

# Appendix R

## A guide to supporting those affected by domestic abuse

### 1. Introduction

This guide has been produced to develop your understanding of what domestic abuse is, the difficulties and dangers faced by those dealing with abuse, and what steps you can take to offer support in a safer way.

Domestic abuse is alarmingly common. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales in 2018 an estimated 7.9% of women (1.3 million) and 4.2% of men (695,000) experienced domestic abuse in the previous year.

People who perpetrate domestic abuse do not discriminate. It can happen to people who are married; not married; heterosexual; lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender; living together, separated or dating. It occurs within all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status.

Whether or not you are aware of it, it is likely that you know someone who has been affected by domestic abuse. The Methodist Church in the UK conducted a survey in 2002 and found that:

- 17% of respondents had experienced domestic abuse.
- The main perpetrators of the violence were husbands and partners.

Christianity Magazine, in conjunction with Restored (An International Christian Alliance whose aim is to transform relationships and end violence against women by working with churches and Christians worldwide) conducted a survey in September 2013 and discovered that:

- 40% had suffered some form of intimidation in their relationship.
- 16% had suffered some form of physical violence.

The Evangelical Alliance UK in its 'How is the Family Report' 2010 found that:

- 10% of women answering the survey had experienced physical abuse in their relationship.
- 7% of men admitted perpetrating physical abuse.

Christian homes are not immune to domestic abuse. The responsibility to offer help and be a voice for the prevention of domestic violence is fundamental to core Christian values – those of love, justice, equality, respect and care for one another.

## 2. Defining Domestic Abuse

In 2013 The UK Government defined domestic abuse as:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.

*Controlling behaviour* is defined as:

A range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

*Coercive behaviour* is defined as:

An act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

It has been widely understood that coercive control is a core part of domestic abuse and the inclusion of this in the definition highlights the importance of recognising coercive control as a pattern of overlapping and repeated abuse perpetrated within a context of power and control.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), so called Honour-Based Violence and Forced Marriage are classified as Domestic Abuse.

### Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (FGM), sometimes known as 'female circumcision' or 'female genital cutting', is recognised internationally as a gross violation of the human rights of girls and women, often taking place whilst girls are still in their childhood or early teenage years. It is illegal in the UK. It is also illegal to take abroad a British national or permanent resident for FGM, or to help someone trying to do this.

Performing FGM or helping it to take place, which would include taking girls/women to countries where FGM is still legal, carries a penalty of up to 14 years in prison.

### Honour Based Violence

There is no specific offence of "honour based crime". It is an umbrella term to encompass various offences covered by existing legislation. Honour based violence (HBV) can be described as a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. Such violence can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their honour code.

## Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is when one or both of the spouses do not, or cannot, consent to the marriage. There may be physical, psychological, financial, sexual or emotional pressure exerted in order to make the marriage go ahead. Forced marriage is illegal in England and Wales. This includes:

- Taking someone overseas to force them to marry (whether or not the forced marriage takes place).
- Marrying someone who lacks the mental capacity to consent to the marriage (whether they're pressured to or not).

Forcing someone to marry can result in a sentence of up to 7 years in prison.

## Scotland

In Scotland there is no criminal offence of 'domestic abuse' or statutory definition of what constitutes domestic abuse. However, Police Scotland define domestic abuse as:

Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, co-habiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere, including online.

# 3. Understanding domestic abuse

## How does domestic abuse happen?

It is of course difficult to understand what motivates one human being to abuse another and why someone stays in a relationship that causes them, and those around them, particularly children, so much suffering. Many ask why the victim stays. Nikki Dhillon Keane in her book *Domestic Abuse in Church Communities*<sup>1</sup>, highlights that this is the wrong question, and a form of victim blaming. Instead we should be asking why the perpetrator abuses.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse, like their victims, come from all walks of life. It is not always easy to recognise perpetrators of domestic abuse, as they can be charming and friendly in public, yet abusive and violent behind closed doors.

Domestic abuse is about one person in a relationship using a pattern of behaviours to intimidate and control the other person. Perpetrators of domestic abuse frequently avoid taking responsibility for their behaviour, by blaming their violence on someone or something else, denying it took place at all or minimising their behaviour. It is therefore important to remember that responsibility for the abuse lies with the perpetrator of that abuse.

Many people experience abuse within the so-called cycle of abuse in which periods of comparative calm or peace (known as the 'honeymoon stage') will be followed by a build-up toward an abusive episode. Although it may appear as though these periods of apparent calm are non-abusive, they represent part of a manipulative cycle, in which the abuser feels in control of their partner and situation. They may show repentance for pain caused, or even promise to change. Often it is these periods of apparent calm, which give the victim of abuse the hope

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<sup>1</sup> Dhillon Keane, N (2018) *Domestic Abuse in Church Communities*

that change can be achieved, and that the abuse will stop, which keeps them locked in the abusive relationship.

Not all relationships follow the same cycle, and individual experiences vary, some stages – especially the honeymoon or calm periods, may shorten or be left out completely, especially as the abuse intensifies over a period. Each stage of the cycle can last from a few minutes, to a number of months

There are many myths surrounding domestic abuse. For instance it has been said that domestic abuse can be attributed to a lack of control. However, perpetrators of abuse are often careful about when, where and to whom they are abusive. They can use violence and tactics of coercion as a way of exercising control and getting what they want. So, rather than being out of control, it can be a method to gain control.

The use (or misuse) of substances such as alcohol or drugs has been suggested to be a contributing factor. However, many people who drink too much or take drugs do not abuse their partners or family members. Likewise, perpetrators of abuse may be violent without the use of alcohol or other drugs.

Some suggest that domestic abuse is perpetrated by people who have mental health issues. However, most people with mental health problems do not abuse other people. Mental health issues are more likely to be the result of experiencing domestic violence than the cause of it. For instance, women who have experienced domestic violence have higher rates of mental illness: 64% experience post-traumatic stress disorder, 48% have depression, and 18% attempt or commit suicide<sup>2</sup>.

A particularly damaging myth is that perpetrators do it because they were a victim of abuse in the past. Some perpetrators of abuse have witnessed or experienced abuse in the past and have normalised that behaviour. However, most victims and survivors of abuse do not go on to abuse anyone. Survivors of childhood abuse are more likely to become victims than perpetrators of abuse in adulthood.<sup>3</sup>

It can be extremely difficult to leave an abusive partner or family member, and some victims will never leave. There are many practical and psychological barriers to ending a relationship with an abusive partner or family member. The risk of death is also at its highest at the point of separation or just after leaving an abusive partner.

## Barriers to leaving an abusive relationship

The reasons why someone experiencing abuse may believe that it is not possible for them to move away from the situation in which they are being abused are complex. Some of these are shown below:

- Fear of death, theirs or their children's.
- Lack of financial resources – no access to money; not able to support themselves and their children independently.
- Safety – the victim may be fearful of what the abuser will do to them and the children if they left or attempted to leave.

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<sup>2</sup> From a Department of Health meta-analysis emerging from the VVAPP programme: Itzin, C. (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Dhillon Keane, N (2018) *Domestic Abuse in Church Communities*

- Remembering good times – particularly those at the start of the relationship. There could for instance be long periods between incidents of abuse when the abuser is charming and caring.
- Hope or belief that the abuser will change or that things will get better.
- A belief that staying is better for the children.
- Shame – the embarrassment of people finding out.
- Having nowhere to go.
- Isolation – if emotionally and financially dependent on their partner, they may be very isolated.
- Religious or cultural beliefs – admitting that there is a problem may bring shame on their family or pressure not to leave the marriage.
- Leaving everything behind – having to leave friends, family, neighbours, job, school, clothes, possessions, pets etc.
- Lack of self-confidence / self-esteem – the victim’s self-esteem has been steadily worn down and they no longer believe that they can manage on their own, or that they have any options.
- Self-reliance. A belief that they can cope and don’t need or want help.
- Pressure – from family and friends to stay and ‘make it work’.
- Denial – convincing themselves that “it’s not that bad”.
- Expectation – having grown up in an abusive household, the belief that this is what relationships look like.
- Guilt – the belief that they deserve the abuse and it is their fault
- A sense of duty.
- Loyalty – devotion to the abuser regardless of their actions.
- Fear of being alone – being with someone, despite their faults, is better than the fear of being lonely.
- Attachment issues/Co dependency.
- Lack of support – doesn’t know who to turn to or where to go, particularly if English is not their first language.
- Rescuing – the belief that they can change the abuser.
- Intimidation – the abuser threatens to take the children or pets away.
- Immigration – the fear of being deported.
- Love – despite the abuse, they still feel that they love the abuser.
- The victim does not realise its abuse.
- Exhaustion. It is easy to underestimate the amount of energy needed for a victim to keep themselves, and possibly their children, alive and relatively safe.

## 4. The different kinds of domestic abuse

Below is a list of the main kinds of domestic abuse. However, in most cases more than one form exists.

### Psychological abuse

This can include threats, gas lighting (making someone doubt their own reality) and mental torture. It can be used to groom victims for other types of abuse, although by itself it can cause devastating and lasting damage to a victim. It is a way of wearing down the victim to make them easier to control and therefore have power over them.

## Isolation

This is a very powerful form of psychological abuse as it is of course much harder to exert power and control over someone that is surrounded by a support network of family and/or friends. Perpetrators might insist on moving to an area far away from their family and friends, sow seeds of doubt about close supportive relationships in a way that damages those relationships or become so aggressive when the victim tries to see family or friends that it is simply easier to stop seeing them. A perpetrator can also prevent someone from working and can monitor and/or block telephone calls.

## Physical

This can include any of the following:

- Hitting, biting, slapping and beating.
- Shaking, pinching and pushing.
- Kicking, burning and hair pulling.
- Squeezing, suffocating, poisoning and using inappropriate restraint.
- Imprisoning, assault with implements and destroying possessions.

Perpetrators of physical abuse often carefully cause injuries only where they will not be visible to others. They do not abuse because of losing control of their temper but use physical abuse to gain and then maintain control over their victim.

## Sexual

There are a range of abusive acts that are included within this definition

- Any behavior which uses sex or sexual activity in order to gain power and control over another person.
- Rape, sexual assault or sexual acts that the person has not consented to, could not consent to or was pressurised into consenting to.
- punishment for not having sex.
- Forcing the victim/survivor to agree to have sex in order to avoid other abusive behaviour.
- sexual name calling or shaming.
- Being forced to watch pornographic material or sexual acts.
- Imposition of dress codes upon a partner, enforced or coerced nakedness or inappropriate photography of a person in sexually explicit ways.
- Involvement in the sex trade or pornography.
- Knowingly passing on sexually transmitted infections.

## Emotional abuse

- Mocking, coercing, threatening or controlling behavior.
- Bullying, intimidation, harassment or humiliation.
- Shouting, swearing, frightening or blaming behavior.
- Ridiculing, being obsessively and irrationally jealous.
- The lack of privacy or choice, denial of dignity, deprivation of social contact or deliberate isolation.
- A lack of love or affection, or ignoring the person leading to feelings of worthlessness.
- Constantly checking where someone is.

- Telling them they are too fat/thin, stupid/useless.
- Telling them they are a bad mother/father, wife/husband/partner.

## Economic/Financial abuse

- Prevent or discourage the victim from working.
- Force the victim to earn money so that they do not have to work.
- Keeping the victim in poverty, controlling all of the money, refusing to allow the victim access to their own money.
- Expect the victim to account for every penny they spend.
- Theft, fraud or embezzlement of monies, benefits or goods.
- Applying pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance.
- Force the victim to take out a loan or withhold money so that they cannot buy essentials like food for the children.

Economic abuse disproportionately affects women.<sup>4</sup>

## Threats

- Making angry gestures.
- Using physical size to intimidate.
- Shouting you down.
- Destroying your possessions.
- Breaking things.
- Punching walls.
- Wielding a knife or a gun.
- Threatening to kill or harm you, the children and/or pets.

## Neglect

Adults can be the victim of neglect as one adult might rely on another individual for example if they are elderly or frail, have a learning disability, a physical disability or an illness. They might also have a mental health issue or English might not be their first language.

Neglect is when a person's wellbeing is impaired, and their care needs are not met. It might include:

- Failing to provide access to appropriate health, social care or education services.
- Ignoring medical or physical care needs, including not giving someone proper food, or assistance with eating or drinking.
- Failing to provide a warm, safe and comfortable environment.
- Deliberately withholding aids, such as walking sticks or hearing aids.
- Denying social, religious or cultural contacts.
- Leaving someone alone or unsupervised.

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<sup>4</sup> Nicola Sharp-Jeffs, 'Money matters: research into the extent and nature of financial abuse within intimate relationships in the UK' <https://www.refuge.org.uk/files/Money-Matters.pdf> cited in Dhillon Keane, N (2018) *Domestic Abuse in Church Communities*

## Spiritual abuse

Spiritual abuse is the inappropriate use of religious belief or practices, or the coercion and control of one individual by another in a spiritual context. In a domestic abuse context, it might include:

- Forcing religious ideas or practices onto people, particularly those who may be vulnerable to such practices.
- The misuse of scripture to control behaviour and pressure to conform.
- The requirement of obedience to the abuser, or the suggestion that the abuser has a “divine” position.
- The denial of the right to practice their faith.
- Intrusive healing and deliverance ministries, which may result in emotional, physical or sexual harm.

## Stalking, harassment and digital abuse

This is a more common type of abuse once a relationship has ended. With the availability of social media abuse by digital means has become an increasing problem. Stalking and harassment can be a sign that a perpetrator could be extremely dangerous, even if they have not so far been physically violent.

# 5. Domestic abuse in different groups

Anyone can be a victim or a perpetrator of domestic abuse. For any victim of domestic abuse, whatever their age, gender, sexuality or culture, the effects of the abuse are likely to be deeply significant. It will also impact friends, family, colleagues and neighbours – in fact whole communities can be affected by abuse that takes place behind closed doors. Below, in alphabetical order, are some groups that are affected. It is not an exhaustive list.

## Children

Statistics from the NSPCC show that 1 in 5 children in the UK have been exposed to domestic abuse. Children are often called the ‘hidden victims’ of domestic abuse – their voices are not heard, and they have no choice whether or not to stay in the abusive environment. Living in a home where domestic abuse is taking place can be hugely distressing and confusing for children.

It can have a serious effect on their behaviour and overall wellbeing, both in the short and long term and they are likely to experience a reduced quality in parenting as a result of the abuse<sup>5</sup>

Children may witness domestic abuse directly, but they can also witness it indirectly by hearing the abuse from another room, seeing a parent's injuries or distress afterwards, finding disarray like broken furniture or being hurt from being nearby or trying to stop the abuse.

Witnessing parental conflict may increase the likelihood of a child developing risk-taking behaviour, like smoking, alcohol and drug use and early sexual activity<sup>6</sup>. Domestic abuse can cause confusing relationships with parents. Children may:

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<sup>5</sup> Royal College of General Practitioners and NSPCC, 2014; Holt, Buckley and Whelan, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Early Intervention Foundation, 2018.



- Not be able to develop a strong bond with their parents/carers (poor attachment).
- Worry their parents will divorce.
- Hope an abused parent will leave for safety reasons.
- Be afraid of their parents.

The Psychological effects of witnessing domestic abuse include:

- Aggression and challenging behavior.
- Depression.
- Anxiety – including worrying about a parent’s safety.
- Changes in mood.
- Difficulty interacting with others.
- Withdrawal.
- Fearfulness, including fear of conflict.
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings.<sup>7</sup>
- Low self-esteem.
- Nightmares and flashbacks.

Physical effects can include:

- A risk of injury when they try to intervene or stop the abuse.
- Self-harming.
- Higher rates of illness and fatigue.
- Reduced physical growth.
- Impact on nervous and hormonal systems (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018).
- Bedwetting.
- Eating disorders.

Emotional effects can include:

- Guilt that they didn’t try to intervene or stop the abuse.
- Feeling responsible for everything happening in the family.
- Attempts to be perfect and anxious to please.
- Fear of the abuser and other people who are similar to the abuser.
- Distressed and/or frightened by seeing arguments or violence.
- Afraid of their own emotions, such as anger.
- Difficulty in creating positive relationships.
- Feelings of powerlessness, insecurities, guilt, fear and loneliness.

Exposure to domestic abuse in childhood undermines a child’s basic need for safety and security and can have a negative impact on their development, educational outcomes and mental health. It is contained within the definition of emotional abuse (Working Together 2018).

Therefore, if anyone becomes aware that a child is living in a household where domestic abuse is taking place, safeguarding procedures must be followed by referring to Children’s Services/Social Work Scotland. This is because of the emotional impact that witnessing domestic abuse has on children, and the increased risk of physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. Children in violent households are significantly more likely to be exposed to other forms of child abuse.

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<sup>7</sup> Diez, et al 2018; *Early Intervention Foundation*, 2018.

## Child to parent/carer

Child to parent/carer abuse is an aspect of domestic abuse where the child in the relationship seeks to control and coerce the parent, grandparent, foster parent or carer. There can be a number of reasons why a child is violent and/or abusive towards their parent or carer. It can include if they have seen a parent/carer be on the receiving end of abuse and they may believe it is normal behaviour to treat them in that manner.

Child to parent/carer abuse is largely under-reported and parents are often unable to identify or define what they are experiencing as abuse. Instead, they may talk about 'struggling with their child', 'having relationship difficulties with their child' or 'living in fear of their child'. They may not realise that there is specific help available for them, or they may feel ashamed and embarrassed that they cannot control their child, and that they are afraid of them. Additional barriers in seeking help may arise if the parents or carers responsible for the child cannot reach a consensus on the best course of action.

## LGBTQ+

Domestic abuse can happen in lesbian and gay relationships, and between people who are transgender or have non-binary gender identities. Stonewall's research shows that 1 in 4 lesbian and bi women have experienced domestic abuse in a relationship. Two thirds of those say the perpetrator was a woman, a third a man. Almost half (49%) of all gay and bi men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16.

There is limited research on how many trans people experience domestic abuse in the UK, and the best studies have small group samples. However, these figures suggest it is a significant issue. A report by the Scottish Transgender Alliance indicates that 80% of trans people had experienced emotional, sexual, or physical abuse from a partner or ex-partner<sup>8</sup>

LGBTQ+ people may experience unique forms of coercive control targeted at their sexual orientation or gender identity. For victims who are not 'out' the perpetrator may threaten to expose the victims sexual or gender identity to friends, family, the police, church or employer. Research by Stonewall found that more than one in ten LGBTQ+ people (13%) who had experienced domestic abuse in the past year reported that their partner had threatened to 'out' them. The concept of 'outing' can also apply to HIV status.

Other forms of abuse that are unique to transgender people are their partner deliberately using the wrong pro noun, forcing someone to perform a gender that they do not want to present as, or preventing them from medically transitioning, for instance by hiding hormones or creating barriers such as controlling finances to accessing surgery<sup>9</sup>

The discrimination often faced by LGBTQ+ people in their everyday lives can create huge barriers to accessing domestic abuse support<sup>10</sup> The Government's national survey of LGBTQ+ people found that 40% of respondents had experienced a homophobic, bi phobic or transphobic incident in the previous 12 months, committed by someone they did not live with<sup>11</sup>.

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8 [Stonewall.org.uk](https://www.stonewall.org.uk)

9 *Free to be Safe LGBTQ+ people experiencing domestic abuse 2018*

10 *Free to Be Safe: LGBTQ+ people experiencing domestic abuse 2018*

11 Government Equalities Committee (2018) *National LGBT Survey: Research Report*

Someone experiencing domestic abuse in a LGBT relationship may struggle to find the necessary support (Broken Rainbow, the UK organisation that offered support for LGBTQ+ victims of domestic abuse closed in 2106) and they may have to 'out' themselves in order to report the abuse. A perpetrator of domestic abuse may attempt to increase isolation by saying that no-one would believe or help them because the police and support services are all homophobic.

People may feel unable to turn to their church community for support because they don't know what sort of response they will get. Some victims seeking support find rejection and condemnation because of their sexual or gender identity.

Misconceptions, homophobia, and simply the lack of suitable and relevant services, can cause LGBT victims of domestic abuse to feel isolated and unable to do anything but suffer in silence

## Men

On average one in six men experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives. However, male victims of domestic abuse are only half as likely to report their abuse as female victims<sup>12</sup>. Shame and embarrassment are common feelings amongst male victims, and unfortunately, there are far fewer support services for them, particularly regarding emergency accommodation like refuges and shelters.

Men can be abused by women or men. It can become complicated when the man tries to ward off or defend himself against an attack by a female perpetrator and some male victims report facing arrest when the police assumed that the female was the victim.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales records (March 2018) that an estimated 4.2% (695,000) men experienced domestic abuse in the previous year. Each year, an average of 30 men are murdered by their partner or ex-partner<sup>13</sup>.

## Older people

Elder abuse can happen in any family, or in institutions. In domestic situations the perpetrator can be the person's main carer, such as a spouse or daughter/son or other relative.

For some the abuse may have started earlier in life and persisted into old age. For others they may have entered into a new relationship later in life, only to find that their new spouse is abusive.

There may be a late onset of domestic abuse that begins or is exacerbated at a significant point in life, such as retirement, ill health and frailty, disability or changes in family roles. For people who are limited to their own homes owing to frailty or disability, the abuse may go on for many years without anyone to see what is happening, particularly if the abuser is the victim's key carer.

It may be more difficult for older victims of domestic abuse to seek help, and when they do, the services available are not always suited to their needs. Dementia can cause the victim extreme difficulties in understanding and reporting the abuse, and in being believed if they do report it.

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12 Office for National Statistics

13 Office for National Statistics

## People living with a chronic illness or disability

People who have a disability are twice as likely to be a victim of domestic abuse<sup>14</sup>, for instance research suggests that one in two deaf women will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives<sup>15</sup>.

People with either disabilities or suffering with chronic illnesses are likely to have higher dependency upon family/carers meaning that if they are being abused, they could be less able to report it. This is compounded if the person has difficulty communicating owing to a speech impairment or hearing difficulties.

The perpetrator could be the persons main carer and withhold or threaten to withhold medication as a form of coercion and control. They may also withhold aids such as wheelchair or refuse to assist with essential tasks such as washing or eating. They may also always accompany the victim to medical appointments which would severely limit their opportunity to report abuse.

People who have a learning disability are particularly vulnerable to abuse, are less likely to report it and even when they do are less likely to be believed<sup>16</sup>.

## Women

Statistics show that women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse. The Office for National Statistics 2018 record that women are four times as likely as men to have experienced sexual assault by a partner (including attempts) in the previous year. The Crime Survey for England and Wales records<sup>17</sup> that an estimated 7.9% (1.3 million) women experienced domestic abuse in the previous year.

Pregnancy is a particularly vulnerable time for women. Department of Health statistics show that 40%-60% of women experiencing domestic abuse are abused while pregnant<sup>18</sup>

Increasingly perpetrators of domestic abuse use technology and social media to control and instil fear in those they victimise. In a Women's Aid survey<sup>19</sup> 85% of respondents reported online abuse perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner as part of a pattern also experience offline.

Domestic abuse will affect 1 in 4 women in their lifetime and leads to, on average, 2 women being murdered each week<sup>20</sup>

In findings by Women's Aid 46.2% of women in refuges had spent between 2 and 10 years in the abusive relationship, with 17% of women enduring a violent relationship for more than 10 years. Research by the NSPCC suggests that BME communities continue to live in abusive situations for longer. Women from BME communities potentially face additional barriers to reporting owing to a fear of discrimination by statutory services or a fear about their children's (mainly daughters) ability or prospect to marry<sup>21</sup>

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14 Women's Aid ([www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk))

15 Dhillon-Keane N 2018

16 Dhillon Keane, N (2018) *Domestic Abuse in Church Communities*

17 March 2018

18 DoH 2005

19 The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The economics of abuse

20 Living without abuse

21 Women's Aid

## Young people (aged 16 – 18)

When the government updated their definition of domestic abuse in 2013, they widened it to include young people who are aged 16 and 17 years old. This definition recognises that those in this age group can experience abuse within their relationships.

Teenagers experience high levels of abuse within a relationship, with a 2011/12 government survey finding that the 16-19 age group were more likely to suffer partner abuse than any other age group.

There is often stigma surrounding domestic abuse in teenage relationships, and young people can feel that adults trivialise the abuse experienced. In addition, many domestic abuse support services are not open to young people until they reach 18 years old.

All young people under 18 are children and the definition of emotional abuse in respect of children includes them witnessing Domestic abuse. Therefore, if anyone becomes aware that a young person is living in a household where domestic abuse is taking place, Children's Services/Social Work Scotland should always be notified. This is because of the emotional impact that witnessing domestic abuse has on young people, and the increased risk and impact of physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect.

## 6. Responding to someone who is experiencing, or has experienced, domestic abuse

It takes tremendous courage for someone who is being abused to come forward and disclose that this is happening. They are most likely to tell someone they trust. Pastoral support can make a huge difference to those who are victims of domestic abuse. It is important, however, to highlight that it is crucial for victims of domestic abuse to be signposted to relevant agencies so that they can receive appropriate specialist support from the various organisations who are trained and experienced in these matters.

Below are guidelines for talking to someone who is a victim or survivor of domestic abuse:

**Listen and believe what they say.** Take time to listen and ensure that you talk in a safe place. It is worth remembering that it is much more likely that a victim will minimise what they are experiencing rather than dramatising it. What they tell you might therefore be the tip of the iceberg. Give them time to talk, but don't push them to talk if they don't want to. Take care not to trivialise, judge, criticise or dismiss what they tell you. Acknowledge that they're in a difficult and frightening situation.

**Take care of your reactions.** It can be difficult to hear a victim's account of domestic abuse. Think constantly of what a victim might need and be mindful of your body language as well as what you say.

**Reassure and support them.** It is important that you tell them that it is not their fault and that nothing justifies the abuse that they have suffered. If they have suffered physical injury offer to go with them to a Hospital or GP. You can also offer to support them in reporting to the Police.

**Make sure they are safe.** If possible, have a prepared plan of action in place within the church, to protect anyone disclosing abuse and to prevent church workers or yourself being put at risk. If you are concerned about someone's immediate safety, contact the police.

**Do not investigate.** It is not your job to go and speak to the perpetrator about the abuse, even if you know them. By doing so you place the victim, any children involved, and possibly yourself, in danger.

**Gently question/Explore.** Do not ask direct questions such as "Does your partner beat you?" or "Are you a victim of domestic abuse?" Instead, ask gentle questions such as "How are things at home?" or "What's troubling you?"

**Keeping confidentiality.** What has been disclosed to you should not become common knowledge within the church community, not even for prayer purposes, unless the victim chooses to share that information themselves. Any records or notes of what has been said should also be kept confidential. However, complete confidentiality cannot be promised, as it may be necessary to contact the safeguarding designated persons of the Church, the police or other statutory authorities, especially if there are children involved.

**Record and report appropriately.**

Fill in the incident report (*Appendix A5*) and pass it to relevant people with victim's consent. A record can be the first step to enable people affected by domestic abuse to seek appropriate support and access other services.

**Talk to an expert.** The church can, and should, work in partnership with other agencies and professionals as appropriate, to provide the best possible support for the individual or family. External support should always be sought in situations beyond your experience and expertise.

**Empower them to make their own decisions.** As far as possible it is vitally important to ensure that a victim/survivor makes the decisions and that you support and respect their choices. In situations where the victim decides to return to the perpetrator and children could be placed at risk it will be necessary to involve Children's Services. If this is necessary you should explain your intention to contact the statutory services and make every attempt to involve the victim in the decision-making process, unless that would mean placing the children at increased risk.

**Do not:**

- Suggest or offer couples counselling to those where their partner is the alleged abuser. This is not a helpful or appropriate response to domestic abuse and creates more fear and strain for the person being abused, whilst offering the abuser another opportunity to exercise control.

## Church response to the perpetrator

Perpetrators of abuse need support and pastoral care. However, caution should be exercised as many perpetrators are highly skilled at manipulating people into colluding with abuse. If a perpetrator asks for help to change their abusive behaviour the most appropriate course of action is to recommend a perpetrator programme. As detailed above it would be completely inappropriate for anyone from the church to engage in couples counselling or reconciliation/mediation. The first priority must be for the perpetrator to address their violent behaviour and the church can help find an appropriate treatment program. Do not agree to advocate for the perpetrator or to provide a character witness for them as this could be misinterpreted as the Church condoning domestic abuse.

Sometimes a perpetrator may claim a conversion experience and use this as justification as to why they do not need treatment. It would be dangerous to accept this, on its own, even if the person appears repentant. A person who is genuinely repentant will understand and accept that they need help to address their problems. Anyone who has been supporting a victim should never meet a perpetrator on their own or confront them with anything the victim has told them. Not only is this a breach of confidentiality but it may also place the victim, and yourselves, at risk. It is important to liaise with the statutory authorities where an individual is subject to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) or Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) involvement.

It may be necessary to discuss boundaries or restrictions you would need to place on their attendance at Church, such as safeguarding contracts. If an individual is convicted of committing crimes associated with domestic abuse, a contract is required with the support of the synod safeguarding officer. A safeguarding contract is advised to protect the alleged perpetrator, victims and the local congregation. The process of writing a contract is the same as described in Good Practice 5's Section 13 – *Managing and supporting those who pose a risk of harm to children*. See also **Appendix Z: Guide to managing risk and offenders** for further details.

## What should churches do?

There are a number of ways in which your church can act as a place of compassion and caring for those who have experienced ,or are currently experiencing, domestic abuse:

**Believe it.** For many people in church domestic abuse is a taboo subject, with many believing that it does not happen.

**Preaching/teaching.** Speak out against domestic abuse in preaching, teaching, study groups and prayers within the context of regular worship. Make it clear that domestic abuse is wrong and against Christian teaching. Pray for victims and perpetrators of abuse and for the work of specialised agencies that can help both victims and perpetrators. It is common for the Christian faith to put emphasis on the family structure and a positive family image, which may not be helpful for those from an abusive family setting.

**Have information available in your church building.** Have brochures and posters in places where a victim can take the information without fear of discovery. Telephone numbers of local and national domestic abuse helplines should also be included. Some of this information could be placed in a private location such as the toilets (male and female) to avoid scrutiny by others. Churches can develop good relationships with other statutory and voluntary agencies working in this area to draw on their expertise and refer victims to them.

**Have a safe space to talk if possible.** Ensure that there is space within the church building for people to talk in confidence and that conversations that warrant privacy are not held over coffee where sensitive information may be overheard.

**Youth groups.** By allowing young people to discuss and work through how they think and feel about their relationships, you are demonstrating that your church is a place of safety and somewhere where it is possible to be honest about abuse. If you can tackle these important issues within the safety of a youth group, youth fellowship or similar, you are creating a space for young people to talk about what might be happening in their families. It will be useful to be mindful of the fact that the definition of domestic abuse was widened to include the age range 16 to 18.

Being mindful will ensure that you do not miss possible signs of domestic abuse between this age range.

**Training.** It is recommended that particularly relevant people in the church, e.g. ministers, elders, pastoral leaders, church safeguarding coordinators and synod safeguarding officers receive training about domestic abuse, either as part of their ongoing safeguarding training or as a stand-alone session. This training will help individuals within the church to reflect on the damage caused by domestic abuse, and how best to support victims and perpetrators. It is also important to make such training available to anyone who wishes to attend, confirming that it is everyone's responsibility to respond well to domestic abuse. Your Safeguarding Officer can either provide training or arrange suitable training.

**Educate the church using local expertise.** You may want to invite someone from the local police or a local support agency to talk about their work and to find out more about domestic abuse. Holding a well-publicised event and opening it up to other local churches and the local community, highlights your desire to stop domestic abuse being a taboo subject. Refuges and domestic abuse charities are always in need of extra resources. You could hold a fundraising event for them or agree to regularly offer financial support.

**Marriage Preparation.** It is a sad fact that getting married is known to be one of the triggers that can lead to the start or escalation of domestic abuse. Marriage preparation is therefore an ideal time to talk with couples about to be married about issues surrounding domestic abuse, such as equality, conflict, communication, control and violence. It will be very important to explain a biblical view of marriage, and to be clear that violence and abuse play no part in the marriage relationship. Those who lead marriage preparation should have received training on the issues of domestic abuse beforehand.

**Personal Reflection.** It is important for all to reflect on their own beliefs and attitudes as these can impact how we respond to a victim or a perpetrator of domestic abuse. Consider whether your views need challenging and find either books or someone you trust, such as a Spiritual Director, to explore your views. There are many helpful resources online also.

## The Domestic Violence disclosure scheme

This is sometimes known as Clare's Law. Under this scheme you can ask the police to check whether a new or existing partner has a violent past. This is called 'right to ask'. If records show that you may be at risk of domestic abuse from a partner, the police will consider disclosing the information. A disclosure can be made if it is legal, proportionate and necessary to do so.

The 'right to ask' also enables a third party, such as a friend or family member, to apply for a disclosure on behalf of someone they know. Again, the police can release information if it is lawful, necessary and proportionate to do so.

In order to make an application under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme you can contact the police by either visiting a police station, phoning 101 or speaking to a member of the police on the street.

## Domestic abuse and The Bible

The Bible has often been misused in domestic abuse situations by the very people whose role and duty it is to help. Victims have been told when disclosing, for instance, to:



- pray harder
- submit to your husband (this is used in the context of heterosexual relationships)
- try to get your partner to church
- lift up the abuse to the Lord

These responses could be unsafe and unhelpful and, in the case of submitting to your husband, can be seen as encouragement to stay in an abusive relationship. It is very clear within the Christian tradition that God does not expect anyone to submit to abuse at the hands of another person.

The church often has much to say about violent crimes in society, but some have regarded abuse in the home as a 'private matter'. We need to acknowledge that biblically this is not acceptable and take an active role in challenging domestic abuse as not being consistent with a Christian life.

# Contacts for help with domestic abuse

Below there is a list of services and organisations that can support people who are victims of domestic abuse. It is not exhaustive.

## **Action on Elder Abuse**

A specialist organisation that focuses on the issue of abuse towards the elderly.

Website: [www.elderabuse.org.uk](http://www.elderabuse.org.uk)

Helpline: 0808 808 8141

## **Asian Women's support**

Website: [www.kiranproject.org.uk](http://www.kiranproject.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 8558 1986

## **AVA (Against Violence & Abuse)**

A national organisation for professionals – frontline workers, policy officers, those with strategic responsibilities providing training and consultancy on teenage relationship abuse, as well as all other forms of violence against women and girls.

Website: [www.avaproject.org.uk](http://www.avaproject.org.uk)

Telephone: 0207 5490 280

## **Bullying UK**

Bullying UK is part of Family Lives, a charity supporting and helping people with issues that are a part of family life.

Website: [www.bullying.co.uk/cyberbullying](http://www.bullying.co.uk/cyberbullying)

Telephone: 0808 800 2222

## **CAADA – Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse**

A national organisation providing practical help and support for professionals and organisations working with domestic abuse victims.

Website: [www.caada.org.uk](http://www.caada.org.uk)

Telephone: 0117 317 8750

## **ChildLine**

for children wanting to talk to someone.

Telephone: 0800 1111

## **Forced Marriage Unit**

The Government's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) is dedicated both to preventing British nationals being forced into marriage overseas and to assisting anyone in the UK faced with the prospect of being forced into a marriage.

Website: [www.gov.uk/forced-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage)

Telephone: 020 7008 0151

## **Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)**

IKWRO's mission is to protect Middle Eastern and Afghan women and girls who are at risk of 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation and domestic violence and to promote their rights.

Website: [www.ikwro.org.uk](http://www.ikwro.org.uk)

Telephone: 0207 920 6460

### **Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)**

Website: [www.lawrs.org.uk](http://www.lawrs.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7336 0888 (closed Wed)

### **ManKind**

Support for men suffering from domestic abuse from their current or former wife or partner (including same-sex partner).

Website: <https://www.mankind.org.uk/>

Telephone: 01823 334244

### **Men's Advice Line**

Run by Respect, Men's Advice Line is a helpline phone and website service for male victims of domestic abuse.

Website: [www.mensadvice.org.uk](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk)

Helpline: 0808 801 0327

### **National Domestic Violence Helpline**

Telephone: 0808 2000 247

### **National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline**

Telephone: 0800 999 5428

### **NSPCC**

The NSPCC are a children's charity fighting to end child abuse in the UK and Channel Islands, by helping children who have been abused, protecting those at risk, and preventing abuse.

Website: [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Helpline: 0808 800 5000 (for adults with a concern about a child / children)

### **Police**

Most local neighbourhood policing teams have a specialist domestic violence unit or coordinators.

Telephone: 999 – in an emergency

Telephone: 101 – in a non-emergency

### **Refuge**

Refuge is a national charity which provides a range of specialist domestic abuse services to women and children.

Website: [www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7395 7700

24-hour helpline: 0808 2000 247

### **Respect**

Respect is a UK membership organisation for work with domestic abuse perpetrators, male victims and young people.

Website: [www.respect.uk.net](http://www.respect.uk.net)

They also offer a helpline phone and website service for domestic violence perpetrators.

Website: [www.respectphoneline.org.uk](http://www.respectphoneline.org.uk)

Helpline: 0808 802 4040

### **Restored**

Restored is an international Christian alliance, based in the UK, working to transform relationships and end violence against women.

Website: [www.restoredrelationships.org](http://www.restoredrelationships.org)

Helpline: 020 8943 7706

### **Southall Black Sisters**

For Asian, African and African-Caribbean women

Website: [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)

Help Line: 0208 571 0800 (Mon, Wed, Friday 9:30am to 4:30pm)

Advice line: 0208 571 9595 (Mon to Fri 10am to 5pm)

### **Stonewall**

Stonewall campaigns for the equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people across Britain.

Website: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/>

### **The Hideout**

Created by Women's Aid, the Hideout is a dedicated website for children and young people to find information and support about relationship abuse and where to get help.

Website: [www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk)

### **The Mix**

Free information and support for under 25s in the UK

Telephone: 0808 808 4994

### **The Samaritans (24/7 service)**

Website: <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Telephone: 116 123

### **Women's Aid**

A national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children.

Supports a network of over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the UK.

Address: PO Box Bristol 391, BS99 7WS

Website: [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

### **Victim Support**

Victim Support is the independent charity for victims and witnesses of crime in England and Wales.

Website: [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

Support line: 0808 16 89 111

### **Signhealth**

A charity that supports deaf people's wellbeing with services focused on domestic abuse

Crisis Text Service: Text DEAF to 85258

Website: <https://signhealth.org.uk/>