

What is Domestic Violence and Abuse?

Domestic Violence and Abuse is a major social concern internationally. It is a substantial cause of death in women, with studies suggesting that approximately 50,000 women across the world were killed by an intimate partner or family member in 2017 alone. 3000 of whom were from Europe¹. Not only can domestic violence result in severe physical injury but it also has profoundly damaging psychological consequences for the victims, including fear, distress, anxiety, depression, and shame. The effects of Domestic Violence however reach much further than to the immediate victim. Similar emotional trauma is observed in children who witness abuse within the family home, an adverse childhood experience, which has been linked to increased physical and mental ill-health, suicide, substance misuse, childhood conduct disorders and the use of violence². In 2014, the European Institute for Gender Equality estimated that the economic costs of gender based violence, across the 28 European member states, was almost 226 billion Euros. Had this estimate included greater consideration of the effects of non-physical forms of abuse, as well as violence, it is likely that this estimate would have been even higher.

In 2011, the Council of Europe defined domestic violence as:

“all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit, irrespective of biological or legal family ties, or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence as the victim”.

This broad definition encompasses acts carried out by one family member towards another and includes abuse towards an intimate partner, a parent, child or sibling.

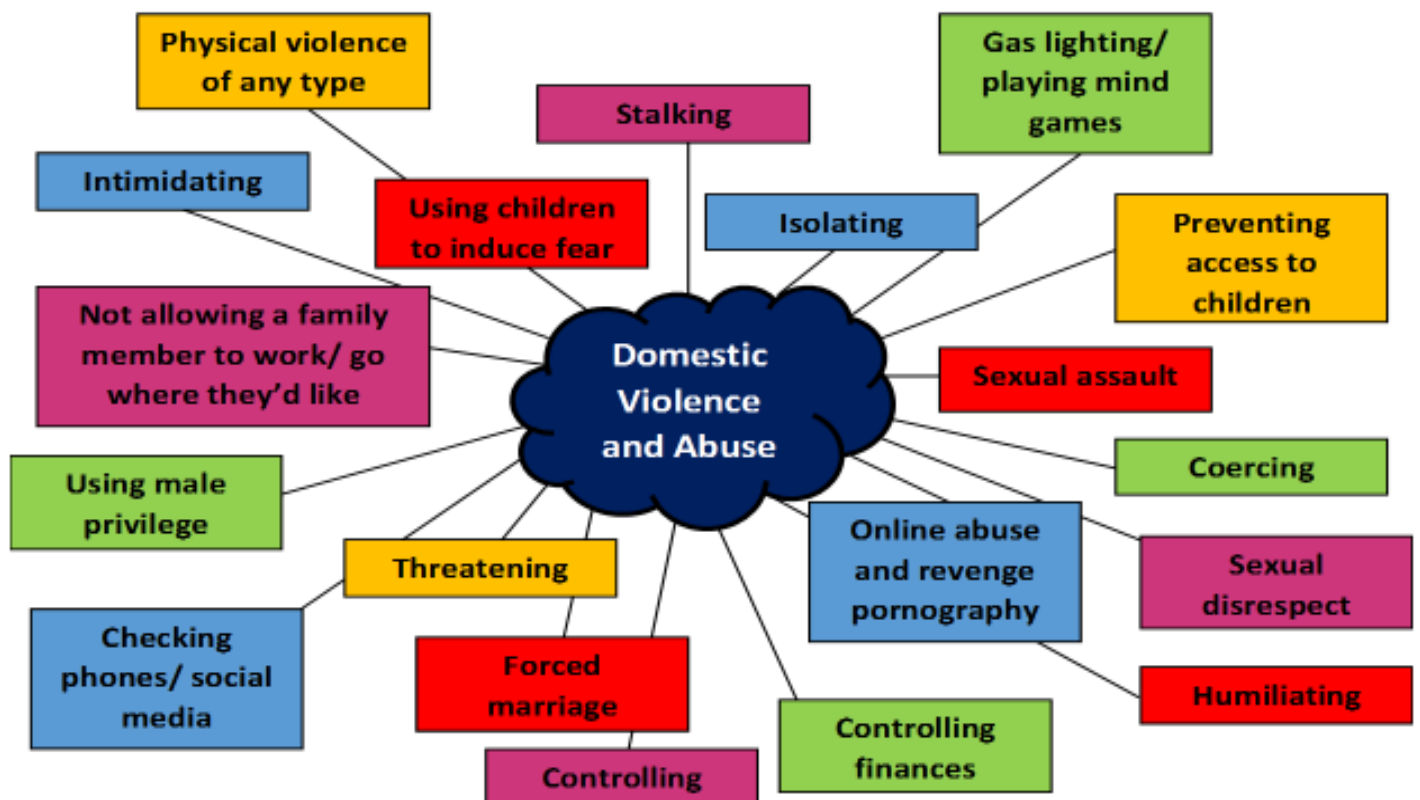
Domestic abuse can happen to anyone irrespective of gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, religion or background. Women are though the most likely to be victimised and to experience the most serious abuse. In 2015, the European Union Agency for Fundamental

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018). *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls*.

² UCL Institute of Health Equity (2015). *The impact of Adverse Experiences in the home on children and young people*.

Rights described that more than 1 in 5 women reported having been sexually or physically abused by a partner/ former partner since the age of 15. It should be noted though that the rates vary between member states and likely underrepresent the true extent of the problem given that Domestic Violence and Abuse tends to go unreported.

Some of the behaviours that can constitute domestic violence and abuse are described in the diagram below, though this is not an exhaustive list:



These behaviours are wide ranging and critically, it should be recognised that Domestic Abuse is not always physical in nature. It also includes non-physical forms of abuse that combine to form a pattern of **Coercive Control**. Coercive control occurs when the perpetrator uses threatening, intimidating, humiliating and/or violent behaviours over time, to frighten, harm or punish a partner and in turn to make that person subordinate. In doing so, they gain control of the victim's everyday life, isolate them from their sources of support and deprive them of the means needed for independence and escape from the relationship.

There is no one offence of Domestic Violence or Abuse. It may include, but is not limited to, offences of: Homicide, Assault, Rape, Sexual Assault, Criminal Damage/ Vandalism, Arson, Harassment and Stalking, Controlling and Coercive behaviour, and Animal Cruelty.

The Istanbul Convention

Given the high incidence of Domestic Violence and the extent of its impact, along with violence committed against women more generally, the Council of Europe introduced the Istanbul Convention in 2011. Once ratified by member states, the convention places an obligation on those states to:

Prevent violence against women and Domestic Violence by:

- Running awareness campaigns
- Including gender equality and the importance of non-violent conflict resolution within educational materials
- Setting up treatment programmes for perpetrators of Domestic Violence and those who have committed sexual offences
- Challenging attitudes that support violence against women or stereotypical gender roles by working closely with Non-Government Organisations, civil society and the media.
- Training front line staff who work with victims

Protect victims of gendered violence and Domestic Violence by:

- Removing perpetrators from their home in situations of immediate danger
- Providing victims with information about the support they can access
- Providing adequate and sufficient shelters
- Providing free state-wide helplines
- Providing referral centres whereby victims can access counselling, trauma care and forensic service.

Prosecute perpetrators

The convention requires states to introduce specific criminal offences, which include:

- Physical and psychological violence
- Stalking
- Sexual violence
- Sexual harassment
- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation
- Forced abortion and forced sterilisation

Once introduced, states are obligated to investigate and respond appropriately to allegations of violence against women and DV.

Author: Sarah Henfrey (Chartered and Registered Practitioner Forensic Psychologist)

Intervention Services, part of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service for England and Wales

EXTRA SECTION TO BE INCLUDED

Psychological risk assessment and rehabilitative interventions

In 2019, a primary aim of the Domestic Violence Expert Group was to share examples of practice across the represented member states, to promote experiential learning and evidence based practice. Assessing the risk of Domestic Violence and the design of rehabilitative psychological interventions were at the heart of these discussions.

If you are interested in finding out more, detailed information about assessment and intervention practices in Austria, Catalonia, England & Wales, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden, can be found on both the EuroPris and the Confederation of European Probation websites.