



Home Office

# THREE STEPS TO ESCAPING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

1. REPORT THE VIOLENCE
2. TAKE ACTION TO ESCAPE THE VIOLENCE
3. KEEP SAFE FROM THE VIOLENCE

A guide for black and minority ethnic (BME) women and children

Produced in partnership with:



# 1. What is violence against women and girls?

This leaflet tells you how to get help to escape violence and abuse, and keep safe. You can also use it to help a friend.

Although this leaflet focuses on issues faced by black and minority ethnic women and children, it also contains information which can be used to help victims of domestic and sexual violence from any nationality or ethnic background.

This leaflet refers to victims/survivors of violence and abuse as female, and perpetrators as male for ease of reading and because it reflects the overwhelming majority of cases. However, this is not meant to imply that violence and abuse does not occur in same-sex relationships or by women against men.

This leaflet has been written in conjunction with Southall Black Sisters

Violence against women and girls includes a range of violent and abusive behaviour, including:

- Domestic Violence
- Forced Marriage
- Dowry Abuse
- Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (female circumcision)
- Honour Based Violence – crime in the name of honour
- Sexual Violence
- Rape
- Sexual Assault
- Stalking and Harassment

There are three steps you should take:

1. Report the violence
2. Take action to escape the violence
3. Keep safe from the violence

If you ever feel that you are in immediate danger, call the police on **999**. Do not be afraid to call the police. All forms of domestic and sexual violence and harmful practices are serious crimes, and the police can protect you and your children. Other agencies can also give you help and support, including BME women's services (see list at the end of leaflet).

**THE ABUSE IS NOT YOUR FAULT AND YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PUT UP WITH IT.**

## 2. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of abuse from a partner/ex-partner or family member (including in-laws) that can take many forms:

- It can be physical abuse like hitting or kicking
- It can include emotional abuse i.e. blackmail, mental torture and threats to disown you or kill you or your children
- It can also be controlling – meaning that you are not allowed out of the home on your own or to make contact with your family or friends or to have access to money or obtain a job of your choice
- Sexual harassment and stalking can also be a feature of both domestic and sexual abuse
- It can be rape – being married doesn't mean that your husband has the right to have sex with you against your will

It is important to realise that you are not to blame and you do not have to put up with it. No one deserves to be assaulted, abused or humiliated, least of all by their family or partner.

### IT IS YOUR ABUSER'S BEHAVIOUR THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE AND NOT YOURS.

Domestic violence can be the same as 'honour based violence' if it is done to defend the honour of the family/community or you feel you cannot leave the abuser because you fear bringing shame and dishonour on them (see section on honour based violence).

The Government's definition of domestic violence is:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or 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. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

“Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

“Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim<sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

## 3. Rape and Sexual Abuse

Rape and sexual abuse can happen to anybody and at any time with a stranger, acquaintance, friend, family member or partner/ex-partner. If you don't consent to sex, wherever it happens and whoever it's with, then it is rape and it's a crime:

- Consent means that you actively choose to have sex and agree to do so
- Nobody has the right to assume that you have given consent – no matter who they are or what your relationship with them is
- Unwanted sexual touching is assault and is also a crime

**IF YOU HAVE BEEN RAPED OR SEXUALLY ASSAULTED, IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME.**

There are organisations that can help you, including providing support to help you to decide whether you want to report it to the police. They can also provide advocacy and counselling. If you know that you want to report it to the police, you should do so as soon as possible.

You can find further information, including details of organisations in your area which can help by:

- Calling the national Rape Crisis Helpline on 0808 802 9999
- Visiting the Rape Crisis (England and Wales) website at [www.rapecrisis.co.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.co.uk)
- Visiting The Survivors Trust website at [www.thesurvivorstrust.org](http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org)

## 4. No recourse to public funds

If you have entered or stayed in the UK as a spouse, unmarried partner, same-sex or civil partner of a British Citizen, or of a non-citizen who is settled in the UK, and if your relationship has broken down as a result of domestic violence during the first five years (two years for those who obtained a spousal visa before 9 July 2012) of your relationship, you may be able to apply for permission to settle permanently (also known as 'indefinite leave to remain') under what is commonly known as the 'domestic violence rule'.

Should your visa contain the words 'no recourse to public funds,' you will not be entitled to public funds such as accommodation from the local council's housing department and most social security benefits. However, if you are pregnant, have children or are vulnerable in some other way, such as having a mental health or another medical condition or disability, you should contact the council's social care services (a social worker) for support (if possible, seek advice before doing so).

On some visas, you may be able to make a claim for council housing and benefits, so you should always check to see if this is possible.

From the 1 April 2012, a spouse or partner who is eligible to qualify for indefinite leave to remain as a victim of domestic violence who is destitute can apply for access to public funds under the Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) concession. Those eligible under the concession have their leave, and conditions associated to this leave, varied to allow them recourse to public funds. Temporary leave under the concession is issued for 3 months leave during which time you must apply for indefinite leave to remain under the domestic violence rule. We recommend that you obtain legal advice before you apply to the UK Border Agency to see if you are entitled to be granted leave. Alternatively, you can apply directly to the UK Border Agency (under the DDV concession (see [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/while-in-the-uk/domestic-violence-for-notification-forms-and-guidance](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/while-in-the-uk/domestic-violence-for-notification-forms-and-guidance))).

## 5. Applying for permission to settle in the UK

You can contact BME and other women's organisations to support you in this application.

Women living in London who are unable to get help under the DDV concession, can also contact Southall Black Sisters for financial support with housing and subsistence. You can email [info@southallblacksisters.co.uk](mailto:info@southallblacksisters.co.uk) or call 020 8571 0800.

Victims of domestic violence who entered the UK on a spouse, civil, unmarried or same sex partner visa can apply under the Immigration Rules for permission to stay permanently in the UK. To be given permission to settle as a victim of domestic violence you must prove you have been given permission to enter or remain in the UK in one of the above categories and that you were a victim of domestic violence and that this caused your relationship to break down before the end of your permission to enter or remain.

Victims of domestic violence or other forms of violence in the UK on other types of visas should seek advice about support or applying to stay in the UK on compassionate or other grounds outside of the Immigration Rules. Women fearing abuse if they return home can also seek advice about claiming asylum or humanitarian protection. You should try to submit an application to remain in the UK before your visa expires. You can still seek advice to make a late or 'out of time' application however, you must explain the reason for delay.

Immigration, asylum and benefits rules and provisions are subject to change so you should always seek advice on these matters.

You should contact a properly qualified immigration service or solicitor as soon as you can, preferably someone who is publically funded (under legal aid). They will be able to advise you on what to do next in terms of your stay in the UK. For advice on where to get this help, and for general support on this and how to access housing and financial assistance, including Asylum Support, contact BME women's and immigration advice organisations.

For more information regarding immigration, go to [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/while-in-uk/domesticAbuse/](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/while-in-uk/domesticAbuse/) or email: [UKBApublicenquiries@ukba.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:UKBApublicenquiries@ukba.gsi.gov.uk). You can also contact UK Border Agency by telephone on: 0870 606 7766.

## 6. 'Honour' Based Violence/ Abuse (HBV)

'Honour' based violence or 'honour' crime is an act of violence explained by the abuser as being committed in order to protect or defend the 'honour' of the family/community. These crimes include:

- Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Forced Marriage
- Sexual Harassment
- Social rejection and other forms of controlling and abusive practices carried out by the extended family or community members

Women may experience HBV if they are accused of not conforming to traditional cultural and religious expectations, including, for example:

- Wearing make-up or western clothing
- Having a boyfriend or being seen alone with a male who is not a family member
- Pregnant outside of marriage
- Having a relationship with someone from a different religion or nationality

- Rejecting a forced marriage
- Rumours / being seen acting inappropriately

In HBV, the risks can be high as there may be many abusers in the extended family or community networks, who may be more organised in the harassment or abuse of women. Other people in the family or community may pressure the victim to return to abusive situations or fail to support them.

**VICTIMS SHOULD URGENTLY SEEK HELP TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN.**

## 7. Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is when someone is made to marry someone else against their will and without their permission. A forced marriage is a marriage in which either or both spouses do not consent, or lack the capacity to consent, to the marriage and duress is involved. This can include physical, sexual, psychological, financial and emotional pressure.

A forced marriage is very different from an arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage, families may play a role in choosing and introducing partners. The choice of whether or not to accept the arrangement should remain with the prospective spouses. In other words – the key thing to focus on is choice – individuals should always be able to freely choose whom they do or do not marry.

In some cases, people are taken abroad without knowing that they will be forced to marry. When they arrive in the country they may have their passport taken away from them and may be told they are not allowed to return home.

There are special support services and legal action available to help if you or someone you know is being forced into marriage. This includes help with obtaining a civil court order to prevent or help you to leave a forced marriage. If you are concerned, you should tell someone you trust such as a teacher, the police or contact a specialist support organisation (see list at the end of the leaflet).

You can contact Southall Black Sisters on 020 8571 0800 or email them at [info@southallblacksisters.co.uk](mailto:info@southallblacksisters.co.uk)

The Government's Forced Marriage Unit is responsible for providing support and information to British Citizens at risk, or potentially at risk, of becoming victims of a forced marriage in the UK and abroad. You can contact them on 0207 008 0151 or visit their website at [www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage](http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage)

## 8. Dowry Abuse

In some cases, women may also be harassed or abused for not bringing in a sufficient dowry with them upon marriage, whether or not the marriage is forced.

**EXCESSIVE DOWRY DEMANDS CAN INCLUDE REQUIREMENTS TO PROVIDE LARGE AMOUNTS OF CASH, PROPERTY, JEWELLERY OR OTHER EXPENSIVE GOODS.**

Abuse of any kind is not acceptable and you should seek help from the police and women's organisations, particularly BME women's services. Also consult a family solicitor if you want to claim back your dowry or to seek court orders to protect yourself.

You can also contact Southall Black Sisters on 020 8571 0800 or email them at [info@southallblacksisters.co.uk](mailto:info@southallblacksisters.co.uk)

## 9. Female Genital Mutilation Cutting (FGM)

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. This is a crime in the UK even if the person is taken overseas for the mutilation. It is also sometimes known as female circumcision or 'sunna'.

**FGM HAS SERIOUS HEALTH CONSEQUENCES, BOTH AT THE TIME OF THE MUTILATION, INCLUDING HIGH RISK OF INFECTION, AND LATER ON IN LIFE LEADING TO LONG-TERM DISABILITY, SEVERE PROBLEMS IN PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH, AND EVEN DEATH.**

If you are at risk of FGM or concerned about someone who may be at risk of FGM in the UK or abroad, talk to a professional you trust such as a teacher, a nurse or doctor, or report it to the police and social care services. You can also contact a specialist BME women's organisation or a specialist FGM clinic.

You can look for a specialist clinic near you by going to [www.forwarduk.org.uk/resources/support/well-woman-clinics](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/resources/support/well-woman-clinics)

# 10. Help for you

We know how difficult it can be to leave an abusive relationship; overcoming cultural or religious pressures from family and community members, and concerns over your immigration status and access to support. **You should not be afraid to ask for help.**

If you are unable to speak English, most statutory agencies will be able to provide you with an independent interpreter. If you are concerned that the interpreter will tell your family about you, you can ask for a different interpreter.

**SPEAK TO SOMEBODY YOU TRUST AND REPORT THE ABUSE TO THE POLICE OR SPECIALIST DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE ORGANISATION OR ADVISER**

These agencies will be able to go through the legal options available to you, including criminal action against your abuser and civil or family court orders to protect you and your children. These agencies can also advise on:

- Housing
- Money issues
- Health and mental health, including self-harm
- Social care
- Educational and children's needs

If you are living at home, it is important to make some plans for the future in case you have to leave as a result of violence and abuse. Keep the following safely at home or, preferably, with a trusted friend:

- Important documents such as birth certificates, driving licence, passports, immigration documents, court orders and legal, property and financial papers, and extra credit and debit cards

- A bag packed with clothes for you and your children and a spare front door and car key, mobile phone, fully charged with credit, cash and other important items, such as extra prescribed medicine

Do not worry if you cannot take these belongings with you if you do have to leave – you can always return with the police to collect them.

**If safe to do so, take your children with you.** If not, contact the police, a family solicitor and a domestic abuse women's organisation or adviser to get help.

Think of three safe places you can go in an emergency:

- Police station
- A friend's house
- A women's refuge or domestic/sexual violence support agency



# 11. Help and Support

## EMERGENCY NUMBERS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HELPLINE

- **The police, ambulance and fire brigade:** 999 (freephone, 24 hours)
- **National Domestic Violence Helpline:** 0808 2000 247 (freephone, 24 hours)  
Run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge

## SPECIALIST HELPLINES

- **Southall Black Sisters** (for BME women experiencing domestic/sexual violence, forced marriage, dowry abuse, FGM, HBV and immigration/no recourse problems)  
Helpline: 020 8571 0800  
Website: [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)
- **Forced Marriage Unit**  
Helpline: 0207 008 0151  
Website: [www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage](http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage)
- **Stalking Helpline**  
Helpline: 0808 802 0300  
Website: [www.stalkinghelpline.org](http://www.stalkinghelpline.org)

- **Rape Crisis** (England & Wales)  
Helpline: 0808 802 9999 (free phone)  
Website: [www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

## HELPLINE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES

- **Northern Ireland Women's Aid 24 hour Domestic Abuse Helpline**  
Helpline: 028 9033 1818
- **Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline**  
Helpline: 0800 027 1234
- **All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence** (Welsh Women's Aid)  
Helpline: 0808 80 10 800
- **The Dyn Wales/Dyn Cymru Helpline:** 0808 801 0321
- **BAWSO** (for BME women in Wales)  
Helpline 0800 731 8147 (24 hours)
- **Rape Crisis Scotland**  
Helpline: 08088 010302 (free phone)
- **Northern Ireland Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre**  
Helpline: 028 9032 9002 (free phone)

## FGM

- **Foundation for Women's Health Research & Development** (FORWARD)  
Helpline: 020 8960 4000  
Website: [www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk)
- **Metropolitan Police** (Child abuse Investigation Command/Project Azure)  
Helpline: 020 7161 2888

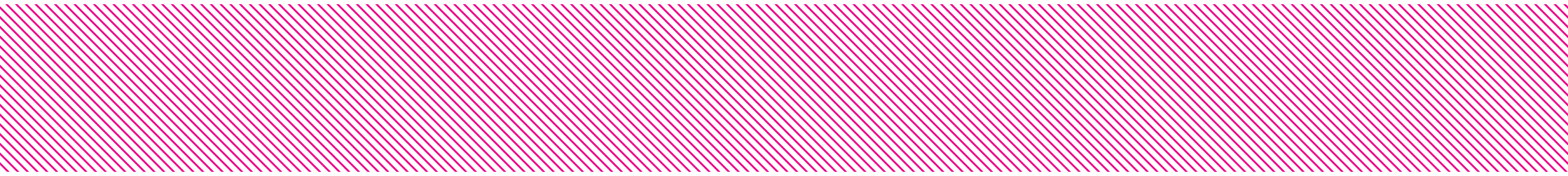
## IMMIGRATION, ASYLUM AND NO RECOURSE

- **Southall Black Sisters**  
Helpline: 020 8571 0800  
Website: [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)
- **Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants**  
Helpline: 020 7251 8708
- **Asylum Aid**  
Helpline: 0207 354 9264

## OTHERS

- **Broken Rainbow** (for lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender)  
Helpline: 0300 999 5428

- **Men's Advice Line**  
Helpline: 0808 801 0327
- **Respect Advice line** (Helpline offering information and advice to people who are abusive towards their partners and want help to stop)  
Helpline: 0808 802 4040
- **Childline** (24hr free helpline for children)  
Helpline: 0800 1111
- **Samaritans** (free 24 hours helpline if you are feeling depressed)  
Helpline: 08457 90 90 90
- **The Ann Craft Trust** (protect people with learning disabilities from abuse)  
Helpline: 0115 951 5400
- **Respond** (Supporting people with learning difficulties, their families, carers and professionals affected by trauma and abuse)  
Helpline: 0808 808 0700
- **Voice UK** (supporting people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable people who have experience crime or abuse)  
Helpline: 0845 122 8695





Home Office

ISBN: 978-1-84987-548-6

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[www.homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls](http://www.homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls)



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on 75% recycled paper