



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW

Social Science

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence (DV) illustrates a persistent model of harmful interactions that take place within any relational context, executed by one partner to create or uphold superiority and power over another intimate partner or a member of the domestic unit. Domestic violence is exhibited through a variety of manifestations, encompassing but not limited to physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological behaviours, in addition to threats of such behaviours or negligent actions that exert control over another individual. This encompasses a wide range of behaviours that may intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, deprive, instil fear, terrorise, coerce, threaten, assign blame, injure, or otherwise harm an individual. The World Health Organisation (WHO) emphasises that the prevalence of violence against women and girls globally remains significantly underreported. This article examines the various types of abuses perpetrated within the domestic sphere, as well as the contributing factors that facilitate the occurrence of domestic violence. In addition, this study briefly analyses the effects of domestic violence on women and proposes potential preventive interventions.

KEYWORDS

Intergenerational violence Contributing factors Legislations Substance Abuse Societal Issue

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence signifies acts of hostility that manifest in a home environment, including within the scope of a marital or cohabitative relationship. In a more expansive context, abuse, including non-physical forms of maltreatment within such environments, is classified as domestic abuse. The term domestic violence is often utilised synonymously with intimate partner violence, which is inflicted by one individual within a close intimate relationship upon the other party. This phenomenon may manifest in ongoing relationships or among spouses or between erstwhile partners. Moreover, the term can also encompass acts of violence directed towards one's family members, which may include children, siblings, or parents.

The manifestations of domestic abuse encompass physical, verbal, emotional, financial, religious, reproductive, and sexual forms. This abuse can range from subtle, coercive tactics to severe instances such as marital rape and other forms of violent physical assault, which may include choking, beating, female genital mutilation, and acid attacks that may lead to disfigurement or fatality, as well as the utilization of technology to perpetrate harassment, control, monitoring, stalking, or hacking. Domestic homicide may involve practices such as stoning, bride burning, honour killings, and dowry deaths, occasionally implicating noncohabiting family members. In 2015, the Home Office of the United Kingdom expanded the definition of domestic violence to encompass coercive control in relationships characterised by abuse, there exists a cyclical pattern of maltreatment wherein tensions escalate, leading to an act of violence, subsequently succeeded by a phase of reconciliation and tranquillity. Victims may find themselves entangled in situations of domestic violence due to factors such as social isolation, the dynamics of power and control, the establishment of traumatic attachments to the perpetrator, the cultural normalisation of violence, inadequate financial resources, pervasive fear, feelings of shame, or efforts aimed at protecting their children. Consequently, as a direct consequence of such mistreatment, victims may suffer from an array of difficulties, including physical disabilities, erratic aggression, long-term health problems, mental health disorders, economic vulnerability, and a reduced capacity to nurture healthy social relationships. Victims may develop profound psychological conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Children residing in environments marked by violence frequently exhibit psychological difficulties from an early stage, manifesting as avoidance behaviours, heightened vigilance toward potential threats, and dysregulated aggression which may play a significant role in the occurrence of vicarious traumatisation

Definition of Domestic Violence

Historically, domestic violence (DV) was predominantly linked to physical forms of aggression. Terminologies such as wife abuse, wife beating, wife battering, and battered woman were prevalent; however, their usage has diminished over time due to initiatives aimed at

encompassing unmarried partners. Currently, domestic violence is generally defined expansively to encompass "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence" that may be perpetrated by a family member or an intimate partner.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. (2011). "Domestic violence is the inflicting of a physical injury by one family or household member on another; also a repeated/habitual pattern of such behaviour".

According to (UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. (1993)

"Physical, sexual, and psychological violence that transpires within the familial context encompasses acts such as spousal abuse, sexual exploitation of female within the household, violence associated with dowries, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other culturally entrenched practices detrimental to women, as well as non-spousal violence and acts of violence linked to economic exploitation."

Nevertheless, contemporary interpretations of domestic violence, as delineated by international treaties and governmental frameworks, encompass a significantly wider array of abusive behaviours, incorporating dimensions of sexual, physical, and economic maltreatment. The expression intimate partner violence is frequently employed interchangeably with domestic abuse or domestic violence; however, it specifically delineates violence that transpires within the context of a couple's relationship, which may include marriage, cohabitation, or non-cohabiting intimate partnerships. In this regard, the World Health Organisation (WHO) incorporates controlling behaviours as a variant of abuse. Intimate partner violence has been comprehensively documented in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships, with the former encompassing both male-perpetrated aggression towards females and female-perpetrated aggression towards males. Family violence is a more extensive term, often utilised to denote child maltreatment, elder abuse, and other violent acts occurring among family members.

Types of Abuses

Not all manifestations of domestic violence can be regarded as equivalent. Variations in frequency, severity, intent, and consequences are all of considerable importance. Domestic violence can manifest in numerous forms, encompassing physical aggression or assault (such as hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects, beating, etc.), or threats thereof; sexual abuse; the manifestation of controlling or authoritative behaviours; acts of intimidation; persistent surveillance; subtle or insidious forms of maltreatment (such as neglect); and the deprivation of economic resources. It can also encompass behaviours such as endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful confinement, trespassing, and harassment.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is defined as any contact intended to instil fear, inflict pain, cause injury, or result in other forms of physical suffering or bodily harm. Within the framework of coercive control, physical abuse is employed as a means to dominate the victim. The dynamics surrounding physical abuse within a relationship are frequently intricate. Physical violence can serve as the culmination of preceding abusive behaviours, including threats, intimidation, and the restriction of the victim's autonomy through isolation, manipulation, and various constraints on personal freedom. Denial of medical care, sleep deprivation, and forced ingestion of drugs or alcohol also represent forms of physical abuse. Furthermore, it may encompass the infliction of physical injury upon alternative subjects whom the victim is interested, such as her children, family members or pet animals, to elicit psychological anguish in the victims.

Sexual Abuse

"According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), sexual abuse is characterised as any sexual act, efforts to secure a sexual act, unsolicited sexual comments or suggestions, or actions directed toward trafficking, or otherwise directed towards an individual's sexuality through coercive means" This definition encompasses mandatory virginity examinations and female genital mutilation. Beyond the initiation of sexual acts through physical coercion, sexual abuse transpires when an individual is subjected to verbal pressure to consent, lacks the capacity to comprehend the nature or circumstances of the act, is incapable of refusing participation, or is unable to articulate their unwillingness to engage in sexual conduct. Such incapacity may stem from immaturity, illness, disability, the influence of intoxicants, or intimidation and coercion.

Emotional and Verbal Abuse

Emotional and Verbal abuse constitutes a recurrent pattern of behaviour that threatens, intimidates, dehumanises, or systematically undermines an individual's self-worth. As articulated in the Istanbul Convention, psychological violence is defined as "the intentional conduct of seriously impairing a person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats" Emotional abuse encompasses threats, social isolation, public humiliation, incessant criticism, continual personal devaluation and coercive control.

Economic Abuse

Economic abuse is characterised as a form of maltreatment whereby one intimate partner exerts control over the other partner's capacity to access financial resources.. Marital assets are employed as instruments of control. Economic abuse may involve obstructing a spouse from acquiring resources, restricting the victim's usage of such resources, or otherwise exploiting the victim's economic assets. This form of abuse reduces the victim's ability to achieve self-sufficiency, thereby escalating dependency on the perpetrator, which may include diminished access to education, employment, career progression, and asset acquisition. The act of forcing or influencing a family member to endorse documents, Dispossess properties, or amend a will serves as an indication of economic maltreatment.

Contributing Factors for Domestic Violence

A fundamental component in the occurrence of domestic violence is the deeply ingrained belief that abusive actions, whether expressed physically or verbally, are acceptable. Additional risk factors encompass substance abuse, insufficient educational attainment, mental health disorders, inadequate coping mechanisms, experiences of childhood maltreatment, and an excessive reliance on the abuser. A primary impetus for the perpetration of domestic and interpersonal violence within a relationship is the desire to establish and sustain dynamics predicated on dominance and control over the victims. The ethical framework of batterers diverges significantly from the established laws and societal norms. Empirical research indicates that a central concern for those who perpetrate abuse is their conscious, intentional choice to engage in such behaviour in the pursuit of personal gratification. Violent male offenders typically exhibit distinct characteristics: they display narcissistic tendencies, exhibit a pronounced lack of empathy, and prioritise their own needs above those of others. Perpetrators engage in psychological manipulation to instil in their victims the belief that the abuse and violence they endure stem from their own inadequacies (as spouses, partners, or human beings) rather than from the perpetrators' egocentric quest for power and control.

Intergenerational Violence

A prevalent characteristic among abusers is that they have observed instances of abuse during their Developmental period. They have participated in a continuum of intergenerational cycles of domestic violence. However, this does not imply that a child who witnesses or experiences violence will inevitably become an abuser. Analysing and dismantling patterns of intergenerational abuse may yield more significant reductions in domestic violence than alternative interventions aimed at managing the abuse.

Responses that emphasise the experiences of children propose that life experiences significantly shape an individual's likelihood of engaging in familial violence (either as a victim or as an aggressor). Scholars endorsing this perspective suggest it is beneficial to conceptualise three origin points of domestic violence: childhood socialisation, prior experiences in adolescent relationships, and the levels of stress encountered in an individual's current life circumstances. Individuals who observe their parents inflicting harm upon one another, or who themselves are subjected to abuse, may internalise such behaviours within the relationships they forge as adults.

Research findings indicate that increased incidence of physical punishment in childhood correlates with a heightened propensity for violence towards family members in adulthood, including intimate partners. Individuals who experienced more frequent spanking during childhood are statistically more inclined to endorse the acceptance of physical aggression towards a partner, as well as to experience heightened marital discord and generalised feelings of anger. A significant volume of empirical research has illustrated a connection between the practice of physical control and "amplified levels of aggression aimed at parents, siblings, peers, and spouses," even when factoring in confounding variables.. Although these associations do not definitively establish causality, several longitudinal studies suggest that the experience of physical punishment has a direct causal influence on subsequent aggressive behaviours. Such investigations have demonstrated that corporal punishment of children (e.g., smacking, slapping, or spanking) is predictive of diminished internalisation of values such as empathy, altruism, and resistance to desire, as well as an increase in antisocial behaviours, including dating violence.

Biological and Psychological Theories

The determinants under analysis consist of genetic factors and brain dysfunctions, both of which are explored through the domain of neuroscience. Psychological theories concentrate on the personality attributes and mental characteristics inherent to the offender. Such personality traits may manifest as abrupt outbursts of anger, inadequate impulse regulation, and diminished self-esteem. Various theoretical frameworks propose that psychopathology plays a significant role and that childhood abuse predisposes certain individuals towards heightened aggression in adulthood. A correlation has been established between juvenile delinquency and subsequent domestic violence in later life.

Research has indicated a notably high prevalence of psychopathological conditions among individuals who perpetrate domestic violence. For example, certain studies indicate that approximately 80% of both court-mandated and voluntarily referred males in these domestic violence investigations presented with diagnosable psychopathology, predominantly characterised by personality disorders. "The incidence of personality disorders among the general population is approximated to fall within the range of 15–20%. As the severity and chronicity of violence within the relationship escalates, the propensity for psychopathology in these men nears 100%."

Dutton has put forth a psychological characterisation for males who perpetrate abuse against their intimate partners, asserting that these individuals demonstrate borderline personality characteristics that are developed during the formative stages of their lives. However, these psychological theories face contention: Gelles asserts that such theories possess inherent limitations, noting that other scholars have identified that merely 10% (or fewer) conform to this psychological archetype. He posits that social determinants hold greater significance, whereas personality attributes, mental disorders, or psychopathy are comparatively lesser factors.

Social Theories

Social theories investigate the external factors affecting the offender's surroundings, which encompass familial arrangements, psychological

influences, social learning systems, and the integration of rational choice theories. Social learning theory asserts that individuals develop behaviours by observing and imitating the actions of others.. When reinforced positively, such behaviours are perpetuated. An individual exposed to aggressive behaviour is predisposed to replicate it. In the absence of adverse repercussions (for instance, the victim capitulating to the violence), the behaviour is likely to persist.

Resource theory, articulated by William Goode in 1971, posits that women who exhibit significant reliance on their partners for economic sustenance (such as homemakers, women with disabilities, or the unemployed) and who primarily fulfil caregiving roles for their offspring are apprehensive about the heightened financial strain associated with leaving their marital union. This dependency engenders a scarcity of alternatives and resources to address or alter their partner's conduct.

Couples who equally distribute power tend to encounter a diminished frequency of conflict, and when disagreements do surface, they are less inclined to resort to violent measures. Conversely, if one partner seeks dominance and control within the relationship, they may resort to abusive behaviour. This abuse can manifest in various forms, including coercion and threats, intimidation, emotional maltreatment, economic exploitation, social isolation, underestimate of issues, fooling the partner, threats regarding children (such as the possibility of experiencing a loss of custody) alongside the adoption of a "master of the castle" mindset.

A separate analysis has indicated that individuals who perpetrate domestic violence may be engulfed by temper it, leading them to perceive themselves as victims in the context of their abusive actions toward their partners. Predominantly fueled by negative emotions and communication challenges between partners, these abusers may feel wronged and subsequently construct a psychological narrative that positions them as the victim.

The experience of stress may be exacerbated when an individual resides within a familial context characterised by heightened pressures. Social stressors, arising from inadequate financial resources or other familial challenges, may further intensify tensions. Violence is not invariably a direct consequence of stress; however, it may represent a particular response mechanism employed by some individuals in reaction to stress. Families and couples experiencing poverty may be disproportionately susceptible to domestic violence, attributable to augmented stress and conflicts about financial matters and additional concerns. Some theorists speculate that economic deprivation may impede a man's capacity to fulfil societal expectations of successful masculinity, instilling a fear of losing honour and respect. A theoretical framework suggests that when he is unable to financially support his spouse and retain control, he may resort to misogynistic attitudes, substance misuse, and criminal behaviour as alternative expressions of masculinity.

Power and Control

The dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships manifest as a mechanism through which abusers inflict physical, sexual, and various other forms of maltreatment to assert dominance within interpersonal relationships. A causal perspective on domestic violence posits that it functions as a strategic approach to acquire or sustain power and control over the victim. This perspective aligns with Bancroft's cost-benefit theory, which asserts that the perpetrator derives rewards from the abuse that extend beyond, or complement, the mere exertion of power over the target. Bancroft provides evidence to substantiate his position, indicating that, in the majority of instances, abusers possess the capability to exercise self-control but consciously opt not to do so for a range of motivations.

In certain instances, an individual may strive for absolute power and control over their partner, employing a variety of methods to achieve this, including the application of physical violence. The perpetrator endeavours to regulate every facet of the victim's existence, encompassing their social, personal, professional, and financial choices.

Substance Abuse

Domestic violence frequently coexists with alcohol intake. It has been documented that alcohol consumption is a contributing factor for two-thirds of individuals experiencing domestic abuse. Individuals who

engage in moderate drinking are more likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence compared to those who consume alcohol lightly or abstain altogether; nonetheless, it is predominantly heavy or binge drinkers who engage in the most persistent and severe manifestations of aggression. The likelihood, frequency, and intensity of physical assaults exhibit a positive correlation with alcohol consumption. Therefore, the rate of violent behaviour is mitigated after the adoption of behavioural marital interventions targeting the treatment of alcoholism.

Legislation

The insufficiency of comprehensive legislation that criminalises domestic violence may impede progress in the endeavour to diminish the prevalence of domestic violence. The Secretary General of Amnesty International has remarked, "It is astonishing that in the twenty-first century certain nations are endorsing child marriage and marital rape while others are criminalizing abortion, extramarital sexual relations, and same-sex sexual conduct – with some offenses even subject to capital punishment." According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "one of the most prevalent forms of violence perpetrated against women is that inflicted by a husband or male partner." The WHO observes that such violence is frequently disregarded as "legal systems and cultural norms do not categorize it as a crime, but rather as a 'private' family issue, or a typical aspect of life." The criminalisation of adultery has been identified as a catalyst for violence against women, as these prohibitions, whether in legal frameworks or societal practice, primarily aim to regulate women's conduct rather than men's; and are utilised to justify acts of violence against women. Numerous nations regard domestic violence as permissible or have failed to implement measures designed to criminalise its occurrence, particularly in predominantly Muslim countries, where some jurisdictions perceive the discipline of wives as a husband's entitlement, as exemplified in Iraq.

Impact of Domestic Violence

Physical Impact

Bruises, fractures, cranial injuries, lacerations, and internal haemorrhaging represent some of the immediate repercussions of incidents involving domestic violence that necessitate medical intervention and hospitalisation. Numerous chronic health ailments have been correlated with individuals who have endured domestic violence, including arthritis, persistent pain, pelvic discomfort, ulcers, and migraines. Victims who are pregnant within a context of domestic violence face an elevated risk of miscarriage, preterm labour, as well as potential harm to, or fatality of, the fetus.

Recent scholarly investigations reveal robust correlations between exposure to various forms of domestic violence and elevated incidences of numerous chronic health conditions. The most substantial evidence is derived from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, which indicates associations between exposure to abuse or neglect during childhood and increased rates of chronic conditions, high-risk health behaviours, and diminished life expectancy in adulthood. The accumulation of evidence linking physical health outcomes to violence against women has been progressing since the early 1990s.

Sexually Transmitted Disease

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has articulated that women in abusive relationships are at considerably heightened risk for HIV/AIDS. The WHO asserts that women enduring violence in their relationships often face challenges in negotiating safer sexual practices with their partners, are frequently coerced into sexual acts, and encounter difficulties in requesting appropriate testing when they suspect potential HIV infection. A decade's worth of cross-sectional studies conducted in Rwanda, Tanzania, South Africa, and India have consistently demonstrated that women who have suffered partner violence are more likely to acquire HIV. The WHO has stated that there exists a compelling rationale to eradicate intimate partner violence, both as an issue in its own right and to mitigate the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS. The evidence delineating the interconnections between violence against women and HIV/AIDS underscores the presence of both direct and indirect mechanisms through which these phenomena interact.

Psychological Impact

Among individuals who continue to reside with their abusers, elevated levels of stress, fear, and anxiety are frequently documented.

Furthermore, instances of depression are prevalent, as victims are often made to feel culpable for supposedly 'provoking' the maltreatment and are subjected to relentless criticism. Research indicates that 60% of victims fulfil the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during the relationship or after its dissolution, and exhibit a significantly heightened risk of suicidal ideation. Those who endure emotional or physical abuse frequently experience depression stemming from a pervasive sense of worthlessness. Such psychological distress often endures over extended periods, and it is recommended that many individuals pursue therapeutic intervention due to the increased risk of suicidal behaviour and other trauma-related symptoms.

In addition to experiencing depression, survivors of domestic violence regularly confront long-term anxiety and panic, and are predisposed to meet the diagnostic criteria for generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder. The most frequently cited psychological consequence of domestic violence is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is characterised by recurrent flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, an exaggerated startle response, nightmares, and the avoidance of stimuli associated with the abuse. Several investigations have indicated that maternal PTSD resulting from interpersonal violence can adversely affect her child's reactions to the domestic violence and other traumatic experiences.

Financial Impact

A 2024 investigation published in the Quarterly Journal of Economics, employing Finnish administrative data with distinct identifiers for both perpetrators and victims of domestic violence, revealed that "women who embark on relationships with (eventually) physically abusive men experience substantial and significant declines in their earnings and employment immediately upon cohabitation with the abusive partner." This phenomenon contributes to a state of economic dependency on the abuser, thereby complicating the victim's ability to extricate themselves from the relationship.

Once victims sever ties with their abusers, they may be astonished by the extent to which the abuse has compromised their autonomy. Owing to economic abuse and social isolation, the victim often possesses minimal financial resources and lacks a reliable support network to assist in seeking help. This has been demonstrated to represent one of the most formidable challenges encountered by victims of domestic violence, and serves as the predominant factor that may deter them from leaving their perpetrators.

In the year 2003, thirty-six major metropolitan areas in the United States identified domestic violence as a principal contributor to homelessness within their jurisdictions. It has also been documented that one in every three women experiences homelessness as a direct consequence of leaving a domestic violence situation. Should a victim manage to obtain rental housing, it is probable that the apartment complex will enforce strict zero-tolerance policies regarding criminal activity; such policies may lead to eviction even when the individual in question is the victim rather than the perpetrator of the violence. Although the availability of women's shelters and community resources aimed at assisting victims of domestic violence has seen substantial growth, these organisations often operate with a limited workforce while serving hundreds of victims in need, resulting in many individuals remaining without essential support.

Women and children subjected to domestic violence face a form of occupational apartheid; they are frequently denied access to preferred vocational opportunities. Abusive partners may restrict employment options and foster an environment devoid of occupational prospects, thereby exacerbating feelings of diminished self-worth and inadequate self-efficacy regarding their capacity to competently execute daily tasks. Furthermore, employment is adversely affected by functional impairments, a lack of ability to sustain essential job-related skills, and challenges in operating effectively within the workplace. Victims are often significantly isolated from other social connections, having few or no friendships, which serves as an additional mechanism of control wielded by the abuser.

Prevention

An extensive range of strategies has been constructed and is presently employed in initiatives aimed at preventing or diminishing occurrences of domestic violence. It is paramount to evaluate the efficacy of any strategy that is being executed. The campaign initiated by the Welsh Government aims to transform societal attitudes towards domestic abuse, exemplified by a concise television advertisement.

Amending existing legislation to ensure that domestic violence is comprehensively encompassed within the legal framework is crucial. This may necessitate the repeal of current laws that perpetuate discrimination against women; the World Health Organisation (WHO) asserts that "when the law permits husbands to physically control wives, the implementation of a program designed to prevent intimate partner violence may yield minimal results." Furthermore, marriage legislation holds significant importance; "women should possess the autonomy to enter into marriage freely or to dissolve it, to acquire financial credit, and to possess and manage property." Additionally, abolishing or placing restrictions on the practices of dowry and bride price, as well as examining the ramifications of these transactions on legislative decisions concerning domestic violence, is imperative. UN Women has articulated that the legislation must stipulate that "a perpetrator of [domestic violence], including marital rape, cannot invoke the fact that he paid bride price as a defence against a [domestic violence] charge."

Gender norms that endorse the subordination of women can precipitate the abuse of women by intimate partners. The WHO posits that "Dismantling hierarchical constructions of masculinity and femininity predicated on the control of women, and eliminating the structural factors that support inequalities are likely to make a substantial contribution to the mitigation of intimate partner violence and sexual violence"

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention state that "A key strategy in preventing domestic violence is the promotion of respectful, nonviolent relationships through individual, community, and societal level change." Early intervention programs, including school-based initiatives aimed at preventing dating violence, have also demonstrated effectiveness. Children raised in violent households may come to accept such behaviour as normative; hence, it is essential to challenge these misconceptions when they manifest among these children.

The UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 encompasses a target to eradicate all forms of violence, including domestic violence, through global advocacy and a demand for robust institutional frameworks. The joint UN-EU Spotlight initiative was inaugurated in 2016 to further this objective on a global scale, with a particular emphasis on developing nations and regions. The Spotlight Initiative is recognised by all implementing partners as vital to both economic and political advancement within the societies involved and those targeted.

CONCLUSION

Women require empowerment through avenues such as education, employment opportunities, legal awareness, and rights pertaining to inheritance. It is necessary that education on human rights and information about domestic violence are accessible to them, as this is linked to their fundamental rights. Extensive supportive services, coupled with legal intervention and mechanisms for redress, ought to be established in situations of domestic violence. Interventions designed to support women's healing and recovery after incidents of violence should be a central aspect of the strategy, including counselling, relocation, financial aid, and employment resources. Continuous support for women must be guaranteed by all relevant sectors, including the criminal justice system, healthcare, welfare services, and the private sector. Additionally, support should be accessible to women through informal networks comprising family, friends, neighbours, and local community organisations.

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