

UK MS Domestic Violence and Abuse Research Initiative: experiences of victim-survivors with MS and healthcare professionals

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Background: MS and Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)

- Recent evidence has highlighted the increased risk of people with MS being exposed to a variety of forms of violence, including DVA.¹
- This has been connected to certain risk factors, including:
 - MS is more common among women²
 - Social isolation³
 - Unemployment³
- In spring 2020, a group of UK consultant neurologists identified an increase in patients with MS presenting with suspected or confirmed cases of DVA but identified a lack of research-informed clinical resources to guide them in supporting patients.
- Recognising this urgent gap, the MS Domestic Violence and Abuse Research Initiative was launched to raise awareness of the impact of DVA on people with MS and to develop guidance on the best ways to offer support in MS clinical practice.



Research Questions

Research Questions (DVA experience of women with MS study)

- In what ways does DVA manifest in the lives of women with MS?
- What impact does DVA have on the general health and socio-emotional wellbeing of women with MS?
- What are the experiences of women with MS of accessing support in relation to DVA through healthcare practitioners and other services?
- How would women with MS like to be supported by healthcare practitioners and wider DVA services?

Research Questions (Healthcare professional study)

- How do HCPs view their role in responding to DVA in people living with MS?
- In what ways do HCPs think that DVA might specifically affect people living with MS?
- What do HCPs see as the main barriers and facilitators to responding to this issue for people with MS?

Methods

DVA Experience of Women with MS Study

Stage One: Semi-structured interviews

- In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 women with MS who have experienced/are experiencing DVA

Stage Two: Co-production workshops

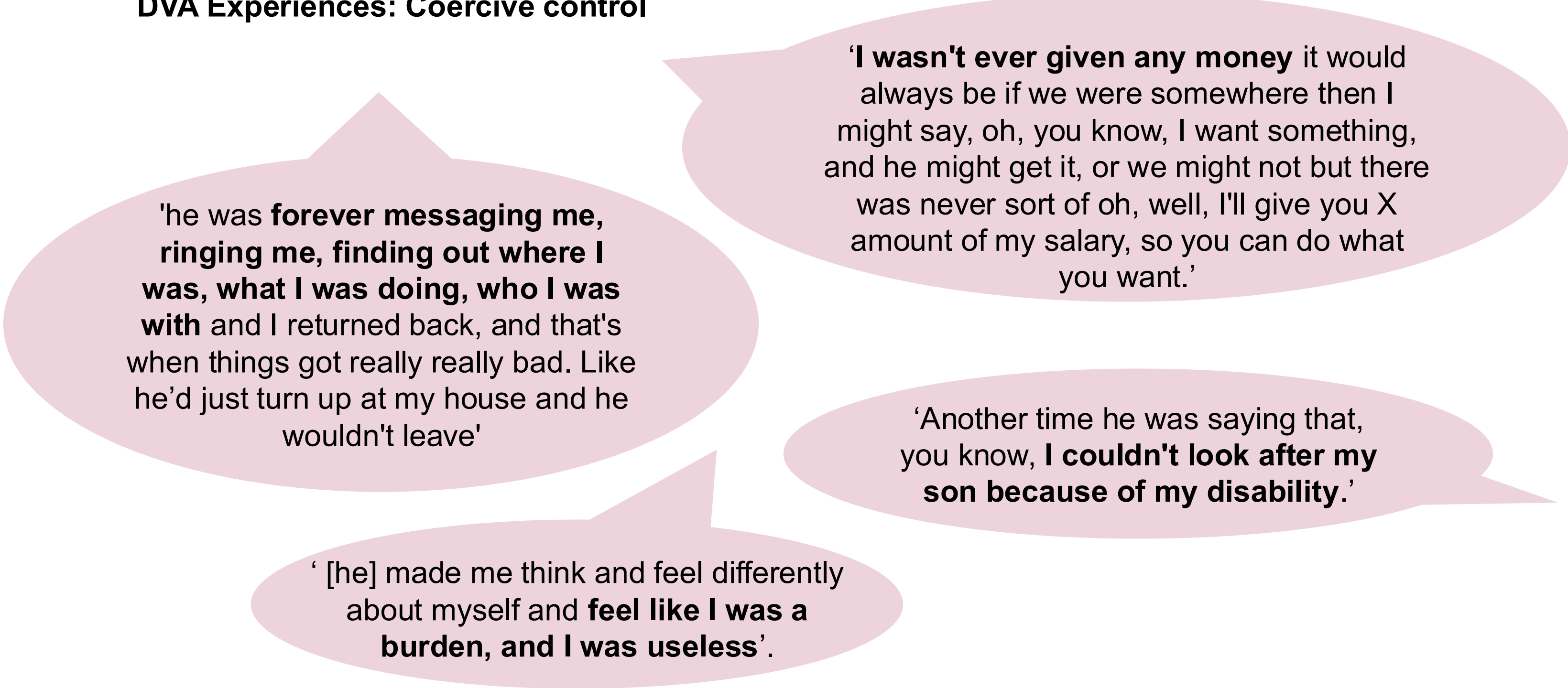
- The second stage of the research utilised an online asynchronous co-production workshop with women with MS who have experienced/are experiencing DVA

Healthcare Professionals Study

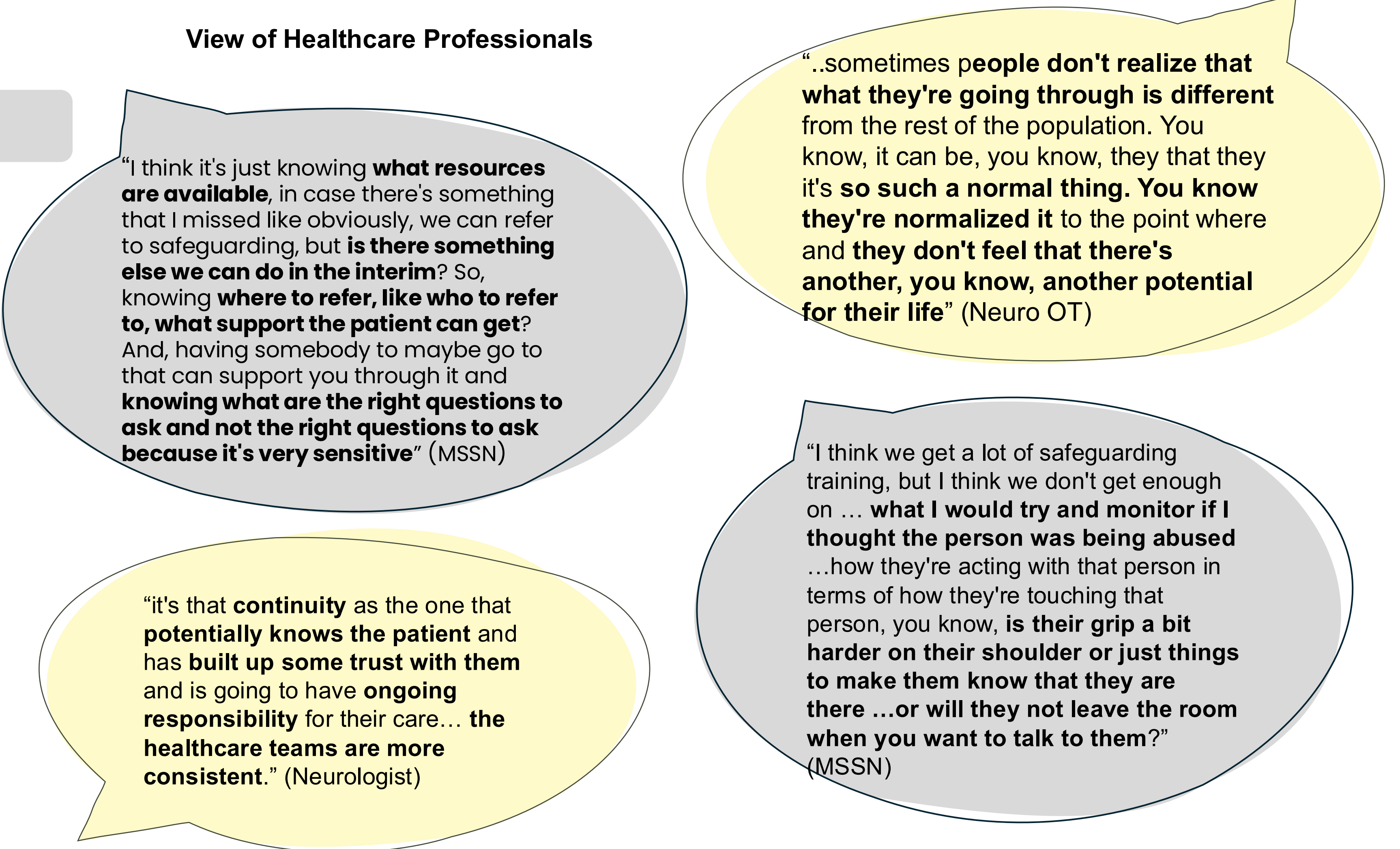
- In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 HCPs from different professional groups about their views, perceptions and possible experiences of responding to DVA in people living with MS.

Results

DVA Experiences: Coercive control



View of Healthcare Professionals



Discussion and Conclusion

DVA Experiences

- Participants had diverse experiences of DVA but all experienced a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour from their perpetrators
- Coercive controlling behaviour can manifest in a number of ways, but in this study included:
 - Degradation and emotional abuse
 - This included the invalidation of experiences of MS and vicious insults targeting symptoms of MS to degrade
 - Using children to coerce and exert control
 - Isolation
 - Disguising abuse as 'care'

Views of HCPs

- HCPs felt that they were in a prime position to identify and respond to DVA in people living with MS, but expressed the view that some professional groups were better suited to addressing this issue
- HCPs held the view that it was right to ask their MS patients about safety and/or abuse, but differed in their opinions about whether they should ask routinely
- HCPs reported that they needed knowledge about identifying the signs of DVA and the skills to ask sensitively and safely. They felt that interactive, scenario-based learning would help them to discuss and learn from complex cases.
- HCPs valued a multiprofessional approach to DVA response, relying on fellow professionals for both formal and informal support and validation when they suspected DVA.

References

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Supported by The Horne Family Charitable Trust

