

## D. THE NATURE AND IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

The statutory definition domestic abuse was updated by the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#). Domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between someone aged 16 or over and someone to whom they are or have been “[personally connected](#)” whether they are partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. ‘Abusive behaviour’ is defined in the act as any of the following:

- physical or sexual
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional or other abuse

‘Personally connected’ is defined in the act as parties who:

- are married to each other
- are civil partners of each other
- have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- are or have been in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- are relatives

Domestic abuse occurs in relationships where one individual holds power over another and uses that power to harm. It consists of the violation of another person’s human rights. Essentially, domestic abuse is terrorism. Webster’s Dictionary defines terrorism as ‘the calculated use of violence (or threat of violence) against civilians in order to attain goals . . . through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear.’ Trauma specialist Dr Judith Herman has identified major commonalities between the experience of survivors of domestic violence and prisoners of war. She compares, ‘the survivors of vast concentration camps created by tyrants who rule nations and the survivors of small, hidden concentration camps created by tyrants who rule their homes’ (Dr Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery, p3).

### 1. Who are the Victims?

Domestic abuse occurs across all of society, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth or geography.

#### Gender-based abuse

- The [Office for National Statistics](#) (November 2023) indicates that approximately 1 in 5 people aged 16 years and over (9.8 million) had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years.
- In the UK, women are more likely than men to be survivors of domestic violence.
- For every three survivors of domestic abuse, two will be female, one will be male. The [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) March 2023 reported that
- Women are less likely to leave an abusive relationship at an earlier stage.
- One in four women and one in six to seven men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime.
- On average two women are killed by their partner or ex-partner every week in England and Wales.<sup>4</sup>
- Men are more than two times less likely to report incidences of abuse.

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<sup>4</sup> [What is Domestic Abuse: The Facts - Refuge](#)

- Accurate figures will always be impossible to ascertain because domestic abuse is vastly underreported. For men, such reluctance to report is compounded by the stigma and shame attached to perceptions of weakness from society in general.
- Women in the SDA Church are just as likely to be abused by their husbands as women in the general population.<sup>5</sup>
- Men are more likely to be abused by their wives than those in the general population.

### Children and Young People

Children are also profoundly affected by domestic abuse and are at serious risk in abuse situations. In addition to the risk of physical harm, witnessing domestic violence can result in long-term emotional and psychological trauma across the life-span. Research has also indicated a strong connection between domestic violence and child abuse. Where domestic abuse is perpetrated in a family context, it is recommended that church leaders work in close liaison with designated safeguarding lead.

- 130,000 children live in households where there is high-risk domestic abuse<sup>6</sup>
- 64% of high and medium risk victims have children, on average 2 each<sup>7</sup>
- A quarter (25%) of children in high-risk domestic abuse households are under 3 years old. On average, high-risk abuse has been going on for 2.6 years, meaning these children are living with abuse for most of their life.<sup>8</sup>
- 62% of children living in domestic abuse households are directly harmed by the perpetrator of the abuse, in addition to the harm caused by witnessing the abuse of others.<sup>9</sup>
- 1 in 5 teenage girls have experienced domestic abuse in their dating relationship. [National Centre for Domestic Violence](#).
- those in the age group 16-24 are those most at risk of domestic abuse. Although some features of teenage relationship abuse are similar to adult domestic abuse, the forms and experience of this issue, as well as the challenges in seeking and providing services, make many of the issues faced by teenagers unique.<sup>10</sup>

Many young people will be experiencing multiple risk factors. However, as with abuse in adult relationships, teenage relationship abuse occurs across diverse groups and cultures. Teenage relationship abuse can occur in various forms, including verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, and financial, and the experience may have both immediate and long-term effects on young people. It is sometimes the case that there are unclear parameters between survivor and perpetrator which adds to the complexity of cases.

### Parents

Child to Parent Abuse (CPA) is where a child (of any age) displays repeated abusive behaviours towards a parental figure. This abuse may be physical, verbal, economic, damage to property, stealing from a parent, digital, coercive or even sexual. Many of these families may be facing multiple issues such as substance abuse, mental health issues and domestic violence. The lack of recognition of this issue means that many families may not recognise that they need support and may feel unable to ask for help due to feeling stigma and shame.

- CPA thought to occur in at least 3% of UK homes, although the real figure could be much higher.<sup>11</sup>
- 43 per cent of cases of child to parent abuse are not reported to the police (Brennan et al., 2022).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [enditnow: Adventists Say No to Violence](#)

<sup>6</sup> [SafeLives - Getting it Right First Time: Policy Report 2015](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Safe Young Lives: Young People and Domestic Abuse 2015](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Child to Parent Abuse: supporting Parents and Professionals](#) – Parental Education Growth Support (PEGS)

<sup>12</sup> [Amanda Holt - Child to Parent Abuse – Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation \(2022\)](#)

- According to the report "[Hidden Harms](#)" by the Violence Reduction Unit, at least 40% of child-to-parent violence and abuse incidents are unreported to police.
- The majority of offences reported were categorised by the police as 'Violence Against the Person' (60%), followed by 'Criminal Damage' (25%).<sup>13</sup>
- Of the victims, 89 per cent were parents and six per cent were grandparents (Brennan et al., 2022).<sup>14</sup>
- mothers (and female carers) appear to be much more likely to be targeted than fathers/male carers, at a ratio of approximately 8:2<sup>15</sup>
- 65 per cent of incidents reported to the MPS involved those aged 19-25 years, with 34 per cent aged 15-18 years, and one per cent aged 12-14 years<sup>16</sup>

There are also often issues of lack of awareness of existing support (notably family support groups); parents not seeing themselves as legitimate recipients of support; lack of knowledge on drugs, alcohol and their effects; an 'it'll never happen to us' mind-set; and a lack of consensus on the best course of action within couples.

It is important to recognise the effects that child or adolescent to parent abuse may have on both the parent and the young person and to establish trust and support for both. It is also important that a young person using abusive behaviour against a parent receives a safeguarding response. Remember this is domestic abuse and general domestic abuse considerations apply.

See the Home Office: [Information guide: adolescent to parent violence and abuse \(APVA\)](#) and HP Inspectorate of Probation: [Child to Parent Abuse](#).

## Elder Abuse

Abuse of older people is a hidden, and often ignored, problem in society. No standard definition of elder abuse applies within the UK public sector. In 1993 Action on Elder Abuse (now [Hourglass](#)) established the following definition of elder abuse as 'A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person'. [Age UK](#) share the following data:

- 1 in 30 people aged 60 to 74 and approximately 1 in 50 people aged 75+ have been subjected to domestic abuse in the 2023.
- 400,000 older people were victims of domestic abuse in 2023 in England and Wales alone.
- older people are just as likely to be abused by an adult child or grandchild as they are a spouse or partner. Abusers may be a partner, relative, neighbour, a paid or volunteer care worker or other professional.
- men become at increased risk of being subjected to domestic abuse as they age.
- many older people subjected to abuse have a health condition or disability, which may mean they rely on their abuser for care and support. Older people may also be abused by a person they care for.

If you become aware or concerned about someone you know, it is important that you refer the case to your local Domestic Abuse agencies. Since domestic violence (DV) does not always meet the threshold for intervention in adult social care, DV services are always the best option in addition to whatever support services Adult Social Care can offer. Cases of alleged Elder Abuse are assessed at a local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). The Domestic Violence MARAC is a meeting where agencies talk about the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and draw up an action plan to help manage that risk. You should be aware that,

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<sup>13</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Ibid.](#)

despite your concern, any older person has the right to decline assistance. However, a statutory obligation exists if the person is an 'adult at risk'.

### **People with Disabilities -**

People with disabilities are often in particularly vulnerable circumstances. Certain disabilities, particularly physical disabilities, may decrease their ability to physically defend themselves and escape from abuse. Other disabilities can limit a person's ability to understand and recognise potential signs of abuse.

- Around 1 in 7 (14.1%) disabled adults aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2019, compared with 1 in 20 (5.4%) non-disabled adults. ([Outcomes for Disabled People, ONS 2021](#))
- People with learning disabilities are three times more likely to experience domestic abuse, and in the last year alone it has happened to nearly one in every five people. ([Outcomes for Disabled People, ONS 2021](#)).
- Disabled women (17.5%) were more than twice as likely to experience domestic abuse in the last year than non-disabled women (6.7%) and people with learning disabilities experience the highest rate of domestic abuse (19.1%) ([Outcomes for Disabled People, ONS 2021](#)).
- Disabled people experience domestic abuse for longer periods of time, and more severe and frequent abuse. This may include more severe coercion and control, or abuse from carers ([Disability and Domestic Abuse - Public Health England, 2015](#)).
- Disabled people experiencing domestic abuse are twice as likely to have planned or attempted suicide. - SafeLives Crime survey ([Disability and Domestic Abuse - Public Health England, 2015](#)).

### **LGBT**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to being to be an organisation that is as diverse, equal and inclusive as we can make it within the biblical values of love, compassion, truth and justice. The Church has a duty of care where individuals within the Church community who either identify as LGBT or have a homosexual orientation are victims of domestic abuse.

- It is estimated that about 25% of LGBT people experience domestic abuse, a figure similar to women in opposite-gendered relationships.<sup>17</sup>
- Underreporting of abuse in LGBT relationships is often compounded by the fear of sexual orientation being revealed.
- Perpetrators may threaten to 'out' the victim to friends, family, religious communities, co-workers, and others as a method of control.
- The often-secretive nature of homosexual relationships can create an environment in which abuse thrives and victims are reluctant to seek help.

LGBT victims of abuse may blame the abuse on being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, however abuse is always the fault of the abuser whatever the circumstance. In seeking to support LGBT victims of abuse, it is vital that pastoral carers do so with a non-judgemental attitude. The primary objective of support in such instances is the safety of the individual.

## **2. Recognising signs of domestic abuse**

- The victim is never alone and is always accompanied by their partner
- The victim seems very isolated from friends and family
- The victim does not have any friends or gradually withdraws

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<sup>17</sup> [SafeLives: Free to Be Safe: LGBT+ People Experiencing Domestic Abuse](#)

- The victim stops attending church
- The perpetrator may talk for or over the victim
- The victim may look or act nervous or anxious in front of their partner
- The victim may have bruises or injuries with no plausible explanation
- The victim may justify the perpetrator's behaviour
- The victim may be reluctant to give their home address and may discourage visitors
- The victim does not have access to money or other necessities
- The perpetrator is always checking up on the victim
- The victim becomes withdrawn, loses confidence, and changes their appearance

### **3. Barriers to Disclosing Domestic Abuse**

- have tried to disclose before, but not been believed
- be dependent upon the perpetrator
- be prevented from speaking to others without the perpetrator present
- be fearful of the consequences, including involvement of police or child protection services
- feel ashamed/embarrassed/guilty
- fear not being listened to/understood/taken seriously/believed
- not realise their experience is abusive
- have problems communicating with others
- believe (or hope) that the abuse will not be repeated
- not know who to tell
- never have been asked the right questions to lead them to open up.

### **4. Barriers to Accountability**

- Denial – a refusal to believe that abuse is happening
- Cultural acceptance – norms of behaviour differ from culture to culture
- Fear of reprisal from the perpetrator or their supporters
- Misplaced priorities - preserving the family unit is prioritised over safety
- Deference to leaders – the desire to protect those of 'high standing' in the community
- Shame culture – it may be easier to endure the abuse than to 'bring shame' on the family
- Apathy – the lack of desire to get involved in other people's business
- Moral justification – the belief that the abuse is 'the right thing to do'