INVISIBLE BATTLES

STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT FOR THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND STALKING

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AURORA
NEW DAWN

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we extend our deepest gratitude to all survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking within the Armed Forces community who bravely shared their experiences. Their voices and resilience are powerful and extraordinary. This work is dedicated to them, in the hope that in their honour it contributes to meaningful change.

A special thank you to Emily and Beth (not their real names) for courageously adding their voices to this research. Your willingness to share your stories, despite the pain and injustice you have endured, is both humbling and inspiring. Your insights have been invaluable in shedding light on the systemic barriers that survivors face, and we are truly grateful for your trust.

To the advocates, frontline professionals, and researchers who work tirelessly to support survivors and challenge the systems that fail them—thank you. Your dedication, compassion, and relentless pursuit of justice are vital in breaking the cycle of abuse and ensuring that no survivor is left unheard or unsupported.

We also acknowledge those within the Armed Forces - both serving personnel and veterans - who are working to challenge the culture of silence, improve safeguarding measures, and advocate for change. Your commitment to accountability and survivor-centered support is essential in dismantling systemic failures and fostering a military environment where abuse is neither ignored nor tolerated.

Finally, to all those fighting for justice and better protections for survivors within the Armed Forces - we stand with you. It is our hope that this research serves as a step toward lasting change, where no survivor is left without the support they deserve.

MESSAGE FROM CEO

My thanks to Laura Robinson for the detailed and compassionate way in which she approached this research. Her dedication and expert knowledge has been instrumental in shaping the learning needed to respond to victim/survivors in the Armed Forces community.

I echo and extend the thanks to the frontline team at Aurora whose work is both innovative and lifesaving. In addition, I extend my personal thanks to our funders at the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust for enabling us to undertake this vital work.

Most importantly I join Laura in thanking all victim/survivors who contributed to this research and extend that thanks to all who use our services at Aurora. We are privileged that you trust us and promise to ensure you remain our central priority in everything we do.

Dr Shonagh Dillon, CEO, Aurora New Dawn

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the experiences of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking within the UK Armed Forces community and evaluates the role of specialist Armed Forces Advocacy (AFA) in addressing these issues. Drawing on service data, practitioner insights, and the voices of survivors, the findings highlight systemic barriers to safety and justice, alongside opportunities for strengthening support across military and civilian services.

Despite increasing public awareness, domestic abuse and sexual violence remain underreported and inadequately addressed within the Armed Forces. Survivors face unique barriers rooted in military culture, including hierarchical structures, fear of professional repercussions, institutional loyalty to perpetrators, and challenges associated with frequent relocations. The report reflects consistent themes: a culture of silence, widespread victim-blaming, and insufficient or harmful responses from both military and civilian systems.

Aurora New Dawn, the only UK-based service providing Armed Forces-specific advocacy for domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking, has become a lifeline for many. Its Armed Forces Advocates (AFAs), a specialist role developed uniquely by Aurora, offer trauma-informed, independent, and confidential support tailored to the complexities of military life. This bespoke model ensures that survivors receive advocacy that is both culturally competent and responsive to the distinct needs of the Armed Forces community. Survivors overwhelmingly credit the service with helping them feel safe, heard, and empowered—often for the first time.

Survivor testimonies illustrate profound harm caused by inconsistent support. Many recounted being ignored by military welfare services or experiencing retaliation after reporting abuse. Others described their disclosures being widely shared, leading to further isolation.

Access to justice was often obstructed by institutional bias, inadequate investigations, or the misuse of power by perpetrators. The lack of specialist sexual violence and stalking advocacy nationally was particularly striking, with no comparable services identified beyond Aurora.

The findings also reveal a lack of awareness and readiness among civilian Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) services to support Armed Forces clients. Only ten (VAWG) services completed the national survey, and of those, most lacked confidence in navigating military-specific policies, structures, or referral pathways. This absence of knowledge leads to missed opportunities for early intervention and support. To address these gaps, the report proposes seven Guiding Principles for all domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking services supporting the Armed Forces community.

Beth and Emily (not their real names), whose stories are detailed within the report, exemplify both the devastating impacts of systemic failures and the transformative potential of specialist advocacy. Their courage in contributing to this research, alongside the voices of many others, calls for urgent and sustained action.

This report makes clear that the Armed Forces community cannot be an afterthought in the national response to domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking. With the right frameworks, training, and commitment to collaboration, services can better protect those who serve—and those connected to them—from abuse and ensure that no survivor is left to fight an invisible battle alone.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that the Armed Forces community faces distinct and heightened barriers to disclosing domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking (Tapley, 2020). However, there is a significant gap in data on the prevalence of domestic abuse within the UK Armed Forces community, making it difficult to fully understand the scale of the issue and develop tailored support services (Williamson & Price, 2009; Williamson & Matolcsi, 2019; Alves-Costa et al., 2021). While domestic abuse experiences in military and civilian families share some similarities, research highlights that military families face unique challenges. These include the risk of losing military accommodation, difficulties securing civilian housing due to frequent relocations, disruptions to children's education, financial dependence on the serving partner, and complex legal and jurisdictional barriers. The hierarchical and male-dominated structure of the military, along with its emphasis on leadership, control, and aggression in certain roles, may further impact victims by fostering power imbalances that make it more difficult to seek help. Additionally, the close-knit nature of military communities can exacerbate these challenges, particularly for non-UK spouses who may face immigration-related barriers and restricted access to civilian support services (Williamson & Matolcsi, 2019; Alves-Costa et al., 2021). The limited collaboration between military and civilian domestic abuse services further limits available resources, leaving many victims without adequate support.

A recent inquest into the death of Gunner Jaysley Beck has drawn public attention to the deeply embedded culture of unacceptable behaviours, including the silencing of victims of sexual violence and harassment within the Armed Forces (Centre for Military Justice, 2025). These concerns align with findings from the UK Government's 2021 inquiry into Women in the Armed Forces, which revealed widespread bullying, harassment, and criminal behaviours, including sexual assault and rape (UK Parliament, 2021). The inquiry found that female personnel are disproportionately affected by sexual violence within the Armed Forces—findings substantiated by the Ministry of Defence's annual publication on sexual offences dealt with under the Service Justice System (SJS) (Ministry of Defence, 2024).

Testimonies gathered during the inquiry detailed a spectrum of concerning behaviours, ranging from unwanted sexual advances and inappropriate

comments to serious offences such as sexual coercion, assault, and gang rape (UK Parliament, 2021).Several women described experiences of sexual exploitation by senior officers or instructors, while others recounted male colleagues attempting to enter their accommodation at night. Alarmingly, some accounts referenced incidents involving the sexual exploitation of under-18s and so-called ‘trophy’ contests, where men competed to ‘bag’ female personnel. Many women who attempted to report abuse faced retaliation, including bullying, downgraded performance assessments, and overt hostility from colleagues and superiors. The inquiry highlighted a culture of silence, where bystanders—including senior officers—frequently failed to intervene, allowing abusive behaviours to persist unchecked (UK Parliament, 2021).

A recent study examining the barriers and facilitators to ex-servicewomen making a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life in the UK found that ex-servicewomen were more likely to have experienced sexual assault compared to their civilian counterparts. Similarly, the research highlighted that ex-servicewomen were at greater risk of experiencing intimate partner violence than civilian women (Sharp et al., 2025).

This growing body of evidence highlights the urgent need for a more consistent, coordinated, and trauma-informed approach to advocacy and support within the Armed Forces community. Strengthening partnerships between military and civilian services, improving data collection, and embedding clear principles for survivor-centred support are crucial steps in breaking the cycle of silence and ensuring meaningful, lasting change.

Armed Forces Advocacy

Aurora New Dawn (Aurora), a registered charity based in Portsmouth, Hampshire, is the only UK advocacy service providing specialist, tailored support for the Armed Forces community in cases of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking. Unlike most advocacy services, Aurora’s support is not restricted by postcode or geographical boundaries; its services extend globally to wherever the Armed Forces community lives or operates.

Aurora pioneered the Armed Forces Advocate (AFA) model, a unique and specialist advocacy role developed specifically to address the complex realities of military life. AFAs provide advocacy for serving personnel in the Royal Navy (RN), Army, and Royal Air Force (RAF), including full-time

personnel, reservists, and their spouses, partners, and ex-partners—specifically when the alleged perpetrator is a serving member of the Armed Forces. Beyond direct victim support, Aurora offers case guidance to professionals working within the Armed Forces and delivers specialised training, including military-specific stalking awareness programmes.

Recognising that many victims fear repercussions for speaking out, Aurora ensures its services remain confidential, independent, and trauma-informed. A service evaluation highlights that partnerships between Aurora and military welfare services significantly improve outcomes for personnel and their families (Tapley, 2020).

While a small number of domestic abuse advocacy services in the UK tailor their approach to the Armed Forces community at a local level, none have been identified as offering bespoke advocacy support for sexual violence or stalking cases, nor replicating the scale, reach, or specialism of the AFA model developed by Aurora.

Purpose of This Report

This research report examines the quality and impact of Aurora's services for the Armed Forces community, identifying key strengths and unique challenges compared to advocacy for the general population. It also assesses the availability of comparable support across the UK and outlines guiding principles for all domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking services to ensure consistent and effective advocacy for the Armed Forces community nationwide.

This research report delivers the following outcomes:

- Recommendations for Aurora New Dawn to contribute to improving advocacy and support for the Armed Forces community nationwide.

- Guiding Principles for all domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking services to enhance advocacy and support for the Armed Forces community.

METHODS

This research was conducted by Laura Robinson, an Independent Consultant and Researcher. Laura is a Royal Navy veteran with extensive operational and strategic experience in domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking. She previously served as a Royal Navy Police Officer and as Strategic Lead for Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment. She holds a Master of Arts in Understanding Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of advocacy provision for the Armed Forces community.

A literature review was undertaken to provide context and background on domestic abuse and sexual violence within the UK Armed Forces.

Aurora New Dawn (Aurora) provided 97 anonymous client evaluation forms, completed between 2017 and 2024. The evaluation results were transferred to a spreadsheet, with quantitative data calculated and qualitative responses into sub-themes. These findings identified key themes and trends that informed the next stages of the research.

A focus group with four Aurora Armed Forces Advocates (AFAs) and a one-to-one interview with an additional AFA explored these emerging themes further.

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence support services across the UK were invited to participate in a survey, which was circulated via Aurora New Dawn's professional networks, with an open invitation to participate, regardless of whether services had prior experience working with the Armed Forces community. This included dissemination through the Women's Aid Federation network, which comprises over 180 member organisations. Despite this broad circulation, only ten services responded to the survey. This limited uptake evidences the relatively small number of services currently engaging with or recognising the distinct needs of Armed Forces victims and survivors.

Four of these services participated in follow-up, semi-structured one-to-one interviews to explore the themes in more depth. Seven additional semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals from within the

Ministry of Defence (MOD) and survivors from the Armed Forces community.

A separate survey targeted survivors directly and was disseminated through Armed Forces and community networks to ensure broad participation, including from individuals who had not used Aurora's services. This approach aimed to capture diverse perspectives and experiences from across the Armed Forces community. The survey yielded 33 responses and captured both quantitative and qualitative data. These results are summarised in the appendices.

Two survivors agreed to share their experiences as case studies. Their stories are included with full, informed consent. To protect their identities, pseudonyms have been used, and some details have been deliberately omitted to ensure confidentiality. Both participants were civilian partners of serving personnel. No uniformed survivors of sexual violence were identified for case study participation, which may reflect wider institutional and cultural barriers, such as mistrust in internal systems and fear of professional repercussions, which discourage serving personnel from disclosing abuse.

Due to the sensitive nature of the client data, identifying details have been excluded throughout the report. All quotes used have been anonymised. Participation in the research was voluntary, and all participants were briefed on the study's purpose and provided informed consent.

Ethical Considerations

The research involved survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking from the Armed Forces community, as well as frontline practitioners. All participants received detailed information about the research, their right to withdraw, and how their data would be handled confidentially and securely.

A trauma-informed approach guided all engagement with survivors and professionals. Language was carefully selected to minimise distress, and participants were not asked to recount traumatic events unless they chose to do so. Those who did share lived experiences did so voluntarily, with full understanding of how their accounts would be used.

All case study participants reviewed and approved their stories prior to

publication, and all data was handled in accordance with best practice for safeguarding vulnerable populations.

As the research was commissioned by a voluntary sector organisation, a formal ethics review was not required. However, the project followed best practice ethical guidance.

BACKGROUND

Aurora New Dawn (Aurora) is an independent charity based in Portsmouth, Hampshire, who provides safety, support, advocacy, and empowerment to survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking.

In 2017, Aurora secured initial funding from the Royal British Legion to explore the low number of referrals from military personnel, despite the significant Armed Forces presence in the local area. Increased engagement and referrals during this one-year pilot led to further investment from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT), which funded the service between 2018 and 2021. Since then, the service has grown substantially. Ongoing support for the organisation's work with British Army personnel has been provided by the Army Central Fund (ACF), while the Royal Navy began funding the service in 2023. From spring 2025, support will once again be extended to RAF personnel and their families through renewed AFCFT funding.

In addition to the provision of one to one support, Aurora offers group work recovery programmes specifically for victims and survivors from the Armed Forces community. In March 2025, the organisation launched the first tri-service Armed Forces helpline for victims and survivors based across the UK and overseas.

The AFA service receives a high proportion of self-referrals and sustained engagement from victims, highlighting the demand for independent, military-specific advocacy. Many victims, particularly women, prefer support outside the military due to fears of stigma, career repercussions, and lack of trust in the chain of command.

Influencing policy and systemic change

Beyond individual advocacy, Aurora has influenced military policy and institutional responses to abuse. One notable achievement was exposing the misuse of character references in criminal proceedings. In one case, a senior-ranking officer provided a positive reference for a stalking perpetrator in an official capacity, which raised serious concerns about the influence of military status on judicial outcomes. Aurora's intervention led to the Army revising its policy on character references. However, the issue persists due to limited

awareness, and similar references continue to be used in family courts, where perpetrators seek access to children. Aurora remains actively engaged with the MOD to strengthen policies and training in this area. Research by Alves-Costa et al. (2021) supports these concerns, highlighting how public regard for the military can contribute to the mitigation of offences involving violence and abuse. Their study found that military service is often considered a factor in reducing sentences, resulting in comparatively light punishments for (ex)partners who have committed domestic abuse or related offences.

Aurora has also advocated for policy changes regarding housing support for victims of domestic abuse. One of the key issues is the return of alleged perpetrators to Service Family Accommodation (SFA) during the mandated 93-day notice period. Under current MOD policy, a service person who leaves SFA is entitled to 93 days' notice before vacating the property. However, in cases of domestic abuse, this means that perpetrators can continue residing in the family home for up to three months, causing significant distress to victims and dependents. Aurora encourages the use of the Commanding Officer's 28-day order, which allows for short-term removal of the perpetrator while longer-term protective measures are pursued. However, inconsistent enforcement and a lack of awareness among victims and professionals leave many without timely protection.

Aurora has also identified how perpetrators exploit a lack of understanding of military structures within the Criminal Justice System. In one case, a judge with military experience dismissed a false defence argument that could have influenced the jury. In another case at Crown Court, a victim had to explain military terminology, rank structures, and processes while giving evidence, extending her testimony by over two hours. These cases demonstrate the critical need for specialist advocacy to support victims through legal proceedings.

Barriers for female personnel

Aurora highlights that many women feel pressured to leave their military careers after experiencing men's violence—not only due to the trauma of the abuse itself but also because of how their complaints are mishandled. Victims frequently report being overlooked for promotion opportunities, while alleged perpetrators continue to progress, even when under investigation. In some cases, victims have been removed from career-advancing courses,

while perpetrators have been prioritised under the justification of safeguarding their mental health. Research conducted by Gray, Lester, and Norton (2023) examined servicewomen's experiences of sexual assault and its aftermath within the UK Armed Forces. The study found that sexual violence is frequently misunderstood and minimised, with bullying of victim-survivors described as pervasive. Notably, participants reported that hostility towards survivors was perpetuated not only by servicemen but also by servicewomen. The authors further highlighted how the prioritisation of institutional reputation and operational needs over the welfare and rights of individuals has caused additional harm. Responses from both the wider military community and formal institutional processes were described as inadequate and, in many cases, actively exacerbating the trauma experienced by survivors.

Aurora also observes that inadequate support often leads to mental health downgrades, leaving victims further disadvantaged in their military careers. Aurora's data highlights a concerning trend of female personnel experiencing suicidal ideation following abuse, particularly when the perpetrator is a superior. These issues are compounded by a broader culture in which disclosures of abuse are frequently minimised, disbelieved, or inappropriately shared within the military community, exacerbating feelings of isolation and shame. Findings from Sharp et al. (2025) reinforce these concerns, reporting that servicewomen who disclosed sexual harassment or assault often faced punishment, were disbelieved, or found their reports ignored. Many felt that the Armed Forces protected perpetrators over survivors, contributing to premature exits from service, often without adequate preparation. The report also identified a lack of health and support services specifically tailored to those who experienced sexual trauma, both during and after service. As a result, the psychological toll of mistreatment frequently extended into civilian life, with long-term impacts on survivors' mental health and wellbeing.

Even in cases where perpetrators are convicted, some women returning to their units have reported being shunned, spat on, or mistreated by colleagues. These collective experiences highlight the deeply embedded institutional barriers facing female personnel and underline the urgent need for trauma-informed, survivor-centred care within both military and civilian systems.

Strengthening advocacy and support

Despite the challenges faced by victims within the Armed Forces community, there is a significant opportunity to turn the tide by strengthening advocacy and ensuring a more consistent, unified approach. *Invisible battle*s are fought not only by those experiencing abuse but also by the services working tirelessly to support them. By embedding overarching principles that define best practice, we can enhance support, improve collaboration between civilian and military systems, and drive meaningful policy change. Aurora's work has already demonstrated the power of targeted advocacy in improving survivor outcomes and influencing systemic reform. By building on this progress, services can ensure that no one fights these invisible battles alone —every victim deserves to be seen, heard, and supported.

Despite the challenges faced by victims within the Armed Forces Community, there is a significant opportunity to turn the tide by strengthening advocacy and ensuring a more consistent, unified approach.

FINDINGS

The data from Aurora New Dawn's (Aurora) client evaluation forms highlights the profound impact of Aurora's Armed Forces Advocates (AFA) in addressing domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking within the Armed Forces community. This specialised support provides tailored solutions to the unique challenges of military life, offering life-changing assistance that extends beyond immediate safety to foster long-term recovery and wellbeing. Many clients credit their advocates with preventing critical outcomes such as homelessness, mental health crises, and continued abuse. These findings highlight the vital role of AFAs in empowering survivors and bridging significant gaps in existing military support systems. A number of key themes were identified, which informed subsequent stages of the research and were updated as the study progressed.

The completion rate for the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence support services survey was low, with only ten services completing the survey and just four participating in follow-up discussions. The survey was disseminated through Aurora New Dawn's professional networks and the national Women's Aid network, reaching a wide cross-section of specialist domestic and sexual violence services. This limited engagement not only highlights a lack of bespoke Armed Forces-related provision but also suggests that many services may not view this as an area relevant to their practice, further reinforcing the invisibility of the Armed Forces community within the wider VAWG sector. Among the services that did participate in follow-up discussions, most were domestic abuse organisations operating in areas with a significant military presence. These services demonstrated strong examples of effective engagement with the Armed Forces community and offered valuable insights into key themes and emerging best practices, illustrating what is possible when the specific needs of this community are recognised and addressed.

Other than Aurora, no other sexual violence or stalking services participated in the research, suggesting that many organisations may lack the tailored provision or recognition of the specific needs of Armed Forces survivors of sexual violence and stalking. This highlights the need for greater awareness, improved outreach, and expanded specialist support to ensure survivors within the military community can access the care they need. The lack of engagement from sexual violence and stalking services also raises concerns that many

Armed Forces survivors may struggle to find appropriate and informed care, reinforcing the barriers they face in accessing support.

Survivors from the Armed Forces community were also invited to participate in a survey. A total of 33 individuals responded, providing both quantitative and qualitative data. The results are presented in Appendix 2.

Seven key themes emerged from the research;

1. Understanding military culture and tailored support

Aurora's Armed Forces Advocates (AFAs) possess a deep understanding of military life, including rank structures, the chain of command, and the unique stressors of service. This familiarity ensures clients do not need to expend emotional energy explaining their circumstances. Many clients valued having an advocate outside the chain of command, appreciating the confidentiality and impartiality of an independent service.

"Because you work with the Armed Forces, it's not like talking to a normal civilian, as things in the Armed Forces are done differently and you can support us and make the service tailored to us."

Findings indicate that while a military background is not essential for advocates, knowledge of policies and Armed Forces culture enhances service delivery. Some survivors expressed the importance of specialist knowledge:

"I didn't need to explain anything about the Navy, which was good. The advocate just understood the hardships of military life and knew who to put me in touch with for ongoing support."

"[The advocate] had more experience of the military police and internal investigation process therefore could help me through these, making me feel less alone. If this had been a general service, I would have felt a lot more alone and less supported."

To ensure that advocacy services are truly accessible and effective for the Armed Forces community, AFAs bridge a crucial gap by providing informed, relevant, and trauma-sensitive support. Unlike general advocacy services, AFAs are equipped to handle the unique challenges of military life. This includes navigating Service Families Accommodation (SFA) policies,

managing risks related to perpetrators' access to military bases, and addressing deployment-related stressors. One survivor explained how their AFA's knowledge was invaluable:

"Having someone there who understood my working pattern, deployments, uniform issues, housing issues, base pass issues (of the perpetrator having access to my accommodation) took away the extra layer of complexity with going through all of this whilst serving. If I had been paired with someone who was not a military advocate, there would likely have been a lack of understanding of my specific risks."

"[The advocate] was able to advise on what to do about staying in my SFA [Service Families Accommodation'] housing etc. I wouldn't have got that advice from anyone else."

However, many services outside of Aurora lack confidence in their ability to support military personnel and their families. Of the 10 services that participated in this research, four reported a lack of understanding of military-specific housing and welfare policies, while half lacked confidence in navigating reporting mechanisms, including the role of the Service Police. Trust in civilian services remains low due to these knowledge gaps. In the service user surveys, the second most important factor (out of 10) when choosing a service was staff understanding of military life. One survivor summed this up:

"This service is critical. The advocate can understand the specifics and how to help ... she knows my situation in the military and how this can affect everything."

AFAs frequently engage with Armed Forces policies and liaise with key military organisations, ensuring victims receive accurate information and access to the right support. Clients reinforced the importance of this expertise:

"It was incredibly helpful to receive tailored guidance and suggestions from someone who understands MoD [Ministry of Defence] policy."

For some victims, military life presents additional complexities beyond policies and procedures. One survivor explained that she was from Northern Ireland and due to political sensitivities and security risks, had never

disclosed her partner's military status to her family. This left her further isolated and created additional barriers to seeking help.

The research found that specialist advocacy is vital in bridging the gap between military and civilian systems. One survivor described how their AFA's expertise helped them access support they wouldn't have otherwise known about:

"[The advocate] knew all the ins and outs that someone outside of the forces wouldn't have understood. She was able to open doors that I didn't even know were available to me. She had the knowledge to guide me."

By ensuring advocacy services are tailored to the realities of military life, AFAs provide a crucial link between victims and the support they need. Without this specialist knowledge, victims face increased barriers to accessing safety, justice, and long-term recovery.

2. Effective liaison with military personnel

AFAs play a critical role in bridging the gap between victims and military authorities, confidently engaging with service police, senior officers, welfare services, and support networks. Their ability to navigate both military and civilian systems ensures that clients' voices are heard, and their safety prioritised. Many clients described this advocacy as instrumental in securing effective interventions;

"*[The advocate] had the military background and the confidence to deal with senior officers—she wasn't in awe or afraid of them, which made all the difference."*

"The fact that immediately the advocate called the military police and got them involved before anything further escalated was so useful. As I had contacted the civilian police who has said they couldn't help in stopping him from coming to the house as it was military housing."

Another survivor explained how having an advocate who understood the chain of command gave them reassurance:

"Because the job I'm in, it's quite hard. I couldn't just go to my chain of command and tell them how I was feeling... [the advocate] being linked with the Armed Forces meant I had her in my corner—she would speak to welfare, who would then go to my chain of command."

AFAs have actively engaged with key military forums and working groups, primarily in the South of England due to geographical constraints. These forums enable effective relationship building with organisations such as welfare services, Service Police, Armed Forces charities, and military mental health professionals. However, inconsistencies in engagement across the UK result in a patchwork of experiences for victims and inconsistent advice.

One service that participated in the research described the benefits of embedding an Inclusion Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) who was also a military spouse. Over 18 months, she built a trusted relationship with a local Garrison, delivered training to welfare officers, set up drop-in sessions at baby and toddler groups, and provided direct support to a small caseload of women. As a result, referrals to the service significantly increased over the past 12 months.

In the service user surveys, many respondents expressed a strong need for services to actively engage with military communities while maintaining their independence. Improved collaboration between military and civilian services was frequently highlighted as essential for ensuring continuity of care.

One survivor summarised the value of this joint working:

"Having a specialist Armed Forces advocate was particularly beneficial in my case, as she was able to appropriately manage my safety and liaise with military personnel who had no prior knowledge or qualifications to deal with DV/SV cases. She effectively utilised her gained military knowledge of rules and regulations and her advocacy to manage the contact. [……]. I truly believe if I had a non-specialist involved in my case at this time I would have been medically discharged. [The advocate] assisted me by advocating with personnel when I was unheard, she put in place an effective safety plan and ensured I knew correct protocols if anything was to happen."

3. Empowerment and emotional support

Clients repeatedly emphasised the psychological empowerment gained from working with an AFA. The advocates' understanding, compassionate approach, and ability to navigate complex military structures helped clients rebuild confidence, regain control over their lives, and believe in themselves again. Many survivors described the service as life-changing, giving them the strength to leave abusive relationships, pursue justice, or begin their recovery journey.

One survivor highlighted the emotional impact of the support:

"It took a long time for me to come to terms with the reality of my situation. The fact that I was believed made a huge difference from the start, [the advocate]'s presence and patience as I struggled to find acceptance made it possible for me to move forward."

Another survivor reinforced the importance of having a dedicated advocate:

"Having a designated person to talk to and confide in was what helped me the most. Having the same person with whom I could build a relationship and trust proved invaluable. I felt I was taken seriously and really listened to."

AFAs noted that individuals in lower ranks can sometimes experience diminished self-esteem, a dynamic unique to the Armed Forces community. In some cases, clients reported being questioned by superiors about whether they were certain they wanted to make a complaint. This underscores the challenges of providing advocacy within the hierarchical structure of the military and reinforces the need for specialist support that understands these power imbalances.

AFAs' knowledge of the Armed Forces allows them to offer tailored support and insights, such as referrals to recovery programmes and groups, pastoral support, and community-based initiatives like coffee mornings and parent-and-baby groups. One survivor who attended such programmes explained:

"Getting referred to the Warrior Programme brought about a massive change in me and gave me the drive I needed to recover and get back to work fully."

Clients also highlighted the importance of flexible and long-term support, particularly for those facing the complexities of military life. Remote support was a critical factor, especially for military personnel who are often separated on duty or deployed overseas. One survivor described how invaluable it was to have consistent support:

"Even like a call every two weeks... If something happened, I knew I could always message her, and she would get back to me."

Another reflected on the ability to receive support at their own pace:

> *Remote support was a critical factor, especially for military personnel who are often separated on duty or deployed overseas*

"The support I received was amazing, and it was the only support offered to me. The long-term support was essential... the flexible contact, whether once a month or more often, depending on what I needed."

AFA support also helped clients understand and validate their experiences, removing the self-doubt that abuse had instilled. One client stated:

"Talking to [the advocate] initially and realising that I'm not crazy for feeling how I feel, and that someone just understood and had my back. Honestly, coming off that call, I felt instantly better."

AFAs also provide a critical alternative to military support, ensuring victims feel safe from potential breaches of confidentiality. One survivor explained:

"That it was delivered by a unit outside the military, and I had complete faith that the information I was giving wasn't going to be leaked. It was so very useful to speak to someone who specialised and could use their previous experiences to guide and explain the whole process to me."

4. Trust through shared experience

AFAs demonstrate genuine care for supporting the Armed Forces community and understand the unique bond and importance of finding common ground with clients. While it is not essential for advocates to have a personal or professional connection to the military, the team effectively leverages the strengths and knowledge within its members to provide tailored and empathetic support. Some survivors reflected on the importance of this understanding:

"The Armed Forces is a community which is very different from normal society and I have no doubt that I would not have felt confident enough to trust an advocate without any specific experience of the Forces community."

One of the services that participated in the research explained that their specialist Inclusion IDVA is a military spouse and that her lived experience has been instrumental in building effective relationships within the military community. Similarly, survivors reported feeling more comfortable speaking to someone with military awareness:

"A lot of people don't understand what it's like to be a military wife, so having a specialist advocate who knows what it's like was brilliant. It made me so much more comfortable talking to someone who understands."

Many survivors highlighted that the ability to talk to someone who truly understands the military environment made a substantial difference in their recovery:

"When I was introduced to Aurora, I didn't have to explain my situation and then put it into the context of the Army. The nuances, rank structure, and minutiae of how the Army operates were already understood. I do not believe you can put a price on how important that is when it comes to both the initial conversations and ongoing support."

By integrating lived experience with professional advocacy, AFAs bridge the gap between isolated victims and essential support, ensuring that those affected by domestic abuse in the Armed Forces feel heard, understood, and empowered.

5. Support through Civilian and Service Justice Systems

AFAs provide vital support during legal proceedings, including both civilian courts and courts martials. Their deep understanding of the service justice system ensures clients are well prepared and supported throughout what is often a distressing, complex and isolating experience. Many survivors expressed immense gratitude for the emotional and practical support AFAs provided, particularly during court martial appearances.

"[The advocate] gave advice around Court Martial and it was good to speak to someone who understands the Armed Forces."

Court martials differ significantly from civilian trials. All serving personnel, including victims, are typically required to wear uniform unless specifically exempted. For many, the formality and unfamiliarity of the court martial

process can be retraumatising. Survivors described the setting as impersonal and intimidating, noting how the presence of an advocate offered emotional safety and stability.

Court martial processes are supported by Red Scientific, a service contracted to provide practical assistance akin to civilian witness care. While Red Scientific offers on-the-day emotional support, it is not an advocacy service and does not provide case continuity or pre-trial engagement. Victims typically meet Red Scientific staff for the first time on the day of their hearing, and the service does not offer in-depth guidance on the judicial process or liaise on the survivor's behalf with other agencies.

Despite the clear need for support, there are significant barriers to advocacy at court martials. Services that participated in the research often lack the funding and resources to attend hearings outside their geographical area, meaning that many victims must face the court martial process alone. Court martials are centralised at Bulford and Catterick, making it particularly difficult for victims based elsewhere to access specialist support. While some services stated they would support clients at court martial if required, many acknowledged they lacked the confidence and expertise to navigate the service justice system. Others cited geographical constraints as a reason they were unable to offer in-person court support.

For many victims, an advocate's presence at court is a critical source of emotional and practical support. Survivors repeatedly described how their advocate provided reassurance and guidance throughout the legal process. One survivor explained:

"[The advocate] was a never-ending source of information. Not only did she walk me through what to expect at the trial, she knew everything regarding how the Court Martial would go, what I could expect, she liaised with my Chain of Command and helped them better understand what I was going through."

Another survivor described how, after a traumatic first day in court, their advocate's support enabled them to return and give their best evidence:

“Attending court with me over the two days, even though she originally was only supposed to be there for the first day, made all the difference. I had a terrible experience on day one and would not have been able to turn it around, go back in, and give my best evidence on day two if it was not for [the advocate].”

For many, an advocate’s presence provided a critical buffer against the pressures of the legal process:

"Knowing [the advocate] was sat behind me listening to the case gave me the calm I needed to answer the questions at my own pace and not be bullied by the defence lawyer. If it was just me in the box, I would have felt like all eyes were on me (which in reality they probably were), but at least with [the advocate] there, I felt like the draining atmosphere of the courtroom was shared, and the weight of it all was halved."

The absence of advocacy at court martials leaves victims navigating a complex and often overwhelming process alone. The service justice system was described as isolating and intimidating, but having an advocate by their side gave victims confidence and reassurance. Survivors repeatedly expressed how much it meant to have someone there who understood the justice system and the emotional toll of seeking justice.

“The absence of advocacy at court martials leaves victims navigating a complex and often overwhelming process alone...Survivors repeatedly expressed how much it meant to have someone there who understood the justice system and the emotional toll of seeking justice.”

6. Data recording and monitoring

Accurate data collection is essential for understanding the scale of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking within the Armed Forces community. However, the lack of comprehensive data continues to hinder progress, making it difficult to develop targeted support services, allocate resources effectively, and push for necessary policy changes.

Among the 10 services that participated in the research, six reported that referrals from the Armed Forces community made up less than 5% of their caseload. Three services did not record whether a client had a military connection, and one service was unsure. This inconsistency in data collection means that the true demand for support remains unclear, limiting the ability to evidence the need and advocate for change.

The lack of available data reflects the broader issue of silence and inaction around domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking in the Armed Forces. One survivor highlighted how the absence of comprehensive data contributes to the perception that abuse within the Armed Forces community is not a priority:

"The military will brush it off as not a problem. It's good to have someone to assess it and say it is a problem and to help address it."

The failure to systematically record Armed Forces related cases also has significant implications for funding and service provision. Without accurate data, it is challenging to justify investment in Armed Forces specific support services. This results in a cycle where services remain underfunded, awareness remains low, and victims continue to fall through the cracks.

7. The role of female advocates

For many survivors, the sex of their advocate played a significant role in their ability to engage with support services. A strong preference for female advocates was consistently expressed, particularly in cases where the perpetrator was male. Many survivors described feeling safer, more understood, and more comfortable opening up to a female advocate, reinforcing the importance of gender-sensitive support.

“I would not have felt comfortable talking to a man about everything I discussed with [the advocate].”

“Due to the nature of the crime committed I would not have opened up emotionally to a straight male at the time. It took me a long time to trust men again and I would not have wanted to speak to one about it.”

Survivors frequently highlighted that women are more likely to understand their emotions and experiences, fostering a sense of trust and empathy that might be more difficult to establish with a male advocate. Some expressed that speaking to a female felt like confiding in a friend, mother figure, or role model, reinforcing the psychological and emotional safety that advocacy services provide.

“Female staff to me was the best I could ever have because she was there for me like a mum.”

“It was critical for me to have a strong, brave female advocate and role model like [the advocate] on my side as I had never been championed by the women in my family.”

However, a minority of survivors expressed that while they personally felt comfortable speaking with a female advocate, the sex of the advocate was not a decisive factor for them. Instead, they emphasised that professionalism, knowledge, and empathy were what mattered most. None of the survivors stated a preference for a male advocate for themselves, but some acknowledged that the inclusion of male advocates could be beneficial for other survivors, particularly male victims, or to offer broader perspectives within support services.

“For me, it’s about the person, not the gender. I am ambivalent to the gender; I just want the most appropriate person in terms of training, experience, etc.”

“I’m indifferent to gender and think that either would have been fine. I had no issues speaking to a female, but more men working in this field would probably benefit others.”

While sex-based preference is inherently individual, the overwhelming response from survivors in this research indicates a strong preference for female advocates when the abuse has been perpetrated by a man. No

participants expressed a personal preference for a male advocate, and all reported feeling safe and supported with female practitioners. Whilst recognising the value of routinely asking victim-survivors about their preferences regarding the sex of their advocate, the findings suggest that Aurora's current approach meets the needs of those accessing the service. Should trends in self-reporting shift in future, service models can be adapted accordingly.

CASE STUDY

EMILY

Emily's account is included with her explicit consent. She has read, reviewed, and approved the contents of the case study to ensure its accuracy and to mitigate any potential risks associated with sharing her story. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of those involved, and certain details have been deliberately omitted or altered to preserve confidentiality and reduce the risk of future harm

Emily is an Armed Forces veteran who left service to raise her children as a single mother. When her children were teenagers, she met Mark (not his real name) through an online dating app at the encouragement of a friend. Mark was serving in the Armed Forces, and from the beginning of their relationship, there were warning signs of controlling behaviour. However, Emily dismissed these concerns, believing she was overthinking things. Mark reinforced this doubt by making her feel that his behaviour was her fault, leading her to question herself and believe she was being unreasonable. This pattern of manipulation worsened as the relationship progressed.

Just two weeks into their relationship, Mark entered Emily's home uninvited and introduced himself to her teenage children, something she had neither planned nor discussed. He portrayed himself as vulnerable, telling Emily that he was estranged from his family, lonely, and had previously attempted suicide. Feeling a sense of responsibility, Emily stayed in the relationship.

After three months, Mark moved in with Emily and her children. Life quickly began to revolve around his wants and needs. Despite earning nearly double Emily's salary, he refused to contribute to household expenses. Emily was left to over all bills, groceries, and even his personal spending on clothing and football tickets. This financial abuse persisted throughout their relationship.

Mark was also emotionally abusive, frequently criticising Emily's children despite their academic and extracurricular achievements. His behaviour escalated to physical violence when he assaulted her eldest child, causing them to leave home. From that point on, Emily had to communicate with her child in secret. Mark then worked to alienate her youngest child, eventually driving them to move in with their father. Within two years of meeting Mark, both of Emily's children had left the home.

When Emily confronted Mark about his financial control, he proposed moving into military housing, which would be deducted from his salary. However, his request was denied as they were not married. To circumvent this, he pressured Emily into a civil partnership. She reluctantly agreed, and they completed the legal process in a brief registry office appointment.

Once they moved into military housing, Mark's control worsened. He insisted that Emily pay for all household bills, though he ensured they remained in his name. Additionally, she was forced to cover all furniture, white goods, his and his children's medical expenses, fuel for his visits to them, all their food costs, part of his legal fees when his children's mother took him to court, mediation costs with his ex-partner, and car expenses, including insurance, tax, MOTs, and repairs for both family cars, which he kept in his name. If Emily refused to pay, she was not allowed to use the cars. On one occasion, he forced her to beg in front of her child for permission to use a car to get to work and for her child to attend college. After she did so, he laughed, mocking her, "Look at the state of you, begging in front of your child".

By this point, Emily knew she was being abused but felt powerless. Isolated in military housing, away from her friends, support networks, and work, she had no choice but to comply. Mark controlled every aspect of her life, dictating how she spent money, who she could see, and even if she could attend football matches with a ticket she had paid for. He monitored her spending on her own children, calling it "wasting money," and when she protested, he forced her to write down every expense. He then manipulated the numbers, removing essential costs like

food and fuel (which exceeded £1,000 per month), to make it appear as though she wasn't paying as much as she actually was

Mark's physical control over Emily escalated. She had to ensure the kettle was always filled in case he wanted a brew; if it wasn't, he would become aggressive. He also controlled her physically, demanding she sleep naked and would pin her head against the steering wheel while she was driving.

Emily repeatedly confronted him about his abuse, but doing so only made it worse. He no longer hid his behaviour; instead, he laughed at her distress, knowing she had no escape.

At one point, Mark attempted to force Emily to have sex. When she resisted, pushing his hands away and telling him "no", he pinned her arms down and dismissed her protests, "Stop being stupid". With her daughter asleep in the next room, Emily lay still, staring at the white bedroom wall, crying, as he raped her.

Though Mark eventually moved into the barracks, he continued to exert control over Emily, returning to the home whenever he pleased, forcing her to live with him on his terms.

Emily sought help from the police and military police, but their response was inadequate. When she approached an Armed Forces welfare agency, they referred her to Aurora New Dawn. Emily wishes she had reached out sooner. The advocates at Aurora had the expertise to secure local authority housing, helping her escape military accommodation. They also engaged with the police on her behalf, challenging their insufficient response.

Emily believes that domestic abuse within the military is often "swept under the carpet." She found that military agencies, including Welfare and the Military Police, frequently claimed there was little they could do. In contrast, Aurora New Dawn's understanding of the military system was instrumental in getting her to safety.

Analysis of Case Study – Emily

Emily's experience highlights patterns of coercive control, financial abuse, emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual violence. Mark's manipulative behaviour began early, portraying himself as vulnerable to trap Emily in a cycle of guilt and responsibility.

A key aspect of Emily's abuse was its impact on her children. Mark used emotional and physical abuse to systematically alienate and drive Emily's children away. His physical assault on Emily's eldest child forced them to leave home, after which Emily had to communicate in secret to maintain a relationship. Mark then worked to alienate her youngest child, leading them to move in with their father. Within two years, both of Emily's children had been forced out of the home, leaving her further isolated and dependent on Mark.

Mark exerted financial control over Emily as a means of coercion, despite earning nearly double her salary. He refused to contribute financially, ensuring that she covered all household costs while keeping financial obligations in his name. This aligns with findings from Williamson & Matolcsi (2018), which highlight financial dependency as a significant barrier preventing victims in military families from leaving abusive relationships. Research by Slapakova, Thue, and Huxtable (2023) further demonstrates how military life exacerbates financial dependence, particularly for civilian partners. Frequent relocations, employment instability, and limited access to independent financial resources can leave victims feeling trapped, fearing homelessness or financial ruin if they attempt to leave. Mark further exploited Emily's vulnerability by controlling her access to essential resources, such as transport for work and her children's education, reinforcing his dominance.

His control escalated once they moved into Service Family Accommodation (SFA), where military housing policies trapped Emily in the relationship. Research by Gray (2016) and Williamson & Matolcsi (2018) highlights that civilian partners lose their entitlement to military housing if they leave an abusive serving partner. Many victims, particularly civilian partners, are

unaware of their entitlement to Local Authority support, increasing their fear of homelessness and preventing them from seeking help. Emily's case illustrates this challenge, as her fear of losing housing and financial security prevented her from leaving earlier.

Emily sought help multiple times from both civilian and military police, yet their response was inadequate, allowing Mark to continue his coercive and violent behaviour with impunity. Military agencies such as Welfare and the Military Police were dismissive, mirroring broader concerns about the normalisation of abuse and lack of accountability within the Armed Forces (UK Parliament, 2021).

Mark's sexual violence against Emily was a further extension of his control. He dictated how she dressed and slept, and his rape of Emily demonstrated how coercive control and physical violence often escalate into sexual violence. Research suggests that military culture can reinforce gendered power imbalances, contributing to the normalisation of aggression in intimate relationships (Alves-Costa et al., 2021).

Aurora New Dawn's specialist knowledge of military policies was crucial in helping Emily escape. Unlike military agencies that dismissed her concerns, Aurora secured local authority housing, mitigating the housing insecurity that had kept her trapped. Their intervention with the police ensured that her case was taken seriously, addressing the systemic failings she initially faced.

Emily's case illustrates the urgent need for improved, specialised advocacy services for victims of domestic abuse within the Armed Forces. Her experience aligns with broader research findings that highlight:

- The impact of domestic abuse on children, including forced separation from a non-abusive parent.

- The barriers to reporting abuse due to fear of repercussions, stigma, and lack of trust in the chain of command (Tapley, 2020).

- The financial and housing dependency that prevents military spouses from leaving abusive relationships (Gray, 2016; Williamson & Matolcsi, 2018; Slapakova, Thue, & Huxtable, 2023).

- The failure of military and civilian authorities to respond adequately, reinforcing the importance of independent services to bridge these gaps.

Emily's case is not unique, but it is a clear example of why specialist advocacy must be prioritised to improve outcomes for victims.

CASE STUDY

BETH

Beth's account is included with her explicit consent. She has read, reviewed, and approved the contents of the case study to ensure its accuracy and to mitigate any potential risks associated with sharing her story. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of those involved, and certain details have been deliberately omitted or altered to preserve confidentiality and reduce the risk of future harm.

Beth, a Civil Servant employed by the Ministry of Defence, met James (not his real name) through an online dating app. They spoke online for several months before meeting in person, as he was serving in the Armed Forces and was based away initially. When they finally met, James was intense from the start, immediately referring to Beth as his girlfriend. Although she found this a little fast-paced, she dismissed it at the time as he was fun to be around. He also told her he loved her early in the relationship but later played it down.

Beth quickly realised that James wasn't right for her. This feeling was reinforced when she received a message via social media from James's ex-partner, advising her to conduct a background check on him using Claire's Law (the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme). When Beth made the request, the police disclosed that James had a history of abusive behaviour, although he had no recorded convictions.

Beth ended the relationship, but James refused to accept her decision and would repeatedly show up at the home she shared with her elderly relative, Anne (not her real name). During these visits, James would frequently become angry. In an attempt to appease him, Beth continued the relationship. Despite trying repeatedly to end things, James refused to leave her alone, making it impossible for her to move on.

When James was deployed, Beth used the opportunity to break up with him again. However, James emotionally manipulated her, threatening suicide if she did not stay with him. He also warned that if she reported him to the authorities, he would lose his job. On one occasion, James staged a video call where he pretended to shoot himself in the head with a handgun, later claiming the gun had misfired. On another occasion, he swallowed a large number of tablets in front of Beth over a video call.

James also harassed Beth's friends and family via social media, including people he had never met. He would visit her neighbours unannounced and attempt to infiltrate every part of her life. Despite Beth's repeated pleas for him to stop, he persisted.

Throughout the relationship, James sexually abused Beth. She frequently woke up to find him assaulting or raping her. She also believes that on one occasion, he drugged and raped her.

Feeling miserable but trapped, Beth reached out to an Armed Forces welfare service multiple times but described their response as rude and unhelpful. Feeling isolated and without support, she resigned herself to trying to make the relationship work.

James eventually left the Armed Forces and wanted to settle down. Beth and James purchased a house together, but as it needed renovation, Beth continued living with Anne while James moved in alone. Eventually, Beth ended the relationship again and told James he could continue living at the house. To make it clear that the relationship was over, Beth told James she had joined a dating app. James responded by threatening to kill her and any man she dated.

James continued to show up uninvited at Beth's home and neighbours' houses. At one point, Beth attended a party with friends, where James also turned up. She later lost all memory of the evening and was found unresponsive and undressed by a friend. She believes James drugged and raped her that night.

Soon after, Beth discovered a tracker hidden in her car. She reported it to the police, but they took over a month to collect it. On another occasion, her tyres were deliberately damaged, and she suspected James was responsible.

She later noticed her hair thinning and realised her shampoo and conditioner had been spiked with hair removal cream. At this point, Beth concluded that James had broken into her home. She suspected that he had done this after accessing a dating app message in which someone had complimented her hair. Around the same time, she discovered that James had stolen several sentimental items.

Beth contacted the police multiple times but described their response as inadequate. Despite being assessed as high risk and referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) several times, little was done to protect her.

James's stalking escalated. He would appear on Beth's walking route, turn up at her gym class, and even applied for a job at her workplace. He was arrested multiple times but was repeatedly released with bail conditions.

Beth and James still co-owned the house, and it was agreed that she would visit at scheduled times to check on the renovation progress. On one occasion, James was there when she arrived. An argument broke out, and James punched Beth repeatedly in the face and choked her. While strangling her, he demanded her mobile phone and PIN. After reading through her messages, he pretended to throw the phone outside. He then called the police and accused Beth of being the aggressor. When officers arrived, they arrested her and held her in custody overnight. The police later told Beth that sometimes they arrest victims "for their own safety." She was released with no further action.

As the situation worsened, Beth was forced to move out of the home she shared with Anne for their safety. As a civil servant working for the MOD, she was entitled to military accommodation. However, James continued to stalk her—even managing to gain access to her military accommodation site using an old military ID he had not returned when he left the

Armed Forces. He took a selfie outside her accommodation and sent it to her. This forced Beth to relocate yet again.

James was eventually issued with a restraining order for breaching a non-molestation order.

In the span of 12 months, Beth was forced to move three times due to James's relentless harassment. Because she relocated across different counties, she was unable to receive a consistent advocacy service, as cross-border funding constraints meant she repeatedly had to retell and relive her ordeal when accessing new support services. She describes the process as exhausting and retraumatising.

Analysis of Case Study – Beth

Beth's case exemplifies the extreme and escalating nature of coercive control, domestic, sexual abuse, and stalking. From the outset of the relationship, James exhibited clear warning signs of coercive control, including intense affection at an early stage, rapid relationship progression, and emotional manipulation. His immediate declarations of love and possessiveness, referring to Beth as his girlfriend before she had even processed the relationship, were early indicators of controlling behaviour. When Beth attempted to leave, the situation escalated rapidly, as James resorted to emotional blackmail, threats of suicide, and psychological manipulation to maintain control.

The systematic sexual abuse Beth endured, including drug-facilitated rape, further demonstrates the severity of the risk she faced. Waking up to find herself being assaulted, as well as blacking out on an evening when James was present, strongly suggests premeditated and repeated offences.

James's ability to infiltrate Beth's personal and professional life using military-specific access points further illustrates the unique risks that Armed Forces victims face. His misuse of an unreturned military ID to access secure accommodation is particularly alarming, exposing critical security loopholes that enabled further stalking. Additionally, the military housing system, designed primarily for serving members of the Armed

Forces and their families, left Beth vulnerable, forcing her to relocate multiple times.

Beth's experiences closely align with Professor Jane Monckton Smith's eight-stage homicide timeline. According to Monckton Smith (2021), coercive control follows a predictable pattern that can escalate to homicide (stage eight). James had a history of abuse (stage one), and as Monckton Smith highlights, abusive relationships frequently begin with rapid progression and early declarations of love (stage two). As the relationship developed, coercive control, sexual violence, and suicide threats emerged (stage three), intensifying when Beth attempted to leave. A change in circumstances often triggers escalation (stage four), which, in James' case, occurred when Beth ended the relationship. This led to increased violence and risk-taking behaviour (stage five), including stalking, drugging, raping Beth, and threatening to kill her. James's persistent surveillance and intelligence gathering, such as tracking Beth's movements, reflects homicidal ideation (stage six). His escalating violence, including an attack involving strangulation, further supports this pattern. Stage seven involves active homicide planning, and given the severity and escalation of James's actions, it is highly probable that he had reached this stage.

One of the most concerning aspects of Beth's experience was the inadequate response from Armed Forces welfare services. Despite reaching out for support multiple times, she described the welfare response as "rude and unhelpful". This lack of support forced her to remain in the relationship longer than she wanted, reinforcing the urgent need for specialised, trauma-informed advocacy services for the Armed Forces community. Beth's case aligns with broader findings that victims of domestic and sexual abuse in the Armed Forces community often experience a culture of silence, lack of intervention, and failure to hold perpetrators accountable and reflect wider systemic issues that prevent survivors from seeking justice. Sparrow et al. (2020) emphasise the necessity of increased awareness of non-physical domestic abuse in military contexts and advocate for specialised training for healthcare and welfare staff to improve identification and intervention.

Similarly, police intervention was insufficient despite Beth being assessed as high risk and referred to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) multiple times. Even after clear evidence of stalking, harassment, and violence, James continued to breach protective measures with minimal consequences. Police failed to promptly investigate the hidden tracker in Beth's car, delayed responses to her reports, and mishandled her wrongful arrest.

Beth's case also exposes barriers created by inconsistent support across different geographical regions. Due to repeated relocations for safety, she was unable to receive continuous advocacy, forcing her to recount her trauma multiple times when accessing new services. This lack of through-life advocacy creates significant gaps in care, leaving survivors feeling unsupported and retraumatised. Without a nationally coordinated approach, survivors like Beth will continue to fall through the cracks when relocating. The need for a consistent, trauma-informed national framework for advocacy services is urgent to ensure that survivors of domestic abuse within the Armed Forces community receive continuous support, regardless of geographic location.

Beth's case also highlights the following key issues;

- Coercive control and stalking were enabled by institutional failings, including inadequate police response.
- A lack of appropriate support from Armed Forces welfare services, leaving Beth trapped in a cycle of abuse.
- Failures in justice and accountability. James manipulated the system by falsely accusing Beth, leading to her wrongful arrest, reinforcing how perpetrators misuse counter-allegations to weaponise legal processes.
- Critical gaps in through-life advocacy for the Armed Forces community. Beth's forced relocation across multiple counties resulted in a loss of consistent support, delaying critical interventions.

Beth's case is a harrowing example of the dangers faced by survivors of abuse within the Armed Forces community. It also highlights institutional and systemic failures that enable perpetrators to continue their abuse with impunity. The failures of military welfare services, law enforcement, and legal protections not only prolonged Beth's suffering, but actively placed her at further risk.

To prevent similar cases, a national framework for advocacy services tailored to the Armed Forces community is urgently needed. This would ensure continuous, trauma-informed support, regardless of geographic location, and improve protections for victims navigating the complex intersections of military and civilian systems.

> *A national framework for advocacy services tailored to the Armed Forces Community is urgently needed*

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Create a Centralised Online Resource for Armed Forces Advocacy Support

Aurora New Dawn should lead the development of a centralised online resource that provides clear, up-to-date information for IDVAs, ISVAs, ISACs and frontline professionals supporting the Armed Forces community.

This resource should include guidance on military-specific systems such as welfare, housing, and legal processes, alongside access to relevant MOD policies and signposting to Armed Forces charities.

By housing this information in one accessible platform, services can provide more confident, informed, and consistent support to victims navigating the complexities of military life.

This resource should be maintained in collaboration with the national working group proposed in Recommendation 2, ensuring it remains responsive to the evolving needs of both practitioners and survivors.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Establish a National Armed Forces Advocacy Working Group

Aurora New Dawn should establish a national working group specifically for domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking advocates working with the Armed Forces community.

This group would provide a dedicated space within the VAWG sector for professionals to share learning, reflect on challenges, and strengthen specialist practice in this often-overlooked area.

By connecting advocates from across the UK, the group would support the development of consistent, informed approaches to military-specific advocacy and help close the current gaps in knowledge, confidence, and provision. The working group would also act as a catalyst for raising awareness within the wider VAWG sector and improving visibility of the Armed Forces community in local and national strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Share findings with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Ministry of Defence VAWG Taskforce

The findings highlight critical gaps in data collection, frontline knowledge, and consistent service provision, particularly in relation to sexual violence and through-life advocacy for Armed Forces survivors. In particular, the report exposes the challenge of cross-border support, where victims are required to move across local authority or devolved nation boundaries due to safety, postings, or relocation. This results in fragmented or lost advocacy, forcing survivors to repeatedly recount their trauma and re-navigate unfamiliar systems without continuity of care.

Engaging these key stakeholders is essential to raise the visibility of Armed Forces survivors and to press for a joined-up national response. This includes recognition of the Armed Forces community within domestic abuse commissioning, the inclusion of military-specific pathways within local and national strategies, and investment in services that can meet the unique and mobile needs of this population.

SUMMARY OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles are intended for all organisations within the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector, particularly those offering domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking advocacy. While much of the focus in this report has rightly scrutinised shortcomings within military and criminal justice systems, it is equally important to acknowledge that civilian specialist services do not always meet the specific needs of the Armed Forces community. Survivors often report fragmented support, a lack of understanding of military structures and culture, and inconsistent responses across regions. These principles aim to support the VAWG sector in improving visibility, accessibility, and relevance of services for victims and survivors in the Armed Forces community, ensuring that all organisations, regardless of location or remit, can contribute to a more joined-up, specialist, and trauma-informed approach. The seven principles are summarised below, followed by supporting evidence drawn from the research findings.

Principle 1: Commitment to knowledge building

VAWG services should proactively address internal knowledge gaps by engaging with specialist organisations that support the Armed Forces community and utilising available resources. This includes accessing centralised guidance on Armed Forces policies and procedures and committing to continuous learning to better understand the unique context of military life and its impact on victim-survivors.

Principle 2. Commitment to Shared Learning, Best Practice and Collaboration

VAWG services should engage actively with the national Armed Forces Advocacy Working Group to exchange knowledge, strengthen specialist practice, and promote consistent, informed responses to victims from the Armed Forces community. Collaborative spaces like this are vital for improving confidence and visibility across the sector.

Principle 3. Proactively Engage with Military Forums and Working Groups

In areas with significant military presence, VAWG services should actively participate in existing domestic abuse and sexual violence forums that include Armed Forces representation. Where such forums do not exist, services should work with local authorities and welfare services to identify opportunities for engagement. Consistent participation fosters stronger relationships and ensures the Armed Forces community is considered in local partnership strategies.

Principle 4. Ensure Access to Support for Military Personnel

Given the mobility and deployment patterns of military personnel, services must offer flexible, multi-modal access to support. This includes online, phone, and in-person advocacy, enabling continued engagement for victims who may relocate frequently or be posted overseas at short notice.

Principle 5. Leverage the Strengths and Knowledge of Your Workforce

While a military background is not essential for advocates, understanding and valuing the unique strengths of each team member is critical. Drawing on lived experience, such as being a veteran or military spouse, or developing confidence with military terminology and systems can build trust and relatability with clients. Services should consider how these strengths can be intentionally harnessed to enhance the quality of support.

Principle 6. Enhance Support for Clients During Court Martials

Victims often struggle to access advocacy during court martial proceedings, which are geographically centralised in Bulford and Catterick. VAWG services should seek to address this by ensuring availability of advocates regardless of location. Where this is not feasible, services should explore collaborative arrangements, such as cross-referrals with other trusted providers, to ensure victims receive consistent, trauma-informed support throughout the legal process.

Principle 7: Strengthening Data Collection to Understand the Needs of the Armed Forces Community

Services should review and, where necessary, improve how they record Armed Forces affiliation during referral and casework processes. This includes tracking whether clients are serving personnel, veterans, or partners/ex-partners of Armed Forces members. Stronger data collection practices will provide a clearer national picture of need, help monitor trends and support the case for investment in specialist provision.

PRINCIPLE 1:

COMMITMENT TO KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

VAWG services should proactively address internal knowledge gaps by engaging with specialist organisations that support the Armed Forces community and utilising available resources. This includes accessing centralised guidance on Armed Forces policies and procedures and committing to continuous learning to better understand the unique context of military life and its impact on victim-survivors.

Findings from this research indicate that many support services in the VAWG sector experience significant challenges in understanding military-specific policies and navigating the complexities of the Armed Forces environment. Of the 10 services that participated in the research, half reported a lack of confidence in navigating military policies related to domestic abuse and sexual violence, while four stated they were not confident in their understanding of the Armed Forces rank structure. One practitioner reflected on these difficulties:

"It is difficult to find policy and challenge the military Chain of Command."

The research highlights that easily accessible resources could significantly improve practitioners' ability to advocate effectively for victims within the Armed Forces community. Service providers stressed the importance of a centralised online resource containing up-to-date Armed Forces policies, guidance, and referral pathways. This would support IDVAs, ISVAs and ISACs in providing tailored advice and navigating military systems more effectively.

Victim testimonies further reinforce the need for specialist knowledge. One survivor stated:

"The advocate was able to understand the military workings and lifestyle. She was knowledgeable on processes and procedures that should have been followed, whereas a more general service would not have been aware and couldn't give as good advice."

The online resource would provide essential guidance for practitioners familiar with military-specific policies, including:

- Housing policies, such as Service Family Accommodation (SFA) entitlements and procedures.
- Reporting mechanisms, including the role of the service police and the service justice system.
- Military welfare services, to enhance collaboration with existing Armed Forces support networks.
- Procedures for advocating within the Chain of Command, ensuring victims receive appropriate support without fear of repercussions.

By committing to knowledge building through an accessible resource and collaborative engagement with military organisations, services can ensure that Armed Forces personnel and their families receive the specialised support they need.

PRINCIPLE 2:

COMMITMENT TO SHARED LEARNING, BEST PRACTICE AND COLLABORATION

VAWG services should engage actively with the national Armed Forces Advocacy Working Group to exchange knowledge, strengthen specialist practice, and promote consistent, informed responses to victims from the Armed Forces community. Collaborative spaces like this are vital for improving confidence and visibility across the sector.

Advocates and practitioners working with the Armed Forces community consistently highlighted the need for improved collaboration and knowledge sharing. Many professionals feel isolated in their roles, lacking a dedicated space to discuss complex cases and seek guidance on military-specific challenges.

"There is nowhere I can go to discuss a complex case. My line manager can't help me. They don't understand the Armed Forces."

"I am a lone shark when I'm doing this work."

Establishing a national working group for Armed Forces advocacy would provide a structured forum for sharing expertise, discussing best practices, and developing collective strategies to support military victims more effectively. Practitioners overwhelmingly supported the creation of such a group, believing it would not only strengthen professional networks but also enhance the quality of support available to victims.

"A working group would make me feel so much more supported as a professional."

For victims, the inconsistency in support across different regions remains a significant issue. Military families frequently relocate, often finding themselves without continuity of care or clear pathways to support. One survivor described the lack of consistency in available services as a "postcode lottery", reinforcing the need for a more unified approach.

“There is a postcode lottery of support available when you move around the UK.”

By fostering collaboration between VAWG services at both national and regional levels, advocates can ensure that military victims receive more consistent, informed, and effective support, regardless of location.

PRINCIPLE 3:

PROACTIVELY ENGAGE WITH MILITARY FORUMS AND WORKING GROUPS

In areas with significant military presence, VAWG services should actively participate in existing domestic abuse and sexual violence forums that include Armed Forces representation. Where such forums do not exist, services should work with local authorities and welfare services to identify opportunities for engagement. Consistent participation fosters stronger relationships and ensures the Armed Forces community is considered in local partnership strategies.

Due to the unique nature of military life, armed forces personnel and their families have access to specialist military welfare services. Domestic abuse services that participated in this research highlighted that engagement with military agencies can be challenging, particularly when attempting to build effective relationships with military welfare teams.

Where strong partnerships had been established, services evidenced successful initiatives, including delivering training to military welfare officers, scenario-based workshops, and joint initiatives such as running advocacy drop-in sessions alongside parent and baby/toddler groups. These collaborations allowed advocates to integrate into military support networks, improving access to support for victims who may otherwise struggle to engage with civilian services.

One practitioner highlighted the significance of relationship-building, stating:

"If the military hadn't opened the doors for me, I wouldn't have been able to open doors for my clients."

Another practitioner emphasised the importance of a collaborative approach, noting:

"Working with welfare hand in hand has much better outcomes for victims."

By fostering stronger, more consistent relationships with military personnel and embedding advocacy within key military forums across the UK, services can strengthen their interventions and improve victim outcomes. Greater collaboration between military and civilian agencies will lead to seamless, victim-centred support, ensuring that no survivor is left without the help they need.

PRINCIPLE 4:

ENSURE ACCESS TO SUPPORT FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL

Given the mobility and deployment patterns of military personnel, services must offer flexible, multi-modal access to support. This includes online, phone, and in-person advocacy, enabling continued engagement for victims who may relocate frequently or be posted overseas at short notice.

Military personnel often face unique challenges when seeking support due to the nature of their service. Deployments, frequent relocations, and unpredictable schedules can create barriers to accessing advocacy and support services. To address this, services should ensure support is available in multiple formats, including online, phone, and in-person options, so that personnel can access help regardless of their location or circumstances.

Victims highlighted the importance of flexible support, particularly for those deployed overseas or frequently moved between bases. One survivor noted:

“If I didn’t have the option to speak online, I wouldn’t have been able to keep accessing support.”

Another service user shared how crucial remote contact was for maintaining engagement:

"Even just a check-in call made a huge difference, knowing that support was still there no matter where I was."

Practitioners also recognised the need for services to adapt to military lifestyles, with one stating:

“The military way of life means you can be uprooted with little warning. Services need to be flexible, or victims will fall through the cracks.”

The availability of online groups, virtual check-ins, and remote advocacy has been instrumental in ensuring that military personnel do not have to

choose between their duty and their safety. Expanding access to digital and phone-based services can bridge these gaps, allowing victims to continue receiving support even when deployed or relocated.

By embedding flexibility into service provision, services can ensure that no military personnel are left without support, regardless of their circumstances. Making advocacy services adaptable to the realities of military life strengthens victim engagement and ensures that those in need can always access the help they require.

PRINCIPLE 5:

LEVERAGE THE STRENGTHS AND KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR WORKFORCE

While a military background is not essential for advocates, understanding and valuing the unique strengths of each team member is critical. Drawing on lived experience, such as being a veteran or military spouse, or developing confidence with military terminology and systems can build trust and relatability with clients. Services should consider how these strengths can be intentionally harnessed to enhance the quality of support.

Advocates do not need to have a personal or professional background in the Armed Forces to provide effective support. However, an understanding of military life, including its structures, cultures, and unique pressures, can significantly enhance service delivery. The research highlights that leveraging the strengths, experiences, and knowledge of the workforce strategically can build common ground with clients, foster trust, and strengthen advocacy interventions. Clients frequently described how feeling understood made a critical difference in their willingness to engage with support services.

Services that participated in the research acknowledged that while lived experience is not a prerequisite, it can be a valuable asset. Staff members who have personal or professional exposure to the military, whether through service, family ties, or previous roles, can often navigate complex military policies and understand the realities of military life in a way that fosters deeper engagement. One practitioner noted:

“There are advantages to having a military background when supporting the military. Similar to IDVAs, you don’t need to have lived experience of abuse, but it helps.”

Similarly, advocates who have been military spouses often demonstrate a deep understanding of the isolation faced by military families, the impact of frequent relocations, and the unique challenges of reporting abuse within a tight-knit community. As one advocate explained:

“Being a military wife, I understand the isolation that these women face.”

This insight is particularly valuable when working with victims who may struggle to disclose abuse due to fears of career repercussions for the serving person, social stigma within the military community, or financial dependence on their partner's service.

Additionally, having a diverse team with varied professional backgrounds allows advocacy services to draw upon a broad range of skills and expertise, from legal knowledge to trauma-informed practice, ensuring a more comprehensive and adaptable service for clients. Even those without prior military experience can build credibility through ongoing training, engagement with military forums, and collaboration with Armed Forces charities and welfare services.

By effectively drawing on the strengths within their teams, services can ensure that clients feel understood and supported, advocacy is tailored to the realities of military life, and the barriers to disclosure and engagement are minimised.

PRINCIPLE 6:

ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR CLIENTS DURING COURT MARTIALS

Victims often struggle to access advocacy during court martial proceedings, which are geographically centralised in Bulford and Catterick. VAWG services should seek to address this by ensuring availability of advocates regardless of location. Where this is not feasible, services should explore collaborative arrangements, such as cross-referrals with other trusted providers, to ensure victims receive consistent, trauma-informed support throughout the legal process.

The Court Martial is the military equivalent of a criminal court and operates under the Service Justice System. While there are two permanent military court centres in the UK; Bulford, Wiltshire and Catterick, North Yorkshire, court martials can also be held in any location where Armed Forces operate, including overseas locations such as Cyprus, Germany, and Gibraltar.

Special measures, such as pre-recording evidence are available, similar to civilian courts, to support vulnerable victims and witnesses.

Some key differences between court martials and civilian courts include:

- Judgment is made by a board of serving personnel, rather than a civilian jury.
- All serving personnel, including victims, are required to wear military uniform in court. However, victims can submit a formal application to the court requesting an exemption.

Services that participated in this research highlighted several barriers to supporting clients at court martial, including:

- Funding constraints preventing advocates from attending court martials, particularly for services geographically distant from Bulford or Catterick.
- Lack of knowledge among advocacy services on how court martial differs from crown court, limiting their ability to provide tailored support.

- Limited collaboration between advocacy services, meaning victims may be left without advocacy support during the court martials.

Strengthening support through collaboration

The lack of tailored advocacy for victims at court martial places them at a significant disadvantage during one of the most distressing phases of their justice journey. To address these gaps, a collaborative approach is essential, including;

- Developing partnerships between advocacy services to ensure victims can access support regardless of location.

- Providing more training opportunities for advocates to observe court martial proceedings and enhance their understanding of military justice.

- Ensuring sustainable funding for advocacy services to accompany victims to court martial when required.

PRINCIPLE 7:

STRENGTHENING DATA COLLECTION TO UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

Services should review and, where necessary, improve how they record Armed Forces affiliation during referral and casework processes. This includes tracking whether clients are serving personnel, veterans, or partners/ex-partners of Armed Forces members. Stronger data collection practices will provide a clearer national picture of need, help monitor trends and support the case for investment in specialist provision.

Effective advocacy and support for the Armed Forces community depend on accurate and comprehensive data collection. Services should ensure they record referrals from the Armed Forces community, including serving personnel, spouses/partners (including ex-partners), and veterans, where the alleged perpetrator is a member of the Armed Forces. Without consistent and detailed data recording, the true scale of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking within military communities remains hidden, limiting opportunities for meaningful change.

The research found significant inconsistencies in how services record Armed Forces-related referrals. Some services collect detailed data, including whether a client is a serving member, spouse, or veteran, while others do not record military affiliation at all. This disparity means that many Armed Forces victims are not recognised within existing support frameworks, making it difficult to identify patterns, allocate resources effectively, and develop targeted interventions.

Survivors repeatedly emphasised the importance of visibility and recognition. Without being counted in data collection, victims felt their experiences were being overlooked, reinforcing the silence that often surrounds abuse within military communities.

Failure to capture data on Armed Forces victims also means that funding for specialist support remains limited, as policymakers and funders rely on recorded evidence to justify investment in services. A more consistent, national approach to data collection would help ensure that victims are

visible, their needs are recognised, and advocacy services are properly resourced to provide tailored support.

By strengthening data collection processes, services can build a clearer picture of the prevalence and impact of abuse within the Armed Forces community, advocate for policy and funding improvements, and ensure that victims receive the recognition and support they deserve.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This research highlights the significant prevalence of domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking within the Armed Forces community, a reality that remains largely underreported and inadequately addressed. Despite growing awareness, the military environment presents unique challenges that heighten survivors' vulnerability, including a rigid hierarchy, a culture of silence, and institutional barriers to seeking support. The nationwide lack of specialist advocacy, particularly for sexual violence and stalking, further isolates survivors, preventing many from accessing the trauma-informed care they need. While some domestic abuse services have developed effective engagement strategies, provision remains inconsistent, with many support organisations failing to recognise or record the Armed Forces status of those they assist.

To improve outcomes for survivors, greater collaboration between military and civilian services is essential. Strengthening data collection will enhance the visibility of the Armed Forces community within existing domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking support services, enabling more tailored responses. By leveraging the strengths and knowledge of the workforce, services can build trust with survivors, while a more coordinated, cross-sector approach would ensure that individuals receive uninterrupted support, regardless of where they are based.

The research findings are framed around seven key principles that highlight best practices for improving support: ensuring survivors are heard, enhancing cross-sector collaboration, adapting services to military-specific challenges, and strengthening data collection. Crucially, services must work together to provide seamless, trauma-informed care that prioritises safety, recovery, and empowerment. Addressing these gaps will require systemic change, but by embedding these principles into practice, services can significantly improve the experiences and outcomes of Armed Forces survivors.

Areas for Further Research

While this research has provided valuable insights, further research is needed to fully understand the experiences of Armed Forces survivors and develop more effective interventions. Key areas for future research include:

- **The connection between sexual violence, domestic abuse, and suicide.** Understanding the long-term impact of these forms of abuse, particularly within the Armed Forces community, is critical for developing early intervention strategies and improving survivor outcomes. Research into the correlation between abuse and suicide risk could inform better safeguarding measures.

- **The specific needs of veterans.** While this research primarily focused on serving personnel and their families, further exploration of how domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking affect veterans, particularly in relation to mental health and wellbeing, and reintegration into civilian life, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of support needs.

Addressing these gaps through further research and improved service provision will be essential in ensuring that Armed Forces survivors receive the recognition, protection, and support they deserve.

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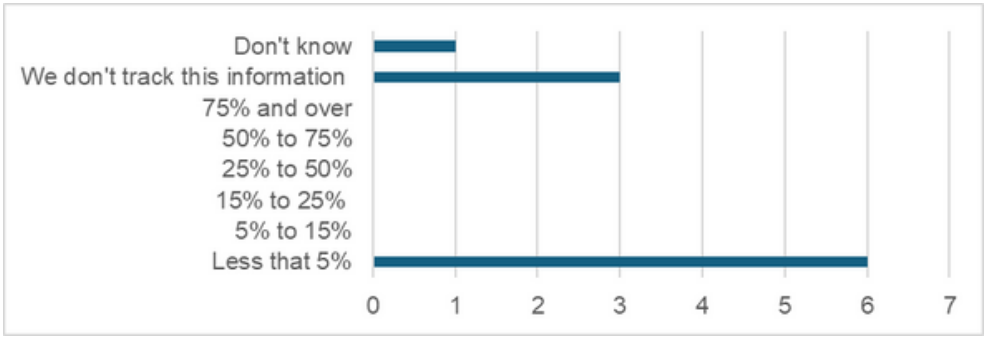
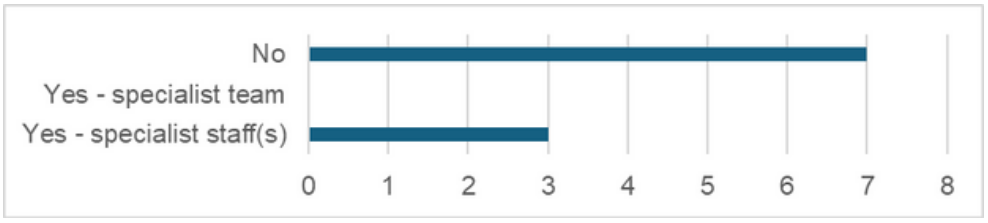
APPENDIX 1

DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE SERVICES SURVEY RESULTS

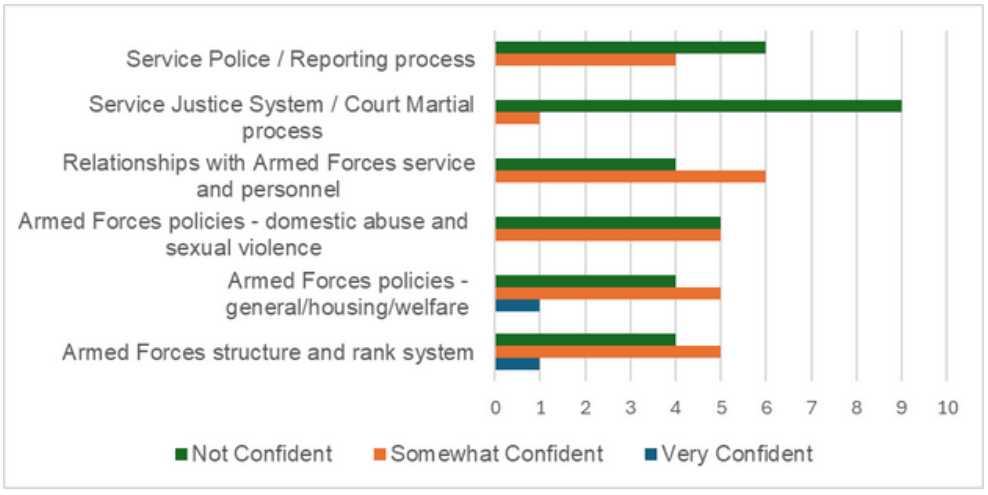
1. Services were asked what percentage of their total referrals each year are for Armed Forces personnel or their family members.



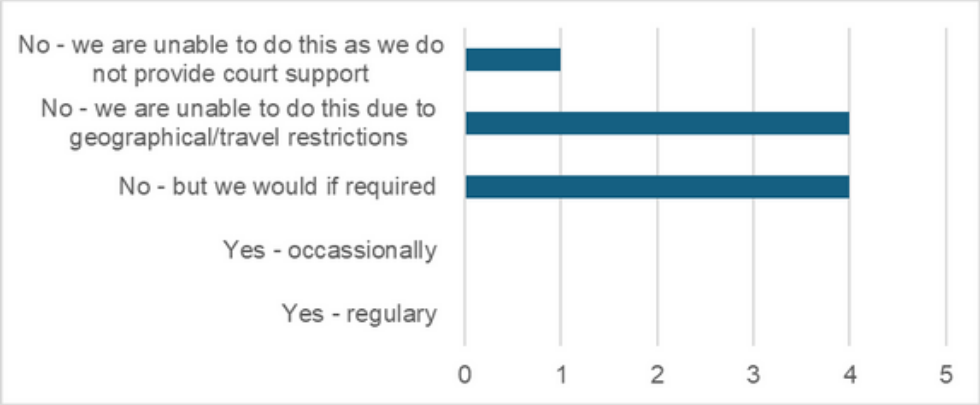
2. Services were asked if they had Armed Forces specialists within their service.



3. Services were asked how confident their staff were in relation to areas of practice



4. Services were asked if they support victims in person at Court Martial.



APPENDIX 2

DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE SERVICE USER SURVEY RESULTS

1. The 33 survey participants were asked to identify the most important factors when seeking support for domestic abuse and sexual violence. They were instructed to rank ten service-related factors from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating the least important and 10 the most important. The cumulative scores for each factor are presented below, reflecting participants' overall priorities when choosing a support service.

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