

7 minute briefing on...Intersectionality and domestic abuse

1. What is domestic abuse?

Defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, it covers behaviour of person (“A”) towards another (“B”), when they are ‘personally connected’ and are ‘aged 16 or over’ that consists of any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional, or other abuse

Being personally connected generally means people who are or have been in an intimate relationship or are related. The act also recognises children that see, hear, or experience the effect of domestic abuse as victims of abuse.

Anyone can be affected by domestic abuse – regardless of age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief. In addition, domestic abuse can manifest itself in different ways within different communities.

The Domestic Abuse statutory guidance provides the full definition and lots more helpful information about domestic abuse: [Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance](#)

2. What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality is about recognising that each person has their unique experiences of discrimination, oppression and inequality, and we need to consider **all the possible factors** that can marginalise people. This includes how those factors link, overlap and can be hidden – how the complexity of these create a very different experience for one person compared to another.



3. Double discrimination

Double discrimination refers to the impact of experiencing two or more forms of discrimination simultaneously. This often occurs when a person belongs to multiple marginalised groups, leading to unique and intensified challenges.

Examples could be where a woman of colour faces biases for both being a woman and for their race, resulting in less support and fewer opportunities to develop in their employment, or an LGBTQ+ person with a disability encountering discrimination based on their sexual orientation and disability, affecting their access to services.

[What is meant by the concept of 'intersectionality'? - Using intersectionality to understand structural inequality in Scotland](#)

4. Diagnostic overshadowing

Diagnostic overshadowing occurs when a professional attributes a person's symptoms to an existing condition, such as a mental health issue or a learning disability, without fully exploring other potential causes, such as being a victim of domestic abuse.

[NHS England » Clinical guide for front line staff to support the management of patients with a learning disability and autistic people – relevant to all clinical specialties](#)

5. Why does it matter in safeguarding adults / domestic abuse?

We need to recognise that the diverse and intersecting identities of individuals are crucial in the context of identifying and supporting people's needs, in order to prevent or protect from abuse. By using our professional curiosity to understand the unique situation of each person we support, we can more easily identify abuse, neglect and recognise specific risks to that person. We need to challenge our own assumptions, or those of others, and tailor support for that individual (making safeguarding personal).

6. Other examples

You see a female in her 30s, who is a sex worker, with drug and alcohol dependency, who presents as homeless and has bruising on her arms. Would you consider the possibility she is a victim of domestic abuse?

A young man with a moderate learning disability and communication difficulties, living with his sister who is experiencing domestic abuse – would you recognise that he may also be victim of the abuse, even if he was not able to express this directly?

What about a woman in her 80s, living in a remote rural area in a large property; recently widowed, with a family who move in and now make all decisions about her day to day life? Would you see someone who is being controlled in a domestic abuse context, or financially abused, or a supportive and caring family? See beyond the initial presentation – be curious and see further.

7. What you can do and useful links

If anyone is in immediate danger call the Police on 999.

Be aware when interacting with people that we all face barriers to accessing services and that intersectionality can amplify these through double discrimination.

Operate with professional curiosity to explore and understand what is happening with an individual or family. It is about enquiring deeper and using proactive questioning and challenge.

Check out [Professional curiosity | Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board for more info.](#)

Refer someone to specialist support services if appropriate: [Professional Referral - NIDAS](#)

Equip yourself with information on the services available to support victims of domestic abuse locally and nationally, including those supporting groups: [Help for victims of domestic and sexual abuse | Norfolk PCC](#)

You can find further information on how domestic abuse affects different protected characteristic groups here: [Resources for DASV professionals | Norfolk PCC](#)