

Compassionate communities are a key to preventing domestic abuse

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New research by the Wales Violence Prevention Unit and the University of Exeter indicates people are more likely to take action against domestic abuse and its warning signs if they feel connected to their community.

The research, funded by Public Health Wales, explored the experiences and behaviors of bystanders to domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic, to help inform policy and bystander intervention training programs in light of the changes to daily lives brought about by COVID-19 restrictions.

The research surveyed over 180 adults who live or work in Wales. Almost 90% of participants indicated that they felt closer to their communities during the pandemic, and 45% indicated that they felt changes in their routine—such as working from home—as a result of the pandemic had allowed them to become aware of domestic abuse or its [warning signs](#). Of the respondents, the majority who said that they wanted to help members of their community also indicated that they were able to step in and take action against abuse or its warning signs as they not only recognized situations as problematic but because they also knew what to do to help.

The research also highlights the importance of education on what domestic [violence](#) and its warning signs look like, and training for people to feel confident to take action when they witness it. Of the survey respondents, all who indicated they had taken action against the abuse they witnessed also indicated that they felt they possessed the correct skills to know what to say or do.

Jon Drake, Director of the Wales Violence Prevention Unit, said, "The last 18 months have been an incredibly difficult time for many of us, and for some people, where home is not a safe place, it has been frightening and even sometimes dangerous.

"This research shows that despite the pressures and unwanted change that has been put upon all of us during COVID-19, people in Wales have been looking out for one another. Home must be a safe place for everyone, and until we make that happen there is some reassurance in

knowing neighbors, friends and colleagues are able to step up for those experiencing abuse, and help them access support.

"Preventing domestic abuse is everybody's business, and it is important that we use this research to better understand the challenges and motivations of bystanders, so we can support everyone in recognizing and safely responding to domestic abuse and its warning signs."

Dr. Rachel Fenton from the University of Exeter said, "This is a really important piece of research because it examines for the first time what bystanders to domestic abuse may see and what they choose do about it and it has been a privilege to work with the Wales Violence Prevention Unit. The research shows that [bystanders](#) will take action if they understand what they are witnessing is domestic abuse and know what to do to help. Thus it is really crucial that we ensure that everyone can recognize the signs of domestic abuse and that bystander training is offered to the public at scale to give them confidence and tools to be able to take safe and effective action."

Provided by University of Exeter

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