



Calls for the upcoming Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill

Introduction

Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the only charity in the United Kingdom dedicated to developing responses to women whose economic resources (money, property and other economic assets) have been controlled, exploited or sabotaged by a current or ex-partner.

Our work is vital: the most recent Crime Survey for England and suggests that 27 percent of women (around 4.5 million) aged 16-59 years have faced some form of domestic abuse and the impact of economic abuse can last a lifetime. For example, coerced debt can lead to a bad credit rating that can follow women for many years after the abuse has ended, and shatter their trust in others. Yet domestic violence support services, the criminal and civil justice systems and financial and legal services do not routinely have the expertise, processes or resources to deal with this form of abuse.

SEA welcomes the upcoming Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill. We believe it is a significant opportunity to resolve a number of issues with the system, and have three key calls we see as necessary to ensure that the response to domestic violence is fit for purpose.

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. 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 financially 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

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