



Official Response

Subject: Financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship inquiry
Requested by: The Scottish Parliament Social Justice and Social Security Committee
Date: 27 February 2025
Prepared on behalf of: The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group with Integrity: the Violence Against Women and Girls Task Group

1. To what extent do Scottish Government strategies such as Equally Safe give proper recognition to financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship?

The response to this Social Justice and Social Security Committee Call for Views has been prepared by the Church of Scotland's Violence Against Women Task Group, Integrity, and agreed by the Church of Scotland's Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group. The remit of Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group includes to “contribute to public life by developing and sharing the witness of the Church with government [and] parliament... [and] providing a space in which to explore theologically, reflect, discuss and respond as a Church to important public matters that arise”. The Convener and members of the Programme Group are appointed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Whilst we cannot comment on specific areas of the Equally Safe strategy, including financial considerations, we do note however that the role of spiritual abuse, alongside other types of domestic abuse, and how this can contribute to financial considerations in leaving a relationship.

Domestic abuse happens in Churches and among Christians in Scotland, as well as in other faith communities, and this is often under-represented in official strategies, including Scottish Government strategies such as Equally Safe.

Our understanding of spiritual abuse, in a Christian context, is justification and excuses for beliefs and practices which reinforce gender inequality through misusing God, Jesus, sacred texts and church doctrine. This type of abuse creates a dynamic where Christian teachings can be used to reinforce abusive behaviours and make it harder to seek help both inside and outside the Church.

In this context, for example, an abuser may wrongly utilise scripture or Church teaching to control household finances, and/or prevent a partner from working outside of the home or having free access to money.

2. How well do social security systems take account of domestic abuse? Do you have specific examples of social security rules and practices that need to change?

n/a

3. When public bodies, for example local authorities and housing associations, are pursuing debt owed to them, to what extent do they take into account the way debt can arise as a result of being in or leaving an abusive relationship? Do you have specific examples of rules and practices that need to change?

n/a

4. Do legal aid rules take sufficient account of the financial circumstances of women who have experienced domestic abuse? Do you have any specific examples of rules or practices which need to change?

n/a

5. What are the particular barriers faced by those with No Recourse to Public Funds? And what can be done at a Scottish and local level to address these?

n/a

6. Does the advice and information available to women experiencing domestic abuse adequately deal with financial barriers?

Whilst we cannot comment on the information which is available from other groups and organisations, it is our understanding the role of spiritual abuse within domestic abuse is still not widely understood, especially in a Christian context.

Spiritual abuse can influence how victims experience coercive control, and abusers may use their or their partner's, beliefs to justify gender inequality in an intimate relationship. This has far reaching consequences, including access to paid work and family finances.

We also know from the experiences of our ministers working locally in communities that many lives have been drastically altered by the financial implications of leaving abusive relationships, having a negative effect on children in the household. We are aware that coercive control may contribute to victims being misinformed of their rights when it comes to social security payments and housing.

Robust training for all persons in front line positions in the community, including Ministers of Religion, on understanding what constitutes domestic abuse; how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse (including financial abuse); how to respond and where to go for help, may help to resolve some of these issues, and increase knowledge within communities about the specific support which is available.

7. To what extent is it the role of government to ensure that someone's economic circumstances do not prevent them from leaving an abusive relationship?

n/a

8. Please share any other comments that you have with us.

The Church of Scotland's Violence Against Women Task Group Integrity supports the national Church to tackle violence against women and all children - girls and boys - and to develop resources and tools for local congregations, and communities.

We work across the Church of Scotland to ensure that there is a strategic and effective approach to tackling this issue. Our members are a mixture of staff, volunteers, elders, and ministers and are drawn from Church of Scotland Committees and congregations from across the country.

We aim to work to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence through promoting a culture where gender justice is central to our life and work; where all individuals are equally safe and respected; where women and children live free from gendered abuse and where the cultural and theological attitudes that help perpetrate it are named and challenged.

In order to do this, we work within the Church, with key ecumenical and interfaith partners, with wider civil society, and within our communities and congregations to support work to end gender-based violence.