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Title	Educational Opportunities and Obstacles for Teenagers Living in Domestic Violence Refuges
Type	Article
URL	https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/32975/
DOI	##doi##
Date	2020
Citation	Bracewell, Kelly orcid iconORCID: 0000-0003-4635-7489, Larkins, Cath orcid iconORCID: 0000-0003-2999-6916, Radford, Lorraine orcid iconORCID: 0000-0002-6095-3845 and Stanley, Nicky orcid iconORCID: 0000-0002-7644-1625 (2020) Educational Opportunities and Obstacles for Teenagers Living in Domestic Violence Refuges. <i>Child Abuse Review</i> , 29 (2). pp. 130-143. ISSN 0952-9136
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It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. ##doi##

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Educational Opportunities and Obstacles for Teenagers Living in Domestic Violence Refuges

ABSTRACT

The hidden nature of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) is well established. Globally, its prevalence is difficult to ascertain, but international legal frameworks and existing studies recognise that domestic violence is experienced directly by children and young people in the home or within their own intimate partner relationships.

In 2013, UK policy transformed teenagers into primary service users of DVA refuges. This study examines teenagers' educational experiences over the period of their refuge stay and whether refuges responded effectively to their educational needs. Twenty refuges in England assisted with the study. Individual interviews with 25 staff members explored their perceptions of teenagers' experiences. Repeat interviews with 20 teenagers were undertaken across the period of their refuge stay. The voices of teenagers are prioritized in this paper; four teenagers contributed to study design and three assisted with data analysis. A thematic approach was taken to analyse the data. Teenagers described various educational difficulties associated with adolescence and refuge life. Major themes included the disruption of education and a lack of resources to support educational achievement. Education can contribute to the resilience of teenagers who have experienced DVA. Refuges and schools should work collaboratively to build a co-ordinated response.

Key Words: Teenagers–Refuge – Education – Domestic Violence and Abuse

INTRODUCTION

Teenagers can encounter domestic violence and abuse (DVA) both in the family home and/or in their own intimate partner relationships. Prevalence rates for DVA in young people's own relationships vary considerably, depending on the sample, definitions and forms of DVA included (Barter & Stanley, 2016). Similarly, obtaining reliable and up to date data of DVA in the home is difficult due to its hidden nature. Author's (2011a) UK study of maltreatment used a random representative sample of 2,275 children and young people (CYP) and found that 17.5 percent of 11 to 17-year olds had been exposed to DVA and 4.1% had experienced severe DVA.

Women's refuges (shelters) provide safe temporary accommodation and offer important practical and emotional support to assist recovery from DVA. As a consequence of the broadening of the definition of DVA in England and Wales to include 16 and 17-year olds (Home Office, 2013), refuges can now offer adolescents who experience DVA in their own relationships independent accommodation. Following DVA in the family home, other young people will move to temporary refuge accommodation with their mothers. A refuge stay represents an opportunity to provide support to young people who have experienced trauma and education has a potentially key role in building recovery and resilience. This paper reports the findings of a study with teenagers living in refuges in England, examining their educational experiences and the educational obstacles they faced.

Teenagers' Experience of Domestic Violence and Abuse

By virtue of their age, teenagers are more likely than younger children to have had lifetime experience of DVA. Both prevalence studies and national crime statistics

illustrate high rates of DVA experienced by teenagers in their childhood and within the last year (Author, 2011a; Office for National Statistics, 2018). Since the government definition of DVA is confined to those aged 16 years and over, teenage victims younger than 16 may be even less visible.

Substantial evidence shows that experiencing DVA is harmful to children's health and development (Holt *et al.*, 2008; Author, 2011b) with a range of adverse effects identified across different developmental stages. Research describes adolescents adopting more negative, externalised coping strategies such as running away and aggression (McCloskey & Lichter, 2003). Teenagers are more likely to intervene directly in violent incidents between parents (Hester *et al.*, 2007). It is becoming widely accepted that CYP are not passive witnesses of DVA but rather have agency and can develop strategies of active resistance (Katz, 2016). However, few studies have discriminated between children and young people. Variations in the impact of DVA and its aftermath may require different service responses.

The transitions experienced during adolescence provide a unique set of challenges for services and for teenagers and their families (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Teenagers experience changes in identity formation and in balancing dependence and independence. Opportunities for increased separation from parents and reliance on peers are accompanied by heightened educational expectations and pressures (Hagell *et al.*, 2012). Those with experience of DVA therefore face a double challenge of coping with the consequences of abuse and trauma in the complex context of adolescence.

Education and Resilience in the Face of Domestic Violence and Abuse

Studies have highlighted the impact of DVA on education and academic achievement, reporting behavioural difficulties, problems with school adjustment or absenteeism (Perkins & Graham-Bermann, 2012). Moreover, living in refuge accommodation has additional effects (Holt *et al.*, 2008; Selvik & Øverlien, 2015). The impact of this can potentially remove many protective factors offered by school such as peer support and a stable educational environment (Wolfe *et al.*, 2003). Protective factors identified as building resilience include positive educational experiences (Daniel & Wassell, 2002), but little attention has been given as to how education might be conceptualised as a source of resilience in the face of DVA. Evidence concerning education professionals' interventions with CYP experiencing DVA is limited (Authors, 2011b), although Jenney *et al.*'s (2016) retrospective Canadian study confirms the importance of teachers as role models.

Resilience, understood here from a social-ecological perspective, is a process and opportunity which resides in individual, familial, contextual and environmental factors (Jenney *et al.*, 2016; Ungar *et al.*, 2013). Education can provide opportunities for academic achievement, social success, participation in extracurricular activities, and the development of agency (Rutter, 2006). It also builds community resilience through social connections and friendships (Byrne & Taylor, 2007); including supportive relationships with teaching staff (Rutter 2006, Jenney *et al.*, 2016). Practically, academic achievements may offer opportunities to engage with further education or employment and to forge a new future in contexts that promote resilience or facilitate escape from DVA.

Refuge Work with Teenagers

There is limited information available regarding the numbers of teenagers accommodated in refuges in England and Wales and little guidance available for refuge staff about working with teenagers. While research has drawn attention to the presence and needs of children in refuges (McGee, 2000; Mullender *et al*, 2002), the status of teenagers in refuges remains ambiguous owing to the tendency to conflate their needs with those of their mothers. These young people are not classified as ‘looked after children’ (LAC) or children in out-of-home care since they are with their primary caregiver and in a place of safety. Their position as service users in their own right within refuges has been further eroded by recent reductions in funding which have restricted CYP provision (Women’s Aid 2015a).

Several issues have been identified across previous refuge studies. Øverlien’s (2012) Norwegian study highlighted severed friendships among the five CYP interviewed. Girls in Bowyer *et al*’s (2015) small scale qualitative study explained that loss of personal space was the worst thing about moving to temporary accommodation following DVA. National survey data from 90 DVA services for CYP found that 42% reported difficulties accessing school places (Women’s Aid, 2015a). How these multiple barriers are experienced requires further exploration.

METHODS

The study methodology incorporated key elements of feminist research and the sociology of childhood, particularly their shared epistemological values of reflexivity and empowering participants. These values influenced the research process, ethics and methods adopted (Authors, 2017).

Refuges in the Midlands and North West England were identified through the Women's Aid website (Women's Aid, 2015b). Of the 70 refuges contacted, 20 were recruited to the study. Teenagers were recruited by staff in 11 of the participating organizations. Single semi-structured telephone interviews were completed with 25 staff members across the 20 organizations including children's workers, adult support workers, and managers. Staff interviews addressed a range of questions: teenagers' friendships and independence, school liaison, gaps in provision for teenagers and refuge facilities. This paper will focus largely on data gathered from teenagers. The paper includes examples of positive experiences in refuges alongside the majority of reports which were less so.

Four teenagers developed research themes such as their 'ideal refuge' in the pilot stage and finalised the research tools. These were incorporated within the semi-structured interviews e.g. worksheets, phrase cards, and rating scales (see Authors 2017 for more detail). Face-to-face repeat interviews using participatory methods were undertaken with 20 teenagers with 64 interviews conducted in total. Up to six interviews with each participant took place at monthly intervals to enable investigation of ongoing experiences during a refuge stay. The average number of interviews per teenager was 3.2. Broad interview topics included arriving at the refuge, refuge life, changes over time and leaving the refuge, but the choice of topic was flexible and often led by teenagers. Teenagers chose the methods they wanted to use, for example, one teenager wanted to talk while walking around the refuge. Multiple interviews were effective in generating rapport and trust between teenagers and the lead author. This enabled increased openness, sustained young people's participation and helped to develop a more participatory framework (Cater & Øverlien, 2014).

Most interviews with teenagers took place in their refuge, with five also interviewed at home once they were rehoused. Teenagers' participation and empowerment were balanced with their rights to protection rights within the research process. Appropriately formatted information was made available to both staff and teenagers. All teenagers provided written consent. Additionally, for those under the age of 16, written consent was sought from their mothers. Teenagers could withdraw consent at any time; they were given control of the digital audio recorder and were able to stop the interview when they chose. Ethical approval was granted by [xxx] Ethics Committee. All refuges and participants are anonymised, with teenagers distinguished using self-selected pseudonyms. Confidentiality was assured within the limits of protection from harm. Teenagers were provided with a £10 voucher at each interview to acknowledge their time and effort. A research summary for research participants was distributed after the research ended.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and entered into NVivo software to organise, sort and code the data collected. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) took place throughout data collection by comparing themes across and between participants (Authors, 2017). Identification of themes developed as interviews and data increased. An ongoing relationship with the researcher (XX) built across multiple interviews provided teenagers with opportunities to evaluate, clarify and interpret comments they and/or others made. Teenagers were encouraged to review interpretations, challenge misrepresentations, or elaborate further with the aim of increasing collaboration.

Three teenage participants volunteered to contribute to formal data analysis. They were given the broad topics explored during interviews, e.g. positives and negatives of

living in a refuge, and anonymised information from other participants. They were asked to identify themes and encouraged to re-name any codes or themes found by the researcher. They subsequently explored relationships between codes and ordered, compared and discussed their reasoning. Teenagers prioritized themes and education repeatedly emerged as a high-priority theme in their rankings (see Authors, 2017).

RESULTS

Teenage Participants

The term ‘teenager’ will be used to describe participants in this study aged 13 to 18 years (mean age 15 years) as that is the term they used to describe themselves. The majority were female (n=15) and half were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (n=10); ten were of White British heritage. Two participants had no recourse to public funds due to their insecure immigration status. One teenager was residing independently, without her family due to fleeing DVA in her own relationship.

Over half of teenage participants (n=11) had lived in two or more refuges or temporary accommodation prior to their current refuge. One quarter of participants had stayed in refuges for over a year. One teenager interviewed in her current refuge at the start of her stay had already been living in refuges for two years. The average move was 57.4 miles, the furthest 220 miles. The difficulties posed by their length of stay, distance from home and refuge restrictions are important factors when considering teenagers’ experiences.

The findings reported below focus on teenagers’ accounts concerning three subthemes identified under the major theme of education: disruption of education;

communication between school and refuge; and educational support within refuges. Reference will be made to staff interviews where appropriate.

1. *Disruption of Education*

Changing schools

Twelve participants had to leave their school because of moving to a refuge. Eight considered this a wholly negative experience. Many described themselves as academically successful before moving, although some felt that poor concentration and worry related to experiences of DVA had restricted their attainment. Teenagers were particularly concerned about their exams and future prospects, often because they were preparing for GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exams which determine access to post-16 education, training and employment.

Changing schools could affect exam plans. Aamir was in his final school year and felt his previous schoolwork was ‘worthless’, as he had now been enrolled on a course with different examination boards and this affected his motivation. Teenagers were required to start new courses with each move and experienced a range of challenges in transferring exam coursework. Emma had moved refuges three times over two years due to her father locating the family. She was now completing four or five GCSE exams, instead of the 11 she had originally anticipated:

‘...my predicted grade was A. Most of them was As, Bs and Cs... when I moved... Cs and Ds below and Es... Then over here, I don't even know what I'm doing now...’ (Emma)

Most teenagers wanted to continue to attend the same school. Initially, a small number of teenagers continued to attend their original school, which they found helpful.

This required long journeys and in subsequent interviews teenagers reported pressure from refuge and school staff to change schools, emphasising the losses this would entail:

‘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... I’ll have no more friends’ (Lulu)

Teenagers’ lack of involvement in decision-making also contributed to friction with their mothers: ‘she caused some of this, she agreed with the school’ (Rebecca).

Time spent out of school

Moving to a refuge often meant being placed on waiting lists for new schools. Eleven teenagers spent time out of education without any alternative provision. The average time spent out of education was 13.8 weeks at any one time, the longest nine months. Zoe calculated the school hours missed due to moving and being unable to access school places. Zoe was the only participant to receive additional tuition:

‘...out of school for 8/9 months...social workers 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 conveys her feelings of powerlessness and lack of voice. While not attending school, Rebecca spent most of her time in the refuge, describing it as ‘Boring. Depressing. Just sat. It’s just...horrible’:

‘...it’s going to get too late for me to start going to school... I can’t be bothered anymore because I want to go back to school now... when I actually get a place, I’m just not even going to want to get my head down... I’ve been off so long - I just miss school...’ (Rebecca)

Education for Teenagers in Refuges

She had not been provided with any schoolwork or support. After four months, Rebecca and her sibling were still not attending school.

Teenagers highlighted the continuity and social networks school provided but the value of these aspects of education did not appear to be acknowledged by their mothers or refuge staff. Scarlet highlighted the school's role in sustaining friendships:

‘I've always felt isolated in this place...I suffer with depression and anxiety.... I haven't seen my friends...I was in school with them’.

Staff interviewed recognised these difficulties but provided no accounts of attempts to tackle such problems. Teenagers did not feel they had any choice about which school they attended. A lack of available school places required teenagers to attend any school willing to accept them.

Alternative educational establishments.

Alternative educational establishments were considered unsuitable by those teenagers who attended them. Four teenagers were attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) (which provide education for those unable to attend a mainstream school - usually due to exclusion). Georgia wanted to travel to her previous school but, on moving to the refuge, had been placed in a PRU:

‘...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...’

Teenagers commented on the stigma associated with PRUs and queried the appropriateness of these placements.

Barriers to study

Teenagers described practical difficulties in completing homework, including a lack of appropriate space and equipment in refuges such as computers, books or internet access. None of the refuges where teenagers were living had separate spaces where teenagers could complete homework. This created a disparity between what was expected by their school and what they could realistically achieve.

‘...it’s dark pretty early so I can’t stay [at school] for that long...If I’ve got a homework that needs to be done and completed using the internet...Three months, the computer hasn’t been working.’ (Mohammed)

Small numbers of staff identified that the internet and additional resources were required for teenagers’ homework purposes, but often internet access was restricted due to safety concerns and books purchased or donated were for younger children.

2. *Communication between School and Refuge*

For most teenagers, there was an absence of ongoing dialogue between schools and refuges. Refuge staff described attempts to find school places for teenagers, but this proved difficult due to their limited availability. One staff member explained that a ‘fair access panel’ operated locally which meant that teenagers in the refuge could be sent to any school in the local authority: this made it difficult to establish relationships with large numbers of schools beyond their local area. Other staff highlighted obstacles to building relationships with education professionals:

‘...getting other agencies to trust [DVA] services and their expertise ... Those that don’t know you are very wary... they kind of look at you as, not really knowing

what you're talking about... we do have to prove ourselves time and time again.'

(S3)

Staff described schools' preoccupation with educational targets and exam results as creating difficulties in accessing school places. Staff interviewed did not describe positive partnerships with local schools and this was evidenced by teenagers spending long periods out of school.

Some teenagers did not think it was helpful for teachers to know they were living in refuges, and expressed 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, male)

Some class activities, such as letter writing for example, exacerbated difficulties with maintaining the secrecy of the refuge location and their living arrangements. This caused significant anxiety for those who did not know how to respond and led to misunderstandings with other pupils and school staff. Participants had not received assistance to manage these situations. Teenagers described hiding their feelings and concealing their home life, especially in new schools. They were worried their confidentiality would be breached resulting in embarrassment and stigma.

In contrast, James described the positive impact of support from his school tutor: they spent time after school studying or playing games. When asked that could be done to encourage collaboration between schools and refuges, James replied: 'let the school know that you're in a refuge and you're struggling to cope...if you need equipment and stuff, they'll happily give it to me'.

3. Educational Support within Refuges

Teenagers explained that their mothers were unable to help with homework. GCSE work was too advanced, some mothers could not read or write English or were caring for younger siblings. Teenagers did not have individual educational support plans to identify learning outcomes or additional support requirements such as external homework clubs.

Only one refuge where teenagers participated in the study organised specific homework activities. Other teenagers reported that they were too old to attend homework clubs. Emma explained that she had previously received practical and emotional support for educational difficulties in other refuges: 'I've got no-one to talk to... every other place I've been there's been someone to help you'. Refuge staff acknowledged that time and space were necessary to assist teenagers' study; with some refuges temporarily transforming staff work spaces or children's spaces into spaces for teenagers in the evening. One manager planned to purchase an outdoor unit specifically for teenagers.

Teenagers had to travel significant distances to their original school. This presented practical obstacles for staff who might offer support with schoolwork. Teenagers left the refuge early and returned late in the evening. This was incompatible with refuge staff's shifts and meant they were unavailable to help with homework or talk about educational difficulties and plans.

Teenagers identified homework support and flexible working as characteristics of their 'ideal' member of staff.

Support with employment and education plans.

Educational changes intensified teenagers' anxieties about their future. Often, they considered academic success as a path to paid employment which offered both economic security and a desired identity – which would enable them to 'fit into' society and provide for their own family. Older teenagers aged 17 and 18 reported that support with the move into employment, including writing CVs (curriculum vitae) - detailing their experience, skills and education– was most helpful:

'I'm looking for a job, so she's just done my CV for me... I think it's really good that she's done it because I couldn't, didn't know how' (Molly).

One member of staff confirmed that supporting teenagers to develop their employability facilitated engagement:

'It was the first time she had approached us, wanting support and we were able to help her with the [job] application and give her some advice... She really felt she was being supported...as a young person in her own right...' (S12)

However, staff also explained the difficulties in offering such support due to capacity issues and a focus on younger children.

DISCUSSION

Research on protective factors for children experiencing adversity suggests four categories of interventions to promote resilience and coping. These include enhancing self-esteem, improving academic achievement, promoting social skills and social engagement and strengthening family and social supports (Rutter, 2006; Ungar *et al.*, 2013). When DVA is part of CYP's experience, resilience can be built through activities

that increase self-efficacy and by developing social support networks and community resources (Jenney *et al.*, 2016).

Schools offer a range of opportunities for promoting resilience including academic and other forms of attainment such as sporting and other activities as well as relationships with peers and teachers (Sterne *et al.*, 2010). Such activities and relationships may also provide an escape from the experience of DVA and/or the restrictions of refuge life. In this study, the role of educational attainment in opening up further opportunities for self-esteem such as further/higher education, training or employment was particularly evident for those teenagers aged 14 to 16 years who were at a key stage in their education.

As Hagell *et al.* (2012) point out, many of the choices available to adolescents are concentrated around exams, further education and training. In this study, teenagers were clear they wanted more involvement in decision making about their education, including choices about school moves. By thinking about themselves in the future, teenagers can accomplish order and meaning which provides a sense of predictability. This contrasts positively with their refuge experience which many found disordered and unpredictable. Likewise, the school setting can offer certainties and structures which refuge life often lacks.

Teenagers who were not attending mainstream education expressed feelings of loss, of being left behind and excluded. Those attending PRUs communicated a sense of stigma which affected their sense of identity. Where teenagers cannot attend school for a period, arrangements should be made whereby they can access work or schooling in refuges. This would require ongoing collaboration and communication between refuges and schools.

Schools provide a sense of purpose, feelings of belonging, a positive source of identity and a secure base (Shepherd *et al.*, 2010, Buckley *et al.*, 2006). Attending school can offer experience of community engagement when other communities have been lost through relocation. Friendships built and sustained at school can be helpful in reducing stress, supporting coping and building resilience (Ungar *et al.*, 2013 2) while living in a refuge. Developing these sources of support should be integral to work with adolescents.

Our study confirms that social factors associated with resilience, such as positive school experiences and contact with peers, were often unavailable to teenagers in refuges. Difficulties obtaining school places meant that teenagers spent long periods out of school at a crucial time. Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places in their area as well as fair access and equal opportunity; they are also required to promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential (Education and Inspections Act 2006). The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2018, para 85) recommend that Government develops a clear strategy to ensure CYP in refuges are given special status underpinned by adequate funding for specialist services. This includes local authorities adhering to the same statutory obligation that they have for looked-after children.

While refuge staff provided some examples of offering teenagers support with education, school attendance and attainment did not appear to be acknowledged as a priority. Enabling continuity for teenagers in existing schools wherever possible would support the maintenance of social networks which promote resilience. It would also enhance school attendance and achievement as the disruption of moving schools and coursework and syllabuses would be avoided.

In common with the girls participating in Bowyer *et al.*'s (2015) study teenagers in our study emphasised their need for space where they could complete homework. Such

requirements are not easily met in refuges, but the study provided some examples of how this can be achieved including temporarily transforming other spaces. Access to community facilities could be explored but such arrangements have the potential to conflict with safety concerns. Schools encourage LAC to be fully involved in extracurricular activities both inside and outside school and assist with the logistics of participating in such activities. This is just one area where policy and provision for LAC offers a model that might be applicable to CYP in refuges.

Restrictive policies and access regarding internet or computer use hampered teenagers' ability to study in the refuge setting. This is an obstacle to educational achievement and reinforces the perception that education is not prioritized in the refuge. Teenagers' accounts suggest they need adults to represent and support them and their mothers in negotiations and interactions with schools. Promoting a positive view of education among refuge staff would assist achievement and recovery.

Many of the findings from this study resonate with those from research on LAC, such as absence of space to complete homework, lack of learning support, and time spent out of education (Martin & Jackson, 2002). Research (Berridge, 2012; Sebba *et al.*, 2015) has focused UK policy attention on the educational needs of this group and they have been allocated priority for school admissions. Reading schemes are encouraged and additional funding funnelled via the pupil premium supports extra tuition and extra-curricular activities (Sebba *et al.*, 2015). In England and Wales, 'Virtual School Heads' oversee the education of all local CLA and CYP are required to have detailed Personal Education Plans.

Teenagers in UK refuges are not looked after by the local authority in the same way as LAC and therefore the duty of 'corporate parenting' does not apply (1989 Children

Act). However, their experiences of both DVA and living a refuge make them vulnerable (under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004). The co-ordinated approach provided to LAC, if replicated for teenagers living in DVA refuges, could deliver significant improvement in respect of their current education and future prospects. It would require collaborative work with schools, refuges, teenagers and their care-giving parent to ensure that any potential practical and emotional difficulties are understood and resolved. For example, the Pupil Premium (Department for Education, 2019) could be used to purchase resources or to fund tuition to help narrow the gap between teenagers and their peers. Virtual School Heads or designated teachers could improve links between refuges and schools while maintaining teenagers' need for confidentiality.

Teachers and school staff have been identified as key determinants of educational progress for LAC (Sebba *et al.*, 2015) and a relationship with a trusted adult outside the family can be a significant source of self-esteem (Daniel & Wassell, 2002). In this study one example included the case of James who described a supportive relationship with a responsive teacher. However, to offer such support, teachers and pastoral staff need to be informed of young people's living situations and needs – again, this requires communication and collaboration with refuge staff. School staff need to be aware that seeking help is not straightforward for teenagers living in refuges and they need to understand the importance of confidentiality for those escaping DVA.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

There are limitations regarding the generalisability of the findings inherent in the sample size of this study.

The staff interviewed in this study were not necessarily from the same refuge as teenage participants; therefore, direct comparisons between their accounts cannot be made. Limited resources and the intention to focus on teenagers' experiences and perceptions meant that mothers and teaching staff were not interviewed. This may have reduced the background information available but allowed for a close and in-depth account of teenagers' perspectives. Future research could focus on professionals' interventions and investigate the relationships between schools and refuges to ground teenagers' experiences in current systems.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has built on previous evidence (Buckley *et al.*, 2006; Mullender *et al.*, 2002) regarding the detrimental impact on education of moving to, and living in, a refuge. Difficulties experienced in accessing school places suggests that refuges need greater support and cooperation from schools regarding educational provision. The centrality of education for teenagers participating in this research indicates the importance of liaison between schools and refuges.

Many teenagers were forced to leave their school and spent unacceptable periods without a school place or educational support. This was likely to undermine teenagers' present and future opportunities. A lack of support for educational attainment in refuges represents a lost opportunity. Engagement and success in education can contribute to teenager's self-esteem and offer protection and recovery in the face of the harms caused by DVA.

Building resilience offers a guiding principle that could inform refuge service provision for teenagers. The target of achieving resilience following DVA could also be

used to promote collaboration between schools and refuges aimed at countering the negative impact of DVA on teenagers' education. This research demonstrated that support with their education and learning from refuge and education staff is valued by teenagers. At a policy level, the support provided to LAC offers a model for providing educational support to teenagers living in refuges.

KEY PRACTITIONER MESSAGES

1. Refuge staff working with teenagers need to identify and prioritise their educational needs.
2. Refuges and schools need to collaborate to improve access to educational support and resources for teenagers in refuges.
3. Where schooling is interrupted, teenagers should be provided with appropriate alternative resources.
4. The co-ordinated educational support provided to children looked after should be considered as a model for teenagers in refuges.

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