

The potential of faith-based resources and theological hermeneutics in responding to domestic violence and abuse (DVA):

In 2024, Project dIdl/ድልድል held its annual conference, “Domestic Violence, Religion, and Migration: Integrating Cultural and Religious Diversity in UK Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) Services and Developing a Future Roadmap for the Sector.” This conference brought together over 80 participants from at least 15 organisations working in domestic violence and abuse (DVA) services provision in the UK and numerous researchers, counsellors, religious leaders and religious scholars working internationally to address the complex intersections of faith, migration and domestic violence. One of the key themes emerging from the conference was the potential of employing faith-based resources and theological hermeneutics to respond to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in faith communities.

Key takeaway message :

Religious mediators and faith-based resources could help reverse or respond to harmful misconceptions and attitudes couched in religious discourse or rationalisations in faith communities. Religious beliefs and theological hermeneutics could also enable victims and survivors to exit harmful situations and could grant language to hold religious perpetrators accountable. Effective engagement would require appropriate cultural contextualisation, theological expertise and training for clerics and religious mediators.



The current ‘Evidence Bits’ is developed from the policy brief ‘A Roadmap for Integrating Cultural and Religious Diversity in UK Domestic Violence and Abuse Services’ authored by Dr Romina Istratii, Dr Natalia Paszkiewicz and Dr Mahmoud Ali Gomaa Afifi with review comments from the conference participants.

The policy brief is re-mixed for the purposes of the current ‘Evidence Bits’ in accordance with the Commons License Agreement specified under Project dIdl/ድልድል: <https://projectdIdl.org/>.

The conference sessions and the roundtable discussion were captured through a live illustration by Camille Aubry, parts of which are reproduced in the current ‘Evidence Bits.’ (with permission from project dIdl/ድልድል)

How can religious mediators and faith-based resources be integrated in responses against DVA?

1. Ensuring cultural and religious sensitivity and inclusion in domestic violence and abuse (DVA) services

"To be inclusive is to be specific"

Dr Romina Istratii's guiding principle underscored the importance of tailored and context-sensitive services and responses to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in diverse faith communities.

Developing cultural and religious awareness and sensitivity. Domestic violence and abuse (DVA) service providers need to be trained to respond in a culturally appropriate manner and to account for their client's religious beliefs and backgrounds with confidence.

Applying an intersectional lens. Adopting an intersectional approach that recognises multiple layers of human identity, abuse and vulnerability is crucial for effective service provision and inclusive policy making.

2. Addressing gender norms and inequalities with faith-based resources

There is an urgent need to disrupt or subvert gender norms, stereotypes, and inequalities that perpetuate or contribute to domestic violence and abuse (DVA), including asymmetries between men and women and harmful masculinities.

The potential of engaging men in prevention and responses:

It is important to recognise that many perpetrators are male, especially in highly patriarchal religious contexts (although DVA is not gender-exclusive). Abusive men would have to be integrated into prevention and intervention programmes to effectively respond to DVA. Religious men who are positive role models in their families and communities could become resourceful in such efforts.



3. Understanding trauma-informed practices as spiritual healing

CREATING SAFE, TRAUMA-INFORMED SPACES IS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE



Creating and fostering safe spaces: Creating safe, trauma-informed spaces can be perceived by domestic violence and abuse (DVA) victims and survivors as a spiritual practice and as essential for their healing process.

Understanding and addressing trauma and its impact: Understanding the relationship between faith and trauma at the level of both the individual and the wider community would be a necessary step to integrating trauma- and faith-sensitivity in domestic violence and abuse (DVA) services.

Providing trauma-sensitive training for religious mediators: Clerics and religious mediators would need to be trained in trauma-sensitive counselling as a way of integrating best practices in their spiritual and pastoral work.

Policy and Practice Implications

Reconsidering accreditation standards: Accreditation of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) services could stipulate requirements for organisations to identify in their referral networks religious mediators and faith-sensitive counsellors that clients could be referred to if they requested it.

Improving funding options for faith-based initiatives: Recognising that not enough has been invested in the faith and DVA/VAWG sector-specific funds could be set up to support such initiatives.

The current emphasis on 'exit' strategies by generalist domestic violence and abuse (DVA) services is at tension with the needs and constraints of victims and survivors from minority faith communities: Survivors often feel conflicted between choosing their communities and seeking support at a generalist service, which may lead to social ostracism. There is a need for holistic prevention and a response mechanism at the level of the community.

Lack of interfaith collaboration: Participants felt that interfaith coalitions previously set up in the UK around other topics were not sustained over time, raising the need for all involved stakeholders to assume responsibility for maintaining such joint efforts to collectively advocate and mobilise against domestic violence and abuse (DVA).

Not enough engagement among white majority and generalist domestic violence and abuse (DVA) service providers with religious and cultural diversity: Participants proposed that such organisations need to 'get out of the pigeonhole' to better engage with religious and cultural diversity, such as by seeking (remunerated) training from 'by and for' organisations and community-based specialists.

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If you are interested in exploring new research collaborations or seek advisory services, contact our Director, Dr Romina Istratii, at ri5@soas.ac.uk.

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