

Economic Abuse: SWRC recommendations for improving systemic responses

In 2019, The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 came into force in Scotland. This legislation recognises the multiple ways in which people are affected by domestic abuse. The Act created a new criminal offence of domestic abuse which covers a range of behaviours such as psychological and emotional abuse, as well as acts of physical violence.

The Act focuses on the effects abusive behaviour has on a victim/survivor, identifying abusive behaviour as any action which is violent, threatening or intimidating. One form of abuse covered under the act is economic abuse, a form of coercive control that seeks to control and isolate victims economically, diminishing their ability to leave the abusive situation or be financially independent.

To mark this year's 16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence, the SWRC, in collaboration with consultant Jenn Glinski, has published a new factsheet which looks at economic abuse and the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. To accompany this factsheet, we are also publishing this set of recommendations for how we believe systemic responses to economic abuse can be improved in Scotland.

What is economic abuse?

Economic abuse occurs when a person interferes with their partner's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources such as housing, food, clothing, transportation, employment and education. It often builds up over time and can in many cases be experienced alongside other types of domestic abuse. It can take many forms but some examples might include:

- Retaining a victim/survivor's salary
- Forbidding a victim/survivor from accessing work or education
- Restricting access to bank accounts
- Convincing or forcing a victim/survivor to take on debt on behalf of their abuser
- Preventing a victim/survivor from claiming benefits
- Creating debt in a victim/survivor's name or through shared accounts
- Making important financial decisions without discussion

Economic abuse seeks to control and isolate victims economically, thus diminishing their opportunities to leave the abusive situation and to be financially independent after separation. It can continue after the victim/survivor leaves the abusive situation and it can lead to an increased risk of homelessness.

Our factsheet

Our [new factsheet](#) includes detailed information on economic abuse and the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act. It covers:

- What is the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018?
- What is economic abuse?
- How economic abuse relates to the Act
- How to evidence economic abuse under the Act
- Support agencies and useful contacts

We have also previously published a full guide on economic abuse which is available [here](#).

Improving responses to economic abuse

At the SWRC, we are committed to ensuring access to justice for survivors of all types of gender-based violence and abuse, including economic abuse. That's why, alongside our new factsheet, we are making the below recommendations around how systemic responses to economic abuse can be improved in Scotland.

Our recommendations are:

1. The development of a formal definition of economic abuse to be adopted by Police Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and frontline services.
2. Increased funding for frontline services such as specialist women's projects and Police Scotland's domestic abuse department.
3. Specialist and specific training on economic abuse for Police Officers and the COPFS, with a focus on identifying and evidencing economic abuse.
4. Updating the Police Scotland and COPFS [Joint Protocol on Challenging Domestic Abuse](#) to address economic abuse specifically, including appropriate guidance.

We believe that implementing these recommendations would help ensure the effectiveness of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 in responding to economic abuse, improving access to justice for survivors.

Further reading

To read more about economic abuse, and to find details of support services for survivors, see our newly published [factsheet](#) or our [full legal guide](#).

To read other SWRC policy recommendations and consultation responses, [visit our website](#).

Further support

If you are looking for support with economic abuse, you can access more information [on our blog](#) or on the [Surviving Economic Abuse](#) project website.

You can also get in touch with the free services below who can provide further information and support. For more information on these services, please see our factsheet or [legal guide](#).

- [Scottish Women's Aid](#)
- [Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline](#)
- [Rape Crisis Scotland](#)
- [National Debtline](#)
- [Money Advice Service](#)
- [Citizens Advice Scotland](#)
- [Shelter](#)
- [Turn2Us](#)

Glossary of terms

Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018

A piece of Scottish legislation which expanded the definition of what domestic abuse is in criminal law in Scotland and how the Police and courts investigate this crime.

Domestic abuse

A pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner (Scottish Women's Aid).

Economic abuse

Involves the control of a partner or ex-partner's money, finances and things that money can buy, such as clothing, transport, food and a place to live (Surviving Economic Abuse project).

Coercive control

A purposeful and sustained pattern of behaviour whereby one person within the relationship (most usually a man) seeks to exert power, control or coercion over another (Scottish Women's Aid).

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)

Scotland's public prosecution service and death investigation authority.

About us

The Scottish Women's Rights Centre (SWRC) is a collaboration between Rape Crisis Scotland (Registered in Scotland, no. 258568; SCO25642), the University of Strathclyde Law Clinic (SCO15263) and JustRight Scotland (SCO47818). All legal advice and representation provided through the SWRC is by JustRight Scotland (SO305962), a firm authorised to act as solicitors by the Law Society of Scotland (Registered No 53703).