Barriers and facilitators of disclosures of domestic violence by mental health service users: qualitative study

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Background
Mental health service users are at high risk of domestic violence but this is often not detected by mental health services.

Aims
To explore the facilitators and barriers to disclosure of domestic violence from a service user and professional perspective.

Method
A qualitative study in a socioeconomically deprived south London borough, UK, with 18 mental health service users and 20 mental health professionals. Purposive sampling of community mental health service users and mental healthcare professionals was used to recruit participants for individual interviews. Thematic analysis was used to determine dominant and subthemes. These were transformed into conceptual maps with accompanying illustrative quotations.

Results
Service users described barriers to disclosure of domestic violence to professionals including: fear of the consequences, including fear of Social Services involvement and consequent child protection proceedings, fear that disclosure would not be believed, and fear that disclosure would lead to further violence; the hidden nature of the violence; actions of the perpetrator; and feelings of shame. The main themes for professionals concerned role boundaries, competency and confidence. Service users and professionals reported that the medical diagnostic and treatment model with its emphasis on symptoms could act as a barrier to enquiry and disclosure. Both groups reported that enquiry and disclosure were facilitated by a supportive and trusting relationship between the individual and professional.

Conclusions
Mental health services are not currently conducive to the disclosure of domestic violence. Training of professionals in how to address domestic violence to increase their confidence and expertise is recommended.

Declaration of interest
None.

Method
This study was a cross-sectional semi-structured interview study. Two topic guides, developed specifically for the project, were used to focus the interview on service user and professional attitudes towards routine enquiry about domestic violence, their experiences of being asked/asking and discussing violence and their views on what interventions had been or would be helpful; the latter will be discussed in another publication. Following consultation with an expert reference group, consisting of qualitative researchers (including service user researchers) and senior mental health clinicians, the two draft topic guides (see online supplements DS1 and DS2) were piloted with three service user and four professional participants. Participants were interviewed individually by K.T. or A.W., who had received specialist training from D.R. on conducting interviews with this client group. Quality and consistency of interviews were checked by D.R. and L.H. Professionals and service users were told that domestic violence was defined as abuse by another person either psychologically, physically, sexually, financially or emotionally, within their home or relationships. Recruitment continued until saturation of themes had been achieved, i.e. no new themes were emerging from the data. After piloting, the main interviews were carried out between May and December 2008 and were audiotaped and transcribed.

Domestic violence is a major public health issue: 20% of women from England and Wales report physical and sexual assault by a current or former partner;1 when financial and emotional abuse and threats of abuse are included, this increases to 25% of women. Two women are murdered by their partner or ex-partner every week in England and Wales1 and similar figures are reported internationally. One in seven men in the UK also report experiencing physical assault by a current/former partner, although these incidents are generally less serious than those reported by women.1 Domestic violence is associated with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, insomnia, alcohol and drug misuse, suicide attempts2 and exacerbation of psychotic symptoms.3 It is therefore not surprising that higher rates of domestic violence are experienced by mental health service users compared with the general population.4 However, experiences of violence are underdetected in clinical settings and service users are reluctant to disclose such experiences in the absence of direct questioning.5-6

There has been little research in mental health settings on the professional barriers to enquiry about, and service user barriers to disclosure of, domestic violence. There has however been more research into barriers to disclosure of childhood abuse experienced by mental health service users. These studies have identified lack of training and confidence, severity of psychological disturbance and fear of exacerbating disturbance and clinicians’ beliefs about the reliability of clients’ accounts as barriers to routine enquiry about childhood abuse;7-11 these may also be relevant to enquiry about domestic violence. The aim of this study was to explore mental health service user and professional views on routine enquiry about domestic violence and to articulate facilitators and barriers to disclosure from both mental health service user and professional perspectives.
verbatim. Interviews lasted between 30 min to 1 h. The majority of interviews with service users were carried out in a private room within local community mental health team bases unless the participant explicitly stated concerns about the location. In these instances, after assessing the level of risk within the client’s home or local community centre, if appropriate, interviews were conducted in these alternative locations. Service users were given £20 for their time and expenses.

Participants
Service users
Our inclusion criteria for the study were service users in contact with community mental health teams (CMHTs) or who had been in such contact and were now only in contact with the local mental health voluntary sector. Service users deemed by clinicians to be too unwell to enter the study were excluded. Participants were recruited in three ways: advertisements placed on notice boards in local south London community mental health centres; an advertisement in a local voluntary sector newsletter; and care coordinators (case managers with a background in nursing or social work) asked service users in routine appointments if they would be interested in participating. A purposive sample of service users was recruited to ensure diversity in age, ethnicity, diagnosis and experience (or not) of domestic violence. In this analysis of barriers and facilitators to disclosure, only service users who had experienced domestic violence are included \((n = 18)\); 16 were female and 2 were male. Nine were White British, one was European and eight self-ascribed their ethnicity as Black Caribbean \((n = 3)\), Black British \((n = 1)\), Black African \((n = 1)\), Asian \((n = 1)\), Mixed Race \((n = 1)\) and Latin American \((n = 1)\). The ethnic background of the sample reflected that of the local population as a whole as identified in the 2001 census. The mean age of the service users was 41 \((\text{range } 19–59, \text{s.d. } = 8.7)\). The following diagnoses were identified: depression \((n = 6)\), bipolar disorder \((n = 5)\), schizophrenia \((n = 2)\), schizoaffective disorder \((n = 1)\), borderline personality disorder \((n = 1)\), adjustment disorder \((n = 1)\), substance use problems \((n = 1)\) and not assigned \((n = 1)\). In total, 12 participants reported having children. Two male and three female participants also reported perpetrating domestic violence. All other participants reported only experiencing domestic violence.

Mental health professionals
Our inclusion criteria were for mental healthcare professionals working in CMHTs in the same catchment area. A purposive sample of mental healthcare professionals was sought with respect to age, ethnicity and professional background from local CMHTs. In total, 20 professionals were recruited; 10 were female and 10 male. Five were psychiatrists, three dual diagnosis practitioners (with counselling \(n = 2\) and nursing \(n = 1\) backgrounds), one was a team manager (with a social work background), one a psychologist and ten were care coordinators (with social work \(n = 2\) and nursing \(n = 8\) backgrounds). The mean age of the professionals was 37 \((\text{range } 27–58, \text{s.d. } = 6.9)\). The average number of years qualified was 11.9 \((\text{range } 4–29, \text{s.d. } = 7)\).

Ethical approval
This study received ethical approval from the Joint South London and the Maudsley and the Institute of Psychiatry NHS Research Ethics Committee (ref 07/H0807/66).

Analysis
Interviews were analysed thematically. It was not assumed that themes would ‘emerge’ from the data but that interpretive work would be needed to identify them. The analysis began with identification of patterns in the data that were coded by two raters (A.W. and K.T.). An initial coding frame was developed by the two raters based on simultaneous coding of five service user and five professional transcripts and supplemented by codes taken from the interview schedule. The appropriateness of the coding frame was checked through progressive iterations and reapplied to earlier transcripts as it developed. In total, 20% of the coding was cross-checked to ensure reliability and 81% agreement attained by the two raters. Nvivo 8 (2008, QSR International Pty Ltd, www.qsrinternational.com) on MS Windows was used for indexing material and for retrieval of text chunks pertaining to the same or similar codes. Data that did not seem to fit into the coding frame were actively sought and multiple coding conducted by two raters. Codes with similar information were merged and pruning of irrelevant codes and an initial identification of themes was conducted. Subsequently, these themes were themselves interrogated and a final level of abstraction was reached in the form of interpretive themes, with a complementary deviant case analysis where individual transcripts were interrogated for information that seemed to be discrepant with our overall analysis. At each step, it was ensured that saturation of themes had been reached. Concept maps were developed to represent the data in a visual format. The diagrammatic representations in the maps reflect the superordinate themes and subthemes that emerged from the data after repeated coding and refinement of the framework.

Results
Saturation of themes was obtained after recruitment of 18 service users and 20 mental healthcare professionals.

Dominant themes
The dominant themes from the interviews concerned disclosure of domestic violence. The two conceptual maps representing the two interpretive themes and their associated subthemes are given in Figs 1 and 2. For service users, the dominant theme was barriers to disclosure of domestic violence. For professionals the dominant interpretive theme was barriers to enquiry about domestic violence. The presentation of results will be given in the following order: themes from the data supplied by service users; themes arising from the interviews with professionals; and themes which overlap between the two groups.

Service users
As can be seen from the conceptual map (Fig. 1), fear is an important and multifaceted subtheme for service users when considering disclosure of domestic violence to mental health professionals. It encompasses fear of Social Services involvement; fear that disclosure will not be believed; fear that disclosure will result in further violence; fear of disruption to family life; and fear of the consequences for immigration status. Some illustrative quotes follow.

“You’re a bit scared to tell anyone in case you lose; I lost two children.” (SU1, female)

“You’re living in fear until people believe you. You’re left feeling dirty and like you’ve been let down again by the system, cause there is a lack of support and lack of people believing you.” (SU22, female)

“They’re more scared of their boyfriend or husband, if they ever found out that you have been speaking about them... because otherwise that could cause... more domestic violence.” (SU3, female)
A further cluster of subthemes concerns blaming attitudes of others, self-blame, and shame and embarrassment, which again makes victims reluctant to disclose abuse.

“My mother said to me “well you’re an idiot, you asked for it because you put up with it”. There’s always that victim blame “oh she must be weak to put up with it, why did she let it happen?” “ (SU14, female)

“You really feel it’s you. The more they hit you . . . you convince yourself that it’s you . . . I convinced myself “well look, this is the third violent relationship I’ve had, it can’t be them it must be me, it must be something I’m doing wrong”. (SU23, female)

“I was feeling a bit embarrassed because something like that had happened to me.” (SU5, female)

Unsurprisingly, this was linked to psychological distress.

“They were asking me if I was ok, if anybody was harassing me or if I was being stalked but by then things were getting out of hand and I didn’t even know who to trust or who to talk to. So I was, kind of like, locked up everything inside me.” (SU5, female)

A further cluster of subthemes concerned not recognising the behaviours as abusive.

“The same with the domestic violence . . . the way that they work [the abuser] is that they, you’re not supposed to know you’re being abused . . . one of the things about domestic violence is that you don’t realise . . . you’re being abused until you’re way down the line.” (SU21, female)

“If you haven’t got a straight thing in your mind “no this is wrong and this shouldn’t be happening” and “no you’re not going to allow that man to do that to you”, that’s what I lacked . . . I suppose you just think it’s normal sometimes.” (SU17, female)

Service users talked about perpetrators’ actions to prevent disclosure and about how this could isolate them from friends and family as the perpetrator did not want them to know about the abuse.

“I was taken to the GP. I’d initially gone in to see the GP on my own and he burst in to her office and started telling her “oh she’s taken overdoses, she’s done this, she’s done that.”” (SU10, female)

“I’ve been isolated from family and friends . . . I’d make friends with people and then he’d [the abuser] phone them up and tell them not to call this number again.” (SU16, female)

Service users were critical of services’ failure to respond to signs of abuse and on the other hand they stressed the importance of engagement between professionals and service users if disclosure was going to be possible. This theme emerged in the professional data as well and is dealt with below.

**Mental health professionals**

As with service users, the interpretive theme that emerged was also disclosure, with an emphasis on barriers to asking clients about any abuse that they have experienced (Fig. 2). The dominant subthemes in this data are clear and are to do with whether enquiry about domestic violence is part of their role and within their competence.

The issue of professional roles is often linked to a medical diagnostic and treatment model in the sense that the professionals sought to focus on mental health symptoms.

“It’s not in my list of things that I now have to cover . . . I suppose my first response to that is, should we be addressing this? Because I think so many things are coming under the role of psychiatry to sort out when actually they are not mental health problems . . . suppose I struggle a bit with us taking on things that aren’t mental health problems . . . perhaps we should be directing people elsewhere.” (P20, female, psychiatrist)

In the following quote, a psychologist states that enquiry about domestic violence is not part of their role.

“On the whole it is not seen as the remit of a community mental health team to be dealing with domestic violence unless there’s diagnostic mental health problems as well.” (P17, female, psychologist)

A contrasting view is described in the quote below from a consultant psychiatrist.

“Another aspect is they might not see it as their role but, you know, we take a broader view that our role is to help people live healthier lifestyles.” (P12, male, psychiatrist)

Competing demands, time constraints and the presence of the partner at consultations were all also mentioned as hindering enquiry into domestic abuse in a client’s life. Many professionals talked about the importance of competency, and training, which many felt they had not received, as well as the boundaries of their role.

“The staff member has to be suitably trained and competent to sort of engage in that kind of work. They have to be reminded that it is an important area to look out for.” (P12, male, psychiatrist)

“Another aspect is they might not see it as their role but, you know, we take a broader view that our role is to help people live healthier lifestyles.” (P12, male, psychiatrist)

“A contrasting view is described in the quote below from a consultant psychiatrist.

“Another aspect is they might not see it as their role but, you know, we take a broader view that our role is to help people live healthier lifestyles.” (P12, male, psychiatrist)
However one professional, a team manager, felt that colleagues in the team did have the expertise to identify domestic violence.

'I think the team here are an experienced group . . . we spend lengthy periods of time working with people . . . and encompass a kind of holistic approach, when people would generally be picking up on those signs as professionals . . . so, I mean it would come up I think, in part of the conversation.' (P19, male, team manager, social work background)

Linked to competency, many staff expressed unease and lack of confidence in dealing with a client's experience of domestic abuse.

'People are hesitant because they don’t feel confident, they don’t feel it’s their job; they think that somebody else is better equipped to do it.' (P12, male, psychiatrist)

'Personally, I think it is something that’s quite sensitive; I wouldn’t feel comfortable in asking it.’ (P4, male, care coordinator, nursing background)

However, a small number of experienced staff, who had been qualified between 11 and 29 years, described feeling confident in approaching the subject of domestic violence.

'I am particularly clued up to look in at bumps and scratches and injuries . . . I would obviously be aware of people who were rowing in front of me . . . I would be inclined to ask one or other of them as to whether or not, you know, how safe or unsafe they felt with each other.’ (P5, male, care coordinator, social work background)

Further analysis showed that six professionals stated they did enquire about domestic violence on occasion; this was not associated with gender, age, professional background or years qualified. However, these six professionals appeared to differ in their ‘interpretation of their roles’, compared with other professionals.

However, for some professionals, routine enquiry in relation to perpetration of violence was felt to be an easier subject to address with clients than enquiry about the experience of violence.

'It’s easier to ask that question . . . cause you can wrap it up in various different ways . . . “your anger, your irritability are symptoms of a particular aspect of mental disorder”’. (P4, male, care coordinator, nursing background)

Although less evident than in the service user interviews, there was also a cluster of subthemes on the issue of fear. Professionals were worried that clients would be offended if they asked about domestic abuse, that there might be consequences for the victim or that discussing the experience might be traumatising for the client.

'I don’t know at what point you turn around and say “have you been a victim of domestic violence?” I think it has the potential to scare some people off.’ (P4, male, care coordinator, nursing background)

'I think the disadvantages could be, and perhaps it’s just a myth, is that it would kind of open up a can of worms and create perhaps re-traumatisation for the client to, you know, delve into those memories.' (P14, male, dual diagnosis practitioner)

Professionals, like the service users, also identified factors that could facilitate discussion of domestic violence, including the importance of therapeutic engagement and a supportive relationship.

**Overlapping themes between service users and professionals**

It has already been seen that the issue of fear is common to service users and professionals although in different ways. A further common theme concerns therapeutic engagement. Both service users and professionals believed that a good and supportive relationship between them and their clients facilitated disclosure and the exploration of domestic abuse.

'Some people might not even be able to talk about it but if their social worker is asking them, asking them in a nice way, in a gentle way . . . making sure that there is good contact between them, one day they will open and say “look this is happening to me.”’. (SU1, female)

'Professionals need to make I suppose a comfortable environment or build up a close enough relationship where the patient actually feels safe enough to actually tell what’s going on.’ (P13, male, dual diagnosis practitioner)

Therapeutic engagement is generally conceptualised as something developed over time but there was an example of a service user immediately ‘hitting it off’ with a worker.

'I was having counselling . . . I did discuss certain things but it’s not in detail like when I’ve actually told [care coordinator] . . . [care coordinator] must have been about the only person who has really got a lot out of me . . . he’s got like five pages in like the short time that I met him.’ (SU11, female)

We have already seen that some professionals queried whether asking about domestic abuse was part of their role. They saw themselves as dealing primarily with the client’s mental health.
Discussion

Main findings

This is the first study to look at the views of both service users and mental health professionals in relation to disclosure of domestic violence. Our main findings were that service users were reluctant to disclose domestic violence because of their concerns about the potential consequences, and mental health professionals reported finding enquiry about domestic violence difficult because of their lack of knowledge and expertise in this area or because they did not think it was part of their role.

For service users an important barrier to disclosure was fear evoked by a number of factors. Men and women were afraid of the potential consequences of disclosure of domestic violence to mental health professionals and other professionals such as general practitioners, other doctors, the police or social workers. Women feared that if they disclosed to health professionals the perpetrator might come to know this and they could be at increased risk of violence or their children would be removed from them. Non-disclosure can therefore be a very rational decision based on the service user's knowledge of the risks and benefits of disclosure. These findings are similar to those reported by mental health professionals in relation to disclosure of domestic violence.19

Service users also feared that they would not be believed if they disclosed domestic abuse because professionals would focus solely on their symptoms. One professional instead expressed concern that her seniors assumed that the client was not 'telling the truth'. There is, however, evidence that psychiatric patients tend to underreport rather than overreport experiences of violence.18 It is common in situations of domestic abuse19 for women to believe that the abuse must somehow be their fault and we found this in some of our interviews. Self-blame is exacerbated when the victim has a mental health problem as she may see this as part of her own involvement in provoking the abuse.

The main themes for professionals concerned role boundaries, competency and confidence. Professionals queried whether enquiry about domestic abuse was part of their role at all, as an assessment should focus on mental health. One psychiatrist expressed exasperation that so many recommendations were made by different stakeholders that they could not possibly all be accommodated. It is noteworthy that the team manager's view of staff competence in dealing with domestic abuse was in direct contrast to the staff themselves, who expressed a lack of expertise in addressing the topic of domestic violence and called for more training. Quantitative research involving a survey of US clinicians to identify barriers to the diagnosis and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in people with severe mental illness, found that these issues of competence and confidence were associated with the percentage of clients with whom trauma and PTSD had been discussed, documented and addressed directly in treatment;20 lack of confidence and competence inevitably has implications for the ability of clinicians to address domestic violence. Finally, professionals talked about this being a ‘delicate’ issue with which they felt uncomfortable.

Generally, the barriers to enquiry highlighted by the community mental health professionals in this study were similar to those reported in a systematic review of studies of barriers to screening for domestic violence in other healthcare settings: lack of training regarding domestic violence, lack of time, lack of effective interventions and patient-related factors such as non-disclosure and fear of offending the individual.21

Service users and professionals expressed similar ideas about facilitators of disclosure. Both believed that a supportive and therapeutic relationship was necessary for enquiry and disclosure so that the issue could be explored further. This has also been stressed by women interviewed in primary care qualitative studies on domestic violence22 and is clearly an important component of effective enquiry in clinical practice. However, research in mental health settings employing standardised screening tools to measure domestic violence suggest the experience of being asked about domestic abuse may be sufficient to facilitate disclosure, despite not having an established relationship with the interviewer.4 Some service users and some professionals believed that the ‘medical diagnostic and treatment model’ was an obstacle to discussion of domestic abuse as the focus was always on symptoms. Gender and culture were subthemes in both sets of interviews, with particular emphasis on the perception that some cultures believed domestic abuse to be acceptable.

One professional made the point that professionals were used to asking people whether they had ever been violent or had a propensity to violence as this is a routine part of a mental health risk assessment but felt that professionals were less comfortable enquiring whether a client had been a victim of violence. The emphasis on the risk of violence by people with severe mental illness rather than on their (higher) risk of experiencing violence appears to be related to the stigma of mental illness, which, it has been suggested, has ‘turned the world on its head’.23 Mental health service users are 11 times more likely to have experienced recent violence than the general population24 and we therefore recommend that risk management should focus more on the risk of experiencing violence. It appears that at present professionals may not routinely enquire about such experiences. In this paper, we have reported some of the barriers and facilitators to enquiry and we are using this data to inform the development of interventions in mental health services to address domestic violence.
Limitations

This study was carried out in a very socioeconomically deprived setting where there is a high proportion of people from Black and minority ethnic groups; our results may not therefore be generalisable to other settings. As with other research, selection bias means the views of those who did not wish to participate in the study are not known and may be different.

Clinical implications

Disclosure of domestic violence is facilitated by a good service–user–professional relationship and is likely to be facilitated further by domestic violence training of professionals. Training interventions in healthcare settings can improve identification and user–professional relationship and is likely to be facilitated further by domestic violence training of professionals.

A recent UK Department of Health initiative (the Victims of Violence and Abuse Prevention Programme, VVAPP) plans to increase training on abuse throughout mental health services and recommends that all service users are asked about violence and abuse as part of routine assessments. However, the focus of the VVAPP is on training to address childhood sexual abuse. Current domestic violence may be more strongly associated with mental health symptoms than childhood sexual abuse and will need different interventions if the violence is still occurring.

Training needs to address the deficits in knowledge identified in this study and include practical examples of how to ask about domestic violence, information on the needs of service users and details of local domestic violence support services. The current evidence base for interventions to support mental health service users experiencing domestic violence remains sparse. It is necessary to develop and evaluate clear care pathways, involving the domestic violence sector when appropriate, to help mental health services address this underdetected but potentially life-threatening issue.

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Online supplement DS1

Service user topic guide

The response of mental health services to domestic violence: an investigation into how mental health services address domestic violence experienced by mental health service users.

Introduction

Explain study verbally and check participants' understanding and agreement to participate, including audiotaping of interview. Check whether they would like to have a friend or advocate with them.

Preamble

We know many people experience domestic violence (sometimes known as domestic abuse) and we know that they may not be asked about their experience of this abuse or asked about their safety. We would like to ask you some questions about whether mental health professionals have asked you about domestic violence and what this was like for you. I want to be sure we are thinking about similar things — what we mean by domestic violence, sometimes called domestic abuse, is being abused by another person psychologically, physically, sexually, financially or emotionally.

There is no right or wrong answer to any of my questions.

(1) What is your understanding of what domestic violence is?
(2) Have you ever been asked about domestic violence by mental healthcare professionals such as psychiatrists, care coordinators, etc.? If yes, what was your experience of this? Probe for:
   By whom?
   Did they speak to you about it on more than one occasion? How did it make you feel?
   Nature of the enquiry, e.g. sensitively or insensitively asked.
   Did you feel comfortable being asked by that person?
   Did you feel it was a good place to be asked about domestic violence?
   Were you hoping or wanting to be asked?
   Did anyone else ask you (any other mental health professionals/GP, etc.)?
   Did anyone write down what you said? Who was it?
   Have you ever felt like you couldn’t tell the worker anything? If so why?
(3) (a) Do you think that staff should ask all clients about domestic violence?
   If not, why not? If yes, why?
   (b) Do you think they should ask only women? Only men? Or women and men?
   How do you think staff should ask about domestic violence?
   (c) Do you think staff should ask people if they have ever been violent?
(4) (a) What has been your own experience of domestic violence?
   Probe for:
   By whom?
   For how long?
   Nature of violence – emotional/physical/sexual/financial/restriction of movement
(5) If participant has experienced domestic violence ask:
   Has any health professional ever known that you were experiencing domestic violence?
   Probe for:
   How did they find out? What did they say or do?
   Did they offer help?
   How did you feel about it?
(6) When you were going through that was there anyone or anything that helped?
(7) If staff know about domestic violence what do you think they should do?
   Probe for:
   What would you want the worker to do?
(8) Do you feel mental health professionals have given you adequate choice as to how best to deal with your situation?
(9) Is there anything else you can think of that may help people experiencing domestic violence?
(10) Have you ever come across services for people who are being hurt by domestic violence?
   If yes, what happened?
   Probe for:
   What was helpful/unhelpful? Did you meet with them?
(11) Have you ever been given information about what victims of domestic violence can do or what their rights are?
(12) (a) Have you heard about domestic violence advocates?
   If no: explain advocacy
   A domestic violence advocate provides advice, information and support to people to help them manage their situation.
   (b) What do you think of the idea of domestic violence advocates?
   Do you think you could talk with this type of worker?
   Would you go to a domestic violence advocate for help? Why/why not?
(13) If such a service was funded, how would you like a domestic violence advocate to work with the community mental health team?
   (a) In your mental health team?
   (b) In an independent agency? (e.g. Women’s Aid)
   (c) In a statutory agency (e.g. police, housing office).
   (d) In a one-stop shop?
   Probe for:
   What made you pick that?
   Which place would be the most comfortable for you?
(14) In order to set up a study to assess whether domestic violence advocacy is helpful for mental health service users we need to have a way of deciding how helpful advocacy has been. What do you think are the most meaningful and important ways of deciding whether or not domestic violence advocacy has been helpful?
Which of the following do you think are most meaningful and important? Which of these do you think would be the most important from top to bottom? (See list of possible outcome measures).

- Frequency of violence (psychologically, physically, financially, sexually or emotionally)
- Quality of life
- Mental health symptoms
- Separation from the abusive partner
- Increased social contacts
- Engagement with mental health services

(15) Is there anything else you would like to say about this issue that we haven’t covered?

(16) Is there anything else you would like staff to do?

Thank the participant.

Closing note:
Thank you for sharing your experiences, it’s very courageous of you and it has been a privilege to speak with you.
How are you doing? How do you feel about it?
If you would like to speak about this further we can discuss this with your care coordinator.

Domestic violence hotline: 0808 2000 247
Witness: 08454 500 300
Bede House: 020 7237 3881

Online supplement DS2

Professional topic guide
The response of mental health services to domestic violence: an investigation into how mental health services address domestic violence experienced by mental health service users.

Introduction
Explain study verbally and check participants’ understanding and agreement to participate, including audiotyping of interview.
This study is exploring service user and staff attitudes about domestic violence and providing help. The outcome of this will inform the development of an intervention.
I’m interested in your own experiences of working with service users but also your thoughts and opinions of service delivery in general.

Preamble
We know many people experience domestic violence (sometimes known as domestic abuse). We would like to ask you some questions about your experience of working with service users who may be experiencing domestic violence. I want to be sure we are thinking about similar things – what we mean by domestic abuse or violence is being abused by another person psychologically, physically, sexually, financially or emotionally.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

1. Have you ever asked or talked about domestic violence with mental health service users?
   Probe for:
   - In what setting?
   - How often?
2. Did you ask the client or did they tell you?
   How do you ask?
   Or was there another way you found out?
   Did you ask if they had discussed this before?

(2) (a) Do you think that staff should ask all clients about domestic violence? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of this?
   If no, why not? If yes, why?
   (b) Do you think they should just ask women? Or women and men?

3. What has been your experience of the nature of domestic violence experienced by mental health service users?
   Probe for:
   - How frequent a problem?
   - By whom?
   - What was the nature of violence – emotional/physical/sexual/financial/restriction of movement?
   - Were children involved in any way?
   - Witnessed violence? Experienced violence?

4. How do you think mental health professionals should address domestic violence?

5. How do you think staff should ask about domestic violence?
   Do you think staff should ask people if they have ever been violent towards someone else?

6. What do you think has helped mental health service users you have known or you have known about through colleagues who were abused?
   Probe for:
   - From whom?
   - Nature of help?
   - What hasn’t helped?

7. Do you know of services for people who are experiencing domestic violence?
   If yes, have you given this information to clients experiencing domestic violence?
   Why? Why not?

8. To your knowledge have mental health service users you or colleagues have worked with known about or used services for people who are experiencing domestic violence?

9. Have you ever been given any training or information on the legal, welfare and housing rights for people experiencing domestic violence?

10. Have you heard about domestic violence advocates?
    If no: explain advocacy
    A domestic violence advocate provides advice, information and support to people to help them manage their situation.

12. What do you think of domestic violence advocacy?

13. Do you think clients would engage with this type of worker?

14. If such a service was funded, how would you like a domestic violence advocate to work with the community mental health team?
   (a) In your mental health team?
   (b) In an independent agency? (e.g. Women’s Aid)
(c) In a statutory agency (e.g. police, housing office)
(d) In a one-stop shop?
Why? Where do you think a client would feel most comfortable engaging with this type of worker?

(15) In order to set up a study to assess whether domestic violence advocacy is helpful for mental health service users we need to know what outcomes to measure. What do you think are the most meaningful and important ways of deciding whether or not domestic violence advocacy has been helpful?

Which of the following do you think are most meaningful and important? Please rank the outcomes below from most to least important in your opinion. Could you explain your answer? (See list of possible outcome measures).

Frequency of violence (psychologically, physically, sexually, financially or emotionally)
Quality of life
Mental health symptoms
Separation from the perpetrator
Increase social contacts
Engagement with mental health services

(16) Is there anything you would like to add about how mental health professionals should offer support?

Thank the participant.
Introduction

Explain study verbally and check participants' understanding and agreement to participate, including audiotaping of interview. Check whether they would like to have a friend or advocate with them.

Preamble

We know many people experience domestic violence (sometimes known as domestic abuse) and we know that they may not be asked about their experience of this abuse or asked about their safety. We would like to ask you some questions about whether mental health professionals have asked you about domestic violence and what this was like for you. I want to be sure we are thinking about similar things – what we mean by domestic violence, sometimes called domestic abuse, is being abused by another person psychologically, physically, sexually, financially or emotionally.

There is no right or wrong answer to any of my questions.

(1) What is your understanding of what domestic violence is?

(2) Have you ever been asked about domestic violence by mental healthcare professionals such as psychiatrists, care coordinators, etc.? If yes, what was your experience of this? Probe for:
   - By whom?
   - Did they speak to you about it on more than one occasion?
   - How did it make you feel?
   - Nature of the enquiry, e.g. sensitively or insensitively asked.
   - Did you feel comfortable being asked by that person?
   - Did you feel it was a good place to be asked about domestic violence?
   - Were you hoping or wanting to be asked?
   - Did anyone else ask you (any other mental health professionals/ GP, etc.)?
   - Did anyone write down what you said? Who was it?
   - Have you ever felt like you couldn’t tell the worker anything? If so why?

(3) (a) Do you think that staff should ask all clients about domestic violence?
   - If not, why not? If yes, why?
   - Do you think they should ask only women? Only men? Or women and men?
   - How do you think staff should ask about domestic violence?
   - Do you think staff should ask people if they have ever been violent?

(4) (a) What has been your own experience of domestic violence? Probe for:
   - By whom?
   - For how long?

(5) If participant has experienced domestic violence ask:
   - Has any health professional ever known that you were experiencing domestic violence? 
     Probe for:
     - How did they find out? What did they say or do?
     - Did they offer help?
     - How did you feel about it?

(6) When you were going through that was there anyone or anything that helped?

(7) If staff know about domestic violence what do you think they should do? 
   Probe for:
   - What would you want the worker to do?

(8) Do you feel mental health professionals have given you adequate choice as to how best to deal with your situation?

(9) Is there anything else you can think of that may help people experiencing domestic violence?

(10) Have you ever come across services for people who are being hurt by domestic violence?
   - If yes, what happened? 
     Probe for:
     - What was helpful/unhelpful? Did you meet with them?

(11) Have you ever been given information about what victims of domestic violence can do or what their rights are?

(12) (a) Have you heard about domestic violence advocates? 
   - If no: explain advocacy
     A domestic violence advocate provides advice, information and support to people to help them manage their situation.
   - (b) What do you think of the idea of domestic violence advocates?
     Do you think you could talk with this type of worker?
     Would you go to a domestic violence advocate for help? Why/ why not?

(13) If such a service was funded, how would you like a domestic violence advocate to work with the community mental health team? 
   - (a) In your mental health team?
   - (b) In an independent agency? (e.g. Women's Aid)
   - (c) In a statutory agency (e.g. police, housing office).
   - (d) In a one-stop shop?
     Probe for:
     - What made you pick that?
     - Which place would be the most comfortable for you?

(14) In order to set up a study to assess whether domestic violence advocacy is helpful for mental health service users we need to have a way of deciding how helpful advocacy has been. What do you think are the most meaningful and important ways of deciding whether or not domestic violence advocacy has been helpful?
Barriers and facilitators of disclosures of domestic violence by mental health service users: qualitative study
Diana Rose, Kylee Trevillion, Anna Woodall, Craig Morgan, Gene Feder and Louise Howard
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