

# Issues affecting certain groups of victims (Appendix B)

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

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This practice advice supports the domestic abuse APP by providing further information on the issues and barriers faced by specific victim groups.

Officers and staff should recognise that victims' experiences of abuse are not uniform. Certain factors may increase vulnerability, reduce opportunities to seek help or shape the risks that victims face. These include:

- cultural background
- immigration status
- age
- disability
- sex
- sexual orientation
- family role
- profession

This appendix highlights considerations for policing responses to victims from these groups. It does not replace the directives in the main APP but should be read alongside them to inform decision-making, risk assessment and safety planning. Officers should continue to follow statutory safeguarding duties and referral processes at all times.

## Victims from different cultural backgrounds

A person's cultural background or immigration status may make them more vulnerable to domestic abuse and may create barriers to leaving an abusive partner. Possible issues a victim may face include the fact that:

- they may not speak much English
- they may not know where to turn to for help

- they may be reliant on their partner or partner's family for financial support
- they may be isolated from people outside their immediate family or community
- they may have an insecure immigration status and may fear contact with the authorities
- their right to remain may depend on their relationship with the abuser continuing
- they may have been forced into marriage or be subjected to so-called **'honour'-based abuse** (HBA)
- the police in the victim's country of origin may not enforce laws against domestic abuse effectively or at all, resulting in a lack of trust by victims
- the police in the victim's country of origin may be involved in persecution, so the community may mistrust police more generally
- police attendance may be viewed as shameful, discouraging those involved as well as neighbours from calling the police

Certain forms of domestic abuse – for example, between husband and wife, father and daughter or uncle and niece – may be accepted in some families or households. Cultural background may also be a factor. If abuse is considered normal by the victim, perpetrator and their community, the victim may not seek help or be aware of what help is available.

HBA is most often a form of domestic abuse, although it may be condoned or reinforced by the wider community. At its core is the notion of bringing shame on the family and it is usually practised by close family members. As a distinct manifestation of domestic abuse, it generates its own set of issues. In particular:

- officers should ensure that victims are offered sources of support from outside their family and community, which may pose a continued risk to the victim
- custody officers should closely monitor detainee contact with other family and community members if HBA is suspected
- suspected HBA should be central to any risk assessment and safety plan

Officers should bear in mind that some distinct cultural groups originating wholly or partly in the UK can also adopt a particular way of life that may create additional barriers for victims of domestic abuse.

For example, Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers who are victims of abuse can face similar cultural issues to those listed above. However, they may also face additional barriers to escaping an

abusive partner, due to the wider community's nomadic way of life.

Some of the reasons for this may be that:

- those who choose to live nomadically may find it difficult to access mainstream services
- inter-family feuds can mean that members of one family should not be housed where members of a feuding family are already living
- as the community is scattered, it may be difficult for victims who are rehoused to keep their emergency location secret from the rest of their family

Further advice and support can be found at [Friends, Families and Travellers](#).

For further information, go to:

- [HBA APP](#)
- [Protocol on the handling of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage offences](#)
- [Multi-agency statutory guidance for dealing with forced marriage](#)
- [Forced marriage resource pack](#)

## Victims with insecure or uncertain immigration status

A person may have insecure or uncertain immigration status if:

- they have entered the country on a spousal visa, having married a British citizen or a person with unlimited leave to remain
- there is a change to the relationship that their immigration status depends on

They may also be insecure if they have entered the country on a work permit and the incident or crime they allege may result in them losing their job. This could affect people in domestic servitude who allege abuse by their employer.

The consequences for victims of domestic abuse who decide to leave a relationship can be both severe and profound. Those with insecure or uncertain immigration status may additionally fear that contact with the authorities will result in them being returned to their country of origin. This could be harmful to their interests for many reasons. They may particularly fear the loss of their children.

Abusers may exploit these fears. Responders need to be aware that in some situations, abuse may be explained as if it is customary, common or acceptable in a specific cultural context. They need to be sensitive to a victim's potential fear of being criticised for:

- not respecting the cultural norm of family privacy
- bringing shame or unwanted attention to the relationship, family or wider community

Others may fear breaking up the family or believe that seeking help represents failure. They may fear insensitive responses, being ostracised or that their victimisation reflects badly on them.

[Immigration Rules, Part 8, paragraph 287](#) is relevant to victims who came to the UK as the spouse or civil partner of someone who is already settled here. These victims cannot apply for indefinite leave to remain in the country in their own right (or consequently have access to benefits) until they have completed a two-year period as the spouse or civil partner of that person.

All of these concerns may prevent a victim from reporting abuse to the police. They may also be emphasised by the perpetrator as a way of maintaining control and further isolating the victim.

However, immigration rules allow a victim of domestic violence (the term used in the rules) to apply independently of their spouse for indefinite leave to remain before the end of the minimum period. The rules require the victim to produce evidence that the relationship permanently broke down as a result of domestic violence. Police officers and staff should be mindful of this when arranging referrals and developing safety plans for victims with insecure or uncertain immigration status.

For further information, go to:

- [Immigration and asylum law information](#)

## Information sharing with immigration enforcement

Officers and staff should follow guidance set out in the [NPCC guidance document](#).

All decisions on sharing information with Immigration Enforcement must be made with consideration of the human rights of all involved. Information sharing is legal, when undertaken in accordance with [section 20 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#). There are also powers to share information with other organisations under common law. Any sharing of personal data must comply with the [Data Protection Act 2018](#).

The considerations below about when to share information help to address issues of necessity and proportionality. The requirement for recording supports accountability.

## Immigration offences

Unless there is evidence or intelligence that creates reasonable suspicion that an immigration offence is being – or has been – committed, then officers and staff should not:

- question a victim or witness about their immigration status
- share information on victims of domestic abuse incidents and crimes with Immigration Enforcement
- pass on information about a person who has insecure or uncertain immigration status to Immigration Enforcement for investigation of immigration offences

Officers should not routinely:

- search police databases for the purpose of establishing the immigration status of a victim or witness
- seek proof of a victim's or witness's entitlement to reside in the UK

## Sharing information for safeguarding purposes

When sharing information with Immigration Enforcement for safeguarding purposes, referring officers must be clear in their mind about how sharing the information will support safeguarding. If there is doubt, the referring officer should seek advice from a supervisor or subject matter expert.

## Sharing information to assist in resolving immigration status

There may be value in sharing information with UK Visas and Immigration to enable Immigration Enforcement to help to resolve a victim's immigration status, by pausing any enforcement activity. If this is considered, officers should seek consent of the person to do so. It may be preferable to refer the victim to a support charity or specialist legal service, so that they can receive the best independent informed advice.

## Proportionality

Decisions to share information must be proportionate. In the case of sharing for the purposes of investigating suspected immigration offences, policing should seek to take actions that are most effective at creating a safer society. In domestic abuse cases where there is evidence to justify reasonable suspicion that an immigration offence is being – or has been – committed, that will involve consideration of the potential for action to achieve improved safety. For example:

- Could a decision to share information with Immigration Enforcement hinder an investigation into a domestic abuse incident or crime because the victim withdraws their support?
- If so, is it more desirable not to share information?
- Will more effective provisions for safety be achieved through investigation of the domestic abuse?
- Will safeguarding measures for the victim and/or taking action against the alleged perpetrator deliver greater protection for the victim and others, including future domestic abuse victims?

## Recording the sharing of information

An officer who shares information about a domestic abuse victim with Immigration Enforcement should record:

- what information was shared
- when the information was shared
- with whom the information was shared
- why the information was shared

## Male victims

A man who is a victim of domestic abuse may be reluctant to approach the police for many reasons. Some of these are the same as for female victims, while other fears may be intensified because of gender stereotypes and societal assumptions. Examples include:

- fear of not being believed
- belief that the police will assume he has done something to provoke the situation
- fear of losing access to children
- shame at not being perceived as a 'real man'
- belief that the police will automatically assume the woman is the victim

The charity Respect has produced a [toolkit to aid professionals](#), including the police, working with male domestic abuse victims.

Not all domestic abuse services work with men, and it can be difficult to find refuge accommodation. The [UK Gold Book](#), available through subscription, lists services for men as well as other groups. The [ManKind Initiative](#) also produces a directory of services for male victims of domestic abuse, known as the [Oak Book](#). It is available by contacting the organisation.

For further information, go to:

- [Domestic Abuse Commissioner support for male victims](#)
- [Respect Men's Advice Line](#)

## Victims within the LGBT+ community

Members of the LGBT+ community may be abused by their partners in specific ways that are connected to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Examples include:

- threatening to 'out' a victim (telling family or work colleagues about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity)
- threatening to 'out' a lesbian or gay parent or couple to social services, claiming that their children will then be taken away from them
- threatening to disclose or make allegations about the victim's HIV status or other sexually transmitted infection (while also possible in the heterosexual community, this is potentially more damaging to a person in the LGBT community)
- telling a victim that abuse is part of a 'normal' LGBT relationship
- claiming that no one will help the victim because they are – for example – lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender
- criticising someone for not being, for example, a 'real lesbian' if they are currently in their first lesbian relationship after a series of heterosexual ones
- forced marriage or HBA

For further information, go to:

- APP on [Victim and witness care](#)
- [Lesbian/gay power and control wheel](#)
- [Same sex sexual violence and sexual violence involving a trans complainant or suspect/defendant – Toolkit for prosecutors](#)

Organisations that can assist LGBT victims of domestic abuse include:

- [GALOP](#)
- [Survivors UK](#)
- [The Albert Kennedy Trust](#)
- [Stonewall](#)
- [Stonewall Scotland](#) (describing LGBT experiences of domestic abuse)
- local [independent domestic violence adviser \(IDVA\)](#) services

For further information, go to:

- [The Coral Project: Exploring abusive behaviours in lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender relationships, interim report, September 2014](#)

Some police forces have lesbian and gay liaison officers (LAGLOs). These are police officers and staff who are dedicated to supporting the LGBT+ community.

A small study looking at transgender people's experiences of domestic abuse found high levels of abuse among those who responded. It also found very low levels of reporting and a lack of confidence in contacting the police. This was due in part to fear of revealing that they are transgender and of transphobia.

Types of abuse experienced that focused on transgender identity included:

- being stopped from being able to express their gender identity through their appearance (for example, clothes, hair, make-up)
- being made to feel ashamed, guilty or wrong about being transgender or about their background
- being stopped from taking medication or having treatment (for example, hormones or surgery) that they needed to enable their physical bodies to more closely match their gender identity

For further information on the study, go to:

- [Transgender people's experiences of domestic abuse](#)

For a discussion of the difficulties in collecting reliable data concerning transgender people, go to:

- [Office for National Statistics 2009 Trans data position paper update](#)

## Victims with a disability

Victims with a long-term illness or disability are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse from partners, ex-partners and family members. This includes physical, mental or learning disabilities. [Office of National Statistics analyses](#) consistently show that both men and women with a long-term illness or disability are significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse than those without.

Victims with a disability may face particular difficulties in reporting abuse and accessing support services.

These could include:

- communication difficulties
- concern that they will not be believed, particularly if they have known mental health issues
- not recognising the behaviour as abusive
- reluctance to report their abuser if that person is also their carer

Safety planning should address their specific needs – for example, supplying appropriate equipment to alert the police to an incident if the person is hearing-impaired and speech-impaired.

For further information, go to:

- [CPS support for disabled victims and witnesses of crime](#)
- [The Unseen: Blind and partially sighted people's experiences of domestic abuse](#)

## Victims from armed services families and emergency service and public service personnel

While there is no evidence that domestic abuse is more prevalent in military families than general society, such families do face unique factors in terms of:

- impact on career
- implications of loss of family accommodation
- particular psychological stressors
- long periods of not being together as a family

Victims can find it difficult to confide in anyone because frequent relocation can prevent them from establishing relationships of trust. Consequently, families can feel that they face additional barriers to reporting domestic abuse and accessing support.

There is precedent for a [protocol agreement](#) between a police force and military police forces that sets out practical working arrangements and information-sharing practices for responding to domestic abuse incidents involving military families. This allows the civilian and military police forces to work together to support victims of domestic abuse.

The umbrella organisation for armed services families is [Cobseo](#).

Confidential welfare support is available to service families affected by domestic abuse from:

- Army Welfare Service (AWS)
- Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)
- Royal Navy, Royal Marines Welfare (RNRM Welfare)

Unit welfare officers, chain of command and equivalent can assist with domestic abuse support, but this will not normally be confidential. [Domestic abuse: guidance and support for the armed forces community](#) is a useful resource for those experiencing armed forces domestic abuse as either victim or perpetrator, or providing support to those involved.

Emergency service personnel – namely, police, fire and ambulance staff – may be exposed to trauma that has an impact on their personal relationships in a similar way to military staff. Victims in a relationship with someone in these services may be concerned that they will not be believed, as may those whose partner is in a public service such as probation, social services or the prison service.

Victims who are themselves employed in an emergency or public service may find it equally difficult to report domestic abuse. They may have a sense that their role, training and increased awareness of domestic abuse means that it should not happen to them. They may be worried about their

partner being able to access personal information if they are both in the police service.

For more information, go to:

- [Specific management considerations when dealing with police perpetrators of domestic abuse](#)

## Teenagers and young persons

Teenagers and young persons may be vulnerable to domestic abuse from their peers and from older partners who may have groomed or conditioned them. They may have little experience of positive relationships, making it more difficult for them to identify abusive behaviour. Organisations like [Victim Support](#) can provide services within the school setting for children and young people to help them understand more about healthy relationships.

Teenagers and young persons may be vulnerable to peer pressure and gang associations. This may result in pressure to engage in sexual activity and sometimes sharing of partners between gang members.

Some of those teenagers and young persons who are part of the LGBT+ community may also be susceptible to domestic abuse. This applies not only in intimate partner relationships, but also from parents and other family members, who may not accept their emerging sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Victims of domestic abuse who are 16 or 17 years old are still children and are therefore victims of child abuse as well as domestic abuse. Witnessing domestic abuse in the home may also amount to child neglect.

Similarly, if the domestic abuse perpetrator is under 18 years old, officers should ensure that appropriate agencies are involved in [multi-agency risk assessment conferences for domestic abuse \(MARACs\)](#) or relevant support, as the offender is still considered a child. Relevant agencies include youth offending teams (YOTs), schools and charities, such as [SafeLives](#).

Changes in how people communicate, including increased use of social media, now mean that social networking platforms may be a setting for domestic abuse. This could be directly, for example, by:

- sending abusive or harassing messages
- sending or threatening to send intimate images or videos
- forming part of a pattern of controlling behaviour – for example, monitoring or interfering with a victim's social media accounts

For further information, go to:

- [SafeLives Resources for working with young people](#)

## Children as victims of domestic abuse

Under [section 3\(2\) of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#), a child is a victim of domestic abuse for the purposes of the act where they:

- see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse
- are related to either a perpetrator or victim of abuse, or either individual has parental responsibility for the child

This means that if the 2021 act imposes a duty in relation to victims of domestic abuse, this will include children falling under section 3.?

The act defines a child as any person under the age of 18. It uses the definition of 'parental responsibility' set out in the [Children Act 1989](#) and the definition of 'relative' set out in the [Family Law Act 1996](#).

The 2021 act does not create a new offence of domestic abuse. It reinforces the need to consider the full range of existing legislation (including relevant offences) and safeguarding procedures to protect children.

There is growing evidence that highlights how significant the impact of witnessing or experiencing domestic abuse is on a child's development and wellbeing. The purpose of this act is to ensure that children's needs are appropriately assessed and met.

Existing safeguarding, risk assessment and referral processes and procedures should be followed to ensure that children receive support and remain visible in the multi-agency response to domestic abuse. Statutory guidance in [Working together to safeguard children](#) sets out expectations for inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including those

experiencing domestic abuse.

The **Children and Social Work Act 2017** and 'Working together to safeguard children' place a joint and equal responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area on the:

- chief officer of police
- clinical commissioning group
- local authority

These parties are required to work together to coordinate targeted services for children to meet their needs at all stages of the continuum of need. This is intended to remove the blockages, bureaucracy and organisational self-interest that prevent the effective and efficient delivery and practice of multi-agency services to protect and safeguard children.

Officers attending incidents of domestic abuse are required to identify and record any children of the relationship, whether present or not. Where they are present, officers should check on their welfare and should communicate with them on an appropriate level.

Appropriately trained staff should be identified to continue to engage with children who might be identified as important witnesses or victims of direct abuse. This will aid communication and enable them to comply with the requirements under **achieving best evidence in criminal proceedings**.

Children experiencing domestic abuse should continue to be considered eligible to access services under the Victims' Code. The Code defines a victim as a person who has suffered harm – including physical, mental or emotional harm or economic loss – that was directly caused by a criminal offence. This includes those who have suffered such harm as a direct result of witnessing a crime, who can also access services that support victims. They do not need to:

- have provided a statement to the police
- have been interviewed by the police
- be required to attend court as a witness

Local arrangements should equip police officers and staff with the knowledge and understanding to safeguard children. This includes how to respond and refer details of children and young people being exposed to domestic abuse to their multi-agency safeguarding systems.

Consideration is required regarding ongoing responsibility for engaging with children and keeping them updated on investigations, particularly where those with parental responsibility are the abusers.

Officers should notify designated safeguarding leads at the child's school about domestic abuse through the [Operation Encompass](#) statutory scheme or similar information-sharing agreements.

There are significant associations between domestic abuse and child abuse. In households where domestic abuse is perpetrated, children may also be abused. Exposing children to domestic abuse may amount to an offence of child neglect by the suspect.

Officers should look out for indicators of domestic abuse when investigating child abuse. Similarly, they should be alert to potential concerns relating to children in a household where domestic abuse is perpetrated.

Guidance on the actions to follow if officers suspect child abuse can be found in APP on [investigating child abuse and safeguarding children](#). There is further information on [child cruelty](#) offences and [neglect](#) offences within this APP.

In all cases – whether child abuse, domestic abuse or both – police officers should focus on the best outcomes for victims and apply safeguarding principles. CPS [Domestic abuse guidelines for prosecutors](#) state that prosecutors should apply the domestic abuse policy to all cases of current or former partner or family abuse, irrespective of the age of the offender or the complainant.

Further resources include:

- [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 statutory guidance](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)
- APP for [investigating child abuse and safeguarding children](#)

## Familial abuse

Police officers are accustomed to dealing with intimate partner abuse, which is what is traditionally thought of as domestic abuse. Familial (non-intimate partner) abuse poses some different challenges in terms of finding the appropriate response. It can be less easily recognisable as domestic abuse, yet it falls within the [definition of domestic abuse](#) and should be treated as

such.

Types of familial abuse include:

- abuse of older people
- child-to-parent abuse
- sibling abuse

## Abuse of older people

As with other domestic relationships, older victims are often dependent on their abuser, whether this is an intimate partner or a family member. Unlike other such relationships, dependence generally increases with age for health reasons. This makes the prospect of the victim gaining independence from their abuser less likely than for other domestic abuse victims.

Abuse can occur where the abuser has taken on a carer role towards the older person. If the adult child or grandchild has formally taken on the role, abuse may result from tensions caused by the carer relationship or as a means of maintaining control. When the presenting issue seems to be abuse by the carer, officers should consider whether it also constitutes domestic abuse.

In some cases, a person with a certain illness or condition – for example, dementia – may also become uncharacteristically abusive to their familial carer. The carer may not recognise this as domestic abuse or may not report it because they feel it is not the person's fault. However, the difficult nature of the situation can sometimes result in mutual abuse. Where such tensions appear to be present, officers should consider consulting with Adult Services to identify appropriate support to keep both parties safe.

**Section 42 of the Care Act 2014** requires a referral to police in any case where abuse is suspected of an adult who has care needs that mean they are unable to protect themselves from abuse. Where the concern involves suspected abuse by a familial carer, officers should consider that the case may be domestic abuse from the outset. Officers should look out for signs of other manifestations of domestic abuse when investigating vulnerable adult abuse in a household. They should also be alert to concerns relating to vulnerable adults in a household where domestic abuse is perpetrated.

For further information, go to:

- [Hourglass](#) (a national charity working on abuse of older people, whose website has links to research and case studies)
- [Building a UK-wide picture of the abuse of older people: Domestic abuse of older people](#)
- [Policy guidance on the prosecution of crimes against older people](#)
- [Adults at risk APP](#)
- [Vulnerable adult abuse investigation](#)
- [Safeguarding adults boards](#)

## Child-to-parent abuse

Child-to-parent (or adolescent-to-parent) abuse is generally used to refer to abuse of parents by teenage children. It can also apply to abuse of grandparents carrying out parental functions. Where the child is aged 16 years or over, this behaviour falls within the [definition of domestic abuse](#). The definition includes those with a parental relationship with the child – for example, this would cover foster parents.

Child-to-parent abuse can be committed by adult children of any age on parents and grandparents, as well as by younger children. Where a child aged under 16 years is abusing a parent or grandparent, officers should refer the matter to social services and investigate as appropriate.

In all cases, parents may be frightened, be ashamed or simply not know how to address the situation effectively and should be offered support.

Although this type of domestic abuse is more likely to come to the attention of the police in families that are more widely involved with services, it can occur in all families. There is some evidence to suggest that exposure to violence at home, either between parents or towards the child, may make parent abuse more likely. Children may imitate the abusive behaviour of the perpetrator towards the other parent, or they may become violent towards the perpetrator to protect the abused parent. Sibling abuse may also occur alongside other abuse.

For further information, go to:

- [Family Lives](#)
- [Respect](#)

## Sibling abuse

Sibling abuse may begin at any age. However, it falls within the definition of domestic abuse once both siblings are aged 16 years or older. If the victim is 16 or 17 years old, it is also child abuse. The dynamics are complex, which makes it difficult for officers to recognise and challenging to resolve. Although there is some evidence relating to sibling sexual abuse, there is little evidence on sibling abuse more generally.

## Tags

APP Domestic abuse