

## Brent Council

# COVID-19 VAWG Services Update

December 2020

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## Contents

National Updates	Page 2
Local Updates	Page 4
Resources for Professionals and Practical Tools	Page 5
Spotlight on No Recourse To Public Funds & Support	Page 5
Supporting A Survivor When A Disclosure Is Made	Page 8
Safety Planning With Survivors Who Are Self-Isolating	Page 10
Young People & Domestic Abuse	Page 12
Additional Resources	Page 13
Coronavirus Update	Page 13

The government defines domestic abuse as an event or pattern of events of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between people aged 16 or over who are (or have been) intimate partners or family members.

Physical violence is just one type of abuse – domestic abuse can be any behaviour which is used to harm, punish or frighten you, or makes you feel bullied, controlled or intimidated. This includes mental, sexual, financial and emotional abuse and other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), so called ‘honour’ based violence and forced marriage.

## National Updates

The Mayor’s Office has released information on a VAWG Grassroots Fund. More information can be found [here](#) along with a [blog](#) on the LCF Website by the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime.

A [funding boost](#) has been announced by the Government for rape and domestic abuse support. This will include £11 million to support victims during winter and beyond, £7 million for innovative programmes to stop domestic abuse happening in the first place and a new set of rights for victims to hold criminal justice agencies to account will be published.

The [Rail to Refuge](#) scheme for domestic abuse survivors has been extended. Train companies are extending free train travel for survivors of domestic abuse until the end of March 2021. More information [here](#).

[Standing Together](#) Against Domestic Abuse relaunched ‘In Search of Excellence - refreshed guide to effective domestic abuse partnership work - The Coordinated Community response (CCR). The Executive Summary can be found [here](#). Full report [here](#).

[Galop](#), a pan-London LGBT+ anti-violence organisation have a new **Specialist Young People’s Service**, which works with 13 - 25 year olds experiencing violence and abuse. As well as intimate partner abuse, grooming, CSE and ISVA work, they offer a specialist service for LGBT+ children and children/young people experiencing honour based abuse family and community based abuse, child abuse based on faith and belief, forced marriage, peer-on-peer abuse, harassment, often linked to the young person’s sexuality or gender identity. If you would like more information contact via the [online form](#).

[Asian Women’s Resource Centre](#) have opened a **multi-lingual support line** for women and girls experiencing domestic abuse (including harmful practices) across London. The support line is

open every Thursday 2 - 4pm offering emotional support, information on rights and entitlements, referrals and signposting and identifying abuse. **0208 838 3462** / [supportline@awrc.org.uk](mailto:supportline@awrc.org.uk)

Concerns have been raised in regards to the **significant increase in domestic homicides** since the first lockdown, more information in this [article](#). Counting Dead Women, a project that records the killing of women by men in the UK, identified 35 murders, with another 12 strongly suspected cases between 23 March and the start of July, when Covid-19 restrictions were largely lifted. Recently, The Femicide Census 10 year report on men's fatal violence against women in the UK 2009 - 2018 has been released and can be found [here](#).

[Victim Support](#) have released a [new report](#) on **Crime and Covid-19** looking at how victims and survivors have been impacted by the pandemic.

A [recent article](#) has been published highlighting how disabled people have been left out of the domestic abuse bill.

Jewish Women's Aid have set up a welfare grant and launched their new campaign **#AMaskWontProtectHer**. More information [here](#).

**FLIC** and **Standing Together** are launching new guidance on Working Effectively with Perpetrators and Survivors of Domestic Abuse in Homelessness Settings. The online launch is taking place on 7<sup>th</sup> December. Register [here](#)

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance ([DAHA](#)) are running free workshops looking at what a safe and effective response to domestic abuse looks like within a housing context.

- [Perpetrator Management](#) - Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2:00pm – 3:30pm
- [Homelessness and Domestic Abuse](#) - Monday 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2:00pm – 3:30pm
- [Inclusivity and Accessibility](#) - Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December, 11:00am – 12:30pm

Click [here](#) to book your place.

**Please note:** The Government has made it clear that **lockdown** rules **do not apply** to those facing abuse in their homes. Survivors of domestic abuse can be supported to leave their homes and find a safe space.

**It is important to highlight that COVID-19 must not be considered the cause of domestic abuse, these are not isolated incidents that have been brought on by the pressures of quarantine. The lockdown has simply added additional risk factors, means of control and visibility of families who were already at risk.**

## Local Updates

Our providers are continuing to ensure support remains available for all those who may be experiencing domestic abuse. Offering vital support in the current situation has become even more challenging. This puts more responsibility on us given the escalation of risk for victim survivors who are self-isolating at home with their abuser/s. Referrals can still be made to all commissioned providers as normal; all services have implemented measures to safeguard staff and service users in accordance with government and public health guidelines.

November 25<sup>th</sup> – December 10<sup>th</sup> 2020 is the **16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM** against gender based violence. During the 16 days the [Brent Council Twitter](#) account is releasing information on daily opportunities to get involved with as well as how to access support. Please retweet and raise awareness during this time.

As part of the 16 Days of Activism, Brent Council and Partners have been offering free **VAWG webinars**. The final webinar in this series is on **Prostitution** and will be delivered by Nia on **December 8<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 – 12:00**. Access the webinar [here](#)

The **Romanian and Eastern European North London Hub** provides free support and advice to vulnerable Eastern Europeans living in Brent. The hub includes a food bank, a befriending service and volunteering experiences as well as advice and information on employment, benefits, childcare/education and social welfare issues **07311488110** / [info@communitybarnet.org.uk](mailto:info@communitybarnet.org.uk)

**Advance** have extended their opening hours to enable victims and survivors to access support outside working hours. The service can now be accessed Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 10am – 9pm and Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am – 6pm.

**07398454898** [brent.admin@advancecharity.org.uk](mailto:brent.admin@advancecharity.org.uk)

**Please keep in mind that during this time, vulnerable victims may not be as able to use their phones.** When making a referral please indicate:

- **Whether there is a safe time to call**
- **Whether it is safe to send texts or leave voicemails**

In addition to making referrals, please also **give service users relevant contact details** so they can reach out when convenient and safe

## Resources for Professionals & Practical Tools

### THIS EDITION'S SPOTLIGHT: NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS & SUPPORT

#### What Is No Recourse To Public Funds?

A victim survivor's immigration status can make it much harder to get support if they are a victim of domestic abuse, including economic abuse, especially if they are subject to 'no recourse to public funds'.

Certain types of visas that allow a person to live in the UK have the condition 'no recourse to public funds' attached. This can apply to spousal visas, student visas, visitor visas and some other types of limited leave. This information may be stamped in their passport or written on the back of their residence permit. It means that they cannot claim most forms of state benefits. These include income support, housing benefit, and jobseeker's allowance (now all part of Universal Credit), as well as other benefits including disability living allowance. Public funds also cover local authority housing but it does not include legal aid and refuge accommodation and child benefit (where the child is British). However, without access to housing benefits and basic welfare benefits, in practice it is difficult for women to access refuge accommodation.

The important thing to remember is that even if they have no recourse to public funds, there are some things that they can do to try to reach safety if they have experienced domestic abuse.

#### Speak to a qualified immigration adviser

The most important step a victim survivor can take when seeking support is to speak to a qualified and reputable immigration adviser or lawyer. They are there to help and will be experienced in advising people with no recourse to public funds. They will be able to let the survivor know what their legal rights are and how they might be able to apply for the right to remain in the UK if they have experienced abuse and are afraid to return home. They may also be able to help them get in touch with a support service for abused migrant women in the UK if they are worried about their immigration status and wider circumstances and need more support to stay safe.

- Contact **Advance** for support on further information and advice **07398454898**
- Contact **The Asian Women's Resource Centre** on **02089616549/5701**
- Contact **Southall Black Sisters** on **02085710800**. They also run a project that provides temporary financial support to those with no recourse to public funds and will

be able to provide advice on accessing what other support is available for abused women with insecure immigration status.

- **Rights of Women** run an immigration advice line on **02074907689**.
- Victim survivors can also search for an immigration adviser on the Office of the [Immigration Services Commissioner website](#).

### Securing Your Immigration Status

If a victim survivor has limited rights to remain in the UK and has experienced domestic abuse, they may be able to apply for the right to remain in the UK (known as **indefinite leave to remain**). There are a number of possible routes to secure their immigration status and a qualified immigration adviser can advise them on finding the most appropriate route.

If they have access to their passport, visa and any other immigration documents, it is important to try to take these with them when they see an immigration adviser (if this can be done safely). They will need to know:

- when they came to the UK
- why they came to the UK
- how long they are allowed to stay
- if their visa has any conditions or restrictions
- the background of abuse
- why they can't return to their country of origin.

It would also be helpful to inform the adviser or lawyer about any reports the victim survivor made about the abuse to any other agencies. This can help to provide any evidence that they may have gathered about the abuse, including any court protection orders; statements from friends, relatives or work colleagues; and letters from their GP or other medical professionals, counsellors, domestic abuse services or school authorities. If the case has been reported to the local MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference), a letter from them would be very strong evidence to support the case. Testimonies from neighbours and friends may also help.

### The Domestic Violence Rule

One way of applying for the right to remain in the UK is through the **Domestic Violence Rule**. A victim survivor may be able to apply for the right to remain in the UK under this rule if they are in the

country as the wife, partner or civil partner of someone who is British or has indefinite leave to remain in the UK and have experienced domestic abuse, including economic abuse.

Physical violence is not required to apply for leave to remain under the Domestic Violence Rule – coercive and controlling behaviour, and economic abuse, also meets the government’s definition of domestic abuse.

The victim survivor must be free of criminal convictions to be eligible to apply, and they must be able to provide evidence that domestic abuse, took place. Evidence could be a police or medical report, or a letter of support from an organisation or a domestic abuse advocate. A qualified immigration adviser and any domestic violence service that is supporting a victim survivor should be able to help them collect evidence and will be able to support them to make the application.

The fee for applying for indefinite leave to remain under the Domestic Violence Rule is currently £2,389 for each individual (including children). But this can change so do check [here](#). However, if they are destitute and cannot access any money, they do not have to pay the fee. The immigration adviser can write a letter to the Home Office explaining that they are destitute and help them to provide the evidence they will need to show that they are destitute. This evidence is usually in the form of a letter from social services, relatives or charitable organisations that may be supporting them, stating that they are destitute and that they are wholly dependent on them to meet basic needs.

If a victim survivor does not have current leave to remain in the UK, for example because it has expired, they may in certain circumstances still be able to apply for indefinite leave to remain under the Domestic Violence Rule. For example, if they have overstayed their visa because of the domestic abuse that they have experienced and they were not in control of their immigration process or stay in the UK. It is vital that they get legal advice from an immigration adviser and explain their entire history and circumstances of abuse.

### **Domestic Violence Destitution Concession**

If a victim survivor is applying for indefinite leave to remain under the Domestic Violence Rule, they may be eligible for temporary financial support, known as the Domestic Violence Destitution Concession (DDVC). This allows them to access financial support for three months while they make their application for indefinite leave to remain under the Domestic Violence Rule. Remember, this

option is only for those who have come to the UK on a spouse visa and have experienced abuse, including economic abuse.

To apply for the DVDC the following needs to be shown:

- you are living in the UK
- you are the partner of a British person or someone settled in the UK and were granted leave to remain as a spouse or partner
- the relationship has broken down as a result of domestic abuse
- you intend to apply for leave under the Domestic Violence Rule as a victim of domestic violence.

#### **Resources on NRPF and Domestic Abuse:**

Applying for the DDV Concession: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-benefits-for-visa-holder-domestic-violence>

Rights of Women Helpline DDV Concession and Immigration Law: [https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ROW\\_Domestic-Violence-A4-DIGITAL.pdf](https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ROW_Domestic-Violence-A4-DIGITAL.pdf)

Rights of Women Immigration Advice Line: <https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/immigration-and-asylum-law/>

#### **SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR WHEN A DISCLOSURE IS MADE**

If a victim survivor makes a disclosure of domestic abuse on the phone, please check that the alleged perpetrator is not in the same room and if it is safe for them to talk.

If it is not safe to talk;

- Offer to text the local and/or national number to them and agree a safe way to do this (ie. text the number backwards).
- If they have access to the internet, encourage the victim survivor to Google the Women's Aid Live Chat and speak to someone online.
- Encourage them to contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline if it is safer to call later in the evening.
- If they are in immediate danger, ask if they would like you to ring 999 or if they are able to themselves.

- **If they ask you to call 999:**

- Please FIRST take the house number and street in case the call gets cut, followed by postcode if they are still on the line
- Check if they are injured as this will determine if an ambulance needs to be requested
- Keep the person on the line and ask a colleague to call 999 with the details
- While you have them on the phone, continue to check regarding their safety (is there somewhere in the house they can lock themselves in?). Give them the option of staying on the phone and not say anything if that is safer.
- If it's safe to do so, ask if they can leave the house and approach a neighbour or anyone in the street to help them
- Stay on the phone until you have confirmation that emergency services have arrived

If it is safe to talk, please encourage them to contact the local domestic abuse service for support:  
**ADVANCE BRENT – 07398454898 / [brent.admin@advancecharity.org.uk](mailto:brent.admin@advancecharity.org.uk)**

**Questions that could be asked if concerned about abuse in the household:**

- *'Are there any particular obstacles you are facing that are stopping you from accessing support? Is there anyone in particular who is stopping you from accessing support?'*
- *'Are there any concerns in your household, is there any particular risk to you or your child/ren?'*

If a disclosure of domestic abuse is made - these key messages that were created by Refuge charity are a great way to acknowledge it:

- *People who experience domestic violence come from all walks of life. All ages, all religions, all races*
- *You are not to blame for your partner's violence...he/she alone is responsible, violence is a choice he/she makes*
- *There are solutions to the problem. . .getting help is a brave and positive step*
- *Take your time to consider your options...take one day at a time, don't feel pressured into making any decisions*
- *Everyone has a right to live free from violence*
- *Reaching out for help (talking about it) is a massive step and you should be proud of yourself for doing this!*

## SAFETY PLANNING WITH SURVIVORS WHO ARE SELF-ISOLATING

These tips should be used alongside pre-existing [advice on safety planning](#)

**Please note:** The National Domestic Violence Centre have been wrongly advising women to seek a court order to legally rule safe zones in their homes which perpetrators cannot access during the lockdown period. **This is unsafe and inaccurate advice and could cause additional risk.**

### General

- What safe communication methods are available to them?
- Establish whether there is an increased risk of harm due to COVID-19.
- What is the usual pattern of abuse? And how might this change with self-isolation?
- Understand who is in the property and any additional risks they may pose
- Explore their support network – is there any family member (not vulnerable / elderly / pregnant) who they can stay with or come to stay with them.
- Devise a new emergency plan – remember local restaurants and shops may be closed

### Health & Wellbeing

- Does the survivor have any medical conditions? Do they have access to their medication?
- Is the survivor able to contact the GP safely instead of usual face to face appointment?
- Explore if they have any interests that can be pursued while in isolation – reading, online yoga, meditation etc.
- Are they able to maintain contact with their support network?
- Encourage them to try maintaining routines for the welfare of themselves & their children.
- Make designated areas in the property for working, playing – [watch advice video](#)

### Substance misuse

- Some may be using substances as a coping mechanism – identify how survivor /perpetrator is accessing substances during self-isolation, and identify risks in relation to withdrawal/unmanaged detox.
- Drug and Alcohol support services are still working remotely, encourage them to link in over the phone. WDP Brent: **03003034611** / 24/7 helpline: **08001071754**

### Finances

- Does COVID change the survivors financial circumstances, increase economic abuse and/or access to financial support?

- Do they have enough food, access to online shopping, is this being controlled by the **perpetrator?**

An abuser may restrict how you acquire, use and maintain money and economic resources, including accommodation, food and clothing. This is known as economic abuse, and it is commonly experienced within the context of coercive control. Social distancing and isolation measures may reinforce the power that an abuser has over their victim.

Surviving Economic Abuse have produced [Guidance](#) on Economic Abuse and COVID-19

### Tech Abuse

Due to the current restrictions and recommendations around social distancing, technology has become an even more integral part of life. Although it can be a source of safety and support, it's also important to highlight the online and virtual risks that victims face; and support them to safeguard themselves online. Encouraging survivors to reduce their use of tech at this time is unrealistic and could isolate them even further from sources of support.

Refuge have created a list of [questions](#) to help identify Tech Abuse. If they answer yes to any of these, there are several resources to support victim survivors protect themselves:

- Safelives [Digital and Online Safety Resources](#)
- Refuge [Tech Abuse Service](#)
- Chayn's [Guide on how to secure your devices](#)

If they are experiencing tech abuse, it may not be safe for them to access these websites, so professionals should offer to provide tips in an agreed, safe way.

### Stalking

Stalking is described as *a pattern of unwanted and persistent behaviour that is motivated by a fixation or obsession that causes a victim to suffer alarm, distress or a fear of violence.*

Calls to the National Stalking Helpline during the Covid-19 lockdown indicate that **victims are still being stalked despite lockdown**, particularly through online methods and social media.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust have produced several useful factsheets for victims of stalking including [Top Tips: What to do if you are being stalked](#)

Victims of stalking can contact the following agencies for specialist support:

- The National Stalking Helpline - **0808 802 0300**
- Paladin - **020 3866 4107**

## Young People & Domestic Abuse

### SAFETY PLANNING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- Ask what their priority is in terms of safety
- Ask them for the safest time and method of communication
- Agree a code word so they can alert you if you phone/text and it is not safe for them to talk
- Ask them if they have access to a phone if they need to call the police or other agencies.
- Ask if they would like to be referred to a specialist service or support in calling the Police.
- Highlight the importance of calling 999 in an emergency (for others or themselves)
- Ask if they are alone at any point or if they can safely get out of the home if they needed to.
- Ask if they have a selection of trusted adults and they know when and how to contact them.
- Ask them if there is anywhere else they could stay should be feel they are not safe at home
- Discuss mobile phone and social media privacy settings with them
- Safety plan around meeting people online
- Safety plan around sharing intimate images.

### USEFUL CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

- **ADVANCE Children & Young Person's Worker** Offering direct work with young people, aged 5 to 18, who have experienced or been impacted by domestic abuse. The young person must be subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan and not living with the perpetrator. Available on **07776665970** or **07398454898**
- **The Brent Family Front Door (BFFD)** can be contacted on 020 8937 4300 (9 - 5) or 020 8863 5250 (Out of office hours) if you are concerned about a child's well-being.
- **Brent CAMHS** 020 3317 5050 / [brentcamhs.cnwl@nhs.net](mailto:brentcamhs.cnwl@nhs.net)
- **Child line** 0800 1111 – calls are free and confidential
- **HOPE line UK** 0800 068 4141
- **Samaritans** 116 123
- **Operation Encompass** National Teachers Helpline for free advice from Child/Clinical Psychologist 8-11am Mon-Fri 0845 646 0890 - <https://www.operationencompass.org/>
- **Young Minds Crisis Messenger** - provides free, 24/7 mental health crisis support - If you need urgent help text YM to 85258
- [Guidance](#) on **Teen Violence at Home** (Family Lives)
- **Women's Aid** have created [this space](#) to help children and young people to understand domestic abuse, and how to take positive action

## Additional Resources

[Guidance for staying safe during Covid-19 for Survivors](#) (Safelives)

[Guidance for practitioners working with perpetrators of domestic abuse](#) (Respect)

The Family Court is continuing to hear cases remotely. Rights of women have produced [Guidance on Remote Family Court Hearings](#)

[Crimestoppers](#) have launched a campaign encouraging the public to report concerns about family, friends and colleagues who may be experiencing domestic abuse while self-isolating.

Home Office [Guidance](#) on Adolescent to Parent Violence & Abuse with some useful resources and how statutory services should respond and support those involved.

Where it is safe to do, some survivors may find it helpful and comforting in speaking with others to share their experiencing domestic abuse and how they are coping. Women's Aid has a [Survivors' Forum](#) that provides peer support and helps people feel connected with others.

[Guidance](#) on Economic Abuse while self-isolating (Surviving Economic Abuse)

[Covid-19 and Child Contact Arrangements](#) (Rights of Women)

[Advice and Resources page during COVID-19 for housing providers](#). Including [guidance](#) for housing providers to use to support survivors effectively (DAHA)

Information on how victim survivors can secure their devices can be found [here](#) (Chayn)

Resources for parents and children - a [Parent Pack](#) (West Sussex Connect)

Information on support available for young people with Covid-19 [here](#) (Achieving for Children)

For details on FGM, breast flattening and child abuse linked to faith and belief risk indicators and how to address your concerns visit the [National FGM Centre's website](#)

### Coronavirus update

For the latest updates on Coronavirus (COVID-19), visit the [NHS Website](#) or view [Brent-specific information](#)