

Presentation title:

Empowerment or responsabilisation? Victim-survivor experiences of domestic violence disclosure schemes

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Since the introduction of Clare's Law (a domestic violence disclosure scheme, DVDS) in England and Wales in 2014 such schemes have travelled the globe and now have a presence in Canada, New Zealand, and are being hotly debated in Australia. Such schemes have proliferated on the basis of very little evidence as to their efficacy and certainly none that include victim-survivor voices. Nonetheless claims are made on their behalf as to their capacity to empower women in making decisions about their lives alongside their preventive potential. This paper, based on data from a British Academy funded study concerned to talk with women who had used a DVDS, examines their experiences through the lenses of empowerment and prevention. In respect of empowerment its findings suggest that their experiences of this was highly dependent on how the scheme had been implemented particularly whether the woman had been provided with support in her decision-making. In respect of prevention its findings suggest that the women were responsabilised for this. This process of responsabilisation had three elements to it: expectations that they would leave their violent partner; expectations that they would avoid violent partners in the future; and feeling responsible for any new partner their ex became involved with. Taken together these findings point to important unintended consequences of developing policies in the absence of taking account of both the consequences of the policies themselves and the costs that they might entail and a failure to build into their development an understanding of women's real lives and they live with the violence(s) within them.