

The escalation of violence against women and girls

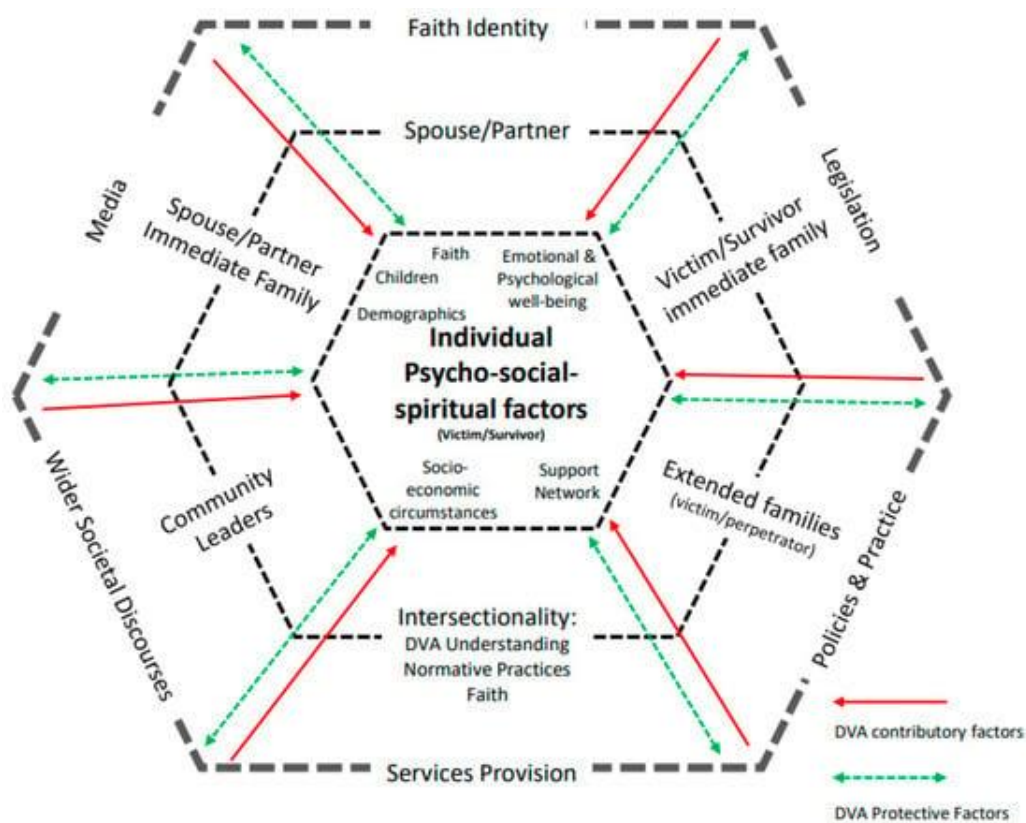
Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry

September 2023

Written Evidence submitted by Dr Rahmanara Chowdhury and Nottingham Civic Exchange, Nottingham Trent University

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This submission aims to provide evidence on question 3.5, particularly in relation to how statutory services might be supported to work more effectively with victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG).
- 1.2. The submission focusses on research that was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council around domestic violence and abuse in UK Muslim communities. The primary output of this work was the web model of domestic violence and abuse, a framework which aims to support front line practitioners to work more holistically with victims of domestic violence and abuse, particularly those from minority communities. This model can be viewed below:



- 1.3. The framework within the web model of domestic violence and abuse is built upon four levels; the individual at the core of the experience, wider stakeholders who may play a positive or harmful role, intersectionality such as race, religion, and all protected characteristics and how this impacts, and the macro level factors which can support or impede a victim's ability to gain access to effective support.
- 1.4. Practitioners across a number of sectors including the police, NHS, and front line domestic violence services have reported back the applicability of the model to all victims, regardless of background, indicating the potential scope for benefitting all victims.
- 1.5. It is therefore recommended to utilise the framework within the web model of domestic violence and abuse by front line services to work more holistically and effectively with victims of VAWG, particularly for minority communities.

2. **About the authors**

- 2.1. Dr Rahmanara Chowdhury, is a Chartered Psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at Nottingham Trent University, specialising in violence against women and girls within Muslim and other minority communities.
- 2.2. [Nottingham Civic Exchange](#) is Nottingham Trent University's pioneering civic think tank with a primary focus on issues relating to the city and the region. Nottingham Civic Exchange enables discovery by creating a space where co-produced approaches are developed to tackle entrenched social issues. Nottingham Civic Exchange supports the role of NTU as an anchor institution in the city and the region. Nottingham Trent University holds engagement with communities, public institutions, civic life, business and residents at the core of its mission.

3. **Evidence**

- 3.1. *How effective is (a) the police service and (b) the criminal justice system at responding to these behaviours and offences and how might those responses be improved?*

- 3.2. This response will focus on minority communities in particular relation to how services might be improved. However, the solutions stand to benefit all communities.
- 3.3. Addressing VAWG has been fraught with oversight and inadequacies, particularly within statutory agencies. As a result there is greater public unrest in relation into the handling of VAWG by statutory bodies. Within minority communities there is an exacerbated mistrust of authorities, particularly those relating to the criminal justice system. Some of this relates to discrepancies in profiling of minority communities within statutory bodies and the securitisation of groups within minority communities. Wider societal stereotyping and discriminative practices are known to also feed into this and widen the scope of distrust. The implications for victims of domestic violence and abuse from minority communities are that when they are ready to report VAWG, they face both internal and external barriers to reporting. Internally, communities may hold them back, citing the general stereotypes, accusing victims of affirming these stereotypes through reporting and drawing further negative attention to already stigmatised and marginalised communities. Externally there is the fear of whether victims from minority communities will receive the same level of service as their white counterparts and whether they will be heard, understood and taken seriously, or whether their culture and minority status will be blamed. Equally, practitioners are not always confident in supporting victims of VAWG, particularly if they are from minority communities where differences in cultural backgrounds may not be fully understood or are only understood from wider societal harmful discourses. This does not mean they do not wish to support clients, often they are worried about causing offence or not having adequate cultural training to be able to confidently support clients.
- 3.4. We therefore propose training front line practitioners in applying the web model of domestic violence and abuse when working with clients who have experienced abuse and/or violence. This model was developed as a result of research funded by the Economic Social and Research Council exploring domestic violence and abuse in UK Muslim communities (grant reference ES/P000649/1). It aims to empower front line practitioners to better understand their clients regardless of what their background may be and thereby work with them more holistically. The model provides practitioners with a framework of four levels and supports practitioners to ensure they are aware of each of these levels, how they impact on the client and what that means in terms of their abusive experiences. This subsequently paves the way for providing

tailored and effective support, enhancing the support of victims by front line practitioners where previously specific needs may have gone unrecognised and therefore unmet. The levels include gaining a better understanding of the individual at the core of the VAWG experience, awareness of wider stakeholders who may play a positive or harmful role in that experience and therefore how this can either be utilised or protected against within the support process, intersectionality such as race, religion, and all other protected characteristics and how this impacts the VAWG experience and how such needs can be catered for, and finally macro level factors which can either support or impede a victim's ability to gain access to effective support and how these can be better utilised as further support systems. Whilst there is broader evidence to suggest all of these areas impact upon victims of VAWG and their experiences with statutory services, this model cohesively brings together all of the areas requiring consideration in a coherent and accessible manner which practitioners can easily adopt in practice. This will support practitioners to work more holistically with clients from an evidence base, supporting all victims of VAWG.

- 3.5. By having a greater understanding of the nuances faced by each client, practitioners will be better positioned to provide improved tailored support to each individual client. This framework will guide practitioners to ask questions that they do not necessarily need to have all the answers to, but that will support them to work in collaboration with clients and allow clients to be able to lead on what is meaningful and relevant to their circumstances, and thereby help to ensure they are better understood within service provision including the criminal justice system.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1. Training of staff across all sectors who work with victims of VAWG, in how to apply the web model of domestic violence and abuse in their day to day practice. This will enable staff to work more effectively with clients from all backgrounds and to better understand the nuances faced by individuals, rather than adopting a one size fits all approach creating missed opportunities for effective interventions. Priority areas are Police and VAWG third sector organisations as these are the first point of call when victims do come forward. Such training is recommended as part of continued professional development in order to have organisational consistency in services.

This would further support adopting a whole person approach within the wider VAWG policy space. Training could be embedded into mandatory introductory training programmes for all new starters and as part of continued professional development training amongst existing staff.

- 4.2. Whilst this may be particularly beneficial for working with minority communities, the web model can be applied to clients from any background thereby broadening out its potential capacity within all services working in the VAWG sector.
- 4.3. The efficacy of this model has yet to be formally tested, we would therefore recommend a formal evaluation of this tool undertaken as a pilot in one region prior to national roll out. This will provide an adequate evidence base upon which long term development of services in the VAWG sector can be supported by the Government.

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