

Sign LOUD: Perspectives on domestic abuse and communication issues and the impact on deaf families

Understanding perspectives of deaf mothers and practitioners on domestic abuse and communication issues and the impact on deaf families.

Key details

Lead institution	Heriot-Watt University
Principal researcher(s)	Prof Jemina Napier j.napier@hw.ac.uk
Police region	Scotland
Collaboration and partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Claire Houghton, University of Edinburgh • Lucy Clark • Tasnim Ahmed • Deaf Links (Dundee) • Angus Women's Aid • Perthshire Women's Aid • Tayside Women's Aid • SignHealth
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	January 2025

Research context

Domestic abuse is primarily perpetrated against women by men and has far-reaching impacts on individuals and families, with women and children often experiencing trauma. Language barriers

compound the challenges faced by both women and children experiencing domestic abuse and children are often involved in assisting with communication in deaf families.

Deaf women are 2–3 times more likely to experience domestic abuse. This participatory project will explore the perspectives of deaf mothers and practitioners (for example, police, domestic abuse services, etc.) on domestic abuse and communication issues and the impact on deaf women and children. Interviews with deaf mothers, workshops with support service practitioners, a range of stakeholders and policy experts will create recommendations to improve the response to the whole family.

Enhanced understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on children and mothers in deaf families will enable project partners to identify steps to reduce the risks for deaf families and improve service provision, explore future research centring children and consider implications for all women and children facing domestic abuse without access to the majority language of the country.

Research methodology

The methodology includes:

- interviews with eight deaf women to determine if their children ever brokered for them in reporting domestic abuse and how they felt about it
- focus group with signing practitioners who work with deaf survivors to discuss observations of whether children support with communication, how and why
- workshop with key stakeholder organisations and policymakers to discuss findings and implications for policy
- co-design workshop to develop policy recommendations

Summary of findings

This project is complete.

Napier J and others. (2025). [Sign LOUD: Perspectives of deaf mothers and signing practitioners on domestic abuse, communication issues and the impact on Deaf families](#). Research report, Heriot-Watt University and University of Edinburgh.

Research participation

- deaf British Sign Language (BSL) using mothers who have experienced domestic abuse
- deaf and hearing signing practitioners who have worked with deaf survivors
- stakeholder representatives

Additional resources

[Project website](#)