



# In Focus

## Domestic Violence and Abuse in the UK

The [Home Office defines domestic violence and abuse](#) as “any incident or pattern 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”. The Department [states](#) that this includes emotional; financial; physical; psychological; and sexual abuse. The Home Office has also recently highlighted honour-based violence (HBV) as a specific area of concern. [Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary \(HMIC\) defines HBV](#) as a collection of practices used “to control the behaviour of women and girls within families or other social groups, in order to protect supposed cultural and religious beliefs”. Examples include forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

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### Prevalence of Domestic Violence and Abuse

A recent [report from HMIC](#) reveals that, since 2013, the number of recorded cases of domestic violence and abuse in England and Wales has increased by 31 percent (from 269,700 to 353,100). However, HMIC attributes much of that increase to “improvements” made by police forces in helping to identify victims of abuse and assess the risks they face. The report also notes that the rise in the number of recorded cases could be as a result of “better supervision” in the standards of investigations. In addition, HMIC [reported](#) that, in the 12 months up to March 2015, police forces in England and Wales received approximately 900,000 calls about domestic abuse—an average of over 100 calls an hour—and that domestic abuse-related crime constituted 10 percent of all recorded crime over the same period.

A [separate HMIC report on HBV](#), also published in December 2015, notes that there were 129 successful prosecutions for this type of crime during 2014 and 2015. However, 96 cases over the same time period did not result in a conviction, the main reason for which, according to HMIC, was due to victims retracting their complaints or showing reluctance to give evidence in court. The report also [contends](#) that only three of the 43 police forces in England and Wales were “adequately prepared” to respond to victims’ needs and to take cases through to prosecution. As a result, HMIC contend that police services in England and Wales have “some way to go” before the public is reassured that they understand HBV and that victims are “adequately and effectively protected”.

Presenting the findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales 2013/14, the [Office for National Statistics](#) report that approximately 1.4 million females and 700,000 males in England and Wales had reported experiencing domestic abuse to police forces in the previous year. In addition, they observe that police recorded 887,253 domestic abuse incidents over the same period, with 103,569 of these incidents then being referred to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), and [70 percent resulting in charges](#). The [Crime Survey also revealed](#) that approximately 28.3 percent of women and 14.7 percent of

men in England and Wales have experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16, which is the equivalent of an estimated 4.9 million female and 2.7 million male victims.

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## Policies Aimed at Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse

On 25 November 2010, the Coalition Government launched [A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls](#), which set out the then Government's plan to tackle violence against women and girls. The paper contained a number of strategies aimed at preventing and challenging violence, and outlined a commitment to further funding for services aimed at tackling the issue. In March 2015, the Coalition Government published a [progress report](#) on what actions they had taken to tackle violence against women and girls. The report noted that, under the Coalition Government, nearly £40m of funding was allocated towards specialist local services and national helplines; a national [‘This is Abuse’ campaign](#) had been launched, aimed at preventing relationship abuse; and the [Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014](#) had been introduced, featuring provisions criminalising forced marriage.

In addition, on 8 March 2014, the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#) (DVDS) was extended across England and Wales, following the piloting of the scheme in four police areas. The DVDS allows individuals to ask police to check whether a new or previous partner has a violent past. If police checks identify an individual as violent and that this could put a person at risk of domestic violence as a result, police can consider disclosing the information to the person at risk, or a third party. The scheme has commonly been referred to as the ‘right to ask’ scheme. The [Domestic Violence Protection Orders](#) (DVPO) and the [Domestic Violence Protection Notices](#) (DVPN) were also implemented across England and Wales on 8 March 2014. They give police and judges the power prevent a perpetrator from contacting the victim or returning to their shared home for up to 28 days. This is intended to allow the victim to consider their options in the given timeframe and to get the help they need.

In August 2014, the Coalition Government launched a consultation aimed at legislating against domestic violence and abuse, entitled [‘Strengthening the Law on Domestic Abuse’](#). The consultation found that 85 percent of respondents were in favour of a strengthening of the law on domestic abuse. Following the consultation, the Coalition Government added clauses to the [Serious Crime Act 2015](#) to criminalise coercive behaviour in intimate or family relationships. In [response to the Government’s consultation](#), then-shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, welcomed the move, stating that the [“the Government’s agreement to this consultation is a welcome tribute to those who have campaigned hard for change”](#). In addition, in their 2015 election manifestos, the [Labour Party](#), the [Conservative Party](#) and the [Liberal Democrats](#) explicitly stated that they would tackle violence against women and girls, through increased funding and improvements to services aimed at helping victims of domestic violence and abuse, for example. Responding to a question on domestic violence on 25 November 2015, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, [stated](#) that “the Government have a good record on helping women and making sure that the crime of domestic violence is properly investigated by the police and prosecuted in our courts”.

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## Further Information

- House of Commons Library, [Domestic Violence](#), 10 February 2015
- Police Foundation, [Policing Domestic Abuse](#), October 2014

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