

Room for Improvement

A Review of Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts in South Wales



Soroptimists in South Wales conducted an observational study of Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts (SDACs) in Cardiff, Llanelli, Newport, and Swansea during June and July 2024. Our goal was to assess the effectiveness of current domestic abuse legislation and suggest improvements to better support victims.

This review follows recent evaluations of similar courts in England and highlights areas for improvement, aligned with findings from the UN Special Rapporteur (February 2024), who urged the UK to further act on its legal commitment to gender equality.

Key findings from the South Wales review include:

1. **Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs):** Inconsistent presence and roles in court, ranging from no presence in Llanelli to active participation in Swansea. Expanded and standardized IDVA involvement could strengthen support for victims.
2. **Coercive and Controlling Behaviour:** The rise of social media has led to increased harassment, underscoring the need for careful application of the Online Safety Bill.
3. **Victim Personal Statement (VPS):** The VPS was absent in 81% of cases, and when used, it was often read by the Crown Prosecution Service, rather than the victim or IDVA.
4. **Technology in Court:** Frequent technical issues hindered the use of special measures (such as Remote Evidence Suites) that allow victims to participate safely.
5. **Bail Conditions and Sentencing:** Courts could improve consistency and thoroughness regarding bail conditions, victim treatment, and consideration of children's needs.

Additionally, accessibility challenges for disabled attendees, such as ineffective hearing loops and limited mobility options, were noted, as well as a lack of clarity on separate entrances for victims and defendants.

We extend our thanks to the court officials and Legal Team Managers whose steerage and willingness to answer questions in general or on specific cases was so helpful.

With 289 observational reports, we hope that these findings contribute to a more effective justice process for victims of domestic abuse in South Wales.