



Adding insult to injury—redefining domestic abuse



Koldral/Getty Images

It is often the most sensational and horrific stories of abuse and violence that make headlines. Claire Throssell endured years of physical and emotional abuse by her ex-husband and was forced to be cross-examined by him during hearings for visitation with their sons. Fearing losing access to them, he later purposefully started a house fire in South Yorkshire, UK, that killed both children. Yet beyond visibly shocking events lie the stealthier forms of non-physical abuse such as verbal or economic ill treatment. Pernicious and prevalent, domestic abuse affects 2 million people in the UK and 10 million in the USA annually, the majority of victims being women.

To target this crisis in the UK, on Jan 21, 2019, the Home Office and Ministry of Justice released a consultation and draft bill, *Transforming the Response to Domestic Abuse*, that seeks to improve radically public health awareness and support, transform the justice process to prioritise the safety of victims within criminal and family courts, and to strengthen the local and agency response to domestic abuse. A central measure of the draft bill is the

introduction of a statutory definition of domestic abuse. The updated definition would acknowledge that domestic abuse is complex and can involve psychological, physical, sexual, economic, and emotional dimensions as well as controlling or coercive acts and behaviours.

The call to overhaul how domestic abuse is addressed in the UK has conversely been accompanied by a troubling retreat from protections in the USA. An expansive US definition of domestic violence, similar to the proposed UK definition of domestic abuse, was quietly circumscribed in April, 2018, by the Trump Administration to encompass only physical harm, no longer recognising psychological abuse. Reasons for this regression are obscure, unjustified, and have left domestic violence experts aghast. The international consensus of specialists, victims, and survivors is clear—domestic abuse must be recognised in both the physical and non-physical sense not only to prosecute it but also to prevent it. Backing away from the broadest definition will only hurt. ■ [The Lancet](#)

For *Transforming the Response to Domestic Abuse* see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772202/CCS1218158068-Web_Accessible.pdf
For more on the US policy see <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>



Abandoning the stigma of leprosy



For thousands of years, leprosy was thought to be a curse of the gods, a punishment for sin, or a hereditary condition. Since ancient Egyptian times, the word leprosy has invoked disturbing imagery of diseased and disfigured bodies. The term has been so heavily stigmatised that it has become synonymous with abandonment, social isolation, and condemnation to a lifetime at the margins of society.

Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen's identification of *Mycobacterium leprae* as the causative agent of leprosy in 1873 left a deeply problematic legacy. In failing to obtain appropriate consent for his experiments—which consequently led to his being found guilty of misconduct—he represented the epitome of a system that professed to care for individuals while disregarding their voices. Indeed, historically the rights of people with leprosy have rarely been prioritised. In the USA, it was only in 1975 that policies of isolation for those affected were disbanded. Today, in many countries where leprosy remains prevalent, affected individuals continue to live as outcasts, leading to myriad mental health issues and perpetuating a cycle of ill health.

To coincide with World Leprosy Day on Jan 27, we publish images from the New Face of Leprosy Project. Based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (with plans to expand to other countries), the project has captured images and personal journeys of those living with leprosy. Photography is a compelling medium through which to tell the human narrative, and this initiative gives a face to a historically much neglected disease. The vibrant portraits convey a wildly different perspective to stereotypical notions of the disease. These stories show people living healthy lives with their families, employed and financially independent, and keen to share their messages of hope with others who are affected.

The positive images portrayed in the New Face of Leprosy Project offer powerful human stories for overcoming stigma. Participants talk of the importance of adhering to treatment, as well as overcoming personal losses, finding acceptance, and reintegrating into communities. A diagnosis of leprosy is not a medical death sentence, nor should it be a societal one. ■ [The Lancet](#)

For *Picturing Health: a new face for leprosy* see [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)30158-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)30158-8/fulltext)