

# **Teenagers' Experiences of Domestic Violence Refuges**

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April 2017

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution.

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# Abstract

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Refuges have been central to UK domestic violence service provision since the 1970s. Early studies focused on the needs of adult women but increasingly, children and teenagers have also become the business of refuges. Much of the existing research regarding users' experiences of refuges has, however, failed to distinguish the needs of teenagers (aged 13 to 18 years) from those of adult women and younger children. This study aims to redress this balance by examining the current service response provided by refuges for teenagers.

Teenagers aged 16 and 17 are now incorporated within the Government definition of domestic violence and abuse in England and Wales (Home Office, 2013). This policy shift requires refuges to ensure appropriate provision for under-18s. The research investigates how teenagers experience refuges and whether refuge provision responds effectively to the needs and rights of teenagers. The findings can be used to inform policy and service development.

This study is influenced by elements of feminist theory and the sociology of childhood which prioritise subjective understandings of experience and children's agency. Data collection took place in refuges across the North West, East and West Midlands of England. It involved telephone interviews with 25 members of staff and face to face repeat interviews using participatory methods with 20 teenagers, resulting in 89 interviews. Originality resides in the detailed

exploration of teenagers' experiences across the length of their refuge stay and, in some cases, into their new homes.

Interviews revealed an absence of educational, emotional and social support throughout the period of a teenager's stay, and the picture was similar upon resettlement from the refuge. Difficulties experienced by teenagers during their refuge residence related to specific features of adolescence; refuges' focus on safety and protectionism was particularly problematic for adolescent development. Refuge life was found to have severe negative effects on teenagers' education. This study found that refuges are currently missing opportunities to reduce harm and promote prevention of future domestic violence and abuse by building teenagers' resilience.

This thesis argues for attitudinal change as well as relevant resources. The research highlights the shortcomings of refuges and links them to conceptions of victimhood in refuge policy and the changing nature and reduction of services. These conditions are restricting refuges' ability to respect, protect and meet the rights of teenagers. This thesis advocates for teenagers to have greater visibility and recognition as service users in their own right.

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# Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence and abuse affects at least one in four adult women (27.1 percent) and one in six adult men (13.2 percent) in England and Wales (ONS, 2016; Woodhouse and Dempsey, 2016). It also affects 20 percent of children and young people (Radford et al, 2011a). Young people, especially teenagers, can encounter domestic violence and abuse both in the family home and/or in their own intimate partner relationships (Barter, 2009; Fox et al, 2014; Smith et al, 2011; Wood et al, 2011). As a consequence, some young people will need to move to temporary refuge accommodation. This study aims to provide in-depth insight into teenagers' experiences and interpretations of refuge life over the period of their stay. In contrast to earlier research with children and young people in refuges, the focus is exclusively on the subjective experiences of 13 to 18 year olds.

Due to the potential for double victimisation mentioned above, teenagers can access refuges either with their mothers or in their own right from the age of 16. Their stay in a refuge brings unique challenges since the period of adolescence is a time of rapid change which requires substantial adjustment (Coleman and Hagell, 2007). Changes during adolescence include physical and psychological changes, changes in relationships, in educational expectations and in social life (Coleman and Hagell, 2007; Daniel and Wassell, 2002). In this sense, adolescence can be a time of vulnerability, but also 'an age of opportunity'

(UNICEF, 2011: iii). Conceptions of adolescence are described in Chapter One of this thesis.

A substantial body of literature exists on adult women's experiences of domestic violence and abuse and the evidence base on the impact and experiences of children continues to develop (Hester et al, 2007; Katz, 2015; McGee, 2000). In comparison, the needs of teenagers have been neglected, although research on teenage partner violence has recently increased (Barter, 2009; Barter et al, 2009; Wood et al, 2011). Experiencing domestic violence and abuse at home has been identified as a significant risk factor for abuse in adolescent relationships (Barter et al, 2009; Ismail et al, 2007; Laporte et al, 2009). Educating young people about healthy relationships has been identified as a priority in the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (HM Government, 2016) and an earlier Home Office Campaign (Home Office, 2010) which focuses on prevention and early intervention. A refuge stay can provide a key opportunity to assess need and contact the relevant services required (Stanley, 2011). It can also be a time for building recovery after domestic violence (Abrahams, 2007; Ball, 1994) and contributing to resilience. There is little guidance available for refuge staff working with teenagers, on their needs and the type of support required.

Refuges in the UK have faced radical policy changes since Mullender et al's (2002) key study of children's experiences of refuge life. These include new legislation and changes in the nature and availability of funding. Most

significant is the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds within the UK definition of domestic violence and abuse (Home Office, 2013; 2016) which therefore acknowledges them as primary service users. In addition, the widespread use of technology has transformed the experience of adolescence since early research on children's experiences of refuge life was undertaken (see Livingstone et al, 2011).

In this introductory chapter, I explain how my interest in teenagers' experiences of refuge life developed, describe the context for the research and highlight the gap in the existing literature in respect of teenagers' experiences of refuge life. The chapter continues by focusing on the research methodology and concludes with an outline of the thesis. The definition of domestic violence and abuse adopted is drawn from government guidance. Chapter One provides a discussion concerning the range of available definitions. It also offers an explanation of the language and terminology to be used in this thesis.

## **BACKGROUND TO PHD STUDY**

My research approach stems from both personal experience and employment in the domestic violence voluntary sector. The domestic violence organisation where I was employed provided both refuge accommodation and community support services across three local authorities in England. I developed and worked on various initiatives and services within the organisation and as part of a multi-agency network. When a new purpose built refuge was planned, I was disappointed that funding for the space allocated to teenagers was withdrawn

by the local authority as a cost saving measure. I was able to develop an age-appropriate educational intervention programme for primary schools but I was unable to extend this to high schools. Teenagers were invisible in the refuge and it was assumed that they could utilise the existing services for younger children. On consulting with teenagers, I found this was not the case. The teenagers' perceived children's services as inadequate and expressed dissatisfaction with the provision available. Rarely were they linked with external organisations such as a youth club. Female teenagers who were accommodated in the refuges independently (in their own right, unaccompanied by their mothers) seemed to find refuge life more difficult than the other residents. It was clear that these young people needed something that was currently unavailable but I was unable to understand what that was and why. I was determined to expand my knowledge to understand what these young people needed from existing services. At the end of 2013, I worked in a voluntary capacity to consult with young people regarding help-seeking for domestic violence and abuse. Focus groups revealed misconceptions around safeguarding issues and the need to provide evidence that domestic violence and abuse had occurred. There was also a lack of awareness of services and a perception that services were designed for adults. In July 2015, I ended my employment due to the demands of PhD study and in order to increase my objectivity by stepping away from the domestic violence sector.

Refuges appeared to be the most consistent form of domestic violence provision in my local region. Not all areas provided community support to children and young people experiencing domestic violence and any

interventions that were delivered were time-limited. My interest in researching refuge provision was first stimulated by the work of Hague et al (1996), McGee (2000) and Mullender et al (2002). I felt, however, that important changes had occurred since that time, as noted above. In light of these experiences and the changing context, a specific focus on teenagers' experiences of refuges appeared valuable and timely.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

The prevalence of domestic violence and abuse experienced by children and young people has been identified by Radford et al (2011b). Their national study demonstrates that experience of severe forms of domestic violence and abuse affects a substantial number of children and young people (as detailed in Chapter One). The widespread nature of domestic violence and abuse requires effective interventions to promote recovery and resilience.

Increasing attention has been directed towards the impact of domestic violence and abuse on children in the UK (Holt et al, 2008; Katz, 2015; Stanley, 2011). There is substantial evidence that experiencing domestic violence is harmful to children's health and development (Cleaver et al, 2011; Edleson, 1999; Holt et al, 2008; Osofsky, 2003; Stanley, 2011). Existing research shows that experiencing domestic violence and abuse affects children and young people in a range of ways with effects varying according to developmental stage and these will be presented in Chapter One. For example, adolescents report feelings of loneliness, sadness and fear (Alexander et al, 2005). They are more

likely to intervene in violent incidents between parents putting themselves in physical danger (Hester et al, 2007; McGee, 2000) Evidence also suggests they are at greater risk of cumulative harm (Cunningham and Baker, 2004). Research has often documented adolescents adopting more negative, externalised coping strategies, as will be detailed in Chapter One. They are also more likely to be labelled delinquent (Radford et al, 2011b; Song et al, 1998). The variation in the impact of domestic violence and abuse and how children and young people make sense of this may require different responses.

Much of the early evidence on the impact of domestic violence and abuse on children was based on adult perceptions, especially those of mothers and professionals. There is evidence, however, that children and young people's perspectives and experiences of domestic violence and abuse differ from those of adults (Edleson, 1999; Mullender et al, 2002). Changes in thinking about and theorising 'childhood' have promoted the view that children should be participants in research matters affecting them (Hart, 1997; Mayall, 2005; Smart et al, 2001). This has also influenced feminist research (Mullender et al, 1999) and research in the UK has increasingly asked children themselves about the impacts of domestic violence, the effects on their lives, and their ways of coping (e.g. Katz, 2013; McGee, 2000).

A number of interventions have been developed for children to address the harm caused by domestic violence and abuse. Humphreys et al (2006) have developed workbooks for mothers and children in refuges. Concurrent

interventions for mothers and children and whole family interventions have been identified (see Stanley, 2011). There remains, however, a challenge in accessing and evidencing consistent and effective service provision. A key finding from Radford et al's (2011a) London study was that services for children exposed to domestic violence were minimal and difficult to access. UK policy and legislation (e.g. The Adoption and Children Act 2002) recognises the impact of domestic violence on children and young people but provisions to address this are inadequate. This research aims to shift attention beyond the impact of domestic violence to consider the context and adequacy of current service responses by focusing on refuge provision and the model of intervention that underpins refuge services for teenagers.

### **Refuge Work with Children and Young People**

In the UK, the Women's Liberation movement took the lead in establishing refuges in the 1970s (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Hanmer, 1977). The initial role of refuges was to provide temporary, emergency accommodation for women fleeing domestic violence. Refuges operated an open door policy, which initially led to them being overcrowded (Barr and Carrier, 1978; Binney et al, 1981; McMillan, 2007). Although safety was the primary aim, refuges also offered an opportunity for women to gain support and advice from staff and others in similar situations, reflecting the principle of mutual self-help (Charles, 1994; Weir, 1977). Since that time, there has been increased legal protection and changes to homelessness legislation aimed at increasing the opportunity for women to stay in their own homes. The provision of refuges has, however, continued in response to need. There are currently over 500 refuges across the UK for women and their children (Women's Aid, 2015).

The history of work with children in refuges is relatively undocumented. Hague et al (2000) identify two main reasons for this. Firstly, within the movement, children's work had been given lower status than work with adult women. Secondly, highlighting the rights and needs of children during the early stages of the refuge movement may have been viewed as counter-productive (Hague et al, 2000). Historically, women's rights for equality were positioned in opposition to the needs of children for nurture, for which women were assumed to be responsible (Smart, 1996). This view was related to a reading of women's experiences as wives and mothers as subordinate, inferior, distorted or invisible (Ylöö and Bograd, 1990). In the early days of the refuge movement, the social institutions of marriage and the family were considered to provide contexts which could promote, maintain or support domestic violence and abuse (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Hanmer, 1977; Ylöö and Bograd, 1990).

Outside the feminist and refuge movements, motherhood and safety concerns for children were prioritised over the protection of women (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). Domestic violence was considered a private matter between a man and his wife, undeserving of arrest or judicial response (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Hanmer, 1977). Dahl and Snare (1978) describe this as the 'coercion of privacy'; seen in the reluctance to employ judicial responses to alleviate male violence and the punitive approach towards abused mothers for failing to protect their children (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; 1979). The only resource offering protection and support during the early 1970s in the UK was welfare provision for young children (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). The needs of

children were described as more important than the needs of women in the concluding comments of the Select Committee report (Select Committee on Violence in Marriage, 1975).

To counteract this, feminists sought to illuminate and prioritise the experiences of women as individuals with needs and requirements, separate from those of men and of children, and regarded as important in their own right (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; 1992; Hanmer, 1977; Weir, 1977). Subsequently, a Children's Rights policy was established in 1989 for the refuge movement and service provision specifically for children within refuges has developed since then (Hague et al, 2000). A growing body of literature on children and domestic violence emerged post 1990 (Abrahams, 1994; Hester and Radford, 1996; Jaffe et al, 1990; McGee, 1997; Mullender and Morley, 1994). However, Chapter Two of this thesis suggests that the status of children and young people in refuges remains ambiguous owing to the conflation of their needs with those of their mothers.

Funding is often identified as a significant obstacle to providing effective provision, as many refuges do not have the resources to cater for a small number of teenagers (Baker, 2005; Hague et al, 1996; 2000). Radford et al's (2011a) London study found that capacity to provide specialist children's services within refuges had declined because of unsustainable funding streams and the decision of some local authorities to outsource services. In England and Wales, most refuges are funded by Supporting People funding for housing-

related support (Quilgars and Pleafce, 2010; Towers and Walby, 2012). This funding is no longer protected and there have been successive national and local Supporting People budget cuts (Quilgars and Pleafce, 2010). Women's Aid statistics suggest that 17 percent of refuges have closed since 2010, with children's services constituting half of the services closed in 2013/14 (Women's Aid, 2015).

## **FOCUSING ON TEENAGERS IN REFUGES**

There have been no UK studies that have focused exclusively on 13 to 18 year olds living in refuges. In addressing teenagers' experiences, this study aims to restore the balance in the research evidence available on children's experiences of refuges. There are three reasons for specifically focusing on teenagers in refuges. Firstly, the available research combines children and young people together with little distinction between ages. Secondly, the significance of transition as a key feature of the needs of teenagers in refuges has not been considered in-depth. Thirdly, new challenges and opportunities are posed by the change in the definition of domestic violence in England and Wales to include teenagers as primary service users (Home Office, 2013).

In reviewing the relevant literature, it becomes apparent that previous studies have presented children and young people as a homogenous group. There has been limited in-depth exploration of differences in experience specifically related to age. Existing studies have demonstrated the positives and negatives of living in refuges and have mostly included the views of younger children (Barron,

2007; Fitzpatrick et al, 2003; Mullender et al, 2002; Stafford et al, 2007). They have failed to adequately include teenagers and explore their experiences, needs and any changes that may occur during a refuge stay. Most research has collected experiences at a single point in time (e.g. Hague et al, 1996; McGee, 2000) which provides limited exploration of ongoing or changing experiences and overlooks the possibility that participants' views may be particular to the time the interview was completed.

The differences in the impact of domestic violence at different stages of development have been highlighted above. The transitions experienced during adolescence provide a unique set of challenges for services and for teenagers and their families (Goldblatt, 2003; Perry and Pauletti, 2011). These challenges include identity formation and the changing balance between a teenager's dependence and independence (Alapack and Alapack, 1984; Erikson, 1968). There is opportunity for increased separation from parents and reliance on peers (Becker, 1992; Coleman, 2011). Teenagers also have an increased likelihood of having experienced domestic violence due to their age (see Radford et al, 2011a). It has also been found that prolonged exposure to domestic violence produces worse outcomes (Rossman, 2001) and problems that are more resistant to intervention (Wolak and Finkelhor, 1998). Whilst the differences in experiences and impact of abuse between individuals and according to stages of development are acknowledged, there seems to be a gap in understanding the specific experiences, needs and rights of teenagers.

Little is known about how refuges formulate their interventions and approaches for teenagers, or which services are most beneficial and represent good use of limited resources (Poole et al, 2008). With the exception of Mullender et al's (2002) and McGee's (2000) studies, there remains limited in-depth evidence about experiences, approaches and effectiveness of services for children and young people in UK refuges (Peled, 1997; Poole et al, 2008; Stanley, 2011). It is currently unclear if teenagers' needs are being met when staying in refuges. There is a need to understand how teenagers experience refuge life, how they make sense of their situation, and the support they receive. Providing a more responsive service would address the challenges created by the broader definition of domestic violence and improve the prevention and recovery response to teenagers at risk of domestic violence both now and in the future.

To summarise, this research argues for a focus on teenagers owing to their position as a vulnerable group who may be doubly victimised by their experiences of domestic violence. They are at greater risk of cumulative harm, homicide or injury from intervening in violent incidents. They also face challenges and opportunities which differ from those encountered by younger children or adults owing to the distinctive characteristics of adolescence. This is a key period in which to promote recovery and resilience regarding domestic violence already experienced and prevention of possible future violence.

## **KEY QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This research provides an opportunity to address the gap identified above by obtaining unique insight into the extent to which refuge services meet teenagers' needs. This study aims to provide a focus on teenagers' own views by generating data on their subjective experiences of refuge provision. On the basis of the gaps identified above, five research questions were formulated:

- What is the nature of refuge provision available to teenagers?
- How do teenagers perceive and experience refuge life?
- Do teenagers' experiences and views of refuge change during the course of their stay?
- How appropriate is refuge provision for teenagers experiencing domestic violence and abuse?
- How might refuge services be developed to be more responsive to the needs of teenagers?

This research adopts qualitative methods to explore the experiences of teenagers residing in refuges in order to provide in-depth understanding of individual perspectives and subjective experiences (Hutchinson et al, 1994). Given the sensitive and gendered nature of the experiences I wanted to examine (Hester, 2009; Stanko, 2006; World Health Organization, 2005), a methodology influenced by feminist theories and children's participation paradigms (Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Allen, 2011; Dickson-Swift et al, 2008; Mayall, 2006) was adopted. From this perspective, social reality is subjectively interpreted through an exploration of people's own understandings (Holliday, 2007).

Using a participatory and ethical methodological framework, I adopted the perspective that young people are ‘experts in their own lives’ who can provide important insights and expertise that adults may not identify or prioritise (Grover, 2004; Langsted, 1994). Prout (2002) suggests that empowering children and young people by giving them a voice and listening to those voices is crucial in developing knowledge about children as social actors. In order to gain a fuller picture of the refuge experience than would be provided by single interviews, the research took a longitudinal approach to facilitate detailed enquiry and establish changes and experiences over time. This is useful for understanding the extent and circumstances facilitating change as well as for building a research relationship (Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Punch, 2002; Renold et al, 2008). The methodology and its rationale are described in full in Chapter Three.

## **THESIS OUTLINE**

This thesis includes two chapters of literature review. The review focuses on key refuge studies undertaken with children and young people from the UK and Ireland, any research from beyond the UK and Ireland is introduced where relevant. The aim of the chapters is to summarise current knowledge and identify strengths and weaknesses in previous research to develop my own research approach.

This is followed by the methodology chapter which introduces the theoretical framework and explains how these questions were addressed in practice. A further two chapters present the findings and are more descriptive than analytical. These are followed by two discussion chapters that interpret and develop these findings. A conclusion then draws the thesis together and makes recommendations from the research. The thesis is organised as follows:

Chapter One contextualises the study in the relevant literature. It defines terms to be used throughout the thesis and includes a discussion concerning adolescence to provide a background to this study. It provides relevant background knowledge concerning the prevalence of domestic violence and the impact and effects of domestic violence on children and young people. The connection between violence in the home and teenage partner abuse is discussed. It reviews the available literature regarding teenagers' coping strategies and protective factors which promote resilience to domestic violence and abuse. This chapter concentrates on teenagers' experiences of domestic violence more generally before moving to focus specifically on refuges in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two documents the history of work with children and young people in UK refuges. It narrows the focus down from that adopted in Chapter One to review the existing literature in relation to children's perspectives on refuge life to establish the focus of this study. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how the refuge movement and research with children and young people in refuges

has developed. This review of the relevant literature helped to identify research questions and contributed to the methodological approach.

Chapter Three is the methodology chapter and explores the process of undertaking the research. It begins by examining the feminist and sociology of childhood framework used in the study, including the importance of reflexivity. It reports the ethical decisions made to support the participation of young people. The issue of negotiating access with a series of gatekeepers is considered in the light of views about teenagers' perceived vulnerability when in refuges. I reflect on the experience of using the research methods and research tools chosen. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the data was analysed and coded using an approach based on constructivist grounded theory.

Chapters Four and Five present the key themes from the analysis of interviews with teenagers and staff. Data gathered from staff and teenage interviews are not presented separately but are integrated under thematic headings in order that differences and consistencies between the two groups of participants can emerge. Chapter Four identifies adolescence as significant. This provides a background to the experiences of teenagers participating in this research. A tension was found between teenagers' experiences of being treated as both competent adults and as vulnerable children. Refuge restrictions directly conflicted with their developmental needs. Analysis of the findings suggests that young people were in a state of uncertainty both physically and emotionally in terms of their refuge stay and schooling and this uncertainty was heightened

by the transience experienced in adolescence. The chapter highlights the need for individual and shared physical, emotional and virtual spaces to deal with practical and emotional obstacles linked to their experiences of domestic violence and living in a refuge. The chapter argues that teenagers in refuges are excluded from individual and collective decision making owing to their non-adult status.

Chapter Five discusses teenagers' views on what would help, what worked and what did not. This chapter presents the different forms of support identified as beneficial to help cope with the experiences highlighted in Chapter Four. This is followed by findings about who should provide that support, including existing support structures. The second part of this chapter presents a small number of case studies to generate further understanding about transitions into, during and out of the refuge. This approach allows for a more dynamic picture of a teenager's time in a refuge. The difficulties experienced at various points of their stay illuminate why support is needed and the case studies explore continuities and changes over the period of a teenager's stay in a refuge. These case studies maintain the theme of support needs and include teenagers' reflections about their refuge journey to highlight both common themes and individual differences. Teenagers were pleased to have left the abusive home but felt neglected upon their arrival at refuge. There was no assessment or recognition of individual needs, differences and circumstances. Cumulative dissatisfaction with refuge life was caused by ongoing restrictions, disruption to their education and support networks, and a lack of support to cope with the domestic violence and living in a refuge. In the final phase of their journey, most teenagers had lived in refuges for lengthy periods and had grown

increasingly frustrated and stressed with the obstacles preventing transition to their new home.

Chapters Six and Seven provide a discussion of the originality and potential impact of the findings and what they add to existing theoretical and research evidence. In Chapter Six I argue that moving into and enduring a prolonged stay in a refuge often undermines rather than develops teenagers' capacity to cope with their adverse experiences. Multiple sources of stress are identified relating to education, friendships, material resources and the refuge environment. The shortcomings of the current response are highlighted and explained in relation to the refuge focus on service users' 'victim' status, together with the changing nature and reduction of services. The difficulties of refuge life experienced by teenagers also appear to be connected with the challenges of adolescence. The focus on rules, safety and protectionism is particularly problematic and is experienced by young people as controlling and limiting. This conflicts with a teenager's growing need for independence and privacy. This chapter ends by arguing for refuges to support teenagers effectively and focus on building their confidence, independence and resilience.

Chapter Seven explores the range of support young people wanted whilst living in refuges. This chapter builds further on the argument that refuge services should develop an environment that promotes empowerment, coping and participation of teenage residents. This has wider implications for policy and practice within refuge services and more broadly for the overall suite of resources across young people's continuum of needs. Reconsideration needs to focus on the aims of refuge services and who the service users are. A

resilience framework is developed, recommending that teenagers in refuges should be considered both vulnerable and capable according to their experiences, the period of adolescence, and the perspective of situated competence. This chapter argues for shifts in attitudes and resources, underpinned by the Government's change in the definition of domestic violence and abuse. In the final section of this chapter I consider the strengths and limitations of the research.

As will be revealed, teenagers were initially happy to have left the abusive household and be in a place of safety. It is, as reported by Harry (a teenager participant), 'a good place to move in. But it's not that good all the way through'. The thesis concludes by providing a summary of the key points of the research and recommendations for funders, policy makers, refuge organisations and other statutory or voluntary agencies working with young people with experiences of domestic violence. This thesis argues for teenagers to be given visibility and recognition as service users in their own right.

# **Chapter One**

## **Literature Review Part I:**

### **Teenagers and Domestic Violence**

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#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is the first of two literature review chapters. It sets the context for my research by focusing on teenagers' experiences of domestic violence and abuse. This chapter begins by discussing the language and definitions to be used throughout the thesis, and provides a detailed overview of the features and conceptions of adolescence. It will then briefly explore the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse, followed by a consideration of the impact and effects of domestic violence and abuse with a focus on young people. It is relevant at this point to highlight the connection to teenage partner abuse before moving to discuss teenagers' coping strategies and protective factors which promote resilience to domestic violence and abuse. A brief overview of community interventions will be presented but will not be considered in depth due to the focus of this research on refuge provision.

There is limited existing research specifically examining teenagers' experiences of refuge provision. Understanding regarding the changes during adolescence and the implications for both teenagers exposed to domestic violence abuse and service providers are not well-developed. Educating young people about healthy relationships is identified as a priority in the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (HM Government, 2016) and Home Office Campaigns

(Home Office, 2010). Indeed, children's experience of domestic violence and abuse at home is recognised as a significant risk factor for abuse in young people's later relationships (Barter et al, 2009; Ismail et al, 2007; Laporte et al, 2009), which suggests further preventive or recovery work is required for those young people who experience domestic violence in their parents' relationships.

There is currently an identified gap in research investigating the effectiveness of domestic violence interventions. The decision to examine refuge provision is based on availability and consistency of local domestic violence provision and personal experience, as outlined in the introductory chapter. Literature relating to adolescents is identified and prioritised with the intention of presenting a framework to help interpret and understand teenagers' position and experience of refuges.

The review of the literature presented in this chapter and the next draws on a number of studies from Canada, America, Europe and the UK (Abrahams, 1994; Jaffe et al, 1990; Mullender et al, 2002; Øverlien, 2010, 2011). Some qualitative studies, particularly those from the UK and Ireland, recur throughout these two chapters as they directly involve children and young people. They are of specific relevance and have influenced the approach adopted in this study in conceptualising children and young people who have experienced domestic violence and abuse as active participants. For example, Mullender et al's (2002) UK study with 54 children aged eight to 16 (half were aged 11 or under) was one of the first detailed studies to explore children's perspectives on domestic violence and the type of help they needed using individual and group

interviews. It placed emphasis on children as social actors and active research participants, and was influenced by childhood studies (e.g. France et al, 2000; Qvortrup, 1994) and children's rights. Mullender et al (2002) also interviewed 24 mothers and 14 professionals. McGee's (2000) early study examined children's experiences of domestic violence in England and Wales. Fifty-four children aged five to 17 years and 48 mothers took part in interviews. These studies coincided with increasing recognition of children as 'social actors' in the sociology of childhood literature (Christensen and James, 2000; Holloway and Valentine, 2004; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; James et al, 1998; Mayall, 1994; 2000).

## **1.2 DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY**

### **Domestic Violence and Abuse**

Terminology surrounding domestic violence varies. According to Hester et al (2004), definitions and constructions of violence against women are culturally, historically and spatially specific. However, even in the present moment within the UK, there is no agreed term and there remains an overall lack of global definitions and measures (Devaney and Lazenbatt, 2016). There are numerous terms used such as 'battering', 'intimate partner violence', 'interpersonal violence', 'family violence' and 'domestic' or 'spousal abuse' (Devaney and Lazenbatt, 2016). Devaney and Lazenbatt (2016) suggest that one reason for this absence of agreement may be that many authors frame their discussion within differing theoretical debates.

For many feminists, patriarchy is the central concept for exploring the principles and structures which underpin women's subordination and it is this male oppression of women that is the fundamental form of domination in both the public and private spheres (Mooney, 2000; Pence and Paymar, 1993). Feminist social theory has been seen to address 'the broad question of how and why women come to be subordinated, and offers analyses of the social and cultural processes through which that subordination is perpetuated' (Jackson, 1993: 3). Feminists argue that historically in the UK, domestic violence has been legitimised in law, religion, and in cultural ideologies of male dominance and women's inferiority (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; 1992). Many radical feminists have considered male violence and the construction of masculinity to be the basis of men's control over women (Mooney, 2000), with male violence reflecting and maintaining unequal power relations (e.g. Mooney, 2000; MacKinnon, 1989; Radford and Stanko, 1991; Hester et al, 1996; Kelly and Radford, 1987; Itzin, 2000). Harwin and Barron (2000) identified the recognition of men as the primary perpetrators of domestic violence and child sexual abuse as one of feminism's major contributions to domestic violence policy and practice (see Hammer and Saunders, 1984; Kelly, 1988; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Itzin, 2000).

The term 'domestic violence' developed in the context of feminist research and activism of the 1970s and is widely used in UK policy and public spheres (British Medical Association, 1998; Malos and Hague, 1997; Radford and Hester, 2006; Smith, 1989). Feminist literature uses findings from national crime surveys and from service providers (e.g. police, refuges) to argue that

violence is embedded in gender inequality and male dominance (Dobash and Dobash, 1977, 1978; Bograd, 1984; Dobash et al, 1992). This approach considers the different experiences, opportunities and resources men and women have or do not have access to because of their gender. Men's use of domestic violence is therefore considered different from women's (Devaney and Lazenbatt, 2016) due to individual experiences and wider structural inequalities (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Radford and Kelly, 1996; Rowland and Klein, 1990). The use of the term 'domestic violence' highlights the intimate nature of the relationship with a known perpetrator (partner, ex-partner) and the location of violence in the home.

Criticisms of the term 'domestic violence' have been made due to its problematic gender neutral implications, particularly in terms of theoretical and policy concerns (Bograd, 1988; Mirrlees-Black et al, 1999; Mooney, 2000; Walby, 2009). It is, however, considered to reflect the historical struggle by women for such violence to be recognised as criminal. On one hand, the word 'domestic' is considered a useful contrast to 'stranger' violence and emphasises that this violence occurs in a relationship, in a place of assumed safety, where it can be hidden as 'private' (Mooney, 2000; Smith, 1989; Stanley, 2011). On the other hand, it is limiting as not all domestic violence from partners, ex-partners or family members occurs in the home (Barter 2009; Harne and Radford, 2008; Edwards, 1989; Walklate, 1992) and often continues, or escalates upon separation (Monckton-Smith et al, 2014). Criticism is also aimed at the word 'violence', which conveys the assumption that physical violence is the only element or worse than psychological or verbal abuse and controlling behaviour

(Hague and Malos, 2005; Mooney, 2000; see also Stark, 2007). Finally, the term ‘domestic violence’ has been criticised for ignoring the experiences of children (Humphreys et al, 2000).

The alternative term ‘domestic abuse’ is preferred in Scotland, as this is considered to provide a better overall picture of the different aspects that such violence can take (Devaney and Lazenbatt, 2016). However, this is also criticised for similar reasons as above, with the addition of ‘abuse’ considered to be minimising. ‘Abuse’ has frequently been used to attribute lesser status to children’s experiences of physical and sexual assault (Harne and Radford, 2008: 31). Conversely, ‘abuse’ is useful to denote non-physical forms of abuse and exploitation. Instead, some radical and socialist feminist groups use the term ‘violence against women’ which was adopted in the 1994 United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the ‘Elimination of Violence Against Women’. This focuses on adult women as the ‘victims’ of domestic violence and ignores the experience of children and young people. The UK policy agenda has more recently moved to ‘ending violence against women and girls’ (Home Office, 2010). However, I have chosen not to adopt this term in this thesis as I am focusing on young people, including teenage boys.

Others from outside the UK, particularly in the USA, adopt familial approaches. Terms include ‘interpersonal violence’, ‘intimate partner violence’, ‘spousal violence’, ‘patriarchal violence’ or ‘common couple violence’ which have also been critiqued (Johnson, 1995; Pahl, 1985). For example, whilst it is generally

accepted that common couple violence exists, there is controversy about which levels of violence and abuse the term encompasses (Hester, 2013). The term also links the violence to individuals rather than societal structures.

The term ‘domestic violence and abuse’ will be adopted in this thesis in accordance with the British Home Office definition. The term ‘domestic violence’ will sometimes be used for convenience due to the limited word count. Following a national consultation, the Home Office changed the definition of domestic violence and abuse on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013, to include 16 and 17 year olds and controlling and coercive behaviour. The Government definition states that domestic violence and abuse is:

‘Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological; physical; sexual; financial; emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim’ (Home Office, 2013, 2016)<sup>1</sup>

This is not a legal definition and does not apply to one gender or ethnic group. It does, however, include family members, which can be ‘mother, father, son,

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<sup>1</sup> Gov.UK, Domestic violence and abuse (accessed 18th March 2016)

daughter, brother, sister and grandparents; directly-related, in-laws or step-family' (Devaney and Lazenbatt, 2016).

## **Refuges**

In the UK, the term 'refuge' or 'women's refuge' remains the most commonly used term in policy and in the public arena. It is used to describe the safe, temporary accommodation provided to those who are fleeing domestic violence and abuse. In the USA, Canada and Europe, refuges are often termed 'shelters'. Home Office guidance (2013: 11) acknowledges that refuges 'tend to provide accommodation and support to victims aged 18 and over', which may prevent those under the age of 18 trying to escape domestic violence and abuse. They suggest service commissioners and providers should 'consider the needs of this group and make appropriate provision available' (Home Office, 2013: 11). However, additional funding is not available for this group suggesting they should access the existing provision usually designed for adults.

## **Experiencing Domestic Violence and Abuse**

There are other definitional questions to be addressed, such as how exposure to and experiences of domestic violence and abuse is defined. Debate also surrounds the terms 'victims' or 'survivors' when referring to women's experiences (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Gondolf and Fisher, 1988; Hague et al, 2012; Hoff, 1990; Johnson, 1995; Radford and Hester, 2006; Skinner, 2000). Similar debates occur when discussing children and young people's experiences.

Initially, research considered the ways children ‘witnessed’ domestic violence (Jaffe et al, 1990). Canadian researchers Jaffe et al (1990) emphasised that witnessing domestic violence involved a range of experiences including: observing direct violence or threatening behaviour, overhearing it, seeing physical injuries and/or observing emotional consequences. They found parents considerably underestimated children’s knowledge of the violence (Jaffe et al, 1990). The term ‘witnessing’ therefore fails to capture the ways children are directly involved (Buckley et al, 2007; Devaney, 2015; Swanston et al, 2014). Later research found additional ways in which children experience domestic violence (Ganley and Schechter, 1996; Hester et al, 2007; Holden, 2003; McGee, 1997; Parkinson and Humphreys, 1998; Peled, 1998).

In the UK, Hester and Radford (1996) found that some children were forced to participate in physical abuse towards their mother. Similarly, they can be involved in ways which encourage them to assume responsibility for the violence (Parkinson and Humphreys, 1998). For example, violence may occur in the context of arguments about the children (Fantuzzo et al, 1997). They can also be physically or verbally assaulted as part of the abuse (Hester et al, 2007; Holden, 2003). They may intervene in incidents, or seek help to protect their mother or siblings (Holden, 2003; Mullender et al, 2002). Some researchers therefore prefer the term ‘exposed to’ domestic violence and abuse to encompass these different types of experiences (Edleson and Nissley, 2011; Holden, 2003). This study, however, uses the term ‘experiencing’ to focus on the teenager’s perspective (Øverlien, 2010) and to acknowledge they are more

than ‘witnesses’ (Irwin et al, 2006). This term conveys their involvement in domestic violence and abuse as ‘intimate and central rather than peripheral’ (Stanley, 2011: 7). The literature reviewed here shows that they are capable of making decisions, taking actions and influencing their surroundings.

## **Teenagers**

Existing domestic violence research refers to ‘children’, ‘young people’, ‘adolescents’ and ‘older children’, usually without distinguishing which ages these terms refer to. In respect of the law and policy (e.g. HM Government, 2015), the term ‘child’ is a person under the age of 18 years in accordance with the definition contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989) and the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. The term ‘children’ has been used in research to refer to all participants under the age of 18 years. In this research, the term ‘teenager’ will be adopted when referring to young people aged 13 to 18 years as this is the term participants used to describe themselves. The term ‘young people’ or ‘young person’ is used interchangeably. The term ‘adolescent’ is used occasionally due to lack of agreement in categorising the beginning and end points of the sub-stages of early, middle and late adolescence according to distinct age groups (Blos, 1962; Coleman, 2011; Goldenring and Rosen, 2004; Kaplan, 2004). To avoid confusion, children and young people under the age of 13 will be referred to as ‘children’.

## **Independent and Dependent**

Teenagers arriving at refuges unaccompanied by an older adult who are accommodated in their own right will be referred to as 'independent' teenagers. In this research, this encompasses young women aged 16 to 18 years. Teenagers accompanying their mothers or carers will be described as 'dependent' teenagers. Dependent teenagers are males and females aged 13 to 18 years and may have other siblings residing in the refuge with them. This research focuses on dependent teenagers who make up the majority of the research sample.

## **Participation**

There are numerous definitions pertaining to young people's participation (Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2001; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997; West, 2004). Thomas (2007: 199) observes that:

'Participation' can refer generally to taking part in an activity, or specifically to taking part in decision-making. It can also refer either to a process or to an outcome... there is also a distinction between participation in collective decision-making and in decisions about children's individual lives.'

Participation is considered more broadly to include decisions about routines, structures and interests (Alderson, 2010). It is also recognised in relational terms, such as occurring in friendship groups (Cockburn, 2010). When considering the multitude of definitions and levels of participation, from the local to the global, informal to the formal, it may be appropriate to consider participation on a continuum (Loncle and Muniglia, 2008). It is helpful at this

point to move on to provide a discussion on teenagers' rights and the period of adolescence.

## **Teenagers' Rights**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides a framework of inalienable and indivisible human rights for all 'children' aged up to 18 years. The Convention, ratified in the UK in 1991, places obligations on state parties to, for example, respect, protect and promote children's participation rights and to ensure that all decisions are made in a child's best interests. The idea that children are rights holders:

'reconceptualises the power relationship between children, adults and the state. Instead of being seen as chattels of their parents or objects in need of benevolent guidance and protection, children become active subjects with individual entitlements which they are entitled to claim'

(Tobin, 2011: 89)

Domestic violence is not specifically referred to within the UNCRC, but many aspects of the UNCRC are pertinent. For example, Article 19 (protection from all forms of violence) and the right to privacy (Article 16). In addition, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have produced relevant General Comments which provide guidance on how specific rights should be implemented. During the course of the fieldwork, the UN Committee published a (then draft) General Comment (see UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/20, 2016) on the rights of adolescents which also provides relevant context for considering the research findings.

Whilst acknowledging that children's rights are indivisible it is important to recognise that competing claims can arise, particularly in situations of crisis or scarce resources (Tobin, 2011). Rights based approaches offer a framework for asserting that some forms of state provision are entitlements and that rights based claims should be prioritised above other competing claims for resources (Tobin, 2011). The application of the UNCRC as a lens for data analysis will be discussed further in the methodology chapter (Larkins et al, 2015).

### **1.3 ADOLESCENCE**

Adolescence is portrayed as the period between childhood and adulthood (Hendry and Kloep, 2012; Kaplan, 2004) characterised by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes (Coleman, 2011). In a review of papers from the USA, Canada, UK and Australia, Schmied and Tully (2009: 1) define adolescence as:

'...[the] transition from childhood to adulthood, a stage of major growth and development in which significant physiological, cognitive, psychological and behavioural changes take place and important developmental tasks, such as developing an identity and becoming independent, need to be accomplished.'

The word adolescence itself is derived from the Latin word 'adolescere' which means to 'grow up' (Kaplan, 2004). The accelerated growth and change during this period is considered second only to infant development (Kipke, 1999; Lerner and Villarruel, 1994). Adolescence is seen to involve transitions, choices, connections, alienation, and risks (Coleman and Hagell, 2007).

Adolescence is not a homogenous or universal life stage (Hagell, 2012; Raby, 2002; UNICEF, 2011) but a social, historical and biological twentieth century Western construct (Adams, 1997; Cohen and Murdock, 1997; Chudacoff, 1989; Demos and Demos, 1969; Gillis et al, 1974; Hendry and Kloep, 2012; Kaplan, 2004; Kett, 1977). The numerous challenges and changes associated with adolescence occur at different paces that vary between individuals and social contexts. Examples of these changes include an increasing need for independence, evolving sexuality, transitioning through education, consolidating advanced cognitive abilities, and negotiating changing relationships with family and peers (Cameron and Karabanow, 2003), including greater separation from parents, reliance on peers, and development of autonomy (Brown and Klute, 2003; Coleman, 2011; Collins and Laursen, 2004; Hagell and Witherspoon, 2012).

The UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) has developed a General Comment on the rights of adolescents (CRC/C/GC/20, 2016). Although this document encompasses the wide experiences, opportunities and challenges facing adolescents across different regions and between different groups, it identifies the lack of investment in measures needed for them to enjoy their rights generally. It highlights the lack of data available to inform policy, identify gaps and support the allocation of appropriate resources for young people. It suggests that generic policies designed for children are inadequate and argues for a realisation of the rights of adolescents (UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/GC/20, 2016) and therefore can be used to support the involvement of teenagers in this research.

The focus in this thesis is on conceptions of adolescence in contemporary Western Europe, specifically the UK. Compared to adults, young people have fewer legal rights and their time is arranged by law, for example, when they enter and leave education or enter employment (Holt, 2013). Holt (2013: 84) suggests that whilst the ‘discourse of children’s rights’ has become more central, the discourse of ‘childhood innocence’ has been sustained with one outcome being constant regulation (see James and James, 2001). Compared to previous generations, young people now remain in the parental home for longer than previous generations and often return home after college or university (Coleman, 2011). This creates tensions as they continue to be regulated like younger children whilst simultaneously being granted more freedom and responsibility, including criminal responsibility (Holt, 2013). There has also been a profound shift to the widespread use of digital technology which has particular relevance for young people (Coleman, 2011; Livingstone et al, 2011).

This section reviews the discourses of adolescence which influence how teenagers are conceptualised. The aim is to highlight the tensions and contradictions within these discourses and within the category of adolescence itself, as relevant to both young people and service providers. Firstly, there is debate as to when exactly adolescence begins and ends (Blos, 1962; Peterson, 2004; Santrock, 1996; Smetana et al, 2006). Adolescence is considered to have lengthened both at the beginning and the end, due to the earlier onset of puberty and young people remaining in education and the home for longer (Coleman, 2011; Hagell et al, 2012). Puberty is the most longstanding identifier

of the beginning of adolescence (Hendry and Kloep, 2012; Kaplan, 2004). In contrast, the end of adolescence is less well defined due to variations in completing social transitions (Patton and Viner, 2007), such as leaving school, starting work, starting a family, or moving away from home. Arnett (2014) has therefore developed the term ‘emerging adulthood’ to mark the transition out of adolescence from the age of 18 years. Secondly, there are numerous theories and discourses of adolescence, some of which will be outlined below. The focus will be on conceptions of adolescence that have particular relevance to this study: storm and stress, beings and becomings, at risk or risky, evolving capacities, and legal definitions.

### **Storm and Stress**

Hall (1904) famously describes adolescence as a period of ‘storm and stress’. He suggests adolescents pass through a turbulent phase of stress, rebellion and mood swings (Coleman, 2011; Hendry and Kloep, 2012; Kaplan, 2004; Lesko, 1996a). Hendrick (1990: 103) refers to this perception of adolescence as a ‘prisoner of its own nature’. Similar positions can be found in Freud’s (1933; 1962) psychoanalysis, Piaget’s (1932) theory of cognitive development, and Erikson’s (1968) identity formation. Piaget (1932) describes how children develop cognitive skills, with adolescence generating the capacity to think logically and abstractly. Generally this means that adolescents are cognitively different from children, having the capacity to see and understand the world as others see it (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1984; Selman, 2003). According to developmental models such as that of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966), young people are at a distinct stage of developing a sense of personal identity.

The popular view of adolescence as a time of difficulty or conflict is reportedly still widely accepted within the public sphere (Coleman, 2011; Hendry and Kloep, 2012; Hines and Paulson, 2006). Various shortcomings are identified with this image of adolescence (see Hendry and Kloep, 2012 for discussion). At the time of Hall's (1904) work for example, teenagers did not attend high school and many assumed more adult roles in marriage or the workplace. Other work argues that difficulties of adolescent development are exaggerated (Bandura, 1973; Rutter et al, 1976; Steinberg and Steinberg, 2000). France (2000) suggests that psychology continues to problematize young people by focusing on the negative experience of puberty, genetics, or cognitive dysfunction. Characterising adolescence as a turbulent and emotional stage is useful to depict adulthood as rational, calm, and evolved (Lesko, 1996a), thereby upholding and reinforcing perceptions of young people as a social problem (France, 2000). For example, Jones (2011) shows how popular UK media representations of the 'Chav' draw on stereotypes to construct young people as a social problem whilst simultaneously identifying them as a source of ridicule. France (2000; 2007; 2008) suggests that psychology and brain science research as scientific knowledge, can be used to justify limitation of young people's rights, increased demands for parental responsibility, or increased surveillance and regulation on the basis that they are not yet fully formed adults (see also Boyden, 1997). Raby (2002: 433) contends that, as a consequence, adolescents become a social group that 'cannot effectively know themselves, whose legitimate grievances may therefore be silenced, and who need

protection from their own instability'. This perception therefore legitimates attempts to manage and/or contain this life stage (Raby, 2002).

## **Beings and Becomings**

The concept of teenagers as 'becomings' is usually discussed in terms of self-discovery and/or identity formation. A reluctance to see children and young people as social agents was countered by the development of child centred paradigms and methodologies, collectively termed the 'sociology of childhood' (see James et al, 1998). In dominant understandings 'childhood' is characterised as a period of 'becoming' where children and young people are considered 'innocent' and in need of protection until they achieve the 'goal' of adulthood (James et al 1998; Jenks, 1982; Qvortrup, 1994). In contrast, the 'being' child is seen as a social actor in his or her own right, who is actively constructing his or her own 'childhood' and has views about being a child (Uprichard, 2008). A focus on children as 'beings' calls for attention to their current experience, whereas a focus on the 'becoming' calls for attention to the impact of current experience on the future adult. A 'becoming' child is also seen as incomplete, an 'adult in the making', lacking the skills and competencies of the 'adult' that s/he will become (Uprichard, 2008).

The problem here is the perception of teenagers as what they will become rather than what they are 'being' (Lesko, 1996b; Morrow, 2011). This view positions young people as 'lesser' than adults (Qvortrup, 1994: 4) owing to conceptions of innocence, dependency and vulnerability (James et al, 1998;

Valentine, 1996). Hudson (1984) suggests this dichotomises adults as naturally productive, rational, and independent, similar to discourses of ‘storm and stress’, thus reinforcing the hierarchy between adults and children. There remains a problem, however, of conceiving only of the ‘being’ child as this neglects to consider the impact of childhood experiences in adulthood (Uprichard, 2008). Uprichard (2008: 303) advises that, used separately, both ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ approaches are problematic, conflicting and unsatisfactory. They should therefore be considered together, as ‘being and becomings’ to increase the onus on children’s agency as both in the present and the future (Uprichard, 2008).

### **At Risk or Risky**

Theories of ‘becoming’ connect with concerns about young people ‘at risk’ (Kelly, 2000: 468). Teenagers are considered ‘at risk’ from numerous sources such as unemployment, substance use, sex, alcohol, eating disorders (Johnson et al, 1999), mental health (Collishaw, 2012), themselves and other young people via for example, self-harm, sexually transmitted diseases, road traffic accidents (WHO, 2014), adults, and the internet (Livingstone et al, 2010). According to Kelly (2000), the category ‘at risk’ can include almost any behaviour, and therefore be used to justify the surveillance and social control of young people in terms of protection or perceived best interests (see Milne, 2005; Steinberg, 2008).

The use of the term ‘risk’ may be associated with a negative stereotype of adolescence, and can be used to describe behaviours about young people that adults either fear or mistrust (Michaud et al, 2006). Consequently, much behaviour classified as ‘bad’ or ‘damaging’ could be considered ‘experimental’ or ‘exploratory’ (Coleman, 2011: 108). These ‘risky’ behaviours potentially bolster self-development and support autonomous functioning (Aymer, 2008). Coleman (2011) promotes an increasing focus on agency, and a realisation that young people themselves play as big a part as any other factor in determining their own development. However, teenagers continue to be framed as a social problem and as a risk to others (Beck, 1992; Raby, 2002), as can be seen in concerns about delinquency (see France, 2000; Garland, 2002; Muncie, 2009). Griffin (1993) proposes that girls are more likely to be considered ‘at risk’ whereas boys are more likely to be treated as a social problem (see Sharland, 2006). This suggests that perceived vulnerability is linked to age and gender. This thinking also characterises cycle of violence theories and the position of teenage boys in accessing refuges, both of which will be discussed in these two chapters.

Raby (2002) suggests that discourses of adolescence overlap, reinforce and contradict each other. Her Canadian research found that teenage girls experienced tension between discourses of becoming, being at risk and being defined as a social problem. She identifies that part of the discourse of becoming positions teenagers as exploring their identities in terms of their future. Yet, as they pursue this, they are perceived as troublesome and vulnerable, thus creating a tension between dependence and independence.

The problem of adolescence for teenagers is helpfully summarised by Hudson (1984: 36):

'they must demonstrate maturity and responsibility if they are to move out of this stigmatised status, and yet because adolescence is conceived as a time of irresponsibility and lack of maturity, they are given few opportunities to demonstrate these qualities which are essential for their admission as adults.'

Despite their contradictions, these confusing taken-for-granted assumptions are naturalised, creating challenges for teenagers themselves, adults, and service provision (Raby, 2002). Coleman (2011) argues that theories of adolescence must do justice to young people's strengths and capacities, and reflect the positive contribution they make both to their own development and to their communities. He also notes, however, the importance of identifying circumstances in which individuals may become vulnerable (Coleman, 2011).

### **Evolving Capacities**

In comparison to adolescence and childhood then, adulthood has normative status (Mason and Steadman, 1997). Children and young people are immature, irrational, incompetent, passive and dependent (James and Prout, 2015; Mason and Steadman, 1997). The construction of 'in training' hides the extent of their capabilities, agency and responsibility (Lansdown, 2005: 10), and they are not taken seriously because it is believed that they do not really know what they want or need (Lansdown, 2005; Melton, 1987). The notion of competency has been challenged (Alanen and Mayall, 2001; Christensen and James, 2008;

James et al, 1998); with Lewis (1983) asserting that capacity to make informed decisions is as well developed for children from 14 years as it is for adults. Many of the reasons for incompetence cited for decision-making are also found in adult decision making (Lansdown, 2005).

Instead, Lansdown (2005) suggests recognition of evolving capacities, as found in Article 5 of the UNCRC. This focuses on capacity rather than age as the determinant in the exercise of human rights. Acknowledging the argument put forward by Punch (2001), she suggests that the principle of evolving capacities is central to the balance embodied in the Convention between development, participation and protection. Punch (2001) argues that transition from childhood to adulthood is not a linear process from dependence to independence or incompetence to competence. Instead, children and young people move in and out of these roles according to their personality, place in the family, gender, and in response to differing expectations and demands (Punch, 2001). As teenagers start to have expectations placed on them, or gain greater freedoms, they start to have experiences outside of the protective structures of childhood that place them in new situations which they may or may not have the experience and resources to cope with. Supporting freedom to engage in new responsibilities and experiences enables teenagers to develop their competence.

At the same time, young people under the age of 18 are still recognised as 'children' under the Convention and therefore still entitled to the protections that it provides. With a focus on recognising children's evolving capacities,

protection may be seen as necessitating provision of adequate resources to enable children navigate any risks (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). Hutchby and Moran Ellis (1998) argue that competence is constantly negotiated according to social interactions or relationship to others and the available material and cultural resources. Therefore, a young person cannot be defined as competent or not but may display more or less competence according to the situation (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998).

Lansdown (2005) notes the challenge to providing appropriate protection to enable young people to extend their boundaries, exercise choices and engage in necessary risk-taking, while not exposing them to inappropriate responsibility, harm and danger. Over-protection can prevent opportunities to gain confidence, contribute to their own protection and affect their ability to make informed choices (Lansdown, 2005). A requirement for this balance can be found within Schmied and Tully's (2009) literature review of effective strategies and interventions for adolescents in a child protection context. For example, young people want guidance and support from caring adults and need a balance between autonomy and setting limits (Schmied and Tully, 2009). The tension between protection and empowerment is considered to be a general issue and the dilemma of dependency versus autonomy has broadly framed the development of laws concerning children (Archard and Macleod, 2002) and Western childhoods (Burman, 2007).

## **Legal Definitions**

It is useful to acknowledge that certain legal rights or responsibilities apply to young people at certain ages (NSPCC, 2016). For example, the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is ten years old; at 13, young people can work part-time; 16 year olds can apply for legal aid, have sexual intercourse, get married (with parental consent), and earn the minimum wage. Seventeen year olds can be detained in custody; drive most vehicle types and donate blood. Eighteen year olds can: vote or stand in local and general elections; serve on a jury; get married without parental permission; and buy alcohol. There are some things young people cannot do until the age of 21, such as adopting a child or supervising a learner driver. There are also cases where decisions are subjectively based upon an adult's perception. The principle of Gillick competence addresses the ability of children and young people to give informed consent (Gillick v. West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority, 1985). It recognises that young people under the age of 16, with sufficient maturity and understanding, can legally make decisions about aspects of their lives, specifically in health-related matters.

The granting of rights and responsibilities at different ages highlights the subjectivity in categorising age and competency and assumptions of linearity. This subjectivity is important when considering research participation and gatekeeping in Chapter Three. The theories and legal rights outlined here demonstrate the various ways in which young people are defined and categorised by adults. It is important to note that the concept of adolescence as a period of entry into adulthood is not being endorsed. Rather it is the expectation or inevitability of adulthood, their child status in transition, and the

impact this has on teenagers' experience of refuges that will be explored. The position taken in this research is founded on the understanding that teenagers have situated competence (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998).

#### **1.4 INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCH**

A growing body of literature on children and domestic violence emerged post 1990 (Abrahams, 1994; Hester and Radford, 1996; Jaffe et al, 1990; McGee, 1997; Mullender and Morley, 1994). This increased acknowledgement of children's experiences of domestic violence addressed its scope, prevalence, and impact and explored the service response (Hague and Mullender, 2006; Hazen et al, 2006; Mullender and Morley, 1994). Originally, data was gathered by obtaining the views of adult women, refuge staff and other professionals. However, studies where both mothers and their children are interviewed demonstrate that children have different perspectives, have seen much more, and have a higher level of awareness of the violence than their mothers realise or report (Edleson, 1999a; Jaffe et al, 1990; Mullender et al, 2002; Swanston et al, 2014). Findings from interviews with 'survivors' and perpetrators confirm the difficulty both parents have in acknowledging the impact of domestic violence on their children (Stanley et al, 2011) due to normalisation of the violence and fears about children being removed by social services (McGee, 2000b; Stanley et al, 2011).

Previously there was reluctance for researchers to engage with children about issues of domestic violence (Mullender et al, 2002). This was partly attributable to ethical concerns, as highlighted by Humphreys (2000: 7 in Baker, 2005):

'The ethics of researching/consulting about issues which are potentially distressing and where confidentiality issues are essential to maintain safety has often created barriers to hearing the stories of women escaping domestic violence. The issues for children are even more complex and sensitive and require not only the permission of the children, but also their mothers'

Changing perceptions of children and young people's involvement in domestic violence have led to their direct participation in research. McGee's (2000) and Mullender et al's (2002) early studies have been followed by other UK studies that have involved children directly and privileged their views. Such studies include Buckley et al's (2006) Irish study which explored the impact of domestic violence and established the needs of children and young people. Their research included focus groups with children and young people aged eight to over 18 years<sup>2</sup> and focus groups with professionals, including volunteers.

Feminist approaches to research with children affected by domestic violence have increasingly been informed by an emphasis on children and young people's agency and there has been increased realisation that it is possible to incorporate their views within research to inform appropriate responses (Katz, 2013; Mullender et al, 1999; Øverlien and Hydén, 2009). Despite this trend, Baker (2005) argues that a lack of research engaging with young people has resulted in a lack of effective service provision for them. McGee (2000a: 13) recommends that in order to support children who experience domestic violence

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<sup>2</sup> The age of their oldest participant is unclear.

effectively, 'it is crucial that we listen to what children themselves have to say, both about their experiences and the types of intervention they believe would be most useful'. For the purposes of this thesis, this will be interpreted to mean enabling teenagers to speak for themselves about their on-going experiences, particularly in relation to their refuge stay and the nature of support they need. This thesis does not include interviews with mothers, and this was partly determined by resource constraints but also reflects the intention to focus on teenagers as social actors whose views and experiences do not require framing within their mothers' accounts.

## **1.5 PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**

This review will not examine domestic violence between adults but acknowledges that domestic violence is recognised by the United Nations and in international discourse as a form of gender violence and a worldwide major public health concern and human rights problem (World Health Organization, 2005). Internationally and in the UK, perpetrators of domestic violence are overwhelmingly men and their victims are typically women and children (Hester, 2009; World Health Organization, 2013), with service provision designed to reflect this.

The prevalence and frequency with which children and young people experience domestic violence in the UK is explored by Radford et al (2011b). Their study of child maltreatment found that where a child or young person had seen a parent beating up another parent, men were the perpetrators in 93.8

percent of cases. Twelve percent of under 11s, 17.5 percent of 11 to 17 year olds and 23.7 percent of 18 to 24s had been exposed to domestic violence during their childhood. In addition, they found that 3.2 percent of under 11s and 2.5 percent of 11 to 17 year olds had witnessed domestic violence in the past year. The higher percentage of 11 to 17 year olds experiencing domestic violence during childhood can be attributed to increased opportunity of experience due to their age.

### **Overlap of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse**

A connection between men's abuse of women and child abuse has been established. Research from the UK, USA and Australia highlights that children and young people are also at risk of direct physical and/or sexual abuse from their mother's abuser (Brandon et al, 2012; Hamby et al, 2010; Kelly, 1994; Radford and Hester, 2006). Hughes (1989) terms this the 'double whammy'. Radford et al (2011b) found that young people experiencing domestic violence were between 2.9 and 4.4 times more likely to experience physical violence and neglect from a caregiver than young people not exposed to domestic violence. A consistent finding is that the combination of being both a 'victim' of child abuse and domestic violence is associated with more severe impacts (Edleson, 1999b; Evans et al, 2008; Kitzmann et al, 2003; Wolfe et al, 2003). Finkelhor's (2009) US research on poly-victimisation argues that children exposed to different forms of abuse are at the highest risk of adverse psychological effects and this raises particular concerns for children and young people identified as experiencing domestic violence.

## **1.6 IMPACT AND EFFECTS**

An extensive body of research literature provides information relating to the impact and effects of experiencing domestic violence on children and young people (Cawson, 2002; Devaney, 2015; Holt et al, 2008; Stanley, 2011). Both the short and long term implications of domestic violence for a child's development and abilities suggest differential but potentially harmful adverse impact (Cleaver et al, 2011; Evans et al, 2008; Pryke and Thomas, 1998; Saunders, 2003; Stanley, 2011). There is agreement that children and young people are affected differently by their experiences. Siblings can be affected differently due to their age or role within the family or because some perpetrators target specific children for abuse (Carlson, 2000; Mullender et al, 2002; Saunders et al, 1995; Straus and Gelles, 1990). Experiences are also framed by disability, ethnicity and gender (Imam and Akhtar, 2005; Mullender et al, 2002). This differential impact means that children and young people have a wide range of responses making it difficult to summarise the impact of shared experiences (Mullender et al, 2002). When describing impact, the focus will be on the experience of teenagers and on gender as this is relevant for young women residing in refuges independently.

## **1.7 EXPERIENCES ACCORDING TO AGE**

Experiencing domestic violence may have a different impact according to a child's stage of development (Cunningham and Baker, 2004). Currently, research identifies the different ways the impact of domestic violence can manifest. These differences are summarised below according to developmental stage:

**Table 1.1** The Impact of Domestic Violence at Different Developmental Stages

Infants & Pre-school Children	School Aged Children	Young People
delayed language and toilet development; sleep disturbance; fear of being left alone; temper tantrums or aggression; distress; anxiety.	conduct disorders; problems in concentration and attainment; difficulties with peers; quiet or withdrawn; loud or aggressive; emotional and behavioural difficulties.	depression; suicidal feelings; self-harm, including eating disorders; delinquency; anti-social behaviour; aggression towards peers or parents, usually mothers.

(Bogat et al, 2006; Bream and Buchanan, 2003; Buckley et al, 2007; Byrne and Taylor, 2007; Cunningham and Baker, 2004; Farmer, 2006; Humphreys and Houghton, 2008; Huth-Bocks et al, 2001; Kelleher et al, 2008b; 2008a; Levendosky et al, 2003; Lundy and Grossman, 2005; Martin, 2002; McCloskey and Licher, 2003; Meltzer et al, 2009; Moyers et al, 2006; Osofsky, 2003; Song et al, 1998).

'Older children' are more likely to show the effects of the disruption in their lives through under performance at school, poorly developed social networks, self-harm, running away and engagement in anti-social behaviour (Humphreys and Houghton, 2008). These effects are less common in younger children, although there are some commonalities, such as anger, as detailed above. Distinct effects according to age indicate the need for specialist domestic violence provision according to developmental stage for children and young people (NICE, 2014).

The effects of domestic violence and abuse on teenagers have generally received less attention than the effects on younger children (Buckley et al, 2006). Part of the reason for this may be that teenagers have opportunities to spend time away from home or school and therefore the effects may not always be scrutinised by adults. Available research does suggest that young people can be adversely affected and have greater awareness of abuse (Buckley et al, 2006; Cunningham and Baker, 2004; Farrell and Sullivan, 2004; McGee, 2000a). In previous studies with children and young people, it is older participants (e.g. 15 and 16 year olds) who report more awareness and sophisticated understandings of domestic violence (Buckley et al, 2007; McGee, 2000a; Thatcher, 2012). These findings suggest that the ability to understand their experience and the impact of that experience are also affected by age.

### **Emotional and Psychological Impact**

Much research utilises the 'Child Behaviour Checklist' (Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1983) as the standardised measurement tool for quantifying impact of domestic violence. As a consequence, vast amounts of US literature refers to either 'externalising' behaviours such as aggressive or antisocial behaviour or 'internalising' behaviours such as anxiety, depression or trauma (Grych et al, 2000; Jarvis et al, 2005; McCloskey and Walker, 2000; Rossman, 2001; Slopen et al, 2012; Sternberg et al, 1993). Criticisms of the 'Child Behaviour Checklist' include the failure to examine the distinctive impacts of witnessing violence, cultural and socio-economic differences, and ignoring variables such as marital status, parental age, family size, family stress, child health or ethnicity (Aymer, 2005; Edleson, 1999a; Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999; McIntosh, 2003; O'Keefe,

1996). Appel and Holden (1998) also highlight inconsistencies across studies, with some studies reviewing lifetime experiences and others focussing only on recent experiences. Nevertheless, such research has helped to indicate the prevalence and impact of domestic violence.

Findings indicate that children and young people who live with domestic violence are at increased risk of developing behavioural problems and emotional trauma, and mental health difficulties in adult life (Hester et al, 2000; Howells and Rosenbaum, 2008; Kolbo et al, 1996; Mullender and Morley, 1994; Silvern et al, 1995; Slopen et al, 2012). Sternberg et al's (2006) mega-analytic review examined age as one mediating factor on the impact of domestic violence on behaviour problems using the Child Behaviour Checklist. Children were divided into three age groups: four to six, seven to nine, and ten to 14 year olds. Their results showed that the type of violence experienced consistently predicted behaviour problems. Children's age moderated the effects of this behaviour, with problems being greatest for seven to 14 years olds. Age was also found to have a significant effect on internalising behaviour, with 'older children' at higher clinical risk than younger children. Unfortunately, this study did not include young people aged over 14 years.

### **Social and Academic Impact**

This section will focus on the social and academic impact of experiencing domestic violence and abuse. A meta-analysis of 118 studies on children and domestic violence by Kitzmann et al (2003) found that children and adolescents

'exposed to' domestic violence are more likely to experience other social and academic difficulties. Their study showed significantly poorer outcomes on 21 developmental and behavioural dimensions for most of the children and adolescents exposed to domestic violence compared to others who had not experienced such abuse.

Adolescence is conceptualised as the point when peer relationships become as important, if not more important than family relationships and where attachment behaviour starts to transfer from parents to peers (Levendosky et al, 2002). Friends can play a key role for young people in times of family difficulty (Dunn and Deater-Deckard, 2001; Gorin, 2004; O'Connor et al, 2001). Lepistö et al (2010) conclude that adolescents from violent homes seek 'belonging', social support and acceptance. Seeking social support can be more prevalent in adolescents experiencing domestic violence (Futa et al, 2003) and friendships can have enhanced significance where support from the family is low (Gauze et al, 1996).

Friendships may be restricted however, where young people are required to take on caregiving roles for mothers or siblings. Such roles can isolate young people from their peers and distract them from their schoolwork (Becker et al, 1998). Others may have difficulty forming healthy relationships with peers due to the relationship models they experienced in their family (Levendosky et al, 2002). Relationships and rapport with friends partly reflect learning about close relationships at home due to early attachments, and because family life provides learning opportunities around self-disclosure, trust, loyalty, conflict

resolution, compromise and respect (Cotterell, 2007). Compared with younger children, adolescents express feelings of awkwardness about meeting new people and joining established groups (Coleman, 2011). Browne (2002) found that young people who had experienced abuse, such as those in foster care, blamed themselves, tried to cope on their own, and tended to keep to themselves. These examples suggest that some young people need active support to develop protective factors outside the family.

Some children and young people avoid forming friendships due to fears that their home circumstances will be revealed (Buckley et al, 2006, 2007; Radford et al, 2011a). Participants in Buckley et al's (2007) study felt embarrassed and feared rejection or bullying. As a result, they were more likely to intensify their isolation by never inviting people to their homes. Findings indicate that living with secrecy can be a source of shame for children (Margolin, 1998) and can be a barrier to the development of peer relationships. The dynamic of secrecy encompasses the lives of children living with domestic violence within and outside the family (Peled, 1996). If mothers separate from an abusive partner, the secrecy about the domestic violence in the home then becomes secrecy about the family's new address (Stanley, 1997). This will be returned to in the next chapter when considering young people's experiences of living in refuge accommodation.

Young people experiencing domestic violence and abuse describe difficulties in concentration and attainment due to their experiences (Buckley et al, 2007).

Others may stay at home to monitor safety or look after their mother meaning they have more school absenteeism (Buckley et al, 2007). Mill and Church (2006) suggest that some children and young people may display behaviour issues such as increased aggression or hostility or they may lack confidence and self-esteem in their schoolwork and in maintaining friendships (see also Mullender et al, 2002; Stalford et al, 2003; Paradis et al, 2009). In contrast, school can represent a safe place to escape to (Buckley et al, 2007; Mathias et al, 1995) by providing stability, normality and a network of support (Mill and Church, 2006).

It is acknowledged that disruptions in education can impact on learning (Radford et al, 2011a). Some children and young people need to change schools and may not be able to return to their old school due to safety reasons or lack of support with transport costs (Mill and Church, 2006). Secondary school placements are considered difficult to find and may take even longer for children and young people with additional educational needs (Mill and Church, 2006). A range of practical issues have also been found, including confusion as to who is responsible for the placement of a child who had to change schools and limited resources for children and young people affected by domestic violence (Mill and Church, 2006). Mothers might not be able to afford new uniforms which could mark children and young people as different. Schools themselves are under pressure to achieve certain targets and may be concerned about enrolling a child or young person regarded 'at risk' or a 'problem' due to a preoccupation with exam results or school performance (Mill and Church, 2006). However, this fails to prioritise their current educational and

social needs and future occupational and career achievement (see Paradis et al, 2009).

Recommendations from Radford et al's (2011a) study suggest that targeted learning support should be available in school to address the academic disadvantages caused by domestic violence. Earlier recommendations include one to one support from a teacher or learning mentor, homework club or opportunities to catch up with school work, help with transport costs and links to domestic violence agencies (Mill and Church, 2006). Good educational support is connected to positive outcomes including a secure base, contact with others and opportunities for building self-esteem (Garbarino et al, 1992; Gilligan, 2000) and is therefore a desirable protective factor (Rutter, 1991). As will be shown across these two chapters, specialist domestic violence services for children and young people are currently under resourced. Consequently, school can be a key place to provide educational and emotional support. However, further obstacles include the unwillingness of children and young people to disclose information about the domestic violence and a lack of knowledge about how to support them effectively in educational settings (Mill and Church, 2006). Such obstacles might affect their recovery but also their relationships with teachers and peers.

### **Long Term Impact of Domestic Violence and Abuse**

There is evidence to suggest that the impact of exposure to domestic violence and abuse is cumulative. Longer exposure is considered to produce the most severe impact which can continue into adulthood (Levendosky and Graham-

Bermann, 1998; Mitchell and Finkelhor, 2001). Cunningham and Baker (2004) suggest that early and prolonged exposure to domestic violence can create more severe problems due to the disruption of the chain of development. Goldblatt (2003), however, found that freedom and autonomy in adolescence enabled the 21 Israeli teenagers in his study to develop a sense of control over their lives.

Rossman's (2001) 'adversity package' describes the multiple stressors which can accumulate for young people exposed to domestic violence. These stressors can include child abuse, parental substance abuse, parental mental health difficulties, unemployment, homelessness, social isolation and criminal involvement (Golding, 1999). Hogan and O'Reilly's (2007) Irish study, involving 22 children and young people aged 5 to 21 years, found that teenagers catalogued many years of witnessing and overhearing violence with longer exposure having the most severe impact. Due to their age, teenagers have more opportunity to experience domestic violence and the stressors outlined above and therefore may be more likely to experience a package of adversity.

## **Gender**

There is debate surrounding gender difference in the impact of domestic violence on children and young people. Some research indicates the similar impact on girls and boys regarding internalising behaviours, but that boys are more likely to display externalising behaviours (Edleson, 1999a; Evans et al, 2008; Jaffe et al, 1986a; Martin, 2002; Osofsky, 1997). McIntosh (2003) attributes these differences to boys experiencing a high level of threat from

violence and girls experiencing higher levels of self-blame. Adolescent males may interpret the use of domestic violence as a legitimate method of resolving conflict thereby influencing the likelihood of increased use of violence (Carlson, 2000). A study by Abrahams (1994) found that once children were no longer living in the violent situation and/or were older, the longer term effects often included a lack of self-confidence; violent and aggressive behaviour; and sadness. Some studies note particular effects on teenage girls, including anxieties surrounding forming relationships with boys, suggesting that perhaps the impact of gender differences occurs at a later stage (Abrahams, 1994; McGee, 2000a).

In contrast, other research does not suggest significant gender differences in internalising or externalising behaviours (Cummings et al, 1999; Kerig, 1996; Lemmey et al, 2001). As part of a larger US study into perceptions of violence among 935 high school students, O'Keefe (1996) examined the effects of domestic violence on the adjustment of adolescents aged between 14 and 20 years and found no gender effects. Hester et al (2007: 72) argues that there is no particular way that boys or girls deal with their experiences of domestic violence and so when considering gender, 'there is a need for more sophisticated ways of looking at its impact'. The issue of gender differences and impacts of domestic violence is relevant when considering cycle of violence theories (see below) and refuge admission policies in relation to teenage boys. The latter will be addressed in Chapter Two.

### **Cycle of Violence**

The ‘cycle of violence’ theory is commonly used to explain the intergenerational transmission of violent behaviour (Laing, 2000). The theory is often used to account for the relationship between describing children growing up in households characterised by domestic violence, and subsequently experiencing it within their own intimate relationships (Jaffe et al, 1986a; 1986b; McGee, 1997; Murrell et al, 2005; Song et al, 1998). Drawing on ‘social learning theory’ (Bandura and Walters, 1977), parents are seen to teach violent behaviour through modelling and fail to teach skills in resolving conflict without using violence (Holtzworth-Munroe et al, 1997; Howard, 1995; McInnes, 1995). Supporters of this theory suggest this results in gender based differences: for instance, boys will become perpetrators of violence and girls will become ‘victims’ (Itzin et al, 2010; Jaffe et al, 1990; Levendosky et al, 2002; Wekerle and Wolfe, 1999).

Clinical research also suggests that witnessing domestic violence is linked to later perpetration of parent abuse (Boxer et al, 2009; Cornell and Gelles, 1982; McCloskey and Licher, 2003; Kennedy et al, 2010). ‘Parent abuse’ or ‘adolescent-to-parent abuse’ refers to ‘a pattern of behaviour that uses verbal, financial, physical or emotional means to exert power and control over a parent’ (Holt, 2013: 1). Young people who are abusive towards their parents are reportedly more likely to be abusive towards partners (O’Leary et al, 1994). Some research suggests that domestic violence adversely affects a mother’s ability to develop authority and control over her children, resulting in physical aggression by adolescents towards their parents (Jackson, 2003; Ulman and Straus, 2003). Sometimes children and young people blame their mothers for

not protecting them from domestic violence and abuse (Holt, 2013; Mullender et al, 2002). Their aggressive behaviour is considered to increase with the young person's age and is found to be 18 times more frequent in families where the mother experienced domestic violence (McCloskey and Licher, 2003).

There are concerns about the 'cycle of violence' theory and identifying future 'victims' or perpetrators. It is overly deterministic and encourages practitioners and children themselves to view their future as fixed (Humphreys and Mullender, 2000; Lapierre, 2008). Other research evidence suggests that the majority of children exposed to domestic violence do not become 'victims' or perpetrators of domestic violence in their adult relationships (Blum, 1998; Margolin, 1998; Humphreys and Mullender, 2000). Resilience research, discussed later, further questions the inevitability that children who have lived with domestic violence will experience abusive relationships as adults. There are also considerable methodological difficulties when exploring the long term effects of domestic violence due to overlap with other forms of abuse or stressors (such as poverty or substance abuse) and so effects may prove difficult to distinguish (Fantuzzo et al, 1997; Laing, 2000; Margolin and Gordis, 2000).

The association between childhood domestic violence and violence in intimate relationships should therefore be acknowledged as a possibility and not an inevitability. Nevertheless, violence in the home is identified as a significant risk factor for violence in young people's intimate partner relationships (Barter,

2009; Barter and McCarry, 2013; Pfleger and Vazsonyi, 2006). Knowledge about these experiences is increasing with research increasingly focusing on teenage partner violence, sexting or sexualisation (Barter et al, 2009; Stanley et al, 2016; Wood et al, 2015).

## **1.8 TEENAGE PARTNER ABUSE**

The change in the British government's definition of domestic violence (Home Office, 2013) to include 16 and 17 year olds increases opportunities for teenagers to access domestic violence services as primary service users. The extension of the definition built on the launch of the Home Office 'Teenage Relationship Abuse' and 'Teenage Rape Prevention' campaigns (see Home Office, 2015) to help young people identify abuse. These aimed to challenge young people's views of acceptable relationship violence, abuse or controlling behaviour and direct them to help and support. However, the campaigns fail to acknowledge the possibility that the first experiences of domestic violence may be in the home. The new definition means that domestic violence services in England and Wales now face the challenge of responding to young people's experiences of domestic violence, both in the home and in their own relationships.

The first study of teenage partner violence in Great Britain provided a detailed picture of the incidence and impact. Barter et al (2009) analysed 1,353 questionnaires completed by young people aged 13 to 17 in eight schools in England, Scotland and Wales (three quarters of the sample were 15 years old or above). They also undertook 91 interviews in five schools to investigate

young people's experiences of interpersonal violence in their own and their friends' relationships. They found that 72 percent of girls and 51 percent of boys had experienced emotional violence; 25 percent of girls and 18 percent of boys disclosed physical partner violence; and 31 percent of girls and 16 percent of boys reported sexual partner violence. Girls were more likely than boys to say that the physical violence was repeated and that it either remained at the same level or worsened.

A later study (Wood et al, 2011) involved semi-structured interviews with 82 boys and girls aged 13 to 18 years recruited from agencies working with disadvantaged young people. They found much higher rates than Barter et al's (2009) earlier study; just over half of girls had experienced physical violence in at least one of their relationships (Wood et al, 2011). This compares to a quarter of the girls participating in Barter et al's (2009) survey. One quarter of girls experienced more serious forms of physical violence, one half had experienced sexual violence, and one quarter had experienced physical sexual violence (Wood et al, 2011). They also found more girls saw the abuse as 'normal' compared with those in Barter et al's (2009) school-based survey. There was evidence of high levels of physical violence in young pregnancy (Wood et al, 2011) consistent with existing research. Looked after young women were especially vulnerable to sexual violence, often from older men. They also reported that foster carers and residential workers failed to take their intimate relationship difficulties seriously. Many of them had been exposed to domestic violence in their parents' relationships, which lends support to studies identifying a relationship between childhood and later experience of domestic

violence, outlined earlier. However, the care system may act to increase existing vulnerabilities (see Farmer, 2006).

## **1.9 COPING STRATEGIES AND RESILIENCE**

Young people's approaches to coping with experiences of domestic violence have been insufficiently studied, even though adolescence and domestic violence have a considerable effect on how coping strategies develop and are used (Lepistö et al, 2010). This neglect is, in part, due to a teenager's ability to physically leave or be emotionally distant from domestic violence by spending more time in their room or away from home, which are coping strategies themselves (Mullender et al, 1998; Rogers, 2009).

Teenagers are considered more likely to use non-productive coping strategies such as self-blame, ignoring the problem or worrying (Lepistö et al, 2010; Lewis and Frydenberg, 2002; 2004). Teenagers can try to cope with their reactions through distracting themselves from the problem, termed mental or emotional disengagement (Steinberg and Silverberg, 1986). This can involve 'tuning out' by listening to music or having the TV volume turned up. Some may become involved in criminal activity or use alcohol or drugs to escape their situation and cope with their emotions (Cunningham and Baker, 2004; Goldblatt, 2003; Jaffe et al, 1990; Mullender et al, 2002; Rogers, 2009; Weinehall, 1997; 2005). Alternatively, anger may be directed at the abuser for the violence or at the mother for perceived failure to protect, inability to leave, or returning to the abuser (Holt, 2013; Mullender et al, 2002). Mothers in Buckley et al's (2007:

302) study detailed how their teenage children demonstrated ‘very challenging behaviour’ after leaving the domestic violence situation including: drinking, stealing, physical aggression, and refusal to attend school. Some mothers noted that they had to call the police to manage their behaviour.

Young people can feel physically and emotionally responsible for younger siblings or their mother (Buckley et al, 2006; McGee, 2000b) and may take on a protective role (Cleaver et al, 2011; Gorin, 2004). Whilst these caring responsibilities may provide self-esteem or satisfaction, they can be a source of worry, isolate them from their peers, and distract them from schoolwork (Becker et al, 1998). Goldblatt (2003) cautions that the cost of over-parentification is a lost childhood and the likelihood of severe emotional distress. Katz (2013) criticises research which assumes such support is negative and suggests that protective behaviour is more complex. She applies advances in parent-child relationship theory (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski et al, 1999) to promote a shift from a unilateral to bilateral model when considering the mother-child relationship in the context of domestic violence. In doing so, she conceptualises agentic children and mothers supporting each other reciprocally (Katz, 2013). However, further evidence of this model is required for its application within the context of domestic violence. Whilst negative impact may not be the case for all young people, participants in Buckley et al’s (2006) and Stanley et al’s (2010) studies communicated some resentment about being forced to ‘grow up’ and assume adult responsibilities.

'Older children' may use physical coping strategies to try to intervene when abuse occurs or challenge the abuser in order to protect the other parent or their siblings, develop a sense of control or reduce feelings of helplessness (Hester et al, 2007; McGee, 2000a). Whilst these might be natural reactions, they can place the young person at risk of being abused or assaulted themselves (Rogers, 2009). Studies from both the UK and USA (Buckley et al, 2006; Christian et al, 1997; Hester et al, 2000; Rees and Stein, 1997) have found that teenagers are more likely to try to prevent violent incidents and get hurt through intervening than younger children. Trying to gain a sense of control could explain the increased likelihood of teenagers intervening in violent incidents.

As an alternative coping mechanism, teenagers may physically remove themselves from the violence by leaving home early, ultimately putting themselves at risk of homelessness as this is perceived to offer a better, safer option than staying at home (Abrahams, 1994; Rogers, 2009). Domestic violence is a contributory factor for young people under the age of 18 running away from home (Diaz, 2005; Randall and Brown, 2001; Bruegel and Smith, 1999). Homelessness exposes young people to increased risk of victimisation, such as physical and sexual assault and to other risks such as substance abuse, self-injurious behaviours, involvement in unsafe sexual practices and neglect of medical and self-care needs (National Crime Prevention, 1999). Lepistö et al (2010) found that young people experiencing domestic violence do not seek help and therefore active measures should be taken to help them.

Coping strategies are not static and vary according to the situation or time. A 17 year old in Hague et al's (1996) study explained how initially she felt she had to stay with her mother at all times to protect her, but her way of coping changed during her teenage years with her spending more time away from home. Coping strategies also develop according to the individual (Hague et al, 1996; McGee, 2000a; Mullender et al, 2002; Templeton et al, 2009). This might mean that a young person's behaviour is misinterpreted and judged negatively if they do not conform to expected strategies or display behaviours designed to manage their experiences. Alternatively, it may be that they require individual support to develop their coping strategies and to deal with their experiences of domestic violence and abuse.

### **Resilience**

Resilience emerged as a relevant concept when reviewing the data and findings from interviews for this research. There are varying definitions and critiques as to whether resilience is a process, a goal/outcome or an individual characteristic (Graham-Bermann et al, 2009). Resilience refers to 'positive adaptation and development in the context of significant adversity' or trauma (Newman, 2004: 6) (see also Luthar et al, 2000; Masten and Obradović, 2006; Rutter, 2006; Ungar, 2011; 2013). A resilient child is 'one who bounces back having endured adversity, who continues to function reasonably well despite continued risk to exposure' (Gilligan, 2000). Individual factors associated with more positive outcomes include temperament, talents or abilities, cognitive ability, self-esteem, active coping style, and social skills (Daniel and Wassell, 2002; Guille, 2004; Kashani and Allan, 1998).

There has, however, been a move away from a narrow child-centred approach to a broader systemic view of resilience. Although not specifically referring to experiences of domestic violence, Ungar (2008: 225) defines resilience as:

'both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways'.

This socio-ecological understanding shifts the focus from the individual to the varied and multiple systems with which an individual interacts. Ungar (2015) proposes that assessment of resilience should therefore refer to a range of factors. These factors should include: the severity and chronicity of risk of exposure to adversity; individual and contextual dimensions of resilience; and the temporal and cultural influences of promotive and protective factors needed to do well (Ungar, 2015). Consequently, interventions should apply this assessment in practice and focus on the promotion of wellbeing (Ungar, 2015). In this thesis, promoting socio-ecological resilience for teenagers will be considered as an objective for refuge services. In examining those factors that can contribute to resilience, I will explore the interaction of individual characteristics, relationships with others such as family, friends or a support worker (inter-personal factors), and environmental and community resources (macro/structural and meso factors). These factors will now be outlined with specific reference to domestic violence research to provide context for the later findings.

### ***Resilience and Domestic Violence and Abuse***

Some children are shown to be remarkably resilient to the effects of domestic violence (Graham-Bermann and Edleson, 2001; Grych et al, 2000; Hughes and Luke, 1998; Kitzmann et al, 2003). Luthar (2003: 4) defines resilience as ‘patterns of positive adjustment in the context of significant risk or adversity’. Stanley (2011) points out that there is less knowledge about how to influence resilience-building processes. Criticisms are aimed at the ways in which research focuses on the damage children and young people have sustained, serving to marginalise their experiences, perceive them as passive, and ignore their coping strategies (Katz, 2013; Mullender et al, 2002; Øverlien and Hydén, 2009). Such research maintains the position of children and young people as incomplete and vulnerable. A resilience approach recognises that whilst future adversity cannot be prevented, increasing a young person’s resilience can enhance the likelihood of better long term outcomes (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). This approach can be used as a framework to inform service provision for young people who have experienced abuse (Gilligan, 1997).

A number of protective factors promoting resilience have been identified (Jaffe et al, 1990; Perkins and Jones, 2004). These include a secure base, self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy and are categorised according to individual, family, and wider community factors (Gilligan, 1997; Jaffe et al, 1990). The sub-sections below address key elements of resilience in more depth. Rather than suggesting that young people do not therefore need support, further research is needed to provide improved understanding of these factors (Laing, 2000) which could then be incorporated into preventative and therapeutic efforts. It is understood that there should be an emphasis on building a protective support

network from the resources available and adding professional support where required (Daniel and Wassell, 2002).

### ***Attributes of the Young Person***

Rutter (1985) provided an early account of the key characteristics that promote resilience in the individual. These characteristics included a sense of self-esteem and confidence, belief in one's self-efficacy and a range of problem-solving approaches (see also Grych et al, 2000; Graham-Bermann, et al 2009). Self-esteem is considered to be a significant aspect of resilience (Daniel and Wassell, 2002; Martin, 2002). It is regarded as fundamental to developing successful coping strategies and is found to be a key factor distinguishing between resilient and non-resilient young people (Guille, 2004; Kashani and Allan, 1998). Some young people can have high self-esteem in one area, such as education, and may therefore be able to focus on that domain as an escape to the violence at home (Lepistö et al, 2010). However, educational attainment can be affected by domestic violence with some young people missing large amounts of school and this emerged as a major issue for the young people participating in this study (see Chapter Four). Additionally, self-esteem may be damaged by experience of domestic violence including the feelings of shame induced (McGee, 2000a).

### ***Support within the Family***

A secure attachment to a non-violent parent or other significant carer is consistently cited as an important protective factor in mitigating the impact of domestic violence (Graham-Bermann et al, 2006; Mullender et al, 2002;

Osofsky, 1999). Much research identifies mothers as important to the resilience and wellbeing of children and young people (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann, 1998; 2001; Mullender et al, 2002; Osofsky, 1999; Radford and Hester, 2006; Sturge-Apple et al, 2010). However, Levendosky et al (2002; 2012) argue that domestic violence has implications for the bond between mother and child, with adolescents who experience domestic violence less likely to have a secure attachment and more likely to have an avoidant attachment. Young people with a secure attachment are considered more likely to make the transition to mature interdependence (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). Katz (2013) suggests that current evidence overlooks agency of the child and calls for a more sophisticated model of parent-child relationships to increase understanding of the ways children actively support their mothers and the subsequent effects. It is unclear then, how teenagers living with domestic violence maintain or develop their relationships with mothers and the impact this may have on informal relationships with others such as friends.

### ***Support Outside the Family***

Connected to family support is the importance of social support outside of the immediate family, including extended family or community members (Kashani and Allan, 1998; Ullman, 2003). Levendosky et al's (2002) research with 111 adolescents aged 14 to 16 years and their mothers found that a supportive relationship with an adult family member served as a protective factor in a high-risk environment. However, McCloskey et al (1995) caution that when the family experiences severe violence, supportive family relationships may fail to adequately protect from negative effects, at least in the short term.

Support from friends or siblings is also important (Guille, 2004; McGee, 2000a; Mullender et al, 2002; Werner, 2000). Rosenthal et al (2003) indicate that it is easier for girls to seek support from friends rather than parents. However, Levendosky et al (2002) found that whilst social support moderates the impact of domestic violence on adolescent functioning, it has no influence on mental health functioning. Interestingly, other studies have found that not all the support young people receive from peers is positive in its effects (Barter et al, 2009; Levendosky et al, 2002).

When considering resilience, a balanced approach is required. In line with Coleman's (2011) thinking, whilst it is extremely important to point out the adaptive abilities of young people, it would be wrong to underestimate the impact of stress and disadvantage, and therefore minimise difficulties and obstacles faced by some adolescents. The more difficulties a young person experiences, the more resources they need to deal with them (Coleman, 2011). For example, a young person dealing with moving school, going through puberty, losing friends, and a problem at home, faces more demands than someone who only has one stressor to manage (Coleman, 2011). This situation is similar to that experienced by teenagers who have to move to refuge accommodation, and will be considered further within the following chapter.

## **1.10 COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS**

Reflecting on the importance of developing protective factors leads to a brief discussion of interventions that aim to repair and support the protective factors

identified above. Recognition of the detrimental impacts of living with domestic violence has led to a range of programmes and interventions developed by domestic violence services and children's organisations (Grusznski et al, 1988; Hague et al, 2000). Mullender (2004) suggests that all children and young people can benefit from individual and group work to understand what has happened and to overcome the negative impact of domestic violence and abuse, regardless of the perceived impact of domestic violence and abuse.

A study in Ireland echoes previous findings that children respond differently to living with domestic violence and therefore services must be tailored to meet individual needs (Buckley et al, 2007). Sometimes, however, children and young people are not asked directly about the services they consider effective. Not being listened to can exacerbate feelings of powerlessness (McGee, 2000a; Mullender et al, 2002). Early UK studies (Abrahams, 1994; McGee, 2000a) found that mothers wanted their children to have counselling whereas children themselves wanted to talk to other children with similar experiences. Research from Canada and the USA (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann, 1998; Jaffe et al, 1990; Stewart et al, 2010) is largely quantitative and places emphasis on clinically proven treatments such as counselling and psychiatry, reflecting a highly positivist medical perspective focusing on trauma and post-traumatic stress (Øverlien, 2012; Stanley, 2011). This fits less well in the UK context, where there has been a stronger feminist tradition of phenomenological and critical social research (Hester, 2004). This lack of fit is reflected by children themselves who rarely mention the need for formal counselling and instead describe their needs for fun and someone to talk to (Baker, 2005; Mullender et al, 2002).

Some community initiatives target mothers and their children in the aftermath of domestic violence and abuse. Examples include the Sutton Stronger Families Programme (Debonnaire, 2007) and the Talking to My Mum intervention (Humphreys et al, 2006). Small pockets of practice also exist to provide domestic violence advocacy such as the KIDVA service in Hyndburn and Ribble Valley (Westwood and Larkins, 2015) and Domestic Abuse Team in Blackpool (Stanley, 2011). Women's Aid provide 'the Hideout' website for children and young people ([www.thehideout.co.uk](http://www.thehideout.co.uk)). There is, however, a general shortage of community provision for children and young people who have experienced domestic violence (Calder, 2009; Radford et al, 2011a; Stanley et al, 2010). Radford et al (2011a) found that services tend to focus on high risk adults or on the impact of domestic violence on parenting. As a result, there appear to be few services that explicitly aim to promote resilience in young people.

Advances were made in Scotland by harnessing the views and campaigning power of children and young people. 'Listen Louder!' was a three year campaign for action launched in 2002 by children, young people and Scottish Women's Aid to raise awareness about the effects of domestic violence on children and young people, and to improve and increase service provision (Houghton, 2006). As a result, short term measures were considered by Scottish ministers and a commitment was made towards considering long term solutions and provision of interim funding for children's workers in 11 Women's Aid services (Houghton, 2006). Funding ensured that every child in a refuge had access to a computer for homework. In the final year (2004-5) the

campaign raised £6million to increase children's support services. This level of funding has not been sustained in the context of austerity policies. This campaign is an exceptional example, as generally, children's strong views concerning the poor quality of communal refuge buildings have limited impact on policy.

### **1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The term 'domestic violence and abuse' will be used throughout this thesis in recognition that it is experienced in the home by male and female young people. Understandings of 'childhood' and adolescence inform how young people are perceived, in terms of their emotional journeys, development, capacities and relationships to risk, but rather than adopting any of these constructions of adolescence, this thesis argues for a focus on teenagers as subjects of rights who actively participate in the social world.

The chapter has argued that for many young people experiencing domestic violence and abuse can have negative short and long term consequences. Teenagers' involvement in and experiences of domestic violence and abuse are intimate and active. They are more likely than younger children to intervene in a violent incident and the impacts may negatively affect their education, social networks and self-esteem. The impact of and response to domestic violence and abuse varies according to age and between individuals, although there is evidence to suggest that impact is cumulative with longer exposure having more severe effects. A teenager experiencing many years of violence and abuse

may therefore experience higher levels of harm and feelings of personal responsibility in reducing domestic violence than a younger child. Some teenagers use negative coping strategies such as running away or self-harm to cope with the violence and abuse. Some adopt caring roles beyond the responsibilities assumed by their peers.

Unlike younger children, teenagers can experience domestic violence simultaneously at home and in their own intimate partner relationships. This review has evidenced research that shows teenagers who are exposed to parental domestic violence are more likely, although not inevitably, to experience it within their own relationships. They also face challenges and opportunities different to younger children or adults which are specific to the period of adolescence. This suggests that young people need support specifically tailored to their needs and evolving capacities. As with the impact of domestic violence and abuse, resilience to domestic violence also varies between individuals with personal attributes and support both within and outside of the family being significant. Little is known about how or if services help to mobilise protective factors which promote resilience to the effects of living with domestic violence and abuse or which enable young people to avoid interpersonal abuse in their own future relationships. The capacity of refuges to promote resilience will be explored in relation to teenagers' experiences of refuge life.

# **Chapter Two**

## **Literature Review Part II:**

### **Teenagers and Refuges**

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#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will focus first on contextualising domestic violence refuge service provision. It will begin with a brief history of the UK refuge movement and Women's Aid in England. Selected early studies and statistics from Women's Aid will be used to indicate the research context, the needs identified for adult women living in refuge accommodation, and levels of provision. Short term funding practices, successive cuts to refuge accommodation in recent years and the potential for commissioning practices to obstruct service development are highlighted. The chapter then moves to provide a brief background to children's work, funding of children's refuge services and work undertaken with children and young people. There are a small number of refuges for men and their children in the UK but an absence of research regarding these. Due to the history of the refuge movement, available literature, and the range of fieldwork sites utilised for this study (see Chapter Three), the review of the literature will focus only on women's refuges.

The second section of this chapter highlights messages and findings from research with children and young people who have experience of living in domestic violence refuges. This section starts with a review of the extent of existing literature in the field and then considers the findings in relation to

access (particularly for teenage boys) and moving into refuges. Children and young people's feelings about refuge life and brief information about leaving refuges are discussed, followed by views on refuge facilities, the potential to diversify provision and challenges to effective provision. This chapter endeavours to focus specifically on the experiences and views of teenagers, rather than younger children, for reasons highlighted in the previous chapters. However, this is not always possible due to a failure of earlier research to discriminate between the experiences of children and teenagers, as already noted.

## **2.2 CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE REFUGE SERVICE PROVISION**

### **History of Refuges**

The 'second wave' of feminism or Women's Liberation movement in the 1960s highlighted the issue of violence in the home and other forms of violence to women (Clifton, 1985; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; 1979; Weir, 1977). Sutton (1978: 577) explains that 'between 1966 and 1971, the only safe places for battered women were with friends or relatives, or in a prison, a hospital or a mortuary'. In the UK, the Women's Liberation movement took the lead in establishing refuges in the 1970s (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; 1979; Hanmer, 1977; Johnson, 1995) through self-organised, informal women's groups and centres. The Chiswick group<sup>3</sup> campaigned to raise awareness of domestic

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<sup>3</sup> The Chiswick group later formed as Refuge and became a registered charity in 1979. They now run the 24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline in partnership with Women's Aid.

violence and the need to provide help. Their efforts ensured that domestic violence was placed firmly on the public agenda and gained massive media attention. This helped to put pressure on politicians and agencies to respond to the problem. As a result of their campaigning, the world's first 'refuge for battered women' opened in 1971 in Chiswick (Coote and Campbell, 1987; Sutton, 1978). Other refuges opened as women's groups in many towns began providing safe accommodation in empty properties (Hanmer, 2003; Harwin, 1997; Rose, 1978; 1985; Sutton, 1978). These early refuges were conversions of properties built for other purposes, run by volunteers and residents themselves on minimal budgets (Ball, 1994).

The initial role of the refuges was to provide temporary, emergency accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic violence. Dobash and Dobash (1992: 1) describe the establishment of refuges as 'one of the most important social movements of our time', which addressed:

'...deeply held cultural beliefs, entrenched patterns of response and the struggle to move away from supporting male violence towards its rejection. It is a story that is at once personal and institutional, local and international, depressing and inspirational.'

Refuges operated an open door policy, leading to overcrowding (Barr and Carrier, 1978; Binney et al, 1981; McMillan, 2007). As the network of refuges grew, women could be referred on to other refuges when the local one was full (Harne and Radford, 2008). Although safety was the primary aim, refuges also provided a place where women could share experiences and gain support from

workers, volunteers and other women in similar situations, reflecting the principle of mutual self-help (Charles, 1994b; Clifton, 1985; Weir, 1977).

### **Women's Aid**

Women's Aid has been central to the development of domestic violence refuges. A focus on its development provides a context in which to understand existing research and the current study. Originally Women's Aid covered all of the UK but it sub-divided in 1975 into English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish federations to encourage autonomy of organisations<sup>4</sup> (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Hague and Malos, 1998; Schechter, 1982). The majority of refuges in the UK are affiliated to the Women's Aid Federations (established in 1974), or work closely with them, including specialist refuges for women of different cultural backgrounds (Abrahams, 2004). Since recruitment to this study was from English refuges, I will focus on Women's Aid in England.

The UK network was committed to the principles of 'collectivism, mutual support and self-help' (Pence, 2001; Pence et al, 1987). They produced the first Women's Aid pamphlet 'Battered Women Need Refuges'. As a result of their awareness raising events, a Parliamentary Select Committee on Violence in Marriage (1975) was established. In response to their strategic written submission (Harne and Radford, 2008), the Select Committee (1975) recognised the need for refuges and recommended the establishment of at

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<sup>4</sup> There was also a split between Erin Pizzey (and her supporters) in Chiswick and Women's Aid (Johnson, 1995).

least one family refuge place per 10,000 population (Ball, 1994; Frayne et al, 1994; Hague and Malos, 2005).

The Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE) had a non-hierarchical structure, explicitly feminist objectives and a commitment to involving residents, volunteers and staff in all decisions (Hague et al, 2000; Hanmer, 1977; Pahl, 1978). Although WAFE now has more of a leadership than liaison role, it still retains its commitment to empowering survivors as:

'the national charity for women and children working to end domestic abuse. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, listening and responding to their needs. We are a federation of 250 organisations who provide lifesaving services to women and children across the country.'

(Women's Aid, 2015b: 2)

Training, qualifications and consultancy are also provided and WAFE continue to campaign about domestic violence issues.

### **Adult focused Refuge Research**

Early refuge research established the need for safe accommodation and support for women experiencing domestic violence. The aim was to provide the evidence needed to campaign for changes to policy and practice (Binney et al, 1981; Clifton, 1985; Pahl, 1978; Rose, 1985). Although these early studies focused on adult women, not children and young people, those that provide useful insight into the levels and range of needs refuges have or should cater for, may also be relevant for children and young people. The methods employed also provide inspiration for the approach taken in my study (presented in Chapter Three).

The first major survey of refuge provision in 1978 (Binney et al, 1981) focused on longer term housing provision for women escaping domestic violence. Postal questionnaires to service providers, interviews with 656 residents and follow up interviews with 60 of these women 18 months later revealed 150 groups running 200 houses in England and Wales. Binney et al (1981) estimated that at any one time 900 women and 1700 children were in refuge accommodation and stated that ‘whenever refuges have opened, they have filled up and become overcrowded’ (Binney et al, 1981: xiv), evidencing levels of demand.

Pahl’s (1978) longitudinal study investigated the problems faced by women leaving home because of domestic violence, the helpfulness of agencies, and the usefulness of refuges. The study involved formal semi-structured interviews with 25 residents, with follow-up interviews two to three years later, and provided insight into the changing needs and individual approach required for each resident throughout their refuge stay. Findings also revealed that living in a refuge gave women opportunities to develop confidence and increase control over their lives (Pahl, 1978). Other early studies investigated the principle of self-help (Clifton, 1983; 1985), the effectiveness of legal protection (Barron, 1990) and circumstances after leaving refuges (Charles, 1994a).

The focus on women’s support needs when entering and living in refuges continued to be highlighted in subsequent research. Charles’ (1994b) Welsh

interview based study observed the need to recover from the traumatic effects of domestic violence. Mostly, refuge residents appreciated the emotional and practical support from other residents and refuge staff (Charles, 1994b). Ball's (1994) study investigated the funding of refuges and the support provided in England using postal questionnaires and case studies. She found that refuges are not only a means to help families get rehoused but for many, provided a period to recover, assess and reorganise their lives (Ball, 1994). Abrahams' (2004, 2007) longitudinal research, utilising participative methods, interview discussion and observation with 23 women from three refuge groups, examined the nature of support available to women, the approaches adopted towards provision and the extent to which provision met need. Women commented on the significance of their initial reception at the refuge and the importance of not feeling rushed, being listened to and treated with respect as an individual (Abrahams, 2007). This confirms findings from earlier research (Binney et al, 1981; Clifton, 1985; Pahl, 1978; Rose, 1985), that the single most important factor identified was safety (Abrahams, 2007). Abrahams (2007) identified the process women experience as one of 'loss, transition and recovery' to highlight that recovery from domestic violence requires emotional, as well as practical support (see also Warrington, 2003).

Research has also investigated rehousing from refuges. Since 1977, local authority housing departments in England have had a statutory obligation to rehouse women and children who become homeless as a result of domestic violence and who are in 'priority need'<sup>15</sup>. Charles (1994b) found the availability

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<sup>15</sup> The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 placed a duty on local housing authorities to secure permanent accommodation for unintentionally homeless people in priority need.

of suitable and affordable move-on accommodation was insufficient. The need for temporary and permanent housing was supported by Malos and Hague (1997). They argued that, for women forced to leave their homes because of violence, the loss of ‘home’ itself had a traumatic impact, and this was partly attributable to limited access to acceptable private housing, as owners or as tenants (Logan, 1987; Muir et al, 1993; Pascall and Morley, 1996; Watson and Austerberry, 1986) They argued for the importance of both safe emergency and temporary accommodation in the short term and secure and affordable housing in the long term (Malos and Hague, 1997).

The lengthy wait for rehousing from refuge accommodation has been established. Whilst women have identified a period of around three months as an appropriate length of refuge stay before being rehoused (McGibbon et al, 1989), Charles (1994b) found that generally 22.8 percent had resided in refuges for three months or longer. Housing policies are now widely in place, but two-thirds of local authorities report they are usually able to meet the main duty to households at risk of domestic violence within six months of accepting them as homeless and in priority need (Quiggars and Pleace, 2010). This is three months longer than the recommended appropriate length of stay (McGibbon et al, 1989) due to housing shortages, and suggests that some families wait much longer to be rehoused.

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Authorities’ duties towards homeless people are now contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

Research with women from minority ethnic communities (Burman and Chantler, 2004; Rai and Thiara, 1997) reveals the importance of accessibility, space and unmet needs. Rai and Thiara (1997) found that Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) women were less likely to access services. However, when they did, they were very positive about speaking with staff from a similar background (Minhas et al, 2002; Rai and Thiara, 1997).

Burman and Chantler (2004: 386) found that refuges were not perceived as 'home-like' by BAME women. They link unwelcoming characteristics to Augé's (1995; 2008) notion of 'non-places' – transient spaces with insufficient significance to be regarded as 'places', such as a hotel. They identify three contributory aspects to feelings of belonging or displacement in refuges: physical space, emotional space and structural positioning. Burman and Chantler (2004) found limited refuge space, unmet emotional needs and dynamics of minoritisation, including racism. They also found difficulties in maintaining the secrecy of the refuge that affected community or cultural identity.

A limited number of recent studies focus specifically on the needs of older women (Lazenbatt et al, 2013) or younger women in refuges (Fox, 2015) but, as the second half of this chapter reveals, there is little longitudinal research investigating the ongoing needs of and services provided specifically to young people who arrive at refuges alone or accompany their mothers. As will be demonstrated, most studies involve single, one-off interviews and include

younger children. These studies undertaken with adults invite reflection on whether the provision of both practical and emotional support, rehousing and accessible welcoming environments may also be significant for young people. They also demonstrate the benefits of investigating needs and provision through longitudinal methods and data collection with service providers, a research approach that may be effective with young people.

### **Level of Provision and Need**

The extent to which existing refuge provision caters adequately to the identified needs of adult women and children is highly questionable, despite increased legal protection and changes to homelessness legislation. Examples of UK legislation include the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 1994, the Family Law Act 1996 introducing non-molestation and occupation orders, Domestic Violence Protection Orders in 2014, and changes in housing and homelessness legislation aimed at increasing opportunities for women to stay in their own homes (e.g. Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002). There are fewer places in refuge than the number recommended by the 1975 Select Committee and the need for domestic violence services is reportedly increasing (Towers and Walby, 2012). Levels of current demand and provision are difficult to calculate due to the closure of some refuges (Laville, 2014; Pearse, 2012; Women's Aid, 2015b). However, surveys with the highest response rates, estimate that up to 20,000 women and 20,000 children and young people reside in refuges annually (Women's Aid, 2012), but the residents in refuges at any one time depend entirely on what, if any, space is available. The level of provision is believed to constitute only around 60 percent of the number of places needed (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010; Women's Aid, 2012).

This means that, after over 40 years of refuge provision, there is no available capacity for some women and their children needing safe accommodation until existing residents move on. Refuge provision continues to respond to need but faces challenges in responding effectively to all. Estimates fluctuate, but according to Women's Aid (2015a), there are currently over 500 refuges across the UK for women and their children.

Data collected on the 'Day to Count' (Women's Aid, 2015b), 26<sup>th</sup> June 2014, showed that 1,791 women (data from 144 services) and 1,669 children and young people (data from 140 services) were supported in refuge accommodation. Inconsistency in the number of respondents and data from previous surveys indicates that more children and young people were likely to be residing in refuges than women on this date<sup>6</sup>. The detailed snapshot also shows that not all women and their children needing help were able to find it. Services were unable to accommodate women and children due to lack of space or high level of need. The length of time it takes to be rehoused varies according to the size and needs of the family and availability within an area.

### **Funding Refuges**

One of the challenges refuges face in responding to the identified level and range of needs are current funding arrangements. These have required many refuges to move away from their original ethos (Davis, 1988) and forced them to respond to bureaucratic demands from funders (Warrington, 2003). Funding

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<sup>6</sup> Further limitations of the Women's Aid surveys include lack of consistency between annual statistics, absence of breakdown according to age of children, and a focus on adult women (see Appendix One).

conditions reportedly altered the management and organisational structure of refuges from a collective (Clifton 1985; Pahl 1985) to a hierarchical structure (McMillan, 2007; Rose, 1985; Warrington, 2003). New measures introduced are usually short term and funding needs to be reapplied for, in competition with other refuges.

Since 2003, most refuges in England and Wales have been funded by Supporting People<sup>7</sup> and rental income (Barron, 2011a; Quiggars and Pleace, 2010; Towers and Walby, 2012)<sup>8</sup>. Funding is paid from central government via local authorities for adult ‘housing-related’ bed spaces (and some floating support services). The insecurity and inconsistency of funding is long established (Baker, 2005; Ball, 1994; Johnson, 1995). Supporting People was subject to an 11.5 percent reduction between 2011 and 2014. This funding is no longer ring-fenced and has seen successive national and local budget cuts (Quiggars and Pleace, 2010) in a context of national austerity policies, resulting in concerns about the causal effect to quality assurance (Audit Commission and DCLG, 2009; Bury, 2011). The extent of cuts is at the discretion of the local authority (Fitzgerald et al, 2014; Towers and Walby, 2012) resulting in some disproportionately high cuts. This absence of protected funding is compounded by the lack of input the women’s sector has at a local strategic planning level

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<sup>7</sup> The Supporting People programme was launched under a Labour Government in 2003 as a £1.8 billion ring fenced grant to local authorities. This extends beyond domestic violence (see Parliamentary research paper 12/40 2012). Previously, services had been mainly funded through Housing Benefit. The aim was to ‘enable people to remain in a more independent living situation, avoiding institutional care such as hospitals or, at the extreme, prison’ or homelessness. It also aims to help people in institutional care to move to a ‘more independent and stable home in the community’ (DETR, 2001: 13-14).

<sup>8</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100210162740/http://www.spkweb.org.uk>

(Gudnadottir et al, 2007) and leaves refuges particularly vulnerable (Bowstead, 2015) as they are perceived as discretionary services (Fitzgerald et al, 2014).

Bowstead (2015) examines the localism agenda (DCLG, 2011) in terms of domestic violence and identifies a lack of evidence on the work of refuges as distinct from other support services. She suggests that refuges should not be considered local services; 70 percent of women cross local authority boundaries to access refuge provision (Bowstead, 2015; Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). Bowstead (2015) recommends that refuges should be planned and funded as regional and national services, hosted locally.

Quilgars and Pleace (2010) establish that, despite a consistent need for refuges, increases in provision have focused on other services. Flexibility in funding arrangements and joint commissioning were commonly identified as factors enabling new service development, with short term funding and changes to funding levels most frequently identified as inhibitors of development (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). The very nature of refuge funding means that service development beyond existing provision for adult women is hindered.

There are concerns surrounding changing commissioning practices. A focus on price means that service providers are unable to compete with large scale housing associations (Towers and Walby, 2012; Women's Aid, 2014). Consequently, Women's Aid began an SOS (Save Our Services) campaign to preserve the national network of refuges (Women's Aid, 2014). Their SOS report indicates that nine out of ten refuges losing services did so through

competitive tender commissioning processes to non-specialist providers who did not necessarily have local knowledge or expertise. Between 2010 and 2014, specialist providers of refuge provision had reduced from 187 to 155 (Women's Aid, 2014). The report found that 48 percent of 167 respondents to the 2013 WAFE annual survey were running without dedicated funding, with six using charitable reserves. They also found that some tenders identify refuge provision as 'emergency' or 'crisis' provision, leading Women's Aid (2014: 8) to underline the failure to recognise the 'value of the holistic provision that refuges provide and the safe space they are for women and children'.

The SOS campaign successfully campaigned for further funding. In November 2014, the government announced £10 million of funding available over two years, 2014-16 (DCLG, 2014). The fund was proposed to 'halt the further closure of good quality refuges, increase provision where appropriate and place refuges on a sustainable footing' (DCLG, 2014, no page number). However, it was local authorities in England rather than refuge organisations who were to apply for these funds. This assumes positive relationships between refuges and their local authority and that applications will be prioritised with developments mutually agreed. The government itself raised concerns over local authority decisions such as the closure or replacement of refuge provision (DCLG, 2014), suggesting they are not best-placed to influence service delivery (see Laville, 2014). Whilst this fund secured investment until April 2016, no long term solution was implemented. Further short term funding is proposed in the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016 until 2020 (HM Government, 2016). This has not yet alleviated the threat of closure, as seen in Lancashire (BBC News Online, 2016; Gee, 2016) where despite nine refuges

securing funding from the initial fund as a group, the longer term future for refuges (and wider domestic violence services) remains uncertain.

### **Children and Young People in Refuges**

Children and young people have always formed a large number of refuge residents (Delahay, 2003; Hague et al, 2000). Initially, however, there were few facilities for them (Binney et al, 1981) This sub-section considers whether teenagers' position may be attributable to the origins of the refuge movement focusing on working with women whereby refuges were seen as operating by women, for women (Hoff, 1990). Teenagers' status as invisible service users is also reinforced by funding frameworks, which will be considered in the next sub-section.

As detailed in the introductory chapter, the history of work with children in refuges is relatively undocumented. This was owing to the status of work with children and the goals of the women's movement. Since then, changes have occurred in both refuge policy and practice. Refuges developed some of the earliest work with children, including the appointment of 'refuge children's workers' and specific policies to support children and their rights in the 1980s and 1990s (Debonnaire, 1994; Hague et al, 2000; Hester et al, 2007; Radford and Hester, 2006). In 1986, the Aims and Principles of WAFE were revised, leading to the inclusion of a specific statement that children are independently affected by domestic violence (Hague et al, 1996). An awareness of children having their own set of rights emerged internationally and, in 1989 the UNCRC established international protection, provision and participation standards for all

those under 18 years of age (UN, 1989). Alongside these developments, a growing body of literature on children and domestic violence emerged post 1990 (Hester and Radford, 1996; Jaffe et al, 1990; McGee, 1997; Mullender and Morley, 1994), as noted in Chapter One.

The status or position of children and young people in refuges remains ambiguous but there is progress towards the need for assessment of children and young people's needs, independent of their mothers. The ambiguity arises as on the one hand, it is suggested that children require support in their own right (McGee, 2000b) and work with children is seen as one of the top three requirements for refuges, after bed-space and rehousing (Ball, 1994). There is substantial support for the role and work of children's workers in refuges and many mothers show a clear understanding and concern that their children have experienced deep emotional trauma and require support (Abrahams, 2007).

On the other hand, some adults participating in other refuge studies argue that if mothers are adequately supported there is less need for children's support workers (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003). This reinforces the position that 'woman protection is frequently the most effective form of child protection' (Kelly, 1994: 53). This is supported by findings demonstrating the strong relationship between children's well-being and their mothers' well-being, which has been found to increase on the receipt of paraprofessional advocacy services (Sullivan and Bybee, 1999; Sullivan et al, 1994). Nevertheless, the presence of so many children and young people argues for attention to their needs (Edleson et al, 2011). Work such as play sessions are considered to both help the child and

improve the relationship between mothers and children, enabling them to move forward together and develop as a family (Abrahams, 2007). Radford et al (2011) propose introducing a separate assessment for children and young people, suggesting their needs are not necessarily synonymous with their mothers' needs.

### **Funding of Children's Services**

Funding is often identified as one of the main obstacles to providing effective provision, as many refuges do not have the resources to cater for a small number of teenagers (Baker, 2005; Hague et al, 1996; 2000). Funding for children's refuge services has traditionally relied on charitable resources (Delahay, 2003). Ball's (1994) early study found that 25 percent of refuge groups had no specialist children's workers and in those that did, workers were financed by a package of 'bits and pieces' and large amounts from one charitable trust, BBC Children in Need (CIN). Ball (1994) noted that the total contribution of CIN amounted to over 50 percent of the total contribution of Social Services Departments in England to refuge funding. Besides CIN, no nationally-based charity appears to have widespread input into refuge groups (Ball, 1994). The resources of CIN are dependent upon annual appeals which vary each year and are therefore subject to the money raised and competition from other applicants. A decade later, Baker (2005) found only 40 percent of funding for children's workers was provided by Local Authorities, with the remainder coming from charitable sources (Dahms, 2004: 9-10). This means that funding is often temporary and needs to be constantly reapplied for. Children's work has capital implications as equipment is needed, access to

playrooms at evenings and weekends is required and resources are needed to take children on trips and outings (Ball, 1994). Limitations in funding and space restrict the interventions that can be offered to children and young people (Izzidien, 2008; Wilson, 2010).

Even with such funding and practical resource constraints, Mullender et al (1998a) found refuges offered high levels of support to children and young people. McGee (2000) found that more than 85 percent of refuges offered children's services and described refuges as the 'ideal' location to work with children and their mothers. A refuge stay is considered a 'key opportunity for a child's need for support to be assessed and the family put in contact with relevant services' (Stanley, 2011: 82; Webb et al, 2001). Missing this opportunity to provide support overlooks the chance to improve a child's life both in the present and in the future (Øverlien, 2011b), but the limited availability of support restricts possibilities to utilise these opportunities.

In their research on cuts to public expenditure, Towers and Walby (2012) found that domestic violence services for children and young people were particularly affected. They identified cuts in wider children's services, reports of service closure, and funding reductions for a large percentage (80 percent) of children's charities. Radford et al's (2011) London study found that capacity to provide specialist children's services within refuges had declined because of unsustainable funding streams and the decision of some local authorities to outsource services. The Women's Aid annual survey indicates that half of the services closed in 2013/14 were children's services (Women's Aid, 2015b)

which suggests that high levels of support for children found in previous studies may have altered considerably. The difficulties maintaining services and staffing to meet children's needs is also identified in the USA (Edleson et al, 2011), again reflecting the perception that women are the primary 'victims' of domestic violence and therefore primary service users. The Supporting People funding programme has contributed to this trend by restricting eligibility for refuge accommodation to adult women (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2009; Quilgars and Pleace, 2010; Towers and Walby, 2012).

### **Range of Work with Children and Young People in Refuges**

A number of mapping surveys establish the extent of service provision and identify the range of work undertaken with children and young people in refuges (Baker, 2005; Hague et al, 1996; Humphreys and Mullender, 2000; Humphreys et al, 2000). Provision includes play, storytelling, music, dance, drama, counselling, outreach, group work, children's meetings and advocacy (Stanley, 2011). Barron (2008) undertook an analysis of work with children and young people by interviewing Project Managers and Children's Workers. Her recommendations include funding for specialist services. However, there is limited in-depth evaluation or evidence concerning the effectiveness of services or intervention (Hague et al, 1996; Peled, 1997; Poole et al, 2008; Stanley, 2011). It is not known if or which services are most beneficial and good use of limited resources or if they cause harm (Poole et al, 2008). UNICEF (2000: 17) suggest that 'researchers need to identify best practices in prevention and treatment, and evaluate them for effectiveness and replicability'. This can be

applied to refuge provision and research. Stanley (2011) and Poole et al (2008) both highlight that with the exception of Mullender et al's (1998a) study, there is limited knowledge about experiences, approaches and effectiveness of services in UK refuge accommodation (Morley and Mullender, 1994). This gap sets the context for my research.

Poole et al (2008) suggest there is a pressing need for research that understands need, identifies successful interventions and evaluates effectiveness. As funding is becoming more restricted, more pressure is being exerted to demonstrate such effectiveness (Sullivan and Alexy, 2001), particularly cost-effectiveness (UNICEF, 2000). Services are currently hampered by a lack of well-designed evaluations that would help to demonstrate such effectiveness (Humphreys et al, 2000; Statham, 2004). Part of the problem is identified by McGee (1997: 15) who states that, like the issue of domestic violence itself, 'the business of refuges was also previously kept "behind closed doors"'. Further research is required to provide direction on effective, workable and replicable programmes.

Living in temporary accommodation is considered to have distinct effects separate from the effects of being exposed to domestic violence (Edleson, 1999). These include the removal of protective factors such as peer support and a stable educational environment (Wolfe et al, 2003). Stafford et al (2007) suggest specific research examining the support needs of children and young people leaving home due to domestic violence needs to be developed. This

research will meet a need for increased understanding and evaluation of refuge interventions by asking teenagers themselves what interventions they consider effective.

## **2.3 FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH WITH AND ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN REFUGES**

With the exception of a small number of studies (Ball, 1990; Debonnaire, 1994), there is little focus on children's services in refuges in England. Fitzpatrick et al (2003) highlight limited direct, in-depth evidence from children and young people concerning their experiences of and feelings about refuge life and sought to remedy this in Scotland. They also point out that there is little exploration of their ongoing experiences over time and limited evaluation of refuge interventions for children and young people (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003).

Inspired by Øverlien (2011a), who identified this gap in Norway, my research aims to counterbalance the lack of focus on children's experience of refuge services by conducting research in England. Øverlien (2011) undertook interviews with 22 children and young people aged four to 17 years to understand their experiences of refuge life. She concluded that, the way children were perceived by refuge staff had shifted and that they currently have a much stronger position as both victims and service users. Nevertheless, she argues that overall their position in refuges still remains subordinate to that of adult women. This suggests a shift in both understanding and refuge policy and practice is required to balance children's perspectives and needs with those of adult women. Øverlien (2011a) recommends that the women's refuge

movement establishes new priorities, rethinks working methods and challenges the traditional women's perspective to make room for the perspectives of the children in refuges. Her work also points to the need to explore children's and young people's perspectives on refuge provision alongside understandings of the possibilities and constraints faced by refuge service providers.

Children and young people usually arrive at refuges following a domestic violence incident. Where mothers and their children leave home for their own safety, children suffer the disruption of separation, loss of home, changing schools, leaving friends, loss of pets and moving to unfamiliar surroundings (Barron, 2008; Hague and Malos, 1994; Laing, 2000; Paws for Kids, 2002). Separation is often accompanied by financial hardship (Parkinson and Humphreys, 1998). As a result, many families (41 percent) have left refuges and returned to their abuser at least once before their current stay (Barron, 2009). Furthermore, there is also considerable UK evidence that domestic violence continues beyond separation and can actually increase around the time of separation and afterwards (Monckton-Smith et al, 2014; O'Hagan, 2014; Povey et al, 2009; Radford and Hester, 2006; Richards, 2004; Stanley et al, 2010). There is little available research concerning interventions to address the possibility of returning to the abusive household or the ongoing violence. Given the likelihood of women and children returning to the perpetrator, the refuge would be an ideal location to undertake such work.

Children and young people living in refuges constitute a distinct population of those most recently and severely affected (Edleson, 1999; Kitzmann et al, 2003;

McIntosh, 2003); they are not representative of all children experiencing domestic violence (Øverlien, 2011b; Selvik and Øverlien, 2015). For example, a Welsh study by Webb et al (2001) found that almost half of the children at five refuges had mental health problems. In addition, refuge life can have a stressful and unique impact distinct from their experiences of domestic violence (Edleson, 1999). It is for these reasons that further understanding of refuge life for teenagers is necessary and this thesis aims to shift attention beyond the impact of domestic violence on to the context and adequacy of current service responses. Existing studies provide useful learning about space, refuge funding and varying lengths of stay (Izziden, 2008; Wilson, 2010). They also improve understanding of the views and experiences of children and young people, particularly in terms of positives and negatives (Stafford et al, 2007). Further in-depth information is required regarding ongoing experiences and for detailed understanding of teenagers' experiences as separate to those of younger children.

### **The Children and Young People Living in Refuges**

The extent to which different age groups of children and young people are represented in refuge populations is debated. Studies by Saunders and Humphreys (2002) and Hogan and O'Reilly (2007) both found that younger children were most likely to experience refuge life. Other authors report that over 80 percent of children in refuges are below secondary school age (Baker, 2005; Barron, 2008; Mullender and Morley, 1994). However, children aged over 11 years constitute up to 16 percent of all children and young people in refuges (Baker, 2005; Hague et al, 1996; Quilgars and Pleace, 2010; Toren, 2004;

Appendix One). They are therefore significant and the two percent of refuge services with a specialist worker for young people is unlikely to meet their needs (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). Some researchers suggest that younger children are more likely to occupy refuges because violence is associated with younger men or younger parents and therefore having younger children (Peters et al, 2002; Radford et al, 2011).

Results from service user surveys show that many women remain in an abusive relationship for many years, with one in five staying for more than ten years (Barron, 2011b). These figures suggest that potentially there could be more young people residing in refuge accommodation than represented by statistics.

The Women's Aid surveys provide an inadequate breakdown of the age of young people (see Appendix One) and few studies investigate the specific impact of domestic violence on teenagers and their refuge experience (Hester et al, 2007). Existing studies are limited by the focus on younger children. In part this may be due to most research undertaking single interviews or focus groups. If teenagers do not constitute a significant proportion of residents at the time of study their views are overlooked. Reasons for lower numbers of teenagers will be considered below within a discussion about refuge facilities and policies regarding the admittance of teenage boys to refuge accommodation.

The majority of teenagers in refuges are female, in part due to the reluctance of many refuges to admit teenage boys and inconsistent admission policies. Many refuges operate an upper age limit policy for male children approaching or over the age of 16 accompanying their mothers (Baker, 2009; Hague et al, 1996;

Hague and Malos, 1994; Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). However, as refuges operate individual policies, some boys as young as 12 are refused admission (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003). This inevitably impacts on the options for research participation and restricts understanding of the needs of male teenagers.

The presence of boys in refuges is viewed as undesirable. Policies are considered to be a response to concerns about how teenage boys might affect the general atmosphere, fears about relationships between boys and girls, and a lack of 24 hour supervision (Baker, 2005; Hague et al, 1996; Mullender et al, 1998a). Such policies are justified by reference to teenage boys' similarity to adult males and fears relating to potentially violent behaviour (Baker, 2009; GLDVP, 2008). Baker (2009) argues that such reasons are based on problematic and outdated theories, such as the cycle of violence, mentioned in Chapter One. Conversely, Aymer (2008) uses these theories to advocate for teenage boys' refuge admission. His study explores experiences of ten adolescents who had experienced domestic violence and other issues (e.g. substance misuse or crime). Sometimes violence was replicated in their own relationships. However, Aymer (2008: 663) argues that permitting refuge access would symbolize a major shift, 'allowing [teenage boys] to receive help, thus preventing them from becoming just like their (abusive) fathers'.

Exclusion policies are criticised by teenage boys, siblings, professionals and mothers (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003; Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007). Mothers and siblings provide important support to young people experiencing domestic

violence (Baker, 2005; Mullender et al, 2002). Consequently, separation leaves teenage boys without their main source(s) of support. Leaving them behind is a reason women (and teenage siblings) fleeing abusive homes may be unwilling to accept refuge space, meaning exclusion policies make it more difficult to find safe accommodation (Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007; Mullender et al, 1998b; Rogers, 2009). As an alternative, teenage boys may be housed separately within the local area (Baker, 2005). Many teenagers, particularly boys, 'choose' to stay at home with the perpetrator (Baker, 2005: 295). Reasons include fears about interrupting schooling, disruption of moving, living alone, losing social networks, or they are refused refuge space (Hester et al, 2007; Malos and Hague, 1993). This raises safety concerns for teenage boys when thinking about the association between domestic violence and child abuse discussed in Chapter One (Baker, 2009; Humphreys and Mullender, 2000).

### **Feelings about Refuge Life**

Children's reported reactions to refuge life are mixed (Hague et al, 1996; Mullender et al, 2002; Stafford et al, 2007). A 'Kidspeak' domestic violence online consultation (Barron, 2007) invited children and young people to post comments on both open and closed-access online message boards. While some of the 105 respondents were positive about the opportunities refuges afforded for moving on and making new friends, others resented the losses and restrictions imposed by moving to a refuge. These findings are limited by incomplete information concerning the age of participants (ranging from seven to 18 years), but provide a useful overview of experience.

Reflecting earlier studies with adult women, being in a safe place is reported as important by children and young people (Barron, 2008; Hague et al, 1996). Other benefits include meeting and forming friendships with others which provides an opportunity to discuss their experiences (McGee, 2000b; Mullender et al, 2002). Mullender et al's (2002) study found that almost all the children who had a positive refuge experience mentioned the importance of being able to talk with others who had shared their experience, although the age of these specific participants is unknown. Children's workers have also been positively identified as providing a 'vital support role' (Stafford et al, 2007). Interestingly, they are frequently referred to as 'children's workers' which indicates an absence of focus on young people.

Refuge life can be experienced as highly stressful. Some children and young people may see the move to a refuge as a very negative experience, given that their mother has taken them away from their familiar surroundings and possibly from someone they love (Center for Child and Family Health, 2010). They will experience disruption and separation and their mother may be emotionally or physically unavailable to comfort and support them (Henderson, 1993; Rosenfeld et al, 1995; Wolfe et al, 1986). Humphreys et al (2006) explain that the child-mother relationship may be undermined prior to moving and Sopczyk (2007) suggests that this relationship may be further undermined by refuge environments. This undermining of their relationship is an argument for interventions that aim to protect or promote mother-child attachments, as mentioned in Chapter One

Transition into accommodation has recently been investigated. Bowyer et al (2015) explore the transition into refuge or bed and breakfast accommodation using single interviews with five girls aged ten to 16 years; three were aged 14 to 16. Their participants described a sense of powerlessness, a lack of control over the whole transition, and perceived themselves as helpless. The girls suggested that moving into temporary accommodation was like moving into a whole new world and they were restricted from behaving in a way they would have liked to (Bowyer et al, 2015). The girls talked about the loss of friends, of their fathers, and of not being able to talk with people as they would have done previously. From their small sample, it is difficult to distinguish the impact of living in a refuge on teenagers specifically. Participants were also asked to discuss their transition into services retrospectively.

Some children and young people find it difficult to adjust to refuge living and the public ‘breaking of secrecy’ concerning the violence (Laing, 2000). Studies have found that many mothers did not share information with children and young people about why they were leaving, where they were going or how long they would be in refuge, which could lead to confusion and resentment (Øverlien, 2011a; Stafford et al, 2007). This is confirmed by a Welsh study (Thatcher, 2012) which found that children and young people interviewed were unclear about why they were receiving support in a refuge. Although this study interviewed 31 children and young people, only nine were residing in refuge accommodation, with three under the age of six.

Children and young people express difficulty about not being able to talk about where they live (Bowyer et al, 2015; Øverlien, 2011a). In Ireland, older teenagers described their loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, along with feelings of being different from peers (Buckley et al, 2006, 2007). Children describe feeling isolated and embarrassed about living in refuge accommodation because they are not allowed to bring friends to the refuge and there are few young people in their age group in refuges (Baker, 2005; Fitzpatrick et al, 2003).

Some children and young people need to change schools when moving to a refuge. This can have an adverse effect on their education, as discussed in the previous chapter (Hague et al, 1996; Houghton, 2008; Mill and Church, 2006) On the other hand, living in a refuge has been found to support education as children and young people have improved concentration (Barron, 2007; Mullender et al, 2002). The 'Kidspeak' Consultation highlights, however, that even with supportive refuge and school staff, changing schools without warning could mean leaving coursework (which contributes to their final exams) behind. This was reported as very disruptive, leading to the possibility of underperformance in exams (Barron, 2008; Houghton, 2008). Young people in Buckley et al's (2006: 41) study told of their regrets about 'lost childhoods' and 'lost educational opportunities'. There is little in the literature about how to combat this, particularly for teenagers who will be preparing for GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) or A-Level (Advanced Level) exams.

As a consequence of moving schools, children and young people also leave their friends. Studies with young people in Scotland and Ireland have found that relocation following separation results in peer and friendship difficulties (Buckley et al, 2007; Stafford et al, 2007). Losing friends is reportedly especially hard for children and young people in refuges (Barron, 2007; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al, 2002; Stafford et al, 2007). Studies that have elicited children's views (Gorin, 2004; McGee, 2000b; Mullender et al, 2002) emphasise that friends are often one of the first sources of support and the people to whom children confide experiences of domestic violence. This is particularly the case for 'older children' (Mullender et al, 2002; Regan and Kelly, 2001). These points reinforce previous findings which stress recognising the importance of friends to young people (Humphreys and Stanley, 2006). Loss of friends could continue when 'new friends' were lost through further moves (Stafford et al, 2007). Again it is unclear if measures are taken to counteract this loss, particularly as friends are identified as a source of resilience (see Chapter One).

Literature concerning the experiences of young people after leaving refuges is scarce. Findings from the USA suggest a need for post-refuge therapeutic services and further research addressing the adjustment of families (Jarvis and Novaco, 2006). Jarvis and Novaco's (2006) interviews with mothers found that children and young people aged four to 18 years who only received emergency shelter (refuge) intervention had higher internalising and externalising behaviours than those who received emergency and second stage services. The longer term counselling and supportive atmosphere of the second stage may benefit children directly and/or foster better parenting skills among the

mothers (Jarvis and Novaco, 2006). The generalisability of this study to teenagers is limited by the age of the children in their sample with the mean age of comparison groups being 9.5 and 10.3; however, the need for resettlement services has also been identified for adult women in the UK (Abrahams, 2007; Quiggars and Pleace, 2010).

Much existing research, detailed above, has focused on children or has grouped children and young people together rather than concentrating on teenagers experiences in depth. It is unclear whether teenagers require different forms of support at different stages of their refuge stay. Many studies have utilised single, one-off interviews which fail to capture expectations of refuge, changes over time and transition out of refuge. These changes may include shifts in thinking, relationships or resilience for example.

### **Views on Refuge Facilities and Support**

Existing reports describe teenagers' negative views of refuge facilities and their needs being overlooked (Hague et al, 1996; Stafford et al, 2007). A refuge stay generally represents a chaotic and cramped period in their lives. Hague et al (1996) found that 'older children' understood far more, were less trusting, angrier and resented the losses living in a refuge entailed more than younger children. In Hogan and O'Reilly's study (2007), teenagers said they were generally pleased to leave refuges as soon as possible. Boys in particular pressured mothers to return home, sometimes by leaving their mothers to live with their fathers. Pressures from children to go home, coupled with feeling

unable to cope alone, can compound women's feelings of failure, if they leave or return (Radford and Hester, 2006).

Many young people find some aspects of refuge life limiting (Stafford et al, 2007). The quality of accommodation significantly preoccupied participants aged eight to 16 years in Stafford et al's (2007) Scottish study about moving home as a consequence of domestic violence. Although over half of participants (19 out of 30) in this study were under the age of 13, refuges have been described as particularly poor by small numbers of teenagers in other studies. The absence of appropriate facilities for young people is a significant reason for wanting to return home (Baker, 2005; Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007; Stafford et al, 2007). Hague et al (1996) found that refuges were unable to provide privacy and high standard facilities for children and for teenagers especially. Lack of privacy for teenagers is confirmed by adult women in Abrahams (2007) research.

Recommendations have been provided by young people in Ireland to improve their refuge experience (Buckley et al, 2006). Examples include: a mix of activities, someone to talk to individually, and someone to talk to both them and their mother together. Being taken seriously in an age-appropriate way is considered key (Buckley et al, 2006; Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007). Hogan and O'Reilly (2007: 54) found that staff who treated them as teenagers, rather than as 'victims', were considered as 'the best'. Being treated as a 'victim' rather than a teenager recalls feelings of 'being different' identified by other research (Buckley et al, 2006).

The value of a youth service delivered in refuges has recently been highlighted. Coburn and Gormally (2014) evaluated a service for young people affected by domestic violence in Scotland with eight participants aged 11 to 15, alongside staff and partner agencies. One-to-one sessions were appreciated by young people as a source of support and guidance. Group work helped them to develop socially and prevented feelings of isolation. Research participants highlighted the specialist nature of dedicated services as advantageous as youth workers are trained in domestic violence and abuse, rather than a generic youth work service (Coburn and Gormally, 2014). Where children's services in Quilgars and Pleace's study (2010) were found to exist, they employed children's workers or combined children's and young people's work in a single post.

Refuges are also criticised by teenagers, mothers and staff themselves, for providing too few suitable activities for teenagers (Charles, 1994b; Mullender et al, 1998a). Øverlien (2011b) found that children and young people aged four to 17 years identified activities, such as trips, particularly helpful. One reason activities were so important was because many children and young people have to stay inside refuges when not attending school; they could not continue with the activities they participated in before moving to a refuge. 'Older children' describe a lack of equipment for 'bigger kids' because many toys are the result of donations (Hague et al, 1996; McGee, 2000b). This suggests more reliable funding opportunities should be developed to meet the needs of all the young

people entering the refuge (Thatcher, 2012). This also indicates a lack of public awareness about the presence of teenagers' in refuges.

Studies identify the inadequacy of physical space for teenagers. Hague et al (1996) found that older refuges had no facilities for children or often had to use inadequate play rooms that had been 'squeezed in'; however, new purpose built refuges usually include children's facilities within their design. Their telephone survey found that four in every five refuges had a play room and three-quarters had outdoor play equipment. A study of Scottish refuges also found that three-quarters of all refuges provided access to a children's playroom (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003). In a study of refuges in rural areas, many had made efforts to make a playroom or activity space available but most were designed to meet the needs of younger children (Stalford et al, 2003). Even in newly built refuges, in order to reduce costs, space specifically allocated for teenagers is often sacrificed or compromised, whereas 'play space' for younger children is retained (Baker, 2009).

The loss of space can be considered to be the worst thing about moving. Teenagers find the lack of space to do homework or just spend time alone problematic (Baker, 2005; Fitzpatrick et al, 2003; Mullender et al, 1998a). Both young children and teenagers believe a separate space for teenagers is important (Baker, 2005). Bowyer et al's (2015: 309) study found the loss of personal physical space could make it impossible to have space internally: young people had 'nowhere to go' either 'physically' or 'mentally'. Bowyer et al

(2015) note this lack of space occurs in the period of adolescence when young people need increased time to themselves and space away from their primary caregiver (Allen and Land, 1999). Bowyer et al (2015) conclude that the implications of transition from latency to mid-adolescence<sup>9</sup> and other groups of children needs to be better understood and recommend an increase in longitudinal research to assist with this understanding. My research aims to address this identified shortage of research by conducting longitudinal research with teenagers aged 13 to 18.

### **Challenges for Effective Service Provision**

Children's workers' pay specific attention to children's own perspectives and needs. Earlier research found that children and young people can talk to these workers and find them supportive (Mullender et al, 1998a). They appreciate being believed, valued and listened to by someone with an understanding of domestic violence and the dynamics involved (Barron, 2008). More recent research maintains the importance of supportive service provision (Bowyer et al, 2015) and advises that children and young people need alternative and additional support to mother-child interventions whilst mothers are aided to take on this role themselves. Mothers in earlier studies (Hague et al, 1996; McGee, 2000b) referred to the benefits of direct work with children in refuges and some reported improvements in behaviour since living in the refuge. Challenges to effective support include staffing levels, trust, the diversity of children and young people, timing and perception of services.

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<sup>9</sup> They refer to latency to mid-adolescence as the ages of ten to 16 during which puberty occurs (Herbert 2003).

Children and young people notice whether staffing levels in refuges permit someone to be available for them, whom they can trust when they want to talk (McGee 2000). Lack of availability, consistency, and frequency of a worker to talk to has been highlighted by staff, children and young people (Bowyer et al, 2015; Fitzpatrick et al, 2003; Hague et al, 1996; McGee, 2000b; Thatcher, 2012). Criticisms by children and young people have generally been made where staff had not talked to them, had spent time with mothers but excluded the children or had not been available when promised, or there was nothing to do (Mullender et al, 2002). Baker (2005: 291) found that activities' for children were often organised in an '*ad-hoc* manner, dependent upon when children's workers, who were often employed part-time, were available'. This is particularly problematic at evenings and weekends due to the part-time nature of the children's workers role (Baker, 2005). A strong theme in Stafford et al's (2007) study is the value young people placed on having someone they could completely trust to talk to about their experiences in complete confidence but finding someone to fulfil that role could be very difficult. The importance of trust is well established across domestic violence studies (Barron, 2007; Irwin et al, 2006; McGee, 2000a; Mullender et al, 2002; Saunders et al, 1995; Smith, 1989).

## 2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

A review of the literature highlights a gap in in-depth knowledge regarding teenagers' experiences and feelings about refuges and refuge based interventions. Earlier studies focus on women's use and views of refuges

(Abrahams, 2007; Binney et al, 1981; Lyon et al, 2008; Pahl, 1978; Roberts et al, 2007) or ask mothers and professionals about the needs of children and young people or gaps in service provision (Bennett et al, 1999; Morley and Mullender, 1994; Mullender et al, 2002). In more recent years, children and young people have become more involved in research due to a growing understanding of the validity of their perspectives on domestic violence (Humphreys and Houghton, 2008). However, since the time of Mullender et al's (2002) study important changes in policy, legislation and technology have occurred. Most significant is the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds within the UK definition of domestic violence and abuse which now includes teenagers as primary service users alongside adult women. Teenagers' unique perspectives on service provision are crucial to identifying what works as well as areas for development.

Teenagers have not been given priority when planning refuge provision. Where available, refuge based and follow-on support is targeted to adult women, suggesting that at a policy level their 'victim' status is more important than meeting the needs of children and teenagers. The continued lack of secure long term funding to support teenagers and the change in legal definition reignites the debate about the status of this type of work and of the children and young people themselves. There is, however, an absence of knowledge concerning the appropriateness of refuges for teenagers experiencing domestic violence and abuse in the home, their own relationships, or both. Available information about necessary support lacks depth, which hinders the amount of

progress that can be made to help support teenagers living within a refuge and the provision of social support thereafter.

On the basis of the gaps identified, five research questions were formulated:

- What is the nature of refuge provision available to teenagers?
- How do teenagers perceive and experience refuge life?
- Do teenagers' experiences and views of refuge change during the course of their stay?
- How appropriate is refuge provision for teenagers experiencing domestic violence and abuse?
- How might refuge services be developed to be more responsive to the needs of teenagers?

Research with teenagers themselves provides an opportunity to explore if and how refuges formulate approaches, programmes and interventions. A longitudinal study from teenagers' perspectives can capture and explore teenagers' interpretations of refuges over time and the complexity of their needs with the aim of increasing awareness of the need for improved service provision. This study will focus on the issue of timing, circumstances and subjective feelings. It will aim to provide insight into the experience of staying in a refuge, collecting detailed accounts from teenagers themselves. The aim is to meet a critical need for increased understanding of interventions provided by refuges and their effectiveness by contributing original findings that may be used to inform practice and policy.

# **Chapter Three**

## **Methodology**

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### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapters, the complexities of teenagers' needs were identified through a wide literature review that revealed significant gaps concerning teenagers' experiences of services. This chapter describes the methodology developed to answer the research questions listed at the end of the previous chapter.

A central concern was how to provide teenagers with opportunities to speak for themselves about their ongoing experience of their refuge stay and the nature of support they need. The research also includes service provider involvement to aid understanding of the changes needed to deliver the services teenagers' identified. Owing to my epistemological commitments, priority is given to teenagers' perspectives, and therefore ethical considerations and reflections concerning their contributions are the focus of this chapter.

The first section of this chapter outlines the theoretical framework. It presents commonalities and tensions between feminist and sociology of childhood research paradigms. The second section focuses on the various stages of the research to provide an overview of the research process before moving to a reflexive account of the ethical framework. This is followed by detailed reflection on recruitment of the research sample and the range of research tools

developed for and used by different participants. I challenge the view that teenagers in refuge provision are ‘too vulnerable’ to participate in research about their current experiences and argue that, whilst the research process was costly in terms of time and resources, intensive research involvement with teenagers was essential to create a strong research relationship and to ascertain their views. The final section summarises how data was analysed using constructivist grounded theory guidelines.

### **3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is influenced by elements of feminist and sociology of childhood approaches to knowledge. The research methodology is characterised as broadly feminist on the basis of the epistemological positioning and methodological decisions made before undertaking any fieldwork. These decisions were based on a number of factors including feminist literature, personal understandings and my employment within the domestic violence sector. There are a number of parallels in the epistemological values of feminist research and some ‘new’ sociology of childhood commitments to research involving children and young people (Mayall, 2002; 2006). These parallels include empowering research participants by prioritising their voices, awareness of power dynamics and the importance of reflexivity. This study sought to bring these approaches together. This approach reflects Burman et al’s (1996) argument that research is a series of strategic decisions rather than one distinct approach. An approach recognising gender inequality is suitable when

considering discrimination and power dynamics between adults and children (UN General Assembly 2010).

Tensions undoubtedly exist when using two different research methodologies surrounding the representation and status of knowledge. The feminist focus on women's experiences results in a lack of attention to children's perspectives (Alanen, 1994; Oakley, 1994). Taking a feminist focus alone, without acknowledging the position of children, is problematic as 'children's worlds have typically become known through adult accounts' (Brannen and O'Brien, 1996: 1). Children and adults are understood to occupy different spaces and have different perspectives which produce differences in knowledge (Corsaro, 1981; Mandell, 1986; 1988).

There are a number of different feminist strands with competing ideas, theories, and practices. It is therefore generally agreed that there is no single feminist methodology (Allen, 2011; Gelsthorpe, 1992; Hammersley, 1992; Maynard, 1998; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Reinhartz, 1992; Stanley et al, 2004). This research is not associated with one particular strand. Features of postmodern feminism are adopted, such as acknowledging that teenagers are not a homogenous group in terms of their identities, views and experiences (e.g. Davis, 2008; see also work with children, e.g. Punch, 2007). Understanding of subjective experiential knowledge is considered valuable and provides a further commonality between the two theoretical approaches owing to the development of a child standpoint (Mayall, 2002) from feminist standpoint theory (e.g. Smith, 1988; Harding, 2007).

Similarly, there are many strands within the sociology of children and childhood. Mayall (2002: 1) suggests that as ‘gender emerged as key to understanding relations between women and men’, generation is ‘key to understanding social relations between childhood and adulthood’. As detailed in Chapter Two, refuges were established by and for adult women, producing a generational hierarchy with adult women as primary service users. Whilst domestic violence towards women and their children is interconnected (Connolly, 2008; Cunningham and Baker, 2004; Edleson, 1999b; Guille, 2004; Hester et al, 2007) women and children have different experiences. For these reasons, a focus on generation is appropriate as it draws attention to whether teenagers are recognised as victims and refuge service users in their own right. Teenagers are considered active participants in this study (Christensen and James, 2008), meaning they were asked about their experiences directly and approached as ‘experts’ in their own right.

Recognising that generation is produced through relationships between children and adults (Alanen, 2014), individual interviews with refuge staff were included to provide organisational context. Mothers or carers were not interviewed, in part a decision guided by limited resources, but it also served to maintain the centrality of teenagers’ experiences. The methodological approach aims to emphasise that teenagers are ‘experts in their own lives’ who can provide important insights and understandings that adults may not identify or prioritise (Langsted, 1994; Grover, 2004; Mayall, 2006). Teenagers’ expertise is not always recognised, as will be demonstrated below in the discussion of access to participants.

For the purposes of this research, it is important to highlight that feminist research is not exclusively about 'women' (Oakley, 1994). Men and women both can be, and are, participants in feminist research (Burns and Chantler, 2011; Kelly et al, 1994). This research is therefore concerned with the experiences, perspectives and understandings of marginalised teenagers, male and female. Women and children are connected by their status as social minority groups (Alldred, 1998; Mayall, 2006; Oakley, 1994), their relative lack of rights, their moral construction as non-adult, their problematic presence in public spaces and resultant restriction to the domestic sphere (Oakley, 1994: 16-17).

### **Voice**

Both feminist and sociology of childhood epistemologies emphasise the importance of giving 'voice'. In recent years, attention has been paid to voices of children and young people in research by listening to and involving them as main participants and/or co-researchers (e.g. Clark and Moss, 2005; James, 2007; Maguire, 2005; Spyrou, 2015). The notion of 'voice' is complex. Khoja (2016) contends that voices manifest themselves in multiple ways that extend beyond the visual (observed e.g. drawing) or verbal (heard). She suggests that voice is a 'process constructed through the interaction of people and shaped by a context in which power is one of several factors (Khoja, 2016: 320)'. This includes their actions, interactions, silences or resistance which need to be considered by the researcher. Further consideration needs to be given to the tensions and limitations of young people's 'voices' in research. For example, what it is that researchers hear, or expect to hear, and the need to move away

from individualised notions of ‘voice’ (Larkins et al, 2015). It is also important to consider whose voices we are listening to, as children and young people are a diverse group.

In this research, the process of constructing ‘voice’ with teenagers was enabled in three ways. Firstly some teenagers contributed to the design of the research methods and questions. Secondly, interviewees were able to speak about their experiences of refuge life from their own perspective, with their experience understood as a form of knowledge (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Mayall, 2000; Stanley and Wise, 1983; 2002) through valuing their subjective understandings (Dankoski, 2000; Harding, 1993; Oakley, 1979; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Finally, some teenagers helped to analyse the data collected. This process is explored in more depth later in the chapter.

Mayall (2001) highlights the importance of studying children as agents who both have and lack power, to influence and organise events, and engage with the structures and social contexts of their lives. Specific circumstances of domestic violence and refuge life also adversely affect teenagers’ power and influence over their own lives. These circumstances reinforce the importance of maximising teenagers’ influence over the research process within the limits of PhD study, including the analytical approach (Franks, 2011). They also present challenges to providing active, meaningful and ethical involvement throughout the research process.

An increasing agenda of child participation promotes understandings that children and young people have a right to be consulted, heard and appropriately influence services provided for them (Lundy et al, 2010). Generally, in the UK, ‘child protection and provision for children has higher status than children’s participation’ (Mayall, 2006: 9). However, in recognising young people as active citizens with rights and responsibilities, this research follows the Council of Europe’s (2012) recommendations relating to the participation of children and young people. This includes the principle that efforts should be made to enable the participation of teenagers with fewer opportunities, including those who are vulnerable or affected by discrimination.

The teenagers in this study could be considered vulnerable owing to their experience of domestic violence and their temporary accommodation in a refuge but their participation in research is vital. Existing research demonstrates they are able to talk about ‘sensitive’ issues and that living in refuge accommodation is a unique experience in itself (Edleson, 1999a). Specifically, learning about teenagers’ experiences and the processes that support recovery can inform practice. Earlier studies demonstrate that children and young people have the capacity to influence and shape events around them; that they are able to contribute to decision-making processes and want to make a difference (Mayall, 2002; Mullender et al, 2002). Mullender et al (2002) found that active participation, being listened to and being involved in decision-making or finding solutions was important to children’s ability to cope. This research is legitimised by the fact that teenagers views and experience may contribute to developing support for others in refuge accommodation (Alver and

Oyen 1998, in Cater and Øverlien, 2014). Without their perspectives, understanding of what they consider beneficial or harmful remains incomplete (Stafford and Smith, 2009).

Oakley (1981) called for the development of a participatory model to produce collaborative, non-hierarchical and non-exploitative research relationships thus reducing the separation between researcher and participant (Cater and Øverlien, 2014; Reinhartz, 1992). A participatory research approach means undertaking research ‘with’ or ‘for’ children rather than ‘on’ children (Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Darbyshire, 2000; Davis, 1998; Hood et al, 1996; Hill et al, 2004; Punch, 2002a). Hunleth (2011) warns against assuming that research ‘with’ or ‘for’ children is automatically superior or has greater legitimacy and authoritative power, but suggests a more nuanced approach is required. This study has endeavoured to follow this recommendation by reflecting on the research methods and decisions made through a process of reflexivity. Teenagers’ participation was sought where practicable, with a specific focus on development of service provision. However, teenagers did not set the research agenda due to time constraints. Less emphasis was placed on service providers’ participation in order to overturn the conventional hierarchy which privileges adult perspectives. This research drew on a number of resources designed to encourage meaningful and ethical participation of young people (Beazley et al, 2009; 2011; Coyne et al, 2006; Laws and Mann, 2004; Save the Children Child Participation Working Group, 2003; Shephard and Treseder, 2002; Thomas and O’Kane, 1998; 2000). Details of teenagers’ participation are provided in the sections below on research stages, methods and analysis.

## **Reflexivity**

A further connection between the two paradigms is the characteristic of reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process of critical reflection undertaken throughout the research (Charmaz, 2006; Letherby, 2004) which necessitates a consideration of the effects *on* the researcher and the effects *of* the researcher. Unlike feminist research by women, sociology of childhood research is not formed from a politics of current experience (Oakley, 1994) of childhood, although past experience of childhood is a significant part of who we are as researchers. Reflexivity is therefore required in relation to my impact on teenagers' processes of constructing knowledge, recognising the situated position of individual teenagers and recognition of the history I bring to this research (Mauthner and Doucet, 1997; Stanley and Wise, 1983).

In this research, I tried to facilitate teenagers' reflexivity through the inclusion of specific principles, including a commitment to grounding research in teenagers' experiences, listening to their accounts and privileging their subjective views (Burman et al, 2001; Morris et al, 1998). Teenagers were also considered able to be reflexive (Mayall, 2000) and provided comments on their own (and others) observations or explanations as 'constructors of knowledge' (Moss and Petrie, 2005: 111). However, I acknowledge that ultimately analysis and resultant theorizing is influenced by my adult position (Mayall, 1994).

There are key differences between individual teenagers in refuges. Teenage participants were therefore not expected to speak for all teenagers in their situation (Save the Children Child Participation Working Group, 2003). The range of variables and experiences included gender, age, ethnicity, personal characteristics, refuge practices, and understandings of domestic violence (Cater and Øverlien, 2014; Hester et al, 2007; Mullender et al, 2002; Stafford and Smith, 2009). There are also key differences between teenagers in refuges and teenagers in the general population. Participants may have: moved house multiple times; experienced disrupted home lives or schooling; lost possessions, friends, family and pets; and have complex relationships with others, including the abusive parent (Stafford et al, 2009; Stalford et al, 2003).

Acknowledging the subjectivity in both my own and participants' personal knowledge supports connections between feminist and sociology of childhood methodological approaches (Harding, 1987; Hutchby, 2005; James and Prout, 2015; Mayall, 2002). Following the example of Carroll (2012: 551) a reflexive diary was maintained during data collection and analysis in order to 'formalise 'researcher reflexivity''. Carroll (2012) maintains that feminist and sensitive research methodologies ask researchers to use their own identity, emotions and experiences within their study. The position, experience and personal history of the researcher must be acknowledged as integral to the research process and resulting subjective interpretation of knowledge (Letherby, 2004; Maynard, 1994; Stanley and Wise, 1983).

As the sole researcher on this study, and given my commitment to reflexivity, it is important to acknowledge my position in relation to key aspects of this research: gender, generation, domestic violence and service provision. I am a white woman from a working class area of Lancashire, living, studying and working in the North West of England. I have no children and at the time of fieldwork I was 26-27 years old. I have been active in the domestic violence voluntary sector since the age of 19. As detailed in the introductory chapter, this experience includes securing funding for younger children's services. I also have a personal agenda to increase awareness and understanding of issues relating to domestic violence (Choak, 2012). I brought to the research my understanding of being a 16 year old experiencing parental relationship breakdown following an incident involving my father's aggressive behaviour. I informed my mum that I was moving out, ultimately facilitating the breakup of their relationship. This experience was not disclosed during this research and participants did not ask about it directly. In contrast to teenage participants in this study, my mother and I moved approximately six miles to stay with grandparents. I continued to work part-time, attended the same college and maintained friendships.

On-going reflexivity in relation to data collection and analysis is also required (Du Bois, 1983; Harding, 1992; Maynard, 1994; Stanley and Wise, 1983; 2002). After a chronological account of the research stages, further reflection on my influence and other contextual factors that influenced the research will therefore be provided, focused on the ethical strategies employed, recruiting a sample, and modification of research methods, before a discussion of data analysis.

### **3.3 STAGES OF THE RESEARCH**

This section provides a chronological overview of the multiple stages involved in this research. It is not an all-encompassing account. Rather, it acknowledges the different sources of knowledge selected to meet my theoretical commitments and offers further reflection on methodological choices.

#### **Stage One – Review of the Literature**

This research began with a review of the literature surrounding children and domestic violence, refuge provision, and domestic violence support and interventions for children under the age of 18: the findings were reported in the two previous chapters. The search strategy utilised alternative terms for ‘domestic violence’ (e.g. interpersonal violence, domestic abuse), ‘teenager’ (e.g. adolescent, young person/people) and ‘refuge’ (shelter). It was not feasible to complete a systematic review due to time and resource constraints. All UK and international publications in English language were included regardless of date. Additional sources were identified from references found in these papers. Research detailing participatory methods, research with children and young people, and telephone and diary methods were studied. Online databases included: Scopus, EBSCOhost EJS and Academic Search Complete. Relevant journals included Children’s Geographies, Childhood, and Children and Society. Authors such as Øverlien (2011), Mullender et al (2002) and Stafford et al (2007) were of particular importance. Useful reviews included Holt et al (2008), Øverlien (2010), Poole et al (2008), Stanley (2011) and

Houghton (2008). The work of Holland et al (2010), Punch (2002b), and Hill (2006) were helpful in developing the research methods. Stafford and Smith's (2009) work provided practical guidance on researching with young people experiencing domestic violence.

### **Stage Two – Selection of Methodology and Ethical Approval**

A qualitative approach favoured by both feminist (e.g. Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002) and sociology of childhood (e.g. Mayall, 2002) researchers was chosen as appropriate for providing in-depth understanding of individual perspectives and subjective interpretations of participants' understandings. Qualitative methods are not the only legitimate approach. They are, however, considered to be flexible, fluid and better suited to understanding the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of marginalisation (Hutchinson et al, 1994). In line with my commitment to a participatory approach, using semi-structured multiple interviews to ask teenagers for their accounts was considered the most effective way to generate their participation in producing representations of their understandings and perspectives. A variety of participatory tools were developed to assist these discussions and are described in a later section of this chapter. Telephone interviews with staff were selected for practicality and efficiency (Chang and Krosnick, 2010; Couper, 2005; Kvale, 1996) and to ensure sufficient time was available for the intensive fieldwork with teenagers. To provide consistency but allow flexibility (Choak, 2012), interview guides were designed and developed for interviews with staff (Appendix Eight) and teenagers (Appendix Nine), drawing on the review of the literature and revised through piloting.

Ethical approval was sought from the University of Central Lancashire PsySoc Ethics Committee, prior to data collection. The committee requested that a number of conditions be addressed. These conditions included changes to the staff consent form (Appendix Three), parental consent letter (Appendix Five), and the production of a list of pseudonyms for teenagers.

### **Stage Three – Pilot Stage**

The pilot stage helped to assess the methodological approach. It was useful to assess participants' understanding of interview questions and identify amendments or additional questions (Cohen et al, 2013; Tucker, 2013). Changes implemented included the wording, structure, and length of interview guides. Piloting research materials correlated with the theoretical framework by encouraging participants to have a voice in the design and direction of the research (Thompson, 1992). It was hoped that developing methods and questions with others with similar experiences would identify means of reducing anxiety about participation (Hill, 2006; Moore et al, 2008).

Women's Aid (WAFE) were contacted and informed about the research. Their National Children and Young People Officer confirmed their interest in this study. This consultation was not intended to influence the outcome of this research and there was no pressure to obtain findings to benefit their activities. As a consequence of this consultation, questions regarding the extended definition of domestic violence were incorporated into the pilot interviews and discussed with participants. The national organisation Refuge was unable to

assist due to limited resources, although individual staff outside the recruitment area expressed an interest in this research.

Pilot staff interviews took place in March and April 2014 with a children's worker and refuge manager from two different refuges in the North West, recruited through my own network of refuge contacts. One refuge was self-contained and one was communal<sup>10</sup>. Their feedback informed questions relating to refuge facilities and multi-agency working. Pilot interviews with teenagers took place in July and August 2014 with four teenagers in four different refuges in the North West and West Midlands, recruited through the Women's Aid network. Participants were residing in communal refuges (n=1), purpose built refuges with self-contained flats (n=1), and semi-communal refuges (n=2). Teenagers were aged 13 to 16 years old, two were male and two were female. At this stage, there were no Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) participants and all teenagers were accompanying their mothers/carers in the refuge (described as 'dependent' in this study). Feedback from participants was used to improve interview guides and research tools. These changes included examples on activity sheets and adding questions about privacy, space for teenagers, internet access and support. Some activities were rejected by pilot participants as difficult to understand (e.g. the 'lock and key' exercise, McCabe and Horsley, 2008). Teenage pilot participants were invited and volunteered to participate in the full study. All pilot interviews were incorporated into the overall data analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Self-contained refuges normally provide bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom for each family. Communal refuges normally provide a bedroom but other facilities are shared with other families.

#### **Stage Four – Recruitment**

Refuges were identified using the public Women's Aid website. They were contacted by telephone and emailed information about this research. Domestic violence organisations not providing refuge accommodation or not listed on the website were not included. Recruitment initially concentrated on the North West of England. This research was also publicised at the Women's Aid national conference in July 2014.

Staff quickly volunteered to participate in telephone interviews. The fieldwork had a positive start and established links with staff. Teenagers, however, were not residing in most of these refuges where staff volunteered at that time. Rather than wait for teenagers to arrive at these refuges, the recruitment area was extended. In total, 70 refuge organisations were contacted across the North West, East Midlands and West Midlands in England. This widened the potential for staff participation but did not mitigate barriers to recruiting teenagers. A number of refuge organisations advised me to make contact after the summer holidays due to staffing shortages. This in itself was an obstacle as teenagers were likely to be in the refuge during the summer as schools were closed then. Twenty organisations were recruited to this research. I had existing relationships through my employment with six refuges in this study but not with all staff in those refuges volunteering to participate. I did not have any existing relationships with teenage participants.

Teenagers contacted me directly or staff made contact on their behalf. The recruitment poster circulated to and by refuges can be found in Appendix Four. Arrangements made by staff proved more practical where there was more than one teenager participating in the same refuge. Teenagers asked questions relating to their privacy and routinely reported wanting to participate as the research presented an opportunity to voice their opinions or was ‘something to do’.

### **Stage Five - Data Collection**

A total of 89 interviews (64 teenage, 25 staff), including pilot interviews, were undertaken with 45 participants (20 teenagers, 25 staff) within 12 months. Interviews lasted between 15 and 75 minutes with teenagers and 12 to 45 minutes with staff. The table below provides an overview of interviews undertaken. Whilst more numbers of staff were recruited, from a greater number of organisations, a larger number of interviews were completed with teenagers due to each of them taking part in a series of interviews. The average number of interviews per teenager was 3.2; the most frequent (n=6) number of interviews conducted was four.

**Table 3.1** Overview of Interviews with Staff and Teenagers

	<b>Staff participants</b>	<b>Teenage participants</b>
<b>Number of participants</b>	25	20
<b>Pilot Interviews</b> (inc below)	2	4
<b>Total Interviews</b>	25	64
<b>Method</b>	Telephone interviews	Repeat face to face interviews
<b>Number of interviews</b>	1	25
	2	3
	3	5
	4	6
	5	2
	6	1
<b>Number of organisations</b>	17	11
<b>Data analysis</b> (excl above)	0	3

Four teenage participants withdrew from the research. This included a participant who returned to live with the perpetrator without his mother to be near his friends and his school; one did not like the audio recorder, another could no longer 'be bothered', and I lost contact with the fourth teenager when her family left the refuge suddenly to return to their previous area (not to the abuser) as they could no longer cope in the refuge. One quarter of teenagers opted to undertake a final interview once rehoused (n=5). This was not possible for six participants who were still living in refuges when data collection ended. Others were happy for research participation to end after leaving the refuge.

### **Stage Six – Data Analysis**

All interviews were audio recorded with the exception of one staff interview; she explained this was a management instruction. In this case I took detailed notes. All interviews were transcribed and stored in NVivo. Three teenagers assisted with data analysis, detailed later in this chapter. This was beneficial to the

research and encouraged further involvement. A constructivist grounded theory analysis of the data was completed and will be discussed later. The 54 completed refuge life rating scales (described in more detail below under heading ‘Rating Scales’) were analysed numerically and scores compared. Difficulties with this data included the small sample size, varying numbers of completed scales per participant, and completion of scales at different points during a refuge stay. The findings are presented in the following two chapters. Data from staff and teenager interviews are not presented separately but are organised under key themes.

### **3.4 ETHICAL FRAMEWORK**

The sensitive nature of the topic and the age of the teenage participants raised ethical concerns (Alanen, 1990; Renzetti and Lee, 1993). There was a need to balance teenagers’ participation and promoting their empowerment with their rights to protection within this research process (see Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Teenagers’ participation is necessary as they are directly concerned and are therefore best placed to describe their understanding and experience (see James et al, 1998), ‘adolescence is not only a time of vulnerability, but also an age of opportunity’ (UNICEF, 2011: iii). Protection from harm is a valid concern (Butler and Williamson, 1994). However, a strong protectionist discourse can deny teenagers the right to give their views on issues and experiences they consider important (Morrow and Richards, 1996; Powell and Smith, 2009) by excluding them on ‘the basis of potential risk’ (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010; Heptinstall, 2000). Emphasis was placed on the importance of

establishing sound relationships with organisational gatekeepers to navigate this process (Berrick et al, 2000; Powell and Smith, 2009; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). It was hoped that my personal experience of work in the refuge sector would support successful negotiation and satisfy gatekeepers that this study was valuable (Sime, 2008).

This research followed the standards presented by Graham et al (2013) in the 'Ethical Research Involving Children' Compendium. According to this compendium, the fundamental principles of research should be respect, benefit and justice. These principles are underpinned by ethics of harms and benefits, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and payment. Each concern will be discussed below. The bulk of the discussion will concern teenage participants due to the nature of this research and their position as 'vulnerable'.

### **Potential Harm**

Protection from further harm (Alderson and Morrow, 2004) was considered an integral part of the research planning, implementation and dissemination (Graham et al, 2013). This was balanced with enabling potential participants to make informed choices to participate (Dickson-Swift et al, 2008; McLaughlin and Shardlow, 2009; Schenk and Williamson, 2005). All participants received an information sheet (Appendices Three and Six). For teenagers, this included details of relevant helpline numbers, websites and services to access additional support, if required. Participants were provided with opportunities to discuss the interview afterwards or ask questions. I was prepared to end interviews if

participants became distressed. The potential for harm was less for staff who were not asked to discuss personal experiences.

### **Benefits**

It was explained to teenagers that this study would not directly benefit their immediate situation. Existing research suggested participants might indirectly benefit by voicing their opinions regarding future improvements for others (e.g. Buckley et al, 2006; Cater and Øverlien, 2014; Stafford et al, 2007). Of direct immediate benefit was a gift voucher they received at each session. Added potential benefits were later identified by participants and included increased confidence, personal development, and enhanced social skills. Interviews also helped participants make sense of their own experience of staying in a refuge(s). The most important benefit reported by teenagers in this study was feeling listened to.

Direct benefit to staff was not a focus of this study, but some found giving their opinions and contribution to knowledge a positive experience in helping to improve awareness of interventions they provided. Participation also encouraged reflection and potential service development. At least one refuge successfully applied for funding for new equipment for teenagers specifically. Other staff found participation interesting, or wanted to exercise autonomy through participation. This was particularly meaningful for those undergoing organisational changes.

A short summary sheet will be produced containing the key messages from the findings and emailed to those refugees recruited. It will also be available to those individual participants who requested it.

### **Payment and Compensation**

There is no consensus regarding paying young people for participation in research (Kellett and Ding, 2004) or what is appropriate (Gallagher, 2009; see Alderson and Morrow, 2011 for discussion). Teenagers were provided with a £10 gift voucher after each interview to acknowledge that their time and effort was valued (Fargas-Malet et al, 2010; Hill, 2005; Laws and Mann, 2004). Teenagers were required to participate in their own time, between other activities, on multiple occasions (if they wished). Payment appeared to motivate some teenagers in this study; others opted in with no knowledge of the voucher available. Teenagers wanted to talk about or raise awareness of their experiences, or to pass the time. Many teenagers reported that they wanted to continue to participate regardless of the voucher. Often teenagers emailed or texted to arrange the next visit or communicate about particular issues, suggesting control over their research participation. It was stressed that participants could withdraw from the research at any stage without consequence (Gallagher, 2008; Veale, 2005). Four participants withdrew at various stages regardless of payment, demonstrating they did not feel obliged to continue (Laws and Mann, 2004). Staff participating in this research did not receive payment as they usually participated during work hours and undertook a single interview.

## **Informed Consent**

Consent was promoted as a process and checked throughout. This decision was shaped by the view that negotiation of consent is always contingent and situated (Sin, 2005), underpinned by Larkins' (2014) principle of 'fluid consent'. Teenage participants were required to 'opt-in' using written consent. Appropriately designed detailed information sheets (Appendices Two, Three, Five and Six) were provided to a series of gatekeepers and potential participants (Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Gallagher et al, 2010). Staff were asked to 'opt in' on a voluntary basis. I could not be entirely sure if this was the case as staff had been forwarded the email by a manager.

This research planned to elicit teenagers' active agreement and their mothers' passive agreement to privilege teenagers' decision making and participation rights (Carroll-Lind et al, 2006; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). The University of Central Lancashire's PsySoc Ethics Committee directed, however, that mothers should provide active consent for their child's participation. This reinforces the view that young people are often not considered 'competent enough to give their informed consent' which 'needs to be gained from a "more competent adult" (Kellett and Ding, 2004: 166). Teenagers gave consent for participation themselves from the age of 16, as 16 to 18 year olds can reside in refuges independently. Seeking parental consent in such situations was inappropriate for safety reasons, whilst seeking parental consent for dependent 16 to 18 year olds would have subjected them to arbitrary age discrimination.

It was emphasised that non-consent would not adversely affect the support families received in the refuge. In the event, obtaining mothers' or carers' consent did not pose a barrier to participation (Alderson, 1995; Hart and Lansdown, 2002; Skelton, 2008). Mothers reported that the decision had been made by their son or daughter, demonstrating perceptions of teenagers' decision-making capacity. On a practical level, where mothers' first language was not English, staff translated the consent form verbally or in writing.

Staff consent to telephone interviews was sought by emailing information, sometimes via a manager and then through telephone contact. Where staff expressed an interest, staff were contacted to agree a time for interview. Staff may have felt in a more powerful position compared to teenagers in this study, as seen by staff's repeated postponement of planned telephone interviews or lack of response to emails. One staff member did not consent to audio recording. She reported this was a management instruction.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

Privacy is considered to be a 'vital' ethical concern (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). It means that 'entrusted information received from children must be respected and safeguarded' (Graham et al, 2013: 75). Privacy was respected under the Data Protection Act 1998. I confirmed participants' understanding that their data would be used without compromising rights to confidentiality, privacy and anonymity (Williamson et al, 2005). Identifying information, including real names and location, has been removed.

Teenage and adult participants had the same rights, with the understanding that confidentiality would not over-ride the duty to protect participants' welfare (Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Laws and Mann, 2004; Schenk and Williamson, 2005). Issues of safety, privacy and anonymity were acknowledged as important for these teenagers (Baker, 2005; Stafford et al, 2007; Stafford and Smith, 2009). Confidentiality encompassed public and social network confidentiality, and third party breach of privacy (Hill, 2005). Rights to, and limits of, confidentiality were explained verbally and included in consent forms (Alderson, 1995). Cater and Øverlien (2014: 74) advise that children exposed to domestic violence often have 'extensive experience of not being listened to, of not being asked about their preferences or wishes, and of having to adjust to adult decisions taken over their heads'. Processes were therefore set up to ensure that, as much as possible, young people would be involved in decisions, including those relating to confidentiality.

Teenagers were able to choose who was present during interviews. Two teenagers undertook their initial interview together. This raised issues of privacy and confidentiality but also resulted in them distracting each other, amending answers, and perhaps 'holding back'. Two teenagers were happy to have their mothers present. One of these mothers could not speak English but could understand parts of our discussion. Both mothers interrupted participants with their own views.

I learned from staff that one mother had asked her son about the content of his initial interview. The teenage participant informed his mother that the interview was confidential. Concerned this may cause alarm and prevent further

participation, I clarified the nature of confidentiality. The participant explained that he had chosen not to inform his mother about his views and our discussion. He insisted that the interview was his space to talk about feelings and things he found difficult to verbalise. Surprisingly, lack of child to parent disclosure did not prove to be a barrier to continued parental consent.

I had planned for teenagers to choose their own pseudonym. Pseudonyms were used owing to the small number of teenagers in refuges and confidential nature of refuge locations (see Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). It was, however, a stipulation of the ethics committee that teenagers were provided with a pre-formulated list to avoid the risk of choosing a known or identifiable nickname. Three girls chose names from the boys section (Mohammed and Bob). Two of these girls selected the same name (Mohammed). Another boy also chose Bob, wanting to be called Bob Marley. The teenagers' selected pseudonyms have been retained to help reduce our unequal power relationship. Staff are referred to numerically, for example, S1, to S25.

## **Power and Participation**

Attention has been given to addressing power relations inherent in the research process (Christensen and Prout, 2002; Cocks, 2006; Komulainen, 2007) There are power differences in any research, particularly when involving child participants and adult researchers (Grover, 2004; Mayall, 2000; Robinson and Kellett, 2004). In this research, this extends to an ethics committee, staff and parents. While a feminist methodology cannot eliminate power, hierarchy and

control in the research process, it can be helpful in partly reducing it by validating participants' experience (Esim, 1997).

This research adopted Renold et al's (2008) approach to work with young people in care. They aimed to develop a research environment where participants could choose their own methods with the intention of disrupting the 'researcher gaze by generating genuinely reflexive research practices' (Renold et al, 2008: 432). This approach was supported through the availability of a choice of methods and provision of choice of focus, intended to support the idea that there were no right or wrong answers and to allow participants to give in-depth accounts about issues important to them (Punch, 2002a; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; 2000). Teenagers had control of the digital audio recorder (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998) and some participants stopped the recording when they felt they had finished.

### **3.5 ENGAGING RESEARCH PARTCIPANTS**

#### **Negotiating access**

Gaining access to teenage participants was a significant challenge. Some organisations did not respond and 12 declined for two main reasons: (1) they did not participate in research or student research specifically; and (2) they were experiencing organisational problems and struggling to maintain existing services. Organisational problems encompassed capacity or staffing issues, views of research, confidential locations and the threat of funding cuts and closures (See Laville 2014; Pearse 2012).

There was a disconnection between my theoretical framework and the reality of working with a series of gatekeepers. Navigating multiple layers of consent was time-consuming (Butler and Williamson, 1994; Mullender et al, 2002). Refuge staff expressed concerns about teenagers' age, what issues would be discussed, and client welfare. Once management had granted access I was faced with re-negotiating access with staff. This 'hierarchy of gatekeeping' simultaneously protects children from harm and increases barriers to participation (Harden et al, 2000; Morrow and Richards, 1996). Staff also gave mixed messages about teenagers' interest in the study. Within one refuge, a staff member advised that teenagers were not interested and had 'too many emotional problems'. A different staff member invited me to visit but then moved on to other employment before the invitation was finalised. I then had to re-negotiate with management who subsequently introduced me to another member of staff who helped to recruit one teenager. This teenager reported that she had been living in refuges for a number of months and did not feel listened to.

The same teenager emphasised that she felt that nobody listened to her or respected her opinion, which reflected the reports of other participants. She said 'I like it [the research] because at least I know someone is listening to us'. She offered the view that refuges may be worried about the consequences of this research. She connected this with funding, demonstrating her competence and understanding of possible tensions between research and organisations.

Teenagers in this study indicated that they valued the opportunity to contribute to this research.

I was concerned that adult gatekeepers were making decisions about teenagers' capacity or competence to participate (Baker, 2005; Balen et al, 2006; Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007). This included decisions about maturity, ability to express their views, and perceptions of vulnerability. Concerns about the potential impact of research acted as a filtering process. Some staff in my study reported that teenagers (dependent and independent) 'had a lot of emotional problems', were 'extremely vulnerable' or stated it was not the 'right time' to participate in research. Another stated that teenagers were 'not in a place mentally to talk about their abuse unless this was done in a therapeutic or counselling setting'. I offered to visit teenagers, mothers and staff to enable informed decision-making. Staff generally declined this offer. It was unclear if these teenagers had any awareness of the study. My experiences reflect other studies, for example, children in care are often denied opportunities to participate in research because of their perceived vulnerability (Berrick et al, 2000).

This gatekeeping denied teenagers access to participation and citizenship rights and defined them by their experience of abuse as passive or helpless, and therefore further marginalised. Staff may have been acting according to their perceptions of the best interests of teenagers and gatekeepers have a duty to scrutinize research, but in some cases they appeared to be making decisions for teenagers. Such protectionist measures highlight the powerless position of

teenagers whilst reinforcing the secrecy surrounding domestic violence and living in a refuge. Contrastingly, a more positive approach was evident in two services where managers encouraged access since ‘academic research has real value in terms of developing our services’ and they would ‘encourage engagement as it is always positive to have an opportunity to talk about your experiences as part of the recovery from trauma’.

### **Opportunistic Sample**

The characteristics of the sample were opportunistic due to the challenges of access within the timeframe, smaller numbers of teenagers in refuges, and the mobility of refuge populations. These factors also influenced the number of repeat interviews. Participants were recruited from July 2014 until February 2015. This cut-off date was chosen to allow time for detailed analysis. The last participant was recruited two months before completion. A rolling recruitment accommodated the shifting population of residents and helped to improve sample size, representativeness, and diversity of experience. The application of a rolling recruitment was particularly helpful in recruiting teenagers from a BAME background, with numbers peaking during the latter half of data collection. Greater numbers of female than male participants were expected due to age restrictions for boys’ admission to refuges, as discussed in the previous chapter. Coincidentally, almost half of participants were male (four out of ten) in the first half of data collection. The opportunities for recruiting participants and repeating interviews were limited by mothers’ disengagement with staff (making communication difficult), teenagers leaving the refuge or short stays, particularly for independent teenagers. Recruitment problems meant that

only one independent (unaccompanied) teenager participated in this research. Staff explained difficulties in obtaining funding for refuge spaces for independent teenagers.

### ***Characteristics of Teenage Participants***

The table below provides an overview of the 20 teenagers participating in this research. In addition to differences in age, gender, ethnicity and status as dependent/independent teenagers, the sample varied in their length of stay in refuges. Some teenagers had resided in their refuge for some time. Other teenagers arrived from temporary accommodation, other refuges or foster care. One family had been in multiple refuges for approximately two years. Two participants had no recourse to public funds due to their immigration status.

The mean age of teenagers was 15 years. Age relates to the beginning of participation in the research and does not include teenagers' birthdays during the fieldwork stage (some entered the 16-18 age group). Further details of participants are provided in the next chapter, as they provide a context for the findings.

**Table 3.2** Overview of Teenage Participant Characteristics

Variables		Number of teenagers (n=20)
<b>Age range</b>	13-15 years	11
	16-18 years	9
<b>Gender</b>	Female	15
	Male	5
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White British	10
	Pakistani British	4
	Sri Lankan	3
	Polish	1
	Black African	1
	White Traveller	1
<b>Client status</b>	Independent (unaccompanied)	1
	Dependent (accompanied)	19

Teenagers had moved between two and 220 miles to refuges. The average move was 57.4 miles. This is an underestimate of total miles travelled since leaving the family home, as it is calculated from home to their current refuge and excludes previous refuge stays immediately prior to their current refuge. Teenagers had fled biological fathers, step-fathers, mothers' partners and older siblings' partners (see Appendix Seventeen). The length of these relationships (all heterosexual) varied from under three years to over 18 years. I did not directly ask about abuse experienced. Often teenagers voluntarily explained instances of violence or abuse to provide context for their accounts. The experiences they recounted revealed they were aware of domestic violence and what had led them to move to a refuge, even if they did not agree with moving.

### ***Characteristics of Staff Participants***

The target number of 25 staff interviews was achieved. Participants were from 17 organisations and included a range of staff members based in independent refuges, refuges run by housing associations, and charities linked to housing

groups. As shown in Table 3.3 below, all participants were female (although I encountered one male employee during the recruitment phase). In contrast to teenage participants, only a small number of staff participants had a BAME background, and only one fifth of the sample was under the age of 30 – most were aged 36-50. Staff participants had between one and 35 years' experience in the sector. Not all staff worked directly with teenagers but were able to provide valuable information regarding service provision, refuge funding and experiences.

**Table 3.3** Staff Participant Information

Variables		Number of Participants (n=25)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	25
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White British	23
	BAME	2
<b>Job Role</b>	Children's Worker	11
	Refuge Support Worker	7
	Refuge Manager	2
	Service/Organisation Manager	2
	Community Support Worker	3
<b>Age</b>	under 25	1
	25-30	4
	31-35	2
	36-40	5
	41-45	4
	46-50	5
	55+	4
<b>Qualifications</b>	Social Work degree	2
	Primary Education degree	2
	Criminology & Linguistics degree	1
	Psychology degree	1
	Youth Work degree	1
	NVQ Level 3 Health & Social Care	1
	NVQ Level 3 Working with CYP	1
	NNEB (Nursery Nursing)	5
	HND Early Childhood Studies	1
	Unknown	10

Table 3.3 shows that, for those 15 staff where qualification information was obtained, the most common qualification was an NNEB (now CACHE) Diploma in Nursery Nursing (held by children's workers). Three children's workers were qualified to degree level but this was not a requirement. Most staff participants were not working in the same refuges as teenage participants and so their accounts could not be compared directly. I attempted to rectify this during later stages of data collection by recruiting teenagers before staff participants. In eight refuges, both staff and teenagers participated in this research.

### **3.6 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

#### **Telephone Interviews with Staff**

Telephone interviews with staff were used successfully in early refuge studies (Binney et al 1981; Hague et al 1996; Pahl 1978). The aim was to generate knowledge to evaluate provision for teenagers by:

- establishing which interventions were provided, their formulation and evaluation
- investigating perceptions of teenagers' refuge experience
- learning about potential improvements
- exploring difficulties of working with teenagers

The initial pilot determined the appropriateness and usefulness of this method. Telephone interviews were time and cost-effective; conserving financial resources for the repeat interviews with teenagers located some distance away from central Lancashire. Telephone interviewing allowed staff to cancel at extremely short notice, in an emergency, with one interview rearranged five times.

Complications were encountered using telephone interviews due to staff participating during play sessions or in busy office environments. Often there was little alternative, with one participant interviewed in her car due to office noise. Some staff were concerned about being overheard or did not have time available during their working day. Arrangements were made to accommodate

this. Other difficulties included not being able to take into account facial expressions or body language, or see the refuge buildings or facilities and particularly, separate areas for teenagers on the rare occasions when these were described.

### **Multiple Interviews with Teenagers**

Individual one-off interviews have been used effectively in refuge studies (Baker, 2005; Hague et al, 1996; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al, 2002; Stafford et al, 2007) with focus groups successfully used with younger children (Buckley et al, 2006). On two occasions, refuges had more than one teenage resident. However, teenagers were not necessarily aware of, or comfortable with each other due to not spending time together. Individual interviews were deemed more appropriate to collect a lot of information and capture experiences, feelings, and meanings (Choak, 2012), although in one case teenagers were interviewed together, and in two cases mothers were present, as detailed above.

This research utilised multiple interviews with teenage participants. Much of the research on children and young people's experiences of domestic violence has relied on cross sectional surveys or 'one-off' interviews limiting the findings to data presented at just one point in time. Single interviews at one point in time cannot capture changes that may occur during a prolonged refuge stay as well as interviews over a sustained period. Cotterill (1992) suggested that multiple interviews are necessary to overcome the problem of participants only providing "public accounts" and Hogan and O'Reilly (2007) felt that some children

appeared to 'hold back' during their interviews. Darbyshire et al's (2005) paper on multiple-methods suggests that a single interview is useful as a 'snapshot' but 'frustratingly limited'. Taking a longitudinal approach aimed to address these issues (Hillman et al, 2008). Practically, however, multiple interviews were time and resource intensive.

It was impossible to predict the length of research participation due to the time taken for refuge residents to be rehoused. Anecdotal evidence gathered from refuge providers corresponded with that found in a report into housing related support for victims of domestic violence (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). Six months was identified as the average length of stay. A series of six potential interviews was planned at monthly, or four week intervals in order to investigate ongoing experiences and understand changes during teenagers' refuge stays. This approach offered a means of responding to and recognising the rapid change and development that characterises adolescence (Coleman, 2011). Multiple interviews were also intended to increase the possibility of making the process more collaborative, helping to advance the participatory aims of the research framework (Allen, 2011). Repeated interviews helped to build rapport and trust, and to sustain young people's participation.

### ***Participatory Techniques***

A flexible range of 'child centred' techniques and processes were developed. These techniques were intended to support active engagement by making interviews more fun and interesting. They were also designed to offer teenagers more control over the research agenda and how they expressed

themselves (e.g. Clark and Statham, 2005; Kay et al, 2003; O'Kane, 2000; Punch, 2002b; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; 2000). Semi-structured interviews provided an approach to incorporating these techniques. This research followed recommendations to use a combination of traditional 'adult' and 'child centred' methods to avoid teenagers feeling patronised by the sole use of 'child-friendly' techniques (Clark and Statham, 2005; Punch, 2002a). Gallacher and Gallagher's (2008: 512) critical assessment acted as a reminder that participatory methods were not "fool-proof" tools to achieving 'ethical and epistemological validity'. I found that participatory methods were not always required, particularly in later interviews. They were useful initially to put the participants at ease as they were more informal, gave them something to concentrate on and provided a foundation for the research process (Barker and Weller, 2003a; 2003b; Nieuwenhuys, 1997).

To develop participatory research materials I referred to numerous handbooks and toolkits for practitioners (as mentioned above, e.g. Laws and Mann, 2004; McCabe and Horsley, 2008; Save the Children Child Participation Working Group, 2003; Shephard and Treseder, 2002), consulted my supervisory team, and utilised my training on improving engagement and accessibility. I identified flexible tools to account for individual differences and presented these to teenagers in the pilot stage. They developed themes and finalised the tools to be used (Appendices Eleven to Fourteen).

Interviews with teenagers aimed to explore the following themes: feelings about refuges; personal needs of teenagers in refuges; positives and negatives of

refuges; ideal member of staff; ideal refuge and perceptions of leaving the refuge. Sometimes teenagers arrived with a specific issue they wished to discuss. Teenagers had the option to talk, write, or draw on the research materials (see Thomas and O'Kane, 2000). Sticky notes, a camera and an IPad were also available. The choice of materials served as 'ice-breakers', particularly in the first interview. For example, the first activity introduced a 'phrase card' (Clark, 2005; Morrow, 2001; Punch, 2002b) to assist my understanding of participants' perceptions about the refuge. This provided space to include information of their choice and incorporated examples of possible words to reduce feelings of pressure. The second activity was a 'problem page letter', similar to a vignette (Barter and Renold, 2000; Hazel, 1995), presenting a hypothetical character worried about moving to a refuge. This helped teenagers to talk generally and facilitated discussion about their personal experience. Nineteen teenagers used the problem page and phrase card methods (Appendices Eleven and Twelve). Further worksheets were developed to reflect particular themes (McCabe and Horsley, 2008; Moore and Layton, 2007). With the exception of 'what teenagers need' which included examples, these sheets were largely blank (see Appendix Thirteen). They included an image relating to the topic, leaving space for participants to communicate their responses. These worksheets were used by varying numbers of participants, as detailed in Appendix Sixteen. Other methods were utilised where possible and directed by the teenage participant. One teenager thought that a walking tour using the IPad during our first interview offered a useful ice-breaker (Ross et al, 2009; Roy et al, 2015). Other participants did not want to do this or it was not possible owing to the nature of the refuge, namely issues of privacy within communal facilities or lack of access around buildings.

Rating scales were used to measure four areas: sleep, homework, worrying and family relationships for 19 participants. A later scale was devised and used by seven teenagers. The option of a diary or scrap book method (Alaszewski, 2006; Bragg and Buckingham, 2008) was offered but was not utilised due to preference for the interview method.

Materials and research tools helped to build rapport and establish individual needs regarding participation. Some teenagers used the activity sheets/tools as prompts for discussion rather than activities themselves. This was particularly the case where teenagers participated in multiple interviews. Appendix Sixteen offers further reflections about the research tools, their aims, benefits and challenges.

### ***Practical Issues***

Interviews took place in the refuge where the teenager was residing or (for the final meeting) at their new home. Time available was limited due to school hours and refuge staffing which on weekdays ended at 5pm. The physical space for interviews was allocated by staff. Examples included play rooms, meeting rooms, interview rooms, communal lounges, and refuge flats. There was little option for the research to take place elsewhere and usually any room available was utilised. This meant that some spaces were more comfortable or less formal than others. Often these rooms were next to staff rooms or other offices. Some teenagers monitored staff whereabouts or talked in a whisper. One interview room was quite large and formal so I chose to sit on the floor whilst the participant sat in a chair in an attempt to lessen my power as a

researcher (Save the Children Child Participation Working Group, 2003; Moore et al, 2008). In some cases, meeting rooms were visible from the reception area. During a final interview, a younger sibling in the reception area noticed a participant and he became extremely disruptive to the point where he exhibited violent behaviour. Overall, play rooms were the preferred option, if available and not in use, as they were less formal and enabled participants to indicate what they were referring to e.g. decoration or facilities.

Other teenagers requested interviews in their flat, resulting in interruptions from mothers or siblings. Interruptions also occurred with a staff member present in an interview, who spoke for both the participant and myself. Another issue with entering flats was that mothers offered me food or drink. This made me feel uncomfortable considering their financial situation. In one interview, a mother asked if I could assist with rehousing and I had to explain, with the participant translating, that I could not.

Independent translators could not be utilised but English language support was necessary with two teenagers. Staff did not have the necessary language skills required. Concerns regarding confidentiality meant it may not have been appropriate to use them if they had. Instead adjustments were made. I adapted my communication style by pacing the interviews, asking fewer questions, checking for understanding more frequently, repeating or asking them to repeat what they had said. Sometimes I was only able to comprehend what they had said by listening to it repeatedly when transcribing.

### **Diary Method**

In addition to participatory interviews, teenagers in this study were offered the opportunity to keep a diary (or scrap book) of their time in the refuge to reflect on experiences between interviews. Such methods are considered useful to explore feelings, establish changes over time, access hard to reach descriptive data and provide longitudinal insight (Bagnoli, 2012; Hawkes et al, 2009). Considerations were given to advantages and disadvantages of using this method (Bagnoli, 2012; Bell, 1998; Fargas-Malet et al, 2010; Hawkes et al, 2009; Thomson and Hall, 2008). Different ways a diary could be maintained were promoted. Individual differences in learning, communication and participation styles, competencies and possible gender differences were accommodated (Alaszewski, 2006; Alerby, 2003; Hawkes et al, 2009; Worth, 2009) by explaining that diaries could be kept using written text, audio, film, drawing, methods, private blog or in any way they preferred (see Appendix Seven for diary instructions).

The proposed diary method was approved at the pilot stage but none of the teenagers provided a diary for analysis. Interestingly, some participants reported the usefulness of the diary method:

‘...if there’d been a little problem with my friends or something, just stuff that I’ve got on my chest that I want to get off. It’s got loads of stuff in there...’ (Rebecca)

Other teenagers reported not keeping a diary due to being at school or college, the lack of structure which caused anxiety about getting it ‘wrong’, not having ‘anything extra to say...’ (Amy) and preferring ‘speaking to someone instead...’

(James). It appeared that the diary method may have felt repetitive, too private to share, or potentially risky as they may have had concerns about parents, siblings, staff or other residents reading their diaries and/or a lack of privacy to produce a diary.

### **Rating Scales**

During the pilot phase, four teenage participants helped to devise the 'Refuge Life Rating Scale' (Appendix Fourteen). The scale was considered complementary to other methods, aiming to enrich findings and provide a consistent element of data collection to be completed at each interview to establish any changes over time. This scale was qualitative and participative, not a standardised measure. It included open-ended questions giving participants the option to elaborate and indicate whether this differed from their situation prior to living in a refuge. Value was placed on understanding and formulating discussion rather than measurement.

In practice, completing the rating scale became an onerous task across multiple interviews, especially where teenagers described little change. If the teenager did not want to complete this activity they were not pressured to do so. Participants felt that the scale was not very comprehensive. It did not provide a detailed reflection of the information they offered during interviews. Questions relating to mothers or siblings generated less feedback. The homework question was irrelevant during school holidays or for teenagers not in education.

Greater numbers of independent teenagers would have necessitated an additional scale relevant to their circumstances.

### ***Developing a New Scale***

To redress the inadequacies of the original scale, towards the end of the study seven teenagers worked with me to compile and complete a new scale 'Important Areas in my Refuge Journey'. This scale could be developed in future research or practice to highlight areas of support needs (Appendix Fifteen).

The table below provides a comparison of the scales. The second scale was developed with greater numbers of teenagers familiar with both the research and researcher. They had already undertaken at least one interview, with one teenager having completed five. Teenagers in the pilot stage were participating for the first time. Interestingly, the majority of indicators were retained, with the exception of their relationship with siblings. This was replaced with 'family' to include extended family members. Scaling was changed to a numeric scale to allow for greater variation.

**Table 3.4** Rating Scale Comparison

Measurement tool	Refuge Life Rating Scale	Important Areas in my Refuge Journey
<b>Point of development</b>	Pilot Stage July 2014	End of fieldwork March 2015
<b>Number of teenagers involved</b>	4	7
<b>Number of indicators included</b>	5	20
<b>Fixed points in time</b>	No – according to interview	Yes - likely to lead to retrospective to completion
<b>Number of instances for completion</b>	Up to 6	Up to 4

Despite the increased number of teenagers involved in its development, the benefit of the second scale is debateable. The advantage of the original refuge life rating scale was that it represented participants' present situation. Had each participant been recruited on their arrival at the refuge, the new scale may have been more illuminating, particularly over their course of their refuge stay. However, a further limitation of this scale may be its extensive nature and the issues posed for analysis as teenagers were completing the scale at different points in their stay and retrospectively. One teenager wanted to complete the scale for each refuge she had lived in rather than at different time points. One teenager did not want to complete particular indicators e.g. social services, fathers. The scales provided useful insight and confirmation of interview data but in order to be used effectively, they need to be developed further and used with a larger sample.

## **Research Feedback**

The research design was gradually improved by taking account of participants' comments. At a basic level, this included asking participants about previous interviews and asking for suggested changes, improvements and feedback about the methods. It was emphasised that teenagers should critique the research to improve it for others. Suggested improvements included: increase frequency of interviews; a collage activity; and communicate issues identified back to staff. This last suggestion highlights teenagers' inability to communicate directly with refuge staff and their feelings that staff may not value their opinion unless communicated by another adult. Teenagers reported participation as helpful or hoped that it increased awareness. They wanted the findings to make a difference to other teenagers in refuges. The research summary will be disseminated to service providers after the thesis is submitted.

## **Reflections for the Future**

Some challenges remain inherent to research in this field; however there are lessons to be learned. Teenagers were recruited to this research at various points in their refuge journeys making comparisons at fixed points in their stay impossible. Ideally, teenagers would have been initially interviewed a short time after their arrival. However, this may have proved burdensome and prompted research disengagement due to the length of time spent in refuges.

The variable length of time spent in refuges creates difficulty in replicating a model exploring the whole of a teenager's stay. This period is extended for

families moving between refuges. Any future longitudinal study could be more formalised. It would require more time, resources and well-established links with a large number of refuges before commencing fieldwork. Consideration would need to be given to issues relating to privacy, confidentiality and intrusion.

Interviewing across time helped to overcome some of the obstacles outlined in other studies (Darbyshire et al, 2005; Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007) by building relationships. It was useful in understanding how teenagers' experiences and emotions varied over time and why, and with regards to specific incidents. Changes were observed between the first and second interviews, with teenagers more critical of their refuge stay during our subsequent interview. It is impossible to know if this was caused by changes in the refuge, greater understanding of this research, or if a relationship of trust was gradually established. It could have also related to the proposed activities which required reflection about their experiences and requirements. An ongoing research relationship meant that participation extended beyond the interviews to include text and email communication when issues arose, which provided a fuller picture of the stresses of refuge life as they happened

A longitudinal approach enabled advanced planning of questions tailored to the individual. I demonstrated that I had re-read their previous interviews, enabling further reflection. I was conscious of actively listening and demonstrating this by reflecting on their contributions or asking for clarification. Consequently, I

was compared positively to refuge staff who some teenagers reported as not listening. I also queried comments or issues raised by other teenagers to enable comparison between individuals. I knew less about the overall experiences of teenagers completing one or two interviews. There was also less collaboration in developing the research. A teenager completing five interviews helped to devise the new rating scale and contributed to data analysis.

For some teenagers, the interviews provided someone to talk to. Many of the teenagers initially thought that I was a young person myself. This initial perception appeared to promote dynamics of trust through perceived shared similarities or understandings, some of which were well-placed. Perceived similarities may have been linked to me being in education, language used and my appearance. Some teenagers asked me to stay after interviews to ask questions about university generally or specific questions about my house, car, pets, and future. Teenagers choosing to close interviews also wanted me to stay and chat. I hoped this would facilitate trust and a reduction in hierarchy through personal investment in the research relationship (Oakley, 1981). One teenager presented a collage she had made in the refuge; another wanted to display impressive magic tricks and another needed help with Christmas decorations, which highlighted their need for peer support.

I had anticipated participants asking questions or offering anecdotal stories but I had not foreseen the level this actually reached. Teenagers presented issues about exams and homework. One teenager described herself as 'not very

emotional', but was upset about the possibility of moving schools for the second time when they were rehoused. She reported having nobody to talk to and specifically asked for my opinion about moving schools, if I had moved schools, and if the other participants had. Whilst preserving confidentiality, I explained that some participants were in similar positions and tried to provide reassurance about her exams. I gave support by volunteering an example of my own educational experience. As recruitment increased I realised that many teenagers used the interviews as a forum to offload thoughts and feelings. Not participating in these conversations might have resulted in a negative research experience, affecting the dynamics of trust and impacting on their engagement with this study and any future research.

I had failed to fully consider the emotional impact of the fieldwork on me as the researcher. I frequently struggled with feelings of wanting to do something more meaningful or effective than simply record their views. There was a gap between my commitment to teenagers and what was achievable. I felt ill-prepared for the overwhelming anxiety of doing their views justice and achieving change. This was particularly the case during the writing up stage where I wanted to present everything the teenagers reported, including a greater number of quotes than necessary. I was concerned at the length of time taken to write up and so I began the task of dissemination from an early stage by providing presentations about the research.

My work experience meant that I was accustomed to feeling accountable for others but also provided varied interpersonal skills. Both my personal experiences and the practical skills acquired working with men, women and children helped to identify and manage the experience of others. Undoubtedly this may have led me to frame teenagers' experiences within my own experiential knowledge and so I do not make claims to objectivity. Additionally, perhaps working in the domestic violence sector made me idealistic in my views and expectations of refuges and what could be achieved.

### **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

This research used thematic analysis supported by grounded theory guidelines to include participants' voices and acknowledge subjectivity (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2000). There are several forms of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2002; Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1990) which share commonalities, including grounding the analysis in the research data and conducting analysis alongside data collection. Data collected directs the research process, rather than being driven by existing theory (Willig, 2001). Although Glaser (1992; 2002) argues that reflexivity is not required, as the theory is in the data, Bryant (2003: 1) suggests Glaser's approach 'takes for granted a neutral observer'. A reflexive approach is therefore more consistent with a feminist paradigm.

Constructivist grounded theory is a development (Charmaz, 2000) of the original methodology by Glaser and Straus (1967; 1978). This constructivist

approach acknowledges that data and theory is constructed by the researcher through interactions with participants (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2000). Researcher understandings are a combination of cultural, historical and context specific factors (Burr, 1999; Malin, 2003). Charmaz (2002) suggests that understanding our research is therefore supported by the process of reflexivity to recognise bias and researcher impact on the research process and resultant findings.

The constructivist approach adopts grounded theory guidelines as tools. It does not subscribe to the objectivist, positivist assumptions of earlier formulations, such as seeking generality discovered by a passive, neutral observer through value-free enquiry (Charmaz, 2008; Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001). The constructivist approach contrastingly assumes ‘the relativism of multiple social realities, recognises the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims towards interpretive understanding of subject’s meanings’ (Charmaz, 2003: 250). This aims to offer an interpretive representation not an ‘exact picture’ (Charmaz, 2006: 10), which I considered appropriate for the nature of this research.

Further compatibility with feminist research (Allen, 2011; Keddy et al, 1996; Kushner and Morrow, 2003; Mills et al, 2006) is found in some common epistemological underpinnings (Campbell and Bunting, 1991). For instance, women can be ‘knowers’, with their views of the world influenced by their experience as a legitimate source of knowledge (Reinharz, 1992; Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1983; 2002). This research includes

teenagers' experiences as a source of knowledge. Grounded theory was not specifically established to give voice to women (or teenagers) or facilitate their development of knowledge. The researcher interprets perspectives and voices of participants through theory development (Maynard, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). An interpretative approach is unavoidable to do justice to participants' accounts (Grover, 1981; 2003; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Grounded theory therefore supports the feminist perspective that participants are 'experts' in their own lives with their subjective experience considered valid data (Wuest, 1995).

Qualitative feminist methodology and a grounded theory approach recognise the existence of participants' influence in the research process (Parr, 1998). Parr (1998: 90) describes the strengths of grounded theory as:

'an open-mindedness and willingness to listen, hear and act on the results at all stages of the research process, grounding the analysis in the research data rather than trying to fit the data into a priori framework'

Reflexivity is considered to reduce the tensions between feminist methodology and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008; Hall and Callery, 2001; Wuest, 1995). Acknowledging both participant and researcher subjectivity provides consistency from the epistemological framework to the analysis (Baker et al, 1992; Charmaz, 2008; Gorelick, 1996; Harding, 1987; Parr, 1998).

Constructivist grounded theory overcomes problems reported by Acker et al (1991), who found women's accounts changed over time during repeated

interviews. Accounts in this study were continually compared to identify emerging concepts, with repeat interviews moving the focus from static accounts to the emergent process (Swanson, 1986; Wuest, 1995). This supported the longitudinal nature of this research which gathered further data to check early analyses (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011).

### **Process of Analysis**

Data analysed was largely text. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and entered into NVivo software to organise, code, and analyse the data collected. The process of analysis began early in data collection and continued until final drafts of the findings and discussion chapters were completed. I used Charmaz's (2006) practical guidance and constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to find consistencies and differences. Transcripts were coded into subcategories which were compared across participants and with other subcategories to form core categories (Keddy et al, 1996). I developed preliminary analytic notes (memos) about the codes, comparisons, reflections from fieldwork and individual participants. This process was useful to identify gaps, links and relationships, including similarities and differences. I read and re-read the transcripts throughout in order to fully immerse myself in the data and to identify specific themes. Data was not collated in a statistical format (regarding numbers of people who said what). Attention was given to meaning rather than quantifiable phenomena.

There were no preconceived codes or categories. Coding began by labelling segments of data using what participants had said. Coding was largely

completed alone. A preliminary coding process was undertaken alongside one of my supervisors. The initial themes identified were client status, refuge facilities, gaps, differential response, funding constraints, trust and adolescence. Further themes were developed as interviews continued and data increased. Conversations continued with my supervisory team about these developing codes and themes due to the large amount of data. Early interviews with teenage participants were very open and generated specific themes which could be explored in more depth in subsequent interviews with the same participant and new participants. I was able to refine my ideas and gather additional data to check my codes. The research can be described as using an iterative process to develop themes from simultaneous data generation and analysis (Charmaz, 2008). I met with 17 teenagers on more than one occasion which enabled me to check ongoing understanding and analysis of both their data and the data gathered from the views of other teenagers. This had the added benefit of involving young people in constructing 'voice', as mentioned earlier.

This research involved teenage participants in the analysis process (Coad and Evans, 2008; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Oakley, 1994; Reinhartz, 1992; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). This reflects the study's position that teenagers are experts in their own lives (e.g. Cairns, 2006). Time constraints meant large scale analysis was not possible. However, all teenagers had the opportunity to (re)evaluate and interpret the comments they and/or others made, providing an element of 'respondent validation' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This included discussing their previous transcripts and particular codes as they emerged

(iteration). Teenagers were encouraged to examine my interpretations, challenge misrepresentations, or elaborate further. Repeated interviews inviting participation in interpretation are considered helpful to limit power imbalances and promote voices of participants (Wuest, 1995) with the aim of making analysis more collaborative (Allen, 2011). Providing opportunities to involve young people in data analysis enables them to have a more influential role in the production of knowledge (Larkins, 2016).

Two final sessions took place with three teenagers to analyse the data, one individual and one pair of siblings. These teenagers had participated in interviews and had wanted the research to continue after its planned ending, whilst they remained in the refuge. Offering participation in the formal data analysis process helped to negotiate further involvement in the research. Others were happy for the research to end as planned or had moved out of the refuge by that time. These teenagers were provided with 'in vivo' codes (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) on the more abstract interview topics explored during interviews, e.g. positives and negatives of living in a refuge. Providing anonymised extracts from interviews with other participants broadened the opportunities for young people involved in the data analysis sessions to identify wider patterns (Larkins, 2016). They were encouraged to re-name any codes or themes found.

I provided participants with all the research themes on cards. Cards were organised according to interview topic so that participants could choose the area they thought was most important. There were four topics to choose from: 'what teenagers need'; 'positives and negatives of refuges'; 'ideal member of

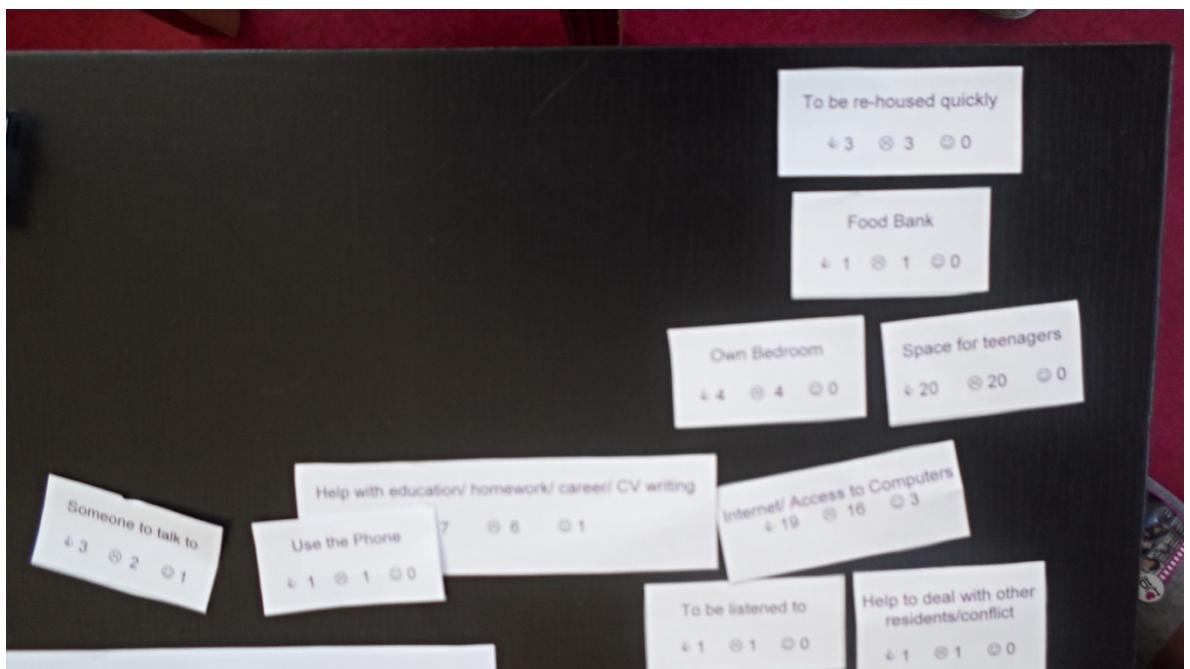
staff'; and 'ideal refuge'. Each topic had its own set of cards. Each card contained the numbers of young people who discussed a particular issue alongside numbers with a positive experience and a negative experience relating to that code. For example, for the topic 'what teenagers need', 20 young people discussed the importance of space and all described a negative experience; 19 teenagers discussed the internet and access to computers; 16 of whom had a negative experience, whereas three provided positive examples, as demonstrated by the image below.

**Image 1: Data analysis cards**

Space for teenagers	Internet/ Access to Computers
👍 20     😞 20     😊 0	👍 19     😞 16     😊 3

Teenage participants grouped these cards according to their own views and those of others (see image 2 below). Where prompted, I provided examples to help them with their decision-making. We explored relationships between codes and teenagers ordered, compared and discussed their rationale for their decisions. The photograph in Image 2 below was taken during their discussions and shows how teenagers organised and re-organised responses.

**Image 2: Data analysis with teenagers**



Teenagers prioritised the data into a pyramid ranking for each topic (Clark, 2005). Whilst I only anticipated detecting the main themes, they used all or almost all codes to create a hierarchy for every interview topic. Their contributions proved invaluable during the writing up stage. The results from both data analysis sessions with teenagers were very similar. Their responses were compared to identify important issues or concerns prioritised in both sessions. The topic concerning 'what teenagers need' was considered the central focus and five major themes were produced. Had time allowed, I would have involved teenagers in the development of the brief summary report. I am mindful that my interpretive account is privileged due to personal situated knowledge, views, and perspectives.

Data gathered from the ratings scales was compared numerically. The biggest obstacle to analysis was lack of consistency as teenagers had not conducted

interviews at the same stage in their refuge stay. Some completed six rating scales; others completed only two due to their length of time in the refuge and/or duration of participation. A further limitation was that not all participants answered all questions as they were not relevant (to them or at that time). Some completed scales relating to their experience of living at home during a final interview outside of the refuge. Analysis of these scales is therefore limited.

It became apparent that some of the themes identified by young people had particular relevance to articles in the UNCRC. Children's rights can be used as research tool, through enabling influence over research processes and applying rights as a lens for analysis. A critical children's rights based approach involves starting from an understanding of children's priorities in their everyday lives, establishing links between children's priorities and rights provisions in the UNCRC and ensuring children have access to adequate resources to enable their activism (Larkins et al, 2015). The research makes no claims to conducting a full child rights based analysis, however, consistencies with the rights of young people will be highlighted, where appropriate. As this was not planned at the outset of the research and there was limited time to address this, it is best described as broadly meeting one of the seven directions provided by Larkins et al (2015): making links with specific rights provisions and principles in order to seek political and social change. This approach is applied to indicate where the recommendations that emerge from the data are clearly related to rights provisions.

In addition to the UNCRC, Goffman's (1961, 1963) conceptualisations of both 'stigma' and the 'total institution' emerged as relevant during the course of analysis. These conceptualisations are helpful to explore teenagers' exclusion from everyday life and their refuge experience, particularly the tensions caused by an emphasis on physical safety, refuge rules and resulting surveillance. Using Goffman's (1961; 1963) work to view teenagers' experiences emphasises that they have limited power to reconstruct the refuge to meet their needs and rights claims. These concepts will be explored in detail in Chapter Six with specific references to the period of adolescence, following two chapters which contextualise the research findings.

### **3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has explored the theoretical underpinnings to this research study, bringing together key elements of feminist research and the sociology of childhood and shared epistemological values include empowering participants and reflexivity. These values influenced the research process, ethics and methods adopted. The methods enabled teenagers and staff to engage with this research. The longitudinal nature of the research contributed to establishing relationships between the researcher and the teenage participants. This chapter has highlighted the challenges of negotiating access to teenagers and the subjectivity within the study, including within analysis.

This chapter suggests that participation rights in research may be compromised by gatekeepers. Underlying some of these issues are common perspectives

positioning children as vulnerable and incompetent, reinforcing a lack of power. Teenagers in this study confirmed the benefits of participation. Gatekeepers' willingness to contribute to research might be enhanced by improved awareness of teenagers' capacities. A better balance between protection and participation is necessary to 'enable children to be heard without exploiting them, protect children without silencing and excluding them, and pursue rigorous inquiry without distressing them' (Alderson and Morrow, 2004: 12). Issues concerning teenagers' perceived vulnerability and a focus on protectionism, rather than empowerment, when they are in refuge settings are also critical themes that emerged from the data analysis. The following chapters present the research findings and subsequent discussion.

# **Chapter Four**

## **Findings Part I: The Experiences of Teenagers Living in Refuges**

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### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This is the first of two chapters presenting the research data. It combines the findings from the interviews with teenagers and staff and explores themes found in both sets of interviews, including difficulties arising from the refuge environment and changes associated with adolescence. It begins by providing an overview of the 20 teenage participants, including demographic information and details concerning their refuge careers. Information relating to staff participants can be found in the preceding chapter.

This chapter then examines staff's and teenagers' conceptions of adolescence. This provides a background to the experiences of teenagers participating in this research. The data reveals a tension between experiences of being treated as competent adults or as vulnerable children, and an ambiguity of status. This links to findings regarding effective ways of working including refuge staff's perceptions of difficulties with engagement and problems of trust. It is relevant at this point to discuss internal resources and external service provision.

The chapter moves to consider the impact of the refuge environment. This encompasses the importance of physical and emotional space within the refuge

and space outside the refuge. This is followed by a discussion relating to new technology and virtual spaces such as the use of social media. At this point findings are presented concerning refuge rules and the emphasis on safety. Consideration is given to the implications of the above findings and teenagers' ability to cope with their experiences of living in a refuge. This includes a discussion on the impact of living in a refuge on their privacy and independence. Substantial attention is given to the impact of moving to a refuge on teenagers' education. This includes findings regarding the problems of changing schools, including school absences and the limited support in accessing and continuing education.

## **4.2 TEENAGE PARTICIPANTS**

Table 4.1 provides details about the 20 teenage participants who are identified using pseudonyms they chose themselves. It should be noted that three female participants chose pseudonyms traditionally considered as male names. The numbers of refuges or supported accommodation settings teenagers resided in consecutively in the two previous years are included. Just over half of participants had lived in two or more refuges or alternative temporary accommodation prior to entering their current refuge. One teenager had resided in foster care before entering the refuge with her family.

In order to maintain a focus on recent and current experiences, my research primarily concerns teenagers' experience of their current refuge (where I interviewed them). Table 4.1 shows the length of time teenagers had already

resided in the refuge at our first interview and the total length of time spent in that particular refuge. For some, this was calculated after the data collection period had ended by contacting refuges, as teenagers remained in the refuge some months afterwards. The total length of stay varies between teenagers but overall it can be considered to be a significant length of time in their lives. The table identifies that one quarter of participants stayed in a refuge for over 12 months, more than the standard length of stay reported in anecdotal evidence (see Chapter Three) and research (Quiggars and Pleace, 2010). Eleven teenagers had stayed in more than one refuge or other form of supported accommodation. Consequently, the total length of time spent in the refuge where they were interviewed does not reflect the full extent of time spent living in temporary accommodation. One teenager interviewed in her current refuge at the start of her stay (1 to 3 months after entering the refuge) had already been living in refuges for approximately two years.

Some teenagers had moved significant distances; six were over 50 miles from their home. Two teenagers had moved over 200 miles from home. In contrast, six were ten miles or less from their home. The difficulties posed by their length of stay, distance from home and the restrictions of a refuge stay are important factors when considering teenagers' experiences and their status as adolescents. These issues are discussed in depth below.

**Table 4.1** Participant Information

Participant (self-selected pseudonym)	Age Range	Gender	Number of refuges or supported accommodation consecutively in last 2 years (excluding previous refuge stays)	Length of time in current refuge at first interview (months)	Distance moved from home (miles)	Total length of time in current refuge (months)
Aamir	13-15	M	3	1-3	50-100	4-6
Amy	16-18	F	1	1-3	>200	10-12
Bob	13-15	F	2	1-3	<10	1-3
Bob Marley	13-15	M	2	1-3	<10	4-6
Daisy	16-18	F	1	7-9	<10	13-15
Eliza	16-18	F	1	13-15	100-150	13-15
Emma	16-18	F	3	1-3	30-50	4-6
Georgia	16-18	F	2	1-3	10-30	4-6
Harry	16-18	M	1	4-6	<10	4-6
James	13-15	M	3	4-6	>200	4-6
Jordan	13-15	M	3	1-3	30-50	4-6
Lulu	13-15	F	2	1-3	<10	7-9
Mohammed	13-15	F	1	7-9	100-150	13-15
Mohammed (pilot)	13-15	F	1	1-3	<10	7-9
Molly	16-18	F	2	1-3	10-30	4-6
Rebecca	13-15	F	2	1-3	30-50	4-6
Ruby	16-18	F	1	1-3	10-30	4-6
Scarlet	16-18	F	1	4-6	10-30	10-12
Sophie	13-15	F	1	13-15	100-150	13-15
Zoe	13-15	F	2	4-6	10-30	13-15

### **4.3 CONCEPTIONS OF ADOLESCENCE**

This section explores the significance of conceptions of adolescence to participants' experience of refuges and relationships between teenagers and adults. Responses to the Refuge Life Rating Scale were converted into numbers with the number one being used as the lowest score for responses such as 'not at all' when discussing sleep or 'never' when asked about concentrating on homework. Question two was reverse scored. Qualitative analysis of the 'Refuge Life Rating Scale' responses comparing age found that older teenagers from the age of 15 had much lower scores overall compared to younger teenagers. Generally, as age increased, refuge life was experienced as more difficult, with the exception of one 13 year old who had a very low score and a 17 year old who had a higher score. There were no comparable patterns for ethnicity, and the number of male participants was too small. Owing to this small sample, findings cannot be generalised to the wider refuge population. However, analysis reveals the matter of age is most significant to these teenagers and this was supported by the interview findings.

Analysis of the data reveals contradictory messages from adults regarding teenagers' status as mature or immature, competent or incompetent, vulnerable or independent. This was seen in the way staff talked about teenagers and language used will be discussed later in the chapter. For example, the term 'child' was used at times to refer to a 16 year old, even though the worker was aware that teenagers may not appreciate this:

'...there is a big gap with children...everybody is recognising that children are the hidden victims and alright a 16 year old might not like me

calling them a child but.... I think there is a big gap to working with vulnerable children ...' (S8)

The quote above also shows how the term children might be associated with ideas of vulnerability and victim status when children had experienced domestic violence. Interestingly, independent teenagers were not referred to as 'children', reflecting perhaps workers' conception that being a child is related to being dependent. These tensions between conceptions of teenagers as near independent adults and as vulnerable children run throughout the findings.

Teenagers described staff seeing them as sometimes competent to take on certain responsibilities, but incompetent to take on others. The distinction between which responsibilities they were seen as capable of appeared arbitrary to the teenagers. As will be explored in this chapter, there were contradictions between different adults about the tasks or responsibilities teenagers were seen as capable of:

'...when we do have an older child in, then almost it's like the other people within the setting think 'oh well it's a babysitter on site'... this adult attitude of 'oh well because you're an adolescent'...when they're in the playground the parents are supposed to be there and the get out clause to the parents is 'well he's 14 you know he's looking after them' and you're like 'NO he's a 14 year old'... (S9)

The quotes above show that at times refuge staff sometimes use ideas of age or ideas of relationship to parent as a distinction between teenagers and adults. There is a consistent idea of vulnerability that is related to their experience of domestic violence as well as an idea of competence in some things but not others. This appears to be related only to age and ideas of what a 'child' is and

what appropriate responsibilities are. There is less understanding from staff of teenagers as individuals with particular competencies and skills that relate to the resources and environments that they are in. It may be more important for staff to understand an individual's own capabilities, interests and needs rather than trying to achieve consistency according to age. The discussion in this chapter will explore moments where that situated understanding of competence could be useful.

In the following example, one staff member describes the need for an age-appropriate appreciation of teenagers' developmental needs and lifestyle:

'...as adults you forget that perhaps their thinking is different... they might not always understand what it is we are asking... We might not understand where they are coming from... things that we think about sometimes aren't the things that they're bothered about... that can change from one minute to the next, they might tell you something one day and then two days later something completely different has upset them and that's the end of the world...' (S16)

Here the emphasis is on communication and being responsive, recognising the way in which teenagers' emotions can change rapidly over a very short period of time and how their day-to-day needs differ to that of adults. However, there is also an indication of teenagers' incompetence and non-adult status and assumptions being made about teenagers as a group, rather than individuals. This example reflects a dominant conception of adolescence as a time of storm and stress.

## **From Vulnerability to Competence**

Adolescence as both a social and biological construct (Hendry and Kloep, 2012; Kaplan, 2004) involves considerable adjustment (see Chapter One). Teenagers acknowledged the potential difficulties for staff working with their age group due to adolescence being a period of transition and they recognised that this could cause problems: ‘It’s hard to explain. Like, teenagers are the worst... you’re at that age now where you’re starting high school... you become a young adult and stuff’ (Rebecca).

The period of adolescence and the difficulties this could present in terms of support were described by 14 of the 25 staff interviewed:

‘...they’re not a child but are just not quite an adult...it’s a very difficult step between caring for them and supporting them as a child but then also giving them what they need and the support they need as an adult...’ (S11)

‘...you’ve got to understand that young people are grown-ups in waiting and treat them as such and not treat them like children...’ (S12)

Here staff highlight the careful negotiation between childhood and adulthood and describe the transition from a focus on care to competence, situating teenagers as ‘active agents’ in their own lives (Lansdown, 2005). As discussed in relation to different areas of teenagers’ experience later in this chapter, staff rarely recognised that young people needed to be treated as adults at times. There was a failure to recognise that teenagers in refuges are entitled to *progressively* exercise their rights on their own behalf in accordance with their ‘evolving capacities’ and that it is through exercising their rights with appropriate guidance that children’s capacity grows (UN Committee, 2009).

Staff also saw teenagers as vulnerable and were frustrated that external agencies failed to do likewise:

'...there's a lot of misconceptions sometimes, especially the more boisterous teenagers, that they're not vulnerable, they can be mouthy or they can be cocky so they know what they're doing...they are vulnerable...' (S11)

'...social care will then close the case because they then see it as, 'well they're in a place of safety'...see them as almost like an adult when really they're still a vulnerable child...child protection stuff should carry on until they are 18 and it doesn't... they've got added vulnerability when they get to refuge because they're isolated...' (S9)

Refuge staff perceived teenagers as children but reported that children's social services saw them as adults. Here refuge staff frame their arguments by reinforcing notions of vulnerability and the need adult protection, which conveys conceptions of 'not yet' adulthood. They are also seen as vulnerable due to their experiences of domestic violence and of living in a refuge. However these ideas of vulnerability, which could be useful in accessing services, are resisted by children's social services staff.

Teenagers were adamant that they should not be defined as vulnerable: 'No, not vulnerable, I hate that word...Emotional, not vulnerable' (Georgia). Georgia is resisting being forced into a powerless position which might risk infantilising her, treating her as immature or reinforcing notions of incompetence or victimisation. Teenagers stressed that they were not victims despite their experiences, highlighting the negative connotations tensions surrounding victimhood. When considering the data it was useful to consider factors that might contribute to protection or vulnerability on a continuum whereby the

significance of different risks could vary over time for different individuals in different places. For example, physical risk was seen as paramount by workers, and the significance they placed on this risk remained high, whereas for teenagers, the significance of this risk diminished over time and might be replaced by other risks such as losing friends or moving schools. While it may at times be necessary for education to take second place to immediate safety, this demonstrates the difference in priorities between young people and refuge staff. Although the original purpose of refuges was to provide a place of physical safety, they have broadened their remit to address the wider welfare of women and children and refuge staff need to be prepared to address any conflicts that may arise between safety and young people's developmental needs.

Boys could sometimes be perceived as less vulnerable than girls. This was evidenced by some refuge admission policies regarding teenage boys. Some staff were unsure why there was an age limit for boys. Other staff were certain it was because of relationships with other teenage girls, fears of violence and their similarity to adult men. Appendix Seventeen provides details of refuges operating age restrictions for teenage boys. Interestingly, some refuges had recently changed their policies and now made decisions about their admission on an individual basis:

'... it used to be up to the 16<sup>th</sup> birthday which is kind of standard for a lot of refuges. But then we had a referral come in, a lady who had a 17-year old son and wanted him to come with her... we reviewed our policy so now any male child that was over 16, we would review on a case by case basis and we wouldn't automatically decline them... it's worked really well.' (S23)

This suggests that not all refuges accept as inevitable the notion that young people who have experienced domestic violence will perpetrate abuse in adult relationships and acknowledge the difficulty women have in accessing space with their teenage sons. Nevertheless, refuges are required to provide a place of physical safety to other residents and may not have the resources to manage or address aggressive behaviour from some teenage boys.

## **4.4 EFFECTIVE WORKING**

This section presents findings concerning staff and young people's conceptions of effective work with teenagers in refuges. Analysis of the data revealed themes concerning young people's reluctance to engage with staff, the importance of trust and the nature of the provision available for teenagers.

### **Engagement**

Teenagers' reluctance to engage was reported by eight staff, particularly in comparison to younger children, who were considered to adapt more easily to refuge life. This was attributed to teenagers' isolation, being removed from their support networks, their increased awareness of domestic violence and a lack of previous intervention. It was also considered to be a feature of adolescence itself:

‘...it’s just a normal teenage thing... Some access it well and some are like, you know, how can I put it? Kevin and Perry<sup>11</sup> type thing, it’s just

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<sup>11</sup> Kevin and Perry are teenage characters from sketches of a television programme ‘Harry Enfield and Chums’.

that, but we don't do anything different for them we just try and encourage them...' (S5)

'...they don't want any intervention... anybody to be involved... They don't want to talk about what's gone on... want to deal with it themselves and protect their mum and I suppose, just attitudes of teenagers that they can do it their self...' (S6)

The quotes above suggest teenagers may be seen as difficult to work with based on their age and developmental stage and that refuge staff may make assumptions about teenagers wanting to work everything out by themselves.

Three staff members suggested that a specific youth worker or a younger member of staff might help to overcome some of these barriers. I noted that staff often used the term 'children' to describe teenagers or used language aimed at younger children in their interviews (e.g. 'big school') which demonstrated their orientation to working with younger children rather than teenagers. Concerns regarding engagement may have had as much to do with staff competence or confidence in working with teenagers as with adolescent development.

None of the teenage participants felt they were treated positively because of their age or developmental stage. From their perspective, a reluctance to engage was often related to staff attitudes, a lack of age-appropriate facilities, trips or activities, and inadequate support. The attitudes of staff as perceived by teenagers will be discussed next.

### **Staff Attitudes**

Teenage participants reported that some staff held negative views of teenagers which contributed to their reluctance to engage. These feelings were reinforced when staff failed to take young people's concerns seriously or teenagers perceived themselves to have been labelled as difficult due to their age. Teenagers presented examples of being ignored or made to feel inferior when trying to communicate with staff:

'...when I say my point of view, she goes over my voice. So, she ignores it like I don't have a right to speak...' (Jordan)

'They don't let you say your feelings. They'll just basically cut you off... I literally had to shout at her because she just wouldn't listen.' (Mohammed)

These teenagers were trying to assert themselves by demonstrating their capacity to communicate their problems and emotions and that they were not subordinate to adults. The examples above convey their sense of not having a voice that is listened to. There is a contrast between trying to obtain respect and status through competently communicating their views and their experience of not being listened to.

### **Trust**

Difficulties in establishing trust when working with teenagers were raised by 13 staff. They attributed this to teenagers' awareness of domestic violence and abuse compared to younger children. Engagement difficulties may be related to diminished trust or reliance on adults because teenagers have taken responsibility for themselves (and others) previously (Cleaver et al, 2011; Gorin,

2004; McGee, 2000), rather than simply being a characteristic of their developmental stage.

Teenagers emphasised that in order to trust staff they needed time to get to know them; staff needed to be available, reliable, and understand the importance of confidentiality:

'...show that they can trust you...whatever had been said in this room stays in this room so they know you won't tell anyone else... I don't think anyone should know anyone's business unless it is necessary...' (Daisy)

Staff were concerned that established trust could be interrupted when young people moved on from the refuge due to a lack of follow-on support. Eight staff suggested further community work was needed to support teenagers, including work in schools. Staff described additional difficulties to establishing trust where children's social services were involved due to additional monitoring or reporting, teenagers witnessing other children being removed, and their general fears or distrust of statutory involvement. This was confirmed by teenage participants.

### **Internal Resources**

Refuge staff (n=17) described funding and organisational instability as major obstacles to working successfully with teenagers while they were in refuges and afterwards. This concerned shortfalls in funding for staff posts, facilities and resources within refuges, and other external services which could provide additional support for teenagers. During the research, a number of Children's Worker posts had been lost or incorporated into adult support worker roles and

the national Women's Aid post Children and Young People Officer ceased to exist. For independent teenagers, additional obstacles included the uncertainty of funding for refuge spaces, issues of parental responsibility and rehousing.

### **External Service Provision**

Staff described further obstacles when working with external agencies. A lack of external support for teenagers compared to younger children was identified by 15 staff, particularly in respect of support from children's social services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). An absence of counselling services was cited (n=3), as were concerns that voluntary sector expertise was not always recognised. When asked why staff considered there to be an absence of support for this age group, one manager reported that perceptions of risk-taking among adolescents could result in negative stereotypes and subsequent decisions about capacity:

'By the time females get to 16, if they've had a pregnancy or an abortion or something like that, they're treated like adults by social care when they shouldn't be. They're still children... there's a perception sometimes in my experience by some professionals, not all, that by that time they're a lost cause so... let's not put resources in at that age...' (S9)

In this example, the specific shortfall in provision is linked to a failure to conceive adolescence as a time of transition to becoming an adult. Issues relating to service provision and support will be explored in detail in the following chapters.

## **4.5 THE IMPACT OF THE REFUGE ENVIRONMENT**

This section examines the significance of physical and emotional space. The following analysis will encompass privacy, the absence of facilities, usefulness of such spaces, and access in or around the refuge. Having discussed this, the section will consider space outside refuges in the form of refuge trips and activities and external provision within the community.

### **Physical Space Inside Refuges**

The need for space was identified as a priority. Teenage participants described a lack of facilities and made recommendations for how space could be made available and teenage-appropriate. They identified the importance of space inside the refuge as it contributed to facilitating the emotional space needed to cope with both experiences of domestic violence and moving to a refuge. Previous research in shared or communal refuges has also highlighted a lack of physical space as an issue (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003; Hague et al, 1996). The findings of the present study reveal that the absence of space, or restricted access to space, is a significant issue for teenagers accommodated in self-contained refuge facilities.

All refuges visited had a children's playroom. Teenagers described, and I frequently observed, that the furniture, games, toys, books, decoration and outdoor facilities were intended for much younger children (usually primary school-aged children). Aamir confirmed there had not been a space for young people in the three refuges he had stayed in: '...in the refuges I've been, there's

not teenage-friendly space...' Having a specific space for teenagers was raised by every teenage participant ( $n=20$ ), 16 of whom lived in self-contained accommodation.

The unsuitability of existing communal facilities (e.g. lounge, playroom) was raised by 11 staff participating in the research, with lack of space identified as problematic. One refuge offered an office space during the evenings, but this was provided on an individual basis, according to the teenager's behaviour. Another refuge converted their playroom into a youth club once a week. Three refuges reported that they had rooms for teenagers but no teenage participants were recruited from these sites; therefore teenagers' views on this provision could not be included. Teenage participants who had accessed such spaces in previous refuges rated them highly. Such examples of dedicated provision for teenagers are not easily replicated due to restrictions imposed by the size, nature and age of refuge accommodation.

Teenagers provided examples of what should be incorporated into such spaces, including educational books, computers, games consoles, board games, sports equipment, and furniture. They made the stipulation that facilities needed to be age-appropriate. Four teenagers had previously resided in refuges elsewhere that did have a specific space dedicated to teenagers. They reflected on this in their interviews and made comparisons when talking about their current refuge. Less favourable facilities than previous refuges were considered to be another loss. This had greater impact where teenagers experienced an absence of

separate facilities generally and were also required to share a room with their family.

Teenage participants thought that access to communal space would be useful for completing homework and revision, a place to 'chill out' and provide an opportunity to meet others the same age. In two refuges, participants had initially been unaware of other teenage residents owing to the absence of facilities or activities to assist meeting one another. It was emphasised repeatedly that the space should be restricted to teenagers in order to provide opportunities to spend time away from family members in the refuge, particularly younger siblings:

'I don't have space other than with my mum and my sister. I just go to college but I don't really go out because we're not allowed...' (Amy)

'...when I'm arguing with my sister as well, it's horrible... can't go nowhere to get away from her for a bit... every time we argue, it just gets worse and worse because we're sat together...' (Rebecca)

Playrooms were frequently locked unless a member of staff was present. Only one teenager reported accessing the playroom unsupervised. When talking about an ideal refuge space, Georgia raised accessibility as an issue and highlighted her need for a break from her family:

'...it should be like an all-around access thing...no matter what time it is. If a child needs a break, they need a break. Even if it is stupid o'clock in the morning or... nine or ten o'clock at night...'

This leads to consideration of teenagers needing emotional space when living in a refuge.

## **Emotional Space Inside Refuges**

The need to have their own physical space was associated with teenagers' need for an emotional space to cope with domestic violence and to gather their thoughts:

'Something to do, to get your mind off things... if you're a teenager like me, when you're at that age and you see all that, it just ruins your life a little bit because it does hurt you... [I'd expect] to come places where you can go and clear your head... sit on my own and do that...' (Rebecca)

'It should have comfy sofas and internet access. Just for girls who want to come and get away from problems...' (Molly)

These examples highlight the need for teenagers to have a comfortable space where they feel safe. Independent teenagers had their own room which provided an opportunity to process what had happened. This was not always through choice, and could be because there was nowhere else they could go: '...you think things about why you've gone through what you've gone through. I'm bad for thinking...I will just sit, lay in my bed and just think about things...' (Ruby). In contrast to the above participants, Ruby was unable to separate herself from her experiences of domestic violence because she was deeply implicated in it. Dependent teenagers seemed to equate space of their own with an ability to separate from the family, and so from the experience of domestic violence, which could be located in the family rather than in them. Normally, adolescence provides opportunities for greater separation from parents (Coleman, 2011), but such opportunities were not available for those living in refuges.

## **Privacy**

Moving to a refuge negatively impacted on feelings of privacy. Teenagers require boundaries separating them from their family. Earlier research has generally discussed privacy in terms of needing alternatives to communal facilities (Hague et al, 1996). However, teenagers living in self-contained facilities described how their privacy had been affected by moving. The reasons for this included sharing a bedroom with their siblings, and sometimes mothers, and surveillance by refuge staff. Towards the end of the study, seven teenagers helped to devise and completed a new privacy rating scale within the 'Important Areas in my Refuge Journey' Scale (see Appendix Fifteen).

**Table 4.2 Measuring Privacy**

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Before Refuge</b>	<b>At 4 to 6 Months in Refuge</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Amy	8	3	- 5
Emma	5	3	-2
Georgia	9	1	-8
Jordan	2	10	+8
Lulu	10	9 (< 2 months)	-1
Mohammed	10	3	-7
Zoe	10	1	-9

The table above shows that six of the seven teenagers completing this scale found that living in a refuge had a negative impact on their privacy, although Lulu had only been in the refuge a matter of weeks at completion. Conversely, Jordan reported he had much more privacy since he had experienced strict surveillance from his father and extended family when at home. He also had

his own bedroom in the refuge in comparison to other participants, underlining the importance of space.

### ***Sharing a Bedroom***

Over half of participants highlighted sharing a bedroom as a practical issue resulting in little privacy (n=11). Most teenagers had much younger siblings residing with them (n=15). This meant that they had to share a room, something they had not necessarily had to do at home, which led to feelings of stress. For example, one 16 year old was sharing a bedroom with siblings aged one and five. The following quotes illustrate the problems teenagers encountered:

'I just want to get in a house, just get my own space, my own privacy. There's not enough... if I do my coursework in [our] room the little kids are going to walk in every ten seconds... I'm not concentrating...' (Emma)

'She wakes up loads of times during the night. Last night, she was messing about with the torch at 4:00am....up at 7.30am... tapping me in the face, 'wake up!' So, I'm waking up really early even on a weekend...' (Georgia)

The problem of teenagers not having their own bedroom was raised by six staff interviewed. The connection between physical and emotional space was also recognised by staff: 'they don't always get their own rooms...I think they find that difficult as well, that they don't always get the head space they need' (S15). Five teenagers had to share a bedroom with their mothers. Four teenagers were not living in self-contained facilities, with one family of four sharing one room for over six months. Teenagers also reported an inability to express themselves by way of personalising their own space; they were unable to decorate their bedrooms or put posters up for example.

### ***Privacy from Staff Intrusion***

Not only did teenagers require privacy or boundaries separating them from their family, they also resented the intrusion of refuge staff into their lives:

'If I go a mate's house as soon as I come back, the staff would be like, "So where have you been?" I've got a curfew and all that. It's like I'm not having a life at all...' (Georgia)

'It's none of their business... It's my life... I just don't want the people in the office knowing about my business...' (Scarlet)

One teenager was so anxious about staff overhearing our interviews that she regularly checked staff whereabouts, closed windows, and spoke in a whisper. She asked if staff would be secretly recording our conversations and feared this happened in her refuge flat via the telephone intercom. This was attributable to surveillance cameras inside the refuge and staff comments about residents:

'I always get a bit paranoid... always this camera on top of you. You're always aware... Even outside in the garden...24 hours...everywhere... There's nothing you can do that they wouldn't know about and there's nowhere we can go where they wouldn't know about... makes me feel like it's a prison than a home... not such a healthy environment for people who have been here so long...' (Mohammed)

Feeling 'imprisoned' or 'trapped' was mentioned by eight other teenagers, in connection with refuge rules and security measures. This theme relates to the absence of space but also to limited independence or freedom, which will be discussed below.

## **Access In and Around the Refuge**

The lack of access to the refuge itself or family spaces, such as their room or flat, was also a significant difficulty. In contrast to life at home, eight teenagers highlighted the problem of not being provided with their own keys. There were additional difficulties where teenagers had moved refuges and had had their own key in a previous refuge. Three teenagers (including one who was accommodated independently) did have their own refuge keys and this was regarded positively:

‘The only thing they have helped me with is giving me my own set of keys to get in and out of the refuge. It’s good because I didn’t have to rely on my mum... I feel older because I’ve got my own keys.’ (James)

Those who did not have their own keys described waiting outside or inside refuge buildings until their mothers returned home, particularly where staff were not always available in reception or entrance areas: ‘...I came home from school, I didn’t have my phone with me. I tried knocking on staff doors and they didn’t answer for half an hour... It’s that hard...’ (Emma). Jordan explained that, after school, he had to meet his mother at his younger siblings’ school and return to the refuge together, ‘...we’d rather they just give us keys. What’s the worst we’re going to do? Go and lose it? Of course, we’re old enough to have a key...’ In this example, Jordan directly connects increased age with increased responsibility and independence. Teenagers explained that having only one set of keys meant that they and their mother had to go out together as they needed to return together. Dependent teenagers were not permitted to stay in the refuge alone. This theme of increased dependency will be returned to later in the chapter.

Some teenagers appeared to be receiving conflicting messages about the levels of responsibility they could assume. On the one hand, they were told that they were unable to stay in the refuge by themselves or were not allowed in their flats unsupervised. At other times, they were allowed to look after siblings whilst their mother collected other siblings from school for example. There was a lack of consistency concerning rules both between and within refuges owing to type of accommodation, levels of staffing, and security available.

### ***Communal Areas***

Teenagers were rarely able to access communal areas, such as the lounge, without parental supervision. Such rules meant that some young people had to wait on the stairs after school until their mothers returned from collecting younger siblings. Mohammed reported an exchange with staff where she was completing her homework in the communal lounge and was informed that she was unable to do so:

‘...I said, “Wow, but I'm 14, you know. I can take care of myself.”... Can you imagine, just there doing your stuff and then the next minute just being told to get out because you're not allowed, because apparently you're a child?’

Mohammed highlights that refuge rules are not necessarily compatible with the requirements of teenagers and overlook their need for varying forms of independence according to age and maturity. Teenagers perceive themselves as responsible but adults do not.

It was unclear whether staff saw teenagers' being on their own in public (refuge) spaces as 'at risk' or posing 'a risk' to others. Stereotypical views of adolescence appeared to play a role here. One staff member explained that the refuge accommodated older teenagers, including males, providing they engaged in education as 'communal living is not well suited to a teenager laying about on the sofa all day' (S3). Another explained that the use of workspaces was dependent on the individual young person: 'If they trash things no, if they don't trash things – yes' (S2). The position of adolescence is used here to allocate the use of space at different times. The equity of using age as a criteria by which access to space is allowed or denied is unquestioned by these workers; exclusion on the basis of teenage status is simply seen as justified, a consequence of their non-adult status. Rather than gaining access to space by demonstrating competence or responsibility, what counts as evidence of maturity in one area (e.g. translation, caring for siblings) does not translate as maturity to access communal spaces. This reinforces the notion that public refuge spaces are associated with adulthood even though children and teenagers also inhabit refuges.

### ***Adult Residents' Perceptions of Teenagers***

Perceptions of adolescence by staff and older residents were also important when considering the use of space. Staff provided examples where other residents had highlighted both the difficulties and advantages of sharing refuge spaces with teenagers, illustrated below:

'...sometimes the older residents take them under their wing a little bit and sometimes they maybe get a little fed up...not used to having teenagers in their living space... Everyone has got different ideas of how the house is run...things like cleaning can be an issue...' (S16)

Ruby reported encountering negative perceptions from older female residents which were associated with her age:

'...people here are a lot older...she said teenagers shouldn't be in a refuge. But obviously it doesn't matter what age you are, you go through abuse, don't you? ...she's 36-year-old... I just thought what, I'm a kid compared to you...she hasn't got a clue why I am in here... [She said] I shouldn't be in here...' (Ruby)

Ruby highlights the lack of status afforded to her by older residents who do not perceive her as having a right to belong in the refuge. Instead refuges are places associated with adulthood or adult relationships. There is a failure to recognise or take her experiences seriously. Ruby appeared ill-equipped to deal with the intense emotions of other residents and she experienced conflict with other adult residents in the refuge due to a combination of her age, maturity and experiences of domestic violence.

### **Space Outside Refuges**

The question of space included opportunities for being out of the refuge, and 13 teenage participants talked about the need for trips or activities. Ten teenagers thought it should be the task of a specific worker to organise trips and activities. Four members of staff highlighted an inability to organise trips outside the refuge and saw this as a significant gap for teenagers. Only four teenagers reported opportunities to attend trips. They wanted more of these experiences

due to being in an unfamiliar area, away from friends, or having limited financial resources to organise such activities themselves. They explained that trips helped with feelings of being trapped, increased their confidence, improved teamwork, and enabled them to spend time with others with similar experiences: ‘...built my confidence up really, took me on trips, and done what I’ve never done before...’ (Bob Marley).

### ***External Provision***

Accessing groups outside the refuge may increase opportunities to build confidence, develop social skills and share experiences. Two teenagers had been linked to external groups in the form of a youth club. They reported this as positive as they had learned new skills, made friends and attended trips. Other teenagers explained that they were unsure if they were allowed to attend outside activities. They described being restricted by refuge rules, uncertainty as to what was available, or needing to stay in the refuge to help look after younger siblings. Nine teenagers thought it would be useful if refuges offered external activities or connected them to external groups, such as a football club. Suggestions mainly concerned sports based activities. Whilst this would be beneficial in providing exercise and participation, they felt it would also alleviate boredom. Providing a space outside of the refuge was considered useful to ‘take your mind off things that you don’t want to think about’ (Zoe); again physical space is valued as a means of offering emotional space. James suggested that outside activity would have the added benefit of providing his mum with some space. However, two teenagers had reservations about attending such activities. They were anxious or ambivalent about meeting new

people: 'I wouldn't like that. I would, but then I wouldn't because I wouldn't know anyone' (Emma). This potential reluctance was raised by three members of staff. The readiness of staff to accept this reluctance may be determined by the ease with which such activities can be offered and accessed.

In comparison, four staff members reported links with their local communities to meet teenagers' needs. One member of staff stated these links '...stop a bit of the boredom, much as you try, you can't keep just doing things from here. They need outside things...' (S21). Other staff noted that funding restrictions imposed constraints as very often activities required regular attendance fees: '...we used to be able to take them out to clubs, art clubs and dancing clubs, but we have got no money... with all the funding cuts...' (S14).

## **4.6 TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNET ACCESS**

Digital technology has become increasingly widespread, but it is of particular relevance to teenagers, as noted by Aamir: '...when you're a teenager, you expect the internet...' Use of computers and the internet is a key feature of the social, leisure and educational aspects of adolescents' lives (Coleman, 2011; Livingstone et al, 2014). Moving to a refuge can cause serious disruption to this.

In the pilot stage of this research, teenagers suggested including questions on access to the internet and use of computers in the worksheets completed by

teenagers. Nineteen teenage participants said they needed access to computers and the internet. Data analysis identified access to computers and the internet as the second most important priority for 'what teenagers need', with increased space as the first priority. Computers and internet access were important for three reasons: completion of homework/revision, maintaining contact with family and friends, and entertainment, such as gaming or music.

Only three participants noted that they had sufficient access to the internet and computers, although they commented on restricted accessibility pertaining to time and content. Obstacles for all teenagers included an inadequate number of computers available: sometimes there was a single computer for the whole refuge or computers were permanently in disrepair. This highlights the limited resources refuges can draw on to address these issues. Where participants had personal laptops they were unable to access the internet as Wi-Fi did not extend across the refuge and purchasing temporary data packages was costly. All five teenagers interviewed at home had obtained internet access once rehoused, reinforcing the disparity between home and refuge life.

When completing the homework section of the 'Refuge Life Rating Scale', those reporting difficulties often attributed this to a lack of computer and/or internet access, with this being worse than before moving to refuges (n=9). Two participants who had not attended school prior to entering the refuge also commented on the lack of computer and internet facilities to complete homework once enrolled. They also explained that the internet was useful for

translation purposes. Independent teenagers wanted to use the internet to locate college courses and information about children's centres.

Frequently teenagers reported that restrictions on the range of internet sites on shared computers meant there was little they could access. Teenagers appeared to be treated as vulnerable; justifications for such restrictions centred on safety concerns related to their age rather than their circumstances. None of the teenagers had knowledge of the Women's Aid online support site 'The Hideout' or any other potential sources of online support. When discussing the possibility of this form of support, Bob explained that internet access was heavily restricted: 'That's probably banned on our computer... Most stuff is banned'.

Access to social media was particularly important to teenagers located in new areas for maintaining contact with friends and family: '...they try and make you get rid of Facebook but I said to them I'm not getting rid of Facebook. No. Not a chance.... That's how I keep in touch with my friends....' (Georgia). Other forms of social media accessible on mobile phones also required Wi-Fi. Aamir directly referred to a previous refuge which provided Wi-Fi and he emphasised the importance of this. Refuge restrictions on internet access lacked consistency. Participants were unclear why restrictions had been imposed when they could still access sites using mobile phones, although this proved costly and there were often problems in obtaining reception. It may be that the technological pace of change has been too fast for refuge staff to continually

implement adequate policies to address safe internet use, particularly as it is likely to be out of their realm of expertise. It may be easier, in the current climate of limited resources, to attempt to restrict usage, specifically with regards to refuge equipment for which they are responsible.

### **Online Safety**

Participants demonstrated good understandings of online safety. In the example below, Emma explains her awareness that people online are not always who they say they are:

'... I don't know if I add someone that's [not] my dad and my brother [or someone they know pretending to be someone else].... with fake names. So I don't have Facebook. I have [other social media]...but I have to be careful on it.'

Emma removed her Facebook profile due to her own fears about her father using it to find them but used other social media sites or applications she thought he was unlikely to be aware of. Others distinguished safety precautions such as using privacy controls and monitoring their own posts. None of the teenagers reported receiving advice about using the internet safely and this was not raised in staff interviews. Staff may not understand the importance of teenagers accessing technology but there may also be a belief that imposed restrictions automatically increases safety, inevitably reducing the need to discuss online safety and minimising potential risks. This is not necessarily compatible with the needs of teenagers and overlooks their abilities to develop their own strategies to keep themselves safe.

In one example, a teenager used an iPad to complete her homework; afterwards she took a ‘selfie’ (photograph of herself) which resulted in her no longer being allowed to use the device. She explained that she had been reprimanded and had felt unable to explain her account of what happened:

‘...apparently, they gave me trust and basically that trust is broken. I don’t understand. I haven’t been to any inappropriate sites. I didn’t even use the internet...I was bored... [Staff] said, ‘If you have been taking photos, we don’t know what else you’ve been doing’...I don’t get it.’  
(Female, aged 13-15)<sup>12</sup>

Here she highlights her lack of status and the absence of trust. Whilst this may reflect the circumstances of heightened safety in which practitioners are operating, there was no explanation offered. One teenager noted the inconsistency between her own perception of her maturity and that of staff. Due to the refuge computer being broken for over four months, Mohammed was advised that she could use a staff computer for 30 minutes with supervision:

‘I don’t feel comfortable... I’m mature enough. I’m responsible enough. I’ve lived here for a year... I should at least have that trust from them, which I don’t...’

Such restrictions became more significant with time. Mohammed explained the situation had made her so angry she preferred not to use the computer at all. She needed more time to complete her homework and commented that staff did not care about her, or understand the importance of her schoolwork, due to the time taken to repair the computer. There was no justification of technological boundaries such as access to staff files on computers which may have contributed to their rationale. She remarked that if staff were concerned about

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<sup>12</sup> Her pseudonym has not been provided to protect anonymity.

her then they would have made it a priority, and described feeling shocked, angry and frustrated. Situations such as this impeded teenagers' ability to complete homework and affected their relationships with staff.

## **4.7 REFUGE RULES**

Difficulties with refuge rules were raised consistently by the young people. None of the dependent teenagers had received a handbook or any information upon their arrival which explained the rules of the refuge, although some thought their mother had been given one. Teenagers felt that new rules were introduced throughout their stay. Nine teenagers reported that they had never had the rules explained to them, they only found out about them once they had been broken, resulting in fears about eviction and subsequent homelessness. Teenagers said they expected to be told about rules shortly after arriving at the refuge. They described their mothers as seeming to know more about the rules from handbooks and residents meetings. These examples signify a lack of focus on teenagers during the admission process.

Curfew times set for returning to the refuge or being back in their room were described as problematic. Rules about permission for nights out, not using social media, and not wearing pyjamas outside their room or flat were also challenging. Participants expressed difficulties with not being able to have friends (n=13) or family members (n=12) visit the refuge. All of these issues contrasted with their life at home and will be examined further in Chapter Six.

Feeling safe, however, was the most positive aspect of refuge life for young people. This was referred to by 18 participants, demonstrating that refuges are still meeting their basic aim, echoing very early research with adult women (e.g. Binney et al, 1981; Clifton, 1985). Although safety was the most significant positive factor identified, this could change over time as a consequence of conflict with other residents or if the perpetrator had discovered their whereabouts. Ruby (an independent teenager) agreed with the 'no visitors' policy, as she did not have an entirely positive relationship with her family and was worried they would disclose her whereabouts if their relationship broke down.

### **Safety Versus Independence**

Staff acknowledged the tension between feelings of safety and restricted independence. Ten staff suggested that rules and restrictions could equate to a negative experience for teenagers owing to feelings of reduced independence:

'...not really allowed to be in the house on their own...don't allow them to walk to the shop because of the surrounding area...we want to give them independence but we need them to understand that obviously it's for their safety...' (S13)

'...they're just getting to the stage in their life where they want this independence, then all of a sudden they're being moved to being dependent again on certain rules and regulations that have got to be followed...' (S8)

These examples highlight the lack of flexibility and choice arising from overriding safety concerns. The emphasis on refuges working towards maintaining safety and welfare creates forms of monitoring and surveillance to regulate teenagers and keep them in the private space of the family. In providing examples of how teenagers might be unsafe, staff referred to risks of

being groomed owing to their isolation, developing unhealthy partner relationships, seeing the perpetrator in public places and their vulnerability to bullying in schools. Only one staff member suggested the possibility of teenagers being taken or harmed by the perpetrator. None of the staff interviewed mentioned the possibility of the perpetrator appearing at the refuge as a justification for the restrictions imposed, which may suggest this assumption is taken for granted.

From teenagers' perspectives, they had spent many years being responsible for themselves, their mothers and siblings whilst living with domestic violence. Frequently this responsibility continued in the refuge in the form of practical and emotional support for family members, including childcare, translation or decision-making. However, refuge accommodation could also restrict feelings of independence. These teenagers had left abusive households where their behaviour may have been heavily controlled and restricted. Often the justification for refuge rules was not explained to teenagers. Staff provided rationales such as 'health and safety' which teenagers did not always consider legitimate. Enablers and barriers to achieving independence identified included: keys, staff attitudes and refuge rules.

Teenagers described how the restrictions affected their ability to make their own choices. Daisy reported that a time ruling which required her to be out of communal spaces made her feel 'like a baby'. They experienced conflict between what they felt they were able to do, what they were permitted to do by their mothers, and what the refuge allowed: 'I'm more independent, I can do

some things for myself now but not... mum would let me but the refuge won't...' (Emma). Teenagers frequently seemed to be viewed as an extension to their mothers rather than service users in their own right. They described being treated in the same way as much younger children without acknowledgement of progression towards adulthood, highlighting a very clear distinction between childhood and adulthood. Aamir illustrated this when he said:

'...you get treated like little kids if you do something wrong. They don't actually let you do anything. They think, "he's too young." But they don't... think you're mature or anything.'

Teenagers reported an absence of flexibility and increased dependency in direct conflict with their desire for developing autonomy. In some refuges teenagers were not allowed out by themselves, without their mother, for example:

'You can't sleep at your friends. You're not allowed out. If you're going out, you're not allowed out by yourself. You need an adult... in my own house, they would let me. I would be allowed.' (Jordan)

Jordan explained that in a previous refuge he had informed staff and his mum of his whereabouts and the time he would return. Teenagers described how increased dependency caused practical difficulties, particularly where they had younger siblings, as they all had to stay together.

In comparison, James was able to travel to visit his friends. Rebecca explained that she had to be let in and out by staff but was able to go to the local shop and travelled to the area where she lived previously if her mother and the refuge

were informed. Issues arose when children's social services conveyed concerns about the amount of time she was spending out of the refuge.

### **Decision-making**

Further tensions were evident in relation to decision-making within the refuge. Ten teenagers reported assisting their mothers with the rehousing process, including deciding on suitable properties and areas. In many cases, this level of involvement was contrasted favourably with that experienced at home where the perpetrator usually had sole responsibility for decision-making.

However, a lack of involvement in decisions or consultation was described regarding refuge life. While three participants reported being consulted about youth club activities or parties, six complained that they had not been consulted about organised trips or if they had, their views had been ignored. None of the teenagers reported being involved in any meetings or decision-making concerning the refuge management or day-to-day operations but 15 teenagers said this was something they would like: 'For kids that have their opinions, they should talk to them about what they think should happen... have a teenagers' or children's own little coffee morning...' (James). This suggestion was based on the existence of an adult coffee morning where consultation took place during school hours. One teenager suggested that refuges should be regulated by OFSTED, in a similar way to schools, to ensure teenagers were involved in planning and reviewing appropriate provision. The absence of involvement was confirmed during staff interviews, with only three staff reporting active consultation with teenagers. Teenagers also described a lack of control over

their own lives which will be discussed below using examples relating to education.

## **4.8 EDUCATION**

This section explores findings concerning the impact of moving to and living in a refuge specifically relating to changing schools, everyday educational attainment, and friendships. This was one theme where the rights conveyed in the UNCRC can be seen as relevant. In particular, applicable parts of Articles 28 and 29 are highlighted below. Article 28 states that:

'1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

(d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;

(e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates'.

Article 29 of the UNCRC states that:

'1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential'

The examples provided by teenagers and staff below suggest that these educational rights are not currently fully realised for teenagers in refuges and will be discussed in Chapter Six.

## **Changing Schools**

Twelve participants had to leave their school as a consequence of moving to refuge accommodation. Eight considered this as a wholly negative experience. Many described themselves as succeeding academically before moving, although not always as much as they had liked, principally due to issues with concentration and feelings of worry. Those aged 14 years and over were particularly concerned about their exams and their future, often because by this time they were in their third year of high school about to embark on their GCSE study or, for some teenagers, already engaged in GCSE courses (n=7).

Changing schools could affect exam plans. Aamir was in his final school year and had conflicting feelings about his situation. He was worried he might have 'messed up' previous coursework after living in two refuges previously. At the same time, he felt his previous work was 'worthless', as he had now been enrolled on a one year course with different examination boards. Although Aamir described trying to remain positive, disregarding earlier work affected his feelings of motivation. Similar obstacles were experienced by Emma who had moved refuges three times over two years. She was in Year 11 (final year) and felt that moving was having a very negative impact on her education, potential college opportunities, and later life chances. Emma described how her grades had been affected with each move:

‘...my predicted grade was A. Most of them was As, Bs and Cs... when I moved, it was like a bit racist... getting Cs and Ds below and Es... Then over here, I don't even know what I'm doing now...’

Emma explained that she would now be completing four or five GCSEs, instead of the 11 she had originally started with, as she was required to start new courses with each move. She had moved from a school with a mixed catchment to one in a predominantly white area, then back to another mixed catchment area. Sometimes the same courses were available at new schools but she was unable to enrol due to a lack of space, leaving no alternative but to commence new courses that she had not prepared for, nor had any interest in.

Teenagers experienced issues in transferring coursework between areas. They reported contacting previous schools themselves in an attempt to retrieve completed coursework. Concerns centred on the detrimental impact this might have when applying for college and an inability to meet specified entry requirements. These issues were anticipated by other, slightly younger, participants:

'...you want to continue something you're good at... my biggest concern is if the spaces are all full and they just put me into whatever is left over. I don't want that because if that happens I'm going to fail. I'm literally going to fail year 10. That's really concerning.' (Mohammed)

'I want to get a house near here because I don't want to move school again... My education is going to get ruined... I'm doing my GCSEs in January... I've told everyone; I said I'm not moving school because it's not fair on me that my education keeps getting messed up just because I'm in a refuge.' (Zoe)

Although these teenagers were desperate to move out of the refuge, they were extremely worried about the educational implications of being rehoused.

Moving to a refuge meant being placed on waiting lists for new schools. Eleven teenagers had spent time out of an educational establishment. This varied from a few days to nine months, with an average of 13.8 weeks spent out of education at one time. This figure is not precise due to issues with memory when recalling timeframes. Two teenagers (not calculated in the figure above) had been prevented from attending school in the UK by their father. One young person had been expelled from school but did not want to elaborate further on this. Zoe had calculated the hours of schooling missed due to changing refuges and being unable to obtain school places in both areas. Initially, a core meeting was held and schoolwork was sent via her old teacher but this arrangement was not sustained. She was the only participant to receive additional tuition, although this was only for one week:

‘...I’ve been out of school for eight, nine months... we found a place to do tuition and it cost £350 a week. The social worker’s paid that for like one week. Then we got into school and they said that we can’t do it no more, but we were still behind... that’s how it is, no one cares about the child’s opinion.’

Zoe highlights her own feelings of powerlessness and lack of voice. She explained that during her time spent out of school there was nothing for her to do. In her view, social workers had a responsibility to arrange clubs and activities but this was not provided. Teenagers spent large periods of time out of school with no alternative provision in place.

In contrast, Amy had moved after her GCSEs but before college. The refuge organised a college place immediately. She was able to start on the first day of

term, less than five days after moving. However, Amy told me it was very likely they would move back in with her father (the perpetrator) at the end of the academic year due to limits on the length of a refuge stay and feeling rushed to move out. Her concern was that she might have to change her A-Level (Advanced Level) courses but her mother did not want to be rehoused in the refuge area as she felt isolated. Unusually, Amy wanted to remain in the refuge until she finished college, underlining the need for consistency and minimisation of educational challenges.

Teenagers wanted to continue to attend the same school. Initially, Rebecca and her younger sibling were attending their same school which they felt was both important and positive. This required long journeys and in subsequent interviews she reported pressure from refuge staff and her school to change schools. Rebecca frequently emailed me regarding this as circumstances changed quickly between interviews. She felt that nobody had asked what she wanted:

‘My old school thought they knew what was best for me, which was a school closer to here. But, I know what’s best for myself and it wasn’t moving school. That just made me lose everything...my friends, my home and my family.’

She explained that the justification for this decision was that they travelled by bus and frequently arrived late. However, there seemed to be no arrangements in place to enable a smooth transition between schools and no discussion about providing transport to enable her to maintain her current school place. Her lack of involvement in these decisions contributed to friction with her mother:

'...if they think they can put me in a new school, they can, but I'm not going to behave. I'm not staying in a new school because everything that I had is just gone through everybody. I'm not just putting it all on my mum, but...she caused some of this, she agreed with the school...'

Whilst not attending school, Rebecca spent most of her time in the refuge, describing it as 'Boring. Depressing. Just sat. It's just...horrible'. She had not been provided with any schoolwork or support. I was able to appreciate how Rebecca's circumstances developed over time. Initially, she was angry about the decision to be removed from school and was concerned about the further possibility of moving, 'I don't want to start a new school just to get dragged out of it again'. Starting a new school in a new area was a daunting prospect. By our third interview, Rebecca had attended a meeting at another school but was not accepted; however her outlook had changed as she explained that she now wanted to attend a new school as she was missing it. After four months, Rebecca and her sibling were still not attending school. Lulu was also feeling under pressure to change school:

'My teacher tells me that we have to move, but I said there's no point of moving because if I'm going to move...and have to move back somewhere else... I really don't want to move... [school] is too nice...I'll have no more friends...'

These participants highlight the continuity and social networks school provided but the value of these aspects of education for teenagers was not acknowledged. None of the participants who had moved schools felt they had a choice about which school they attended. Often this was attributed to lack of spaces and they were required to attend the first or any school willing to accept them.

## **Alternative Educational Establishments**

Alternative educational establishments were generally considered unsuitable by those teenagers who attended them. Four teenagers were attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). One was transferred to a mainstream school once his behaviour had been monitored and assessed. This made the mainstream school the fourth school he had attended over a period of two years since fleeing the family home, though he had less of an issue with changing schools compared to older teenagers. One participant had been in a hospital-tutored school as she suffered from depression and self-harm but on moving to the refuge had been eventually placed in a PRU, or as she described it, a ‘school for naughty kids’. This participant spoke positively about the teachers, but did not think the school was appropriate or able to meet her needs. She wanted to travel to her old school where they understood her additional needs.

Teenagers’ concerns about PRUs were summarised by Georgia:

‘I don’t really think I should be at a school where there’s a pupil there that have been excluded for putting lighters in Year 7’s faces. There’s a boy there that got excluded, he literally had a shit on the floor and rubbed it into the walls. What place am I at all? I shouldn’t be there...’

Aamir informed me that he was the only pupil attending his PRU due to moving home; other pupils were there because ‘most of them got kicked out of school’. Emma reported that she did not feel it was benefiting her and found the experience to be negative. These accounts question the appropriateness of these placements for teenagers escaping domestic violence.

## **Barriers to Study**

Participants reported that missing school had disadvantaged them academically and socially. I noticed they often lacked confidence and would ask how to spell words when completing task-based activities or if I could check their writing, commenting that it was not very good. Some teenagers talked about how they had fallen so far behind at school they had lost their motivation. Others spoke of how they could easily fall behind but were determined not to let that happen. It may be that for these teenagers academic success can be an important source of resilience by enabling them to adapt and resist the negative impact of the stress entailed in coping with domestic violence, the refuge environment, or both.

Practical difficulties in completing homework were described, including a lack of appropriate equipment in refuges such as computers, books or internet access. Difficulties accessing computers and the internet outlined earlier had direct relevance for their education. Teenagers residing in refuges some distance from school were unable to utilise libraries, or more often, were afraid to travel home alone, especially in winter. Participants attending PRUs reported that there was no library and it was not possible to access computers after school hours. None of the refuges had separate spaces where teenagers could complete homework, although three refuges had computer rooms. This resulted in a disparity between what was expected by their school and what they could realistically achieve.

Homework was also affected by an inability to concentrate. Where teenagers said difficulty concentrating on homework was the same as it was prior to

moving to refuges they attributed this to events at home, such as noise or feelings of worry ( $n=4$ ), rather than practical obstacles. This highlights a continuity of the problem of completing homework, although the source of stress now differed. Amy believed her education had been affected by her parents' relationship when living at home and consequently she had not achieved the grades she was capable of. In the refuge she was still worried about her grades and her mother, and felt unable to focus sufficiently on schoolwork. Amy felt that her mum did not understand the anxieties she faced now that they were no longer in the abusive household. A pressure to achieve good grades was something expressed by many participants.

### **Educational Impact of a Refuge Stay**

Teenagers' anxieties about the future were intensified by changes in their education. For many participants ( $n=9$ ) academic success was seen as the means of obtaining paid employment in adulthood. Work was regarded as offering economic security but also a desired identity - to 'fit into' society and provide for their own family. This was confirmed by older teenagers aged 17 and 18 who would have appreciated support with writing CVs (curriculum vitae - detailing their experience, skills and education) and assistance with the transition into employment. Ruby had arranged her own support and training via a local children's centre.

## **Support within School**

There was an absence of ongoing dialogue between schools and refuges. When appropriate, I encouraged participants to speak to school staff about their anxieties concerning schoolwork. Some teenagers did not think it was helpful for teachers to know they were living in refuges, owing to fears about trust, embarrassment and confidentiality:

‘I didn't have anybody. Probably just school, but I didn't trust them...last time I told them stuff, they'd been passed on to teachers and other teachers, and I don't like that...’ (Jordan)

Teachers need to be aware that seeking help is not straightforward for young people living in refuges and of the need to preserve confidentiality as much as possible. Two teenagers described experiencing racism within school which caused conflict with teachers and resulted in disciplinary action, making it impossible to seek support.

Mohammed explained that, in her previous school, older pupils acted as mentors for younger pupils but she judged this as unsuitable in her present circumstances. She found it difficult to explain her situation and reported difficulties trusting a fellow pupil who might tell others. She felt the mentor would be ‘more interested in hair and makeup’, and unable to comprehend her experiences if they had not experienced domestic violence themselves.

In contrast, James described the positive impact of support from his school tutor: they spent time after school studying, learning new skills or playing games. James felt that he could ask for extra support in future if required.

When I asked what could be done to encourage constructive co-operation between schools and refuges to support teenagers James replied:

'Let the school know that you're in a refuge and you're struggling to cope...school knows that we were in a refuge, which was helpful...we've got students that are first priority, like me...if you need equipment and stuff, they'll happily give it to me'.

Participants explained that they were particularly disadvantaged economically and so could not afford equipment they had previously had at home. The lack of resources had been addressed to a certain extent by schools in the cases of Amy and James. Amy had been provided with a bursary for a temporary laptop (although issues with internet access remained). James was aware a bursary could be provided if necessary. A combination of economic, educational and emotional support could be helpful to manage educational challenges.

Teenagers faced the added pressure of being the 'new person' in school. Some class activities, such as letter writing for example, exacerbated difficulties with maintaining the secrecy of the refuge location and concealing the fact they were living in a refuge. This caused a significant amount of anxiety for teenagers who did not know how to respond and led to misunderstandings with fellow pupils and teachers. None of the participants had received any assistance with such difficulties and did not know how to manage these situations. Zoe reported that teachers needed to understand the difficulties of being in a refuge and effect on behaviour:

'...sometimes, it just all blows up...you just get angry, it all comes out. You got to try and prevent that because that's going to ruin your school life. Put it back down'.

Teenagers described hiding their feelings and being extremely careful regarding who they talked to about being in a refuge and what had happened, especially in new schools. Often they were unwilling to tell even their closest friends that they were residing in refuges. They were worried their confidentiality would be breached resulting in feelings of embarrassment and stigma. They were also worried about changing their friends' perceptions of them. Such anticipated negative reactions appeared to be based on their own feelings about refuges before moving there. Mohammed wondered if any teenagers had been bullied or experienced depression as a consequence of others having knowledge of their circumstances.

### **School Friends**

Participants found that relocation affected existing friendships and contributed to feelings of loss and dislocation as school guaranteed daily contact with friends:

'School had most of my friends in...school decided what they thought was best... I do thank them for thinking of me...all the adults think it is better for me to be in a school closer... I know what's best for myself and I know just moving out of that school wasn't.' (Rebecca)

This example illustrates feelings of powerlessness. Rebecca draws a specific distinction between her views and those of adults, with hers being disregarded. Bob was also upset that she had been separated from her friends without saying goodbye and had missed her school trip.

Participants who had moved some distance reported increasing difficulties in maintaining friendships. They could not see their friends and were unable to maintain contact using technology. Teenagers who were absent from school felt particularly isolated as they had no friends to offer support and affirmation – they were all in school. For the two participants who did not speak English initially, entering education was important in helping them to learn English and make friends as they had not previously attended school.

In line with existing evidence (e.g. Buckley et al, 2007), teenagers reported that living in a refuge also caused difficulties when making new friends. Teenagers explained that when they started a new school, especially if they were older, fellow pupils had already established their friendship groups. Where they had made new friends they faced further obstacles maintaining these friendships. Staff recognised the difficulties teenagers experienced concerning friendships but did not describe any examples of assistance they offered in relation to this.

### **Educational Support within Refuges**

None of the participants had their own educational support plan in place. This could have identified learning outcomes or additional support required in or outside of school. Nor did they attend after school homework clubs to allow them to complete homework in a more suitable environment and meet others. Where young people were participating in the research, only one refuge organised specific homework activities for teenagers. Other teenagers had been told they were too old to participate in homework clubs and so had nobody to talk to about the difficulties they were experiencing with schoolwork. Emma

explained that she had received this form of support when previously residing in other refuges:

'I need someone to talk to... I'm going to special school. It's pretty shit...half my courses I can't even do... I've got no-one to talk to...all that on top of my head and to be honest, every other place I've been there's been someone to help you.'

When asked how they believed teenagers experienced living in a refuge, staff were aware of many difficulties, but were generally unaware of the overwhelming sense of multiple losses teenagers experienced and their severity. Some, but not all, refuges had funding for children's workers but there were no specific workers for teenagers. In addition, some of these posts had been lost or merged with other adult support worker posts during the period of the research, further reducing the likelihood of support.

Due to the amount of travel involved, teenagers who continued to attend their original school could experience practical obstacles to receiving support with school work from refuge staff. For example, a young person would leave the refuge at 6.00am, not return until much later and then need to complete homework or revision. As staff worked during the day, this meant that they could not physically meet to carry out direct work, help with educational work or have any conversations. One staff member commented that she assisted teenagers with their education or homework, aside from obtaining school places, and chose to work flexible hours, both of which teenagers identified during the 'ideal' member of staff activity.

Refuge staff described attempts to find school places for young people but this could prove difficult due to a limited availability of school places. In some areas, fair access panels operated to disperse refuge children between different schools. This often meant teenagers travelling to another area. Some staff described difficulties in accessing school places due to a focus on producing higher grades to meet educational targets. None of the staff interviewed described positive partnerships with local schools. This was evident in the long periods without school places some participants experienced. With regards to equipment, there was little acknowledgment of the importance of computers or internet access for this age group. However, one staff member explained that on one occasion she had been able to acquire funding for a laptop via school. This enabled a teenager who had been out of school for a significant period to access schoolwork and build a relationship with a teacher in preparation for her return to education.

## **4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The period of adolescence was identified as significant by staff and by teenagers themselves. Key difficulties were attributed to teenagers not yet being defined as responsible adults but being distinct from younger children in terms of their awareness, capabilities and needs. This is an important period for these teenagers and their identity is still emerging. These young people were in a state of flux both physically and emotionally in terms of their refuge stay, schooling and given the transience experienced in adolescence. Despite

advances in creating purpose-built refuges in the UK over the last 20 to 30<sup>13</sup> years (Ball, 1994), this research found an absence of space for teenagers. Limitations in refuge space restricted the support, interventions and facilities that could be provided. Whilst participants wanted more privacy, the improvements they suggested centred on providing shared spaces with other teenagers, indicating the importance of friendships and peer networks for young people. Analysis of the findings revealed that a lack of physical space contributed to the difficulties teenagers experienced in separating themselves from their family and from experiences of domestic violence and abuse.

Teenagers struggled to maintain their independence due to restrictions imposed by numerous refuge rules. Inconsistencies between rules and constraints at home and between and within refuges could cause further conflict. Although teenagers sometimes felt capable and responsible, their autonomy was limited by their experience of refuge accommodation. They received conflicting messages about the levels of responsibility they could assume and were not necessarily able to make their own choices or have the same options as their peers, or indeed as they had previously.

Although refuges were successful in increasing young people's sense of safety, the research found that refuge life entailed multiple losses for teenagers which encompassed personal space, privacy, independence, education and friendships. The difficulties encountered in accessing education and the long term implications of missing school due to fleeing domestic violence give

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.centre56.org.uk/history/> the first purpose built refuge opened in 1984 in Liverpool.

particular cause for concern. The decision to move to a refuge often resulted in reduced freedom for teenagers to organise their own lives. This was paralleled by their lack of involvement in, or contribution to, the running of the refuge or organisation of activities. They received little in the way of appropriate stimulation or activity whilst in the refuge and felt little concern was shown regarding their education and development. Teenagers described trying to complete homework as stressful. Lack of access to technology affected academic attainment, contributed to feelings of not ‘being normal’, and heightened isolation.

The next chapter presents the ideas teenagers had for improving their experience of staying in refuges with a focus on the support required.

# **Chapter Five**

## **Findings Part II: The Support Needs of Teenagers in Refuges**

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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter identified some of the difficulties experienced by teenagers living in refuges. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the various types of support teenage participants said they wanted and how well their needs were met by the services that were available to them both during their refuge stay and in the process of moving on from the refuge. The second part of the chapter considers teenagers' needs using detailed case studies to map the three phases of their current refuge journey: beginning, middle and end.

The chapter begins by presenting themes from the interviews with teenagers. Two of the most important themes to emerge were the wish to be listened to and to feel 'normal'. Teenagers also identified additional needs for personal and social support to help them to: communicate with mothers, talk to someone outside the family, meet other teenagers and maintain friendships. This chapter will go on to discuss other potential forms of support, who should provide that support, and what was covered by existing support structures, as described by research participants. Building on the findings presented in Chapter Four, this chapter will consider enablers and barriers to successful engagement with reference to teenagers' 'client' status in refuge services.

The second part of this chapter will focus on four case studies to generate deeper understanding of the need for support (when and what for) and explore continuities and changes over the period of a teenager's stay in a refuge. Since adolescence is a period of rapid change and development (as detailed in Chapter One) this approach seems particularly appropriate for this group of research participants in order to provide detailed exploration of feelings and issues over time. As will be discussed, the case studies illustrate that refuges do not meet teenagers' expectations or requirements for support throughout the course of their stay. Case studies were selected on specific criteria, detailed later, to maintain confidentiality and are representative of the larger sample. Teenagers with any identifiable experiences, such as self-harm, were not selected in order to protect their anonymity for safety reasons, as linked to the discussion in Chapter Three.

The aim of these case studies is to go beyond a snapshot of understanding and demonstrate the commonalities but also individual differences in experience when staying in a refuge. They maintain the theme of support requirements and include teenagers' reflections about their refuge journey(s). These reflections consist of feelings about refuge, friends, rehousing processes and moving out of refuge. They demonstrate that teenagers were initially happy to leave the abusive home but became increasingly frustrated with the unpredictable length of time spent in refuges and restrictions of a refuge stay. Multiple sources of stress are identified after their initial period in refuge. The case studies also provide details pertaining to teenagers' completed refuge life

rating scales. These scales highlighted more continuity than change for individuals and reasons for this will be explored. Further information regarding the scales as research tools can be found in Chapter Three.

## **5.2 DIFFERENT FORMS OF SUPPORT**

Teenagers in this study appreciated that refuges helped their mothers or carers by contacting relevant agencies and providing practical help. However, none were able to provide examples of direct help they had received themselves: ‘...actually, I don’t know myself...’ (Lulu). The research literature suggested that if mothers are properly supported there is less need for children’s workers (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003). To test this view, I specifically asked teenage participants if they thought they would need separate help themselves if their mothers or carers received adequate support. All participants asked stated that they did. Teenagers emphasised that they had feelings just as adults did, with their own individual needs, anxieties and experiences, distinct to those of their mothers (or carers). References were made to their position as teenagers, with needs specifically related to their education, wanting increased independence and more privacy. While refuge staff recognised the need for specific individual support for teenage service users, in practice, due to funding restrictions, there was already a move towards generic services only for adult women.

This section will discuss the different forms of support identified. It is organised into small sub-sections to maintain detailed focus on each type of support needed, as identified by teenagers. While piloting research tools, participants

added the example of ‘family support’ to the worksheet ‘What Teenagers Need’. When asked for clarification, Daisy said: ‘...you’ve got people to turn to when things go bad or when you feel like you’re on your own in the refuge...’ Eighteen teenagers reported that they needed family support. Importantly, ‘family support’ was interpreted more broadly than talking to their mothers, and included meeting other teenagers and individual support from someone outside the family and connected to the need to feel listened to.

### **Feeling Listened To**

As discussed in the previous chapter, teenagers wanted more independence and freedom. They also wanted more information, support and guidance to help them deal with different sources of stress, particularly school work and future choices. However, they identified an absence of support which they attributed to their age. This was explained by Ruby: ‘I don’t think you get as much support as you need because obviously, you turn 18 they say you’re an adult... to me you’re still a teenager.’ This quote exemplifies the ambiguity of their ongoing status between childhood and adulthood. Teenagers also wanted staff to understand the urgency of their problems as they perceived them:

‘They don’t listen down here. It’s like tell them something they will be done like two weeks later. They don’t act on it quickly...’ (Emma).

‘I don’t think that I will be listened to... I don’t think they take me as seriously as they should...’ (Mohammed).

Over half of teenage participants (n=11) reported they did not feel they had anyone that they could talk to if they had a problem.

These examples help to identify a further theme in which the rights conveyed in UNCRC can be seen as relevant provisions, most notably Articles 12 and 13.

Article 12.1 asserts that:

'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.

Article 13 states that:

'The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information...'

In practice, however, staff described being restricted by working hours and funding stipulations. This meant that staff were generally not accessible at evenings and weekends, though they acknowledged the importance of availability: 'Being available for them is better. Rather than having a weekly appointment... they can come as something happens...' (S3). One teenager did feel listened to when a member of staff had helped to resolve a practical problem:

'I feel like I'm listened to. If I want to speak to someone in here I could... I had a serious problem and she helped me with it. She got me transport, you know, to the place where I needed to go.' (Molly)

Molly's refuge had 24 hour staffing and her comment refers to staff availability, as she felt that support would be (and had been) available when required. Her example suggests the staff member understood the seriousness of the problem as Molly perceived it. This perception is crucial. Teenagers were also asked about whether other organisations or services outside refuges listened to them.

The majority of those involved with children's social services did not think a problem would be solved if they approached their social worker (n=4).

Teenagers said that they were taken more seriously by family members, especially their mothers. Nonetheless, 16 teenagers felt it would be helpful to have support from a specific member of staff: 'I think just everyone needs someone to talk to. So it would be nice if there was someone to listen...' (Amy). This reinforces Buckley et al's (2006) findings on children's and teenagers' need to talk and 'let it out'. One participant explicitly asked if I could pass on his concerns about being in a refuge to staff as he felt they would be more likely to listen to me. Two teenagers said that I was the only person who listened to their opinions and that, if they had a problem, they would ask me to advocate on their behalf, which emphasises the absence of support. For someone to listen there first had to be someone to talk to, which perhaps connects to the perception of time given to listening. However, the task of listening was not a straightforward one for refuge staff with a focus on victims: teenagers resisted being defined as vulnerable or in need of protection yet wanted support to deal with and overcome their experiences. The theme of someone to talk to will be returned to in the next section on different forms of support, after the review of findings about teenagers' wishes to be 'normal'.

### **Feeling 'Normal'**

Often teenagers compared themselves unfavourably to their peers. Living in refuges made them feel different and this affected their confidence and self-esteem: 'I want to be in a home like a normal person, not in a refuge.' (Zoe).

Participants were embarrassed about living in refuges for two primary reasons. Firstly, they were not in a ‘normal’ house, and secondly, telling anyone they were staying in a refuge would reveal their experience of living with domestic violence. The rules and secrecy surrounding refuges (discussed in Chapter Four) contributed to their feelings of abnormality as these issues were not something experienced by their friends. This is consistent with the findings of other studies elsewhere (Buckley et al, 2006; Øverlien, 2012).

Sometimes teenagers felt that they were required to undertake roles that were not necessarily the responsibility of somebody their age. They reported feeling torn between wanting to help with more adult tasks and wanting to feel less responsible:

‘I was always the one to do the translation and stuff... you’re just a child and you shouldn’t be worrying... shouldn’t be having to do things like that... should be worrying about other stuff that for you are more important... I felt fine about it because she’s my mum. But obviously sometimes I think, ‘Is it my job to do this?’... Because I’m just a child, you know...’ (Mohammed)

These conflicting messages highlight the difficulty staff might experience in establishing a consistent approach to work with teenagers. Four teenagers were required to translate for their mothers. This included translation during refuge meetings and in external meetings with organisations such as housing advice. Other teenagers assisted with other tasks such as rehousing or caring for siblings. These tasks again were not necessarily undertaken by their peers outside the refuge who had support from family, friends and neighbours for example. Feelings of being different could contribute to friction with mothers.

## **Communication with Mothers**

Many teenagers described positive relationships with their mothers. Four teenagers, however, wanted support to talk to their mothers about their feelings and how to resolve conflict without arguing, as illustrated by Aamir: ‘...then you can solve things, you can move on by sorting the situation out’. None of the participants received this form of support. Participants sometimes opted for silence to avoid conflict, but this did not always work. Support is needed to establish communication between mothers and teenagers and reduce the stigma and secrecy surrounding domestic violence (see Humphreys et al, 2006). Teenagers’ accounts also indicate that mothers need support to listen to teenagers and make sense of their experiences. This was highlighted by two members of staff who noted that some adult women spoke openly, and in detail, or projected their own feelings about domestic violence, rather than focusing on teenagers’ experiences. Staff reported that this was not always helpful for teenagers.

Other teenage participants were concerned that mother-child support would not be appropriate. They reported being unable to talk openly for fear of upsetting their mothers by reminding them of what had happened. Young people were often protective of their mothers and described some experiences as still too sensitive to discuss:

‘...you just need someone to talk to, to share feelings, because I wouldn’t want to talk to my mum about like anything too much because I don’t think she would understand it the right way...’ (Amy)

However, participants also communicated the distress involved in keeping their feelings to themselves. These included feelings about their experiences of domestic violence, living in refuges, educational difficulties, and their future, suggesting the need for holistic support. Young people repeatedly described not having anyone to talk to. Daisy confirmed that teenagers may need to 'rely on someone else if they can't talk to their mums', raising questions about the appropriateness of mother-child interventions for some teenagers and highlighting the value of talking to somebody outside the family. This person was usually a support worker but could also be another teenager.

### **Meeting Other Teenagers**

Participants said they would have valued opportunities to meet other teenagers with similar experiences but frequently they were the only teenager in their refuge and felt isolated. Teenagers commented on the difficulty of not having other people in their age group and marked age as an explicit indicator of difference to other children and adults residing in the refuge. Feelings of isolation were magnified by difficulties in trying to communicate with younger children who did not have shared interests or understandings, as explained by Scarlet:

'...I'm the only teenager... This place is filled with little kids; it makes me uncomfortable... I don't hardly socialise with other people... it would be better to talk to somebody that's the same age as me....'

Harry had initially shown an interest in the research hoping that he would meet other participants, and was disappointed when I explained this was not

possible. Where groups and activities existed for younger children in the refuge, this sometimes caused feelings of resentment if there were no similar activities for teenagers where they could share frustrations or have fun: both of which were things young people said they needed.

One refuge held a weekly youth club and provided trips or activities which were considered positively. Bob (female) and Bob Marley (male) both attended and said that it was helpful to meet others the same age. They reported increased confidence and reduced feelings of worry due to having similar or shared experiences and therefore a similar identity. In general, however, there was little scope to facilitate friendships or activities. Amy noted the value of speaking to another teenager as they had similar experiences of both abuse and refuge life but explained they did not spend much time together other than walking to school. Two girls in one refuge became particularly close but frustrations arose when they wanted to have sleep-overs which were not permitted by refuge rules, again exacerbating the sense of not feeling 'normal'.

These experiences relate directly to the rights provision in Article 31 of the UNCRC. This Article asserts that:

- '1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties ... shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity'.

This is not currently realised for all teenagers in refuges. Promoting these rights could prove particularly useful for teenagers living in a refuge who might benefit from the social contact and the opportunities for increased self-esteem that such activities offer. Activities and meeting others will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

### **Maintaining Friendships after Leaving Refuges**

Aamir tried unsuccessfully to maintain contact with teenagers in previous refuges, via the internet. James had contact with another teenager who had previously resided in the refuge as their mothers had built a friendship: ‘...they know what living in a refuge is like and how you feel, and I know how they feel...’ This indicates that there are opportunities to develop mutual support so teenagers do not feel alone in their experiences. There was a lack of follow-on support to sustaining such friendships noted by both staff and teenagers. This finding is consistent with Øverlien’s (2012) study in Norwegian refuges which found severed friendships among children and young people.

### **Direct Support Concerning Domestic Violence**

Teenagers, with and without experience of direct support, reported the potential significance of group work directly concerning domestic violence and abuse. Four participants explained that in previous refuges they received this form of support via children’s workers but this had terminated after moving to a new refuge. However, not all teenagers thought that this would be suitable and they

were apprehensive about being judged, particularly when describing the abuse, as explained by Amy:

‘...when you want to talk about the future, I think that will be better with other teenagers. Because mostly, we think the same thing. But if I talk about like what I’ve experienced then probably one to one is better... I can talk and no one would be able to judge or anything.’

In the refuge setting, secrecy continued to surround domestic violence and abuse for these teenagers. Teenagers’ accounts highlight continued fears about shame and stigma, even concerning the perceptions of others who have been through similar experiences. This signifies the importance of acknowledging their concerns about the views of others and resultant social acceptance and highlights the need for individually tailored support.

In making links with specific rights provisions and principles Article 19.2 of the UNCRC could be of use in developing refuge policy and practice in respect of providing support for their experiences of domestic violence and abuse. This Article states that protective measures should include

‘effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment’.

Teenage participants in this study indicate how this right can be realised in practice. Further discussion will be provided in Chapter Seven.

## **Individual Support**

A number of teenagers said they were supposed to receive one-to-one support but did not. Participants felt that it would be useful to have a staff member to help them with domestic violence, with school, to help them make decisions and to ‘get on with your life’. Four teenagers (all female) stressed that help may be required for experiences including bullying, rape, self-harm, depression, anxiety and situations such as the death of a friend or relative. They said the refuge was an ideal place to do this:

‘...it would be better to have a counsellor in the refuge...talk about how they feel...what is making them depressed...letting it out...they've been physically hurt and they're hurting themselves...talk about what's happened and why...’ (Scarlet)

Four teenagers mentioned the use of counselling, with Ruby (independent teenager) reflecting on her childhood experiences of domestic violence. Three participants with a history of self-harm were not receiving any support for their experiences which they felt had been intensified by the abuse, suggesting support could address mental health needs for some teenagers. One teenager had been referred to a voluntary sector counselling service to support her mental health needs. She reported they were unable to visit the refuge due to restrictions surrounding confidentiality. Instead, she needed to arrange to meet her counsellor at school which she described feeling extremely uncomfortable and distressed about. However, on a practical level, it may not have been appropriate for counselling to take place in the refuge, where there is often limited opportunity for privacy or emotional space.

Two teenagers expected to receive counselling via statutory services. Due to their age (16 years old), there was confusion about access and options were further restricted, as described by Georgia:

‘...by the time my birthday comes, they can’t do work with me. I have to go to an adult mental health unit. They said there’s no point starting therapy because they’d have to stop... I’m going to have to wait... They put me on antidepressants.’

This highlights a specific shortfall in provision linked to adolescence and transitions between child and adult mental health services. This is consistent with findings reported by Brodie et al (2011) in their review of research literature pertaining to mental health service transitions for young people. These teenagers have the added impact and implications of moving to a refuge to contend with.

Teenage participants explained that they struggled to talk about the abuse but wanted to do so and needed somebody who would understand. Others described feeling apprehensive about talking about domestic violence and abuse due to never talking about it previously. Analysis of the data suggests teenagers did not have the language or confidence to articulate their feelings. Amy reported that talking would have been easier had it happened early on in her arrival at the refuge, whereas James felt there were ‘some feelings you can tell and some of those you can’t’. He expressed anxiety about staff reactions to what had happened, his feelings about the abuse, and events since. It was

apparent that there was a lot of anxiety preventing him from disclosure and he needed 'permission' to explore his experiences.

Teenagers were asked how support could be facilitated. Daisy suggested communicating in writing so that confident staff could initiate conversations and Jordan mentioned the existence of a 'secret box' in a previous refuge. Emma explained that in previous refuges they had completed activities such as posters and worksheets about the future and safety planning to build relationships with staff:

'...this is your safety plan. Call 999. It's not safe to do this... where do you see yourself in 20 years' time? Or what are you worried about... anyone else going through this, what would you advise them to do?'

Those with experience of support placed emphasis on the value of having their own worker. This related to developing shared understandings and trust, and accessibility in terms of the availability of support. Participants' 'ideal member of staff' will be discussed in the next section after findings relating to follow-on support and other forms of support. For some teenagers, the availability of support was also important after they had moved out of the refuge.

### **Follow On Support**

None of the teenage participants had access to follow-on support after leaving refuges and this picture is consistent with the difficulties in providing follow-on care described by staff (see previous chapter). At least six teenagers said this would have been helpful - three of these teenagers were interviewed after they

had left the refuge. Bob, who was receiving support within the refuge (youth club, trips, and activities), reported that although she was happy to leave, she wanted to continue to see her key worker. Sophie said she wanted to continue to return to the refuge for activities, parties, help with homework, and to see other residents. Eliza reported ongoing family problems she said they needed help with. These examples highlight the need for consistency and continuity of relationships when managing the transition from the refuge to the community.

Given that they had not received individual support whilst living in refuges, some participants were unsure if they wanted community support after leaving. Molly did not think she would like follow-on support, commenting that she was happy to move out and 'it just be over'. She equated physically moving out of the refuge with an ability to move on from the domestic violence. Others, however, did not see their experiences as ending after leaving the refuge. Ruby (independent teenager) was due to receive follow-on support after leaving the refuge suddenly but explained that in the two months since leaving she had experienced major problems regarding benefits and had no support. She received two phone calls regarding her mail but felt that refuge staff were unenthusiastic about maintaining contact with her. She described her own situation as 'too complicated' and considered that her opposition to residing in another refuge had been a barrier to receiving further support. It may be, however, that staff are restricted in the support they can offer when residents leave in an unplanned way.

### **Other Forms of Support**

Independent teenagers needed practical support with life skills such as knowing when and how to pay bills for example. They had not had to do such tasks before going to the refuge and staff had dealt with them whilst in the refuge. Six teenagers identified difficulties in terms of their cultural or religious needs. Emphasis was placed on the importance of religious festivals such as Christmas, Eid and Ramadan. A lengthy refuge stay could mean that they missed out on these celebrations which increased feelings of isolation due to being away from their families and restrictions of refuge rules regarding visitors.

It was anticipated by teenagers that some young people would need assistance with their own relationships but that support would vary according to the individual. There was no mention about the potential of utilising social media support which may have been due to an absence of online support or knowledge of how it could be used, in addition to practical access constraints outlined. Teenagers' suggestions emphasised their dependence on the availability of support within the refuge. Their suggestions were reflected in staff comments about the need to be flexible, available, and acknowledge the pace of change experienced by teenagers.

### **5.3 WHO PROVIDES SUPPORT?**

Considering the support needs identified above, this section presents findings relating to who should provide support for teenagers. It considers individual qualities and provides examples of positive engagement. The findings also

identified barriers to successful engagement. This section offers findings from the perspectives of teenagers and staff. Since their current relationships with staff members were described as limited, an ‘ideal member of staff’ was discussed with 13 teenage participants, seven of whom thought this staff member should be younger than most refuge staff. Reasons for this included teenagers’ view that a younger staff member would be more active, easier to relate to, more sympathetic and able to understand the language and concerns of teenagers. Other key qualities identified included: a positive and non-judgemental attitude, good communication and listening skills, an ability to give sound advice, and good organisational skills. Teenagers considered that staff should be available, approachable, helpful, relaxed, trustworthy, respectful, caring and reliable. These qualities will be explored further within the sections below.

Teenagers were asked about the gender and ethnicity of their ‘ideal staff member’. Generally, teenagers did not consider the ethnicity of staff was important, although two described BAME staff in their refuge supporting BAME clients more favourably, with one suggesting this amounted to racism. One of these teenagers was of a BAME heritage different to the staff and residents she was referring to. Two teenagers requested that the staff member should be female. Both of these participants were BAME. They reported feeling ‘shy’ around men and more trusting of females due to cultural reasons and experiences of male abuse. Three organisations had tried unsuccessfully in the past to engage male staff from other organisations to support their service users, specifically to provide positive male role models for teenage boys.

## **Existing Support Structures and Practices**

Staff reported the absence of specific programmes, and difficulties trying to adapt existing programmes for women or children, to meet the needs of individual teenagers. Young people's level of maturity was described as a significant issue. Staff provided examples where they had sensitively engaged with teenagers and had drawn on existing skills and experiences to do this, rather than using specified models of intervention. Staff interviewed highlighted that support must be flexible rather than a fixed programme. The following sections will consider challenges and enablers to engagement.

## **Successful Engagement**

Staff offered examples where they had built positive relationships with teenagers in refuges. A number explained that they did not ask directly about domestic violence and abuse until they had spent time with an individual. Staff placed emphasis on confidentiality, echoing teenagers' accounts. The examples below offer positive examples of engagement:

'...we try to explain to them that we understand it's a difficult time...but actually they can change things if they have got control over what happens next and there are people to support them...' (S16)

'It's probably one of the first, from my experience anyway, probably one of the first times they've been able to be given their own voice...' (S4)

Here staff highlight the importance of teenagers having a sense of control over their own experiences. This is important considering teenagers' lack of control in respect of domestic violence or given their lack of agency in relation to the process of moving in and out of refuges. Emphasis is placed on teenagers having a voice, feeling listened to and reducing feelings of helplessness. The

importance of developing efficacy, competence, and supportive relationships with adults has been identified in recent adolescent rights research (McNeely and Bose, 2014).

In one example provided by a staff member, a teenager who had not previously engaged with refuge workers approached staff for help with a job application:

'It was the first time she had approached us wanting support and we were able to help her with the application and give her some advice on interview techniques and things like that. It really changed for this young woman; she really felt she was being supported - it wasn't just her mum. She felt that we were supporting her as a young person in her own right.' (S12)

Interestingly, this form of engagement places the teenager in an adult role whereby she is asking other adults about employment. The realisation that support was also available for teenagers provided recognition of her experiences and promoted engagement. However, it also continues to highlight the difficulties faced by staff in developing a consistent model of support due to the wide fluctuation in age, needs and developmental stage of young people.

From the perspectives of teenagers, there was an emphasis on feeling staff cared about them as individuals and participants recollected examples where they perceived particular staff had made additional effort to support them. For example:

'...she took us to the shops...I thought it was normal...their job. But now that I look back on it, it seems like actually, this person is different... she asked, 'Oh, how are you doing? Is everything all right? Are you fitting in

well? Do you want to meet other residents... how are you, how are you doing? ...' (Mohammed)

Teenagers said this type of interest improved their confidence to approach staff with concerns as they felt someone was interested in their wellbeing. Rebecca compared refuge staff to her social worker and reported that her social worker told her what she had to do (or not do) rather than trying to understand her point of view.

Teenagers emphasised the importance of staff being trustworthy, reliable, and available, as well as listening and acting quickly to confirm their concerns were considered seriously. Establishing positive relationships appeared vital. However, there were two instances where boundaries appeared blurred. One participant commented that a staff member had disclosed personal experiences of domestic violence and another remarked that staff had regarded her as her own daughter. These examples suggest staff are not always sure of the most appropriate ways to engage with teenagers.

One staff participant talked about using a teenager's interests to develop a relationship but commented on problems if resources could not be provided. Another described the use of a 12-week art therapy programme as a sensitive way of exploring feelings. Two members of staff mentioned the use of a support plan. Staff identified that independent teenagers generally received more support through planning and key work sessions as this met Supporting

People funding requirements. Staff reported many more interventions could be accessed for independent teenagers overall, although this research found no evidence for this in respect of the one independent teenager participating in the study.

Interestingly, the two participants who reported being the happiest were in the same refuge. They were both aged 13 and had not embarked on GCSE study. They had a support worker within the refuge, they attended a regular refuge youth club, had access to a computer room, and participated in refuge trips and activities. Their refuge was staffed 24 hours. Their experience of refuge can be associated with the availability of resources. Despite this, one participant returned to live with the perpetrator when a move from the refuge did not materialise as he wanted to be near his friends and school after five months in the refuge. This emphasises the importance of continuity for these teenagers and obstacles (and potential dangers) of lengthy rehousing processes. The other teenager was rehoused much more quickly, after a period of three months.

### **Barriers to Engagement**

Whilst teenagers highlighted the possibility of support being provided by various people, most perceived barriers related to refuge staff as the refuge is where they expected to receive support. Often teenagers were unaware of who refuge staff were. They said it would be helpful within the first week to be introduced to staff and the refuge rules. Teenagers felt they had to wait until they had a

problem or needed help before approaching staff, and this conflicted with their expectations. Jordan commented that it was important teenagers did not feel ‘told off’ by staff. Staff who were seen as too busy, not really listening, or indicating negative body language or facial expressions were described negatively and considered unapproachable.

From staff perspectives, time could present an obstacle, both in terms of too much or too little. The longer a family was in the refuge, the longer work could be undertaken. However, problems were often encountered when a family felt ready to move on. Staff reported complications when preparing teenagers to leave, especially if moves were rushed or unplanned. Staff described providing practical help with transitions such as school transport or registering with health care providers rather than emotional support. One member of staff said she could provide safety planning advice.

Other areas had recently introduced a commissioned early support service. This required families to be assessed at level 2 or 3 on the continuum of need using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) - ‘just coping’ or ‘struggling to cope’. There was confusion, however, as to whether teenagers in refuges could access this early support service and providers operated differently in each area. The early support service incorporated programmes such as ‘Helping Hands’ or ‘You and me Mum’, both of which appeared to be directed towards younger children. The service was limited for a maximum of 12 weeks and I was not informed of any specific programmes for teenagers. A participant residing in one of the refuges delivering these programmes had not accessed

this type of provision. Considering her length of stay, 12 weeks would have provided support for a very short period, less than one quarter of her time in refuge but it may have proved helpful.

Staff explained that a lack of follow-on support was a consequence of financial restrictions. Further pressure was placed on those refuges operating on a 'payment by results' basis. Any follow-on support was directed at adult women and provided practical assistance with benefits, budgeting or acquiring furniture. Another refuge provided a drop-in centre delivering groups and programmes, subject to availability. Follow up support continued for between three months and two years (depending on funding), according to need, but there was no direct work with dependent teenagers. Staff noted that the drop-in centre was considered as more of an adult service and less of a 'child-friendly environment'. This highlights the lack of appropriate follow-up support for adolescents were excluded from service provision due to their lack of adult status. It raises the question as to whether it is refuges or other organisations that should be providing this.

Refuges in four areas explained that they had lost funding for floating support and outreach services. Instead services were providing ad-hoc telephone support, generally to assist mothers in the community with matters concerning schools or perpetrators. One area had an outreach service for teenagers to provide 'transitional work' for six to eight weeks, although no teenage participants were recruited from this site, so teenagers' views on this provision could not be included in the data. The lack of community support for teenage

participants reflected the ongoing situation within refuges with support focused on adults.

### ***Client Status***

It was noted by five staff that an independent (unaccompanied) teenager could access more support in a refuge and was in a different situation from that of a dependent (accompanied) teenager:

‘...a teenager as a client gets a lot of support and they embrace that support, more than a 16 year old say who is the child of client... they’re coming from a different place; the woman who is here is escaping or fleeing domestic violence but the teenager might look at it differently. They have a lot more problems; they haven’t made that choice to flee...’  
(S12)

Here staff highlight that teenagers have a lack of choice or decision-making power when leaving the family home and moving to a refuge resulting in a possible reluctance to engage with staff. This reluctance may be compounded by the fact that there is less support available.

Dependent teenagers described an inequity of support and compared themselves unfavourably to younger children and adults who they saw as receiving very much more support:

‘...they class me as still being a child... yet they don’t want me at the kids club because I’m not a child.’ (Emma)

‘...they kicked me out of [the coffee morning] and said, ‘Oh this is for the adults. You’re not allowed to be here’... It were pamper day... I’m going to want to get pampered now and then but no, it’s for the adults...’  
(Georgia)

This lack of status was also experienced by independent teenagers. Staff acknowledged that existing support was not necessarily appropriate: ‘...they’re not fitting in with what the younger children are doing but they’re not fitting in with what their mums or the adults are doing so they feel a bit lost really...’ (S16). Staff felt that teenagers needed individual or tailored support and recognised (n=13) that a ‘one size fits all approach’ was not appropriate:

‘You don’t deal with adults the same way you deal with children and you don’t deal with children in the same way you deal with young people... it needs to be a separate thing. It shouldn’t be something that’s just bolted onto somebody else’s work. It should be acknowledged within its own right...’ (S3)

This highlights the need for specific support tailored to the needs of young people.

Staff interviewed identified a number of gaps in service provision for teenagers, including one to one support (n=10), counselling (n=5), art therapy (n=2), and group work (n=4). One member of staff suggested language support as she was supporting two teenagers who had been unable to speak English at the start of their stay. Staff also suggested that more support was needed relating to child sexual exploitation, self-harm, healthy relationships and life skills, echoing teenagers’ observations. There was no reference to legal differentiation between teenagers such as voting, full-time paid employment, sexual consent, marriage or imprisonment for example (see Chapter One).

## **5.4 REFUGE JOURNEYS**

Initially teenagers were happy to have left the abusive household and be in a place of safety, reinforcing earlier research findings (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003). Participants explained that they ‘got used to the refuge’ by physically and emotionally ‘settling in’. They would advise other teenagers not to worry or panic, to understand the situation they are in, cope as much as possible and eventually everything would go back to ‘normal’. This highlights their feelings of optimism and adjustment when dealing with the initial impact of moving but also conveys their understanding that they were still in transit.

Teenagers appeared to understand that safety required some sacrifices and were ready to accept this, for a short period. Their experiences are summarised by Harry: ‘I’d say it’s a good place to move in. But it’s not that good all the way through’. Participants often described being in a refuge for longer than they actually had been, as a consequence of distorted perceptions of time and numerous previous refuge stays, reporting that they were ‘tired’ of being in the refuge. For example, Molly told me she had been in the refuge for six months and could not wait to leave when she had resided there for four months.

Teenagers described waiting patiently initially but then experienced challenges which prevented transition to their new home. They were ready to relocate and move on but were unable to do so. Many resided in inappropriate, temporary accommodation for lengthy periods, and described the rehousing process as ‘useless’. Fifteen teenage participants suggested teenagers should only reside

in refuges for six months or less, and reported being ready to move out much sooner than this (see Appendix Eighteen). Two thirds of those who answered the question thought that their refuge stay should be four months or less but most teenagers (15/19) had been in their current refuge for more than four months by the end of the study (this does not account for previous refuge stays meaning they had usually been in temporary accommodation much longer).

The unpredictable length of time and restrictions caused increasing frustration and cumulative stress as teenagers spent longer and longer ‘trapped’ in refuges with their pathway to increased independence and normality restricted. This was particularly the case when participants believed they would be rehoused but this did not materialise as planned, and for teenagers who had moved repeatedly or been in refuge for over three months (the previous chapter provides length of stay information for individual participants). One teenager successfully applied to children’s social services for respite care to spend time away from the refuge. Teenagers who had resided in refuge the longest (and who were usually aged 14 and over) described feeling the unhappiest and the most discontent during their first interviews.

Other teenagers were more positive in their first interviews than in subsequent interviews. This may suggest changes over time (usually one month later) or feeling more comfortable voicing their opinions to me when they did not receive the support they expected from the refuge. In contrast, one participant wanted to remain in her refuge until she had completed college and was unhappy with a time limited move-on policy, identifying continuity of education as her priority (in Chapter Four). Interestingly, she was the only participant to describe her refuge

as ‘homely’. Eliminating such a policy and allowing the family to remain in the refuge, however, would have prevented another family fleeing domestic violence and abuse from occupying the space at a time when the number of refuge places is insufficient to meet demand.

Of the five teenage participants interviewed at home, three said they were happier since leaving the refuge. Sophie, the youngest participant, described feeling sad due to missing other residents. The oldest participant, Ruby, on the other hand explained that she had not wanted to leave the refuge but no longer felt safe there due to other residents. Their accounts highlight the differences in age, understanding and experience.

## 5.5 CASE STUDIES

This section will explore the situation of teenage participants living in refuges in more detail, highlighting changes and continuities over the length of time spent in the refuge. The four examples provide more detailed descriptions about features identified during data analysis to illustrate why teenagers need the support identified in the first half of this chapter. There are common themes over time including the need for support, difficulties establishing or maintaining friendships, the effect on family relationships and education, lack of space and privacy, and restrictions during a refuge stay. There was also a lack of focus on teenagers at their admission to and departure from the refuge.

The case studies are presented in three stages of the refuge journey: beginning, middle and end. In some cases the end phase marked the end of

the fieldwork and they remained in refuges for some time afterwards. In these instances participants discussed their feelings of being rehoused in the future. Presenting the case studies in this way identifies individualities in experience. For example, Rebecca was removed from school which increased feelings of isolation, James focused on the rehousing process, Zoe reported feelings of injustice, and Emma described an increasing need for someone to talk to owing to the length of time in refuge and cumulative impact on her future prospects. These differences will be explored in more detail below, following an overview of all teenage participants' refuge journeys. However, significant differences within case studies are limited to protect anonymity.

### **Details of Case Study Participants**

To maintain confidentiality but retain detail, the four case studies have been selected according to the following criteria: dependent status; moved more than once and located in the refuge with siblings. Taking into account the average number of interviews (3.2) they were also selected on the basis that they had participated in three interviews. These cases are representative of the larger sample but contain various characteristics which allow the exploration of key issues identified. One participant (James) was interviewed after being rehoused; one had been rehoused but did not complete an interview in her new home due to timing and the complexity of her situation (Rebecca); and two remained in refuges at fieldwork completion (Emma and Zoe). Two of the participants who feature in these case studies worked with me to devise a new rating scale. One participant was involved in the pilot stage and one was involved in data analysis. Data from these sessions are not included in the data

below. All participants were residing in different refuges; two had a BAME background and one was male, as shown in the table below:

**Table 5.1 Case Study Participants**

Participant name:	James	Rebecca	Zoe	Emma
<b>Age</b>	13-15	13-15	13-15	16-18
<b>Gender</b>	M	F	F	F
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White British	White British	BAME	BAME
<b>Number of moves</b>	3	2	2	3
<b>Number of completed interviews</b>	4	4	5	3
<b>Time in current refuge at first interview (months)</b>	4	<1	5	1

### **Beginning Phase**

This information was obtained from our first interview but was not necessarily immediately after their arrival owing to time already spent in their current refuge. James, Emma and Zoe described being greeted on arrival at their refuges but were not spoken to by staff or provided with information about the refuge or local area. Rebecca was provided with items including pens and paper. None of these teenagers received support for their transition into the refuge and had nobody to talk to about their feelings of moving or domestic violence. James noted that he would have liked to have known about the refuge itself, the local area, staff, and other teenagers' thoughts about it beforehand. Advanced awareness might have contributed to feeling more positive about moving although the practicability of this due to the unplanned nature of refuge admissions and resource implications is problematic. Like many other participants, these four teenagers had also resided in refuges immediately prior to their current refuge or some years previously. They were happy to be in a

place of safety and said it was during this initial period that they 'got used to the refuge'.

James was in his second refuge at the time of the first interview and was unhappy that they had not been rehoused. This was the third time they had fled from his mum's long term partner, his siblings' father. They had moved unexpectedly, leaving behind pets and belongings and he had been informed by telephone whilst on a school trip. He was, however, pleased that they had moved away from the perpetrator and closer to other family members.

Rebecca, her younger sibling and her mother, had been moved out of the family home by social services and the police. She had been collected from school and taken to a refuge which she described as 'horrible' and the family refused to stay. After a short time in temporary accommodation, they moved to the current refuge and initially Rebecca attended her original school. She thought the refuge was 'okay' at the outset; she described it as clean and quiet, but boring. Rebecca had stayed in a refuge when she was younger, fleeing a different perpetrator.

Zoe was in her second refuge fleeing her father. Initially, they had moved unexpectedly after she had returned home from school. They moved refuges because their social worker mistakenly revealed their whereabouts. Zoe felt that the family was being judged and controlled by external agencies who seemingly made decisions with little consideration for their needs. She reported

that the move to the second refuge was very upsetting and stressful, more so than the first, as they had got used to the refuge and described starting again as ‘messing with their heads’. Zoe repeatedly described being ‘forced’ to live in the refuge, with her resentment directed towards children’s social services who she saw as abandoning them and failing to communicate, leaving ten minutes after arriving at the new refuge.

Emma was in her third refuge, having spent a period of two years in refuges. The family had to move refuges due to a family member informing the perpetrator of their whereabouts. Emma had assisted the planning for leaving the family home and had helped her mum to access support at that time. Unlike Rebecca and Zoe, no external agencies were involved.

### ***Middle Phase***

This information was obtained between teenagers’ first and last interview. Although they may have only been in their current refuge for two to three months, they had all resided in refuges or temporary accommodation immediately prior to their current refuge. Teenagers said they appreciated being in a safe place but felt they had to ‘put up with’ educational and friendship difficulties or shortfalls in support until they were rehoused and everything would go ‘back to normal’. It was during this phase that the ongoing impact of refuge restrictions became apparent. These teenagers felt that being in a refuge marked them out as not ‘normal’. The limited support available within the refuge could exacerbate feelings of difference, as set out earlier in the chapter.

None of the case study participants attended a youth club or accessed any form of external provision. This data was gathered from the second interview onwards, according to the length of participation, and demonstrates their need for the different types of support outlined earlier in this chapter.

James compared the refuge unfavourably with a previous one. The previous refuge had a children's worker and improved facilities for teenagers, including activities. His mother was aware of some of his feelings about the refuge but 'not much'. He reported that his mother did not ask and that he 'doesn't mind if she doesn't ask'. James also explained that he felt lonely and embarrassed, kept his feelings to himself and had nobody to talk to. He would have liked a support worker to talk about domestic violence and abuse and about living in a refuge. There was another teenager in the refuge who spent his time lying in bed to pass the time. James was worried about the impact on his schoolwork but was aware of support that could be accessed through school and spent time with a teacher after class. These opportunities or resources were not available to Rebecca, Zoe or Emma.

Rebecca attended refuge activities during school holidays and found this beneficial in terms of confidence and learning new skills. A refuge youth club operated but was attended by younger children. Rebecca was very aware of the abuse she had lived with and reported needing support for events she had witnessed. Whilst she understood why they had moved and the dangerousness of the situation, Rebecca did not agree that they had to leave the area itself and explained her reasons for this. She noted that her younger sibling had been

affected by the abuse and had nobody to talk to. Instead, they received informal support from her mum and her mum's friends. Rebecca emailed me regularly during her refuge stay but not after they were rehoused, suggesting that her need for somebody to talk to was most acute whilst she was in the refuge.

Zoe reported keeping her opinions to herself. When she had tried to express her feelings to her social worker she had been informed that she had a 'bad attitude'. It was during this phase that her feelings of resentment appeared to grow. Zoe struggled to understand why she was unable to see other members of her extended family and reported that it was their father who posed the risk. She thought they were safe living at home and felt she could protect herself with 'self-defence'. Zoe seemed to suggest she could enforce her own authority by taking personal responsibility for stopping the violence rather than seeking criminal justice remedies. She perceived such remedies as penalising her family rather than the perpetrator. Zoe resented her father being able to remain at home and said that he should have been (re)moved.

Emma was not receiving individual support and felt she needed someone to talk to, more so than she had done when initially moving. Previous refuges had provided facilities including a children's worker (refuge 1) and group work (refuge 2). Emma wanted the research to continue after fieldwork completion to meet her need for someone to talk to. When completing the new rating scale she had helped to devise, Emma preferred to distinguish between each refuge

rather than different points in time. She indicated that, at home and in her current refuge, support for domestic violence was zero. In refuges 1 and 2 this had increased to 9:

**Table 5.2 Emma's Rating of Domestic Violence Support**

Important Areas in my Refuge Journey		Support for domestic violence (out of 10)	
How were these things BEFORE the refuge	How were these things at the refuge? REFUGE 1	How were these things at the refuge? REFUGE 2	How were these things at the refuge? REFUGE 3
			
x	x	x	x
0	9	9	0

### ***Feelings about Refuge***

Teenagers explained that, after they had settled in, their initial feelings changed due to specific events that had happened or because they started to notice more negative aspects about the refuge and its impact on their everyday life. This included friendships which will be discussed next.

James focused on the physical aspects of the refuge, describing it as very plain and bare, and the furniture as tired and old. He commented that there was no 'life' such as plants or pets. He was unable to decorate and it did not feel homely. He said that it was impossible to forget about being in a refuge. During the school holidays he stayed with his dad for two weeks. He reported

feeling much happier out of the refuge and ‘kind of depressed’ when returning. He commented that there was nothing to look forward to other than being with his mum. Returning to the refuge reminded him of the domestic violence experienced but also that he was different to his peers. Similar to other participants, he had no support to help him deal with these feelings.

Once removed from school, Rebecca reported feeling frustrated in the refuge as there was nothing to do and she was ‘sat in’ most days. Interestingly, she reflected that she had ‘loved’ being in the refuge as a child but that it was different for teenagers due to restrictions. Sometimes, she stayed with friends or at her dad’s house to avoid returning to the refuge. Initially, teenagers of a similar age were residing in the refuge but they moved out shortly after her arrival, leaving only much older teenagers or younger children.

Zoe expressed dissatisfaction concerning broken and old furniture in the refuge. She described it as plain, dark, worn and unhygienic. Later, the refuge obtained a small amount of funding for refurbishment and Zoe appreciated this. However, like James, she emphasised that it did not feel homely: ‘even if it was maximised to the best it could be...it wouldn’t feel like home...’ Zoe reported feeling ‘tired’ of being in refuges. She said it was unfair on her and her siblings and ‘not normal’. There were no other teenagers in the refuge. She worried about people knowing that it was a refuge and damaging it or breaking in.

Emma said that initially moving to a refuge had made her feel safe and people were there to support them with their concerns, particularly about being located but, like Zoe, now she was ‘tired of moving’. She became increasingly dissatisfied with refuge life due to issues with refuge rules, an absence of space and a lack of privacy. Emma explained that concerns regarding her education had gradually got worse and she was unable to concentrate on homework. She was also unhappy with the lack of support available to help her to cope with these issues.

### ***Friends***

James travelled a significant journey to see his best friend and was looking forward to when his friend could stay over at his new house. He explained that he hid his feelings and did not look forward to returning to the refuge after spending time with him. He would have preferred to stay at his friend’s house every night and found the summer holidays challenging due to bedtimes and curfews. He commented that he was unable to have a relationship whilst in the refuge as he would not be able to invite a girlfriend to visit due to issues of secrecy.

Rebecca became gradually more concerned that staying in the refuge would affect her friendships and spent considerable amounts of money on her phone to maintain contact. During the fieldwork period, Rebecca was removed from school and felt increasingly isolated. Instead, she spent time visiting her family whilst the perpetrator was imprisoned. However, refuge staff and social

services raised concerns about this due to the emotional support she provided to family members outside the refuge. Rebecca reported that instead of attending school or visiting friends and family she had to spend more time in the refuge which exacerbated feelings of loneliness and being 'stuck'.

In contrast, Zoe found it difficult to keep making new friends owing to difficulties in explaining why she had moved and where they were living. She spent a lot of time helping her mum with her younger siblings and providing translation support. There were no other teenagers in her refuge during her stay and she was not linked to any external activities. Zoe had been out of school for nine months before being enrolled at a new school. She was extremely worried about the impact on her education. Like another female participant, she was excluded for a period between interviews four and five due to an outburst at school. She explained this had occurred due to keeping her feelings to herself.

Emma described difficulties starting new schools and commented that she had tried to change in order to fit in. This was due to a combination of factors including domestic violence, living in refuges and being new. At one time, Emma and her family were living in a predominantly white area and so she had the added pressure of trying to build her support network in an area where they experienced racism (refuge 1). Emma reported that she had no social life and found maintaining friendships stressful due to refuge rules. Emma made a friend in the refuge who was evicted following an incident with another resident. This intensified her feelings of being 'stuck', similar to Zoe and Rebecca.

However, there were improvements to her rating of isolation compared to being at home, as they were now closer to her maternal family who they were prevented from seeing previously.

**Table 5.3** Emma's Rating of Isolation

Important Areas in my Refuge Journey		Isolation (out of 10)	
How were these things BEFORE the refuge	How were these things at the refuge? REFUGE 1	How were these things at the refuge? REFUGE 2	How were these things at the refuge? REFUGE 3
 X	 X	 X	 X
7	6	6	3

### ***End Phase***

Towards the end of their research participation - the end of fieldwork or prior to being rehoused - teenagers were asked how they felt about leaving the refuge, either in their third interview or later, but usually their last interview.

James found the rehousing process frustrating. He explained that they would find houses, plan to move but would then fail to secure the house. This happened repeatedly, meaning they had to 'keep waiting and waiting and waiting', highlighting the continued disruption he experienced. He noted that it was not necessarily the refuge itself that felt safe but leaving the abusive home.

The allocation of a new property marked the start of a new phase. He was looking forward to having his own room but after another move did not materialise, it became apparent that they would be moving to a smaller property and he would have to share with his younger sibling. Although he felt 'pretty down' about this, James was still hoping his mum would be successfully allocated the property as he did not want to remain in the refuge any longer, even if that meant compromising on space.

Rebecca was hoping to move out before her birthday (after six months in refuges) so that she could spend time with friends. She explained that they were waiting for a house but due to statutory involvement they had little control over where they would move or when. Rebecca reported concerns that staying in a refuge was affecting their relationships with other, older siblings, who were not in the refuge, who she now saw less frequently. She commented that these siblings too had lost a form of support - their mum.

Zoe suggested that families with teenagers should be rehoused from refuges after two to three months due to the need for privacy, normality and stability. Echoing the views of other participants, she felt that in reality teenagers were 'stuck' in refuges. At the time of our second interview (6 months in current refuge, 11 months in refuges in total), Zoe was eagerly waiting to be rehoused and was anxious to get a house nearby so they did not have to move school again. Five months after fieldwork ending, Zoe was still waiting, meaning she had spent well over a year in refuges.

Emma's main concerns were coursework and the impact on applying to college. She commented that younger siblings always secured school places first. Emma was looking forward to leaving the refuge and noted that she would have her own room, decorated how she wanted, as well as freedom and space. Similar to Zoe, the family were still waiting to be rehoused five months after fieldwork completion.

### **After the Refuge**

Not all teenagers had been rehoused at the end of the fieldwork. As noted earlier, both James and Rebecca had been rehoused but only James participated in a final interview in his new home. Nobody spoke with James before he left the refuge and he received no follow-up support. He felt happy to leave the refuge and said that his biggest concerns were school and the perpetrator. He commented on the usefulness of the research helping him to 'finally' speak to someone and get it 'out of his system', although it would always 'be there'. When asked if anything had changed since leaving the refuge, James reported that he could now complete his homework without being disturbed and had the option of studying in his room or another room in the house:

James: I can say one thing. I'm not upset that I left the refuge. Like I said, I'm glad that I have.

Kelly: What do you think was the most difficult thing about being in the refuge?

James: Not having my own space.

The above extract from our final interview reinforces the importance of personal space for teenagers, as discussed in Chapter Four.

### **Rating Scales**

These teenagers completed at least three rating scales which help to compare feelings about key indicators for each individual. The limitations of these scales are discussed in Chapter Three but the ratings still provided some illuminating data as part of our discussions.

#### ***James' Refuge Life Rating Scale***

The rating scale that James completed shows very little change across most dimensions with the exception of sleeping and concentrating on homework. Both of these improved following rehousing, which James attributed to having more space. James explained that sleeping and worrying whilst he was in the refuge were at the same levels as before moving to the refuge. He had been worried because his mum was upset or worried. This remained the same when they moved out of the refuge as they were worried about the perpetrator finding them. He commented that he got along with his mum and siblings most of the time whilst they were in the refuge, rather than all the time, because they argued about being in the refuge. He had no space or privacy due to sharing a room with his mum and siblings. James wanted to be in a normal house but there was little that could be done to resolve this. The level of family arguments remained the same following rehousing as there was a lot of work to complete in the new house which made for some conflict and stress. It seemed unfair to

James that now they had moved out he was experiencing continued disruption and he just wanted it 'done'.

**Table 5.4** James' Refuge Life Rating Scale

Indicator	In the refuge...			(At home)
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4
I sleep	Well	Well	Well	Very well
I worry	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
Me and my mum get on	Most of the time			
Me and my siblings get on	Most of the time			
I can concentrate on homework	Most of the time	Most of the time	Most of the time	All the time

#### ***Rebecca's Refuge Life Rating Scale***

Rebecca's completed rating scales show some change across measurements with the exception of sleeping and concentrating on homework. This may be because Rebecca was interviewed shortly after her arrival at the refuge. Rebecca noted that she slept consistently in the refuge but had slept better at home. She said she sometimes heard noises but also that it did not feel like home. Initially she was not worried about being in a refuge but this changed due to the restrictions imposed by refuge rules and leaving school. Rebecca noted that her relationship with her mum had deteriorated as they argued about being in a refuge. She clarified that she got along with her sibling who was living in the refuge with her because they 'have to be strong together', indicating

a shared understanding of their experiences. However, their relationship was worse than at home because they had no space. Initially she felt too tired to concentrate on homework due to the length of her day travelling to and from school but her situation deteriorated due to being removed from school and not attending at all.

**Table 5.5** Rebecca's Refuge Life Rating Scale

Indicator	In the refuge...			
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4
I sleep	Okay most of the time			
I worry	Never	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
Me and my mum get on	Most of the time	All the time	All the time	Most of the time
Me and my siblings get on	Sometimes	All the time	All the time	Sometimes
I can concentrate on homework	Never	Never	Never	Never

### **Zoe's Refuge Life Rating Scale**

Zoe's completed rating scales show change after our initial interview but then remain steady. This was due to sharing a room with her siblings and not having enough space. Zoe explained that she did not sleep as well in the refuge as she had done at home: 'I just don't sleep, I don't know why'. Zoe described feeling despondent and reported there was very little change whilst she was in the refuge. As with the other three case study participants, Zoe reported having no space or privacy from younger siblings.

**Table 5.6** Zoe's Refuge Life Rating Scale

Indicator	In the refuge...				
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4	Time 5
I sleep	Okay some of the time				
I worry	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
Me and my mum get on	All the time	Most of the time	Most of the time	Most of the time	Most of the time
Me and my siblings get on	All the time	Most of the time	Most of the time	Most of the time	Most of the time
I can concentrate on homework	All the time	Most of the time	Most of the time	Most of the time	Most of the time

Although she indicated she worried 'sometimes' on this scale on the 'Important Areas in my Refuge Journey' she rated worrying as ten at home and throughout her time in refuge, suggesting feelings of worry were significant. Like Emma, Zoe had wanted the interviews to continue and I was concerned that ending the fieldwork as planned whilst she was still in refuge would exacerbate her sense that she had nobody to talk to.

#### ***Emma's Refuge Life Rating Scale***

The rating scale that Emma completed shows no change. This may be partly attributable to her considerable length of time already spent in refuges. Emma

explained that her sleeping was uneven in the refuge due to worrying about school, college, and her father locating them. In contrast to James and Rebecca, her relationship with her mum had improved since leaving the family home as she now felt able to ask for advice and helped her with decision-making and caring responsibilities. Her relationship with her siblings had improved since leaving the family home as they were less scared and ‘more free’. Throughout her refuge stay, Emma described herself being unable to concentrate on homework. This was the same as before leaving home but she noted that she had been unable to concentrate there due to domestic violence. In the refuge, she attributed poor concentration to lack of space and unhappiness concerning the school she was attending. She also described a lack of privacy from younger siblings.

**Table 5.7** Emma’s Refuge Life Rating Scale

Indicator	In the refuge...		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
I sleep	Okay some of the time	Okay some of the time	Okay some of the time
I worry	All the time	All the time	All the time
Me and my mum get on	All the time	All the time	All the time
Me and my siblings get on	All the time	All the time	All the time
I can concentrate on homework	Never	Never	Never

To set the experiences of this group of four teenagers in the context of the wider study, it is worth noting that by the end of the fieldwork (April 2015) 12 of the 20 teenagers had been rehoused. Some left the refuge of their own accord: one was staying with a relative and one had returned to live with the perpetrator without his mother. Six remained in refuges or had moved to further temporary accommodation. Research engagement, particularly whilst residing in refuges, reinforced the fact that teenagers are not provided with opportunities to communicate about their experiences and the research interviews were used as an independent forum in which to do this.

## **5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Although moves were generally unplanned, teenagers initially considered moving to a refuge as an opportunity to access a place of safety and expected support to deal with loss, change and moving on from domestic violence. Frustration grew when they lacked certainty as to how long they would remain in refuges. This led to teenagers feeling trapped. They consistently reported wanting to be 'normal' which they felt was impossible whilst in the refuge. Teenagers were sensitive to their surroundings and commented on the fact that refuges did not feel like their 'home'. Whilst refuges may have provided shelter and physical safety, they struggled to provide a place of belonging and to offer teenagers emotional security.

Currently, refuges lack consistent models and guidance for direct intervention when working with teenagers. The ambiguity of teenager status in society more

widely appears amplified in the refuge setting where, although staff were able to acknowledge teenagers' fluctuating needs, a binary distinction between child and adult often seemed to shape the services available. Teenagers' needs included support for time spent out of school, interpreters for mothers, someone to talk to, support for self-harm, direct work concerning domestic violence, support to maintain social networks, and help to develop strategies for coping with a prolonged refuge stay. Support in refuges appears to be adult-focused with minimal assessment, little initial or ongoing support, and no follow-up support for teenagers once they leave. Informal support options reduce as teenagers are often the only young person in the refuge and experience long periods out of education. Refuge rules increase social isolation and restrict access to social support. Teenagers wanted to meet with others in order to validate their experiences. In addition, support work to strengthen the mother-teenager relationship was unavailable. Teenagers' social and emotional development was constrained by a lack of resources within refuge and community settings resulting in inconsistent service provision. There was no mention by teenagers of any alternative programmes in school and teenagers themselves suggested they may need support with more complex needs. Teenagers with documented histories of self-harm received little support and fell between services.

Teenagers develop their own strategies to build resilience or protective factors (such as academic achievement) to minimise the effects of their experiences. These strategies could be identified and strengthened in work with teenagers. Whilst teenagers in this study did not necessarily define themselves as

vulnerable and resisted the label of victimhood, they wanted support concerning domestic violence, the constraints of refuge life, and other areas of their lives. They wanted to be considered seriously, listened to and receive support in their own right. They wished to move on from their experiences of domestic violence but were still experiencing distress and loss and there were few resources to assist with promoting recovery. They wanted support to communicate effectively with their mothers and they have concerns about how or whether they can talk about the abuse they lived with.

Teenagers' perceptions of refuge staff are crucial – they wanted to know that staff cared and were interested in them; where support was received this was valued. It is clear that effective support needs to encompass a range of areas and should be flexible and personalised to meet individual needs. This research would have benefited from the inclusion of participants accessing more developed initiatives to improve understanding of the support teenagers described when reflecting on previous refuges, but no contemporary examples of such initiatives were available.

The case studies highlight that teenagers understood their experience as continuing and cumulative. Anticipated changes over time were less than expected due to limited availability of support to address social, emotional and educational challenges and the length of time teenagers spent in refuges. This includes the time teenagers had spent in refuges prior to our first interview. Worry and stress associated with domestic violence were replaced by anxiety about the future and stress resulting from restrictions and isolation experienced

when living in a refuge. There is a critical need to provide opportunities for teenagers to explore their experiences, to be listened to, and to be accepted and respected as individuals. Many of their criticisms were directly linked to a lack of resources, including the levels of support, standard of accommodation, rules regarding safety and internet access.

Teenagers value relationships with their peers and significant adults and they want to sustain such relationships. Based on the data collected, refuges should consider developing models of social support that could enable teenagers to simultaneously maintain existing informal relationships and develop new friendships. This could include the use of social media, measures to enable young people to continue to attend their same school, where possible, and additional professional support.

Teenage participants expressed a need for individualised support to assist processing experiences of both domestic violence and refuge life. It can be argued that teenagers in refuges constitute particularly disadvantaged individuals who appear to be disproportionately affected by staying in refuges for long periods. There is a case for a needs-led, age-appropriate approach which minimises disruption in all areas of their lives. In practice, refuges often appear to fail to distinguish between children and teenagers or between teenagers. The need to consider teenagers as distinct from children may have resource implications and implications for practice and training.

The findings outlined in this chapter and the previous chapter will be explored further in the subsequent two chapters where they will be considered in the context of relevant literature. These chapters will focus on the tensions of adolescence, the service response, the refuge environment and the impact of staying in a refuge, and teenagers' desire to feel normal.

# **Chapter Six**

## **Discussion Part I**

# **The Challenges for Teenagers in Refuges**

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### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

While UK policy recognises the impact of domestic violence on children and young people, services to address this remain inadequate. This research has sought to shift attention beyond the impact of domestic violence on to the context and adequacy of current service responses, focusing on teenagers' experiences of refuges. The research findings reported in the previous two chapters identified key challenges for refuge provision for this age group. This chapter considers in more depth and in the context of the wider literature: refuges' focus on protection and risk, providing safe opportunities to use new technology, the contradictions and positioning of adolescence, and the change in definition of domestic violence.

Frequently, research, policy and practice approach younger children and teenagers as one group. By adopting a focus on teenagers' experiences, this study aims to restore the balance in the research evidence on children's experiences of refuges. This discussion will begin by placing the research into the context of the wider picture regarding refuge provision for teenagers and highlight the lack of data on this group. It will then seek to interpret and

understand the research findings reported in previous chapters and their implications for policy and practice. The implications of findings relating to teenagers' experiences of refuge life, the service response, the refuge environment and the impact of staying in a refuge will be discussed. The final section discusses the implications regarding the educational impact of moving separately.

Teenagers in refuges are treated as less important than adult women or younger children, not directly, but because their specific needs and circumstances are overlooked. As detailed earlier in Chapter Two, in the UK, feminism was the original driver for the development of refuges which focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Currently, refuges aim to provide physical safety, practical and emotional support delivered by staff, and mutual support between residents (Refuge, 2016). The findings reported in the last two chapters revealed that these objectives were targeted on adult women or much younger children, and teenagers were left out and often felt isolated.

## **6.2 REFUGE ROLE AND DATA**

Data for this research was collected between March 2014 and April 2015. Since the definition of domestic violence (in England and Wales) was widened to include 16 and 17 year olds, there can be teenagers of equivalent age in the same refuge, subjected to different rules and regulations and in receipt of different forms of provision. This will be determined by their status as dependent (accompanying their mothers) or independent (unaccompanied) individuals, accommodated as victims in their own right. I had originally

planned to compare the annual statistics of participating refuges for 2013/14 to 2014/15 but the low response rate made this impossible. Staff were unable to provide local statistics because the relevant details were not recorded as there was no mandated recording requirement. Some staff provided anecdotal evidence of referrals for teenagers increasing.

Bowstead et al (2015) argue that refuges are a distinct service for women who have not been able to remain in their local area. They maintain that refuges should not be considered, planned or funded as local services, but rather as regional and national services, hosted locally, due to the numbers of women and their children forced to relocate. The argument that refuges are not local services for local women (due to insufficient capacity or distribution) highlights the likelihood of residents experiencing isolation from friends and family, lack of knowledge of the local area and lack of awareness of local agencies when they move to a refuge. The needs of children and teenagers, as outlined in the thesis, are rarely considered in this argument. Yet they too experience dislocation issues while additionally changing schools and losing leisure activities. These circumstances are regularly overlooked when considering the national planning and funding agenda for refuges nationwide.

It is recognised that over 70 percent of women travel across local authority boundaries to access refuge provision (Bowstead, 2015; DCLG, 2014). This was similarly the case for at least 70 percent (n=14) of the participants in this study. Three families had specifically requested cross boundary refuge

provision for safety reasons and to be near other family members; three were able to stay local, while others *had* to move to available refuge space. The average relocation distance for a teenager in this research was 57.4 miles, resulting in 12 teenagers being forced to move schools. The Women's Aid (2015) survey similarly found that, on the 'day to count'<sup>14</sup>, 136 services were supporting 1,144 children and young people accommodated in refuges who had been forced to move schools as a consequence of domestic violence (Women's Aid, 2015). The ages of those included in this survey are not provided and there is no analysis of the number of teenagers accommodated alone or with their family. It is not apparent if those surveyed had been able to access new schools or colleges, and the length of time spent without a school place.

Further shortcomings have been identified with the Women's Aid data including inconsistent annual figures. Data is also limited by reflecting their core business of supporting adult women. There is no alternative national data available. Improved disaggregated data could be used to better identify the needs of infants, children, teenagers and adults and consequently inform the allocation and commissioning of appropriate resources. The initiative to collect this data could be taken either by individual refuges or by local authorities with an interest in improving services.

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<sup>14</sup> The 'day to count' is a snapshot of the women and children supported on census day (usually in June) for refuge services. Questionnaires are completed by providers and submitted to Women's Aid.

## **Changes to Provision of Refuge Children's Services**

This research adds further evidence to other studies that have highlighted substantial gaps in service provision for children and young people who experience domestic violence. McGee (2000) established over 16 years ago that more than 85 percent of refuges were delivering 'children's' services. Specialist 'children's' workers were still found to exist in 'most' accommodation based services for domestic violence in the Communities and Local Government report, but workers for young people were very rare, and much less than required for the number of young people in refuges (Quigars and Pleace, 2010). There is no available data on the numbers of refuges currently offering services for children and young people. Anecdotal evidence gathered in my research suggests that such services have drastically reduced in number. Towers and Walby (2012) found a 31 percent cut to the domestic violence and sexual abuse sector from local authorities between 2010/11 and 2011/12, from £7.8 million to £5.4 million. Wider 'children's' services were also found to be particularly affected (Towers and Walby, 2012). Some respondents to the Women's Aid Survey reported closing services (13% n=17) due to lack of funding<sup>15</sup>, almost half of which were 'children's' services (Women's Aid, 2015). Some refuges also had to be closed (Women's Aid, 2015). Constant changes make it difficult to obtain an accurate picture of service provision. The volatile and rapid change of domestic violence provision has been reported in earlier London research (Radford et al, 2011) and was a key issue in Lancashire during the final stages of this study (BBC News Online, 2016).

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<sup>15</sup> 132 services responded to this question.

### **6.3 INDEPENDENT TEENAGERS ACCESSING REFUGES**

The primary client group has previously been seen as focused on adult women, with services mostly designed to meet their needs. This does not appear to have changed since the change in definition to domestic violence. Findings cannot be generalised, but this research found substantial gaps in provision and practice knowledge in regards to services for independent teenagers which warrant further investigation. Further research is needed to assess the appropriateness of a refuge for independent teenagers and the support they need. Chapter Four highlighted confusion amongst staff over accessibility and funding of refuge places for independent teenagers. A number of independent teenagers recruited to this study chose to leave the refuge a few days after their arrival. Staff explained that this was a common occurrence suggesting they do not adapt easily to refuge life. An absence of support and negative perceptions from older (adult) refuge residents towards independent teenagers was reported. This hierarchy in refuge life was also identified in staff interviews undertaken by Fox (2015) in a service evaluation for the Harmony project. She found that a more specialised service aimed at the specific age group of 16 to 24 year olds who had complex problems requiring intensive 24 hour support helped these young women to settle into the refuge lifestyle more easily, to engage in activities/with others, and they were less likely to return to an abusive situation (Fox, 2015). In my study, support from older residents varied according to the residents accommodated at the time, and so resident support of teenagers cannot be relied upon by teenagers, staff or funding bodies.

Parallels were found between dependent and independent teenagers concerning the need for physical space, access to computers and the internet, the importance of maintaining friendships, and a focus on future prospects. Similarities in support needs were also identified, including the need for someone to talk to in the refuge, activities to increase confidence, support with understanding domestic violence, and follow-on support after leaving the refuge. While the research found some similarities in experiences of refuge life among dependent and independent teenagers, there were inequities in service responses, as detailed in Chapter Five (within findings relating to Successful Engagement and Client Status).

The difficulties refuges face accommodating both independent and dependent teenagers could be problematic in the future if, as staff suggest, the numbers of teenagers referred to refuges continue to increase. This research showed that independent teenagers were treated as adults and dependent teenagers were viewed as equivalent to much younger children. One staff member described independent teenagers as having the option of accessing adult and/or child forms of support. While this may assist with their position as an adolescent, in between child and adult services, this could also cause confusion. Teenagers aged 16 to 18 years are required to follow distinct rules and access differing support but are accommodated alongside each other. This risks creating hierarchies within the teenage population which may weaken opportunities for friendships and mutual support. There are, however, opportunities to target services at this age range of teenagers (16 to 18) and extend them to younger teenagers.

## **6.4 TEENAGERS' EXPERIENCES**

This research advanced existing methods by conducting a series of interviews which aimed to capture the changing views of teenagers in refuges over a period of time. The epistemological position adopted informed the approach to prioritise the voices of young people, encourage participation, and understand changing interpretation over time. As discussed in Chapter Three, this approach also enabled the researcher to develop relationships with young informants and gain a more detailed and nuanced understanding of their experiences. In practical terms, this meant using participatory methods and repeat interviews. Talking to teenagers over time enabled an understanding of events as they perceived them, highlighting social, educational and emotional challenges they experienced during their refuge stay.

### **The Accumulative Impact of Domestic Violence for Teenagers**

It has been suggested that children and young people living in refuges with their mothers may constitute a particularly disadvantaged group and consequently should not be considered as representative of all children and young people who experience domestic violence (Kitzmann et al, 2003; Øverlien, 2011b). Bowyer et al (2015: 306) suggest they can be considered to be a 'distinct and high risk population'. This does not, however, acknowledge teenagers' position as distinct from younger children. It is therefore important to establish the specific needs of these teenagers in order to provide appropriate support.

Assumptions that teenagers are less affected by domestic violence than younger children (Buckley et al, 2006; Hughes, 1988) can be challenged using my research findings. For teenagers in refuges, the experience of domestic violence within the family will be very recent and exposure has often been severe and prolonged (Edleson, 1999; McIntosh, 2003). The teenagers interviewed were very clear that they had been adversely affected by domestic violence and wanted support to deal with their experiences. Although the research did not ask teenagers directly about their experiences, during the interview process they described intervening in violent incidents and living with abusers for many years, sometimes from birth.

As indicated in Chapter One, teenagers are more likely than younger children to have experienced domestic violence over a long period. The longer an adult woman is exposed to domestic violence, the higher the likelihood of adverse health outcomes, which is relevant when considering teenagers' exposure (Bonomi et al, 2007). Rossman's (2001) study with children aged five to 14 years concerning the impact of exposure to domestic violence over time provides considerable support for an accumulative model of adversity (see also Hughes et al, 1989). Prolonged exposure to domestic violence not only produces worse outcomes (Rossman, 2001) but also problems that are more resistant to intervention (Wolak and Finkelhor, 1998). Experiencing domestic violence at home has been identified as a significant risk factor for abuse in adolescent relationships (Fox, 2015; Ismail et al, 2007; Laporte et al, 2009). One refuge in my study gave the example of a teenager who had been accommodated as a dependent aged 15 with her mother and as an

independent aged 17 due to an abusive partner relationship. A refuge stay could provide opportunities for engaging dependent teenagers with supportive services and building resilience to domestic violence in the future. Intervening during adolescence is a strategy for improving health in adulthood (Lancet Editorial, 2012). The needs of teenagers in refuges, however, have not been conceptualised as health problems.

### **Returning to the Perpetrator**

While previous research has shown the difficulties adult women face in separating from an abusive partner (Radford and Hester, 2006), this research shifts attention on to some of the challenges teenagers face in getting away from a violent parent or partner. Some teenagers in my study had left the abusive household repeatedly prior to their current stay (see also Barron, 2009). Teenagers reported being ‘tired’ of moving and expressed a desire to feel settled. One teenager talked about the possibility of returning to her father if he changed his behaviour and was ‘like he used to be’. It was apparent that the family were likely to return to the perpetrator during the school holidays, after the research period had ended – a decision made by her mother. Another teenager returned to the perpetrator without his mother. The possibility of teenagers returning to live with perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse needs to be addressed within the service response.

### **The Challenges of Refuge Life**

This research found that difficulties with refuge life were attributable to a combination of factors such as teenagers’ developmental needs, refuge staffing,

stage of educational study, presence or (more usually) absence of a support worker, availability of trips or activities, access to technology, refuge rules, and the speed at which the family were rehoused. An ecological perspective is helpful here to describe the relationship between an individual and their environment (Pardeck, 1988) which includes the larger system beyond the individual, family, and near environment (Edleson, 2000). A number of authors have applied this concept to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; 1986), problems of child abuse and neglect (Belsky 1980, 1993) and domestic violence (Carlson 1984; Dutton 1988; Edleson and Tolman, 1992). An ecological framework suggests that change can be achieved in several ways via efforts within and between systems (Edleson, 2000). Taking this perspective would promote the development of protective factors and reduction of risk factors for teenagers across all of these levels.

Participants' accounts of refuge life as disruptive and stressful are consistent with existing evidence (Øverlien, 2011a; Stafford et al, 2007). In addition, this research has shown that initially teenagers appreciated a place of safety, but became increasingly frustrated in reaction to the length of stay in the refuge, restrictions of refuge life, and the failure to be rehoused. In earlier research with wider age groups (Baker, 2005; Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007; Stafford et al, 2007), teenagers reported being pleased to leave refuges as soon as possible, citing the absence of appropriate facilities as significant in their desire to return home. In contrast to existing research (Øverlien, 2011a; Stafford et al, 2007; Thatcher, 2012), teenagers participating in this research understood why they were residing in the refuge and some had supported their family to leave the abusive

household. They also reported wanting to leave the refuge after a few months, but not to return to the perpetrator. Many teenagers reported wanting to move on with their lives, and described the refuge both as an opportunity and a hindrance in doing so.

### **Protection and Empowerment in Refuges**

The analysis of the data indicates that, currently, refuge provision focuses on vulnerability and protection rather than achieving a balance with opportunity and empowerment. Interviews with staff identified a tension between perceptions of teenagers' vulnerability and independence. Protectionist discourses regard adolescents as victims of abuse whereas children's rights discourses construct adolescents as active social actors in their own right (Lesko, 1996a; 1996b). This tension is key to teenagers' experiences of refuges. However, advocating a move towards a children's rights discourse is not necessarily a straightforward means of achieving a balance with protection.

Milne's (2005) perspective can be harnessed to understand how the rights of teenagers may be overridden under the guise of teenagers' 'best interests'. Sometimes teenagers were viewed by refuge staff through a protectionist lens, constructed as vulnerable and therefore in need of protection. At other times, teenagers were viewed as capable and therefore failed to receive support from refuges or statutory agencies (as detailed in Chapter Four). These conflicting responses resulted in provision that was inconsistent, insufficient and inappropriate from the perspectives of both staff and teenagers. If provision is to be made more appropriate, the first step must be to hear what teenagers say

about how refuges could respond to their needs as they define them. While balancing young people's 'rights', 'needs' and 'best interests' can be difficult, value laden, and often used to justify adults' views (Milne, 2005; Woodhead, 2005), refuges could do more to ensure that young people's voices are heard and that their participation in the planning and management of refuge life is encouraged. Best interests cannot be determined without consideration of a young person's wishes (UN, 2009). Archard and Skivenes (2009) offer a useful checklist of questions aimed to balance the rights principles of best interests with hearing and responding to young people's views.

Lansdown's (2005) work is relevant here. She explains that during adolescence many of the protective structures and securities of childhood are relinquished. At the same time, teenagers under 18 years old are still recognised as 'children' under the UNCRC and as such are entitled to its protections, provisions and recognition of their growing capacity. The challenge for refuge staff is to provide appropriate protection that 'enables teenagers to extend their boundaries, exercise choices and engage in necessary risk taking', whilst at the same time 'not exposing them to inappropriate responsibility, harm and danger' (Lansdown, 2005: 32). This group of young people is distinguished from their peers by the added risks they face from exposure to domestic violence.

### ***Challenges of Adolescence***

Staff in this research described the challenges in working effectively with teenagers; these difficulties were also acknowledged by the teenagers

themselves. Teenagers directly identified adolescence as problematic. In addition to their experiences of adolescence, teenagers are also trying to deal with other transitions such as moving to the refuge, moving a significant geographical distance, changing schools (and frequently subjects of study) and changes to friendship groups and family dynamics.

Difficulties were experienced by the teenagers in this study in response to organisational practices. Teenagers were observed to be striving to be accepted as independent individuals in an environment which they felt infantilised them. On some occasions, however, they were expected to undertake more adult roles such as translation or assisting their mother with rehousing. Teenagers experienced these shifts in expectations as contradictory. This in itself reflects the fact that transition to adulthood is not a linear process from dependence to independence, and incompetence to competence (Punch, 2001). Teenagers' own accounts included requests for help, support and advice, as well as demands for freedom and resistance to the restrictions imposed by a refuge service. Staff may struggle to develop a consistent model of support for teenagers due to conflicting demands as well as to differences in age, competence, experience and needs within the group.

These contradictions were embodied by Mohammed, who at times expressed discomfort with adult responsibilities (in Chapter Five):

'I was always the one to do the translation and stuff...you're just a child and you shouldn't be worrying...shouldn't be having to do things like that...should be worrying about other stuff that for you are more important...I felt fine about it because she's my mum. But obviously

sometimes I think, 'Is it my job to do this?'...Because I'm just a child, you know...'

On the other hand, restrictive refuge rules, such as those prohibiting teenagers from entering communal refuge spaces without their mother resulted in Mohammed arguing to be treated like an adult (in Chapter Four):

'...I said, "Wow, but I'm 14, you know. I can take care of myself."...Can you imagine, just there doing your stuff and then the next minute just being told to get out because you're not allowed because apparently you're a child?'

Whilst this obviously caused confusion for practitioners and for teenagers themselves, these examples demonstrate that adolescence is a time of continuing change. This takes place through experimentation which may involve taking on new roles, and decision making within and outside the family (Peterson and Leigh, 1990). Coleman and Hagell (2007: 3) suggest that one of the reasons adolescents seem contradictory is that 'inside every teenage individual is both a child and an adult'. Alapack and Alapack (1984) argued that adolescents are required to navigate existential issues such as dependence and independence, being with others and being apart, and both resembling and at the same time being different from others, as part of transition. Further, as mentioned in Chapter One, the period of adolescence is considered to have lengthened with young people maturing earlier but remaining reliant on their families for longer (Coleman, 2011). All of this has relevance for service provision which needs to take account of messages that may seem contradictory but are specific to teenagers' experiences of transition and identity formation.

## **6.5 THE SERVICE RESPONSE**

### **The Positioning of Teenagers in Refuges**

Chapter Two made the important point that refuges first acknowledged the impact of domestic violence and began to undertake direct work with children before any other agency in the UK (Mullender and Morley, 1994). Lack of provision is a response to the current context of austerity policies (see Towers and Walby, 2012). Staff in this research described the insecurity, reduction and erosion of funding. Teenagers staying in multiple refuges identified differences in funding levels and quality of provision. A key finding emerging from this research is that refuge support for teenagers to overcome harm is still not appropriately resourced. Living in refuges for prolonged periods without such support can be extremely difficult for young people.

Achieving the required balance between safety and independence may be particularly difficult in a refuge setting. Historically, there appears to have been a shift from what refuges were originally intended to do and what they actually do now (Warrington, 2003). The findings of this research indicate that the founding values of empowerment and gender equality appear to have been replaced with a focus on risk reduction and protectionism. This has particular relevance when considering the impact of the refuge environment on teenagers and will be returned to later in the discussion.

### ***Child Focused Service Provision***

While refuges cater for young children as an appendage to their mothers, the needs of teenagers are rarely understood or met. The staff I interviewed frequently referred to teenagers as 'children' or used terminology aimed at younger children, indicating their expectations of working with younger children. Some staff held qualifications such as social work or primary education degrees but these were not a requirement for their role. Of those with training specific to children and young people, a greater number held nursery or early years' qualifications and only one was a qualified youth worker. The majority of refuge resources available (including staff) were intended for younger children (e.g. play spaces or toys).

This research found that, within the refuge setting, dependent teenagers are seen as secondary victims rather than victims in their own right who were offered adequate time and resources. The teenagers considered themselves to be neglected by existing services, falling in between provision. They provided examples of being excluded from access to children's services or of refuge facilities that were deemed inappropriate, yet they were also unable to access the provision and support provided for adult women. These experiences were echoed in the interviews with staff. The findings of this research reveal that not only are teenagers excluded from individual and collective decision-making in refuges, their status results in them being presented with inappropriate or non-existent opportunities to participate in existing provision.

### ***Age-appropriate Provision***

Previous research on domestic violence systematically highlights how health, social and educational professionals have struggled to identify or understand the dynamics of adolescents' experiences and respond appropriately to their individual needs (Hester et al, 2007; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al, 2002). This research extends these findings to refuge provision. Repeatedly, teenagers participating in this study focused on the fact that facilities, activities and support were not age-appropriate. Both staff and teenagers in my study specified a need for a dedicated support worker for teenagers, separate from the children's worker role, to reflect the key worker system provided to adults in refuges (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). None of the young people in this study were currently receiving this dedicated support although there was evidence of this in their accounts of previous refuge stays, with age-appropriate provision and dedicated staffing regarded positively. In 2010, only two percent of refuge services provided a dedicated worker for young people (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). The funding cuts experienced since then make effective provision even less likely in the future.

This research considered teenagers' views in depth, and found that those who were happiest in refuges were those who had access to the most resources. These resources included computers, activities, the company of other teenagers and a support worker. The happiest teenagers also resided in refuges for shorter periods of time in comparison to other participants. It was notable, however, that they also tended to be younger participants. Existing reports describe teenagers' views of refuges as negative with their needs being overlooked (Hague et al, 1996; Stafford et al, 2007). Qualitative findings from

my research confirmed this but found that the older a teenager was the more difficult they found refuge life; these difficulties were particularly evident for teenagers engaged, or preparing to engage, in GSCE study. Teenagers' needs for educational support are discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

### **Multi-agency Provision**

Refuges are unable to meet the needs of teenagers on their own. Over two decades ago, Ball (1994) made a case for one full-time children's worker post per six adult bed spaces and recognised that children and young people would require different responses according to their age and experience. As detailed in Chapter Two, arguments were previously made for funding (Hague et al, 1996) and liaison with other agencies (Mullender et al, 1998) to address challenges relating to teenagers. Refuge staff in my research identified difficulties making links with other agencies and cited funding stipulations requiring a focus on adults, as well as a lack of time and resources as barriers to multi-agency working for teenagers. Outside the refuge, staff felt that they were not always taken seriously by other agencies and needed to 'prove themselves' frequently. This may be connected to their role as a non-statutory service.

Staff reported that they had limited services to signpost teenagers to and that more services were available for younger children. Cuts to the range of relevant services, such as CAMHS, have been reported in other research (Radford et al, 2011; Towers and Walby, 2012). Staff felt that some agencies or services considered teenagers as 'old enough to look after themselves' or not in

need of support. Alternatively, other agencies recognised the need but had limited capacity. Trying to locate provision was very difficult, and support from social services was described as ‘wishy washy’ (S16). There was some evidence of refuges linking to external or community services, such as a youth club and a young carer’s project. Findings indicated that these were valued by teenagers but such links were rare. Reasons cited for this included the unaffordable cost of attending outside activities or service reduction. There were no examples of joint funding or joint applications for activities to support teenagers within refuges or in the community.

According to refuge staff interviewed, other agencies often withdrew involvement once teenagers were in a refuge, as they were then judged to be safe. Teenagers highlighted that whilst they were in a refuge their lives were not yet stable, and they required support with other areas of their lives such as education or mental health. Transitions between schools or from child to adult mental health services were experienced as challenging. Staff in refuges are well-placed to support these teenagers, but a range of obstacles were encountered when accessing relevant external services: a lack of support available in comparison to younger children, lack of recognition of voluntary sector expertise, negative stereotypes of teenagers, and subsequent decisions about capacity.

## **Engagement**

As reported by refuge staff and teenagers themselves, teenagers can be neglected by services, within and outside of refuges. Staff explained this in

terms of perceived challenging behaviour or difficulties with engagement. Even if teenagers were not seen as challenging, support within refuges remained unavailable due to the absence of funding and appropriate resources mentioned earlier. Staff worked during the time teenagers attended school and were therefore unavailable at evenings or weekends. Staff working hours have also been highlighted as problematic for adult women in refuges (Quiggars and Pleace, 2010). The lack of appropriate support for teenagers sends uncomfortable messages about their value – messages reflected in their feelings that nobody cared about them. The dominant perspective is of adolescents being difficult to engage rather than recognition of services as ill-conceived to meet their needs.

### ***Establishing Trust***

Other explanations for a lack of engagement concerned trust. Staff and teenagers alike described teenagers' lack of trust in supervising adults; this was attributed to fears that confidential information would be shared with other staff, and with their mothers. Staff provided examples of how children's social services involvement could constitute a barrier to establishing trust with teenagers due to demands for monitoring and reporting. This research has provided examples of how some refuge staff successfully engaged and developed trust with teenagers (see Chapter Four). It also includes suggestions from teenagers as to how refuge staff could contribute to building better relationships with them. Teenagers expressed a need for confidentiality, and for staff to spend time with them – both in conversation and undertaking joint activities. Staff confirmed that in their experience these were positive and

possible ways to build trust (see Chapters Four and Five). Unsurprisingly, this research indicated that teenagers were more trusting of staff who understood their needs, listened to them, took them seriously, and acted quickly to support them; as well as viewing them as individuals whose needs and capacities differ to those of younger children.

Teenagers in this study talked about their need for confidentiality. According to Larcher (2005), confidentiality based on mutual trust is critical to young people's future relationships with professionals. This could prove difficult where a staff member was required to support both the mother and the young person. This issue was conveyed in teenagers' accounts when they described needing a support worker 'just for teenagers'. Trust, rather than the need for help per se, is key in determining whether a young person seeks help (Frydenberg, 1997) A young person's perception of a potential helper as a good listener, rather than simply offering advice, is central (Frydenberg, 1997; Leavey et al, 2011). Staff were aware that disclosing teenagers' confidences to mothers would have 'destroyed that trust' (S10) and they were cautious not to disclose information that was not linked to safeguarding. This need for staff to build focused and understanding relationships provides support for the argument for teenagers to have their own support worker. Article 39 of the UNCRC (rehabilitation of child victims) could be used to support such arguments. This Article covers traumatic experiences including violence and sexual violence. It states that children and young people have the right to receive help to support their recovery from these experiences:

'Children who have been neglected, abused or exploited should receive special help to physically and psychologically recover and re-integrate into society. Particular attention should be paid to restoring the health, self-respect and dignity of the child'.

This Article may be particularly useful to guide refuge work aimed at promoting the physical and psychological recovery of teenagers.

Descriptions of successful engagement with refuge staff placed teenagers closer to adult status or roles. One staff member described increased engagement with a teenager she had supported to complete a CV and subsequent job applications (Chapter Five, Successful Engagement). Focused support addressed teenagers' requirements to be treated with maturity, and reduced any feelings of being infantilised. Engagement needs to progress towards viewing teenagers as closer to adult status with situated competence. This could assist the development of a supportive relationship, creating the foundation to engage in therapeutic work to address the impacts of domestic violence.

### ***Negative Perceptions***

Barriers to engagement included teenagers' perceptions that their feelings were trivialised or dismissed. A children's worker, who was also a qualified youth worker, identified that events which caused strong emotions or upset in teenagers could be perceived as trivial by adults who failed to recognise the speed of change for teenagers. This trivialisation was linked with misconceptions of teenagers' capacity and a perception of their status as not

yet ‘adult’. Teenagers were treated as lacking in competency, both as a ‘child’ and as an ‘adult in the making’ (Uprichard, 2008). It is acknowledged that social constructions may create thresholds between what constitutes a ‘child’ and an ‘adult’ (Alanen and Mayall, 2001), but teenagers felt that they were considered nearer to child status than adult status and not yet considered capable or competent. Perceptions that their feelings were unimportant contributed to their reluctance to engage with professionals and intensified feelings that nobody understood them or their needs.

Teenagers felt that staff held negative perceptions of them, which contributed to their reluctance to engage. They described staff as not taking their views seriously, treating them as ‘difficult’ due to their age, and not listening when they tried to speak. Children and teenagers are often not taken seriously because adults believe that they do not really know what they want or need. Chapter One of this thesis suggested that Lansdown’s (2005) work on evolving capacities provided a useful framework for conceptualising teenagers’ decision making. Moreover, teenagers tend to be closer to adults than to younger children in terms of cognitive development, such as thinking and reasoning (Kaplan 2004). Such evidence could be used to inform training and development of refuge staff’s work with teenagers.

This research has shown that teenagers try to manage their time in the refuge themselves. Their apparent resistance is often a consequence of them trying to retain control over their lives. One teenager successfully applied for respite care to spend time away from the refuge, and other teenagers chose to leave

the refuge before they were rehoused. Reasons for needing to be away from the refuge will now be explored in terms of the refuge environment.

## **6.6 THE REFUGE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Moving to a Refuge**

Leaving home because of domestic violence is known to have a traumatic impact on women and children (Malos and Hague, 1997). Living in a refuge is likely to have distinct effects separate from those linked to domestic violence (Edleson, 1999). The accounts of teenagers participating in this study indicate that the initial move away from the abusive home was considered positively. This was due to a sense of physical safety rather than reduction of traumatic impact. There was a lack of support in helping teenagers to develop productive and positive coping strategies in order to deal with their experiences of domestic violence, and the cumulative stress resulting from an extended refuge stay, representing a neglect of emotional safety.

This research highlights that moving in itself creates additional complications for teenagers, and that these are linked to the challenges of adolescence. Hague et al (1996: 32) found that 'older children', when compared to younger children, understood far more, trusted less, had more anger, and had greater resentment of the losses they incurred when living in a refuge. This research found that this resentment and anger related to feelings of being 'stuck', to the loss of protective systems, and to the impact of refuge life and residence on education and social networks. This was coupled with a lack of support in managing

secrecy and confidentiality, and restrictions imposed by refuge life during the time of adolescence.

Teenagers in this research reported that they would have liked more information about the refuge itself, the local area, staff and other teenagers' thoughts about it beforehand. The five participants aged ten to 16 years (three were aged 14 to 16 years) in Bowyer et al's (2015) study perceived themselves as helpless and described a lack of control over their transition into refuge or temporary accommodation. Whilst advanced information is not always practicable, due to the unplanned nature of refuge admissions and resource implications, Bowyer et al (2015) propose that leaflets designed by children and young people about refuge life would be valuable. This is supported by the suggestions of teenagers in this study who reported that their mothers received verbal and written information, but young people did not. This research suggests that this is due to their social positioning within refuges, perceptions about their capacity, and the inability of refuge staff and service providers to perceive teenagers as primary users of refuge services.

### **Length of Refuge Stay**

Teenagers in this study identified the length of time spent in refuge as problematic. In line with existing research with women (Charles, 1994; McGibbon et al, 1989; Taylor, 1989), teenage participants noted that around three months but fewer than six months would be the optimum length of stay. Three quarters of teenage participants suggested that rehousing should occur within six months and reported being ready to move out much sooner than this

(Appendix Eighteen). One cause of longer stays is the lack of suitable and affordable housing. This shortage has been identified as a policy problem for over two decades in London (Pleace et al, 2008) and is reported by service providers as a major problem across the rest of England (see Quligars and Pleace, 2010). This highlights that move-on accommodation for families leaving refuges is still insufficient and contributes to cumulative feelings of stress for young people.

Teenagers wanted rapid responses to assist move-on and were frustrated with the rehousing system. They understood the processes but were disappointed when a house they had hoped to secure did not materialise. Research from over 20 years ago, which is still echoed today, identified that women want their own home, privacy and the ability to feel safe, without an interminable wait (Charles, 1994). My research highlighted that a wait for move-on accommodation led directly to one teenager returning to live with the perpetrator, without his mother, so that he could continue to see his friends and remain in his school.

Teenagers reported that refuges did not feel like short term or temporary accommodation to them. Those who had repeatedly moved between refuges or supported accommodation could not accurately remember how long they had lived in refuges, and participants frequently over-estimated their length of stay. Their accounts indicated that a few months in a refuge is a relatively long period in their lives, especially as refuges were supposed to be transitional accommodation. Data analysis showed that the longer they remained in refuge

the more stressful they found the experience due to ongoing restrictions imposed by refuge rules, being removed from school, and the negative impact on relationships.

Women's Aid surveys (2012, 2013) highlight that housing shortages lead to prolonged lengths of stay and additionally prevent other families from leaving abusive households due to the resultant shortage of refuge places (Women's Aid, 2012; Howard et al, 2013). Two-thirds of local authorities (65 percent) report that they are 'usually' able to meet the main duty to households at risk of domestic violence, within six months of accepting them as homeless and in priority need (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). The evidence in this research does not support this. Omitting teenagers that left the refuge themselves, or returned to the perpetrator, families were accommodated in their current refuge for approximately 8.6 months. At least two teenagers were rehoused in further temporary accommodation linked to the refuge, which would increase this figure. Moreover, figures from my research are not representative, owing to one area rehousing a number of teenage participants far more quickly than other areas. Over half of the teenage participants in this study lived in their current refuge for six months or more and a quarter stayed in the refuge for over 12 months. When families do finally secure a house, the process is often rushed. One family I visited had no carpets, and the house was not ready. This contributed to stress and conflict between one teenager and his mother as he experienced this lack of preparation as ongoing disruption.

## **Feelings of Safety**

The analysis of interviews with teenagers and staff showed that the physical safety offered by refuges was important to teenagers. It was regarded as the most positive aspect of a refuge and was a helpful feature of the initial period of their stay. One teenager explained that it was not the refuge *per se* which contributed to feelings of safety but the fact that they had left the abusive home. Feelings of safety could also change over time. This was because teenagers were sometimes worried about the perpetrator finding them, reflecting fears of adult women in earlier research (Binney et al, 1981; Kirkwood, 1993). Having a ground floor bedroom contributed to one teenager feeling unsafe. Teenagers' accounts also revealed that they worried about other residents' behaviour towards them, break-ins and damage from strangers. This perhaps indicated that refuges can become fear-based environments due to the constant emphasis on secrecy, safety and protection. Research shows that people routinely feel unsafe in less familiar places (Merry, 1981) and teenagers described the anxiety caused by not knowing the area or community they were living in and sometimes not knowing refuge residents and staff members.

## **Space in Refuges**

### ***Physical Space***

Teenagers identified a need to exercise and develop their independence, and to balance this with a need for safety and boundaries. They felt that they should be able to spend time away from the refuge; however, staff described the limitations of the environment they were working in, and prioritised issues of

safety which ultimately brought teenagers back into the space of the family. Interestingly, teenagers were willing to accept limits placed on them by their mothers or carers, which they regarded as reasonable, but sought freedom from the refuge staff whom they saw as imposing unreasonable restrictions. Young people's hostility to such restrictions may create difficulties for staff which cannot be resolved without additional resources. In more standard circumstances, reaching adolescence would typically allow increased opportunities for spending time outside the family home (Coleman, 2011) that up until then may have been a stressful setting.

### ***Space Away From Their Family***

Data gathered from interviews with staff and teenagers highlighted the importance of teenagers having spaces of their own. It is noted elsewhere that space is important to teenagers' distinct needs for increased time to themselves and space away from their primary caregiver to develop their independence and identity (Allen and Land, 1999; Coleman, 2011; Kaplan, 2004). Referring to refuges in the Netherlands, Donkers (2015) identifies the importance of having a space to 'hang out' and talk with friends without the presence of adults. In newly built UK refuges, space specifically allocated for teenagers was often sacrificed or compromised in order to reduce costs, whereas space for younger children was not (Baker, 2009). This was observed when visiting the refuges, and demonstrates a lack of understanding of the needs of teenagers and their low priority in comparison to women and young children. The lack of space to complete homework or spend time away from their family was problematic.

Teenagers in this study emphasised that they needed time away from younger siblings.

Issues were identified with teenagers not being able to occupy communal refuge spaces without the presence of their mothers. Theories of urban space suggest that spaces are not neutral but permeated with social meanings (Cahill, 2000; Matthews, 2003; Matthews et al, 2000). Additionally, they provide a place for inclusionary and exclusionary practices to operate (Sibley, 1995). For example, Matthews et al (2000) suggest that children's and young people's visible presence in public places is often seen as inappropriate and they are thus disapproved of, leading to surveillance and regulation. This need to control teenagers' movements appears to have transferred to those places considered 'public' within refuges, with teenagers excluded and expected to stay in certain places or be monitored by an adult (Addams, 1909). This differential access to space reflects their non-adult status and is a consequence of the refuge's need for safety and protection. Generally, teenagers felt that there was no room for negotiation with staff over their access to spaces within the refuge, and they felt they had no voice. This reflected a lack of negotiation more generally in terms of refuge rules and protectionism. To some extent this can be seen to reflect France's (2007) argument that youth policy frameworks have been underpinned by an approach that limits rights, demands greater parental responsibility, or increases surveillance. It confirms the regulation of teenagers who lack the status of adults. The principle of independence for these young people is not included as a right within the UNCRC. However, the reference to the concept of 'evolving capacity' in General Comment 12 (UNCRC Committee on the Rights

of the Child CRC/C/GC/12, 2009) and Article 5<sup>16</sup> of the UNCRC may be useful in supporting teenagers' rights claims for increasing independence according to their capacity rather than age.

### ***Emotional and Physical Space***

This research found that for teenagers, the need for physical space reflected their need for emotional space. Similarly, participants in Bowyer et al's study (2015) explained that loss of personal space was the worst thing about moving to temporary accommodation. They spoke of having 'nowhere to go', both physically and 'mentally' and described the loss of physical space having a significant impact on their ability to think things through (Bowyer et al, 2015: 309). Teenagers in my study explained their need to have space to help them cope with domestic violence and gather their thoughts (see Chapter Four). For some adolescents, the environment hinders the coping process if they do not feel in control of their personal space (Rask et al, 2002). Goldblatt (2003) suggests that because young people cannot leave their families emotionally, their sense of entrapment may be magnified, which connects with teenagers' descriptions of prison-like environments and will be discussed in the following sections. Teenagers experience refuges as a lack of physical and emotional space which undermines both their coping mechanisms and survival strategies.

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<sup>16</sup> Article 5: 'States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention'.

Contrastingly, teenagers housed independently described having too much space to think about what had happened. Ruby described a lack of emotional support; she had her own room but there was nowhere else that she felt she could go (Chapter Four, Emotional Space Inside Refuges). She appeared unable to separate herself from her experiences of domestic violence in the way described by dependent teenagers, most likely because of differences in experiencing the abuse. Ruby had experienced domestic violence as a child in her parents' relationship as well as in her own relationship. A teenager's individual layers of experience are likely to be relevant to determining the nature of the support to overcome harm.

Other than time spent in school or college, the lack of appropriate facilities and the restrictions imposed by the refuge impacted on teenagers' abilities to physically or emotionally remove themselves from both the space of the refuge, and their family. Their experiences were more acute when they were not attending school. Other research has identified that spending more time in their room or away from home is a useful coping strategy for teenagers living with domestic violence and abuse (Mullender et al, 1998; Rogers, 2009). Essentially, they cope by being able to physically leave or distance themselves emotionally from the situation. Teenagers are unable to utilise such strategies when living in refuges, due to the intense restrictions of refuge life and disruptions to school, social support and leisure activities. Their ability to control their own experience is again limited by an emphasis on perceived 'safety' and 'protection'.

## **Absence of Privacy in Refuges**

Teenagers' need for, or right to privacy was key to the issue of physical and emotional space. Privacy for teenagers and the quality of accommodation in refuges have been identified as significant issues in earlier research (Abrahams, 2004; Hague et al, 1996; Stafford et al, 2007). These studies, however, often recruited participants living in refuges with communal facilities. Interviews in this research revealed that these issues remain salient for teenagers accommodated in self-contained facilities due to refuge rules regarding safety, lack of age-appropriate facilities, and intrusion from staff. All of these disrupt privacy. Privacy is especially important for teenagers (Coleman, 2011) during changes in physical development and identity formation (Kaplan, 2004). Most teenagers in this study were required to share bedrooms with either younger siblings or their whole family. The length of time teenagers were accommodated in refuges in these circumstances directly related to feelings of lack of privacy. UNCRC Article 16 states that: 'No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy' in an institutional context, this might be interpreted as supporting children and young people's claims for private space where they can go to be alone; although protection from harm may take precedence over the right to privacy in dangerous situations. This principle might be of use in developing refuge policy in respect of private space for young people.

## **6.7 THE IMPACT OF STAYING IN A REFUGE**

### **The need to be ‘normal’**

Teenagers felt that living in a refuge meant they were different from others. Those interviewed expressed a desire for ‘normality’ which was related both to their experiences of domestic violence and to living in a refuge. Previous research (Buckley et al, 2007; Lepistö et al, 2010) demonstrates that adolescents experiencing domestic violence seek to ‘belong’, are concerned with what others think of them, and are ashamed of their experiences of domestic violence. This is a common finding in research with other children and young people who have experienced abuse, neglect and other forms of adversity (Bennett et al, 2010; Jackson and Martin, 1998). These feelings have led some young people to avoid committed friendships or have difficulty in forming friendships (Buckley et al, 2007). Others have been found to rely on their friends as a form of support (Futa et al, 2003). Teenagers in this study, such as James, explained that spending time with friends away from the refuge contributed to feelings of being ‘normal’.

According to developmental models (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Marcia, 1966), a key developmental task for teenagers is identity formation. During this period, social relationships are significant and requirements for conformity to peer group norms and the need to fit in are overwhelming (Coleman, 2011; Erikson, 1968). Buckley et al (2006) found that some adolescents were unable to live ‘normal’ lives due to feelings of burden and responsibility. Whilst young people typically become free of those responsibilities once they leave home, teenagers

in my study described the requirement for ongoing responsibilities. Examples included translating for mothers, caring for siblings and helping with rehousing.

### ***Stigma Resulting From a Refuge Stay***

The need to be normal was particularly important for adolescents whose experiences of domestic violence can be considered to contribute to self-perceptions of a 'spoiled identity'. This has been identified previously with mental health patients (Goffman, 1963; Rogers and Pilgrim, 1991). Goffman's (1961; 1963) conceptualisations of both 'stigma' and the 'total institution' may be applicable, in some parts, to teenagers' exclusion from 'normal' life, and their experience of increased surveillance. This heightened surveillance was routinely reported by teenagers and contrasted with life at home; they stated that it was 'not normal' to be in a refuge. Goffman (1963: 9) defines stigma as 'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance'. As with the cases analysed in Goffman's (1963) work, teenagers in this study were concerned about the perceptions of others; they actively concealed information about their situation as a process of identity management and acceptance.

The difficulties posed by refuge rules have been identified in other research (Fitzpatrick et al, 2003). This research considers the impact of such rules in the context of adolescence and utilises US research (e.g. Haaken and Yragui, 2003) and the work of Goffman (1961; 1963) to explore feelings of stigma and incarceration. Below, I consider the refuge as a controlling environment with examples of restricted freedom, monitoring and surveillance. The discussion

progresses to consider the relevance of refuges feeling unhomely and institutionalised (as presented in Chapter Four). This is then explored in terms of risks to and risks from teenagers, followed by a section concerning secrecy and confidentiality. The refuge as a barrier to peer support will be discussed with a subsequent section on the opportunities and risks of modern technology.

### ***The Refuge as a Controlling Environment***

Teenagers described refuges as feeling like a ‘prison’. Accounts of feeling trapped have also been articulated by adult women (Haaken and Yragui, 2003; Stout and Thomas, 1991). Some have argued that many US shelters are beginning to replicate the controlling environments women are attempting to flee (Bumiller, 2009; Stark, 2007) owing to the organisational need to maintain order prevailing over goals such as empowerment (Gengler, 2012). Hartnett and Postmus’ (2010) study of a refuge in Ohio described policies as similar to ‘rules that parents impose on children or prisons on convicted criminals with the intent of controlling and reinforcing good behaviour’. Teenagers are required to obey rules imposed by both their mothers and staff, and this may amplify negative experiences of control and feelings of imprisonment. Sometimes these responses were compounded by other agencies’ input, such as that of social services who could add further restrictions to a teenager’s stay which refuge staff had to adhere to due to their safeguarding responsibilities.

Goffman (1963) conceptualises stigmatization as a function of social control which is consistent with Hartnett and Postmus’ (2010) claim that refuge policies

subject women to control and subordination. Goffman (1961) identified that ‘total institutions’, such as prisons or mental asylums, aim to subject the inmates to regimes of power whereby everyday routines are separated from the outside world, and rationalised. Such routines and ‘prison-like characteristics’ were referred to by teenagers who used the terms ‘prison’ and ‘mental hospital’ to describe refuges, and such accounts are attributable to refuge practices prioritising safety, protectionism and avoiding vulnerability. Teenagers’ opportunities to critique or act to change such policies were restricted and they were expected to conform and comply. However, they were observed to challenge such ‘total institutions’ by leaving the refuge before they were rehoused, applying for respite care and by disengaging with staff. Teenagers demonstrated resistance directly through conflict with staff and indirectly via critical comments made during research participation.

Teenagers’ status prompts the application of protective measures out of concerns about welfare and assumptions of vulnerability. When considering refuges in the USA, Haaken and Yragui (2003: 52) suggest that they are part of a ‘social category that establishes a boundary between danger and safety, between protectors and predators’. Ultimately, refuges separate those needing protection from those considered as dangerous (Haaken and Yragui, 2003). This leads to teenagers feeling confined and denied the freedom of ‘normal’ teenagers. Haaken and Yragui (2003: 52) note that usually prisons contain ‘the bad’ people inside their walls to protect ‘the good’ outside, but this order appears to have been reversed in refuges. Those who have experienced domestic violence are segregated from the community, their friends and family,

and feel stigmatised. Living with the secrecy of domestic violence could lead to feelings of shame which hindered relations with peers. For teenagers, the stigma associated with isolation and incarceration was reinforced by the small numbers of people of their age in the refuge and restrictions on visits from friends and family. Zoe felt that she was being punished. She expressed feelings of injustice, and the view that her abusive father should have been the one to have moved (Chapter Five). Providers and stakeholders in a study (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010) into domestic violence housing-related support identify the need for stronger policies to evict perpetrators from the family home. This could potentially reverse perceptions of ‘the good’ and ‘the bad’.

### ***Monitoring Inside the Refuge***

In Chapter Two, Burman and Chantler’s (2004) conceptualisation of refuges as non-places was identified as relevant for the experiences of young people in this study. Burman and Chantler (2004: 385) also note that increased use of close circuit television (CCTV) in refuges creates a ‘very material link between support and surveillance’. Such practices raise questions as to who being is monitored. Teenagers felt that security measures were aimed at monitoring their behaviour. This surveillance is characteristic of an institution and connects to teenagers’ perceptions that refuges do not feel ‘homely’. Such views may be connected to the reduction in staffing levels and refuge funding.

### ***Homeliness***

The concept of 'home' has generally been described as a potential source of ontological security where people feel in control of their environment, free from surveillance, and free to be themselves (Saunders, 1990). Although this may not necessarily be the case for those living with domestic violence, it is relevant in terms of teenagers' experiences of the refuge environment. Burman and Chantler (2004) identified markers of institutions, such as fire doors, and noted that these were linked to funders' requirements and professional standards. These markers reduced the status of refuges as homes. Characteristics of an institution were identified within teenagers' accounts. Teenagers have not chosen to live in the refuge. They described sharing a bedroom with younger children and/or their mothers like prisoners sharing cells with fellow inmates. Some teenagers were residing in communal facilities; they had to share spaces such as the lounge or bathroom with other residents. Two teenagers conveyed their distress concerning specified times (and purchasing tokens) for washing clothing. Teenagers described being unable to personalise their spaces and described the decoration and furniture negatively. They described refuges as lacking 'life' and noted the absence of pets or gardens. The concept of the refuge as a 'home' is also undermined by the lack of private space (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 1999), detailed earlier.

Only one participant described her refuge as 'homely'. She was not entirely sure why it felt that way but she explained that the refuge was a relatively new purpose-built building which had new furniture and pictures on the walls. She shared a bedroom with her sister but not with her mother, and they had their

own kitchen, lounge and bathroom. The refuge also had a garden. This refuge did not have gates or a reception area, and from the outside looked like any other large residential building. This outlier account suggests that attention to design, décor and openness in refuges might make a significant difference to teenagers' experiences.

Teenagers conveyed feelings of displacement which were attributed to repeated moves and the emphasis on security measures. For example, Georgia described moving to alternative temporary accommodation and then to the refuge and the associated difficulties of not being able to see her father (not the perpetrator) and her step-siblings. She contrasted the refuge with home throughout our interviews:

...they (staff) just walk in and let themselves in... we're not allowed to put pictures up unless there's nails that are already in the wall. Our Christmas decorations had to be put up with sellotape. We're not allowed anything... It's like it's not even your own life. You have to go by the rules... Otherwise you lose your place and you're on the streets, basically.

Ultimately, teenagers are constrained in the name of protection, but from their perspective, 'protection' becomes an imposed system of rules and regulations which restricts their agency.

### ***Imposed Restrictions***

Teenagers' descriptions of institutionally imposed rules highlight a perceived lack of trust and regulation of refuge residents. They located the responsibility

for imposing these rules with staff members, rather than the organisation, which may have acted as a further barrier to engagement. They perceived the rules, and the staff imposing those rules, as rigid with no room for flexibility. For example, dependent teenagers described not being allowed to stay out of the refuge overnight, meet friends or go to the shop without their families. Teenagers felt that such rules were not explained sufficiently. Staff conceived teenagers as vulnerable and reasoned that teenagers 'needed' to understand such restrictions were for their own safety. Lansdown (2005) suggests that over-protection actually increases vulnerability by failing to equip children and young people with the information and experience they need to allow them to make informed choices in their lives. They are denied opportunities to gain confidence, make informed choices and contribute towards their own protection. Ultimately, however, the refuge is responsible for the safety of families residing there.

### ***Perceptions of Risk from Teenagers***

It was unclear, at the refuges I visited, whether the rules and restrictions were aimed at preventing risk from teenagers or risk to teenagers. This was particularly the case regarding teenagers' access to refuge buildings, use of communal spaces and being alone in refuges without their mothers. It was interesting to note, predominately in respect to males, that sometimes policies and staff focused on a teenager's physical appearance, such as size (Chapter Four). Their appearance was seen to pose a risk rather than place them at risk. This thinking was linked to their potential to become perpetrators of domestic violence and preconceptions of risky and reckless behaviour (Steinberg, 2008).

This attitude was not identified in staff's responses to female residents. This may reflect awareness of the higher likelihood of boys using violence towards their partners (e.g. Barter et al, 2009; Wood et al, 2011) or parents (e.g. Boxer et al, 2009; Holt, 2013).

Chester-James (2004), however, argues that the reason for not accepting boys into refuges is less about them being potential perpetrators and more about the practicalities of space and privacy. Given the experiences of teenagers in my study, this seems reasonable. Yet staff accounts from my study also suggest that such policies stem from concerns about the possibility of boys' violence and relationships forming with other residents. This supports wider arguments that girls are constructed as 'at risk' whereas boys are perceived as 'risky' (Sharland, 2006). As a consequence, concepts of masculinity and gender norms associated with violence can be considered to compromise boys' rights and access to refuge provisions (see UN, 2016 CRC/C/GC/20). Quilgars and Pleace (2010) found that 36 percent of refuges did not accommodate boys over the age of 12 and 44 percent did not accommodate boys over the age of 15. This makes it difficult to accurately identify the level of need for teenage boys, and may explain why only one fifth of participants were male in this study.

### **Secrecy**

Secrecy and stigma surrounding both domestic violence and abuse and refuges proved problematic for teenagers. Young people often report feeling embarrassed about living in refuges, and describe feeling isolated due to

difficulties about not disclosing where they live (Donkers, 2015; Øverlien, 2011a). Whilst this study confirmed these findings, staff tended to treat this as inevitable and not open to amelioration. This resulted in a lack of sensitivity from staff in supporting teenagers to maintain their friendships and to explain their circumstances to others. Instead, refuge rules relating to maintaining the secrecy of the refuge were prioritised. Participants in Bowyer et al's (2015) study also described new threats associated with living in temporary accommodation. These included the relentless questioning from peers at new schools enquiring about why they could not disclose where they lived. Participants also thought that they had to 'manage' these threats by themselves, often having to 'think on their feet' when being questioned (Bowyer et al, 2015: 310). Teenagers in this research were similarly unsure as to how to explain their situation and felt threatened when asked questions.

### ***The Need for Refuge Secrecy***

Staff were clear that there was no question refuges should remain secret and that the security of the refuge took priority over teenagers' needs. Confidential location of refuges is normal practice within the UK (Burman and Chantler, 2004). The rationale for this secrecy is to ensure safety from further retaliation, and attacks from perpetrators. Whilst safety is absolutely essential, there have been some challenges (in the USA) to the need for complete secrecy (Haaken and Yragui, 2003). Chester-James (2004: 583) opposes Haaken and Yragui's (2003) thinking on this, arguing that the 'very real risks for women being found in refuges by ex-partners should not be overlooked or misunderstood'. She suggests that location away from the abuser is also about avoiding manipulation

of the women to return home, and not just physical safety. This overlooks the fact that families can be asked to leave the refuge if they disclose the address to anyone, even if they are not the perpetrator. It is also important to note that perpetrators are able to manipulate women without being present or knowing their location by using telephone, email and social media (Barter et al, 2009), through friends, family members and communities, or during contact arrangements (Radford and Hester, 2006). Haaken and Yragui (2003) found no evidence that more public sites posed greater risks for residents or staff. A number of respondents in their study indicated that violence and threats to staff were uncommon, however abusive partners did show up more often at public sites which may compromise feelings of safety. Haaken and Yragui (2003) propose adequate safety procedures and strong relationships with neighbours and law enforcement agencies to address this.

Although maintaining the secrecy of the refuge was seen as a barrier to maintaining or developing friendships, a number of teenagers said that they would prefer refuges to remain secret as they did not want to say why they were staying in a refuge. Burman and Chantler (2004) acknowledge the need for secrecy but suggest that it operates in tension with the importance of maintaining existing supportive networks and developing new ones. Teenagers in this study did not want their friends or passers-by to know that the refuge was for people who had experienced domestic violence. They felt that the refuge marked them out as being 'different', and reinforced the notion that experiencing domestic violence and abuse is shameful. This reflects US research with adult women (Haaken and Yragui, 2003) and with a wider range of children and

young people in Ireland (Buckley et al, 2006) and supports prevailing practice that refuges and their residents should be kept secret. However, such secrecy reinforces the dominant message that being a victim of domestic violence is shameful and intensifies feelings of isolation.

Teenagers in this research described feeling lonely whilst in refuges. Haaken and Yragui (2003) argue that, since isolation is a tactic used by many perpetrators, refuges may perpetuate that process by isolating women and children. This isolation takes the form of not being able to share their address with supportive friends and family, or invite them back to the refuge, consequently making it very difficult to sustain or develop reciprocal friendships and the transition to emotional and financial independence (Haaken and Yragui, 2003). In this way, the emotional geography of the refuge unhelpfully replicates that of the abuse (Haaken, 1999). Teenagers can feel isolated whilst being accommodated in refuges and staff need to be aware of this possibility and consider how best to address this. Teenagers suggested a range of support including undertaking activities, attending trips, and meeting others with similar experiences (see Chapter Five) and these suggestions will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

### ***An Alternative Approach to Secrecy***

The findings from this study reignite the secrecy debate and the need to explore and discuss alternative solutions. An alternative approach, The Oranje Huis (Orange House) has been developed in the Netherlands and is described by Stanley (2015). In this approach, there is an emphasis on transparency and

visibility, and whilst security measures are in place, the location and function of the refuge are public knowledge. This reduces the secrecy surrounding domestic violence, and refuge life and places emphasis on the shared community responsibility for tackling domestic violence (Stanley, 2015). The Oranje Huis is described as offering visible and accessible services which support the whole family, including the perpetrator, allowing visitors to the refuge and focusing on empowerment (Blijf Groep, 2011). This approach has relevance for tackling how teenagers experience the shame and stigma of living in a UK refuge. Teenagers would benefit from engaging in conversations with refuge staff aimed at enabling them to develop strategies for addressing questions about where they live that they will inevitably encounter from friends and teachers. They could be supported to prepare a response and assisted to decide if they respond with honesty or fiction. This would not require substantial resources but would make a significant difference for many teenagers living in refuges.

### **The Refuge as a Barrier to Peer Support**

The move into temporary accommodation can be seen as having the potential to remove many protective factors, such as peer support and a stable educational environment (Wolfe et al, 2003). School provides structure for teenagers, maintains their routine, and secures peer group connections which are important sources of support for teenagers experiencing domestic violence (Mullender et al, 2002; Regan and Kelly, 2001; Humphreys and Stanley, 2006).

Teenagers' accounts revealed that staying in a refuge could inhibit friendships. During adolescence, peer relationships are as important, if not more important than family relationships (Levendosky et al, 2002). Adolescents, on average, spend increasing amounts of time with friends and therefore increasing amounts of time away from home (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1999). Adolescents in adverse family environments can seek protective relationships outside their immediate environment (Smith and Carlson, 1997). In contrast, the teenagers interviewed in this study were required to move away from their friends and struggled to maintain peer group contact which contributed to their feelings of stress. They generally spent the majority of their time in the refuge due to imposed restrictions and the fact they were in an unfamiliar area. It is known that children without a supportive network of friends are more likely to develop depression (Goodyer et al, 1989). Masten et al (2009) suggest it is the loss of protective systems around the young person which markedly contributes to adversity. Previous research has outlined both the difficulties relating to maintaining or losing friends and the importance of friendships to children experiencing domestic violence (Barron, 2007; Buckley et al, 2007; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al, 2002; Stafford et al, 2007). Teenagers who were not in education described missing out on seeing their friends and being denied the opportunity to make new friends, leaving them to cope alone. Staff were aware of these difficulties but prioritised refuge rules. There was little assistance to help teenagers form new or sustain existing social networks.

## **Opportunities and Risks of Technology**

The widespread use of technology has transformed the experience of adolescence since early research on children's experiences of refuge life was undertaken. In earlier studies, (for example, Hague et al, 1996) the internet, mobile phones and other forms of technology were absent. Facebook was launched in 2004 and WhatsApp in 2009. By 2008, 94 percent of 11 to 14 year olds and 95 percent of 15 to 17 year olds reported using the internet (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009; Livingstone et al, 2011). Teenagers in my study reported wanting to go online for educational purposes, entertainment, such as games or music, and for keeping in touch with their friends, but access was significantly restricted (see Chapter Four). The importance of access to the internet and social media to realise their rights to participation has been identified in the draft General Comment on the Rights of Adolescents (UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/20, 2016). Technology presents a number of opportunities including educational learning and digital literacy, participation and civic engagement, creativity and self-expression, identity and social connection (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009). Among children and young people in the general population, the most popular online activities have been identified as watching video clips, social networking and listening to music (Livingstone et al, 2014). Interestingly, activities which cause the most concern, such as registering geographical location or using chatrooms, are rare (Livingstone et al, 2014). However, the primary focus in the UK, and certainly in my study, was on risk and safety. This is prioritised, both in wider society and in refuges, over maximising opportunities.

### ***Maintaining Support Networks Using Social Media***

Whilst teenagers in this study stressed their need for access to communication channels such as social media, refuge staff did not recognise the importance of this. Social media is central to today's adolescents' participation in social life as it enables connections to existing friends and helps establish new friendships (Valkenburg and Peter, 2009; Valkenburg et al, 2006). Even those with low self-esteem can benefit from social networking sites (Ellison et al, 2007; Steinfield et al, 2008). Online communication can also provide control over the management of intimacy with peers, which might be relevant for teenagers in this study who reported being asked difficult questions face to face such as why they have left school or where they are living. Online participation provides teenagers in refuges opportunities to maintain and enhance their supportive network from a distance in ways where they can exercise choices and control. This may be especially useful for those who rely on their friends as a source of support.

### ***Achieving a Balance Between Internet Safety and Protection***

Refuge rules and regulations about communication technology appeared to prioritise staff needs over those of teenagers. Restricting internet access was described as meeting requirements for 'safety' and 'protection'. The teenagers interviewed noted that this restriction was ineffective, as they could still access the internet, albeit in a limited and expensive way, using mobile phones. Livingstone et al (2014: 7) argue that increasing use of smartphones means that supervision is becoming more difficult and as such children and young people should be educated to become 'competent and resilient digital citizens'. The

increasingly privatised and mobile use of the internet (Livingstone et al, 2011) has not been considered in refuges. It is both impractical and inappropriate to seek to restrict access to computers and the internet due to its pervasive nature. Instead, risk policies should identify opportunities to increase coping mechanisms, and safety could be promoted through strategies and support mechanisms that build teenagers' capacities to protect themselves. Advances in technology could be used to increase the safety of teenagers, for example, to keep mothers or staff informed of their whereabouts and to provide access to resources such as the Hideout website<sup>17</sup>. Engaging in safety planning advice, guidance and support, rather than imposing limitations, would provide a positive step towards meeting some of their needs which are also their rights, with the benefit of maintaining or increasing their knowledge of safe use.

## **6.8 THE IMPACT ON EDUCATION OF MOVING TO A REFUGE**

### **Differing Priorities**

It is widely recognised that domestic violence and moving to a refuge is likely to have a negative impact on educational attainment (Barron, 2008; Buckley et al, 2006; Houghton, 2008; Mill and Church, 2006). This research found that teenagers' attendance at school has not been a priority for refuge staff, other professionals, and possibly mothers. Education appears to take second place to mitigating the immediate risks associated with domestic violence. For some teenagers, their education appeared to remain a low priority for these adults for significant lengths of time, even after the immediate risks associated with

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.thehideout.org.uk/>

domestic violence had subsided. Analysis of the data demonstrates that shortfalls in individual educational support contributed to feelings of loss in a teenager's life. Enrolment in school was delayed for a number of reasons and attendance was not monitored.

Mothers did not always have the capacity to focus on teenagers' priorities. Whilst parents have responsibility for ensuring their children attend school, the aftermath of domestic violence may mean that some mothers are physically or emotionally unavailable to their children (Baker et al, 2003; Sterne and Poole, 2009). Moreover, domestic violence may also have affected their parenting skills, including attachment and role modelling (Holt et al, 2008). In the present study, at least five mothers did not speak English and so needed support to liaise with schools and to organise enrolment. Some teenagers interpreted for their mothers due to the lack of available translators. These individuals did not know how to navigate the school process and relied on refuge staff to inform them.

Teenagers' accounts suggest they need adults to act for them in school interactions. Finding school places was considered by all children's workers as part of their role ( $n=11$ ). It was also considered part of the children's worker role by adult support workers, managers and community workers, including independent domestic violence advisors ( $n=7$ ). In contrast, 12 teenagers had spent periods of more than four weeks out of school, including two teenagers who had never attended school in the UK, and one teenager who had been

expelled. This research found that some teenagers had spent up to nine months without school places. Likewise, 42 percent of respondents to the Women's Aid survey reported having difficulties in placing children and young people living in refuges in schools (Women's Aid, 2015).

### ***Aspirations and Accomplishing Order***

Normally, teenagers spend an average of six to seven hours every weekday at school. While at school, their day is organised and structured. When not in school they have large amounts of unstructured time. Teenagers cited this as a source of stress linked to an absence of appropriate facilities, support or educational alternatives. Teenagers are right to be concerned about the effect moving to a refuge has on their education, specifically their GCSE results. They saw this as a pathway to further education, employment and economic success. Missing large periods of schooling affected future aspirations. By thinking about themselves in the future, teenagers can accomplish order and meaning which provides a sense of predictability in their lives (Becker 1999). This contrasts positively with their experience of the refuge. There are tensions here, however, as refuge staff are required to focus on present safety and immediate recovery rather than future opportunities or life chances. As Hagell et al (2012a; 2012b) point out, many of the choices available to adolescents are concentrated around exams, further or higher education and training. There is currently no data available on teenagers' educational achievement to chart trends over time for those experiencing domestic violence or living in refuges. I was unable to obtain any national data concerning the length of time teenagers in refuges remained without school places.

## **Educational Disruption**

Many of the teenagers interviewed were concerned about changing schools and had little or no choice in decisions about doing so. This research found teenagers without school places, with inappropriate school places, and with little support to maintain their current school placement, as shown in the findings (see Chapter Four). Participants were concerned about starting new schools for a number of reasons including being viewed as ‘different’, joining established friendship groups, changes to their chosen curriculum and changes to exam plans. The research found moving to a new school was often stressful or upsetting because of incompatibility between teenagers’ needs and wants and what schools offered. Teenagers were unaware of any contact between previous and new schools. They were concerned about the possibility and impact of moving schools and starting the cycle again when leaving the refuge. This was of particular relevance to those who had already experienced long periods without school places.

Teenagers also raised concerns about attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). They described them as inappropriate: attended by those who are unable to attend mainstream education or, as teenagers described them, ‘naughty kids’. There was also an absence of library or computer facilities in PRUs, exacerbating their experience of a lack of resources for study in the refuge. Again there is no data pertaining to the numbers of teenagers in refuges attending Pupil Referral Units due to a lack of alternative educational places.

Teenagers participating in this study considered that insufficient resources were invested in their education whilst they were in refuges. They wanted active measures to compensate for disadvantages caused by domestic violence at home, moving to a refuge, and time spent out of school. They identified a significant gap in provision, indicating a failure to recognise that challenges of school and exams are a particular feature of adolescence (see Hagell et al, 2012c). These experiences can be of overwhelming importance to teenagers residing in refuges. Hagell et al (2012c: 33) explain that the stresses of these challenges vary according to ‘whether young people are immersed in high-achieving expectations or are being excluded and marginalised by educational failure’. Whilst some educational problems may have started at home, not enough was done to address these problems whilst they were in refuge. The lack of focused support did little to prevent teenagers feeling marginalised and excluded. Some teenagers explained that they had fallen so far behind that they had lost confidence in their ability to make progress and struggled with motivation to do so.

### **Educational Support**

Teenagers argued that additional support such as homework clubs and tutorial support would assist them with their studies. They considered that tutorial support would allow them to catch up on school work they had missed, start new courses, retrieve coursework, and improve schoolwork that had been affected by living in the abusive home. These suggestions were associated with improving grades and future prospects, which were key themes in the accounts of teenagers aged 14 years and over. This highlights the need for

support and intervention to focus on not only the present but also the future. When asked if their mothers could help, teenagers often said they could not, as the work was now too advanced for their parents; especially those who were unable to speak or write in English, or were focused on caring for younger siblings. Tutorial support might offer an additional means of bridging the divide between school and the refuge.

The timing of this study has highlighted the importance of computers and internet access. As mentioned, there has been a profound shift to the widespread use of digital technology for homework, which has particular relevance for teenagers. This has not been apparent in earlier research. Three-quarters of participants in Livingstone et al's (2014) study reported being encouraged to use the internet for schoolwork. Restrictive policies on internet use and inadequate access to technology (presented in Chapter Four) currently hamper teenagers' ability to study in the refuge setting. This further prevents teenagers from catching up or improving school work and reinforces the perception that education is not prioritised in the refuge.

Currently a number of aspects of Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC are not being met. For example, accounts of staff and teenagers suggest that education is not 'available and accessible' and there is limited financial assistance to combat this (28.1b, 28.1c). Article 28 makes specific reference to achieving their right to education on the basis of 'equal opportunity,' and applying this principle to teenagers in refuges highlights their lack of equal opportunities in relation to education. It could also be argued that young people

living in refuges, particularly those without school places or with inappropriate school placements or courses, are not able to develop to their 'full potential' as stated in Article 29 (1a) of the UNCRC. Teenagers in this study have indicated how their educational rights could be achieved in practice 'on the basis on equal opportunity' (Article 28).

Many of the findings from this study resonate with research on looked after children, such as lack of space to complete homework, lack of books, and time spent out of education (Jackson, 1994; 1998; 2001; Martin and Jackson, 2002). Jackson (1998) found that children in care were massively disadvantaged within the education system. She identified that alternative provision, such as Pupil Referral Units, was 'unacceptable' and 'in contravention both of the Children Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' (Jackson, 1998: 54). As a consequence of her research, renewed attention has focused on the educational needs of looked after children. For these young people it is recognised that education is a key factor in economic and personal fulfilment (Berridge, 2012; Sebba et al, 2015). In order to prioritise the educational experience of children in care, a number of policy initiatives have been developed to ensure the necessary support is available. For instance, children in care must now be a priority in school admissions, even if schools are full (Berridge, 2012). Reading schemes are encouraged and additional funding, Pupil Premium Plus, can be provided (Berridge, 2012; Sebba et al, 2015). 'Virtual School Heads' have been appointed who oversee the education of all local children in care. Children are required to have detailed Personal Education Plans as part of overall care planning. Participants in Sebba et al's

(2015) study found one-to-one tuition beneficial. This was recommended through Personal Educational Plans and funding using the Pupil Premium Plus. These measures aim to promote a more consistent system. This approach and co-ordinated response, if replicated for teenagers living in domestic violence refuges, could provide significant improvement for their current education and future prospects. As mentioned earlier, in areas where there is a shortage of school places refuge staff often struggle to access school places and alternative provision.

## **6.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has acknowledged that teenagers are adversely affected by their experiences of domestic violence and moving to a refuge. Consequently, they require support to cope with their experiences. Currently, teenagers' stays in refuge produce multiple sources of stress relating to education, friendships, material resources and the refuge environment. This research was undertaken across the trajectory of teenagers' prolonged stay in refuges and repeat interviews gave this study unique access to data identifying difficulties experienced in refuge stays.

This research has taken place in a new policy context and has gone beyond the impact of domestic violence for young people to address the current service response. The adoption of a wider definition of domestic violence and the prevalence of digital technology now form a new background to the work of

refuges. This study has identified that policies and practices designed firstly for women and secondarily for younger children, are not sufficiently nuanced or sensitive to meet the needs and rights of teenagers. Staff are increasingly generic, and not trained in specific areas of youth work, which only adds to the challenges.

Multiple interviews generated rapport between interviewer and interviewees which enabled increased openness and more detailed reflections over the course of teenagers' time in refuges. Teenagers would have liked more information about the refuge beforehand. After arriving at the refuge they wanted more knowledge about the refuge itself, staff, the local area and refuge residents. They initially felt safe in the refuge and were glad to be away from the domestic violence they had been exposed to in the family home. Subsequently, they became frustrated with refuge life owing to a lack of facilities to meet their needs and the impact of staying in a refuge on their privacy, peer relationships and education. They became increasingly distressed when planned moves out of refuges failed to materialise. When they were eventually rehoused, some teenagers were still experiencing feelings of stress owing to rushed moves, unfinished properties and, for some, a lack of post-refuge support.

Findings in this research have established increasing age as a key factor mediating the experience of refuge life for participants. Difficulties with refuge residence appear to be connected specifically to features of adolescence.

Interviews with teenagers highlighted difficulties with the length of stay and a lack of facilities to support both their education and social networks. The specific requirements of adolescence have not been incorporated within refuge service design. The focus on safety and protectionism is particularly problematic. Not only is this restrictive but it also denies a realisation of teenagers' rights. The emphasis within and outside refuges is on supporting adult women. Refuge services available to teenagers were designed for much younger children, which teenagers saw as inappropriate and inadequate. In some circumstances, teenagers were considered risky or troublesome, and being characterised in this way caused confusion and added resentment.

Teenagers themselves identified support needs designed to address their transition to adult roles. This included help with future plans such as further education, training and employment. The research has shown that teenagers need to be provided with opportunities to have their voices heard.

The length of stay in a refuge is especially difficult for teenagers. It reinforces feelings of shame and stigma owing to rules concerning secrecy and confidentiality. This is exacerbated by their experiences of domestic violence and abuse and lack of support to overcome harm. Teenagers routinely described a lack of emotional and physical space within the refuge, and a lack of privacy. There is a lack of support to maintain friendships, to access appropriate education and to remain in the same school. These were identified as particularly important for teenagers.

Organisational practices, predominantly the emphasis on protection and perceived vulnerability, generate particular challenges for teenagers. Refuges are premised on physical rather than emotional safety. This causes difficulties for the teenager's growing need for independence and privacy. Rules and restrictions were perceived as infantilising and controlling, leading to the argument that refuges act as a 'total institution'. Needs that young people saw as vital, such as accessing school and maintaining friendships, were accorded low priority by refuge staff. Opportunities to build protective factors were not understood or taken. This research has shown that for teenagers a prolonged refuge stay often undermines their capacity to cope with their experiences rather than developing it. It has highlighted that some themes identified by teenagers as needs can also be accorded the status of rights under the UNCRC.

# **Chapter Seven**

## **Discussion Part II**

# **Opportunities for Teenagers in Refuges**

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### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Evidence presented in Chapter Six discussed the difficulties of refuge life and failures to respond to teenagers' needs, and in some cases their rights, and highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for young people to influence the design and delivery of services. This chapter moves on to focus on key messages from the findings about positive forms of support and intervention.

This chapter identifies opportunities to improve awareness of teenagers as service users in their own right. The challenge is to develop appropriate and equitable provision and to use the Government's revised definition of domestic violence as a vehicle to support teenagers below the age of 16. Implementation of such policies, however, requires investment, wider provision of domestic violence services, comprehensive training and more specialist staff, all of which remain longstanding issues for refuges.

This chapter moves from presenting the problems teenagers experience to the range of support required whilst in refuges. The teenagers interviewed were

keen to use their own experiences to identify improvements that might benefit others. Practice developments acknowledged as successful with other young people will be noted. The implications for policy and practice will be identified and a resilience framework will be presented. I argue for attitudinal and resourcing change, for all teenagers under the age of 18, underpinned by the change in the definition of domestic violence.

In this chapter I propose that Masten's resilience framework (1994) can be used to balance concerns about safety in refuges with teenagers' needs for independence and outward facing peer support. The centrality of education for teenagers indicates the importance of liaison between schools and the refuge. The length of time teenagers spent out of school draws attention to the need for sensitive housing and educational policies and alternative solutions. Finally, I reflect on the limitations and strengths of this research.

## **7.2 SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION**

The support needs identified varied with the individual, reinforcing the view that services should respond to the specific needs of a particular young person (Buckley et al, 2007). Successful engagement is crucial, as some adolescents want someone to talk to and share feelings with (Buckley et al, 2007), whilst others find seeking or accepting help difficult (Browne, 2002). Some refuge staff in this research, in common with external agencies, made assumptions about teenagers 'wanting to work everything out by themselves'.

### **Coping Alone**

Teenagers in this study described having no option but to cope alone. Browne (2002) found that maltreated adolescents try to cope on their own, tend to keep to themselves and to blame themselves. This perception and appearance of coping is important when considering the assumptions of some refuge staff and external agencies mentioned above. Throughout this research, teenagers, both male and female, wanted help to learn how to cope with their experiences of domestic violence and of living in a refuge. Ideally, practitioners need to be more aware of the issues and respond pro-actively to help teenagers cope with their experiences. Where this type of support had been received during previous refuge stays it was considered to be positive.

Teenagers adopt multiple strategies for coping with both the stresses of refuge life and the recovery from domestic violence and abuse. Lepistö et al (2010) report that these strategies can include focusing on the positive, concentrating on problem solving, seeking relaxing diversions, participating in physical recreation and working hard. Some of these coping strategies were reported by participants in this study. Important strategies included reading, spending time away from the refuge with family or friends, focusing on their education, and solving problems, for example, assisting their mothers with the rehousing process. Positive strategies such as spending time away from the refuge and focusing on their education were, however, restricted when living in refuges which caused increasing frustration. The lack of ability to deploy such strategies is of particular concern, given that the review of the literature highlighted teenagers' use of non-productive or harmful coping strategies if

problem-focused coping strategies were perceived to be useless (e.g. Lewis and Frydenberg, 2002). My research suggests that developing a range of proactive measures could assist teenagers to learn and maintain positive coping strategies during a refuge stay.

## **Support Developments**

Shortfalls in individual support contributed to breakdowns between staff and teenagers. Both groups identified areas where service provision could be improved. As discussed in the previous chapter, educational support was a primary concern. Recommendations also included: one-to-one support for teenagers, group work, meeting other teenagers in similar situations, counselling, trips and activities, practical help such as budgeting or registering with healthcare or education providers, help to communicate with their mothers and ongoing support after leaving the refuge. These support requirements are long established and consistent with earlier studies (McGee, 2000; Mullender et al, 2002; Radford et al, 2011), but provision remains inadequate. Each form of support will be discussed below. Where these forms of support had been provided, refuges were experienced more positively.

## **One to One Support**

Teenagers in this study frequently reported having nobody to talk to. Teenagers wanted to talk to someone who was trustworthy, non-judgemental, caring, and understanding. They also wanted to be listened to, taken seriously and treated as mature. Emphasis was given to the availability and timeliness of support. This is consistent with previous research. Research with younger

children (McGee 2000) identified that individual support from staff can be helpful. Girls aged ten to 16 years old in Bowyer et al's (2015) study emphasised the importance of frequent, consistent care from services. This study adds teenagers' needs for support to these existing findings. Availability, consistency and frequency of someone to talk to was more important than who that person actually was (Bowyer et al, 2015). Teenagers in my study required a specific worker, but were not concerned about attributes such as gender or ethnicity. Adding to the existing literature, both staff and teenage participants suggested that practitioners working with teenagers may need to be closer to them in age. Teenagers also reported that staff should be non-authoritarian.

## **Counselling**

Requests for one to one support extended to an identified need for counselling for some teenagers, all of whom were girls. The counselling received in refuges by children in Mullender et al's (2002) study was considered highly beneficial. The experience of counselling in other studies with wider age groups of children has generally been positive. Counselling has been found to provide validation of children's and young people's experiences and meets their need to feel listened to (Øverlien, 2011; Stanley et al, 2012).

Locating counselling provision within refuge premises was suggested by both teenagers and staff in this research. Children in Mullender et al's (2002) study reported that the safe and relaxed atmosphere made it possible to share their fears and anxieties. Difficulties accessing counselling services outside refuges

were reported by two teenagers in this study. Difficulties included the transition from child to adult mental health services and lengthy waiting lists. This was echoed in staff statements and is consistent with Women's Aid (2015) data. Accessing mental health services for children and young people was problematic for 44 percent of 90 organisations responding to the 2014 survey (Women's Aid, 2015). Emotional and mental health difficulties intensify during refuge stays. Teenagers with mental health difficulties described the absence of support having a negative impact, and treatment delays are known to exacerbate symptoms (Carr, 2000; Walker, 2005). Realising their claims to mental health services could be supported by reference to Article 24 of the UNCRC. Whilst mental health care for all young people may be considered difficult to access generally, Article 24 states that: 'States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services'. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Article 39 which promotes physical and psychological recovery for child victims of abuse can also be used to underline teenagers' rights to mental health care.

### **Mutual Support and Leisure Activities**

Teenagers reported the importance of mutual support and meeting others who understood their experiences of both domestic violence and of life in refuges. Refuges have been perceived as places where women and children can share experiences and gain support from others in similar situations, reflecting the principle of mutual self-help (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Hague and Malos, 1998; Harne and Radford, 2008). Previous research has found a number of benefits for young people meeting others in similar situations (Baker et al, 2004;

Coburn and Gormally, 2014; McGee, 2000; Mertens, 2014). Yet only a minority of participants in this study described benefiting from peer support. Others experienced difficulties accessing this due to low numbers of teenagers in refuges, lack of activities or opportunities to facilitate spending time together, restrictions on access to space and a lack of provision outside refuges.

Research evidence regarding the benefits of mutual support for adult women in refuges (Charles, 1994; Hester et al, 2007) needs to be utilised to develop peer support approaches for teenagers. As detailed in Chapter One, social and group activities helped to develop social skills and confidence for young people in the community who had experienced domestic violence (Westwood and Larkins, 2015).

Teenagers reported the value and multiple benefits of leisure provision and research with a wider age range of children and young people in refuges has reported the value of leisure activities (Bowyer et al, 2015; Øverlien, 2011). The benefits of physical activity were emphasised by many participants in my research. Trips and activities provide opportunities to increase coping mechanisms by spending time out of the refuge. These outings were important to provide an escape and help with feeling 'normal'. They also enabled young people to engage in peer relationships without worrying about the secrecy of the refuge or domestic violence.

Teenagers frequently cited feelings of boredom and isolation due to being 'stuck' in refuges. Staff explained the absence of activities was due to funding shortfalls. This research found that those happiest in refuges had access to trips, outdoor pursuits and other activities such as cooking. Teenagers reported these activities increased their confidence, helped to develop new skills, gave them and their mothers space, provided emotional distance, and new opportunities to do things they had never done before. Teenagers also said activities developed team working skills and provided opportunities to meet others with similar experiences.

Teenagers reported mixed feelings on the topic of joining youth or sports clubs and activities outside refuges. These feelings mirrored fears about starting new schools. Fears included not knowing anyone and managing questions from peers. Staff attributed difficulties in accessing external activities to lack of funding. Teenagers reported uncertainty surrounding access owing to refuge restrictions. Donkers (2015) recommends that the provision of a sports club, for example, provides social contacts with others outside of refuges, physical development, physical release of tension and stress, distraction, relaxation, and fun with peers. Gonzales et al's (2012) retrospective study with adult males found that extracurricular and sports activities offered opportunities for professional and personal achievements. Supporting positive coping strategies is vital to developing resilience in adolescence. Networks with peers in other refuges may be helpful to provide opportunities to participate in activities and meet others and links to Article 15 of the UNCRC: 'States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association'.

## **Group Work**

As outlined in Chapter One, the mother-child relationship may be undermined by domestic violence (Humphreys et al, 2006). A range of manuals and interventions designed to improve communication between mothers and their children are available (Debonnaire, 2007; Humphreys et al, 2006) but teenagers in this study were not aware of these. The programmes reported by refuge staff were intended for younger children and undertaken in community settings. Other studies indicate that children in refuges benefit from engagement with these programmes (Mullender et al, 2002; Stafford et al, 2007).

Teenagers' concern about upsetting their mothers was a factor when considering barriers to engagement with group work. Humphreys et al (2006) identify a 'conspiracy of silence' whereby mothers do not talk to their children and vice versa due to both wanting to protect the other from further distress. This was true for both boys and girls in my research. Mothers are likely to be traumatised by their experiences of domestic violence and may not be able to provide a consistent, available relationship (Mullender et al, 2002; Osofsky, 1999). In common with US research (Sopczyk, 2007), my study found that a prolonged refuge stay could create tension between teenagers and their mothers. Teenagers were not offered any interventions to cope with this tension. Consequently they adopted non-productive coping strategies such as keeping their feelings to themselves, similar to those found in other research (Browne, 2002; Sopczyk, 2007).

Although none of the teenagers in my study reported abuse from their mothers, some research shows that some mothers who have experienced domestic abuse use aggressive and neglectful parenting behaviours (Holden et al, 1998; Holden, 2003; Kelleher et al, 2008; Mallet et al, 2009). Kelleher et al (2008) found this was a result of their experiences of domestic violence and abuse. Such dynamics might therefore present a further barrier to intimacy between teenagers and their mothers provides additional support for the argument for teenagers to have their own source of support, separate to that available to their mother.

Some teenagers did want to engage in group work with other teenagers. Studies undertaken in North America suggest that such group work regarding domestic violence can be beneficial (Glodich and Allen, 1998; Jaffe et al, 1990). Funding restrictions, however, meant that group work interventions were under-developed in refuges in this research. Some staff reported developing programmes of their own, due to the inadequacy of existing programmes for teenagers, but being unable to use them in practice. Staff usefully suggested that group work should take place outside the refuge. This meant that group work could continue beyond the refuge, after rehousing. It would also address the obstacles arising from the fact that refuges are likely to house small numbers of teenagers at any one time. Staff acknowledged that group interventions were usually aimed at younger children, as was the case with other services such as counselling. This research highlights a gap in group work provision for teenagers both inside and outside the refuge setting.

## **Support After Refuge**

The research found a requirement for ongoing support after leaving the refuge for some teenagers. The importance of follow-on support is widely recognised (Donkers, 2015; Fitzpatrick et al, 2003; Humphreys and Thiara, 2002; Jarvis and Novaco, 2006; Stalford et al, 2003), yet has still not been provided for young people. Chapter Five indicated the importance of continuity for teenagers, including maintaining their relationships with support workers, but no evidence of this was found. The current practice of supporting mothers as a means of supporting teenagers indirectly is inadequate. Furthermore, the availability of follow-on support for adult women varied between refuges in line with variations in funding. Independent teenagers required additional practical support such as budgeting assistance, once rehoused, but this was not available. Follow-on support for adult women cannot be relied upon to meet these shortfalls in provision.

Not all teenagers in this study thought that follow-on support would be helpful. Some wanted to experience a fresh start, away from domestic violence and associated services. This suggests that work needs to be carried out *during* the time they are living in the refuge. Not doing so presents a missed opportunity and can produce a further barrier to later support. Follow-on support from community based services that offer a flexible package of support may be more appropriate. Support could be based on a needs assessment completed with teenagers whilst they are still in the refuge and on liaison with refuge staff where appropriate.

## **Decision-making and Participation**

Teenagers reported disempowerment resulting from their lack of involvement in decisions affecting them. As detailed in Chapter Two, early research found that refuges are not only a means to help families get rehoused but, for many, provide a period to recover, assess and reorganise their lives (Ball, 1994). This should also be the case for teenagers. Making active decisions has been shown to be beneficial to young people's engagement with services and to their coping (Westwood and Larkins, 2015; see also Mullender et al, 2002).

Teenagers reported wanting to make decisions about where they could go and at what time, both inside and outside the refuge. They wanted choice about when they could see their friends and family, if they could sleep out of the refuge overnight, and if they could use the internet to maintain relationships and complete homework. They emphasised their need to be involved in making decisions about their education. However, some choices posed direct conflict with their 'best interests' and may have put them at some risk, for example the perpetrator may have been able to contact them via the internet or at school. Teenagers, however, demonstrated their competence to choose how to keep themselves safe. They could be assisted to develop further competence and practical methods of maintaining safety, further promoting a shift towards balancing protection and participation rights.

### ***Adult Influence***

Teenagers' competence is narrowly defined by organisational policies and practices. As discussed in the previous chapter, teenagers were generally afforded more decision-making power by their mothers than by staff or other agencies, suggesting differences in perceptions of capacity. In the refuge setting, teenagers experienced little control and were constrained by restrictions and non-negotiable rules linked to their dependent status. Lack of control over participation affects self-esteem and feelings of security (Donkers, 2015). Larkins et al (2014) construct a lattice of participation for conceptualising engagement. This tool is useful for understanding how different actors (children, young people, facilitators, adults, and institutions) influence different stages of participation. It could be used to ensure teenagers are presented with appropriate opportunities to participate in decision-making.

### ***Collective Participation***

Teenagers were unable to collectively challenge refuge policies or practices. The findings of this study provide evidence that more attention should be directed to providing opportunities for children and young people to participate more fully in refuge life. Teenagers wanted to be consulted about trips, activities, refuge rules, support within the refuge and the regulation of refuge provision. Participation in these decisions could prove useful in helping to increase feelings of control over their environment and circumstances, and in improving confidence and self-esteem, factors associated with resilience (Daniel and Wassell, 2002; Guille, 2004). Participation could also prove valuable in designing and developing appropriate policy and provision at both a

local and national level. Houghton's (2006) work demonstrates how children and young people who have experienced domestic violence can be supported as effective social and political actors to secure resources for others. However, appropriate assistance and resources are required to enable collective participation (Larkins et al, 2013; Larkins et al, 2014; Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2012).

Baker (2005) argues that a lack of research that engages with young people has resulted in a lack of effective service provision for them. There has been a failure to fully involve children and young people in research about them and this is not specific to domestic violence research but a reflection of wider research on and for children and young people (Hill, 2006; Spratling et al, 2012). Stein et al's (2009) review of adolescent neglect highlighted that children up to the age of 18 years are treated as a homogenous group, meaning teenagers have received very little attention in UK welfare literature or policy. Hagell and Witherspoon (2012) identify disciplinary allegiances as contributing to the neglect of adolescence research in the UK, and they note that psychology focuses on deficits and challenges in adolescence. For example, there is more research on adolescents as criminals or deviants (see France, 2000; Garland, 2002; Muncie, 2009) than on their support requirements. They argue that this has resulted in a history of underdeveloped support for practitioners working with adolescents and limited consideration of social policy initiatives for this age group (Hagell and Witherspoon, 2012). In summary, teenagers are often grouped with children or are considered negatively and presumed to have problematic outcomes.

## **Right to Support**

The support needs identified above could be strengthened by making specific links to relevant provisions in the UNCRC. Whilst a balancing of entitlement to education with the need for safety may be necessary when coming into refuges, UNCRC Article 19 makes it clear that the right to protection from abuse should be accompanied by the provision of support: ‘2. ... protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child...’ This can be strengthened further by reference to Article 39 (physical and psychological recovery for child victims), discussed earlier. Adopting a rights-based service approach may assist in ensuring that young people living in refuges have access to these types of provision.

## **7.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

The findings support the need for teenagers to access refuge services in their own right and to be involved in the design and implementation of provision. Previous research (e.g. McGee, 2000; Mullender et al, 2002) has studied children up to the age of 18 years as a single homogenous group. This study found that refuges lack models for intervention and guidance when working with teenagers. The refuge response is related to the perception of who constitutes a service user and confirms the findings of Humphreys and Houghton (2008) who suggest that services for children and young people are often seen as an ‘add on’ or secondary to services for mothers.

Current practice is underpinned by a restricted focus on risk, mitigation and protectionism. This research recommends the implementation of a more collaborative and empowering approach requiring recognition of teenagers' unique status and rights. Such an approach needs to account for individual needs, experiences of domestic violence and of moving to a refuge(s), and teenagers' situated competence. There is a requirement to build on strengths and assets whilst addressing barriers to recovery and survival strategies. It should promote teenagers' active engagement and participation in individual and collective decisions affecting their lives both inside and outside the refuge. Teenagers need opportunities to express their views and have these views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

### ***Developing an Approach***

Masten's (1994) resilience framework provides a relevant starting point to identifying an empowerment approach, offering a balance between rights and risk. This framework has been utilised in resources for practitioners working with vulnerable adolescents e.g. in local authority care (Daniel and Wassell, 2002; Newman, 2004). Masten (1994) suggested five strategies for intervention. These strategies are useful when considering how the research findings might be translated into policy and practice. In addition to these five strategies, this research identifies teenagers' participation as key to developing a more responsive refuge service. Each strategy will be considered below. Opportunities for teenagers to express their views should be encouraged within each strategy. These strategies are:

- i. Reduce vulnerability and risk
- ii. Reduce the number of stressors
- iii. Increase available resources
- iv. Mobilise protective processes
- v. Foster resilience
- vi. Increased participation

### ***Reduce Vulnerability and Risk***

Teenagers considered refuges as a place of safety. Sometimes, however, the refuge was deemed ‘too safe’ owing to restrictions on their independence. US shelters analysing their own rules found that while some were necessary for safety, others appeared to be based more on organisational tradition rather than logic or current needs (VanNatta, 2010). This research found that refuge rules could result in increasing resentment and frustration from teenagers. Restrictions and rules about confidentiality were unquestioned. The findings from this study reignite the debate concerning the secrecy of refuges and the need to analyse and discuss alternatives.

Conceptions of risks to and from young people are socially constructed (Buckingham, 1994; Sharland, 2006). Politicians and policy makers are increasingly focused on preventing young people from taking or being exposed to risk, alongside a ‘professional blame culture’ regarding child protection (Sharland, 2006). Sharland (2006) advises that a desire to protect young people (or adult professionals) serves to prevent them from achieving the maturity that risk-taking or learning from mistakes may provide (see also de

Winter and Noom, 2003). In this research, fears about physical safety outweighed the importance of protective factors such as social support. Risk assessments were viewed negatively by teenagers, regarded as unnecessary paperwork preventing them from participating in ‘normal’ teenager activities, such as staying away from the refuge overnight at the homes of family or friends.

Staff fears concerning internet access predominated over risks of educational failure. There is a requirement for refuge intervention to move beyond simply eliminating risk; they must also challenge conceptions of which risks are important and when. Physical safety may be more important initially but once addressed, consideration should include other risks and how to manage them. For professionals, this may be useful for reflection on their current practice; particularly in relation to whether teenagers’ support needs are effectively met. Within this strategy, teenagers could be engaged in their own protection by identifying and developing ways to mitigate potential risks. Not only would this support a balance between risk and safety, it might assist in building capacity for making positive life choices. Useful reports concerning internet safety have been produced by the EU Kids Online Project (Vandoninck et al, 2014; Haddon and Livingstone, 2014). These could be used to increase staff awareness and develop practical ways of providing safe internet use.

As identified in the previous chapter, teenagers’ vulnerability is, in some ways, intensified during a refuge stay, due to the restrictive refuge environment which impacts on their rights to empowerment. Opportunities afforded to other young

people are constrained. A balance is required between physical protection and participation rights in order to address this. Teenagers in refuges are unable to cope by detaching themselves from the problematic situation either through behaviours or thoughts. Insufficient attention has been directed at how best to maximise teenagers' coping mechanisms during a prolonged refuge stay.

Vulnerability, risk and opportunity should be understood to extend beyond the present or physical setting of the refuge. Shelters in the Netherlands have been challenged to:

'organise and design shelters in such a way that children and young people feel safe in them and are able to develop in a positive way; delve into what children in shelters need to recuperate from the damage and disadvantages from which they have suffered, and create optimal opportunities for the future' (Ilja van Haaren in Donkers, 2015: 5).

This demonstrates a need to move beyond risk focused practice emphasising physical safety. Data from this study echoes earlier research findings with adult women by highlighting the importance of emotional space within refuges (Burman and Chantler, 2004). Teenagers in my study reported wanting to talk about their experiences of domestic violence but being anxious about doing so. This has implications for emotional support. Reflecting on the identified importance of trust, reassurance is needed regarding confidentiality and privacy. It should also be made clear that teenagers' views will be listened to and taken seriously. Actions should be taken to address teenagers' concerns that staff do not 'act quickly'. Teenagers may need encouragement over a period of time to talk with staff. Teenagers reported having to approach staff

with concerns, rather than staff approaching them. Routine questions could be asked as part of a support planning process.

There was an absence of support devoted to developing teenagers' coping strategies. Examples of safety planning were provided by a small number of teenagers with experience of previous refuge stays (in Chapter Six). They reported the safety planning process had the additional benefit of increasing confidence to talk about domestic violence. Teenagers need to know where they can access help, support, and a place of safety, should they need it. Safety planning has been advocated elsewhere (Donkers, 2015) with suggestions that it provides a sense of control within a powerless situation (McGee, 2000). A US study, however, identified varying practices (Chanmugam and Hall, 2012). They suggest safety planning with teenagers may be more complex, with more research required. Chanmugam and Hall (2012) also identify perceived risks of using safety plans. Staff concerns, in their study, include increased fear, anxiety, guilt or hypervigilance amongst children and young people. Some teenage participants in my study mentioned the usefulness of safety planning activities when staying in previous refuges, but none had developed or worked on a safety plan in their current refuge.

### ***Reduce the Number of Stressors***

Many of the problems experienced by teenagers in this study related to the combination of experiences: of domestic violence, moving to a refuge and the period of adolescence. These experiences need to be recognised, and where possible, their impact should be minimised. Teenagers are expected to

manage transitions in and out of their homes to refuges and schools. They are also required to undertake exams, establish their identity, support their family in a variety of ways, come to terms with their experiences of domestic violence, and make important choices linked to future careers. An absence of support to assist in the reduction of stressors was identified in this research.

Teenagers' accounts revealed a desire for normality, greater separation from parents, increased autonomy and independence, the importance of education and friendships, and a demand for increased opportunities for leisure and social contact such as internet access, youth clubs and going out; all of which were affected by a move to a refuge. Some of these may not be easily addressed by refuge staff, for example, the quality of accommodation or length of stay. However, refuge rules, such as internet access and the conflicting interests between teenagers' needs and the refuge's focus on protection are more easily addressed. Increased multi-agency working is required to address some of the stressors identified. Currently teenagers' time in refuge is not utilised as a 'window of opportunity' to assess needs and provide appropriate intervention.

Teenagers' practical and emotional requirements for space in refuges are not easily met. Some refuge staff described temporarily transforming staff work spaces or children's spaces into spaces for teenagers. One manager planned to purchase an outdoor unit that would belong to teenagers. This communal refuge was small but the issue of space was also relevant to teenagers residing

in self-contained or partially self-contained facilities. Creation of space may provide opportunities for teenagers to spend time away from their families.

As discussed in the previous chapter, teenagers reported feeling physically and emotionally trapped. Space incorporates ‘the social’, which expands and enhances children’s relationships with each other and with adults (Lansdown, 2005). This concept of space extends to teenagers being able to express their feelings about their experiences. Lansdown (2005) argues that this goes beyond conventional adult imperatives to protect and control, towards more reciprocal and negotiable relations between adults and children (see also Moss and Petrie, 2005). Ideas of children’s space encourage emphasis on children and young people having an audible voice in matters affecting them (Lansdown, 2005). Wyness (2003) asserts that these spaces also have a political dimension where children and young people can be viewed as a separate social group with their own interests. This research does not advocate the separation of teenagers in refuges (Hodgkin and Newell, 1996), but rather appropriate inclusion. This includes adopting a broader framework that allows for difference, including age, stage of development (Alldred and Biglia, 2015) or competence.

Changes in home address should not always have to mean a change of school. Acute stressors for adolescents have been found to be linked to school-related stressors and interpersonal conflicts with peers or family (Smith and Carlson, 1997). These stressors are often felt more intensely by teenagers than by

younger children (Colten and Gore, 1991). Where possible, teenagers should continue to attend their original school, if that is what they want. Safety measures should be put in place to help them to do this. Improved multi-agency planning and co-ordination should be used to support continuity. Where teenagers want to change schools or it is not possible for them to travel to their previous school, they should be enrolled in appropriate educational placements. One refuge provided an example where they had worked extensively with teaching staff to enable a teenager (not a research participant) to remain in her school whilst in the refuge and after rehousing. The model of support provided to those in care or care leavers, identified in the previous chapter, could be replicated for teenagers in refuges.

Improved co-ordination with children's social services is required. Continuity of school for academic and social reasons should be prioritised. Teenagers reported feeling dissatisfied with their social workers. Staff described their lack of social worker involvement once families were placed in refuges. Where teenagers are not attending school for long periods, social workers and refuge staff need to be more pro-active in accessing alternative provision in the interim. The priority, however, should be accessing educational placements that are relevant and inclusive. Zannettino and McLaren's (2014) Australian research into child abuse and neglect found that there needed to be more collaboration between sectors to develop a continuum of service provision similar to that mentioned in the previous chapter with looked after children. Their research found limited focus on teenagers who had experienced abuse in comparison to

younger children. My interviews with staff in refuges in England extend this finding to refuge provision.

### ***Increase Available Resources***

Refuges need to provide more than a place of physical safety to teenagers. A need for support that addressed the impact of domestic violence and losses linked to moving was recognised by both staff and teenage participants. This has implications for capital spending. Resources are needed to provide equipment, access to spaces, staff at evenings and weekends and for trips and activities outside the refuge. The short term measures to improve and increase service provision secured by the 'Listen Louder!' campaign in Scotland (2002-2005) (described in Chapter One) have not been replicated beyond the Scottish border (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2003). This funding provided children's support workers and ensured that every child and young person in Scottish refuges had access to a computer for homework purposes (Houghton, 2006). My research shows that refuges in England have been unable to achieve these goals due to continued instability of funding and resources. At the time of this study, refuge services for children and young people appear to have reduced or stagnated. This is no more apparent than in Women's Aid central organisation. Due to funding shortages the National Children and Young People Officer post no longer exists which adds to uncomfortable messages about the value of such work and children and young people as service users.

### ***Mobilise Protective Processes***

Research on protective factors suggests four categories of interventions to promote resilience and coping. These include enhancing self-esteem, improving academic achievement, promoting social skills, and strengthening family and social supports (Rutter, 1987; Smith and Carlson, 1997). This research proposes that the provision of positive and supportive opportunities should be added to these categories. Strengthening protective factors can assist young people to overcome some of the consequences of earlier childhood harm and to mitigate future harm (Daniel and Wassell, 2002; Gilligan, 2001; Newman, 2004). This is particularly useful for teenagers who have experienced domestic violence over long periods of time.

Self-esteem is considered key to successful coping strategies (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). It has been found to be a significant factor distinguishing resilient and non-resilient adolescents (Kashani and Allan, 1998) and is maximised when teenagers have choice, personal control and responsibility (Brooks, 1994; Guille, 2004). Self-esteem is enhanced by many factors, including the development of a “secure base” of positive interactions with adults, including parents, siblings, other family members, peers, and teachers (Garbarino et al, 1992).

Internet access is essential to maintaining teenagers’ peer support networks and to bolster self-esteem. The internet is also an opportunity for exercising voice and agency (Oswell, 2013). Refuges need to consider monitoring and safeguarding rather than outright prohibition or restricted access to the internet.

Explanations beyond safety need to be provided to teenagers where internet access is restricted. Teenagers in refuges could be supported to attend local clubs and activities such as youth clubs and, where possible, meet other teenagers in similar circumstances. One refuge gave the example of a teenager returning to the refuge during the summer holidays to support other teenagers living there.

Teenagers with high self-esteem in one area, such as school, may focus on and build on that area (Lepistö et al, 2010). This may provide an escape from the experience of violence, the restrictions of refuge life, or both. The importance of education has been emphasised throughout the findings of this research. This was particularly evident for teenagers aged 14 to 16 years since this is a key educational stage. For teenagers not attending school, arrangements should be made whereby they can access work or schooling in refuges. This is connected to the point concerning improved collaboration between refuges and with schools, made above. One example of positive collaboration provided was of a teenager preparing to return to school. She received online support from a teacher with the help of refuge staff, using a laptop provided by the school.

Family or community factors include a secure relationship or attachment with an adult carer, and practical and emotional support from extended family, from friendships or in the wider community (Blagg et al, 2000; Booth and Booth, 1998; Graham-Bermann et al, 2006; Kashani and Allan, 1998; Mullender et al, 2002; Osofsky, 1999; Ullman, 2003). Positive peer friendships and sibling relationships can also be helpful in reducing stress, supporting coping and

building resilience (Guille, 2004; Muller et al, 2008; Mullender et al, 2002; Tajima et al, 2011). Previous studies have highlighted friends as a key source of support to whom children confide their experiences (McGee, 2000; Mullender et al, 2002; Gorin, 2004). Developing these sources of support should be integral to working with adolescents experiencing domestic violence. Teenagers in this study experienced reduced opportunities to maintain friendships and family relationships whilst living in refuges. They also reported hiding their experiences from friends, suggesting they may need alternative forms of peer support or ways to foster protective processes.

A secure attachment to a non-violent parent is widely considered an important factor mitigating trauma and distress (Graham-Bermann et al, 2006; Mullender et al, 2002; Osofsky, 1999). It has been argued that interventions should focus on promoting the mother-child attachment (Gewirtz and Edleson, 2007; Sturge-Apple et al, 2010). Teenagers in this study however expressed their need to receive support from somebody that they could trust from outside the family. Maintaining a positive relationship with an extra-familial caring adult is also considered to be a protective factor (Beeman, 2001).

### ***Foster Resilience***

Many of the features of resilience have already been outlined above. The concept of resilience has previously been outlined in Chapter One and applied in studies of domestic violence with a wider age range of children (Mullender et al, 2002) and to women's shelters in the Netherlands (Donkers, 2015). This highlights its possible applicability to teenagers in UK refuges. The current

focus on protection may make it difficult to assess resilience. It has been suggested that resilience outcomes should be understood from a developmental perspective (Yates and Masten, 2004). This takes into account changes with age and continuing development. Yates and Masten (2004) suggest that the presence of protective factors, detailed above, can help to consider resilience, rather than the absence of symptoms or risk. Daniel and Wassell (2002) provide a practical resource for ways to promote resilience in adolescence which could be successfully utilised.

The protective factors that support positive outcomes work to prevent longer term social and emotional impacts. These protective factors can help one young person cope with adversity more than another (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). A refuge stay provides an opportunity to foster such protective factors but my findings indicate teenagers' coping strategies were challenged. Mullender et al (2002) note that many of the protective factors which promote resilience are actually undermined by domestic violence. For example, the factors mentioned above: self-esteem, a supportive relationship with the non-abusive parent or carer, and social support such as friends, peers, teachers or neighbours (2002). It is therefore essential that these factors be included as a priority throughout safety planning. Promoting protective factors may enable improved long term outcomes by increasing chances of positive adaptation in future (Newman, 2004).

This research recommends that building resilience should be a guiding principle of refuge service provision to pro-actively support teenagers with the aim of

maximising better outcomes. The harmful effects of domestic violence to children and young people have been well established (Cunningham and Baker, 2004; Levendosky et al, 2002; McGee, 2000; Martin, 2002). Some children and young people seem better able to cope with traumatic experiences than others (Haggerty et al, 1996; Rutter, 2007). Studies have also recognised that despite their experiences many do cope and display remarkable resilience (Jaffe et al, 1990; Margolin and Gordis, 2004; Sullivan et al, 2000). Children and young people actively develop their own coping strategies (Rutter, 1996). Macy's (2007) research with adults regarding their experiences of childhood sexual abuse reveals different methods and outcomes of coping. Taking a proactive approach and adopting a 'survivor' perspective, rather than a 'victim' perspective, was found to be important in preventing re-victimisation in later life (Macy, 2007).

It has been identified that the more stressors or difficulties a person experiences, the more resources are needed to help them deal with this (Coleman and Hagell, 2007). The stressors of moving home and school have been well-documented (Mullender et al, 2002; Barron, 2008; Buckley et al, 2006). Reflecting on Rossman's (2001) study, outlined in the previous chapter, it is the accumulation of adversity that is significant. Therefore as risk increases, attention should be paid to increasing resilience. In their study of improving outcomes for children by supporting parents, Garbarino et al (2002) suggest that child welfare research, policy and practice should be considered in terms of 'accumulated opportunities' rather than 'accumulated risk'. They suggest that risk may be counterbalanced by introducing protective factors (Garbarino et al, 2002). An approach which balances risk and strengthens

protective factors (Pollard et al, 1999; Yates and Masten, 2004) has relevance for teenagers experiencing prolonged stays in refuges.

School may have a role in building or maintaining resilience for teenagers living in refuges by providing a secure base, a sense of self-efficacy and opportunities to boost self-esteem. The associations between lack of qualifications and long term outcomes reinforce the importance of education (Rutter, 1991). For some participants, investment in their education appeared to be an important means of managing their experiences. Rutter (1991) argues that the positive effects of school seem most evident among students who are vulnerable and have few other supports. Schools provide a sense of purpose, feelings of belonging, a positive source of identity and a secure base (Glover, 1998; Shepherd et al, 2010; Smith and Carlson, 1997). Attending school can also provide opportunities to build self-esteem and confidence through academic achievement, socialising with peers, sport and extra-curricular activities. All of these may assist recovery (Romans et al, 1995). This research found that wider social factors associated with resilience, such as positive school experiences and contact with peers, were often unavailable to teenagers in refuges. Their education was frequently disrupted and they often felt unwanted in schools. There were difficulties obtaining school places and teenagers described teaching staff as making negative comments during interviews or meetings for potential places.

The value of a protective support network with professional support has been emphasised (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). This reflects the perspectives of the

teenage participants who reported a need for support outside of the family. A significant adult offering consistent support as a mentor and possibly role model was identified in Jackson and Martin's (1998) study of children in care. This included providing help with career choices and decisions about the future; helping to arrange travel to and from school or college, and tutorial and homework support. The importance of a trusted attachment figure was confirmed in my study by James, who had a positive relationship with a responsive teacher who spent time with him after school. As a result, James felt confident that he could ask for support when required. Teachers and school staff have been identified as main determinants of educational progress for children in care (Sebba et al, 2015).

### ***Increased Participation***

This research found that refuges focused on protecting teenagers rather than enhancing their participation (defined in Chapter One) in decisions or refuge life. The discussion here will focus on collective decision-making (or user participation) and individual decision-making, as identified support needs mentioned earlier. Teenagers described an absence of opportunities to be involved in decisions about their own lives. Their views were often ignored, with protectionist actions rationalised as being in their 'best interests'. Teenagers also described a lack of active participation concerning opportunities to influence the structure, policy or organisation of refuges. They were considered as an appendage to their adult mothers. A focus on participation could challenge the invisibility of teenagers and respond to their demands for inclusion. Providing this would be consistent with General Comment 12

(UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/12, 2009) on interpretation of Article 12 which states that:

'The concept of participation emphasizes that including children should not only be a momentary act, but the starting point for an intense exchange between children and adults on the development of policies, programmes and measures in all relevant contexts of children's lives'.

(CRC/C/GC/12, para 13)

This General Comment also emphasises that these obligations apply in situations of violence:

'The Committee encourages States parties to consult with children in the development and implementation of legislative, policy, educational and other measures to address all forms of violence.'

(CRC/C/GC/12, para 118)

Other research has found that children's participation was crucial in their ability to cope with domestic violence (Mullender et al, 2002) and this is confirmed by the General Comment which states: 'effective inclusion of children in protective measures requires that children be informed about their right to be heard' (UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/12, para 120). This included being listened to and taken seriously, being involved in making decisions, and finding solutions. A focus on protection was acknowledged by staff (in Chapter Four) as restricting teenagers' independence but also appeared to be a taken for granted assumption owing to their non-adult status:

'...not really allowed to be in the house on their own...don't allow them to walk to the shop because of the surrounding area...we want to give them independence but we need them to understand that obviously it's for their safety...' (S13)

Staff acknowledged that teenagers could be infantilised by this approach and yet inflexibility remained. Lansdown (2005) argues that children require varying degrees of protection, participation and opportunity for autonomy in different

contexts and across different areas of decision making. Utilising this argument, refuges need to acknowledge teenagers' capacities and involve them in policies and processes of the refuge, thus increasing opportunities for teenagers to participate in decisions affecting them.

At the same time, it is relevant to acknowledge the existing tensions between ongoing risk of domestic violence and teenagers requests for increased independence and decision-making. It is important to understand and acknowledge the limitations of their capacities while not imposing inappropriate demands on teenagers (Lansdown, 2005). This should include further consideration of the various roles teenagers are (or have been) required to undertake e.g. translator or carer. This research has identified a need to balance teenagers' vulnerability and rights to protection with their roles in supporting their families and ability to mitigate risk. As Alderson's (1993; 2010; 2012) research shows, most children want a say in important issues affecting them. Many want to be able to make decisions for themselves, but they want to do so in consultation with the support of their families, or sometimes another trusted adult (Alderson's 1993; 2010). This was identified in this study by teenagers wanting help with decision-making about their future (Chapter Four). Participation, however, should not be imposed on teenagers; they should have the choice whether or not to participate (CRC/C/GC/12, 2009).

## **Developing Standards and Monitoring**

When commissioning services for domestic violence and abuse in the UK, the Secretary of State recommends that authorities adhere to six standards (DCLG,

2014). These standards include: (4) stability, resilience and autonomy, (5) children and young people. Referring to stability, resilience and autonomy, the guidance suggests that service users are supported to take charge of decision-making processes in their lives; encouraged to identify goals and access education, training and employment to maximise their stability and independence; and have access to resettlement and follow-up services with exit strategies tailored to individual need (DCLG, 2014: Annex A). This guidance is specifically aimed at services supporting adult women; however the findings from this study suggest that they would be applicable to teenagers.

With regards to the 'children and young people' standard, the guidance suggests that their safety and wellbeing is addressed in risk assessment and support planning; they are able to access support to understand their experiences and build resilience and confidence; support is provided to mothers to develop parenting resources and maintain relationships with their children; and services are responsive to the needs and views of children and young people. The findings of this study suggest these standards are generally not met by refuges or other providers.

Research findings highlighted short term ad-hoc work together with a lack of evaluation within refuges. Any improvements to the support strategies and interventions offered to teenagers need to be measured. A national set of standards for domestic violence provision by Women's Aid form an accredited set of criteria (McDermott, 2014). Women's Aid standards were not mentioned in any of the interviews suggesting they are not embedded. The standards

address children and young people with no distinction between younger children and teenagers. Many of the standards would help to promote a recognition of rights, consistency of provision and the importance of participation, but do not appear to be translating into practice. The findings of this research highlight a lack of engagement with teenagers' rights in refuges from policy though to practice. The new definition of domestic violence includes 16 and 17 year olds as primary service users and thus requires providers to give comparatively more priority to the complexities of working with young people.

The Women's Aid standards could be improved by utilising designs from elsewhere. Lansdown and O'Kane's (2014) 'Save the Children' monitoring and evaluation toolkit emphasises the collection of baseline data, and provides an existing set of indicators. It stresses the importance of involving children and young people in developing these indicators. Alternatively, a child rights situation analysis could prove useful in collecting the relevant information to assess the context of the problems and identify key issues (Dixon, 2013). This would establish priorities against which the long term impact of an intervention could be evaluated.

Measuring change, quality and outcomes more effectively could prove useful on an individual progress level but also on an organisational level. It could also be used to develop a more co-ordinated and strategic approach nationally by providing a measurable set of standards. Improved monitoring and evaluation would directly assist data production, which could be used to identify areas of

need. Organisations may then be able to make a case for more secure forms of investment and the allocation of appropriate resources.

### **Funding and the National Picture**

Justifications provided by staff for the lack of interventions targeted at teenagers included a lack of engagement from teenagers, and the small numbers of teenagers in the refuge population. This had a knock-on effect on obtaining or maintaining funding to meet their needs. Where positive examples of work did exist, such as having a support worker or engaging in trips and activities, it was evident from staff accounts that these were difficult to sustain due to limited amounts of funding and short term duration of funding. Staff also mentioned that the preoccupation with regular competitive tendering rounds among commissioners made it very difficult to maintain existing services, even at reduced levels.

Funding and tendering tasks took priority over refuge service development. The insecurity of resources was evident throughout the research and refuge services were seen to be closed or transferred to other, often less specialist, providers. One member of staff described how, in the context of insecure funding, there was a constant need for community fundraising to support trips and activities. Staff also described a lack of follow-on or community support for teenagers in comparison to provision for adult women. All of this means that teenagers' needs for advice and emotional support are not met in refuges or in the community. Consequently this research has highlighted a number of proposals for development.

Concerns have been voiced about disappearing quality assurance due to the removal in 2009 of ring-fencing of Supporting People funding and successive national and local Supporting People budget cuts (Audit Commission and DCLG, 2009; Bury, 2011; Quilgars and Pleace, 2010) The Supporting People Quality Assessment and Outcomes framework (QAF) applies to adult women living in refuges with the exception of providing evidence of safeguarding children (CLG, 2009)<sup>18</sup>. This single focus prioritises the protection ethos in refuges and overlooks support requirements. This research found that refuge staff posts that were previously allocated separately to adults and children had been merged into more generic support worker roles. The loss of children's worker posts was described by staff and noted by teenagers moving between refuges. Similarly, service providers responding to Quilgars and Pleace's (2010) study were concerned that specialist domestic violence services were being replaced by generic services to reduce costs. Such changes are in direct conflict with the views of teenagers and staff participating in this study who identified the value of a dedicated, specialised support worker and emphasised the distinct needs of teenagers. Some staff reported services had previously been provided, both inside and outside of refuges, but were no longer available. This had a direct impact on teenagers in refuges. Staff described support that could be provided if sufficient time and resources were available. Support had not been provided or was provided on an ad-hoc basis due to insufficient resources. The insecure and temporary nature of such work makes it difficult to evaluate its effectiveness.

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<sup>18</sup> Sitra leads on the QAF guidance <http://www.sitra.org/policy-good-practice/quality/#qaf>

Support for teenagers needs to be given higher priority both in refuges and in national policy. Current provision is fragmented, unevenly delivered and remains unevaluated. In November 2014 the government published guidance for £10 million of funding available over two years (up to £3 million available in 2014-15; up to £7 million in 2015-16) (DCLG, 2014). This funding followed a campaign by Women's Aid<sup>19</sup>. The fund intended to 'halt the further closure of good quality refuges, increase provision where appropriate and place refuges on a sustainable footing' (DCLG, 2014). The fund was to be applied for by local authorities in England rather than refuge organisations. This assumes refuges have positive relationships with their local council and that they would agree on developments. Examples provided in this study suggest this is not the case.

In obtaining this funding, refuges were expected to adhere to six categories of set standards, detailed earlier. This is in addition to the standards already set out by Supporting People, other funding bodies and local authority policies in their area. While the fund was welcomed by Women's Aid and Refuge, it was not considered to provide a sustainable long term solution (Laville, 2014). It is unclear if any of the funding has been used to support teenagers in refuges. Cuts linked to the Supporting People Programme mean it is highly likely it will be used to fill gaps in support for adult women. This was reportedly the case in five refuges in this study. The short term nature of this additional funding was also a concern.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/sos/>

Further funding is reportedly available for 2016 to 2020. £80 million is proposed for core support for refuges and rape crisis centres over the four years (HM Government, 2016) but it is currently unclear how this is to be applied for, how it will be used and if services successful in the previous fund can reapply. There will also be a gap between the previous fund ending by April 2016 and the new fund being available. The Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy suggests this will be for adult women through its reference to 'helping local areas ensure that no *woman* is turned away from the support *she* needs' (HM Government, 2016: 11, my emphasis). Refuges are acknowledged as playing a 'vital role' (HM Government, 2016: 32). Within this, there is mention of 'breaking the generational cycle' of abuse by continuing to build on prevention such as the teenage relationship abuse campaign 'This is Abuse' (HM Government, 2016: 15). Support for teenagers experiencing abuse in the home is recognised indirectly by suggesting local services pool budgets to support 'all family members, including children' (HM Government, 2016: 29).

### **A Paradigm Shift**

It has been argued that 'woman protection is frequently the most effective form of child protection' (Kelly, 1994: 53). This philosophy still informs much of the work of refuges who retain meeting the needs of adult women as their primary focus. Radford et al (2011) identify a continuing focus on mothers, with teenagers' needs on the periphery among wider domestic violence services. They suggest the requirement of a separate assessment to address children's

needs. The findings of this study reveal that teenagers did not view their needs as synonymous with their mothers.

Both staff and teenagers in this research consistently reported shortfalls in therapeutic and other interventions for teenagers exposed to domestic violence, both within refuge and community settings. Corresponding with earlier work (Baker, 2005; Hague et al, 1996), lack of funding was identified as one of the main obstacles to providing interventions. Staff reports showed little in the way of community interventions to meet teenagers' needs. Refuges lacked strong connections with other agencies and the response from schools appeared insufficient in many cases. The combination of these factors reveals insufficient resources to support teenagers in refuges.

Previous studies have included both children and young people. They have generally been discussed as a homogenous group with little distinction. Requirements relating to the period of adolescence specifically have not been considered in-depth. Tensions will inevitably arise when teenagers are regulated in the same way as much younger children at a time when their peers, outside of the refuge, may be granted more freedom and responsibility. Findings from this study could be used to sensitize domestic violence organisations and policy makers to the position of teenagers in refuges. The change in definition to domestic violence now provides equal status from the age of 16. Due to commonalities in experience and their position as vulnerable yet capable, outlined earlier in the thesis, this should include teenagers under the age of 16 years. The views of teenagers should be given equal weight as those of their mothers or carers and other adult women. This would support a

paradigm shift enabling teenagers to contribute to identifying and designing age appropriate services that promote and respect their protection, their competence and opportunities for their autonomous action. The Scottish model detailed in Chapter One, which gave young people power in decision-making (Houghton, 2006), could be replicated in England. Their active participation at a political level resulted in direct developments in service provision and resources for others (Houghton, 2008).

### **Alternative Solutions**

Despite the availability of increased legal protection, families still need to leave their homes to access refuge provision. As detailed in the previous chapters, this research found an initial period of physical safety followed by social, emotional and educational difficulty. The length of time teenagers were accommodated was a particular source of stress. Most teenage participants experienced considerable difficulties in terms of rehousing. The impact of this extended stay in a restrictive environment on independence, dependence and interdependence needs to be taken into account in both refuge and housing planning. It is unclear which organisation (if any) has responsibility for teenagers experiencing prolonged stays in a refuge or multiple refuges. Two teenagers had moved three times across local authorities within a two-year period and were concerned about the impact of this. This research found a lack of governance of such moves or consideration of the consequences, such as the length of time teenagers spent out of school for example, as discussed towards the end of the previous chapter.

Adding to the existing literature, the findings of this research reveal that a prolonged stay underpins teenagers' negative experience of refuge as an institution. In contrast with previous studies (Baker, 2005; Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007; Stafford et al, 2007), teenagers did not consistently express a desire to return home, but instead reported wanting to leave the refuge. The shortage of social housing means that a safety issue becomes a housing issue.

The emphasis on maintaining secrecy, discussed in the previous chapter, impacts on teenagers' independence, social networks and self-esteem. The length of time teenagers are living in refuges means that this issue can affect them for a substantial period of time in adolescence. The first refuge, Chiswick Women's Aid, had a public address and public phone number. This policy resembles that adopted by the Oranje Huis in the Netherlands which was described in the previous chapter. It may be appropriate for UK refuges to review their secrecy policies. Some refuges provide dispersed housing. This research found differences regarding rules and regulations between different refuge organisations, for example, some dispersed housing allowed friends to visit, whereas others operated in the same way as refuges. Consideration should be given to prioritising families with teenagers on housing waiting lists.

This research recognises that refuges still play a vital role in terms of physical safety. It may not be safe for some families to remain in the family home. For other families, there may be an alternative to refuges altogether. Sanctuary measures may be beneficial in terms of making homes physically safer (Quiggars and Pleace, 2010). Measures comprise the installation of a 'panic

room' or added security measures such as reinforced doors, fire safety equipment, emergency lighting and reinforced windows. It is suggested however, that these measures place the responsibility for protection on victims (Jones et al, 2010; Netto et al, 2009). Such security measures can also produce a sense of feeling imprisoned (Clarke and Wydall, 2015) and may replicate feelings of injustice experienced in refuges. Further, not all areas have Sanctuary Schemes available and their long term effectiveness is unknown.

Clarke and Wydall (2015) explored other options enabling families to stay in their own homes. They describe the 'Making Safe Scheme' in North Yorkshire as providing a co-ordinated response including finding alternative accommodation for perpetrators as well as support for adults, children and perpetrators. They argue that removing the perpetrator can empower families by increasing capacity for independent decision-making and creating opportunities to engage with support (Clarke and Wydall, 2013). Such options are considered to have the potential to 'facilitate recovery', allow 'expanded space for action' (Stark 2007 in Clarke and Wydall, 2015: 20) and promote a 'sense of justice' (Clarke and Wydall, 2015: 20). These approaches go some way to meet demands for stronger policies to evict perpetrators from the family home (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). These policies may increase the likelihood of teenagers being able to stay in their own homes and schools and maintain existing social and educational networks.

Facilitating and speeding up the allocation of housing to families experiencing domestic violence is another alternative to refuge provision. The Domestic

Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) is a partnership aiming to tackle domestic abuse by coordinating the work of housing professionals (DAHA, 2014). Parts of their alliance, Peabody and Gentoo housing associations, have been successful in rehousing families experiencing domestic violence without the use of refuge accommodation. Instead they use management transfers and reciprocal arrangements<sup>20</sup>. Quilgars and Pleafce (2010) found that London authorities were more likely to have specific policies to transfer applicants at risk of domestic violence (75 percent) in comparison to other unitary authorities (51 percent) or district councils (39 percent). Currently local authority transfer policies are not sufficiently available.

## **7.4 LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH**

This final section will provide a brief reflection on the research as a whole in light of the findings and discussion already presented. It begins by acknowledging the limitations of the research to provide opportunities and suggestions for future research. Identifying the strengths of the study is also intended to recognise successful elements on the research process. These are useful to consider the characteristics of this research and potential future research.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.elhp.org.uk/reciprocal-agreement.html> <http://www.elhp.org.uk/reciprocal-panlondon.html>

## **Limitations**

The limitations regarding the generalisability of the findings inherent in the sample size were acknowledged earlier in the thesis (Chapter Three). Difficulties obtaining access to teenage participants were also detailed. Only a quarter of the teenagers were male and only one independent teenager was recruited to this research. More teenagers could have been recruited from BAME communities had translation services been available. Information pertaining to sexuality or disability was not collected from teenagers, as this was not identified as a key issue at the outset but may be a worthwhile consideration for future research.

As previously acknowledged in Chapter Three, teenagers were recruited at various points in their refuge journeys due to moving refuges or issues with access. This made comparisons at fixed points in their stay impossible. Some teenagers had been residing in refuges for significant periods before the research began or continued to do so after it had ended. Ideally, teenagers would have been initially interviewed a short time after their arrival. This might, however, have proved burdensome and contributed to disengagement. Teenagers also had differing numbers of refuge stays which may have impacted on the findings. Only one quarter of teenagers were interviewed after leaving the refuge. Four teenagers remained in the refuge when the fieldwork ended, meaning their experience was still ongoing. It was not possible to interview the teenager who returned to the perpetrator during the fieldwork phase. Interviewing these teenagers would have added further data.

Telephone interviews were undertaken with staff volunteering to participate and so the staff interviewed were not necessarily from the same refuge as teenage participants, therefore direct comparisons between their accounts cannot be made. Directly comparing their views on the identified themes would have provided a more thorough evaluation. In addition, a comparison of refuge type was not undertaken, for example between communal, self-contained, mixed or dispersed; or housing association or other providers and Women's Aid refuges.

It was actively decided not to interview mothers. They could have provided more background information about moving to a refuge, changes to their relationship with their teenage children, or concerns about the impact of an extended refuge stay on teenagers. The decision not to interview mothers was in part determined by limited resources but I also aimed to focus on teenagers' perspectives.

Staff who reported offering support to teenagers did not recruit any teenage participants. This research would have benefited from the inclusion of participants accessing more developed initiatives. This could have improved understanding of the support teenagers described when reflecting on previous refuges, but no contemporary examples of such initiatives were available. Where teenagers provided examples of best practice, refuges were outside of the catchment areas or declined to participate.

Additional funding by the government was received by some refugees after the fieldwork ended. This may have led to improved provision for teenagers in some areas. I was informed, however, that in five areas this was used largely to fill gaps triggered by SP cuts, including follow-on support for adult women, suggesting changes to provision for teenagers may not have been significant.

### **Strengths**

The research exceeded the original recruitment target of 15 teenage participants. Half of teenage participants were from a BAME background and yet age was found to be the most significant factor for teenagers. At least one teenager was recruited for every year of age and other experiences such as mental health were captured. The focus on adolescence aims to redress the balance in research on children's experiences, which has included children and teenagers as one group. This research makes a distinction between them.

Teenagers' positive and ongoing engagement in the research process was particularly successful. This extended beyond the interviews to include text and email communication when issues arose, which provided a fuller picture of the stresses of refugee life as they happened. Repeat interviews gave this study unique access to data identifying difficulties experienced by teenagers in refugee stays. Subsequent interviews allowed further explanation and clarification of their accounts.

Teenagers and staff were involved in the initial design of the study, including designing questions to be asked and materials to be used (see Chapter Three). Towards the end of the study, teenagers further improved the research tool to highlight areas of support needs. This tool could be used in future research. Teenage participants were also involved in data analysis.

Data was collected from both staff and teenagers using methods to suit their needs and preferences. The research was able to recruit teenagers from 11 refuge organisations and staff from 17 organisations across the North West, East Midlands and West Midlands. Eight organisations recruited both teenagers and staff.

The timing of the study has allowed it to address new themes not identified in earlier research on children and young people in refuges. It highlights the importance of access to online technology for teenagers in refuges. It has also taken place within a new policy context owing to the change to the domestic violence definition.

To conclude, most studies have strengths and limitations. I have aimed to acknowledge the limitations in the methodology and in myself as the sole researcher for this study throughout the thesis, most notably in Chapter Three. Hopefully, some of the approaches adopted here will be of value for other researchers in this field.

## **7.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has suggested that teenagers should be given visibility and be recognised as service users in their own right owing to their unique position.

This shift is underpinned by the change in definition of domestic violence, bringing teenagers experiencing domestic violence into the primary client group.

The findings from this research identify ways in which refuges could support teenagers more effectively and focus on building protective factors. Providing a more responsive service would address the challenges created by the new broader definition of domestic violence in England and Wales.

This research highlighted the need for strategies to promote teenagers' empowerment, coping and control over their circumstances. It discussed a range of support that could be beneficial, including support that has been applied elsewhere, in other contexts, or in some cases in other refuges. The findings revealed the significance of education and peer support for teenagers and the importance of online communication in supporting coping mechanisms.

The discussion has argued for both an attitudinal and resourcing change. It identified that the position of teenagers living in a domestic violence refuge differs from that of adult women or younger children. In some ways teenagers in refuges are no different to their peers but they have the added experience of domestic violence. This experience is often long term and severe, accompanied by multiple losses when leaving their home. Teenagers felt that

they were not cared about and that money specifically allocated for refuge provision and services was spent elsewhere. The shortcomings of this response were highlighted due to the changing nature and reduction of services. Despite this, some refuges in this study and outside the recruitment area were able to provide positive forms of support.

The issue of funding was prominent within the staff interviews. Teenagers' rights need to be realised at a strategic policy level supported by sustainable investment. It was evident at the time of this research that posts for children's workers and adult community support were being reduced, both of which directly and indirectly impact on teenagers. Currently this influences the ability to respect, protect and fulfil their rights, resulting in a prolonged negative experience that compounds their experiences of abuse, the long term impact of which has not been investigated. The opportunity for improved life chances is linked to the case for investment in service provision.

The proposed resilience model recommends that teenagers in refuges be considered as vulnerable *but at the same time* capable. The extent to which individual teenagers are able to demonstrate their competence needs to be questioned within practice and policy-making. The discussion has explored the positioning of teenagers within refuges to see how possibilities for and limitations on such competencies are experienced. As a consequence of funding arrangements linked to the original purpose of supporting women, there appears to be a hierarchy of perceived need both inside and outside of refuges, imposed by statutory funding. Currently provision is adult-centred and incompatible with the needs and rights of teenagers experiencing a prolonged

stay in a refuge. Teenagers are unable to contribute to policy or practice and their views are not considered. This exclusion is mirrored in national policy documents and Women's Aid surveys which contain a number of shortcomings in relation to teenagers. The discussion has highlighted theoretical frameworks focussing on levels of participation and enabling competence.

This chapter also identified the limitations and strengths of this research. Recommendations for further research are included in the Conclusion.

# Conclusion

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## INTRODUCTION

This research project set out to examine the nature of the support provided for teenagers who had experienced domestic violence and abuse and left the family home to live in refuge accommodation. These teenagers are potentially at risk of double victimisation from violence and abuse in the home and in their own relationships (Barter et al, 2009) and therefore require support aimed at promoting recovery and prevention of future abuse.

This chapter revisits the research objectives, summarises the key findings of the research and highlights contributions to knowledge. It provides possible directions for future research, recommendations for policy and practice and reports on the dissemination of the research. These findings can be seen as having significant implications, as discussed below, for funders, policy makers, and refuge organisations. They may also offer helpful insights to other statutory or voluntary agencies working with young people with experiences of domestic violence.

## REVISITING OBJECTIVES

The intention of this final chapter is to synthesise the thesis findings in relation to the research questions:

- What is the nature of refuge provision available to teenagers?
- How do teenagers perceive and experience refuge life?

- Do teenagers' experiences and views of refuge change during the course of their stay?
- How appropriate is refuge provision for teenagers experiencing domestic violence and abuse?
- How might refuge services be developed to be more responsive to the needs of teenagers?

In order to answer these questions the research aimed to provide in-depth insight into how teenagers experience refuges, investigate whether refuge provision was meeting the needs of teenagers and contribute original findings that could be used to inform refuge and government policy.

The findings are based on a series of interviews undertaken in 2014-15 with 20 young people aged 13 to 18 years over the period of their refuge stay. In addition, 25 refuge staff were interviewed by telephone. Data collection and analysis were informed by theories of children's participation and feminist research principles.

## **SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This study has revealed the complexity of the needs of teenagers who use refuge accommodation with adolescence providing a common thread that underpins and explains many of the key themes identified by this study.

The literature reported in Chapter Two examined the support available to adult women identified by early research in refuges (Binney et al, 1981; Clifton, 1985; Pahl, 1978; Rose, 1985). Changes to refuge management and organisational structure were briefly described, taking into account the introduction of the government's Supporting People programme which has funded the development of a range of refuge services, including those for children. The review also mapped feminist thinking and policy in the 1970s and their impact on the current model of support provided by refuges. An absence of a clear understanding of teenagers' experience within refuges was highlighted. The evidence presented in Chapters Four and Five shows that whilst refuge provision has shifted from a collective to a hierarchical model in the last 40 years, adult women are still perceived as the primary service users. The levels of support, advocacy services and mutual support identified as important for adult women have not been extended to teenagers living in refuges due to interlinked factors of government policy, refuge policies, staff attitudes and training, and funding restrictions. The interviews with refuge staff showed that refuge-based services were more likely to cater for younger children who were conceptualised as an appendage to their mothers. However, the specific needs of teenagers for support to cope with their experiences of domestic violence, to continue in education, sustain friendships with peers and their growing need for independence were rarely catered for. Teenagers wanted active forms of support to help compensate for the losses they had experienced as a consequence of domestic violence and their subsequent move to a refuge.

## **Building the Knowledge Base on Refuge Life for Teenagers**

This study has built on existing research (e.g. Buckley et al, 2006; Mullender et al, 2002) regarding the detrimental impact on education of moving to, and living in, a refuge. It found that many teenagers in this study were forced to leave their school and spent unacceptable periods without a school place or educational support. This was relevant to teenagers' present and future opportunities. The obstacles encountered in accessing education and the immediate and long-term implications of missing school give cause for considerable concern. Since engagement and success in education can contribute to young people's self-esteem and offer protection against the harms inflicted by domestic violence, a lack of support for educational attainment in the refuge setting represents a lost opportunity.

Teenage participants in this research explained the importance of sustaining friendships. Their need to maintain their social network is recognised as an essential part of adolescent development (Coleman, 2011; Levendosky et al, 2002) but is currently hindered in the refuge setting. Earlier UK research on refuges was undertaken before widespread access to new technology became the norm for young people and this emerged as crucial in terms of maintaining and developing support networks and for the completion of school work.

This research suggests that support for teenagers is needed from the beginning of their refuge stay and afterwards and that current provision is inadequate. A variety of practical, social and emotional forms of support for teenagers were identified as important. However, refuge staff experienced challenges in delivering an appropriate response to the changing and complex support needs

of adolescence. The study found a lack of training for refuge staff and liaison between refuge staff and other professionals in education, mental health services and the community. There was also an absence of partnership working with other neighbouring refuges which would potentially be beneficial in supporting teenagers.

Insight into factors that facilitate effective provision of support was provided by the teenagers when they made references to positive experiences in refuges elsewhere and reported aspects of support they found particularly helpful during their time in a refuge. They emphasised the importance of trust, confidentiality and a shared understanding of problems. They valued staff who provided active listening, were non-judgemental and treated teenagers with respect. Interestingly, teenagers particularly appreciated being offered support by staff members who were closer to them in age and demonstrated a non-authoritarian approach. Younger members of staff were perceived as less controlling and as offering a relationship in which teenagers felt they were being treated as peers rather than children. Opportunities for mutual support and making new friends in the refuge were limited and so there was a perceived need from teenagers for more formal counselling and group work.

The findings of this study also have implications for the design and management of refuges and refuge rules. Refuge rules concerning secrecy and confidentiality reinforced feelings of shame and stigma related to experience of domestic violence and living in a refuge. Teenagers needed help from refuge staff to enable them to prepare a response to questions from friends and others about their living arrangements. Young people found that refuge rules were

non-negotiable; they felt that rules needed to be reassessed in the light of a young person's age or situated competence. Teenagers' reports revealed that they were not considered able to contribute to their own lives or to the running of the refuge and such attitudes failed to acknowledge positive characteristics of adolescence, such as increased independence, maturity and competence.

Teenagers described the need for privacy and individual space but also a communal space they can share with other teenagers. A key finding was the connection between teenagers' emotional space and physical space in refuges, and this resonated with the findings of Bowyer et al's (2015) study of the experiences of five girls aged ten to 16 years in temporary accommodation. In the present study, the negative impact of rules and absence of physical space resulted in feelings of restriction and control which were not dissimilar to the feelings evoked by the experience of domestic violence and abuse.

Within the refuge sector, young people's needs are currently under-resourced due to their position as secondary service users. The importance of this work needs to be fully appreciated and properly funded, taking into account the need to spend time with teenagers on a one-to-one basis and to provide this support over an extended period, including after they have left the refuge and been rehoused. My research found that shortfalls in individual support can contribute to relationship breakdowns between staff and teenagers. Prioritising the needs of teenagers within refuge services could offer an opportunity to build resilience and reduce future demands on services and could therefore be viewed as cost-effective in the long term.

If refuges are to offer teenagers an effective service, they need to be considered more than a place of safety and offer more than basic practical assistance with rehousing. Recognising the opportunities for building resilience in adolescence highlights the importance of providing teenagers with appropriate forms of support relevant to their age-specific needs. Restricting support and possibilities for building resilience may be counter-productive in the long term in relation to education, career plans or ambitions, and social and interpersonal relationships. Given individual differences in need, and transitions associated with adolescence, the research has suggested the use of a resilience framework. This does not seek to be prescriptive but offers a potential framework for refuge policy and practice based on what teenagers said they needed. Further research is needed to clarify its application for teenagers fleeing domestic violence in their own relationships (independent or unaccompanied teenagers).

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

As detailed within the thesis, much of the existing research on refuge provision has failed to distinguish the needs of teenagers from those of adult women and younger children. This study has sought to balance this by offering an original contribution to the investigation into the adequacy of the current service response. The analysis of the findings highlight the significance of adolescence as crucial to teenagers' experiences of staying in a refuge and the opportunity their stay provides to promote resilience, recovery and prevention in the face of current and future domestic violence and abuse. I found that teenagers stressed they often knew what was best for them but their views were frequently overlooked by adult decision-making.

The research was unique in that it was undertaken across the trajectory of teenagers' prolonged stay in refuges. A longitudinal approach generated knowledge of individuals' ongoing experiences, including their transition into the refuge, their stay afterwards and in some cases teenagers completed a final interview once rehoused, which provided insight into the transition out of the refuge. Using an alternative approach would not have identified the changes, continuities, and emerging obstacles during their stay.

## **Scope for Further Research**

A possible avenue for future research would be the experiences of older teenagers residing in refuges who may have experienced domestic violence for longer periods or may have experienced domestic violence both in the family home and in their own intimate relationships. Staff participating in this research raised concerns about a lack of publicity aimed at this age group, resulting in lower numbers of teenagers referred to refuges in comparison to adult women. However, other staff reported a recent increase in referrals for this age group. Further investigation of teenage referral rates and acceptance patterns might indicate the extent of young people's awareness of refuge provision and the degree to which it is perceived as acceptable and appropriate by teenagers experiencing domestic violence and abuse. This research was unable to comprehensively compare the differing experiences of young people who were housed in refuges on an unaccompanied (independent) basis and those who were accompanied by their mothers (dependent) as was originally planned. Interestingly, the views and experience of the one independent teenager

included in this study did not differ substantially from those of teenagers accommodated with their family. Similarities included the need for emotional and practical support and activities, the importance of new technology, help with education and career prospects, the need for independence and freedom and space to spend time with others. Differences included the perception of refuge visitors' policies. The independent teenager was unable to emotionally separate herself from the domestic violence she had experienced and she experienced conflict with other, older residents due to their perceptions of victim status. Once teenagers were rehoused, differences in experience encompassed the practicalities of living alone and additional needs relating to being a parent.

Further investigation with teenagers after leaving refuges would be invaluable in evaluating the long term effects of living in a refuge. Given the difficulties encountered in recruiting teenagers for this research, establishing a research relationship before they leave the refuge would be an effective means of undertaking a longitudinal study. In particular, it would generate enquiry into the long term implications of a refuge stay on education, relationships and future prospects.

## **Recommendations from the Research**

The long term nature of refuge accommodation requires a shift from conceptualising refuges as a crisis response service to considering their capacity for delivering positive outcomes for teenagers. The recommendations below are intended as means of improving the design and quality of refuge

services for young people with a view of contributing to recovery from the impact of domestic violence and abuse and increasing resilience. Currently, refuge services do not sufficiently or clearly distinguish between the rights, needs and outcomes for younger children and teenagers and there is a significant shortage of professionals trained to work with teenagers (Quiggars and Pleace, 2010). The importance and long-term benefits of working with teenagers in refuges needs to be fully appreciated by policy makers and adequately funded, taking into account the needs identified for a range of support and the timeliness of this. In this section, summary recommendations from this research are highlighted in italics and are linked to the relevant research evidence. Different aspects of experience are important for different individual young people at different points in time; therefore it is difficult to prioritise recommendations. For example, it may sometimes be necessary for education to take second place to immediate physical safety for individual teenagers. Teenagers' views and experiences provide messages as to how provision can be improved to realise their rights in practice. As has been argued, a number of the articles of the UNCRC (12, 13, 16, 19, 28, 29, 31, and 39) are relevant and the following recommendations indicate how respect for the rights of teenagers living in refuges might be enhanced. Other articles are also relevant, as mentioned earlier (e.g. 5, 15 and 24) and below (e.g. 2, and 17, 42).

*Ensuring that sufficient and varied opportunities are available for teenagers to talk in confidence about the domestic violence in their lives is a priority.* If teenagers are to be successfully supported in managing their experiences of

domestic violence and moving to a refuge they need to receive practical and emotional support to address differing sources of stress, in line with Article 19 of the UNCRC. In particular, their needs to maintain social networks and for educational support should be met. The immediate and long-term implications of not receiving support need to be acknowledged by policy makers. This includes harm to education and/or career prospects, and present or future relationships. Teenagers require the necessary skills to recognise abusive behaviour early on in a relationship, hopefully preventing future requirements for refuge provision.

*Refuge policies restricting access to teenage boys should be reviewed by refuge organisations.* Given that research suggests that exposure to domestic violence does not inevitably lead to repeating this behaviour in later intimate relationships (Blum, 1998; Margolin, 1998; Humphreys and Mullender, 2000), it is surprising that male teenagers are still often 'labelled' as potential perpetrators. A number of refuges explained that they now made decisions on a case by case basis. It could be argued that preventative work with all teenagers, aimed at reducing or eradicating violence within their own intimate relationships, would be a more appropriate and effective form of intervention than refusing teenage boys refuge space. It may be helpful for those planning refuge services to consider Article 2 of the UNCRC which states that the 'child is protected against all forms of discrimination' as this challenges gender based exclusions.

Whilst it is not always feasible or practicable for refuges to provide information in advance, due to the unplanned nature of refuge admissions, *an information*

*booklet upon arrival would be helpful for teenagers.* Such information should be specifically designed for young people and could perhaps be developed by young people with experience of refuge life. This information should include details of staff, rules and support they can expect whilst in the refuge, broadly in line with Articles 13 (freedom to seek, receive and impart information) and 17 (access to information) of the UNCRC. A full briefing on the range of provision available should be developed with and for teenagers.

*Practice guidance with accompanying resources and appropriate training should be developed for staff working with teenagers in refuges.* This could be developed with input and advice from young people themselves, domestic violence service providers and youth service providers. This guidance should be promoted widely and should target professionals in education, mental health services, children's social care and housing providers as well as refuge staff. It should include examples of positive practice that is sensitive to teenagers' needs and rights under the UNCRC consistent with Article 42: 'States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children'.

Teenagers require emotional and practical support and tailored interventions to help them overcome their experiences of domestic violence and cope with living in a refuge. *Someone to talk to outside the family would be valuable*, namely a specific support worker who is responsive and understanding. *Refuge services should continue and build on the examples of good practice highlighted.* For the young people in this study, trust was key to facilitating communication with

refuge staff. Positive examples included being available when they needed support, showing they cared about them as individuals, and spending time engaging with them in shared activities which promoted feelings of confidence and independence and provided opportunities for success. *Practice materials should be developed focused on empowering and non-stigmatising approaches to supporting teenagers.* For some teenagers, support was required after leaving the refuge and this should be with the same support worker who has already developed a trusting relationship with an individual teenager. Article 39 of the UNCRC may be particularly relevant here to develop provision to meet their rights to recovery and support.

Current austerity measures have led to reductions in funding to adult and children's domestic violence services (Towers and Walby, 2012) and these have the potential to impact negatively on teenagers. None of the refuges in this study received statutory funding for children's worker posts. *Further resources are needed to support teenagers living in refuges. Resources need to be allocated over longer periods and the option of resources for young people being shared between refuges should be investigated.* This would allow for fluctuating numbers of teenagers and might also provide a mechanism through which teenagers could meet other young people with similar experiences.

Support from other teenagers with similar experiences was found to be important for young people. *More opportunities should be provided within and outside of the refuge for teenagers to meet with others to help reduce feelings*

of shame and stigma. *Support should be given to maintaining teenagers' friendships* both while they are within, and once they have left the refuge. Teenagers described trying to maintain relationships themselves but found it difficult to do so due to limited internet access, lack of help with transport, secrecy of refuge location and lack of alternative venues.

There is a need for collaboration with young people themselves to develop methods of building recovery and resilience. Teenagers would value increased opportunities to influence service delivery and design; their current involvement appears to be low or non-existent. *Teenagers should be involved in developing service provision to meet their needs.* Regular meetings and consultations with refuge staff were suggested to remedy this. Such an approach would also have the effect of increasing recognition of teenagers' rights under the UNCRC, particularly Article 12. The continued need for refuge provision and minimal evaluation of interventions delivered by refuges indicates the need for *more evaluation of work undertaken in refuges.* Further evaluation is needed of the refuge as an intervention in itself.

*Teenagers should be more involved in individual decision-making when moving to and living in refuges.* Those participating in this study were keen to point out that they knew what was best for them but their views were frequently overlooked. Decisions should be made and explored *with* teenagers, not *for* them. Teenagers who are living in refuges should have access to support that meets their needs. This includes the provision of an individual support plan and a planned strategy to answer questions about living arrangements. Decisions,

plans and strategies should be developed *with* the teenager. Support needs to go beyond a focus on safety, risk and protectionism. It may therefore be helpful for those planning refuge services to refer to General Comment 12 (UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/12, 2009) which provides guidance on the implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC. These make particular reference to participation and emphasise that these obligations apply in situations of violence, discussed earlier.

There is a need for *further development of teenager-friendly risk assessments which fully involve them in the task of balancing their own safety with their need for independence*. Providing this would be consistent with Article 12 of the UNCRC and General Comment 12 (UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/12, 2009) which states that children and young people have the right to have a say and have their views listened to and considered. It also emphasises that every action taken on their behalf ‘has to respect the best interests of the child’ (CRC/C/GC/12, para 70). They should therefore be included in any assessment of what is in their ‘best interests’.

Refuge risk policies should also identify opportunities for learning and safety which should be promoted through strategies that aim to develop teenagers’ capacities to protect themselves and strengthen coping mechanisms. *Restrictions on access to refuge buildings and refuge spaces need to be explored in depth*. The current approach which frequently entails treating teenagers in the same manner as younger children is inadequate and there are real restrictions on space that are not easily resolved. A review of this type

could be part of a wider reflection on whether refuge rules could be negotiated rather than imposed on teenage residents. *Refuges should also review policies that prevent teenagers from accessing communal spaces without their mothers.* Article 15 of the UNCRC ‘rights of the child to freedom of association’ may be particularly relevant here in helping young people to achieve this.

*Refuges need to achieve a balance between empowerment and protection when considering online risks for young people.* Recognition must be afforded to the extent to which social/digital media are increasingly the primary means teenagers use to communicate and receive, create and disseminate information. Teenagers in refuges should have access to different forms of media and be able to utilise the internet as a means of communicating and engaging with friends and family and for educational purposes. They should also be educated to understand and manage online risks. Developing work around this may be assisted by reference to the General Comment on Adolescents (UNCRC Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/20, 2016) and UNCRC Articles 13 (the right to ‘freedom of expression’) and 17 (access to the mass media).

*Where accommodation is being built or adapted, specific space for teenagers should be included.* Any existing spaces allocated to young people should be preserved. Teenagers criticised the absence of age-appropriate facilities in refuges. Increased recognition of young people as primary users of refuges may increase readiness to meet their requirements. The lack of space to complete homework or just spend time away from their families was identified

as stressful by the young people participating in this study. The possibility of *creating or allocating a designated space for teenagers should be considered* within the refuge as this may provide a means of realising aspects of Article 16 (the right to privacy).

The research identified teenagers' need for support with education and following these recommendations could enable more effective respect of UNCRC Articles 28 and 29. *Refuges and schools need to work collaboratively and proactively to address the negative impact that domestic violence and moving can have on a teenager's education.* This may require *training for teachers, social workers and other professionals to promote awareness of the effects of domestic violence and moving to a refuge.*

Learning support should be available in school for young people whose academic potential has been harmed by living with domestic violence. Examples provided by teenagers in this research demonstrated that receiving positive and encouraging support from educational staff is vital. The positive example of a supportive teacher spending time with an individual after school could be replicated. At a policy level, *the support provided to care leavers should be considered as a model for offering support packages to young people living in refuges.* It should be ensured, as far as possible, that teenagers can continue with their examination curricula and choices. *Where schooling is interrupted, teenagers should be provided with alternative resources.*

*Improved access to counselling and mental health services should be prioritised.* This research highlighted the gap between differing levels of provision of such services for adults and children which directly affected young people approaching the age of 16 years. This group requires improved access to mental health services to give effect to the rights set out within UNCRC Articles 24 (the right to access health care services) and 39 (physical and psychological recovery). The likelihood of teenagers falling ‘in between’ services due to their age and bureaucratic barriers needs to be reduced. *The possibility of providing counselling services for young people in refuges should be explored.* This may mean relaxing refuge confidentiality policies to allow external counselling services refuge access.

*Opportunity to utilise existing spaces outside the refuge, such as school or community premises, should be improved.* These spaces could be used for completing homework or spending time alone or with others. *Refuges, schools and youth services should seek to provide opportunities for teenagers to meet other young people outside the refuge* for example, at homework clubs or youth clubs. Further investigation needs to be undertaken into the possibilities of working in partnership with existing community or youth services to provide activities for teenagers which can contribute to building self-esteem and developing social networks. It is relevant here to consider the use of UNCRC Article 31 which promotes the right to participate fully in leisure and recreational activities.

## **Dissemination**

The research has been disseminated at local, national and European conferences using posters and presentations. The conclusions presented have generally been accepted and welcomed. It has resulted in at least one refuge applying for further one-off funding for equipment for teenagers; similarly, young people involved in other research but with refuge experience, have expressed their support for the findings. A summary sheet of the findings will be sent to all refuges involved, to participants who provided contact details and key organisations such as Women's Aid. Further plans for dissemination include journal articles in peer reviewed publications and more accessible publications for refuge staff.

## **Final Comments**

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the need for a focus on teenagers. The expanded definition of domestic violence in England and Wales offers an opportunity to target services to improve prevention and response services for these young people due to the potential for teenagers of the same age (residing independently and independently) and the shared characteristics and experiences of teenagers. Existing prevention efforts targeting abuse in teenagers' own relationships are important. However, it must be remembered that young people's first experiences of domestic violence and abuse may be in the home. Those teenagers need to be supported at the earliest opportunity so that they can recover from their experiences of domestic violence and build resilience to potential domestic violence and abuse in the future. This research study has attempted to give a voice to teenagers themselves to

identify their support needs and the factors they identified as helpful or unhelpful.

The findings from this research provide a detailed picture of how young people experience and understand a refuge stay over time. The study has highlighted the significance of support, independence, access to new technology, space and education. This thesis argues for an attitudinal and resourcing change, underpinned by the opportunity presented by the widened definition of domestic violence and abuse. The opportunity for improved life chances is linked to the case for investment in service provision. Teenagers should be given visibility and recognition as service users in their own right.

Finally, the thesis ends with a poignant summary from one of the teenage participants. Daisy draws attention to the need for young people to be accorded rights and status as service users by refuges and also to the importance of investing resources and thought in young people to reduce future harm:

‘...young people have feelings as well as older people, and if they don’t get anything sorted out, it could lead to problems...’ (Daisy)

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# Appendices

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