

# Emergency response team for domestic violence to be given more power from Jan 2025



Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling speaking at an appreciation event for partners of the Domestic Violence Emergency Response Team on Nov 18. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO



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SINGAPORE – To better protect victims of family violence, officers from a 24-hour emergency response team will soon be given the power to issue emergency orders at the scene of high-risk domestic cases, which will immediately stop perpetrators from committing further violence.

An emergency order may include prohibiting the perpetrator from being in the home of and places frequented by the victim, as well as from visiting or contacting the victim.

Amendments to the Women's Charter will take effect from January 2025 and will include the electronic monitoring of high-risk domestic violence perpetrators in some cases where a victim's personal protection order (PPO) is breached.

On Nov 18, Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling announced the date that the changes will take effect at an appreciation event for partners of the Domestic Violence Emergency Response Team (DVERT).

DVERT was one of 16 recommendations made by the Taskforce on Family Violence in 2021. It was rolled out in phases from April 2023, and, till July 2024, has responded to 307 cases referred by the police.

Most of these cases relate to spousal violence, with physical abuse being the most common type of abuse, Ms Sun said.

She cited the case of a mother who was physically abused by both her son and daughter. In one incident, the daughter punched, slapped and attempted to strangle her mother on returning home.

DVERT officers made an immediate social assessment, and placed the mother in a crisis shelter, Ms Sun said.

The mother was then referred to a Protection Specialist Centre and is now seeking PPOs against both her children.

DVERT has since been expanded and serves all seven police divisions in Singapore.

Before DVERT was set up, emergency response after hours was not available for all cases of domestic violence, except for those involving child or vulnerable adult abuse, Ms Sun said.

“There were high-risk domestic violence cases with immediate safety concerns but they could not receive immediate help from social service professionals. There was a clear need for a 24/7 emergency social service response for such cases involving not just children and vulnerable adults but also other instances of domestic violence,” she added.

Under the changes to the Women’s Charter to take effect from January 2025, the minimum age to apply for a PPO [will be lowered to 18 from 21](#).

Currently, those between the ages of 18 and 20 who are unmarried need to rely on others, such as their guardians, to apply for a PPO on their behalf.

The definition of family violence [will also be updated](#) to explicitly include physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse.

Egregious forms of controlling behaviour, which some jurisdictions call coercive control, will be considered emotional or psychological abuse under the amendments.

Care Corner Singapore deputy director Martin Chok told The Straits Times that the broader definition of family violence is an important step.

“We should emphasise that violence is not only physical. Expanding the definition will help to create awareness among the public and allow them to flag cases that they might have been wary to report in the past.

“We’re not only talking about people hitting each other,” he said.

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The implementation of DVERT has also largely improved the time taken for survivors to be referred to the different agencies and teams that follow up with case management and support services.

DVERT senior manager Kumaran Govindaraju said that, previously, the police would alert social service agencies only the next day or day after. But many acts of domestic violence happen at night, when the agencies are not operating.

With DVERT, the family can get support immediately to ensure their safety, he said.

“By empowering DVERT officers to issue emergency orders from January, we can really protect victims from further harm immediately.”

DVERT is also vital in ensuring that survivors can be attended to by social workers when they feel the most vulnerable and when the situation is the most urgent, said Mr Chok.

“If there is a lapse or delay in getting a social assessment for them, it may give them time to normalise the violence and say they no longer need help,” he added.

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