



# **Spotlight: learning disabilities and domestic abuse**

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# About SafeLives



We are a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for good. We combine insight from services, survivors and statistics to support people to become safe, well and rebuild their lives.

No one should live in fear. It is not acceptable, not inevitable, and together – we can make it stop.

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# About Spotlights

- Particular groups are not accessing the **support** they need
- Our data showed us that disabled people are **not being identified** and **accessing support** soon enough.
- Disabled people's **experience of domestic violence** is different to the stereotypical 'victim'
- Domestic violence practitioners or the police may not always be best placed to **identify** these victims sooner
- We need a multi-agency approach to better **identify and support** them.

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# About Spotlights

## Spotlight #2: Disabled people and domestic abuse

- **Unseen groups:** Spotlights was developed to highlight groups that sometimes go unseen by support agencies.
- **Short-term intensive engagement:** each Spotlight series runs for 6 weeks and focuses on a different 'unseen' group's experience of domestic abuse.
- **Showcasing experts:** We deliver content from experts around the UK in an accessible way.
- **Influencing policy and practice:** at the end of the Spotlight, we bring together our data, and the advice and guidance from experts and develop a policy report.

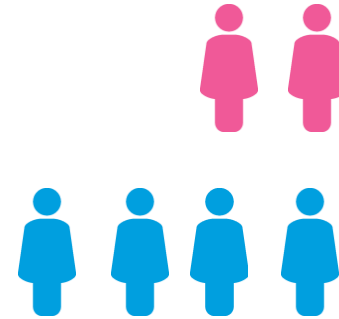
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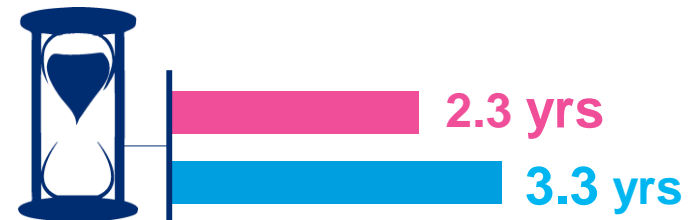
## Case Study

# What our data tells us

**Disabled women** are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled women



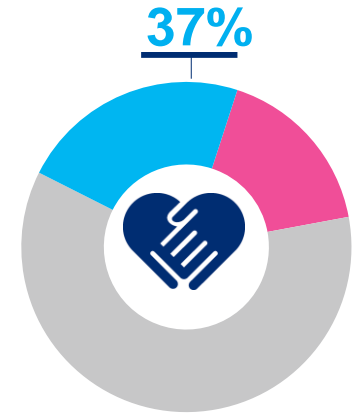
**Disabled clients** typically experience more frequent and severe abuse over longer periods of time.



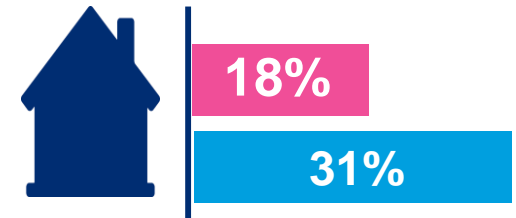
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# What our data tells us

**Disabled victims** are more likely to be suffering abuse from a **current partner** (37%) than non-disabled victims (28%).



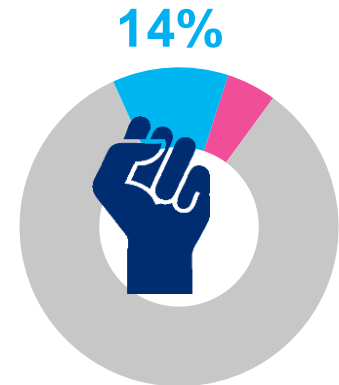
Almost a third of disabled victims (31%) were living with the perpetrator of the abuse compared to 18% for non-disabled victims.



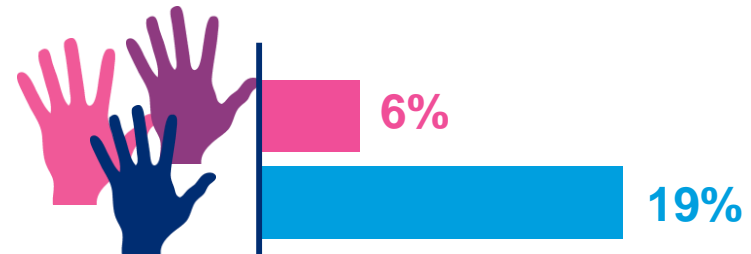
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# What our data tells us

**Disabled victims** are more than **twice as likely** to be experiencing abuse from an **adult family member** (**14%**) than a non disabled client (**6%**)



Disabled victims are more likely to report abuse from multiple perpetrators; **one in five (19%)** compared with **one in twenty (6%)**.



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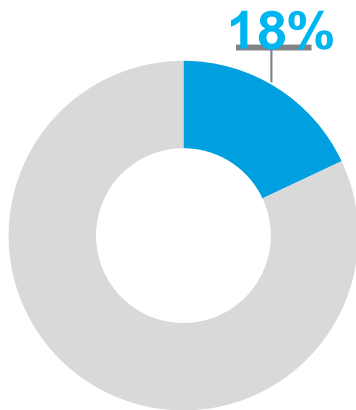


# What our data tells us



Of the **16,000** disabled people experiencing high risk domestic abuse

An estimated **13,600** either are not supported by Marac, or their disability is not identified by the Marac process.



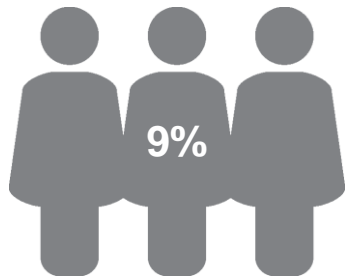
Almost one in five Maracs (18%) are not recording any disability referrals

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# What our data tells us



In 2015-2016 **none** of the **925** referrals into domestic abuse services were from adult safeguarding



Despite continuing to experience a higher level of abuse at case closure

Only **9%** of disabled victims accessed adult safeguarding services

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# What have the Spotlight experts told us



Perpetrators use their positions as carers to **coerce and control** disabled victims, which play on the victims' impairments and **normalises** the abuse.

*“People pity him because he is taking care of you... people are reluctant to criticise this saint or to think he could be doing these terrible things.”*

*Dr Ravi K Thiara, 2016*

*“That in itself was quite a barrier; for [victims with impairments] to be able to see that actually life could be better and to aspire to that.”*

*Dr Michelle McCarthy  
Reader in Learning Disabilities  
University of Kent*

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# What have the Spotlight experts told us

The **perpetrator IS often disabled as well**, and uses their knowledge of the disability **to control and isolate** the victim.

*"A disabled abuser will also manipulate assumptions about disabled people not being abusers themselves."*

*Ruth Bashall  
Director of Stay Safe East*

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# What the Spotlight experts told us

**Society ignores that disabled people experience domestic violence** and does not target DV education towards disabled people-especially regarding sexual violence and abuse.

*“Society tends to avoid discussion of disabled people’s relationships, particularly their sexual relationships, and it may well be that domestic violence falls under this curtain of paternalistic discretion. But we are doing disabled people a major disservice by not acknowledging their sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing, and talking about issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse is a key part of this.”*

*Dr Justin Varney  
National Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing  
Public Health England*

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# What the Spotlight experts told us

Learning disabilities are often **invisible** to professionals and support and information is **inaccessible**.

*“One of our service users did not understand negatives and so would find it difficult to answer questions accurately depending on how they were phrased. This was only apparent once a speech and language therapist had assessed the client.”*

*Learning Disabilities Primary Care Liaison Nurse*

*"To communicate with the police direct [ly], it was really difficult for me and when I met them I didn't have an interpreter so we'd have to write things down...I couldn't make a statement straight away."*

*Excerpt from a survivor's story*

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# Spotlight Recommendations

- **Involve disabled people** in the prevention of domestic abuse
- **Promote greater understanding** about the dynamics of disability and domestic abuse.
- **Promote greater awareness** of hidden impairments
- **Ensure institutional advocacy** for disabled victims of domestic abuse
- **Invest in more person focused services** and support for disabled victims of domestic abuse.

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# To find out more

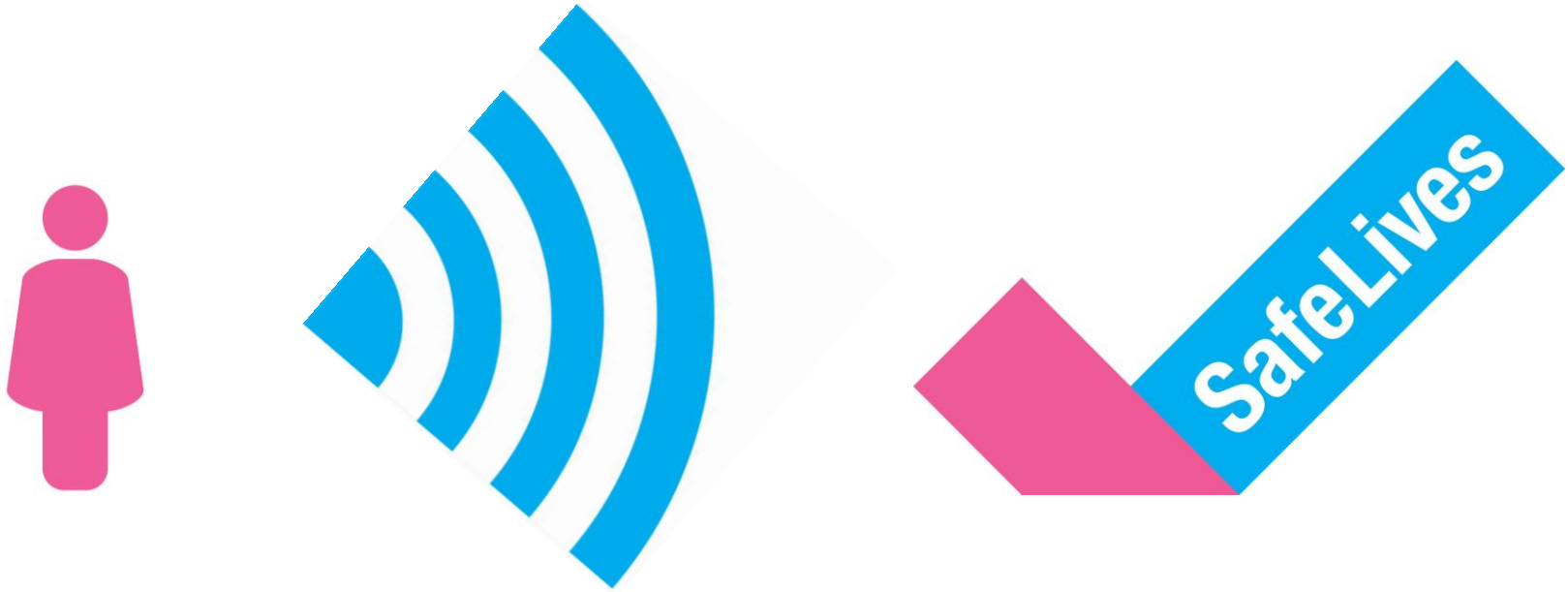
- [Spotlights Homepage](#)
- [Spotlight #2: Disability and domestic abuse](#)
- Our policy report: [Disabled Survivors Too](#)



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# SafeLives is listening



## Get in touch:

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