



“It really was a roller-coaster”

the impact of domestic violence on the adult friends and relatives of survivors

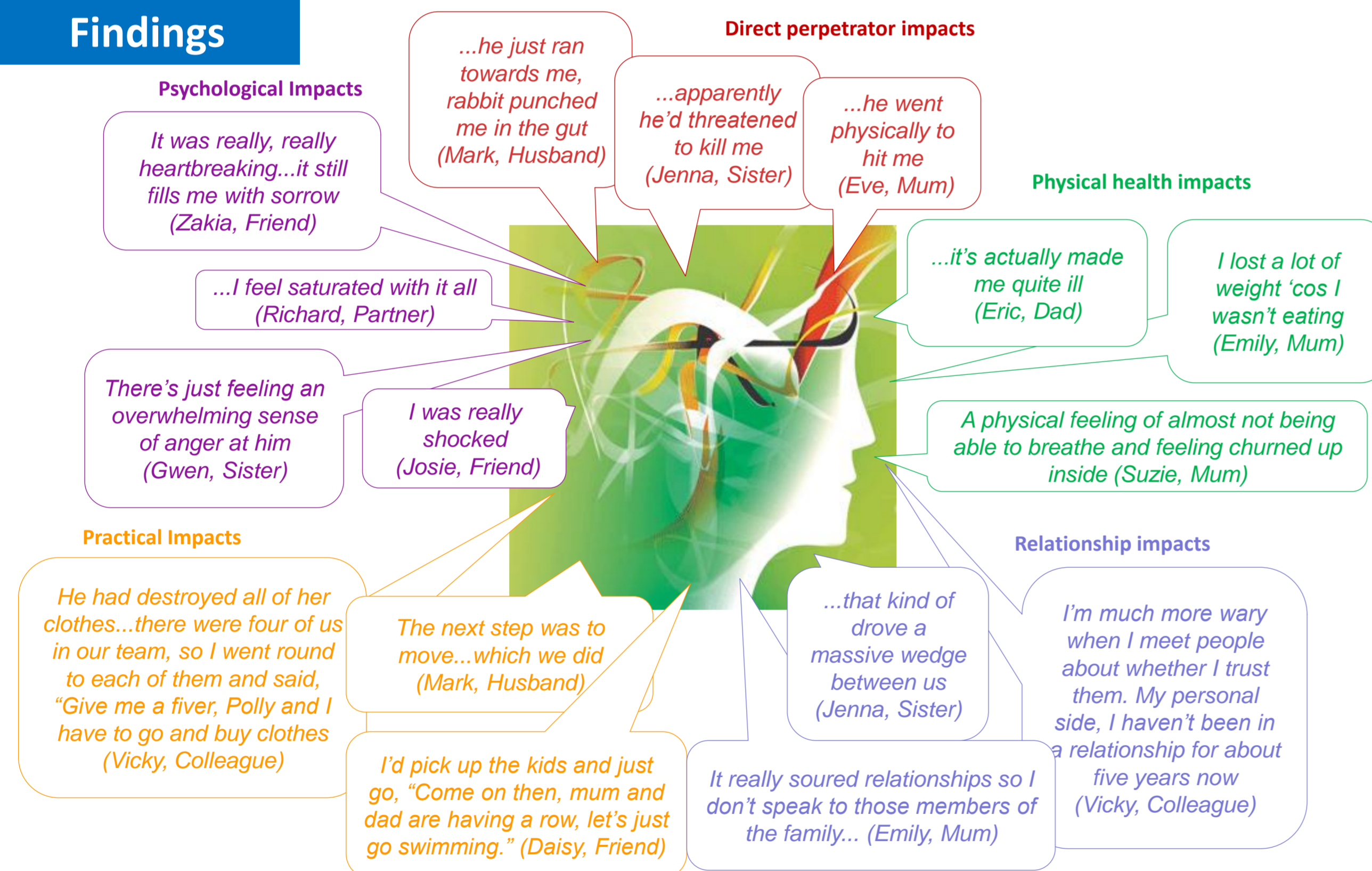
Background

- Domestic violence is experienced by 1 in 4 women in the UK and has a range of health consequences for survivors.
- Most women who experience abuse will choose to seek informal support from friends, relatives and colleagues.
- This support has potential to buffer against effects on physical & mental health, and to protect against future abuse.
- There has been an absence of discussion about the knock-on consequences for the health and wellbeing of network members; we simply haven't known what the toll on these people is.

Methods

- Semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews with adults in a close relationship with a DV survivor.
- Findings from a systematic literature review formed the basis of the topic guide for the interviews.
- Varied recruitment strategy using: websites, social media, local radio, and posters in community spaces.
- 23 Interviews carried out (face-to-face, telephone and Skype).
- Coding and thematic analysis was carried out.

Findings



Meta-themes

- Coercive control – control over friends and relatives as an extension of the survivor.
- Moderators and mediators of impact:
 - Gender of network member
 - Closeness of the relationship between survivor and network member (both in terms of intimacy and proximity)
 - The severity of the domestic violence the survivor has experienced
 - Whether or not the survivor has children.
- Mirroring of the survivor's experience – degree of overlap regarding impact:

“It was a roller-coaster, it really was a roller-coaster...she did leave and go back a few times, and want to end the relationship, and went back and, like the relief and then the pain again, and the worry and, I think, yeah, obviously it's nowhere near, I can't compare with what my sister was actually going through, but I think we mirrored that in like a smaller way. So if her waves were really sort of huge troughs and small peaks, our curve was just mirroring that...”

Recommendations for policy & practice

- Formal recognition of survivors' social support networks within domestic violence policies.
- Mechanisms for third parties to log concern with the police and social services.
- Consideration of informal supporters by professionals who work with survivors; reflection upon who might be experiencing impact, and provision of opportunities for disclosure and legitimisation of concerns, experiences and feelings.
- Campaign and publicity materials directly targeting network members to open the way for those providing informal support to recognise the impact that the abusive relationship is having on them personally.
- Extension of specialist services to incorporate the needs of informal supporters, equipping them with skills and knowledge, and providing them with emotional support.
- More inspired commissioning models for DV services; rethinking the support of survivors within communities.

Future plans

- Knowledge mobilisation - working with Women's Aid to develop:
 - a training module for DV courses, to address the impact on network members
 - guidance for helpline staff regarding the impacts on informal supporters
 - information for family and friends on the helpline site
 - input into policy work regarding the role of friends and family in supporting survivors.
- Research to develop and test a support intervention directly aimed at people in the survivor's informal support network.

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