

Book review

Blackstone's Guide to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021



Editors: Susan Edwards, David Malone & Gillian Jones KC

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This is an extremely readable and comprehensive guide for the specialist practitioner and the less experienced practitioner alike. It deals with all aspects of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (DAA 2021), covering criminal remedies as well as family remedies, and begins with an exploration of the context in which DAA 2021 came to life: this is essential reading, no matter the level of experience of the reader. It includes very useful research and case reports; particularly insightful are the introductory commentary sections which introduce the component parts, as well as the 'critical commentaries' which often appear, providing the insight of the expert practitioner which will be essential to those new to the subject.

The introductory remarks will be a stark reminder for all of us who participated in the

consultation and drafting of amendments to DAA 2021 while at the Bill stage. It was a hard-fought campaign to attempt to achieve what was promised by the government: a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get it right on domestic abuse.

The section on definition of abuse rightly highlights the reason why it has been necessary to include this in the statute. Non-physical forms of domestic abuse have been minimised by both professionals and victims alike for decades, due to a lack of understanding of the deeply corrosive nature of coercive control, emotional and psychological abuse, which is covered well in this section. There are useful chapters on police powers, the role of the domestic abuse practitioner (which many may never have heard of as yet), and duties of local authorities. The authors, however, are not

blind to the lack of resources which challenges the efficacy of these new roles.

Nor does it shy away from what it does not get right. There is a comprehensive analysis of the glaring omissions of DAA 2021, such as the rights of migrant women in the UK on visas other than spouse visas, for whom the domestic violence discretionary visa concession and funding does not apply. This has led to criticism of the discriminatory nature of an Act which promised not to leave any victims behind, yet it does. Also of note is chapter 20 which addresses the position of domestic abuse victims who are accused of offences by their abusers—an all-too-common means by which the abuser may make counter-allegations to the police, often resulting in neither being charged. This critical analysis is thought-provoking, concluding that for all the strengths of DAA 2021, it nonetheless offers no protection for the victim who is criminalised.

The book includes a well-written clarion call for better professional practice. Those specialising in this area will cheer at this. Finally, the book contains an annex of the full text of DAA 2021 for reference. This is an excellent handbook for any lawyer embarking on this area of law.

NLJ

Reviewer: **Cris McCurley**, partner at Ben Hoare Bell LLP (www.benhoarebell.co.uk).



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