

Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf



Safeguarding

Guidance on Domestic Abuse

(2025)

DOMESTIC ABUSE

1 - What is Domestic Abuse?

Defining Domestic Abuse

"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. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse."

— Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (UK)

Domestic Abuse can occur in:

- Any type of romantic, sexual, or marital relationship where one party is abused by the other, whether it be within the same household or not.
- Any situation where a child over the age of 16 is subjecting any other family member over the age of 16 (including a parent or guardian) to abuse.
- Any situation that includes so-called 'honour'-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), or forced marriage.

Children and Young People

Young people aged 16 and over can experience domestic abuse, either as victims or perpetrators. (Domestic Abuse Act 2021)

However, the Children Act 1989 classifies anyone under 18 as a child.

Therefore, domestic abuse issues involving 16/17 year olds are also treated as a child safeguarding concern.

Children who live in a home where domestic abuse occurs are considered victims, even if the abuse is not directed at them.

In the *Adoption and Children Act 2002*, the definition of 'harm' includes situations where a child or young person sees or hears abuse happening to someone else.

Control & Coercion

'**Controlling behaviour**' refers to a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent.

'**Coercive behaviour**' involves an act or a pattern of acts such as assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation, or other abuse.

'**Coercive control**' is a term used to describe extreme psychological and emotional abuse.

It can include:

- Monitoring their whereabouts using GPS and constantly checking up on them.
- Isolating them from friends and family and putting them down in front of others.
- Forcing them to commit crimes.
- Threatening them, their family, or pets.
- Stalking behaviours.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

Domestic abuse is included in the broader category of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

This can include:

- Forced marriage.
- Female genital mutilation (FGM).
- So-called "honour-based" abuse.

(Men can also be victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage)

These acts are usually committed by family members.

Those involved may not recognise or accept that these actions are crimes.

All of these are criminal offences in the UK

Forced marriage occurs when someone is made to marry against their will, usually by parents, family members, or religious leaders.

- Forced marriage is distinct from **arranged** marriage.

- Forced marriage is **not limited to a single country or culture**.

In 2022, the *Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act* came into force, raising the minimum legal age for marriage in England and Wales to 18 and making it a crime to facilitate the marriage of anyone under that age.

In 2023, there were 280 confirmed cases of forced marriage and 519 enquiries to the FMU. Most victims were under the age of 25.

FGM involves the deliberate cutting of female genitals for non-medical reasons.

Justifications include beliefs about:

- Cleanliness;
- Religious obligation;

- Maintaining chastity;
- Protecting family honour;
- Improving marriage prospects.

FGM is often performed in secret, in unsterile conditions, and can lead to illness or death.

FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1985.

FGM is practiced in at least 29 countries in the world, in addition to diaspora communities in Europe including the UK.

37,615 cases of FGM were identified between April 2015 and March 2024. (NHS)

An estimated 60,000 girls under the age of 15 in the UK are at risk of this type of family violence.

Data also suggests that there is a strong link between FGM and forced marriage.

Honour-based' abuse is a form of domestic abuse carried out to protect the so-called “honour” of a family or community. Those who violate these unwritten rules are punished.

Can include:

- Murder
- Forced marriage
- Domestic violence
- Sexual violence
- Threats to kill
- Pressure to travel or move abroad
- House arrest and restricted freedom
- Isolation from family and friends

Can occur in response to:

- Seeking a divorce or separation.
- Starting a new relationship.
- Talking to or socialising with members of the opposite sex.
- Having relationships or marrying outside their religion.
- Engaging in sex before marriage.
- Choosing their own marriage partner.
- Attending college or university.
- Expressing a sexual identity deemed culturally unacceptable.

Domestic abuse refers to a **relational context** in which abusive behaviour takes place in one or more forms. Domestic abuse also involves **specific dynamics** of power and control.

Some **cultural or religious practices** are considered criminal offences under UK law and are included within the legal definition of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is widespread in society, and is not limited to a particular section of the population, nor determined by gender, ethnicity or religion.

2 - Who is most affected by domestic abuse?

Statistics show:

- Domestic abuse is a widespread and persistent problem in the UK.
- Domestic abuse disproportionately affects women and carries serious consequences including a high number of crimes, low prosecution rates, and a troubling rate of domestic homicides.
- These statistics highlight how domestic abuse is a problem that affects children and young people in line with its effect on adults.
- Domestic abuse has a profound impact on children's lives, both physically and emotionally.

LGBT+ Community

Statistics suggest that LGBT+ individuals are more likely to experience domestic abuse than those who don't identify as LGBT+. This is important to bear in mind as we seek to support all members of our communities.

Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse

Church Research data - a case study in Cumbria (2018)

Aim: to study the rates, impacts and levels of awareness of domestic abuse as well as to gauge the church's response and experiences of seeking support.

- 2.2% had experienced at least one abusive behaviour in a current or previous relationship.
- For 1 in 4 of respondents, this was in their current relationship.
- 12 women had experienced 10-20 different abusive behaviours.
- 6 women feared for their life in their current relationship.
- 71.3% of church-goers were aware of domestic abuse in their community.
- Only 37.6% thought it was a problem in church.
- Just 2 in 7 church-goers thought their church was equipped to deal with disclosures of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is a deeply pervasive issue in society, including the church.

No demographic is immune.

Those who are particularly at risk:

- Those already marginalised or who hold less power within social structures.
- Women, with men more frequently the perpetrators.
- Members of the LGBT+ community.

The true scale of domestic abuse remains obscured.

Recognising this hidden crisis is the first step toward addressing it with honesty and compassion.

3 - What are the signs of domestic abuse?

The signs and patterns in both victims and perpetrators that may indicate that domestic abuse is present. For example:

- Signs of emotional or psychological abuse.
- Signs of physical abuse.
- Signs of financial abuse.
- Signs of spiritual abuse.
- Signs of online abuse.

Signs of **emotional/psychological abuse** include:

- Hyper-vigilance/exaggerated startle response
- Agitation, anxiety and fearfulness
- Wanting to please all the time
- Loss of interest in daily activities, work or social life
- Changes in sleep (too little or too much)
- Developing drug or alcohol or food problems
- Self-harm
- Avoiding eye contact – ‘cowed’ stance
- Very apologetic/meek/indecisive
- Low self-esteem / loss of confidence
- Symptoms of depression
- Talking about/attempting suicide

Signs of **physical abuse** include:

- Black eyes
- Bruises on arms/inner thigh/unusual places – bilateral/finger marks
- Split lips
- Red or purple marks on neck
- Sprained wrists
- Cut/missing hair
- Covering up with clothing
- Wearing heavy make-up or sunglasses
- Unconvincing explanations
- Burns

Signs of **financial abuse** include:

- Spending someone's money or property without their consent, or borrowing money and never repaying it
- Controlling how much money someone is given, such as giving them a small allowance and making them beg for more
- Forbidding someone from having a bank account
- Forcing someone to take out a loan, or taking out a loan or credit card in someone's name and racking up debts or deliberately ruining their credit rating
- Squandering or gambling away family resources
- Preventing someone from getting a job or education

Signs of **spiritual abuse** between intimate partners include when an abusive partner:

- Ridicules or insults the other person's religious or spiritual beliefs
- Prevents the other partner from practicing their religious or spiritual beliefs
- Uses their partner's religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate or shame them
- Forces the children to be raised in a faith that the other partner has not agreed to
- Uses religious texts or beliefs to minimise or rationalise abusive behaviours (such as physical, financial, emotional or sexual abuse/marital rape)

Signs of **Forced Marriage, FGM Honour-Based Abuse**

- Withdrawing from their friends.
- Subject to excessive surveillance or control.
- Going abroad for long holidays.
- Having siblings who were forced to marry or were married very young.
- Withdrawal or drastic change in behaviour.
- Inability or no permission to make independent decisions.
- Reluctance to seek help due to potential repercussions.
- Excessive concern with issues of "family honour" or "reputation".
- Often being forced to adhere to strict codes of behaviour, dress, or conduct.

Signs of Perpetrators

- Treats partner as a slave/servant.
- Puts partner down and uses constant derogatory comments.
- Minimises and reduces their own behaviour.
- Says their partner has no need to work.
- Controls all the money.
- Tires victim out by constantly changing their demands.
- Doesn't accept no as an answer.
- Stalks victim, keeps a check on everything, isolates victim.
- Uses threats and intimidation (to harm or to kill)
- Forgets when people are coming over- moans and is verbally abusive.

Cycle of Abuse

1. **Tension Builds:** Stress and strain escalate; victim will often try to placate or comply. ➡
2. **Abusive Incident Occurs:** Tension erupts into eg physical violence, emotional abuse, or sexual assault; leaves the victim traumatised and fearful. ➡
3. **A Honeymoon Phase:** The abuser may show remorse, apologise, or promise change. The victim feels some hope. ➡
4. **A Period of Calm:** Things seem stable, but the underlying issues remain unresolved. Then tension rebuilds. ➡ 1. Tension Builds

4 - Why does domestic abuse happen?

- Insights from the Christian faith and those drawn from social psychology.
- How domestic abuse is handled in Christian communities, and the added complexities for victim/survivors in these settings.

We are created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27)

We have an inherent dignity, worth, and the capacity for love, creativity, reason, and moral choice. This divine image reflects God's character and purpose for humanity.

However

Human nature has been deeply affected by sin, and this distorts our desires, inclinations, and behaviour. (Genesis 3)

People are capable of great kindness, compassion, and self-sacrifice and also prone to selfishness, pride and violence.

All forms of abuse involve the misuse or abuse of power.

- Power imbalance can arise from finances, education, gender, age, ethnicity, and more.
- Power differences can increase or limit a person's ability to make choices and take action in a situation.
- Power differences (e.g. in gender expectations) are often rooted in cultural assumptions, beliefs, and values ('social norms').
- An awareness of power dynamics and cultural assumptions is essential for identifying and understanding domestic abuse.

Gaslighting

A form of emotional abuse that makes somebody question their beliefs and perception of reality. It wears down self-esteem and self-confidence, leaving the victim dependent on the person who is gaslighting.

In addition to the signs that someone is experiencing emotional and psychological abuse, those experiencing gaslighting also may:

- Believe they can't do anything right
- Have a sense of hopelessness, frustration, or emotional numbness
- Be constantly wondering if they're too sensitive
- Believe they're to blame when things go wrong
- Have a persistent sense that something isn't right, though they can't identify exactly what's wrong
- Feel disconnected from their sense of self, as if they're losing their identity

Three stages of gaslighting:

- The 'Idealisation' stage. Perpetrator seems like a perfect partner, whisks victim off their feet
- The 'Devaluation' stage. Victim goes from feeling adored to devalued
- The 'Discard' stage. Victim dropped.

Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children

ACE's (**Adverse Childhood Experiences**) are traumatic events that occur in childhood, such as **abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction**. This definition also includes domestic abuse; either as a **recipient** or as a **witness**.

Whole life impacts - Those exposed to multiple ACEs are at significantly higher risk for mental health issues, substance abuse, chronic disease, and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Mitigation - The effects of ACEs are not inevitable—early intervention, supportive relationships, and trauma-informed care can help mitigate their impact.

Prevention - Education, stable home environments, and access to mental health services play key roles in preventing ACEs.

Why does domestic abuse happen ? (cont)

Abusive behaviour often stems from deeply rooted core beliefs that distort how individuals perceive themselves and others. Three such beliefs —**ownership, entitlement, and superiority**— play a significant role in justifying and sustaining abuse.

Ownership reflects the belief that another person is a possession. In relationships, this manifests as control over a partner's actions, choices, and even thoughts. The abuser may feel justified in monitoring or restricting the victim, viewing them not as an autonomous individual but as someone to manage or command.

Entitlement fuels the idea that the abuser deserves special treatment, regardless of others' needs or boundaries. They may believe they have the right to act out, demand obedience, or be prioritised, even at the expense of others' well-being. When expectations aren't met, this perceived violation often triggers anger or retaliation.

Superiority reinforces the notion that the abuser is inherently better, smarter, or more important than others. This belief devalues the victim, allowing the abuser to dismiss their feelings, minimise harm, or blame them entirely.

Together, these beliefs create a toxic framework where control and harm are rationalised. Challenging and dismantling these beliefs is essential to ending abuse and fostering respectful, equal relationships.

Domestic Abuse within the Christian community

- Theological beliefs and cultural norms can both comfort and empower survivors — but also trap them.
- Emphasis on marriage, family, and forgiveness can lead survivors to feel shame or guilt about speaking out, fearing they are betraying their faith or community.
- Some churches offer false hope that abusive partners will change through spiritual means, which can prolong harmful situations and prevent necessary action.
- Scripture is sometimes misused to justify abuse, promoting harmful ideas like unconditional submission or spiritual value in suffering.
- Teachings on divorce and re-marriage can deepen survivors' dilemmas, making them feel morally obligated to stay in unsafe relationships.

Why don't people leave abusive relationships?

EMOTIONAL BARRIERS e.g.

- Low self-esteem, shame, or trauma bonding.
- Self-doubt, love for abuser, hope for change, or fear of threats.

CULTURAL BARRIERS e.g.

- Community may discourage separation or divorce.
- Victims experience fear of judgement.

PRACTICAL BARRIERS e.g.

- Finance, safe housing, or concerns about child custody.
- Health issues or being a dependent (being a child or having a disability).

One of the riskiest times for the victim is at the point of leaving the relationship and/or home.

Recognising when something doesn't feel right and understanding what our role is—and isn't—in the situation.

- Don't try to investigate or draw our own conclusions.
- Always following the proper reporting steps.
- Involving the police if someone is at immediate risk of harm.
- Being there for the people affected.
-

Seeking help from the church for domestic abuse (Cumbria Study):

Would seek help from the church **42.9%**

Would not seek help from the church **42.9%**

Would signpost a friend to the church **59.8%**

Would not signpost a friend to the church **24.6%**

Reasons why people would not seek help or signpost others:

They would not have the right expertise to help **39.9%**

I'd be worried about confidentiality and other people at church finding out **31.7%**

I'd be too embarrassed or ashamed **26.4%**

It would be wrong to talk negatively about my spouse/partner to someone at church **22.1%**

I would feel that it is my duty to make this relationship work **20.2%**

They might make things worse **19.7%**

There's no-one that I know or trust well enough **19.2%**

I would blame myself for my partners behaviour **11.1%**

My partner has a position of responsibility which would make it difficult to confide in others **9.1%**

I wouldn't expect anyone to believe me **9.1%**

I'd be worried that what I said might be reported to another organisation **8.7%**

I wouldn't know the signs that I was experiencing domestic abuse **4.8%**

In Christian communities, power shouldn't be about control—it should be about serving others.

- Jesus used his power to help, heal, include those on the edges, and stand up to injustice.
- Love, humility, and lifting others up.
- Make space for others to feel safe, get involved, and grow.
- Listening, sharing responsibility, and being open to feedback.
- Helps people feel valued, especially those who have been ignored or hurt before.
- Right use of power is shown in our actions, and in the kind of community we build.

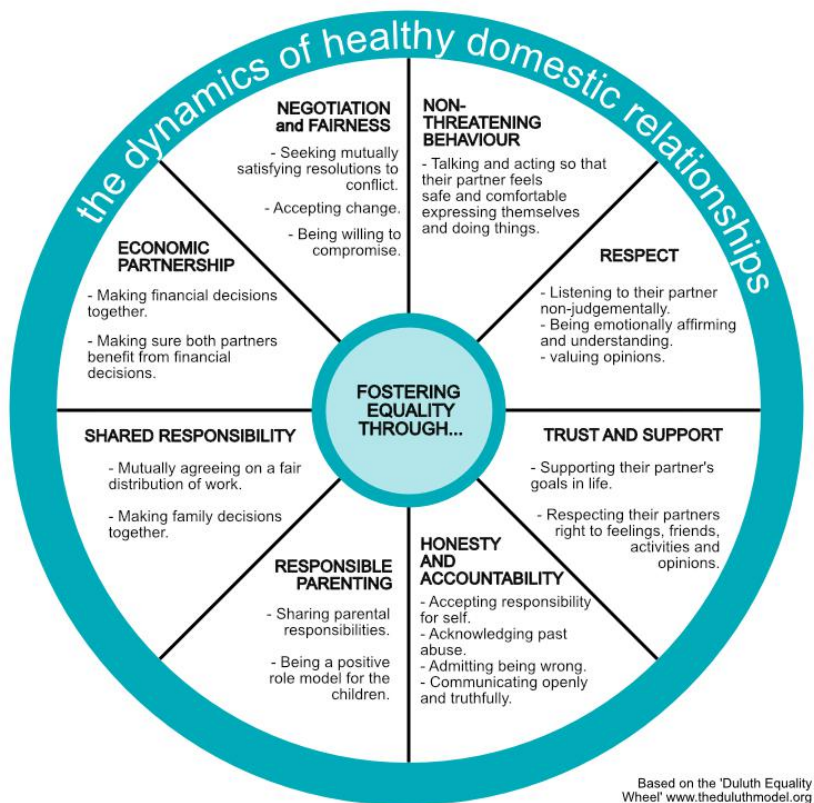
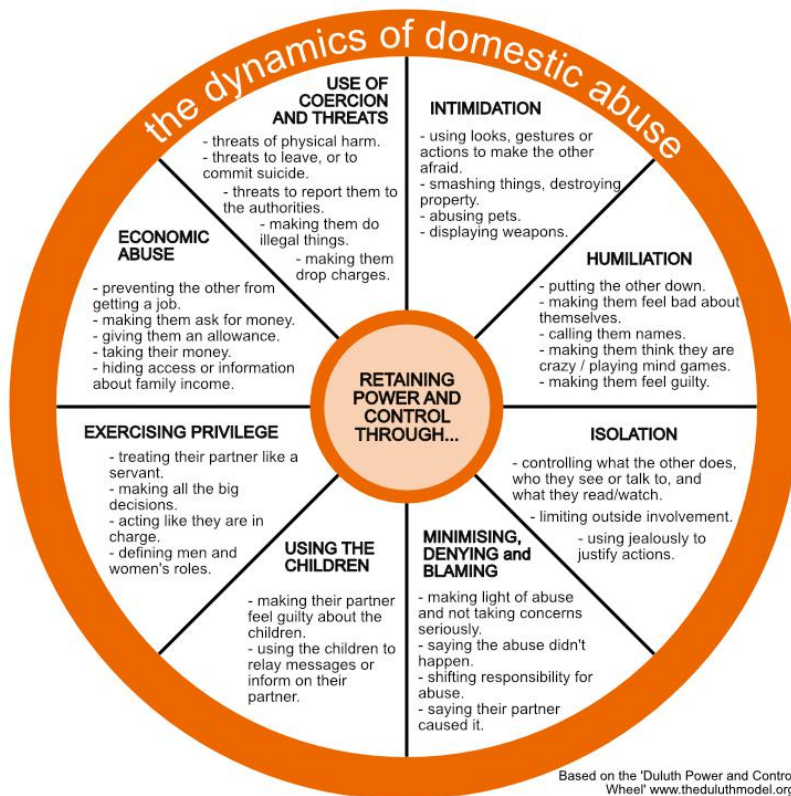
There are lots of **simple, practical steps churches can take** to respond well to safeguarding and domestic abuse concerns. In governance, it starts with making sure the right people are in place—appointing a Parish Safeguarding Officer and working closely with your Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor. These conversations shouldn't be one-offs; they should be part of regular PCC or Chapter discussions. Agreeing a clear domestic abuse statement and keeping safeguarding procedures and training up to date shows that your church takes this seriously.

Partnerships also matter. Make sure your church knows how to contact local domestic abuse services, and make that information visible—leaflets or posters in public areas can quietly help someone in need.

And finally, **keep it part of your church's life and learning.** These issues can be explored sensitively in youth and children's work, small groups, and through teaching and prayer. Some may feel called to support this work through giving or volunteering. However you respond, the key is to stay engaged and make your church a place of safety and support.

Remember, **cultural sensitivity is key** when responding to domestic abuse. It means listening without judgment, respecting different backgrounds - and also be aware of how your own culture may shape your action - or inaction.

Finally, **always follow safeguarding procedures, but approach every conversation with empathy, openness, and a willingness to understand the person's unique context.**



The 4 Rs of Safeguarding

Recognise

- Accept and take seriously what is being said without displaying shock or disbelief.
- Let the person tell their story and don't push for information or ask leading questions.
- Do not interrogate or decide if they are telling the truth.
- Be alert to signs and symptoms of abuse.

Respond

- Reassure the individual they have taken the right step in sharing this information and they are not to blame.
- Be honest; never make promises to keep what you are being told confidential. If abuse is involved, you will need to tell someone.
- Tell them what you will do with the information they have shared and that they will be kept informed.
- Do not introduce personal information from either your own experience or that of others.
- Do not investigate the matter any further for yourself, or approach the person about whom allegations may have been made.

Record

- Write down, concisely, exactly what is seen, said or heard and make clear where you have added your views or interpretation. You may find it helpful to use the 4 W's, as follows:
- WHO was involved? Name the key people
- WHAT happened? Facts not opinions
- WHEN did it happen? Date and time
- WHO have you referred the issue on to?

Refer

- Pass the information to the Safeguarding Lead or Diocesan Safeguarding Officer in your setting within 24 hours
- In case of an emergency call the Police