

Domestic violence attitudes and responses in UK ethnic minority and migrant communities and the role of religious and cultural influences

Study overview

The study explored domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in Ethiopian, Eritrean and Bangladeshi migrant faith communities in the UK, examining attitudes, responses, and the roles of religious and cultural influences. This qualitative research, conducted by community-based researchers, involved 16 interviews and one focus group discussion (total n = 24).

The findings highlighted **barriers faced by DVA victims from ethnic minority faith communities in migration contexts**, revealing the interplay between norms from their countries of origin and host society conditions.

The study emphasised the **significant yet unprepared role of religious establishments and mediators in addressing DVA** and **proposed solutions to integrating these institutions and resources**.

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The full citation of the study is as follows: Romina Istratii, Natalia Paszkiewicz, Aysha Ahmed, Gezahegn Kng, Ali and Feder. Domestic violence attitudes and responses in UK ethnic minority and migrant communities and the role of religious and cultural influences: A qualitative study, 11 October 2024, PREPRINT (Version 1) available at Research Square [<https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-5209153/v1>]

Use of Statutory Services



Participants across all study contexts consistently reported that **women affected by DVA often avoid statutory services** due to fears of being misunderstood, collective shame and distrust in social services, often viewed as entities that ‘take children away’ or ‘destroy families.’

For instance, Eritrean participants noted that welfare systems often reinforced **power imbalances**, as benefits tended to be in the husband’s name, leaving women economically dependent.

Key Points:

- ➔ Fear of child removal or deportation often manipulated by abusive partners.
- ➔ Limited awareness of available services tailored to ethnic minority communities.
- ➔ Cultural norms around shame and honour reinforced may by family and community pressures.

“So, the man had settled and adjusted and knows about the system. **The woman comes as a guest. She's under the control of the man.** So that's more hurdles for the woman.”

- Eritrean study participant

Role of Faith and Religious Mediators



Faith-based conceptualisations of marriage as holy and ordained by God contributed to the expectation that women endure abusive relationships. Participants highlighted that religious mediators rarely advocate for divorce, even in severe cases. Instead, **women were often encouraged to reconcile and endure their situation**, further limiting their options.

Religious mediators were identified as **influential yet underprepared in addressing DVA**. Despite shortcomings, participants recognised the potential for religious establishments to tackle DVA through **trauma-informed training** and collaborative efforts with formal services.

Key Points:

- ➔ Religious mediators can reinforce cultural norms that prioritise family preservation over victim safety.
- ➔ Religious institutions tend to be male-dominated, limiting women’s willingness to disclose abuse.
- ➔ Some religious mediators provided positive examples by encouraging open discussion and proactive interventions.

“We need to talk about this issue **more openly in places like mosques.**”

- Bangladeshi study participant

Recommendations

Recommendations put forth by study participants echoed the importance of **engaging professionals from the same community to reverse the existing distrust of statutory organisations.**

Participants agreed that **extensive awareness-raising campaigns** would be needed to educate people on how domestic violence endangers women's lives, impacts on children's mental health, and damages the community in general. For this to happen effectively, there would need to be **more collaboration between secular and religious stakeholders responding to DVA.**

Participants also suggested **involving female Islamic counsellors** and advocated for **couple counselling sessions based on the Islamic Hadith and Sunnah traditions to address the knowledge gaps in the community around women's and men's responsibilities within a marriage and the wider family setting.**

Participants also suggested **community workshops under the name of family life** where **religious leaders would be invited to speak and draw on religious texts** to reinforce the message that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable. These workshops should be planned with consideration given to women's care responsibilities and/or risks if they are existing in abusive relationships.

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