



There are a number of different definitions of domestic violence. In Eve's view, domestic violence is **physical, psychological, sexual or financial** violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. This can include **forced marriage** and so-called 'honour' crimes. Domestic violence often includes a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are, in themselves, inherently 'violent' - hence some people prefer to use the term 'domestic abuse' rather than 'domestic violence'.

Domestic violence is very common: research shows that it affects **one in four women** in their lifetime. **Two women a week** are killed by their partners or former partners. All forms of domestic violence - psychological, financial, emotional and physical - come from the abuser's desire for power and control over an intimate partner or other family members. Domestic violence is repetitive and life-threatening, it tends to worsen over time and it destroys the lives of women and children.

Crime statistics and research show that domestic violence is gender specific - that is, it is most commonly experienced by women and perpetrated by men, particularly when there is a pattern of repeated and serious physical assaults, or when it includes rape or sexual assault or results in injury or death. Men can also experience violence from their partners (both within gay and straight relationships); however women's violence towards men is often an attempt at self defence, and is only rarely part of a consistent pattern of controlling and coercive behaviour. For this reason, we will generally refer to the abuser as 'he' and to the survivor as 'she'. See also [Women and men, victims and survivors](#).

Domestic violence also has an enormous effect on the children in the family. Nearly three-quarters of children considered 'at risk' by Social Services are living in households where one of their parents/carers is abusing the other. A high proportion of these children are themselves being abused - either physically or sexually - by the same perpetrator. (Estimates vary between 30% to 66% depending upon the study.) See [Children and domestic violence](#) for more information.

Any woman can experience domestic violence regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, class, disability or lifestyle. Domestic violence can also take place in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. Domestic violence can also be perpetrated by other family members (for example, extended family). In some cases, older children - teenagers or young adults - are violent or abusive towards their mothers or other family members. (See '[When children become aggressive](#)' in the Children and domestic violence section of this handbook.)

Although every situation is unique, there are common factors that link the experience of an abusive relationship. Acknowledging these factors is an important step in preventing and stopping the abuse. This list can help you to recognise if you, or someone you know, are in an abusive relationship.

- **Destructive criticism** and verbal abuse: shouting; mocking; accusing; name calling; verbally threatening.
- **Pressure tactics:** sulking; threatening to withhold money, disconnecting the telephone, taking the car away, taking the children away, or reporting you to welfare agencies unless you comply with his demands; threatening or attempting



suicide; withholding or pressuring you to use drugs or other substances; lying to your friends and family about you; telling you that you have no choice in any decisions.

- **Disrespect:** persistently putting you down in front of other people; not listening or responding when you talk; interrupting your telephone calls; taking money from your purse without asking; refusing to help with childcare or housework.
- **Breaking trust:** lying to you; withholding information from you; being jealous; having other relationships; breaking promises and shared agreements.
- **Isolation:** monitoring or blocking your telephone calls; telling you where you can and cannot go; preventing you from seeing friends and relatives; shutting you in the house.
- **Harassment:** following you; checking up on you; not allowing you any privacy (for example, opening your mail), repeatedly checking to see who has telephoned you; embarrassing you in public; accompanying you everywhere you go.
- **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 and the children; threatening to kill or harm family pets; threats of suicide.
- **Sexual violence:** using force, threats or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts; having sex with you when you don't want it; forcing you to look at pornographic material; forcing you to have sex with other people; any degrading treatment related to your sexuality or to whether you are lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.
- **Physical violence:** punching; slapping; hitting; biting; pinching; kicking; pulling hair out; pushing; shoving; burning; strangling.
- **Denial:** saying the abuse doesn't happen; saying you caused the abusive behaviour; being publicly gentle and patient; crying and begging for forgiveness; saying it will never happen again.

See also [Recognising domestic violence](#).

### **Is domestic violence a crime?**

Domestic violence can include a number of different behaviours, and there is no single criminal offence of 'domestic violence'. Not all forms of domestic violence are illegal; some forms of emotional abuse, for example, are not defined as criminal - though these can also have a serious and lasting impact on a woman's or child's sense of well-being and autonomy.

However, many kinds of domestic violence constitute a criminal offence, including physical assault, wounding, attempting to choke, sexual assault, rape, threats to kill, harassment, stalking and putting people in fear of violence.

### **Who is responsible for the violence?**

The abuser is always responsible for the violence, and should be held accountable. There is no excuse for domestic violence and the victim is never responsible for the abuser's behaviour.

'Blaming the victim' is something that abusers will often do to make excuses for their behaviour, and quite often they manage to convince their victims that the abuse is



indeed their fault. This is part of the pattern and is in itself abusive. Blaming their behaviour on someone else, or on the relationship, their childhood, their ill health, or their alcohol or drug addiction is one way in which many abusers try to avoid personal responsibility for their behaviour.

It is important that any intervention to address domestic violence prioritises the safety of victims/survivors and holds the perpetrators accountable.

### **Women and men, victims and survivors**

This handbook is primarily addressed to women for the following reasons:

- The majority of domestic violence as defined above is perpetrated by men and experienced by women.
- Eve's information and support services exist to respond to the needs of women and children.

However, most of the information here would also apply equally to men who are on the receiving end of abuse, whether from a male or a female abuser.

The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' are both used, depending on the context. 'Survivor' is, however, preferred as it emphasises an active, resourceful and creative response to the abuse, in contrast to 'victim', which implies passive acceptance. If you are reading this, then you are - at least to some extent - a survivor.

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### **References**

- Department of Health (2002) 'Women's Mental health: Into the Mainstream: Strategic development of mental health care for women' (London: DH)
- Farmer, E. and Pollack, S. (1998) 'Substitute care for sexually abused and abusing children' (Chichester: Wiley)
- Walby, Sylvia and Allen, Jonathan (2004) 'Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey' (London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate)

This document has been adapted from the Women's Aid website:  
<http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-survivors-handbook.asp?section=000100010008000100310003>