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# HELP AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR VICITIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MAURITIUS

## Domestic violence in Mauritius

Statistics obtained from Gender links sadly reveal that globally 1 out of 5 women is victim of Domestic violence. In Mauritius, this figure is even higher and reveals that 1 out of 4 women is a battered women or victim of some sort of domestic violence.

The local perception is that domestic violence occurs only in working class and in rural areas. Domestic violence affects women from all areas, walks of life, race, religion or level of education.

This leaflet is aimed to help British citizens in Mauritius who are victims of domestic violence, understand the local system and know how and where they can seek help.

## Definition of Domestic Violence and Domestic Violence Act 1997

The Domestic Violence Act 1997 amended in 2004, defines domestic violence as any act of violence by a person against his/her spouse, mothers battered by their sons, daughter in law abused by their mother in law and all children abused by their parents.

The amendment now stipulates the punishment of any act of violence committed under one roof (*Mauritius News* Aug. 2004).

The Act defines domestic violence as:

* Any act of physical, mental or sexual violence
* Any attempt of such violence
* The forcible restriction of individual freedom and of privacy, carried out against individuals who have or have had family or kinship ties or co-habit or dwell in the same home

Mauritius is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, structures for the provision of 24 hour service, free legal assistance and psychological counseling have been set up.

## Family Welfare and Protection Unit

In line with one of the UN recommendations that states should set up appropriate mechanisms to implement policies and programmes in favour of families, the Ministry of Gender Equality has set up a Family Welfare and Protection Unit since July 2003.

The objectives of the Family Welfare and Protection Unit are:

1. To implement policies and strategies to promote family welfare; and
2. Adopt relevant strategies and implement actions to address the problem of Gender-Based Violence including Domestic Violence.

Through the Family Support Bureau, the Ministry offers services to victims and perpetrators of GBV including Domestic violence. There are six regional Family Support Bureau around the island which all falls under the Family Welfare and Protection Unit.

The Family Support Bureau offers the following services:

1. First hand counseling
2. Psychological counseling
3. Legal advice
4. Assistance to victims of domestic violence and
5. Counseling services to perpetrators (According to the Protection from Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act 2007, district Magistrate can refer perpetrators of domestic violence for Psychological counseling to the Family Support Bureau).

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Below you will find some advice on what to do if you are victim of domestic violence in Mauritius.

* Whether you feel you are or you are in danger, call the police. The police may take some time to reach your location so if you are in danger remove yourself from the situation and go to the nearest police station. Be prepared that police in Mauritius may not respond in the same way as in the UK. You can ask to deal with a female police officer but this may not always be possible if no female police officer is present. Some police officers, both male and female, are trained to deal with domestic violence cases and work with the Police Family Protection Unit. However not all police officers are trained to deal with cases of domestic violence. The British High Commission can accompany you to the police station if you would like additional support.
* If you need to leave your house but don’t want to involve the police, go to a safe place where you can receive assistance and protection. If you do not know where to go, there are shelters for women victim of domestic violence (see details below). You can call the shelter or ask someone to call on your behalf. The British High Commission can also assist you with calling the shelter. Shelters may be able to assist you with legal advice and can help you to find a job and your own accommodation once you are able to cope emotionally and financially with the situation. They can also help with children schooling.
* When you leave your home, if it is safe, take some personal belongings including clothes for yourself and your children. Remember also to take your passport and all important documents.
* Get the help of a lawyer. A lawyer can help you to file for a protection order and any other legal order to protect you from your abuser. The British High Commission can provide you with a list of lawyers but will not pay the services of a lawyer for you.
* If you have been hurt, you should ask to see a doctor. Ask for a form 58 at the police station and ask to be taken to a hospital to seek medical attention.

Please contact the High Commission if you are a victim of domestic abuse. We can accompany you to the police station, shelter or hospital, if you don’t feel comfortable going on your own.

Please note that if your family home is in Mauritius you can’t take your child out of the country without the other parent’s permission. You will need a lawyer to help you to get full custody from the court before you can take the children abroad.

## Association and Shelters available to support victims of Domestic Violence in Mauritius

### SOS WOMEN’S SHETER

SOS Femmes is a non-governmental organisation, set up in 1989 to give advice, support and a shelter to women and children who are victims of domestic violence, incest and rape. The Director is Mrs Ambal Jeanne. It is an NGO open to women of all religions and beliefs and of all walks of life. Its aim is to eliminate violence within Mauritian families and the NGO runs public awareness campaigns, educational workshops and publishes leaflets and pamphlets on domestic violence.

They may also provide legal advice; accompany victims to the police station if they so wish and provide temporary refuge should the victims want to stay away from the perpetrators until such time they can find their own accommodation. The NGO will help victims of domestic violence to obtain a protection and/or an accommodation order if that is necessary.

They can be contacted at the following:

**Address:** Ramana Maharshi Street, Coromandel,

**Tel/Hotline**: +230 2333054 (available 24/7)

**Email:** [sosadmin@intnet.mu](mailto:sosadmin@intenet.mu) or [sosshelter@intnet.mu](mailto:sosshelter@intnet.mu)

**Website:** <http://sosfemmes.intnet.mu>

## Shelter for Women and Children in distress

The Shelter for Women and Children in distress is situated at Icery Road, Forest Side. The shelter does not officially take battered women but is open to child victims of domestic violence. The Shelter works together with the Mauritius authorities such as the Child’s Development Unit (CDU), Ministry of Gender Equality etc. The Director of the shelter is Mrs Sheela Baguant.

Contact details:

**Phone**: +230 674 8875

**Email**: [icerys@intnet.mu](mailto:icerys@intnet.mu)

## Important telephone numbers:

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| British High Commission | + 230 202 9400 |
| Police | 999/112 |
| Emergency Police Response Service | Hotline: 686 5500 |
| Police Family Protection Unit (PFPU) | Headquarters: 210 2116 or 210 2122  Hotline: 5251 2730 |
| Family Counseling Service | Hotline: 119 |
| Family Welfare & Protection Unit (Domestic Violence) | Hotline: 139 |
| Child Development Unit | 113 |
| Suicide Prevention Unit | 188 |
| Befrienders – Suicide hotline | 800 9393 |
| SOS Femmes shelter (available 24/7) | 233 3059 |
| SAMU | 114 |

There are also Non Governmental Organisations that work to raise awareness about the problems of domestic violence.

## Men Against Violence

Preventive work mostly with youth organisations giving talks and presentations to schools to raise awareness about Domestic violence. Contact telephone number +230 401 2328

Prepared by the British High Commission

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