



Topic: Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is defined as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence. In the majority of cases the abuse is perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner, a family member or carer.

Domestic abuse is gendered and a hate crime. Female victims of partner abuse are more likely to experience physical and non-physical abuse (emotional, coercive, manipulation, financial) and sexual assault.

1.6 million women in England and Wales reported experiencing domestic abuse in 2019, 2 women are killed each week by a partner/former partner.

Pregnancy is a trigger for domestic abuse and has negative consequences for the woman and her child. Sixty per cent of survivors using domestic abuse services are mothers and 1 in 15 are pregnant women.

Potential impact of COVID-19 in this topic area

Measures to control the spread of COVID-19 including social distancing and isolation means some women will be more vulnerable to domestic abuse. The advice to stay at home has meant that many women and girls are locked down at home with violent parents, partners, or other family members. Domestic abuse charities are reporting high call levels to helplines and online services since COVID-19 lockdown.

Many victims of domestic abuse may be trapped in abusive households with very little or no opportunity to contact health professionals, speak to them in private, call the police, or escape. Children are equally at risk of suffering the impacts of an abusive environment.

The charity project, Counting Dead Women, gave evidence that it had identified 16 suspected domestic abuse killings in the UK between 23 March and 12 April 2020.

Considerations

Domestic abuse is complex, not easily identified by professionals and does not only occur between couples. It is important to note that all family members can be involved in domestic abuse

Other than physical violence, domestic abuse involves many acts such as manipulation, isolation, coercion threats and humiliation which harm, frighten and aim to punish.

The instruction to stay indoors as a result of coronavirus does not apply if a victim needs to escape her home as a result of domestic abuse.

Supporting victims of abuse

- It is important to assure women that you will keep confidential any information they disclose about domestic abuse.
- Observe their demeanour, ask if they have been upset by anyone and tell them you are worried about them.
- Some women might worry about burdening midwives or feel that there is not the opportunity to speak in confidence. Try to reassure the woman that you can offer support

- Victims may be fearful of revealing the abuse to neighbours or other family members and may just want to escape.

Current key guidance – clinical care and advice for women

Be vigilant, especially where face to face appointments are being reduced. Prioritise women who are vulnerable and known to be at risk of domestic abuse for face to face antenatal appointments away from the home.

Ensure women can contact the service by providing the designated telephone number. Check the woman's preferred contact number and/or email address if sending a weblink.

During telephone consultations, ensure the woman is not on speaker phone. Introduce any staff who are in the room, but off camera, and ask the woman to do the same.

Ask direct questions and don't assume women will talk to you when they are vulnerable or afraid. In some circumstances, it may not be possible to ask routine safety questions, consider other ways to explore safety. A starter might be, how are you coping? any money worries? how is your partner coping? is there family or social support they can call upon?

Ask if they are okay. If they haven't been in touch, follow up appointments may be necessary, especially if they have expressed a wish to "freebirth".

If women do disclose, reassure them that they are believed and that the abuse is not their fault. Where there are serious concerns and to provide for immediate safety, to allow for a full health and social care assessment, consider admission.

Advise women to make careful plans if they want to leave home by calling, Refuge, Women's Aid or other sources of support.

Undertake safeguarding assessments for mother and other children in the household and make a personalised care plan; if appropriate seek advice/support of social services, especially where children are involved.

Advise women at risk about the silent system solution. The woman should call 999 and remain silent, they could also cough or tap the headset, their call will then be transferred to the silent service where an operator will request that the woman dials 55. After dialling 55 the woman will then be transferred through to a police officer who will attempt to assess the situation by asking yes or no questions.

Signpost women to credible sources of digital/online support.

References and links to online and virtual support and guidance

Refresh your knowledge with RCM i-learn

<https://www.ilearn.rcm.org.uk/course/info.php?id=633>

You can also visit the TUC domestic abuse and coronavirus learning tool

<https://learning.elucidat.com/course/5e875ae4d0715-5e8c6417dfc28>

Advice and information

Caldicott resources <https://www.ukcgc.uk/covid>

Karma Nirvana support for victims of honour based abuse <https://karmanirvana.org.uk/help/>

Including sign language <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-and-support-resources/>

Institute of Health visiting virtual consultations guidance <https://ihv.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Virtual-Contacts-FINAL-VERSION-27.3.20.pdf>

NHS England advice on safeguarding during the pandemic www.shorturl.at/blPW1

Women's Aid COVID resource hub <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-resource-hub/>

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/new-rail-to-refuge-scheme-offers-free-train-travel-to-women-fleeing-domestic-abuse/>

Women's Aid COVID safety and support resources for survivors, family and community members in **multiple languages**

Southall Black Sisters <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/>

UK Government advice on supporting vulnerable children <https://bit.ly/33RGSeg>

Getting help

National Domestic Abuse Helpline - 0808 2000 247 or [online contact form](#).

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 999 5428

Women's Aid [webchat](#) [Available Monday 10am -12pm]

Rape Crisis services - 0808 802 9999 – or [webchat](#)

Nations specific

Scotland 24-hour helpline: 0800 027 1234; Scottish women's aid <https://womensaid.scot/>

Northern Ireland 24-hour helpline: 0808 802 1414 Northern Ireland <https://www.womensaidni.org/>

Wales 24-hour helpline 0808 80 10 800: Welsh women's aid <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk>

Sources

Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2019) Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2019 [Published online](#): ONS.