

# Coaction Hub's new research report launch: Rethinking Risk Beyond the Checklist: The Need for a Holistic and Inclusive Framework

## Study Overview

There is limited academic or practical research into how risk assessment structures and tools such as the DASH Risk Identification Checklist (RIC)—used by state agencies and domestic abuse services reflect the lived experiences of Black and minoritised victim-survivors.

This research seeks to encourage further dialogue about risk-based systems and practices that are used by agencies in their responses to domestic abuse, specifically in relation to their applicability for Black and minoritised victim-survivors. The learning should be used to encourage system and practice improvements to safeguard and support Black and minoritised victim-survivors. A critical part of this work involved creating the space to generate learning for an improved framework that better meets the needs of all victim-survivors whilst simultaneously reducing the risk they face, and foster a culture of accountability, proactive responses, and meaningful change. This research was produced by Coaction Hub, which is a partnership project between Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) and Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) which works to strengthen the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to improve responses to Black and minoritised victim-survivors of domestic abuse and harmful practices. The project aims to create an equitable partnership between a by and for agency and a mainstream agency working in the ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector.

Coaction Hub is grateful to individuals and agencies who were part of this research as well as their learning partners.

The paper is aimed at VAWG practitioners, policymakers, and frontline professionals responsible for assessing, supporting, and safeguarding Black and minoritised victim-survivors. It serves as a policy and practice influencing document, informed by consultations with professionals across the sector.

The research presented was conducted and written by Coaction Hub (AWRC in partnership with STADA).

Through its 'Evidence Bits' series, IDVRM aims to disseminate both the work of the Institute and its members. The views and recommendations made are those of the original authors and not necessarily those of IDVRM.

# Background: risk assessment in the context of domestic abuse

The research findings highlight critical gaps and opportunities for strengthening risk assessment processes for Black and minoritised survivors. Key themes include the importance of building trust, recognising barriers to disclosure, and moving beyond narrow, short-term understandings of risk. Findings also emphasise the need for intersectional, trauma-informed approaches, greater understanding of coercive control and harmful practices, and improvements in professional language, training, and use of judgement. This paper examines whether current risk assessment frameworks, such as the DASH RIC is effective for Black and minoritised victim-survivors of domestic abuse and harmful practices. Coaction Hub have highlighted in the paper that they are not aware of any research which explores effectiveness of RIC tool for Black and minoritised victim-survivors.



## Key Findings:

Assessments have a narrow focus on types of risk and short term focus on risk and safety.

An understanding of trauma is essential to reducing risk and meeting survivors' needs, particularly when trauma is shaped by the intersecting impacts of race, gender, and structural inequality.

Several participants noted that a challenge with the DASH checklist is that it focuses on the specific forms of risks individual perpetrators pose, without adequately integrating focus on risk factors at different levels.

The language the DASH checklists encourages professionals to use is often difficult for victim-survivors to understand.

Many by and for organisations said they adapted the DASH checklist according to support victim-survivors and used additional questions informed by their professional experience and expertise. The paper also highlights shift from risk based model to needs based model to offer holistic support to victim-survivors.

The DASH question on mental health fails to capture the complex realities of depression and suicidality among Black and minoritised women. There is an urgent need for culturally competent, anti-racist approaches within mental health and risk assessment systems.

Frontline professionals must engage in ongoing training and reflective practice to improve and widen their understanding of domestic abuse through an intersectional lens, particularly the experiences of Black and minoritised victim-survivors, including migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women.

Some participants felt the checklist was designed for white, middle-class, heterosexual British women, which leaves significant gaps in addressing the unique identities and experiences of others.

## Conclusion :

The current risk-led model is insufficient. A shift is needed toward approaches that centre both risk and need, addressing not just physical harm but long-term safety, housing, mental health, immigration status, and systemic oppression. This research highlights that many Black and minoritised women feel unable or unsafe to disclose abuse particularly in cases involving sexual violence, coercive control, or harmful practices due to limitations within the DASH tools, which lacks the intersectional framing needed to reflect their lived realities.

There is a clear call for change. The sector must critically consider whether a specialist tool is needed for by and for agencies, or whether the DASH must be fundamentally improved to become inclusive, survivor-led, and fit for purpose. Central to this work is the expertise of by and for agencies, and the need for investment in culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and anti-racist practice.

This research offers practical, survivor-informed recommendations for agencies, commissioners, funders, and policymakers to take coordinated action ensuring no survivor is invisible in the systems designed to protect them.

## Recommendations

### 1.

**Improve Engagement and Referral Pathways Frontline responders (Police, Housing, Health, and Social Services and wider VAWG Sector) should:**

- Engage with victim-survivors in ways that minimise harm and re-traumatisation, including creating safe spaces for disclosure and ensuring consistent communication.
- Resource and integrate early referral and collaboration with 'by and for' organisations as standard practice, providing wrap-around housing support, legal advice, advocacy, and longer-term recovery and support.
- Embed trauma-informed, culturally competent, and survivor-led approaches within all safeguarding and support structures. Ensure clear provision for staff personal development, training, and adequate resources to build and maintain professional expertise.
- Prioritise partnership working and knowledge-sharing with by and for agencies where dedicated funding is limited. Agencies should proactively develop skills, professional curiosity, and culturally sensitive practices to ensure responses meaningfully reflect the lived realities of Black and minoritised women.
- Conduct strengths-based assessments that highlight the survivor's capabilities, skills, resources, and community supports alongside their support needs, using a holistic approach to understand the full context of a survivor's experience. This involves sensitive, open-ended questioning, a better understanding of coercion and control, and recognition of the cultural and systemic barriers that may affect a survivor's ability to disclose or engage with services.
- Facilitate reflective practice on cases involving multi-layered issues and barriers, such as those experienced by Black and minoritised victim-survivors, to draw out learning, recognise strengths, and improve professional responses across all services.
- Strengthen multi-agency engagement with by and for agencies and other relevant agencies, ensuring their expertise informs risk assessment processes and builds on community and survivor strengths as well as identifying needs.

## 2.

Agencies across the VAWG sector including statutory services, housing, substance misuse, and mental health support should consider wider risks that disproportionately impact Black and minoritised women, such as;

- Patterns of abusive behaviour carried out by multiple perpetrators, including extended family involvement.
- Mental health impacts of abuse and structural barriers to accessing support. Risks of homelessness, destitution, and enforced social isolation.
- The impact of immigration status on victim-survivors ability to seek support, including transnational risks, threats of deportation, abandonment, and legal precarity

## 3.

### Invest in Specialist Training for Practitioners

- Mandatory, well-funded training is essential across statutory and non-statutory agencies.
- Training must cover harmful practices, coercive control, the mental health impact of VAWG, systemic inequalities, and how professional bias and assumptions shape risk assessment and access to justice.

## 5.

### Call for Collaborative Action to Review and Improve Risk Assessment Frameworks

- Convene a Strategic Roundtable
- Bring together national stakeholders—such as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, PCCs, MOPAC, Imkaan, and by and for agencies to lead a sector-wide review of current risk assessment frameworks.
- Review the DASH Checklist. Undertake a formal review of DASH through wide consultation, collating best practice across the VAWG sector, and ensuring tools are inclusive and relevant to diverse survivor experiences.

## 4.

### Sustained Investment in the by and for VAWG Sector

- A crisis-driven funding model is insufficient. National policy must prioritise the full implementation of protections and sustained investment in by and for services.
- Long-term funding is essential to deliver stable, trauma-informed, culturally competent, and needs-led support.
- Equitable access to specialist services must be guaranteed across the UK.

## 6.

### Centre Victim-Survivor's Voices

Victim-survivors must shape any reform of risk assessment tools. Their lived experience is vital to building safe, effective, and survivor-centred responses.

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If you are interested in exploring new research collaborations or seek advisory services, contact our Director, Dr Romina Istratii, at [romina.istratii.work@gmail.com](mailto:romina.istratii.work@gmail.com)

If you'd like to join our network of partners, contact us at [soasflf@soas.ac.uk](mailto:soasflf@soas.ac.uk).