Immigration Abuse

Definitions

Domestic abuse
'Any incident or patterns of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.'

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, from any background and at any age. It occurs in a range of relationships, including with an intimate partner, a child, a sibling, an ex-partner, a casual partner or a family member. It can happen at any point in a relationship, whether you live with the person or not. Domestic abuse is not always physical – any type of threatening, controlling or coercive behaviour is abuse whether it's physical, psychological, sexual, economic or emotional.

'Honour'-based abuse
'A collective and planned crime or incident, mainly perpetrated against women and girls, by their family or their community, who act to defend their perceived honour, because they believe that the victim(s) have done something to bring shame to the family or the community.' (IKWRO definition)

'Honour'-based abuse is an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour.

Immigration abuse
Immigration abuse is a form of domestic abuse in which a perpetrator uses, manipulates or exploits a person's immigration status, immigration insecurity, immigration processes, documents or lack of immigration knowledge to exert power and control, including to control, intimidate, isolate or create dependency, and to prevent or deter them from accessing safety, support and justice.

Immigration status can become a weapon of coercive control. The perpetrator does not need to be legally correct about immigration law for threats, misinformation or document control to create real fear, dependency and barriers to safety.

Handling and responding to disclosures

Handling disclosures of domestic abuse by migrant victims requires sensitivity, cultural awareness, and some legal understanding. These survivors often face heightened vulnerabilities such as immigration insecurity, language barriers, and fear of deportation that make disclosure especially difficult.

What to do when a disclosure happens

Email: bookings@sundialcentre.org

Website: www.sundialcentre.org

Ensure safety first

- Speak in a private, secure space – never in front of others, especially family or community members.
- If on the phone, ask if they are safe to speak and agree on a safe word or time for follow-up if needed.

Use trauma-informed language

- Reassure them (but do not promise solutions).
- Avoid judgment or disbelief. Many migrant survivors fear they won't be taken seriously.
- Avoid assumptions based on culture or religion.

Check for communication needs

- Offer an interpreter in their preferred language, ideally of the same gender.
- Be mindful of disability or literacy needs that may affect understanding.

Understand immigration-linked risks

- Survivors may be on spousal visas, have no recourse to public funds, or fear deportation.
- Refer them to legal support.

Maintain confidentiality and consent

- Explain what information will be shared and why.
- Avoid contacting immigration enforcement unless legally required and with informed consent.

Always complete a Safety Plan!

Risk assessing

The DASH checklist can be a useful starting point, but immigration abuse, 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices require additional contextual assessment and may require specialist professional advice.

Further considerations needed:

- Escalation or increasing severity of abuse
- Threats of deportation or reporting
- Withholding documents
- Financial dependency
- No access to safe accommodation
- Digital, phone, email or immigration-account surveillance
- Community/family surveillance
- Threats involving children
- Threats involving relatives overseas
- Forced marriage or 'honour'-based abuse concerns
- Planned overseas travel or previous removal abroad
- Previous attempts to seek help.

Documents
Who has the passport? Does the survivor have independent access to documents?
Information
What does the survivor understand about their status? What have they been told?
Control
Who controls applications, appointments, correspondence and money?
Threats
Are there threats of deportation, reporting, child removal or harm to relatives overseas?
Safety
Is there safe accommodation, money, a phone, documents and a safe way to communicate?
Surveillance

Is the survivor's phone, email, location, bank account or contact with professionals being monitored?

High risk indicators of domestic violence:

- Victim's fear
- Separation
- Pregnancy or recent birth
- Escalation/increasing frequency or severity
- Community isolation
- Stalking behaviours
- Sexual assault
- Strangulation or suffocation
- Credible threats to kill
- Use of weapons
- Controlling or jealous behaviour
- Substance misuse
- Mental health issues
- Criminal history
- Suicide threats or attempts

High risk indicators of 'honour'-based abuse:

- Victim's fear of harm or death
- Multiple perpetrators
- Recent perceived breach of 'honour' code
- Threats of forced marriage or actual attempts
- Isolation from support networks
- Surveillance and monitoring
- Previous 'honour'-based abuse in family
- Victim has left or is planning to leave
- Immigration or residency vulnerability
- Community pressure or 'gossip'
- Perpetrator has access to weapons
- Previous history of violence or abuse
- Mental health or substance abuse in perpetrators
- Victim has been taken abroad or plans exist to do so
- Victim has disclosed abuse but was not believed

Safeguarding and safety planning

If someone is in immediate danger, call **999**.

If you are concerned that a child may be at risk, you need to make a **report** to the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) / Children's Social Care or the equivalent in your area.

If you talk to a child or an adult about domestic and immigration abuse, please bear in mind the following:

- Find a private space
- Use independent translators (if needed)
- Avoid judgemental language
- Maintain a record of your conversation
- Do not promise not to share information

***NB**. Never approach the family

Please remember that children are victims of domestic abuse in their own right and the risk grading for a parent might not be the same for a child. Always ensure you risk assessing children separately.

Tips for professionals

- Inform (adult) victim of your concerns and requirements for a referral
- Identify the victim's details, including religious, ethnic and nationality background, preferred language and specific needs
- Details of the perpetrators
- Immediate concerns/risk and specific details of the abuse - Who? What? Where? When? How?
- Inform the victim and agencies of the actions that have been taken
- Safety plan

Always follow up a safeguarding referral!

Support services

- **Immigration advice**

Law Centres Network - 020 3637 1330
Law Centres Network

Migrant Rights Network - 07534 488696
Home - Migrants' Rights Network (migrantsrights.org.uk)

AIRE Center (EU rights) - 020 7831 4276
The AIRE Centre

Public Interest Law Centre - 0203 559 6342
Public Interest Law Centre • Public Law • Human Rights • Legal Action

Rights of Women - 020 7251 6575
Home | Rights of Women

Refugee Council - 020 7346 6700
Homepage - Refugee Council

Migrant Help - 01304 203977
Migrant Help (migranthelpuk.org)

Muslim Women's Network - 0800 999 5786
Muslim Women Network (mwnuk.co.uk)

Safety for Sisters - 0161 464 9505
Safety4Sisters

Southall Black Sisters - 020 8571 0800
SBS No Recourse Fund - Southall Black Sisters

Latin American Women's Rights Service - 0808 145 4909
LAWRS - Latin American Women's Rights Service

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants - 0800 1601004
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

- **Accommodation & specialist domestic violence organisations**

No Woman Turned Away (NWTA) project (Women's Aid) – 0800 2000 247
No Woman Turned Away - Women's Aid (womensaid.org.uk)

Ashiana - 020 8539 0427
Home - Ashiana Network

- **Destitution & benefits entitlement**

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) - 020 7837 7979
CPAG | We are the trusted voice on child poverty

Project 17 - 07701 330016
Home | Project 17

Together With Migrant Children - 01865 528 658
Together with Migrant Children | England (togethermigrantchildren.org.uk)