

# Opening Doors to Women with Complex Support Needs

**Karen Ingala Smith**

Eaves

[www.eaves4women.co.uk](http://www.eaves4women.co.uk)

# Eaves

**Our support and accommodation projects are:**

## Eaves Women's Aid

For women and their children fleeing domestic violence

## The POPPY Project

For women who have been trafficked into prostitution, new pilot scheme for women trafficked into domestic servitude/forced labour

## The Amina Project

Peer support scheme for women who have experienced sexual violence

**Our education and research projects are:**

## The Lilith Project

Research, education, campaigning and training to prevent violence against women.

## POPPY Research and Development Team

Research, education, campaigning and training to prevent sex trafficking and assist women exiting prostitution

# Eaves – putting women first

At Eaves, we put the needs of women first. We are determined to give a voice to the most excluded women in society and provide direct, innovative services to help them to help themselves.

Eaves believes that to ensure an enduring commitment to specialist services for women, it is critical that such services are situated in a women's organisation; reflecting this, Eaves remains firmly an organisation run by women, providing services for women and children only.

We are a feminist organisation which is committed to:

- ♀ Challenging inequalities
- ♀ Embracing diversity
- ♀ Enabling people to fulfil their potential
- ♀ Treating people with dignity and respect
- ♀ Promoting innovation

# Domestic Violence in the UK

- Up to 1 in 3 women experience domestic violence in their lifetime
- Between 1 in 8 and 1 in 10 will be experiencing domestic violence at any one time
- One woman is killed every 2-3 days, strangulation is the most common method
- The police receive one phone call per minute for assistance for domestic violence, or 1300 calls per day,
- At least 750,000 children a year experience violence in the home
- Nearly three-quarters of the children on the at risk register live in homes where domestic violence occurs
- Approximately 23,500 children a year live in refuges
- Most reported sexual violence takes place within a domestic violence context, the rapist was an intimate in 54 per cent of self –assessed worst cases of sexual violence suffered since the age of 16, (being a husband or partner in 45 per cent and former husband or partner in 9 per cent).

# Eaves' Perspective on Domestic Violence

**VAW does not exist in neat little boxes**  
and we need to come to a better  
recognition of the links between

- domestic violence
- sexual violence
- forced marriage
- sexual harassment
- FGM
- trafficking
- prostitution
- and other forms of VAW.

# Supporting Women with Complex Needs

## UK

**383 refuges in UKROL database**

Refuges supporting women with mental health problems: 303

Refuges supporting women with drug problems: 293

Refuges supporting women with alcohol problems: 249

Refuges supporting disabled women/children: 286

Wheelchair access: 8

## London

**60 refuges in UKROL database**

Refuges supporting women with mental health problems: 44

Refuges supporting women with drug problems: 38

Refuges supporting women with alcohol problems: 33

Refuges supporting disabled women/children: 41

Wheelchair access: 2

# Chamlong House

- Opened February 2004
  - 24 hour staff on site
  - 24 hour admissions
  - No blanket exclusions
- 127 women supported by August 2008

Why should a domestic  
violence service  
provider bother about  
substance misuse?

# Domestic Violence and Substance Misuse – some links

**Women experiencing domestic violence are up to fifteen times more likely to misuse alcohol and nine times more likely to misuse other drugs than women generally.**

**51% of responding service users from UK domestic violence agencies claimed that either they or their partners had used drugs, alcohol or prescribed medication in a way they considered problematic in the last 5 years**

**30% of women respondents in a study of inner London drugs/alcohol agencies reported physical violence from their current partner.**

**60% of women respondents in a study of US drugs/alcohol agencies reported physical violence from their current partner.**

**A US study showed that abused women are 15 times more likely to use alcohol and 9 times more likely to use drugs than non-abused women**

# Domestic Violence and Substance Misuse – some links

Starting to use

Seeking treatment

Minimising domestic violence

Ending relationships and stopping  
substance use

***Women with problematic substance use who experience domestic violence deserve and need support from domestic violence services as much as, or perhaps more than, any other woman.***

# London Borough of Southwark's Identification of Need:

- Betsy Stanko's research 1999
- The Housing Strategy Consultation 2004,
  - Supporting People Shadow Strategy
- Safer Southwark Partnership's Crime and Drugs Audit 2003/4

# Key points when working with women who are drug and alcohol users

- Non-judgemental
- Get rid of your assumptions
  - Openness
- Needs assessment
- Clear boundaries
  - Client led
- Realistic goals
- Multi-agency links
  - Staffing levels
- Health and Safety

# Why not have a zero tolerance approach to substance misuse?

- Referrals
  - Safety of women and children
- Relationship been project and service user
  - One change at a time
    - Equality

# Substance Misuse Policy

## Key Points

- Drugs and/or alcohol
  - Harm minimisation
  - Legal framework
- Duty to provide a safe environment for all
- Responding to inappropriate behaviour
  - Language and Terminology

# Minimum Standards

- Training
- Needs assessment/screening
  - Access to information
  - Links with specialist services
- Addressing links and consequences
  - Policy
  - Monitoring

# Diversity Issues

Possible impact of race, culture, sexuality, age, disability and class on domestic violence and substance misuse:

- ♀ Language and cultural barriers
- ♀ Needs
- ♀ Additional vulnerabilities
- ♀ Ability to access services
- ♀ Identity

# What we would like to do differently

- Services for children
  - Local connection
- Broaden range of activities
- Resources for follow-up work
- A service for women escaping gender based violence, not only domestic violence

# Lessons we've learned along the way

- Staffing
- Specialist Worker?
  - Length of stay
- Developing links
  - We can do it!

# References and further reading

- Domestic violence and substance use: overlapping issues in separate services, Greater London Authority 2005
- Struggle to survive: Challenges for delivering services on mental health, substance misuse and domestic violence; Jackie Barron, 2004
- Domestic Violence, drugs and alcohol good practice guidelines (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), The Stella Project, 2007