

Religious and cultural influences on domestic violence attitudes and responses in UK ethnic minority and migrant communities: A qualitative inquiry

Study overview

This issue of Evidence Bits highlights key findings and recommendations from a study of attitudes and responses to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) engaging ethnic minority and migrant faith communities in the UK. The study was conducted with twenty-four female and male participants from Ethiopian, Eritrean and Bangladeshi faith communities, encompassing both Muslims and Christians.

While migrant and ethnic minority communities are not necessarily reported to experience DVA more frequently than non-migrant communities, they face an intersection of migration-specific vulnerabilities that can contribute towards it and create additional barriers to accessing support. This includes norms and pressures ascribed from their country of origin as well as pressures in the host society and structural inequalities and barriers created by the UK statutory system.

Building on previous evidence, the study underlines the potential role that religious establishments can play in supporting survivors of DVA within ethnic minority and migrant faith communities, but also their current unpreparedness to do so.

The current 'Evidence Bits' is based on the publication:

Istratii, R., Paszkiwicz, N., Ahmed, A., King, G. E., Ali, P., Feder, G and Teck Ascurra, M. (2025) [Religious and Cultural Influences on Domestic Violence Attitudes and Responses in UK Ethnic and Migrant Communities: A Qualitative Inquiry](#). *Violence: An International Journal*, SAGE.

Through its 'Evidence Bits' series, IDVRM aims to disseminate and make more accessible both the work of the Institute and its members to inform policy and practice. Views and recommendations expressed in these publications are those of the original authors and not necessarily those of IDVRM.

Key Findings

Despite the diverse religio-cultural backgrounds of the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Bangladeshi participants, the study underlines various cross-cultural findings that act as barriers to accessing support for survivors of DVA in ethnic minority and migrant faith communities in the UK:

Point 1

Multiple perpetrators within the extended family

- Most participants identified multiple perpetrators within the extended family, particularly mothers-in-law who in many cases occupy an elevated hierarchical position and have a direct influence on the relationship.
- Due to the close-knit nature of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Bangladeshi migrant faith communities, power dynamics and pressure can also be perpetuated from overseas.

Point 2

DVA is treated as a private family matter

- Participants expressed that speaking publicly about DVA would be perceived an intrusion into the family's private life and deemed as a woman's failure to fulfil her role as a "good" wife.
- Notions of stigma and honour prevent survivors of DVA from seeking external help or pursuing formal action.

Point 3

Marital pressures

- Participants underlined cultural and religious pressures within their communities to endure DVA for the sake of protecting the institution of marriage.
- Divorce is widely perceived to be sinful and stigmatised among migrant faith communities, putting pressure on women to stay in abusive relationships.

Key Findings

Point 4

Male-dominated religious establishments

- Participants highlighted that religious establishments are male-dominated spaces that lack a nuanced awareness and understanding of different forms of abuse, making survivors less likely to seek support within them.
- Relationships with faith leaders are often formal and public, making sensitive and private mediation less accessible.

Point 5

Unprepared social services

- Social services are not equipped to address the complex intersection of cultural, religious and familial pressures which compound DVA for women from ethnic minority and migrant faith communities.
- The UK's welfare and asylum systems reinforce power imbalances due to social housing and welfare benefits being under the name of the husband.

Point 6

Hostile policy environment

- The Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016 restrict migrants' access to public services, housing and welfare support.
- Racial discrimination, bias towards Islamic communities and fear of social services taking children away are barriers to help-seeking.

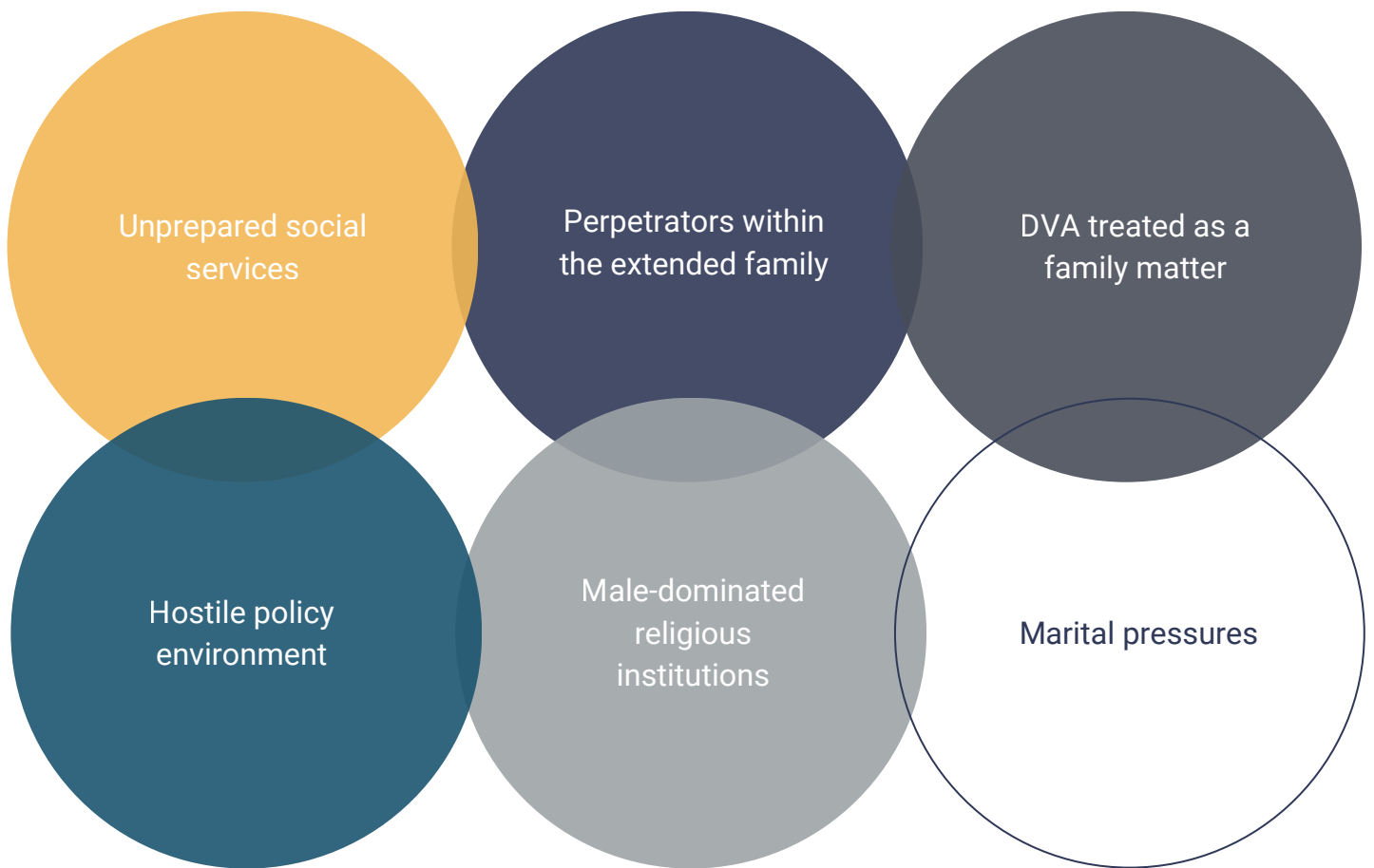
For **further reading** on the **contextual factors compounding DVA in migrant communities**, please see:

Du Mont, J. and Forte, T. (2012) An exploratory study on the consequences and contextual factors of intimate partner violence among immigrant and Canadian-born women. *BMJ Open* 2: e001728.

Intersection, not Isolation

In the case of ethnic minority and migrant faith communities in the UK, these barriers do not exist in *isolation*, but *intersect* with each other.

Women within these communities may be subjected to many, if not all, of these barriers simultaneously, compounding their experience of DVA and preventing help-seeking.



Overcoming these barriers requires culturally-resonant support that recognises the nuances of each situation and actively addresses the diverse and intersecting pressures placed on women from ethnic minority or migrant faith communities.

On the next page, we identify key policy recommendations laid out in the study that can be followed to ensure that these intersectional needs are met.

Key Policy and Practice Implications

Gender representation in religious spaces

Participants noted that religious establishments were male-dominated spaces that often prioritised family unity over women's safety. Bangladeshi participants emphasised the importance of involving female Islamic counsellors in the belief that greater gender representation within religious spaces may make culturally-resonant support more accessible for female survivors of DVA.

Theologically grounded support

Eritrean participants recommended workshops framed around "family life" that would draw on religious texts to reinforce the message that domestic violence is unacceptable in all its forms and that women have the right to leave abusive relationships. Similarly, Bangladeshi participants suggested couples counselling sessions grounded in the Islamic Hadith and Sunnah traditions.

Secular-religious collaboration

There is a lack formal organisations equipped to deal with the complex intersectional needs faced by women from ethnic minority and migrant faith communities in the UK. Participants emphasised that effective change would require collaboration between secular and religious stakeholders to address this knowledge gap and make support more accessible.

Further Related Reading

Istratii, R. (2023) Domestic violence, religion, and migration. In: Rowlands A and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh E (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Contemporary Migration*. Oxford: Oxford Academic.

Khelaifat, N. (2018) Seen but seldom heard: the healthcare experiences and needs of migrant women affected by domestic violence and abuse. PhD Thesis, <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/seen-but-seldom-heard>.

Get Involved with us

You are invited to subscribe to our [Newsletter](#) to become part of our community, access new evidence and share experience.

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

If you'd like to join our network of partners, contact us at dvrm.info@gmail.com