

Understanding the barriers faced by the Foreign and Commonwealth community within the Armed Forces who are affected by Domestic Abuse



Rushmoor



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Introduction

Commonwealth personnel are represented throughout the Armed Forces, and with an active recruitment programme currently running their numbers will start to increase. It is recognised that the term 'Foreign and Commonwealth' does not capture the diversity within this cohort of service personnel, who in turn often have families who are also part of the Armed Forces community. By referring to the Foreign and Commonwealth community in general there is the danger that their specific needs, culture and differences will be overlooked or potentially misunderstood. This set of briefing sheets aims to capture specific cultural barriers that may be faced by different Commonwealth communities and in turn can inform the support provided. It is hoped this insight will help unit staff and other specialist welfare providers provide targeted, effective support to individuals from the Foreign and Commonwealth community who are affected by domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse affects 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men during their lifetime, as well as 1 in 4 same sex relationships. It can affect anyone, regardless of background. The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

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 abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

The Armed Forces are a reflection of wider society and it is inevitable that there will be cases of domestic abuse within the armed forces community. Welfare support is available at unit level as well as from specialist practitioners, with victims and perpetrators also able to access the same support as their civilian counterparts.

Foreign and Commonwealth within the Armed Forces

Commonwealth personnel are recruited from the other 52 member states of the Commonwealth of Nations. Although Zimbabwe and Gambia are no longer part of the Commonwealth, it should be noted that there are soldiers from these countries currently serving in the British Army. It should also be noted that the majority of Commonwealth personnel serve within the Army; in 2017 the Army comprised 5,820 (7.1%) Commonwealth personnel. The Armed Forces have started to actively recruit from the Commonwealth again, although recruits are currently in training. The majority of Commonwealth personnel are from Fiji, Africa (notably Ghana) and the Caribbean, with a large number of Nepalese personnel who are primarily employed as Gurkhas.

Barriers faced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Community

Domestic abuse encompasses physical violence within a relationship, although it must be understood that it is primarily about control. A perpetrator will seek to control every element of a victim's life to varying degrees and may actively isolate them from the wider community. All victims of domestic abuse must overcome barriers if they are to access help. To ensure effective support, it is important that support providers fully understand these barriers and can place them in context. To help support this understanding, Appendix 1 outlines common barriers faced by victims from the military community. It is understood that immigration status is the most common tool for control used by perpetrators of domestic abuse within this cohort. This applies across the Foreign and Commonwealth community and is outlined in more detail at Appendix 2. Barriers can also be specific to an individual's nationality and the remaining appendices capture relevant cultural considerations where there is significant representation within the Armed Forces Foreign and Commonwealth Community.

Barriers faced by the military community affected by domestic abuse

1. Introduction

The Armed Forces community is a reflection of a wider society within which domestic abuse is not uncommon. It is inevitable that domestic abuse occurs within the Armed Forces, and it is therefore important to understand the dynamics within this community that can add to the vulnerability of victims. Some unique factors that often affect families within the Armed Forces community are outlined below. These factors can place additional pressures on families and may contribute to an individual's concerns when they are in, or seeking to leave, an abusive relationship and include:

- Economic dependence on the serving person is increased due to good job security and military benefits such as Service Family Accommodation (SFA). These benefits are linked to the serving person and are very valuable to young families.
- Regular postings can make it difficult for a spouse to maintain a career which can diminish their own employability and financial independence. As a result, it is not uncommon for couples to rely on a single income and experience financial hardship.
- Military commitments can lead to long and frequent periods of separation with the partner who is left at home taking on additional roles. This can necessitate significant readjustment by the whole family when the absent partner returns. Long periods of separation can foster distrust, and children born during separation can also place additional strain on families and relationships.
- Regular assignments to new locations can isolate victims from wider family support as well as local civilian support services.

Within the Armed Forces community there is little to separate professional and personal lives. For example, individuals who work together will often also be neighbours. Unmarried personnel often live in single living accommodation (SLA), and may be living in the same accommodation block as an abusive partner for example. Military personnel may also fulfil the role of medical staff and welfare support workers. With such close links within the Armed Forces community the worry of unwanted repercussions is often a significant concern to victims.

Of even greater concern is the threat that the perpetrator may lose their job if the victim reports the abuse, with a family potentially facing significant loss of earnings as well as military benefits such as housing.

2. Common concerns and barriers

Feedback and additional information regarding each concern is detailed below and can be used to ensure victims of domestic abuse are able to make informed decisions.

Concern regarding the impact on their partner's career (serving perpetrator). This is often the primary concern which stops victims from seeking help and reporting cases of domestic abuse; perpetrators will often maximise this fear to threaten the victim and secure their silence. Early stages of domestic abuse tend to involve non-criminal behaviour which, if raised, can be dealt with without necessarily impacting on a serving perpetrator's career. Once a criminal offence has taken place then a punishment or sanction may affect an individual's career. There are a wide range of sanctions, of which termination of service (discharge) would be used in only the most extreme cases. If a victim is concerned about possible career consequences, they can seek confidential advice from one of the armed forces welfare providers (NS FPS, AWS, SSAFA fieldworkers).

Concern regarding the impact on their career (serving victim). Domestic abuse is not tolerated within the armed forces and any victim of domestic abuse will be supported; there would be no impact on a serving victim's career. General awareness and understanding of this issue is also improving, and it is recognised that men and women alike are affected by domestic abuse. If a serving victim is concerned about possible career consequences, they can seek confidential advice from one of the armed forces welfare providers (NS FPS, AWS, SSAFA fieldworkers). Serving victims may also want to discuss concerns they have for their children, possibly regarding their safety when they are away on deployments or training. If required, specific action can be taken within the working environment to help protect the victim and may include time off to speak with a solicitor or the opportunity to move into single living accommodation. A serving victim should highlight their concerns to the chain of command, who will be flexible and supportive and wherever possible will help facilitate solutions.

Concern regarding the confidentiality of the military support services. All military units have an established welfare support structure to call upon. Local support is carried out by The Royal Naval Divisional System, Army Unit Welfare

Officers and RAF personnel staffs; these services may be obliged to report certain circumstances to the chain of command. The main armed forces welfare providers such as NS FPS, AWS and SSAFA fieldworkers are independent of the chain of command. They work to a specific code of confidentiality, in accordance with legal requirements, which would be explained during any initial contact.

Concern regarding leaving Service Families Accommodation. Service housing is provided for armed forces personnel who are married; if a couple separate, they will be able to remain in service accommodation for a maximum of 6 months (up to 93 days prior to a change in marital status, followed by a 93 day notice to vacate period). The exception might be when a serving individual needs to retain a house because they need to be able to accommodate their children. A victim who is not a serving member of the armed forces would therefore have to leave service housing if they separate from their partner. They will have to vacate the property within a set period of time; normally 93 days from the day the serving person changes their marital status on JPA (notice to vacate). In some circumstances it may be possible to extend this period although it may attract market rates. NS FPS, AWS and SSAFA fieldworkers, as well as military charities and local authorities, will actively support a family as they move home and transition out of the military community.

Additional housing considerations are detailed below:

- [The Joint Service Housing Advice Office \(JSHAO\)](#) (provides housing information and advice to service personnel and their families to assist them in their transition to civilian life)
- [Services Cotswold Centre](#)
- [SSAFA Stepping Stone Homes](#) (2 family units are available for Foreign and Commonwealth citizens who do not have recourse to public funds)

Concern about leaving the military community. Victims of domestic abuse who are not serving personnel are often worried about leaving the military community were they to separate from their partner. This can be very daunting, especially when people have spent a long period of time in this environment, and they also enjoy the way of life as well as the opportunities that are available to them. If a victim is thinking of leaving an abusive relationship they should think about where they would like to settle. Do they want to remain in the area, or would they possibly prefer to move closer to their family or friends? They should think about what they would want and come up with some possible options. It may all seem very difficult initially although the benefits in the longer term can make it all worthwhile.

Armed forces families are often used to moving and are more resilient than they may at first think. NS FPS, AWS and SSAFA fieldworkers would also be able to help with the process of transition into a civilian community.

Concern about the impact on children's education. Victims of domestic abuse are often concerned about the impact on their children's education were they to leave an abusive relationship. These concerns are looked at in more detail below:

- **Additional information.** Those parents who require additional information regarding education should contact the MOD [Children's Education Advisory Service \(CEAS\)](#) via DCYP-CEAS-Enquiry@mod.gov.uk. CEAS provide expert and impartial advice about the education of children of service personnel, and are part of the [Directorate Children and Young People \(DCYP\)](#) which is the lead Department within MOD for all issues relating to service children and young people.
- **The needs of children of serving personnel.** Separation may involve a school change, with a possible move to a school that may not understand the specific needs of the child of serving personnel. If this is the case the parent should ask the current school to liaise closely with the receiving school and seek advice from CEAS as quickly as possible.
- **Retention of Service Families Accommodation (SFA).** It may be possible to retain SFA if there is an educational need. If a child is about to take GCSEs or A Levels, and their service parent is posted, they may apply to remain in their quarter until they have completed that stage of their education. If their parents separate, the Occupancy Management Centre (OMC) can "consider" factors, such as educational impact, to allow them to retain their quarter until they complete a crucial stage of education; this is at the discretion of OMC and a CEAS educational impact statement is likely to be required.
- **Service Pupil Premium (SPP),** can be claimed by state schools and free schools in England with children on role that live with a Service person as their primary care giver, including step children and adopted children. If the Service person leaves the Service or the parents are divorced, any child in Reception to Year 11 who has been flagged as a Service child since the January 2011 census will continue to receive SPP under the ever 5 Service child measure.

Any child starting school after the Service person has left the Service, or no longer living with the Service person following a divorce, will not be eligible for SPP.

- **Continuity of Education Allowance.** Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) is covered in the Tri-Service Regulations for Allowance (JSP 752). Anyone with a query regarding CEA should contact the Defence Business Services Pay & Allowances Casework and Complaints Cell (PACCC) through their Unit HR staff.

Concern of losing contact with children. Serving parents can be particularly concerned about maintaining contact with their children because of the friction of military service. This can include overseas deployments, regular training commitments and frequent postings, both in the UK and overseas. In the case of serving parents, the armed forces will always manage these situations sympathetically and will help facilitate a solution wherever possible. Additional information for parents is available at '.gov.uk' - [Looking after children during divorce](#)

3. Other sources of support and information:

The information within this appendix has been taken from [Domestic abuse: guidance and support for the armed forces community](#). Further information can be found at:

- Families Federation; each of the 3 services has a Families Federation that will offer confidential advice on issues such as education
 - [Naval Families Federation](#)
 - [Army Families Federation](#)
 - [RAF Families Federation](#)
- MOD Domestic Abuse Strategy
- "Working Together to Safeguard Children"
- JSP 834 – Safeguarding Service Children and Young People
- JSP 913 – Tri-Service Policy on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

Immigration barriers faced by the Foreign and Commonwealth community affected by domestic abuse

1. Introduction

Non-British spouses of armed forces personnel may be dependent on their partner for their immigration status. In abusive relationships this reliance can be used as a threat to silence the victim. Cases of domestic abuse where either one or both partners are Foreign and Commonwealth nationals can impact on their immigration status and the right to reside in the UK. This is a very complicated issue, with further information detailed below.

2. Further information

When a victim of domestic abuse is not a British citizen it is important to seek qualified immigration advice as soon as possible after a relationship has broken down rather than wait until their current visa has expired. When the perpetrator is residing in the UK on a dependant's visa, a breakdown in the relationship will mean their visa is no longer valid and as a dependant of a service person and on expiry of that visa they will most likely have to return to their country of origin.

Domestic abuse victims (and their children) who are subject to UK immigration controls, may be eligible for settlement Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) if they have experienced domestic abuse as the partner of a British citizen, a person settled in the UK, or a Foreign or Commonwealth member of the armed forces who has served for at least 4 years. The status of dependants of Service personnel is clearer if they entered the UK under Immigration Rules Armed Forces. The Domestic Violence Concession allows domestic abuse victims to apply for settlement (ILR) in their own right, enabling access to UK state support. Spouses or partners of service personnel who are not British citizens or have not settled in the UK and who have not yet served for 4 years are not eligible for leave to remain under the domestic violence provisions. They would need to take [Office of the Immigration Service Commissioner \(OISC\)](#) accredited advice on whether they were eligible to remain for other reasons.

Any victim of domestic abuse who intends to apply for (ILR) should seek qualified immigration advice before submitting an application. The [OISC](#) has a register of regulated immigration advisers, including those who do not charge clients for advice or services.

More information on this process, including the eligibility of children, can be found at [.gov.uk](#)

3. Other sources of support and information:

- Within Army Families Federation their Foreign and Commonwealth Specialist is Office of the Immigration Service Commissioner (OISC) accredited, and best placed to advise armed forces families on immigration issues that are linked to domestic abuse. For further information go to the Army Families Federation [website](#).
- [New Society Organisation of Caribbean \(Cultural\) Affairs](#)

Barriers faced by the Nepali community affected by domestic abuse

1. Introduction

Gurkha units recruit from Nepal and are a long-established element of the Army. They are based within the UK and Brunei and can be located at sub-unit level. It should also be recognised that when faced with redundancy a significant number of Gurkhas transferred to other Regiments and Corps, resulting a redistribution of Nepalese soldiers throughout the Army. There is also a third category of ethnically Nepalese soldiers who are serving in the Army but hold British National (Overseas) status.

2. Cultural barriers: the importance of respect ('honour')

Anyone wishing to support a potential victim of domestic abuse from the Nepalese community must understand the importance that is placed upon respect. The need to protect and maintain the respect of the family permeates throughout the community and will be the primary factor that influences the behaviour of a victim of domestic abuse; the need to protect their respect within the community may outweigh their personal safety.

To support a Nepalese victim of domestic abuse the importance they place on protecting their respect must be recognised and understood if trust is to be developed. This will take a significant amount of time, but as trust is established further disclosure will take place. It is incredibly difficult to establish the trust that is needed if the support provider is not Nepalese, and it should also be recognised that victims are unlikely to respond to male support workers, regardless of nationality.

3. Other cultural barriers

Language and education. English is usually the second or third language within the Nepalese community. Women from the older generation are often poorly educated and are likely to be illiterate in both Nepalese and English, although it should be noted that this dynamic is changing as dependents who join their serving spouse are increasingly better educated. Illiteracy will impact on confidence, and it should also be understood that although individuals may be able to speak English, they may not be able to read.

Significant restraint regarding the disclosure of personal circumstance.

Within the Nepalese community details which are deemed to be very personal, including sexual relationships, are not normally discussed openly. This means that a Nepalese victim of domestic abuse will be very unwilling to discuss their personal situation which makes crimes such as rape and child abuse very difficult to identify. It takes time and the creation of trust to overcome these barriers.

Historical perception that men are superior within the community.

Although this does not reflect current social attitudes within Nepal or the Brigade of Gurkhas, there is a historical perception that men are superior within the Nepalese community.

Total reluctance to consider divorce or separation. It is important to recognise and understand that very few Nepalese victims of domestic abuse will consider divorce or separation; those that will are likely to be younger, better educated or be able to access support from their wider family e.g. parents living in the UK or older children. The priority should be to ensure a victim's safety if they are to remain with the perpetrator, the primary solution being the use of court orders.

Addictive behaviour in the perpetrator. Nepalese men may demonstrate addictive behaviours, the most likely being alcohol and gambling. This could impact on their personal relationships and can be an additional factor in cases of domestic abuse.

4. Other sources of support and information:

- [Domestic Abuse: Guidance and Support for the Armed Forces Community](#)
- Email support through Citizens Advice:
fandc@citizensadvice.rushmoor.org.uk
- Nepali [booklet](#) covering domestic and sexual abuse (see North East Hampshire DA Forum, resources)
- Local support in Rushmoor and Aldershot Garrison:
 - [Nepalese help group](#)
 - [Gurkha Chautari](#)
 - [Naya Yuva](#)
 - [Greater Rushmoor Nepalese Community \(GRNC\)](#)
- [Asian Mahila Association \(AMA\)](#)

Barriers faced by the Fijian community affected by domestic abuse

1. Introduction

Fiji comprises a mixture of cultures and religions due to colonial influence and the historical use of Indian workers; a significant number of Indians have remained in Fiji. Although Christianity is the dominant religion, a variety of religions are practiced including Hinduism and Islam. It is important to understand that the main island of Fiji has embraced western culture and has been heavily influenced by the UK and Australia. The majority of recruits come from the main island, Viti Levu, and are broadly comfortable with UK culture. Fijians from the smaller islands will face greater cultural barriers and it is important to understand where an individual has spent their life, noting that Fijians will often refer to their ancestral island when asked where they come from.

2. Background information and cultural barriers

Although Fijians are comfortable with western culture, more subtle differences do exist and are outlined below.

Family and religion. Fijians do not have arranged marriages and will choose their partner. Families are usually large and because of this a Fijian wife will often struggle to manage additional commitments such as employment; they are usually dependent on their husband for financial security. Within Fiji sex education is limited and it is not clear if family size is a reflection of choice or poor education. Children are involved with every element of family life and will attend all functions and celebrations, with parents having very little time together without their children. Faith and religion are of primary importance within the Fijian culture. Religious leaders are chosen by the community, and do not therefore go through the more rigorous process of selection and training that is generally associated with this role. Tribal hierarchy is an element of Fijian culture; however, it is important to recognise that religion and religious leaders hold greater influence within the community. The majority of Christians are Methodists, with national gatherings and annual conferences taking place in the UK; Stoke on Trent is often chosen for gatherings and is where many veterans settle when they leave the military.

Financial commitments. It is common for Fijians to give 10% of their income to charity or their local church for example. The majority are also supporting family members in Fiji where access to support such as health and education is not as readily accessible as the UK. The UK immigration process is also expensive, and it is important to recognise that Fijian families within the Armed Forces community may be facing financial hardship. These pressures are compounded when providing for a large family where typically one parent is employed.

Alcohol. Although practicing Fijian Christians would not normally drink alcohol, it is important to recognise the impact of alcohol within the Fijian community. The national drink is called kava, or grog, and is brought into the UK as a powder which is then mixed; kava generates a feeling of lethargy and can also numb the face. Fijians sit around a large bowl of kava and pass a cup around the group, which is predominantly male although women can join. In general, Fijians can lack moderation when drinking and excessive alcohol consumption is often linked to family abuse.

A reluctance to ask for help. Victims of domestic abuse are often reluctant to ask for support and are primarily concerned about their immigration status; if they have a large family, they will not receive welfare support in Fiji. They have often settled within the Fijian community within the Armed Forces and do not always understand the wider welfare support that is available to them. It is important to understand that welfare support is very limited within Fiji, and there will therefore be limited expectation regarding wider support within the UK.

3. Other sources of support and information

- [Domestic Abuse: Guidance and Support for the Armed Forces Community](#)
- Email support through Citizens Advice:
fandc@citizensadvice Rushmoor.org.uk
- Fijian [booklet](#) covering domestic and sexual abuse (see North East Hampshire DA Forum, resources)
- [Communities Fiji Britain](#)

Barriers faced by the Ghanaian community affected by domestic abuse

1. Introduction

With greater economic prosperity there is a growing influence of western culture within Ghana. A strong economy coupled with an established democratic political system has ensured Ghana is a regional power in West Africa. Ghana's population is ethnically mixed; most of the population being Christian with just under 20% Muslim. Ghanaians are clearly represented within the Foreign and Commonwealth community of the Armed Forces.

2. Background information and cultural barriers

Although Ghanaians are generally comfortable with western culture, differences do exist and are outlined below.

Family and religion. Although domestic abuse is not tolerated within Ghana, the importance of maintaining privacy must also be recognised. Families are close knit and problems are not widely discussed. If support is needed it will usually come from within the family or from the religious leader. Religion is an important element of the Ghanaian culture, with Christianity being the dominant religion. Although personal problems are often managed within a family, there is no stigma associated with divorce if it is felt the marriage is not working. Ghanaians will often access local churches in the UK, the main denominations being Roman Catholic and Methodist. They also integrate within the Armed Forces community and do not tend to establish separate specific Ghanaian groups due to limited numbers.

Financial commitments. The majority of families also support family members in Ghana where access to support such as health and education is not as readily accessible as the UK. As well as providing for their parents, they may also be responsible for supporting younger siblings and it needs to be understood that if a family member is ill, they can only access medical support if it can be paid for. The UK immigration process is also expensive, and it is important to recognise that Ghanaian families within the Armed Forces community may be facing financial hardship. Separation for periods due to immigration/visa restrictions can also be an added stress.

Timekeeping. The Ghanaian culture is very relaxed and laid back, and because of this by UK standards timekeeping can be poor, with appointments and stated times not adhered to. This mind-set and approach are changing gradually with the influence of western culture within Ghana, although it must be understood and managed. Support providers need to understand this and explain to victims the importance of timekeeping when accessing scheduled support for example.

A reluctance to ask for help. Victims of domestic abuse are often reluctant to ask for support and are primarily concerned about their immigration status and the impact of disclosure on their wider family, particularly parents. In addition, they often lack an understanding of the wider welfare support that is available to them and are likely to be concerned about the confidentiality of unit level support. It is important to understand that welfare support is very limited within Ghana, and there will therefore be limited expectation regarding wider support within the UK.

3. Other sources of support and information

- [Domestic Abuse: Guidance and Support for the Armed Forces Community](#)
- Email support through Citizens Advice:
fandc@citizensadvice.rushmoor.org.uk
- [Ghana Union](#)