



/guide

Your questions answered

WHAT IS ECONOMIC ABUSE?

The purpose of this Stowe guide is to explain what economic abuse is and how it can be used by abusers to control a partner.

What is economic abuse?

Economic abuse is the use of finances and resources to exert control over a victim. It is designed to create financial insecurity and restrict independence making victims economically dependent on their abusive partner.

It is a legally recognised form of domestic abuse and is defined as:

*"Any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on another person's ability to—
(a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
(b) obtain goods or services."*

In the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 the definition of domestic abuse was broadened to include economic abuse for the first time. By legally defining this common form of abuse it's

hoped that victim-survivors will have better access to support that meets their needs and circumstances, to ensure that professionals are aware of the indicators of economic abuse, and to be able to direct survivors to the right resources.

It is estimated that one in six women, and one in seven men, have suffered some form of financial abuse by a current or former partner.*

Economic abuse is often subtle and difficult to identify, meaning it can go unnoticed for some time. It frequently occurs in conjunction with other types of abuse, such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. In fact, it is estimated that 95% of reported domestic abuse involves economic abuse*.

As Economic abuse separates people from sources of support and takes advantage of their resources or capacities, depriving them of independence, resistance, and escape options, it fits into a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour.

The signs of economic abuse?

Economic abuse can take many forms, but often involves the perpetrator controlling or restricting a person's ability to acquire and maintain money or other resources.

In many cases, the perpetrator will have sole access to the family's finances, capital, and income, and will restrict the victim-survivor's access to money, credit facilities, goods, services, food, clothing, and warmth in the home.

They can hinder the survivors' ability to earn money and income by deliberately keeping them out of education or work, or by reducing their working hours. For those that work, a perpetrator may take their pay from them.

It is also a common tactic for them to exploit a victim's economic situation: stealing money or goods, refusing to contribute to bills, building up debt with or without the victim's knowledge through loans and credit cards, clearing out joint bank accounts and running up overdrafts.

This has a significant impact on the survivor's life, trapping, frightening, and isolating them, with long-term effects on their mental and financial wellbeing.

Examples of economic abuse include:

- Sabotaging your income
- Excluding you from financial decisions
- Controlling or denying your access to money
- Blocking financial resources, benefits, and information
- Dictating, tracking, or making you justify all expenditure
- Refusing to contribute to household expenses
- Deliberately making you ask for money
- Preventing access to necessities, like food, clothing, or medications
- Removing any money you have or make
- Insisting accounts and property are in their name only
- Coercing you into debt or building debt in your name without your knowledge.

Leaving an abusive relationship

For some survivors, control can persist after the relationship ends when the abuse continues. This is known as post separation abuse.

For those going through divorce, it's crucial that your family lawyer is aware of your circumstance as it directly affects how the divorce case is handled and whether additional protection would be beneficial.

When reaching a divorce financial settlement, the perpetrator may use this opportunity to continue the abuse by sabotaging the legal process and limiting access to marital assets as a means of control.

The perpetrator might deliberately make the divorce process very challenging. For instance, they may fail to disclose marital assets, actively delay the process to gain control, causing fear and stress and intentionally driving up legal costs.

In high-net-worth cases, perpetrators can take advantage of complex asset structures and start to relocate, sell or conceal their assets, or move money internationally. They may seek to have businesses and properties undervalued, along with expensive gifts such as watches and jewellery.

They may change their personal circumstances, such as resigning from their job or retiring early to manipulate their wealth and cause financial hardship for their ex-partner.

Victims can find they have no access to funds, bank accounts or borrowing capability. Maintenance payments are frequently forgotten or neglected.

The intention is to deprive the victim of any source of money, limiting their freedom and reducing their options to increase control, so that they will be more likely to revert back to the abuser.

Help for victim-survivors of economic abuse

Economic abuse was finally recognised by the UK Government as a form of domestic abuse in the [Domestic Abuse Act of 2021](#), and improved safeguards were put in place for victims and survivors.

It is important for victims to know there is support available. Family lawyers have legal options including orders that require the abusive partner to leave the family home, interim maintenance orders to help meet needs while the case progresses, and freezing orders to prevent the disposal or sale of assets.

Other support that may help victim-survivors to re-establish their life and regain control of their finances include advice on budgeting, bank accounts, understanding financial records, mortgages, and credit ratings.

The lasting impact on victims-survivors' lives can include far-reaching personal consequences. Guidance from Refuge advises to trust your instincts if something doesn't feel right and seek help as soon as possible.

Useful links

[Surviving Economic Abuse - the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse and transforming responses to it.](#)

[Refuge: Economic abuse](#)

[Stowe talks: Surviving Economic Abuse with campaigner for survivors of economic and domestic abuse, Rosie Lyon.](#)

* Statistics from research by the charity [Surviving Economic Abuse](#).

Need more information?

Call our Client Care Team on **0330 838 7456** to speak with one of our specialist family lawyers or visit www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk

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