



RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the main barriers preventing adult women from leaving abusive intimate partner relationships in the United Kingdom?

AIM

To critically examine UK evidence about barriers that may make leaving an abusive intimate partner relationship difficult or unsafe, and consider implications for health and social care practice.

OBJECTIVES

Identify UK evidence on personal and structural barriers; examine how safety, financial resources and family responsibilities interact; assess the quality and limits of selected studies; and discuss implications for health and social care support. These are planned objectives, not completed results.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A structured literature review will examine published evidence on adult women's experiences of barriers to leaving intimate partner abuse in the UK. Qualitative, peer-reviewed research will be prioritised because it explores lived experiences. Mixed-methods studies may also be included if relevant qualitative findings can be extracted separately. There will be no interviews, surveys, participant recruitment or use of confidential case records.

SEARCH STRATEGY

An initial UWTSD Library search on 20 October 2026 combined 'domestic violence UK' AND 'women abuse'. With English-language and 2016–2026 filters, 642 records were displayed; these have not yet been screened. Further searches will use academic databases accessible through UWTSD, including relevant ProQuest databases. Terms will cover abuse, women, leaving, barriers and the UK. Synonyms will use OR; concepts will use AND. Search dates, filters and results will be recorded.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Include peer-reviewed, English-language studies published 2016–2026 about UK women aged 18 or over who experience intimate partner abuse and barriers to leaving or separation. Prioritise qualitative findings. International studies will be included in the main synthesis only when UK results are separately identifiable. Exclude opinion pieces, children-only or perpetrator-only studies and research unrelated to leaving. Remove duplicates; screen titles, abstracts and full texts against the criteria. Record selection numbers and reasons for full-text exclusions.

DATA ANALYSIS

A data extraction table will record authors, year, UK setting, sample, study design, reported barriers and limitations. Following Thomas and Harden (2008), qualitative findings will be coded, organised into descriptive themes and developed into analytical themes. Possible areas include coercive control, safety, money, housing, family responsibilities and service responses. These are not research findings yet: final themes will emerge from the selected evidence. Contradictory results and differences between women's circumstances will also be explored.

QUALITY APPRAISAL

The CASP qualitative checklist will guide assessment of clarity of aims, study design, recruitment, ethics, reflexivity, analysis and evidence supporting conclusions (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2024). The strengths and weaknesses of each study will be recorded in an appraisal table. Findings will be interpreted in light of study quality, with limitations and uncertainty reported clearly rather than treating every study as equally reliable.

ETHICS AND LIMITATIONS

Only published secondary research is planned; no survivors will be contacted and no private case records accessed. A PG2 ethics application is in preparation; approval has not yet been granted. Sources will be cited using UWTSD Harvard style and discussed without blaming survivors. Limitations may include publication bias, English-only selection, differences between UK services and analysis by one researcher. Search records, screening decisions and appraisal notes will be stored securely.

REFERENCES | HARVARD STYLE

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2024) CASP checklist: for qualitative research. Available at: <https://casp-uk.net/casp-checklists/CASP-checklist-qualitative-2024.pdf> (Accessed: 20 October 2026).

Thomas, J. and Harden, A. (2008) 'Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews', BMC Medical Research Methodology, 8, article 45. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45> (Accessed: 20 October 2026).