Series 1 Episode 6

Young people's views on domestic abuse: A Conversation with Nicola Roberts and Demi Price

[00:00:00] **Lesley:** Hello and welcome to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work. I'm your host and my name is Dr Lesley Deacon.

[00:00:13] **Sarah:** And I'm your other host and I'm Dr Sarah Lonbay. So we hope you enjoy today's episode.

...

Introduction to Episode 6

[00:00:27] **Lesley:** Hi there, welcome to the Portal Podcasts, I'm Dr Lesley Deacon, and as usual I'm here with Dr Sarah Lonbay.

[00:00:34] **Sarah:** Hello everyone!

[00:00:35] **Lesley:** Thank you, Sarah, and really happy to have our guests today, so we've got Dr Nicola Roberts and Miss Demi Price. So I'm going to ask you guys to introduce yourselves. Nicola, do you want to go first? Just tell us a little bit about yourself as an academic and your research area.

[00:00:52] **Nicola:** Yeah, I'm Dr Nicola Roberts, as you said, and I'm a Senior Lecturer in Criminology [now Associate Professor of Criminology] here at the University of Sunderland. My research focuses on gender-based violence, and my more recent research is around students' experiences of interpersonal violence on and off campus, their perceptions and strategies of safety on and off campus, and I also evaluate bystander interventions.

[00:01:20] **Lesley:** Thank you very much. Demi, do you want to tell us a bit about yourself?

[00:01:23] **Demi:** Yeah, so I'm Demi, I'm currently training to be a probation officer in the Probation Service. My research was about gender perceptions of domestic violence.

[00:01:36] **Lesley:** So how did this come about? This is a project, was this part of your research you were working on with Nicola?

[00:01:43] **Demi:** It was part of my dissertation, that I did three years ago now.

[00:01:48] **Lesley:** Right, that's really interesting, and you turned it into a Working Paper to share the findings, which are really, really interesting. I have to admit when I was reading it I was both interested and incredibly shocked, actually, by your findings. Do you want to just give us a little summary of the research, just so that our listeners can understand what happened?

[00:02:13] **Demi:** Yeah, so we sent an online survey out to students just asking their perceptions of a lot of things about domestic violence. And we found that it was massively gendered. Males tended to see a lot of coercive and controlling behaviours *not* as domestic violence, and women tended to. And that was one of the main things that we found, I think, within the research.

[00:02:44] **Lesley:** Because when you talk about the behaviours, that's one of the things when I was reading it. Because I work in social work and I also supervise, with Nicola, we supervise students with PhDs who are looking into domestic violence. One of the things I think for social workers in particular is to try and understand when we use terms like 'violence' and 'abuse', people can misunderstand what exactly that means. So I don't know whichever one of you wants to address that, but can you, from your perspective and your research perspective, what do we really mean in terms of that difference between violence and abuse?

The difference between domestic 'violence', 'abuse' and 'coercive control'

[00:03:22] **Nicola:** Okay, so domestic violence has historically been termed 'domestic violence', but there's been more recent moves to name it as 'domestic *abuse*', largely to recognise that the violence isn't just physical in nature, that there are other aspects of the abuse, such as psychological and emotional violence, financial violence, sexual violence, which can be physical as well. But the terms are often used interchangeably, but there's been much more moves towards the 'domestic abuse'. I mean, throughout this interview, I

will deem it as 'domestic violence', and I always have, because I mean, obviously I do recognise the varying types of abuse, but I just feel 'domestic violence' gives it its serious and harmful nature. Demi will talk about it from a practitioner point of view.

[00:04:25] **Demi:** Yeah, I think within my practice, I normally use the term 'domestic abuse' because I think a lot of the times the word violence doesn't, I think as Nicola said, it doesn't carry that physical element. Everyone just assumes 'violence', ah it's physical violence. So I think 'abuse' encompasses all of the behaviour, but it also recognises that that victim is being abused rather than it just being kind of one act of violence. I think the term 'domestic abuse' definitely encompasses all of that rather than just the physical.

[00:04:59] **Lesley:** Yeah, because you referred to it as being like a pattern rather than it being just this single event, because it's almost like you can separate it out and rather than it just being one thing that's happening, it's actually a pattern of behaviour. Do you think, what I'm getting at is, 'abuse', does that fit better with that idea of what we're discussing here?

[00:05:26] **Demi:** I think so, yeah. I think it recognises the trauma it goes through, I think 'abuse' is a good term to describe, as you say, those patterns of behaviours rather than just an isolated event.

[00:05:39] **Lesley:** You're right, because when I was thinking about my practice when I was reading this, and obviously because I worked in child protection, so I would have to speak to families where there was, and at the time we did just use the term 'domestic violence'. When I raised that with male perpetrators, their immediate response was "I didn't hit her", and that was it. "I didn't hit her". So the word violence, rightly or wrongly, just does get, as you were saying Nicola, it gets connected more with a physical act rather than an understanding of actually there is abusive behaviour that goes on within these relationships and *that's* the problem.

[00:06:18] **Sarah:** I think that links in with coercive control as well, which I know a lot of people either don't understand what it means or aren't aware of it, so I was wondering if you could explain what is coercive control as well?

[00:06:34] **Nicola:** Okay, so coercive control, which is now a criminal offence, it's a range of behaviours. Because the defining feature of domestic violence and domestic abuse is that it is a pattern. It isn't a one off incident. That might

be deemed as something else, but not domestic violence. So coercive and controlling behaviour, the perpetrator is using a range of behaviours, it could be they're abusive behaviours or physical violence, and they're doing it to intimidate and make fearful the victim, because they're seeking to gain power and control over that victim, particularly to make the victim *dependent* on the perpetrator in some way that might affect their daily activities, such as they might seek to isolate them from their friends or family, from their workplace, they could be monitoring their movements, checking their messages. There's a whole range of behaviours that are deemed as coercive and controlling behaviours and are now recognised in the criminal law.

[00:07:42] **Lesley:** And that was the bit that, in your research, that the male respondents just, they didn't seem to recognise that at all as being any form of abusive or violent behaviour in any way.

[00:07:55] **Nicola:** Well, some did, but it was more likely females, the women were more likely to recognise, significantly likely to recognise more of the controlling behaviours than the men.

[00:08:10] **Lesley:** It's really created a concern for me that you've got a huge problem here that if it's not recognised then it's not called out, and not just within those relationships, is it? It's more wider society that's then, we're not calling it out. Because that connects possibly with the bystander work that you do, Nicola, I know that's not part of what you did in this article, but it makes me think that that's where people are acknowledging behaviour that really is concerning, this coercive, controlling and misogynistic behaviour. And we don't really, we're not calling that out.

[00:08:48] **Nicola:** Well, no, the public story of domestic violence is still very much physical in nature, and we'll talk a bit more about that, but bystander intervention, where bystanders intervene into problematic behaviours, whether that's before, during or after an incident, and the bystander would intervene to send out a message that actually, you know what, like you were saying, the behaviour is inappropriate, it's unacceptable. And the more that people do that at a community level, the idea is that you will change social perceptions around what is problematic behaviour. And the issue, and I wrote about this looking at bystander interventions, the problem is going back to, for example, coercive control, what *is* problematic behaviour? How do you name something as 'inappropriate' to begin with? Because only then can bystanders

begin to think about intervening. So, it's about naming the behaviour as abusive.

[00:10:02] **Sarah:** I think not just bystanders, but I suppose for professionals as well, so the police, social workers, probation workers, anyone who might be called in to intervene or respond to situations, need to be able to recognise it as well. Do you feel like amongst practitioners, or in practice, aspects such as coercive control are being recognised now?

[00:10:27] **Demi:** To some degree I think, but when we talk about coercive control I think it's, as Nicola says it's those little things, and I think it's recognising that if a perpetrator or a victim disclosed some things that if you weren't fully trained or you weren't fully educated on those little things, you might miss that, and not regard that as coercive control. Well, it's that education that makes you realise, "oh wait a second that's not normal behaviour, that's unacceptable". But looking at that as one incident, it doesn't give you that overview, of coercive control.

[00:11:10] **Sarah:** What are some of the common risk factors for domestic abuse?

[00:11:15] **Nicola:** So, well, it depends if you're looking at it from a victim's point of view, certainly young women and girls are the more likely gender to be victimised. And the 16 to 24 age range is a really high-risk age group for victimisation of young women and girls. If you're looking at perpetrators, the perpetrators are more likely to be male than female. And going back to these coercive and controlling behaviours, the early warning signs in a relationship would be the coercive and controlling behaviours. They're risk factors, the warning signs that you want to be looking out for because domestic violence is a pattern, it predominantly will get worse, and could lead to fatal homicide. So, the early risk factors would be the isolation, the monitoring, restricting someone's movements, checking messages, they would be key behaviours to be looking out for there.

[00:12:35] **Demi:** I think speaking from a practice point of view we look at things like experience of DV [domestic violence], witnessed it growing up, that always, in one of our risk assessments, it flags up as a risk factor. I'll see things like the use of drink, the use of drugs, relationship history.

[00:12:58] **Sarah:** Is that looking at the perpetrators?

[00:13:00] **Demi:** Yeah perpetrators predominantly in practice, yeah. Because I think witnessing DV, if you know that about perpetrator you can then go into what are their values about relationships, and then you can pick something up a lot more easily if you know that. So that's something that we do, definitely look a lot more in probation.

[00:13:21] **Lesley:** That comes to a practical question I had, because when you were designing the survey, obviously you would have had all of this information, but we don't always put this in articles. When you were asking the question of the people who answered the survey, were you asking them about their *general* views on domestic violence? Or did you ask them to reflect on their own relationships when they were talking about their understanding of it?

[00:13:48] **Demi:** Just general views yeah, general perceptions.

[00:13:51] **Lesley:** Because I was interested if that might shift, they might see that? I don't know, I'm not saying you guys have got the answer, but it did make me think are people honest about how they actually behave in their relationship? And it would be interesting to know, can they actually connect with those behaviours? For them, they won't necessarily see them as coercive or controlling, but checking phones, wanting partner to spend as much time with them and not other people, all of these kind of behaviours could cross over couldn't it, into just someone who's insecure and things like that. So it'd be interesting, I don't think I've got a question really, because you've answered it, but I was just sort of interested in that, because it's almost about how you position your question as to that's the response you're going to get. So these people were just talking generally, so we certainly don't know that they don't, they could be also violent or controlling themselves, but not see it. And that seems to be part of the problem, if I'm right in what you've been saying, which is that it's people not perceiving behaviour *towards* them as controlling and people not perceiving it towards *others* as controlling. And that is difficult isn't it?

[00:15:07] **Demi:** Yeah, I think even just speaking from practice, I've got a lot of cases that don't recognise, because it hasn't been physical they don't recognise the behaviour as abusive. And one of my cases, it was against an ex-partner, that was physical violence and just because it was against an ex-partner, he doesn't recognise that as domestic violence.

[00:15:25] **Lesley:** Oh, because they're not in a relationship? So they're putting these boundaries around "yes, it's not this". It sounds like people kind of acknowledge domestic violence is *bad*, but "it's not me because..." that's what seems to come across, that's certainly my practice experience as well, but it's like, I don't want to be identified as that.

[00:15:46] **Demi:** Yeah. And I think as well a lot of the people that we get through for coercive controlling behaviour, they're very quick to tell you that they didn't physically abuse them. And I think, again, that's a bit of 'othering', I think it's, "that's not me, I didn't do that, I'm not a woman beater because...". But then they don't recognise yes, but this was still abusive.

[00:16:07] **Lesley:** Yes. So they don't see that, that actually you can be abusive in relationships through your controlling behaviour. Which means we've got a problem. It comes across in this article doesn't it?

[00:16:19] **Sarah:** I think that's what's so interesting about this paper, because it gives a bit of depth to that practice experience that you're having, what's actually going on in terms of what people understand about this area. I know we were wondering what courses the students were registered on and whether they might be enrolled in courses where they would have some kind of awareness of these things already? Or whether they were just a range of programmes where domestic abuse might not be looked at at all?

[00:16:46] **Demi:** It was, typically, it was quite generalised. I put the survey link out to a number of groups, but a lot of the groups were predominantly social science based. So I didn't ask about courses, but it was distributed a lot more to social sciences groups, so I would assume that a lot of social sciences students probably completed the survey.

[00:17:10] **Sarah:** Okay, was it predominantly undergraduate?

[00:17:12] **Demi:** Yeah.

[00:17:12] **Sarah:** Yeah. Okay, yeah, that's interesting isn't it? Do we know anything from other research about, has other research like this been done with other people in that age group? Not necessarily at university.

Gender roles in society

[00:17:26] **Nicola:** The literature review did review young people's views of, not necessarily of domestic violence, but it was about when young people, male and female, would justify when violence was appropriate. And a lot of that was around the way women were constructed in terms of their stereotypical gender roles. So, it was often justified, in the research, if women were not *conforming* to those gender roles, such as maybe they weren't cooking or cleaning up, looking after the children in the way they should, and if they deviated from their gender roles, then young boys and girls were likely to justify the violence against them. So, there is research out there on young people and their views that are forged, worrying views that are forged quite young. And when you look at the ages of the samples in the research, certainly by the time they're 11, these worrying views are formed that justifies the use of violence in intimate relationships.

[00:18:44] **Sarah:** That's really interesting actually, because what you've just said really highlights that this isn't just about an individual interpersonal issue, but actually this is something about society and structural and societal factors that are influencing the way that we see gender and the gender roles, as you say. So therefore does it make sense to just respond to domestic abuse with an interpersonal intervention? And that comes through in your paper as well, that actually something more than that is needed because it's not just about that, there is something bigger going on. Yeah, that's quite an interesting conclusion that maybe we can talk about a bit more as well.

[00:19:31] **Lesley:** I was interested in how, when you talked about the young people there Nicola, that connects across to contextual safeguarding. When I was practicing there used to be a common thing of a young person responds with their feet, they can get out of places, they can go, because the child protection process is 0 to 18 basically. And so a lot more needs to be done about recognising the risk factors for young people, because they're not just in the family. And obviously, as you go through adolescence, the influence of external factors becomes much more significant. And I think what you were saying before about what those risk factors can be around things like what they're expecting in a relationship, what they think in terms of gender perceptions on what's expected, but also those things around the actual behaviours around checking things, all of that. I think that's, for me, that's really beneficial for people who are working in contextual safeguarding to be looking at all of those things. Because it sounds to me as if, if you dig, it's there. There is information there, it's not actually hidden, because if they don't see it as a problem, they don't hide that behaviour. Would that be fair? Do you see

that in, I don't know if you work Demi with younger people or is it mainly adults that you work with?

[00:20:56] **Demi:** It's mainly adults, yeah, but I think even just speaking quite generally, I think it's noticing, again, just small things of, say you had someone, a young person in an online relationship, and they felt like they couldn't either be ever offline or without their phone, it's recognising, okay, is that healthy? Because that might be a warning sign of being in that online abusive relationship. And I think it's just noticing those things and being aware of what 16, 17 year olds are doing in order to inform yourself of what can be done rather than just assuming, oh, they're a teenager, they're always going to be on their phone. It's knowing what they're getting up to, who are they speaking to?

[00:21:42] **Lesley:** Yeah, so rather than it being about the fear of missing out type behaviours, you're actually looking for what are their relationships with others like? And it isn't necessarily just romantic relationships, it's how they're being treated within those. Because I suppose there's a tendency towards people accepting behaviour from not just intimate partners, but from other people that they've known. It's just really interesting stuff. It makes you feel a bit concerned as well for how it's very complicated to deal with, because you really, like you were saying before, you're talking about the need for these almost massive structural changes in how we perceive gender roles and how we perceive behaviour towards other people. And I'm just trying to think about the practitioner who's like, well, I've got to do something today, what do I do today? And I suppose the impression I'm getting is it's about the questions that you're asking, and trying to dig a little bit into looking for these little trigger points, as to whether or not there is that from a potential perpetrator and then from potential victims as well.

[00:22:48] **Sarah:** I wanted to ask you about the ethical aspects of this type of research, because I think that's really interesting when you're involving participants and working with people to talk about very sensitive topics and how we approach and manage that. So I was wondering what your thoughts were about the ethics of this research, and what did you find about people's willingness to participate, and if you can speak to maybe some of the potential or actual impacts on people or why they might be willing to speak about this kind of topic in a research project, that'd be great. That was a lot of questions rolled into one, but ethics, talk to me about the ethics of your research.

[00:23:25] **Demi:** I think obviously as we said before, I presume a lot of the students who responded to the research were social science students, and I think that probably did open it up a bit more because it's a bit more, if you're speaking about it in a university setting you're a lot more likely to talk about it. With regards to ethics I put on at the end a list of domestic violence organisations, if they were struggling with that. But with regards to the impact, I didn't ask about that at the end of my research, which I know a lot of research has. But as I say, I didn't ask about that because I felt like that may hinder the impact itself. If I'm then asking about domestic violence in a generalised capacity it might then hinder if I'm then asking how that impacted on them. But as I say, I did guide them towards organisations if it did affect them.

[00:24:31] **Sarah:** So you took into account those care aspects in terms of being able to signpost?

[00:24:37] **Nicola:** Yeah, because we didn't actually give a definition of domestic violence, so they wouldn't, we didn't do that. We just said, you know, these behaviours. So, in terms of the willingness to participate, my research, survey research I've done on student bodies since then, usually generate around a 6 to 10% response rate of the sample population. I think when we look at this research we've done here, it looks around a 4%. But you did do hard copies to increase the response rate from males, so that's why we get quite, almost a clear gender split there don't we? It's almost 50-50. But in my other research I've done, predominantly it's online surveys of women, who are much more likely to complete the surveys than men. And that's around this sensitive type of research asking about experiences of interpersonal violence perceptions of safety, strategies of safety, and so forth. And for this research here we're talking about that's domestic violence.

[00:25:56] **Sarah:** Do you have any thoughts about why women are more likely to participate? Because you're not specifically asking about experiences of domestic violence, or you weren't in this research, which might then suggest that women would be more likely because they're more likely to have experienced it. But more generally, do you have any thoughts about why?

[00:26:17] **Nicola:** Not this one, but the research I've done where I've done online, women are more likely to complete the survey. In the student population there are more women than men, so we have to recognise that, there are more women than men, but disproportionately though women are more likely to complete surveys, maybe because they have more to say about

the aspects we're asking them about? And maybe men, well I mean more research needs to be done into this in terms of qualitative research, maybe men either don't have much to say or they don't want to say.

[00:26:58] **Sarah:** Okay, thank you. I know from a project that I've competed around domestic abuse in older people's experiences, too, it was two older women who wanted to come and be part of that research project. And they said the reasons they wanted to be involved is because they wanted to tell their story and they wanted their experiences to be heard and they wanted to improve things for other people. So maybe if women are more likely to have experienced it, they're more likely to want to contribute if they feel that might have a positive impact for other people. I don't know, it just might be interesting to understand and explore that, but yeah, if you're looking at student populations there's a natural slant anyway, I suppose isn't there? But yeah, thank you.

[00:27:47] **Lesley:** When you're saying about like women more likely to be completing surveys, when I'm just sitting there thinking about my research projects, it does, whatever it is, I remember doing research into child protection processes and I had to actively go out to try and get some fathers to engage, because it's just automatically they weren't there, they didn't respond. So, it's like, almost, from a methods perspective, we have to actually, they are a hard-to-reach population that we have to actively seek, to some extent, because it's really important that we hear what they're thinking about this. Otherwise, we're not getting the full picture are we?

So just to move on, I'm interested in the issue of under-reporting of domestic violence, by victims, but regardless of what their gender is, regardless of age or any other issues. And what I was feeling from the findings is the problem with the controlling, if you don't see behaviour as being controlling then that adds an extra element into, they're not going to report it. So people are not seeing it, and I'm just wondering what your views on that were.

[00:28:57] **Nicola:** So, I'm assuming you're referring to under-reporting to the police and the authorities.

[00:29:04] **Lesley:** I suppose it comes to that point, but I think that even in the first step of saying it to *anybody*, if they don't recognise it they're not going to necessarily say it. And even if they did say it to a friend, the friend wouldn't

recognise it. So I suppose, yeah, if we think about the official aspect where somebody would become involved.

[00:29:22] **Nicola:** Well, the crime surveys over the years have shown us that the victims are very rarely reporting to the police and the authorities, generally domestic violence, they're more likely to tell friends, family, neighbours. So generally domestic violence is under-reported to the police. Then you've got to factor in what we're talking about here, coercive and controlling behaviour, which often isn't *named* as abusive. And the crime surveys show us generally that in order to report something to a crime survey or to the police, you've got to name it as a problem. But not only do you have to name it as a problem, you have to name this as *criminal*, if you're wanting to report it to the police. So, you have to have that legal framework there, which, you know, coercive and controlling behaviour has only recently, in 2015, become a criminal offence. And it is a complex set of behaviours, and a picture has to be built up, and one has to recognise that they are a victim of that. So, there will be under-reporting of that anyway under the banner of domestic violence.

[00:30:43] **Lesley:** I suppose that connects in, Nicola, to a thing that came through with the article, which is about education isn't it? Because really what we're saying here is that people don't recognise, that this is quite new, that it's been extended, they're not recognising that behaviour as being violent. And therefore, really we're talking about education here as being a really important element, because I think that came through in the article.

[00:31:13] **Demi:** I think the main issue is that with a lot of specifically coercive and controlling behaviour, because obviously perpetrators are very manipulative, a lot of it's done under the thing of, "but I really care about you, I'm controlling where you go and what you spend your money on and who you see because I care, I don't want you to get in with the wrong people". And I think that's the issue because, going back to talking about young people, if you have a young person going to their friends and saying, "oh, well my boyfriend's checking my phone, and he's checking where I've been, and he's checking who I'm talking to", you might have a friend that says, "yeah but he cares about you, he clearly cares where you go". And I think it's things like that, that we need to be more educated on. It's those little things that are recognising, yes, someone might care about you, but also they can be abusive towards you, and that that, over a long period of time, wanting photos wherever you've been, that's extensive and working out the normality of things like that.

[00:32:12] **Lesley:** It also sounds like it's getting used to the culture of the generation as well, especially when you're talking about young people, and I'm thinking about when I was their age we didn't do any of that kind of stuff, because you've then got to factor in the social media aspects of all of that, and the way in which people communicate now, and the fact that we've got phones that are connected and can tell you where you are at any given time, and you've got to purposely go into settings to avoid things like that. So we've got a very messy situation. It sounds to me like we're not there in terms of being able to really understand what's going on here and the shifts that are making some of that coercive and controlling behaviour more possible in those young people's relationships.

[00:32:58] **Demi:** Yeah, I mean, even when you think about things like Snapchat maps, that's something that obviously all young people have now, and it would be probably considered strange if you didn't have your location on. And then I think that makes, if you're in an abusive relationship, it then makes that behaviour more normalised to question, well, why haven't you got your location on? Rather than, you know... there's a lot more now, with technology, there's more new ways of abusing someone rather than it just being, he's not letting me go out or he's not doing this. I think it's a lot more normalised in a younger generation, and that's where that behaviour will, you won't recognise that and you will just continue going through that abusive relationship.

[00:33:38] **Sarah:** It's a very complicated landscape when you take all of that into account, isn't it? I think reflecting on that and what Lesley was saying about education and things changing, you obviously wrote the paper a while ago, do you think you've seen any developments or changes any positive, hopefully or negative since you wrote the paper?

Educating about domestic abuse: individual and structural

[00:34:01] **Nicola:** Well, in the paper we talk about there have been campaigns, particularly campaigns aimed at young people through soaps, for example *Hollyoaks* actors, they engaged in 'This Is Abuse' campaign, and there's research been done on the effectiveness of that campaign. And it's not as clear that the campaign was, I mean the Home Office might suggest it was effective, but research might suggest otherwise, it's more problematic than that. And Demi you before were saying something interesting about the cases is you work with.

[00:34:38] **Demi:** I think it's difficult because when you think about campaigns and soaps and things like that, I mean, just speaking from practice, the demographics of people who watch soaps are a lot different to the people who are getting arrested for these types of offenses. A lot of my cases are working-class males that are 27, 28, they're not the kind of people that would sit down and watch a soap. So you're not really educating those people through these campaigns. And I think for me, I think the only thing I think has changed is making domestic abuse more normalised to talk about. But I think in terms of how we address it, I don't feel like we've moved that much forward, personally.

[00:35:28] **Nicola:** We have seen compulsory sex and relationship education coming in secondary schools, but the problem is, like what we see from this research is by the time children leave primary, those justifications for the use of violence in intimate relationships are already forged. So, whilst primary school children, compulsory now to have relationship education, that's much more general than sex and healthy relationship education, although some schools might opt into that. So, some more needs to be done in terms of challenging stereotypes and stereotypical gender roles, and teaching about healthy relationships, particularly the empowerment of women and girls, from a young age in an age-appropriate curriculum in the primary schools is important.

[00:36:32] **Lesley:** Yeah, because you're talking about really significant shifts that need to happen. And therefore you're not going to get a change overnight. It's something that does have to come in earlier, and it's about a generational shift to change a way the next generation are thinking whilst trying to change current generations into thinking. I mean, when you were talking there Demi, I was thinking, yeah, I don't know anything about that Snapchat thing whatsoever, and it's a whole different landscape, like you were saying, so it's very complicated to think about where people might get messages, and how to engage them, because people aren't always happy about it being in the school environment either. I know my son's just at that age point for the sex education side and he's getting all that information from friends and it's spreading and the questions have changed that he asks me at home. He comes with different questions now, and that's good, because I can hear it coming through. So it's just about getting, because children are curious and questioning and that is the time isn't it, to try and get them. Have you moved any further in researching this area? Or are you doing different things?

[00:37:45] **Nicola:** Well, one of the things that come out of this research is, it is a statistical piece of research, and we know there are gendered aspects as to, you know, females are more likely to view controlling behaviours as domestic violence than males, but we don't necessarily know *why* that is and more research needs to be done on why that is. And that's much more qualitative research. You do have an official definition currently at the moment, it's an official definition, it's not necessarily a legal definition and you're assuming, one that all people understand that definition, and it's clear they don't, for whatever reason. And this is for practitioners as well. They may not understand the definition, like you were just saying about what is domestic violence? What is domestic abuse? Are they the same? And so forth. Some more research needs to be done into looking at why did the genders view the behaviours as different? Because understanding that is key to unpicking and maybe *changing* their views, because you were talking about cases before, Demi, where they were saying they didn't understand domestic violence because the partner was an ex-partner.

[00:39:33] **Demi:** Yeah. And I think it's really difficult because we haven't got domestic violence as a set crime on his record, it's just down as battery, so he thinks, "yeah, but that was just a battery, that's not domestic violence because I got charged with a battery, that's on my previous convictions". And it's difficult to then challenge that because it isn't a DV crime, it's not listed on that. It's just down as a battery, and having that discussion with him and trying to make him understand that, yeah but it was against an ex-partner, and he's fully admitted that the relationship was toxic and volatile and there was abusive behaviours in that, but with regards to the actual crime, he doesn't regard that as DV. And I think when we talk about the definition, it's all well and good to have a definition, but obviously the people who are perpetrators and victims, they're not sat at night looking through that definition. So it doesn't help.

[00:40:30] **Lesley:** No. And it's making me interested to know, I'm curious as to why there is that perception from him and maybe from others, that battery's alright, but actually having it as domestic violence that's *not* alright. So there must be some sort of cultural perceptions around something to do with that as a negative, but what is it? Like we have our, obviously we've discussed the negatives of it, but what is it they're perceiving as being negative about it, that therefore they don't want that said? And it's an issue that's been there for so long, and yet when we're talking here and when reading your work, I feel like we haven't scratched the surface of this issue. So basically you two have got a

lot of work to come, in terms of your research. Have you got any specific research plans? Did you plan to go in further about the qualitative side of this?

[00:41:31] **Nicola:** Well, I did discuss with a colleague, because her existing research has also inadvertently looked at, through perceptions of women who didn't realise they were victims. But if you look at a definition of domestic violence, they *were* a victim, but they didn't realise that, and it's quite interesting. So, we were thinking of doing a survey, but a validated survey. And I'm not sure there is one in existence of how we want it to look in terms of domestic violence behaviours and whether we'd have to create it for a general population, not a random sample, I don't think we're going to get that, but a general population of, not necessarily victims and perpetrators, but a general population to look at on a wider scale about perceptions of domestic violence according to gender and maybe age and so forth. But also, then following up with that survey, as part of the research, we would want to look at where do those perceptions come from? How are they constructed? Why does the participant believe that, in a much more qualitative way. So yeah, that research is always on the agenda, on the horizon somewhere. But I think it would be worthy research to do.

[00:43:08] **Sarah:** Definitely would be, yeah. Because I think also, what we're talking about in terms of understanding of domestic abuse and recognising that as part of your own situation, when we think about coercive control I know you'd said Nicola earlier that it was 2015, so that's not been around for that long, like you said people aren't sitting at home studying the legal framework and saying, "oh, coercive control, right, okay, I now understand". So there is something about how that gets out there, and I was wondering more broadly whether you feel like the current legal framework is sufficient? Or if from this research and other research that you've done, there are any other policy responses that you would like to see developed?

[00:43:53] **Nicola:** Well, the legal framework, and it goes back to, you know, and I know things have changed quite a lot with domestic violence in terms of some of the legislation around this, but because our criminal justice system is very adversarial in nature, you are allowed a defence, all defendants need to give a defence, are encouraged to give a defence. And Jeff Hearn talks about this in his 1998 book *The Violences of Men*, about how they talk about and justify their violence, how they excuse it, how they minimise it. And part of his sample was a criminal justice sample, and they talked from that position of being asked over and over again, by the police, solicitors, the judiciary, for that

defence. So, defences that they might draw on to mitigate their responsibility is completely accepted in an adversarial criminal justice system. So those defences might blame the victim, they might blame their being intoxicated. So, I think it's very difficult because you have a system that encourages those kinds of mitigation of culpability, even in domestic violence cases. But I know some of the legislation has changed around that and some mitigating factors are not allowed for domestic violence perpetrators, because when you look at domestic violence behaviours, like we've just been talking about, they are a pattern, they are purposeful, they are intentional, and they serve to control the victim and it's over a period of time, it is a pattern. And for that reason, the perpetrator should be held accountable in order to begin a process of change. So, the legal, the criminal justice system I should say, allows them to mitigate some of that responsibility. And that is a structural issue with the criminal justice system, and other criminal justice systems globally as well. So, that's a much bigger problem in terms of how the legal system works, but allowing, and fostering, and accepting mitigations of responsibility. Because when we were talking before, by the time they, for example, might get to Demi as a trainee probation officer, you're wanting them to accept responsibility, aren't you?

[00:46:51] **Demi:** Yeah. I think as well it comes down to the penalties that they get, and I know a lot of domestic violence offenses they'll have, say, three or four cautions, or they'll have a few NFAs [No Further Actions]. And I think that's not then getting the message through to perpetrators that that behaviour's unacceptable, if they're just receiving a caution for that behaviour, what's stopping them from going out and carrying on that behaviour? Especially when we talk about coercive and controlling behaviour, because it does carry a lesser penalty than physical violence. So even within kinds of legal framework, that's saying that's not as serious as physical violence. And often obviously when victims go towards the police, that's happened for a number of years or months, and it's got to the point where they view that as serious, but then they're not being supported by the justice system.

[00:47:50] **Lesley:** So it's like the system is set up that, whilst it's got this information in it, it's like the rest of the structures around it are almost *barriers* to people being able to engage with it, access support, it's allowing people to think it's okay to have excuses for why they've done it, and it's their fault because of X, Y and Z, and they're allowed to do it. And so where's the stuff in the middle of that, before they then get to the probation? Where's the education at *that* point? I would imagine that, because I know in child

protection, when we had that, we did have things like domestic violence perpetrators programme, but that's in child protection because we were saying, "well, look, this child's not safe in this environment, you need to go and you need to learn". And then we were referring women to Women's Aid, for example, to go on, I can't even remember what their programme was called, but it was understanding that they *were* a victim of domestic violence, because that acknowledgement wasn't there. It's like we've got some of that in place in different parts of society, but not across the board.

[00:48:54] **Demi:** Yeah, it almost seems as though addressing that behaviour comes *after* the seriousness and the offence, it seems like it has to get to a certain point and *then* we'll intervene, rather than focusing on, hold on, why don't we just educate everybody on what healthy relationship is.

[00:49:12] **Nicola:** But then even, in the criminal justice system, not everybody will be afforded a domestic violence perpetrator programme. The more risky they are, the more likely they'll get that intervention, but do such interventions work? Well, you know, there's a lot of inconclusive evidence in the research. So, I think what we're saying here, and other academics have said it as well, that early intervention, challenging those worrying behaviours in young people, and empowering women and girls, and challenging gender stereotypical roles from a very young age, before they leave primary school, is the way to go. Because after that, as you say, it's too late really, once they're in the criminal justice system.

[00:50:05] **Lesley:** Yeah. We need to wait for that shift.

[00:50:08] **Nicola:** Well, there have been pilot interventions done in schools that aim to teach about healthy relationships. And there's been, and we look at this in this research paper, there have been problems of engaging boys and girls, how you do it, how you educate them, you know, psychological and emotional violence is very difficult for them to understand, so there's a lot of work needs to be done. But also, you are competing against the primary school curriculum, of targets within that.

[00:50:45] **Lesley:** And it doesn't fit in there, it's a different issue.

[00:50:47] **Nicola:** Because you can't measure it very easily can you? You can't measure the success of what the programme aims to achieve at the age 11. But when you look at the homicide rates, domestic homicide rates of young

people, and women, you might then think about well maybe early education *is* needed.

[00:51:09] **Lesley:** Yeah. But it will take a long time to find that out and to see has it had an impact and things like that.

[00:51:15] **Nicola:** Well, I think you're up against different kinds of structures to do with economy, and schools meeting targets that are different to the wellbeing of the pupils in them really.

[00:51:39] **Lesley:** Across all of the podcasts that we've done, Nicola, what it's ultimately come down to is that the social work practitioners that we're aiming this at need time and space to take on board information from research and be able to then think about how to help, how they can implement that in their practice. And this is obviously even *bigger* than that, which is that we need to also include the teachers, because it's about having, like you said, it goes up against economy and different issues. And actually, where is the space for this? Because actually we know there's a problem, and we've had this across the board, haven't we Sarah? There's a problem that's going on, and people know about it, but it's just not getting its space in the right areas, and it's not getting time. It's like the sad point of all of this!

[00:52:37] **Sarah:** Yeah, just to follow on from that, thinking about the implications for social workers in particular, but perhaps other practitioners too, you've already talked about the role in schools, but what key messages do you think your paper raises for practitioners and particularly for social workers, if there are any?

[00:52:59] **Nicola:** I think I alluded to this before about practitioners, I've probably said it before about the definition of domestic violence, which a lot of research has been done into domestic violence, and that's how that definition has been generated and altered over the years. But not everyone understands that definition, and the cases of offenders that Demi deals with may not understand that definition, and practitioners may not understand that definition. Demi was talking before, she understands it because she has an undergraduate and a master's in Criminology and she's focused on domestic violence, in terms of what she's researched and so forth. So, I think there needs to be a recognition that the cases that come forward to practitioners, they might have differing views. And because more research needs to be done into *why* they have differing views. The automatic assumption is that they're

denying it, then minimising it, they're justifying the behaviour, which may well be the case. But there might just be a genuine lack of understanding about what is domestic violence.

[00:54:30] **Sarah:** So having a really clear understanding of that definition, what it means, what kinds of things to be aware of is crucial isn't it, actually?

[00:54:41] **Nicola:** Yeah, but even then, as we know, social demographics, gender is going to, people are going to view it differently and just define it differently. And we need to understand why that is it. We don't all agree on the same things for various reasons, and I think more research needs to be done into why you don't think that's domestic violence, and what do you think it is if it isn't?

[00:55:08] **Sarah:** That sounds like a really important step for you, so we'll have to have you back on the podcast, when you've done that bit of work, see what you found out.

[00:55:16] **Demi:** I think for practitioners I think it's just, as I said before, it's education, especially if you think about teachers, even from when I was at school, if a boy was mean to you, it was obviously like, because he likes you. It's instilling those views so early on. And it's just checking what you're instilling into young children that is then going to follow them throughout their life. And I think, especially in things like the police, a lot of police officers still think that, "oh it's just a domestic, that's all we're going to". And it's not regarded as being serious, even though we know how many women actually die as a result of domestic violence. Speaking from a personal point of view, when police came out to my house when I was younger, it was, "okay, sleep on it, and if you still think this is an issue in the morning, then you can report it". It's not recognising that, knowing that family needs intervention there and then. And I think going forward it's things like that that need to be really taken seriously rather than just, "oh, it's just an argument".

[00:56:28] **Sarah:** Yeah, so really actually acknowledging the seriousness of it and not dismissing it.

[00:56:33] **Nicola:** And that's particularly key for the controlling and coercive behaviours, because when you look at Evan Stark's work, an American academic, the behaviours can be quite a fast track into domestic homicide quite quickly. And that's worrying, like you said before, if often there's no

physical violence, but a terrible history of coercive and controlling behaviours, particularly isolation for the victim, and that can lead to domestic homicide. And that's a worry in terms of intervening into that before anything fatal happens.

Going back to the bystander intervention, the part of this community level response about challenging inappropriate behaviours and challenging social norms that *uphold* violence against women, I know increasingly bystander interventions are becoming more popular in higher education in universities, but they're more likely to focus on sexual violence, particularly the student cohort, sexual violence on and off campus, but there is a role and more bystander interventions in America will focus on, will look at domestic violence, will look at how bystanders can intervene safely, whether that's before, during or after an incident to interrupt, if you like, the violence and challenge it and challenge the unacceptability of the beliefs and behaviours that are happening. And because we know that friends and family and neighbors are likely to know, people do know that the violence is going on and the abusive behaviours, it's how to enhance bystander intervention safely, for the bystander, but also for the victim. And I think more needs to be done on that, because it is a community problem, it is a social problem. It's endemic in society, and a more societal community response is needed for that reason.

[00:59:05] **Sarah:** Yeah, I think that's a really, really important point you've just made, I think that really underscores what we were saying earlier about actually there are things needed at all kinds of levels in all kinds of different ways to tackle this, because it's not just a simple issue with a simple solution. There's so many complicating factors that lead into these situations and these experiences.

[00:59:26] **Nicola:** And that's why the Violence against Women and Girls Action Plan has always looked at, we began with the different aspects, the early education, the criminal justice response, the multi-agency working, the supporting the victims and survivors to encompass a holistic approach. So that's nothing new, on the policy and government agenda, and that's the aim, but it's how far that happens in practice.

[01:00:02] **Sarah:** Yeah, I know. Unfortunately we know, I mean, for Lesley and I, obviously our areas more of the health and social care field than the criminal justice one, but we know that money for intervention, early intervention, preventative work, just doesn't exist. It's just not there anymore is it? Even

though it is part of what should be happening, it doesn't happen. So yeah, and like you said earlier, you're up against that challenge of bigger structures and issues with the economy and how that feeds into what's funded and what's not funded. That feels like a bleak note to end on though, do we have anything positive to finish the conversation with?

[01:00:43] **Nicola:** Well, we'll definitely come back, if you're doing more around the podcast and you can wait a couple of years for the more qualitative, in-depth research that looks at constructions and how perceptions are formed and what the implications of that are.

[01:01:05] **Sarah:** Yeah, definitely, we'd love to have you back to talk about that, I think that would be really interesting to hear what you find out.

But yeah. Thank you so much, Nicola and Demi, for coming in and spending the time to talk to us about your research today. It's been an absolutely fascinating and really important conversation as well. So thank you.

[01:01:22] **Demi:** Thank you.

[01:01:22] **Nicola:** Thank you.

[01:01:23] **Lesley:** Thank you very much and goodbye to our listeners.

[01:01:26] **Sarah:** Goodbye everyone!

...

[01:01:28] **Sarah:** You have been listening to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work with me, Dr Sarah Lonbay.

[01:01:35] **Lesley:** And Dr Lesley Deacon. And this was funded by the University of Sunderland, edited by Paperghosts, and our theme music is called, *Together We're Stronger* by All Music Seven.

[01:01:46] **Sarah:** And don't forget that you can find a full transcript of today's podcast and links and extra information in our show notes. So anything you want to follow up from what you've heard today, check out there and you should find some useful extra resources.

See you all next time.

[01:02:00] **Lesley:** Bye.