*' with the JSA DV Easement being discussed at their team meetings – '*It was explained to us that 'it was a right' and will change how we relate to DV claimants*'.

For another office, the DV lead explained that she took steps to ensure all staff were aware of both policies, following and delivering a 'trickle down' approach on a face-to-face basis.

While the guidance produced by DWP was widely seen to be fit for purpose, one Jobcentre Plus office had produced additional summary information to accompany the main guidance document. Elsewhere, steps taken to reinforce the guidance and briefing provided included:

- encouraging staff to keep copies of the guidance for both policies to hand – in one case on their desktops for rapid access; and
- providing lists of appropriate local agencies to advisers – with the national contacts provided with the guidance being considered helpful, but not a substitute to more local contacts.

Good practice approaches in introducing the policies were also inclusive – with briefings not being confined to managers/more senior advisers also, but also including advisers at all levels, particularly front line staff whose roles made them the first point of contact for DV victims.

### **5.1.2 Maintaining awareness and understanding**

However, the study also identified that awareness and understanding of both policies, but particularly the DDV Concession, could be variable even where their initial introduction represented good practice. It was clear that where the number of JSA DV Easement claims taken by the office was higher staff awareness and understanding of the easement was strongest – with familiarity being linked to practical experience. Given the absence of DDV Concession cases across four of the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited, it is likely that the reverse position applied, with any initial briefing received being forgotten among other changes introduced subsequently and awareness of the Concession diminishing, among frontline staff at least.

This decay in awareness levels, particularly where low case numbers do not allow familiarity with the delivery process to develop, stresses the importance of continuing to maintain awareness of the policies among staff. Interviewees also emphasised that the levels of staff turnover and change in individuals' job roles and functions meant that maintaining awareness needed to be an ongoing process. Good practice in this area included:

- continuing to include references to, and discussion of, both policies in team meetings;
- holding specific 'refresher sessions' for staff on the policies;
- providing briefings to new staff, or staff whose roles had changed; and
- in common with the approach to introduction, ensuring that staff at all levels are included in any ongoing awareness raising/'refresher' sessions held.

Given the continuing requirement to maintain awareness of the policies, the role of individuals with specific responsibilities for leading on DV was highlighted. This included leading on awareness raising/maintaining, as well as being a contact point for staff with questions or queries.

## **5.2 The role of the domestic violence lead**

In two of the Jobcentre Plus offices individuals with lead responsibilities for DV had been established for some time (in one case some way in advance of the policies' introduction), and in a third a DV lead had recently been appointed. Establishing a DV lead represented good practice, and offered the following benefits:

- providing leadership on the issue of DV across the office – helping establish and maintain the profile of DV support needs generally and the DV policies specifically;
- leading on initial awareness raising for staff and maintaining awareness particularly when case numbers were low;
- acting as an internal DV 'expert' and providing a first point of contact for staff with questions or queries on the policies;

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

- helping oversee and encourage additional training for staff, including the cascading of learning to other ‘team DV leads’; and,
- contributing to raising awareness of the role Jobcentre Plus can play in supporting victims of DV, and establishing links and credibility with external partners.

The example of an established DV lead provided by one of the Jobcentre Plus offices visited shows the importance of having capacity to proactively support colleagues in their work with DV claimants, even if this role is not formalised as such. Activities included:

- the production of additional tailored guidance targeted at different staff levels to ensure that all staff are aware of both policies and know what to do when a claimant discloses;
- the delivery of regular refresh updates as part of team meetings; the Jobcentre Plus environment is one of rapid change, so reminders are essential, particularly when DV instances are comparatively low;
- engaging with and attending regular meetings of appropriate local partnership groups, including Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) sessions to identify potential DV cases among existing claimants; and
- arranging for staff to attend a half-day DV training course provided by the local authority DV team – with a mix of advisers and assistant advisers attending to date, so extending those able to provide DV advice across the office.

However, it was clear that delivering the DV lead role requires additional time to deal with a range of tasks such as extra administration, giving support to colleagues and attending external meetings. These tasks associated with the lead role all needed to be undertaken alongside their wider adviser role. One lead described ‘... *having to squeeze (the DV lead role) in alongside the full adviser diary – so I do it after 4 pm when everyone’s gone*’. It is, therefore, important to ensure that a DV lead:

- is allowed time to deliver their role – particularly important in terms of networking, partnership development and maintenance; and
- is supported by other DV trained staff who, in their absence or otherwise, can also provide advice and support to colleagues as appropriate.

In the Jobcentre Plus offices without a DV lead, levels of awareness of the policies were found to be low and mixed views were expressed on how to best support DV claimants. A number of advisers in these offices suggested that it would be helpful to have a person with a detailed knowledge of DV issues, and training in dealing with victims to support staff.

### 5.3 Partnership relations and joint working

Active relationships with local external support groups and wider local partnership bodies with an involvement or interest in supporting victims of DV were identified in several of the Jobcentre Plus offices visited. In one case, these relationships had been developed some way in advance of the policies’ introduction, making them well placed to communicate the existence and intent of the policies externally and work jointly to support their delivery.

In addition to raising awareness of the Jobcentre Plus offer for DV victims to partners, active partnership links could also provide useful local intelligence for Jobcentre Plus staff. Often built on a history of joint working and the efforts of a number of committed individuals, these links served to:

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

- raise awareness of the Jobcentre Plus ‘offer’ – developing a shared understanding of the ‘offer’ and establishing trust and credibility;
- develop a good working knowledge of the services available for DV victims within their local areas;
- encourage referral and signposting – both in terms of cases into and out from the Jobcentre Plus office; and
- help with the early identification of DV claimants via multi-agency meetings.

In one example, the DV lead had established links with a range of statutory and Voluntary and Community Organisation (VCO) agencies including the police, the local authority DV team, local refuges, support groups, and IDVAs (independent DV advocates – part of the local authority). Many of these contacts were made through the lead’s attendance at local MARAC meetings, but also more widely through a history of joint working around the topic of DV. The links with the local authority team have proved especially useful, through the sharing of local authority data on DV hotspots in the local area, which is useful for targeting efforts. For example, the data showed that many cases of DV were among 18 to 24-year-olds, which led to the DV lead providing training to an adviser working with this specific age group.

In this case, attendance at fortnightly MARAC meetings also provided a source of local intelligence. Where relevant, and within the confines of the data sharing protocol established, DV case details are shared with the Jobcentre Plus DV lead, who is able to match these against information on their own computer system and, if relevant, mark up a case as a potential DV claimant. This provides the basis for an adviser to more proactively explore any support needs with the claimant.

### 5.4 Supporting delivery

A number of interviewees highlighted a range of skills and approaches that are considered to be important for advisers when working with DV claimants, and which can help support the effective delivery of both policies. These included the need for:

- Knowing when to refer DV claimants to an appropriate adviser or when to seek further advice (e.g. from the DV lead where relevant). This was highlighted by a number of front line staff who, while not necessarily having the detailed knowledge of either of the policies, knew who to refer a DV claimant to.
- Good interviewing skills – drawing on the learning from generic training in terms of working with vulnerable claimants. Many interviewees found that the skills acquired through generic training provided a good basis for supporting DV claimants with examples given of the importance of face-to-face contact, toning down technical language and using the diagnostic interview to draw out any underlying issues. One DV lead, for example, explained how she advises her colleagues not to use the term ‘*easement*’, but rather ‘*a little break from job search to help get things sorted out*’, which has helped encourage victims to take up the easement.
- As part of this, building trust with the claimant and dealing with cases sensitively and empathetically allowing time and privacy where possible. Where advisers had access to private rooms, they felt this had helped to provide DV claimants with the space to

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

discuss any wider issues more fully. Many advisers spoke of having ‘a duty of care’ to their claimants, and were keen to emphasise that they were sympathetic to the needs of this particularly vulnerable group. In the words of an assistant adviser, for example: *‘You need to have empathy as an adviser and understanding – it is not easy to do due to the timeframe you have with people. It can take longer to work with victims of DV and you need time to support them.’*

- Taking a holistic approach and being aware of, and/or probing for, any wider issues or barriers faced. Partly linked to the two points above, advisers tended to demonstrate an awareness of the common challenges faced by DV claimants in terms of low confidence, lack of work experience, concerns over childcare and the safety of their children, and broader emotional support issues. These were all issues they would explore with the claimant when designing a package of support.
- Information sharing with colleagues was seen by many as critical. There were some examples where DV markers had been placed on the Labour Market System (LMS) to help ensure all relevant staff were aware that the claimant was a potential DV victim. This also helps prevent the victim having to re-tell their story to multiple staff members.
- A regular forum within the office to allow colleagues to support each other and to discuss and resolve issues relating to DV as they arise. Regular team meetings where DV issues are a standing item provide staff with a forum for raising concerns, particularly important given that some of the DV disclosures can be extremely distressing. This can also help maintain awareness and the profile of the two policies more widely.

### **5.5 Additional staff training**

As suggested above, many interviewees (managers and advisers) considered that the generic training provided to advisers was sufficient to enable them to work effectively with victims of DV. However, in a few cases individual advisers expressed concerns about working with this group, and suggested that specific training in dealing with DV victims would be helpful. Elsewhere, other interviewees acknowledged that working with DV victims required a specific set of skills, notably to promote disclosure, and that some staff were more comfortable in this area than others. The view emerged that while additional training was not a necessity, it could be helpful.

One of the Jobcentre Plus offices visited reported inviting Jobcentre Plus staff to attend half-day training sessions, provided by the local authority DV team, on raising awareness of DV and dealing with victims. To date, a mix of assistant advisers and advisers had attended the training, which was considered to have raised their capability to support both victims and the other staff working with them. In addition, attendance was considered to have allowed relationships to develop with partners beyond the DV lead, and further establish credibility with partners by demonstrating the active commitment of Jobcentre Plus to the DV agenda.

## 5.6 Additional support to help victims towards the labour market

### 5.6.1 Jobcentre Plus provision

While no examples of ‘specific’ additional support services or products for victims of DV were identified by the Jobcentre Plus offices visited, it was clear that claimants returning from the easement period, or those who had disclosed an incident of DV but not taken up the easement offer, were routinely offered access to mainstream Jobcentre Plus support (through the Jobcentre Plus ‘offer’).

There were some examples of advisers offering ongoing support and contact during the easement period, and all offered a meeting with DV victims on completion. At this appointment all DV claimants are offered tailored support with their return to the labour market as part of the package of holistic support offered to all claimants, but recognising that victims of DV may also face a range of additional challenges to returning to the labour market. Support can include: training to raise confidence and self-esteem (the most commonly recognised issues and barriers experienced by DV victims); support for money management; training to develop basic and wider skills to enable the return to work; and support with job search (such as help on CV development, advising on where to send CVs and using the universal job match database).

The provision of ongoing support to DV victims during the easement period was considered by the advisers interviewed to have worked well. In one Jobcentre Plus office an adviser explained that he viewed the JSA DV Easement as an *‘easement of conditionality not easement of support’* and consequently he:

- maintained contact with his DV claimants regularly throughout the easement process (in the case of one claimant he saw her four times in the first week);
- kept in touch with the claimant either via meetings or telephone to provide a familiar face and to offer a supportive role; this often took the form of ‘catch up meetings’ to discuss *‘how’s it going’* and to provide signposting; and,
- organised a ‘wrap up’ meeting at the end of the 13-week period.

These regular contacts helped prepare the claimant for the return to conditionality – as one adviser described: *‘if we cut them adrift for 13 weeks then conditionality can be a real shock.’* The continued contact throughout the easement period also helped in offering a tailored package of support such as confidence training. Elsewhere, other instances were described where the need to support a claimant ahead of the easement completion was recognised: *‘it can be a significant change and possibly a leap too far for some.’* In such cases advisers make contact in advance, usually a week before or midway through the nine-week extension.

Finally, staff in one Jobcentre Plus office, and their district office colleagues, reported that the return from a period of easement could provide an opportunity to build upon any momentum established following what could be a significant life changing event. Consequently, this was seen in some cases as a good time to introduce the idea of the return to work, with the end of easement interview focusing on positive steps forward.

## **5.6.2 Referrals and signposting**

More generally, several examples were cited by advisers of signposting or more formal referral of DV victims to local support organisations. These included both individuals who had received an easement as well as those who did not – either because the disclosing claimant declined the offer or in the limited instances where the JSA DV Easement criteria had not been met.

Consequently, signposting or more formal referrals included directing victims to local refuges, support groups, the police or wider health and social services. Where relationships existed with external providers some advisers described ‘brokering’ links with claimants, for example by calling ahead to introduce claimants and set appointments for them. However, this was recognised as being resource intensive, so while signposting took place it was recognised that the responsibility for continuing to support external engagement remained the responsibility of the claimant.

Where external referrals and signposting were found to take place more frequently, staff interviewed described how knowledge of the local area, and the provision available within it, was key. Consequently, efforts were made to maintain up-to-date contact lists, which were often shared with colleagues to enable more effective communications.

## 6 Conclusions and recommendations

This section provides the study conclusions and recommendations. In doing so we emphasise that the research upon which they are based included a small sample of Jobcentre Plus offices, district staff and stakeholders, and that the Department may wish to test the findings and recommendations with a wider population to verify their validity.

### 6.1 Conclusions

In 2010, the Government launched a strategy *Violence Against Women and Girls* which included a focus on prevention, provision and protection. The Jobseeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement (JSA DV Easement) and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession) policies form part of this wider social justice agenda and require a duty of care on the part of advisers to victims of DV. If certain criteria are met, DV victims are entitled to access these policies as appropriate, and unlike other support measures they are not discretionary. There has been broad support for these policies among the Voluntary and Community Organisation (VCO) stakeholders interviewed for this study, particularly in terms of how the policies recognise the needs of this vulnerable group and among the Jobcentre Plus staff who welcome it as an additional tool for supporting DV claimants.

However, the rate of uptake of both policies has been low since their introduction nearly a year ago in April 2012. Nationally, there have been 338 cases of the four-week easement and 115 cases of the full 13-week easement as part of JSA DV Easement and, according to UK Border Agency (UKBA), approximately 50 applications per month under the DDV Concession. While there is currently an absence of data on the take-up of benefits under the DDV Concession, and limited availability of data on the JSA DV Easement at district or Jobcentre Plus office level, the research undertaken for this study has allowed us to at least begin to explore some of the issues behind this.

There were differences in how the two policies were experienced, most notably in terms of the generally much lower awareness among managers and advisers of the DDV Concession. In line with VCO stakeholder views, low awareness among Jobcentre Plus staff, particularly in relation to the DDV Concession, does seem to be an issue. However, a common barrier to the uptake and implementation of both policies is also the issue of disclosure and the barriers that prevent, or make it difficult for claimants to disclose DV; accentuated for migrant DV claimants who have additional language barriers and support needs. We know from official statistics that DV rates overall are high, affecting one in three women, and that it is particularly prevalent among unemployed women.<sup>38</sup> Yet the Jobcentre Plus offices visited with the highest numbers of JSA DV Easement cases were reporting fewer than 20 cases overall during the course of a year.

Why are the numbers of cases so low? A key part of this is that overall, Jobcentre Plus offices do not have a remit to actively promote the policies. Awareness of the policies among the wider local support network, including statutory and Voluntary and Community

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<sup>38</sup> Source British Crime Survey (2010) See Section 2.1.2.



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

Sector (VCS) agencies was considered to be (and in some cases experienced as being) generally low by Jobcentre Plus office staff and district staff. With the exception of key national campaigning organisations that have been involved with UKBA and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in developing these policies, stakeholders also reported that most services at the ground level have limited knowledge. Given this, awareness of the policies among claimants themselves appears to be low, with few examples given of local organisations referring DV claimants. If the claimant is not aware of the easement or of the wider support that Jobcentre Plus can offer to DV victims, and faced with a busy, open plan office, there is little incentive to disclose DV. Indeed, the most common route to disclosure came further down the benefit claims pathway once a relationship had been formed with an adviser and/or an adviser had noticed certain behaviour patterns indicating DV.

Given these challenges of identifying DV claimants, the examples of good practice identified showed the importance of:

- providing detailed briefing to staff at all levels on the policies both at the outset and on an ongoing basis, and providing a forum for discussing issues and queries;
- providing additional DV specific training to build the skills and confidence of staff in identifying and supporting DV claimants;
- having a DV lead to provide internal leadership and support to colleagues, but also to establish external links with referring local agencies; and,
- outward facing links to provide information for the Jobcentre Plus office on DV hotspots, to help raise awareness among key local agencies of the policies and to stimulate referrals, so relying less on advisers having to probe claimants to disclose DV.

Where offices adopted all or some of these activities, JSA DV Easement caseloads overall were higher; and, conversely, where there were no such activities DV cases overall were much lower.

In addition to these overarching points, we now summarise the key findings in more detail as they relate to each individual policy.

### **6.1.1 JSA DV Easement**

The JSA DV Easement, introduced on 23 April 2012, provides a specific easement from job seeking conditionality under Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for claimants who are victims of actual or threatened DV. Following disclosure of actual or threatened DV by an existing or new JSA claimant, Jobcentre Plus staff are required to check four conditions and if met the claimant is entitled to an initial four-week exemption from job seeking conditionality, followed by a further nine-week exemption if suitable written evidence is provided.

#### **Awareness and understanding**

The vast majority of managers and advisers were aware of the JSA DV Easement and recognised that it was a right and not discretionary. There were no examples from any of the offices where an adviser had opted not to inform a DV claimant about either policy as appropriate. Overall, and in comparison to broader changes within the benefits system, most interviewees viewed the introduction of these measures as straightforward, with the guidance being considered as concise and fit for purpose. This contrasted with Jobcentre Plus staff who showed relatively low levels of awareness, and where staff on the whole did not know

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

about the purpose and content of the easement. Unsurprisingly, those Jobcentre Plus offices with high awareness level were in districts where managers recognised and took ownership of the policy.

### **Delivery**

Methods for rolling out the policies to staff across Jobcentre Plus offices varied from guidance being simply 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.

There were also different examples of delivery structures, with some offices having established DV leads. Where this was the case, there was evidence of more coordinated and proactive activities on DV that helped support staff in identifying and supporting DV claimants.

In terms of implementing the easement, most reported that the criteria worked well and that the initial procedure for four-week easement ran smoothly. However, some examples were given in an office with a high take up rate of claimants not meeting the criteria, most commonly as they were still living with the perpetrator, or because they had used up their allowance for the year although still a victim of DV.

There were also some examples where the guidance had not been followed explicitly, but these were few and far between and indicative of where low awareness levels and few cases had been processed.

Overall, across the Jobcentre Plus offices, there was general recognition that DV claimants faced a particular set of challenges, with an overall view that they needed more support than most. All advisers expressed a duty of care to their claimants and cited low confidence as one of the key challenges faced by DV claimants along with a range of other 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.

Advisers and managers raised a number of issues affecting implementation:

- lack of awareness of pre-promotion activities and limited ongoing promotion of the easement internally and externally;
- limited availability of management information (MI) at the Jobcentre Plus office and district levels meaning there is no mechanism for systematically reviewing throughput against expected numbers;
- identifying claimants and prompting disclosure is challenging with specific points made about the absence of a question/prompt on DV at the initial Contact Centre/on-line form stage; the environment of Jobcentre Plus offices not being conducive to disclosure and the lack of time for advisers to spend with claimants; and
- there were some issues experienced with extending the easement to a further nine weeks in terms of claimants not turning up to the four-week appointment and having little scope for following this up with them.

### **6.1.2 DDV Concession**

The DDV Concession was introduced on 1 April 2012 and seeks to ensure that migrant spouses who are victims of DV can access eligible income-related benefits when granted 'limited leave to remain outside the immigration rules status'. Individuals who came to the UK and were granted leave to stay as the spouse or partner of a British citizen, or who had settled in the UK and whose relationship has broken down due to DV, can apply to the UKBA for Limited Leave to Remain (LLR) pending consideration of an application for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).

As part of this and in light of the DDV Concession, the UKBA has to consider a number of criteria. If met, the UKBA issue the individual with letters notifying the start and end date for three-months limited leave to remain in the UK, including a letter for the DWP permitting access to public funds and their entitlement to apply for financial support, including Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance or Jobseeker's Allowance.

#### **Awareness and understanding**

Overall, awareness and understanding of the DDV Concession was limited, and practical experience of implementation was confined to just one of the five Jobcentre Plus offices visited. Compared with the JSA DV Easement, while most interviewees expressed an awareness of the DDV Concession and its general policy intent, a large number had either not read or did not recall reading this part of the guidance, and relatively few demonstrated a detailed understanding of it. This was generally the case for advisers, managers and district level staff.

#### **Delivery**

While the general process of dissemination among the individual Jobcentre Plus offices and staff was the same as for the JSA DV Easement, several interviewees felt that the JSA DV Easement had been emphasised to staff more than the DDV Concession. Certainly subsequent recollection of the DDV Concession and guidance was some way below that for the JSA DV Easement.

In terms of the guidance, although some found the DDV guidance to be more complicated overall it was generally found 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 came up, and as such had been accessed infrequently in line with the number of cases reported.

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 ability to refer cases on to a DV lead was highlighted as important by several interviewees, given that the DDV Concession follows a more complex model and cases are rare.

Experience of the delivery of the DDV Concession was confined to just one of the Jobcentre Plus offices visited, where two cases were reported. Difficulties were experienced in both cases, mainly to do with lack of background information relating to the claimant and lack of prior awareness about the Concession.

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

Advisers and managers highlighted a number of issues affecting the actual or potential implementation of the DDV Concession:

- language barriers and limited resources for interpretation services, with Jobcentre Plus staff reporting that they no longer have access to face-to-face interpreters. Translation for non-English speakers is either done via phone translators, 'Google translate' or unofficial translators attending the appointment with the claimant;
- lack of links with specialist migrant support/DV agencies, with perceived levels of awareness on the Concession seen as particularly low; and,
- specific training needs, but the lack of time to engage.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

On the basis of the study conclusions, we provide the following recommendations, set out as recommendations for the DWP Corporate Centre and for Operations.

### **6.2.1 For the DWP Corporate Centre**

- Take steps to refresh/re-introduce the DDV Concession to Jobcentre Plus staff at district and local office levels, encouraging more 'active' dissemination approaches.
- As levels of disclosure vary considerably between both districts and offices, encourage periodic 'refresher/reminder' sessions to ensure that awareness of the JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession policies is maintained.
- Support 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 – discussed in more detail under Section 6.2.2.
- Take steps to improve the provision of MI for the JSA DV Easement – to allow better monitoring of implementation at the Jobcentre Plus office, district and national levels. As a minimum, this MI should include at Jobcentre Plus office level the numbers receiving a four-week easement period and those continuing to the full 13 weeks.
- Explore opportunities for providing sub-district level data on concentrations/hot-spots of DV activity, to allow more effective targeting and resource deployment. This would allow for the exploration of any disparities between the level of reported DV cases and the level of take-up of the JSA DV Easement locally.
- Further build on current efforts with UKBA to introduce a comprehensive approach to monitoring the DDV Concession, to provide a picture of take-up at the local, district and national levels. Data collected and reported should include the number of migrant individuals receiving indefinite leave to remain, and the numbers applying for benefits.
- Monitoring information collected for the DDV Concession should then be reviewed to establish the distribution of cases nationally, to inform where additional resource allocation may be required and to identify areas where take-up is below expectation.

### **6.2.2 For DWP Operations**

Our recommendations for DWP Operations, and specifically for Jobcentre Plus district and local offices, are provided below.

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

- Ensure that at district and individual Jobcentre Plus office levels the DDV Concession is re-introduced to all staff. Active dissemination methods should be followed, such as introduction at team meetings and office briefings.
- Encourage the provision of periodic ‘refreshers’ on both policies to ensure that awareness of them is maintained, particularly in offices where the reporting of domestic violence is infrequent. These can be as specific events or by reference to the policies in generic team meetings and wider briefings.
- Consider promoting the role that Jobcentre Plus can play in supporting victims of DV, both in the Jobcentre Plus offices and through the provision of information more widely, for example, through the distribution of posters and flyers in a range of community settings such as GP surgeries and schools. In order to encourage disclosure while limiting potentially inappropriate claims, we recommend that any promotional materials should simply describe the wider support offer for DV victims rather than detailing that a conditionality easement is available.
- Where possible within existing office infrastructures, seek to provide an environment where potential victims of domestic violence are comfortable in disclosing – e.g. making rooms more routinely available for on-to-one discussions. In addition, Jobcentre Plus offices should seek to ensure that adequate interpretation facilities should be made available where required, for claimants accessing the DDV Concession and JSA DV Easement policies.
- Where relevant and useful replicate good practice identified within Jobcentre Plus offices such as considering the benefits of establishing ‘DV leads’/single points of contact at Jobcentre or district levels. Should such a role be established it would be important to allocate sufficient time from front-line and other duties to deliver the role effectively. Specific roles for ‘lead’ staff could include:
  - providing specific knowledge and understanding of both of the DV policies, acting as a contact point for questions and queries from staff;
  - sharing their knowledge across adviser teams or Jobcentre Plus offices – to establish capacity to deal effectively with victims of DV more broadly;
  - advocating and promoting the importance of the DV agenda – both within the Jobcentre Plus office or district and to other external agencies; and
  - establishing or developing further links with local support agencies and partners with an involvement and interest in DV – to encourage effective two way referral and signposting practice referrals and to emphasise the commitment of Jobcentre Plus to the DV agenda.
- While we recognise that the current number of cases of engagement with both policies appears very limited among some of the Jobcentre Plus offices visited, the link between the presence of a lead adviser and staff awareness and understanding, and with external support agencies, was particularly strong.
- Consider exploiting opportunities for additional adviser training – where available through local multi-agency partnerships, which offer the benefits of better equipping staff to work with victims of DV as well as further reinforce/embedding relations with local partners.

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

- Consider replicating the other ‘good practice’ approaches identified in the study, including:
  - developing contact lists for DV support agencies, and providing them to all members of front line staff for easy reference;
  - making the guidance easily available to both policies to front line staff, for example, by including on desktops or in hard copy format (e.g. the summary guidance); and
  - emphasising the importance of, and potential opportunity provided by, interviews with claimants returning from four and 13-week easement periods.

### **6.2.3 Recommendations for further research**

Finally, we have emphasised throughout this report that our findings are based on fieldwork with a small sample of Jobcentre Plus office and district office staff, which may or may not be reflective of experiences and practice more widely. In addition, while acknowledging the role of the Benefit Delivery Centres (BDCs) and Contact Centres in the delivery of the policies, due to time and budget a decision was taken to focus the research on the face-to-face front line delivery staff within Jobcentre Plus offices.

Consequently, we recommend that further research could usefully be undertaken with a larger sample of Jobcentre Plus offices and districts once better data is available and also following any actions taken following this report. This could explore awareness, understanding and implementation issues across a larger range of stakeholders including:

- local support providers and partners, including statutory and VCS organisations;
- BDCs and Contact Centres – to explore their experience of the policies and any issues arising;
- victims of DV who have engaged with the policies, and others who, while disclosing incidents of DV to the Jobcentre Plus office, chose not to take up the offer of an easement; and
- victims of DV, who have chosen not, for whatever reason, to disclose their experiences to the Jobcentre Plus office – this would require close working with local support providers to identify a suitable sample and, as with fieldwork with all victims of DV, would need to be undertaken with considerable sensitivity.

Specific topics which could usefully be explored include:

- wider levels of awareness and understanding of the two policies (among Jobcentre Plus office staff, external partners and support agencies), and the relationship between adviser awareness and the levels of take-up reported;
- relationships with, and collaborative activity between, Jobcentre Plus and local interest and support providers from the statutory and voluntary sectors; and
- levels of take up against expectation and if low such research could explore potential and actual reasons for this to identify barriers and identify what Jobcentre Plus can do to stimulate disclosure.

# Appendix A

## Jobcentre Plus interviewees

Table A.1 below sets out the individuals interviewed in each of the case study Jobcentre Plus offices in terms of their job roles. In total 35 individuals were interviewed, comprising:

- 10 Jobcentre Plus management staff;
- 22 Jobcentre Plus advisers; and
- 3 District Office representatives.<sup>39</sup>

**Table A.1 Interviewee job roles**

Case Study Jobcentre Plus office	Jobcentre Plus Interviewees – Management	Jobcentre Plus Interviewees – Advisers	District Office Interviewees
1	1x Operations manager/ATM	3 x Adviser 1 x Assistant Adviser	1x Deputy District Manager
2	1 x Deputy Jobcentre Manager 1 x ATM	2 x Adviser 2 x Assistant Adviser	1 x District CSOM
3	1 x Jobcentre Manager, 1 x CSOM/deputy CSOM, and 1 x ATM	2 x Adviser 2 x Assistant Adviser	–
4	2 x ATMs	2 x Adviser 4 x Assistant Adviser	1 x District Manager
5	1 x Deputy Jobcentre Manager 1 x ATM	2 x Adviser 2 x Assistant Adviser	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3</b>

<sup>39</sup> Note: Two of the Jobcentres were set in the same district and for one district there was no district interviewee available.

# Appendix B

## Topic guides

### **Interview checklist – Jobcentre Plus Managers, Customer Services Operations Managers and Adviser Team Managers**

#### **Introduction and overview**

- 1 What is your understanding of the policy intent, and intended outcomes for customers, of: The JSA Domestic Violence Easement policy; and The Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV).
- 2 Are you aware of when the policies were introduced in this office?
- 3 Are you aware of, and have you seen, the guidance materials for the: JSA DV Easement; and DDV Concession?
- 4 What do you think of the guidance produced for the JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession policies? (For each explore: quality and appropriateness; clarity; comprehensiveness; fitness for purpose; and any additional guidance/supporting material produced by the Jobcentre/District).
- 5 How were the policies and guidance introduced to you? Was the process effective? E.g. did you have any questions (on either policy), and were they addressed? Are there any ways in which the communication of the policies could have been improved?
- 6 How did you introduce the policies and guidance to the advisers, and was this process effective? What questions did staff raise (on either policy)? Were these addressed?
- 7 Do you have a feel for the prevalence of domestic violence in the Jobcentre catchment? In this context, are the numbers of cases under each policy what you would expect?
- 8 In your view, are your advisers able and comfortable to discuss domestic violence issues with claimants? Are there any areas where training would be helpful?
- 9 Are you aware of any local organisations which support victims of domestic violence? If so, does the Jobcentre have a relationship with them?
- 10 To what extent are these organisations aware of the policies? E.g. do you receive referrals from them/do they inform their clients of the policies? Do you signpost victims of domestic violence to them?
- 11 Have you taken any steps locally to inform these organisations of the policies?



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

### **The delivery process**

- 12 How is the delivery of the two policies organised in this office? – i.e. is there a lead for domestic violence, is responsibility distributed amongst advisers, etc.?
- 13 Overall, how closely do you think the guidance for both policies is being followed here?

### **JSA DV Easement**

- 14 (For 'lead' staff) How is the JSA DV Easement policy being implemented in this office? To date, how many individuals at the Jobcentre have: Requested a four-week JSA DV easement; requested an additional nine-week easement? Approximately what share of claimants receiving the four-week easement provides further evidence for the additional nine-week easement? Why is this?
- 15 Are claimants reporting domestic violence aware of the JSA DV Easement policy? If so how do they know/were they referred by a partner/stakeholder? To your knowledge do staff consider whether an easement would be beneficial to claimants reporting incidents of domestic violence?
- 16 What share of claimants reporting incidences of DV apply for a four-week easement? If they do not apply, why is this? Do you offer claimants any other support (Jobcentre Plus or referral to partner) if claimants report DV but do not wish to apply for a four-week easement?
- 17 What share of claimants who report incidents of domestic violence to the Jobcentre do not meet the criteria for inclusion?
- 18 What share of four-week easement claimants apply for the additional nine-week easement? Of these, what share produce the required evidence? If claimants do not apply for the additional nine-weeks easement, why is this? If claimants do not apply for/do not receive the additional nine-weeks easement, do you (Jobcentre Plus or referral to partners) offer any other support?
- 19 At the end of the four or 13-week easement period: Are claimants always called in for an interview with an adviser/JSA review? Are claimants offered additional support with their return to the labour market? If so what?

### **DDV Concession**

- 20 (For 'lead' staff) How is the DDV Concession being implemented in this office? Has the Jobcentre been approached by a claimant or organisation on behalf of a customer for support under the DDV Concession? If yes, how many individuals have applied for an income-related benefit having been granted limited leave to remain as a result of domestic violence? To your knowledge, how many have secured indefinite leave to remain and continue to receive benefits?
- 21 What does the Jobcentre expect the claimant to provide when they visit the Jobcentre?
- 22 Have DDV Concession claimants ever been turned away, for any reason, by the Jobcentre? If Yes – why?
- 23 What share of DDV Concession customers requires interpreter services? Are these always available?

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

- 24 In general, how long does it take individuals under the DDV Concession to access benefits? Why is this?
- 25 What share of DDV Concession claimants do you have to obtain a National Insurance number for? Does this cause any issues in terms of processing payments?
- 26 What share of DDV Concession claimants have had to access the Crisis Loan Alignment Payment before they received their benefits?

### **Overall**

- 27 For both policies, what is the role of the benefit delivery centres? Are there any issues associated with their role?
- 28 Thinking about the delivery approaches followed, what do you consider is working well/represents good practice in each case?
- 29 What are the key implementation issues faced for each policy: From the Jobcentre perspective? From the adviser perspective – what challenges and difficulties are they reporting?
- 30 Are there any ways in which the delivery of the policies could be improved?

### **Additional measures to support victims of domestic violence**

- 31 In addition to the two policies, do you/your partners offer any additional support to victims of domestic violence to help them progress towards the labour market? If so describe additional provision/support offered – including who provides, roles, referral mechanisms, delivery models (including outreach) etc.
- 32 What represents good practice in supporting victims of domestic violence to return to the labour market? And what are the key success factors for their effective return?

## **Interview checklist – Assistant and personal advisers**

### **Introduction and understanding**

- 1 What is your understanding of the intent, and intended outcomes for customers, of:  
The JSA Domestic Violence Easement policy; The Destitute Domestic Violence (DDV)  
concession policy?
- 2 Are you aware of when the policies were introduced in this office?
- 3 Are you aware of and have you seen the guidance materials for the: JSA DV Easement;  
DDV Concession?
- 4 What do you think of the guidance produced for the JSA DV Easement and DDV  
Concession policies? (For each explore: Quality and appropriateness; Clarity;  
Comprehensiveness; Fitness for purpose; and whether any additional guidance/  
supporting materials produced – were they useful?)
- 5 How were the policies and guidance introduced to you? JSA DV Easement; DDV  
Concession.
- 6 Was the introduction effective? Did you or your colleagues have any questions, and  
were these addressed? Are there any ways in which the communication of the policies  
and guidance to you could have been improved?
- 7 In the context of the two policies, do you feel sufficiently able and comfortable  
discussing domestic violence issues with claimants? If No, would additional training/  
support be helpful?
- 8 Are you aware of any organisations in your area who offer support to victims of domestic  
violence? If so, does the Jobcentre have a relationship with them?
- 9 To what extent are these organisations aware of the policies? Do you receive referrals  
from these organisations/do they inform their clients of the policies? Do you signpost  
victims of domestic violence to them?
- 10 Have you/the Jobcentre/District taken any steps to inform actual/potential stakeholders  
of the policies?

### **Delivery process**

- 11 How is the delivery of the two policies organised in this office? – i.e. is there a lead for  
domestic violence, is responsibility distributed amongst advisers, etc.?

### **JSA DV Easement**

- 12 What is your experience of implementing the JSA DV Easement policy in this office?
- 13 To date, how many individuals have reported being a victim of domestic violence to  
you at the Jobcentre and: Requested a four-week JSA DV Easement? Requested an  
additional nine-week easement?

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

- 14 When a claimant reports being a victim of domestic violence to you, would you introduce the option of a DV easement? What would influence your decision?
- 15 Are claimants reporting domestic violence aware of the JSA DV Easement policy? If so how do they know/were they referred by a partner/stakeholder?
- 16 What share of claimants reporting incidences of domestic violence apply for an initial four-week easement? If they do not apply, why is this? Do you offer claimants any other support (Jobcentre Plus or referral to partner) if claimants report DV, but do not wish to apply for a four-week easement?
- 17 What share of claimants who report incidents of domestic violence does not meet the criteria for inclusion?
- 18 What share of four-week easement claimants apply for the additional nine-week easement? Of these, what share produces the required evidence? If claimants do not apply for the additional nine-weeks easement, why is this? If claimants do not apply for/ do not receive the additional nine-weeks easement, do you (Jobcentre Plus or referral to partners) offer any other support?
- 19 At the end of the four or 13-week easement period: Are claimants always called in for an interview with an adviser/JSA review? Are claimants offered additional support with their return to the labour market? If so what?

### **DDV Concession**

- 20 What is your experience of implementing the DDV Concession policy in this office?
- 21 Have you been approached by a claimant or organisation on behalf of a customer for support under the DDV Concession? If yes, how many individuals have you dealt with who have applied for an income-related benefit, after being granted limited leave to remain due to domestic violence? And to your knowledge how many of these have so far secured indefinite leave to remain and continue to receive benefits?
- 22 What do you expect the claimant to provide when they visit the Jobcentre?
- 23 In your experience, have DDV Concession claimants ever been turned away, for any reason, by the Jobcentre? If Yes – why?
- 24 What share of your DDV Concession customers requires interpreter services? Are these always available?
- 25 In general, how long does it take individuals under the DDV Concession to access benefits? Why is this?
- 26 What share of DDV Concession claimants do you have to obtain a National Insurance number for? Does this cause any issues in terms of processing payments?
- 27 What share of your DDV Concession claimants have had to access the Crisis Loan Alignment Payment before they received their benefits?

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

### **Overall**

- 28 What is the role of the Benefit Delivery Centres? Are there any issues associated with their role?
- 29 Thinking about the delivery approaches followed, what do you consider is working well/ less well in delivering the domestic violence policies?
- 30 What is working well? What are the key success factors for effective delivery/working with this claimant group?
- 31 What are the main issues and challenges you face in implementing the policies, and has anything been done to address them?
- 32 Are there any ways in which the delivery of the policies could be improved?

### **Additional measures to support victims of domestic violence**

- 33 In addition to two policies, do you/your partners offer any additional support to victims of domestic violence to help them progress towards the labour market? If so describe additional provision/support offered – including who provides, roles, referral mechanisms, delivery models (incl. outreach) etc.
- 34 In your experience: What are the main challenges facing victims of domestic violence in returning to work? What are the main challenges facing Jobcentre Plus staff in working with them?
- 35 What represents good practice in supporting victims of domestic violence to return to the labour market? What are the key success factors for their effective return?

## **Interview checklist – district office interviewees**

### **Introduction and understanding**

- 1 What is your understanding of the intent, and intended outcomes for customers, of the policies? JSA Domestic Violence Easement; Destitute Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession
- 2 To what extent do you consider that this understanding is shared across Jobcentre Plus staff in your district?
- 3 What do you think of the guidance produced for the JSA DV Easement and DDV Concession policies? (For each explore: quality and appropriateness; clarity; comprehensiveness; fitness for purpose; and any additional guidance/supporting material produced by the Jobcentre/district).
- 4 How were the policies and guidance introduced to the Jobcentres? Was this process effective?
- 5 What questions did the Jobcentres and their staff raise (on either policy)? How were these addressed?
- 6 Could the way in which the policies were introduced to Jobcentres overall have been improved?
- 7 In your view, are Jobcentre Plus advisers able and comfortable to discuss domestic violence issues with claimants? Are there any areas where training would be helpful?
- 8 Are there any organisations across the district who offer support to victims of domestic violence? If so, to what extent do the Jobcentres/the district have relationships with them? To what extent are these organisations aware of the policies?
- 9 Across the district, do Jobcentres receive referrals from these support organisations?
- 10 Has the district or any of the Jobcentres taken steps locally to inform these organisations of the policies?

### **Delivery process**

- 11 How is responsibility for domestic violence provision organised across the district: Within the district office/management team; Among the Jobcentres – in terms of individual leads by role, etc?
- 12 To your knowledge, how many individuals in this District: Have received a four or 13-week easement under the JSA DV Easement policy? Have applied for benefits under the DDV Concession?
- 13 Overall, how closely do you think the implementation guidance for both policies is being followed by the Jobcentres in your district?
- 14 Have any Jobcentres amended the process models, and if so how/why.
- 15 What is the role of the Benefit Delivery Centres in the implementation process? Are there any issues associated with their role?

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

- 16 Looking across the district, what do you consider is working well/represents good practice in the delivery of each policy?
- 17 What is working less well/are the key implementation issues faced for each policy across the district? Do these vary between Jobcentres, and if so why? What have the Jobcentres done to address any issues faced?
- 18 From your perspective, are there any ways in which the delivery of the policies could be improved?

## **Additional measures to support victims of domestic violence**

- 19 In addition to the Easement and Concession policies, what additional support is offered by the Jobcentres/their partners to help victims of domestic violence progress towards the labour market in the district? Describe additional provision/support offered – including who provides, roles, referral mechanisms, delivery models (incl. outreach) etc.
- 20 Looking across the district, what do you consider to represent good practice in helping victims of domestic violence to return to the labour market? And what are the key success factors for their effective return?

## **Interview checklist – VCO Stakeholders**

### **Understanding and awareness**

- 1 What is your own understanding of the JSA Domestic Violence Easement policy and the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession policy in terms of what they are trying to achieve?
- 2 Did you welcome the introduction of the policies, and did your clients?
- 3 How did you become aware of JSA Domestic Violence Easement and the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession) policies?
- 4 How effective was this process, and are there any ways in which it could be improved? JSA Domestic Violence Easement policy; Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession).
- 5 In your work with victims of domestic violence, does your organisation always introduce either of the policies (as appropriate) to your clients when they report incidents of domestic violence? If yes: How is this introduced and what help is offered to take this forward?
- 6 To your knowledge, what are the levels of awareness and understanding of the JSA Domestic Violence Easement policy and the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession policy: Among other stakeholders; Among your clients?

### **Experience of claimants**

- 7 What feedback – both positive and negative – do you get from clients about the implementation of the JSA Domestic Violence Easement and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDV Concession) policies?
- 8 How do you find out about your clients' experiences of the two policies?
- 9 What appear to be the main specific issues/challenges experienced by your clients?
- 10 More broadly do you have any evidence suggesting that Jobcentre staff are turning DV claimants away? If so, how many/on what scale?
- 11 What, in your experience, represents good practice in the introduction and implementation of the two policies?
- 12 What could be done to improve the delivery of both policies from your clients' perspectives?

### **Other links with Jobcentre Plus**

- 13 In addition to the two policies, do you offer any additional support to help victims of domestic violence progress towards the labour market? If yes, any examples of where this is done in collaboration with Jobcentre Plus? Any recommendations for additional provision/support?
- 14 What represents good practice in helping victims return to the labour market? And what are the key success factors for their effective return?



# Appendix C

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