



## **Calls for the upcoming Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill**

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### **Introduction**

Economic abuse involves an individual interfering (through control, exploitation and/or sabotage) with a partner's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources. Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the only charity in the United Kingdom dedicated to raising awareness of this form of abuse and building the capacity of services to respond.

Our work is vital: the most recent Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that 26 per cent of women (around 4.3 million) aged 16-59 years have experienced some form of domestic violence. Research also reveals that:

- Women are three and a half times more likely to be subject to domestic violence if they find it impossible to find £100 at short notice.<sup>1</sup>
- The risk of experiencing physical abuse among those who experience economic abuse is nearly five times greater than those who do not.<sup>2</sup>
- When women experience economic abuse within a context of coercive control then they are at increased risk of domestic homicide.<sup>3</sup>
- Economic barriers to leaving can result in women staying with abusive men for longer than they want to and experiencing more harm as a result.<sup>4</sup>
- Lack of economic security and access to resources post-separation are the primary reason women return to an abusive partner.<sup>5</sup>

Yet despite high levels of economic abuse reported to domestic violence support services, responses to this issue are at an early stage of development.<sup>6</sup>

SEA welcomes the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill announced in the Queen's Speech. We believe it is a significant opportunity to recognise and address economic abuse - ensuring that community, legal, financial and political institutions all have the understanding, resources and processes in place to respond to it. We have three key calls:

### **1. Economic abuse must be recognised and defined in the Bill**

The proposed legislation will define domestic violence in law and this definition must include economic abuse. The Government's current policy definition of domestic violence recognises financial abuse – which is a form of economic abuse – yet this is too narrow as victims may be denied more than money itself, but also those things it can buy, including food, clothing, transportation, and a place to live. In addition, the victim may be forced into

taking out loans and entering into other financial contracts by the perpetrator. Economic abuse accounts for all of these types of behaviour.

As such, SEA believes **it is vital that economic abuse is recognised in the Bill, both through including it in the definition of domestic violence and defining what economic abuse is.** Without this, support for victims of economic abuse will continue to be limited, and they will have no access to justice through the law.

## **2. The response to economic abuse must support victims whilst strongly tackling perpetrators**

It is vital that the response to domestic violence both supports victims of economic abuse, and brings perpetrators to justice and that overseeing this forms part of the new Domestic Violence and Abuse Commissioner's role.

In terms of perpetrators, **economic abuse must be made a criminal offence** in the Bill. Whilst Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 provides scope for recognising economic abuse within controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate/family relationship, it does not criminalise specific acts of economic abuse, nor does it release victims from liabilities that arise from it. The Bill must do this, whilst also recognising the impact that economic abuse can have on children and ensuring that perpetrators are unable to benefit economically if they kill their partner (through jointly owned assets etc.).

Furthermore, **to help prevent ongoing economic abuse, measures to address it must be included within a consolidated domestic abuse civil prevention and protection order.** For example, the return of specific items of the victim's property and a freeze on the sale of jointly owned property and use of joint bank accounts.

In addition to holistic support for victims, **the Bill must introduce access to financial support for those who have experienced domestic abuse.** This will enable them to rebuild their lives safely, and will encourage more victims to feel able to leave or report a perpetrator.

## **3. The prevalence of economic abuse, and effectiveness of the response to it, must be measured**

In the run up to the Bill and following its introduction, it is important that the prevalence of economic abuse is better understood so that organisations can effectively plan their responses to it in terms of both victims and perpetrators. The existing question about financial abuse within the Crime Survey for England and Wales needs to be reviewed and broadened. The Office of National Statistics should also report on economic abuse alone, not alongside emotional abuse which is currently the case. In addition, it is vital that any new responses to victims and perpetrators introduced as a result of new legislation are evaluated to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

## For more information

For more information on SEA or any of the issues covered in this briefing, please contact Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs at [survivingeconomicabuse@gmail.com](mailto:survivingeconomicabuse@gmail.com)

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<sup>1</sup> Walby, S. and Allen, J (2004) *Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*. London: Home Office Research Study 276

<sup>2</sup> Outlaw, M. (2009) No One Type of Intimate Partner Abuse: Exploring Physical and Non-Physical Abuse Among Intimate Partners *Journal of Family Violence*. 24: 263-272

<sup>3</sup> Websdale, N (1999) *Understanding Domestic Homicide*, California: Northeastern University Press

<sup>4</sup> Earlywhite, M. and Stohl, I. (2005) *In Our Shoes: The Next Steps*, Washington: State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<sup>5</sup> RMIT/ANZ (2016) *MoneyMinded Impact Report 2016: The role of financial education in a family violence context*

<sup>6</sup> Sharp-Jeffs, N. (2016) *Supporting Survivors of Financial Abuse*, Winston Churchill Memorial Trust