

WALKING ON EGGSHELLS

ENDING MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



OLDHAM SAFEGUARDING
ADULTS BOARD



OLDHAM SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP



BRITISH
SCIENCE
ASSOCIATION



wellcome



the
ideas
fund

Conference Report – Made By Mortals

Introduction

Made By Mortals exists to *bring lived experience to life*. We use immersive audio stories, film, music, theatre and interactive workshops to create spaces where people can learn *with* rather than simply *about* those who have experienced marginalisation.

Our work is grounded in participatory arts and principles of coproduction: every story we create is powered by the expertise of lived-experience groups, health and social care professionals, researchers, voluntary organisations, musicians and facilitators – each helping to shape resources that drive social change.

Held on White Ribbon Day, our conference, *‘Walking on Eggshells: Ending Male Violence Against Women’*, invited delegates to experience this entire methodology first-hand. Throughout the day, senior practitioners from across Greater Manchester, working in domestic abuse, safeguarding, social care, education, health and the voluntary sector, immersed themselves in stories co-created with survivors.



We chose White Ribbon Day deliberately. It is a day that calls men and boys to take action against violence towards women and girls. A call grounded in stark reality:

- One in four women will be a victim of sexual assault or attempted assault in their lifetime.
- Three in five women have experienced sexual harassment, bullying or verbal abuse in the workplace.
- 39% of secondary school teachers have witnessed at least one incident of misogynistic behaviour from pupils in the previous week.

Our conference, developed in partnership with Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board and Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership, sought not only to share these realities but to explore creative, collaborative ways of responding to them.

Aims and Mission

We set out to create a learning environment that honoured the women whose stories shape our resources and recognised the depth of expertise already held by everyone in the room.

Delegates brought with them decades of professional knowledge, personal experience, and a shared commitment to improving the lives of women and girls. Our mission for the day was clear: to pool this collective expertise and explore practical, compassionate ways to prevent and respond to male violence against women.

We wanted to challenge, provoke thought and spark new ideas, while also providing a supportive space to reflect, feel, and connect.

Creating a Fictional Practitioner

To root the day in a shared perspective, delegates began by co-creating a fictional practitioner, who the group named Jessica. We explained that Jessica was new to her role in the sector and was seeking advice from everyone in the room as she navigated the complexities of her case load. She would become their guide through the case studies we would be exploring - a lens through which to examine decisions, dilemmas and emotional responses, with enough creative distance to support open, honest discussion.



Character creation is a central tool in participatory arts. It gives everyone a stake in the story while providing safety: the character is not a real service user, colleague or victim, it is a composite of experiences, concerns and professional realities contributed by the group. This 'one step removed' approach reduces pressure, invites imagination and encourages delegates to project their own insights without disclosing personal details.

Who Jessica became (in brief):

- A 26 year-old support worker, new to her post in Oldham, passionate about women's rights and committed to doing a good job.
- Warm, colourful, slightly chaotic, hard-working and a little unsure of herself, experiencing imposter syndrome but deeply motivated.
- Recently heartbroken, living with her mum, juggling work, wellbeing and a complicated shared-care arrangement for a bulldog called Elvis.
- Driven by lived experience, either directly or through her mother and determined to 'give something back', even while she quietly worries about how her own past might affect her work.

Delegates also explored why Jessica joined the sector and what drives her. Ideas included: a desire to understand her mother's history, personal experiences of trauma, the wish to

support survivors, and a strong sense of justice combined with perfectionism and pressure to prove herself.

Throughout the day, delegates stepped back into Jessica's shoes to consider what she needed to know, feel or do in three different case study scenarios - an approach that encouraged reflection on both professional practice and personal wellbeing.

Eggshells: Coercive Control and Impact on Older Women

The day's first case study centred on [Eggshells](#), our short co-produced film exploring coercive control and domestic abuse in older adults. The film introduces delegates to the story of Elizabeth and her husband David, an older couple whose relationship is shaped by decades of coercive control.

Watching the film together created a shared emotional starting point: many delegates recognised the subtlety and invisibility of the abuse portrayed, particularly in long-term relationships where harmful patterns have become normalised. Through the lens of our fictional practitioner, Jessica, the group began to explore how difficult it can be for older victims to identify their experiences as abuse, let alone trust a practitioner enough to disclose them.

Delegates reflected how Jessica would need to move slowly, listening with care and avoiding any rush to label Elizabeth as a victim. They discussed how older women often carry generational beliefs about marriage, duty and privacy, and how these beliefs can make them reluctant to seek help. For Jessica, this means building trust over time and ensuring her support does not feel overwhelming or intrusive.



Some of the most important issues raised included:

- **Safety:** Jessica would need to develop discreet ways to check on Elizabeth, as David closely monitors her movements, conversations and access to support.
- **Managing retraction:** Delegates highlighted that victims in long-term coercive relationships may withdraw statements due to fear or pressure. Rather than interpreting this as a setback, Jessica should ensure there are clear pathways back to support.
- **Generational differences:** The age gap between practitioner and survivor may require extra sensitivity, and Jessica could benefit from seeking guidance from colleagues with experience of working with older adults.
- **Financial and social dependency:** Delegates noted that long-term financial ties, pensions and shared assets can make leaving - or even imagining life outside the marriage - feel impossible.
- **Understanding the legal context:** Knowledge of coercive control legislation would equip Jessica to document patterns of behaviour and advocate effectively on Elizabeth's behalf.

After exploring these issues, delegates turned to the broader safeguarding considerations specific to older women. They recognised that practices designed for younger victims, such as encouraging swift separation, may not be appropriate or safe in later-life cases. Instead, a person-centred approach is crucial, ensuring Elizabeth's choices are respected while still addressing risks.

In summary, the group's reflections highlighted the unique challenges of supporting older women experiencing coercive control and painted a picture of work that is slow, relational and grounded in respect for Elizabeth's lived reality. Delegates concluded that supporting older victims of coercive control requires patience, curiosity and a steady presence rather than quick solutions.

For Jessica, the priority is not to 'fix' the situation but to create trust, build options and move at the victim's pace, combining professional diligence with compassionate understanding to ensure Elizabeth always has a safe and open pathway to help, whenever she is ready to use it.

Kerri: Impact on Boys Who Witness Domestic Abuse

The second case study shifted from film to immersive audio, bringing delegates inside the daily reality of [Kerri](#), a mother of three whose partner's controlling and violent behaviour is escalating.

Experiencing her story through headphones created an intimate atmosphere, allowing delegates to hear the fear, exhaustion and disorientation in her voice. This perspective helped frame the discussion around Jessica's role in supporting Kerri and, crucially, the impact of the abuse on her children, particularly the eldest boy, Liam.

Delegates reflected on the complexity of working with children who witness domestic abuse. They noted that boys like Liam may internalise harmful models of masculinity or reenact behaviours they have seen, while others may withdraw, shut down or attempt to take responsibility for protecting their mother. The emotional burden carried by young people in these situations is immense, and Jessica would need to recognise the wide range of coping strategies that might present as behavioural difficulties.

Several key themes emerged:

- **Manipulation by perpetrators:** Delegates discussed how abusive partners often use children as part of their control, encouraging them to undermine or blame the non-abusive parent.
- **Emotional literacy:** Many boys lack the language to explain how they feel. Jessica may need to help create opportunities for them to properly process and explain their emotions.
- **School as a stabilising influence:** Teachers and pastoral staff often notice changes first, making schools vital partners in monitoring safety and offering early support.
- **Therapeutic access:** Delegates highlighted the need for timely mental health and trauma-informed interventions, noting that inconsistent provision across boroughs leads to unequal outcomes for children.
- **Positive male role models:** A strong consensus emerged around the importance of boys encountering safe, emotionally literate men who can model healthier forms of masculinity.

The group also explored potential early interventions that Jessica could draw on. They mentioned youth-led PHSE initiatives, boys' discussion groups, and programmes that teach respectful relationships in mixed-gender settings. Delegates were keen to emphasise that these interventions should not demonise boys but instead provide them with tools to understand, reflect and make sense of what they have seen.



However, delegates acknowledged the challenges Jessica may face in implementing support. Limited youth spaces, stretched services, fears of triggering distress in conversations, and a general lack of long-term funding all surfaced as barriers. Despite this, the group agreed that avoiding difficult discussions is far more dangerous than having them; what matters most is ensuring they are handled with care and followed by consistent support.

In summary, Kerri's story illuminated the profound and lasting effect domestic abuse can have on children, especially boys who witness violence directed at their mothers. Delegates' reflections reinforced the need for early, collaborative and child-centred intervention, and the importance of giving young people safe language, safe adults and safe spaces to understand their experiences.

Sadiqa: So Called Honour-Based Abuse and Violence

The final case study introduced delegates to [Sadiqa](#), a woman who has fled so called honour-based abuse and violence involving her husband and extended family. The audio resource, which was co-created with local South Asian women, gave a powerful and nuanced insight into the emotional, cultural and practical barriers she faces.

Listening to Sadiqa's story encouraged delegates to reflect deeply on the responsibilities and challenges Jessica would encounter in her role, especially given her lack of experience with so called honour-based abuse.

The discussion highlighted how cultural expectations shape both risk and resilience. Delegates emphasised that women in Sadiqa's situation may be under intense pressure to preserve family honour and may even be blamed for the abuse they experience. Jessica would need to understand that involving statutory services without Sadiqa's consent could increase danger dramatically, as so called honour-based abuse often involves multiple perpetrators from across the community acting together. It would also be important for Jessica to remember that so called honour-based abuse and violence effects many different communities, not just South Asian.

Delegates explored several key considerations:

- **Cultural context:** Jessica must take time to understand the cultural dynamics influencing Sadiqa’s decisions, experiences and fears.
- **Multiple perpetrators:** So called honour-based abuse rarely involves one abusive individual; whole networks of relatives may be implicated, significantly increasing risk.
- **Language and communication:** Interpreters must be chosen carefully to avoid community links that could compromise safety.
- **Safety planning:** Jessica must work at Sadiqa’s pace, co-creating plans that reflect what feels safe to her rather than imposing standardised approaches.
- **Children’s welfare:** Delegates acknowledged the tension practitioners face when balancing cultural sensitivity with mandatory safeguarding responsibilities.
- **Practitioner safety:** Supporting survivors in these circumstances can also pose risks to professionals, and Jessica would need supervision, guidance and clear protocols.

The conversation also addressed systemic challenges, particularly the inconsistencies between local authorities, the limited specialist services available, and the fear many survivors feel when navigating unfamiliar systems. Delegates encouraged Jessica to ask questions, seek specialist support and avoid working in isolation. They highlighted that genuine cultural humility, combined with practical knowledge of risk, is essential when supporting survivors of so called honour-based abuse.

In summary, Sadiqa’s case demonstrated the heightened complexity and risk involved when abuse is embedded within a wider family or cultural system. Delegates agreed that Jessica’s role would require patience, curiosity and specialist guidance, and that effective intervention depends on centring the survivor’s voice while coordinating a strong, multi-agency response.

Practitioner Wellbeing

In the final immersive exercise, we stepped away from case studies to reflect on Jessica’s wellbeing. Delegates were told that Jessica, like many real practitioners, feels overwhelmed by the emotional weight of her work, frustrated by systemic barriers and unsure if she’s making a difference.

Delegates shared what she (and by extension, they) needed to hear:



- **It isn’t all your responsibility.** Multi-agency work is the only path to safety and change.
- **Peer supervision matters.** Sharing successes, failures and concerns keeps workers resilient.
- **You are not alone.** Depend on, and share with, your team.
- **Positive workplace culture is vital.** It must be safe to say ‘I’m struggling’.

- **Recognise vicarious trauma.** Managers need training to spot and support it.
- **Remember your impact.** Even small changes matter.
- **Work-life balance is essential.** Practitioners need leaders who model healthy boundaries.
- **Mindfulness and rituals help.** Figure out what works for you. How can you effectively manage your emotions? 'I like to put on my armour in the car', one delegate said.
- **Training and support are ongoing needs,** not one-off fixes.

This session prompted heartfelt discussions about the emotional load of working in domestic abuse services and the importance of caring for those who care for others.

Music as a Tool For Learning

Alongside the storytelling, film and discussion, music played a key role throughout the day. At Made By Mortals, we create music *with* people with lived experience, shaping soundtracks that reflect their emotions, identities and journeys.



During the conference, a composer, cellist and clarinettist worked alongside delegates to co-create a piece of music representing Jessica. No musical experience was required, participants contributed feelings, themes and thoughts while the musicians translated them into sound.

The resulting composition included:

- **Melodies** reflecting Jessica's childhood and moments of innocence.
- **Lower, darker tones** capturing her doubts and emotional burdens.
- **Muffled textures** symbolising prenatal trauma.
- **Clarinet lines** giving voice to Jessica's, often quirky, personality.
- **Rhythmic piano patterns** representing her love of running.
- **Long, breathy cello notes** echoing exhaustion after a hard run or stressful workday.
- **Samples** of music taking from the three case studies.
- **Melodies** imitated by all 3 musicians, created using the natural rhythm and intonation of a delegate in the room saying 'Jessica, it'll be ok'.

The piece, 'Jessica', premiered at the end of the conference, leaving many listeners moved. This musical process demonstrated how creativity can deepen empathy, open emotional insight, and turn lived experience into something tangible and connective.

Key Learnings and Takeaways



As the musicians played Jessica's theme one final time, we invited delegates to reflect on the stories, discussions and emotions of the day. Their reflections included:

- A sense of **gratitude** for being among inspirational practitioners working toward the same goal.
- Recognition of the **scale of systemic change** needed, and a renewed feeling of collective responsibility.
- A reminder to be mindful of **older victims/survivors**, who are often overlooked.
- Appreciation of **cross-organisation learning** – the reassurance of knowing others face similar challenges.
- A renewed understanding of the **importance of lived experience**, and how to embed it meaningfully rather than tokenistically.
- Enthusiasm for **character-building** as a training tool, providing permission to ask difficult questions and explore complex situations safely.
- Recognition that **music is a form of medicine**, evoking emotion and reflection in a unique way.
- A powerful closing reminder: *"It takes a village to raise a child, but it will take a global response to eradicate domestic violence."*

Thanks and Let's Work Together Again

Thank you to everyone who contributed their time, insight and emotional energy to 'Walking on Eggshells: Ending Male Violence Against Women'. The day demonstrated the power of creativity, empathy and lived experience in deepening understanding of domestic abuse and strengthening professional practice.

If your organisation is looking for training that goes beyond information and creates genuine connection – training that invites people to feel, empathise and act – we would love to work with you. Whether through immersive audio, film, live music, workshops or bespoke co-production processes, Made By Mortals can help bring lived experience into your learning in a meaningful, impactful and safe way.

To explore how we can support you, please visit: <https://www.madebymortals.org>

With thanks again to [Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board](#), [Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) and [The Ideas Fund](#).