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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, ARTS &
SOCIAL SCIENCES**

School of Social Sciences
Division of Politics and International Relations

**The British parliamentary e-consultation system:
A case study of e-consultations**

by

Byoungju Kim

Thesis for the degree of Master of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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Democracy is being challenged by low public participation in the democratic process. This has resulted in low voter turnout and is therefore called a crisis of representative democracy. As a means of increasing citizens' engagement with their representative bodies, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been implemented to encourage public online participation. In particular, the British Parliament has adopted an e-consultation system, available on its website since 2007, as an electronic tool for online participation.

As e-consultation is the only system which truly enables the public to engage the legislative process, it is worth assessing this system in order to determine its effectiveness and impact. To do this, it is necessary to conduct an analysis through case studies on past e-consultations. Through this analysis, an aim of this thesis is to seek new methods by which to maximise the efficiency of the e-consultation system through the consideration and application of specific research questions. Answers to specific questions were sought by means of employing empirical studies on two e-consultation cases to determine levels of public participation: the successful topic of 'Domestic Violence' and the less popular topic of 'e-Petitions.'

Analysis of the two e-consultation cases reveals that e-consultation provides the public with valuable opportunity to connect with its representatives and to engage the legislative process. However, in order to maximise the efficiency of the e-consultation system, several modifications are suggested including: adequate preparation and publicity on behalf of the organising body, a high rate of MP participation, active consideration of any contributions by the committee in charge, and the establishment of a parliamentary division unit specifically for the conduction of e-consultations.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, **Byoungju Kim**, declare that the thesis entitled:

'The British parliamentary e-consultation system: A case study of e-consultations' and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I contributed myself;
- None of this work has been published before submission

Signed

Date

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1 Introduction

1.1 ***A possibility of the crisis of representative democracy***

Democracy secures its legitimacy by enabling open participation in the democratic process: the electorate choose candidates who best represent their interests and they are able to re-elect the candidates if they are deemed to have successfully done so. It would be reasonable to assume, then, that democratically elected representatives would invariably seek to act in the best interests of the electorate. However, a consideration of the Oxford Internet Survey, which found that only 18% of the British public trust politicians and only 16% trust the political parties, suggests that faith in the abilities of political parties to represent the people is wavering (Coleman, 2004a: 112). Further evidence of this can be found by looking at public participation rates during the 2001 General Election, where only 59% of the British public turned out to vote, the lowest election turnout since 1918. During the 2005 election turnout was 2% higher than in 2001, at 61.4%. However, it was still the second lowest turnout of the UK General election since 1918 (House of Commons Library, 2001: 8; House of Commons Library, 2005: 59). Not only has this lack of trust in elected representatives dissuaded people from voting, it has also discouraged participation in other institutionally connected activities (Coleman, 2005: 197; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Norris, 1999; Nye, Zelikow and King, 1997). This perceived disenfranchisement of the electorate has led the Power Inquiry to suggest that we (the people) are facing a situation where ‘the processes of democracy, including general elections, become empty rituals’. A key result of this perceived disenfranchisement is highlighted in the findings of a survey which asked for the opinions of two thousand people about those who are supposed to be representing them. Comments received were consistently negative, such as: ‘I don’t think they are on the same planet. They have no idea about normal life; they are disconnected from real life; he lives in a different world from me’ (Coleman, 2004a: 112). Coleman notes that the problem of disconnection with representatives has manifested itself as public detachment from the entire political system:

Not only as voters, but in a range of routine social activities, citizens find themselves in disconnected isolation from institutions and process that are supposed to represent them. Disconnection gives rise not only to cynicism and disengagement, but also a pervasive sense that the political sphere is frustrating, joyless, and ultimately pointless (Coleman, 2005: 198).

Representation, the very root of representative democracy, appears to have become obsolete as the public become increasingly mistrustful of politicians and political parties, the result of which is low voter participation in elections and a growing sense of indifference towards politics in general. As a result, it becomes increasingly problematic to assume the legitimacy of democratic institutional mandates as truly representative. The report of *Power to the People* describes this crisis of democracy:

Democracy continues to exist because it allows citizens a collective voices and a point of peaceful negotiation over the issues that affect them. When this collective voice is not being expressed efficiently, democracy is threatened (The POWER Inquiry, 2006: 261-2).

Recommendations made by the Power Inquiry also include the public right to be involved in the decision-making process as a way to solve the problem of disengagement:

Citizens should be given the right to initiate legislative processes, public inquiries and hearing into public bodies and their senior management (House of Commons Library, 2006: 7).

In consideration of this, in order to overcome the crisis of representative democracy it is essential to revive public interest on politics. If citizens are able to communicate with their representatives without difficulty it is possible to increase public involvement in political issues, which in turn can ease the crisis of perceived disenfranchisement and political mistrust. The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has allowed for much easier public participation in discussions with their representatives. It is crucial, therefore, to consider whether ICTs can offer an alternative method for resolving the crisis of representative democracy.

1.2 The development of ICTs and representative democracy

ICTs were first used in the USA in the early 1970s during the development of electronic democracy. Increasing concern about the American political system such as declining rates of political participation, principally in voting, and high levels of cynicism and civic mistrust gave impetus for the development of ICTs. Since then, the development of ICTs has overcome communication obstacles of distance and time through the creation of cyber space. The increased possibility of communication without obstacles that ICTs were able to provide allowed for virtually unlimited numbers of people are able to participate in both political debate and voting (Horrocks and Pratchett, 1995: 1220-1).

With reference to representative democracy, the potential benefits of new ICTs are threefold, affecting representatives, parliaments and citizens. First, ICTs potentially allow for the development of a more efficient and professional relationship between the constituency and its MP. New ICTs would allow for a more interactive relationship between the elected and their constituents in which opinions are collected through regular two-way conversation via e-forums, e-surveys, or e-surgeries, and chat rooms, bulletin boards or weblogs. ICTs may also shift the balance between representatives and their party. The creation of individual MP websites may also allow for potential audiences of voters or even dissenters. While it is difficult for party officials to monitor and control such communication flows, it is easier for a party members to challenge official policies they if able to communicate effectively and easily with other like-minded dissenters (Ward and Lusoli, 2005: 60-1).

Second, ICTs have the potential to also improve parliamentary processes. Most notably, legislative activity of MPs can potentially become more efficient: their work would be supported by easy and quick access to a wide range of available resources for enacting legislation through various databases, intranet, digital libraries, and so on. In the course of deliberation within committees, e-consultations have been used for shaping recommendations or pre-legislative scrutiny by means of collecting public viewpoints, while videoconferencing allows for added communicative efficiency and a new method of utilizing evidence by means of calling upon witnesses located beyond the immediate hearing room. Another effective communication tool becoming more commonly implemented is webcasting, which can deliver proceedings in real time, while the resulting electronic archives of webcasts provide access to meeting content whenever it is needed. These ICTs offer increased opportunities for MPs and their staff to both participate in and observe meetings in and beyond their constituency offices without having to be present, with the added opportunity to review recorded sessions. Information technology is also allowing for the use of electronic voting in

the parliamentary chambers and access to the internet within the chambers and committee rooms (UNDP, 2006: 7-8; Griffith, 2007: 8; Brassard, 2000: 5-6). Moreover, parliamentary information is becoming more accessible. Parliamentary websites include detailed information about records and events within Parliament: there are records of current debates, including both plenary sessions and committees in each House; the stages of Bills are readily available including their summaries; related documents and linked debates; webcasts that show proceedings in real time; oral and written evidence related to legislation that can be confirmed through on-demand webcasts and Hansards and official proceedings reports; and records such as library research papers, committees reports and publications are accessible (www.Parliament.uk).

Third, ICTs provide the public with the opportunity for enhanced dialogue. Internet-based technology enables people to communicate with their representatives or representative organisations without being limited by time. As constituents, individuals can remain informed about on-going issues from their representatives via individual representative websites, while the establishment of further online governmental and parliamentary websites provide citizens with the ability to interact and to participate online in electronic petitions, discussion forums and online polls. These tools for two-way interaction play essential roles in increasing both participation and interest in political discussion and debate.

Thus development of information and communication technologies has the potential to establish a valuable communication link between the public, representatives and representative organisations. By increasing two-way communication and enabling public participation as well as increasing access to both representatives and parties, it might well be possible to recover a degree of trust from the indifference that has come to define the public attitude toward politics. Reviving public interest in politics would provide a much needed antidote for the crisis in representative democracy resulting from declining rates of political participation and interest in addition to high levels of cynicism and civic distrust.

For initiating public online participation in the democratic process, ICTs would play a significant role in linking the elected representative and the electorate. In order to assess how this could be achieved, it is necessary to consider the concept of e-democracy and its application within governments and parliaments, referring to this within the terms used for e-government and e-Parliament.

1.3 *E-democracy and its application in Parliament and Government*

There is no single definition of e-democracy. Stephen Coleman defines it as “the use of new digital technologies to enhance the process of the democratic relationship between the government and the governed, representative and represented,” while the e-democracy programme of the Hansard Society states that “it aims to develop innovative ways of using new interactive technologies to reconnect Parliament with the public and encourage participation in the democratic process (Parry and Parliament & Constitution Centre, 2004: 2).” Another definition offered by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) defines it as “the use of new ICTs to increase and enhance citizens’ engagement in the democratic process (POST, 2009: 1).” Putting these together, it can be determined that e-democracy is comprised of the following terms: citizens (for whom?), enhancing engagement (for what?), democratic process (where?), participation (how?) and ICTs (by what means?). Clearly, the purpose of e-democracy is to enhance citizen participation in the democratic process by harnessing the opportunities provided by new ICTs.

E-democracy may be realized through representative bodies: the Government and Parliament are responsible for providing these ICTs to enhance the democratic process, thus offering the terms of e-government and e-Parliament. In the case of the British Government and Parliament, the official websites may play a connective role to strengthen the democratic process between representative institutions, representatives and the public. The government e-democracy website, www.direct.gov.uk, has the slogan “Public services all in one place.” It is through this site that the public is able to access online services by using the ‘Do it online’ tool, as well as being able to access all governmental websites, from the central department to the local council. In particular, the government consultation websites enable the public to participate in the policy making process on a wide range topics across various governmental departments. Furthermore, The “10 Downing Street” website, www.number10.gov.uk, allows the public to communicate with the Prime Minister via e-petitions. Responses to the petitions are posted on the site as well as being e-mailed to all signatories. Since 1996 there has also been a British Parliament website, www.Parliament.uk. In terms of engaging the public on the legislative process, e-consultations have been carried out via the parliamentary website. This has allowed for the inclusion of public opinion during these online consultations, which has resulted in increased pre-legislative scrutiny and affecting committee activities. An additional element is the inclusion of e-petitions, which have been used by the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly since 1998 and 2008 respectively. A similar e-petition system has also

been recommended by the Procedure Committee of the House of Commons, which anticipates the system being implemented by the beginning of 2010 (2008: 50-2).

With reference to public online participation in the process of policy-making and interaction with representatives or representative institutions, these two-way online processes have the potential to provide much greater opportunities to increase and enhance citizen engagement in the democratic processes.

1.4 The significance of parliamentary e-consultation

The term “(e)-consultation” represents a number of factors:

“Consultation” is defined by the OECD as:

...a two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to the government. It is based on the prior definition of the issue on which citizens' views are being sought and requires the provision of information. Governments define the issues for consultation, set the questions and manage the process, while citizens are invited to contribute their views and opinions (2001: 23).

“E-consultation” is described as:

The government website provides the tools necessary for e-consultation. It allows citizens to set the agenda for the debate through e-petitioning. The government ensures that its elected officials have a website to communicate directly with their constituents. It maintains an archive of their discussions and provides feedback to citizens (UN, 2008: 18).

The British government also offers a definition at www.direct.gov.uk which suggests that “Consultation involving the public in the work of government has become an integral part of the policy making process.” In e-consultations posted on the British government website, the following words are included to encourage public participation: “Public consultations involve the public in the process of government policy making. Have your say on a broad range of topics across of the government.” Parliamentary e-consultations have been run by Parliament on behalf of select committees. Each consultation in the introductory pages presents its goal: “to encourage more input from participants, such as shaping recommendations to the government in committees’ reports.”

Thus, e-consultations are able play a valuable role in encouraging interaction between the public, elected representatives and public servants, enabling the public to take part in the decision-making process or the development of pre-legislative scrutiny. In the case of e-democracy, however, Parliament appears to have taken a less proactive attitude towards creating an accessible online public sphere than the government. The government employs two-way online tools of communication, which are both top-down in the case of e-consultation systems, and bottom-up in the case of e-petitions. However, Parliament has only implemented the top-down system. In particular, the bottom-up electronic tool implemented by the Prime Minister's Office is the launch of the 10 Downing Street website, which has received over 29,000 petitions containing 5.8 million signatures from over 3.9 million email

addresses (POST, 2009: 2). This may be a positive step toward increasing public participation and interest in governmental policy-making processes. However, in the case of Parliament it can be argued that a further element of parliamentary crisis has occurred, referred to as the crisis of Parliament, resulting from increased public apathy toward their representative institutions. This is arguably the result of Parliament and its members' failure to respond to new technology, which has stifled communication between executive and political leaders and resulting in the marginalisation of elected legislatures and the elected (Ward and Lusoli, 2005: 61).

In the same way that a lack of public interest in politics has resulted in low voter turnout and therefore a crisis of representative democracy, so too has low public participation in the parliamentary processes of policy-making resulted in a crisis of Parliament. A potentially serious problem that may be detrimental to the governmental campaign to use communication technology for gauging public opinion and to engage the public in government policy is the tendency of Parliament to bypass elected representatives and legislative organisations. If this trend continues, the elected and their institutions are in danger of becoming obsolete.

In order to re-establish its centrality as well as its members' roles endowed by voters, Parliament needs to establish a better connection between itself and the public. Currently, the parliamentary e-consultation system, active on the parliamentary website since 2007, is the only online communication tool that allows the public to express their views, to interact with their representatives, and to engage in the legislative process. Therefore, the establishment of a two-way online communication system is crucial for increasing public participation in Parliament, which would stimulate interest and counter indifference. Thus, parliamentary e-consultations are worth researching in order to properly establish their potential as a means of enabling and encouraging public participation and involvement in political decision-making.

1.5 Factors reducing public online participation

Though ICTs provide new opportunities for interaction between citizens and policy-makers through online interactive space such as e-consultation, these new communication methods tend to encourage the public to participate in issues tabled solely by political institutions.

To become an established participatory tool, e-consultation should be a means to impact both representatives and the represented (Tomkova, 2009: 49). However, some argue that citizen contributions from e-consultation processes tend to be poorly acknowledged and vaguely incorporated into policy-making. Additionally, feedback on the effectiveness of public input is rarely disclosed. In this respect, there is a lack of transparency and accountability needed for such interactive processes to be effective. Thus, the public perception is that e-consultation is nothing more than a facade for political correctness rather than a new and significant opportunity for public engagement (Tomkova, 2009: 53).

Meanwhile, the European Commission define ‘eGovernment barriers’ as:

Characteristics-either real or perceived-of legal, social, technological or institutional context which work against developing eGovernment at the EU level, either: because they impede demand, by acting as a disincentive or barriers for users to engage with eGovernment services; or because they impede supply, by acting as a disincentive or barrier for public organizations to provide eGovernment services (2006: 14).

According to the definition above, seven eGovernment issues have been identified by the European Union: leadership failures; financial inhibitors; digital divides; poor coordination; workplace and organizational inflexibility; lack of trust; and poor technical design (European Commission, 2006: 9, 14-21). It is notable that a lack of sufficient leadership during key steps such as initiation, implementation, promotion and on-going support of progress potentially result in slow and inconsistent eGovernment growth.

In defining Electronic Governance (e-Gov), Haroula N. Delopoulos states that “the use of ICT in the public administration and services is specified as Electronic Governance (e-Gov), which contains organisational changes and new skills for the improvement of public services and democratic processes (2010: 623).” However, she also points out that certain barriers are preventing citizens from adopting e-Gov services into their everyday lives: a lack of knowledge (digital literacy); limited access to technology (the internet); issues of privacy and safety; public preference for face-to- face communication; and the reluctance of decision makers to effectively utilize ICT technology (Delopoulos, 2010: 625-6).

Research findings point to several reasons for the lack of public involvement in local bureaucracy (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001a). First, citizens have a negative view of local authorities. Poor service and a record of broken promises made by council members increase their negative perception. In particular, the public has a negative view of council members who issue campaign promises but fail to act on them and are not receptive to public concerns. Second, citizens generally lack of awareness of opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. People do not know how to attend council meetings and are not aware of how they are conducted. Third, a lack of responsiveness and availability of council members for consultation is the single biggest deterrent for public involvement. Ironically, it was surveyed that local administrative officials worry about raising public expectation through increased participation (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001b). Finally, issues of social exclusion, primarily of neglected social classes may be a reason that ordinary citizens are reluctant to become involved. The general opinion is that various methods of participation are needed to meet the needs and concerns of a range of social classes.

According to the research results above, the primary factors generating public reluctance to online participation can be summarised as:

- poor response and feedback to recommendations made by citizens
- insufficient leadership resulting in slow and inconsistent eGovernment growth
- negative public perception of local authority
- a lack of awareness about opportunities for participation
- minimal public authority response to consultation
- exclusion issues of neglected social classes
- low-level public access to the internet and a general lack of digital literacy
- public mistrust of ICT technology due to privacy and safety concerns
- public preference for face-to- face communication
- reluctance of policy- makers to utilize ICT as a means of involving public consideration in the decision-making process

In order to increase public online participation, decision-makers as well as administrative officials need to acknowledge the issues of decreasing participation outlined above as significant considerations when conducting online consultations.

1.6 Thesis aims

Democracy secures its legitimacy by guaranteeing open public participation. The recent development of internet-based ICTs based has increased the possibility for public participation without the potential obstacles of distance and time. Websites of representative institutions have the potential to play a significant role as a connective platform between the elected and the electorate. In light of this, 140 parliaments globally have launched their own parliamentary websites (Web Sites of National Parliaments, www.ipu.org), including the British Parliament, which was launched in 1996. British parliamentary online consultations have been conducted via this parliamentary website. This two-way communication system provides the public with the opportunity to participate in parliamentary democratic processes. Coleman commented on this online system in the Modernisation Committee of the House of Commons as:

On-line consultations are something that you [Parliament] have in fact pioneered, and have done better than any other Parliament in the world. There is quiet a lot of data suggesting that these consultations have had an effect on the fairly small minority of people who have engaged in them-because they have been deliberative, because they have been expansive over a period of a month, and because you [Parliament] have taken people seriously (Modernisation Committee, 2004: 20).

However, the e-consultation system is the only tool which Parliament employs to fulfil the role of two-way communication. This raises several issues needing to be addressed: does this system offer the public enough opportunity to express its views; does this system allow MPs to respond to public messages; and will it be possible for public contributions to be linked to legislative policy? The purpose of this thesis is to consider a number of research questions which are based upon the issues raised above and to seek methods by which to maximize the effectiveness of the online consultation system. The following issues will be considered:

- Q1. Should participants be provided with information related to issues in advance?
- Q2. Does interaction between MPs and the public occur via e-consultation?
- Q3. Does public contribution shape committee recommendations?
- Q4. After e-consultations do MPs maintain interest in issues that have been discussed?
- Q5. Does the moderator's role contribute to the effectiveness of e-consultation?
- Q6. Do contributors receive adequate feedback after consultation?
- Q7. Are contributors able to access their posted messages after their e-consultations?

1.7 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The following chapter (Chapter 2) presents a review of research papers and related material about public online participation via parliamentary websites. This is followed by an exploration of prior research of e-consultation in order to ascertain the focus of the research. This is followed in the next chapter (Chapter 3) by an establishment of research methods and a framework for analysis, including basis for choosing specific case studies. The next two chapters (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) are empirical studies based on two cases of parliamentary e-consultations which are considered, according to the research methods outlined in chapter 3, in order to answer the research questions. The final chapter (Chapter 6) will include an analysis of any findings relating to the research questions as well as recommendations for maximizing the effectiveness of the parliamentary e-consultation system within future investigation as well as some concluding remarks.

2 Literature review

2.1 *Introduction*

Low voter turnout, which may be due to the low rate of public participation in the political process, can potentially bring about a crisis situation in the system of representative democracy. Similarly, decreasing constituent participation in the parliamentary process may result in a crisis within Parliament. In attempting to prevent these crisis scenarios, e-democracy policies have been implemented within both the government and Parliament. Specifically within the British Parliament an e-consultation system is utilized as a two-way communication tool that may well offer a solution to the crisis. In order to conduct a qualitative analysis of this statement, it is necessary to consider a range of data from a number of sources including analytical data from various academic studies, parliamentary and governmental reports, and those produced by international organisations. This is valuable in establishing a framework analysis on which to base empirical studies and a suitable objective for this study.

Before considering the existing research, it is necessary to establish a number of factors. With reference to the fact that e-consultation is an online tool designed to increase public participation via parliamentary websites, the significances of e-participation and parliamentary websites will be initially established in the next two sections (Section 2.2 and Section 2.3). This will be followed by a classification and definition of the term e-consultation (Section 2.4). It will then be possible to accurately present an analysis of existing research on e-consultations (Section 2.5). This chapter will conclude with a summary (Section 2.6).

2.2 *E-participation: A new opportunity for public participation*

2.2.1 The definitions and objectives of e-participation

Public disengagement from the political process may result in a growing sense of mistrust of representative bodies. A possible solution is the implementation of e-participation, which Ann Macintosh defines as:

Describing efforts to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives and governments using Information and Communication Technologies.

Meanwhile, a consultation paper on the policy for electronic democracy and the British government refers to e-participation in the following terms:

The government's e-participation strategy seeks to find ways in which new technologies can be utilised in the democracy process to connect politicians and the public between elections. The proposal seeks to provide greater opportunities for consultation and dialogue between government and citizens (HM Government, 2002: 23).

A further definition is that e-participation represents:

ICT-supported participation in processes involved in government and governance. Processes may concern administration, service delivery, decision making and policy making (Avdic, Hedstrom, Rose and Gronlund, 2007: 3).

An additional concept of e-participation was also defined by the European Commission in the Work Programme (2007: 1):

A Preparatory Action to promote the development and use of Information and Communication Technologies in legislative and decision-making processes within parliamentary and government environments, aiming to enhance the participation of citizens and contribute to better legislation.

Discussing the possible benefits of e-participation, Hacker and Van Dijk (2000) state that:

E-participation has the potential to establish more transparency in government by allowing citizens to use new channels of influence which reduces barriers to public participation in policymaking.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that e-participation provides the public with new opportunities for participation, several objectives are stated (OECD, 2003: 33; Macintosh, 2004: 2):

1. Enable a wider audience for broader participation, by offering a range of technologies that can provide various technical and communicative skills to citizens
2. Offer relevant information to audiences for enabling more informed participation in a more accessible and understandable format
3. Engage with a wider audience to enable in-depth contributions, and support deliberative online debate
4. Provide citizens with relevant and appropriate feedback to ensure openness and transparency in the policy-making process.

Considering these definitions, e-participation can then be summarized as:

- Purpose: enhancing public participation and enabling better connections with the elected
- Application: legislative and decision-making processes
- Means: Information and Communication Technologies

With reference to public needs, the objectives of e-participation are as follows:

- Enable wider participation
- Offer accessible information
- Make more detailed contributions possible and support in-depth debate
- Provide relevant and appropriate feedback

The primary purpose of e-participation is to encourage wider public participation in the policy-making process through the use of ICTs, and to enhance this experience through the inclusion of relevant and accessible information prior to discussions, the encouragement of in-depth online debate and the inclusion of feedback.

2.2.2 The component elements and levels of e-participation

OECD(2003: 32) describes the relationship between the public and the government as consisting of three levels which indicate the stages of public involvement in the policy-making processes:

- Information:

A one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information for use by citizens.

- Consultation:

A two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to the government. It is based on the prior definition of information. The government define the issues for consultation, set the questions and manage the process by which citizens are invited to contribute their views and opinions.

- Active participation:

A relationship based on partnership with the government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, although the responsibility of making final decisions rests with the government.

According to the UN e-Governments Survey 2008 (UN, 2008: 18) the 'e-participation Index' is comprised of three sub-categories:

- E-information

The government website offers information about the list of elected officials, government structure policies and programmes, point of contact, budget, laws and regulations and other information of public interest. Information is disseminated through a number of online tools.

- E-consultation

The government website provides the tools necessary for e-consultation. It allows citizens to set agendas for debates through e-petitions. The government ensures that its elected officials have a website to communicate directly with their constituents. The website maintains an archive of discussions and allows for citizen feedback.

- E-decision-making

The government is willing to consider citizen e-input during the decision-making process. The government informs its citizens of what decisions have been taken based on the consultation process.

This index can serve as an e-government barometer. The index can provide a measure by which to gauge and ensure the implementation of quality and useful services for the purpose of public engagement in the policy-making processes through ICTs. The E-participation index (2008) was produced after assessing 21 services and facilities associated with public information and participation for citizens in 189 countries. Surprisingly, the UK ranked only 25th with a scoring index of 0.4318 (with the USA ranked highest, with a scoring index of 1.000) representing the biggest drop of any nation since the previous survey in 2005, which had the UK had ranked as the leading nation for e-participation in the world (UN, 2008: 59).

Considering the definition of e-participation in relation to the terms “information, consultation” and “active participation,” Macintosh developed three levels of participation: e-enabling, e-engaging and e-empowering. The first stage is the enabling of participation through the use of technology. The objective of this stage is to support increased public access to more understandable and accessible communication technology and information. The second stage is to engage the public by means of technology. This is achieved by utilizing a top-down electronic consultation tool, which is led by the government or Parliament. This may encourage wider participation and to allow participants to make more in-depth contributions and encourage active debate on policy issues. The third stage empowers citizens through technology. To support active participation a bottom-up facilitation can be implemented to allow for the public to have greater influence on political agendas. At this final stage, participants change from policy consumers to policy producers (Macintosh, 2004: 2-3).

Additionally, the Government’s policy for e-democracy aims to facilitate, broaden and deepen participation in the democratic process. This is achieved through ICTs which enable more direct access to public information, track political processes, provide means for participation in discussions and the formation of groups, engage in policy formation, and provide a means of scrutinizing the government and to vote in elections. By broadening participation it is possible to include members of the public in the democratic process who may have previously felt excluded or disenfranchised or who cannot participate, by means of new ICTs. Meanwhile, the aim of deepening participation is to construct strong and active relationships between the public and all levels of representative bodies by using ICTs (HM Government, 2002: 15-7).

Before a large-scale implementation of ICTs, Arnstein describes the scale of citizens’ participation in her paper of ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation’ (1969: 216-24). Arnstein’s “ladder” consists of eight levels of participation grouped into three parts: non-participation, degrees of tokenism and degrees of citizen power. The first part includes two rungs which are Manipulation and Therapy, which are characterized as non-participation and do not reflect legitimate public involvement. The second part is comprised of three rungs: Informing,

Consultation and Placation. These rungs are also characterized as degrees of tokenism. The third part of the ladder has three rungs: Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control. These rungs represent degrees of citizen power. Though Arnstein's "ladder" is more directly related to citizen involvement in the planning process, it can be seen to equally reflect citizen participation in political processes and the degree of public empowerment (Kingham, 2003: 33).

In summary, according to the reports of UN and OECD e-participation consists of three elements: (e)-information, (e)-consultation and e-decision-making or active participation. Further concepts of e-participation levels have been proposed by both scholars and governments. Macintosh defines the scale of participation as e-enabling, e-engaging and e-empowering. The British government also defines participation levels as objectives of e-democratic policy: facilitating, broadening and deepening participation. Furthermore, according Arnstein's establishment of varying participation levels, the highest levels can be understood to include: active participation, e-decision-making, e-empowering, deepening participation, and an encouragement of wider participation and degrees of citizen power. It is these highest levels that are the objectives of e-participation. The factors and levels of e-participation described above are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of factors and levels of e-participation

Defined by	1st level	2nd level	3rd level
OECD	Information	Consultation	Active Participation
UN	E-information	E-consultation	E-decision-making
Macintosh	E-enabling	E-engaging	E-empowering
UK government	Facilitating participation	Broadening participation	Deepening participation
Arnstein	Non-participation	Degrees of tokenism	Degrees of citizen power

In this framework of participation levels, it is possible to identify the level at which e-consultation takes place. According to Macintosh, e-consultation is included in the second level of 'e-engagement.' This level represents the top-down approach, whereby public opinion is gathered on issues which have been initiated by the government or Parliament. E-petition, however, is placed at the 'e-empowerment' level of participation, as a bottom-up method, in which issues are determined by citizens. According to the OECD report, online forums are located at the 'consultation' level rather than the level of 'active participation' due to the fact that the government defines the purpose of consultation, poses the questions and manages the process. Therefore it is not until the level of 'active participation' that citizens are able to fully engage the policy-making process, to propose policy issues or shape policy dialogue.

2.2.3 The ICT principles for public participation in the British Parliament

In its report, *Digital Technology: Working for Parliament and the Public*, the Information Committee in the House of Commons presented five principles for the incorporation of ICTs into the House (Information Committee, 2002: 7-18) (See Box 1).

Box 1 ICT Principles - House of Commons Information Committee

1. Accessibility

The House is committed to the use of ICT to increase its accessibility and to enable the public, exercising its right to use whatever medium is convenient, to communicate with Members and with Committees of the House

2. Professionalism

The House is committed to using ICT to enhance the professionalism of Members, their staff and House staff in all aspects of parliamentary life

3. Public Participation

The House is committed to the use of ICT to increase public participation in its work, enabling it to draw the widest possible pool of experience, including those who have traditionally been excluded from the political and parliamentary process

4. Openness

The House recognises the value of openness and will use ICT to enable, as far as possible, the public to have access to its proceedings and papers

5. Relevance

The House will develop and share good practice in the use of ICT with other parliamentary and governmental bodies within the United Kingdom and elsewhere, and will work in collaboration with outside bodies

With reference to the principle of public participation, the Information Committee comments that online consultation might play a significant two-way communicative role in the process of select committee inquiries, while it may also allow for public participation in the law-making process with the aim of enhancing pre-legislative scrutiny. If there is to be a greater level of public participation in the work of the House, whether it is in select committee inquiries or in pre-legislative scrutiny, the Parliament website will need to act as a portal (Information Committee, 2002: 16).

According to the Information Committee's report, the principle electronic parliamentary tool which enables the public to participate in the British Parliament is online consultation. However, it is also possible that public participation can be realized via the Parliament website, thus making it a platform by which to connect Parliament and the electorate.

2.3 The importance of parliamentary websites: a platform for realizing e-participation

2.3.1 The role of parliamentary websites

Parliamentary websites have played an important role in the efforts of Parliament to achieve its aims of representation, accountability, accessibility, transparency and effectiveness. They have provided numerous channels by which to communicate and support parliamentary activities, not only for representatives and their staff but also for parliamentary officers, and have allowed for more public access to information and better communication between the electorate and the elected (UN and IPU, 2008: 87). In light of this, Parliaments in 140 countries have constructed their own parliamentary websites (www.ipu.org). It is worth noting, however, that, possibly due to an apathetic attitude towards the need to establish suitable electronic systems, the public is somewhat less familiar with parliamentary websites than those of governmental bodies. Therefore, the term e-government might be more familiar to the public than e-Parliament. However, according to Stephen Coleman's definition below, e-democracy includes both e-government and e-Parliament:

... using new digital technology to enhance the process of democratic relationship between government and governed, representative and represented (Parry and Parliament & Constitution Centre, 2004: 2).

Currently, e-government provides citizens with access to various online services and removes the need to visit or contact specific governmental service departments, such as taxation. Furthermore, central and local governments have been able to use online discussion to connect directly with public opinion and to engage the public in the policy-making process. Ironically, however, increased development of an e-government may well be responsible for decreased interest and support for Parliament due to the public perception of its redundancies.

In the same way that the crisis of representative democracy can be viewed as the result of decreased public participation within politics, low levels of public participation in Parliament can also be seen as a crisis of Parliament. Therefore, it is crucial for Parliament to encourage public interest and to engage the public in the legislative process. In terms of increasing e-participation within Parliament as a means of combating this crisis, it is essential that parliamentary websites are employed as a tool by which to connect with the electorate and civic society. In order to be successful websites need to contain information and content that is well laid out and provide tools for communication with the public that are both useable and accessible. Thus it is worth examining which contents and functions should be included. The following sub-section will consider existing guidelines for establishing parliamentary websites.

2.3.2 Guidelines for parliamentary websites

In 2000, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) produced the report, “Guidelines for the Content and Structure of Parliamentary Websites.” After implementing the IPU guidelines, this report was re-named, “Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites.” The report aimed to make a “contribution to the development of effective parliamentary websites” (IPU, 2009: 11). The guidelines also state a number of website objectives, such as providing basic information, adding tools to encourage two-way communication, providing better access through search engines, information about Parliament through various media, including or audio or video webcasts, improving design and usability to ensure easy and straightforward use and enhancing accessibility for all, especially those who are disabled or non-native English speakers (IPU, 2009: 9-10).

In order to meet these objectives, six Guidelines are suggested (IPU, 2009: 16-31):

1. Content: General Information about Parliament
2. Content: Information about Legislation, Budget, and Oversight
3. Tools: Finding, Receiving, and Viewing Information
4. Tools: Communication and Dialogue with Citizens
5. Design: Usability, Accessibility, and Language
6. Oversight: Management and Responsibilities

With reference to e-participation, the two central factors of feedback and interactive communication are recommended in Section 4 (IPU, 2009: 27):

4.1 General feedback

- a. A feedback utility that allows users to send comments and ask questions about any section of the website.
- b. Information about options and recommended ways to contact members, committees, and officials of Parliament such as by phone, by email, in person, and through the internet.

4.2 Communication between members and citizens

- a. The capacity to contact members, committees, and officials of Parliament through unstructured email messages or email forms.
- b. Tools to enable members, committees, and officials to efficiently receive, manage, and respond to email from citizens and civic society.
- c. Interactive tools such as blogs, online forums and discussions, e-petitions, and other methods for interacting with citizens.
- d. Systems for allowing online polling of significant subject matter and the reporting of potentially beneficial results.

- e. Testing and implementation of new methods for citizen-Parliament interaction as technologies emerge and as they prove useful to parliaments.

According to these guidelines it should be possible for members of the public to receive feedback on demand and be informed about contact points by both on-line and off-line means. Moreover members of Parliament, including those of committees as well as parliamentary officials, should be able to efficiently manage and respond to citizen email.

There is also the suggestion of possible means by which to conduct interactive communication, and several potential electronic tools are suggested: blogs, online forums and discussion, and e-petitions. Online-polls can also be used for collecting public opinion on current policy issues.

2.3.3 The development of the British Parliament's website

The British Parliament had two significant information revolutions during its six-hundred-year history. The first took place in the 16th century with the printing of the Bill. Prior to this, Bills were read aloud in the chamber, taking two hours. However, it was not until 1909 that Parliament became responsible for printing its official reports, which had been since 1811, the unofficial duty of Thomas Hansard. The second revolution was the ability to transmit parliamentary proceedings via radio and television. In 1978, the public was first able to listen to debates recorded by radio microphones, and, just two decades later, it was possible to watch the proceedings of the Lords and Commons in 1985 and 1989 respectively (Coleman, 1999: 371-2). There was arguably a third revolution on the horizon which emerged from the development of internet-based tools. In 1996, the parliamentary website (www.Parliament.uk) was established, providing a range of free parliamentary information such as daily Hansard reports from the Houses, all the Written Answers, Bills, Committee Reports, etc. These materials are able to be accessed by searching for the name of an individual member or by subject (Coleman, 1999: 377). Following this, in 1999, an educational site targeting young people was added, www.explore.Parliament.uk. The objective of this site is stated on the website itself: 'working with schools to support young people's understanding of Parliament and democracy.' These sites were later joined by another, <http://www.parliamenlive.tv>, which webcasted parliamentary proceedings beginning with the experimental webcast of Westminster in 2002, and, since 2003, webcasts of live debates from both Houses (Lester, P. and Parliament & Constitution Centre, 2009: 2).

At the beginning of its implementation, proposals made for the improvement of the parliamentary website. One critic indicated some problems, suggesting that it was not user-

unfriendly for inexperienced or less experienced users; that it lacked direct links to members; that it was non-interactive; and that visually, it was somewhat dull (Coleman, 1999: 377-9). As a result, Parliament has made an effort to improve its websites in both design and content. In the summer of 2002, a newly designed primary website was constructed with a content-management tool. Following the re-design, the website experienced a steady increase in the number of visitors. For example, during January 2004, over 2.5 million page requests took place on the main server, while there were over 5 million hits on the publications server. Despite this process of improving the website, however, figures suggest that a sense of dissatisfaction still existed among its users. Indeed, the Modernisation Committee's report included suggestions made by users, who commented that 'the search facility was not satisfactory' and that 'information was not classified and grouped in a helpful way.' In response, Coleman stated that 'the website could not be said to be performing a 'democratic function' unless it was able to reach those people 'who cannot find what they might need but they do not even know it is there' (Modernisation Committee, 2004: 17-8). More recently, a further re-designed version of the parliamentary website was launched, on April 9th 2009. According to the Parliament News, this re-design aimed to achieve three things: provide a modern, fresh and engaging site; refine information routes to make them more accessible; and offer more focused, timely and dynamic content.

In terms of the contents of the parliamentary website, progressive sections have been added: in 2005, a 'Glossary' section was launched for a non-specialist audience which explained parliamentary terms; an 'About Parliament' section was added in 2006 to explain how Parliament operates; in 2007, the 'About and Visiting' sections were offered in Welsh and Gaelic, while in the same year, an 'Online Forum' section, an interactive parliamentary tool, was introduced. In order to reach new audiences, the website has also published contents on 'YouTube', 'Twitter' and in 'Podcasts'. Last year, a section named 'Topical Issues' was installed, which allows users to search for specific content by subject.

With reference to public interaction, it might be worth considering how closely this upgraded website meets the guidelines proposed by the IPU. The guidelines recommend the inclusion of three types of interactive tools: email of Members and blogs for dialogue with the public; online forums and e-petitions to encourage interaction and engagement in the legislative process; online polling to find out public opinion on specific issues.

Responding to the first recommendation, the parliamentary website offers links to MP emails, websites and blogs. The alphabetical lists of MPs in the section, 'MPs, Lords and Offices' provide constituents with the opportunity to contact their elected representatives. All member blogs are available, which detail individual political histories, fields of interest, party positions, any memberships of select committees etc. It also contains details of how to contact MPs by email, phone and through the web. Constituents are also able to contact their MPs by

email through the website itself. According to recommendations by the Information Committee made in 2002, the ‘@Parliament.uk’ e-mail domain is used by nearly all Members. However, 15 MPs are reluctant to publicly provide their email addresses. In addition to e-mail, individual websites are also accessible. Over three quarters of Members, 546 out of 640, have their own websites which contain various information, materials, and interactive tools including biographies, activities in Parliament, video-informing, campaigns, constituency surveys, press releases, etc. as well as their own contact details

As in the second recommendation, the parliamentary website creates an online public sphere through online forums. The ‘Forums’ link can be found in the ‘Get Involved’ section. Launched in 2007, 16 e-consultations have been conducted through this link in the last two years. However, the website is yet to introduce an e-petition system, although the Procedure Committee proposed the launching of one from the beginning of 2010 (Procedure Committee, 2008: 50-2).

Regarding the third recommendation, the main website does not operate an online polling system. With reference to the IPU guidelines, the website meets the first two conditions, but e-petition systems are still only in the proposal stage. As a result, British parliamentary e-consultation on the website is the only two-way system enabling the public to participate in and engage the legislative processes. In light of this, an important finding is that, among the various tools linking constituents and their representatives, Members’ individual websites are the most powerful as they are the only forum in which MPs freely express themselves.

Then, it could be argued that, during the six-hundred years of parliamentary life, the information revolution has taken place in three phases, arising from the development of the printing press, followed by telegraphy and finally the internet. The process can be termed the ‘History of the British Parliamentary Information Calendar.’

Table 2 History of the British Parliamentary Information Calendar

Information Event	Year	Means	Details
Printing Press	1811	Hansard	- Providing printed proceedings materials, Hansard, to MPs
Telegraphy	1978 1985	Radio Television	- Delivering proceedings through radio and television to the public
The Internet	1996	Website	- Enabling the public to access to proceedings materials via website - Providing MPs and the public with online sphere to interact through e-consultation

From the perspective of communication and the transmittance of information between the public, the elected and Parliament, three phases can be identified as:

- A period of ‘Unopened Parliament’: no means by which to print parliamentary material
- A period of ‘Partially Opened Parliament’: audible and visible means
 - radio and television transmissions in the form of recorded debates
- A period of ‘Opened Parliament’: web-based information tools
 - web-based parliamentary material such as the Hansard
 - webcasts in real time or access to archives on-demand
- A period of ‘Participative Parliament’: web-based interactive tools
 - members’ emails, blogs and websites
 - e-consultations

At the conclusion of developments in the communication of parliamentary information, parliamentary websites have been behind the most progressive shift in public access to Parliament and interaction with the elected. In particular, e-consultation is significant, as a two-way online communication tool, enabling citizens to engage the setting of parliamentary policy. Therefore, it is worth studying this system in terms of public online participation in Parliament. First of all, however, it is necessary to classify and define the various terms which are commonly referred to as “online forums” which is discussed in the following section.

2.4 Usages of the term ‘e-consultation’

There are various terms and definitions associated with ‘e-consultation’. Before examining previous studies about online consultations, it is necessary to determine which terms will be used in this study. To do this, the different terms used in existing literature and reports and in practice should be classified. This section contains three categories of terms as used by scholars, representative institutions, including the British Parliament and international organisations.

2.4.1 The academic terms used by researchers

Tomkova divided *e-consultations* into five types: question and answer discussion forums (Q & A forums); on-line polls; e-petitions or on-line testimonies; e-panels; and editorial e-consultations. ‘Q & A forums’ are where the public is invited (by initiates) to post their views, questions and concerns, and to receive feedback from the respective authorities. ‘Editorial e-consultations’, meanwhile, invite citizens and representatives to comment in the form of moderated on-line discussion to find recommendations for policy documents. Tomkova argues that the growing trend for e-consultation initiatives is to combine two or even all of these elements into a single website portal (2009: 2-3).

The term ‘e-consultation’ has also been used by a number of scholars. Macintosh and Whyte use the term in the title of their research papers. They highlight two forms of e-consultations for corresponding during different stages of policy-making: ‘Issue-based forums’ and ‘Policy-based forums’ (Whyte and Macintosh, 2001: 187-98, 2002; 2, 2003: 11). The term is also employed by Peters and Abud, who recognise that “e-consultation as an emerging approach and a tangible opportunity for Canadian democratic institutions to make better decisions through an engaged public” (Peters and Abud, 2009). This term can also be found as the title of the research report by co-authors, including Fagan, Newman, McCusker and Murray (Fagan, Newman, McCusker and Murray, 2006).

A further term, ‘online consultation,’ is also put forth. Coleman comments in the Modernisation Committee of the House of Commons that “on-line consultations are something that you [Parliament] have in fact pioneered and have done better than any other Parliament in the world” (Modernisation Committee, 2004: 25). Scholars such as Coleman and Götze use the term in the title of their research paper (Coleman, 2004b; Götze, 2001), while ‘online forums’ are also referenced in the working paper written by Janssen and Kies (2004). Graham also adopts this as a term in his research paper (2002). Additionally other terms are used including ‘online consultation forum’ (Beierle 2002), ‘e-consultation forums’ (Monnoyer-Smith 2004), ‘online discussions’ (Graham and Witschge 2003) and ‘online discussion forums’ (Wright and Street 2007).

Scholars appear to interchange various terms, rather than insisting on only one. Coleman employs terms relating to online consultations, such as ‘online policy consultation’ and ‘online public consultation’ (Information Management Office, 2004; Modernisation Committee, 2004: 25; Coleman *et al.*, 2002). Norton’s book, meanwhile, includes both terms ‘online forum’ and ‘online consultation’ (Norton, 2005: 234-5). Whyte and Macintosh use not only ‘e-consultation’ but also ‘internet-based e-consultation’ and ‘consultation discussion forum’ (2001: 188; 2002: 4).

In summary, there are various terms which are being interchangeably used within the academic field by researchers, the most notable of which are:

- e-consultation, internet-based e-consultation
- online consultation, online policy consultation, online public consultation
- online forum, e-consultation forum, online consultation forum
- online discussion, online discussion forum
- consultation discussion forum

2.4.2 The practical terms used by the British Parliament

In 1997, the British Parliament launched an online forum section for hosting committee inquiries on its website. However, several other terms are also used on the website. On the main website, www.Parliament.uk, a ‘past committee forum’ section has been launched, a portal through which the public can get involved in the legislative process. Once through it, however, a user is presented with an ‘e-consultation’ screen, <http://forums.Parliament.uk/html>. As of 16 November 2009, it has been possible to see introductory messages of all e-consultations which have taken place since 2007. Within these, there are a variety of terms associated with e-consultations, including ‘online consultation’, ‘web forum’ and ‘online forum.’

Before the inclusion of online consultations on the parliamentary website, they were run by the Hansard Society, www.tellparliament.net on behalf of Parliament. On this site, the terms ‘online consultation’, ‘online forums’ and ‘online discussion’ had been adopted. Committees’ reports, meanwhile, included these terms: ‘online consultations’; ‘online forums’; ‘on-line consultations’ (Information Committee, 2002: 14-5, 31; Modernisation Committee, 2004: 4-5, 25-6). Interestingly, the Scottish Parliament used a wider variety of terms: ‘on-line discussion forums’, ‘forums for online discussion’, ‘discussion forums’ and ‘web-based discussion’ (Information Committee, 2002:19-23).

After running online parliamentary consultations, committees have produced its reports in which various terms are employed. For example, the Home Affairs Committee’s report on *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence* uses the term

‘e-consultation’ (2008: 153-162). Another report, *Market Failure: Can the traditional market survive?* conducted by the Communities and Local Government Committee, refers to ‘online consultation’ (2009: 68).

Therefore, it is possible to accumulate terms which can be used practically within the British Parliament, including e-consultation, ‘online consultation’, ‘web forum’ and ‘online forum.’ Additionally, the Scottish Parliament uses additional terms: ‘on-line discussion forums’, ‘forums for online discussion’, ‘discussion forums’ and ‘web-based discussion.’

2.4.3 The reportorial terms used by international organisations

There are several terms referred to within the reports of various international institutions. The report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) contains the terms ‘e-consultation’ and ‘online discussion forum’s (2003: 48-55). In addition, ‘e-consultation’ and ‘web forum’ is found in the United Nations’ report (2008: 18, 63-4), while a further reference is made to ‘online discussions’ in the World e-Parliament Report 2008 (UN and IPU, 2008: 130). It can be seen from these reports that similar terms as those identified previously have also been applied: ‘e-consultation’, ‘online discussion forums’, ‘web forums’ and ‘online discussions.’

2.4.4 The terms used in this thesis

It is clear from the information provided above that several different terms associated with e-consultations have been used by researchers, parliaments and organisations. These terms can be divided into three distinct and two less distinct uses, as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3 Usages of the term ‘e-consultation’

Types	e (electronic)	online	web/internet
Consultation (A)	e-consultation	online consultation online policy consultation online public consultation	internet-based e-consultation
Forum (B)		online forum	web forum
Discussion (C)		online discussion	web-based discussion
(A+B)	e-consultation forum	online consultation forum	
(B+C)		online discussion forum on-line discussion forum forum for online discussion	
(A+B+C)		consultation discussion forum	

The classifications, ‘e,’ ‘online,’ ‘web-based’ and ‘internet’ are all similar in terms of using ICTs to enable citizens access to their democratic institutions through cyberspace and websites in real time. Therefore, it might be possible to apply the same meanings to the terms described in Table 3. However, the principle terms which are described in this study need to be more carefully selected in order to avoid confusion between terms and their meanings. Therefore, the terms ‘e(online)-consultation’ and ‘online forum’ will primarily be used. This does not mean that other terms will be entirely excluded; others will be inserted if necessary. There are three reasons for the specific use of these terms with reference to their use in the British Parliament. First, these terms are currently used in the committee reports on e-consultations within Parliament. Second, the parliamentary website operates an ‘online forum’ section which includes the term ‘e-consultation’ and includes it in ‘online consultation.’ Last, advisors such as Coleman, use ‘online consultation’ in the Committee of the House of Commons and includes it in their reports.

In summary, various terms are used to refer to ‘e-consultation’ which are employed by researchers, parliaments and other institutions. However, the terms ‘e-consultation’, ‘online consultation’ and ‘online forum’ are primarily used in this study due to their frequent use within Parliament.

2.5 Previous studies on e-consultations

2.5.1 An evaluation of e-consultation: Assessing its effect and impact

Whyte and Macintosh (2001; 2002) have considered the existing evaluation of e-consultation. Both agree that while many of the evaluations concentrate on surveys of “citizen satisfaction,” the actual impact of the public on governmental policy through e-consultations is overlooked. Indeed, it may be worth determining whether e-consultations meet objectives for both the government and the public, what has or not has been achieved through online consultation, and the benefits and impacts of applying ICTs. Therefore, they suggest an evaluation framework to find the answer to the research question, “How effective is e-consultation in engaging a wide audience and enhancing deliberation so as to inform and influence the policy process?” To develop an analytical framework, three perspectives can be considered, each of which are addressed below:

- The political perspective:

Does the e-consultation process follow best practice guidelines for undertaking consultations that are published by the government, and are stakeholders satisfied with the process?

- The technical perspective:

To what extent does the design of the ICTs directly affect e-consultation outcomes?

- The social perspective:

Are contributions relevant to policy topics, were they informed contributions and were the contributions debated and supported (or not) by others?

Macintosh and Whyte suggest an e-consultation evaluation framework composed of 7 consultation criteria, taking into account these perspectives:

1. Was the e-consultation process conducted as planned?
2. Were the consultation objectives and what was expected of the citizens made clear?
3. Did the consultation reach the target audience?
4. Was the information provided appropriate?
5. Were the contributions informed and appropriate?
6. Was feedback provided both during and after the consultation?
7. Was there an impact on policy contents?

The framework proposed by Whyte and Macintosh for evaluating e-consultations is significant for its establishment and assertion of evaluation issues. It also emphasizes the importance of empirical research to the application of these evaluation criteria.

Another evaluation method for e-consultations is offered by Jones and Grammell (2004) who suggest that public consultation is being carried out in unprecedented numbers as a direct result of trends such as greater transparency in decision-making, evidence-based policy making, and recognition that inadequate consultation leads to unintended consequences. These trends have produced a remarkable growth in consultation by enabling the public to become more engaged through the use of ICTs. However possible problems may arise if, for example, consultations are held to an insufficient and unprofessional standard by their organisers who may be somewhat blasé toward these processes, thus resulting in inconsistent standards. In order to overcome these problems, Jones and Grammell suggest ways to conduct evaluations after e-consultations. They recommend three approaches for conducting evaluations: First, the adoption of the 'decision audit method' which can be used to exam how a consultation exercise impacts particular decisions. In 'pre-considered decisions,' which are proposed to the public before being included in government's plans, the consultation can play a role as a potential tool for checking governmental policy processes. Other decisions which are 'programmed, structured' and 'open-ended' are also included in this method. According to this evaluation method, which also classifies deferred as well as abandoned decisions, it may be possible to find answers to the question, "How do the consultations change the decision?" This is the most appropriate method for consultants to convince stakeholders that their contributions are heard and that they have a clear impact on decisions. The second follows 'the process review method.' This evaluation stage considers the consultation process and whether it complies with standards of best practice and follows pre-defined criteria. The process includes: 'the scope of the consultation;' 'the targeting of the consultation;' 'the choice of techniques;' 'the effectiveness of the techniques used;' 'data management and analysis;' and 'feedback to the consulted and the decision-makers.' This is the most appropriate method for organisations seeking to improve their standards of consultation practice and the public's perceptions of these activities. The third method of evaluation is 'stakeholder satisfaction.' This evaluation is conducted from the public perspective and considers factors such as: the potential reasons that the public is unwilling participate in consultations; those being consulted often have difficulty finding substantive content in a consultation exercise; and the code of practice for consultations which can be used for those who wish to complain about the process. This approach is the most appropriate for consultants who do not wish to reach all of their targets and secure their support.

Jones and Grammell also have 8 recommendations for conducting consultation evaluations:

1. Ensure that consultation strategy documents allow for proper evaluation provisions
2. Allocate sufficient budget to undertake meaningful evaluations
3. Identify a suitable reviewing body to be responsible for absorbing evaluation results
4. Consider integrating elements of stakeholder satisfaction activities
5. Pre-announce an evaluation for high-profile consultations
6. Oblige decision-makers to proactively and consciously decide to engage consultation
7. Train all staff engaged in organising consultations to routinely perform simple first-level evaluations
8. Develop contacts with other bodies with consultation programmes in order to exchange best practice information.

Jones and Grammell's evaluation framework can be summarized with the terms 'decision audit,' 'process review' and 'stakeholder (and public) satisfaction,' with each of these elements playing a role at each stage of the consultation process. It may be possible for policy-makers to modify or disregard their judgment through 'the decision audit.' Moreover, pre-set consultation criteria published by conducting bodies might play an effective role in the level of 'process review' evaluation. The evaluation of public satisfaction also has significance in terms of a customer-centric approach. Additionally, it could be seen from their recommendations that it is necessary to assign trained staff to these consultations in order to avoid the need for more evaluations. To ensure efficient evaluations the principles mentioned above or the implementation of a practical code for consultation can provide evaluators with guidance for a better analysis.

2.5.2 The guidelines for e-consultation: Using indexes for evaluation

It is essential that e-consultations are processed effectively and are evaluated analytically. In order to achieve this, establishing specific principles of consultations can be particularly beneficial in terms of providing an evaluation framework. In other words, a pre-set criterion for consultation can be used an index of what is to be evaluated. Such consultation guidelines have been presented by various governmental bodies, parliaments and other institutes, including those listed below:

- Code of Practice on Consultation (HM Government, 2008)
- Code of Practice on Consultation (Isle of Man Government, 2008)
- Guidelines and Checklist for Online Consultation and Citizen Engagement (Treasure Board Secretariat, Canada, 2001: 28)

- Recommendations for the conduct of consultations (Information Committee, House of Commons, 2002: 15)
- Guiding principles for online public consultation (OECD, 2009)
- Guidelines for Online Public Consultation (OECD, 2006)
- Guiding principles for successful online consultation (OECD, 2003: 10-1)
- Guiding principles for successful information, consultation and active participation of citizens in policy making (OECD 2001: 15)
- Key principles for successful consultation (The Voluntary Arts Network, 2006: 3)
- Online Policy Consultation - Better Practice Checklist (Information Management Office, Austrian Government, 2004)

The Voluntary Arts Network (2006) emphasizes key principles for a successful consultation: ‘integrity’, ‘visibility’, and ‘transparency and disclosure.’ ‘Integrity’ is the most important factor to ensure that involved citizens maintain confidence in consultant motivations and processes, even if their aims or suggestions are not realized. To ensure that as many participants as possible are able to gain access to the process, ‘visibility’ is vital in terms of informing about the nature of consultations, the possible implications or outcomes, and the importance of participation. The obligations of ‘transparency and disclosure’ are essential for ensuring that all received contributions are reported by consultants and differences of opinion are declared by those consulted, so that all participants will feel included, and so the published reports are fairly-interpreted and be an accurate reflection of proceedings and are provided in an accessible format. In addition to these principles three stages for a successful consultation are suggested:

1. Pre-consultation planning

- define the objectives of consultation exercises
- identify target audience(s)
- identify how best to reach the target audience
- prepare material-feedback forms, event planning, scripting adverts, design posters etc.

2. The consultation process

- consultation event-meetings, online forums, workshops, submission forms etc.
- publicity campaigns to ensure public awareness of participation methods
- on-going monitoring of various aspects of consultation-ensure that the website is functioning properly, advert appears in paper etc.

3. Consultation feedback

- provide feedback to consultation participants
- perform consultation evaluations to identify which areas worked best, which areas did not, and why

These three stages may highlight and explain consultation processes and may be a useful framework for analysing each level.

Another organisation, the OECD, presented online consultation guidelines. The OECD's ten guidelines in the report, *Guiding principles for successful online consultation* (2003: 10-1) include two of the three stages mentioned above:

- Pre-consultation planning
 - 1. Starting planning early
 - 2. Demonstrate commitment
 - 3. Guarantee personal data protection
 - 4. Tailor approach to fit target group
 - 5. Integrate traditional methods
 - 6. Test and adapt tools
 - 7. Promote online consultation
- Consultation feedback
 - 8. Analyse the results
 - 9. Provide feedback
 - 10. Evaluate the consultation process and its impacts

These principles seem to focus on the processes which take place before and after consultations are conducted. An example of this is the need to secure the privacy of individual information. In online consultations, particularly, this is regarded as one of the most central factors.

A more recent version of *Guidelines for Online Public Consultation* (OECD 2006), which can be found on the website includes the sections:

- LEADING UP to the consultation;
 - 1. Begin the consultation process long before the actual consultation
 - 2. Identify organisations with the appropriate expertise and maintain an up-to-date database
- LAUNCHING the consultation;
 - 3. Explain the consultation procedure and how responses are treated
 - 4. Simplify the process: provide all relevant documentation
 - 5. Allow adequate time for responses
- FOLLOWING the consultation;
 - 6. Analyse and summarise responses for formal discussion and publication on the website
 - 7. Report back to the public via the website and other communication channels
 - 8. Monitor effectiveness

From the point of view of citizens, it is crucial to set consultation guidelines, such as explaining the process and methods of responses, providing any related information, securing an adequate amount of response time, accessing responses once they have been analysed and summarised and reporting back through online methods.

The British government has set standards for conducting consultations. Since 2000, the government has followed a practical code for effective consultations (HM Government, 2008). The consultation criteria aim to improve the transparency, responsiveness and accessibility of consultations, and to reduce the level of engagement in government policy of those who are regular contributors to government consultations. The criteria are guided toward these objectives. It is important to note that although these principles are primarily for off-line consultations, they are also applicable for online consultations as well. Criterion 2 suggests that the minimum duration of consultation exercises to be considered is 12 weeks. In terms of feedback, Criterion 6 states that “clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.” This feedback can be offered in summary form, for example, of respondent experiences and views expressed about each consultation question (Criterion 6.4). Meanwhile, the responsibility for conducting consultations is given to the officials who are organising them, with the clause that “they should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.” This code of practice can encourage policy officers to find the best way to effectively operate the consultation process.

In the case of the Canadian government, *Guidelines and Checklist for Online Consultation and Citizen Engagement* was presented (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2001: 28-38). While the guidelines support public service managers in the use of ICTs in consultations, it is worth paying attention to the online consultation checklist. The check-list consists of five stages: ‘preparation’; ‘design’; ‘implementation’; ‘feedback and follow up’; and ‘final evaluation and integration.’ Each stage also lists points to be met. Such pre-defined and detailed checklists is an effective tool for consultation organisers, helping to recognize what should be processed, which stages should be supplemented, and how it can be evaluated.

The British Parliament approved ‘the recommendations for the conduct of consultations’ (Information Committee, 2002: 15, 30-1) and the seven recommendations can be seen in Box 2.

Box 2 Recommendations for consultation conduct - House of Commons
Information Committee

- The purpose and terms of the consultation should be made clear at the outset, both to those initiating the consultation and those participating in it. Consultations may range from a simple invitation to submit views to a more deliberative and interactive debate including senior decision makers
- It must be made clear to participants that they are not being asked to make policy but to inform the thinking of legislator
- Effort need to be made to recruit participants, whether individuals or organisations, who can impart experience and expertise
- Special efforts are needed to make online consultations socially inclusive: these may include training in the necessary ICT skills and directions to public Internet access for participants
- A good consultation exercise will bring value to both the decision makers and the consulted. This can be tested through effective evaluation procedures, which should be built into each consultation proposal. These should be both quantitative and qualitative. Of particular value is the follow-up with a selection of both the consulted and decision makers to assess the value of the consultation.
The results of any evaluation should be produced in good time and made available to all participants
- Participants should receive feedback on consultation outcomes
- In each case, the consulted should be given clear information about what can be expected, perhaps in the form of a "consultation contract"

These can be regarded as guidelines for e-consultation in the British Parliament and can be divided into five stages known as *ROACE*:

- Reasons to conduct the consultation;
- Objective for collecting contributions;
- Accessibility to the Internet;
- Contribution management;
- Evaluation and feedback.

It may be better to exclude the guideline, 'recruiting participants' because a current consultation system launched in 2007 has allowed for universal participation. However, it needs to be carefully noted that legislators want to be informed by participants, rather than be influenced by them in policy making. In this case, the public contribution to the legislative process via e-consultation may depend on what representatives take into account.

2.5.3 Empirical research on parliamentary e-consultations

Parliamentary online consultations have been conducted since 1998. Over a ten-year period, these exercises, run by various parliamentary organisations such as select committees, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) and All Party Groups, can be divided into two periods in terms of being overseen by different commissioned bodies. In the early period, between 1998 and 2006, the Hansard Society operated (or co-operated with POST) consultations on behalf of select committees or Parliament. From 2007, the British Parliament has operated them directly through its websites. There are several empirical studies and evaluation reports on online parliamentary consultations by researchers and implementing institutions.

Sarah Pearce produced a research paper based on a brief survey of six parliamentary consultations conducted between 1998 and 2001. She defines online consultation as “a useful method for encouraging wider and more interactive participation than is usual in select committee inquiries.” This usefulness arises from the fact that more people can be involved than in physical meetings; contributors have more time to consider topics, allowing for in-depth debate; participants can be actively involved in the discussion as they are able to see public contributions; and citizens can choose convenient participation times without the physical ties of an off-line meeting.

However, even if there are benefits of participants, there are issues to be considered in terms of encouraging the widest possible range of public participation. In terms of internet literacy and access, the online interface should be easy to use and as straightforward as possible. In terms of technical support, specialists can provide solutions to participants with poor internet skills. In addition, the inclusion of well-defined consultation objectives can ensure that participants submit appropriate contributions. It is also true that subjects of discussion need to be deemed interesting and attractive to ensure greater participation. The time of the consultation is also a factor to be considered. Case studies such as Data Protection consultation revealed that consultations conducted during the summer resulted in lower participation, as potential contributors are on holiday. Linking contributions to Parliament is vital because contributors wish to make their views known to Parliament and to influence the legislative process. Indeed, posted messages can be used to broaden a committee’s basis for inquiry, provide a means of scrutinizing draft bills, and provide evidence for debates in the chamber.

Another significant issue is the need to encourage those within Parliament to participate in online consultations. Contributors wish to interact not only with other participants but also their policy makers. It can be seen from Pearce’s studies that participants

were dissatisfied with the low level of response from MPs. This may be the result of some MPs having little internet experience or inadequate support staff.

By assessing contributor impact, it is possible to establish whether commissioning committees adopt contributions as evidence. In the case of the Woman Science consultation, for example, only one paragraph about implementation of e-consultation was mentioned in the final inquiry report. Furthermore, the E-Democracy consultation did not consider public participation in any detail in its report. Clearly, more work needs to be done to ensure that the experience of contributors is appreciated and that recommendations are followed up.

Pearce concludes by suggesting ways that online consultations can be integrated into the mainstream of parliamentary processes:

- topics are of personal interest to the community
- direct links to Parliament are available, so participants have incentive to join
- discussions are run with the assistance of stakeholder groups
- assistance is given to those who are unfamiliar with such technologies being used
- discussions are widely publicised and not restricted to an invited few

Pearce's studies clearly state that successful consultation exercises need to ensure specific factors such as public internet accessibility with supporting specialists, well-defined objectives and interesting subjects, more MP participation, contributions linking to parliamentary activities, and the inclusion of participants' views in recommendations.

Another case study of parliamentary online consultations was conducted by Coleman (2004b: 5). He established four hypotheses to be tested:

- online consultations provide a space for inclusive public deliberation
- online consultations generate and connect networks of interest or practice
- online interaction between representatives and represented leads to greater mutual trust
- most online discussion is uninformed and of poor quality

In order to examine these, he chose two consultations out of ten operated as empirical studies between 1998 and 2002; the Womenspeak consultation on domestic violence and the consultation on the draft Communications Bill, moderated and summarised by the Hansard Society. Both consultations had specific purposes: the former was designed to allow women survivors of domestic violence to submit their experience as testimony to a parliamentary group that was interested in developing relevant policies; the latter enabled citizens to present evidence for committee members as part of the process of pre-legislative scrutiny.

Online consultations such as these offer solutions to accessibility and security in terms of using the internet. Even though 52% of participants in the Womenspeak consultation had no internet literacy prior to their participation, they were helped by trained workers during or after posting their messages. According to a post-consultation survey, it was reported that 60% of the women needed help accessing the website, revealing that the technical supporter can play a role in raising accessibility for the computer illiterate. Another problem is security. If participants were invited to attend actual meetings in Parliament, the survivors of domestic violence would not participate due to the obligation to reveal their names as witnesses. In online consultations, however, names of the participants were replaced with usernames- their real names were used only for registering for the purpose of authentication- allowing them to take part anonymously. A survey revealed that 85% of participants felt that the website was a safe and secure space.

These online consultations also provided participants with an online network. During the Womenspeak consultation, participants created an online community based on mutual support through shared experiences, and 90% of women reported that they learned something new as a result of viewing posts by other participants. Online networking developed participant relationships and there were even attempts by some to continue the online network after the end of the consultation through their own website. In contrast, the Communications Bill consultation reflected a low level of online interaction between contributors. Nonetheless, the post-consultation survey reported that 72% of participants learned something new as a result of reading the messages of other participants.

Therefore, it is clear that between the two case study consultations there is a significant difference in the level of contributor interaction. In the Womenspeak discussion, 82% of all messages were replies to previous messages, in comparison with only 8% of messages in the Communications Bill consultation. With reference to the interaction between the representatives and the represented, 31 messages in the Womenspeak consultation (3.2% of all messages) and 8 messages in the Communications Bill consultation (3.6%) were contributed by six MPs and 4 MPs and peers respectively. Despite the fact that three-quarters of participants in the Womenspeak forum stated that their major reason for taking part was to have an opportunity to interact with MPs, 68% of them thought that MPs were not interested in their comments and 39% of participants were not satisfied with MP contributions. Nonetheless, 94% of participants said that online consultation was a worthwhile exercise and 93% confirmed that they would like to participate in future consultations of this kind. This implies that participants were interested in group networking more than political interaction. In the case of the Communication Bill consultation, 53% of participants were satisfied with the level of MP involvement. One in four participants reported that members of the committee were interested in what they had to say, although slightly fewer than 3% disagreed with this,

while the majority remained unsure. However, 72% thought that online consultations were worthwhile, while 91% wanted more parliamentary e-consultation, with 87% stating that they would be prepared to take part in future online consultations.

From these studies Coleman concludes that not all online consultations are alike. For example, while some are designed to collect experiential evidence, as in the case of the Womenspeak consultation, others are designed to enable interested citizen to connect with the legislative process for pre-legislative scrutiny. Lastly, he made conclusions to his research hypotheses based on the above study:

- the first hypothesis: that “online consultations provide a space for inclusive public deliberation” is supported by the findings of both studies
- the second hypothesis: that “online consultations generate and connect networks of interest or practice”, is strongly supported by evidence from the Womenspeak consultation, but there was little interaction between participants in the Communications Bill
- the third hypothesis: that “online interaction between representatives and the represented leads to greater trust between them” is not supported by the findings from either of these studies
- the fourth hypothesis: that “most online discussion is uninformed and poor quality” is not supported by the findings from either study

According to the post consultation survey of these case studies, the participants’ primary purpose for taking part in the parliamentary online consultation was to have an opportunity to interact with members of Parliament. However, an examination of the third hypothesis proves that the degree of representative-represented interaction was deemed unsatisfactory. Coleman argues that MPs must see the benefits of going online and there exists tangible evidence within online consultations which factors should be taken into account in MP deliberations. To support this, Coleman introduces some examples: Margaret Morgan MP, the chair of the All-Party Group on Domestic Violence, raised issues from the consultation at the Prime Minister’s Question Time. Moreover, Brian White MP commented that “the online consultation on the draft Communications Bill changed the report we wrote. We can say that the report would have been different had it not been for the online consultation.”

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) produced a report on the online consultation, Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (2000), from which several implications were found. Online consultation provides more time for discussion; face to face meetings taking place within Parliament are limited by time constraints, while online discussion can continue for four weeks, thus giving more opportunity for contributions to be

made. Moreover, the level of engagement with contributions was high. 54.8% of participants responded to previous contributions, which can be seen as providing a community of views. Sharing experiences between contributors also occurred with 38.2% sharing experiences as part of their evidence. In respect of policy proposal, the quality of proposals was high, with 50.9% of participants making proposals for action which were connected to previous discussions with rational articulation. It is important to note that these earlier online consultations did not contain contributions by members of Parliament. However, it can be useful to produce similar independent evaluation reports about online consultations.

Thus, from this research into parliamentary online consultations, the following points can be noted:

- easy access to the internet is necessary; in particular, for those who have little internet literacy, and technical support is crucial
- objectives of online consultations should be defined well and clearly delivered to participants to ensure the collecting of appropriate contributions
- to increase the number of participants, interesting and diverse subjects need to be selected
- more MP participation will encourage more citizens to take part
- participants want to be linked to parliamentary activities through their contributions and their views to be included in recommendations
- online consultations may have different purposes and designs: for collecting experiential evidence or for pre-legislative scrutiny
- online consultations provide a space for inclusive public deliberation
- online consultations provide opportunities for shaping and creating online networks between participants
- online consultation does not necessitate the construction of trust between representatives and the represented

2.6 Summary

Public distrust of representative organizations may be a result of its lack of engagement in the political process. If this is the case, e-participation may provide solution. According to its definition as provided by scholars, government bodies and international organizations, e-participation encourages enhancements of public participation and enables better connection with the elected by engaging legislative and decision-making processes through ICTs. Indeed, elements of e-participation are defined by Macintosh as ‘e-enabling’, ‘e-engaging’ and ‘e-empowering.’

The UK Government also makes classifications: ‘facilitating participation,’ ‘broadening participation’ and ‘deepening participation.’ According to the participation levels defined by Macintosh, e-consultation is applicable at the second level, ‘e-engagement,’ because representative bodies present the issues that are open to public opinion. Moreover, the British Parliament presented five ICT principles: accessibility, professionalism, public participation, openness and relevance. In terms of public participation, the Information Committee urges in its report the need for ‘using ICT for increasing public participation in the political and parliamentary process.’ The committee also comments that online consultation may play a significant two-way communicative role to encourage public participation in the process of committee activities. Therefore, from the perspective of the British Parliament, an e-consultation system is the ideal online parliamentary tool for e-participation, which will enable the public to engage in the legislative process.

In order to increase e-participation within Parliament, parliamentary websites can become interactive tools and a platform from which to connect the public and the electorate. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) produced the report, ‘Guidelines for Parliamentary websites.’ In particular, regarding communication between members and citizens, the IPU suggests several electronic means to be included on its websites such as MP blogs and individual websites, online forums, e-petitions and online-polls.

In 1996, the British Parliament established its own website as an internet-based tool. At the beginning of its operation, a range of free parliamentary information was accessible, such as daily Hansard reports. Following this, an educational website was added in 1999, which targeted young people and was aimed at increasing understanding of Parliament and democracy. These sites were later joined by a webcasting site in 2002, designed to deliver webcasts of parliamentary proceedings. Since 2007, the parliamentary website has provided an online public sphere via online consultation. Moreover, all Member blogs, nearly all MP email addresses (expect for 15MPs) and over three quarters of personal Member websites (546 in 640) are available on the main parliamentary website. Therefore, considering IPU

guidelines, the British parliamentary website provides interactive online tools such as MP blogs, websites, email addresses, and e-consultation, while e-petitions and online-polling systems are not implemented. Additionally, an e-petition system is only at the proposal stage. In consequence, British parliamentary e-consultation through its website is the only two-way system enabling public participation and engagement in the legislative processes.

There are various terms which are commonly referred to as 'online forums.' To determine the use of this term and others in this study, it is necessary to classify it as it is used by scholars, representative bodies and international organizations. In the academic field, many terms are used interchangeably by researchers, such as '(internet-based) e-consultation,' 'online (public) consultation,' 'online (consultation/discussion) forum,' 'consultation discussion forum,' etc. Moreover, the practical terms used by the British Parliament and Scottish Parliament are 'e-consultation,' 'online consultation,' 'web forum,' 'online forum,' 'online discussion forum,' 'web-based discussion.' In addition to the practical application of these terms, there are reportorial terms as adopted by OECD and UN, which are found in their reports: 'e-consultation,' 'online discussion forum' and 'web forums.' From these classified terms the principle terms to be used in this study can be selected: 'e (online)-consultation' and 'online forum.' These terms are being included because due to their frequent use within Parliament in its reports and its website. Previous studies on e-consultation have taken several forms: evaluation of e-consultations; guidelines for e-consultations; and empirical research on parliamentary e-consultations.

In terms of evaluating e-consultation as a means of assessing its effect and impact, Macintosh and Whyte produced a research question to shape an evaluation framework: "How effective is e-consultation in engaging a wide audience and enhancing deliberation so as to inform and influence the policy process?" They then suggest a framework for evaluating e-consultation which consists of 7 criteria: conducting e-consultation as planned; making clear objectives and expectations from the public; reaching target audiences; providing appropriate information; providing feedback both during and after consultation; and impacting policy content. In applying these criteria, Macintosh and Whyte emphasize the importance of empirical studies.

Another evaluation framework is presented by Jones and Grammell. They provide three approaches by which to evaluate consultations: the decision audit method; the process review method; and public satisfaction. In particular, the evaluation approach of public satisfaction is one that has a customer-centric focus. They also make 8 recommendations for evaluating consultations. Jones and Grammell particularly stress the importance of training all staff who are involved in organising e-consultation to perform simple first-level evaluations through recommendations.

In order to analytically evaluate an e-consultation, specific criteria may be essential. There are various consultation guidelines presented by representative bodies such as the government and Parliament, as well as related organisations. The Voluntary Arts Network offer *Key principles for successful consultation*. Moreover, OECD recently provided 8 consultation principles entitled *Guiding principles for online public consultation*. Various government bodies have also produced guidelines, most notably the *Code of Practice on Consultation* by the British government and *Guidelines and Checklist for Online Consultation and Citizen Engagement* by the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada. However, it needs to be noted that the British Parliament also produced its own report, *Recommendations for the conduct of consultations*. In 2002, the Information Committee adopted 7 recommendations for conducting e-consultations, which are classified as: reasons for conduction, objectives for collecting contributions, accessibility to the Internet, contribution management, evaluation and feedback.

Online parliamentary consultations have been conducted since 1998. Since the initial implementation, e-consultations have been run by parliamentary organisations such as select committees, the All Party Group and POST, or the Hansard Society on behalf of select committees or Parliament. However, in 2007, the British Parliament has directly operated the exercises via its own website. These parliamentary e-consultations have been studied and evaluated by researchers and operating bodies.

Sarah Pearce's survey of six parliamentary e-consultations implemented between 1998 and 2001 reports that several factors are needed for successful consultation: public internet accessibility with support specialists; well-defined objectives and interested subjects; more MP participation; contributions linking to Parliament's activities; and the inclusion of participant contributions in recommendations. Another empirical study of online consultations was conducted by Coleman. He built four hypotheses for examination and, in order to test them, two e-consultation cases out of the ten that were implemented between 1998 and 2002 were selected. These studies revealed that the primary aim of public participation in parliamentary online consultations was for the opportunity to interact with their representatives. However, the case studies revealed that the degree of interaction between the represented and their representatives was unsatisfactory. Coleman states that MPs should see the benefits of online exercises and that concrete evidence within online consultations must be considered within MP legislative deliberations. In addition to empirical studies by researchers, there was a report on the online consultation conducted in 2000 by a parliamentary organisation such as POST. The report implies that online consultation gives participants better opportunities to contribute because it can run for four weeks rather than face to face meetings taking place within Parliament which are limited by time and space.

From evaluation of the e-consultations, it can thus be determined that the level of engagement and sharing experience between contributors, and the quality of proposals by participants were crucial. However, it is important to note that the e-consultations studied did not receive any contributions from MPs, which means that no interaction existed between the public and their representatives via parliamentary online consultation.

3 Empirical studies and an analytical framework

3.1 Overview of parliamentary online consultations

Online parliamentary consultations have been conducted since 1998. The Hansard Society played a role in operating web forums on behalf of commissioned bodies of Parliament such as select committees, Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology (POST) and All Party Groups. From 2007, however, the British Parliament has directly run online consultations via the parliamentary website on behalf of select committees. Such consultation contains three significant differences in comparison with the previous consultations as co-operated by the Hansard Society. First, parliamentary e-consultation is conducted independently by Parliament, which means that select committees in both Houses have greater opportunities for citizen consultation without having to go through the additional procedures of other commissioned organisations. Second, online consultation is open to everyone who wants to participate: previous consultations were offered to a limited number of participants who were recruited and given the opportunity to join web discussions. Third, the parliamentary website has the potential to be a connective portal linking Parliament with the people: in online consultations, people can access the Parliament web portal without limitations of distance and time.

During the last twelve years, 32 parliamentary online consultations have been conducted (see Table 4).

Table 4 Number of online consultations cases during the period 1998-2009

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Cases	1	2	2	2	3	-	4	1	1	3	6	7	32

Source: Coleman, S. (2004) Connecting Parliament to the Public via the Internet: Two Case Studies of Online Consultations, *Information, Communication & Society*, p. 4.; The Hansard Society (2006) [tellparliament.net](http://forums.Parliament.uk/html/index.html) interim evaluation report, 2003-2005, the Hansard Society, p. 19.; <http://forums.Parliament.uk/html/index.html>; <http://www.tellparliament.net/>

Since the adoption of online consultation by Parliament in 2007, there have been 16 e-consultations, as shown in Table 5. These were commissioned by Select Committees, Joint Committees and the Speaker's Conference. There were 69 select committees in Parliament, comprising 45 select committees in the Commons and 24 in the Lords, and it can be seen that e-consultations were adopted by 8 select committees in the Commons and only 1 committee in the Lords. Despite the low rate of online consultation, however, the Committee on Innovation, Universities, Science and Skill hosted online forums three times, and the Defence

Committee and the Justice Committee each hosted them twice. In the case of the Lords the Information Committee was recorded as the only one to have hosted a parliamentary e-consultation.

Table 5 Online consultations run by the British Parliament

Year	Cases	Subject	Commissioning Body
2007	01	Local government and the Draft Climate Change Bill	Joint Committee
2007	02	Draft Human Tissue and Embryo Bill	Joint Committee
2007	03	Medical Care for the Armed Forces	Defence Committee
2008	04	E-Petition	Procedure Committee
2008	05	Domestic Violence	Home Affairs Committee
2008	06	Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces	Defence Committee
2008	07	Justice Reinvestment	Justice Committee
2008	08	Engineering in the UK	Innovation, Universities, Science and Skill Committee
2008	09	Young Engineers	Innovation, Universities, Science and Skill Committee
2009	10	Post Offices: Securing their Future	Business and Enterprise Committee
2009	11	Aid Under Pressure	International Development Committee
2009	12	Student and University	Innovation, Universities, Science and Skill Committee
2009	13	Traditional Retail Markets	Communities and Local Government Committee
2009	14	People and Parliament	Lords Information Committee
2009	15	Role of the Prison Officer	Justice Committee
2009	16	Parliamentary Representation	Speaker's Conference

Source: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/html/index.html>

During last three years, 16 e-consultations were operated by 9 Select Committees, 2 Joint Committees and the Speaker's Conference. Furthermore, it can be seen that 60 out of 69 committees in both Houses did not make the best use of e-consultations as an online means by which to collect public opinions. In terms of public participation in e-consultation, meanwhile, there were several types of contributors such as registers, message-posters and viewers. Regardless, the posted messages were undoubtedly the most important factor in developing a system of web forums. Therefore, the number of posts can provide a useful scale by which to measure whether this system is successful or not.

Table 6 shows that three e-consultation cases received over 200 messages, 6 cases received less than 200 but over 10, and another 6 cases received less than 100. Particularly noticeable, however, is that three cases received less than 50 posts. Unfortunately, Case 3, Medical Care for the Armed Forces, did not state its posts either on the website or in its report so it is impossible to consider its results. On average, however, 137 messages were posted for each e-consultation.

Table 6 Number of messages per e-consultation

Cases	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
Posts	29	153	-	33	245	185	134	101	169	327	50	196	32	58	258	86	1,970

Source: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/html/index.html> ; Reports of commissioned bodies

During the three years that e-consultation has been implemented, there has been a clear fluctuation in the number of posts (Figure 1). Therefore, it is possible that not all e-consultations are deemed interesting enough to elicit public contributions.

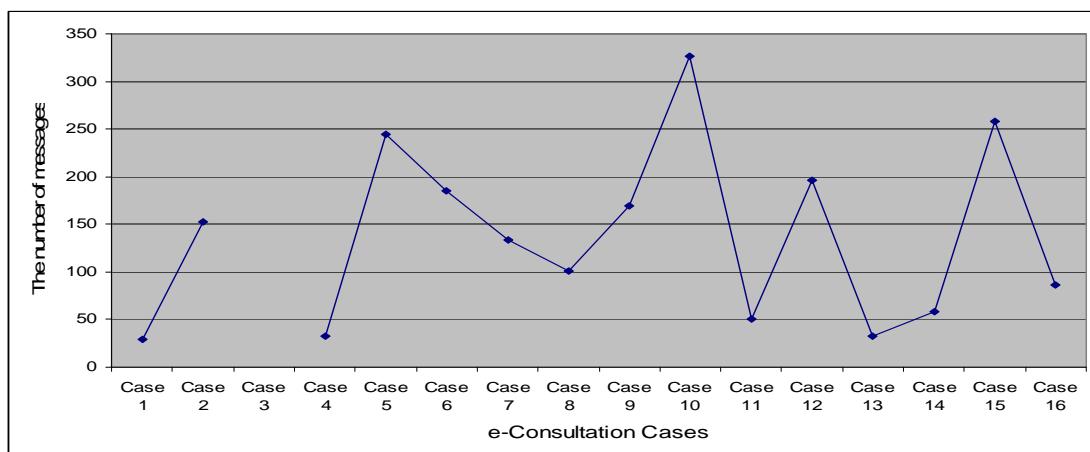


Figure 1 Overview: the number of messages per parliamentary e-consultation

To sum up the use of Parliament's web forums since 2007, there have been 16 e-consultations conducted by parliamentary organisations, including two Joint Committees, eight Select Committees in the Commons and one in the Lords, and the Speaker's Conference. Out of a total of 69 Select Committees in both Houses, only 11.6% have conducted e-consultations. However, there is evidence to suggest that this online system has been and can be fully be successfully optimized, as in the case of the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skill Committee which hosted e-consultations three times to help shape its policy-making process. Meanwhile, in terms of the number of posts, there were dramatic differences between the hosting committees. The first e-consultation by Joint Committee on the draft Climate Change Bill only received 29 messages, while the Business and Enterprise Committee had the best record receiving 327 posts. This can imply that participants have specific preferences about consultation topics which directly affect their willingness to contribute.

3.2 The significance of e-consultations as case studies

Online consultation is the only system which allows the public to truly engage the legislative process. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate this system to assess its effect and impact. In order to evaluate it accurately, it is necessary to conduct an analysis with reference to cases studies of conducted e-consultations. An empirical study such as this would be significant for a number of factors. First, there has not been a case study-based research project on parliamentary e-consultations since 2007. Of the studies which do exist, all were concerned with online consultations which were not operated by Parliament. Therefore, it may be worth assessing whether similar consultations within Parliament can ensure a rise in public participation. Second, an empirical study can reveal potential improvements to e-consultation, in terms of practical application rather than theory. Cases which are practically applied can provide detailed information such as participant behaviour, the moderator's role, MP participation and the extent to which they are linked to shaping policy. Such factors can then be considered for the improvement of web forums. Third, an evaluation produced by studying cases can provide suggestions for improving the efficiency of e-consultation. Various analyses by scholars, external organisations and internal organisers might identify problems as well as their solutions. Ultimately, accumulated assessments may be able to provide online consultation systems with ideas for improving the connection between the public and its representatives.

3.3 Research scope: two cases of e-consultations in 2008

There have been sixteen parliamentary web forums. In 2007, three e-consultations were conducted, while another six took place in 2008 and another seven in 2009. Most of the research in this thesis focuses on the e-consultations conducted in 2008. This is due to the fact that e-consultations were first implemented in 2007 and thus not truly established, while reports of recently conducted e-consultations (2009) have not yet been published. Of the six cases in 2008, two cases have been selected: one, which was the most popular among participants, and the other which was the least (Table 7). The number of posted messages are used as the marker by which to judge the popularity of each case. The two cases used for this research are: “Domestic Violence” and “E-petitions.”

Table 7 Parliamentary e-consultations conducted in 2008

Subject	Period	Posts	Views
e-Petitions	4 January to 15 February (6 weeks)	33	5405
Domestic Violence	18 January to 29 February (6 weeks)	245	20457
Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces	2 April to 28 May (8 weeks)	185	21812
Justice Reinvestment	9 June to 22 July (6 weeks)	134	7513
Engineering in the UK	17 September to 24 October (5 weeks)	101	7042
Young Engineers	28 October to 9 December (6 weeks)	169	9135

Source: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/html/index.html> (as of 6 May 2009)

3.3.1 The outline of e-consultations in 2008

Six e-consultations were conducted by five select committees and operated, on average, for six weeks each. About 145 messages were contributed by participants and nearly 12,000 viewer hits were recorded. Inquiries consisted of three or four questions that were put on the parliamentary website in the form of e-consultations.

In terms of public participation in the web forums, it can be classified into three types of users (Figure 2). First are those who are *viewers* who did not register. This is the initial step by which the public gains interest in e-consultation - they take time to read announcements and consultation questions, after which viewers may decide to contribute if they are interested. In order to attract attention, the topics of consultations should arouse public curiosity. Therefore, it is at this stage that the provision of related information plays a crucial role in stimulating attention.

The second type refers to those participants who are *registers* who do not post messages. For those who want to willingly participate in e-consultations, a good registering procedure is essential. Generally, in order to register, a real name and e-mail address should be submitted, while another user name is needed for posting messages on the website, without revealing true identities. An easy registration procedure as well as adequate security of personal information needs to be guaranteed in order to encourage more viewers to become registers. However, not all of those who do register actually contribute.

This presents a third type: *contributors* who actively post messages. If the registered do not post comments, this could, from the perspective of e-consultation organiser, result in a failure to produce a successful forum. Therefore, Parliament needs special measures to transform registers into contributors because, ultimately, the only real participation comes from contributions. It may be useful, then, to periodically provide both registers and contributors with summaries or analyses of messages during consultations.

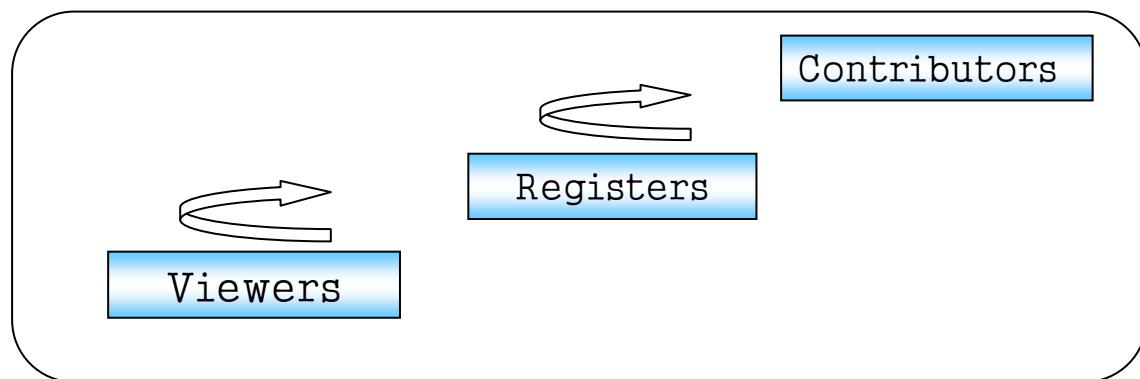


Figure 2 Participant types per e-consultation

All consultations have an introductory message by the chairman of the particular commissioned committee, and contain details of the background, purpose, and the methods of collecting contributions. Following this, the questions to be consulted are provided. The topics of the consultations in 2008 were as follows:

1. E-petitions

- Q1. What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?
- Q2. How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?
- Q3. Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

2. Domestic Violence

- Q1. Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?
- Q2. Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Q3. What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Q4. Are victims of “honour-based” violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

3. Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces

Q1. What are the disadvantages of working in the Armed Forces? If you have left the Armed Forces, what were your reasons for leaving?

Q2. What are the positive aspects of working in the Armed Forces? Why join and why stay?

Q3. Why do you think that the Armed Forces face such a challenge recruiting ethnic minority personnel?

4. Justice Reinvestment

Q1. If the government could take one action that would cut crime and save the taxpayer money, what should it be?

Q2. How much do you feel you know what happens in the prisons and probation services? How confident are you in the effectiveness of these services and how well they are run?

Q3. Do you know of someone who committed a crime and was helped to become a law abiding citizen? What made the difference to them?

Q4. Is it more important to spend money on imprisoning more people for longer or to spend money to ensure that those who've finished their sentence do not commit more crimes?

5. Engineering in the UK

Q1. How easy is it to recruit the engineering staff you need?

Q2. Are you optimistic about the future of engineering in the UK?

Q3. What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing engineering companies?

Q4. What one thing could the government do to help engineering employers?

6. Young Engineers

Q1. What would you do to improve engineering in the UK?

Q2. Has your education prepared you for engineering?

Q3. Is engineering a good career choice?

Q4. What or who inspired you to consider engineering as a career?

In total, there were twenty-two questions posted during the six consultations in 2008. Considering the number of responses they received, it can be argued that the most interesting questions were found in the consultations of ‘Domestic Violence’ and ‘Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces’:

Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations? (Domestic Violence Q1)

What are the disadvantages of working in the Armed Forces? If you have left the Armed Forces, what were your reasons for leaving? (Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces Q1)

The Domestic Violence Q1 received 104 messages with 8674 hits, while the next highest record, 98 posts including 12130 hits was achieved by the Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces Q1. In contrast, the E-petitions Q2 invoked only 7 messages with 1109 hits.

How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?

Clearly, there was a big difference in public participation between the consultations and it is worth evaluating these results to establish why this was the case. Therefore, the cases studies will be considered with an awareness of the participation gap between each consultation.

3.4 A framework for analysis

In order to evaluate the e-consultations, it is necessary to establish a framework for analysis. Considering that there are three stages by which to conduct online forums: planning consultation, consultation process and consultation results, it may be effective for these factors to be included in a framework.

1. Planning consultation

(1) Criterion

The norms of conducting e-consultations may provide principles for organizers to maintain and follow. Moreover, they may be used as indices by which to assess effectiveness after consultations have taken place. From the public's perspective, this may also offer insight into what the procedures are and how contributions will be handled. Therefore, this factor has significance both for Parliament in terms of the principles to be followed and for the public in terms of keeping them informed.

(2) Target stakeholder

It is highly important to establish a target audience. Clearly targeting a group in advance can allow for Parliament to encourage high levels of participation. Furthermore, some consultations may require specialist opinions on specific areas while others can rely on comments from the general public in different fields. Thus, well-defined tentative participants can be an important factor in order to maximise participation.

(3) Providing Information

Parliamentary provisions on related information for targeting participants may be one of the factors which encourage participants to contribute. Information may include not only the purpose of the consultations but also any associated analytical reports and professional materials. Easy access to systems and relevant information, such as well-classified search engines on the website, may be also be useful to the public.

2. Consultation process

(1) MPs' participation

There is no doubt that representative participation is the most significant factor in building successful e-consultations. Those who are consulted may want to interact

with their consultants who are the policy-makers. When participants are sure their voices are being heard, more contributions are accumulated. Therefore, an analysis of MP participation is crucial, as a key factor in increasing the number of contributors.

(2) Citizen exchange

Participants may share experiences with one another in the online space, and while this interaction could help to establish an online community. Analysing the contents of messages could establish the extent of the exchange between citizens.

(3) Discussion & Debate

Citizen may participate in discussions on given topics. They may submit various contents, such as opinion, fact, suggestion, thought, analytical data, cite and so on. When going through the debate procedure, responses on different issues may be grouped for consideration by policy-makers. Thus, there is a possibility that e-consultation can provide the public with a deliberation space.

(4) Moderation

All messages are posted on the website after having been moderated. Furthermore, MP responses are also filtered by a moderator whose role is to preside over an online forum like a speaker in the chamber. Therefore, the moderator plays a significant role as a coordinator between citizens and representatives. Despite this, however, evaluation indexes are limited because the process of moderation is largely undisclosed. However, the time it takes for moderation may be one of the factors to assess.

3. Consultation results

(1) Feedback

Informing all participants of consultation results may be a way to build trust between consultants and those who are consulted, and may take one of two forms: the indirect form is to post results on the website while the direct method is to deliver results to each participant via email. To ensure that contributors continue to participate, good feedback may be essential.

(2) Links to decision-makers

Contributions may be adopted by MPs. Committee recommendations may be shaped in the reports based on the messages from citizens. A comparative analysis of the content of messages and recommendations in reports may establish the extent to which the public is linked to policy-makers. Additionally, representatives may raise issues in debates, which, alongside recommendations, require governmental answers. Therefore, in the end, the public may have a significant impact on policy processes through e-consultation.

(3) Evaluation

Evaluating e-consultation may make it possible to assess its effect and impact on the legislative process while it also may be possible to extract valuable information regarding possible improvements to the consultations. The criteria of consultation may be used as a guide for evaluation which can be conducted by internal bodies such as parliamentary or external organisations.

(4) Contributor access to posted messages

Participants may want to view their own contributions even after the e-consultation had ended. If committees provide these on their conducted websites, contributors can maintain ongoing interest in consultation-related issues.

3.5 Methodology

In order to begin research on the two e-consultation cases of *Domestic Violence* and *E-Petition*, the British parliamentary consultation websites (<http://forums.Parliament.uk/devc>, <http://forums.Parliament.uk/e-petition>) have been used to analyse all hosted messages. The reports, *E-petitions* (HC 136, HC 493) and *Domestic Violence* (HC 263-1, HC 263-2) operated by the Procedure Committee and the Home Affairs Committee respectively, are considered to be the main sources by which to trace the relationship between contributions and recommendations. Government Responses to the Committees' reports (HC 952, HC 1165, Cm 7450) are also screened to research whether Parliament's suggestions based on e-consultations are considered by the government in its policy-making. In addition, there will be an establishment of whether MPs continued to take an interest in the issues which they raised in online forums once the consultations are finished. The remarks in the Commons by all involved members: 15 in the Home Affairs Committee and 13 in the Procedure Committee are considered, as found in *Commons Hansard by Member 2007-2008 / 2008-2009*, in which it is possible to browse debates, written statements, and oral and written question contributions. Moreover, MP websites (linked <http://www.Parliament.uk/>) are explored using search engines into which the phrases such as "domestic violence" and "e-petitions" have been entered.

4 An Empirical Study: The Case of *Domestic Violence*

4.1 *Introduction*

4.1.1 The composition of this chapter

This chapter analyses the e-consultation on Domestic Violence through an examination of materials such as parliamentary websites and the reports of both Parliament and the government. Section 4.2 contains an abstract from the Domestic Violence e-consultation. The next three sections assess the e-consultation according to the analytical framework of chapter 3. The first stage, planning the consultation, considers three factors: criterion, target stakeholder and providing information (section 4.3). This is followed by the stage regarding the consultation process that explores citizen contributions, MP participation and the moderator's role (section 4.4). The next stage, consultation results, presents three key aspects of a web forum: feedback, linking to decision-makers, and evaluation (section 4.5). From this empirical study, research results are provided in section 4.6. The final section (section 4.7) offers a summary of the chapter.

4.1.2 Analytical materials for the case study

This empirical research begins by exploring the following material:

All contributions

□ Material downloaded on 15 May 2009 from: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/devc>

Websites

□ Parliamentary website: <http://www.Parliament.uk>

□ Hosted online forum website: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/devc>

□ Hansard website: <http://publications.parliamentary.uk/pa/pahansard.htm>

□ They WorkForYou.com: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>

□ Committee MP personal websites:

- Keith Vaz: <http://www.keithvaz.labour.co.uk>
- Tom Brake: <http://www.tombrake.co.uk>
- Karen Buck: <http://www.karenbuck.org.uk> (No search engine)
- James Clappison: <http://www.jamesclappison.co.uk> (Text only website)
- Ann Cryer: <http://sites.google.com/site/anncryermp>
- David TC Davies: <http://www.david-daviesmp.co.uk> (Text only website)
- Janet Dean: <http://www.janetdean.info>
- Patrick Mercer: <http://www.patrickmercer.org.uk> (No search engine)
- Margaret Morgan: <http://www.margaretmorgan.org.uk>
- Gwyn Prosser: <http://www.gwynprosser.com>
- Bob Russell: <http://www.bobrussell.org.uk>
- Martin Salter: <http://www.martinsalter.com> (No search engine)
- Gary Streeter: <http://www.garystreeter.co.uk> (No search engine)
- David Winnick: <http://www.epolitix.com/David-Winnick>
- Jeremy Browne: <http://www.tauntonlibdems.org.uk> (No search engine)

Parliament reports

Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons (2008) *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence*, Sixth Report of Session 2007-08 (HC 263-1, HC 263-2)

Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons (2008) *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence: Further Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2007-08*, Third Special Report (HC 1165)

Government report

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (2008) *THE GOVERNMENT REPLY TO THE SIXTH REPORT FROM HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SESSION 2007-08 HC 263*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, July 2008 (Cm 7450)

4.2 Abstract: the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

4.2.1 Purpose, topics and time period

The Home Affairs Committee in the House of Commons announced that on 26 July 2008, it would conduct a broad-ranging inquiry into domestic violence, including so-called "honour" killings and forced marriage. As part of its overall inquiry, the committee decided to conduct an e-consultation in October 2007 in order to engage with a wide cross-section of the public and other interested groups, and to hear directly from victims and survivors of domestic violence, so-called "honour"-based violence and forced marriage, as well as receiving testimony from people who were currently experiencing or had previously experienced domestic violence (Home Affairs Committee, 2008: 9, 153-4). The consultation was split into four topic questions:

- Q1. Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations? (Domestic violence)
- Q2. Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will? (Forced marriage)
- Q3. What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence? (Single action)
- Q4. Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped by public and voluntary sector agencies? ("Honour-based" violence)

The online forum was open for 6 weeks from 21st January 2008 to 29th February 2008 on the parliamentary website: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/devc>.

4.2.2 The status of participants: registers, contributors and viewers

4.2.2.1 Registers

In order to access the site, users were asked first to register. The user was prompted to choose an anonymous user name and a password, in accordance with registration guidelines, with the selected user names being checked by moderators. Generally e-consultations collect user details such as email addresses, age, gender or ethnicity for the purpose of analysis after closing a web forum. However, this consultation did not ask for any personal or contact details due to a general reluctance among users to provide their details. Instead those who wished to register were given the option of putting themselves into one of eight categories

that they most identified with: victim of domestic violence, victim of forced marriage, victim of "honour"-based violence, family or friend of a victim, abuser, professional stakeholder, rather not say and other (HC 263-1: 156-7).

This forum had 238 registers: 222 citizens, 13MPs, 3 moderators and 1 administrator. All members of the Home Affairs Committee were assigned a personal password and username to encourage their log-in and participation in the online forum.

4.2.2.2 Contributors

During the six-week online forum, 245 messages were posted by 130 contributors. 119 citizens posted 227 messages and 8 MPs participated in the web forum with 13 leaving posts. The moderators' 5 messages, meanwhile, explained how to participate in the different topics of the online forum.

4.2.2.3 Viewers

Over twenty thousand people participated in the online web forum as accessed through the parliamentary website not only during the open period of the e-consultation but also after it was closed. Furthermore anyone who wanted to review all posted messages was able access the website and view the messages until they were eventually deleted.

Table 8 Number of hits on the website of the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

Topics	Views
Announcement: Message from the Committee's Chairman	1,111
Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?	8,674
Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?	3,037
What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?	5,622
Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?	2,013
Total	20,457

Source: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/dvec/index.php?index,1> (as of 6 May 2009)

4.2.3 Parliament's recommendations

After conducting the committee inquiry, including the web forum, a report was produced with the approval of the committee members. Accordingly, the Home Affairs Committee produced its sixth report for the 2007-08 session: *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour-Based" Violence*, which was published on June 2008. The report consisted of two volumes: volume 1 (HC 263-1) was composed of 429 paragraphs and conclusions and recommendations with 168 pages; and volume 2 (HC 263-2) had over 514 pages of oral and written evidence. The 111-page Conclusions and Recommendations report was delivered to the government so that the administration had the responsibility of replying to Parliament.

In terms of the online consultation, the report in volume 1 partly quoted 84 posts from contributor messages which shaped the Conclusions and Recommendations report. Furthermore, the Annex in volume 1 explained the details of the e-consultation such as its purpose and value, respondent profiles, while Appendix 1 described the 85 stakeholder organisations which were contacted and encouraged to publicise on the committee web forum (HC-1: 153-163). In addition, the e-consultation's summary of responses was published in volume 2 (HC-2: 473-514).

4.2.4 The Government's response

After receiving the parliamentary report of the Home Affairs Committee, including its recommendations to the government, the Secretary of State for the Home Department presented a Command Paper to Parliament in July, 2008 (Cm 7450). Additionally, the government submitted a further response to the committee on September 30, 2008 (HC 1165). In total, the government delivered 82 responses about the committee's 111 conclusions and recommendations, with some of the recommendations grouped for a response. About two months later, 20 updated responses were received from the government.

4.3 The planning consultation stage

Citizens who want to join an e-consultation need to access the parliamentary website at <http://www.Parliament.uk>. The '*Get Involved*' section on the main page has three sub-sections, *Watch*, *Join in* and *Listen*. The '*Committee Forum*' section under *Join in* is the only gateway through which to participate in parliamentary e-consultations, and from where the public can gain information about which consultations are currently being conducted, meaning that citizens are able to judge whether or not to join depending on the extent that the topics of e-consultations relate to them.

This section handles three factors: e-consultation criteria, targeting stakeholder and providing information, that relate to web forums as the pre-stage before full-scale implementation.

4.3.1 Criterion

Specific criteria for e-consultations may work as not only a principle for those who organise web forums but also as a guideline for participants. It also may be an indicator for assessing e-consultations after they have been conducted. However, it is difficult to find any guiding principles of e-consultations such as criteria, guidelines, checklists or a code of practice on the forum website: <http://forums.Parliament.uk>, with only discussion rules available for viewing. There are 13 rules for participants taking part in e-consultations. Additionally, the website states that participants under the age of 12 must have the consent of parents or guardians and that all messages are pre-moderated before posting (See Box 3).

Box 3 Discussion rules of parliamentary e-consultations

1. Keep your comments relevant to the discussion topic.
2. Do not submit defamatory comments (comments that are untrue and capable of damaging the reputation of a person or organisation).
3. Do not condone illegal activity or incite people to commit any crime, including incitement of racial hatred.
4. Do not submit comments that could prejudice on-going or forthcoming court proceedings (contempt of court) or break a court injunction.
5. Do not submit comments containing someone else's copyright material.
6. Do not swear or use language that could offend other forum participants.
7. Do not otherwise submit comments that are unlawful, harassing, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive. This includes comments that are offensive to others with regards to religion, gender, nationality or other personal characteristic.

8. Do not impersonate other forum members or falsely claim to represent a person or organisation.
9. Do not submit comments or chose user names that contain personal information that would identify yourself or others. For example last names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses or other online contact details either relating to yourself or other individuals.
10. Do not post comments in languages other than English.
11. Do not advertise or promote products or services.
12. Do not spam or flood the forum. Only submit a comment once. Do not resubmit the same, or similar, comments. Keep the number of comments you submit on a topic at a reasonable level. Multiple comments from the same individual, or a small number of individuals, may discourage others from contributing.
13. Do not use an inappropriate user name (vulgar, offensive etc.).

If you are under the age of 12 please get your parent/guardian's permission before participating in this forum. Users without this consent are not allowed to participate or provide us with personal information.

Comments will be pre-moderated before being posted on the discussion forum. If a comment contravenes any of the discussion rules it will not appear on the forum and will be returned to the participant by e-mail, along with a reference to the rule(s) contravened. The participant will be invited to resubmit their comment, after making appropriate changes, but a participant who repeatedly submits comments which contravene the discussion rules will have their account closed.

Source: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/html/rules.html>

It is possible that these discussion rules may have a negative effect on participants who encounter lots of restrictions when they visit an e-consultation website for the first time. Therefore, it may be better to simultaneously provide citizens with both the consultation principles and the discussion rules.

In order to identify such criteria for parliamentary e-consultation, it is necessary to find another report as an example. The "recommendations for the conduct of consultations" were adopted in the report of the Information Committee (2002: 15, 30-31). The seven adopted recommendations may be used guidelines for e-consultation, which can be classified into five points for consideration: reasons to conduct; object for collecting contributions; accessibility to the Internet; contributions management; and evaluation and feedback (Box 1).

In terms of e-consultation criteria, there does not seem to be a concise, formal parliamentary principle on the matter. If the conduct of consultations admitted by the Information Committee in 2002 can be developed and updated as an e-consultation criterion, it has the potential to play a role in raising the efficiency of web forums.

4.3.2 Target stakeholder

The Home Affairs Committee decided to conduct an e-consultation as part of its inquiry into Domestic Violence. The committee was particularly interested in directly hearing the views and experiences of victims and survivors of domestic violence, so-called "honour"-based violence and forced marriage rather than gathering written and oral evidence. Therefore, consultation topics were designed for those who were actual victims and survivors. Targeted participants were able to group themselves into one of eight categories which were given during registration. Due to these categories, it was possible to conclude the status of registers, as seen below:

Table 9 Registration status in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

Interest in consultation	Number of registered users
Victim of domestic violence	108
Victim of forced marriage	5
Victim of "honour"-based violence	2
Family or friend of a victim	13
Abuser	1
Professional stakeholder	52
Rather not say	11
Other	29
Total	221

Source: Committee report (HC-1), p 161.

It can be seen from Table 9 that this consultation was clearly targeted meaning that the committee received live voices from their target participants as intended. Properly targeting participants, therefore, may increase contributions and increase the capabilities of a committee web forum.

4.3.3 Providing Information

4.3.3.1 Publicity

The Domestic Violence consultation was publicised in various ways to potential participants through the committee's efforts to encourage a high degree of participation. These efforts stemmed initially from committee staff, who, via telephone and email, contacted related organisations to provide details of the consultation and to outline the measures by which to safeguard participants. These stakeholders were then encouraged to publicise the web forum by means of networking, distributing flyers and posters designed by the committee staff, and

promoting the web link through websites, e-bulletins, newsletters and blogs. These organisations also contacted victims and survivors. In total, 85 organisations were contacted and encouraged to publicise the e-consultation (HC- I : 163). In particular, it was noted that the committee staff designed a number of posters and flyers for publishing the e-consultation. These were branded with the logo used on the consultation website (See Figure 3). The colourful logo was also used by support organisations to publicise the e-consultation and was inserted 51 times in the committee's reports. This may present the only case in which a specific logo was used for publicising e-consultations amongst all 16 parliamentary consultations.



Figure 3 Logo for the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

Source: Downloaded at <http://forums.Parliament.uk/html/dvecforumpage.html>

Further efforts to contact victims were made via a bespoke website which was developed by eQuality Networks and supported by the specialist advisor to the e-consultation. In addition, a range of media such as television, radio and the press were used to advertise the web forum. In terms of securing a high level of participation, information about the e-consultation was shared two months before it was conducted. Meanwhile, at the point of commencement of the committee web forum, press notices were released and continued to be released for its duration.

Publicity about the Domestic Violence consultation was clearly well-prepared to raise the rate of participation. Sufficient time for publicity was secured two months prior to the opening of the consultation website. Additionally, various publicity methods were adopted, such as encouraging related organisations to use their networks, as well as advertising through the media such as television, radio and the press. Particularly posters, flyers and a branded logo, which were designed by committee staff, were used for publicising the e-consultation by support organisations.

4.3.3.2 Providing topic-related Information

The information related to consultation issues was given to citizen via the committee's e-consultation website. First of all, a welcome to the forum on the introductory page which included comments from the Chairman and a member of the committee provided participants

with valuable information about the e-consultation; in particular, offering information about the aims of forum and the ways which gathered contributions would be used. Additionally, the front page included an ‘advice and support’ section that offered the contact information of various victim support agencies for viewers and contributors in case further help or advice was desired.

In terms of ensuring the security of participant identities, guidelines on confidentiality and anonymity were explained on the main page with reference to the privacy rules and confidentiality policy. Further information was given on the ‘covering your tracks’ page, which gave details of how to delete one’s internet history and cache to prevent tracking back to the site. In case participants were afraid of having their identities revealed while using the site, a ‘quick exit’ button was made available on every e-consultation page which enabled participants to jump directly to the BBC home page.

It can be seen that the Domestic Violence e-consultation provided related information, a welcome from MPs and contact information of victim support agencies on its home page. Particularly, it seems that the consultation organizer made particular effort to safeguard against revealing participant identities and the possibility of tracking usage of the site through methods such as a ‘covering your tracks’ page and a ‘quick exit’ button.

4.4 The stage of the consultation process

4.4.1 Citizens' posting behaviours

During the six weeks that the conducting e-consultation was in operation, 130 contributors posted 245 messages. 97% of messages, 228 out of 245, were submitted by 119 citizens, while 3% were posted by 8 MPs and 3 moderators with 13 and 4 messages respectively.

Before starting to analyse the content of the messages contributed by citizens, it may be worth examining citizen posting behaviour in terms of posting times during the day, the extent of participation on each day of the week, and how many overall contributions were made. First, it is necessary to discern the rate of contribution. 221 citizens registered, but out of 53.8% of them, 119 out of 221, were linked to contributors. This implies almost a half of the registers did not participate in the actual e-consultation. Considering that registers may be willing to participate in the web forum, it may be critical to actively target and encourage them to become contributors.

4.4.1.1 Preferred times of day for posting

In all, 228 messages were posted by 119 citizens. However, by analysing the time when most posts were made (Figure 4), it can be seen that contributors had a tendency to post in the afternoon and at night rather than in the morning: In 84% of messages, 175 out of 228, were distributed in the time between noon and midnight. In addition, the most preferred time periods among participants were between 11am and 12am, 1pm and 2pm, and 3pm and 5pm. Approximately half of the messages, 120 out of 228, were posted within these times, while 29.4% of messages, 67 out of 228, were presented in the time period between 3pm and 5pm. Furthermore, 73% of posts, 166 out of 228, were contributed by citizens during business hours, while only 4 messages in the six weeks were submitted during the time between midnight and 8am.

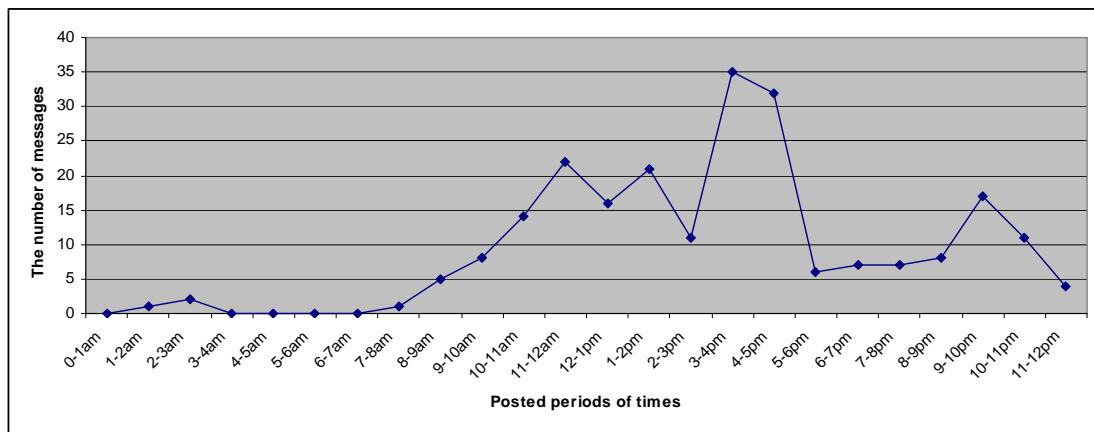


Figure 4 Number of messages posted per time period for the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

4.4.1.2 The extent of participation on different days of the week

Participants showed different posting trends for particular days of the week. Figure 5 shows that 48.7% of contributions, 111 out of 228, were concentrated on Thursday and Friday. However, only 5.7% messages, 13 out of 228, were posted on Saturday and Sunday. Therefore, the trends in contributions reveal that the citizens may have preferred to post on Thursdays and Fridays, while they may not have been so willing to spare their free time, such as on Saturdays and Sundays.

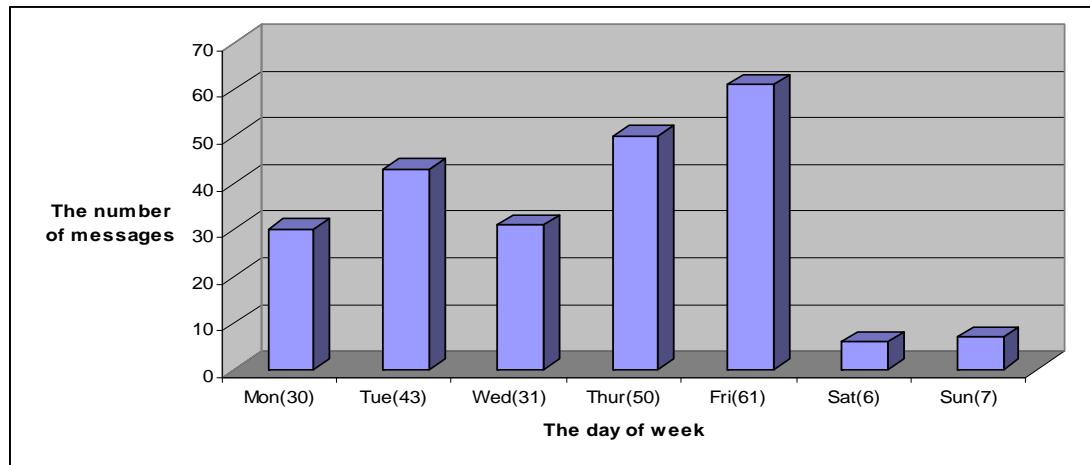


Figure 5 Number of daily message postings for the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

4.4.1.3 The length of contribution

228 contributions submitted by participants, consisting of 49,884 words, meaning that one message was composed of an average of 219 words. However, 64% of contributors posted messages using less than 200 words. Interestingly there were extreme cases, such as user

‘Skywaker’ who used only the word “No”, while ‘Lady Portia’ wrote a message containing 1,806 words.

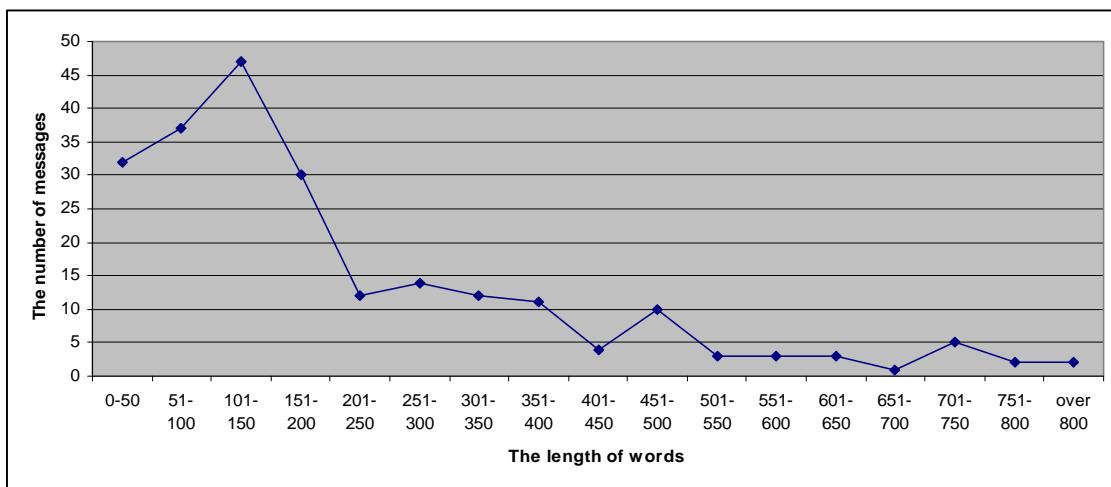


Figure 6 Number of messages per range of word length in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

4.4.1.4 Citizens’ preference of topics

Contributors showed preferences for particular topics among four topics in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence:

- Q1. Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations? (Domestic Violence);
- Q2. Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will? (Forced Marriage);
- Q3. What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence? (Single Action);
- Q4. Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies? (Honour-based Violence)

100 submissions out of 228 were concentrated on the topic of *Domestic Violence* (43.9%), which was followed by the *Honor-based Violence* topic with 84 contributions (36.8%). These two topics collected four fifths of contributions (80.7%). Based on the rate of participation it seems that the other two topics attracted fewer participants. For example, *Forced Marriage* and *Single Action* received only 27 and 17 messages respectively.

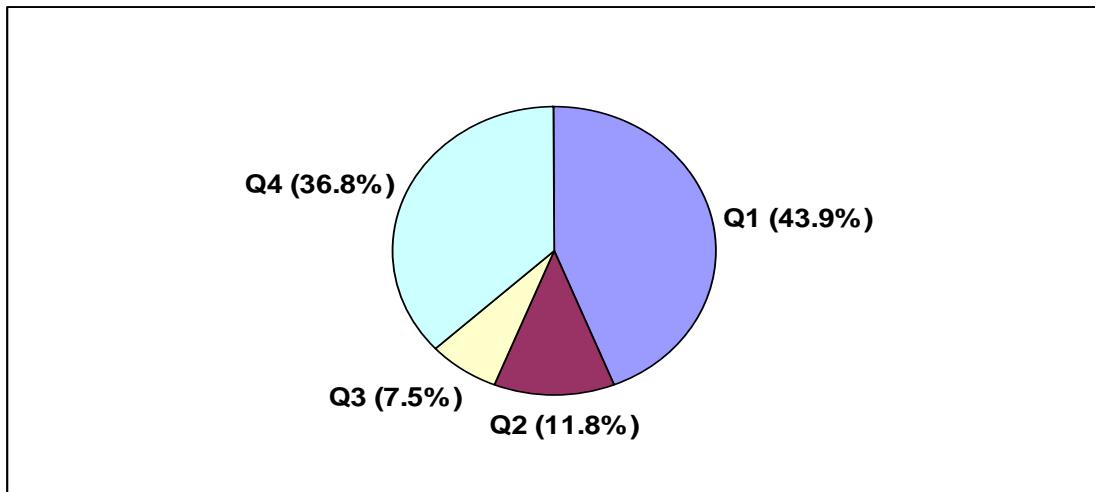


Figure 7 Rate of contribution per topic in the e-consultations on Domestic Violence

4.4.2 Types of citizen contributions

4.4.2.1 The type of contributions

Contributions may be classified into three types: exchange, statement, discussion and debate. Exchange can include the level and form of interaction between contributors, such as responding to earlier messages and sharing experience. Statements, meanwhile, can be composed of various factors such as thoughts, opinions, suggestions, recommendations, and proposals. Moreover, discussion and debate can mean agreements or disagreements in opinions with the other contributions and may include the use of data, statistics or fact. These three types may overlap within a single contribution.

In the e-consultation on Domestic Violence, 228 contributions were posted by citizens showing these different types (see Figure 8). Almost all the messages, 200 out of 228, were expressed as statements (87.7%). This was followed by experiential contributions: 29.4% of participants told of their experiences in the online discussion topics. Just over one tenth responded to previous messages (10.9%), while 7% of contributors participated in discussions.

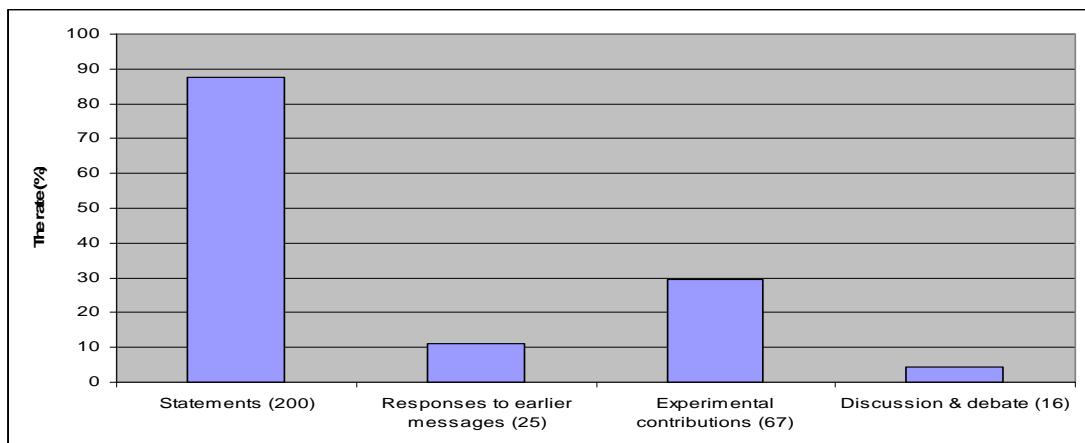


Figure 8 Types of citizen contributions in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

4.4.2.2 Exchanges between contributors

In terms of participant interaction, two types are visible: responses to previous contributions and experiential contributions. 25 messages out of 228 were responses to earlier contributions (10.96%). Responses were direct and either quoted other posts in response to them or to show sympathy with them. An example of this is given below:

I agree awareness raising is so important (Username ‘Magicae’);

I strongly agree with this comment (Username ‘harriann’);

I am so sorry to hear of your terrible experience (Username ‘Franklin’);

It is heartbreaking to hear how desperate you feel (Username ‘DVProfessional’);

I have read this forum several times... your comment.Thank for helping me realise it was not me (Username ‘you can move on’).

Another factor which indicated contributor exchanges was the sharing of their experiences. About three tenths of submissions, 67 out of 228, included experiential comments (29.38%). Interaction between participants through the sharing of experiences may potentially increase mutual understanding and contribute to raising participation in an online forum. Experiential remarks can be seen in these messages:

I called the police in the early hours scared for my life after being beaten and having something thrown at my head. I waited an hour cold, ·he would break through the door I had shut myself behind to try to kill me. No police arrived....so again I called 999. I was then left to wait another 45 mins before the police finally arrived by which time I could literally have been dead. 1hr45mins.... they could have found me dead in a pool of blood. (Username ‘clare-health’);

I had an arranged marriage. I was beaten daily. My husband was a student and wanted to marry a British Girl so he could get his British Passport....where is the judge in the immigration law. We have written many letters to the home office, informing them that guys from Asian countries only come to UK as a student or a visitor so they can marry British Girl and turn British then use the welfare system and bring the rest of their family over....How can change the immigration law ? (Username 'billo786');

As an inner-London teacher, working in Tower Hamlets, I am very concerned about the issue of forced marriages, especially amongst the Yr12-13 group (6th form). My comments are specially in response to my experiences of teaching young Bengali women (Username 'ict1921').

There were also differences in participation for different topics. The greatest number of contributions, 24 in 25, responded to previous submissions in the two topics of Domestic Violence and Single Action (96%). However, 73% of experiential messages, 49 in 67, were focused on the single topic of Domestic Violence.

Therefore, it can be seen that sharing experience was more popular than responding to other participants and that there were preferences by topic within the e-consultation. This may be critical, considering that experiential contributions may be significant in enabling participants to deliver live voices to policy makers on a particular topic.

4.4.2.3 Statements

The majority of contributions could be classified into specific types of statements. 200 messages out of 228 included participants' thoughts, opinions, and proposals (87.7%). It could also be found that 78.5% of contributions, 157 out of 228, were made in the two areas of 'Domestic Violence' and 'Single Action.' Statements were composed of various kinds of comments. Some participants shared their thoughts and opinions, while others posted concrete proposals and recommendations. These participants' voices could be heard through their contributions. Username 'Seca' delivered her thought about emotional abuse:

The physical violence is so bad you just give up with life sometimes but the emotional abuse is by far a lot worse and this is the one that is so hard to prove in a court the bruises heal but the damage he has done to you emotionally will probably never fully heal.

Recommendations and proposals, meanwhile, can be seen in the example below from User 'Jane J':

Sustainable funding should be made available to specialised refuge services to enable them to accommodate women who have experienced domestic abuse..... Ongoing specialist training

is essential to all police officers, solicitors, judges, health professionals etc to ensure that they are able to support and also keep victims safe.

Additionally, participant 'tiscali' suggested detailed action steps focusing on the police:

- All police forces must know what to do when domestic abuse is reported*
- Officers must tell senior offices if they think danger is about to visit a member of the public*
- Officers must investigate reports of crime and take them seriously*

Moreover, 'bouncingback' made recommendations based on his or her experience for securing victim's rights:

- When a child called 999 to report serious domestic violence, the police and ambulance should take priority and act straightaway without asking too much questions*
- The police should arrest the offender without asking the victim's permission*
- The victim particularly these being strangled should be kept in hospital overnight by law*
- The victim of any type of attempted murder cases or grievous bodily harm should be referred to psychotherapist as soon as after the incident*

In particular, posters proposed the need for changes in legislative policy:

We need to legally raise the age of marriage to 18 in the UK in order to keep young people like this in education, and therefore away from the pressure of marriage until they have matured further (Username 'ict1921');

As government like quick and easy wins...I'd suggest...a law to ban forced marriage (Username 'Campaigner');

If the British Parliament adopted an anti violence against women policy, within this the level of violence would be recognised and acknowledged (Username 'Ap1').

Therefore, it may be important for policy makers to note proposals that are raised in the online forums because they are extracted from the life experiences of the citizens.

4.4.2.4 Discussion & Debate

7% of contributions, 16 out of 228, included statements of agreement or disagreement with other posts, concentrating primarily on the topic of Domestic Violence and Single Action. Comparing other contribution types, meanwhile, citizens seemed to least prefer taking part in

discussions. Considering the posts which did form discussions, however, 14 out of 16 presented opinions which agreed with earlier contributions, while only 2 messages voiced disagreements with others. These pro-opinion contributions were found under the topic of Domestic Violence:

I would like to reply to this posting because I feel the person who writes this has never experienced domestic abuse in any shape or form (Username 'Seca');

I have to express my concern that a great deal of these messages seems to be focused on damning other professional practice, while promoting the practice of the refuge (Username 'female').

Overall, however, it is clear that discussions were not prevalent among participants in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence.

4.4.3 MPs' participation

4.4.3.1 The rate of participation

The Home Affairs Committee consisted of 13 MPs. When the e-consultation started, all the committee members were registered. Despite this, however, during the 6 weeks of the online forum, only 8 MPs took part. In other words, about 62% of MPs moved from being registers to contributors. Comparing this with the citizens' participation rate of 53%, which was calculated from 119 contributors out of 221 registers (see Table 10), the rate of MP participation was higher than that of citizens by nearly 10%. However, with respect to the aim of raising levels of citizen participation, more MPs joining the e-consultation could be effective.

Table 10 MP and citizen participation rates in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

	MPs	Citizens
No. of registers	13	221
No. of contributors	8	119
Rate	61.5%	53.8%

Source: Analysis based on the data from the committee's report (HC 263-1)

4.4.3.2 Posting pattern

The Home Affairs Committee had 8 members out of 13 participate in its e-consultation, leaving a total of 13 messages. 6 contributions from MPs focused on the topic of Forced Marriage, while another 3 messages were submitted under the topic of Domestic Violence and the last two topics each received 2 posts from members of committee (see Table 11). It is important to note that 6 contributions were submitted by one MP, Margaret Moran, who also delivered the introductory welcoming message on the main e-consultation website. However, three of the messages that she posted consisted of the same 5 sentences, composed of 88 words (see Table 12). Strictly speaking, therefore, 2 contributions by MPs should not to be counted.

Table 11 Number of MP contributions by topic in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

Topics	No. of contributions
Domestic Violence	3
Forced Marriage	6
Single Action	2
Honour-based Violence	2
Total	13

In terms of the length of contributions, 8 MPs posted 13 messages consisting of 53 sentences and containing 1,052 words. The average length of a contribution was 85 words, with 4.3 sentences. In addition, about 70% of messages, 9 out of 13, were posted between 3pm and 5pm. During the 6 weeks, 9 messages were submitted in 5th and 6th weeks, 5 and 4 respectively, while the 2nd and 3rd weeks received 4 postings from MPs. However, there were no messages in the 1st and 4th weeks (see Table 12).

Table 12 MP contribution length and posting date & time in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

Topics	MPs participated	Date & time posted	Length of contributions	
			Words	Sentences
Domestic Violence	Janet Dean	18/02 03:19pm	81	3
	Bob Russell	20/02 04:18pm	59	3
	Margaret Moran*	29/02 04:52pm	88	5
Forced Marriage	Margaret Moran	31/01 03:12pm	119	7
	Margaret Moran	07/02 06:15pm	157	9
	James Clappison	19/02 01:19pm	88	3
	Martin Salter	21/02 11:51am	58	2
	Ann Cryer	26/02 01:18pm	64	3
	Margaret Moran*	29/02 04:51pm	88	5
Single Action	Gwyn Prosser	06/02 05:04pm	62	3

	Margaret Moran*	<u>29/02 04:51pm</u>	<u>88</u>	<u>5</u>
Honour-based Marriage	Margaret Moran	31/01 03:18pm	100	5
	David Davies	18/02 05:38pm	55	3
Total (Average)	-	-	1,052 (85.15)	53 (4.31)

* Same contented messages

Therefore, MP posting patterns can be summarized as follows:

- MPs posted messages which averagely consisted of 85 words with 4.3 sentences;
- MPs preferred to submit their contributions in the time between 3pm and 5pm;
- MPs tended to post their contributions near the end of the e-consultation period

4.4.3.3 The type of contributions

MP contributions can be divided into four sections:

- Remarks on citizen contributions
- Explanations of MP endeavours or government systems
- Questions to the citizen
- Appreciation of the citizens' contribution

First, MPs cited citizens' experiences or opinions at the beginning of their messages. 5 MPs started to post as follows:

I'm concerned that some of you have not received the support you needed from healthcare professionals (Janet Dean MP);

We've heard evidence during our inquiry that lawyers and court staff do not receive enough specialist training for domestic violence cases, which could help to explain some of the negative experiences you're had of the court process (Bob Russell MP);

We have heard evidence during our inquiry that a major reason why people are forced marriage overseas is so they can sponsor their spouse to come to the UK (James Clappion MP);

I'm interest in what you say about educating perpetrators (Gwyn Prosser MP);

We've heard evidence suggesting that current police witness protection scheme is not designed to deal with victims and survivors of forced marriage and "honour-based" violence (David Davis MP).

Second, MPs explained their endeavours and government systems which were related to the topics. 2 MPs showed their ongoing interest in the issues raised, while 4 MPs introduced government policy on the related topics:

My office runs an (a) FM(Forced Marriage) project as there is nowhere else safe to do so. We have worked to influence young men and women from the community to act as ambassadors and have done a report (Margaret Moran MP);

On 30 January I asked the Prime Minister to investigate why some schools are refusing to display Forced Marriage Unit poster and to introduce improved guidelines to ensure that support services are available to young people at risk of being forced into marriage (Martin Salter MP);

Do you think the Government's proposal to raise the sponsorship age for marriage to 21 will help to reduce the risk to young people of being forced into marriage? (James Clappison MP);

Government guidelines suggest that health trusts should be working towards training healthcare professionals to routinely ask all women if they are experiencing abuse support service (Janet Dean MP);

The government is expanding the Specialist Domestic Violence Courts programme (Bob Russell MP);

The government is considering raising the age at which marriages from abroad can take place, do you agree? (Margaret Moran MP).

Third, MPs posted related questions to citizens. 10 messages out of 13 included interrogative sentences, for example:

We have been discussing setting up an online helpline so that those affected by FM and so called honour killings can get help and support, and support each other. What does anyone think of this idea? (Margaret Moran MP);

What else could be done to help people who are reluctant to sponsor their spouse to come to the UK but fear reprisals from their families if they do not? (James Clappison MP);

What do you think should be included in guidelines for frontline professionals, such as teachers or police officers, to make sure they recognise and help young people at risk? (Martin Salter MP);

What would be the crucial elements of a victim protection programme? Do you think better protection for victims would encourage more people to come forward to report "honour-based" violence? (David Davies MP).

Last, MPs submitted appreciative messages to contributors. Margaret Moran MP, who could have been speaking on behalf of committee, posted 4 messages to the contributors for each topic. As mentioned above, however, 3 messages which she posted were identical same. Interestingly, MPs seemed to use some common expressions within their posts. In particular, these were “*I wonder if (whether)....?*”, and “*we've heard evidence...*”:

I wonder if anyone has been spoken to in this way by their doctor and if you think this approach will mean that more people report abuse and seek help? (Janet Dean MP);

I wonder if anyone thinks these courts produce better outcomes for victims? (Bob Russell MP);

I wonder whether anyone has had experienced of their partner or ex-partner attending one of these programmes and if it helped them to change their behaviour? (Gwyn Prosser MP);

We've heard evidence during our inquiry that lawyers and court staff do not receive enough specialist training for domestic violence cases, which could help to explain some of the negative experiences you're had of the court process (Bob Russell MP);

We've heard evidence during our inquiry that a major reason why people are forced into marriage overseas is so they can sponsor their spouse to come to the UK (James Clappison MP);

We've heard evidence suggesting that current police witness protection scheme is not designed to deal with victims and survivors of forced marriage and “honour-based” violence (David Davies MP).

To summarize the contribution types of MPs, there was a tendency to produce organised messages which responded to citizens on issues related to the forum’s topics (76.9%, 10 out of 13). Furthermore, MPs often informed citizens of their knowledge about particular issues or explained the government’s policy related to the topics (46.2%, 6 out of 13). In addition, MPs responded to participants by citing their experiences or opinions (38.5%, 5 out of 13). There were also messages from MPs on behalf of committee to thank for contributors at the time of the closure of the e-consultation (30.8%, 4 out of 13).

4.4.3.4 Interaction with citizens

Interaction between MPs and citizens is possible when both join an online forum. There can be two patterns of interaction: MPs responses to contributions and citizen reaction to messages from MPs. In the forum on Domestic Violence, MPs responded to citizens by citing parts of their earlier contributions. 5 MPs handled general issues which were proposed by

citizens. However, these were handled broadly and did not directly deal with the issues raised by contributors:

Victims' not receiving support from healthcare professionals (Janet Dean MP);

Lawyers and court staff not receiving enough specialist training for domestic violence cases (Bob Russell MP);

A major reason why people are forced into marriage overseas is so they can sponsor their spouse to come to the UK (James Clappison MP);

Forced marriage people's less likely reporting for fear of sending their parents to jail (Ann Cryer MP);

Not designing of current police witness protection scheme for dealing with victims and survivors of forced marriage and honour-based violence (David Davies MP)

Only one case can be found where an MP responded directly to a citizen's suggestion (See Box 4).

Box 4 MP response to citizens in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

“ Education is the key... my husband assaulted my teenager. On the surface, he was a very charming man... When I told my GP what had happened to my daughter he said that this sounded very out of character for my husband. He'd met my husband three or four times. Part of people being more aware about domestic violence surely has to involve an understanding of how these charming perpetrators operate ”

(Username *nadin*, posted on February 04, 2008, 11:00pm)

“ I'm interested in what you say about educating perpetrators ”

(Gwyn Prosser MP, posted on February 06, 2008 05:04pm)

In terms of citizen reactions to MPs, there were two cases where they directly responded to remarks made by MPs. One was a response to an MP's activity, while others commented on the MP's questions (See Box 5, Box 6).

Box 5 Citizen reaction to MP (Case 1) in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

“ We have tried to influence imams but bar one, all are reluctant to get involved ”

(Margaret Moran MP, posted on January 31, 2008, 03:12pm)

“ I read a post from Margaret Moran MP that mentioned trying to gain support from imams and all bar one was reluctant to get involved ”

(Username *Fatema*, posted on February 12, 2008 01:11pm)

Box 6 Citizen reaction to MP (Case 2) in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

“ Do you think the Government's proposal to raise the sponsorship age for marriage to 21 will help to reduce the risk to young people of being forced marriage? ”

(James Clappison MP, posted on February 19, 2008 01:19pm)

“ In reply to the question of raising the age to 21, the responses of parents hell-bent on sending their child abroad would be to send them and keep them they reach the age when it is possible to have them return ”

(Username *Fatema*, posted on February 27, 2008 12:43pm)

However, many citizens still did not feel listened to or represented by their MPs and pleaded with them to be acknowledged:

Due to lack of understanding from GP's, the court and CAFCASS. I had to turn to my MP, who could not help (Username ‘honey’);

I have been to see 3 local MPs who have promised to help and delivered absolutely nothing (Username ‘cheeky monkey’);

So Mr MP do you want to interview me and take up my case to protect my son? (Username ‘tidewillturn’);

If my MP or anyone reading this can help me please get in touch. Please listen. My children and I can take no more and there is no quality of life for us any more (Username ‘anonymous’)

Clearly, interaction between the elected and the electorate was made possible through the parliamentary online forum, even if only in a few cases. It is significant that e-consultation may provide MPs and citizens with interactive online space. Moreover, it needs to be noted that participants expect and anticipate hearing responses from their representatives.

4.4.4 The role of the Parliament moderator

A Parliament moderator has the job of presiding over online discussion, in the same way that a speaker does in the chamber. He or she monitors the areas in which participants post messages. It could be crucial, then, for a moderator to keep posting guidelines and to moderate contributions before posting. After having moderated them, prompt posting is one of the most important roles.

4.4.4.1 Guiding areas by topics for posting

At the beginning of the e-consultation, the moderator suggested posting areas by topics. In the domestic violence topics, forced marriage and honour-based violence, 25 detailed areas for posting were monitored. For example, the Domestic violence topic had 7 areas in which the following suggestions and guidelines were made to participants wanting to post:

In replying you may wish to comment on one or more of the following areas:

- the effectiveness of agencies e.g. police, health and social service, at identifying and preventing domestic violence
- how well coordinated local services are and whether there are gaps in provision
- how support services can effectively address the needs of male victims, black and minority ethnic group, refugees, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people and people with disabilities
- the forms of support you have found most helpful and agencies you've felt most comfortable talking to
- your experience of court system, including Specialist Domestic Violence Courts
- how effectively probation and prisons work with abusers to change their behaviour
- how victims can be best helped to rebuild their lives

These guidelines were important for two reasons. Participants were informed of what to post without actually being restricted and the MPs in the committee had access to genuine and real life experiences from citizens in these areas. Therefore, the areas guided by Parliament moderator was able to be linked to the committee's final report.

4.4.4.2 Pre-moderation to protect participants' privacy and enforce rules

There are two forms of moderations: pre-moderation and post-moderation. Parliamentary e-consultation has adopted the pre-moderation system. Messages should follow the posting guidelines, and moderators are responsible for monitoring and flagging any names, ages, contact and geographical locations are given, or any potentially defamatory comments about the services. Furthermore, the moderator may edit comments that could influence on-going or forthcoming court proceedings or which break court injunctions.

All messages posted not only by citizens but also by MPs were read, approved, and edited by moderators before they were posted on the website. During the online forum, 19.7% of messages, 45 out of 228, which had been submitted by citizens were edited by moderators. Interestingly, 3 messages by Margaret Moran MP were also edited.

In the case of real names being used in messages, moderators amended them to say 'anonymous', and here were 10 cases in which 'anonymous' appeared as a username. It could be essential, therefore, to moderate in terms of protecting participants' privacy and keeping a sound online space.

4.4.4.3 Prompt editing for posting contributions

Contributors may not want to wait to post their messages on the website. In terms of providing an efficient service to participants, it is important for the moderator to promptly edit any posted contributions. The committee stated the objectives that all comments would be moderated within 24 hours of posting, and implemented this twice a day at 10am and 4pm during the week but not during the weekend. It can be seen from Table 13 that the editing time of a message took on average about 15 hours, so it seems that the moderators were able to achieve the goal of editing messages within 24 hours. However, 7 messages took over 24 hours to edit (See Table 14). From the participants' perspective, it might well be important that they are able to view the messages that they have posted on the website as quickly as possible.

Table 13 Moderator editing time of citizen contributions in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

Topics	No. of messages edited	Total editing time	Editing time per message
Domestic Violence	28	534hr 34min	19hr 06min
Forced Marriage	4	3hr 26min	52min
Single Action for domestic violence	12	126hr 32min	10hr 33min
Honour-based Violence	1	5hr 21min	5hr 31min
Total	45	669hr 53min	14hr 53min

* One message submitted by username 'The Real Me' was not calculated because it took 70 days to be edited. This appears to be an anomaly and might indicate an error by the moderator

Table 14 Messages taking over 24 hours to edit in the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

No	Username	Posted			Edited			Time for editing
		Date	Day	Time	Date	Day	Time	
1	bouncingback	21 Jan	Mon	11:50 am	22 Jan	Tue	1:05 pm	25:15
2	anna	22 Jan	Tue	3:42 pm	25 Jan	Fri	4:09 pm	72:25
3	ocean33	26 Jan	Sat	8:35 pm	29 Jan	Tue	4:01 pm	67:26
4	bill0786	29 Jan	Tue	11:17 am	30 Jan	Wed	4:33 pm	29:26
5	Reflective	29 Jan	Tue	10:23 pm	31 Jan	Thur	4:47 pm	42:24
6	porijata	14 Feb	Thur	7:43 pm	19 Feb	Tue	12:54 pm	113:11
7	The Real Me	29 Feb	Fri	4:59 pm	9 May	Fri	4:20 pm	70days

Parliamentary moderators played a significant role in making the online forum safe and efficient. However, it seems that their aim to finish moderating within 24 hours did not reflect the contributors' demand in the current ICT society. Another obstacle which hindered live interaction between contributors was that moderation was implemented only during business hours after 4pm on weekdays, and moderators were unavailable during weekends. Since the online communication system via the internet allows a link between all participants in real time, it is central that a moderator is able to meet participant demands to see their posted appear on the website quickly.

4.5 The stage of the consultation results

4.5.1 Parliament's feedback to contributors

A central part of the e-consultation process is that the committee which collects messages from contributors also informs them of the results. The feedback from the committee can take two forms - direct feedback and indirect feedback. Direct feedback takes place through one-on-one modes of communication such as telephone calls, e-mails and letters. Generally e-consultations gather the e-mail addresses of participants during registration, so it is possible for a committee to give feedback to contributors via e-mail. However, participants of the domestic violence e-consultation were not asked for any personal details, including e-mail addresses. Therefore, e-mail feedback was not an option as a means of giving direct feedback. However, it was possible for the committee to give indirect feedback to contributors through the parliamentary website. This indirect feedback took two forms - the chairman's address and the committees' reports, both available on the website.

4.5.1.1 Appreciative remarks to contributors by the chairman

In an example of indirect feedback, the chairman posted thankful addresses to participants on the website at the end of the e-consultation. Through this posted statement, citizens could feel that their contributions were appreciated. The committee chairman, Keith Vaz MP, delivered his appreciative remarks to all contributors on the website as follows:

I am very pleased that we have received such a wide range of contributions to our e-consultation. Your responses will make an important contribution to the Committee's inquiry in offering us a remarkable insight into the experiences of people who have experienced domestic violence, forced marriage and honour-based violence. Thank you to everyone who has participated over past six weeks.

Meanwhile, after the publication of the committee report contributors were again addressed by the chairman and a member of committee on the website:

The Home Affairs Committee's Domestic Violence forum, which formed part of the Committee's wider inquiry into Domestic Violence, closed on 29 February 2008. The committee's final report and recommendations to the Government, entitled Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence was published on 13 June 2008. The wide range of postings received on this site gave us an excellent insight into the experiences of victims of domestic and "honour"-based violence and forced marriage, and we are very grateful to everyone who contributed. Details of where you can get advice and support will remain on this site.

(Keith Vaz Chairman & Margaret Moran MP)

By viewing these remarks as a form of feedback, participants were able to be informed about the report to which they had contributed and how their contributions would be used. After the publication of the committee report, for example, contributors could locate their messages in the report, with the expectation of seeing their influence on certain recommendations.

4.5.1.2 Reflecting contributions in the committee's report

After conducting the committee e-consultation as a part of its inquiry, a report was produced with the approval of the committee members. Accordingly, the Home Affairs Committee published its sixth report for the 2007-08 session, “*Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and Honour-Based Violence*” on June 13, 2008. This report consisted of two volumes: volume 1 (HC 263-1) was composed of 429 paragraphs, conclusions and recommendations over 168 pages; and volume 2 (HC 263-2) contained oral and written evidence and had 514 pages. The 111 conclusions and recommendations that were made were then delivered to the government which then had the responsibility of replying to the committee.

In terms of the online consultation, the committee’s report (volume 1) quoted 84 citizen contributions, forming a total of 39 paragraphs out of 429 (9.1%). Therefore, participants’ messages directly contributed to shaping 39 issues in the committee’s report. Some examples cited from the report are seen in Table 15.

Table 15 Committee conclusions & recommendations influenced by contributions

Conclusion & Recommendation (No.)	Based contributions (Username)
Some respondents to our e-consultation noted that society does not condemn violence by women against men, as it does by men against women (47)	Boys for years have been taught that is it not right to hit girl. Counter to that, it is rare to hear girls educated not to hit boys. In fact I feel it is widely accepted that boys can be hit by girls and it is acceptable. Why? Is it because girls don't hit as hard and boys are tougher? The comic T-shirts by David and Goliath demonstrate this prevalent attitude to hitting and hurting of boys.....can you imagine the uproar if there were T-shirts promoting the hitting or throwing of rocks at girls because they are stupid? (drthomas)
We heard about significant levels of domestic violence between teenagers. Respondents to our e-consultation outlined worrying attitudes held by some young people towards violence in intimate relationships (73)	More and more young girls seem to regard being hit by their boyfriends as a badge of honour. Showing them where this type of attitude can lead and how it affects those around them would be a star. (peri249)

<p>Respondents to our e-consultation described unsympathetic, and in some cases, ignorant, judges, and stressed the need for those involved in the judicial process to be trained in domestic violence (303)</p>	<p>The only negative experience I had was in relation to the judge in my court proceedings. Unfortunately I found him to be judgmental, rude and dismissive and I struggled to maintain my confidence as a result. (Harrison)</p> <p>At a conference today...we had been discussing the problems of judges in the higher courts(magistrates are getting better and SDVCs etc) still taking extraordinary decisions and making remarks which betray an ignorance of the nature and dynamics of domestic abuse. The damage done by some judges is greater than the effort required to change their behaviour and knowledge. (tiscali)</p>
<p>Evidence from our e-consultation attested to patchy distribution and inadequate funding of domestic violence services across the board (378)</p>	<p>Considering how prevalent and serious domestic violence is - there should be blanket coverage of high quality services over the entire country as a matter of priority. What is the point of spending money on national defence if 1 in 4 women are not even safe in their own homes? I live in a town of 20,000 people in the South of England. There are NO domestic violence services here. (woman)</p> <p>There isn't any provision to support women in a rural setting [in my area]. (angie)</p> <p>It is absolutely ridiculous that some women can expect to receive support from well-funded and supported local service providers, while others...will receive no support at all. (16b)</p> <p>FUNDING!!!! FUNDING!!!! FUNDING!!!! Voluntary organisations struggle financially to provide necessary and vital services to support victims/survivors of DV. It is getting harder and more time consuming to prove your worth as agency. (paula)</p>

It was significant that citizen contributions were directly quoted as part of the committees' report and that these contributions played a central role in shaping parliamentary recommendations which would then be put forth to the government. It can be considered a positive feedback to contributors that their messages were included in the report as evidence of parliamentary opinions.

4.5.2 Links to decision-makers

Parliamentary e-consultation can be significant contributions if they are included in the committee recommendations and are linked to policy recommendations. Moreover, if MPs maintain interest in issues of the online forum, then the public will have the opportunity to influence legislative policy even after the e-consultation has finished.

4.5.2.1 Shaping Parliament's recommendations based on contributions

Following the online forum, the Home Affairs Committee made conclusions and recommendations in its report. These conclusions and recommendations were composed of 111 parts which were grouped into 44 issues. From the analysis of the report, it can be found that 32 out of 111 conclusions and recommendations were developed from citizen contributions (28.8%). For example, username 'drthomas' posted his/her message on male victims of domestic violence as follows:

Boys for years have been taught that is it not right to hit girl. Counter to that, it is rare to hear girls educated not to hit boys. In fact I feel it is widely accepted that boys can be hit by girls and it is acceptable. Why? Is it because girls don't hit as hard and boys are tougher? (HC 263-1: 23)

Conclusion and recommendation No.9 was extracted from the contribution above:

We recognise that there are male victims of domestic violence. We also note that the issue of relative numbers of male and female victims is a highly emotive one in which views are polarised. During our inquiry we took evidence on both male and female experiences of domestic violence and forced marriage. We acknowledge that there is a dearth of reliable data about the prevalence of domestic violence against men... (HC 263-1: 137).

Another example can be seen in a post which proposed to raise the legal age for marriage in order to prevent forced marriage amongst young people:

We need to legally raise the age of marriage to 18 in the UK in order to keep young people like this in education, and therefore away from the pressure of marriage until they have matured further (Username 'ict1921').

The message could be linked to the conclusion and recommendation No. 20 as shown below:

The testimony we heard from forced marriage survivors suggests that the desire to procure a marriage visa for a spouse can be an important factors in forced marriage. When we asked for their views on this issue, survivors told us that raising the age of sponsorship for marriage visas from 18 to 21 could better equip victims to refuse an unwanted marriage.....(HC 263-1: 137).

From the citizen's perspective, it is important positive and rewarding that their messages contributed towards shaping Parliament's suggestions to the government. Therefore, it is possible that more contributions that are traceable within a committee's recommendations could lead to more efficient parliamentary e-consultations.

4.5.2.2 The government's response to parliamentary recommendations

The government has the responsibility of replying to Parliament's recommendations. With reference to the Home Affairs Committee's report, published on June 2008, the Secretary of State for the Home Department presented its response to Parliament in July 2008. However, the committee also received a further response from the government on 30th September. The government's reply contained responses to all the committee's 111 separate conclusions and recommendations, with some of them having been grouped for a response. Most notably, it could also be seen that the committee's 32 recommendations based on citizens' messages had secured government's response.

In the introduction of the Command Paper, the government suggested that many of the committee's recommendations were acceptable and that many of them would be or had already been implemented:

...we recognise the importance of building on these successes in the future and we are therefore pleased to accept the majority of the conclusions and recommendations from the report. We have already made a good start on implementing many of the recommendations (Cm 7450, 2008: 1).

On the surface, then, it seemed that the government had given much consideration to Parliament's suggestions. In terms of the length of some responses, however, contributors may not necessarily be so satisfied. For example, the committee's two recommendations about 'abuse in teenage relationship', which related to citizen's contributions, received only one sentence reply:

From user 'peri249' e-consultation respondent;

More and more young girls seem to regard being hit by their boyfriends as a badge of honour. Showing them where this type of attitude can lead and how it affects those around them would be a start" (HC 263-1: 32).

This message was linked to committee's recommendations such as;

- Conclusion and Recommendation No.13

We heard of concerning attitudes and abuse between young people in intimate relationships. However, 16-18 year olds are excluded from the current government definition of domestic violence, there has been little research on the needs of teenage victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, and there is little support for under-18s in abusive relationships. The existence of abuse in teenage relationships further underlines the urgent need for effective early education on domestic violence and relationships.

- Conclusion and Recommendation No.14

We welcome the research being carried out by Respect and the NSPCC with the Big Lottery Fund. We recommend that the government consider amending its definition of domestic violence to include under-18 (HC 263-1: 137-8).

Somewhat insufficiently, however, the government's response consisted of only one sentence:

The government acknowledges those issues raised about widening the definition of domestic violence to include under 18s and continues to keep the definition under review (Cm 745: 6).

However, an updated reply was offered within the government's later response, which stated that the issue of 'the definition of domestic violence to include under-18s' would form part of new governmental strategy;

Consideration of definition will be covered in our Delivery Plan for 2009/10 (HC 1165: 4).

From these examples of government treatment of parliamentary recommendations, it could be well be necessary for the committee to conduct on-going observations, as described in the 'Delivery Plan for 2009/10'.

In summary, then, it is particularly significant that contributions by citizens via parliamentary e-consultations were used to extract a response from the government on a particular issue, suggesting that the public are able to use this form of communication to successfully reach their policy makers.

4.5.2.3 MPs' interests in the issues after e-consultation

Even once the e-consultation has ended, contributors could continue to affect the legislative process if their MPs maintain an active interest in the consultation issues - they can raise these issues in the Parliament through parliamentary questions and debates, while MPs' personal websites could be used as a means by which to publicise their on-going interests.

In terms of MP activities in Parliament, 7 out of 15 members of the Home Affairs Committee raised issues such as domestic violence, forced marriage and 'honour-based' violence after the closure of the e-consultation. 68 parliamentary written questions were delivered to the government by 2 MPs and 22 oral questions were conducted in the chamber by 7 MPs (See Table 16). Indeed, thanks to MPs' questions, the government's responses were recorded officially in the Hansard as evidence.

In case of Margaret Moran MP, she has continuously raised the issues of domestic violence and forced marriage. After the e-consultation on domestic violence, the government responded to her 60 parliamentary written questions, while the government's secretaries answered the oral questions in the chamber during the business of the House, Topical Questions, the Third Reading Debate on the Bill of Housing and Regeneration and the International Women's Day Debate. It might worth noting the most recent written question made by Margaret Moran MP about the government's position on the implementation of the committee's recommendations:

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the recommendations made in the Home Affairs Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2007-08, on Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and 'Honour-based' Violence, HC 263, were accepted by the government; of those accepted by the government, what proportion have been implemented; by what date he expects those accepted but not yet implemented to be implemented; and if he will make a statement. (Citation Hansard, 8 Mar 2010: Column 120W)

Mr. Alan Campbell: The government's responses (23 July and 30 September 2008) to the recommendations made in the Home Affairs Committee's report on domestic violence, forced marriage and honour-based violence are available at:

www.publications.Parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmhaff/cmhaff.htm

We understand that the Committee is reviewing all of the recommendations it has made in the last five years. We have contributed to this exercise and our update reflects the latest information on implementation and progress. (Citation Hansard, 8 Mar 2010: Column 121W)

Even if the government's answer was deemed insufficient, it is significant that an MP's on-going interest in the results of an e-consultation could result in pressing for governmental action. Another significant example can be found during Prime Minister's Questions which

took place during the period that the e-consultation was active. Within the House of Commons Martin Salter MP, a member of the Home Affairs Committee, raised an issue related to forced marriage:

Martin Salter (Reading, West) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister find time to examine the evidence heard yesterday by the Home Affairs Committee on how the government's own forced marriage unit cannot get even its own posters advertising advice and support for young people into local schools for fear of upsetting local opinion? Will he ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families to investigate this problem and introduce new guidelines to ensure that support services are available to young people at risk of being forced into marriages against their will?

The Prime Minister (Gordon Brown): I am extremely concerned by what was said there and by what my hon. Friend now says. I believe that Ministers with responsibility for schools will want to look further into this. Indeed, we will do so and report back to the House (Citation Hansard, 30 Jan 2008: Column 315).

After the Prime Minister's Questions, Martin Salter MP took part in the committee e-consultation and posted a message explaining his endeavours to encourage the Prime Minister to make a stand on the issue of forced marriage:

On 30 January I asked the Prime Minister to investigate why some schools are refusing to display Forced Marriage Unit posters and to introduce improved guidelines to ensure that support services are available to young people at risk of being forced into marriage. What do you think should be included in guidelines for frontline professionals, such as teachers or police officers, to make sure they recognise and help young people at risk?

(Posted by: Martin Salter MP (IP Logged) Date: February 21, 2008 11:51AM)

The case of Martin Salter MP arguably reveals that e-consultations can play a crucial role in conveying key issues to top policy-makers. Perhaps even more significant, however, is the fact that e-consultations allow the public's voices to be heard and for them to interact directly with the policy makers through their representatives.

Table 16 MP questions to the government on issues related to domestic violence

Members of the Home Affairs Committee	After e-consultation (16/02/08 - 23/03/10)		During e-consultation (04/01/08 - 15/02/08)		Before e-consultation (05/05/05 - 03/01/08)		Total	
	written	oral	written	oral	written	oral	written	oral
Keith Vaz	8	3				2	8	5
Tom Brake								
Karen Buck		3						3
James Clappison		2				1		3
Ann Cryer		8		2		15		25
David Davies		1				2		3

Janet Dean						1		1
Patrick Mercer		1				2		3
Margaret Moran	60	4	1	1	26	27	87	32
Gwyn Prosser								
Bob Russell					1		1	
Martin Salter				1		1		2
Gary Streeter								
David Winnick								
Jeremy Brown					8			
Total	68	22	1	4	34	51	104	77

Source: <http://www.publications.Parliament.uk/pa/pahansard.htm> (Commons Hansard)
<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mps/>

E-consultation aside, MPs also have another means by which to communicate their interests and concerns with both citizens and the government. MPs' personal websites can reach out to those wanting to explore their legislative activities because nearly all personal MP websites have been linked to the Parliament's main website: <http://www.Parliament.uk>.

All members of the Home Affairs Committee also had their own websites. However 7 websites did not provide a search engine, so it was difficult to find information on various issues. Furthermore, 2 were constructed as text only websites which meant that they did not allow for exchanges between citizens. In total, 4 MPs out of 15 handled issues related to the e-consultation on their websites. The website of Keith Vaz MP provided a link to the Hansard website, on which was recorded his question about domestic violence in the chamber. In addition, Tom Brake MP website introduced his activities during International Women's Day, such as remarking on the issue of domestic violence and signing an Early Day Motion in support of amending legislation. Two additional female MPs, meanwhile, used their websites to publicise their representative activities. Ann Cryer MP showed her interest in the issues of domestic violence through various endeavours - questions in the chamber, speeches at local campaigns or international conferences and comments on specific issues such as the Queen's speech, and Margaret Moran MP's active passion on the issue of domestic violence was also made clear on her website. The website announced three political issues: the economy, domestic violence and housing. It was not difficult to find her activities related to domestic violence on the website, which were included in her annual parliamentary report.

From the analysis of MPs' websites it is clear that issues raised within an e-consultation period can be continued through personal MP websites even after the e-consultation has closed. Therefore, in order to maintain interest in e-consultation issues, an MPs' willingness to handle them via their website is crucial.

4.5.3 Evaluation

The committee conducted its inquiry into domestic violence including so-called “honour” killings and forced marriage. The inquiry was preceded by various efforts to gain information –holding a seminar, visiting families and organisations, collecting oral evidence from witnesses, and running an online consultation. This reveals that the e-consultation formed a central part of the committee’s inquiry. After conducting the inquiry, the committee produced its report, which includes an evaluation of the e-consultation. This report consisted of two volumes: Volume1 (HC 263-1) formed the main body of the report, and consisted of 12 chapters and others small sections such as an annex, formal minutes and so on. Volume 2 (HC 263-2), meanwhile, included oral and written evidence. Evaluation of the e-consultation is found in both volumes.

The Annex in Volume1 included a *Summary of the Home Affairs Committee’s e-consultation on Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and “Honour”-Based Violence* (HC 263-1: 153-162). This summary explained the 9 sections of e-consultation:

- The Committee’s Domestic Violence inquiry and e-consultation
- The purpose and value of the e-consultation
- Site structure and development
- Registration
- IT access and computer literacy
- Publicity
- Management and moderation
- Facilitation of moderation by committee staff
- Profile of respondents

An assessment of the e-consultation gave those who had been involved valuable information. It explained the aims of the e-consultation, the committee’s efforts in its organisation such as designing a web site which protected participants’ privacy, the use of publicity to raise participation, and the moderators’ management of the forum. Moreover, meaningful data of the e-consultation, such as the number of registered users and contributors was given, even if it was basic. The data clearly showed how many citizens were registered and how many registers went on to become contributors.

From the ‘Summary of Responses’ in Volume 2, messages from citizens were classified into 10 subject areas (HC 263-2: Ev473-514):

1. National Policy and Strategy
2. The Nature of Domestic Violence and Barriers to Seeking Support
3. Prevention
4. Identification of Abuse

5. Crisis Intervention
6. Support and Survival
7. Prosecution and Courts
8. Perpetrators
9. Partnerships
10. Legislative Changes

These classifications were in almost the same order of contents as in the main report (Volume1), possibly meaning that most of the contributions were used for shaping the report. According to Table 16, 573 messages written by 315 participants addressed the issues surrounding domestic violence. There were 11 participants whose contributions were cited over 10 times, and surprisingly, user name *Jane J*'s messages were used 28 times.

Table 17 Number of cited messages and participants in the report on the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

Classification of responses	No. of messages cited	No. of participants
1. National Policy and Strategy	35	28
2. The Nature of Domestic Violence and Barriers to Seeking Support	58	42
3. Prevention	75	41
4. Identification of Abuse	44	27
5. Crisis Intervention	78	44
6. Support and Survival	131	57
7. Prosecution and Courts	82	42
8. Perpetrators	31	18
9. Partnerships	26	13
10. Legislative change	13	3
Total	573	315

Source: HC 263-2 (pp.473-514)

It was found that the rate of cited contributions within the committee's report was very high. Most of the citizens' contributions (95%), 113 out of 119, were used for shaping the evaluation report, suggesting that citizen contributions were highly valued by Parliament.

4.5.4 Contributor access to their postings after e-consultation

The e-consultation on Domestic Violence finished on 29th February 2008. After it was closed the committee published its report in June and the two government replies were submitted in July and September of 2008 respectively. Even after the consultation was finished, participants were available to access the consultation website where their contributions could be viewed. Surveys were conducted on the number of hits on the website during roughly 2 months between 6th May and 17th July 2008. Figure 9 shows a steady increase of 1,854 hits in

from a total of 20,457 times on 6th May to 22,311 on 17th July. This suggests that citizens maintained an on-going interest in the issues of the e-consultation after it closed.

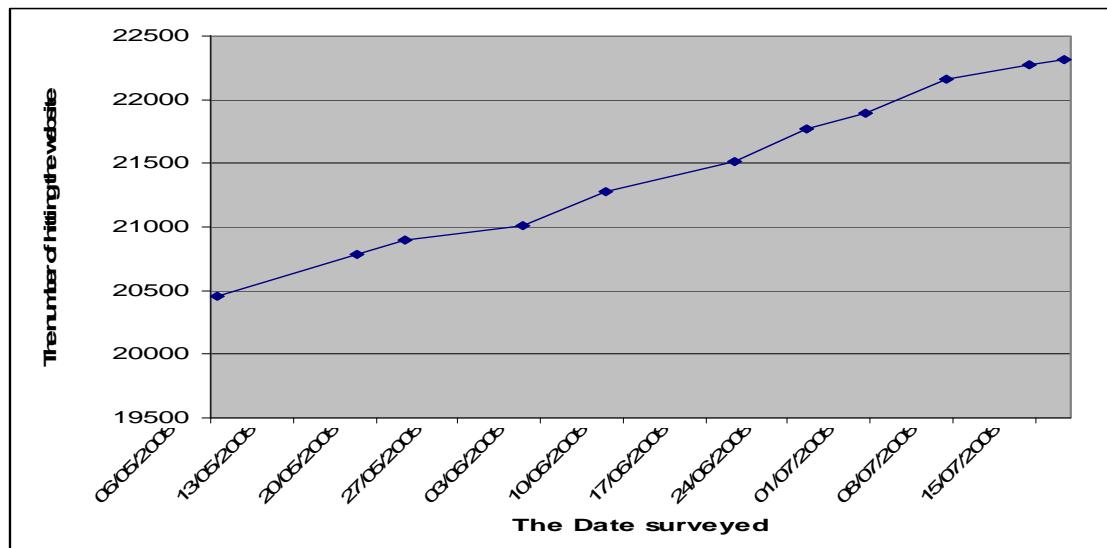


Figure 9 Number of hits on the website of the Domestic Violence consultation

However, from October 5th, 2008, it was impossible to find all the messages on the website, though it can be assumed that participants still maintained an interest in being able to view their own messages as well as those posted by other participants. Fortunately, almost all contributors, 113 out of 119, could still access their contributions in the committee's additional report because their contributions were linked to shaping part of the evaluation. Therefore, it can be argued that it is necessary for participants to be able to access their messages on the website even after the consultation has finished.

4.6 Research findings

4.6.1 Criterion

There were no specific formal criteria or principles for conducting the parliamentary e-consultation. Rather, 13 discussion rules were provided on the website for participants. The rules, then, may work as a guideline for those who organise e-consultation and who have the responsibility to maintain it. However, it should be noted that the report, *The conduct of consultations*, was admitted by the Information Committee in 2002. It is comprised of seven recommendations: reason for conducting, the objective for collecting contributions, accessibility to the internet, contributions management, and evaluation and feedback. Therefore, it may be suggested that 'the conduct of consultations' can be adopted as the principles of parliamentary e-consultations, once they have been further developed and amended by Parliament.

4.6.2 Target stakeholders

The e-consultation on Domestic Violence was clearly targeting those with experience - consultation questions were designed for victims of domestic violence, forced marriage, and "honour"-based violence. In addition, participants were classified into 8 different groups when they initially registered: victim of domestic violence, victim of forced marriage, victim of "honour"-based violence, family or friend of a victim, abuser, professional stakeholder, rather not say, and other. Adequately targeting participants, then, might increase the rate of participation in e-consultations, allowing the committee to collect more live voices, opinions and experiences from citizens.

4.6.3 Providing information

In terms of providing information on the committee's web forum, three endeavours to raise participation levels can be found. The e-consultation on Domestic Violence was well-conducted in the area of publicity, providing information and safeguarding participants. First, publicity was well-organised. Sufficient time in which to publicise was provided, totalling two months before the consultation commenced. Moreover, various methods of publicity were adopted, including advertising through television, radio and the press, and using the websites of related organisations. In particular, off-line information material was produced – the committee staff made efforts to design posters, flyers and branded logo. Secondly,

consultation related information was provided on the web forum site. The introductory web page explained the aims for conducting the e-consultation and the ways that contributions would be made. Lastly, participant safety on the website was considered. The main web page provided privacy rules and the confidentiality policy. Another section designed for protecting users, '*covering your track*' was also published on the front page and explained how to delete the internet history so that users could not be traced back to the forum. In addition to these devices, there was also a measure for escaping the site if emergency situations occurred: participants who were afraid of being discovered using the site could directly link to the BBC's main website with one click of the '*quick exit*' button.

From the committee's lengthy preparation of the web forum, it can be found that committee staff efforts played a crucial role in making the e-consultation a success. In terms of securing the safety of participants on the website, particularly, the negotiation between the committee's organisers and the web specialists who designed the consultation web page no doubt contributed to raising participation.

4.6.4 Citizens' posting behaviours

Approximately 54% of citizens who registered, 119 citizens out of 221, became contributors. In other words, 46% of registers did not participate in the e-consultation. Therefore, it is arguably necessary for Parliament to make greater effort to encourage registers to become contributors, as it is possible that registers might have willingness to post. In total, 119 contributors posted 228 messages. On average, a contributor submitted 1.9 messages. Moreover, the 228 contributions consisted of 49,884 words meaning that one message was on average composed of 219 words.

Contributors preferred particular times of the day and even days of week to post. 84% of messages were posted between noon and midnight, while 73% of messages were posted during business hours, between 9am and 6pm. The most preferred time, however, was between 3pm and 5pm - almost 30% of messages were posted during this two hour period. Surprisingly, however, only 4 messages during the whole 6 weeks were posted in the time from midnight to 8am. In addition, contributors had different posting trends depending on the day of the week. Almost half of the messages were submitted on a Thursday or Friday, while only 5.7% of the messages were posted on Saturday and Sunday.

Moreover, citizens showed different levels of interest in different topics. There were four topics in the Domestic Violence consultation. However, two topics collected 81% submissions (Domestic Violence 43.9%; Honour-based Violence 36.8%), while only 19% of messages were submitted on the other two topics (Forced Marriage 11.8%; Single Action

7.5%). Clearly contributors had varying interests on the four topics, suggesting that more attractive topics might allow committees to increase participation.

It can be assumed that the moderators' busiest time was between 3pm and 5pm on Thursdays and Fridays because 12.7% messages, 29 out of 228, were posted during these times. Therefore, the activity of parliamentary moderators needs to reflect the preferable posting habits of participants.

4.6.5 Types of citizen contributions

Contributions could be classified into exchanges, statements, and discussions and debates. Exchanges may be divided into two types: sharing experience and responding to earlier messages, which can also overlap within a single message. 87.7% of contributions included statements such as thoughts, opinions, proposals, suggestion and recommendations. This was followed by experiential contributions (29.4%), while just over one tenth of posts responded to previous comments (10.9%), while 7% of contributors participated in discussion and debate.

In the e-consultation on Domestic Violence, it seems that citizens preferred to submit solutions and suggestions with the hope of being heard by policy makers. In terms of exchanges between citizens, meanwhile, expressing experiences was more popular than responding to other contributions. Furthermore, it generally seems that discussion was not prevalent among participants.

4.6.6 MP participation

62% of MPs, 8 out of 13 who registered, participated in their committee web forum. This rate of participation was higher than that of citizens by nearly 10%. There was also evidence of MPs posting patterns. 8 MPs submitted 13 contributions, consisting of 53 sentences and containing 1,052 words. On average one message consisted of 4.3 sentences and was comprised of 85 words. Comparing this average length of the MP's messages with those left by the public, the MPs messages were only around a quarter of the length. MPs also displayed tendencies towards specific periods of time in which to post. 70% of messages that were submitted by MPs were done so between 3pm and 5pm. This period of time was the most popular for both citizens and MPs alike. During the 6 weeks of the e-consultation, MP participation was concentrated within the last 2 weeks, near the end of the period. 70% of the messages, 9 out of 13, were posted in the 5th and 6th weeks alone. There were no contributions from MPs in the 1st and 4th weeks.

In terms of the types of contributions made by MPs, the content can be divided into four sections: remarks on citizen messages; explanations of their own endeavours or government policy, questions to citizens, and thanks to participants. The most popular posting pattern was to ask citizens questions on topic-related issues (76.9%, 10 out of 13). This was followed by a tendency for MPs to inform citizens of their knowledge of the issues or an explanation of the government policy related to the topics (46.2%, 6 out of 13). In addition, most MPs responded directly to comments made by citizens (38.5%, 5 out of 13). MPs also submitted messages to thank for contributors at the closure of the e-consultation on behalf of committee (30.8%, 4 out of 13).

It is essential to comment on the interaction between MPs and the public through the online forum. 5 MPs referred to issues raised by citizens in their messages, and directly cited parts of earlier contributions. Additionally, in two cases citizens responded to messages from MPs. Therefore, it can be confirmed that interaction between the elected and the electorate occurred through the parliamentary online forum, even if only in a few cases. It is significant, then, that e-consultation can provide MPs and citizens with an interactive online space. Moreover, it needs to be noted that participants expect to receive responses from their representatives.

4.6.7 Moderator's role

Parliamentary e-consultations utilize a pre-moderation system. The system aims to maintain safety and security within web forums. Therefore, moderators monitor all messages and edit them if necessary to protect participant identities or when messages broke the posting guidelines. In total, one fifth of citizen messages, 45 out of 228, were moderated (19.74%), taking a total editing time of 669 hour 53 minutes. On average, a message took 15 hours to be posted. There was a parliamentary aim to finish moderation within 24 hours, excluding weekends, which was clearly achieved. However, from the citizens' point of view, more prompt publication of their submissions on the web is desired. Moreover, participants could not read their messages after 4pm on weekdays or during the weekend because moderation took place only twice a day, at 10am and 4pm during the week and never during the weekend. Clearly this system of moderation did not satisfy contributors who, in an ICT society where online communication systems via the internet creates links between all participants in real time, want to instantly see their posts on the website. Considering the benefits of the internet, the parliamentary moderation system with reference specifically to moderators' activities may need to be improved to provide greater accessibility to submissions. Indeed, the message posted by user 'CllrDavison', explicitly points out the problems with short working hours:

Support is also sketchy, some areas provide 24 hour help and advice, whereas in others, you need to be a victim Monday to Friday between the hours of 9-5!

4.6.8 Parliament's feedback to contributors

Parliament feedback was reflected in the use of contributions within the committee report, the main part of which (HC 263-1) consisted of 429 paragraphs and 111 recommendations. 84 contributions submitted by citizens were used in shaping 39 paragraphs in the report. It is significant that citizen contributions were directly integrated into the committee's policy, allowing them to be linked directly to the composition of the committee recommendations that were presented to the government. Therefore, it can represent strong and positive feedback to contributors that their messages were adopted in the report as evidences from which to compose parliamentary opinions.

4.6.9 Links to decision-makers

Citizens' messages submitted through e-consultation were linked to policy-makers. There were three forms in which citizen contributions were used by decision-makers.

First, the committee's recommendations were often formed based upon citizen contributions. The committee report (HC 263-1) produced 111 conclusions and recommendations: 28.8% of them, 32 out of 111, came from citizen submissions. From the citizens' perspective, it is important that their messages contribute to shaping parliamentary suggestions to the government. If this is indeed the case, linking more contributions to committee recommendations can increase the efficiency of parliamentary e-consultations.

Second, the government responded to parliamentary recommendations. The Secretary of State for the Home Department presented his responses to the Home Affairs Committee about all of their recommendations. This is particularly significant as many of the citizen messages were directly linked to the recommendations which had secured government responses. However, it became apparent that Parliament had to continuously observe the government's action plan about the parliamentary recommendations. Despite this, the significance can be found in the fact that the consultation offered citizens the opportunity to reach policy-makers.

Third, MPs were able to raise the consultation issues, even after the actual consultation had been closed, MPs used parliamentary questions, both written and oral, as a means by which to demand further governmental action or related materials about issues of consultation. After the e-consultation, there were 68 written questions submitted by 2 MPs and 22 oral questions in the chamber submitted by 7 MPs. The parliamentary questions were significant because the government's replies were officially recorded in Hansard as evidence. This may mean that contributors were able to affect policy process even after the closing of the e-consultation, as long as MPs maintained interests in the issues. Indeed, there was one

case in which an MP raised the issue of forced marriage with the Prime Minister in the House during the time in which the e-consultation was taking place, and asked him to take action. The Prime Minister responded that “we will do so and report back to the House.” From this, it may be possible to conclude that the collective voices of the citizens through e-consultation directly reached the top policy makers through their representatives.

Moreover, personal websites of MPs can be used as a means to keep up with issues brought from the e-consultation. Indeed, 4 members of the committee handled related issues on their websites. Furthermore, if their websites had allowed for online interaction with the public, then the e-consultation could have been kept going even after it had officially been closed. However, the key factor is the MPs’ willingness to continue to address the issues on their websites.

4.6.10 Evaluation

The form of evaluation on the e-consultation of Domestic Violence was identifiable in the additional report (HC 263-2). This part of the evaluation, ‘Summary of Responses’, classified contributions into 10 subject areas, which were made up of 573 messages submitted by citizens. There were 11 participants whose contributions were cited over 10 times, and surprisingly, user Jane J’s messages were used 28 times.

From the analysis, it can be found that most of the contributors, 113 out of 119, were involved in shaping the evaluation report (94.96%) arguably suggesting that citizen contributions were highly valued by Parliament.

4.6.11 Contributors’ access to their posted messages

After the e-consultation had finished, participants were able to access to their messages on the website for only a certain period of time. From the survey, it was revealed that the number of website hits by citizens steadily increased. Therefore, in order to meet citizen demands about message accessibility, it is necessary for the consultation organiser to make all messages available on the website.

4.7 Chapter conclusion

The e-consultation on Domestic Violence can be regarded as an example of a well-managed British parliamentary online forum. The factors which support this conclusion are as follows:

First, the subject of the e-consultation was interesting to citizens. Domestic violence is a long-standing and widespread issue within society: some may be victims of domestic violence and others may be relatives or friends of victims. Moreover, domestic violence can affect all citizens. Therefore, this issue is applicable to all people, which is arguably one of the factors that enabled the consultation to accumulate a lot of contributions.

Second, publicity efforts were well planned and thoughtfully prepared. Sufficient time to publicise was provided for two month before the consultation started. There were many methods used to generate publicity, such as advertising through television, radio and the press, informing the public via the websites of related organisations, and the production of posters, flyers and a branded logo. The committee's efforts to publicise its web forum in advance potentially played an important role in attracting a high level of interest in the e-consultation.

Third, public participation was high. 228 submissions were contributed by 119 citizens out of a total of 221 who registered, and sufficient time to publicise may be linked the high level of participation. In terms of the length of message, one message, on average, consisted of 219 words. Almost all contributors expressed their thoughts, opinions and suggestions (87.7%) and most described their experiences (29.4%). Moreover, there were examples of participants interacted with each other through the web forum (10.9%). Discussion and debate, however, were less popular among participants (7.0%).

Fourth, MP participation was comparatively high. 62% of committee members participated in the web forum by posting messages, which was a higher rate than citizen participation by nearly 10%, though the length of MP messages were briefer. During the e-consultation, some MPs responded directly to citizen submissions and a few of citizens replied to the MP messages as well. Therefore, it can be concluded that MP participation encouraged and promoted interaction between the elected and the electorate.

Fifth, a moderator's activity should be able to meet participant needs and interests in the current ICT society. Parliamentary moderators aimed to complete moderations within 24 hours, excluding weekends. Citizens, however, desired to be able to promptly view their messages on the website, and this type of instant production may have the potential to help simultaneously link all participants. Thus, the moderation system may benefit from modifications to better meet the needs and wishes of contributors.

Sixth, citizen submissions were linked to the policy of representative organisations. A significant number of committee recommendations were based on contributions and the government responded to all parliamentary suggestions, including those related to this particular issue. Thus it may be understood that citizen messages helped to secure acknowledgement and responses from the government. Therefore, an important result of the web forum was that citizens were ultimately able to reach policy makers via parliamentary e-consultation.

Seventh, MPs continued to maintain interest and raise issues related to the topic even after the closing of the e-consultation. Some committee members demanded further governmental action or related materials through written and oral questions presented in Parliament. The MPs' continued interests in the issues of the consultation may have provided contributors with a greater chance to have an effect on the policy process even after the e-consultation had finished.

Eighth, most citizen contributions were used for producing the evaluation report. The evaluation section, the *Summary of Responses*, classified contributions into 10 subjects. These subjects were composed of 573 messages submitted by 113 citizens. 95% of all contributors, 113 out of 119, were involved in shaping the evaluation report. Thus, it can be understood that citizen contributions were effectively recognized and utilized by Parliament.

Ninth, contributors were not able to access to their messages after a certain period of time after the e-consultation had ended despite the increase in the number of hits on the website by citizens. Additionally, participants were unable to access contributions after a certain period of time because they were eventually deleted from the website. To maintain participant satisfaction, it is necessary for consultation organisers to continue providing access to messages on the website even after the consultation has finished.

According to the analysis of this case study, it can be seen that there are effective participation strategies being implemented at each stage of the consultation: before it is conducted a topic that is able to attract public interest was extensively publicised through various methods of advertisement in addition to the production of publicity materials by the committee staff. During the e-consultation, there was interaction between participants, even if only a few cases, as well as between citizens and MPs. After the consultation was completed, committee feedback to contributors reflected the use of contributions within its report and a number of them were linked to policy makers and contributed to shaping committee recommendations, which secured a response from the government. Because MPs utilized parliamentary questions and their personal websites, issues related to the consultation were raised even after it was closed,

Thus, if properly managed, it is clear that parliamentary e-consultation has the potential to provide the public with opportunities to reach policy makers and perhaps affect the policy-making process.

5 An Empirical study: The Case of e-Petitions

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The composition of this chapter

This chapter seeks to analyse the *E-petitions* consultation in the same manner as the previous case of Domestic Violence. First, Section 5.1 introduces the analytical materials for analysing the case study. The following Section, 5.2, includes an abstract of the *E-petitions* consultation. The next three sections contain the analysis conducted in accordance with the analytical framework described in Chapter 3. There are three stages in the implementation of the e-consultation. First, the planning stage handles consultation details which are: listing criterion, targeting the stakeholder and providing information (Section 5.3). The second implementation stage explores citizen contributions, MPs participation and the role of the moderator (Section 5.4). The last stage examines the results of the e-consultation such as feedback, linking policy and evaluation (Section 5.5). After the analysis, Section 5.6 provides research findings while the final section (Section 5.7) offers the chapter conclusion.

5.1.2 Analytical materials for the case study

All contributions

□ Material downloaded on 15 May 2009 from: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/e-petitions>

Websites

□ Parliamentary website: <http://www.Parliament.uk>

□ Online forum hosted website: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/e-petitions>

□ Hansard website: <http://publications.parliamentary.uk/pa/pahansard.htm>

□ They WorkForYou.com: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>

□ Committee MPs' personal websites

 - Greg Knight: <http://www.gregknight.com>

 - Celia Barlow: <http://www.celiabarlow.org.uk>

- Christopher Chope: <http://www.christchurchconservatives.com>
- Katy Clark: <http://www.katyclarkmp.org.uk>
- Roger Gale: <http://www.rogergale.com>
- Andrew Gwynne: <http://www.andrewgwynne.co.uk>
- John Hemming: <http://john.hemming.name>
- Eric Illsley: <http://www.ericillsley.co.uk>
- Sian C. James: <http://www.sianjamesmp.co.uk>
- Rosemary McKenna: <http://www.rosemarymckenna.labour.co.uk>
- Linda Riordan: <http://www.linda4halifax.org.uk>
- Robert Smith: <http://www.scotlibdems.org.uk/people/mpssmith>
- Rob Wilson: <http://www.robwilsonmp.com>

Parliament's reports

- Procedure Committee (2008) *e-Petitions*, First Report of Session 2007-08 (HC 136)
- Procedure Committee (2009) *e-Petitions: Call for Government action*, Second Report of Session 2008-09 (HC 493)

Government's response

- A written ministerial statement on e-petitions in Debates (HC Deb, col 99WS, 22 July 2008)
- Procedure Committee (2009) *E-petitions: Call for Government action: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2008-09*, First Special Report of Session 2008-09 (HC 952)

5.2 Abstract: the online consultation of e-Petitions

5.2.1 Purpose, topics and time period

The Procedure Committee had been asked by the House of Commons to propose an e-petitions system. The committee focused on 3 issues: members should be as engaged with e-petitions as they are with written petitions; e-petitions should be open to the addition of e-signatures for a certain period before formal presentation; and once presented, they should have the same status as written petitions.

In order to produce suggestions for implementing an e-petition system, the committee held an inquiry on the subject. As part of a committee inquiry, an e-consultation was set up to gather public views.

Citizens were asked about three topics:

- Q1. What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?
- Q2. How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petition system?
- Q3. Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

The online consultation was conducted for 6 weeks from January 4th, 2008 to February 15th, 2008 through the website: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/e-petitions>.

5.2.2 The status of participants: registers, contributors and viewers

5.2.2.1 Registers

In order to submit contributions to the website, all participants, including both citizens and MPs needed to be registered. Generally, some participant details are needed at this stage such as their real name, user name and email address. However, there was no data about registers in the committee report. Therefore, it was not possible to classify the number of registers by participation group, such as citizens, MPs and moderators.

5.2.2.2 Contributors

The data of contributors was able to be extracted from material downloaded from the host website. During the 6 weeks of consultation, 32 messages were submitted by 16 contributors. 13 citizens posted 29 submissions and 3 moderators posted 3 messages to explain each topic.

5.2.2.3 Viewers

Even after the e-consultation had closed, all posted messages were accessible for a period of time before they were eventually deleted from the website. Over five thousands citizens expressed their interest in the subject of e-petitions by visiting the e-consultation website.

Table 18 Number of hits on the website in the consultation on e-Petitions

Topics	Views
Announcement: Message from Parliament Moderator	1,240
What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?	1,561
How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?	1,109
Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?	1,495
Total	5,405

Source: <http://forums.Parliament.uk/e-petitions/index.php?index,1> (as of 6 May 2009)

5.2.3 Parliament's recommendations

The Procedure Committee published its report on *e-Petitions* on April 6th, 2008. The report consisted of 151 paragraphs including formal minutes, oral and written evidence and committee approved 19 conclusion and recommendations. In terms of implementing the parliamentary e-petition system, it was suggested that it could put into operation from the beginning of 2010. Additionally, the committee produced a second report, *e-Petitions: Call for Government action*, on May 8th, 2009. This report indicated that the government appeared to lack the will to introduce a parliamentary e-petition system and called on the government to allow the e-petition project to move forward to the next stage of implementation.

5.2.4 The Government's response

The government response to the committee's first report on *e-Petitions* was submitted to Parliament on July 22nd, 2008. A written ministerial statement by the leader of the House of Commons was presented during the debate. The Procedure Committee concluded that the government responded positively to accept its recommendations. In addition, there was a further government response to the committee report, *e-Petitions: Call for Government action* on July 20th, 2009. The government was concerned that the project would cost more than £4 million over a Parliament and stated that it intended to establish a new committee on parliamentary reform, as stated by the Prime Minister to the House on June 10th, 2009. Therefore, the government hoped that the new committee would be able to draw on the findings of the Procedure Committee.

5.2.5 Citizen contributions in the committee report

The Procedure Committee held an inquiry into a parliamentary e-Petition system. The committee's web forum was conducted as a part of its inquiry. After implementing the web forum, the committee's report was published. However, citizen contributions submitted via e-consultation did not appear in the committee report. Furthermore, there was no statement about the e-consultation such as planning, data of participants, and evaluation.

5.3 *The planning consultation stage*

5.3.1 Criterion

The previous case study revealed that the criterion of e-consultation was not prepared as a set of formal parliamentary principles. Therefore, in terms of e-consultation criteria, the same standard was applied to this case study.

5.3.2 Target stakeholder

The subject of petitions could potentially attract a range of different people. Particularly, an e-petition system may be able to raise petitioner interest because it would make e-signatures easier to submit. All citizens need to be targeted for the successful introduction of a parliamentary e-petition system, considering the effect that a successful e-petition could have. For example, the case of Number 10 Downing Street that was entitled “Scrap the vehicle and road pricing policy” gained 1,810,687 signatures. However, it was difficult to find any effort by the committee to target participants within the committee report.

5.3.3 Providing Information

Providing topic-related information including publicity may be critical for encouraging citizens to participate in an e-consultation. Furthermore, from the introductory remarks made by the chairman of the committee, citizens can be informed that their contributions are used to shape its conclusions. However, in this case, there was no action taken to publicise the e-consultation or to provide information related to the subject.

5.4 The stage of the consultation process

5.4.1 Citizen posting behaviours

29 messages were submitted by 13 contributors during the 6 weeks of the e-consultation. However, the rate of contributors could not be produced because there was no data on the number of registers. The posting behaviour of citizens can be classified into preferred times of day, participations per day of the week and the length of contributions.

5.4.1.1 Preferred time of day for postings

All 29 contributions by citizens were posted after 1pm, with the most popular time frame being between 7pm and 8pm, in which 31% of messages were submitted. In addition, contributors preferred to post messages out of business hours: 65.5% of submissions, 19 out of 29, were posted after 6pm.

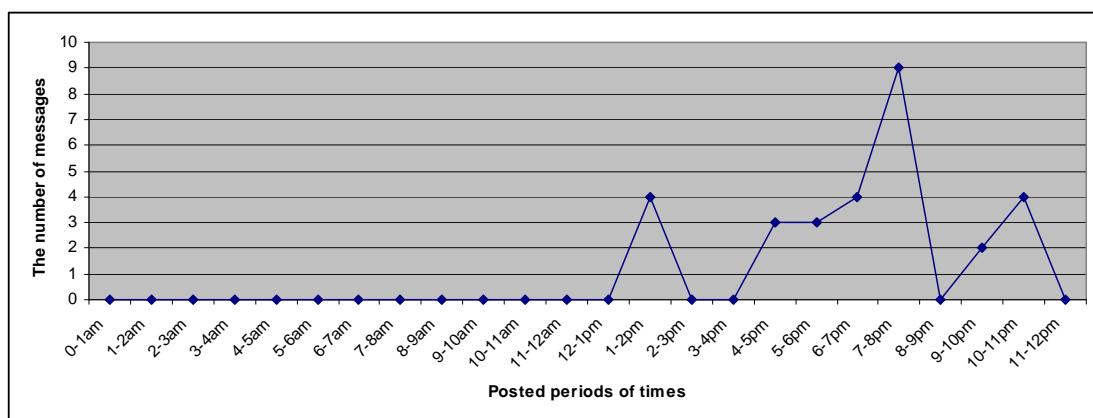


Figure 10 Number of messages posted during different time periods for the e-consultation on e-Petitions

5.4.1.2 The extent of participation on different days of the week

Figure 11 showed that there was a preference to post on a Monday, Tuesday or a Wednesday, with 82.8% of contributions being made on these days. In particular, 55.2% of messages were submitted on a Tuesday. Comparatively, the other four days of the week accumulated only 5 messages during the 6 weeks.

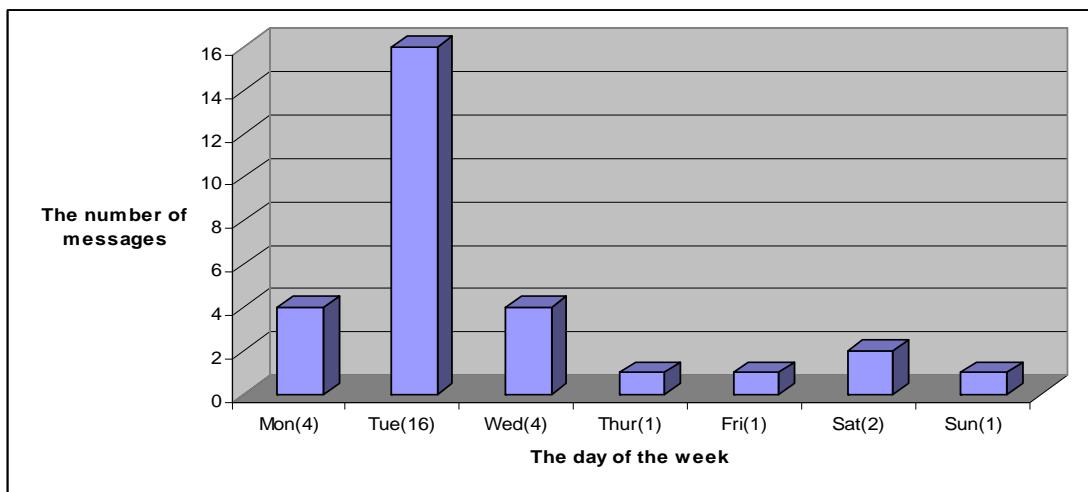


Figure 11 Number of posted messages on each day of the week for the e-consultation on e-Petitions

5.4.1.3 The length of contributions

29 contributions consisted of 5,768 words, with each message containing an average of 199 words. However, user ‘*mojo*’ submitted the longest message with 752 words, while user ‘*Anubis*’ presented the shortest submission of only 23 words. Overall, 72.4% of submissions, 21 out of 29, were below 200 words.

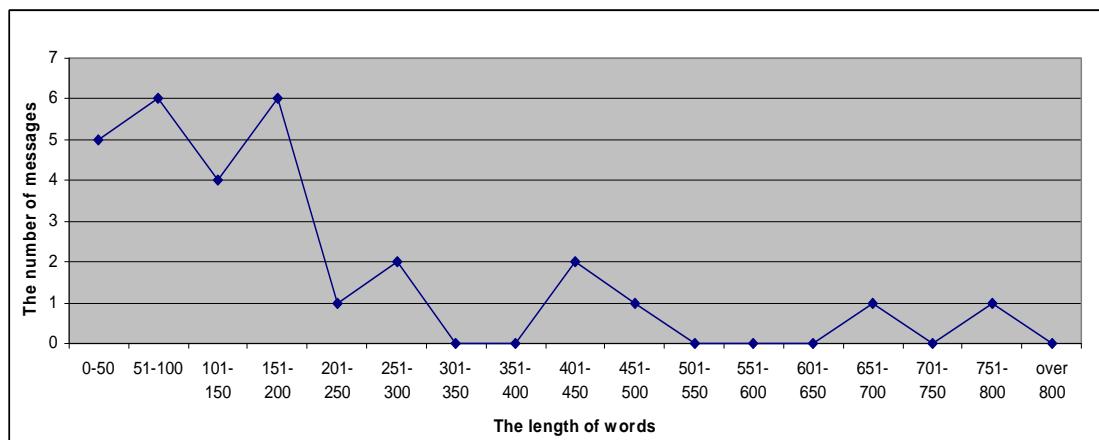


Figure 12 Number of messages per range of word length in the e-consultation on e-Petitions

5.4.1.4 Citizens’ preference of topics

There were three questions in the web forum of *e-Petitions*:

- Q1. What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?
- Q2. How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?
- Q3. Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

13 out of 29 contributions were submitted to Q1(44.8%) and this was followed by Q3 with 10 messages (34.5%). Q2 collected 6 citizens' submissions (20.7%).

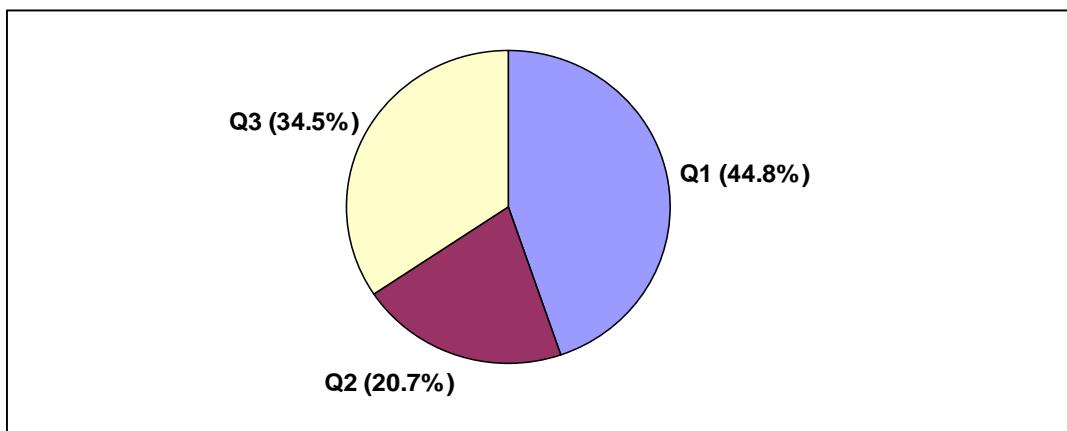


Figure 13 Rate of contributions per topic in the e-consultation on e-Petitions

5.4.2 Citizens' contribution types

The previous classification could also be applied to this study. There were three types of contributions: exchange, statements, and discussion and debate. Exchange can be divided into experimental contributions and responding earlier messages; statements can include thoughts, suggestions and proposals; discussion and debate can be for or against opinions about the contributions. These types can be seen to overlap in single messages.

All 29 citizen messages were classified as statements (100%). 5 contributions out of 29 were responses to previous contributions (17.2%). Discussion, meanwhile, could be found in 2 messages (6.7%) and only 1 submission was an experiential one (3.5%).

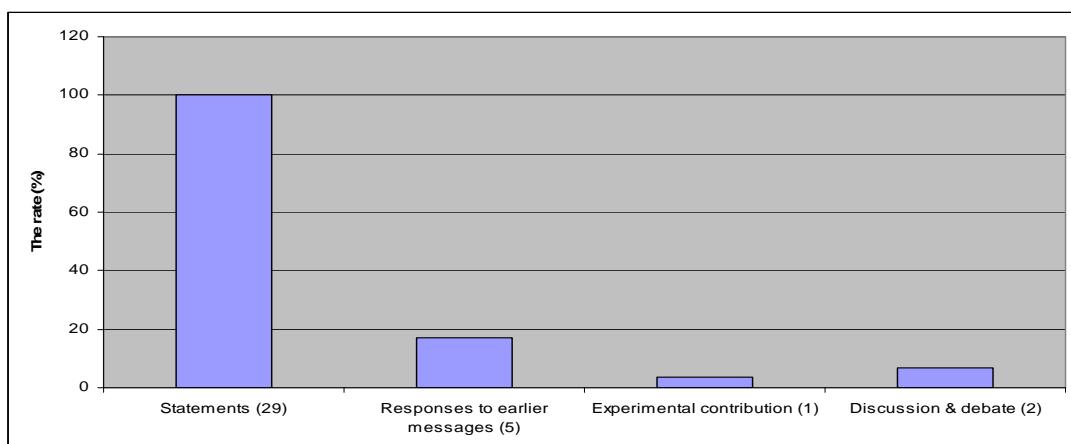


Figure 14 Types of citizen contributions in the e-consultation on e-Petitions

In the e-consultation on e-petitions, all contributors stated their thoughts, opinions and proposals about the different topics of e-petitions. Moreover, there was an interaction between participants created through responding to earlier contributions. However, debating and sharing experiences was less popular.

5.4.3 MP participation

The Procedure Committee was composed of 13 members. During the implementation of the e-consultation, no MPs participated. Considering that MP participation could potentially be a crucial factor in encouraging citizens to take part, the consultation on e-petitions might not have expected to get high levels of public participation. Furthermore, due to the lack of MP participation, it was not possible to produce analytical data, such as their posting patterns, contribution types and cases of interaction with citizens.

5.4.4 Parliamentary moderator's role

Parliamentary moderators posted three guidance messages per topic at the start of the e-consultation. After reading these initial messages, participants could then decide whether they wanted to contribute. The moderator's role of moderating all contributions is also the role of the moderator. However, after an examination of all the messages downloaded on the consultation website, there were no cases in which moderation was necessary meaning that it was not possible to calculate message editing time.

5.5 The consultation results stage

5.5.1 Parliament feedback to contributors

Feedback is an essential part of the committee's role of informing citizens of the results of the e-consultation, and could affect decisions by contributors to participate again in the future.

There are various feedback methods that can be utilized. Direct feedback can be implemented through the committee providing all participants with the results via telephone, letters, emails, etc. Furthermore, indirect feedback to participants can also be conducted via the committee's web forum site. Another form of communication that may be considered a form of feedback is the committee report including citizen contributions. In the case of this particular consultation, however, the committee report could not be seen to have provided any feedback to participants. Furthermore, the report did not refer to the subject of the e-consultation even though it was conducted as a part of the committee inquiry.

5.5.2 Links to decision-makers

5.5.2.1 Shaping Parliament's recommendations based on contributions

E-consultations may provide the citizen with a valuable means by which to engage in the process of policy-making, particularly if their submissions contribute to shaping committee recommendations.

The chairman of the Procedure Committee left the following remarks on the introductory web page of e-consultation:

The Committee has been asked by the House of Commons to propose an e-petition system. We are therefore holding an inquiry on the subject and set up this online forum to gather the views of the public....The contributions to this forum will be taken into account, along with the evidence received, as we consider our final conclusions.

However, citizen contributions do not appear to have been linked to committees recommendations at all. There was no evidence that they had adopted contributions or used them to shape conclusions in the report.

5.5.2.2 MP interests in the issues after e-consultation

Even after an e-consultation has been closed, people are able to engage its issues if MPs have maintain interest in them. MPs can raise the issues in the House through parliamentary oral questions or debates, while written questions to the government could be an alternative method. Additionally, personal websites of MPs can also be used to continue the discussion of issues.

In terms of raising the issue after the e-consultation in the House, only one case was found. Robert Smith MP, a member of the Procedure Committee, raised the issue in the Debates during the report from the House of Commons Reform Committee on Rebuilding the House on 22 February 2010. An answer was delivered by Tony Wright, Chairman of Reform of the House of Commons Committee. This was recorded in Hansard as oral evidence:

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I welcome the recognition of petitions. The Procedure Committee did a lot of work bringing forward the e-petition system, which was never debated by this House and, in a sense, that justifies the need for a business committee that could get things debated. What would be the position of the Procedure Committee? As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman's Committee did not think the Procedure Committee needed to be elected, because it is not a departmental Select Committee. Should not the Procedure Committee also be linked to the House in that way?

Dr. Wright: In the time that we had available, we did not turn our mind to the composition of the Procedure Committee, although perhaps we should have done. On e-petitions, the fundamental argument-although there are arguments on both sides, not least that of cost-is that the House should have an opportunity to express a view. That is something that underpins our whole report (HC Deb, 22 Feb 2010, col 54).

Another was found on Katy Clark MP's private website. The section 'Latest News' on her website referred to the subject: 'Katy welcomes reform in the House of Commons'. In this article, parliamentary e-petition system was remarked upon:

Katy Clark supported crucial reforms of the House of Commons this week as part of a debate on proposals from the Wright Committee on Parliamentary Reform.

The committee set out its suggestions in a report, Rebuilding The House, which was released in November. The changes mean that select committees are now elected by all MPs in a free vote rather than appointed by Party whips to make them more democratic and able to be more hard hitting.

Other changes include opening up opportunities for public participation through e-petitions and changing the way the agenda for business is set so that backbench MPs control some of what is discussed, timetables and procedures with a newly elected

Business Committee which is elected by all MPs on free vote and decides what is discussed in non-government time.

The website also posted Katy's remarks:

... The changes in this report give people more chances to become involved with the political process".... "In my opinion we need to see further reforms to make the House of Commons more genuinely able to discuss the real issues and effectively represent the people of this country... (<http://www.katyclarkmp.org.uk>)

However, there were no instances of MPs directing written parliamentary questions to the government as a means of raising the consultation issue.

5.5.3 Evaluation

The Procedure Committee held an inquiry on the subject of introducing a parliamentary e-petition system. As a part of the committee's inquiry, the committee met three times to gather oral evidence from 10 witnesses who were comprised of MPs and specialists. 17 cases of written evidence were also collected from MPs and related organisations. Moreover, an online forum was set up to hear public views.

After the committee's inquiry, the report on *e-Petitions* was produced. The report consisted of 151 paragraphs and included 19 recommendations with oral and written evidence. However, it did not offer any e-consultation details, which could mean that the committee did not evaluate the e-consultation. Therefore, not only the contributors but also researchers were limited in their opportunities to review and analyse contributions.

5.5.4 Contributors' access to their postings after e-consultation

After the e-consultation on *e-Petitions* had closed, the number of hits on the website was surveyed during approximately 2 months between May 6th and July 17th of 2008. From the survey, it was revealed that, similar to the e-consultation on Domestic Violence, the number of hits continuously increased 542 times from 5,405 hits on May 6th to 5,947 hits on July 17th (See Figure 15). The similar result was found that participants wanted to have access to their messages or those of other contributors even after the consultation had closed.

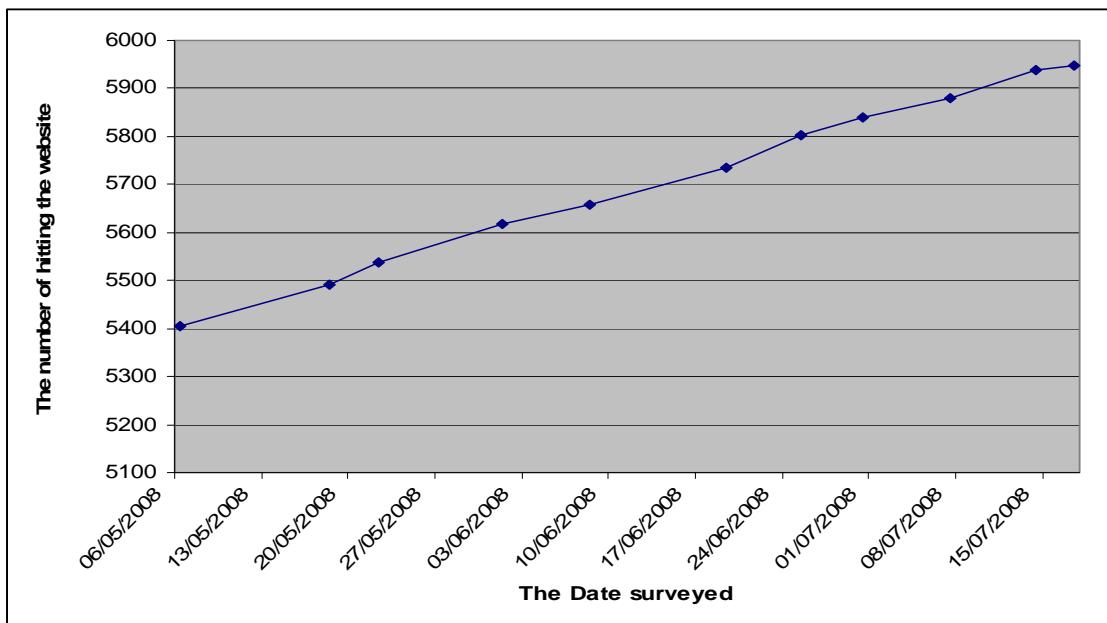


Figure 15 Number of hits on the website of the e-Petitions consultation

As of October 5th, 2008, all postings disappeared from the website and participants were not able to access them anymore. However, another opportunity for participants to see their messages could have remained if the committee had included citizen contributions in its report. Unfortunately, the committee did not put any e-consultation details, including contributions, into the report, meaning that the contributors who participated in the *e-Petitions* consultation no longer had access to their messages anymore. Thus, in terms of the participants' desire to view their postings, the consultation organiser needed to maintain access to contributions on the website even after the consultation ended.

5.6 Research findings

5.6.1 Preparation for e-consultation

In the e-consultation on *e-Petitions*, parliamentary e-consultation criterion was not provided. Therefore, as suggested in the previous case study on *Domestic Violence*, there needs to be a formal principle adopted for e-consultations.

In terms of targeting participants, there was no evidence that the committee settled on a target group to encourage participation in the e-consultation, and it can be assumed that the subject of e-petitions was opened to all citizens. However, it may be critical for a successful e-consultation to accumulate more participants by clearly targeting a sector of the public in advance. Moreover, any action to raise public awareness of the *e-Petitions* consultation cannot be found. Indeed, only those who were able to access the committee's forum website could discover that the e-consultation was being conducted. A message from user 'level 80' indicates the significance of publicising consultations:

Most people do not know about this, it's the first I've heard about it.

5.6.2 Citizen contributions and MP participation

During the 6 weeks that the e-consultation was taking place, 13 citizens submitted 29 messages to the committee's web forum, with an average of one contribution posted every two days. Compared to the previous consultation case of *Domestic Violence*, which collected 228 messages from 119 citizens in the same duration, it seems that the consultation of *e-Petitions* did not set out to proactively attract citizens. In terms of the length of messages, meanwhile, a contribution was, on average, composed of approximately 200 words. In addition, it is clear that contributors preferred to submit statements such as thoughts, proposal and recommendations rather than posting issues for debate and experiential contributions. Furthermore, no MPs participated in the committee web forum, making it impossible to create interaction between MPs and citizens in the online forum. The lack of participation from MPs may be responsible for the low level of citizen participation. Additionally, from the research perspective, it was not possible to produce analytical data such as MP posting patterns, contribution types and instances of interaction with citizens. Thus, for a successful e-consultation, securing MPs participation may be a crucial factor.

5.6.3 Consultation results

In the analysis of the report there was a lack of evidence that citizen contributions assisted in the shaping of recommendations. In terms of committee feedback to contributors, there was also no assurance that citizens were informed of any results or that their views were taken into account by the e-consultation organizer. This could have potentially generated feelings among participating citizens that their efforts were not truly appreciated. In addition to this, participants were not able to access their messages through the website after a certain period of time even if the number of visitors to the website steadily increased after the consultation period. It may be necessary to provide more long term access to contributions on the website in order to satisfy participant inquiries.

However, there were meaningful cases in which members of the committee maintained an interest in the issue even after the e-consultation was closed. Robert Smith MP raised the issue during the debates in the House. Another MP, Katy Clark, handled the e-petition issue via her personal website. There is the potentially that an issue brought from an e-consultation could have an effect on political policy even after the e-consultation if MPs maintain interest and keep the issue relevant and current.

5.7 Chapter conclusion

The *e-Petitions* consultation may be viewed as perhaps one of the less popular consultations from the public perspective, considering its low levels of participation. There may be several reasons for this:

First, publicity of the *e-Petitions* consultation could have been better utilized. The consultation may have benefited from advanced publicity in order to encourage more citizen participation. However, the Procedure Committee did not take the necessary steps to provide consultation details such as the consultation topic, the conducting period and related information prior to the e-consultation taking place. A lack of publicity may help explain the low level of public interest or awareness.

Second, citizen participation was low. During the six weeks that the e-consultation was active, only thirteen citizens submitted a total of twenty-nine messages. In terms of the efficiency of the e-consultation, such a low participation level may lead to the perception that e-consultation is not the best use of Parliament resources. However, the low level of participation may encourage consultation organisers to establish measures to encourage more potential participants to become actual contributors.

Third, there was no MP participation. None of the thirteen committee members submitted messages to the web forum, and, as a result, citizens were not given the opportunity to interact with MPs. There may have been a public understanding that participation in the web forum would provide an opportunity to communicate with their representatives. Therefore, increased participation from MPs may directly lead to a rise in citizen participation.

Fourth, the committee report did not include any details about the e-consultation. After the e-consultation, contributors expected to be able to find their messages in the report, as was implied through an introductory message on the web site, which stated that the contributions would be taken into account as the committee formed its final conclusions. However, recommendations that were directly shaped by citizen contributions were not found in the report. This may produce uncertainty in citizens that the committee values their contributions.

Fifth, contributions were not accessible on the website after a certain period of time. Even though the number of hits on the site increased after the consultation period, contributions on the website were eventually removed. In order to encourage citizen participation and interest, it would be beneficial for citizens to be able to view their messages continuously even after a consultation has closed.

From the analysis of this particular case study, lack of vigorous e-consultation activity may be the result of some specific factors. The analysis highlighted three obstacles that negatively affected the level of citizen participation: lack of publicity, lack of MP participation and lack of contribution recognition in committee reports. If these factors are reduced or eliminated, e-consultations have greater opportunities to succeed.

Even if the consultation could have produced more satisfactory results, there were two MPs who maintained interest in the issue after the e-consultation period was over. One MP raised the issue during the Debates in the House, while the other posted an issue related article on her individual website. It was particularly significant that the consultation issue was continued through the maintained interest of the MPs. In other consultations as well, this could mean that even if an e-consultation was closed, the issues within it could have an on-going effect on political policy.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Summary of e-consultation cases

Since 2007 the British Parliament has directly conducted its e-consultations via the parliamentary website. During these years, 16 e-consultations were implemented by the Select Committees, the Joint Committees and the Speaker's Conference. To conduct empirical studies on e-consultations, two cases, *Domestic Violence* and *e-Petitions*, both opened in 2008, were selected because of their differences in the levels of the public participation; the former had a high level of public participation and the latter had a low level of public participation.

In the consultation preparation stage, the publicity to promote public participation was applied differently. The *Domestic Violence* consultation was well publicised using various means such as advertising and informing through TV, radio, the press and websites for two months before it started. Moreover, the committee also produced publicity material such as posters, flyers and a branded logo. However, it was difficult to find any similar activity for the *e-Petitions* consultation.

Another factor, the subject of consultation, may affect public participation levels due to public interest, or lack thereof, in the consultation subjects, and whether citizens are interested enough to participate in a consultation on the subject. The issue of *Domestic Violence* was arguably more attractive to participants than that of *e-Petitions* considering that this issue was directly relevant to more of the population than *e-Petitions*, which was a more abstract subject matter.

During the consultation process stage there was a big difference between the two cases in terms of the level of participation,. The *Domestic Violence* case received 228 contributions by 119 citizens and 13 contributions by 8 MPs; whereas the *e-Petitions* case received only 32 contributions from 13 citizens, and no contributions from participating MPs. The low level of public participation in the *e-Petitions* case may have been affected by a lack of pre-consultation publicity, for which the consultation organiser was responsible. Additionally, a high rate of MP participation, as in the *Domestic Violence* case, clearly encourages citizen participation because this mode of communication is perceived as the only way for the public to interact with their policy-makers.

Another factor for a successful e-consultation is the guarantee of an efficient role for the parliamentary moderator through whom all contributions should be screened prior to being posted on the website. In the *Domestic Violence* case, 45 messages were edited, which took on average about 15 hours each, although 7 messages took over 24 hours to edit. There was an aim to finish moderation within 24 hours during weekdays and no moderation activity

during the weekend. From the participants' perspective, this level of moderation did not accommodate public demand for instant information which is a common expectation in our current internet-based society. Therefore, it is necessary to regulate a moderation system to meet contributor expectations of efficiency.

After the implementation of a consultation, the committee report can be a means of providing feedback to participants. In the committee's main report on the *Domestic Violence* case (*HC 263-1*), 39 paragraphs out of 429 were influenced by the citizens' 84 contributions. The additional report (*HC 263-2*) included an evaluation of the e-consultation, in which contributions from almost all participants, 113 out of 119, were cited 573 times. In terms of linking the contributors to representative organisations, 32 recommendations out of 111 were influenced by citizens' submissions, which called for replies from the government. From the analysis, it can be concluded that public contributions were highly valued by Parliament. However, in the *e-Petitions* case, the report did not include any evidence related to the e-consultation such as citing public messages, evaluating the e-consultation or public influence on recommendations. In other words, citizen contributions did little to impact committee policy. From this result, it can be assumed that participants may find it difficult to assess how their contributions were valued by the committee.

There were examples of issues continuing to be raised in both e-consultation cases after they had been closed. Parliamentary questions, both oral and written, were used as a means to demand further governmental action or related materials. These issues were also continued via MPs' personal websites. Therefore, MPs' continuous interest in the consultation issues may be able to provide the public with the chance to further engage in the legislative process even after the conclusion of the e-consultation.

From the analysis of the successful *Domestic Violence* case, the following research findings can be summarized:

- Publicity of the case may play an important role in encouraging the public to participate in the e-consultation
- An interesting and topical consultation subject may contribute to raising the level of citizen participation
- More MP participation is essential to providing the electorate with the opportunity to interact with the elected and the chance to engage policy-makers
- It is necessary for a moderator to edit messages promptly in order to meet the participants' expectations about feedback
- The parliamentary e-consultation allows for direct interaction between the public and its representatives

- Citizen messages may influence committee recommendations and, ultimately, affect government policy
- The issues related to e-consultations can be continued even after it been completed, through parliamentary oral and written questions and MPs' individual websites, offering the opportunity to press for further governmental action

However, the less successful *e-Petitions* case also suggests several implications:

- A low level citizens participation may partially be due of a lack of publicity
- There was no interaction between MPs and the public because there were no MPs participating in their own e-consultation
- The committee's report did not include e-consultation details and did not consider any public contributions or allow them to shape recommendations

Some factors were common in both cases:

- There were no specific e-consultation criteria or parliamentary principles. Only 13 discussion rules were provided;
- After the committee reports were published, all messages on the e-consultation forum were deleted from the website even if the number of hits continued to increase

In conclusion, these case studies found that parliamentary e-consultations provide the public with an online sphere and the opportunity to interact with their representatives, the chance to reach policy makers, and to open the possibility of engagement with the policy-making process.

6.2 Examining research questions

In order to achieve the objective of this thesis, which is to suggest ways of maximizing the efficiency of the online consultation system, research questions have been formed in order to find the best methods. These questions can be examined through the analysis of the two consultation cases:

Q1. Should participants be provided with information related to issues in advance?

One case provided information well in advance, while the other did not hold this as an important factor:

The *Domestic Violence* consultation was well-conducted to provide consultation information in advance. The case also ensured that sufficient time was available to publicise the case. Two months were allotted to advertise through various methods such as advertising, website postings, and producing informative material. Consultation-related information was provided on the introductory web page explaining the aims of the conduction and the ways in which contributions would be used. There was information provided about participant safety, including the mechanisms, ‘covering your track’ and the ‘quick exit button,’ which were installed on the front web page, as well as privacy rules and a confidentiality policy which were also provided.

The *e-Petitions* consultation did not take any action to publicise or provide information related to the subject in advance. There were only the chairman’s introductory remarks on the front web page to inform participants that contributions may be used to shape committee conclusions. However, there were no contributions linked to recommendations or any consultation details found in the report.

Q2. Does interaction between MPs and the public occur via e-consultation?

Only one case occurred in which MPs interacted with the public:

The *Domestic Violence* consultation offered an example of interaction between the elected and the electorate. There were two interaction patterns: one MP responded directly to a citizen’s suggestion saying that “I’m interested in what you say about educating perpetrators,” while two citizens responded to remarks made by MPs.

The *e-Petitions* consultation included no examples of interaction occurring between representatives and citizens. No members of the committee participated in the e-consultation, despite being the ones conducting it. Without MP participation, of course, there was no opportunity for the public to interact with their representatives.

Q3. Do public contributions shape committee recommendations?

It was found that one case was linked to the shaping of committee opinions:

The *Domestic Violence* consultation committee included a number of citizen contributions in its recommendations. Indeed, 28.8% of recommendations, 32 out of 111, were developed from public messages. These recommendations developed from contributions secured government responses the government was responsible for replying to all parliament recommendations.

The *e-Petitions* consultation committee did not consider any contributions when shaping its recommendations. Furthermore, the committee report did not include any e-consultation details.

Q4. Do MPs maintain interest in case issues after e-consultation?

Both cases revealed that MPs continued to keep the issues active even after the consultations had ended:

The *Domestic Violence* consultation revealed that, even after the e-consultation had finished, MPs continued to raise the issues related to the subject of the consultation through parliamentary questions and on the MPs' personal websites. 7 MPs posed 22 oral questions to the government in the chamber and 2 MPs delivered 68 written questions on the issue. Moreover, 4 MPs handled the issues on their individual websites.

The *e-Petitions* consultation findings also had examples of consultation issues remaining active beyond the consultation period. There was only one instance in which the issues were raised in the chamber during the Debates, which was recorded in Hansard as oral evidence. In addition to this, one MP posted an article related to the consultation issues on her personal website. However, there were no cases of written parliamentary questions to the government being used as a means to raise the case issues.

Q5. Does the moderator's role contribute to effectiveness of e-consultation?

One case demonstrated that the role of the moderator was not satisfactory in the creation of an effective e-consultation:

The *Domestic Violence* consultation revealed that the moderation system did not meet participant expectations of rapid feedback. 19.7% of citizen contributions, 45 out of 228, were moderated, taking a total of about 670 hours, with one message taking an average of 15 hours to be posted. Meanwhile, there were aims set by Parliament for moderation: to finish moderation within 24 hours, to read messages twice a day, at 10am and 4pm during weekdays, but not during weekends. However, this moderation system did not accommodate participant expectations of creating a link between all contributors in real time.

Q6. Do contributors receive adequate feedback after the consultation?

One case provided indirect feedback to contributors:

The *Domestic Violence* consultation included indirect feedback through the reflection of citizen contributions within the committee report. The main report (HC 263-1) consisted of 429 paragraphs and 111 recommendations, and citizen messages contributed to shaping 39 paragraphs and 32 recommendations respectively, while the additional report (HC 263-2) also included nearly all contributed messages in its evaluation which cited contributions on 573 occasions, which had been submitted by 113 citizens out of a total of 119 who took part in the consultation.

The *e-Petitions* consultation revealed no evidence from which to consider contributions in the report. Even details of the e-consultation were absent from the report

Q7. Are contributors able to access their posted messages on the website after the e-consultation has taken place?

Both cases revealed that, after a certain period, contributions were no longer available on the respective websites:

In the two consultation cases, *Domestic Violence* and *e-Petitions*, once the consultation had been closed, it was possible to access posted messages for a short period of time. However, it was surveyed that, before all messages were deleted, participants continued to visit the websites even after the consultations had ended.,

6.3 Recommendations for maximising the effectiveness of the parliamentary e-consultation system

Research findings are extracted from the empirical studies about the parliamentary e-consultation system. The research questions are also examined through the analysis of the two consultation cases. These research methods are able to provide the means to realize the aim of this thesis: maximizing the effectiveness of the online consultation system. Therefore, several recommendations are suggested for each stage of the consultation:

□ The planning consultation stage

1. Provision of parliamentary criteria for e-consultations -

The e-consultation criteria may serve not only as principles for consultation organisers who have the responsibility to uphold them, but also as guidelines for participants. So far formal parliamentary e-consultation criteria have not been established. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that 'the conduct of consultations,' recommended by the Information Committee in 2002, included topics such as reasons for conducting consultations, objectives for collecting contributions, accessibility to the Internet, contribution management, and evaluation and feedback. Therefore, it can be suggested that 'the conduct of consultations' could be adopted as principles of parliamentary e-consultations, once they have been developed and amended by Parliament. In particular, it should be considered that e-consultation guidelines have been adopted by various institutions such as OECD. These examples may be helpful for shaping parliamentary e-consultation criteria.

2. Increasing e-consultations in the legislative process -

The rate of conducting e-consultations has been considered to be low. Only 13% of select committees in the both Houses, 9 out of 69, have adopted the system. In terms of increasing the opportunity for public participation, it might be necessary for committees to use e-consultation systems in the legislative process as well as in committee inquiries. Thus, a proposal can be suggested that Bills in the committee stage after the First Reading and the Second Reading consult the public through the committees' web forum. Considering the number of Bills - 163 Bills were considered during the 2008-09 Parliament Session - and the time required to prepare e-consultations, it may be most efficient for commissioned

committees to choose Bills related to citizen interests and current issues. Then the committees must be assigned responsibility to host e-consultations at least one time per year. More opportunities could be provided to allow the public to engage in the legislative process. In order to implement this suggestion, a legal basis should be established in STANDING ORDERS of both Houses.

3. Publicity of e-consultations with improvements to topic-related information -

Publicising e-consultations is crucial activity to increase public participation. The case studies demonstrated that it played an essential role in creating a successful e-consultation. Publicity requires consideration of three factors: securing sufficient time before the consultation begins; exploiting various means such as websites, advertisements through TV, radio and the press, and off-line informative materials such as posters and flyers; providing information related to the subject during the publicity activities.

The consultation process stage

4. Encouraging more members of the public to participate in e-consultations -

From the perspective of consultation organisers, a high level of public participation is critical for the success of an e-consultation. In order to attract more citizens to participate in e-consultations, it could be effective to periodically post a summary of contributions on the consultation website. In particular, those who are '*registers*' should be targeted by emailing summaries to them. The inclusion of summaries of contributions, posting on the website and emails to the registers may be a responsibility appropriate for the moderator.

5. Seeking ways to increase MP participation -

Interaction between MPs and citizens is only possible if MPs participate in the e-consultations. It may be effective to encourage MPs to join the committee web forum and the moderator could provide MPs with the summary of contributions throughout the duration of the consultation period. Member sections are installed on the introduction web page enabling citizens to link directly to them and to write topic-related remarks. The evaluation report may include details of MP participation which can then be compiled into statistical data for each MP.

6. Expanding the parliamentary moderators' role -

The moderator's main role is to screen contributions before posting them on the website. The current aim of parliamentary moderation is to complete moderation within 24 hours and reading messages twice a day at 10am and 4pm, implementing moderation during weekdays but not during the weekend. However, this does not meet the expectations of contributors who wish to see their messages posted instantly. Therefore, in terms of editing and working time, the moderation system needs to be improved, with the aim of reducing the edit time. Additionally, messages need to be read more frequently and moderating hours need to be extended. Moreover, a moderator's additional responsibility can include summarizing contributions, posting them on the website, and distributing them via email to both MPs and participants.

The consultation results stage

7. Direct feedback to citizens via online tools -

Adequate feedback to participants may increase their feeling of being valued. Generally, feedback from the committee is conducted by posting its report on the website. However, this may not be considered real feedback because participants want to hear the results directly from the committee. Therefore, it can be suggested that, after the e-consultation, the results are sent to participants via email, to the addresses provided by citizens when they registered. These emails may include details such as the committee report, evaluation document, and material related to the consultation issues.

8. Publishing the official evaluation report -

From the *e-Petitions* case study, it can be seen that the committee did not consider any of the contributions in its report, nor were any consultation details included. This implies that, if there is no evidence of the consultation details in the report, it is impossible to assess the impact of the e-consultation, meaning that finding factors for improvement through analysis is not available. Therefore, it is necessary for the committees who conducted the e-consultation to produce formal evaluation reports, which should include essential details about the consultation, including all messages from citizens, MPs and moderators, contribution types, the number of participants, the number of hits on the website, moderation activities including time given for editing, and so on. From the researchers' perspective, these are crucial factors to assess.

9. Enabling citizens to view messages on the website after the completion of an e-consultation-

For a time after an e-consultation was closed, participants were still able to access to their messages. After a certain period, however, the messages were deleted from the website. A survey of the case studies, meanwhile, revealed that a steady number of participants continued to access the website to view the contributions. Therefore, it is suggested that posted contributions should permanently remain available on the website.

10. Establishing a unit parliamentary organisation for conducting e-consultation -

Each select committee has conducted its e-consultation independently. Thus, the e-consultations were each conducted differently using different processes. From the analysis of consultation case studies, it can be found that only one committee included publicising the e-consultation in advance, providing topic-related information, considering contributions for the shaping of recommendations and producing an evaluation report. In order to establish consistency in the how parliamentary e-consultations are conducted, it is recommended to establish a single unit parliamentary organisation to conduct consistent e-consultations. This division would be in charge of all consultation processes: developing e-consultation criteria; planning modes of publicity; designing informative materials; managing consultation websites; oversee participant safety while online; supervising moderators' activities; producing evaluation papers; provide consultation summaries to both MPs and citizens; email participants for feedback and regular assessment of e-consultations for potential improvements to the system; and survey participant satisfaction.

These recommendations have been designed from the point of view that an e-consultation has three principle and crucial components: consultants (MPs), those who are consulted (the public) and linkers (organiser: moderator or the committees). It can be seen that most recommendations include steps that need to be taken by linkers. Therefore, assuming that it is a given that active participation of both citizens and MPs is a crucial factor for successful e-consultations, the organiser is able to play a central role in encouraging all participants to contribute.

6.4 Future work

This empirical study analysed two parliamentary e-consultation cases out of a possible sixteen, potentially meaning that these research findings and recommendations were based on an analysis of only a small sample size. Research on all e-consultations that have been run by Parliament since 2007 could perhaps provide more general findings from which to extract recommendations. Therefore, future studies and assessments on all e-consultations which have previously been conducted by Parliament by both researchers and parliamentary officers might produce findings and recommendations to make online forums more efficient, and could provide the new British Parliament with a better parliamentary online tool through which to connect citizens to their representatives.

6.5 **Concluding remarks**

The crisis of representative democracy may be the result of decreased levels of public participation in the democratic process and diminished opportunities for interaction with representatives. These symptoms could in turn be linked to increasing political indifference and subsequent low voter turnout. In order to overcome this negative trend, representative organisations have tried to seek ways to provide the public with increased opportunities to take part in the political process. In terms of potential obstacles to participation, for example, such as limitations of time and distance, recently developed ICTs linked to the internet offer the possibility for increasing public participation. In particular, websites of representative institutions may provide a key online gateway through which to access these ICTs, and therefore could play a significant role in creating a vital link between the electorate and the elected.

Recently, the British government has started to provide various services to the public through the governmental portal website: <http://www.direct.gov.uk>, in accordance with the site's slogan "Public services all in one place." An example of this is the 10 Downing Street website: <http://www.number10.gov.uk>, which offers the public an opportunity to communicate with the Prime Minister about any issue through an e-petition system. In addition to these governmental services, the British Parliament also launched its website: www.Parliament.uk in 1996 which provides a range of free parliamentary information such as daily Hansard reports. Furthermore, a webcasting system via www.parliamentlive.tv has broadcast live debates from the Houses of Parliament since 2003. Currently, however, the parliamentary e-consultation system, which has been active on the website since 2007, is the only two-way communication tool enabling citizens the opportunity to communicate with their representative bodies, to interact with their representatives, and to engage in the legislative process.

In terms of reviving the public's interests in politics, it is necessary to note whether a parliamentary e-consultation system can be implemented as a tool in the recovery of the public's trust in politics.

The research on the e-consultation cases reveals that there are considerably different results arising from the two cases. The *Domestic Violence* e-consultation, which can be regarded as a successful online forum, has several positive factors: well-prepared publicity on view for a long period of time (2 months) before the e-consultation and using various means (mass media, websites, and posters and flyers); a high rate of public participation (228 contributions); active participation from MPs (62%, 8 out of 13); interaction between the public and MPs; public submissions used to shape committee recommendations (29%, 32 out

of 111); MPs' continuously raising consultation issues within parliamentary oral and written questions to the government, and on their personal websites after the closure of the consultation. In particular, one MP questioned the Prime Minister in the House about the consultation issue and secured an answer, revealing that parliamentary e-consultations clearly provide the public with the opportunity to reach policy makers, to interact with their representatives and to affect policy process.

However, the other case, that of *e-Petitions*, was clearly less popular among the public. Indeed, the level of public participation was quite low (32 contributions). The low levels of participation were arguably the result of the lack of publicity of the *e-Petition* case. Moreover, there was no MP participation; citizens were not given the opportunity to interact with MPs. In terms of the use of contributions following the consultation, the committee did not meet the public expectations: there was no linking of contributions to help shape committee recommendations, nor was there any mention of the e-consultation in the committee's report. From the public perspective, participants may have assumed that their contributions were not valued.

Thus, it is possible to summarise the following factors as obstacles which might hinder a successful consultation: lack of publicity, no MP participation, no consideration of the contributions by the committee following the e-consultation.

Despite the fact that the consultation appears unsatisfactory, there were some factors which could be deemed promising: following the closure of the e-consultation, a number of MP raised the issues during the Debates in the House; while another MP posted issue-related articles on her personal website. It is significant, therefore, that the consultation issue had a lasting effect on political policy even after the consultation has been closed if MPs choose to maintain interest.

From the analysis of the e-consultation cases, it can be understood that parliamentary online two-way systems provides the public with the opportunity to express their views, the chance to communicate with MPs, and the opportunity to engage in the legislative process. In addition, the issues raised can be maintained by MPs after the consultation through the Debates, written questions and their personal websites.

An increase in the public's opportunity to participate in the parliamentary process and to reach policy makers would assist in recovering political trust from the current state of indifference in the democratic process. Therefore, a parliamentary e-consultation system could be one of the solutions by which to increase public interest in politics. However, not all e-consultations offer such optimistic possibilities; some of them have low participation from both MPs and the public. Such low participation in the parliamentary process may also be the root of public indifference toward parliamentary processes and proceedings, resulting in an inevitable crisis of Parliament.

It is imperative that the parliamentary e-consultation system, the only online means within the British Parliament, is improved in order to meet public demands to have more participation in the decision making processes of their representative organisations, to have more interactions with their representatives, and to be more engaged in the legislative process. This responsibility now falls to the new Parliament established in May 2010, handed over from the previous Parliament which began the process in 2007. The only two-way system in the British Parliament should be set as a participative online tool to connect the electorate and the elected and to provide the public with the opportunity for engagement in the legislative process. Most crucial is ensuring that, in order for these goals to be realised through e-consultations, MPs actively participate and that committees' endeavours are decisive.

In conclusion, increasing public participation through parliamentary online participative tool is one possible way of beginning to overcome the crisis of representative democracy.

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http://www.gov.im	Isle of Man Government
http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca	Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
http://www.finance.gov.au	Austrian Government Information Management Office
http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk	Hansard Society
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http://www.powerinquiry.org	The Power Inquiry
http://www.voluntaryarts.org	The Voluntary Art Network
http://www.ipu.org	Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
http://www.oecd.org	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
http://www.un.org	United Nations (UN)
http://www.undp.org	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
http://ec.europa.eu	European Commission

MPs' personal websites

The Home Affairs Committee, the House of Commons

http://www.keithvaz.labour.co.uk	Keith Vaz, Chairman
http://www.tombrake.co.uk	Tom Brake
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Appendix 1 All contributions of the e-consultation on Domestic Violence

(Downloaded at <http://forums.parliament.uk/devc> on 6 May 2009)

Message from Rt Hon Keith Vaz MP (Chairman)

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 05:31PM



I am very pleased that we have received such a wide range of contributions to our eConsultation. Your responses will make an important contribution to the Committee's inquiry in offering us a remarkable insight into the experiences of people who have experienced domestic violence, forced marriage and honour-based violence. Thank you to everyone who has participated over the past six weeks.

Rt Hon Keith Vaz MP (Chairman)

Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 18, 2008 05:19PM

In replying you may wish to comment on one or more of the following areas:

- the effectiveness of agencies e.g. police, health and social services, at identifying and preventing domestic violence
- how well coordinated local services are and whether there are gaps in provision
- how support services can effectively address the needs of male victims, black and minority ethnic groups, refugees, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people and people with disabilities
- the forms of support you have found most helpful and which agencies you've felt most comfortable talking to
- your experience of the court system, including Specialist Domestic Violence Courts
- how effectively probation and prisons work with abusers to change their behaviour
- how victims can be best helped to rebuild their lives

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [bouncingback](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 21, 2008 11:50AM

I was strangled by my exhuband a few years ago. He released his hands when he thought I was dead. He did that in front of my son. I came around eventually. After 1 hour of the incident, my son, who was terribly scared and was threatened not to call 999 by his Dad, managed to call 999. The Ambulance came, but I had to wait in the ambulance for the police for at least half hour. The police was informed that I was strangled, but he asked me if I wanted my husband to be arrested. I was very scared not only for me but also my son, I said I do not know. I need to go to hospital first, because I could not breath properly and I was not able to feel most part of mo body.

I had to wait in hospital for 3 hours to be seen and they released me. My son and I were very scared and alone. we had no where to go. I was too weak to do anything. My exhusband was arrested the next day. The doctor was very irresponsible to release me, it would be so helpful if I could stayed in the hospital in case my neck got more swollen. A lady who was very kind called the police on mybehalf to see if they can accommadate me and my son for the night before I go to police station next day. They said no.

Not only the police are so ignorant how serious of the strangulation is, but the doctors, the justice system, my friends adn family, eveybody let me down. As I was regarded a very

strong career woman, people do not understand how vulnerable I was. I was very scared and suffered very severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorders, which took long time for my GP to accept and for me to get treatment. Of course, I could not carry on working and lost my job and my life I used to have. Because I did not appear to people even the doctors that I was weak, which made me suffered more alone then it should be. You cannot imagine what I have been through last few years. I was suisidal for a long time but I feel sorry for my son. He was released 6 months after in prison and sentanced for 2 years for Actually Bodily harm with 2 years suspension. He got most of the house which I bought because the judge think he was suffering depression and I may be able to find job again and possibly marry! There is no justice for the victims. Him being out of prison made more scared and impossible to recover from my condition. Anyway later that police was demoted due to his negligence. But it was too late for me. Because the police's negligence, and the prison was full, he got away with much lesser sentence then he deserved.

I was so dertimed to get my life back, but no matter how strong and positive I have been, it is impossible to recover fully. I was also lucky to find another nice gentlemen to help me through all the terrible time and we got married. Otherwise, I were not be able to move on. I never dare to mention this in public in case he will find me and kill me, though I do not think he is going to do it but I am still very scared in my mind and it upset me and disturb me a lot everytime I mention the incident. But to help to prevent such horrible incident and protect other victims, I am sending you this e-mail. I am willing to share with you all my experence and my views. Strangulation is very dangerous and it should be taken seriously.

Best regards

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Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:01:22:13:04:56 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [women centre](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 21, 2008 09:03PM

my personal experience was the police were very pushy for me to press charges i did but dropped them as i was more scared than ever. social services came round i wasnt allowed to be ib the same room as my children when she asked how my children were they were so scared i felt like i was a bad mother i gor in touch with an organisation that gave me so much support and made more aware of my situation and helped me overcome my fears and made me stronger i now 4 years on help out at the centre voluntarily and unfortunately it is extremely busy but women feel so safe and secure and open up as they are not judged there needs o be alot more funding for these places as they are all ran voluntarily

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [mojojo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 21, 2008 09:29PM

When I finally asked for help, the organisations didn't take into account I had a small child, and I was unable to walk 2 miles to the nearest office. I met with one woman who promised to help me, by improving security at my property, and my providing emotional support. I didn't hear back from the woman and nothing was done to help myself and my daughter. We finally got away from my ex partner, my childs father. He went to prison, then came out and kept trying to get back together ith me. When I finally got the help I needed- from family and friends, I moved on with my life. But couldn't, and still can't go out in my home town. I didn't see my ex partner for about a year. The last I heard about him, was when his friend came into my work and told me he had committed suicide. Again, I didn't receive any help with this situation.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Hellraiser](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 01:32PM

Survivors of DV are best helped to build there lives with outreach work, gaps in the provision, are gaping, once where there were outreach workers we now have the IDVA, who DO NOT DO THE SAME SORT OF WORK. (I speak as one who knows) low risk women, do not fall into the IDVA's role, low risk left unsupoted eventually become high risk. A drain on police resources, and the SS, rural area's have very little to offer survivors of DV, due to lack of provision.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anna](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 03:42PM

I finally divorced the ex-husband in 2003. It was an acrimonious and difficult divorce in which he really showed his true colours by assaulting our daughter and myself. At one stage I was in fear of my life. He almost made us bankrupt and I had to open a bank account and sweep all our dd's for mortgage etc and took sole responsibility for paying them. He stole mu cash card but when I went to the Police they just said to "order another". I was referred to our local dvu and although they were good to talk to, they didn't really do much or were very helpful e.g. they advised me to go to a refuge with my daughter. How could I do that when I had sole responsibility to pay alll the bills on the home. Why wasn't he arrested? so that my and my daughter could be safe. After the divorce he told me that he would take our daughter off me, he also told mutual friends that he would take our daughter off me, he then started to poison our daughter's mind about me, he abducted her forcing me to start a costly residency case. This was the most horrendous part, far worse than the divorce. Social Services did nothing to help my daughter, The school nurse referred her to CAMHS and they did not even aknowledge the referral. Social Services simply said it is a civil matter! CAFCASS, well at one point CAFCASS officer was actually writing about another person in one of her reports about me. I asked for a change in CAFCASS officer and got one with about the same intelligence as the 1st one. All the professionals involved in the residency case knew about that man's violence, his motive for wanting our daughter (money, control, power), they even had written proof from a psychologist, school statements, police logs from dvu and they made a joint residency order. They actually put her back in the situation that I got us out of. Today, I havent's seen my daughter for over a year, apart from a brief glimpse. He breaches the court order everyday and I am about to lose everything to pay CSA. Unfortunately the CSA does not go far enough to ensure the child gets the money. I wrote to the judge about the breach of court order, and she simply replied "seek legal representation and re-open the case" Errr.... what with. So you see, in my experience nobody helped us, nobody is interested in the continuing domestic violence that this man continues to inflict on me and my daughter. Who will pick up the pieces for her, she is so psychologically scarred now, and me.... well I currently write this because I am off sick from work. My daughter and me do not have bruises or marks for people to see but we are extremely damaged psychologically. I will never be the same again. I have lost my most loved, cherished daughter because the system has let us down. And him., well he abuses us on a daily basis and there does not appear to be anyghing or anyone willing to help people like me and my daughter.

This posting has been amended to protect the privacy of the poster.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:01:25:16:08:51 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [george36](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 05:50PM

I was involved in an abusive relationship for around 2 years, in that time we had a daughter who I subsequently have an uncontested residency order for.

During our time together there were several incidents where the neighbours phoned the police, each time they removed me from our home rather than my abusive partner.

The police refused to take my claims as the injured party seriously, preferring to leave our baby with her drunken mother despite the fact I was the primary carer.

I took my then partner to the doctor to see if her temper was because of a medical reason, the doctor said 'no wonder you hit him' because I interrupted him during his suggestion of giving my then partner a prescription for vitamins to stop her severe mood swings.

Thankfully i had a supportive family and as things progressively got worse I managed to escape the relationship taking my baby with me, there are still no refuges that accept men in my region and although there now are a few support services, there were none at the time (8 years ago) and I felt that no one would take me seriously.

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Edited 2 time(s). Last edit was 2008:01:22:21:08:40 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [bouncingback](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 11:42PM

Dear Sir/Madam,

You may not want to hear suggestions or feedbacks from victim but I would still like to make some recommendations based on my experience. Which I think would benefit other victims in the future, particularly regarding horrible incidence such as serious domestic violence crime like strangulation, grievous bodily harm etc.

1. When a child called 999 to report a serious domestic violence, the police and ambulance should take priority and act straightaway without asking too much questions. Because most of the case, the caller is very scared and do not dare to say anything. Children can be in danger too in these cases. If the child tries to protect the victim, the offender may try to kill or threaten both mother and child. It was very close in my case.
2. The police should arrest the offender without asking the victim's permission. The police or any other government body or charity organisation should make sure that the victim has a safe place to go. It is extremely scary and unacceptable for the victim to go back home where the horrible incident happened. In my case, it was a new place for me. I did not have a family and a close friend I can turn to. It was horrible experience.
3. The victim particularly these being strangled should be kept in hospital overnight by law.
4. The victim of any type of attempted murder cases or grievous bodily harm should be referred to Psychotherapist as soon as after the incident. It is very unlikely anyone who is going through such horrible trauma will not suffer in a very severe degree sooner or later. So it is better the victim to be looked after by professional therapist as early as possible to prevent the victim through more severe mental and physical pains and save NHS money. I cannot have enough words to describe to you how much and severe I had suffered mentally and physically last few years. If I was seen by professional therapist early, with my strong will and positive attitude, then I would not need suffered so much to a degree that was unbearable. It took me nearly one year to be seen and receive professional treatment because the therapist waiting time was 9 months, by then I was in a terrible state both mentally and physically. Each NHS hospital should have dedicated therapist or a team to deal with these victims. The police, GP and hospital should be able to refer to these victims straightaway after such trauma. Talking to any other people only make the stress worse.

I feel heart broken when hearing people fighting for the human right of these serious offenders. The innocent vulnerable victims' human right (their basic right to be safe) have been taking away, their life and career being taken away, their confidence and health being taken away. Who cared about the victim's right? People should not commit crime in the first place if they want their liberty or freedom.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Read me please](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 23, 2008 12:50PM

I grew up in a violent house hold. My father used to drink and would come home on payday and beat my mum. As the oldest child I witnessed many violent out bursts. I would be to afraid to sleep incase my mum needed help, I needed to keep an eye on my little sister incase she woke up, I may need to phone for help, until I was 5 when my mum took the massive courageous step to kick him out of the family home.

I remember mum screaming for help while he hit her, strangled her, I used to shout for the police and he smashed the phone so I could not call them. I remember her body shaking on top of me when she tried to stop him from hitting me. Him leaving was a massive relief to me, but still he would not leave us alone, he would come late at night and kick down the front door, come and plead for her to come back. I was bullied at school durring this period and when my mum went to talk to the head teacher he told her to "go and get a husband".

My father wanted contact and so went through the courts, at no stage was I listened to. My sister and I would be interviewed by CAFCAS, this was not taken into consideration. We were given the chance to say face to face that we did not want to see our father, to the meeting he brought a pile of gifts, how could I not let her have the toys when I saw how happy she was?

Contact was awared by the court. We went to his parents house, some time later I told him we did not want to see him again, we had to be locked in a car for our own safety as he tried to kick his way in. Durring the court awared contact he went on to abuse my sister and I, nobody listened to me and so he was a load to continue his reign of terror.

My message from this is always listen to what the children have to say. I knew right from wrong, I knew this was a cruel world while other children my age were safe in their family home. I knew the situation and that 'daddy' was a bad man, why was my sister and I ignored, only so he could prove my young assessment of the situation right?

I now have nothing to do with him. My mum re-married to the man I call dad, the man I look up to, the man who will always be there. My really father, because of his actions, has missed out on knowing two strong, indepenant and funny young women.

This posting has been amended to protect the identity of the poster.
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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [angels](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 23, 2008 02:26PM

Quote:

Hellraiser

Survivors of DV are best helped to build there lives with outreach work, gaps in the provision, are gaping, once where there were outreach workers we now have the IDVA, who DO NOT DO THE SAME SORT OF WORK. (I speak as one who knows) low risk women, do not fall into the IDVA's role, low risk left unsuprted eventually become high risk. A drain on police resources,

and the SS, rural area's have very little to offer survivors of DV, due to lack of provision.

I completely agree with this. IDVA's or for Women and Men suffering high risk Domestic Violence. The provision for all services needs to be reviewed. MARAC and IDVA's are for High risk cases which is important as all Services such as Housing ,Police,SS,Refuge and lots more all get together monthly and can put in place things like panic rooms,alarms its all about Murder Prevention. some areas are lucky and have Floating support which for those that dont know is support that is carried on from refuge so Women and Men are not on there own in the early stages of there new life. Outreach in rural areas is so important as this is sometimes the only service that DV sufferers and survivors can access, more and more outreach are being closed because of funding which is a great shame because of the support that is given to these areas.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [penguin](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 23, 2008 03:08PM

My mother lived alone with my brother for a number of years and on one visit I was shocked to see that both her legs were black and blue all over with bruising. She said my brother had kicked her. She has always had mental health issues, suffering from depression at the least, sometimes paranoia too and she was a vulnerable, timid and dependent person . I took her to the local health drop-in centre, where someone in the mental health team saw her on her own. They arranged for her to go into a women's refuge. We told my brother that she had to go into hospital because of her mental condition. We also somehow managed to get people into the house to assess my brother but the psychiatrist said that he was perfectly lucid so there was nothing they could do. I think the health team did everything they could, and I'm sure the refuge people did too, but at the end of the day she didn't want to try to move away and went home to my brother after only a few days. The mental health team arranged for mum to go to the centre each week for quite a while she did occupational therapy there, but at least they knew her situation. For a long time I would ask mum every time I saw her if everything was alright and she always said 'yes'. But I made myself ill worrying about her and after some therapy for myself I had to accept that I couldn't make her choices for her. It didn't even occur to me to call the police and I didn't know about non-molestation orders or occupation orders (I do now as I have a friend who works with victims of domestic violence). I didn't even confront my brother - again mum didn't want me to and we'd established the lie about going into hospital. I've always worried about her and whether things really were alright. I never saw any more signs of abuse but I'll never know for sure. From what my friend says it's unusual for abuse just to stop. It sickens me to think of that. Also other types of abuse also often go hand in hand, e.g. financial. I would handle it differently now that I know more about abuse and what's available to help someone. But how do you find out from scratch? There should be a lot, lot more publicity about domestic violence and where to go for help - and there should be specialist advisors at the Citizens Advice Bureau and there should be specialist counsellors available through the health service. And everyone should know, as I do now, but didn't then, that it's a crime and the law does support you.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [lux1234](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 09:52AM

Hi, just adding my experience, with regard to Housing Services in particular.

After experiencing two bouts of actual domestic violence, plus constant emotional abuse and threats, I went to the Housing Advice Centre with my young children. I wanted to find out what my options were as my husband and I own our house jointly, so I would not be eligible for council housing, and have no savings so no way to escape (he refused to move

out or accept that the marriage was over). I was asked really loudly "has there been violence?" in front of the whole waiting room - I had tears running down my face and I was whispering, "yes", ashamed, though I'm not sure why. Then I was asked whether I was scared to return home that evening. I had to reply truthfully - no. I'd been with my husband for 9 years and only on two occasions had he lashed out physically, when he was very angry. The majority of the time he was a good father to his kids, but controlling, moody and emotionally abusive to me. When I told the Housing people this they shrugged and said they couldn't help. In fact I felt very embarrassed, as though I had wasted their time. I felt conspicuously middle class, especially as I own (half of) my own home whereas the other people there were all homeless. I left quickly.

In short - I would suggest that we need more (state) provision for sufferers of emotional abuse/bullying, as well as actual violence. You can't have a cut-off point - "are you scared to return home tonight?" - as it's not always as clear-cut as that.

The footnote? I am still with him. My only option would have been to find a hostel for victims of domestic violence, but I don't feel that I can drag my children away from their nice home - they are not aware that there is a problem. I guess there are others in a similar position to me. I feel like I have no options. I don't know if this helps, I am sharing my story because I hope in some small way it will help others - if we all speak up we will have a louder voice!

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [amosemper](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 11:33AM

There is gap for women who have higher needs ie mental health, drug or alcohol issues. Sometimes these issues can be created by Domestic violence and some not. The ultimate need of a women who is fleeing is a bed and safe place to live in order to get herslef back on her feet. I feel for women who have higher needs there should be more 24 hour staffed Refuges and beeter networking between CMHT/Drug/ Alcohol services.

I have found for women who are fleeing without additional needs have fed back that good and bad expierances with public and voluntary sectors. Mostly is surrounding being judged for not leaving before, this has been from police, social workers and housing officers. And then there are police, social workers and housing officer who have better insight because of expierience or training.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Leo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 02:15PM

The answer is NO when the victim is a man.

My friend was repeatedly attacked by his wife and did not retaliate.

The police each time removed HIM "for his safety", rather than the perpetrator because she was a woman and there was a child.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Stockport](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 25, 2008 10:56AM

I agree with you, IDVAs are very different, all the money spent on refuges could be spent

on outreach, responsibility for safe houses in self contained property could be given to local councils. Staff ratios in refuges are about 1 worker to 2 women, in outreach this is 1 worker to 12 women, providing the same service. Most of the work that refuge workers do is admin, health and safety, cleaning, housing management. IDVAs could focus on the high risk, Outreach all the rest.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Happynow](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 25, 2008 11:51AM

I found the police very helpful at the beginning, when I first called them, but the follow up support was severely lacking. I was told a DV policewoman would call in the next couple of days, but it took over two weeks for her to call me. She asked if there was anything I needed help with, I asked what kind of help she could offer, she said I obviously didn't need her then, and hung up. I couldn't believe I had waited so long for so little. I never heard from the police or her again on the matter. I hadn't been given any phone numbers of support groups or anything. I found some numbers in the phone book to call, and tried to get in a refuge, but there was no room for miles around.

Housing were unhelpful, I had to be made homeless, but didn't get help with furnishing my home when I did eventually get one, even though women from refuges do get some help with furniture.

The court system is hopeless. My ex husband took all our savings and wouldn't leave the home that I jointly owned. I had to take him to court. He claimed he was depressed, so kept dragging everything out. He was warned repeatedly that he would be in contempt of court if he didn't fill in forms and turn up, but he did what he wanted, costing me more and more in solicitor fees. The court wouldn't get tough with him. He took me to court for access to the children, but the court didn't listen to a word I said. He had filled in a form saying there was no violence. I wasn't even asked my opinion on anything. I was talked down to, and the CAFCASS reporter said there is no reason to deny this man his children. He said it as if I was dirt.

I have found an outreach support group very helpful. They have spoken to me on the phone when I have been in a terrible state. Unfortunately they can't give any real help with courts and housing. I have found that a children's charity have been wonderful with my children, helping them come to terms with the awful things they saw and heard. There need to be more resources for the children affected by DV.

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Edited 2 time(s). Last edit was 2008:01:25:14:55:11 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [pinky](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 25, 2008 12:38PM

Strangulation is surely attempted murder and should be treated as such, whether in a domestic setting or not.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [amosemper](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 25, 2008 01:17PM

Anon story of survivor of Domestic Violence-- When I was with the perpetrator, Social Services were alerted by the Police after 5 incidents of call outs by family/friends. Social

Services wrote to me 5 times, following 5 further police call outs, saying that they would intervene if I did nothing about protecting the children. The 5th letter followed them turning up, although at wrong address, they called me. I then left and went to my sisters. Social Services asked me to call to prove I had left and then called them from my sisters.

After the Police came the first time, they did give me a leaflet regarding Domestic Violence. the last time they were called out they asked me various questions about what kinds of things the perpetrator did to me eg, did he strangle me, did he hold a knife to me. All together the police were called out about 20 times. The Police or Social Services never offered a refuge to me. I Ut was the homeless team at a council i approached.

On the last incident I found the Police helpful.

The last phone call I got from Socail Services helpful.

The most helpful person was a support worker at a Housing Association.

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Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:01:25:14:59:23 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [ocean33](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 26, 2008 08:35PM

I would like to say that I contacted the police last year when my ex partner violently kicked me and dragged me all around his flat in front of our baby, this lasted for quite some time whilst my daughters dad also became aggressive with her screaming and shouting in her face. I was then thrown out of my ex partners flat and not allowed to get my daughter.

When I eventually managed to get my daughter I called my mum and told her what happened. As soon as I arrived at my parents I called the police and told them what had happened, I was informed that an officer would visit me the next day at home. The following day a male officer alone visited me at home. I explained everything that had happened whilst also explaining that I was due in court the following month as a witness for a pending assault on myself from ex partner as he always denied assaulting me and was very clever as to where he injured me, and I didnt always visit the doctors.

Furthermore I explained to this officer that I was really anxious and nervous about attending court and was still in shock and suffering the effects from the previous assault the day before. This officer told me that if I were to make a statement it would undermine the pending court case??Because I was so nervous I followed his advice, at the same time this officer wrote in his pocket book that the assault had never took place and persuaded me to sign it. Regrettably I did. I was to be informed at a later date when my ex started harassing me that this officer SHOULD of took a statement from and should have never said what he did this was from various officers.

Therefore my ex partner was allowed to get away with what he did to me and his daughter, furthermore the court case he was found not guilty because his solicitor twisted everything and claimed I was the abusive one. Therefore he got found not guilty there was never any evidence that I had ever been violent towards my ex partner my ex partner manipulated the facts and the system. Since then I have been dragged through court regarding contact between my daughter and her dad. Furthermore welfare officers became involved and compiled a report for the courts regarding contact. The police passed over the incorrect information my assault was just a serious argument. There have been many implications and consequences from this officers misconduct. Firstly I have to take my daughter for contact with her dad knowing full well he is a risk. I have attempted over and over again to voice my concerns to all involved this includes the courts and welfare officers. However no-one is listening this man has manipulated every professional, the courts, the police, welfare officers and I can do nothing to protect my daughter. I have

since placed a formal complaint with the police, as there have many implications which have arisen since that officers misconduct. However I'm still not being heard I have since discovered that my ex partner was arrested for that assault however I was not informed at the time when it took place.

I am utterly appalled at the level of service I have received from the police, whilst at the same time other agencies such as Cafcass have really let me down. I went to the police for help yet they let me down and my daughter my ex partner still abuses me indirectly through our daughter I have raised my concerns again with management of Cafcass and stated that this must stop whilst also asking them for help. Still no-one listens to me I have been severely failed by the system and am left alone to deal with all of this. Something needs to drastically change more and more children are being put at risk through forced contact with their abusive fathers whilst the mother has to suffer at the same. I truly believe that if the police had helped me my situation would be different to what it is, I am powerless like I was when in the abusive relationship this man my ex can still abuse me and I have to just deal with it, "It's wrong, where is the justice in all of this what I am having to suffer"?I would say in most cases of domestic violence where women are the victims they do NOT receive the support they should I certainly didn't and I'm still paying the price for "that" officers misconduct!

This posting has been amended to protect the privacy of the poster.
Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:01:29:16:00:41 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [kpelt](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 27, 2008 02:41PM

I live in a rural market town and although the local police have a campaign showing that they want to take domestic violence seriously they just don't have the resources for it or the clout to follow allegations through sufficiently enough for the protection of victims, unfortunately I experienced this first hand.

The only time I was brave enough to contact the police my ex partner was released the same evening and I was foolish enough to fall with emotional blackmail. Unfortunately the mental pressure has left more scars than the physical violence.

Two years later I have escaped the relationship but without the help of the police and my ex partner still makes excuses to be in my local area.

I feel stuck, I don't know who to turn to. I know the police will want something serious to have happened for them to take any complaint seriously. I'm still afraid to be alone in my flat. Where can I go for support? When will I ever feel safe again?

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Franklin](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 28, 2008 09:32AM

I am so sorry to hear of your terrible experience. I am glad you are a survivor, and you have the determination to want to bounce back. However, I know from my own experience (not as life threatening as yours) that it is not easy. I want you to know you are not alone. Women's experience is often pushed away and hidden, but there are many who will understand. I hope and pray that you will continue to find strength, and you will also find support, and be able to give the sort of support that can only come from shared experience, in the future. Best wishes, fellow survivor.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [pureland](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 28, 2008 08:20PM

the effectiveness of agencies e.g. police, health and social services, at identifying and preventing domestic violence

• how well coordinated local services are and whether there are gaps in provision . My area is working on developing the coordinated community response model - we have good interagency working and a number of dedicated groups and fora to identify and consider issues - gaps and solutions. Agencies have signed up to an inter agency agreement - these include police, probation, victim support, CPS and HMCS.

• how support services can effectively address the needs of male victims, black and minority ethnic groups, refugees, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people and people with disabilities .

There are many lessons to be learned from the hate crime models that have been developed in the country and linking these with DV may have many benefits. Specialist LGB groups may not always have the capacity or expertise to address DV in same sex relationships and many agencies see the asking of sexuality in terms of equality monitoring as difficult. There are complexities in seeking support from within diverse communities and there are concerns around confidentiality in small/ inter connected communities. LGB victims may have issues in seeking support if they are not out about their sexuality or the nature of their relationship.

• the forms of support you have found most helpful and which agencies you've felt most comfortable talking to

• your experience of the court system, including Specialist Domestic Violence Courts
My area has recently progressed towards the SDVC model with success in terms of listing times and inter agency discussions on identifying difficulties and agreeing solutions.

• how effectively probation and prisons work with abusers to change their behaviour
IDAp programmes are only available to a certain type of perpetrator - they do not address LGB perpetrators - there is little to address female perpetrators - there is a lack of voluntary programmes and health should be engaged with CBT approaches to challenging aggressive behaviour.

• how victims can be best helped to rebuild their lives.

effective prosecutions and perhaps being held to account. Some victims fall outside the remit of support - ie recourse to public funds - support services that provide practical and emotional help should be supported and funded - such as victim support and more opportunities for people to have input at a local level would give professionals greater insight into the variety of ways people may need help - there is not one solution but solutions should be tailor made according to individual needs.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [billo786](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 29, 2008 11:17AM

The answer to the above question is no....there is support out there....being let down by the immigration system, social services and others.

I had a arranged marriage. I was beaten daily. My husband was a student and wanted to marry a British Girl so he could get his British Passport after he received his indefinite stay...I was beaten, I blamed myself and tried many times to commit suicide, cutting my wrist, making myself be sick after eating. The police was involved but at no point was he arrested, no one from social services or domestic services visited me. I received threats daily and after informing the police I was told until my husband actually tries something

they can not do anything.....My mental health deteriorated and I started to have conversations with myself. Anyway it took me many years to get over my experiences but now my sister who also has had an arranged marriage is going through the same experience....where is the justice in the immigration law. We have written many letters to the home office, informing them that guys from asian countries only come to uk as a student or a visitor so they can marry British Girls and turn British then use the welfare system and bring the rest of their family over. Now my sister is at risk, Her husband has threatened her and knows where she lives. After several years she is still living in the temporary accommodation, where is the help with the housing system....will her husband have to kill her until something is done about it....where is the police....why don't they send him back to his home country.....so who wins.....these Guys from abroad....who loses us innocent Born British girls.

I think there is a let down in all these systems, people are scared because as soon as Social services get involved they take the children off you so again you lose out so people don't want them to get involved.

How can one change the immigration law?

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Reflective](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 29, 2008 10:23PM

My relationship with my ex lasted a number of years, he was predominantly emotionally abusive, regularly physically abusive, but to the outside world we were an ordinary happy couple. Before him I was a strong, bubbly, outgoing girl and with reflection I can't pinpoint the time that the relationship went down hill. The abuse wasn't sudden, the emotional/psychological abuse was gradual and then sustained throughout the relationship, I guess I just put up with it, however I did suffer from panic attacks as a direct result and received treatment for this periodically throughout the relationship (which was later to be instrumental in the court case being unsuccessful).

Following the birth of our son and subsequent deterioration in my ex's behaviour I had the strength to end the relationship. He still turned up at the house regularly to see his son, and I kept the relationship civil in fear of sparking off an attack, this was ok for a while until he found out I had been for a drink with a man. He arrived at the house and barged in then proceeded to attempt to strangle me. I didn't go to the police immediately as I was fearful that they would just slap his wrist and then he would come back and kill me, my mother persuaded me to go and the police were very supportive on the most part although seemed unsure of what exactly he could be charged with (surely breaking and entering and attempted murder had he not been my ex) He was repeatedly bailed with conditions for a number of months leaving me feeling vulnerable and terrified, the police told me to call anytime I was scared although the reality was, would he be kind enough to pause long enough for me to call the police and by the time they could get to my rural home he would have had more than enough time to kill me. When the court date arrived I was so stressed I was on antidepressants and having treatment for debilitating anxiety attacks, my ex didn't turn up for the hearing, so it was postponed for another few months.

The case went ahead a number of months after the attack, I was grilled for an hour by his solicitor who had had many months preparation time, the CPS chap who was prosecuting knew nothing about me, I met him 5 minutes prior to the hearing, during the hearing I was painted out to be an unstable woman with severe mental health problems who had most likely inflicted the injuries on herself and the case was dropped as I was not a credible witness.

Somehow through it all I continue to hold down my job as a manager, I am not a mad woman, or a liar only someone who wanted to feel safe in their own home.

Thanks for the opportunity to voice these issues, I look forward to seeing improvements for other people in similar situations in the future.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [christmas](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 30, 2008 10:27AM

there are not enough resources across all providers to help victims fully. even if victims 'cant' press charges they should still be given help because they may want to eventually but need to be strong and have confidence that they will be helped.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [claire-health](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 30, 2008 11:48AM

In my experience the police force continues to let down victims of domestic abuse. I called the police in the early hours scared for my life after being beaten and having something thrown at my head. I waited an hour cold, shivering and petrified of my ex-partner fearing he would break through the door i had shut myself behind to try to kill me. No police officer arrived....so again i called 999 and requested police assistance i was then left to wait another 45 mins before the police finally arrived by which time i could literally have been dead.

my home was already listed on the local DVU's supposed 'fast response' list due to my fear of violence..i had previously discussed this with a domestic abuse outreach worker. So much for priority and fast response eh!? 1 hr 45 minsthey could have found me dead in a pool of blood.

when they finally arrived. They spoke to my partner first and not me which immediately gave him control over the situation..they then asked me what i wanted ..did i want him to be arrested. How ridiculous to put a victim of abuse who has been obviously beaten and is scared witless in that kind of situation. I was so scared of the repercussions if he was arrested that i said no and asked that they remove him from the property.

The police force should not ask the victim if she wants the perpetrator to be arrestedbecause usually she will say no due to fear. They should take statements look at the presenting evidence and make the decision to arrest themselves.

women in abusive relationships need the police force to advocate for them, to prove that there is zero tolerance to violence and to truly protect the women in this country. I personally still think the police have the ' its just another domestic' attitude and that only goes on to allow perpetrators to move from one abusive relationship to another ..never having their own behaviour challenged and never having to pay for the crimes they've committed because the women are too scared to say they want them to be arrested.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Lana](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 30, 2008 10:27PM

I hope that the Government are aware that now,in many divorces,especially in custody battles,violent,abusive fathers who apply for custody of the children obtain it hands down

as ,apparently, "their behaviour is the past" or "he beat up the mother,not the children". Even medical evidence for injuries that the battered mothers sustained is,according to many mothers,ignored and abusive men are obtaining custody even of the tiniest of children. Judiciary is separate from the Government,but that does not mean that this misogynistic conduct of some court workers should not be stopped! Children also,officially,on paper, have their rights under the UN Convention, yet they have no say in the proceedings that influence and scar their entire lives!

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Woman](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 02:54PM

Considering how prevalent and serious domestic violence is - there should be blanket coverage of high quality services over the entire country as a matter of priority. What is the point of spending money on national defence if 1 in 4 women are not even safe in their own homes?

I live in a town of 20,000 people in the South of England. There are NO domestic violence services here. Calls to services in to other towns nearby resulted in no response - I was out of their area so they ignored me and didn't return my calls. It was terrifying to phone them in the first place and very disheartening to get that response. Luckily I am assertive and educated and knew I deserved more, so I kept trying and eventually managed to get them to allow me to their support group.

Even for women in their area they only offer 'support' not counselling. If you ask for referrals to sympathetic counsellors they have no names to give you - even if you can afford to pay - this is very important, as not all counsellors really understand domestic abuse especially when it is emotional not physical as in my case. Many women need extensive counselling to recover from the brainwashing they are being subjected to - even to get enough self-esteem to leave.

These services are extremely inadequate - if I was a women with fewer educational and monetary advantages I would still be stuck with my abusive partner and so would my children.

It seems if you have suffered a physical attack from your partner you may get some help from the Police/social services - but this is the tip of the ice-burg - I doubt there is much they do for people suffering emotional abuse. I don't blame these services, they are all underfunded in the extreme - many many more resources need to be allocated to them and all these professionals need much more thorough training in dealing with these situations. Victims often minimise abuse or are to scared to do anything about it, so a lot of input is needed to help them and this can be a very long process - six sessions with a support worker are just not enough.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Lady Portia](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 05:50PM

No.

This is how it works.

Domestic Violence Why Is It Still Allowed.???

I have been asking myself this same question for many years now, due to my own experience of it.

Having done my thesis on the subject I honestly believed I knew it all.

How could any woman allow this?? I used to ask myself.

No, it will never happen to me.!!! But it did.

All the words in those books were useless in the real world.

All the advise was futile because those who wrote on this subject had never been inside a secret Gestapo family court in their lives.

If they had, they were gagged from speaking out anyway.

I have remained quiet for those years until my children were 18 and free from gagging orders etc.

Now, it is time to speak out the truth as to :

Why it happens, ??

Why it is even rewarded in the court system,??

Why is it allowed to continue??

Why it will never end with the law as it is now,??

Domestic violence goes back thousands of year when women were first enslaved by the Changos about 5,000 years ago.

The institution of marriage was later created to make sure the women were financially dependent on men.

Women and children became possessions of men.

Men were considered the more powerful and bit by bit women were demonised by the church as it gathered power over all people.

Violent men are really weak in themselves and only know how to get their own way through violence.

Men have been conditioned for thousands of years to take and take from women at will.

Women were equally conditioned to give and give without question, always putting themselves last in the family.

Today, we are at a stage in evolution where both are realizing that there is a new way to wards equality.

Not the equality used in the propaganda machine either, where women are being taught that they have equal opportunity so why are they still complaining??

This new equality recognizes women as the nurturers and men as equal helpers who feed their partners on all levels and encourage them to fulfill their full potential.

Inside each man and each woman is a God and a Goddess. We are now balancing both inside each of us and in society too.

Women should come first as a strong woman is then able to look after all the family.

Putting children first is not the answer in my thinking.

The mother must be strong in herself before giving birth and must be well looked after following the birth.

There are now men who suffer violence in relationships too. No wonder.!!!

Women see that to get to the top violence is often used.

Also, violent men are rewarded by our system so some women feel, well if he can do it so can I.

When I say violent men are rewarded I mean that when an abused woman comes forward for help from the system, many agencies become involved and she is led into a false sense of security.

Whatever self esteem she had when she left her abuser is soon knocked out of her by those who claim to protect her and the children.

The latest word from CAFCASS is that Womens Aid is a feminist group led by Germaine Greer and ALL women there, put women up to making these accusations.

That is a big generalization to make and a dangerous one.

Social workers use a woman's vulnerability against her.

Suddenly she finds herself more abused by their use of reverse psychology and mental torture that Hitler would be proud of.

For me it was different as I recognized the game plan and abuse quickly but for others with no qualifications, what chance do they stand.

As it is all done in secret and we are not allowed by law to utter a word under threat of prison and our children being returned to the abuser or put into care for someone else to abuse them more, we stay quiet. This suits the system perfectly.

For myself I certainly did not make it all up or follow instructions from woman's aid or anyone else either.

Why would I leave the home I paid for and go homeless for many years to stay safe and keep children safe.

Hardly something one does for fun???

So , the court orders assessments etc, and almost all men guilty of violence are rewarded with contact to children.

Now, I ask you?? What message is that to send out to the abused mother and children??

To the abuser it says...wow....I still have control here.!!!!

The Judge is allowing me to get away with this and I can persecute her and the children every time at contact.

I give you an example from my own case. My ex did not want contact but his lawyer advised him to ask for it as he would look better in the eyes of the Judge for the case of violence.

So, there it is, it is not actual quality time with children they seek but permanent control and the system gives it to them as a present for their wrong doing.

So little Johnny is dragged by the hair if so ordered by the Judge to have contact with a violent father.

This child learns to quickly identify that this violence is rewarded and is thus confused.

He remembers his Mum promised to keep them all safe and suddenly he is being handed over to an abuser.

Then the blackmail begins.

If Johnny says" I do not want to go with violent parent,"then his mum will be locked up in prison for not forcing him into violence.

If he still refuses, chances are he will be put into care where Social Services will make sure he has contact with violent father.

The law must be obeyed.

Now, here is the confusing part.

If a mother stays in a violent relationship the Social Services will say she is allowing her children to be emotionally abused and take the children into care unless she leaves the abuser.

Then she decides to leave and the Social Services still take the children claiming she is unable to protect them herself as the ex might come to her new home and abuse them.

This is a no win situation. There is no escape as the law now stands.

So every week or so Johnny goes into the energy field of violence and carries it home like an unseen plague, where he begins to abuse his Mum and siblings first and then society.

Little by little the next generation of violence begins all over again and the woman asks herself- why did I bother going for help???

She then tells other women not to come forward to be completely crucified by a system that proclaims to protect her and others.

I know of pedophiles and child abusers who still get contact.

Supervised at first, but then money comes into play and as in my case I ended up having to supervise contact myself.

So, the message is clear. NO ESCAPE.!!!!!!

Thus it is clear that violence full stop is just propaganda.!!

Putting safe rooms in homes creates a prison within a prison.

Abused people should be allowed a new life in a new place.

Plus plenty of support and help to empower themselves so it does not happen again.

Mothers must empower their children to be strong inside on all levels.

Girls must see that they are not second class.

This is difficult as the legal profession is still extremely "old boys club"and full of pomp and many men are deluded into thinking they are above the rest of us.

Why is it allowed to continue then you ask??

One of the main reasons is the secrecy of the courts and the truth remaining hidden.

Also, violence creates vast wealth for the system.Peace does not.

Those who come forward are strong people and the system dislikes this trait and does everything to break that spirit.

For myself, I was told I was too powerful for a woman. So, what does that tell you.??

Men and women are used against each other in the system which makes billions from their misery.

Lawyers drag the cases out for all it is worth.

Rarely do they advise properly and treat many of us like dirt.

Psychologists and psychiatrists make huge sums of money for writing a pile of rubbish, or worse still, as in my case, a report was written up based on 5 minutes with psychiatrist, because he had all the information from my ex.

I know,!! the mind boggles.

I sat there in court not knowing who they were talking about.

I was labeled an alcoholic, a witch, a cult member etc.I mean, I pinched myself to see if it was all real and it was.

When I began making notes in order to correct these discrepancies I was ordered to put my pen down and stay quiet or go to jail.

No, my lawyer did not speak up for me either.

He was only interested in the money he had received and was quite happy to hang me out to dry.

Also, in line for wealth are care homes and foster parents receiving £400 per week per child.

Many of the care homes are owned by ex social workers in fact.

As long as violence is rewarded because it creates vast wealth for the old patriarchal system then nothing will change.

Why would they want to change.????

There are some very gentle and peace loving men in society now and they should be honored and respected accordingly, as they feed and support women on all levels and help them nurture the next generation into peace.

These are the real strong men not macho fools.!!!!

Abusers should have to earn their right to contact.

Children should not be forced into it or bribed by CAFCASS officers either, because then children feel they have been tricked into a situation where their own natural instinct said danger.

As long as we allow the people we gave power to with our votes, to continue to use OUR money in the manner above, then domestic violence will continue to increase like it is at the moment and women will become just as violent too.

Simply because that is the real agenda of our government.!!!!

The only thing that matters to the old system is power and money and control.

The only people that are listened to are dead people!!! Too late then.!!!

I hope that by shedding a new light on this situation, we, as a society will see how we are paying our Government with our tax money to actually condone violence because it is

more profitable.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Lady Portia](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 06:02PM

My friend came forward for help only to have the SS remove her children.

Then they gave the abuser residence even though he had a conviction and was a known paedophile.

She has had to live with that for many years.

So now, children are adult and guess what- these young men think abusing others is normal.

So, the system has allowed the abuse to continue to the next generation.

Best interst of the children and the abused??

I have studied the paperwork and it was all a set up.

The solicitors involved just made their deals in little rooms.

We now know how this works.

Solicitors play abuser against abused.

Support Abuser.

They know the abused will fight for justice, so they keep it going and line their pockets from our misery.

I have studied many cases and the pattern is always the same.

Sad but true.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [atlantis](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 06:14PM

This government has taken ten years to wake up to the fact that D.V is the highest killer of women in this country and by the times victims are at a point where they will leave the abuse has been going on for years. Not enough can be done to protect women who have suffered D.v and likewise the children of families affected by D.V, in most cases the children have either witnessed these crimes or have been a party to them as D.V and child abuse go hand in hand in the power games of the men involved.

While it's all very well and good for agencies to spring up and offer safe houses out of the area, safe rooms in a house , non molestation orders and panic buttons, the real problems

will start when the abuser decides to use the family courts to continue their abuse of the family, although you can ask the court not to release your address if a father has PR, which most do now, they can use these powers to track the children through other means. Social services will write a 'balanced' report in the case of contact which 9 times out of ten will recommend contact under the banner ruling that a child has a right to contact with both parents, even when the child has been traumatised and refuses contact, even when 'experts' recommend against it. But under a different set of circumstances, where the parents are still living in the same house, that same social worker will tell the mother that the father should move out and cease all contact with the children or the children will be taken into care or the mother could be prosecuted under a failure to protect banner. The use of cafcass in contact cases involving D.V will also end in a 'balanced' report which recommends contact with the abuser and even if this is recommended as supervised, resources are not infinite and this will move onto unsupervised contact reasonably quickly. Judges in the family courts are faced with a barrage of evidence that shows the abuser has committed these crimes against their family and on the other side of the table the 'reports' from cafcass and social services recommending contact. It takes a 'special' kind of judge to stand up for the best interests of the children in these cases and rule against the 'expert' witnessess. If a mother then continues in her stance to keep the children safe she is sentenced for up to two years in prison for her 'crime' of contempt of court and /or the children are given to the abusive parent. What is the point in spending time, energy, resources to help families of D.V to escape their nightmare only to be forced back into it again on a weekly basis inside the family courts. If you truly want to help the survivors of D.V, which are not only the women but the children then you have to look at the whole picture, it's no good saying that you will make contact for the children and mother as safe as possible when the mental torment of emotional if not physical abuse continues for these families on a weekly basis and the abuser is awarded contact for his crimes.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Skywalker](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 06:27PM

I don't know where to start on this topic. I was sexually abused by a family member, my parents called Social Services because I was locking myself in the bedroom and screaming, as I didn't know who to confide in, and Social Services put me in a children's home system. Although I was not sexually abused in the home (others were), I was thumped by the man in charge, for crying in bed as I was homesick. I hit him back and was put into a psychiatric hospital for a year on an adult ward as a "place of safety" where I was abused, sexually, physically and psychologically - I was only a teenager.

I have tried to tell people over the years about this, but no-one seems interested. I could not go to the police as the police forced me to have a vaginal examination against my will, and I was so traumatised that I was terrified of the police for many years.

Since then, I have been in a number of abusive relationships. I have been threatened with a broken bottle by my husband, and I have been raped by a friend of my father. The man who raped me is currently taking me to court for parental "rights", he is using the Family Court to stalk me, and this has been going on for several years. He has been forced to apologise for what he did to me, but I am now expected to forgive and forget, or else. I have been threatened with jail if I break a contact order several times.

My life has been an absolute nightmare. I think it is only because I am a Christian believer that I have been able to stand the pain that is my life. The thought of a better life one day keeps me going, plus I have two lovely children and good friends.

The victims of domestic violence certainly do not receive support, in my experience. The answer is no.

The system that should be in place to protect people like me has never been there at all. I believe I have fallen through every single safety net that exists.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anon0207](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 07:03PM

In a word - NO!

I was severely attacked by my ex partner while on holiday with my children.

I was advised by social services not to return to my home until it could be made safe. I was then left there with little or no information regarding my ex's arrest/bail conditions and without a mobile phone. A male police officer finally came to inform me that my ex had been released 5 DAYS AFTERWARDS at 11.30 at night. This, was quite frankly, very frightening.

I did make the decision to go with my children to a Refuge and was rehoused on the other side of the country. I was just let to get on with the move, no support, no back up, no introductions to any kind of follow on or support services.

The only thing that the Refuge Worker did was to telephone my local Social Services as they thought that there may be a slight chance of me drinking (I wasn't). This lead to all the obvious investigations Doctors/schools etc and I had to explain all of my previous history to the relevant authorities - not what I wanted to do considering we were supposed to be starting a new life.

The 'stigma' of being a survivor of DV hangs over me still.

I also have grave concerns about the level of support offered to children.

My young child witnessed the attack and was diagnosed as suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She was referred to CAMHS in XXX area. We then moved to the Refuge and she was on the waiting list for CAMHS in that area. We then moved from the refuge to a permanent home and once again she had to go on the bottom of a waiting list. All in all it took almost 18 months of an extremely traumatized young child to receive the help she so desperately needed.

What I would like to see is the ability to fast track these poor children to the help they need. or at least be able to retain a place on the waiting list moving from borough to borough. It was only during a contact court case when a Judge was made aware of the emotional damage my daughter had suffered that she finally received support.

Several years on she is still under the care of a psychologist. Had she received help at the time I feel she would be much further along in her recovery.

Children are the hidden victims of Domestic Violence and NOTHING is being done to help them.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Trish](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 04:44PM

Post code lottery. Some areas have fantastic, co-ordinated services, others have virtually none. Very few services for male survivors, certainly if refuge space is required. Greater need for culturally specific services, and support and advice for women with No Recourse to Public Funds

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Justme](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 09:48PM

not really. I am stuck in the same town as my ex and live in the same house we did. I am unable to move as he ran up massive rent arrears here and I now have to pay them. He knows exactly where I am, the house layout, exits etc and yet I have no idea where he is. So at any time he could just turn up. I only go out to collect my children from school and to the local shop because I'm too afraid of bumping into my ex. I'd love to move even a short distance away but cannot and there is none to help me. I have to ask friends or family to help me or buy things for me, I shop online. I feel a burden to everyone around me. Yet my ex swans around like he owns the town or something grr I'm the victim and yet I'm far worse off

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [zander](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 04, 2008 03:32PM

This pushiness is something I have heard of before. Perhaps it is because they are made aware of the "zero tolerance" policy operated in their force areas and feel this is what they have to do. Similarly, the prosecution may also be in the same boat ie "zero tolerance" therefore it must be prosecuted come what may. My view is that the victims views are the most important. They should feel free to voice their needs and if community support is what they want then so be it. If they want to pursue a prosecution then ok. One size and approach will not fit all.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [nadine](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 04, 2008 10:42PM

Support services need to be more consistant. Having recently escaped from an abusive relationship I am acutely aware that this is a lottery. I first went for help to my GP. He gave me a course of anti depresants and failed to refer me to any other agencies. I felt that he wasn't taking me seriously so I didn't bother going back or taking the tablets, which he had so helpfully prescribed. However, the nurse practitioner, working from the same surgery, was enormously helpful. Without her I would never have approached Women's Aid. I finally left my husband last year when he assaulted my teenage daughter. the whole process involved the police, cafcass, social services, my childrens schools and women's Aid . It is as if my whole life ,as I knew it ,has dissolved. My children and I have had to move, the children are in new schools and I have a new job.

For the most part I found the attitude of support services to be very good but the information for proper support had to be sought by me when I felt least able to cope. Women's Aid were the exception here . Social Services told me that there were no free anger management courses for perpetrators, which concerned me, as my youngest

daughter wants contact with her father. This was infact wrong there was a local group. There should also be a way of women getting free legal support. I was told that I would not be entitled to legal aid because of the equity in the family home ,which of course I cannot access anyway. My soon to be ex husband earns £50,000 per annum and did not lose his job, in spite of being cautioned for assaulting a minor. His life has been unscathed and my children and I are still picking up the pieces. Of course he will very easily afford the services of a solicitor

Support services should be consistant not just well meaning. Gps and other service providers need to be trained and monitored for the service that they provide. It should not be left to the victim to have to cope alone especially when she is actively seeking solutions for her family

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [female](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 10:56AM

I am a professional working for CAFCASS, I am deeply concerned about the number of victims, usually women and children, who are forced to leave their homes and support networks, because of the failure to prosecute and/or evict the abuser.

These people are often relocated to other areas, causing isolation, and depression, it has a huge emotional effect on the children who often have to leave friends, school and family behind.

It causes a huge drain on resources, eg provision of housing for both victim and perpetrator.

The courts are not equipped to safeguard a victim from bumping into the very person that has abused them.

Almost every case of residence that we deal with now has issues of domestic abuse, and failure to prosecute allows perpetrators to go on and have another family and children, without having had to address their behaviour.

In my view there should be convictions for domestic abuse that cause the perpetrator to have a status akin to those who are convicted of rape or child abuse, e.g. schedule 1 offences, that prevent them being able to have contact with any woman or child until full assessments have been completed, which address the likelihood of reoffending, and address their behaviours. It should then be presented to a panel of child care, psychology, DV experts to decide whether they can continue a relationship.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [aztecanni](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 03:55PM

yes and no

Those that are lucky enough to come into contact with services recieve a good service on the whole the issue here is that the majority do not come into contact with services.

Statutory services are not looking for the client groups that are effected by DV rather they look at DV as a contributory factor associated wtih their client group. ie its about children

and childrens services - it is not about anyone else.

Services are skewed towards women with children as victims/survivors of DV. What about woman with out children, women whose children have grown and left home, men with children, men with out children, those in same sex relationships and other familial relationships - these people there is little to nothing for.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [mari](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 03:57PM

I have an example of how the health care profession reacts to survivors of domestic abuse.

My Gp sent me for an X ray of my spine.

Prior to my X ray being taken, I was asked by the radiographer if I had fallen at any time. I explained that as a victim of a domestic violent relationship I had been grabbed by the neck at least once a day every day. I was then slammed against the wall and held there by the neck until he decided to release me.

I had also been dragged up the stairs, causing me to walk backwards by my hair resulting in my neck being held at an angle. Again this occurred on such a regular basis that I couldn't recall the number of actual times this had happened.

I had also on a number of occasions been slapped with such force across the face, that I had been physically knocked into the bath tub.

These events were related as facts, told with no emotion on my part. I wasn't looking for sympathy. I just wanted her to know what the GP thought the cause of my injuries could be.

The radiographer either hadn't heard me or had refused to listen.

Her irritated reply to me was " have you fallen at any time"?

This illustrates the lack of understanding that exists within some pockets of health professionals.

As a member of the health care profession I can make the following statement with some confidence.

Unless you are working directly with victims of domestic violence there appear to be no guidelines on how to speak or how to recognise victims.

Maybe this is because the health service is still looking at the stereotypical victim of abuse.

I know my colleagues were amazed that one of their circle had experienced domestic violence.

I didn't fit the stereotype that obviously still exists.

I know that people within the profession will give you the politically correct answer when faced with the question "who can be a victim of domestic violence?"

They will reply "any one can be".

If each one of them were asked the question "Does that mean that you or anyone close to you could be a victim"?.

I wonder who honestly would reply "Yes" and mean it.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [dab](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 08:27PM

I feel the police should be more aware that females can be capable of domestic abuse and when called to a situation should do their utmost to be fair to both parties and listen and follow up on things that are said, domestic situations are not black and white, they need investigating as other crimes are. My son was accused yet it was his wife who was the

perpetrator, she has a mental history but that was ignored by the police. Females can be violent and males cannot retaliate so the situation gets worse. His life was threatened so I phoned the Domestic Violence helpline but that is only for women. I do not know what to advise him, what support groups are there for men?

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [nadine](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 10:49PM

It concerns me too that many perpetrators have complete anonymity and will be able, as you say , , to do this to another woman/child.

However , with regards to having to move, whilst this is really difficult and unsettling sometimes its for the best even where the perpetrator has felt the full force of the law. I had an occupation order but many of my family and friends are in the area to which I have resettled. Part of the perpetrator mindset is to isolate, so sometimes the home which is , after all, where the abuse has taken place, is not the best place to be even when it has been made safer. Besides , even where jail terms are harsh the woman can feel that she is looking over her shoulder if she stays where she is because we all know that things can happen many years after a relationship breakdown

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [andiecraft](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 09:40AM

I was very fortunate as in my area two social workers had taken it upon themselves to provide a service to women who had experienced domestic abuse. There still is no service provided by the MBC or PCT and the service really operates on the good will of the social workers and support staff's determination to address this problem. The service provided by them is split into three areas, group 1 a support group while waiting to attend group 2, a ten week programme designed to empower women to understand the effects of abuse on their mental health, self esteem and confidence and group 3 a self help group.

If it had not been for the service provided (WINGS) there would not have been anywhere I could have gone to.

The women have been so empowered that we have gone forward ourselves and set up our own voluntary organisation, held a major fundraising event to be able to use funds to go on and help ourselves.

With reference to the police, CPS and courts.

My area has specialist "domestic abuse status" courts, however, after a thorough investigation into my situation by the police, (lasting over six months) the CPS decided not to take the case any further. I actually wrote to them as I felt abused all over again, they arranged a meeting with me which I attended and stated my case and wishes to them again but they still decided not to move forward with my case. I was devastated as it left my husband free to continue his terror campaign against us.

The police treated me really well, listened to me, I felt understood and believed.

After speaking to many women on our group, the CPS has acted very much in the same manner. What is the point of having specialist court status if the CPS are not prepared to carry our cases forward.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [ksurvives](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 01:09PM

The public do not understand, or perhaps don't take seriously, their responsibility wrt domestic violence. **This includes the professional classes.** It is too easy to listen to the victim's story of abuse, say the right things, then do nothing wrt to the perpetrator - say nothing, collude in the secret, make the victim's experience worse, ultimately perpetuating the status quo. There is no **personal** commitment to confronting the perpetrator to support the victim so the victim's disclosure is next to useless.

Professionals, doctors, in particular, may well be the first port-of-call for victims (especially middle/professional class victims). They need to be fully comfortable about asking questions, never backing out of this responsibility. Surgeries should make it very clear that the doctor can be approached about domestic violence (given the mental and physical health ramifications). Confidentiality is a shallow excuse. Child protection is a good model.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [hswa786](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 03:34PM

those who are able to make that initial contact may receive support, but due to lack of funding its getting difficult every day. more needs to be done, what about them millions that are just to scared to make that first move?more powers given to the police to tackle this crime, more support for women and children...

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Jane J](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 11:46AM

The women's voluntary sector has been around for decades providing support and safety to women and they are constantly being asked to provide more services for less money or being forced to close down. While the number of statutory organisations has increased the number of specialized voluntary organisations have decreased e.g. the opening of Sexual Assault Referral Centres which is criminal justice led while the number of rape crisis centres have halved in recent years (1984 84 rape crisis centres and today there are 32). It really is a post code lottery for many people experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault in regards to what support they will receive and whether they are able to have any specialist support at all.

Sustainable funding should be made available to specialised refuge services to enable them to accommodate women who have experienced domestic abuse and have additional mental health problems, misused alcohol, used illegal substances, are disabled, are from same sex relationships or who presents a risk, or potential risk, to children or have a criminal record. As it stands the level of funding made available to specialised domestic abuse services are being squeezed and there is not enough provision for women with multiple needs.

The statutory organisations are providing a great deal of support but that support is not consistent throughout that particular agency in that area. You will sometimes have an individual police officer who takes the domestic violence incident seriously, keeps the woman informed throughout the process and then you will have others in the same police

station that will not inform her when the perpetrator has been released on bail putting her in danger or does not understand the nature of domestic abuse. Ongoing specialist training is essential to all police officers, solicitors, judges, health professionals etc to ensure that they are able to support and also keep victims safe.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [amosemper](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 01:02PM

The first time i reported dv with a previous boyfriend the police done absolutly nothing. I called them about 5 times and they always said that they would come to where i had fled to to get a statement but they never came. So i called them asking if i could go to the station to give a statement and they wouldnt let me. They said that dv can only be reported in the home. So in the end i gave up trying as i got no support.

With my next boyfriend the police did come and he was arrested but as there werre no witnesses and i had never reported what he had done before, he got away with it.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [hope through help](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 03:12PM

some thoughts from an I.D.V. A within the service supporting people from incident to post court when necessary.

- *intensive training received from CAADA and continued support ..invaluable.
- *my contract ,at one time limped along and terminated every four months. Impossible to offer consistent care to clients or develop the service over time. De- values the work of advocate, the very person trying to help others to regain self confidence.
- *the 'host' organisation needs to understand the specialist role of the advocate. We are not social workers, Victim Support workers or Probation officers. If sited in official buildings [police stations] they should also be aware.
- *clear, concise recordkeeping is vital but should not curtail the time available for client contact either telephone or , more effectively face to face.
- *MARAC , when agencies understand how important it is to the continued safety of the client, can be extremely effective. Agencies need to really 'buy' into the concept.
- *legal aid seems to discriminate against all clients not receiving income support. A review of eligibility in dv cases would be welcome.
- *often victims experience unacceptably long delays for the start of their case, adding to the reluctance even then to appear as a witness.
- * it is imperative that the trial outcomes are relayed to the victim on the same day. Delay endangers the client.
- *is it possible to offer screens to vulnerable witnesses as a matter of course instead of the present discretionary system in the interests of 'best evidence'?
- *difficult for some clients to understand why defence often work with suspect over time but prosecution sometimes only receive case before trial .It doesn't seem fair to them.
- * A growing number of interpreters will be needed .
- * there is still some confusion about the perameters of confidentiality and date protection issues amongst agencies.
- *too many agencies all asking same question can result in confusion and sometimes added distress.
- * it should not be an assumption that a convicted perpetrator should have contact with children at all. The children's views should be paramount [age and maturity dependent]. If granted needs carefully monitoring to prevent using them to further abuse.
- * counslling services should be offered automatically to the family as well as victim.
- *what happened about the payment of £15 collected after each conviction and put towards the dv service?
- *Advocates working together with DV Liason Officers in close proximity are more effective

than advocates working alone. A skilled advocate reduces the work of the police and other relevant agencies as well as being a lynch- pin for dissemination of information . Plainly , from all I have read on this web-site alone as well as my daily case-load there is much to do from breaking down the secrecy that surrounds domestic abuse to initiatives like this. Our words here, sincerely expressed, from the front-line need to be heard and translated into actions..

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [lorca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 04:11PM

Victims do not get enough support form the public and voluntary sector for the following reasons

The key agencies get are fed up with going to 'domestics' often several times a month they will go to the same address and the victim will not take action or withdraws it the next day regardless if support is offered !!!

We need to make victims know that if they use an agency such as police and then do not enter into changing the abusive relationship by either leaving it or going on behavioural/ relationship programmes they they will get fined.

All to often police are called out to act as referee or used as a power game to get back at the perpetrator , this sends the wrong message about what the role of agencies are for in this situation and also encourages lack of personal responsibility in both parties. and the cost to the tax payer is rediculous as police are not dealing with other crimes, if as the statistics say a domestic occurs is reported to the police every few minutes what an absolutely waste of police time!!

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Seca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 09:25PM

I would like to reply to this posting because I feel the person who wrote this has never experienced domestic abuse in any shape or form. Unfortunately, because of people like this one, the police do not take these incidents seriously, because police and the general public are not informed in the effects of domestic violence/abuse on women. Let me make you aware that it takes a lot of courage and time for many of these victims to make that phone call, aside from this, these victims are completely emotionally manipulated by the perpetrators, that is the reason why they do not prosecute them or leave them, which makes them call the police again in a further incident.

I agree, there are very few cases of women who abuse the police service, trying to 'get even' with their partners, but these are not victims of domestic abuse. Police officers need to be educated in identifying the real victims of domestic abuse, forced marriages, honour violence.

It is quite easy to blame these victims of 'wasting police time' when in reality there are many more cases of police not taking these incidents seriously or seeing further than a phone call, i.e. perhaps the woman is too afraid to prosecute the partner? perhaps she does not have the strength to leave him because he has destroyed her self-esteem? These are very important questions the agencies should ask before labelling as a waste of time!!!

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Seca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 11, 2008 03:48PM

I decided to reply to your posting as I also live in a small market town and understand your position. I also work in DV in the city and know very well that there isn't any provision to support women in a rural setting. I wanted to run the Freedom Programme in my town but needed funds to rent a room, so I am still trying to do this. I can only advise you to get in touch with Women's Aid and try to find telephone support? I am very sorry.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Louie](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 11, 2008 07:40PM

There is so much more that can be done. I fled with my children in 2004 to a womens refuge who i have to say were absolutley fantastic and helped me no end and until recently i still attended the freedom project that they run which has helped me to gain so much more understanding about domestic abuse.

My story is far too long to put on here but basically i was tracked down by my ex using seek and find orders on myself and my children and battled long and hard with the court system, they forced me to send my children to a supervised contact centre even though their father had never paid them any attention never brought them a single item baiscally done nothing for them but make our lives a misery and leave me in debt trying to feed us.

Imagine this scene being beaten so bad you just curl up and wish to die but then you hear him say he is going to kill you and the children with a gun you then realise you have to save your kids you panic and try to fight back in the mean time your toddler wakes up crying he then comes towards you with the gun at the time you have your toddler in your arms and a baby asleep you beg him not to shoot instead he throws the gun and comes at you and your daughter and punches you repeatidly in the face and head you both fall on the floor and feel like giving up. After all that and my goodness thats only a piece of my story i'm still here i suffered post traumatic stress syndrome after that night but i left him not many moths later and it was the best thing i could have done for my kids and me we are happy on our own we can play, make a noise and as much mess as we want to and have nobody to go mad about it, only the stress that followed due to court proceedings really didn't help.

The physical violence is so bad you just give up with life sometimes but the emotional abuse is by far alot worse and this is the one that is so hard to prove in a court the bruises heal but the damage he has done to you emotionally will probably never fully heal. The courts need to recognise this and act now as it's not only us but our innocent children who are forced to have a relationship with their father that become the victims of this damaging abuse.

Contact arrangements are misused by men like my ex along with everything else he smacked my toddler so hard it bruised her leg, a larger catalouge of things but yet the courts and cafcass said a man had a right to have a relationship with his children and vice versa, well i'm sorry but that man loses his right to be called a father the minute he raises his hands to them or their mother.

My children suffered and needed play therapy following contact with him but now we have no contact arrangements only because he finally gave up not due to the courts having a bit of sense. The courts even wanted me to tell him my childrens school as he has parental responsibility sod the fact that i relocated moved miles away from my family and friends to protect us they was just going to hand it to him on a plate and i know what would have happened i would have ended up one of those statistics one of the 3 women killed in england and wales by their partner or ex each week.

Sorry this is so long i could go on forever as this is a topic close to my heart and if it helps just one change to make improvements then its worth it. COURT SYSTEMS FAIL VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE WOMEN AND CHILDREN AND THEY ARE IN NEED OF BIG IMPROVEMENTS WHEN IT COMES TO CONTACT ARRANGEMENTS. THEY SHOULDN'T VIEW A CASE OF WHAT CONTACT IT SHOULD BE A CASE OF IF CONTACT. The children have far

more rights to be protected than a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [freenow](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 12, 2008 03:57PM

for years i was a victim of domestic violence and in the begining there was not enough support as the years went on the police and government were cracking down on it. My main concern now is that how the children are effected by the violence. i feel that this information should be taken into schools and made an issue of as a lot of children are suffering in silence and this will effect their education i know this as i am dealing with this situation now. parents children and members of staff need to be aware of this situation and more counselling and programmes for children of all ages should be able to attend to help them through life as we dont want the pattern to continue we need to break the chain with the children. Most children get through life but a lot of them are ignored and this is where they need to know and feel that there is help for them as they are victims too. For the victims that are abused physically or mental etc.. should have the funds to start a new life with as much support out there where they know that they will be safe at all times this is serious why shouldn't the government help more more funding should be available for those who cant afford to go to court or move home if it required. How many lives have to end or be destroyed before someone takes it more seriously.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [honey](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 13, 2008 04:29PM

Due to lack of understanding from GP's, the court and cafcass. I had to turn to my MP, who could not help.

two years after leaving the abuser , the abuse is worse and everybody from the courts, cafcass, the police, social workers are watching, but no one is doing anything about it.

it seems that when the abuse is emotional, no one knows how to deal with it. not even the courts.

also what I am experiencing is status and colour.

depending on who you are and what colour you are, you are treated differently. lets say believed differently.

there is lots to do for changes to happen , Because DV in all its forms is destroying

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Care worker](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 14, 2008 12:43PM

I am a care worker running a safe house for battered women and children. I have several things to feed back.

1.) Women in my experience stay and stay and stay, and take abuse. It then becomes far too serious to ignore, and they have to flee. Meanwhile they have not called the police or been to the doctor regarding any of the things that have been through. When couples are

married and have children, there can be a lot of history and emotional investment to stay in that marriage. Add to that him saying he is devastated by what he's done, he'll change etc etc; in my opinion, many women bury their heads in the sand because they do not want their marriage to be over. They just pray that he will change. When it becomes apparent that he will not, they flee, come to us, and have no Police evidence to back their claim up. They are then found not to be entitled to housing or immigration rights, because they have no paperwork to back their claims up. The fact that they may have been terrorised for years and suffered physical and emotional injuries counts for nothing. Another factor at play here is that they often do not want to go to court or the Police; they have had it up to the back teeth and just want everything to do with him over and done with. This harms them because in order for them to receive help, they need proof. But the burden of requirement for proof is directly contrary to the emotional needs of most women.

2.) I went to my own Doctor the other week and said I worked for a DV charity. He had never heard of us! How can a doctor in this day and age not have heard of DV charities where women and children can flee to safety???

3.) The Duluth wheel of power and control in my opinion should be taught in schools. It is not acceptable that women hand over their wages, not see their friends, be told what they can wear, be manipulated and then made to feel they are mad etc. If young people were taught the dynamics of what is right and wrong, they would more readily spot it.

4.) I recently moved house. It was a highly stressful time. Yet every week residents and children move out of safe houses. We as staff are not able to help them. They are not allowed to call taxis or handymen to come and help them, as men are not allowed on premises. They are generally on benefits and have very little money. Moving on must be ten times worse for them than it was for me. We need more money to be able to help them move on.

5.) When you do not work you give away your power. You have limited ways to control your life because you have limited means. When young women routinely expect a man to provide for them, they are giving away their power. This needs challenging imo.

6.) My final word is on patriarchy - the given that men rule. Men do not rule, and I believe it is from this myth that a lot of people's problems stem. Are you prepared, Government Ministers, to actually stand up and say this, or is it too close to the bone?

Two women die every week from domestic violence. Yet we are not even funded by the govt. Little children grow up in despair and chaos, which is not attended to, and they then repeat the patterns. When I am oncall for room vacancies, I can take sometimes 12 calls in one hour from women who have been sleeping on the streets or in public toilets in x station. It is painful work. We look forward to some change.

This posting has been edited to remove geographical references.
Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:14:17:01:33 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [marigold123](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 14, 2008 01:29PM

I was in a similar situation as you and did manage to escape. I owned our lovely home with my ex husband and really did not want to leave and drag the children away from their own rooms, local friends etc. I had a small income of my own and used to save a little each month in order to escape. One night things became unbearable and he tried to strangle me, shouting and threatening me and saying he would put me through days of sleep deprivation. I was terrified for myself and the children. The next day, after no sleep, I pretended to take the children to school, he followed me in his car but I managed to escape and drove to my parents. I stayed there for x weeks then rented a tiny house, eventually getting him to buy me out. He begged me to come back but I didn't. He told me

that if I left him he would make me suffer forever. That was x years ago and I havnt looked back.

It was really hard to escape but it is possible and my life is so much happier now. I'm glad I got out in time for my children to have a happy childhood rather than a daily stresful one - you cant really hide it from children - they live it with you.

I have not been able to form another relationship although I am happy, have a good job and the children are now well balanced and delightful.

Good luck.

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Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:14:17:07:01 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [marigold123](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 14, 2008 01:43PM

I called the police after my ex husband tried to strangle me, had been threatening and verbally abusive all night and said he would put me through days of sleep deprivation. The officer who I spoke to asked me if I really wanted flashing blue lights outside my house with all the neighbours watching and told me to call back in the morning when things had calmed down! I was utterly horrified and realised I had to deal with the situation on my own. I never rang them again. That was nearly 10 years ago. I hope the response by police has improved since then.

Luckily, I managed to escape that night and that was a start to a new, and much happier life.

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Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:14:16:59:55 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [pariata](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 14, 2008 07:43PM

I am white/English but have also had a really bad deal with the legal system, so don't think it makes any difference. It just seems to be loaded against women in general, unfortunately. The police who came out to rescue me were very kind, sympathetic and supportive and when my husband refused to agree to cease harrassing me- but would leave to live with his parents- they escorted him from the house. He still has access to the house by prior arrangement with me and an officer could be present if desired. They subsequently checked up to see i was okay at intervals on the phone.

However, because he could no longer bully, control and interrogate me for hours or days on end, he decided to divorce me by filing a petition containing nothing but outrageous allegations and lies ('legalised abuse') which still rests with a County Court. A solicitor had previously told me i could not divorce on grounds of his behaviour, but this obviously did not apply to him! Not only this, but he had also blocked me from defending myself. My solicitor advised that if he could prove just one piece of alleged behaviour this could happen, so replied to his solicitor, saying we might not agree with some accusations as the case progressed. I was at the time so shattered by the abusive relationship that i agreed to this and have suffered much emotional and mental torment since, as a result. I already have chronic fatigue syndrome after my ordeals. Had i been in a stronger state of mind, i would have objected more strongly to this decision, as of course nothing so outlandish could have been proved against me anyway.

For reasons too lengthy to go into here, I have seen 2 further solicitors, who have both launched straight into the 'Poor chap needs to re-house himself - how much is your property worth?' routine. This is because the worse nightmare has been that to sell our house and split the remaining amount, would give barely enough to acquire one room, so i would have to dump most of my possessions and hobbies and give up my beloved garden.

Also not being a driver, life would have become unbearable. The solicitor had also informed me that my husband could have me forced out of the premises if necessary.

In desperation I really opposed my husband on this as i have never wronged him - quite the reverse in fact. and thankfully he has now come up with a scheme for me to stay in the house and he will get his equity when the mortgage is paid-off. This means i can stay in the house for life, but my point is that he is STILL able to control my life and 'call the shots' even after committing criminal offence against me in the form of mental torment, threatening behaviour etc.

A couple of times i tried to phone the DV department at the police station - as i had been warmly invited to do by officers on several occasions, should i need to - but on both occasions i met with an irritable WPC who the first time said the police weren't interested, i just had a 'messy divorce'. The second occasion the reason was that it had just been a 'domestic argument'! She was not checking the information, and said she couldn't have traced the officer involved even though i gave the exact date and time i had last spoken to him. I felt very depressed and humiliated after this, but have since heard other women say they have received the same treatment there. I am now having counselling, referred by my GP, to help me through the remainder of this stressful time. I'm also finding a local womens' support group is helping enormously.

I can quite believe the content of another message that suggests solicitors collaborate to disempower the victim and empower the perpetrator. A friend of mine is enduring a similiar nightmare, involving a violent and sadistic ex-husband demanding increasing access to their child, the legal system and Cafcass. As with my own experiences, she is finding that no-one is interested in hearing of her (and her child's) horrific suffering at the hands of this man.

The police seem to be updated on the current epidemic of violence toward women, but the rest of the system hasn't kept pace it seems.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Front line](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 15, 2008 12:40PM

Although we have progressd from violence in the home being seen as a private not a public issue there is still a long way to go. I find it depressing that support for victims of domestic abuse is not guaranteed or consistent. Women need to feel support not the shame and guilt that many do. For this to come about a fundamental change in public perception and the way we respond to abuse must happen alongside preventative work to stop the abuse occurring in the first place. People in general fail to recognise the hidden influence and impact of domestic abuse i.e. the thinking, morals and values of the perpetrators that impact on families and hence society as a whole. Men abuse their partners because they know they can get away with it. Plain and simple! This isn't helped by the medias portrayal which often normalises and can even glorify and make violence seem exciting. It also often blames the victim and excuses the perpetrators behaviour making abuse seem an acceptable response. Television shows like Jeremy Kyle - I can't even begin to explore that one! It would help victims if perpetrators were punished more severely. There needs to be tougher legislation and an increase in the number of prosecutions and careful consideration with regard to e.g. child contact. In some states in America and in New Zealand if a parent is violent within the family the court must not grant unsupervised contact or allow the perpetrator residence. When an offence is committed the perpetrator should without exception be arrested and charged. If an individual is attacked by a stranger this is an automatic response yet victims of domestic abuse can be put in the uncomfortable and often dangerous position of being asked if they want to press charges. Public awareness should be raised. There have been many high profile public campaigns which have helped changed people's attitudes and contributed to making certain behaviours socially unacceptable such as 'Clunk Click Every Trip' Drink driving and Stop Smoking campaigns. The same could be applied to domestic abuse. It is paramount that professionals and the population in general should realises a perpetrators ability to manipulate - they are often portrayed and portray themselves as polite, well

mannered, well thought off members of society when in essence they are extremely manipulative, devious dangerous and destroy lives. Men can convince a woman that she is suffering from e.g. post natal depression, the woman can be diagnosed and the perpetrator will later use this against the woman as a way of accusing her that she is 'mad' or in relation to child contact etc. Healthy relationships should be promoted from an early age - this should be mandatory within the education system, as should training for professionals and e.g. magistrates. Social Services can appear to place more emphasis on a mums substance misuse than the dad who is a perpetrator of domestic abuse. This is even if the substance misuse has developed as a way of coping with the abuse, or as a result of the perpetrator influencing and even forcing the woman to use alcohol or drugs. Social Services can appear unsympathetic and tend to overlook the needs of the mother which in turn plays into the hands of the perpetrator and further isolates the woman. It is appalling that so many women feel let down by the system which should be sympathetic to them. The impact of domestic abuse on children is well known therefore it is astonishing that there are so few child workers. Every Child Matters? Children need consistent support e.g. they can often feel anger and resentment which can be directed at mum and not the perpetrator. Sustainable funding is needed for child workers. The Stockholm Syndrome is recognised yet society still tends to blame victims of domestic abuse which highlights that despite being in the 21st Century the imbalance of power between men and women remains. The cost of domestic abuse to the tax payer is in the billions. this is not including the emotional cost to victims and e.g. their friends, relatives and neighbours. Domestic abuse is a human rights issue. Women and children have the right to live without violence or the fear of it.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Janet Dean MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 18, 2008 03:19PM



I'm concerned that some of you have not received the support you needed from healthcare professionals. Government guidelines suggest that health trusts should be working towards training healthcare professionals to routinely ask all women if they are experiencing domestic violence, and provide all women with information on domestic abuse support services. I wonder if anyone has been spoken to in this way by their doctor and if you think this approach will mean that more people report abuse and seek help?

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [lifeafter](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 18, 2008 03:43PM

No I never received the support I required. The housing let my husband stay in the house while I stayed with my brother for months till the "housing" allocated him with a new flat. No one spoke to me on what I had been through and also the damaging effect it has had on my children. My daughters are now grown up but my youngest daughter still lives with the effect DV had on us as a family and had to receive counselling for years. I live with the guilt, in why I never got them out of their sooner.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [cheeky monkey](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 19, 2008 01:32PM

I totally agree. The family courts, social services, CAFCASS, etc need to be aware of the effect that contact with a violent father has on children. After all, there is enough research

out there if they cared to look. How can they possibly justify driving Mothers to despair by forcing them to send their children off, for often unsupervised contact, with violent fathers. Men, who they know will harm their children. Men, who probably have already harmed their children.

These agencies simply do not fully understand how an abusive man's mind works. They need to listen to, and act upon what we, as survivors tell them. Only then, will women and children be safe. PLEASE LISTEN !!!

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [cheeky monkey](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 19, 2008 09:20PM

I would just like to say a huge WELL DONE to you. You have rebuilt your life and your childrens lives.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [cheeky monkey](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 19, 2008 09:46PM

I truly hope the Government take on board all of the comments posted. It is quite obvious that many, many women and children are being appallingly let down by systems that should be protecting us. It is without doubt going to cost a lot of money to address these problems, but in the long run, surely it will be less than the 23 BILLION a year it costs us now.

And what about the well-being of our great nation. Don't the Government realise that so many of society's problems are obviously inextricably linked to what goes on " behind closed doors ". Do everything possible to stamp out domestic violence and the knock on effect will be amazing.

And then, the 23 BILLION can be spent elsewhere.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [cheeky monkey](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 19, 2008 10:04PM

There is only 1 agency that I got the help and support I needed from. A dedicated drop-in centre called The Zero Centre. Without their amazing support, I truly do not know what would have become of me and my Child.

And guess what ! It's going to close unless it gets some funding soon. I have been to see 3 local MPs who have promised to help and delivered absolutely nothing.

What message does this send out to abused women everywhere ? That we DO NOT MATTER ! Isn't that just what our abusers drummed into us. This is just another way in which domestic violence is perpetuated.

There MUST be somebody out there who can stop this vital service from closing down. PLEASE !!!

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Bob Russell MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 04:18PM



We've heard evidence during our inquiry that lawyers and court staff do not receive enough specialist training for domestic violence cases, which could help to explain some of the negative experiences you're had of the court process. The Government is expanding the Specialist Domestic Violence Courts programme: I wonder if anyone thinks these courts produce better outcomes for victims?

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 04:51PM

I have worked in the DV field now for 12 years, managing a 35 bedspace refuge provision in the North-West and chairing a mulit-agency DV forum for the last 6 years. The refuge provision, which has been established for 30 years, is under threat due to Supporting People tendering process which will be introduced within the next two years. The competative environment will more than likely result in this high quality provision being replaced by a cheaper alternative from an inexperienced provider, as has been our recent experience with the Floating Support contract, won in my region by a generic floating support provider. This has brought an end to the refuge aftercare service - a much valued service, especially for the women who we work with from BME communities, with whom a relationship of trust is built during their stay at the refuge - many will not be referred to a seperate floating support project with workers they do not know ... they do not want to tell their story again and they are frightened. There is no government funding for Children's Services at the refuge - all funding is ad hoc and short term. Last year, 128 children lived at the refuge for a period of up to 6 months. All needed intense support to overcome their traumas. At the end of March 2008 (approx 5 weeks time) the refuge will have no funding in place for services to children who live there. The management committee have committed to protecting the service as long as possible from refuge reserves (which are not a lot) - the crisis situation is appauling. In September 2007, my town lost its Women's Aid, and important frontline service for women in my region experiencing domestic violence in the home. This meant that 25 units of specialist DV floating support were lost. In addition, the helpline and drop-in support service run by Women's Aid also disappeared. I now find myself working endlessly to influence local statutory agencies to provide funds to support a temporary helpline service for the area ... and have secured short term funds to do so. How long this will last i do not know. I am heartened by the recent advances in the Criminal Justice System, i am currently managing to IDVA's based within my organisation and attending the local MARAC, however, there needs to be a much broader development, especially in terms of funding and support for support services, refuges, helpline services, services for children and services for BME women. In particular, government has to make appropriate provision for children and young people, both within refuge provision and in the community. This is both interventional and preventative. Children need help now which will also prevent future demands on health and social services. Thank you.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 04:55PM

It is time for us to take a fresh look at this topic. The recent call by a senior police officer for purpitators of Domestic Violence to be tracked as in the case of sex offenders does not help. In my area we have tried to explore proactive approaches to the subject. Surely it is preferable to prevent rather than punish offenders. Whilst it can be argued that there is a psychological class of individuals that will always be prone to controling and bullying behaviour, - it is also the case that a number of domestic violence offences are carried out by individuals who for various reasons feel trapped and threatened. In this catagory we

find [in increasing numbers] women frustrated and angered by the relationships they are in. Also, men who are scared regarding the future of their relationships given the insecurity of family breakdown. Whilst none of these "symtoms" are excuses for individuals loosing control, by identifying the causes of Domestic Violence we identify the ways of preventing it. By providing help and support for parents experiencing family breakdown, society [ie the state] can greatly reduce the problem. How do I know this? By stressing the message that Domestic Violence is not an option to fathers angry at their treatment by ex partners and giving them hope of a mutually acceptable settlement, we have been able to proudly boast a 100% record for our attendees not being involved in any allegations of Domestic Violence. All this without hardly any direct funding. Children caught in relationship breakdown suffer. They suffer more if they witness violence and anger between their parents. Surely it is time for an early intervention stratergy in these cases. Organisations such as Relate, Families Need Fathers and Zero Tollerance should be invested in. Evidence should be gathered on what effect early intervention has and how it can be improved. For the hard core of offenders there is a fast track already in place which would give them the option of "change your ways or suffer the consiquences". For the ordinary people caught up in emotional turmoil, the application of properly funded aid and support surely would have a dramatic effect. In the meantime could we please refrain from the sound bite, look at me quotes which dumb down the debate and are designed purely to get politicians support and public servants promoted

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 04:58PM

I was subject to domestic violence from my ex husband and was very relieved when I learnt that he had an affair that relief did not last long as the abuse and violence incresed when I was not prepared to stay in the marrige, he went to a solicitor to file for divorce admitting his adultery, however his attempts to panic me in to taking him back did not work. at this point I had been isolated from friends a social life employmenent and independence so my only source of income was his income he stopped paying the mortgage on our home and forced me to agree to place the property for sale, I managed to gain employment and gain my independence back and I am no longer dependant on him for anything, however this has not been easy to gain and can understand why victims may return as when I gained back control of my own life and though I had given him the very clear message that he was no longer going to control. He started to use agencies to control me starting with a solicitor who represented him in court for financial and child contact proceedings, this resulted in our children and myself having to attend CAFCASS appointments and myself having to attend court as he got his friend/employer to make him redundant to avoid the CSA and gain legal aid this ment he did not have to take time off work or explain to an employer like i did why time off work was needed as i was working and not eligible for legal aid I had to represent myself at court and could not afford the money for a non molestation order. I felt that all the agencies I came in to contact with due to my situation colluded with my ex husband. I also find it a joke for the amount of money that must go in to promoting the general public to come forward and inform the relevant agencies of crime and benefit fraud, I now belive it is a total waste of money just has it has been a complete waste of my time contacting the agencies on numerous occasions as he is still very much flaunting a very good standard of living form a life of crime and benefit fraud When will there ever been any justice for victims? Also when will there be appropriate support rather than collusion from agencies including the courts who have no understanding of domestic violence possibly placing victims at further potential risk and pushing the back in to an abusive relationship.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 04:58PM

It depends entirely on who they are and where they live.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 05:02PM

As both a victim of domestic violence and a qualified barrister I found the entire process through the courts, both criminal and civil weighted heavily on the side of the abuser. There was no support whatsoever for myself and children and Cafcass wrote a report weighted in favour of my ex, quoting blatant lies about me without even asking me whether the accusations were true. This made my ex even smugger and self satisfied in the court room when it was declared that I was a heavy drinker (I was tea total as I always had to keep my wits about me). As my ex was winning hands down he abducted my child forcing me to make an expensive application to get him returned, of course he was legally aided as he hasn't worked for over 20 years. He disregarded the court order to return my child and forced me to return again in another costly application, my child was returned by bailiffs! He then started a vicious, violent campaign of hate against our youngest son, my son informed Cafcass of the severe violence and nothing was done, too much hard work for the officer involved, a man of course. As I owned a home before I met my ex, a most charming man until he had a ring on my finger, he decided to pursue me through the civil courts for his perceived share of my home, once again legally aided. As I was maintaining the home and children single handed I could not afford a solicitor but was in the position of being able to litigate for myself, NOT recommended as it is emotionally crippling. The upshot is he was awarded a large sum of money for committing violence and abuse against his family, a nice reward for years of torturing us. I also tracked down his first wife and found he had done the same to her but she hadn't informed the police of the attempted murder! He had won a handsome payout from her too. He was only charged with one incident of violence against me and got off with a conditional discharge for 12 months. He has laughed me through both the criminal courts and the civil courts with the help of legal aid, Cafcass, fellow lawyers and the judiciary. In my opinion there is No justice for victims of domestic violence be they women or children, the system is weighted heavily in favour of the abuser. As a barrister I was disbelieved by Cafcass and indeed the "system" so what chance has a lay person of getting justice if I was disbelieved instead of a man who had hid a lengthy criminal past and laughed in my face when he was discovered.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [survivor76](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 21, 2008 02:13AM

Personally it is pot luck as to the sort of help you receive. I received no help, my reason for that was, in my experience I was not aware that I was a victim of DV, I was raped by my ex (but my line of thought there was, can a husband rape his wife?) surely they were his rights? the physical scars well there are none but the emotional ones are deep. I believed that what went on indoors was between a husband and his wife, for better or worse, unfortunately half the population agrees with me, that includes the police, social services, MP's need I go on, all living and hiding behind the shame, So to get to my point, you can advertise and offer all the support imaginable but until we recognize the abuse we are living in you are banging your head against the wall.

Education is the key. Spell it out to us and our children. Help us to help our children.

A list of commandments!!!! "Thou shalt not strike a human beingor my wife" That would be a start.

This is huge and will take more than a memo and feel good words, this needs a big shift in society. NSPCC have the right idea..... the buck STOPS here!.....NOW right NOW.

I belong to a support group the freedom programme (which is voluntary and national,) but they work wonders, if this programme could get into the schoolsits another good place to start, infact let me offer my services in promoting this to the mainstream.

I look forward to hearing from you

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [sotbas306](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 21, 2008 10:39AM

Citizens Advice Bureau are often the first point of contact for people when things go wrong. Clients may approach us asking for advice on debt or benefits or separation and as part of the interview process information maybe disclosed on abuse and violence. Clients can get holistic advice via their CAB where we can look at the whole issue and help the client to look for a way forward. CABs can access on behalf of clients emergency access to solicitors, access to refuges or other accommodation, access to benefits, help to resolve financial problems as well as access to Domestic Violence coordinators either through statutory or other voluntary agencies. More funding should be provided to CAB to enhance the role of Citizens Advice Bureaux as the first point of contact for victims of Domestic Violence.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [tidewillturn](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 21, 2008 07:18PM

I too was strangled by my ex husband when heavily pregnant. He sat astride my bump and tried to kill me. He got 6 months probation and a conviction of ABH. I have been to hell and back. I am now happily remarried but the nightmare continues. He uses the contact order for our son to try and get to me and now that he can no longer get to me directly he has started hurting my son. He bit my son. There have been signs for years with my son and what has been happening but no one wants to know. This time because of the bite the police and social services have got involved but they still seem to be lacking. Why does no one listen to children? Why does no one try to protect children from being hurt. All the services involved don't regard a bite mark as being serious enough evidence. This is beyond all belief. My son talks about killing himself in school and yet the psychologist has been scared off seeing him because my ex has complained and threatened her if she sees my son without his consent.

What I find hard is the fact that he constantly admits his actions; strangling me; locking a child in a house and leaving him alone; biting his son and yet he still gets away with it. I flag this up time and time again and yet no one tries to deal with him or put him straight about his inappropriate behaviour. I have many nasty letters from him and yet no one will admit that I am still suffering DV at the hand of this man. Just because I have remarried and moved on with my life does not mean the control and threat has stopped. If anything it is worse now because he is hurting my son and that hurts me more than direct physical violence to me.

The government needs to pile a tonne of money into caring for children in these difficult situations. Women need help to get out and stay out and there is a lot of good help there; Women's Aid saved my life. But what about years down the line when judges order contact because and I quote "DV has no relevance in child contact orders". These judges are the worst. They are now subjecting my son to nasty insidious abuse. How long does he have to keep suffering until Social services declare there is enough "hard evidence"?? Does he need a broken arm or leg, to be so traumatised that he can't talk or eat? The Childrens Act says children should be protected of likely harm as well as harm that has occurred and yet all the authorities what to do is wait until they have "hard evidence". It is a national disgrace and I will happily talk to anyone who will listen. So Mr MP do you what to interview me and take up my case to protect my son? Lets see what the government really do to help victims of DV I somehow think we'll be in the same situation in 5-10 years time.

By that time my son could have suffered real damage at the hand of his father and yet the family legal system will still insist on sending him unprotected to his violent bully of a father.

The family courts are failing our children and something has to be done to protect everyone from DV be them men women or most importantly children. I want justice for my son and to protect him.

This posting has been edited to protect the privacy of the poster.

Edited 2 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:22:13:18:45 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [blackburn](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 22, 2008 10:02AM

[quote Parliament Moderator]In replying you may wish to comment on one or more of the following areas:

- the effectiveness of agencies e.g. police, health and social services, at identifying and preventing

As a health professional and also one that has in her childhood witnessed domestic violence in my opinion services have moved on since the last decade sadly the issue is still prevalent and my area is a known hotspot. Within all of the public sector areas domestic violence is starting to be talked about at a training level. This however should be mandatory for all front line staff and should run alongside child protection as the 2 are closely interlinked. After reviewing abstracts of people's experience on the sight I agree that we have still got such a long way to go in placing the needs of the victim (so-if children are also present) instead of the abuser. Domestic violence refuge's need more funding and safe house or temporary sheltered accommodation could be created where multi-disciplinary outreach services could access.

My concern is a lot of focus is being placed on high level risk with the monthly MARAC meetings but I am fearful that the impact on continual low-level domestic violence will be interpreted wrong and the effects upon children are the same. Again the judgement of low/high level is perceived by others and I wonder whether we are going to get variances in thresholds like we do with child protection. From my professional perspective I would welcome a lot more inter-agency working throughout the differing levels/sharing of information to all will enable each and every one of us involved with that family to try and offer support when safe to do so. Trust and confidence through those key workers will then develop and hopefully when that person is ready as a multi-agency team we could help/assess and address the needs and support short/medium and long term. We should also not be judgmental when the victim returns to the abuser- this process we know can be repeated many times for various reasons but our job is to help them gradually build up their strength until 1 day they leave for good.

Finally to all those that have never witnessed/experienced it- don't judge!!! you can't empathise because you'll not even comprehend half of it and the emotional web formed is complex- just be there with whatever your service can offer and GIVE it.

To those who've SURVIVED- CONGRATULATIONS/WELL-DONE your inner strength came up to the surface and gave YOU the power to escape. You're not a VICTIM now you are a SURVIVOR just like the survivors of the holocaust- with all the emotional/physical scars I know but with freedom/choice (I hope)

To those still contemplating and searching for the strength- I wish you all the luck in the world that one day you'll find it- the road is long and hard I'll not pretend but for most if done with the CORRECT level of support via services you

can change your life around and build a safer future for your children. Don't loose sight or hope of this- i wish you well.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 23, 2008 04:22PM

There is a significant gap between what many people think the police offer and the reality. I suspect it is a common misconception that the police will always take risk to help victims. I pay tribute to the many dead and injured officers who have done that but they frequently broke police rules in their sacrifice. We perhaps only need a police force if we require someone to take risk on our behalf. If there was no risk, we would surely contemplate doing it ourselves. I have read of a new policy of a police force which re-inforces the commitment to protect the public and place the police between the threat and those threatened, where feasible. It is the words "where feasible" that make this member of the public doubtful of the help that will be sent in response to a 999 call. I do have experience of a police force promising a whole lot more than they were prepared to deliver. Two murders followed.

From some victorian principles of policing comes this quote - "...and by ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life."

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 24, 2008 09:30PM

I think there is a significant gap between what the public believe the police offer in the way of protection and the reality. I think a good reason for calling a police force is because we require them to take risk on our behalf. If there was no risk, we would surely contemplate managing issues ourselves. I think the police perpetuate this gap. I have experience of the police telling a victim of their response only for them to admit afterwards it was not true. Forces vary of course, but I think we need a contract between the public and the police so this gap is closed.

I pay tribute to the many officers who have lost their lives and been injured taking risk on our behalf. They often took risk in breach of police policy which is very telling.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Yet another battered wife](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 25, 2008 02:01PM

I wanted to pick up on what "Reflective" said. Mental health workers seem to underestimate time and again the effect of domestic violence on women. We are painted as mentally ill, weak, feeble, unstable, psychotic etc. No one ever asks "why does this woman present these symptoms?". We're doled out anti-depressants like smarties but never counselling advice or support. Being a victim is disempowering. Agencies which ought to know better like the NHS, social Services, CAFCASS, the police treat us in a way that disempowers us further. This is very damaging to women trying to put their lives back together. Professionals must have better training than they currently get. I suggest the government could fund Womensaid and the CWASU of the Met University and organisations like CIS'ters in Portsmouth to offer obligatory training. And next year's Map of Gaps survey should cover those regions where the training requirement has not been taken up.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [female](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 25, 2008 08:13PM

I have to express my concern that a great deal of these messages seem to be focussed on damning other professionals practice, whilst promoting the practice of the refuges. I have to wonder why, and if they have a vested interest. During contact disputes all parties have the option of being legally represented, legal representatives have a duty on behalf of their client to bring to the notice of the court any allegations of domestic violence, as do those parties representing themselves, they also have a duty to bring it to the attention of CAFCASS. The court then has a duty to decide whether a finding of fact hearing takes place to make findings as to the violence that has occurred. Those findings have to be accepted by the perpetrator before contact can be looked at again, and only then if it is appropriate for it to be looked at again, they are also ordered to access a DV perpetrators course, and be seen to have changed their behaviour. Of course the people that run these courses get funding by promoting their own success, despite the fact that over and over again they abuse further partners. Independent bodies need to regularly inspect and review the providers of these courses, and the providers of refuges for women, to look closely at their outcomes.

In a number of discussions I have had with victims who have experienced the refuge system (in some cases not all) have felt powerless and out of control whilst in the refuge, with lots of rules and regulations, directing them to a particular divorce lawyer, and telling them they must divorce and never communicate with them or allow the children to see them. When what most victims want is for the abuse and control to stop, and to stay in their own homes. Perhaps refuges on the other side of the country should be taking in perpetrators who are not residents of that area, where they are closely monitored and told what to do!

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Campaigner](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 25, 2008 09:35PM

Totally agree with the person who said it's a post code lottery. This was confirmed by the Nov 07 End Violence Against Women report the Map of Gaps. Interestingly, the report found that Scotland has a better spread of services than the rest of the UK and attributes this to the Scottish Govt.'s use of a gender-based analysis of domestic violence, which is something the UK government should take on board.

However, in Scotland we are still lacking services which work with perpetrators and broader prevention services.

While this thread has understandably focused on adult victims, who clearly don't receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations, we shouldn't forget the child victims who either witness or experience violence and abuse at home or who in their teens can experience it in their own intimate relationships. Education and other youth services are a long way from being able to deal with this, both in terms of the immediate service response but also in terms of building preventative messages into their teaching on sex, health, relationships etc.

Prevention work is the key to all of this, to prevent another generation of victims and abusers, but it is poorly funded (as is the whole violence against women sector) and not high enough on the political agenda. Until we get that bit right, we will still be debating service shortfalls in twenty years time. We need to get the service response right today, but also plan for tomorrow too, and work hard to help stat and vol orgs to prevent violence against women as well as helping those who suffer it.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Kymberly](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 25, 2008 09:53PM

[u][/u]

Quote:

Lady Portia

My friend came forward for help only to have the SS remove her children. Then they gave the abuser residence even though he had a conviction and was a known paedophile.

She has had to live with that for many years.

So now, children are adult and guess what- these young men think abusing others is normal.

So, the system has allowed the abuse to continue to the next generation.

Best interst of the children and the abused??

I have studied the paperwork and it was all a set up.

The solicitors involved just made their deals in little rooms.

We now know how this works.

Solicitors play abuser against abused.

Support Abuser.

They know the abused will fight for justice, so they keep it going and line their pockets from our misery.

I have studied many cases and the pattern is always the same.

Sad but true.

This posting has been edited to protect the privacy of the poster.

I too suffered dv, i feel to the fact that my brother used to sexually assault me!!! I have siblings now and am so so scared of men getting close to us in fear of history repeating itself..... If you love your children you really need to get them out of his care, I really do feel afraid for them!!!

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:26:13:20:47 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Northampton Women](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 04:16PM

There is a big shortfall in resources for tackling domestic violence. There is a particular lack of funding for training front line staff in all agencies to identify domestic violence and support victims.

there is also a need for more co-ordination and awareness. There is a need for co-ordination in referrals. At present there is a silo mentality towards delivering services for domestic violence victims, whereas most people need the support of a number of different agencies.

There are also some very important gaps, for example for

- * children who have witnesses or experienced domestic violence
- * perpetrators aged under 18.
- * more co-ordination between domestic violence agencies and substance abuse agencies - there is only one refuge for women with substance abuse problems, and that is in Northamptonshire.
- * Women with no recourse to public funds - this is a particular problem for Somali women, some of whom are very vulnerable and very isolated.
- * more services for male victims of domestic violence, who are on the increase. There is no provision locally for these.
- * services for domestic violence with disabilities, especially in the area of mental health.
- * More work with perpetrators.

Northampton courts have a fast track system for domestic violence, rather than special courts. It takes 75 days from arrest to sentence, and that is a system that seems to be working well.

A lot of prisoners have been victims of domestic violence, and there is a need for more funding for work in prisons. At present there is good work being undertaken in Wellingborough prison.

Another area that has emerged recently that there is insufficient knowledge or support for is the position of multiple wives, where the women are very vulnerable.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 10:03PM

I speak for my murdered sister and nephew. At a conference today I was reminded that the judiciary was independent. We had been discussing the problems of judges in the higher courts (magistrates are getting training and SDVC's etc) still taking extraordinary decisions and making remarks which betray an ignorance of the nature and dynamics of domestic abuse. Their being independent mustn't serve as a barrier. The damage done by some judges is greater than the effort required to change their behaviour and knowledge. We must try to change this or we accept that any aspirations to equality of treatment and appropriate judgement will remain as aspirations.

We could start by inviting judges and coroners to observe MARAC's. This would build up knowledge of risk. We should also invite them to Homicide Reviews. These are not yet law (but in 2004 Act) but are happening. These should have an ameliorative approach. We are still engaged in a process which we hope will lead to the relevant Coroner being invited to contribute to the Homicide Review into my sister's and nephew's murders. These reviews can benefit from:

- Real attempts by reviewers to see what happened through the victims' eyes
- Having family and friend involvement
- Setting excellent standards of communication with victims' friends and families
- Drawing widely from agency and community players in order to capture any new insights into how to prevent these deaths
- Being open, comprehensive, detailed and challenging
- Having victim experience represented

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 10:12PM

When police flag an address they should ask the victim to call the station from their mobile and landline and make sure both are capable of being recognised on the police systems.

Chief Constables must meet families of individuals murdered on their patch where contact has existed with the police force she or he heads up.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [dot.com](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 27, 2008 11:16AM

Quote:

anna

I finally divorced the ex-husband in 2003. It was an acrimonious and difficult divorce in which he really showed his true colours by assaulting our daughter and myself. At one stage I was in fear of my life. He almost made us bankrupt and I had to open a bank account and sweep all our dd's for mortgage etc and took sole responsibility for paying them. He stole my cash card but when I went to the Police they just said to "order another". I was referred to our local dvu and although they were good to talk to, they didn't really do much or were very helpful e.g. they advised me to go to a refuge with my daughter. How could I do that when I had sole responsibility to pay all the bills on the home. Why wasn't he arrested? so that my and my daughter could be safe. After the divorce he told me that he would take our daughter off me, he also told mutual friends that he would take our daughter off me, he then started to poison our daughter's mind about me, he abducted her forcing me to start a costly residency case. This was the most horrendous part, far worse than the divorce. Social Services did nothing to help my daughter, The school nurse referred her to CAMHS and they did not even acknowledge the referral. Social Services simply said it is a civil matter! CAFCASS, well at one point CAFCASS officer was actually writing about another person in one of her reports about me. I asked for a change in CAFCASS officer and got one with about the same intelligence as the 1st one. All the professionals involved in the residency case knew about that man's violence, his motive for wanting our daughter (money, control, power), they even had written proof from a psychologist, school statements, police logs from dvu and they made a joint residency order. They actually put her back in the situation that I got us out of. Today, I haven't seen my daughter for over a year, apart from a brief glimpse. He breaches the court order everyday and I am about to lose everything to pay CSA. Unfortunately the CSA does not go far enough to ensure the child gets the money. I wrote to the judge about the breach of court order, and she simply replied "seek legal representation and re-open the case" Errr.... what with. So you see, in my experience nobody helped us, nobody is interested in the continuing domestic violence that this man continues to inflict on me and my daughter. Who will pick up the pieces for her, she is so psychologically scarred now, and me.... well I currently write this because I am off sick from work. My daughter and me do not have bruises or marks for people to see but we are extremely damaged psychologically. I will never be the same again. I have lost my most loved, cherished daughter because the system has let us down. And him., well he abuses us on a daily basis and there does not appear to be anything or anyone willing to help people like me and my daughter. This posting has been amended to protect the privacy of the poster.

Message from Dot.com

I was happily married for many years to a serving police officer. He drank heavily and suffered from depression, he then started to spend money erratically, ran up huge debts and after striking my child, I then found him in bed with someone. Upon starting divorce proceedings I discovered that he had contacted solicitors several months prior. During mediation he had to be contained in a room for me to get away from the premises. CAFCASS placed us both together in a room which I felt was insensitive but I was thrown back into the intimidation which I was trying to escape from. Inspite of many independent witness statements of his violence towards myself and my child during the court hearings, the court was notified that the Police had deemed no action required on the assault upon myself without even contacting or interviewing me. The court subsequently ordered my children to see him on a regular basis. I was thrown around on one of the pick up meetings in front of the children. Everything has been completely biased towards my husband and the system has not taken into account the responsibilities I have for providing stability, care and financial support for my children. Why does he only have to provide 20% of his income for maintenance. He earns twice as much as I do and all of my

salary goes towards meeting our needs on a day to day basis. He is having expensive holidays and two properties whilst we are struggling to pay the bills. How can that possibly be fair?

To this day I wonder whether friends in the police covered up for him. Since the divorce he has breached the court order with regards to house and finances. It is at my expense that I am now having to return to the courts to insist upon compliance with the court order. He is still verbally abusing me and has assaulted me more than once since decree nisi... He has been using the knowledge of his police role to circulate vast inaccuracies with the sole purpose of isolating me and intimidating me. If the police cannot be trusted who can we turn to for help. Having reviewed the Assistant Chief Constables Forum (ACPO) they apparently are cracking down on Domestic Violence from my experience they should start by putting their own house in order first!!!!

The system does not protect the children in my experience, I have been lucky to get them support and help from a local charity project and the children are now doing well- I am very proud of them but they should never have been placed in this position in the first place. We have all been badly let down by the court system who seem to think that a police officer would never do such a thing! I am determined to survive, it has been years of hell and we are still not at the end of matters .In fact I am concerned as to what the court will do next but I have no choice other than going back through the court to get the financial matters resolved - are they going to let my family down again? The one good thing is that the children have said they were there, they know what it was like at the time ,but it is difficult to get them to believe in a system that has let us all down so badly.

Having experienced many kinds of abuse the physical abuse is horrible but the verbal and emotional abuse are far worse- no one sees that and often people think you are the one with the problem not the abuser. The emotional abuse goes on for a long time and believe me thats what you need help with. sadly there is not a lot of support out there. I would happily deliver a presentation to any government committee to put across the problems encountered - come on this is a major issue which needs to be addressed!!!!

Refuge have been stating the case for long enough it is about time someone in government "grasps the nettle" and gives families the protection they deserve!

This posting has been edited to protect the privacy of the poster.
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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [victim](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 27, 2008 01:51PM

AFTER REPORTING AN DOMESTIC INCIDENT TO THE POLICE AND FROM FEAR WITHDRAWING COMPLAINT. THE ANSWER GIVEN BY AN OFFICER WAS THAT THE DOMESTIC UNIT WILL BE IN TOUCH TO MAKE SURE THE WELFARE OF THE DV VICTIM IS SAFE. NOT HEARD SINCE NOW WHAT KIND OF HELP ARE VICTIMS GETTING AND THE GOVERNMENT ARE DOING NOTHING TO TACKLE THIS. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS EXPERIENCED IN NEARLY EVERY HOME AND EVERY FORM YOU NAME IT THEN WHY IS NOTHING BEING DONE? IT IS PHYSICAL, VERBAL, MENTAL, EMOTIONAL AND SEXUAL. I WOULD LIKE TO SEE STRICTER LEGISLATION/LAWS PROTECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS WHATHER THEY WERE MARRIED HERE OR ABROAD AND IF COMPLAINTS ARE WITHDRAWN BECAUSE OF FEAR ETC THEN THE HELP SHOULD CONTINUE FOR VICTIMS AS VICTIMS NEED TO KNOW SOMEONE IS LOOKING OUT FOR THEM AND THE ABUSER THAT IS LIVING WITH THE VICTIM WOULD KNOW THAT HELP IS THERE SO THEY WOULD THINK TWICE BUT AN ABUSER IS NO DIFFERENT THEN A BULLY.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [NSPCC Children's Services Manager](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 27, 2008 03:02PM

I'd say that there's an absolute lack of therapeutic services for all children around issues of domestic violence-that's within the statutory sector and the voluntary sector as well

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [NSPCC Children's Services Manager](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 27, 2008 03:06PM

The majority of refuges don't have domestic violence workers purely for children. If a refuge can access a local service, and refuges do try very hard...there just isn't enough provision for children at all.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Harrison](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 27, 2008 03:49PM

My experience whilst I was living in Yorkshire was a very positive one in relation to the support I received from the Domestic Violence and Accommodation Project (DVAP). My DVAP worker was always at the end of a telephone and the visits I received were regular and extremely supportive. I was given support during my divorce proceedings and I went on several of the courses that were available that allowed me to meet up with others who had or were experiencing similar situations. The support, friendship and confidence from meeting with the course facilitators and the other ladies gave me the opportunity to start to build relationships with others again. I am sure that for many people in such situations isolation is a common problem. The alarms that were fitted to my home had a profound effect in making the children and myself feel secure whilst at home. The only negative experience I had was in relation to the Judge in my court proceedings. Unfortunately I found him to be judgemental, rude and dismissive and I struggled to maintain my confidence as a result. Perhaps some judges could be aware of the importance of approaching individuals in a more sensitive manner as many of us do not necessarily want to feel humiliated yet again.

I am presently studying at a local university despite being a 'very mature' student and I hope that one day I can help other women and men who may need support in the future.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [lauren](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 28, 2008 11:00PM

Unfortunately i've found myself in a very similiar situation and have only spoke in depth to close ones and relatives. I married my ex-husband the same year I met him then became pregnant shortly after. He was physically and mentally abusive - pulling my hair, strangling me, pushing me, grabiing at my face and neck, locking me in the house and throwing me out of the house at all times during the evening. I was unable to see friends or family especially my parents {whom may i add are lovely people}. I never contacted

the public services available to dv I WAS TOO SCARED. My son was delivered nearly 7 weeks early due to high blood pressure I was so ill that I couldn't see him for 3 days. Finally how I don't know but I manage to build my confidence move away and keep him away. My son of course didn't remember any of this as he was three when we left. My ex's visits in the first year were very sporadic nearly always abusive. Then he decides to stop contact altogether leaving me to explain to my then 5yr old that I didn't know where his father was. I meet a lovely man and move in with him. nine months on out of the blue his father wants contact. I want consistency therefore a contact order is drawn up. I have not a problem with visits at this point as my ex showed no signs of being abusive towards him I didn't feel that I had a right to refuse access. That court order was April 07 this last month my son has informed me of his father grabbing his face so hard that he began to cry my ex also calls me to my son, my son is too scared to say anything back to him - why should he have to defend himself at age 8yrs?. Cafcass are now involved last week we attended a meeting and thoughts and feelings for my son who said he did not want to see his father who scares him the judge has ignored this and wants all of us to attend a meeting -dispute resolution. Does this judge have sawdust for brains he isn't listening, nobody is listening to my son or me, the only proof I have of my ex husband's dv is one police log ! Why is the assault on my child not important as it is a 'first incident' I'm in utter disbelief of the whole situation and I know now what the judges outcome will be {I can just see my ex's smirk as he realises that he's got away with the abuse yet again.} Well I will not send my son out of the door crying on day of collection I am not able to do this, I removed myself from this violent man now I will have to remove my son with no help from the authorities! why is the law not on my side? but on the abuser's side...

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Concerned](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 10:28AM

Quote:

billo786

The answer to the above question is no....there is support out there....being let down by the immigration system, social services and others.
I had a arranged marriage. I was beaten daily. My husband was a student and wanted to marry a British Girl so he could get his British Passport after he received his indefinite stay...I was beaten, I blamed myself and tried many times to commit suicide, cutting my wrist, making myself sick after eating. The police was involved but at no point was he arrested, no one from social services or domestic services visited me. I received threats daily and after informing the police I was told until my husband actually tries something they can not do anything....My mental health deteriorated and I started to have conversations with myself. Anyway it took me many years to get over my experiences but now my sister who also has had an arranged marriage is going through the same experience....where is the justice in the immigration law. We have written many letters to the home office, informing them that guys from asian countries only come to uk as a student or a visitor so they can marry British Girls and turn British then use the welfare system and bring the rest of their family over. Now my sister is at risk, Her husband has threatened her and knows where she lives. After several years she is still living in the temporary accommodation, where is the help with the housing system....will her husband have to kill her until something is done about it....where is the police....why don't they send him back to his home country....so who wins....these guys from abroad....who loses us innocent born British girls.

I think there is a let down in all these systems, people are scared because as soon as Social services get involved they take the children off you so again you lose out so people don't want them to get involved.

How can one change the immigration law?

This posting has been amended to protect the privacy of the poster.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Concerned](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 11:12AM

This whole issue is very distressing and complicated and there are so many victims so I don't want to sound callous or unsympathetic. Clearly all the victims of domestic violence and forced marriages deserve a proper response from public bodies. But most of these victims at least have the ability to speak English, are British and know their rights (even if they cannot actually exercise them).

From my experience as someone from a Pakistani background who has seen abuses happen in the wider family, and has been left to help the victim in one such situation to pick up the pieces, I would say that one particular type of victim who does not get much attention is the wife who has come from, say, Pakistan on a spouse visa.

Most of the time, such women have very little education, no independent means and no experience whatsoever of how to live in this country. They are completely at the mercy of their in-laws. Whilst they are on they probationary leave their status in this country, in practice, is also very much at the whim of their in laws as well. I would say that this is one of the most vulnerable if not the most vulnerable group. However, in my view because they are immigrants, I think this is one of the groups that receives the least sympathy and attention - such women are in fact invisible.

I know that there is a concession in the Immigration Rules for such women to claim permanent residency on the basis of their domestic violence. However the Home Office still insists on a level of evidence that is virtually impossible for the type of victim I describe above to obtain. Such applications seem to take a very long time to process and victims often have to go to the courts to reverse the Home Office decision (from what I know, the courts take a more realistic approach to the type of evidence required to 'prove' you are a victim - however the 'limbo' in such situations is long and takes its toll on women who are already considered by their families etc 'back home' to have brought shame and dishonour by walking out or complaining).

In my view, this is a regrettable instance of the Home Office playing politics on a vulnerable group. They need to be seen as tough on all immigrants generally, so they leave it to the courts to reverse legally 'dodgy' decisions.

The other crucial factor from what I have seen of all the instances of women who have successfully escaped from such abusive relationships is that they have been fortunate enough to have had the assistance of someone who has some experience of how things work in this country. Women who do not have this assistance go on suffering for many years and the abuse might be getting worse - this is the most vulnerable group.

I know this, because in my wider family (with which I don't have any contact) I have heard of a case in which the wife, brought over from Pakistan, lived here for about 10 years, had (I think) three children, during that period still remained on a Pakistani passport, no attempt was made to secure her a permanent visa (or indeed offer her an education etc) and as I understand it, some years ago she was taken to Pakistan by her husband who simply left her there. She has never returned, she has simply 'disappeared' from this country. Her children are grown up - but I don't know what has happened to their mother, except that she has rights in this country to access her children and property and also to live which she is being denied because her family (I presume) feels shame and she herself is not able to raise her voice or exercise her rights. In the past when other concerned members of the family have tried contacting social services etc they have been told that it is for the mother to get in touch.

I am sure given how easy it is in such cases to simply make a foreign national 'disappear', this is not the first and only case of such a 'disappearance'. The government should look into this issue as well. This strikes me as a completely ignored abuse of perhaps the most vulnerable group of victims.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [lis7901](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 11:15AM

After getting out of my relationship, it has taken 2 years to finally feel safe. That was until the CSA mistakenly told my ex of my new address. It makes me angry that the safety of myself and my children has been put in jeopardy again, through no fault of our own. The help i received from the DV unit and womens refuge outreach has been very good and supportive, which had allowed us to almost get back to normal. I still think that more help could be offered, with regards to help with housing(being moved if neccesary) and more sensitivity be used whilst in court, dealing with DV matters. But even though there is now a drive to help victims of DV, why are some services being closed down?? I was told yesterday that the outreach project in my area was being stopped, which means unless you go into a refuge, you will be turned away!!

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Frances](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 11:17AM

My daughter who has a visual disability was the victim of a very serious assault by her ex-boyfriend last year. The response that she received and we as a family received was totally inadequate and there was a catalogue of errors from start to finish. The police response was that they were more interested in getting a statement than taking any steps to make sure that everyone was safe and this appeared to us to be an attempt not to have to do anything; they were meant to have made sure that the property where the assault took place was safe for our daughter to return to to collect some belongings that night and upon returning to the property we found that a window had been left open; the perpetrator was released that night and within 24 hours had assaulted another former partner; and the police went to the address of a key witness who was a member of the public in the middle of the night thinking that this was the perpetrator's address. The Crown Prosecution Service barristers were ill-prepared and a trial date was set for days when the key witnesses had said that they were unavailable. There was little coordination between witness care and other agencies with information that had been given to them not being passed on. Victim Support were more interested in how my daughter felt rather than anything practical. My wife and I had to basically take on the coordination of the whole process and without us doing so we do not see how there would have been a successful prosecution and conviction which was thankfully the outcome when the case did eventually come to court. The perpetrator did plead guilty due to the number of witnesses with full acceptance of the facts but even at the court session for the sentencing the probation service attempted to convince the judge that he was a low risk despite his history. He had been out on license when the assault on my daughter took place so it was known that he has assaulted at least three women. Thankfully the judge took a different view and he received a 30 month sentence with a two year extended sentence. It was fortunate that our daughter was able to move back in with us but it has meant that she has had to give up her home and will ultimately have to move away from an area that she knows but unfortunately is known in and therefore not safe for her as a woman with a visual impairment. My wife and I are aware that we might also have to move for our own safety as our address is also known. The experience for the family has been very distressing and stressful as we have had to cope with the direct affect of the assault-- physical injuries, frequent nightmares, being scared when going out alone etc but we have had to contend with the inadequacies of the legal system. The whole experience has totally undermined my confidence in the legal system and that women and girls will be protected.

The last week has seen three men convicted for the murders and serious violent assaults on a number of women. These men had all violently assaulted former partners. I have to wonder whether if there had been a better coordinated response to domestic violence that these women would have felt confident enough to have contacted whether a number of these young women would still be alive today.

In terms of the services meeting the needs of the victims of domestic violence a group that does not appear to have received the attention they deserve are children where it is now recognised in child protection procedures that they will have experienced significant harm by seeing or hearing domestic violence. From my professional perspective I can see this in the correlation between a number of children who have difficulties at school and domestic violence. This can be seen in their behaviour generally, a noticeable change in their behaviour following contact with their violent father, the number of children with speech and language difficulties, the number of children who are diagnosed as having ADHD which may well be their response to having been exposed to domestic violence and the children identified as having special educational needs and/or receiving a statement of special educational needs.

I am aware that the present government has passed legislation in relation to domestic violence and I welcome the opportunity to contribute to a select committee. As the father of a daughter who has been the victim of domestic violence I would like to see a fully funded coordinated response so that the victims are able to access appropriate services including the response of the criminal justice system.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [NormalFather](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 12:49PM

Having looked at the whole area of DV/DA and having suffered myself I am working on Piloting an Integrated Family Centre which will serve men, women & children and provide a one stop access to support and services for Early Intervention & Crisis Management as well as education and prevention involving a people based community village model.

The Core Service will deal with all types of family crisis from breakup, child contact & DV/DA without the politics.

The current gaps are unacceptable as they do not address issues in real time.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 12:59PM

Young people do not have many services to help them. My nephew was murdered at the age of 17. Who could he go to about his fears? Who would detect what his fears meant for risk? How can schools be best set up to provide a telling intervention? How can they be set up to be institutions that young people can share fears with?

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [NormalFather](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 01:19PM

Quote:

Lana

I hope that the Government are aware that now, in many divorces, especially in custody battles, violent, abusive fathers who apply for custody of the children obtain it hands down as, apparently, "their behaviour is the past" or "he beat up the mother, not the children". Even

medical evidence for injuries that the battered mothers sustained is, according to many mothers, ignored and abusive men are obtaining custody even of the tiniest of children. Judiciary is separate from the Government, but that does not mean that this misogynistic conduct of some court workers should not be stopped! Children also, officially, on paper, have their rights under the UN Convention, yet they have no say in the proceedings that influence and scar their entire lives!

The same goes for Violent and Abusive Mothers, the need to look at who commits the crime not the gender. Violence and abuse needs to be taken out of Gender Politics it damages children! The Violent and Abusive are also very good liars and these are a minority not a majority of people both victims and perps can be men and women and Children, the problem would seem to be only a question of degree and due to its massive prevalence, we are talking millions of people how it is stopped and handled, you cannot lock up millions of men or women. The only rational response is intervention for change whilst protecting those suffering, the violent tend to repeat and the common fact is vast majority of perps were abused themselves in childhood.

Abuse of children is actually mostly committed by women 62% and only 8% by natural fathers (NSPCC Stats) so gender blaming is not a good argument, abusers are mainly also previous victims early in life, so we need to address the realities of all forms of violence/abuse in the home, unfortunately none of us have a monopoly on suffering and the whole system to deal with it is inadequate and failing everyone!

My story is very much the same as yours only I am male.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 01:52PM

Although multi agency approaches are clearly very effective I want to concentrate on the police as that is where my experience lies.

1. All police forces must know what to do when domestic abuse is reported.
2. All officers must recognise that emotional/psychological/financial abuse requires a total response too.
3. All officers must recognise that sexual abuse is abuse too (some officers are just looking for black eyes).
4. Officers with specialist roles, say DV co-ordinator, must be reminded that their responsibilities as a police officer are not removed because they have taken on the specialist role.
5. Intrusive supervision must work both ways. Officers must tell senior officers if they think danger is about to visit a member of the public.
6. Officers must investigate reports of crime and take them seriously
7. Officers applying to join domestic abuse units must declare if they have committed domestic abuse. This won't stop lying but it will make their removal from office easier if they are shown to have lied.
8. DV units must be joined up with CID sharing information safely and intelligently designed to ensure dynamic risk assessments are timely.
9. Police record keeping needs to improve. Often it is the cumulative history that enables others to identify risk.
10. Police officers volunteer to join. I pay tribute to those who do their job properly for their public service and particularly to those who have died or been injured while attempting to save the public. I ask all police officers who don't know how to do their job to seek training. I ask those who don't wish to do their job properly to resign.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:24PM

There is wide disparity in provision of informed and responsive services for DV survivors. Front line police officers tend to be young and not well trained, particularly when it comes to risk assessment. However specialist DV officers are on the whole well trained and great support. CAFCASS and social services seem to have little or no insight into DV and these services in my experience add to the feeling of abuse I and my children still suffer. They are ill resourced and ill informed and should all have specialist staff to deal with DV. My ex was stopped from even writing to my elder daughter as a psychiatrist stated he wrote 'seductive' letters to her and was like the protagonist in Lolita. However, the CAFCASS officer did not take this into account and my younger child has had a five year unsupervised relationship with her father. She returns home upset at having been denied her own bed and having witnessed severe domestic abuse of her new stepmother who has been thrown down stairs and kicked while pregnant. My local social services regard me as implacably hostile to contact, which of course is true given the history of this man and what my child is telling me, so refuse to work to support myself and my child from this violent man whom my daughter has no desire to see. CAFCASS reports are worthless unless the information put within them is checked. My former husband told lie after lie and the report is still used five years later as if fact because written by a CAFCASS officer. This should cease. My case was co-worked by two officers, the female of which was threatened by my ex husband. Her male colleague who was seen out socially on a Sunday with my ex and admitted that saying he was advising him on a legal issue, failed to put into the report he submitted what had occurred with his co-worker. I eventually out of frustration tape recorded the woman admitting she had been threatened, and when I offered this to CAFCASS management they reacted angrily telling me I had no grounds for complaint as had acted in an underhand manner. What the hell is one to do when being told to hand a very young child over to a violent man who has attacked her already for unsupervised contact? Surely the full facts should have been presented to the court? Children who have survived DV are offered little in the way of specialist services - locally they are only available to children in refuges. My daughters have been ignored by CAFCASS and social workers as it is felt they are so well spoken that they may have been coached by me. My elder child is in fact of gifted and talented status and has been privately educated, so i would be disappointed had she been unable to communicate clearly. She feels personally ignored and guilty that she has been unable to protect her sister from experiencing DV as she did. Her whole life has been blighted as even after leaving the relationship we have been abused via the contact this violent man has with the other child. She cries and says she wishes she could be allowed to forget him. Please, services for and belief in children should be top priority, and stop putting fathers rights top of the agenda, but protect the mums and kids instead, otherwise you build a new generation of damaged people. Finally, Family Courts. Stop the secrecy first and foremost. Secondly, lets have specialist judges with deep working knowledge of DV. The magistrates courts locally now hold specialist DV court hearings, so there should be no reason FAmily Courts could not follow suit. The judge who heard my case did not protect my little daughter as his thinking was this: I was abused as a child, and this was accepted. However, the judge held the opinion that those abused as children cannot be abused as adults as they would be "hypervigilant" and avoid any abusive situation in the future. Thus I was a liar in my allegations against my husband and even the medical evidence was just swept aside. I was treated terribly by the court, called names such as manipulative, and have spent every penny I ever earned on trying to protect my five year old. How can this be right, that we have lost everything? THe Home Office told me I am unable to challenge the views held by the judge although all research has found that people live what they know, and abused children are highly likely to enter abusive relationships as adults. Meanwhile my ex husband has been given carte blanche to continue his anti social and abusive behaviour. His new wife was procured via the internet from Russia and is very young and unable to stand up for herself in the face of his violence. He has never paid maintenance although his business advertises [on commercial television] and turns over millions, owns many properties, fancy cars etc. His businesses break many laws and have even caused a death which made headline news. His ego grows by the day and he becomes more and more dangerous, and my little girl may now be forced against her wishes to live with him full time. No-one protects the innocents and money and power speak volumes once you get down to grass roots. I fear our family will become a tragedy of national significance and only then will anyone listen.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:26PM

I would be grateful for anonymity for obvious reasons; I believe that things have improved dramatically over the last 2/3 years for victims of domestic violence. I reported an incident myself 4 yrs ago. I had been a victim of violence and had to leave my nice home, my cars, all my belongings and a life which had taken me 25 years to build, but I was lucky enough to be given local authority housing as I was classed as homeless. My husband found out where I was living and was at the house, issuing threats to kill. I called the police, who eventually came but stood in my living room and said "what do you want us to do about it". I was frightened and felt very alone and fled many miles away to a relative. The threats continued, and my car was damaged to the tune of over £2k deliberately, but because he'd left a note apologising the police said they could do nothing. He then started to follow me and would sit outside my place of work to intimidate me. I eventually had to call 999 and was lucky enough to get a police officer who cared. To cut a long story short, the **CPS took my case seriously** and 6 months later he was arrested and taken to court where he received a suspended sentence for threats to kill. I was lucky. I have heard recently that many women **have to take out 'civil' cases which they have to fund themselves** in order to get restraining orders. DV is now a government and police priority. There are still far too many obstacles in the way. Often, victims think it is simply easier to remain in a violent relationship than to jump through so many hoops to get the help they need.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:28PM

I had hurriedly posted my comments as the consultation is due to close, but because of the ongoing abuse surrounding child contact in my case, I have been struggling recently and so as with many things this got left until almost too late. Having posted my comments I have now taken the trouble to read remarks posted by others in the last few weeks. I have gone from feeling alone and close to suicide over the danger my five year old daughter faces from her 'Dad' who spits in her face and beats his new wife in front of her, to pretty much now being over the edge. It is one thing to feel this is just about you, your family, your ex, your kids, your CAFCASS officer, your social workers, your judge. However, to see this repeated again and again from all corners of this country is devastating. While it is about me I can tell myself that I just don't speak well enough, or I am too well spoken, or I didn't dress right, or I don't fit a stereotype. To think all of those things gives me at least some feeling of my fate being in my own hands, and terrible as things are if I try harder I could resolve them, it's just a matter of finding the key. But reading all those other stories which are carbon copies of my own nightmare experience, I feel without hope and I cannot fight my way through this any more. Why is the system allowed to heap abuse on the abused? IF MY MP OR ANYONE READING THIS CAN HELP ME PLEASE GET IN TOUCH. PLEASE LISTEN. MY CHILDREN AND I CAN TAKE NO MORE AND THERE IS NO QUALITY OF LIFE FOR US ANY MORE.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:47PM

This is not a straightforward YES or NO, every victim has her/his personal experience, in inner cities more likely to find agencies like CAB, Shelter, the Police, advice is given, how helpful this is depends on accessibility of provision and availability. Often victims have said they are referred on to the local housing departments and have to go through rigorous investigations, in counties like Hertfordshire, there is a mechanism in place, a partnership of agencies working together to raise awareness of DV and assist offenders who carry out DV. All women from any background goes through a harrowing experience trying to find help, United Kingdom Asian Women's Association a voluntary organisation advises and supports women from Bme and Muslim background, support is not there for these women, they face language barriers, lack of awareness of services, their rights and entitlements of benefits, their housing rights and lack of confidence and shame to come forward that they are in a violent relationship. The fault is felt by the woman. The UK Asian Women's Association helps women via a telephone service, refer them to agencies, will represent and advocate, if needs be will accompany the victim to any where in the country for safety and assist the victim and liaise with agencies. Its 4 branches, in Birmingham, N.London, S.London and Hertfordshire do their best but help depends on the person at the desk on the day the victim arrives for assistance and how well the victim can speak or how well the advocate can represent. UKAWA can confidently say that it does help as a voluntary organisation but public sector help depends on their resources.

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:52PM



I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has participated in the Online Discussion. It is very important that we hear people's views in order to better represent them. I would also like to thank my colleagues, staff, special advisors and all the organisations supporting this consultation.

As ever I am very committed to making a real difference but this cannot be realised without continuous support and contributions from those affected.

Once again, thank you very much for all your assistance with this Consultation.

Margaret Moran MP

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Re: Do victims of domestic violence receive the support they need from public and voluntary sector organisations?

Posted by: [DVProfessional](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 05:12PM

Quote:

anonymous

I had hurriedly posted my comments as the consultation is due to close, but because of the ongoing abuse surrounding child contact in my case, I have been struggling recently and so as with many things this got left until almost too late. Having posted my comments I have now taken the trouble to read remarks posted by others in the last few weeks. I have gone from feeling alone and close to suicide over the danger my five year old daughter faces from her 'Dad' who spits in her face and beats his new wife in front of her, to pretty much now being over the edge. It is one thing to feel this is just about you, your family, your ex, your kids, your CAFCASS officer, your social workers, your judge. However, to see this repeated again and again from all corners of this country is devastating. While it is about me I can tell myself that I just don't speak well enough, or I am too well spoken, or I didn't dress right, or I don't fit a stereotype. To think all of those things gives me at least some feeling of my fate being in my

own hands, and terrible as things are if I try harder I could resolve them, it's just a matter of finding the key. But reading all those other stories which are carbon copies of my own nightmare experience, I feel without hope and I cannot fight my way through this any more. Why is the system allowed to heap abuse on the abused? IF MY MP OR ANYONE READING THIS CAN HELP ME PLEASE GET IN TOUCH. PLEASE LISTEN. MY CHILDREN AND I CAN TAKE NO MORE AND THERE IS NO QUALITY OF LIFE FOR US ANY MORE.

This posting has been edited to protect the privacy of the poster.

It is heartbreaking to hear how desperate you feel! Please, please don't feel that you are alone or that it isn't possible for things to change for you and for your children. I urge you to call the National Domestic Violence Helpline for advice and support and to talk through your options with trained professionals: 0808 2000 247.

You should also contact The Rights of Women, a voluntary women's organisation who aim to educate and empower women about their legal rights: 0207 251 6577 or www.rightsofwomen.org.uk.

For details of local services, contact the Domestic Violence co-ordinator though your local Council.

This site also contains details of other advice and support agencies, under the page called 'Get Help Now'.

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Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 18, 2008 05:18PM

In replying you may wish to comment on one or more of the following areas:

- the role of education and other agencies in early identification and prevention for those at risk of forced marriage
- how well support agencies address the specific needs of victims of forced marriages
- whether available support services meet the needs of all individuals and communities who may be affected
- barriers to seeking support
- how victims can be best helped to rebuild their lives and the forms of support that are most helpful
- who you have felt most comfortable approaching for support and why
- how effectively the police and courts deal with cases of forced marriage
- gaps in provision of support

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Hellraiser](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 01:36PM

The education system should report girls and boys that have been removed from schools immediatley, they are aware of the situation, of girls and boys being removed for some time then coming back into the system to continue their education they know what is going on and that it is child abuse, and against the law, this should be the first port of call for joined up working, with othet agencies.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [amosemper](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 03:32PM

There may be adequate services but there is not adequate awareness. This should be taught in schools (in sociology, religious studies, PSHE and sex education (Sex Ed we should have the right to who we have a sexual relationship with)).

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Sally](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 28, 2008 11:53PM

I think the question should be, is there adequate awareness within the communities in which force marriage happens. The services are aware of forced marriage and the police are most escapees first port of call and they are aware of forced marriage policies however, who is educating the communities in which forced marriage is not thought of as a 'wrong doing'. You can't tackle an issue without putting preventative measures in place and I think its time to start educating the root cause.

I was forced into a marriage but my parents did not think it was wrong, they thought it was the right thing to do. So how are we going to educate people like my parents, how are we going to rewrite rules which have been in place for hundreds of years..... thats what we should be thinking.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [billo786](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 29, 2008 11:23AM

As an asian i think it needs to be tackled at the root and no that is not reporting it from school but to talk to the imaan at the mosque. All asian parents go to the mosque and some do get pumped by other elders so if the mosque is addressed then maybe the parents could see it differently.

Forced marraiges are no islamic but culturally and it will keep going on until parents are talked sense into and that would be to get other Asian support workers to go out and talk to parents informing them abou the law and other concerns.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [christmas](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 30, 2008 10:08AM

Your bullet points miss the point completely. It is about changing attitudes and beliefs within these communities. Without tackling this then we will always be reactive to the problem rather than preventing it from happening in the first place. Womens groups need to work with the Immams and together they can influence and change the views of families that this is acceptable. Having posters up on mosque notice boards, in community centres and asian business premises, saying that this is wrong will help. Education systems and teachers actually raising this issue with parents and finding out their attitudes towards the children may help.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Margaret Moran MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 03:12PM



My office runs an FM project as there is nowhere else safe to do so. We have worked to influence young men and women from the community to act as ambassadors and have done a report. Now the money has run out, which I think is typical of the problem. We have tried to influence imams but bar one, all are reluctant to get involved: they too fear causing offence in thier communities, who after all fund them. So all ideas are welcome. We have been discussing setting up an online helpline so that those affected by FM and so called honour kilings can get help and support, and support each other. What does anyone think of this idea?

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:01:11:24:01 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Skywalker](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 06:37PM

I lived opposite a family with several daughters, all of whom were sent overseas to be married. I was very concerned for these children but there was no-one I could tell. So no.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Trish](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 04:46PM

Far more training needed for those that may encounter this issue; schools, youth activities, etc. Forced Marriage Unit needs to be far more widely publicised.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [ict1921](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 02, 2008 11:38AM

As an inner-London teacher, working in Tower Hamlets, I am very concerned about the issue of forced marriages, especially amongst the Yr12-13 group (6th form). My comments are specifically in response to my experiences of teaching young Bengali women.

Firstly, my experience is that there is a strong feeling of "acceptance" of the tradition of arranged (and if necessary forced) marriage amongst young women. Some young women do not see any alternative. We have to decide as a society whether we want to continue to allow traditions like arranged marriage to continue or whether we want to deter it in line with the traditionally liberal views of British society.

I believe that arranged marriage is not acceptable unless it is entirely at the agreement of the parties involved. Even then we have to ensure the arrangement is for acceptable reasons.

I recently had a 16 year old student who left the school and accepted an arranged marriage as an alternative to unemployment as she was borderline special needs and had no real qualifications. This is a failure of the educational system to provide a pathway for a vulnerable group of young women. We need to legally raise the age of marriage to 18 in the UK in order to keep young people like this in education, and therefore away from the pressure of marriage until they have matured further.

Of my current sixth form group, I am likely to lose 2-3 young women at the end of Year 12 to arranged marriage. In all cases they do not understand that as a British citizen they do not have to agree to such an arrangement and that they have the right to turn it down.

When challenged about improving their education, especially their written and spoken English which in many cases is very poor, they point out that they do not need these skills to be a housewife.

The concept of deciding the most important decision in one's lifetime for themselves is one which simply does not occur to them. As educators we have to do more to help young people realise their life choices.

The point I am getting to is this: we do not have adequate educational programs in place to ensure that young citizens of recent immigrant families understand their rights in our society. These children may hold British passports but they are still living in their country of origin as far as their perception of rights and responsibilities are concerned.

We must replace the existing PHSE program in schools with a program on Citizenship. In fact, I would ideally like to see all students sit a compulsory GCSE on Citizenship in which a whole broad range of issues are discussed and their rights and responsibilities are understood.

Bottom line, though, we have to decide whether as a society we are willing to tolerate this practise and possibly bring in laws as well as educational reforms to deal with it.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [zander](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 01:53PM

In 1992 I was teaching law in a College of FE in Lancashire. I was new to teaching. At least half of my classes were asian and half of them female. When we went on visits to the courts etc we had opportunity over lunch to chat about all sorts of things. It came to my attention that many of the girls sought refuge through education to avoid marriage to an unwanted partner. The longer they pursued their studies (usually law, pharmacology, medicine etc) they could avoid the inevitable. I admit then I was completely ignorant about such matters. I was unable to offer any constructive help or advice, reading some of the messages here I think that the education system is very often in a key position to start to help such individuals.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [aztecanni](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 04:01PM

There is limited understanding of this issue, specifically the difference between forced and arranged marriages.

There is little or no action when young men and women are taken from school, to another country, and never return after their 'holiday' (statistics bear this out)

The new piece of legislation due (forced marriage civil protection Act due later this year) will hopefully give some support to this issue and offer agencies some recourse

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [zander](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 06, 2008 04:16PM

Given the problems encountered perhaps an internet helpline might be the way forward. I note that Hemat Gryffe(Glasgow) and Karma Nirvana(Derby) are recorded as being specialist organisations that may be able to help in relation to ,inter-alia, forced marriage and honour based violence. perhaps they may have some ideas?

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [hswa786](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 03:44PM

We need ALOT more awareness, in school with young girls and boys.. many would see this as a religious issue, its got nothing to do with religion, it is a CULTURE thing... from my experience tackling the imams, and other religious leaders in the community, isn't the answer, as to them this is a 'taboo' issue... i know many imams doing just this....its not happening... parents are right !!! its for your own sake !!!
they don't know the meaning of confidentiality, before you get home that information would be with your parents...

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Margaret Moran MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 06:15PM



As this online consultation shows, an online support network can give support and anonymous advice. I'm certainly convinced.

Luton Council of Faiths is very supportive and helping to work positively with all religious leaders. Should we be working through such groups? We shouldn't forget that the issue affects a range of communities including Sikhs and a range of ethnicities, for example Somali. Are there sufficient community agencies to deal with the issue and the range of communities?

Has anyone been in touch with the Forced Marriage Unit? The government is considering raising the age at which marriages from abroad can take place, do you agree?

Are there any comments on the immigration system? I have lots of cases where we have all tried to tell the Home Office that it was a forced marriage, and that the application for leave to remain is being signed under threat, only to be told they can't do anything about it!!

Edited 2 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:08:10:24:23 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Jane J](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 11:38AM

Core funding is needed for voluntary organisations that support people who have been forced into marriage. Schools/ teachers should be made aware who to contact when a child does not return after summer/ other holiday periods and all schools should have a policy in regards to what they should do when a child does not return to school or is removed from school for length time. Teachers should have training on forced marriage/ domestic violence so that they are confident when a child comes to speak to them about their worries about being forced into a marriage.

Training should also be made available to professionals and practitioners in the Health, Criminal and all Education sector on forced marriage and offences in the name of honour. A number of professionals do not have sufficient understanding and confidence when they are supporting and come into contact with women who have been forced into marriage or are in danger of so called 'honour' violence. A number of public authorities are in need of training or support in the field of forced marriage, information on legislation, good practice, contact lists of supporting agencies and support in producing policies and practices.

Training is essential in this area and the same can also be said about professional bodies understanding of honour based violence, especially after the case of Banaz Mahmud who feared for her safety and reported this to the police on at least four occasions without receiving protection from them against her family. Training and information is essential when dealing with forced marriage and honour based violence. Also forced marriage should be seen as child abuse and not considered to be a cultural issue.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Seca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 10:05PM

No, there aren't adequate support services because again when these young women try to say what is happening they are either ignored or sent back home. Again I think that there is a huge need to educate professionals on signs, cultural beliefs, ways of identifying and supporting people going through a forced marriage. This does not mean the agency or professional is going against this victim's cultural needs, it means this person needs to be saved from further abuse and misery because she is marrying someone she doesn't know and/or is willing to come to live in Britain and her parents have promised her to do so.

The follow up after these victims run away from a forced marriage is very important as well, as they become totally isolated from their community and family and they need further support to help them move on with their lives, whether this support is emotional or practical but there should be a follow up of these victims when they are trying to adapt to a different world without the support of their close knit families.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [dare2connect](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 11, 2008 12:06PM

I think it is difficult to assess whether there are adequate support services for people who are forced into marriages without first assessing what is the honest number of people out there who are going through this are. It's a hard subject to get accurate statistics for because it is ever changing and hidden.

We need to train professionals, to make them aware of cultural issues and steps they can take when faced with an individual who may be going through this. There is also a fear to tackle cultural issues such as these, and sometimes due to cultural sensitivity gone too far.

I stress the importance to recognise that forced marriages are a cultural issue and not a religious one as some may assume. There is no religion I know of which allows forced arranged marriages.

In reply to the original question I do not believe there are adequate support services for people forced into marriage against their will.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Seca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 11, 2008 03:19PM

Yes, Karma Nirvana has been working very hard raising awareness and providing support to many victims of forced marriage and HBV, however, as far as I am aware more funding needs to be available for these organisations to provide a more efficient and effective service.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Fatema](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 12, 2008 01:11PM

I am a project caseworker for [a project] specialising in offering help to victims of forced marriages. We are a small organisation that has its hands tied in matters of funding and also further tied in how we are accepted as a group supporting victims that are perceived as being disobedient.

We attempt to offer support, guidance and help in whatever capacity we are able to. We often find that the best way is through email or over the phone. For young Asian women these would be the safest ways, they would not have the freedom or the time to visit our office.

We work closely with colleges and domestic violence groups and are currently trying to build links with schools in the city. This has been an uphill struggle; many schools will not give us the time of day for fear of upsetting parents. It is also quite telling that the schools most unwilling to talk to us are those in the areas that are probably most likely to have victims.

I think the forced marriage issue must be approached at many different levels. The first and foremost is the well-being of the potential victim by providing a culturally aware

service, secondly, the raising of awareness within education, social services, medical staff and any one that is likely to come into contact with forced marriage and then campaigning and tackling community groups.

The last point is perhaps the most difficult. However it is done, it will be perceived by some as attacking religion and culture. This means attempting to approach the matter with sensitivity. I read a post from Margaret Moran Mp that mentioned trying to gain support from imams and all bar one was reluctant to get involved. If we can get the support from that one and others who are like-minded around the country it would be a start. It may be a slow process but at least we can begin to make some kind of effort in tackling the subject. unacceptable practice. We cannot sit and wait for this practice to die out with future generations. We have to be proactive in bringing the matter to the fore, making it a totally unacceptable.

This posting has been edited to protect the privacy of the poster.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:12:16:10:35 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [James Clappison MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 19, 2008 01:19PM



We've heard evidence during our inquiry that a major reason why people are forced into marriage overseas is so they can sponsor their spouse to come to the UK. Do you think the Government's proposal to raise the sponsorship age for marriage to 21 will help to reduce the risk to young people of being forced into marriage? What else could be done to help people who are reluctant to sponsor their spouse to come to the UK but fear reprisals from their families if they do not?

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 04:52PM

Systems has improved over time, however there is still a long way to achieve some sort of normality. Its easy to say that the schools, the community leaders, the Imams/religious leaders any others can solve this problem but each section/org has their own duties to perform. The whole society needs to be made aware of the difficulties faced by young people and the lasting impact it has on the society as a whole. The Domestic abuse/ forced marriages not only destroy one person or one family it ruins the lives of so many. I believe that the young people needs support&advice and parents needs education to raise their awareness about the severity of the problem. Law enforcement is vital to eradicate this poison from our society as this act is clearly human rights abuse. The only way forward is for the government to put more resources at grass root level.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Martin Salter MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 21, 2008 11:51AM



On 30 January I asked the Prime Minister to investigate why some schools are refusing to display Forced Marriage Unit posters and to introduce improved guidelines to ensure that support services are available to young people at risk of being forced into marriage. What do you think should be included in guidelines for frontline professionals, such as teachers or police officers, to make sure they recognise and help young people at risk?

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 22, 2008 04:32PM

There are a number of issues here that need to be addressed. There are not enough support services and as yet not a clear pathway for people who are being forced into marriage against their will. We need the community and the professionals to understand that this is a human rights issue. It is a form of domestic abuse. That every person has a right to make choices in their lives and that as professionals we should not hide behind "cultural issues" so cannot interfere, may upset the community etc. The attitudes and views on this subject are what used to be, and to some extent still is in the arena of domestic abuse. Supporting parents is also key as sometimes they too are under pressure to force - either from the extended family or other community members. Schools are key in looking at working with young people. We need to work with community leaders and faith group as well as women's group to locally develop strategies that should fall in line with national set strategies and action plans. In order to do this adequately, funding needs to be identified against these action plans. Like with domestic abuse a lot of energy goes into supporting high risk people. This is obviously important, but a lot of work in strategies for prevention, awareness raising and education and training will support people at the lower and medium risk and also ensure that they do not become high risk due to inadequate support being available. It is important to continue to ensure an understanding of the difference between arranged and forced. Arranged is fine, I myself went through an arranged marriage. There were no pressures put on me and I am in a happy relationship. Forced is different and we must understand the subtleties that work in this - again a comparison can be drawn with domestic abuse - emotional, psychological, physical etc.

The username of this poster has been anonymised to protect their privacy.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:22:16:33:19 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [ict1921](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 23, 2008 08:18AM

Although there may be a role for helplines, my experience of working with at-risk young women is that the most at-risk would not be able to use them because of poor language or communication skills.

It would be far better to have trained child protection officers whose job is to directly educate both children and parents in school.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Ann Cryer MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 01:18PM



Some people have told us that making forced marriage a criminal offence would encourage people at risk to resist and report in greater numbers as it would send a stronger message of condemnation; others have argued that it might make people less likely to report for fear of sending their parents to jail, or that it disproportionately criminalises certain communities. What do you think?

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Northampton Women](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 04:49PM

There is not enough awareness and knowledge of the problem of forced marriages. One of our local secondary schools is particularly involved with the issue which affects a number of ots students. Yet it is not clear whether schools have the right access to other services to help them support students who may be at risk of being forced into marriage. It seems there is presently no guidance for schools, including guidance for working with parents who may be forcing their children into arranged marriages. There is a good practice guide in Northampton for dealing with victims of forced marriages, and it is important that any work like this is properly disseminated.

Very often forced marriages only become apparent after the event, once there are children.

Providing support services can be hard - staff from the affected communities who work in this area can find themselves under pressure or even threatened by people in the community. Refuges can also find themselves in difficulty because they need to be able to guarantee the security of the victims.

One of the big barriers to seeking support is fear, and a sense of loss of identity, fear of loss of children, and especially of children being taken abroad.

The extreme vulnerability of Somali women was highlighted - the pressure on them reflected the poor status of women in the community. Some work was being undertaken in Northampton to encourage mutual support, and provide them with training.

One victim of a forced marriage said that the Force Marriage Unit at the Home Office was helpful in providing information - she found that her local social services was not much help, and she could not risk having the police come round to her house.

Another went through the great lengths that women had to go through to escape forced marriages - they had to keep away from tehir community, lie about their origins, and create a new identity.

People also raised the matter of education - expectations are raised at school that young women should not have forced marriages, but then the schools do not have the means to deliver this.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Fatema](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 27, 2008 12:43PM

In reply to the question of raising the age to 21, the response of parents hellbent on sending their child abroad would be to send them and keep them their until they reach the age when it is possible to have them return. The argument for the spouse to be able to speak english before they arrive is a good suggestion although people abroad may then encourage learning the language to overcome this barrier.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [NSPCC Children's Services Manager](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 27, 2008 03:03PM

I don't think victims of forced marriage feel like they can go anywhere to seek help. Also there's a lack of understanding all around. I know it's an issue that has been raised more recently, it is a bit more at the forefront but there's still a long way to go. Schools are not aware and the statutory bodies or service providers only become aware when it's too late.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [francois](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 28, 2008 01:46PM

I agree with the need for there to be more awareness around this issue (of forced marriage, honour killings), including not only definitions, practices and legislation, but what it is like for those who have experienced it 'from the inside' and the ripple effect into the wider community of such acts.

I also think there needs to be a clearer policy (and protocols and procedures) within organisations about their position regarding 'intercultural' issues. Organisations such as Social Care Services for example will talk about being 'culturally sensitive' when working with families but what does that mean? Are they aware of the distinctions/boundaries between being culturally respectful and condoning practices that bring people harm (the 'back off' position when confronted with difference). I think organisations need to be more willing to gather all the relevant information and take a stand if necessary without labelling and blaming cultures, while providing support to help victims/survivors.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [CllrDavidson](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 12:56PM

One of the problems seems to be that if a young girl disappears from the school system, it is very difficult to gain access to her house without a relative being present, making it very difficult for her to say whether she is under any pressure, or to be honest about what is really happening. I think procedures need to be put into place where agencies work together to hold confidential interviews, in private, without any family members there who may intimidate her.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:51PM



I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has participated in the Online Discussion. It is very important that we hear people's views in order to better represent them. I would also like to thank my colleagues, staff, special advisors and all the organisations supporting this consultation.

As ever I am very committed to making a real difference but this cannot be realised without continuous support and contributions from those affected.

Once again, thank you very much for all your assistance with this Consultation.

Margaret Moran MP

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:57PM

We only know a couple of Asian women led voluntary organisations and the Forced Marriage Unit opened as a response to the campaigning carried out by voluntary organisations like our organisation as well as others. There is not enough support for victims, there is no first port of call, again it would be a centre for victims of all DV crimes to receive advice, support and advocacy to help victims with a new life. Also a centre that can offer a bed for the night for a victim, specialist staff who can support and counsel young and older victims.

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Re: Are there adequate support services for people who are forced into marriage against their will?

Posted by: [The Real Me](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:59PM

As a young British Muslim female of Pakistani origin, I feel compelled to add to this debate about the issue of Forced Marriage. I was also a victim of Forced Marriage and endured major systematic abuse. I want people to stop and think about exactly what happens in these situations and stop jumping to preconceived ideas that include making our families sound barbaric or evil. I am NOT a supporter of Forced Marriages. But I get upset and angry with the attitude and stupidity of some people who make matters a million times worse.

Firstly my parents would never think what they did to me was 'forced'. They genuinely thought they knew what was best for me. In ALL relationships (husband/wife, child/parent, employer/employee, state/citizen etc) there is always one party who thinks they know what's best for the other. For example in Britain, the whole country thinks they know what's best for the Royal Family.. look at when Prince Charles wanted to marry Camilla - we all had an opinion and thought we knew best (which included pressure on him not to marry Camilla). So it's not just my community that has problems, in fact Forced Marriages are decreasing in my community only because a lot of parents have started to realise that maybe their child does actually know what's best for them.

Secondly, it is so hard talking about Forced Marriages coming from my ethnicity/religion. Over the last few years a malignant form of hatred, directed against Muslims especially those of Pakistani origin has come to permeate British life. A recent article described the problem well: "Muslim people as a whole are now being stereotyped not just as terrorists but also as backward, sexist, homophobic bigots whose intolerance and values threaten [Britain's freedoms]". Muslims living in the UK are facing a crisis of a sense of not being accepted or belonging to society. It then does not help when topics such as Forced Marriage are branded with Muslims as that just frustrates us even more as ISLAM IS AGAINST FORCED MARRIAGES. It has been my religion and my local Imaam that empowered me and enabled me to break the chains and come out of the marriage.

Thirdly, in relation to help and services. We need to start by asking people and organisations to stop making assumptions about victims and the communities we belong to. No matter how bad my community may be they are still my community. No matter how bad my family are they are still my family and I love them very much. Everytime I sought help I was told what an evil community I came from and how barbaric and backward my

parents were. This didnt help as I didnt want to hear this. I was pited and looked at as if I came from some alien planet. Even organisations set up by those claiming to be the experts were useless - most of the people there ended up forcing you back to the situation or couldnt stop gossiping about me and my family behind my back. The Government needs to stop trusting the usual suspects or those who claim to be 'the experts'. This results in funds being channelled to organisations that have set ways of working, set views and specific client bases. The sad thing is that they all claim to do everything the Government wants them to do but the sad reality on the ground is somewhat different.

Lastly, There are so many voices out there and each and every one of us is unique. We may agree on some things but we dont agree on everything. What may help one person will not necessarily help another. This needs to be acknowledged - one service does not fit all.

Im sorry if people dont like what I write - it is only right that as a victim of forced marriage that you hear my pain and anguish. I want you to realise that whatever you are doing it is not working and all the fancy new projects and organisations that are coming up are just taking vital funds but are making absolutely no difference whatsoever to the heart of the problem. This can only be achieved through education and sensitiive work with families at a much earlier stage of a child's life.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:05:09:16:20:01 by Parliament Moderator.

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What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 18, 2008 05:17PM

Can you suggest one thing that the Committee should consider in making their recommendations to improve policy for victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [women centre](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 21, 2008 08:57PM

understanding non judgemental not make the women feel like she has committed a crime on going support there needs to be more centres that women can access advice and support and where women can go and talk to other women that have experienced it to this is very important it lets women know they are not alone and someone does understand what they are going through

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Hellraiser](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 12:58PM

Quote:

women centre

understanding non judgemental not make the women feel like she has committed a crime on going support there needs to be more centres that women can access advice and support and where women can go and talk to other women that have experienced it to this is very important it lets women know they are not alone and someone does understand what they are going through

many women are bullied by Social services, they are made the scapegoat, for the crimes that have been committed against them, they lose their children, women who experience help from someone that is independent, does not work for the police or the social services, is non judgmental, knows how hard it is to leave, understands what that women is going through, empathises, not gives sympathy, encourages support through other women's groups and education, oh in an ideal world where funding for this was available, for at least a 3 year period, my project keeps running from 6 month -6month, not enough time to make a difference.project worker with 15 years experience.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Hellraiser](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 01:08PM

What single action could most improve the lives of survivors, well a solid funding commitment, projects come and go, usually to co-exist with the way that funding is applied, inner city fare well, but that is not the case with rural areas, Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England, we all get projects up and running three years on with full client books evidence of need within the community, after three years other professionals have got the message your project is best place to help this client group, after 3 years the Local Council or the community safety are expected to fund this project, the project finishes, for almost 12 months later referrals are still being placed, CONTINUITY, COMMITMENT, CONFIDENCE.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [lux1234](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 09:57AM

I'd like to see a safe, government-funded place in every borough / county, with a trained counsellor on hand night and day, plus beds. A first port-of-call for women experiencing domestic violence. If this place was full, the staff would make some calls and find you somewhere to stay, they would never turn anyone away. You would be able to get practical non-judgemental advice on housing, pressing charges, custody, divorce proceedings, restraining orders, benefits, etc. This place would be heavily advertised / publicised so that as many women as possible knew about it. A true safe haven.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [amosemper](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 11:16AM

More beds for women and children fleeing domestic violence and stronger laws against perpetrators.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Radish](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 12:22PM

I think that service provision is of the utmost importance to survivors of domestic violence. However I think the one single action that would most improve the lives of victims is a concerted effort to change society itself. We continue to deal with the symptoms of a whole range of men's violences, but it is the attitudes and behaviours of men themselves that must change. Of course this is a huge project and involves many areas, but we have to overcome the magnitude and start to believe that changing society is believable and 'do-able'. If we continue to avoid discussion and debate around sexism and male dominance then we will continue to focus only on the paltry resources that have to be fought for on a daily basis. Changing men would ultimately mean that fewer resources would be required. I realise that this is a utopian dream state, but I firmly believe that we should aim for the highest ideal.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Leo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 01:59PM

Re-distribute existing funding of victim support, promotion and influencing-the-public-opinion-via-media in fair proportion to the number of male and female victims.

Approximately 1/3 of victims are men. Funding men's support is non-existent. Number of men victims does not decrease while DV against women decreases.

NOT to confuse the proportion of victims with the proportion of those CHARGED or CONVICTED: the chances of a man being convicted are about 10 times higher than of a woman.

NOT to confuse the proportion of victims with the proportion of the number of incidents: statistically there are more incidents per single women than per single man.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Ap1](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 02:59PM

If the British parliament adopted an anti violence against women policy. within this the levels of violence would be recognised and acknowledged. front line services such as safe refuge spaces, with bilingual workers as and when needed, and childrens workers would be available as determined per population need. there would be systematic awareness raising within all agencies and levels to forms of violence and effects. all orgs would have policies linked to thier performance indicators in taking this work forward. women and children escaping violence would be risk assessed and given priority housing/benefits etc to ensure safety. CPs ploice judiciary system would all be working together to bring perpetrators to justice. All women would be offered safety irrelavent of thier british identity and all forms of current violence to women including the male abuse of women through prostitution would be recognised as such.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Stockport](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 03:22PM

Shut refuges - spend the money on community based support.

Why should women and children leave homes, all their stuff,, friends, family, jobs, school and the dog? Alternatives to refuges would be better, and save money, - how much money is spent on refuges for relatively small numbers of women, when all that money could be spent better on outreach/housing/alternatives to refuge.

Why send women and children to refuges? Workhouses for the 21st century.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Ali](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 05:19PM

Its difficult to think of one single action as the needs of victims and survivors are so diverse and complex. Funding probably comes at the root of it all though. In my area voluntary sector agencies run from hand to mouth and statutory agencies such as councils and health vary in how high a priority they view domestic violence/abuse. Many individuals within such organisations don't see how it affects their workload. Yet we can see links between DV/DA and so many things such as crime, substance misuse, housing problems, behavioural problems in children and young people, illness such as depression, anxiety and injuries, minor or otherwise.

The Police are constantly stretched and realistically only have capacity to really make a difference to the high risk victims. Yet many of the lower risk will one day become the high risk.

Most of the work already done relies on goodwill.

I speak from both sides of the fence. having grown up in an abusive household (less physical/more verbal/controlling) and now as an adult who has experienced several years of emotional/controlling abuse where I never knew it was even abuse and wouldn't have known where to go if I did. Now I work in the field and everyday is spent trying to find funding and willing volunteers to run projects for women, children and those who perpetrate. Thats without even starting on the needs of male victims, and those from already marginalised groups.

We need to raise awareness and draw attention to the secrecy that surrounds domestic abuse, particularly in those nice leafy suburbs where 'this kind of thing doesn't happen'. We need to ensure every public sector employee understands that the next victim may be

calling them asking for help with housing or their children but really they are screaming inside for help to stop the abuse. They might even be working with a colleague in need of help.

We should start with the young and make a commitment to educating young people in what a healthy relationship looks like, at the same time, supporting them if they are living in an environment where DV is carried out.

So one action to improve lives? I can't pin it down, but money, understanding, knowledge of how to help people and where to send them, and acceptance that controlling, abusive and violent behaviour is unacceptable and a strong message that as a society (all communities within) we will not tolerate it. This may be a start.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [scottie](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 24, 2008 09:59PM

we must not forget the men that are subjected to domestic violence by women ever day.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [dias](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 25, 2008 08:47AM

Quote:

Hellraiser

What single action could most improve the lives of survivors, well a solid funding commitment, projects come and go, usually to coincide with the way that funding is applied, inner city fare well, but that is not the case with rural area, Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England, we all get projects up and running three years on with full client books evidence of need within the community, after three years other professional have got the message your project is best place to help this client group, after 3 years the Local Council or the community safety are expected to fund this project, the project finishes, for almost 12 months later referrals are still being placed, CONTINUITY, COMMITMENT, CONFIDENCE.

(**Quote DIAS**) we have been providing a range domestic violence services to adults and children for 14 years now and still have no permanent/guaranteed funding. our services for children have a 5-6 month waiting list with statutory agencies sending referrals every day and no funding beyond March 08! victims of domestic violence are members of the community, tax payers and victims of crime so why are they not acknowledged as such by all those in a position to make a real difference and change lives and behaviours for many generations to come? Money is a small price to pay to reduce suffering and death and in very cold terms service provision is cost effective in the criminal justice system alone. Forced marriage and honour based killings and abuse are appalling crimes against people and in towns where there are few members of the BME community (such as where I work) the marginalisation and sources of assistance are very limited.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Happynow](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 25, 2008 11:21AM

The most important thing would be to give children more rights of protection, instead of giving violent fathers the right of access. What is the point in escaping a violent marriage, moving away to hide, and then having to give your children away to a known violent man every month or so? I believe children should come first in these circumstances.

The other important thing is having enough spaces in refuges. Many women can't get into one, so are pushed back into the family home.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [pinky](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 25, 2008 12:21PM

No one single action can solve someone's problem when experiencing domestic abuse. What is needed is a comprehensive and holistic approach to avoid repeat victimisation. Being able to access all agencies together, when needed, is vital so I would suggest creating solid funding streams to develop IDVA services and Family Justice Centres. The major issue regarding service provision & delivery is regular & continuous funding and the recruitment and retention of good quality & skilled staff due to short term funding.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [amosemper](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 25, 2008 12:52PM

Anon story from a survivor of Domestic Violence-----In my experience when my partner hit me during an argument, I honesty thought it was normal for men to hit and feel there needs to be more awareness for women to know that it is not acceptable. I feel women need to know that even if they (the women) raise their voice it is not ok for a man to physically hit them. I still actually struggle with realising its not ok for men to hit women.

Raise more awareness.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Franklin](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 28, 2008 09:23AM

We need to continue work to change attitudes. The constant threat of government legislation to promote family values, whether from current government or the opposition, does not acknowledge the trauma women often face when remaining in an abusive relationship. The idea that marriages/relationships break up in order to gain a bit of extra weekly income, or the Radio 4 play syndrome where a couple get a bit bored, needs to challenged. Many, many relationships break down after years of abuse and, whilst this is not recognised, women's experience is devalued and the survivors continue to be damaged by societal attitudes.

We also need to recognise that domestic violence is not just about physical attack, but those lucky enough not to experience dv need to be made aware that aggressive behaviour, threats and bullying are underlying these relationships, and this is harder to recognise. Many women do not fully realise that that is what is happening to them. They may feel they are to blame for their partner's behaviour. I speak from personal experience.

Until attitudes are addressed, legislation will never be fully effective.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [pureland](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 28, 2008 08:26PM

[s][/s]

Encourage employers to have a postive policy in relation to DV - including procedures for

people arrested / charged with DV offences and policy to safeguard workers disclosing.

Circiclus development to expand citizen work with young people to include DA. youth peer groups developed to address child victims / witness

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [drthomas](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 29, 2008 10:03AM

The one single action that I believe will help overcome Domestic Violence and create greater awareness and support for all victims is to ditch the sexist, gender messages that are prevalent with this issue. Too many organisations have made DV a campaign and as such they have gendered the subject to support their campaign objectives. This is all well and good when desperate for funds or acknowledgement but when those campaigns and those organisations then get established and label themselves as the "[National Domestic Violence Helpline](#)" yet only support women and children, it is very very concerning and damaging to victims as a whole.

Domestic Violence is a people and society problem, and although statistics and research can be used to sell any message, the fact is, DV affects everyone it touches and knows no boundaries between gender or race. Please ensure all future Government lead DV initiatives target perpetrators of either sex equally, and protect victims of either sex equally.

The campaigns and campaign groups are by their very nature biased, and the Government must distance itself from aligning itself, and the authorities such as the Police with such bias. The majority of Police DV training and literature comes from one of the most well funded campaign groups, Womens Aid, and Refuge. The proportion of funded support initiatives for women compared to men is a classic example of the bias that exists, and no amount of comparing figures or quoting statistics can justify this imbalance.

If DV is under reported across both genders, the truth has to be that men under report a lot more than women, given the myriad of support channels open to women compared with men. If you fix this, and turn this into a people issue and not a gender issue, you will reap the rewards of effecting change.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Concernedman](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 29, 2008 03:07PM

Quote:

Radish

I think that service provision is of the utmost importance to survivors of domestic violence. However I think the one single action that would most improve the lives of victims is a concerted effort to change society itself. We continue to deal with the symptoms of a whole range of men's violences, but it is the attitudes and behaviours of men themselves that must change. Of course this is a huge project and involves many areas, but we have to overcome the magnitude and start to believe that changing society is believable and 'do-able'. If we continue to avoid discussion and debate around sexism and male dominance then we will continue to focus only on the paltry resources that have to be fought for on a daily basis. Changing men would ultimately mean that fewer resources would be required. I realise that this is a utopian dream state, but I firmly believe that we should aim for the highest ideal.

It is unfortunate to be asked to name 1 single action to improve the lives of victims- but wholeheartedly support the idea above that service provision and protection is of vital importance but PREVENTION through cultural change to stop all men's violences is what is most required. That's what we, men, in White Ribbon Campaign try and do , not just by working to have changes made in schools curricula but by getting men who are opinion

formers and cultural icons to take a lead as well in stating that they will never commit condone or remain silent about violence against women, (or the chronic underfunding for women's organisations)

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Reflective](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 29, 2008 09:33PM

It's very hard to narrow this down to one action, however the ongoing and open support of the Government and statutory agencies is imperative to changing views and attitudes around domestic abuse and violence. People who sit in judgement in Magistrates courts or Crown courts need to have a full understanding of the causes and effects of domestic abuse including enduring psychological, physical and financial problems faced by survivors and their families.

Evidence given in court needs to be seen in relation to the crime committed and not the relationship of those involved, currently many courts continue to treat these crimes differently to those committed between two strangers.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [nanbear](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 30, 2008 09:05AM

My experience was in the US over ten years ago and lasted about as long. I am a social worker now living and working in the UK. I assessed persons for domestic violence in the emergency departments of five hospitals in the USA in the past, and I currently work in an emergency room on a duty basis in the UK. I see that no one asks the important questions at entry into the ED. It was policy in US that SW, nurses and doctors would have to ask "are you a victim of domestic violence", "is your partner or anyone in your family abusing you", and if there was evidence we had powers to go steps further. I have a mother in law here in UK who is a victim and the voluntary and public sectors have let her down, and the violence continues to happen without her leaving him.

this brings up the other lack of resources. mine and most women i speak to who do not work at time of abuse were frightened of leaving the security of finances with their partners....how would they afford to live and somewhere safe from them? In the area where i reside there is no DV shelter or place for women to go, get safe, and have support to get a job, get own bank account, apply for govt aid, etc. Along with housing their children. It is horrible to me that this does not exist in a country prideful of HUMAN RIGHTS.....wow what a dicotomy. The govt uses those words when it fits them, and to be honest since arriving here in 2004 i have yet to recognise where the HUMAN RIGHTS occur. ???? help me understand?

Also, the govt should allow immigrants who pay taxes to Natl Insurance but have "no access to public funds" -like i do on their passports access to domestic violence assistance and counselling. It is horrendous, human rights....WHERE?

This posting has been amended to protect the privacy of the poster.
Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:01:30:11:30:20 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [christmas](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 30, 2008 09:59AM

The government should adopt a campaign of making it socially unacceptable for domestic violence to be tolerated within our communities. Many attitudes in working class environments still see that hitting women (and to a lesser degree men) is completely normal. The kids witness this within the family and as it is not frowned upon - just accepted, the kids grow up and repeat the behaviours. Middle classes are also affected but it is more hidden because they are more ashamed of raising this. Impactive TV, advertising etc campaigns need to be funded and long running such as the Think! speed kills driving campaigns.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [claire-health](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 30, 2008 11:26AM

As a survivor of domestic abuse i feel that the main area still to be tackled is the issue of educating the perpetrators. I think boys should be taught more in their early years about respect and care for future partners. There should be more energy put into preventing domestic abuse rather than just reacting to it.

As the UK is becoming more and more culturally diverse, people migrating to this country should also be made well aware that what may be common practice in their country of origin is not acceptable here i.e wife beating, female circumcision and so on.

In my own experience i firmly believe that the perpetrator of the abuse towards me felt that it was his right as a man to control and dominate 'his' woman. unfortunately that is still a commonly held belief and it needs tackling at the roots.

start abuse awareness projects in schools to address the issues before they start. It might also encourage children to disclose the fact they are living in abusive household and to seek help for their mothers/carers.

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Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:01:30:16:18:29 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Skywalker](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 06:34PM

Getting rid of the secrecy of the Family Courts. This is forcing domestic abuse survivors back into the not so loving arms of their abusers. If these courts were not secret, justice could be seen to be done, and violent ex partners (or even rapists, as in my case) would not be able to use the courts to stalk their victims. I think people would be shocked to discover how often this happens.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [hr puff](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 11:38PM

well i think free limitless counselling should be offered on the NHS for victims- after all the NHS doesn't leave broken arms to heal by themselves so why do they leave broken minds? I am a survivor of child abuse (my father is in court next week- many years after the abuse and in a different country!) and DA I have asked my gp if i can get counselling on the NHS and he said no. I was paying for counselling but after my husband left me and

when I needed it most I was unable to continue it.

This post has been edited to protect the privacy of the poster.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:01:10:40:59 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [drthomas](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 10:44AM

"Many attitudes in working class environments still see that hitting women (and to a lesser degree men) is completely normal."

I think this is a classic example of where attitudes and gender bias lead us all to the wrong conclusions. Rather than the comment above that implies the hitting of men is less acceptable than the hitting of women, I believe it is the complete opposite.

Boys for years have been taught and had it drummed into them that it is not right to hit a girl. Counter to that, it is rare to hear girls being educated to not hit boys. In fact I feel it is widely accepted that boys can be hit by girls and it is acceptable. Why? Is it because girls don't hit as hard and boys are tougher?

The comic T-Shirts by [David & Goliath](#) demonstrate this prevalent attitude to hitting and hurting of boys, whereas a equivalent product or message never dare be said, or accepted in our society. Can you imaging the uproar if there where T-shirts promoting the hitting or throwing of rocks at girls because they are stupid? That is exactly what is acceptable when the victim is male. A recent survey in Scotland amongst women found that attitudes do in fact support my argument that it is more acceptable to hit boys/men, than girls/women, and it is this message that needs seriously attention.

Research here:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/glasgow_and_west/5092100.stm

Survey finds male abuse approval

Many of the Glasgow women admitted assaulting a partner

More than half of women questioned at a Glasgow university said they approved of wives hitting their husbands.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [battletech](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 11:10AM

There are four crucial elements to recognising male victims and their children:

1. That women can be violent without the excuse of provocation. Female violence can result from illnesses such as cancer, brain tumours or elements such as PMT, drug and alcohol abuse. If this is denied, then there is no help for these sufferers. Macmillan has confirmed that there are many people knowing they have cancer but try to beat it - anger is one symptom, particularly in brain tumours as these are complicated and unseen.

2. Family Lawyers must cease using Orders as a means of removing the 'perpetrator' (usually the male) from the Family Home. Denial and blame transfer are common with those people suffering from violence caused by brain tumours in particular. Some tumours cut out the insight of the violence, an element noted in child abusers.

3. Any violence 'party to party' must remain on the Court file as it will give the Court an indication of the permanence of the problem if the children are then abused. Without record of this permanent maladaption, which often predates the marriage, will prevent

professionals to provide not only proper care for the children but also the parent.

4. Domestic Violence must be treated as a crime; to allow family lawyers to use it as a means to speed up divorce helps no one, particularly the children. All domestic violence cases should be heard in the criminal court and the accuser cross-examined on his or her allegations. To remove the victim and not the abuser puts the children in danger as they are left undefended and usually have to roam the streets to escape further abuse. result - they get locked up for alcohol abuse or theft.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Magicae](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 02:58PM

I agree awareness raising is so important. I have always considered myself to be very aware of issues, but it took me a long time to recognise that what I was suffering was domestic abuse, and as the abuse I suffered was mainly emotional and financial I felt wary of telling others as I didn't think I would be believed. It was only as the relationship became more physically violent that I began to think of ways to leave.

I have been out of my marriage for some years now and actually work in the domestic abuse arena but it was only at a training session the other day that I realised that the abuse hadn't started some years into my marriage as I thought but that it is likely my ex-partner was grooming me from day one.

My people consider me a very strong women but the memories still make me shake and I am sure that the after effects will stay with me for the rest of my life. The support services that are gradually being put in place to support victims are great but there are two significant areas (amongst many others) that I still feel need to be addressed - firstly people must be made more aware that domestic abuse is not only physical and secondly that the damage caused is long term and far reaching - support must be made available long term. As has just happened to me - sometimes things don't impact on you until many years later.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Trish](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 04:41PM

Co-ordinated support from immediately after the incident until issues resolved, be they Criminal Justice, housing, emotional, or other

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Justme](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 09:07PM

Quote:

HappyNow

The most important thing would be to give children more rights of protection, instead of giving violent fathers the right of access. What is the point in escaping a violent marriage, moving away to hide, and then having to give your children away to a known violent man every month or so? I believe children should come first in these circumstances.

Totally agree.

Stop making the women (or man) feel like the bad guy. They are victims and what

happened was in no way their fault.
More support for children. It has been very hard to get my son support
More awareness so women can recognize the signs and get help/out. If I look back now I
can see even in the first years when he was lovely my ex had all the signs of being an
abuser. If I'd of known that maybe I wouldn't be here now or would of been aware and got
help sooner
Changes to parental responsibility laws so children can be safe and abusers don't have a
possible way to track down former partners. If the victim moves away but the abuser then
receives letters etc from their children's school then it gives them an idea where to start
looking

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [battletech](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 03, 2008 09:30AM

THE ATTITUDE OF THE FAMILY COURTS TO MALE VICTIMS MUST BE CHANGED THIS MUST INCLUDE:

1. Registration of that abuse on the Court Record to protect children.
2. This reagistration will give experts a history of violence and whether it is long-term or new. Should it be the former, quite clearly the abuser requires treatment. During this treatment the father could have custody and the abuser cured. Should she refuse then custody stays with the father. If there is a long-term probelm the abuser should be monitored to protect violence to the children.
3. Allegations of Domestic Violence must be taken out of the system and Ousters banned as many sufferers of tumours or other illnesses practice blame transfer.
4. Domestic Violence is a crime and should be trated as such in the crminal court where both parties can be cross-examined.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [kim999](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 03, 2008 12:49PM

My experience is that there is a conflicting approach to DV. The police want to prosecute, the victim is often unsure due to of many reasons, not least that she feels that it does not constitute 'much of a crime' - a reflection of her own self esteem. The violence increases in intensity, eventually if she is brave enough she will go along with the police. The police gather evidence, the perpetrator spends time slowing down the court process. In the case i am focusing on it was 18 months before it was heard in court. During which time, the perpetrator is still at large. The day of the court case dawns, the perpetrator has brought into court a string of character witnesses from reputable walks of life (head teacher, pastor, vicar etc). In this particular case the perpetrator had also physically abused a child of the family (this was taken into account) The magistrates (all men - and middle class) had police photo evidence and medical notes from the victims GP. The perpetrator was acquitted. I am aware that the law is an ass, but really what more evidence would the magistrates need? The point is that the acquittal of a perpetrator is a hugh double blow for the woman, who would never put herself through that experience again, thus allowing further abuse - husband returns home victorius and vengefull- not a good cocktail. Of course the woman can flee but practicalities and children do not make this an easy option. The husband has learned a valuable lesson HE CAN GET AWAY WITH IT

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Natasha7](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 04, 2008 11:49AM

I believe that a one stop shop (similar to that of the sunflower centre) is a great resource for victims of domestic violence. Although we do not have one in our area, It is my understanding it is an umbrella for all supporting agencies under one roof. I have found that for many victims there is a sense of being pushed from pillar to post in relation to various agency intervention at the point upon which they are seeking advice to leave or are at a point of leaving. This style of multi agency working will allow a more co-ordinated response. It would be integral I feel for the IDVA service to be of core importance in bringing the agencies together.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [zander](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 04, 2008 03:14PM

I would agree with the comments here. Is there too much emphasis placed on prosecuting perpetrators perhaps? Would it be better to use available funds in other ways such as those stated here and support victims within the community in various ways and only proceed with a prosecution if that really is the route that should be followed and the victim is supportive of this course of action.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [nadine](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 04, 2008 11:00PM

Wave a magic wand and have a sea change in attitude. A single action will do little, or just address one bit of the problem. Education is the key. I have recently escaped a relationship where I was physically abused, ultimately my husband assaulted my teenage daughter. I have felt shame and I know that many people have judged me, not him. On the surface he is a very charming man. I know that he has lied to his friends and family about his actions. I am only grateful that he told the truth to the police, although I'm sure that this was damage limitation. When I told my GP what had happened to my daughter he said that this sounded very out of character for my husband. He'd met my husband three or four times. Part of people being more aware about domestic violence surely has to involve an understanding of how these charming perpetrators operate, so that there denials are not met only by the victims shame and silence.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [hk66](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 02:03PM

To provide more publicity of the services available and provided more front line services. Also ensure that all police are trained in dealing with such situations as the response from some officers is not always sympathetic - they do not seem to understand that something seemingly innocent to them like a phone message can actually be very intimidating and frightening for the victim. My ex is also a policeman who knew how to work the systems and behave in front of the police

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [aztecanni](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 03:49PM

Proper funding for support and intervention - for the majority of victims/survivors - coupled with open dialouge on the subject - ring fenced DV funding was removed a few years back even though it was clear that as professionals we had only scratched the surface and, beacuse of under reporting, DV was not going to be a geographic priority.

For those we can't help (ie the dead) the enactment of S9 (Murder Reviews) from the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 - 4 years later and a fundamental part of this Act is still un enacted - this is not a governmental commitment to the issue.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [female](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 06, 2008 11:31AM

I am a professional working for CAFCASS, in my opinion, the single action that would improve the situation of society is making domestic abuse a crime of which there are long term consequences, e.g a status similar to a schedule 1 offence.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Gwyn Prosser MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 06, 2008 05:04PM



I'm interested in what you say about educating perpetrators. We've taken evidence from the Probation Service about the programmes they run for domestic violence offenders on their release from prison, to help them change their behaviour. I wonder whether anyone has had experience of their partner or ex-partner attending one of these programmes and if it helped them to change their behaviour?

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [andiecraft](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 09:23AM

Providing a survivor centered approach to support women and their children who are suffering or have suffered domestic abuse, holding the perpetrator responsible and accountable for the abuse. To help women to understand the impact on their physical and mental health encouraging them to make plans for the safety of themselves and their children and empowering them to remain in control of decisions affecting their lives in an environment free from persecution or harrassment (based on the grounds of their, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religious conviction). It needs to be recognised that domestic abuse affects women from all backgrounds and sectors of society. Particular efforts must be made to ensure that services are abailable to groups who may be marginalised, including women from minority ethnic communities, disabled women, older women and women in same sex relationships.

Domestic abuse is the collective responsibility of our society and tackling it requires an inter-agency approach.

co-ordinating services which prioritise women and childrens safety.

A range of services, sufficiently flexible to meet an individuals need.

An approach that encourages empowerment and self determination.

Services that recognise and respond to the diverse needs of the area for example victims and survivors living in priority neighbourhoods and black and minority ethnic groups.

Participation in developing services to address their needs in the future.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [ksurvives](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 01:23PM

I suggest powerful prevention/promotion messages on tv, in newspapers (local and national) that 'hit' the professional/academic classes, with clear messages to the secret perpetrators that will hopefully 'open their eyes' to their own behaviour and making clear to those who know that the abuse is going on, their responsibility to the victim and with the perpetrator. Confronting the perpetrator is, understandably, difficult. Show us how to do it - what to say, how to sustain the pressure. This is important because of the high level of denial among perpetrators and the fact that the majority of cases never get to court. We need to deal with this denial full-on, friends and family probably being the ones most likely to have an impact on the perpetrator.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [peri249](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 03:27PM

I think taking the issue into secondary schools may be one of the ways that we could start addressing the issues. More and more young girls seem to regard being hit by their boyfriends as a badge of honour. Showing them where this type of attitude can lead and how it affects those around them would be a start.

Children that have lived in abusive house are aware of how things can escalate but are unaware of the dynamics behind their parents actions. Many abusers have very low self esteem and therefore need to control their victims. Being aware of why someone is doing sometimes can be the first step in making it stop.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [hswa786](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 03:36PM

education!!! starting from primary school....

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [female](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 04:53PM

I have not had first hand experience of Domestic abuse, however, as a professional working with families and children I come across it on a daily basis. I have worked on

cases both in Public and Private law where male abusers have undergone domestic violence courses and come out of them changed people, only to go on and abuse again.

In one particular Public Law case, where the mother had to part from the very abusive father in order to keep the children, he had also been on a DV course, but abused again, four years later I was not surprised that another Public Law case, mainly due to DV, was again in the courts, the father of the twins was the same man!!

Again I would say that a status similar to schedule 1 offence, shared by all professionals, such as HVs Midwives, SSD, GPs, schools, police etc., by listing on a computer with easy access by professionals, I believe would assist.

I would be happy to set up any group to lobby parliament for a positive change in attitude to this appalling and damaging problem.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [female](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 10:45AM

Stop using the word 'domestic', violence is violence, after all perpetrators can stop themselves from thrashing out in all other situations, for example, they wouldn't be likely to hit people at work, or in the street because they disagreed with them, or annoyed them, because the consequences of that would be to criminalise them. If a female or male was walking in the street with their children and someone attacked them, either verbally or physically, in front of their children, they would likely be assessed by a psychiatrist and/or arrested immediately. Domestic makes it sound so minimised, it should be grievous, actual, bodily harm, or 'murder'.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [sk](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 10:55AM

I would like to agree cost of refuges are extremely high, it would be more cost effective if local authorities had satellite properties, I feel that when a woman has fled she is carrying a lot of trauma with her putting her in an environment full of complete strangers who have their own tragedies places her in a more stressful situation.

Floating support workers could visit the women every day and provide with support and advice she could take pets, older children especially boys which a lot of refuges don't allow and children with disabilities. I recently struggled to find space for a woman with 4 children 2 of whom had physical disabilities. When refuges were first created they were a fantastic idea but I think now that there is more awareness around domestic abuse and money has been put in for specialist DV courts, MARAC's and IDVA's it would be better to provide flats or houses for women who are fleeing on a temporary basis.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Jane J](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 11:43AM

There are a number of different actions that would improve the lives of victims such as

dealing with perpetrators, educating society and statutory bodies and core funding for voluntary organisations. The main actions would be

1) Core funding should be made available to voluntary organisations so that they do not have to worry about job losses, funding applications every year and that they can then provide sustainable refuge provision, support services for women and children, outreach work and awareness raising within community.

2) Fathers who have been convicted or there is evidence that he has abused his partner should not have any direct contact with his children until the necessary risk factors have been considered. Organisations such as CAFCASS should recognize that fathers who allow their children to see them abusing the child's mother are putting that child at risk of harm and direct contact should not be allowed.

3) An integrated service to protect and support the family unit. As it stands hundreds of thousands of women and children every year have to flee their homes from domestic abuse. Women have to move into refuge, housing association accommodation, temporary accommodation, are rehoused by Local Authority, private housing or stay with family and friends. This upheaval has a significant impact on women but also on their children. By fleeing their homes the women and their children have significant disruption to their lives through no fault of their own. The men in the majority of the cases remain at home. Emergency accommodation should be made available for perpetrators so that women do not always have to be the ones to leave the home.

4) A clear government strategy on how perpetrators will be educated supported and dealt with in the civil and criminal justice system. The perpetrator agenda needs to be looked at closely due to the limited number of perpetrator programmes available in the country and also the significant costs and implications on society due to the number of men who serially abuse their partners. There needs to be a clear strategy how to deal with perpetrators because a number of them will move on to offend against other women in the future.

5) Education agenda influenced to ensure children and particularly teenagers learn more about health relationships. Department for Education should engage in issues surrounding violence against women and teachers should be trained. Teachers could be a first point of call for many children who are experiencing domestic abuse or violence themselves, or are seeing violence in the home. Teachers need to have the ability and the confidence to be able to provide assistance, information and understanding to these children. Teenagers in school need to learn more about healthy relationships and the fact that violence against women is not tolerated in society. Teenagers and young people need to be educated to make them aware of the risks and the patterns of behaviour to ensure that they realise that domestic abuse does not have to be physical and that emotional abuse can escalate to other forms of abuse in the future.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [lorca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 03:33PM

Remove the monopoly that currently exists in refuge provision away from womens aid agencies and open transparent and good quality services for those that need to leave. Or better still make the perpetrator move into a refuge and let the refuges be run by womens aid - after living with that regime they certainly wont act violent again!!!

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [lorca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 03:43PM

At last there is someone out there with some common sense !!! well done the feminist

movement never asked victims if they wanted to be shoved into refuges in the first place, they needed help to get away from the abuse that's all!!! we punished the victim and not the perpetrator- what a ridiculous state to be in!!

And lets not forget its cheaper, better for the family and community for the victim to stay in the community and for the perpetrator to be tagged and removed from the area.

Obviously women's aid organisations will bleat on about the possible death issue and not to minimise it at all women are no safer in refuges on the whole!!! lets strengthen protection for victims not punish them even more

finally who benefits from this?? refuges and academics that write bias papers / books about this subject matter benefit there is a whole industry - very profitable keeping women and children in a state of victimhood.

lets move past the feminist rhetoric of 70's and have a more intelligent service based on the needs of victims not the needs of the charities egos and academics (mainly women) that are benefitting from this parasitical problem

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [lorca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 03:56PM

Hi my response is not directly related to your question sorry, but I just wanted to say that we need to be mindful that perpetrator programmes work, I think that anyone can say that a piece of work is successful - as this leads to more money, what is needed is some long term study into the attitudinal change of the perpetrator not just over the lifetime of the programme or 3-6 months down the line but a more extensive period of time. as we know with many behavioural change programmes the relapse is high, and we need to make sure that robust mechanisms are in place to monitor the victim (as sometimes the issue is both of them being abusers- but the perpetrator mainly the male is convicted for this) and the perpetrator over time and any future relationships entered into over a period of 2-4 years.

also how about running programmes for women - they are needed although statistically they are in a minority most dv cases both partners are violent.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Seca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 09:50PM

Quote:

Hellraiser

Quote:

women centre

understanding non judgemental not make the women feel like she has committed a crime on going support there needs to be more centres that women can access advice and support and where women can go and talk to other women that have experienced it to this is very important it lets women know they are not alone and someone does understand what they are going through

many women are bullied by Social services, they are made the scapegoat, for the crimes that have been committed against them, they lose their children, women who experience help from someone that is independent, does not work for the police or the social services, is non judgmental, knows how hard it is to leave, understands what that women is going through, empathises, not gives sympathy, encourages support through other women's groups and education, oh in an ideal world where funding for this was available, for at least a 3 year period, my project keeps running from 6 month -6month, not enough time to make a difference.project worker with 15 years experience.

I would like to join in the many requests in this forum to provide longer term funding for projects tackling domestic violence issues. As the person above I have been working on a Perpetrators programme that took 18 months to set up and we have only had 6 months to

run a 35 weeks educational programme??? The project helps perpetrators of domestic abuse reflect on their past behaviours, realise that what they have been doing for years is wrong, that the behaviour they learnt from their father (mother?) is wrong. However, funding ends at the end of March and the outcomes of the programme have not been achieved. The women I have been supporting are left hanging and the men who were attending the course couldn't finish it???? Many programmes have the same problem, there isn't continuity and real expectations for this reason people/the general public does not have faith on voluntary or statutory agencies any more and they don't trust anything related to Social Services or the Police, because they are afraid of being victimised one more time by taking their children away from them!!!!

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Seca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 11, 2008 03:29PM

I agree with you completely. These sort of services are not easily available to the general public. I also tried to access counselling services through my GP practice, but firstly they had a long waiting list and when I finally received a letter giving me an appointment, the appointment was for a working day from 9-11 a.m. Consequently, for people that work and pay taxes meaning being productive members of this society, there are not any free services available. The Counsellor at my GP's practice only worked one working day in the morning!

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Calamity](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 11, 2008 06:02PM

I think the decision to take action should be taken out of a victim's hands, they are often too afraid to make a decision and often retract statements. Making it difficult for housing providers to take action against perpetrators in breach of their tenancy agreements.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [louie](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 11, 2008 07:05PM

More understanding and action by the courts and cafcass particularly with regard to seek and find orders, child contact arrangements and parental responsibility.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [angie](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 12, 2008 03:58PM

An end to the 'postcode' lottery of specialised (third sector) service provision for women who experience domestic and sexual violence. It is absolutely ridiculous that some women can expect to receive support from well-funded and supported local service providers, whilst others (i.e someone hoping to receive a service from a Rape Crisis Centre in my area) will receive no support at all. There can be no excuse for neglecting to support some victims of serious crimes!

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [VoiceforVictims](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 14, 2008 03:58PM

Investing in parenting and educating people about the effect that domestic violence has on children would help.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [mari](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 14, 2008 08:28PM

Society needs to stop blaming the victim.

Being a victim is the fault of the abuser. It's not the victim's own fault as society suggests and still believes.

There are two ways where I feel this can be changed.

The first one is to educate society by raising awareness and increasing understanding of what is happening to the victim emotionally.

The most important part of any education campaign is that the victim needs to realise that they are indeed a victim.

Many of us didn't know that is what we were. I thought my abuser had anger issues he had to work through and that the abuse he showed towards me was my own fault for "winding him up".

The second one is to deal with the abusers correctly through the court systems with appropriate consistent punishments.

Society needs to be made aware that domestic abuse is a crime. "What goes on in the privacy of someone's home has got nothing to do with me". We need to get rid of this way of thinking. Domestic violence matters. It must be made unacceptable in our society.

The current punishments given to people convicted of domestic abuse are so varied and depends on the individual magistrate. This should not be happening. The guidelines issued to these people must be clearer and evaluated on a regular basis by an independent body.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [nadine](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 15, 2008 02:03PM

The success or not of perpetrators courses depends largely on a willingness to change. Domestic violence is usually not an act of anger, perpetrators often have complete control over their actions and make the choice to abuse, there is no blind rage. I'm aware that in spite of this, sometimes anger management courses are offered rather than courses which properly address the dynamics of abuse. Most perpetrators are in control of their anger.

With reference to what could be done to improve the lives of survivors this rather depends on their circumstances. Refuges in the UK have been put under a great deal of pressure, supporting women who have insecure immigration status. Those who have no recourse to public funds often face the starker choice, either return to the perpetrator or face destitution. There have been cases where women have had their children taken into care because they have no financial resources and can claim nothing. This is nothing short of disgraceful. We have the privilege of living in an economically advanced country and these women are allowed to suffer violence and degradation with nowhere to turn but charity.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Yet another battered wife](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 15, 2008 03:18PM

Create a central agency. One of the problems encountered is that victims have to move across counties or regions to escape abuse, and yet their files and support do not move with them. I and my children's treatment suffered in moving just 100 miles from London to Suffolk.

MPs should realise that 5/12 of the adult population have suffered DV.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Sarahbelle](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 16, 2008 07:23PM

You need to look at what can realistically be applied. Ideas thrown around about programmes for the perp are great but with the problems with the probationary service at the moment it's simply implausible that an efficient and effective service would work.

I believe the answer lies in educating the public. We need to get away from these myths that it's rare and that the victims are people from council estates who are too stupid to leave and just as bad as the perp. We need to acknowledge that domestic violence is common, tragic and a very serious crime. This is the most efficient, easiest and cost-effective idea.

I see very few posters around in my area and have NEVER seen any adverts like this on TV:

[[uk.youtube.com](#)]
[[uk.youtube.com](#)]
[[uk.youtube.com](#)]
[[uk.youtube.com](#)]
[[uk.youtube.com](#)]

See the bottom radio adverts here:

[[www.met.police.uk](#)]

We need to have adverts running on TV and radio making it clear that:

- 1) If you hear your neighbour screaming you need to dial the nines. It's not something for the couple or family to sort out. Ignoring it is helping the perp and could lead to the victim's murder
- 2) Relationship abuse is common and it's verbal, socio-economic, psychological, physical and sexual.
- 3) The victims are often traumatised and/or trapped. They need help not condemnation. Condemnation enables the abuser.
- 4) DV isn't just between couples, it's between family members as well.

Overall society has a responsibility to stop this crime and if they don't victims will continue to be beaten, raped and psychologically tortured.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [paula](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 17, 2008 02:08AM

FUNDING!!!! FUNDING!!!! FUNDING!!!!

Voluntary organisations struggle financially to provide necessary and vital services to support victims/survivors of dv. It is getting harder and harder and more time consuming to prove your worth as agency. This should not be the case, we should be funded by central government.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [ocean33](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 17, 2008 10:29PM

There cannot possibly be one single action that would improve the lives of victims and survivors of abuse. It is clear that many things need to change in order to improve these lives. First and foremost the process begins with the Police when reporting violence. Although there are some women who have positive experiences with the Police when reporting violence, there are many that do not. Myself for example, when reporting an assault against myself I was to be informed by a PC (male) that quote "If I were to make a statement it would undermine a pending court case", where I was due to attend as a witness for a previous assault on myself by my ex partner. I naively thought this officer knew what he was talking about, therefore I followed his advice if that's what you call it. He also persuaded me to sign his pocket book to say the assault never took place. However upon my ex partner harassing me after this assault different officers became involved and they informed me that this male officer should never of said that to me and he should of took a statement. I am now in the process of following up a formal complaint with the Police. From this experience I have learnt that there are "some" officer's that still do not take violence seriously against a partner, or believe what the victim is saying.

I have suffered immensely through this officer's misconduct. My ex is still allowed to abuse me indirectly through having contact with our young daughter. He was also aggressive towards her during the incident. This Officer has enabled my ex to continue to make my life unbearable, through the aid of the Courts and Organisations such as Cafcass. Inappropriate recommendations were made for contact because of this officer's misconduct. It is my opinion that Cafcass needs to be abolished also in order to help victims of abuse. They make recommendations for contact based on their own "personal opinions", how is that good practice. I was informed by the manager of my local Cafcass that the cafcass officer who had dealt with my case made recommendations based on her "personal opinions". Furthermore when I attempted to raise my concerns regarding my ex partner having contact with our daughter I was informed by the manager quote "how do we know that you are not doing this out of spite". My child's safety is being put at risk and no-one cares. I firmly believe that we also need to open the doors on the Family Court System in order for the general public and media to see what really is going on. Cafcass, Social Services etc are systematically allowing abusive father's and (mother's) to have contact with children and no-one is held accountable. This is WRONG! Therefore many many things need to change in order to improve the lives of victims and survivors of abuse. There are so many I cannot mention them all. These are just the tip of the iceberg!!

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [lifeafter](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 18, 2008 03:37PM

The action that would have helped me would have been able to stay in my own home, instead of moving my children away. Women should be able to feel safe in the homes that

mostly they had built. Women suffer from the violence, the man does this, yet in a lot of cases he has the marital home. The women ends up having to start over again because if you have been a victim of violence, there is no way you are going to argue over who gets the tv.

Another point that would have helped, if there was legislation for women who are working that are suffering from Domestic Violence to be able to have some paid time off. I had to sort this all out after I finished work at 5 p.m. With two children it was a nightmare.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [harrann](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 19, 2008 07:37AM

I strongly agree with this comment. It describes my own experience(s) so well. My entire life has to an extent been clouded by domestic violence. My own family of two are 'now grown up' - I put this in inverted commas as my son is now deceased, in his twenties, after having taken his own life - he leaves behind two lovely little girls.

Our encounter with Social Services was horrendous and I am actually now in the process of dealing with something I should have dealt with 20 years ago.

I do have to say that I cannot fault the Police. I live in Scotland

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [harrann](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 19, 2008 08:44AM

I am unable to answer your question but feel it has relevance to my situation. Does this probation service approach apply to Scotland? My partner has assaulted me on many occasions but has phoned the local DV unit to ask for help. He had no reply and other incidents have followed. He did go to Edinburgh and could have received help there but we live in another part of Scotland and as such we are not allowed to access Edinburgh projects. He has served several short term prison sentences in the space of several years and is due in Court soon. This is his first not guilty plea and I have to be a witness. I have three options - don't be here, commit perjury once his defence solicitor starts on me or contempt of court if I don't turn up.

You may question why we are still together (Jeremy Kyle certainly would!!). I am still with him because although he lifts his hands and I am scared at those times I know from experience he is not the same as the abusers I have lived with in the past. I don't know how to adequately summarise what I am trying to say without minimising the situation of others.

DV is an umbrella term which encompasses many unique situations. One reply on the forum does express this and I shall have to re-read this. It is not an issue which should form part of Police Targets as in for example Car Tax Discs. I may be wrong but I understand the approach of Zero Tolerance encourages this. Zero Tolerance puts the Police and Court Services under pressure to prosecute and convict under any circumstances. In such a situation many despicable cases may be in danger of being overlooked - the baby may be in danger of being thrown out with the bathwater.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 04:49PM

Following domestic violence which commence during pregnancy with pushing etc my daughter left him three times finally when the baby was several months old both returned home to parents. We tried to log this with the police and seek advice. When my daughter tried to make an appointment over the phone she was told the police would come to her. When that happened she was told off because they thought she was in danger at that time. They did not want to know unless he was actually hitting her. Now several years later he wants over night access including weekends. She left for the safety of her baby, now it looks as though he will get exactly what he wants. All the distress he has caused and the excessive drinking, probably drugs being smoked..... how do we prove all this now? He sees the baby on two occasions each week, the one thing that Fathers who committ domestic violence should loose is over night contact, he already disrupts all of our family life around the two days he sees the young child. Please do not allow men like this to have night time visits, holidays, etc. They should forfeit this pleasure when domestic violence is used to women which has spilled over to the children. Please look hard at this overnight issue. thank you from a very worried mum and Nan.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 04:52PM

There is no "one thing" in this complex issue that will improve victims' lives. I trust the government is not looking for soundbites. All agencies must be aware of the effects of dv on primary and secondary victims. Comprehensive services must be put into place nationally, offering transparent medical, legal, social et al support as a matter of course. Public attitudes re the unacceptability of this crime should follow on from legislation . . . remember the introduction of drink/driving laws? Increase funding for all support agencies; make sure first rate awareness training is in place for everyone from school children to senior judges; increase provision for Anger Management programmes and do not restrict them to convicted serious offenders. At present, it feels as if the victim is on trial.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [you can move on](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 20, 2008 05:05PM

dear magica
i have read this forum several times...your comment "he groomed me" has struck such a chord with me. I remember the film with Julia Roberts "sleeping with the enemy", mine started on honeymoon, whereas her character was after the honeymoon. Thank you for that comment. It has helped me on to the next stage of recovery where I can begin not to blame myself for what happened over many years. Mine was extreme emotional and financial...every financial outlay (for the children, or a £10 pair of curling tongs for me) had a big fist of a price to pay. thank you for helping me realise it was not me.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [survivor76](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 21, 2008 01:01AM

I firmly believe that the only way to tackle this huge and I mean huge dilemma is to pull the huge proverbial rug and get our hands very dirty and stop living lies, the truth is the future, the only way to obtain the truth is to stand up and stop hiding behind the secrets and that very visible veil of shame.

If we are set on this road then the slate has to be swept clean.....unfortunate for millions of us, but with such a task I would forgo my broken mind and my sanity if it meant that our children our future could be safe from the villainous abusers that break our hearts. Education, Education, Education is the key.

I was sexually abused by my father, I watched him beat my mother and my brother.....I thought this was normal!!!!

I went on to marry a man who was a bully, who raped me and repeatedly told me and my two lovely children how worthless we were. I found strength and have been on my own now for several years, living on benefits I might add, my father and my ex-husband can put their hands on their hearts and believe that what they did to me was for my own good and mores the pity so did !!!!!!! there lies the rub

EDUCATION -EDUCATION-EDUCATION

Its not too late for the children

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [sotbas306](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 21, 2008 10:26AM

More funding should be made available for voluntary sector organisations like Women's Aid and the Citizens Advice Bureau to support and advise victims so they can get the help and advice they need when they need it.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [tidewillturn](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 21, 2008 07:22PM

Yes this is simple impose injunctions for life on any one convicted of dv crimes. They have to forgo contact with their children if they have been convicted of a crime against the other parent or child. Only supervised contact in special cases should be granted. Children need to be protected and violent controlling bullies should not have the chance to continue victimising their ex's or children.

Sort out child contact where there is proven dv against the child or other parent. It HAS to be supervised or not at all. Otherwise it will continue!

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [blackburn](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 22, 2008 10:10AM

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE CAN DO TO ENSURE ALL OF THE BASIC LEVEL SERVICES ARE SINGING FROM THE SAME HYMN SHEET. WE NEED CONSISTENCY/INTER AGENCY GUIDELINES THAT ARE FLUID AND TRANSFERABLE ACROSS ALL OF OUR SERVICES. SAME WITH TRAINING (MULTI-AGENCY). DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICIES SHOULD ALSO BE CREATED FOR PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES (SHOULD THEY NEED TO

ACCESS THEM). IF EVERY ONE HAD CLEAR REGULATED GUIDANCE AND HOW APPROACHES MATCHED THE VICTIMS NEEDS WOULD BE MET. AT PRESENT WE HAVE VARIED APPROACHES/DIFFERING TRAINING/GUIDANCE, AND OUR OWN SERVICES VIEWS ON HOW IT SHOULD BE MANAGED. LETS GET SOCIAL CARE, HEALTH AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMBINED WITH EQUALITY AND KEEP THE NEEDS OF THE VICTIM CENTRAL.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 23, 2008 03:58PM

More training by experts and victims to enable those tasked with assisting victims and survivors to see the problems through the eyes of the victim. This will help agencies understand the compromises and decisions of abused people which very often are about ensuring survival. More funding for this could come from recognition that there is a war primarily against women and many children requiring all the powers of the State to fight with the same energetic approach and funding enthusiasm that is applied to wars more overtly positioned.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Campaigner](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 25, 2008 09:54PM

I agree with Pinky, who said "What is needed is a comprehensive and holistic approach to avoid repeat victimisation. Being able to access all agencies together, when needed, is vital." The fact that a single action is not adequate is the reason that local authorities now take a multi-agency approach and bring together services to support women and children experiencing violence and abuse, in recognition of its impacts on their health, housing, safety, education etc.

The question mentions two groups of people (victims and survivors) and the need to tackle 'all forms of DV' which can include coercive control, forced marriage, physical violence etc - so to find one single action which works for all of these is a bit of a long shot.

However, I recognise that a bit of realpolitik is needed here, as governments like quick and easy wins....so if pressed to name possible items for that list of actions, I'd suggest:

- extending the Domestic Abuse courts model (seeing a perp in court on Monday for an assault on Saturday is a real incentive to press ahead with charges)
- improved funding for VAW services including refuges - at least 3-yearly streams but a commitment to meet ongoing core costs for key services would make a world of difference
- a law to ban forced marriage
- proper legal protection for women without recourse to public funds.

However, the single action I'd like to see is the introduction of a consistent, well-funded, long-term prevention programme, integrated into school and pre-school curricula across the UK and included in teacher training. Without long term work to change attitudes, any and all service improvements are small beer.

I'd also love to see the government get much tougher on the root causes of domestic abuse - gender inequality. Compulsory gender pay audits, equal maternity and paternity leave, improved women's pensions etc could all contribute to ending gender-based violence. But the government needs to be brave enough and radical enough to do these in the face of criticism from the usual suspects....I won't hold my breath.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [victim](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 02:01PM

What if you are married to someone from abroad? Don't you think it's wrong that an abusive partner from abroad gets indefinite visa to remain in UK stamped without an interview? I have read on websites that married couples get their indefinite leave to remain when they have stayed together for two years and all they have to do is pass a silly Life in the UK Test? I think that's insulting to victims of DV. The best action here would be to have their indefinite leave to remain here status taken away and to just give them temporary visa or deportation.

I know when you are a victim of DV then it's hard to tell family/friends what is happening and you feel scared and confused. Please do something ASAP and re-consider how to deal with abusive partners from abroad. Remember a person can easily be stranded once the abusive partner gets their indefinite leave to remain.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Northampton Women](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 04:04PM

The most important single action would be positive police action. There's a need for awareness raising along the lines of the very successful work undertaken in Australia and New Zealand. We need to ensure that domestic violence is seen as a crime, and that it is understood that everyone in this country has the right to go about their lives free from the threat of violence, including domestic violence. This should be included in any discussion of "Britishness."

There is also a need to look at the problems of perpetrators of domestic violence aged under 18. This syndrome is not currently recognised and services are not directed in this area. Women who are abused by their partners and then sometimes abused by their children, usually, but not exclusively, their sons. The children learn the behaviour from the adults. People reported that the problem of domestic violence by the under 18s was getting worse.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 09:47PM

My sister kept telling me that she was to be murdered. I kept saying that he wouldn't do it while I was alive. How useless was that information? So here's what I have learned from that. Helping family and friends to understand what is going on and what is required once they know someone is suffering domestic abuse is critical. If a family gather round the fireplace and discuss a safety plan, that is a type of MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference). The various family/community members will be bringing their skills and resources to the table. These people will probably know about the abuse much earlier than will the professional MARAC. The first intervention opportunity to ensure safety is usually with family and friends and can be done successfully if the friends and family are informed. Education of the public can help launch these family and friends actions to ensure safety and stop repeat victimisation.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [NSPCC Children's Services Manager](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 27, 2008 03:01PM

I think there needs to be more services aimed directly at children and young people. There's not enough. I know we've got NSPCC and excellent work is being done, but I think we need to do more work with young people. I'm just trying to think of other services that work with young people, but other than NSPCC, there's not a lot around for young people.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [francois](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 28, 2008 02:08PM

I agree that men's attitudes need to change and it often feels like we are backsliding on issues around sexism, patriarchy and women as sex objects and minimising the extent and scope of violence against women.

Having worked with DV for close to 20 years, initially with survivors and children, then in more recent years with perpetrators, I do see the value of working at the individual level also to bring men to a different attitude towards women and themselves, as well as to be accountable for their violence and controlling behaviours in the context of power relations. Even if it is slow work without good outcomes - we have to keep going and learn to do it better, and get the funding and support to do that.

Referring back to comments on socialisation, I think it is fair to say that women too have internalised messages around male dominance and the impact on expectations in male/female relationships (even though the feminist movement and emerging women's views and discourse have done much to shift the paradigm). We live in a society which still values competitiveness, control and aspirations to power over collaboration and collective processes. So I think that while men clearly have the bulk of the work to do with regard to change, women must also be looking at themselves and how they may too have bought into power and control.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Kitty](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 28, 2008 03:02PM

I totally agree. As a professional involved in DV/DA, we give a service within a very limited budget and engage with men and women who need assistance both emotionally and practically and then the funding finishes. Many of the victims have been let down by services and often, just as trust is being gained, they again feel let down because a project ceases to be funded. What message is this giving? Often it feels if government is simply ticking a three year box and not looking at the bigger picture. I especially feel that this is the case within smaller boroughs. NOT ENOUGH MONEY AND NOT ENOUGH TIME!

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Frances](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 28, 2008 11:09PM

My partner was charged with ABH for trying to kill me but the whole system and process was a shambles. Even before he was arrested and charged there was no protection for me at all. By some miracle the case got to trial and he got convicted and I am still here. But there should be immediate professional support and protection for women like me and for any woman experiencing domestic violence. There was nothing.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [peace](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 12:12PM

As a 'survivor' of domestic violence and a professional stakeholder, I can only speak from my own experience and I understand that everyone's experience is specific so I first feel we need a range of responses for different situations.

I have been in a situation where violence is used in the relationship to mark particular times of pressures and difficulties which has been accentuated by alcohol, but also where violence is used in emotional and psychological and at times physical ways to control decisions in the family and work.

I feel the most important measure to be taken is to change our focus from victim and perpetrator to see the relationship as one inwhich there are broader structural, media impacts which can influence, degrade or support relationships, and to see the responsibility for that relationship and possibly children as a wider societal responsibility.

Violence of emotional, psychological, physical, financial nature cannot ever be condoned or accepted but it needs to be understood in a relational manner giving support to both parties in a wider context.

First we need to take away the sensational image of violence. With one in four women affected in Britain -we need to understand violence as a day to day factor in many of our lives. I have remained silent amongst colleagues and friends as to speak creates an image of violence which would jeopardise professionalism in work, my children's opportunities for friendships, and my own image of myself as I would become only a victim of violence in other's eyes... Similary my partner is a good parent, dedicated to his profession etc etc... for which an image of evil and violence destroys any potential for resolving the issues, and for thier role in society more generally.

Also official agencies are too quick to provide the exit or report options which are unrealistic as the police, social services and legal institutions present an acrimonious, adversarial and aggressive environment whilst at the same time keeping the ties with the partner through court hearings etc.

If a partner wishes to exit completely then there needs to be absolute commitment from the institutions to allow him/her to do so without the ongoing legal hearings etc.

I have been supported through councelling with my local gp which has empowered me to put the boundaries and understand the causative factors aswell as helping create an environment to appease the situations which can often be due to mental stress, alcohol, work pressures etc... yet at the same time keeping myself strong enough to assert my own decisions and ultimately stop the violence.

Close friendship and family networks have been very important on the understanding that I don't want to end the relationship but resolve it and are supportive for the good and bad days , and longterm commitment to ending the violence as a shared goal.

I would recommend a less sensationalised image of violence but providing forums whereby we can speak about violence without threatening our jobs and our day to day lives. We need more help in learning dispute resolution methods in an increasingly pressured lifestyle and wider support for those facing related issues of unemployment, alcoholism, bereavement, etc from which violence can be a tooeasy and difficult to supress reaction....

In conclusion I would recommend a move away from blame, punishment etc to understanding, rehabilitation and reconciliation

and to recognise the different strengths of those in relationships to be supported by dispute resolution methods, shared councelling and positive images of survival and healing.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [CllrDavison](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 01:06PM

Continuity of provision, and a dedicated support network which is easily accessible. Refuge provision differs dramatically from one area to the next. I live in a county with 150,000 residents but we only have 7 refuge beds, whereas 20 miles away in a neighbouring authority they have 15. We also need this provision to be more flexible, ours only accepts women and will not accept teenage boys over the age of 13; one more obstacle to prevent women from leaving a violent home. Support is also sketchy, some areas provide 24 hour help and advice whereas in others, you need to be a victim Monday to Friday between the hours of 9-5!

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 01:12PM

The police must tell victims the truth about their response times and the type of response on offer. Then the victim's safety plan is accurately informed. My sister was told that she could expect a response within ten minutes and that even a silent 999 call would bring the police. The actual response time was 6 hours and 42 minutes measured as the time from the start of the 999 call to when the police entered the house to find my sister dead.

The police are keen that we call them if we are in trouble but that requires two things at least:

1. They will tell us the truth about their response (part of safety planning).
2. The response will be timely and interventionist

Otherwise the human's inalienable right to life will drive other actions to protect that life. One action might be leaving the house and area.

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:51PM



I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has participated in the Online Discussion. It is very important that we hear people's views in order to better represent them. I would also like to thank my colleagues, staff, special advisors and all the organisations supporting this consultation.

As ever I am very committed to making a real difference but this cannot be realised without continuous support and contributions from those affected.

Once again, thank you very much for all your assistance with this Consultation.

Margaret Moran MP

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Re: What single action would most improve the lives of victims and survivors of all forms of domestic violence?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:57PM

How can a sensitive area like DV improve by one single action?. There needs to be a holistic approach, there needs to be a BIG Campaign to highlight the issue, DV in diverse communities, particularly in Muslim communities is taboo, BME professionals supporting and campaigning to end violence are viewed as home wreckers, therfore, DV IN ALL Communities must be raised as Crucially important as a crime. Each Borough or County should have a centre for victims with specalist staff on hand, a first port of call, they can advice and support the victim and refer the victim to the relevant agencies, the centre to represent the victim to agencies like Social Services, many victims are reluctant to report for fear of their children will be taken away but there is a need for specalist staff to be mentors and advocates for the victims to agencies so they do not feel alone. Public service providers, staff in those agencies need to be non judgmental, there should be a drive to enlist men to talk about DV and assist male offenders and slo help change the attiude of men, make DV a shameful CRIME.

This posting has been edited to protect the poster's privacy.

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Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 18, 2008 05:18PM

In replying you may wish to comment on one or more of the following areas:

- the role of education and other agencies in early identification and prevention for those at risk of honour-based violence
- the effectiveness of public and voluntary sector agencies in addressing the specific needs of victims of honour-based violence
- whether available support services meet the needs of all individuals and communities who may be affected by honour-based violence
- barriers to seeking support
- how victims can be best helped to rebuild their lives and the forms of support that are most useful
- who you have felt most comfortable approaching for support and why
- how effectively the police and courts deal with cases of honour-based violence
- gaps in provision of support

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [hope](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 11:47AM

The short answer, No.

As a person trying desperately to get away partly from this situation and partly from other forms of abuse, i have spoken to many people (Social Services, Police, Counsellors, MP's and small organisations set up by and to work with local council's to support people), i have found everyone can give a shoulder to cry on, a sympathetic ear and all the promises in the land. Sadly not a single one has materialised. I have a friend, who has also gone to the same people, to try and get me support, and he walks away just as disheartened, scared and feeling alone, as me. When i first talked to these different professionals about what i had been going through, every single one pulled the face of disgust and gave me the sympathy. But at the end the answer is always the same, "sorry there is nothing more we can do for you". I find this very annoying and it makes me angry because they have usually done nothing for me in the first place.

If a friend talks to them the answer is different and to be quite honest it does not shock me anymore. What does shock me, is when they do not whisper it, or at least try to make sure i don't hear them, they all freely say 'It's their religion'. It's NOT 'their' religion. Abuse is NOT anyone's religion. The sooner PROFESSIONAL's learn that, the sooner they can combat 'honour-based' violence.

I have told these professionals not only about what i am running from, but also the fear that controls me, knowing that one day i could be found. They have seen how i live, but still they either don't or won't help. Another problem these organisations/professionals, i have met, have, is that there is no real concern. The sympathy and understanding they show cannot possibly be real, because i go out of my way to make sure i am hidden, but these people freely discuss your situation with whoever they want. For example, i spoke to someone at a government agency, and asked for help, all they had to do was write a letter to a woman i had been talking to. They choose to ignore me, and write to their own contact in the same organisation. By doing so, they revealed my situation to a complete stranger, who had never heard of me, and to this day, i have never met.

The sympathy is usually replaced by bad attitude when you have had to ask for help about 4 times. You are made to feel even more isolated, scared and alone than you did at the start. Anyone helping you (friends) are also made to feel this way. I understand not everyone knows about 'honour' based violence and abuse, but nobody wants to learn or even try to understand, it's always "out of our league".

These are not 'one off's', i will not allow anyone to say that they are. I have been to more than one of each of the above mentioned professionals, in many parts of the country since

i have been running. This all seems to be routine procedure every where you go. And no matter who you call, their answers are always the same, which makes me think everyone is well connected and to be straight about it, I do not trust a single person i have met, i will never trust any of them either. Their response's to my situation and compared to their promises, have made me realise i would be alone if it wasn't for a friend. Sadly that friend can not help me the way these professionals are paid to help me and other people in these disgusting, horrific, abusive, violating and far from religous situations.

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Re: Are victims of “honour-based” violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [Hellraiser](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 01:47PM

hear hear, i come from a very closed rural community, some who speak in a diffrent toungue, mostly white, i have attended confrences on hounor crimes and forced marriages, I have some comprehension, it is not about religon, again it's about power and control, but would feel very ill equiped to deal with a client presenting me with issues of forced marriages. i do know wht organisations are out there and who would be able to help, but losing all your family, never seeing them or talking to them again, i can not comprehend.

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Re: Are victims of “honour-based” violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [pureland](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 28, 2008 08:21PM

recourse to public funds is an issue

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Re: Are victims of “honour-based” violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [christmas](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 30, 2008 10:15AM

We need to be able to give practical help in safeguarding victims not just giving them tea and sympathy.
Professional services do not have enough specialist expertise to deal with these issues. this needs to be invested in.

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Re: Are victims of “honour-based” violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [Margaret Moran MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 03:18PM



Thanks for all your postings, which are really helping me and my fellow MPs on the Committee to understand the key issues faced by victims of domestic violence, “honour-based” violence and forced marriage. It would be great to hear from even more people about their experiences.

Are you able to say what type of organisations you went to for help e.g. the police, your GP, a women's centre etc? Where would you consider to be a safe place that could help and what would be your priority to get sorted for you? Have you heard of or been in touch with the Forced Marriage Unit? Do you know of any specialist groups dealing with this crime?

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:01:11:20:15 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [Skywalker](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 06:34PM

No

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [Trish](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 01, 2008 04:49PM

Firstly, stop calling it 'honour-based' crime. Call it murder, torture, kidnap or any other 'real' term. There is nothing honourable in it. Most organisations who do work in this area are voluntary sector and grossly under-funded. As with all the questions above; put your money where your mouth is!

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [aztecanni](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 05, 2008 04:03PM

No, there is no funding or common understanding of the issue. agencies are woefully inadequate in dealing with the honour based violence or understanding the cultural implications and/or indicators of this kind of abuse.

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [hswa786](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 07, 2008 03:49PM

support is never enough, many are turned away due to no recourse to public funds. some1 needs to take responsibility !! and quick, before the REAL figures are revealed....

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [Jane J](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 11:32AM

First of all, as others have stated in the consultation, stop calling it 'honour-based' crime. There is no honour in offences such as murder, torture, kidnap, rape and many perpetrators use the word 'honour' as an excuse or to give an explanation to these horrendous crimes.

The work that voluntary organisations carry out is life saving but they are under resourced and full to capacity in regards to how many women they can support. It is clear that the work voluntary organisations carry out saves lives but there is a lack of provisions/ services for BME women, for example there are only two specialist services in the whole of Wales supporting BME women.

There are a number of barriers to seeking support such as language, isolation, community pressure and lack of understanding within society but the main barrier for many women is the no recourse to public funds rule. No recourse to public funds during the two year

'probationary period' should be abolished where domestic abuse is established. By allowing women to receive public funds during the two year period this would mean that less women will return to their abusive partners and the voluntary organisations resources are not diminished. The no recourse to public funds forces many women to return to their abusive partner and their family due to the fact that she is financially dependent on them. The no recourse rule has a detrimental effect on women trying to survive with a family in the UK and has a significant impact on BME refuges. Currently women with no recourse are solely dependent on charities/ voluntary organisations so this has significant implications on their resources. The cost of supporting one woman and her children for a charity is roughly £15,000 per annum, and in some cases can be significantly higher, so resources are taken away from the charity and also a number of women are turned away because of the lack of funding. Children also suffer by the no recourse to public funds rule because it prevents many women, if they leave, from accessing protection, housing or welfare benefits. The no recourse to public funds should be abolished and if not core funding should be made available to voluntary organisations to support women with no recourse so that they are not forced to turn them away.

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [kka38](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 12:38PM

I would like to say 'yes' but my situation arose a number of years ago, when I left home after a series of violent incidents leading up to the imminent arrangement of a forced marriage to bring me 'into line'. After leaving home the threat of being found by my family and what would happen was real and I lived scared for a good few years, even moving to France to ensure my safety. Nothing can protect you from the psychological fear that is drilled home to you regarding what happens when you dishonour the family.

To cut a long story short I was a teenager and wanted to go to university. I was helped by a police officer to gain a full grant as my parents could not be means tested. I gained financial help from the state in terms of housing benefit, income support until I could support myself. However my point is that a number of years ago it was the kindness and tenacity of individuals that supported me, not agencies as such.

Today, working for a charity which supports BME people, I am horrified to find the situation has not really changed. In terms of the families who are still entrenched in this way of thinking and the children who are subjected to such violence.

There is not enough understanding by authorities of the actual dynamics of family honour/violence/forced marriage from the perspective of parents or the children who love them or are too scared to disobey. In abuse children still love their parents and find it hard to 'blame' them. Same with this whole issue, going outside of the family is punished and you are torn between loyalties and survival. I think it is very difficult for agencies to provide support because there are so many factors. I do believe the real core of the issue lies in integration of cultures rather than separation, so that there is more transparency around customs and beliefs rather than ignorance.

This posting has been edited to protect the privacy of the poster.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit was 2008:02:08:17:59:15 by Parliament Moderator.

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [Seca](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 08, 2008 10:00PM

No, unfortunately I don't believe the victims of these crimes , I don't want to call them 'honour' either, are supported in the way they should be. I believe this is because of ignorance, there is a huge need of educating the members of the agencies usually involved in these cases, i.e. police, social services, health visitors, etc. So they don't send these victims back to their houses where they are receiving the abuse. I have worked for a voluntary agency supporting victims of forced marriages and 'honour' bases violence, and

they are definitely under staffed, they are trying to do too much in order to 'spread the word', meaning to raise awareness so the responses from professionals are adequate, however they do not have enough funds or staff to do this and at the same time to support the hundreds of victims that seek their support from all over the country.

There is extreme political correctness but I quote Sir Ian Blair, political correctness is not accepting the unacceptable, it is definitely unacceptable in a 21st century British society to allow this to happen!!!

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [David Davies MP](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 18, 2008 05:38PM



We've heard evidence suggesting that the current police witness protection scheme is not designed to deal with victims and survivors of forced marriage and "honour-based" violence. What would be the crucial elements of a victim protection programme? Do you think better protection for victims would encourage more people to come forward to report "honour-based" violence?

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [relative](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 19, 2008 04:53PM

The short answer is no.

I have a relative who is separated from her husband after 20 years. He is a professional man, who was held in great standing within their business circles and community. My relative would say he is charming and ruthless - untouchable. He could also afford top barristers and he set out, through private law proceedings and other means, to totally discredit my relative, in the community and the family courts, as well as carrying on a vendetta of threats, emotional abuse and bullying. It is still rumbling on through the courts in terms of divorce settlement and issues in relation to the children. My relative is not entitled to legal aid due to being just over the legal aid ceiling, and is having to budget her legal instructions and consultations, meaning she is not getting the best representation in court. Unfortunately, she does not fit the threshold for support from social services, and the area in which she lives does not have a designated female domestic violence police officer.

I am also a professional dealing with this problem and it isn't until you find yourself personally involved that you realise how difficult it is for women to 1) be believed, 2) get appropriate legal representation, 3) escape from the violence and intimidation, whatever form it takes, without losing all of their support networks. Why should the woman have to move away, when she is the victim? Services are often patchy, with women falling between the gaps in terms of getting a wholistic service with appropriate support. There is a myth that if the courts are involved in terms of family law, social services does not need to respond. Perhaps there should be a multi-disciplinary team consisting of police and social services, including social workers from adult and childrens services.

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 24, 2008 09:23PM

Is there a link between the National Criminal Intelligence Service, which monitors large cash withdrawals and the risk assessment of those at risk of being killed by bounty

hunters ?

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Re: Are victims of “honour-based” violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [tiscali](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 25, 2008 09:24AM

I think it may assist the committee if they looked at the very recent Van Colle case which, in layman's terms, ruled that if there existed a witness protection scheme then failure to deploy it would leave the agent of that failure open to legal challenge. Since any domestic violence policy must have at its heart the protection of those reporting domestic abuse, one can apply the Van Colle case (about witnesses) to agents providing protection to victims of domestic abuse. This means the State should be protecting victims but clearly they are not applying sufficient and capable resource to do that. The Van Colle case has already been used outside of the Courts to draw a settlement from the police in a case of domestic abuse leading to murder.

The Van Colle case is due to be ruled on in the House of Lords but it is currently law having survived an appeal by the police against the original ruling. The appeal did lead to guidance being changed downwards on any amounts awarded but it still provides a route to challenge failure by agents of the state. Previously, it has been near impossible to secure a judgement against the police as they relied on the case of Hill (Yorkshire Ripper).

Van Colle's parents received a moderate award. More cases brought under Van Colle would bolster the effect of this law to increase protection of victims.

I am not a lawyer but my sister and nephew were murdered in domestic violence four years ago.

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Re: Are victims of “honour-based” violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [Northampton Women](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 26, 2008 04:21PM

Quote:

Parliament Moderator

In replying you may wish to comment on one or more of the following areas:

- the role of education and other agencies in early identification and prevention for those at risk of honour-based violence
- the effectiveness of public and voluntary sector agencies in addressing the specific needs of victims of honour-based violence
- whether available support services meet the needs of all individuals and communities who may be affected by honour-based violence
- barriers to seeking support
- how victims can be best helped to rebuild their lives and the forms of support that are most useful
- who you have felt most comfortable approaching for support and why
- how effectively the police and courts deal with cases of honour-based violence
- gaps in provision of support

On the effectiveness of public and voluntary sector agencies, there is a lack of response from the police on this issue. There is a need for early intervention, and especially work in the schools, and also for training.

One of the biggest barriers to seeking support is the limit that many victims of honour-based violence have in access to public funds. Voluntary sector agencies have to factor in the costs of supporting these victims into their own operating costs.

There is a real need to enforce equality, and especially to contact the Imams to get them to understand the scale of the problem. There is a need also to enforce equality.

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [CllrDavison](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 01:27PM

This remains very much an issue of culture and people are reluctant to involve themselves. Know that some authorities find it difficult to investigate young asian girls who disappear from the education system as they are not allowed by family members to interview the young girl alone, and are often accused of racism when they try to do so.

I feel that this is an issue we need to face head on, more publicity and education in our schools so that young girls who are brought up to believe that honour is the most important thing in her life and that she must not bring shame on her family, are taught that it is in fact against the law in this country to force marriage and that she must be free to live her life the way she wants to.

Muslim leaders also need to play their part. I know local leading members of the Muslim community who although they say they respect the laws in this country, still counsel women to go back to their abusive families in the name of 'honour'.

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Re: Are victims of "honour-based" violence helped enough by public and voluntary sector agencies?

Posted by: [anonymous](#) (IP Logged) Date: February 29, 2008 04:36PM

The answer is NO, because there are not enough organisations in the country to help, there are only a handful of agencies but not well financed to help, mostly voluntary women's organisations, our organisation is volunteered by women and spend their time supporting and assisting victims to rebuild their lives. You need to find out how many organisations help victims of honour based crimes, fund those organisations and there is a need to highlight the crime as a crime against women, local authorities are not furnished enough information to give advice or support or even how to deal with sensitive areas as honour based crimes.

This posting has been edited to protect the privacy of the poster.

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Appendix 2 All contributions of e-consultation on e-Petitions

(Downloaded at <http://forums.parliament.uk/devc> on 6 May 2009)

What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 04, 2008 11:10AM



**PARLIAMENT
MODERATOR**

The Government has agreed normally to respond to all petitions. These responses are printed in Hansard. Would you want to receive notification of the progress of a petition (debates, government responses) you had a) written b) signed?

At the moment petitions are rarely debated on the floor of the House. Should there be greater opportunity for Members of Parliament to debate, and ask the Government questions about the subject matter of petitions and its responses to them?

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [Watching Them, Watching Us](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 09, 2008 07:02PM

There are lessons to be learned from the [Code of Practice for 12 week Public Consultations](#) issued originally by the Cabinet Office, now under the Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform.

There is a danger of appearing to be "going through the motions" if the people who have put some ideas out for consultation, then go and issue some secondary legislation or regulations which impinge on the topic under consultation, during or immediately after the 12 week consultation period. This totally devalues the whole exercise.

Care should be taken to coordinate the business of the House of Commons or the House of Lords to ensure that, if, say, a Select Committee is writing a report on a certain issue, and there is also an ongoing e-Petition on the topic, that they do not leak or publish their findings, before the results of the e-Petition have been made public.

This mechanism must not, however, be abused to deliberately delay the publication of a Select Committee report which may be critical of the Government until after, say, a forthcoming election or crucial vote in Parliament.

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [psow.co.uk](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 06:12PM

A similar system to the Scottish one should be introduced. A petition select committee should be introduced. With responsibility for identifying serious petitions, debating them, procuring a response from the appropriate department and then reporting to parliament.

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [foo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 07:05PM

Quote:

The Government has agreed normally to respond to all petitions. These responses are printed in Hansard. Would you want to receive notification of the progress of a petition (debates, government responses) you had a) written b) signed?

Most definately (to both parts), if I deem it worthy enough to put my name to then I would absolutely want to hear any feedback (both positive and negative) on its reception by policy makers.

Quote:

At the moment petitions are rarely debated on the floor of the House. Should there be greater opportunity for Members of Parliament to debate, and ask the Government questions about the subject matter of petitions and its responses to them?

I don't see why not.

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [Watching Them, Watching Us](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 07:43PM

Proposing or Signing a controversial e-Petition - safeguards from snooping ?

If Parliament is to be seen by the public to actually be independent of the executive branch of Government, then Parliamentary Privilege must be used to protect those who propose the wording of an e-Petition and those who eventually sign it.

It is inevitable that there will be e-Petitions which touch on politically sensitive subjects e.g. Northern Ireland, animal vivisection, human genetics, abortion, fundamentalist extremist religions, immigration policy, foreign wars etc

All of these topics may attract small minorities whose activities come under suspicion by the Police or Intelligence agencies etc. on the vague grounds of "extremism" or "national security" etc. some of whom may well try the peaceful democratic approach to getting policies changed, by signing an e-Petition, along with the vast majority of others who remain peaceful and law abiding. The current trend towards slurping large amounts of data about the general public, treating them as potential suspects, and retaining it indefinitely into the future, e.g. [Project Rich Picture](#) etc. should not be allowed to be applied to the Parliamentary e-Petitions system.

Proposing or Signing a Parliamentary e-Petition on a controversial topic should never be recorded against you as a black mark on your electronic secret dossier held by law enforcement or intelligence agencies or by any other branch of Government.

Unless there are extremely strong legal protections, comparable to those under which the Census data is collected and protected, then many of the people most likely to be affected, or most vehemently for or against the e-Petition, will be inhibited from responding, and Parliament's political engagement with the public will be brought further into disrepute

There must be legally enforceable prohibitions, with criminal penalty sanctions e.g. up to 2 years in prison and / or unlimited fines, against the use or abuse of the Parliamentary e-Petitions system where it asks for, or records Personal Data (e.g. name, address, post code, Parliamentary Constituency, age etc.) , or any associated electronic Communications Traffic Data e.g. IP address, web browser cookies, web browser type, proxy server variables, mobile telephone SIM card number, mobile phone handset International Mobile Equipment Identifier, Cell ID Location etc.)

The Prime Minister must promise Parliament that the "Wilson Doctrine" extends to all aspects of any such Parliamentary e-Petitions system (see the [Spy Blog Wilson Doctrine category archive](#) for more details about this vague exemption from interception of

Westminster MPs telephone calls, which should, in theory, cover emails , web form submissions and mobile phone SMS text messages to an e-Petition system)

Any Parliamentary e-Petitions system must be legally exempt from snooping by the Police or Security or Intelligence services etc. under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) ,or any other legacy law or secondary legislation powers under any other Statute.

Private sector commercial companies must never have access to the data collected.

Individual Members of Parliament or Peers or Political Parties must never have access to name and address or email or phone contact details etc. of e-Petitioners, without the explicit, informed prior consent of the signer.

None of the electronic infrastructure should expose British citizens data to snooping by foreign Governments with useless Data Protection laws or to commercial companies e.g. if the web servers or email servers etc. are hosted in countries outside of the European Economic Area such as the United States of America or the Russian Federation or India etc.

It should be obvious, but it is worth emphasising, that there must never be any HMRC / NAO style "missing unencrypted copies of the entire database" on CDs, DVDs, tapes, laptop computers, USB memory devices etc.malarkey with any Parliamentary e-Petitions system.

The security and privacy protections of the e-Petitions system should be regularly reviewed by independent penetration testing experts, - if you can find any of them left in the UK once the inept and controversial "dual use tools" and "belief" amendments to the Computer Misuse Act come into force.

[Spy Blog](#)

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [level80](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 10:05PM

>The Government has agreed normally to respond to all petitions. These responses are printed in Hansard. Would >you want to receive notification of the progress of a petition (debates, government responses) you had a) written >b) signed?

Most people do not know about this, it's the first I've heard about it! People are more interested in actual result than the debate IMHO.

>At the moment petitions are rarely debated on the floor of the House. Should there be greater opportunity?

If individual MPs want to make more time to discuss matters relating to petitions they should schedule it. At local authority level, submitted petitions are noted in minutes but not necessarily discussed.

> for
>Members of Parliament to debate, and ask the Government questions about the subject matter of petitions and >its responses to them?

Much can be done outside of the House of Commons/Lords. There are already avenues to raise questions eg ministerial correspondence unit etc.

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [mojo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 16, 2008 01:55PM

The situation seems quite simple to me. Petitions are a form of direct government, and so should always be considered very seriously.

If people knew that they could have a direct say in government policy and actions, I'm sure the system would be even more popular than it is now.

The only real issue is how to decide how much weight to apply to each petition. The obvious metric is the number of signatures. Decisions on weight should be made by an independent body, not one chosen by the government. The body should be able to legally require certain actions, ranging from a debate in parliament to a referendum.

Anything less would seem to be anti-democratic. After all, the very nature of democracy is to do the will of the people, and petitions are a direct way of expressing that will.

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [Grant](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 20, 2008 07:50AM

Well Said mojo

Quote:

mojo

The situation seems quite simple to me. Petitions are a form of direct government, and so should always be considered very seriously.

Einstein Said "*Everything in the world should be made as simple as possible !, but not one little bit simpler !!*"

IMHO e-petitions are a fantastic idea, but would require a bit of further internal support ie: -

Separate Formal Hierarchy of forums for debates in the public domain.
Individual Posters having the ability to be raised in the hierarchy (possibly with thumbs up vote count on posts)

Posters should be dissuaded from the "*Presenting trays of shattered glass*" approach & encouraged to offer real world suggestions to the solutions required when issues are raised.

In my 20 yrs experience with forums (I started with DOS & dial up modems) I've learned that there are some bloody clever people out there.

I would expect a petition generated from such a recognized & formal hierarchy should at least get read occasionally by the relevant Cabinet

If an e-petition type Direct Gov can be achieved then it must contain certain values at its very heart :-

Simplicity - honesty - transparency - rules & boundaries

Headlines = **UK Parliament Introduces true e-government democracy framework**

ALL IMHO

GW

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [mojo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 21, 2008 04:20PM

The problem with forums of the nature you suggest is that too many people will want to participate, and only the early posters will have any influence. Take the BBC "Have Your Say" for example. Within an hour of a topic being started, it has usually filled to more than ten pages (20 posts per page). Since most visitors only look at the first page or two, unless you post in the first 20 minutes and your post is moderated up, chances are no-one will read it.

Petitions avoid this problem. Although wording can be an issue, if people disagree they can simply choose not to sign or set up a rival, opposite petition. Besides which, the petition should be seen as the first step in a process, which would lead to either direct action by the government or a referendum (with wording chosen by an independent panel).

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [Grant](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 21, 2008 05:37PM

I'm sure a single forum would fill up pretty quick - but I was suggesting a Hierachial Set of Forums.

Say for each Cabinet there were a set of 10 Forums - CabinetName_1, CabinetName10

A new poster would have access to the lowest forum & join the discussions. At set intervals or some other trigger some posters could be elevated to a higher forum.

A poster would have read only access to all forums beneath them.

A thread started in a lower forum could eventually get elevated to the higher forums.

Something like that

GW

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [mojo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 21, 2008 06:43PM

The problem with making forums exclusive like that is you are then excluding people from certain debates. Someone in one forum cannot directly address someone in another in a useful (e.g. thread based) way.

Another problem with such a system is that it would require registration and membership to the forum. In my opinion, anonymous forums (such as the Japanese 2channel) work much better since it is impossible for anyone to gain credibility or weight by the amount of time or number of posts they have to their name. The only arguments that work are well made, logical ones.

Furthermore, forums usually require moderation, which would be difficult and highly controversial on this scale.

While I do agree that debate would be a very useful feature, if petitions could be developed into parliamentary debates and/or referendums, a more effectual debate would be possible as people communicate in their own way through forums, newspapers, friends

etc. In that way petitions which gain large amounts of support could set the agenda, but not control the way it is debated.

While the concept for total equality and every person having their individual say is admirable, it is unfortunately not practical. For that reason petitions are an excellent tool, identifying issues that large numbers of people feel are important and allowing them to be considered within the current political hierarchy.

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [Grant](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 22, 2008 04:49PM

mmmm OK Mojo - I hear your points

However

Quote:

"The problem with making forums exclusive like that is you are then excluding people from certain debates."

I believe that common people have always been excluded from cabinet debates. this measure would at least take steps to try and include valid debates from some of them.

Quote:

mojo

"Someone in one forum cannot directly address someone in another in a useful (e.g. thread based) way. "

Again this is a matter of the Mechanics of the Rules - for example & just off the top of my head how about each thread started including a poll button - each week the 3 top poll scorers are visibly flagged as having been escalated to next forum layer above for further discussion

Quote:

mojo

"Another problem with such a system is that it would require registration and membership to the forum."

Yes - IP & ISP is Logged anyway

Quote:

mojo

"In my opinion, anonymous forums (such as the Japanese 2channel) work much better since it is impossible for anyone to gain credibility or weight by the amount of time or number of posts they have to their name."

I'm afraid in my opinion anonymous forums are the most easy to artificially manipulate and covertly introduce hidden agendas - & hey if you get caught - just sign back in with a different alias - IMHO This just would not do.

Quote:

mojo

"The only arguments that work are well made, logical ones. "

In a true democracy the arguments that should work are those of the interested & educated majority - a forum approach provides a vehicle to try and achieve this.

Lets not forget that recent wars have been started on the basis of well made & logical arguments !!

Quote:

mojo

"Furthermore, forums usually require moderation, which would be difficult and highly controversial on this scale. "

Yup - but at least people get to see what the (impartial) moderators actions are & if necessary they are discussed & if necessary they are Reported

nobody would suggest that creating such an e-democracy forum would be easy

Quote:

mojo

"While I do agree that debate would be a very useful feature, if petitions could be developed into parliamentary debates and/or referendums, a more effectual debate would be possible as people communicate in their own way through forums, newspapers, friends etc. In that way petitions which gain large amounts of support could set the agenda, but not control the way it is debated. "

The problem with current petitions is that they tend to present to the petitioned, little more than a one way ultimatum (As in - we say that you should do this) & that is where the petition often stops.

A petition presented with a freely available transcript of the debate that has already taken place. A debate by members of the interested public forums, which itself (As psow indicated above) has justified the presentation of the petition. This should be a Very Good starting point from which the petitioned can embark upon their own controlled internal debate (and hopefully consideration of the previous debates various solutions !!).

Quote:

mojo

"While the concept for total equality and every person having their individual say is admirable, it is unfortunately not practical."

with todays technology I believe that it is practical for every INTERESTED individual to have a say, in fact I believe there are fast becomming fewer & fewer excuses why they should'nt

Quote:

mojo

"For that reason petitions are and excellent tool, identifying issues that large numbers of people feel are important and allowing them to be considered within the current political hierarchy."

I believe you could be making a common & classic mistake here - merely taking an existing manual process and automating it does not neccesarily make it better, if anything in this case I believe it will make the petition less valuable.

I'm afraid we may have to agree to disagree on this matter - but hey we're adults, that's life.

methinks It would be so much better if someone else could join in this thread (foe which i'm extremely grateful that the moderator has started).

So in answer to the original question - "What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?"

Ans = As it is currently proposed "Very, very little"

GW

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [mojo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 23, 2008 10:41PM

Quote:

Grant

I believe that common people have always been excluded from cabinet debates. this measure would at least take steps to try and include valid debates from some of them.

Who decides which debates are valid? Aside from perhaps swearing I think it would be a mistake to introduce any kind of censorship. Open petitions that anyone can start are the best way to achieve that IMHO. Look at how the internet has changed popular music, for example. Heavily invested parties (record companies) no longer control which artists

become popular.

Quote:

Again this is a matter of the Mechanics of the Rules - for example & just off the top of my head how about each thread started including a poll button - each week the 3 top poll scorers are visibly flagged as having been escalated to next forum layer above for further discussion

Of course the next forum layer could just ignore those discussions, and how is having a poll any different/better than a simple petition?

I'm afraid it's no use simply saying "off the top of my head", because my point is that there is no workable system and the only counter to that is to suggest one.

Quote:

Yes - IP & ISP is Logged anyway

IP address proves nothing, people can use Tor or a proxy etc. It would still be anonymous.

Quote:

I'm afraid in my opinion anonymous forums are the most easy to artificially manipulate and covertly introduce hidden agendas - & hey if you get caught - just sign back in with a different alias - IMHO This just would not do.

The problem with registration is that people who have been registered for a long time tend to gain authority and gravitas, plus in order to have a proper debate people must be allowed to contribute anonymously. In that respect I would argue that petitions should be anonymous too, with names and addresses only collected for verification purposes and not made publicly available. After all, no-one knows which way you vote.

People living near me have been attacked for supporting contentious issues.

Also, when I say anonymous, I mean not even aliases - just comments and no attribution what so ever. It seems counter intuitive but it does work.

Quote:

In a true democracy the arguments that should work are those of the interested & educated majority - a forum approach provides a vehicle to try and achieve this.

Lets not forget that recent wars have been started on the basis of well made & logical arguments !!

That depends on your point of view. Arguably the majority of people were not convinced by the arguments made for the last war, and they were neither logical or well made (partially plagiarised from internet sources etc). At the very least, many assumed them to be untrue simply because the government made them, which is what anonymous debate is designed to avoid.

For example, necessary has one 'c' and two 's's (see your next paragraph). By pointing that out I have detracted from your otherwise reasonably presented argument and damaged your reputation, however slightly, thus reducing the effectiveness of any further arguments you make regardless of logic or reasoning. Anonymity would prevent this.

Arguments should be considered on their merits, not on who made them. In that sense the current petition system actually works quite well, since most petitions are not started by known figures and the majority of people reading them do not know anything about the creator.

Also, I question your assumption that democracy should follow the will of the educated majority. My understanding of the word is that education is not necessary to participate.

Quote:

Yup - but at least people get to see what the (impartial) moderators actions are & if necessary they are discussed & if necessary they are Reported
nobody would suggest that creating such an e-democracy forum would be easy

I tend to side with John Stewart Mill who suggested that all arguments should be at least considered, however briefly, no matter how outlandish, offensive or unpopular they are. Otherwise it is impossible to fully consider any given subject. Moderation, no matter how impartial, is incompatible with that. Again, look to the BBC "Have Your Say" forums, which are supposedly impartially moderated, for an example of how truly impartial moderation is an oxymoron. At some point, someone has to decide what is acceptable, thereby becoming partisan.

Quote:

The problem with current petitions is that they tend to present to the petitioned, little more than a one way ultimatum (As in - we say that you should do this) & that is where the petition often stops.

This is why it would be necessary to have the petitions debated, and perhaps voted upon in a referendum. Also, I do not see any inherent problem with such direct demands, if that is indeed the will of the people.

Quote:

with todays technology I believe that it is practical for every INTERESTED individual to have a say, in fact I believe there are fast becomming fewer & fewer excuses why they should'nt

I agree in so much as the petitions such as these which can trigger debate and referendums do now mean there is very little reason they should not be used. However, again I have to point out that there is no system in the world available which can deal with the numbers of people we are talking about. Even the most successful registered or anonymous forums do not appear to scale to having millions of people attempting to comment on a single issue. Petitions, however, do, while still allowing full debate and for each individual to have a direct say (vote) on the outcome.

Quote:

I believe you could be making a common & classic mistake here - merely taking an existing manual process and automating it does not neccesarily make it better, if anything in this case I believe it will make the petition less valuable.

Surely giving people a free platform on which to run a petition which can be accessed easily by almost every voter in the UK makes the system highly valuable in a democracy?

Consider what is required to run a petition otherwise. Web sites, web hosting, auditing, security, printed forms, advertising, coordination and more. In particular, careful auditing and security are required for the petition to be valid. The current web site does all this for free, for any citizen who cares to use it.

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Re: What result would you expect from submitting or signing an e-petition?

Posted by: [MerseyMog](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 31, 2008 07:20AM

From submitting a petition I would expect the submission to be checked for "reasonableness" of content; i.e. something that once checked and if necessary corrected for basic grammar, spelling and other errors which do not affect the spirit of the petition would merit serious discussion for inclusion in future legislation.

Once accepted the E-petition should allow votes both for and against the motion and should run for a term of no more than 6 months. When a petition is rejected there must be a written explanation in plain English which the originator can fully understand. It may even be that the motion is felt to be worthy enough without a petition to be considered by parliament in debate. At least one M.P. should be listed in favour of the motion; this give it their blessing

The present P.M.'s E-petition mechanism has a number of flaws with it. There is no option to oppose other than setting up another petition, as such it can never be a true snapshot of opinion. Number of people reading and signing E-petitions tends to be very small so there does need to be a means of making the public more aware of the existence of

petitions. The present system is effectively a free-for-all almost anything goes into which a lot of frivolous non-starters get acceptance; this means that potential signatories cannot see the wood for the trees.

When a P.M.'s E-petition is completed with 200 or more signatures it does get a response but these responses are invariably a simple brush off irrespective of the number of signatures or the merit of the proposal. When I first saw the E-petition site I thought "Great the government giving the people a say", however I have since formed the view that they are a ruse to let the people think they may have say so much so that I now believe they are not worth having. At the end of the day it must be remembered the public elected M.P.'s to legislate on their behalf so parliament must have the final say.

If a system of E-petitions is adopted it should run alongside normal petitions so as to allow conventional lobbying to take place. The petition supporters and opposers should be able to get signatories the counts of which will be added to the E-totals.

Whatever proposal is adopted it must be seen to be a genuine and serious attempt to extend democracy. If that is not possible then the whole idea should be abandoned.

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How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 04, 2008 11:10AM



PARLIAMENT
MODERATOR

The Committee believes that the involvement of the local MP would be a valuable part of the system. Would you welcome advice from your MP on preparing an e-petition?

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Re: How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?

Posted by: [Watching Them, Watching Us](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 09, 2008 06:47PM

What will the quality and timeliness of advice be from an MP who is personally opposed, or whose party is opposed, to a particular controversial e-Petition topic ?

Individual Members of Parliament or Peers or Political Parties, must never have access to name and address or email or phone contact details etc. of e-Petitioners, either Proposers or Signers, without their explicit, informed, prior consent.

Aggregated anonymous public statistics of the number of signers of a particular e-Petition, cross referenced by Parliamentary constituency, (easily determined explicitly or via a post code lookup during the signing process) should be available to the public and therefore to constituency Members of Parliament.

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Re: How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?

Posted by: [averagejoe1](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 12, 2008 01:05PM

MP's should take on E-mails and forum messages in the same way they would respond to a letter, if it is a valid and indeed popular point then the MP should take action on the issue.

The MP could of course post their own messages onto the forum and have some kind of cyber debate with the forum members, meaning that the forum becomes more of an advisory center than a simple expression of simple idea ans issues that are being vented onto the internet. MPs could use this to see views on local and national issues alike and that would enable them to bring up questions in PMQ that will have real interst from the public and use to the public.

I'm not saying the MP should rely on this forum but simply have it at his/her side to consult and listen to their electorate and deside what issues to tackle due to the thoughts of the forum visitors and the e-petitions signed.

This could be a brilliant tool to increase political involvement and be more representitive of the public's needs.

Thanks Very Much.

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Re: How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?

Posted by: [foo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 07:03PM

Advice from people more knowledgeable about the workings of government would always

be welcome. It is, however, up to the submitter/signatory to take that advise as he/she will.

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Re: How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?

Posted by: [level80](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 10:00PM

>What will the quality and timeliness of advice be from an MP who is personally opposed, or whose party is opposed, >to a particular controversial e-Petition topic ?

It depends whether they think it is best to be public about their opposition, or these are private views that counter their party's policies. Their advice is determined partly by the information their staff and party give them on the matter.

Petitioners would often be getting in touch with these groups (individual MPs, Lords and members of political parties) looking for a response.

For petitions of a local issue, seeing the geographical spread of petitioners may be useful.

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Re: How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?

Posted by: [mojo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 21, 2008 04:28PM

MPs should have two functions in relation to e-petitions. Firstly, like any other private citizen, they should be allowed to start petitions.

Secondly, they should be allowed to publicly support or oppose petitions, with the option to comment on them. Comments should be displayed on the web site along with each petition, as well as lists of MPs who support or oppose it, but should not be given too much prominence.

The main purpose of allowing this should be to allow the public to better understand the views of their elected MPs, and to allow comment from those directly involved in politics and policy making.

Furthermore, this should replace the system by which the government can email all those who signed a petition. The relevant government minister would be able to respond, if they choose to, in the same manner as any other MP by writing a comment.

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Re: How do you think individual MPs should take part in an e-petitions system?

Posted by: [Anubis](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 29, 2008 06:12PM

Personally, I would hope that any petition with a high enough level of signatories would get discussed in parliament...

Say more than 5,000...

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Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [Parliament Moderator](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 04, 2008 11:11AM



**PARLIAMENT
MODERATOR**

Should anyone be able to sign any petition or should some be limited to people living in a particular area (e.g. where a new road will be built or a hospital closed)? How important is it that e-petitions should ask for specific remedies to specific problems?

It may be that anyone starting or signing an e-petition would have to give certain personal information such as post code or contact number to help prevent abuse. This information would not be published on the website and would be subject to an explicit privacy policy. Would you be comfortable providing such information if you were a) writing a petition b) signing a petition?

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [Mash, Tory](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 08, 2008 10:58PM

I am supportive of an e-petitioning website hosted by the British Parliament, enabling people irrespective of their political affiliation or those of none are able to address their concerns and draw support amongst online supporters. My one concern is whether MPs or Ministers endeavour to listen to what people believe or say on an online petition. Secondly, there would be a need to ensure that e-petitioners are United Kingdom citizens, allowing Members of Parliament (MPs) and Ministers to gauge some indication of feeling on the ground. However, I am not precisely sure how you seek to moderate the e-petitioning system or prevent non-UK citizens to participate. If this is for MPs and Ministers to understand the concerns of their constituents, then there clearly needs to be a system to ensure only UK citizens can participate. Thirdly, what measures will be in place to ensure the system is not randomly abused by its online users?

Perhaps MPs and Ministers if possible should blog either on their own blogs and websites, or attempt to blog on other politically active blogging spheres, providing them with a more comprehensive understanding of feeling amongst the blogging population. That is my own opinion anyway.

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [Perspective Vortex](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 11, 2008 01:11PM

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Whether I would consider signing an e-petition depends entirely on the details of the system. In connection to this, I would like to condemn in the strongest terms the so-called petitioning system currently housed on the PM's web-page.

I believe I was the second person to post a petition on this site; I did this in good faith. My petition, which was essentially against replacement of the Trident nuclear weapons system, was one of the five most popular petitions for several months after the system was set up. On its close, I was not contacted, but all signees were sent an email putting the government's point of view. I had expected to be able to email those who had supported the petition, but it turned out that the guidelines had been written in an extremely misleading way and that this was not to be possible. I sent a large number of emails to the civil servants running the site, with no response.

In essence, my petition was used to create a mailing list to assist the government in

lobbying the public; I consider myself to have been duped into assisting interest groups opposed to my petition. I will never use it again and I now advise others not to: I consider the e-petitioning system to be a mendacious gimmick with the overall effect of generating political disengagement and cynicism.

The underlying problem is that the e-petitioning system is purely an administrative tool with no political content; no MPs moderate or consider the petitions that are received; petitioners are placed in direct contact with civil servants, and in the absence of MPs to provide scrutiny and leverage, this is a disempowering and frustrating experience - civil servants are not accountable to the public and are not obliged to give a nuanced response.

e-petitions, in generating a flood of petitions which overwhelms the limited political resources available to MPs, are an essentially de-politicising tool. It should not be quick and easy to sign a petition; petitions should never by-pass MPs. Slowness filters out the politically naive and so reduces the burden on MPs.

I summary: I would only sign an e-petition under circumstances of extreme urgency, and in general I am very sceptical of the use of information technology to make democracy more "efficient": efficiency can only lead to depoliticisation. In this respect, e-petitioning is a danger (though probably a mild one) to democratic values.

Many thanks;

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [averagejoe1](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 12, 2008 01:13PM

I think an e-petition website is a brilliant idea, a great way for people to get their issues heard and to get it heard without going to silly measures like fathers 4 justice did. As long the petitions are actually taken into account then it would definatly work. Pressure groups would have adverts asking people to go onto the petition website and sign an e-petition, its so simple!

As for the moment, issues that I feel would be worthy of a petition would be in order to gain views on certain issues, such as the Iraq War, House Of Lords reforms and a possible nationalisation of the rail. Some issues will crop up that MP's will never have heard of allowing them to take on differing and new issues which would hot up House of Commons activity.

This is a marvellous idea! I hope it goes forward as planned.

Thank You.

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [fidbod](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 05:36PM

Like the previous poster, I am also strongly supportive of the epetitions website. It is a valuable tool for the electorate to rapidly express their view on a specific subject. It has certainly increased my involvement in the political process.

The corollary to this is that the government and parliament must be prepared to interact with the petitions and the views expressed. previous posters have criticised the pathetic response to petitions that have run to fruition, which I also endorse.

For me the key to my continued participation is to see concrete evidence that my involvement impacts the issue that is the subject of the petition. Whilst I appreciate that my voice alone should not directly influence public policy, I feel there is a distinct quid pro quo that if a sizeable portion of the electorate expresses a view the government must

move policy to account for the view that has been expressed.

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [fidbod](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 05:42PM

in addition to my previous post the most valuable addition to the current website would be the ability to vote against a petition. I note that there is an open petition at the moment asking the government to hold banks responsible for failed investment products. this is something I would strongly oppose - surely a no vote has a value equal to a pro position?

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [foo](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 07:02PM

[quote]Would you be comfortable providing such [personal] information if you were a) writing a petition[/quote]

As an existing petition initiator, Yes, I have no problem with supplying my information to verify who I am assuming that that information is treated with due respect [1].

[quote]b) signing a petition?[quote]

As above.

[1] Writing this data to CD and then leaving it in a public place doesn't count.

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [Watching Them, Watching Us](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 07:29PM

>Dear forum user
>The e-petitions forum should not allow registered users to start new
>threads. This is to make sure that the forum discussion remains focused
>on the specific questions agreed by the Procedure Committee for public
>consultation. Unfortunately due to a technical fault the system was not
>properly configured when it was set up and consequently you were able to
>create two new threads. We have now changed the settings so that new
>threads can not be created.

Words fail me !

How do you expect to get a wide range of opinions from the public, if you make it so hard to contribute ?

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [Watching Them, Watching Us](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 07:55PM

e-Petitions do not have to be as limited as paper based ones

Do not be limited by thinking of e-Petitions as being exactly like their paper based analogues. There are things which can easily be done with an e-Petition which are technically impractical with a paper based one e.g. the ability for an authenticated signer to "**unsign**" the e-Petition at a future date.

Consider a lenient approach to made up pseudonyms and aliases and email addresses, even if a list of signatories is displayed on a public website. There will be a minority of some offensive names and political slogans, but most web blog or discussion forum users easily take these in their stride.

That does not negate the need to **spend money on human staff and up to date software**, for forum anti-spam moderation, a problem which the [Scottish Parliament e-Petition system](#) forums seems to suffer from.

Following the example of [PledgeBank.com](#), it should be possible, and permitted, for the creators of an e-Petition to email or send SMS texts to signers via the system, without knowing people's individual details, informing them of slight error corrections to an e-Petition, details of when and where the formal response, if any, to the e-Petition can be found , or the existence of other similar e-Petitions on similar topics. The signer should always be able to opt out of such future email / SMS announcements.

There is no reason why aggregated anonymous public statistics of the number of signers of a particular e-Petition by Parliamentary constituency (easily determined explicitly or via a post code lookup during the signing process) should not be available to the public and therefore to constituency Members of Parliament.

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [Voice of the Mob](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 09:50PM

Petitions are only as good as the issue identified by the sponsor.

Many of the current petitions on the 10 Downing Street site appear to relate to failures of local government to follow the law, and as such a failure by Parliament to hold local political associations to account. As most of the members of Parliament are nominated by the same political activists who run Council's, etc. It is not that surprising that the issues don't get raised, or enter the political sphere.

Petitions effectively appear to identify the failure and inability of party politics (and party politicians) to support democracy in the age of the Internet. Political parties at the national level appear to rely very heavily on donations from developers of land (who have been granted consent at local level to engage in development). The Internet has made geography redundant (nearly) - and today there seems to be little need to return MP's to Parliament apart from declaring war on small countries that the USA does not like, and ratifying decisions of the European Parliament. It keeps MP's occupied, but is it productive?

Surely, the role and function of MP's today should be to highlight problems with their 'patch' and organise petitions to ensure that the people are aware - and that change is sought ? This would inevitably lead to a very real change in party political focus and funding.. Examination of the work of the Local Government Ombudsmen (all former appointments of local political parties), and failure of Council Complaints systems identifies that there are very real problems at the 'local patch level', and that there is a need for reform. The Internet and epetitions are an ideal tool to effect change.

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Re: Would you consider signing an e-petition? If so, for what sort of issue?

Posted by: [level80](#) (IP Logged) Date: January 15, 2008 09:55PM

>Should anyone be able to sign any petition?

Yes.

>Should some be limited to people living in a particular area (e.g. where a new road will be built or a hospital closed)?

No, as there may be people living outside an area that have an interest in it (eg they work there, own property there etc etc) or used to live there.

> How important is it that e-petitions should ask for specific remedies to specific problems?

Yes petitions are more successful when they propose specific remedies. However, there still has to be the political will and budget to implement them.

>It may be that that anyone starting or signing an e-petition would have to give certain personal information such >as post code or contact number to help prevent abuse.

These measures won't help prevent abuse.

>This information would not be published on the website and would be subject to an explicit privacy policy. Would >you be comfortable providing such information if you were a) writing a petition b) signing a petition?

- a) yes
- b) yes, as regular petitions often have space on them for an address

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