



Economic abuse and the Domestic Abuse Bill

Accessing justice

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

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

What is the 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 introduced the Domestic Abuse Bill to Parliament to transform the response to this issue.

It 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 Bill recognises economic abuse

When the bill has progressed through Parliament, economic abuse will be recognised in law for the very first time.

The Bill recognises that domestic abuse can be (but is not limited to):

- psychological abuse
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse
- **economic abuse**

Abusers may control (through restriction, 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 Bill defines economic abuse

The 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 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 violence. 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 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.

As part of recognising and responding to the needs of 'vulnerable customers', many companies that have contact with victims and survivors of economic abuse are already doing this.

Several 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

- [develop resources](#) to help people identify if they are experiencing economic abuse and what they can do

5. The Bill will help victims access justice

The 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
- 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?

The Bill was introduced to Parliament in early 2020. We expect the Bill to become law by the autumn.

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

"I often wonder how I got here. I got married to this charming man in the legal profession and we had children. But it was after I got married that I was systematically and unwittingly socially isolated, psychologically, emotionally, financially abused and controlled."

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.

Financial Support Line for Victims of Domestic Abuse

W 01323 635 987 (Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm & 2pm–5pm)

The Financial Support Line for Victims of Domestic Abuse is run in partnership between Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) and Money Advice Plus. It offers specialist advice to people experiencing domestic abuse who are in financial difficulty.

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

