

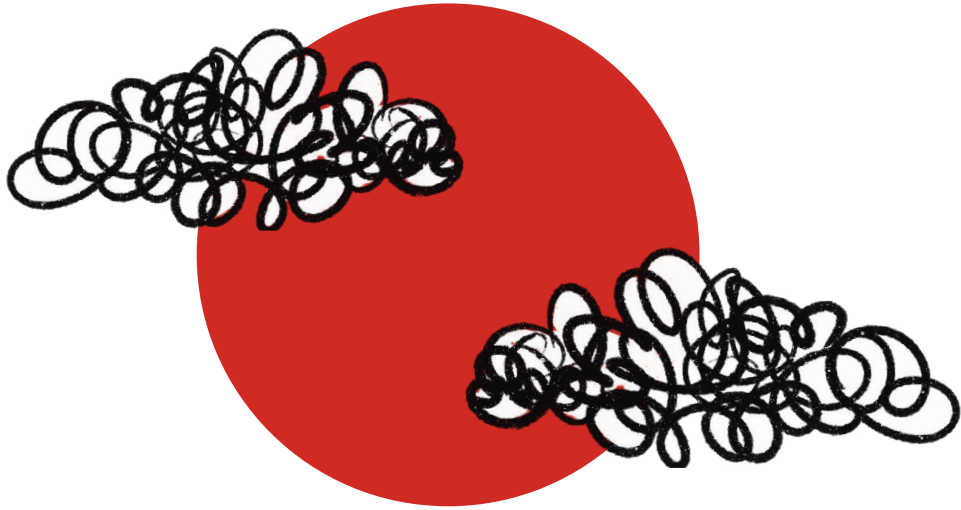
**“It wasn’t a matter
of choosing to die,
just who was going
to do it.”**



*Exploring the links
between domestic
abuse and suicide*



Please look after yourself and seek **help** if you need it. If you are in Kent or Medway, text **KENT** to **85258** for **free 24 hour support** or, if you are elsewhere in the country, text **SHOUT** to **85258**.



This briefing has been prepared by Nifty Fox Creative working in partnership with the Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention Programme, and is based on research conducted by Josephine Ramm and Perpetuity Research.

Thank you to Josephine, and all the survivors and professionals who took part in the research in the hope of helping others.



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Kent and Medway

What we know

Suicide is devastating. Increasing evidence points to a link between domestic abuse and suicide.



The local picture in Kent and Medway is sombre:

30% (184 out of 608) of suspected suicides in Kent and Medway between 2018 – 2022 had been impacted by domestic abuse.



Real Time Suicide Surveillance data, Kent Police



If replicated nationally, this data suggests that **over 1500 deaths by suicide in England each year could be linked to domestic abuse.**

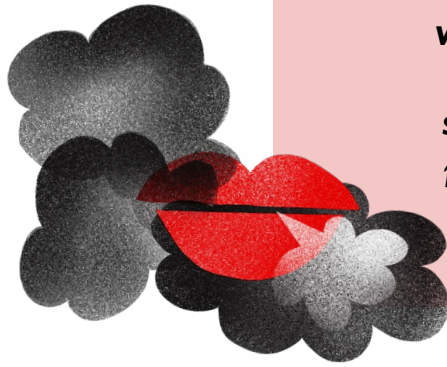
The Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention Team is working hard to understand the link between domestic abuse and suicide to help find **practical ways to prevent suicide.**

“If they’d have just asked me at that point [about suicidal ideation]. I didn’t have the words even though it was the only thing I was thinking about, but if someone had spoken it, it might have broken the spell, I might have come back to earth.”

Survivors' voices

To understand more we spoke to survivors and professionals.

They all wanted people to feel less alone and know that recovery is possible.



“We are very grateful to everyone who took part in our research, especially the survivors who shared their most painful and personal experiences in order to make positive change.”

No two people told the same story. But, although the **research showed** that there is **NO one size fits all experience**, importantly, there were **emerging themes**.

1. Survivors have different reasons for wanting to die

Some victims attempt to take their own lives to avoid being killed by their perpetrator

“I knew that he was going to kill me, so it wasn’t a matter of choosing to die, just who was going to do it.”



For others it wasn’t physical violence that drove them to feeling suicidal, it was the manipulation and coercive control tactics the perpetrator employed

“I thought I was worthless, like I didn’t deserve to be alive and that everything they said was true. I was horrible and that the only way out was for me to die.”





While others felt so depleted, trapped, lonely and exhausted that dying was the only way out

“You go into survival mode. You’re hyper vigilant. It’s exhausting and tiring. I was sick of fighting, I was sick of surviving... I knew when I woke up that day that I would attempt suicide.”

2. Timing is critical

Some survivors are most at risk of suicide during the abuse

“We didn’t get the restraining order, he’d walked out of court and she did not feel safe. She tried to take her life that day.”

For others, their suicide attempt came after the direct abuse had ended when the long term impact of the trauma was felt

“I felt broken, I felt so many emotions, shame, hurt, fear, grief... I felt like damaged goods, I couldn’t sleep at night. I was having flashbacks and he was on Tinder finding the next victim.”



3. Different groups have different risks

Our initial research has shown that deaths by suicide happen in **many different groups** impacted by domestic abuse, and we are planning much **more targeted research** in the future to try and **understand the differences** between groups.

Some female victims of abuse die by suicide

“I felt so drained, he pushed me over the edge. I felt useless and like I was dead inside. He treated me like an animal, told me I was worthless. I was completely alone. I wanted to kill myself, I needed to get out.”



So do some male victims

“The way she abused me was very different to the way abuse is traditionally depicted. It wasn’t violent, but if you can drive someone insane to the point they want to take their own life then that’s just as damaging.”

Perpetrators of abuse are also dying by suicide (which some survivors felt was a tactic of abuse in itself)

“He ended up trying to take his own life and said he wanted me to get back with him. I didn’t want to but he wouldn’t accept it. He threatened to kill himself again. He just wouldn’t take no for an answer.”



Emerging evidence suggests that some deaths by suicide are amongst people who are known to the police as both potential perpetrators and victims

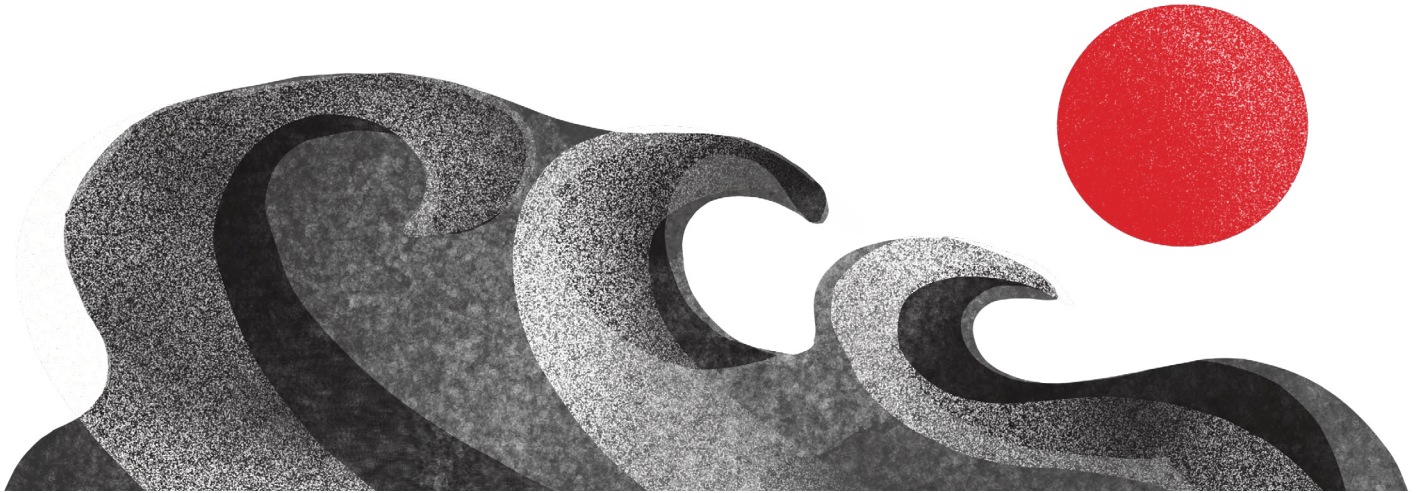
“They had been coercively controlled for years, but when they finally lashed out, they were the one arrested. They develop addictions, lash out more or kill themselves.”



Recovery is possible

All the survivors interviewed want to tell others that recovery is possible (but will take time).

“Recovery is possible. You’ll feel like you can’t live or breath without [them]. We’ve all been there, it’s fucking hard. Just keep going. Phone the helplines every day if you need to. It takes time... you have to ride the waves but it does get better.”



“We have to grieve what could have been, all the promises and lies we were told. But the bad days will get less and further apart”.

You can help

The survivors also had lots of advice for professionals who may be supporting people impacted by domestic abuse.



“People often reach out for support but are not believed or responded too quickly enough – you should take them seriously.”



“Domestic abuse is really complicated but don’t judge us – we are not the problem.”



“Greater awareness of coercive control is needed.”



“There’s not enough professional curiosity.”

What are we doing now?

1. Finding out more

But much more targeted and **SPECIALIST** research is needed:

We will continue our local research and we are pleased that our work has encouraged other organisations to look into the link between domestic abuse and suicide.

This will allow better understanding of the nuances and complexities involved in the relationship between suicide and domestic abuse.



at **SCALE**

that involves following different groups and understanding the nuances between **COHORTS**

looks more closely at individuals' **MOTIVATIONS**

that measures effectiveness of new and existing **INTERVENTIONS** and **SERVICES**

2. Changing practice

By changing how we work, front line service providers can get better at recognising signs and supporting people going through domestic abuse, resulting in suicide prevention and lives saved.

We have:



Developed a briefing paper and face to face training to help front line professionals understand how they can change their practice to reduce risk

Improved safe routine enquiry and initial risk assessments - asking questions about mental health, self-harm and suicide ideation

Encouraged more professional curiosity at high risk points (e.g. court appearances or when a survivor tries to end a relationship)

Provided training to anyone in Kent and Medway about how to ask someone if they are suicidal and how to develop basic suicide safety plans

We have funded specialist support programmes:



Providing trauma support for survivors where the abuse has stopped



Targeting isolation



Providing protection against stalking



Tailored for adolescent boys who are survivors of domestic abuse



Supporting male victims

We want to explore how we can change practice and roll these examples out locally and nationally.

What can you do now?

Help raise awareness - share this briefing and our findings.

Support your organisation to get involved in exploring the links between domestic abuse and suicide

Change practice - can you support this to happen locally or nationally?



Please let us know what you do after reading this briefing, we'd love to know the impact of the report, as well as hearing your examples of best practice. We want to learn from you too.

Email us suicideprevention@kent.gov.uk to:

- **Let us know what you are going to do after reading this report**
- **To tell us of any best practice we should know about**
- **To request a copy of the briefing paper for front line professionals**

