

Economic abuse and the Domestic Abuse Bill

Accessing justice



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A B U S E

The effects of economic abuse can be life-changing, but this form of abuse has never been recognised in UK law.

The draft Domestic Abuse Bill includes economic abuse for the first time, and has the potential to bring change for victims and survivors.

What is the draft Domestic Abuse Bill?

"I am completely broke and broken. I have no food for my child. I can't pay my rent or my bills. We sit in the dark in our coats with hot water bottles because I can't afford gas and electricity. I'm totally isolated and full of shame and guilt."

The government has committed to introduce a new law on domestic abuse to transform the response to this devastating crime.

The draft Domestic Abuse Bill contains new measures to protect victim-survivors of domestic abuse. It gives a legal definition of domestic abuse and would create a Domestic Abuse Commissioner role to monitor the government's response to domestic abuse.

What difference will it make?

1. The draft Bill recognises economic abuse

The draft Bill includes economic abuse as a form of domestic abuse. This means that economic abuse would be recognised in law for the very first time.

The Bill recognises that domestic abuse can be (but is not limited to): psychological, physical, sexual, **economic** and emotional forms of abuse.

Abusers may interfere (through control, exploitation and sabotage) with more than 'just' their partner's access to money and finances (financial abuse). They also interfere with things that money can buy, including

food, clothing, transportation and a place to live. This is **economic abuse**, and it is designed to limit someone's freedom.

This type of abuse can create economic instability and/or make one partner dependent on the other. This can prevent victims from leaving and rebuilding their lives.

2. The draft Bill defines economic abuse

The draft Bill defines economic abuse as any behaviour that has a substantial and adverse effect on an individual's ability to:

- acquire, use or maintain money or other property (such as a mobile phone or car) or
- obtain goods or services (such as utilities, like heating, or items such as food and clothing).

This definition means that everyone will have the same understanding of what economic abuse is. It also means that agencies such as the police will have to recognise economic abuse and take it seriously.

The Bill will not make economic abuse a crime in its own right (although SEA is campaigning to make this happen). However, it can be addressed through other offences, such as criminal damage and controlling or coercive behaviour.

3. The draft Bill raises awareness of economic abuse

The inclusion of economic abuse in the legal definition of domestic abuse helps raise awareness of it.

Domestic abuse has long been understood to include forms of physical abuse. Economic abuse does not 'leave bruises', and so it often goes unnoticed.

The change to the law may help people become more aware of the signs of economic abuse, so it can be recognised earlier.

It also reinforces the fact that domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour and that all victim-survivors are entitled to a response.

4. The draft Bill will help transform responses to economic abuse

Services such as the police, housing and social services will need to consider how they respond to economic abuse.

Many companies that have contact with victims and survivors of economic abuse are already doing this. A number of banks and building societies, for example, are training their staff, and reviewing policies and procedures that can inadvertently facilitate economic abuse.

The government provided around £250,000 to help transform responses to economic abuse. The funds have been used to:

- create a [national advice service for banks and building societies](#) to help them identify customers who may be facing economic abuse and improve their responses
- increase the capacity of existing [telephone casework services](#) for victims of domestic abuse who are experiencing financial difficulty, and
- [develop resources](#) to help people identify if they are experiencing economic abuse and what they can do.

5. The draft Bill will help victims access justice

The draft Bill will help hold perpetrators of economic abuse to account so that victims can access justice.

The government has committed to updating:

- the legal guidance on the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour so that it references economic abuse; and
- relevant legal guidance for prosecutors to ensure cases of economic abuse can be prosecuted.

[Police training](#) is also being updated to support officers to identify and respond to economic abuse.

When does the Bill become law?

We expect the Bill to be introduced to and progress through Parliament during the course of 2020.

Read [SEA's response to the draft Bill](#) and recommendations to the government.

Further support

If you are experiencing economic abuse, you are not alone. We have more information that can support you to take steps towards safety and begin to regain control of your finances.

Visit www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/resources for information including:

- Steps you can take towards economic safety
- Economic abuse and controlling or coercive behaviour
- How the police can help

Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse and transforming responses to it. We are determined that women are supported to survive and thrive.

For more information

Visit www.survivingeconomicabuse.org

Created July 2019
Reviewed January 2020
Next review July 2020

Registered charity number 1173256