

What is Domestic Abuse

What are the Impacts of Domestic Abuse; a webinar for survivors

Webinar Support Materials Handout

1. What is Domestic Abuse.

Definition from the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019/20 (DA Act 2020)

The cross-government definition of domestic abuse from the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-2021 (at the time of writing awaiting a second reading in the House of Lords).

Behaviour of person A towards person B is domestic abuse if - A and B are 16 or over and are *personally connected* to each other and the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is abusive if it consists of the following - physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; psychological, emotional or other abuse. It does not matter whether the behaviour consist of a single incident or a course of repeated incidents.

Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property or to obtain goods or services.

A's behaviour may be considered abusive towards B if it consists of conduct directed at another person, for example Bs child.

Two people are *personally connected* if they are or have been married to each other; are or have been civil partners of each other; have agreed to marry each other regardless whether or not the agreement has been terminated; have entered into a civil partnership (section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004) whether or not the agreement has been terminated; they are or have been in an intimate relationship with each other; they have or had a parental relationship in relation to the same child, that is if the person is a parent of the child or has parental responsibility (as in the Children Act 1989) for the child. Child means a person under the age of 18 years; or they are relatives (section 63 of the Family Law Act 1996).

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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.

It includes stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and 'Honour Crime'.

Controlling Behaviour is:

'...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 every-day behaviour'.

Coercive Behaviour

'...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'.

1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse in her life time.

2. Statistics and Societal Perspective

Domestic abuse is the most common cause of depression and mental health difficulties in women. 64% of survivors suffer from traumatic stress.

46% of women in prison have experienced domestic abuse.

A study by Safe Lives (2019) found that 66% of survivors with mental health support needs struggle to cover the cost of basic living expenses.

Two women are killed by a partner or former partner each week in the UK.

Gender specific services are important in order for services to respond appropriately to the specific needs of service users. Domestic abuse is a gendered crime, in the majority of cases women are abused by men, although men also experience domestic abuse. Domestic abuse also occurs in LGBTQI relationships and for people with disabilities and mental health support needs.

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone or be perpetrated by anyone regardless of social or economic status, religion or ethnicity.

According to the Home Office domestic abuse has a higher rate of repeat victimisation than any other crime.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales 2019 found that there were as estimated 2.4 million cases of domestic abuse that year with 215,000 arrests however charging fell by 11%.

The Home Office estimate of the costs of Domestic Abuse in the UK are 66 billion per year

Link to statistics on Womens Aid web site

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/how-common-is-domestic-abuse/>

3. Gendered Nature of Domestic Abuse.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales 2019 (for the year ending March 2019) established that of the 2.4 million estimated cases of domestic abuse that year two thirds were women.

A study by police found that men are significantly more likely to be repeat perpetrators than women and to use physical violence, threats and harassment.

83% of victims who experienced 10 or more incidents of abuse were women.

4. What Does Domestic Abuse Look Like.

Domestic abuse can take many forms some very clear like physical violence and others more subtle like *gaslighting*. The power and control wheel below, shows ways in which abuse may manifest. Survivors may experience some or all of these types of abuse. In the media and in drama on television domestic abuse is often portrayed as physical violence, which might be why women who experience other types of abuse do not realise that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

Gaslighting is the action of tricking or controlling someone by making them believe things that are not true, especially by suggesting that they may be mentally ill, it is a form of psychological abuse.

Domestic abuse behaviours can manifest in many ways, these are some examples:-

- Using privilege
- Sexual abuse
- Threats
- Technological abuse
- Abuse targeting children or pets
- Emotional or psychological abuse
- Physical abuse
- Threats of harm to family, friends or pets
- Economic or financial abuse
- Stalking or harassment
- So called honour violence

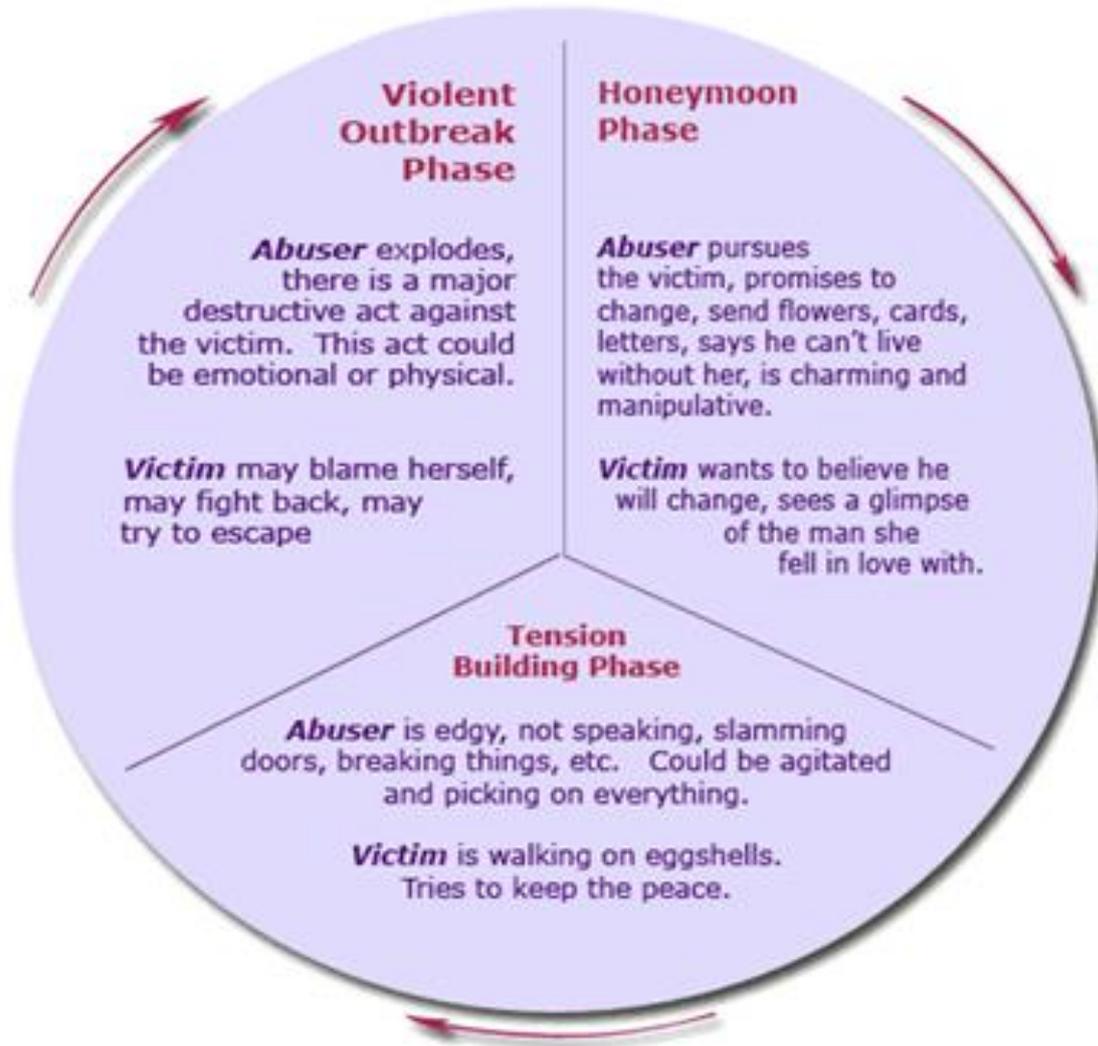
No one chooses an abusive relationship, at the beginning of the relationship the person can be charming, highly attentive, appearing to value the victims company, giving lots of compliments, gifts, support and claiming they cannot bear to be apart from the woman, these behaviours are highly seductive. This is the person the woman falls in love with, feeling understood and cared for. Abusive behaviours start gradually, in small ways over time and might not be immediately noticeable. The difference is the intention of the perpetrator. A person with genuine care for another does not try to control them. In the case of power and control perpetrators the

indicator is when the person who is subject to their control tries to be independent, for example chooses to travel home with friends instead of being collected by the perpetrator. A caring partner would support independence and might say they will be available if the plans change, a controlling person will object, possibly citing their concern for the wellbeing of the women or claiming their offer of a lift is unappreciated. The intention of the perpetrator is different but only comes to light when the woman tries to alter the plan or step out of the control. The perpetrator may change their behaviour to try to keep the woman within their control, if their expression of concern is challenged they might use guilt, for example saying they have changed their plans in order to take care of the woman or they might use the woman's independence against her, not being available when they have said they would be then citing her independence 'I thought you wanted to do things yourself'.

The indicator is when you realise that you cannot do/feel/say/act what you would like to. Many women experience this as a loss of self, a feeling of not being who they really are in the relationship, that is being decided by another person.

Abusive relationships can go in cycles leaving women feeling conflicted. There are times when they have the person they love and care about and other times there is the abuser. 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 of time.

Each stage of the cycle can last from a few minutes to a number of months, but within an abusive relationship, the stages can often be pin-pointed: See the example below.



5. Causes and Behaviours

Power and control within abusive relationships; the Duluth Model



Abuse of women is grounded in years of patriarchy where women had little or no power. Patriarchy is a system of social management dominated by men which controls and manipulates women's dependence on men. In the UK the law, society and religious institutions promoted (and in some cases still do) a system of male privilege and female subservience but changes have taken place, for example in 1870 the Married Women's Property Act changed the law so that money and property earned by a married woman was her own, prior to that any money a woman earned or obtained belonged in law to her husband; in 1923 the Matrimonial Causes Act gave women the same rights to divorce as men; in 1918 British women over 30 won the right to vote, women under 30 (aged 21 and over) obtained the right ten years later. Up until 1981 pubs and bars could refuse to serve women because of their gender. Women could be asked to leave pubs and refused service unless they were with a man. In 1991 rape in marriage became a crime.

The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 finally outlawed discrimination against women seeking to obtain credit. Before that women who wanted to buy something on 'hire purchase' as it was called then, had to get the agreement signed by their husband or father even when they were making the payments themselves.

Campaigning by the suffragettes, feminists, the womens sector and unions has brought about change. Whilst laws have changed and new laws developed supporting womens equality and emancipation, the attitudes of some sectors of society have changed more slowly. Women still report being brought up to believe in patriarchal privilege and subservience, where male abuse towards women is normalised and in some cases excused or blamed on women. Woman's Trust supports and campaigns for an end to all laws, structures, policies and assumptions that support male privilege and dominance over women.

Gender inequality, culture, religion, media, societal norms all contribute to the persistence of domestic abuse.

There are many myths about domestic abuse which can make it very hard for women to identify that what is happening to them is abuse and to make changes to their situation. Myths such as:

- only physical abuse is domestic violence
- uneducated or poor women experience abuse
- abuse only happens on council estates
- the woman is to blame because she provoked him
- she must have enjoyed or 'asked' for the abuse otherwise she would leave
- she deserved the abuse because she wasn't a good wife

Domestic abuse is not the result of anger, drink, drugs, work or housing problems it is a chosen way of behaving. All of these things are used as excuses for abuse but they are not the reason for it and to suggest otherwise is a pernicious insult to the many people who choose *not* to abuse women.

These and many more myths are just that, myths. They are not true but they are very powerful

6. Psychological Impact on the Survivor

A survivor of domestic abuse might feel all or some of these things

- Guilt
- Blaming herself
- Shame and dishonour
- Loss of self-confidence
- Low self-esteem
- Depression
- Unable to make decisions
- Suicidal or self-harm

- Unable to cope
- Inability to relax
- Embarrassed or ashamed
- Worthless and useless
- Lonely and isolated
- Terrified and lost
- Frightened
- Angry
- Nervous or anxious
- Unable to concentrate
- Hopeless
- Vulnerable

For some survivors there can be

- Development of mental health problems
- Physical ill health
- Use of drugs or alcohol

Survivors sometimes minimise the abuse or deny that they are being abused.

A survivor might withdraw from social contact, avoiding friends or family.

Commonly women experience 35 incidents of abuse before seeking help.

7. Impacts of Long Term Exposure to Repeated Domestic Abuse

The psychological effects of long term exposure to abuse might include alterations in the way a survivor sees herself of the wider world. Persistent feelings of unease, agitation, explosive or inhibited anger or changes to sexual behaviour.

Dysphoria is a very unpleasant feeling of deep uneasiness or agitation.

The long-term effects of severe, prolonged or repeated trauma, particularly due to repeated abuse in child or adult hood can result in Complex Traumatic Stress Disorder (CTSD) characterised by memory loss, an inability to control emotions, dissociation and/or withdrawal from social contact for example.

8. Physical Impact

Possible physical effects that may be associated with experience of domestic abuse

- Hypertension
- Heart problems
- Respiratory problems
- Stroke
- Vision impairment

- Bladder or bowel problems
- Problems with digestion
- Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)
- Sleep disturbance
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Headaches/dizziness
- Dental problems
- Medically unexplained symptoms
- Bruising or broken bones
- Miscarriage/premature labour

Pregnancy is a high risk period. 40/60% of female victims are abused during pregnancy.

Disabled women are twice as likely to experience abuse than non-disabled women (1995 Crime Survey). Women with a disability experience abuse over a longer period of time and suffer more severe injuries as a result of the violence. A Womens Aid study in 2014 found that 6.9% of women in refuges had a physical impairment.

9. Social and Cultural Factors

Domestic abuse occurs across all religions, ethnic, social and financial groups at similar rates.

Women without recourse to public funds such as those with insecure immigration status or having entered the UK as the spouse of a British Citizen are at increased risk of harm. Abusers weaponise women's immigration status and mislead them about the process so that some women are rendered 'undocumented' deliberately. Migrant women face multiple barriers when fleeing domestic abuse and are often unable to access vital support due to their immigration status. A government review of 100 cases this year (2020) found that 80% of those applying for the Domestic Abuse Indefinite Leave Rule (DVILR) were women.

Help and support for migrant women is available through the National DA Helpline 0808 2000 247 or Southall Black Sisters southallblacksisters.org.uk

10. Children

In 90% of domestic abuse incidents children are in the same or next room.

The Domestic Abuse Bill notes that a child who sees, hears or experiences the effects of abuse is a victim of domestic abuse, if they are related to the survivor or perpetrator. For the purposes of the Act a child is a person under the age of 18.

11. Why Doesn't She Just Leave

Frequently people ask, 'why doesn't she just leave?' as if that is a simple thing to do. There are many and varied practical and psychological barriers to ending a relationship with an abusive partner.

Safety; lack of confidence; denial; shame; guilt; financial dependence; loyalty; fear; feelings of vulnerability; hope; lack of support; family or social pressure; religious or cultural beliefs; love; intimidation; parenting; caring responsibilities; mobility/disability; abuse has become normalised; patriarchal subservience; immigration status; economic dependence.

Women and children are at immense risk when a survivor tries to leave the relationship. It takes a great deal of courage to leave someone who controls and intimidates you. Women often attempt to leave several times before making the final break. Leaving an abusive partner can be very dangerous. Women are at the greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner.

'When a fire alarm goes off.... you would not leave your mobile phone behind to save your life but you expect women to turn away from their family, their jobs, their lives.' Jess Philips MP 2020

Shouldn't the question be 'why should she leave, why are we not doing more to remove perpetrators?'

11. Self Care

- Be compassionate to yourself, you are not responsible for what is happening/happened
- Your emotional and behavioural responses are entirely normal responses to trauma, there is nothing wrong with you
- Consider writing a journal if safe to do so
- Talk to or find people and groups who know about domestic abuse
- Be kind to yourself and acknowledge the resilience you have developed

12. Domestic Abuse and Covid 19

See the Womens Aid web site for details of Coronavirus advice for survivors.

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/>

13. How to Support a Family Member of Colleague

Do not tell her what to do

Do not make your friendship conditional on her doing something

Listen and believe her

If she is looking for specialist help and support help to find it – visit the Womens Aid web site www.womensaid.org.uk or give her the number of the National Help Line 0808 2000 247

Do not attempt to act as mediator

She is the expert on her situation

See the advice for friends and family members on specialist web sites such as Womens Aid

Woman's Trust contact details

www.womanstrust.org.uk

020 7034 0303

office@womanstrust.org.uk

Useful web sites

www.womensaid.org.uk

www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/

www.solacewomensaid.org

www.niaendingviolence.org.uk

www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/

<https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2019-21/domesticabuse.html>

**Domestic abuse is always wrong –there is no excuse.
The only person to blame for the abuse is the abuser. Abuse happens
because the abuser chooses to be abusive – it is a choice of behaviour.
Abuse can happen to anyone but help is available.**