



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

The Outcomes and Impacts of Support for Victim-Survivors in the Context of Safe Accommodation

A Rapid Evidence Assessment

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University of Westminster & Research in Practice

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

LA – Local authority

MHCLG – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

MI– management information

Executive Summary

Introduction

This rapid evidence assessment (REA) explores the outcomes and impacts of support provided to adult and child victim-survivors in the context of safe accommodation in the UK, as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. It forms part of the broader evaluation of Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act, known as the DA Duty, and from here referred to as the duty, commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and led by Ipsos with Ecorys. This REA is intended to be read in conjunction with the evaluation report, available on gov.uk. The REA was carried out between August and December 2024, by Dr Claire Cunningham (University of Sheffield) and Dr Jessica Wild (University of Westminster and Research in Practice). The REA findings are intended to strengthen the evidence base for national and local policy and inform the ongoing implementation and future development of the duty.

Context

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced a statutory duty on Tier 1 local authorities to provide support within safe accommodation and mandated collaboration across local areas. However, while the duty is supported by government funding, demand for safe accommodation continues to exceed supply, with 60% of referrals to refuges rejected in 2023-24, primarily due to capacity constraints. Gaps in access are particularly serious for individuals with complex or intersecting needs, including those with no recourse to public funds, racially minoritised women, LGBTQIA+ communities and disabled victim-survivors.

Safe accommodation is defined under the act as including a range of settings such as refuge accommodation, specialist and dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes, and move-on or second-stage housing. This REA focuses specifically on outcomes and impacts experienced by adults and, where data exists, children within these accommodation types.

Methodology

The REA followed a targeted review approach due to time constraints, examining empirical evidence published between 2019 and 2024. Fifty-seven documents were included, comprising 15 academic articles and 42 grey literature reports. Literature was drawn from UK sources primarily, with two international studies added following a search extension. Searches were informed by formal definitions from statutory guidance and organised around a Theory of Change provided by Ipsos. Evidence was mapped against three levels: individual outcomes, local authority level provision and system wide impacts.

Key findings

Evidence on outcomes and impacts remains limited, particularly in terms of long-term trajectories for adult and child victim-survivors. However, available studies point to several

important themes relating to both benefits and barriers associated with safe accommodation support.

Positive outcomes for adults

For adults, the most commonly reported positive outcomes include increased physical safety, greater awareness of available support services, improved self-confidence, and feelings of connection with others, particularly through shared lived experience. Many victim-survivors also valued emotional and therapeutic support, including counselling and practical assistance with housing and finances. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's survey (which included responses from over 4,000 victim-survivors) highlighted the high value placed on accessible counselling and specialist advice services. These findings were echoed in the literature on refuge and dispersed accommodation models, where participants cited safety, community, and the presence of non-judgemental staff as key enablers of wellbeing.

Negative experiences in accommodation

Negative experiences were also documented. In some cases, refuge regulations (such as those concerning parenting, visiting family members, or maintaining confidentiality regarding location) were perceived in some cases as disempowering. Others reported challenges related to overcrowding, lack of autonomy, or difficulties adapting to communal living environments. Some individuals, particularly those with specific access or support needs, were unable to enter refuge accommodation at all due to eligibility restrictions or lack of provision.

Outcomes for children

Outcomes for children are less documented in the literature, but the evidence that does exist suggests that positive outcomes are often linked to the ability to maintain social ties, such as continuing in the same school or retaining contact with friends and trusted adults. Disruptions to education and social networks can undermine children's mental health and development. This highlights a tension between the focus on confidentiality and safety in traditional refuge models and children's need for continuity and familiar environments. Alternative models, such as open or 'Dutch' model refuges, have shown some promise in balancing safety with social connection, although UK-based evidence remains limited.

Local authority provision and equity of access

At the level of local authority provision, the review highlighted wide variability in the availability and quality of services. 'By and for' organisations are those designed and delivered by people from the same communities they support. These services appear to offer better outcomes for racially minoritised women, LGBTQIA+ people, disabled individuals, and others often underserved by mainstream provision. For example, Black and minoritised women accessing 'by and for' services reported significantly higher levels of safety and support than those accessing mainstream provision. Despite this, such services remain at risk due to insecure funding and marginal positioning within commissioning frameworks.

Move-on accommodation

The shortage of suitable move-on accommodation emerged as a critical barrier across the system. Limited housing supply, coupled with restrictive allocation practices (such as ‘local connection’ criteria), means many victim-survivors are unable to leave temporary accommodation or are left with the impossible ‘choice’ between homelessness and returning to an unsafe situation. Some women reported being unable to secure housing that could accommodate their children, especially if children were not currently in their care. Others encountered difficulties if they had multiple children or boys over the age of 12. A lack of accessible or pet friendly properties, or discriminatory attitudes within housing services, also presented barriers to stable resettlement. These challenges particularly affected those with no recourse to public funds or insecure immigration status, who are legally excluded from most forms of housing and welfare support.

Whole Housing and Housing First

Several models have emerged to improve housing outcomes for victim-survivors. The Whole Housing Approach and Housing First were both identified as promising, particularly in their emphasis on flexibility, choice, and trauma-informed practice. While evidence on these models within the UK domestic abuse context is still emerging, early findings suggest they offer increased housing stability and better long-term outcomes. However, their scalability remains limited without greater investment and coordination across services.

Data gaps

At the system level, the review found a lack of consistent data collection and monitoring practices. While individual service providers collect data for internal or funder reporting, the absence of a shared national outcomes framework hampers the ability to compare services or track victim-survivor journeys across local authority areas. For those required to move to increase their safety, this often results in disrupted or fragmented support. In addition, much of the available data focuses on service delivery rather than outcomes, especially for victim-survivors with protected characteristics or who experience minoritisation. This limits the ability to assess efficacy over time or understand the nuanced experiences of different cohorts of people who experience domestic abuse.

Structural barriers for underserved groups

Underserved groups or those with protected characteristics (such as older adults, LGBTQIA+ individuals, men, and those with specific access needs) were found to face additional structural barriers to accessing safe accommodation. These included a lack of tailored services, stigma or discrimination within provision, and geographical disparities in availability. In particular, there is limited published data on the outcomes achieved for trans and non-binary people, older adults, those with disabilities, and men, meaning their support needs often remain largely unmet within existing service models and mainstream provision.

Recommendations and conclusions

The evidence reviewed indicates that improving the quality and consistency of outcome monitoring is essential. Currently, the lack of a shared outcomes framework across services and local authorities inhibits the ability to track progress or compare the efficacy of different models of support. Developing a national outcomes framework, underpinned by ethical, consistent, and inclusive data collection practices, would support a more accurate understanding of what works, for who, and in what contexts.

The funding landscape also presents a fundamental, significant constraint. Services operate under substantial financial pressure, with short-term and insecure funding cycles undermining continuity and stability. This is especially true for specialist 'by and for' services, accessed by groups that are most likely to encounter barriers in mainstream provision. More investment in these services, along with long-term commissioning arrangements that recognise their value, is needed to ensure that support is inclusive, culturally competent, and reflective of the diverse needs of all those seeking safety.

Improving access to housing remains a key area for action. The shortage of affordable, appropriate move-on accommodation creates a bottleneck in the system. This can often result in extended refuge stays and restricted access for new referrals. The review points to the promise of alternative approaches, such as Whole Housing and Housing First, which prioritise the stability and autonomy of those accessing the provision. Embedding models like these more widely could help to ease pressure on services for those in acute need, as well as support long term recovery for people experiencing domestic abuse.

Another area for attention is coordination of services across local authority boundaries. While many survivors move to increase their safety, they are often met with inconsistent systems and support. Greater collaboration across areas could aid smoother transitions and better continuity of care. This could be done by implementing shared planning, data systems or joint commissioning. Equally, services must be designed with the needs of all users in mind. This includes those with no recourse to public funds or insecure immigration status, those minoritised by gender identity or sexuality, additional or multiple support needs, and/or caring responsibilities to ensure that exclusion is not built into the system.

The evidence also highlights the importance of centring the voices of lived experience in policy and service design. Often, people with the greatest need are those whose experiences are least reflected in the systems intended to support them. Engaging directly with all those who experience domestic abuse is crucial in shaping effective, inclusive, accessible, responsive and rights-based provision.

Overall, while the introduction of Part 4 the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and associated funding represents a significant step forward, systemic barriers continue to limit the potential for safe accommodation to deliver long-term safety and recovery for all those who experience domestic abuse. Without meaningful changes to funding, housing availability, data infrastructure and inclusion practices, the outcomes envisioned by the duty will remain unevenly realised. There is a clear need for a more coordinated, well-resourced and equitable approach to ensure that all survivors - regardless of background, identity, or circumstance - can access the safety, support and stability to which they are entitled.

1 Introduction

This rapid evidence assessment (REA) was commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and managed by Ipsos as part of an evaluation of Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 for support in safe accommodation, known as the DA Duty and from here referred to as 'the duty'. Dr Claire Cunnington (University of Sheffield) and Dr Jessica Wild (University of Westminster and Research in Practice) carried out the review.

The focus of the review is on the outcomes and impact of support for victim-survivors in the context of safe accommodation. The focus was on adults (primary service users) but emerging themes for children and young people were also recorded to a limited degree.

A targeted review of the literature was carried out using the formal definitions of 'support' and 'safe accommodation', focused on empirical evidence. The review aimed to map what is known about the outcomes and impacts of support for victim-survivors delivered in the context of safe accommodation, charting and synthesising the available evidence, identifying 'gaps' and areas of uncertainty.

The purpose was to serve the wider evaluation by:

- Providing an accessible and timely resource for central government partners;
- Generating insights to inform the evaluation team's fieldwork with local authorities;
- Creating a public repository of collated information for funders, commissioners and service providers.

1.1 Context

The need for safe accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse, is significant, urgent, and ongoing. The most recent Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 2.1 million people over the age of 16 years experienced domestic abuse in the year ending 2023: 1.4 million women and 751,000 men (ONS, 2023). The Women's Aid 'On Track' national referral system estimates that refuge services supported 11,305 women and 12,436 children in 2023-24. Meanwhile, 112,866 women and 146,726 children were supported by community-based support services (Women's Aid, 2025).

Women (cisgender and transgender), men (cisgender and transgender) and non-binary individuals can all experience domestic abuse as victim-survivors. Similarly, anyone can perpetrate domestic abuse. However, there are significant distinctions in the experiences of women and the rates at which they experience domestic abuse in comparison to men, which are important to note when contextualising the availability of evidence concerning support outcomes in safe accommodation. There is a significant body of well-established, global research to substantiate that women experience higher rates, greater severity, and more significant impacts of domestic abuse compared to men, including a higher likelihood of encountering coercive control (Hester, 2013; Myhill, 2015, 2017), repeated victimisation, and severe injury (Walby & Towers, 2017). Moreover, women tend to experience greater levels of fear, and they are more likely to be killed than male victim-survivors of domestic abuse (ONS, 2024). Other forms of inequalities, such as racism, ageism, discrimination against differently abled persons, and experiences of minoritisation by gender or sexuality,

all critically intersect with gender inequalities, thereby fundamentally shaping lived experiences of domestic abuse and access to support.

Domestic abuse perpetrated against cisgender men does not typically arise from the same structural conditions of gender inequality that drive violence against women, nor is it rooted in patriarchal systems. For women and gender-minoritised people, domestic abuse is deeply embedded in societal gendered power imbalances and structural conditions that deepen experiences of oppression. Furthermore, the needs of men victim-survivors tend to differ from those of women and gender-minoritised people, making it crucial to acknowledge these differences and their implications for service provision (Respect, 2019), including in safe accommodation.

The landscape of provision of safe accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse has shifted significantly over the past few years, driven in part by changes in legislation, most notably the Domestic Abuse Act England and Wales (2021). The Act received royal assent in 2021 after the Bill's reintroduction into parliament in March 2020, three years after it was first announced. While it represents one of the most comprehensive legislative reforms addressing domestic abuse in England and Wales, challenges remain, particularly in terms of funding, the availability of services, and ensuring equal access and inclusivity for all those experiencing domestic abuse.

Key provisions of the act include a statutory definition of domestic abuse, as well as recognition of children as victims in their own right. It also includes the establishment of a statutory duty on Tier 1 local authorities to provide support within safe accommodation for adult and child victim-survivors, and on Tier 2 local authorities to cooperate with Tier 1 local authorities. Thus, it mandates a coordinated approach to domestic abuse support at the local government level. Local authorities are responsible for assessing the specific needs of those accessing their services, as well as for commissioning appropriate services to meet those needs.

The duty was supported by a government funding package of £125 million for local authorities in 2012-22 – the year the act came into law – to improve and expand the availability of safe accommodation and the provision of support within those settings. In subsequent years, the UK Government has allocated the following funding amounts to support local authorities in England to fulfil their statutory duties under Part 4 to provide support within safe accommodation: 2022-23, £125 million, 2023-24, £127.3 million, and 2024-25, £129.7 million (MHCLG, 2024). [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Looking more broadly at the funding landscape, according to the Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025, published in January 2025, domestic abuse services in England faced an estimated overall funding shortfall of £321 million in the year 2023-24. Women's Aid reported that while the government invested £195 million in total to support victims (including the £127.3 million allocated by MHCLG for support in safe accommodation mentioned above), it did not meet the £516 million per annum that Women's Aid estimated was required to sustainably fund local specialised domestic abuse services, including the minimum level of funding required to sustain specialist domestic abuse services, including 'by and for' services (discussed further below) (Women's Aid, 2024b, 2025).

Considering the prevalence of domestic abuse set out above, the demand for safe accommodation often exceeds supply. According to the Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025, there were 4,344 refuge bed spaces in England, including 374 specifically available for

women or men and 33 dedicated bed spaces for men. The total number of bedspaces is 23.2% less than the minimum amount recommended for safe accommodation by the Council of Europe (Women's Aid, 2025).

Moreover, Women's Aid estimated that 60% of referrals to refuge services were rejected in the year ending March 2024. The main reason for rejection was that the refuge did not have capacity to support the individual (45.7% of all rejected referrals) (Women's Aid, 2025). The 'No Woman Turned Away' (NWTa) project run by Women's Aid records all cases in which victim-survivors are unable to secure a safe accommodation space, including, but not limited to, situations where women are refused due to a lack of capacity, ineligibility for housing benefits (and thus have no recourse to public funds), having a son over the age of 14, the service being ill-equipped to meet the needs of the victim-survivor presenting for safe accommodation (such as complex mental health need, substance use needs and/or disability access). No Woman Turned Away has been funded by MHCLG since January 2016 (Women's Aid, no date).

Management Information

Management Information (MI) for domestic abuse support services commissioned within safe accommodation is compiled annually by MHCLG and is derived from returns submitted by Tier 1 local authorities in England. This data is used to track local authorities' progress in fulfilling their responsibilities under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, ensuring that adult and child victim-survivors of domestic abuse receive the necessary support within appropriate safe accommodation across England.

The MI indicates the following. In 2023-24, 63,950 individuals received support in safe accommodation, representing a 26% increase (13,280 more individuals) compared to 2022-23. This also marks a 75% rise from 2021-22, when 36,550 individuals were supported. Of the total number referred to a safe accommodation service, MI reports that 26,870 households could not be supported. This is 9% higher than in 2022-23 and 6,250, or 30%, higher than in 2021-22. In most cases, this was due to capacity constraints (10,610, 39%), followed by an inability to meet the individuals presenting needs (5,370, 20%), including no recourse to public funds (580, 11%), drugs support needs (530, 10%) and alcohol support needs (500, 9%).

The disparity between government MI and Women's Aid data on those unable to access safe accommodation primarily stems from differences in data collection, service scope, and reporting criteria. Firstly, government MI reflects data from services funded through local authority commissioning arrangements. In contrast, Women's Aid tracks a broader range of services, including those outside local authority funding, through its 'Routes to Support' database. Disparities also arise from reporting criteria, as government MI only counts households formally recorded as 'unsupported'. Women's Aid data includes individuals or families who do not present for support due to waiting lists, a lack of specialist provision, and or those who were advised in advance that no spaces were available.

The most recent data from 2023-24, set out above, illustrates these disparities (Women's Aid, no date). These differences highlight the value of engaging with data from a range of sources. While government MI provides an essential benchmark for service provision, this

data does not capture the full extent of demand, particularly for those victim-survivors with complex or intersectional needs.¹

1.2 Review objectives

The objectives of the review were to provide an overview and synthesis of the evidence on the impacts and outcomes for victim-survivors who use support in the context of safe accommodation. It recognised that those who are the primary agents in seeking safe accommodation are adults. As such the review focuses on:

1. adults' impacts and outcomes;
2. the impacts and outcomes of minoritised communities;
3. the experiences of children and young people.

For point 2, this includes people with no recourse to public funds, insecure immigration status, racially minoritised people, LGBTQIA+ people, women with physical disabilities, women with mental health needs and women with substance use issues. For the purpose of this review research about services for men were specifically searched for as being in a minority accessing services, although not a minoritised community.

1.3 Definitions

The definitions used to frame the searches and analysis were drawn from the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the related guidance for Part 4.² Specifically, 'safe accommodation' is defined in statutory guidance as accommodation, which is safe for persons who are, or who are at risk of being, victims of domestic abuse, and includes:

- a) refuge accommodation; single gender or single sex accommodation with on-site, specialist support for both adult and child victim-survivors. Refuges generally operate with security measures and are at undisclosed locations which are not publicly available to ensure the safety of residents.
- b) specialist safe accommodation; single gender or single sex accommodation offered alongside dedicated support which is designed specifically for people who share a protected characteristic and/or have additional needs. This includes 'by and for' services where residents "see themselves reflected in staffing, management and governance structures" (MHCLG, 2021).
- c) dispersed accommodation; accommodation that is safe ("secure and dedicated to support victim-survivors of domestic abuse" (MHCLG, 2021)) and self-contained rather than in a communal or shared setting. This includes properties in the community where individuals can live independently with access to visiting specialist support. Where more than two units share any part of the accommodation, it must be single gender or single sex.
- d) sanctuary schemes; provide enhanced physical security measures to a property or perimeter of the property to enable people to remain in their own homes (including local authority and private registered providers of social housing), where it is safe to do so.

¹ For more detailed information regarding any of the data set out here, please see Support in Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation MHCLG release [October, 2024](#) and the [Women's Aid National Audit 2025](#), respectively.

² Note that reference to "single gender or single sex accommodation" is as stated in the statutory guidance accessed at the time of the REA being conducted (August-December 2024). The Domestic Abuse legislation itself does not reference either gender or sex in relation to Part 4 – see <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2021/991/part/2/made>.

- e) move-on or second-stage accommodation: temporary accommodation provided as transitional accommodation for adults and children moving out of other safe accommodation settings such as refuge to more permanent housing.³

Move-on or second-stage accommodation includes other accommodation designated by the local authority, registered social landlord or registered charity as domestic abuse emergency accommodation (MHCLG, 2021; see also Home Office, 2022).

Theory of Change

The review was informed and structured by the duty Theory of Change provided by Ipsos. Specifically, within the Theory of Change outcomes and impacts were set out at three different levels:

- the local level at which the duty takes effect;
- the people in safe accommodation (adult and child victim-survivors);
- the system in which the local authorities, providers and individuals are experiencing the duty.

1.4 Research questions

The review intended to address three research questions:

1. What evidence is there regarding the outcomes and impacts of support for victim-survivors in a context of safe accommodation?
2. What evidence is there regarding local authority level provision, in terms of: needs, provisions, cost and outcomes; evidence-based practice?
3. What evidence is there regarding impact in terms of: fiscal, social and economic benefits; accountability and consistency in local authorities in the way that domestic abuse support within safe accommodation is delivered; improved practice supporting victim-survivors of domestic abuse in safe accommodation nationally; equal access and long-term and sustained distance from domestic abuse, enabling victim-survivors to lead independent and fulfilling lives away from abuse?⁴

³ For full details of the UK government's definitions of these types of accommodation please see the statutory guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services>

⁴ The Theory of Change was revised over the study in line with evidence; the Lived Experience Panel which co-developed and advised on the evaluation noted that the original concept of 'freedom' was not appropriate given the prevalence and impact of post-separation abuse.

2 Methodology

Due to the time constraints of aligning with the evaluation, a targeted evidence review was chosen as an appropriate method. A targeted evidence review is a form of literature review that assesses existing evidence on a particular topic within a short period of time (Barends, Rousseau and Briner, 2017). This section outlines the review methodology.

2.1 Search process

The review involved searching academic databases and other websites using the key words below. The following databases were searched: APAPsycArticles; Pro Quest; Social Science Premium collection; Google Scholar; Google; National Grey Literature Collection; SAGE Journals; Taylor & Francis Online and Starplus (the University of Sheffield database).

Searches failed to identify relevant 'grey literature' therefore a manual, targeted search was conducted using the following websites: Age UK; gov.uk; the Office for National Statistics (ONS); Domestic Abuse Commissioner; Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance; Homeless Link; Crisis; Centre for Homelessness Impact; Everyone's Invited; Galop; Hourglass; Refuge; Respect; Imkaan; Latin American Women's Aid; ManKind; Sistah Space; Safe Lives; Stonewall Housing; UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, and Women's Aid.

A broader range of non-government organisations and charities were not included in the manual search because they do not capture nor report on, support outcomes in safe accommodation for the populations they serve, as discussed further below.

A note on the scope and parameters of the review

The primary focus of this rapid evidence assessment is on support outcomes and impacts within the context of supported accommodation. It does not discuss nor assess the available evidence concerning the broader support needs and barriers to help-seeking encountered by all those experiencing domestic abuse. Several charitable and non-government organisations which serve specific groups of people who experience domestic abuse (such as cisgender men, older adults, lesbian, bisexual, trans and non-binary people, and or young people), produce valuable research concerning the specific support needs of these groups.

However, these organisations often do not provide data on support outcomes within safe accommodation, so they were not included in this review. This points to a series of significant 'gaps' in the available evidence, highlighted at various points throughout this review. Where this type of data was available, it was incorporated and referenced here due to its relevant contributions in this area. A much broader body of research exists on general support needs and barriers to help-seeking among diverse populations affected by domestic abuse, but this falls outside the scope of this review. Furthermore, the problems with using broad identity-based categories such as 'LGBTQIA+' due to their lack of homogeneity and the intersectional nature of these identities is noted within this report at various stages.

The inclusion of the distinct but heterogeneous groups listed below is justified by the availability of recent data on their support outcomes in domestic abuse safe accommodation. In some cases, this is due to the increased attention some groups received during the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the subsequent response from ‘by and for’ organisations and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s office, especially concerning the lack of focus placed on specific cohorts of victim-survivors such as those with no recourse to public funds. Additional information regarding these ‘gaps’ is included in the forthcoming sections.

The decision to set 2019 as the start point for this rapid evidence assessment is rooted in the significant policy developments that occurred subsequently, notably the introduction and eventual enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. In December 2019, the UK Government committed to supporting all victims of domestic abuse and advancing the Domestic Abuse Bill, which was subsequently passed into legislation in April 2021.

This period marked a pivotal shift in the policy landscape, with the act introducing comprehensive measures such as a statutory definition of domestic abuse, establishing the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and creating Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders. By focusing on data produced post-2019, this review captures support outcomes in safe accommodation after these legislative changes, providing a clear baseline against which the impact of subsequent reforms can be assessed.

In addition to the developments surrounding the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, other key policy changes and events influenced the decision including the UK Government’s introduction of the Serious Violence Duty through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which mandated public bodies to collaborate in addressing serious violence, including domestic abuse and sexual offences. This legislative shift underscored a broader commitment to tackling domestic abuse, marking 2019 as a pivotal year in the policy landscape.

2.2 Eligibility

The key inclusion criteria were that papers were:

1. UK specific: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom.
2. In English.
3. From 2019-2024.
4. Regarding domestic abuse.
5. For individuals who have utilised safe accommodation as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
6. Regarding families, adults and /or children.
7. Regarding support or outcomes.
8. Each search limited to the first 50 results when sorted by relevance.

2.3 Search key words

Table 2.1 includes the key words used in searches.

Table 2.1 Search key words

Population	Problem	Intervention/Comparator	Limiters
Adult* Child* Adolesce* Infant* Bab* Young pe* Teen* Parent* Famili* Surviv* Victim	Domestic abuse Domestic violence Interpersonal violence Interpersonal abuse Gender based violence Family violence	Refuge accommodation Specialist service Safe accommodation By and for service Dispersed accommodation Second stage 'Move on' accommodation Sanctuary schemes Complex need service Provision	Outcome or impact Support or intervention

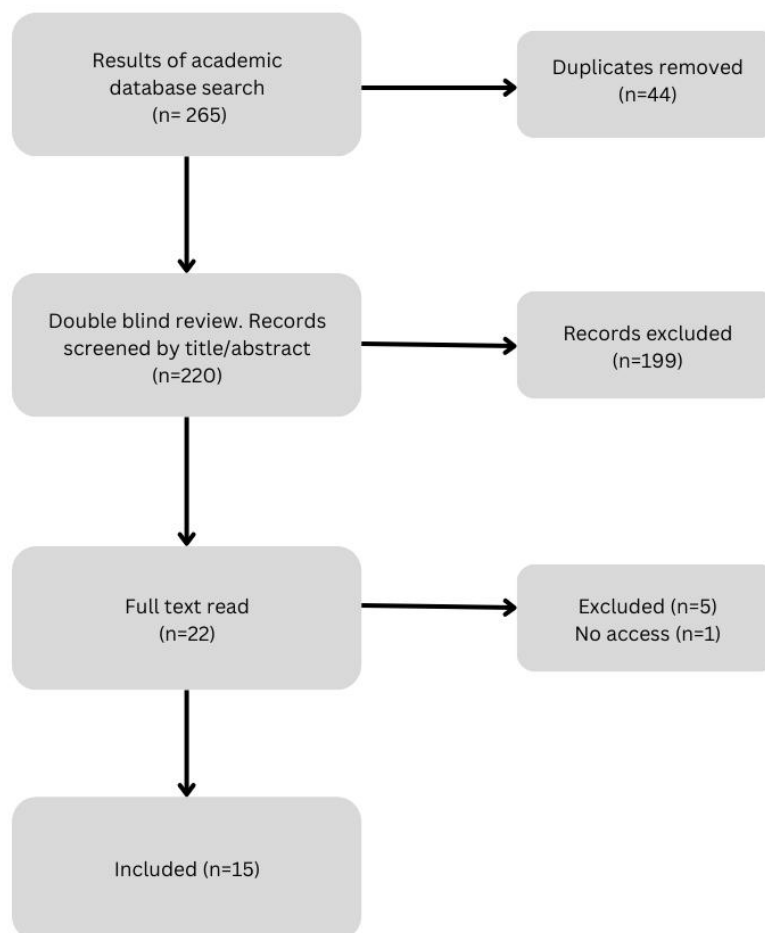
2.4 Screening and assessment

Results were separately screened in Rayyan by two researchers. Potential literature abstracts were read and articles or reports included if they appeared relevant. Following this initial sift, the full articles or documents were read and the relevant literature agreed. Finally, the included literature was read, assessed for quality, and themes identified.

Academic Literature Search

Figure 2.1 outlines the process of the academic literature search, showing how from 265 results, 220 titles and abstracts were screened, 22 full texts reviewed, leading to fifteen articles included.

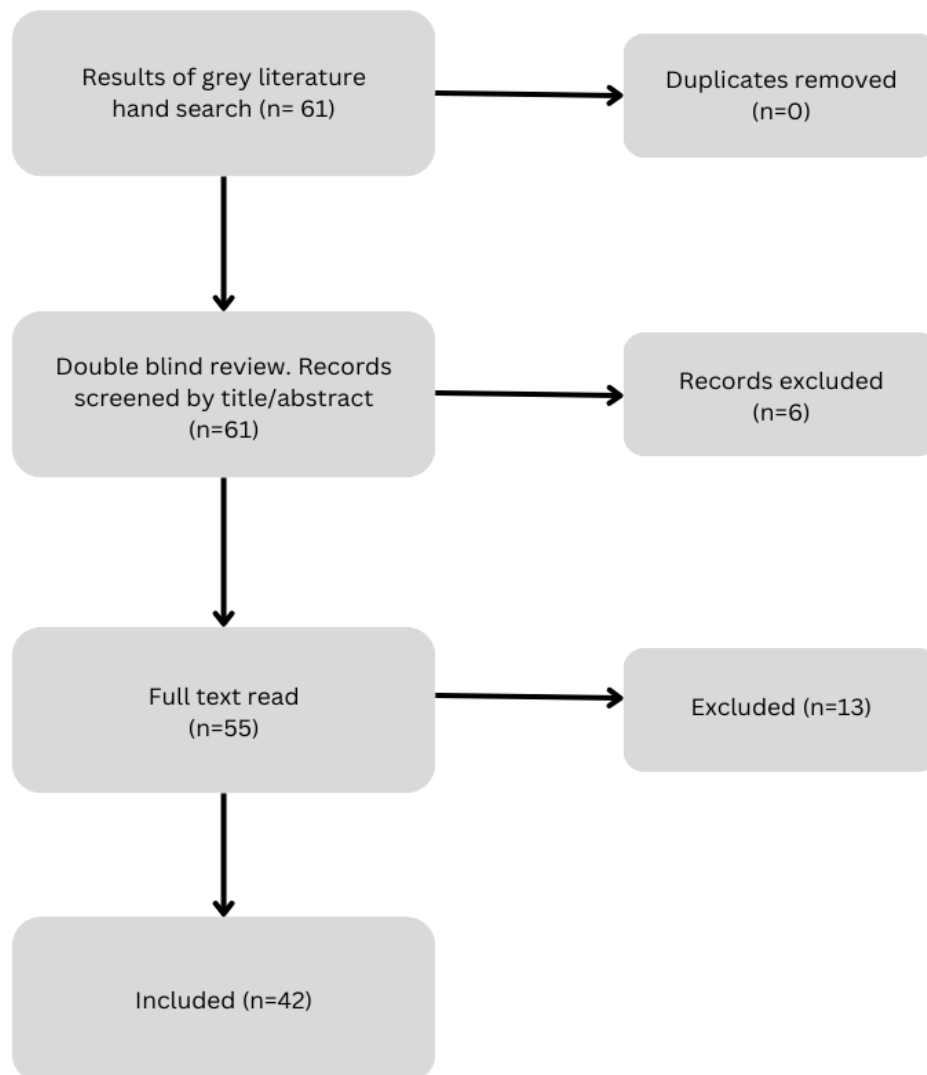
Figure 2.1: Academic literature search flowchart



Grey Literature Search

Figure 2.2. outlines the process of the grey literature search, describing how 61 articles were screened, 55 of which were reviewed in full and 42 of these included.

Figure 2.2: Grey literature search flowchart



In summary, through this method, facilitated using Excel, the research team identified 57 papers of relevance to the research questions: 15 academic articles and 42 grey literature documents. After a request from Ipsos, the lead contractors on the main evaluation, the literature search was extended beyond the UK and, using the same methods as above, 48 potential international articles were reduced to 2 included articles.

2.5 Critical Assessment

For each document the following was recorded on Excel: title; year; authors; publisher (organisation/journal); abstract or executive summary; notes; relevance to the Theory of Change and key themes. Table A.1 in the annex is an overview of the included papers.

The data from the included papers, reports and documents was assessed for quality and synthesised. Themes were identified and discussed with Ipsos. Themes follow the structure of the Theory of Change in terms of outlining structural, operational and

individual results. Key findings are summarised in section 3. It is noted that grey literature, specifically non-government organisation (NGO) reports may not be of gold standard for evidence, having not necessarily undergone ethics approval and/or peer review. However, many included reports were prepared by academics on behalf of such organisations and as such follow academic standards for evidence. It is also worth noting the value of non-government organisations' reports in giving voice to people with lived experience and the staff supporting them, especially those that serve underrepresented, minoritised, and/or more marginalised families and individuals experiencing domestic abuse. This addresses one of the objectives of the review.

3 Results

Overall, the results in terms of outcomes were limited. There was a more extensive evidence base addressing access to services. Both are included in the discussion.

3.1 Question 1. Evidence on outcomes and impacts

Question 1 is What evidence is there regarding the outcomes and impacts of support for victim-survivors in a context of safe accommodation?

Outcomes for adults

A survey conducted by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office involving approximately 4,000 victim-survivors who had either sought or considered seeking support, including in safe accommodation, showed that victim-survivors placed the highest value on counselling, therapeutic intervention and advice (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021). The study also found that the type of support prioritised differed across various population groups. Notably, the majority of Black and minoritised respondents (67%), lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans respondents (68%), and more than half of d/Deaf and Disabled respondents (55%) expressed a preference for specialist support that was provided 'by and for' their own communities (by and for services are discussed in forthcoming sections).

For adults, positive outcomes after accessing refuge are characterised by knowledge and understanding of the help available, increased self-confidence, a sense of safety, connection and community with other victim-survivors (Bowstead, 2019b; Bretherton and Pleace, 2021). Safety is an essential factor in positive outcomes (Bowstead, 2019a, 2019b; Commonweal Housing, 2020; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021b; Little, 2023). Negative outcomes arise from refuges imposing rules regarding family access and parenting choices which can feel disempowering (Bimpson, Parr and Reeve et al., 2022).

A study by Hine et al. (2022), with a data set of 27,876 people exiting from specialist domestic abuse services, which included refuge and outreach services, identified gender differences in outcomes. Men were more likely than women to continue living with the perpetrator after accessing support or maintaining ongoing contact with an abusive partner. Women generally reported higher rates of quality of life and safety. Both genders did have a significant reduction in abuse (Hine et al., 2022).

Outcomes for children

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognised children as victim-survivors of domestic abuse in their own right, but there is little research that documents the outcomes achieved for children in safe accommodation settings. The limited available literature indicates that positive outcomes for children are characterised by maintaining social links, continuing at the same school, hope and positive parenting. Negative outcomes can result from housing insecurity and losing social networks which then may have an impact on the child's mental and physical health (Hock et al., 2023).

Thus, there may be a tension between the typical refuge model which entails ensuring the location of the refuge is private and disclosed only to those accessing its services, and

positive outcomes for children if they can maintain social and educational ties. Multiple models of provision may be applicable with an 'open' or Dutch refuge appropriate in some circumstances (Allen, Adisa and Hermolle, 2023). This is a refuge that is within the community, is not secret and allows visits from family members and trusted individuals. Prospective service users are risk assessed to ascertain if it is a viable option and there is security on site. For eligible families this does appear to result in fewer victim-survivors returning to relationships with abusive partners, although more research is needed (Allen, Adisa and Hermolle, 2023).

3.2 Question 2. Evidence on local authority level provision

Question 2 is What evidence is there regarding local authority level provision, in terms of: needs, provisions, cost and outcomes; evidence-based practice?

'By and for' domestic abuse services

'By and for' domestic abuse services provide specialised support services to people with protected characteristics, and are designed, led, and delivered by individuals who are part of the same communities they serve, such as black and minoritised women, deaf and disabled women, and LGBTQIA+ victim-survivors (Women's Aid, 2024a). This model recognises that certain groups of victim-survivors can encounter unique barriers to accessing 'mainstream' services, which can include cultural stigma, language barriers, co-occurring needs such as mental health, and/or mistrust of institutions or agencies. The support provided is intersectional, holistic and underpinned by a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the structural inequalities particular groups of victim-survivors encounter when accessing and using provision (Thiara and Harrison, 2021).

There is evidence that there are better outcomes for underserved populations in 'by and for' services (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021; Scottish Government, 2024). For example, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner carried out a survey of over 4000 victim-survivors and compared the outcomes for those who had accessed a specialist 'by and for' organisation with those who had accessed another type of support, and with those who had accessed no support at all.

For Black and minoritised survivors 78% of those who had accessed a 'by and for' service felt safer, compared to 48% who had accessed another service, and 30% who had no support. However, such services have the most precarious funding and a rising demand for their services (Jacobs, 2023). Shifts in commissioning agendas away from 'specialist' provision towards generic domestic abuse services or those run by housing associations, have also significantly impacted the funding available for 'by and for' Services and have jeopardised their survival (Gill and Anitha, 2023).

Housing: 'move on' accommodation, planning and availability

Housing is a particularly acute problem as there is a significant lack of 'move on' accommodation for people ready to leave safe accommodation settings (Magill, 2023; Women's Aid, 2023, 2024a; Office for National Statistics, 2024). There are several factors contributing to this.

First and foremost, housing stock shortages and increasingly high rent costs, are significant impediments to safe move-on. Eligibility requirements for access to more permanent accommodation mean that when women do not have their children currently living with them, they may be unable to obtain a home that will accommodate their children (Bimpson et al., 2022, Parr and Reeve, 2022).

Priority for housing is typically given to those deemed to have a 'local connection' to an area. This has significant consequences for victims-survivors who must often move out of their local area to increase their safety and that of any children (Bowstead, 2022; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021; Stulz et al., 2024). These difficulties can lead to victims-survivors experiencing homelessness or being insecurely or informally housed (Bimpson et al., 2022). The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (MHCLG, 2018) states that domestic abuse victim-survivors should be exempted from this requirement, and legislative changes are planned to ensure that domestic abuse victim-survivors are exempt (MHCLG and Ministry of Defence, 2024).

The pipeline from temporary housing to permanent housing must be addressed (Hock et al., 2023). Housing insecurity harms adults' and children's mental and physical health (Hock et al., 2023). Housing insecurity harms adults' and children's mental and physical health (Hock et al., 2023). Little (2023) underlines the importance of a secure home as a place of safety. They also highlight the tensions concerning housing allocations within local authority housing services, with some housing officers' beliefs concerning the 'legitimacy' of a victim-survivor's claim for housing support shaping their decision-making, against the backdrop of a highly limited housing supply.

There remain systemic issues concerning the treatment of black and ethnic minoritised victim-survivors when seeking access to housing, with other studies indicating these cohorts of victim-survivors also experience discrimination from local housing representatives as well as a continued failure to account for their intersecting needs at the point of access (Dos Ventos Lopes Heimer, 2019; Imkaan, 2020; Hastings, Mackenzie and Earley, 2022). Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation assists local authorities in the development of their processes and responses to victims/survivors, which could go some way to address some of these challenges (Bretherton and Pleace, 2021).

The 'Whole Housing' approach offers an alternative model, bringing together all the housing needs of victims/survivors within a local area (Walker and Hester, 2019; Vagi and Jones, 2020; Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse, 2021; Vagi and Jackson-Grimes, 2021). This includes supporting women to stay in their own privately rented or owned home (Vagi and Jones, 2020). The Whole Housing approach also includes a flexible fund for refugees to help women set up a permanent home or pay a deposit (Bretherton & Pleace, 2021). Advantages include being able to maintain social ties and avoiding the cost of setting up a new home. Victims/survivors also report feeling safer and better able to rebuild their lives (Vagi and Jones, 2020). But this initiative is hampered by difficulties associated with removing an abusive partner from a joint tenancy and the legal right to access that this affords them (Walker and Hester, 2019).

Another initiative is the 'Housing First' approach. In many circumstances, applications for safe accommodation are rejected, often because of a lack of capacity or suitability (Women's Aid, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024a; Commonweal Housing, 2020; Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Women's Aid, 2020; Domestic Abuse

Commissioner, 2021; Kendrick, 2024). For example, from April 2022 to March 2023 nearly 25,000 requests were unable to be met (Kendrick, 2024). An American article on Housing First reports that a focus on victim-survivors being safely and securely housed results in improved mental health and wellbeing (Goodman-Williams et al., 2023). Data indicated this intervention was less effective when individuals also experienced poverty and lack of social support.

For local authorities, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Women's Aid recommend that local authorities work as regional groups when planning provision and 'move on' housing (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Women's Aid, 2020). They also recommend that victim-survivors should be able to bypass the local authority bidding system as part of a 'choice-based letting' system. They argue this can be achieved by directly linking refugees to housing associations with available housing (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Women's Aid, 2020).

Under the current UK Labour government, local authority housing allocation continues to prioritise need, with preference given to those who are homeless, living in overcrowded, or poor-quality housing. While the government has decided against implementing changes proposed by the previous Conservative administration (2010-2024), which would have altered the allocation criteria, local authorities still manage housing allocations. Most local authorities continue to use a 'choice-based lettings' system, where people can bid for available properties, but the government does not mandate this and so it varies across regions. The number of councils utilising choice-based lettings systems is monitored and published as part of the government's collection of [Local Authority Housing Statistics](#).

Funding

The precarious funding of refugees impacts both services and outcomes for adult and child victim-survivors (Women's Aid, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024a). This is particularly acute for 'by and for' services (Gill & Anitha, 2023) which continue to grapple with even more of a 'postcode lottery' when it comes to the allocation of resources. A localised duty, where provision reflects the local population, could mean there is insufficient demand to warrant the provision of such services, thereby exacerbating the existing challenges they face (Hastings, Mackenzie and Earley, 2022).

3.3 Question 3. Evidence of impact on local authorities, improved practice and long-term outcomes for victims.

Question 3 is What evidence is there regarding impact in terms of: fiscal, social and economic benefits; accountability and consistency in local authorities in the way that domestic abuse support within safe accommodation is delivered; improved practice supporting victim-survivors of domestic abuse in safe accommodation nationally; equal access and long-term and sustained distance from domestic abuse, enabling victim-survivors to lead independent and fulfilling lives away from abuse?

Data

Provider organisations routinely collect data regarding victims/survivors, support offered and outcomes. However, the data gathered is not consistent because there is no standard set of impacts and outcomes to measure (Bunce et al., 2024). Different commissioning

agencies expect different measures. The quality of the data is shaped by the resources available to the provider organisation as well as the levels of training and understanding possessed by the practitioners completing data capture forms and assessments for database entry.

The ethical implications associated with sharing such sensitive information present challenges. One consequence of this is a lack of data regarding underserved communities who are limited in their ability to access services and, consequently, not available to monitor (Bunce et al., 2024).

A further issue is the inability to map individual journeys across local authority areas following a facilitated move, owing to difficulties associated with data sharing among agencies and local authorities (Bowstead, 2019c). Moving 'out of area' is a common feature of the help and safety-seeking process, but a lack of comprehensive and cross-boundary data concerning victim-survivors' relocation trajectories limit effective service planning, which is consequently often reactive rather than proactive. Authorities also often lack the essential knowledge to ensure safety and support across regions thereby leaving victim-survivors underserved (Bowstead, 2019b). Bowstead (2019b) recommends de-identifying and unifying administrative data to address this issue because, without national-level and archived data, local authorities will continue to encounter difficulties when anticipating demand, justifying funding, and/or designing and delivering responsive and adequate support for individuals and families who relocate.

As a tool for service planning Women's Aid produces yearly audit reports informed by 'On Track', their case management and outcomes monitoring system database (Women's Aid., 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023). The 'On Track' national data set reflects the experiences of 239,234 individuals (221,712 of which are women) who received support from one of more than 100 domestic abuse services throughout England that use 'On Track'. It also includes data from those who used the Live Chat, email, and 'No Woman Turned Away Project' (NWTAP) (addressed in forthcoming sections), all operated by Women's Aid. 'On Track' reports based on a core outcomes framework for victim-survivors, created in collaboration with the charity Imkaan (Women's Aid, 2025).

While the Women's Aid 'On track' system captures outcomes for men presenting for domestic abuse support as well as individuals who do not identify as woman or man, the National Audit 2025 does not report on their outcomes. The published national dataset concerning women presenting for support, includes the following: "referral patterns, experiences of abuse, support needs, demographics, types of support provided, outcomes, feedback, negative experiences of external services (e.g. housing, legal services, local authority safeguarding, NHS, police). It contains data on both adults and children and young people accessing support services" (Women's Aid, 2025: 15).

As the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office has stated, while the overall impact of support is evident in some of the available data (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021, Women's Aid, 2025), a more detailed analysis is needed to understand how outcomes differ based on the type of support accessed and the setting in which it was delivered, such as counselling, Independent Domestic Violence Advocate support, refuge, or other services.

Long term impact of Covid

The pandemic resulted in individuals experiencing domestic abuse for longer periods before accessing help, higher demand for services (Jacobs, 2023) and less available 'move on' accommodation for those exiting safe accommodation (Women's Aid, 2023). The higher demand for services and the complexity of cases by the time people were able to access support services had long-term implications and differentiated consequences for certain groups of victim-survivors.

The Covid response both disproportionately and uniquely impacted migrant and racially minoritised women (Gill and Anitha, 2023; Magill, 2023). In some cases, abuse was exacerbated as extended family members moved into the home (Magill, 2023). The increased funding made available as part of the Covid response was welcome, despite being continually insecure. However, additional resources did not benefit victim-survivors with no recourse to public funds as their needs could not be met within the extra funding (Women's Aid., 2023; Gill & Anitha, 2023; Magill, 2023).

Underserved groups

There are notable inequalities in provision, especially for victim-survivors with protected characteristics or additional and/or 'complex' needs (Hastings, Mackenzie and Earley, 2022). There is not equal access to domestic abuse refuges (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021) and provision is not always designed for, or inclusive of, all victim-survivors who require access to safe accommodation. The factors contributing to this are diverse and intersectional, and are specific to each group, notwithstanding differences between and among what are heterogeneous groups of people.

Available data indicates that people with no recourse to public funds or insecure immigration status (Walker and Hester, 2019; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021b; Gill and Anitha, 2023; Magill, 2023; Women's Aid, 2023; UK Visas and Immigration, 2024), racially minoritised women (Gill and Anitha, 2023; Magill, 2023), women with disabilities (Allen, Adisa and Hermolle, 2023; Jacobs, 2023) women with mental health needs (Commonweal Housing, 2020; Airlie, 2023; Allen, Adisa and Hermolle, 2023; Hock et al., 2023), substance use needs (Airlie, 2023), and men (Hine et al., 2022), are less able to access safe accommodation settings designed to meet their specific needs.

Women with more than one child (Women's Aid, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023) or male children over the age of 12 (Airlie, 2023) also face difficulties finding suitable safe accommodation. Victim-survivors with pets also face barriers to accessing safe accommodation (Ma et al., 2024).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary and/or queer+ people

Similarly, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary and/or queer+ victim-survivors experience barriers to access and inclusion (Donovan et al., 2022; Sanders et al., 2022) in some safe accommodation settings such as refuges, but not to the same degree for each of these distinct groups of people. For example, the impediments to inclusion experienced by trans and non-binary people are particularly pronounced and they do not always have equal access to safety and support (Pain, Cygnus Support and O'Neil, 2021).

This is especially the case when people are seeking refuge in single gender or single sex accommodation settings, with Safe Lives noting they risk being turned away from services at the point of access (Safe Lives, 2024). These challenges are complicated further amidst increasing public discussion concerning the inclusion of this cohort of victim-survivors in single-gender or single sex safe accommodation services (Pain, Cygnus Support and O’Neil, 2021).

This issue is exacerbated by the lack of geographical availability of specialist provision for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, trans and non-binary victim-survivors (Donovan et al., 2022). This reflects a broader systemic issue concerning extant geographical gaps in services equipped to meet the specific needs of certain groups of people presenting for support in safe accommodation, as discussed in relation to ‘by and for’ services (discussed further below) (Gill & Anitha, 2023).⁵

No recourse to public funds

There is a significant and acute problem concerning the lack of available refuge spaces for people with no recourse to public funds (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021b; Women’s Aid, 2023, 2024). UK Government no recourse to public funds regulations mean that victim-survivors with insecure immigration status who leave an abuser must often choose between homelessness and destitution, or returning to an abuser because they cannot access welfare benefits and are therefore prevented from accessing most safe accommodation options (Centre for Women’s Justice and Imkaan, 2023).

According to data from Women’s Aid, only 11.7% of refuge services could consider women with no recourse to public funds in the year ending March 2023 (Women’s Aid., 2024). Owing to this very limited number of refuge spaces for those with no recourse to public funds, they are heavily oversubscribed year after year (Women’s Aid, 2024a). The Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) can provide some victim-survivors permission to stay in the UK for 3 months, during which time they must apply for leave to remain under the Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain scheme (DVILR). But there is no right of appeal (UK Visas and Immigration, 2024) and it is only available to individuals who entered the UK on a spousal visa.

The limited research available concerning dispersed accommodation indicates that this form of safe accommodation, including as part of a Whole Housing approach (discussed further below), can offer a solution to address some of the aforementioned barriers (Airlie, 2023), especially for individuals with additional needs (Hastings, Mackenzie and Earley, 2022). For example, providing accommodation for people who cannot be accommodated in refuges. This includes families with older male children, individuals with pets and people whose needs are best served individually rather than in a group setting. It must be noted, however, that dispersed accommodation does not address the ongoing challenges and inequalities encountered by victim-survivors with no recourse to public funds.

⁵ Note, this REA was conducted prior to the Supreme Court judgment made on 16th April 2024 in the appeal of [For Women Scotland Ltd \(Appellant\) v The Scottish Ministers \(Respondent\)](#), as well as the subsequent EHRC consultation in June 2025.

Older Adults

Older adults who experience domestic abuse represent another underserved population. While there is no public data on support outcomes in safe accommodation for this cohort, the UK charity Hourglass emphasises the importance of tailored housing solutions for older victim-survivors, advocating for sanctuary schemes that allow them to remain in their homes and of promoting awareness among housing support services (Hourglass, 2024).

Moreover, it is important to consider that older adults may experience domestic abuse within care settings, such as residential care homes or by paid carers, rather than in 'traditional' domestic environments. As a result, their experiences often do not appear in national domestic abuse datasets, which primarily focus on abuse occurring within intimate or family relationships in private homes.

Abuse in care settings is typically categorised under safeguarding concerns rather than domestic abuse and may be recorded separately under adult social care regulatory frameworks rather than within domestic abuse safe accommodation reporting systems. This data gap means that the prevalence of domestic abuse affecting older adults may be significantly underreported and overlooked in policy and service provision.

Men

While there are limited services available for men such as a confidential helpline by charity Mankind and an advice and support line by charity Respect, neither provide data on the support outcomes of men in safe accommodation. The absence of detailed reporting on accommodation outcomes for men highlights a gap in data concerning male survivors' experiences in safe accommodation environments. However, it is essential to recognise that male survivors are also represented within Black and other racially minoritised groups, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer+, and in no recourse to public funds groups respectively.

As regards bed spaces for men, while there is a limited number (see data discussed earlier), it is important to highlight that the refuge bed space capacity specifically for women or men, or men only, has increased year on year since 2020, with an estimated 213 organisations in England as of May 2024 offering one or more services for men (Women's Aid, 2025).

In response to the extant 'gaps' concerning male victim-survivors, the ManKind Initiative (ManKind, no date), in collaboration with Hestia, has developed [National Quality Service Standards](#). These standards serve as guidelines for services and commissioners to enhance the quality and efficacy of support provided to men, including aspects related to safe accommodation.

4 Discussion

When compared with the research questions some areas are addressed well in the literature and others are not. There is little data in the literature on individual outcomes for adults or children which may reflect the narrow field examined (research question 1). The available evidence highlights the need for safety and housing as primary and paramount considerations. When considered against the backdrop of the current housing crisis, characterised by an acute lack of affordable housing, limited housing stock, and increasingly high rents, the challenges of moving-on individuals out of safe accommodation and into more permanent, secure housing are further exacerbated. In practice this means victim-survivors remain in safe accommodation for longer than is necessary and consequently waiting lists increase for those requiring access to safety.

For local authorities, there is evidence that a more regional approach in terms of planning refuge provision and other types of safe accommodation would be beneficial (research question 2). There are also clear improvements required in terms of changing practices concerning the allocation of housing provision. Nationally, the positive impact of policy is lessened by the extant gaps in provision, both geographical and in terms of specific populations with protected characteristics.

Research reviewed here indicates that there are differing outcomes for different groups of people experiencing domestic abuse, such as women, men, and children and minoritised groups (research question 3). There are also several groups not currently served by the current provision. There is therefore no data on outcomes for them, thereby making it impossible to assess the appropriateness or efficacy of the provision for these groups' needs. There is also a dearth of evidence concerning specific interventions, nor is there evidence to indicate efficacy or outcomes for comparing safe accommodation types and the associated outcomes in each.

There are also gaps in data gathering regarding individual outcomes and pathways following departure from refuge or other form of safe accommodation. This data, if high quality and collected systematically, would assist with commissioning and planning services in a manner that better responds to the needs of different cohorts of adult and child victim-survivors. It could also inform evidence-based practice and decision-making concerning the allocation of funds and resourcing. There is also an absence of socio-economic data despite evidence that domestic abuse has a social gradient (Skafida, Morrison and Devaney, 2022).

Reliable, consistent, stable funding for safe accommodation is an ongoing, oft-repeated need that would undoubtedly enable better outcomes for adult and child victim-survivors, as well as better data gathering. It would also likely improve the quality of service provision as staff members would be able to devote more time to the delivery of support provision, rather than diverting their energies to repeatedly chase short-term pockets of funding.

5 Conclusion

This rapid literature review highlights gaps in provision and data concerning outcomes for adult and child victim-survivors. It also contains suggestions for improvements in both. Overall, the aim for adult and child victim-survivors to have long-term safety from domestic abuse, with appropriate, well-resourced support to meet their social and economic needs, requires changes in both funding and practice.

The Covid pandemic highlighted the urgent need for more flexible and responsive systems for providing safe accommodation. Research conducted in the aftermath suggests that the lessons learned during the crisis must be used to build a more resilient system for the future, especially when it comes to victim-survivors who have protected characteristics and/or additional needs.

Continuous monitoring, funding reassessments and targeted financial support for high-demand areas, both in terms of geography and relating to specific cohorts, are essential for achieving the intended outcomes. However, there is no uniformity in the frameworks used for collecting or evaluating data, nor is there consistency in terms of what data is recorded. Staff routinely balance 'frontline' duties with requisite administrative tasks associated with service monitoring and data capture. But there remains an underlying issue regarding the capacity of staff and the time available to them, to develop the skills required for effective data gathering and usage. This can further impede consistent data management practices.

Moreover, it is clear from the evidence reviewed that it remains the case that specific cohorts of victim-survivors continue to face significant barriers in accessing safety when leaving an abusive partner – namely, those with no recourse to public funds or insecure immigration status and Black and racially minoritised victim-survivors. While we know that trans and non-binary victim-survivors face additional and often significant barriers to access and inclusion, the very limited data available concerning the outcomes achieved for these groups when accessing safe accommodation means that it is difficult to make claims regarding what is required to better meet their needs. It is possible, however, to look to the small minority of 'by and for' services working to support these victim-survivors, to understand how services can be more inclusive.

While the research evidence addressed in this rapid review suggests that Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has made a significant legislative advancement in offering safety to victim-survivors, practical challenges concerning the statutory duty of local authorities to provide safe accommodation remain. These manifest in the allocation of resources, regional disparities in terms of availability of safe accommodation and 'move on' options, and insecure and inconsistent funding streams which together significantly impact the full realisation of the duty across all local authority areas.

References

The first list includes all documents referenced in the REA. The second list shows those documents which were included in the REA process but not referenced in the report. All references are set out in the Annex, Table A.1.

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6 Annex

Table A.1 outlines the nature of each of the papers included in the rapid evidence assessment. Note that not all papers will have been directly cited in this REA report.

Table A.2: Literature included within the analysis

Literature	Type	Method/s	Theme	Produced by ⁶
Airlie (Refuge), 2023	Feasibility study prior to project	Literature Review, qualitative research and financial modelling	Dispersed accommodation	NGO
Allen et al, 2023	Journal article	Literature synthesis	Open or 'Dutch' refuge.	Academic
Bimpson et al, 2022	Journal article	Biographical research	Homelessness	Academic
Bowstead, 2019a	Journal article	Editorial	Good practice.	Academic
Bowstead, 2019b	Journal article	Interviews, and participatory creative groupwork	Outcomes for individuals.	Academic
Bowstead, 2019c	Journal article	Administrative data	Housing	Academic
Bretherton and Pleace, (DAHA), 2021	Report	DAHA accreditation evaluation	Housing	NGO
Bunce et al, 2024	Journal article	Discussion paper	Practice. Data. Equal access.	Academic
Centre for Women's Justice and Imkaan, 2023	Report	Case Study analysis	No recourse to public funds. By and For services. Funding.	NGO
Commonweal, 2020	Report	Chapters written by different provider services	Housing	NGO
Women's Aid, 2023	Report	Cost assessment	Funding	NGO

⁶ NGO is non-governmental organisation

Ministry of Housing, communities and Local Government, 2021	Consultation Response		Practice duties	Government
Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021a	Report	Providers and victim/survivors of domestic abuse	Equal access, housing, data. By and for services,	Government
Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021b	Report	Cost benefit analysis	No recourse to public funds	Government
Donovan et al, (Galop), 2021	Report	Benchmarks against good practice indicators	LGBTIA+	NGO
Dos Ventos Lopes Heimer, (Latin American Women's Aid) 2019	Report	Project Report. Case analysis, interviews and focus groups	By and for services. Move-on accommodation issues.	NGO
Foster et al, 2022	Journal article	Interviews and focus groups	Covid. Housing.	Academic
Gill and Anitha, 2023	Journal article	Interviews	Equal access. National approach to provision.	Academic
Goodman-Williams et al., 2023	Journal article	Latent profile analysis	Housing first.	Academic
Hastings et al (UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence), 2022	Report	Documentary analysis and interviews	Housing	NGO
Hine et al, 2022	Journal article	Analysis of quantitative data set	Gender differences in outcomes.	Academic
Hock et al, 2023	Journal article	Qualitative systematic review	Insecure housing and children.	Academic
Literature	Type	Method/s	Theme	Produced by
Home Office, 2023	Statutory Guidance		Outlines practice duties	Government
Hourglass, 2024	Policy Paper		Economic abuse, older people	

Imkaan, 2020	Report	Surveys, interviews, desktop research	Disparity of services. Move-on accommodation . By and for services. Funding..	NGO
Jacobs (Domestic Abuse Commissioner) 2023	Journal article	Editorial	Covid. Equal access. Funding. By and for services	Academic
Kendrick (Centre for Homelessness Impact), 2024	Report	Evidence review	Homelessness. Equal access.	NGO
Lakshminarayana n et al, (Centre for Homelessness Impact), 2023	Report	Literature review	Housing.	NGO
Little, 2023	Journal article	Interviews	Housing	Academic
Ma et al. 2023	Journal article	Interviews and questionnaire.	Safe accommodation for pet owners	Academic
Mackie et al, (Homeless Link, in collaboration with Cardiff and Heriot-Watt universities), 2024	Report	Roundtable event	Housing	NGO
Magill, 2023	Report	Interviews with staff from Southall Black Sisters	No recourse to public funds. Housing.	Academic
Ministry of Housing, communities and Local Government, 2022	Statutory Guidance	Statutory guidance under section 169 of the Housing Act 1996	Housing	Government
Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024	Report	Qualitative research	Practice. Housing.	Government
Pain et al, 2021	Report	Focus groups, interviews and closed online group. Literature review.	Trans people.	NGO
Sanders, et al, (Centre for	Report	Literature review	LGBTQIA+	NGO

Homelessness Impact), 2022				
Scottish Government, 2024	Report	Literature review	Equal access. Funding. By and For services.	Government
Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse, 2021	Report	Policy Report	Move-on accommodation . Children. Equal access.	NGO
Thiara and Harrison (Women's Aid), 2021	Report	Narrative Literature Review	By and For Services	NGO
The National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group, 2024	Report	Policy paper for APPG for Ending Homelessness Inquiry	Homelessness	NGO
UK Government 2021	Law	Law	Defines safe accommodation	Government
UK Government, 2021	Statutory Guidance		Outlines practice duties	Government
UK Government, 2024	Statutory Guidance on UK Visas and Immigration		Migrants	Government
Literature	Type	Method/s	Theme	Produced by
Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Team, 2019	Statutory Guidance		Funding. Commissioning Equal access.	Government
Vagi and Jones (Whole Housing Domestic Abuse), 2020	Report	Project Report	Outcomes. Fiscal benefits	NGO
Vagi and Jackson-Grimes (Whole Housing Domestic Abuse) 2021	Report	Project Report	Housing	NGO
Walker and Hester (Peabody Trust and DAHA), 2019	Report	Interviews	Housing	NGO

Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE), the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, 2020	Report	Workshops with nine member organisations	Housing	NGO
Women's Aid, 2019	Annual Report	Member organisation data.	Equal access. Funding. By and for services.	NGO
Women's Aid, 2020	Annual Report	Member organisation data.	Equal access. Funding. By and for services.	NGO
Women's Aid, 2021	Annual Report	Member organisation data.	Equal access. Funding	NGO
Women's Aid, 2022	Annual Report	Member organisation data.	Equal access. Funding. Children. Covid. Move-on accommodation .	NGO
Women's Aid, 2023	Annual Report	Member organisation data.	Equal access. Funding. Practice. Covid. Cost of living crisis.	NGO
Women's Aid, 2024	Annual Report	Member organisation data.	Finance. Housing. Equal access. Commissioning .	NGO
Women's Aid, 2025	Annual Report	Member organisation data.	No recourse to public funds. By and For services. Children. Cost of living crisis.	NGO