



# **The Coaction Hub AWRC in Partnership with STADA Learning Review Report**



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With special thanks to the Global Majority women, the Coaction Hub partners, AWRC and STADA, whose voices and experiences have informed this learning review.

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## 1. Background

Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) in partnership with Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) received 3-year funding from The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to deliver a joint project which aims to strengthen the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) model for Black & Minoritised women/girls subjected to violence and abuse including harmful practices'. The Coaction Hub project aims to improve support responses through training, mentoring, best practice toolkits and strategic multi-agency collaboration. This learning review report reflects the work they have undertaken over the last 3 years between May 2022- May 2025.

Below is a summary of the outcomes and outputs guiding the programme. Whilst the majority of project events were jointly hosted and co-ordinated by AWRC and STADA, in the spirit of equity, each partner separately led on specific areas of project activity.

### **Summary of grant objectives**

**Outcome 1:** *The ability of professionals to respond to the needs of minoritised survivors/ victims in statutory processes will increase.*

#### **Progress Indicators:**

- Create toolkits and train MARAC reps in specialised responses to harmful practices.
- Increase the number of trained Black and minoritised VAWG workers trained to chair DHRs.

#### **Project outputs:**

- Co-ordinate the recruitment and selection process for the DHR mentoring scheme (STADA & AWRC)
- Work with the STADA Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) team, Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA), and the Harmful Practices Strategic Forum to recruit, deliver and pilot a 12-month DHR Chair mentoring programme specific to Black and Minoritised/global majority workers in the sector. Recognising the inequality of resource and funding distribution, compensate each 'by and for' organisation for their staff to be seconded to a DHR case. (STADA).
- Produce best practice guidance for supporting survivors of harmful practices during MARAC process from the point of referral to the end of conference and beyond. (STADA)
- Deliver training and workshops on harmful practices to MARAC reps and co-ordinators. (STADA & AWRC)

**Outcome 2:** *Efficiency and responsiveness of the CCR model for Black and minoritised survivors will be better understood and acted upon*

#### **Progress Indicators:**

- In depth consultation with specialists and survivors.
- Create new pilot toolkits to improve responses.

### **Project outputs:**

- Consult with specialist pan London partners to review CCR and its application to Black and minoritised women/girls. (AWRC)
- Research with *by and for* providers on existing domestic abuse risk assessments and engagement pathways for Black and Minoritised/global majority women and girls.(AWRC)
- Launch a specialist 'Knowledge Hub' with a focus on participatory mapping of specialist *by and for* engagement within the CCR model.(AWRC)
- Disseminate and launch MARAC and harmful practices best practice guidance through a national webinar event in partnership with Standing Together's CCR Network, the Harmful Practices Strategic Forum, the Faith and VAWG Coalition and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office. AWRC and STADV (AWRC & STADA)

**Outcome 3: Effective collaboration between specialist services and multi agency stakeholders will be increased**

### **Progress Indicators:**

- Effective collaboration between specialist services and multi-agency stakeholders will be increased.

### **Project outputs:**

- Identify *by and for* organisations and local authority VAWG leads to participate in a '*by and for*' led Harmful Practices Strategic Partnership. Hold quarterly forum meetings co-ordinated to pool knowledge, coordinate resources and collectively represent the voice of harmful practices workers and influence practitioners, policy makers and commissioners. (AWRC & STADA)
- Organise a high-level workshop with MOPAC, the Domestic and Victim Commissioner, Home Office, London Councils and *by and for* organisations looking at ways to centre the experiences of Harmful Practices survivors and Black and Minoritised/global majority women in their VAWG strategies, commissioning and policy work and explore the possibility of these stakeholders funding a bigger DHR mentoring programme and a commit to funding the HP Strategic Forum. (STADA & AWRC).
- Explore international models to share best practice and learning from the Global South relevant to harmful practices and the CCR. (AWRC)

### **Operational context**

Some factors had an operational impact on aspects of the project deliverables and required adjustment to the original work programme. Changes to the work programme created delays to meeting some targets, but project adaptations based on ongoing project feedback and learning also strengthened the work in certain areas. For example, in Year 1, it became evident that more time was required to build trust, develop

relationships and understand current practice with key stakeholders of the project, *by and for* organisations in London and national organisations outside of London. This also led to the delivery of a World Cafe event. Therefore, some of the research and good practice resource outputs were moved to year 2.

*'We have realised that in order for the research to be as meaningful as possible, we need to take more time so that by and for are really centred in the work'.*

In addition to this, both AWRC and STADA experienced staff turnover, which led to project delays; however, strategies were put in place to replace staff. This was communicated and understood by Esmee Fairbairn and did not impact the overall achievements of the project.

## 2. Approach

As researchers and co-learners with the Coaction Hub, we aim to disrupt and challenge power relations, structures and systems that maintain racial and other forms of inequity. This means holding a lens to and redefining power, knowledge creation and the process and purpose of research itself.

Our approach to this learning review is grounded in the principles outlined in the **Research Design and Practice Guidance document (RDPG)**<sup>1</sup> developed by us to support and guide the work of the Coaction Hub. These include understanding HP in the context of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and adopting a de-colonial intersectional feminist action research-based approach. In practice, this means:

- Centering the voices, views, and needs of survivors. Amplifying the extensive knowledge, experience, and wisdom gathered over multiple generations and decades by Black, minoritised, and Global Majority women-led '*by and for*' VAWG organisations.
- Acknowledging and honouring the intersecting experiences of stakeholders and survivors, particularly concerning identity and types of VAWG. Gender is consistently embedded within multiple power relations. We recognise this and highlight how structural racial (and other forms of) inequity manifests to sustain social, political and economic systems of power which perpetuate white supremacy, particularly within white-dominated systems and structures.
- Enabling community ownership and agency within this research by amplifying the voices of *by and for* organisations driving change to achieve better support and outcomes for Black and minoritised survivors.
- Understanding the value of wrap-around holistic support approaches provided *by and for* organisations, including prevention, early intervention, institutional advocacy and advice, housing, therapeutic support, and much more.
- Engaging in the theory and practice of intersectionality to understand how oppressions relate to create webs of multiple and overlapping inequalities, acting as a catalyst for increasing socio-political and economic justice.
- Understanding VAWG in the context of power and control and highlighting its disproportionate impact on women as both a consequence and a cause of gender inequality.
- Grounding research in an analysis of harmful practices within the continuum of VAWG, including domestic violence, sexual violence and exploitation, stalking, and more.

These principles and associated practices have been essential for supporting the Coaction Hub to remain bold and courageous in their collaborative efforts to develop new and effective responses for Black and minoritised women and girls within the current CCR Model.

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<sup>1</sup> Available on request

### **3. Summary of Work**

A multi-method approach was adopted, which included gathering and analysing qualitative and quantitative data across project activities. This involved a combination of interviews, a review of key project documents, learning resources, project monitoring data, an online survey, and focus groups. The activities are summarised as follows:

#### **2022/2023/4: Year 1-2**

- Three 121/group interviews and reflective space to capture learning and achievements with the Coaction Hub leads and Senior Management.
- 16 online interviews with a variety of individuals who had engaged with the Coaction Hub in various ways and were critical to the development and delivery of the Coaction Hub project and with a key role in the delivery of a Coordinated Community Response (CCR):
- Co-founders and/or members of the Harmful Practices Strategic Partnership (HPSP)
- Participant at the World Café event hosted by the Coaction Hub team.
- The Faith & VAWG coalition (originally within STADA and now an independent entity from April 2024) and are members of the HPSP.
- Funder
- DHR mentees
- Previous/current STADA staff involved in MARAC/MARAC research and DHR
- A summary document highlighting key issues raised at the World Cafe event and minutes from the HPSP meetings.
- Evaluation feedback from the HPSP asking participants to reflect on the value and learning from being a participant in the group.

#### **2024/2025: Yrs 2 - 3**

- Development of an interim learning report.
- Review of project background documents, including the Harmful Practices Strategic Partnership terms of reference (TOR).
- Review and discussion spaces to support the development of learning resources, e.g., risk assessment and MARAC papers.
- Review and analysis of feedback forms from training and events (World Cafe event; DHR and MARAC training, Children and Harmful Practices conference).
- Review of funder monitoring reports.
- Monthly research and learning partner sessions between learning partners and the Coaction Hub leads.
- Two (half-day) away-day sessions with AWRC and STADA, the Coaction Hub staff to support team building and reflect on the external strategic landscape and the overall achievements and aspirations for the work.
- A final project reflection survey with the Executive Director of AWRC and the STADA Partnership Manager to explore the difference the project has made, the value of The Coaction Hub's equitable partnership model, successes, and future suggestions for change and development.
- Development of final learning review report.

Thematic analysis was used to identify key emerging themes and patterns within the data. The collated data informed the scope of the learning review, interim and final report delivered across the three years.

## 4. The Coaction Hub Equitable Partnership Model

This section of the learning review examines the value of the Coaction Hub's equitable partnership model and how this approach has played a central role in its work over the past three years. As one respondent noted:

*The partnership between Asian Women's Resource Centre and Standing Together is a unique one. Both agencies have a wealth of experience and expertise in the VAWG Sector and have brought individual strengths to the partnership, which has enabled us to achieve more effective outcomes and learning opportunities.*

*'The equitable way of working extends beyond our partnership and it's the bedrock of all we do and how we work with our by and for partners'. Coaction Hub Partner*

The value of the partnership lies not only in what is produced but also in how it is produced—through mutual respect, shared learning, and a commitment to challenging existing power structures. This involves centering the voices and experiences of *by and for* organisations, challenging white-led organisations to recognise their role in maintaining inequitable power structures and taking action to change this. As a senior member within the Coaction Hub partnership reflected:

*This is work in progress, we understand that this comes with challenges as it is not an equal playing field. This partnership has demonstrated partnership working and the involvement of *by and for*'s agencies is essential and integral part of service delivery and integrating their specialisms and voices is essential if we are serious about addressing inequalities.*

The partnership recognises this commitment as an ongoing process that requires constant attention, care, and a willingness to adapt, rather than as a one-time achievement, as illustrated in two short stories on Instagram:

[https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDMwKTYK\\_cU/?igsh=MXI5NzlkcTZvN3JhMg==](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDMwKTYK_cU/?igsh=MXI5NzlkcTZvN3JhMg==)

[https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDMwKTYK\\_cU/?igsh=MTZvcmd5c3BoOGU5YQ==](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDMwKTYK_cU/?igsh=MTZvcmd5c3BoOGU5YQ==)

This commitment to unlearning, relearning, and consistently taking the next step is essential for fostering partnerships between *by and for* and white-led organisations that strive to be truly equitable in the context of broader structural racial inequalities.

### 4.1 The Value of an Equitable Partnership Model Approach

The Coaction Hub has worked and collaborated extensively with a wide range of *by-and-for*, white-led VAWG and statutory sector services to critically develop its work around MARAC, DHR, RA and the effectiveness of the CCR model for Black and minoritised women.

The Coaction Hub and its focus on equity as a core aspect of its approach are overwhelmingly regarded as valuable by those interviewed for this learning review and feedback from the World Café Event, which took place in June 2023. As one Coaction Hub partner highlighted:

*One of the things I was thinking about was maybe something around action and creating conversations and narratives in places where they weren't really happening before. So part of what we have done... is created these learning spaces.*

Taking an **equitable** partnership approach which centres the needs of Black and minoritised women and challenges the effectiveness of MARAC, DHR, and risk assessment processes was seen as crucial, particularly by *by and for* organisations. As one respondent remarked:

*The partnership between AWRC and Standing Together.. their proactive and respectful approach between one another is clear...there have also been key achievements, for example with the HPSP and the DHR mentee programme. Together they bring different perspectives to what a CCR response looks like for Black and minoritised women, and those experiencing HP creating tools that reflect their lived experiences. This work is crucial.*

Central to this was the Coaction Hub's significant role in fostering ongoing conversations, critical thinking, and modelling good practices in allyship. This theme particularly emerged from the World Café event, where 25 individuals from various agencies operating both locally and nationally were invited to collaborate, network, and share ideas related to the work of the Coaction Hub<sup>2</sup>.

Allyship was recognised as valuable and vital to the Coaction Hub's equitable partnership model. To truly improve the efficiency and responsiveness of the CCR model for Black and minoritised survivors, the allyship and solidarity of white-led organisations alongside *by-and-for* organisations were deemed essential. Key reflections and learning from the event included:

- **Allyship in the context of partnership is active, ongoing, and intentional**  
Being an ally means taking consistent, deliberate action to center the voices and experiences of Black and minoritised survivors in designing support services. It requires more than good intentions—it's about behaviour, commitment, and accountability.
- **Power and privilege must be recognized as a first step to genuine change**  
Allies in white-led organisations must be aware of and willing to name the power and privilege they hold. Acknowledging these dynamics is the first step toward using them to amplify Black and minoritised women's voices, experience, skills and wisdom rather than dominate conversations, spaces and resources.
- **Listening Is fundamental**  
Listening with empathy, courage and openness is central to allyship and trust building. It involves valuing different lived experiences without defensiveness, minimising harm, and being willing to unlearn 'race' and faith-based stereotypes, assumptions and biases which permeate all systems and institutions.
- **Allyship happens both publicly and privately**  
It's not just about speaking up in meetings or on social media—true allyship also happens behind the scenes through sponsorship, power sharing and meaningful

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<sup>2</sup> [https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/cdn.webfactore.co.uk/7982-allyship%20\(1\).pdf](https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/cdn.webfactore.co.uk/7982-allyship%20(1).pdf)

policy influence to amplify the work and leadership of *by and for* organisations for Black and minoritised women.

- **It Involves Risk and Discomfort**

Allyship involves challenging peers, systems, and oneself. It requires giving up comfort and/or status to stand in solidarity with *by and for* organisations.

- **Self-reflection and growth are essential**

Allies must continuously reflect on their own biases, actions, and motivations. It's a learning journey that involves humility, courage, vulnerability, and growth.

- **It's not about recognition**

Allyship isn't performative. It's not about being seen as "good"—it's about doing what's right, even when no one is watching.

The Coaction Hub's equitable partnership approach has also contributed to the learning of its funding partner, Esmee Fairbairn, about the needs of Black and minoritised survivors to access effective support and the need for ongoing equitable funding for specialist *by and for* services to provide this support, alongside the current CCR model.

*I'm impressed with the partnership between the Asian Women's Resource Centre and Standing Together, their shared passion for and commitment to improving services for (Black and minoritised) women and girls. There is a reciprocity, openness and honesty in their approach... There has been a lot of personal and professional learning from working with them, understanding more clearly the importance of equitable partnerships and the need for funders to understand what true partnership means. (Funder)*

Further reflections included:

- Understand the context and experiences of Black and minoritised women led *by and for* organisations, emphasising the significant variations in capacity due to the inequitable distribution of funding compared to white-led organisations and the need for funders to be more intentional and informed in their decision-making processes<sup>3</sup>.
- Proactively addressing the need for equitable investment in underfunded and under-resourced organisations led by Black and minoritised women with critical knowledge and expertise.
- An expectation that white-led mainstream organisations demonstrate a solid understanding of the importance of working in genuine partnership with *by and for* organisations.
- Recognising that many mainstream, white-led organisations have dominated this space and that more equitable partnerships will result in better outcomes for Black and minoritised women and girls.
- Decision-making that adheres to racial justice principles and the role of the funding organisation's internal and external operations in achieving this.

## 4.2 Recognising and responding to structural racism

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/new-government-vawg-fund-fails-to-reach-services-supporting-the-most-marginalised/#:~:text=The%20End%20Violence%20Against%20Women,hardest%20by%20this%20funding%20crisis>.

Respondents and participants in the World Café event emphasised the importance of establishing equitable partnerships between *by and for* and white-led organisations, grounded in an understanding of how structural racial inequity operates to uphold an unequal playing field. As one respondent commented:

*(As a white led organisation) when you sign up to working with a by and for agency, you have to understand the unequal power dynamics and shift the way you work.... that acknowledgement and understanding can go a long way in actual inclusion. If we don't have partnerships that understand that and, and that are willing to share those challenges with us... then we are always going to talk about inclusion as Ok, we have ticked it off, we are done, and partnerships between by and for and white-led organisations will continue to be inequitable.*

The partnership recognises the intersecting structural barriers faced by Black and minoritised women seeking support within the current CCR model. The Coaction Hub plays a valuable role in challenging these issues, amplifying *by and for* organisation's leadership, expertise and knowledge of the communities they serve. This was highlighted by respondents:

*The Coaction Hub challenges the behaviours and 'cultures' found in systems such as social services, health and non-by and for services. These systems have been created in the context of structural inequality. Professionals operating within them often lack understanding of the complex and hidden impact of the intersections of harmful practice, racism, misogyny and patriarchal interpretations of culture.*

*The partnership recognises that it is not an equal playing field in terms of the funding landscape and that smaller BME [organisations] are often excluded from discussions on HP at a strategic level and policy discussions.*

Many respondents praised the equitable partnership model as a means of disrupting power disparities between *by-and-for* and white-led organisations, where there is often a lack of recognition of the critical skills and expertise that *by-and-for* organisations possess. As staff member of a *by-and-for* organisation highlighted:

*It's about the importance of...equal distribution of resources, including money and work, power-sharing, of (white-led) organisations stepping aside when necessary, and understanding the unique challenges faced by frontline organisations. This partnership really understands this and could serve as a model of good practice that others could replicate in their own collaborations.*

### 4.3 Influencing Policy and Practice

Through its equitable partnership model, the Coaction Hub has shaped policy and practice through various written papers and events with diverse stakeholders. These include the national CCR Network, the Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office (along with DA Regional Leads), representatives from MOPAC, the Home Office, London Councils, the London MARAC Coordinator's Forum, the National Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, as well as contacts in multiple statutory and non-statutory agencies.

The partnership actively collaborates on other initiatives, including the Harmful Practices Operational Group, which AWRC currently co-chairs in the boroughs of

Hammersmith and Fulham, Westminster, and Kensington and Chelsea and their founding role in the Harmful Practices Strategic Forum. The partnership also represents itself on strategic platforms and engages in national multiagency forums to share insights and pilot tools.

One of the Coaction Hub's key outputs has been the creation of a specialist Knowledge Hub- an accessible online resource that amplifies issues affecting Black and minoritised survivors, raises awareness around harmful practices, and shares valuable case studies, blogs, factsheets, research, and links to other services and resources. The aim is to inspire learning, action, allyship, and equitable partnerships among agencies and, as a key outcome of this project, improve the efficiency and responsiveness of the CCR to Black and minoritised survivors.

The Knowledge Hub has significantly expanded its visibility and reach in the past year of the project. It serves as a valuable resource for a diverse range of practitioners and agencies, including both large and smaller mainstream VAWG agencies, local authority employees working in VAWG, generic third sector agencies specialising in domestic abuse, and statutory sector agencies, such as the NHS, academic institutions, and health and social care providers. The full set of resources can be accessed [here](#). If the project is refunded, the Knowledge Hub will continue to develop as a valuable resource.

#### Key insights:

##### Policy and Practice

- Produced resources like the MARAC research paper that directly impacted training and understanding of harmful practices
- Supported *by and for* organizations to gain more confidence in statutory spaces
- Helped statutory agencies like NHS England rethink their approaches to harmful practices

##### Learning and Visibility

- Provided spaces for *by and for* organisations to develop specific skills (e.g., DHR expert panel training)
- Created networking and learning opportunities across different sectors
- Amplified voices of organisations traditionally marginalized in the sector

##### Strategic Communication

- Developed tools and resources to shift racist narratives around harmful practices in the context of VAWG
- Created platforms for sharing learning and expertise across organizations
- Worked to break down siloed working in the sector

The partnership is also seen as playing a key role in shining a light on the lack of recognition and effective response to women experiencing HP and other forms of VAWG, highlighting the need for a better understanding across services, including schools, colleges, and employers to identify and support women and girls affected by HP. This includes more and enough resources to support survivors in their own language and more support for migrant women and women with insecure immigration status. As one respondent stated:

*The Partnership's work around MARAC and risk assessments is much needed- these models are not fit for purpose for most Black and minoritised women experiencing VAWG, nor many other groups of women.*

This was also emphasised from a funder perspective, where the partnership was praised for its valuable contribution to shifting policy and practice around current mainstream CCC models.

*A lot of the value of this project is the contribution it will make to policy and practice work, particularly addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls.*

Aligned with this, and outcome three of this project, the Coaction Hub has begun to explore international models to share best practices and learnings from the Global South relevant to harmful practices and the CCR in the UK.

This exchange aims to reflect on the gaps in understanding and embedding responses to harmful practices within the CCR and to learn about the Special Cells model and its strategies for centring women's needs within the criminal justice system in India. The key focus of the learning exchange is outlined below.

- **Special Cells Model:** Focus on survivor, perpetrator, and family; implications of prevention and risk management approaches.
- **UK Comparative Models:** Drive, Safe & Together, children's services, criminal justice responses, and perpetrator behaviour change programs.
- **Multiagency Forums (CCR & MARAC):** Evaluates how the survivor's voice is represented and prioritised.
- **Community Engagement:** Feminist advocacy and activism with local government/ 'panchayats' in rural India.
- **Colocation Models:** Compares Indian Special Cells with the UK's colocation approaches; examines strengths and limitations.
- **Intersectionality & Institutional Oppression:** Comparative strengths and gaps in systemic responses.
- **Challenging Misogyny:** Confronting patriarchal norms and enhancing women's agency in familial and institutional settings.

The findings will be shared at the Coaction Hub's celebratory learning event on 30<sup>th</sup> April.

The value of the Coaction Hub's work in the context of MARAC, DHR and risk assessment is outlined further in sections 6-8 of the report.

#### 4.4 Challenges and considerations for the future

The clear value and importance of the Coaction Hub's equitable partnership model coexist with the challenges it faces. Throughout this report, structural racism and the uneven playing field it creates are experienced daily by organisations and the Black and minoritised women they serve. Many expressed deep frustration regarding the ongoing inequity they, along with the Black and minoritised women accessing services, encounter. They also addressed the broader systems of structural racism and the challenges this poses for equitable funding models and partnerships. As one respondent stated:

*Black and minoritised women, and women whose first language is not English are vulnerable to being mistreated or ignored due to a lack of understanding of their specific needs and cultural backgrounds. We face daily challenges due to insufficient funding, unequal treatment from the government, services and the difficulties in providing appropriate services for Black and minoritised women experiencing harmful practices and other forms of violence.*

Within this context, some respondents reflected on how AWRC and STADA are viewed and responded to differently, and there was a need to recognise and disrupt this wherever possible. This point is reflected across the learning review and highlighted by the reflection below:

*As a white led organisation, STADA are in a position of greater power, of privilege, because of this and how they are seen, the funding they receive, the resources available, a seat around tables etc... (I think) an important part of, and challenge of this partnership is to show something different... for example presenting together and sharing space. How the white led partner can show allyship and use privilege to do this.*

The Coaction Hub has to navigate how structural inequality shows up across the wider systems in which they work. Two recent examples include:

- Positive feedback around the MARAC paper, co-produced by the Coaction Hub, but positioned in the feedback as 'the Harmful practice report STADA completed'.
- The Safelives 'Managing Risk of Serious Harm from Domestic Abuse' review in London referenced the MARAC paper as authorised by STADA and a link to the paper, which takes the reader to STADA website rather than AWRC<sup>4</sup>

Institutions and systems consistently perpetuate and maintain systems of white supremacy, where white-led organisations are visible and credited with work that has been co-produced with *by and for* organisations, privileging white knowledge creation and 'knowers'<sup>5</sup>. Being alert to and actively engaged in disrupting this pattern is a challenging and crucial component of the Coaction Hub's aspirations and commitment to equitable partnership working.

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<sup>4</sup> Following a conversation with the Coaction Hub partnership, this has now been corrected, although the link to the paper still remains STADA rather than AWRC.

<sup>5</sup> Collins, P. H. (2008) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

This raises a key point about how STADA, as a co-partner, will integrate the learning from this project internally throughout the organisation to prevent it from being treated as an add-on or ad hoc initiative that depends on the commitment of individual staff members. As one respondent commented:

*The risk is that projects like the Coaction Hub are used as a way to say we don't really need to do anything. So they used as a shield for accusations of lack of inclusivity. Or of, you know, racism, if you want to put it bluntly.*

This shows up in many ways; for example, there is an expectation of participation of *by and for* organisations from white-led organisations without acknowledging the structural barriers that affect engagement with mainstream organisations.

*We have... had many frustrating conversations about why we can't attend this or that meeting, not because we don't want to but because we simply don't have enough staff or resources. Staff are beyond stretched. They are looking at it from their place of privilege and making judgements based on that.*

It was noted that some staff members would benefit from ongoing learning and development to enhance their awareness and understanding of anti-racism and how to apply this learning in practice. This includes recognising the value and contributions of *by and for* organisations and how to work effectively within this context. To build on the excellent work accomplished by the Coaction Hub, the learnings from this process must be shared across both partner organisations with a long-term commitment to strategic development.

There are also lessons for AWRC in working with STADA, a well-established and respected organisation leading on strategy development, policy, and practice in relation to the CCR. Embedding and integrating this learning as a frontline *by and for* organisation will serve as a strong foundation for future developments in this area and is a key benefit of the Coaction Hub's equitable partnership model.

## 5. The Harmful Practices Strategic Partnership (HPSP)

### **Outcome 3: Effective collaboration between specialist services and multi-agency stakeholders will be increased**

<sup>6</sup>Developing a strategic partnership focused on harmful practices (HPSP) with the *'by and for'* sector, involving *'by and for'* organisations and local authority VAWG leads, was a key grant objective and recognised as an invaluable component of the Coaction Hub in our research. Several respondents described it as a platform for information exch

*The HPSP is a really special space, a great partnership where, because of well, how we hold it, to pay attention to power dynamics and create safe spaces, we actually make progress. We listen and we learn together...it's a precious space.*

The HPSP is recognised as a conduit for establishing broader cross-sector support networks, particularly for organisations working with Black and minoritised women who experience harmful practices and various forms of gender-based violence. Many participants noted that the partnership's involvement with the HPSP has enhanced coordination and created more opportunities for discussing and taking strategic action regarding the institutional barriers hindering the provision of more effective support for Black and minoritised women and '*by and for*' led organisations.

Feedback highlighted key themes regarding the value and impact of the HPSP, led by The Coaction Hub, the challenges encountered, and the potential for its development moving forward.

<sup>6</sup> Word cloud compiled based on what 5 words HPSP members would use to describe their experience of the HPSP

## 5.1 A trusted learning space

The HPSP was praised as a space where women feel supported, respected, and able to share a wide range of perspectives grounded in diverse lived experiences and sector backgrounds. This was emphasised by one respondent who underscored the safe, inclusive environment established to support Black and minoritised survivors with intersecting identities:

*It was great and reassuring to see that the HPSP takes an intersectional approach to how we support the needs of Black and minoritised women... for example being inclusive of (Black and minoritised) trans women, Disabled women.. I really appreciate this space for being able to hold this and has helped me to feel included and able to contribute.*

### Key themes

- Creates a unique 'safe enough space'<sup>7</sup> space for cross sector dialogue
- Brings together statutory, non-statutory, academic and activist organisations
- Breaks down traditional organisational silos – cross pollination
- Enables collective learning and knowledge sharing

Creating an environment that fosters collective ownership has been crucial for reflecting and learning. This was emphasised by a founding member, who views the HPSP as a unique platform for sharing insights and best practices- applying a 'sharp lens' to harmful practices within a theoretical and policy framework. She states:

*I think collective learning and the intention of creating a joined-up voice to critically locate, flag and centre leadership of by and for providers in the response to harmful practices has been a shared purpose in the team... There is a long way to go, but the spirit and collective ownership of the group so far is very encouraging.*

Reviewed meeting minutes emphasised the HPSP as a space that values diverse perspectives and lived experiences. When learning together (for instance, developing a more 'culturally competent' approach to conversations about faith-based abuse in the context of VAWG and recognising how this is weaponised and interwoven into racist narratives), having a trusted space where various perspectives can be discussed before taking action is considered essential<sup>8</sup>.

Members' commitment and attendance to quarterly meetings (by those who can) contributed to a sense of generative learning. A respondent described this as a 'relationship-based learning cycle'. Members enjoy, benefit from, and gain value in coming together for conversations. They use this time to learn, return, discuss insights, agree on actions, and further build on their learning.

*It didn't feel like this transactional space where I come, and they just tell us stuff... when I did a workshop a couple of weeks ago I've been really like thinking about what was*

<sup>7</sup> The term safe 'enough' is used to recognise the different contexts and experiences of safety how these intersect with lived experiences of discrimination across different -social identities <https://psychsafety.com/psychological-safety-inclusion-and-political-beliefs/>

<sup>8</sup> Summarised from HPSP meeting minutes

*discussed at the group. And I've been really thinking about how to change things and now I'm going to do X, Y, Z.*

## 5.2 Cross-sector network of support

As well as an inclusive learning space, the value of having time to connect and build networks of support was also highlighted by many respondents:

*It's a place where they can come and talk to other organisations, find out what other people are doing, see what's working, what's not working, and kind of think about those issues more... I think, yeah, we've really benefited from that.*

The benefits of being able to share information, network, and collaborate across different sectors to better support Black and minoritised survivors were also highlighted by an HPSP member who holds a Strategic Lead position for Domestic Violence and Abuse services within NHS England:

*This group is invaluable for us in the NHS England London Region safeguarding team.... we are privileged to be allowed to attend the meetings of this group of by and for agencies who lead their collective voice in true partnership. The group provides us an opportunity to hear many different perspectives and helps us be aware of emerging issues from a wide-ranging number of organisations.*

Members appreciated their ability to contribute in various ways—observer, listener, educator, learner—all of which were recognised as equally valuable methods of supporting and amplifying one another's work. This approach and experience of collective partnership reflect Patricia Hill Collins' description of the four tenets of black feminist epistemology: lived experience, or 'connected knowers', dialogue, an ethics of care, and accountability.<sup>9</sup>

## 5.3 Expanding Space for Action

The data reviewed position the HPSP as a space for action arising from their learning. As indicated by the name, there is an acknowledgement that this needs to be strategic and rooted in an understanding of the pervasive nature of structural racism and its consequences for Black and minoritised women experiencing VAWG. This was summarised in an HPSP

### Key Themes

- Creates networks of support across different sectors and organisations
- Supports institutional reflection and change
- Enables more nuanced collaborative approaches
- Generates an enhanced, collective understanding of harmful practices in a VAWG context

### Key Themes

- Challenges existing racist narratives and practices
- Provides nuanced feedback to external organisations with an intersectional lens
- Supports institutional advocacy
- Provides a platform for strategic conversations and action

<sup>9</sup> Collins, P. H. (2008) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

discussion where themes for subgroups and research were explored.<sup>10</sup>:

*It's not about the individual; it's about the systemic and institutional oppression against women; the women's experiences should be valid in terms of their experience of violence.*

*Our role is agitators, and we need to be more strategic at different levels, like with community leaders in community settings, with professionals in professional settings, etc. We need to change the denial attitude.*

Effective collective action can only occur in spaces and partnerships where enough psychological safety has been created<sup>11</sup>. As highlighted, this is a key success of the HPSP and has enabled several other important achievements. These include challenging the government's recent response to recommendations from the Women and Equalities Select Committee regarding 'honour' based abuse. Through collective conversation and agreement, the HPSP has:

- Drafted a template letter for VAWG leads to present to cabinet members, who in turn can lobby government<sup>12</sup>.
- Set up an online petition which outlines the concerns of the **HPSP** regarding the UK government's inadequate response to recommendations on addressing **'honour' based abuse and makes three key points to introduce:**
  - Mandatory comprehensive data collection,
  - Mandatory training for all statutory agency professionals, led by **by and for agency experts.**
  - A Statutory Definition of HBA to attract a wider audience.<sup>13</sup>
- Amplifying this work and call to action via social media platforms such as X and LinkedIn
- Spoken at various meetings and networks to highlight their collective response, such as the Community Safety Advisers Network, Crossing Pathways Network & NWL ICS.

The HPSP has developed a collection of valuable resources, fact sheets, and articles that provide context, information, and good practice guidance related to a range of harmful practices, including honour-based abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, caste-based abuse, and spiritual abuse. Several respondents praised their usefulness, including one who stated:

*The factsheets are great, they explain in simple language what HP are, how they are part of VAWG, and are a practical resource which anyone, whatever level your knowledge is,*

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<sup>10</sup> February 2023

<sup>11</sup> [www.psychsafety.co.uk/psychological-safety-inclusion-and-political-beliefs/](http://www.psychsafety.co.uk/psychological-safety-inclusion-and-political-beliefs/)

<sup>12</sup> [Response+to+Honour+Based+abuse+call+for+evidence.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](http://Response+to+Honour+Based+abuse+call+for+evidence.pdf (squarespace.com))

<sup>13</sup> [Petition - Victim/ Survivors of 'Honour' Based Abuse Deserve Safety - United Kingdom - Change.org](http://Petition - Victim/ Survivors of 'Honour' Based Abuse Deserve Safety - United Kingdom - Change.org)

*can understand and use...it's one of best achievements I think of the HPSP...I hope they keep being used and more resources developed.*

Factsheets and good practice guidance have been disseminated across the Coaction Hub work strands, including their initiatives on DHRs and integration into the MARAC training provided to MARAC Coordinators. These materials have also been widely distributed among HPSP member organisations within the VAWG sector and beyond to the statutory sector, including social care, housing, local authority commissioners, the NHS, and the DAC.

Contributing to the positive impact the HPSP has had on generating awareness and shifting perspectives around harmful practices, in March 2024, the Coaction Hub held a presentation on dowry and caste-based abuse using the factsheets they developed. The presentation was attended by 37 professionals from the VAWG sector across Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Kensington and Chelsea. The Coaction Hub used a process of 'before and after' evaluation to determine the difference the presentation made in participants' levels of awareness.

Before the presentation, the Coaction Hub generated a word cloud collecting the concerns professionals felt about exploring dowry or caste-based abuse:



This aligned with low levels of awareness of dowry and caste based abuse at 20%. After the presentation, this increased significantly, with 60% reporting a good to very well-informed level of understanding, highlighted by participants who commented:

*Thank you...for the excellent presentation - extremely informative*

*Excellent presentation - extremely informative.*

*Really informative, thank you. It's also about exploring in more depth in Risk assessing where possible.*

### **Case study: Raising awareness of policy/practice gaps**

The Coaction Hub in partnership with HPSP has been instrumental in raising awareness of policy / practice gaps in responses to 'harmful practices'/VAWG. An example of this is a multi-agency conference that was organised on the specific impacts of 'harmful practices' on Black, minoritised children and young people which was prompted by concerns about the invisibility of and lack of understanding of the needs of Black, minoritised children/young people and consequently gaps in a multi-agency safeguarding response.

*The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) mandated that children in households where there is domestic abuse are victims in their own right. As many forms of harmful practices fit the definition of domestic abuse, this applies to children living in environments where abuse such as 'honour' based abuse, spiritual abuse, dowry related abuse and others are occurring. There is concern that they are being missed in policy and practice decisions. For too long we have heard from practitioners that there is hesitation to act on what is perceived to be 'cultural' or religious practices. (the Coaction Hub).*

The conference brought together 78 experts spanning the statutory, voluntary and community sector including Local Authority VAWG and safeguarding leads, NHS, Home Office, *by and for*/VAWG specialists, academics, youth and faith based organisations. Attendees valued a focused, multi-agency discussion and action on the protection, safety and welfare of Black/minoritised children incorporating 'honour-based' abuse, FGM, spiritual abuse, survivor perspectives, including impacts on LGBTQi communities and developments in the online context.

*'Thank you so much for bringing us all together yesterday - it was a thought provoking conference'*

*'It's invaluable, I deliver training to social workers/other professionals, so will implement it into my training sessions.'*

*'Hearing the stories from survivors was insightful '*

*'There is a lot done within safeguarding but we are not there yet in terms of prevention'*

*'The effects of harmful practices on children needs to be taken more seriously so more can be done to support and prevent harm'*

*'I am a frontline practitioner working with children and young people who have experienced sexual violence and i wanted to better understand my knowledge of harmful practices and how I can use my position to engage young people and create safe spaces'*

*'I'm a specialist midwife and can share this with my organisation'*

## 5.4 Challenges and considerations for the future

Feedback from an HPSP workshop highlighted key developments they would like to focus on. These include spiritual abuse; bridging the gap between government/ sector language and communities' language; how to bring along/involve communities; support from more established *by and for* organisations around with harmful practices; risk management and MARAC training for the team; practicality of purpose – what can communities get in terms of support and safety; advocate for increased safety measures & Improve risk assessment processes; how Local Authorities can support regular training in their boroughs.

Fully realising these aspirations is a key challenge. It connects to the capacity of members, particularly those from smaller *by and for* organisations, to fully participate in the HPSP and creates tension in wholly achieving the group's strategic potential.

This lack of capacity has a well-documented impact on providing necessary support to Black and minoritised women and girls. The Coaction Hub and the HPSP recognise this as part of the broader institutional barriers faced by *by-and-for* VAWG services, particularly in the context of inequitable funding and financial constraints, partnerships, and commissioning models, which lead to a lack of capacity due to overwork and under-resourcing.

These challenges coincide with the need to grow the HPSP, develop effective subgroups, and broaden the membership. As one respondent noted,

*There is a need for greater representation from the charity sector and service providers, particularly those addressing issues like gender-based violence and safeguarding.*

Feedback also came from respondents about strengthening their clarity purpose: 'A clear direction/ workplan/ aim/ actions'<sup>14</sup> To operate as a strategic group, HPSP could benefit from a stronger guiding framework that clearly defines its aims, purpose, and strategic position. Resources will need to be considered, and different structures, such as sub-groups focused on thematic areas like housing, could engage members in a more targeted way. As one respondent noted:

*One of the challenges I foresee going forward as we grow is the demand on member's time and how to create effective subgroups so make the forum stronger. I think further connections with housing and other thematic areas of specialism within the CCR will benefit the group."*

### Challenges:

- Limited capacity among some smaller *by and for* organisations to fully engage
- Institutional barriers- underfunding and inequitable funding
- Overwork and under-resourcing of the *by and for* sector

### Strategic development needs:

- Expansion of HPSP and effective thematic subgroup formation
- Broader representation, especially from charity and service providers
- Clarity of purpose and structured workplan

<sup>14</sup> Feedback from HPSP workshop

The HPSP's value in creating transformative spaces for cross-sector dialogue, learning, and strategic collaboration on complex issues of harmful practices and VAWG to secure better outcomes for survivors is clear. Addressing these challenges to realise its full potential is a key focus for the Coaction Hub and should be prioritised if further funding is secured to enable the HPSP to continue supporting its work and vice versa.

## 6. Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs)/ Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR)

Outcome1: The ability of professionals to respond to the needs of minoritised survivors/ victims in statutory processes will increase.

### 6.1 Programme of work

The DARDRs/DHR strand of work evolved through the Coaction Hub's involvement in local multi-agency MARACs and DARDRs/DHR panels and ongoing discussions with members of the HPSP. The absence of and marginalisation of '*by and for*' organisations as both panel members and as chairs of local authority DHR panels, particularly on cases of femicide involving Black and minoritised women was evident. This under-representation has specific implications on the level of understanding that exists within DARDRs/DHR panels of the specific barriers and intersectional contexts for Black and minoritised women and girls seeking help and support for violence and abuse. Whilst DHR panels are required to recruit 'cultural' experts, those recruited often lack VAWG expertise and experience, which prevents effective organisational scrutiny and learning to prevent future homicides, particularly where police and other agency failures have led to missed opportunities for intervention, inadequate risk assessment, and support (CWJ & Imkaan, 2024). Meaningful collaboration with *by and for* organisations is consequently a critical component of a CCR.

The Coaction Hub DARDRs/DHR work strand seeks to address this gap through the development and implementation of bespoke training workshops, shadowing, and mentoring opportunities specifically for staff/practitioners working in *by and for* organisations to increase their knowledge of, confidence in, and engagement in DARDRs/DHR processes as either chairs or expert panel members. Where wider knowledge and practice gaps were identified amongst statutory agencies, targeted learning resources were also developed to raise awareness and influence future practice. Mentees were recruited on the basis that they were able to demonstrate a range of skills and experience, as outlined below in the Coaction Hub recruitment process:

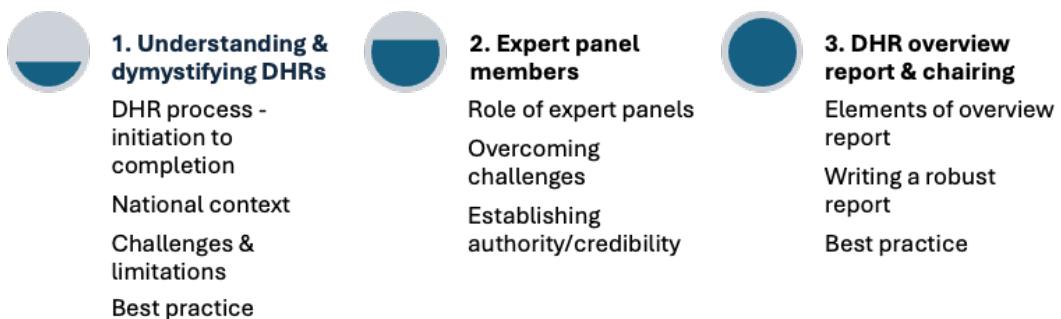
1. Working in the End Violence Against Black and Minoritised Women and Girls Sector (also known as the '*by and for*' sector).
2. Strong leadership skills and keen to enhance their skills to become a DHR Chair.

Three different workshops were delivered. Workshops one and two were delivered twice, and workshop three ran once throughout the duration of the programme, due to timing. Additionally, some trainees had already accessed DHR Chair training through existing programmes delivered by Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA).

**Table: Nos attending DHR workshops**

	Topic	Cohort 1 (no)	Cohort 2 (no)
WORKSHOP 1	Understanding and demystifying DHRs	8	8
WORKSHOP 2	Role of Expert Panel Members	9	7
WORKSHOP 3	The DHR overview report and chairing	8	

The knowledge-building sessions for Black and minoritised *by and for* organisations were designed to share information and build practitioner confidence across all aspects of the process, from developing a core understanding of the purpose and scope of DARDRs/DHRs to understanding the specific roles and responsibilities of being an expert panel member and chair. Sessions also focused on what is entailed in the production of a DHR overview report. Interactive discussions were designed to explore intersectional considerations such as power dynamics and inequalities, racialised and ‘cultural’ myths, and assumptions. The diagram below highlights the areas of focus across the training.



10 trainees benefited from an additional two sessions delivered by a STADA associate chair, which focused on ‘*engaging with family and friends*’ and ‘*engaging with perpetrators as a DHR chair*.’ A DHR shadowing opportunity was offered to one practitioner from a *by and for* organisation who needed more support to build confidence

to take on such a role. Opportunities for shadowing stem from practice-based reflections from the Coaction Hub staff who observed the need to extend time and support at two critical points. This included needing more time during the recruitment phase to build an understanding of the expectations and aims of the programme and, secondly, to increase the level of support and mentoring offered to mentees to ensure they felt equipped and confident.

*We have also offered DHR shadowing opportunities to a professional at a by and for who has received DHR chair training but does not feel confident to chair without further support. (The Coaction Hub co-ordinator)*

In addition to the dedicated training workshops for *by and for* organisations, a DHR webinar was co-facilitated by a current DARDR/DHR chair, together with a practitioner from a *by and for* organisation speaking from her own experience. The session was attended by **67 practitioners** from a broad range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies. The session aimed to create a space for existing chairs to hear from the perspectives of *by and for* organisations.

## 6.2 Project impact

### **The value of applying an intersectional lens to the DHR process**

The DARDRs/DHR training developed by the Coaction Hub specifically for Black, minoritised practitioners was considered to add significant value to the training currently available to those interested in taking on a chairing role. The Coaction Hub programme was described as valuable and necessary because of the way in which equality and diversity themes are integrated, unlike other types of training, which were described as lacking the depth and specificity required to understand the specific VAWG/harmful practice contexts for Black, minoritised women/girls. A key strength of the programme was described as STADA's openness to collaborating with and being guided by Black and minoritised VAWG experts.

*Organisations like Standing Together are keen to learn and willing to stand back and allow experts to guide their approach (DHR mentee).*

Increasing the number of Black and minoritised Chairs was considered crucial given the levels of under-representation within the process. The opportunity to access the programme was deemed crucial for identifying and addressing systemic racism, which was described as "rampant" in some statutory services. and in challenging the racialised unconscious biases and harmful, victim-blaming narratives that contribute to missed opportunities for intervention and agency failures.

Increasing the number of skilled VAWG-informed Black, minoritised DHR chairs with an intersectional approach was considered essential to improving the overall quality of reviews and recommendations and action to prevent domestic abuse/femicide.

*It's really important that we tackle the unconscious biases that are held by the chair of a review panel. There is a real need for cultural competency and understanding of diverse communities you might encounter during the review process (trainee).*

*From a frontline perspective, we see gaps and challenges in DHRs relating to South Asian women (trainee).*

*The intersectionality approach is crucial in DHRs. Also, it was great to learn about the characteristics in addition to the 9 protected characteristics (trainee).*

Where possible, Black and minoritised practitioners with experience of DARDRs/DHRs were recruited to facilitate sessions with *by and for* organisations. This provided a good example of how the Coaction Hub sought to recognise and foster Black, minoritised women's leadership and expertise on VAWG.

*The facilitator that we use for that group is someone who is a DHR chair, who is an Asian woman who said, I'm a chair now, and this is, I know I can do it, and this is how I did it. (The Coaction Hub partner)*

Positively, events were also designed with an intention to share learning between *by and for* organisations and the mainstream statutory sector, which amplified the opportunity for cross-sector learning and dialogue.

*The by and fors came and spoke in that webinar, and it's directly aimed at DHR chairs, and they can hear from someone who's an expert panel member who works for by and fors is going to talk about the issues that they've seen and what good and bad practice is. And so it's almost like we're trying to cross-pollinate information and learning across the two different spaces. (The Coaction Hub partner)*

### **High-quality training with a supported learning approach.**

*DHR mentee training:* Both DHR mentees commented positively on the support provided to them throughout the duration of the DHR mentee programme. Mentees valued the opportunity to access a unique and targeted programme of this nature. In addition to the training, mentees valued the bespoke one-to-one support and mentoring, information and advice provided, and the responsiveness of staff to their queries and support needs.

The opportunity to shadow meetings attended by STADA mentors and access guidance from 'established panel members' was also an opportunity for mentees to develop their thinking and deepen their understanding of the DHR chairing role.

Training has helped to increase mentee confidence, and the Coaction Hub was commended for improving women's personal and professional growth and creating opportunities for Black and minoritised women's leadership, hoping that their own experience would inspire other Black, minoritised women in a similar position. One mentee noted that when she started the programme, she had internal doubts and feelings of '*imposter syndrome*'; however, once she had the opportunity to access the programme and read DHR reviews of Black, minoritised women she began to recognise what was missing and her ability to provide a stronger, nuanced understanding about the lived experiences/contexts of the Black, minoritised victims which would strengthen the ways the reviews are conducted.

*Reading the reviews gave me confidence (DHR mentee)*

A key success of the DHR training provided by the Coaction Hub is that one of the mentees have acquired the skills and experience to formally take on a chairing role. One of the DHR mentees completing the programme is currently chairing a panel with the support of a DHR mentor with prior experience of the process and is also sitting on an expert panel on a separate DHR. She plans to continue in this role in the future as an Associate Chair for STADA. The need for further investment from funders to continue to increase the positive outcomes from the program was highlighted by the Coaction Hub Partners.

*Two women from by and fors are going to be chairs—we need such schemes and more funding for these issues (the Coaction Hub partner).*

**Expert Panel Member Training:** Practitioners attending the expert panel member (EPM) workshops found the training approach informative and helpful for building their knowledge, confidence, and understanding of the process and expectations of becoming a panel member. The opportunity to share fears and concerns was considered helpful to fostering a supportive learning environment.

*Facilitators are great, just the right balance and synergy of expertise and personal insights (workshop participant).*

*I gained insights, new ideas, and best practices that may help me enhance my own expertise. It's helped me clarify and articulate my own understanding of my role as well as reflect on my strengths, areas for growth, and the responsibilities that come with being an expert (trainee).*

*These sessions were brilliant and insightful while allowing for candid and open conversations and in sharing fears and experiences (trainee).*

*Will discuss it in the staff meeting, as we received a request to join the DHR meeting; the staff should have the confidence to join (trainee).*

The case study below from a participant completing the expert panel member (EPM) session highlights the positive impact of the training on her understanding and development of the process and the value of peer-learning spaces for *by and for* organisations.

## Case study: Expert panel member

### Identifying Cultural Nuances

*'They help ensure that cultural contexts are considered in reviews, leading to more effective and relevant recommendations. This is integral to DHRs and should be from the perspective of a by and for expert'.*

### Enhancing Review Quality

*'Their expertise and involvement ensures a thorough examination of the victim's journey, barriers and dynamics which might be invisible, this requires recognising both the overt and subtle challenges that victims from BME communities face. These barriers can be systemic, such as institutional policies that could disadvantage victims, or personal, such as ingrained biases or unspoken social norms. By embedding perspectives from a by and for expert, we can widen the breadth and depth of DHRs with an intersectional and anti-racist lens'.*

### Recognising the value of by and for organisations

*'The Coaction Hub has taken proactive steps to enhance their involvement in DHRs. They have facilitated workshops for specifically specialists from BME by-and-for organisations. The expert panel member sessions aim to equip us with the skills and knowledge necessary to become expert panel member'.*

### A valued learning space

*'These sessions fostered an environment of collaboration and mutual learning, where ideas were exchanged freely, and diverse perspectives were valued. Learning from other by and for sisters and session leaders enriched our understanding and equipped us with innovative strategies to enhance the review process'.*

**Addressing inequity in the DARDRs/DHR process:** The Coaction Hub staff spoke about the continued need for dedicated DHR training sessions as they benefited *by and for* organisations by enabling them '*to gain more confidence in statutory spaces*' and build '*networking and learning opportunities across different sectors*'.

Importantly, the discussions '*exposed inequities within existing DHR practice*' and created a much-needed space for collective discussion about fair representation and strategies for overcoming barriers to participation.

*The DHR work has been transformative in building confidence and skills and challenging systemic inequalities in the review process (Coaction Hub partner).*

*Some of them [the participants] have sat on panels as expert panel members. Nearly all of them talked about being dismissed, sidelined, and not being re-enumerated (Coaction Hub partner).*

The discussions on the systemic barriers and challenges that influence the participation of *by and for* VAWG specialists led to the development of expert panel member (EPM) guidance, which was co-produced with *by and for* organisations participating in the expert panel member workshops. The guidance provides a positive example of the way in which the Coaction Hub has been able to work in an agile and needs-based way to catalyse action on shared concerns. The guidance aimed at local authorities conducting DARDRs/DHR's was designed to provide guidance to address the systemic inequalities that exist within the DHR process. The gaps include under-representation and lack of financial compensation, the importance of integrating faith-based understanding and 'cultural' competence, and recommendations for embedding intersectional expertise within DHR processes. A meeting was coordinated with the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to share lessons and key issues from the EPM guidance.

### **6.3 Challenges and considerations for the future**

Initially there were plans to recruit a minimum of 4 mentees throughout the duration of the project; however, one DHR Chair mentee successfully completed the DHR mentee programme over the three years. A number of issues had an impact on delivering this aim. The turnover of managers within STADA who were responsible for shadowing the mentees had a significant impact on delivery. Potential mentees required more time during the recruitment process to understand the aims and expectations of their involvement and the nature of the commitment. The level of ongoing support required by mentees in addition to formal DHR training, including help with confidence-building and preparation for taking on the role, had been underestimated. To address this, follow up support sessions were arranged.

The need to address the under-representation of *by and for* organisations as expert advisors on local panels was identified as a significant concern, and therefore the project also shifted its attention towards sessions that built the capacity, skills, and knowledge of expert panel members. Given the level of systemic disparities that impact the capacity of small, specialist *by and for* organisations, in addition to the way in which DARDRs/DHR panels are conducted, it may have been helpful to have built in time during the inception period to assess the practicality of the DHR mentee programme, considering resources, timelines, and staff capacity prior to launching the recruitment process. Despite these issues, the activities led to an increase in the Black/minoritised representation of DHR chairs and expert panel members, which will have a sustainable positive impact on future DHR practice.

*Considerations for future development:* the Coaction Hub partners are committed to exploring opportunities to continue the work, and the DARDRs/DHR programme's lessons have established a strong basis for expanding similar work in the future, suggesting the need for further initiatives to increase the engagement of Black/minoritised VAWG practitioners to improve the quality of and learning from DARDRs/DHR processes.

*We will continue to enhance representation of Black and minoritised women/by and for agencies in Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs). To influence Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) commissioning so that 'by and for' agencies are adequately funded to support Black and minoritised survivors. (Coaction Hub partner)*

Building ongoing strategies to address resource inequalities that prevent *by and for* organisations from participating is a key consideration for future development, as highlighted below by a Coaction Hub lead:

*It's not just about coming and saying, well, this is what a DHR looks like. It's about being in a room together and saying, well, actually, I think it should be like this. Well, I get paid. Why aren't you getting paid? You know, all that sort of shared understanding and learning, it feels like a very useful space for those women to be going away and say, actually, I can, I definitely can do this (Coaction Hub partner).*

A few of the learning review respondents also suggested the development of a peer network for Black, minoritised DHR chairs, while another described the need for further advocacy that makes the commissioning of *by and for* expertise a statutory requirement.

*On a policy side, I would be keen to support a legal requirement for DHRs to automatically commission by and for specialists in relevant cases (trainee).*

DHR mentees highlighted the importance of pre-and post-training support and the importance of ongoing specific training as new areas of law and policy develop in the VAWG, DHR policy, and legal context. For example, a respondent noted the proposed changes to the statutory guidance, which have created a greater recognition of suicide as a domestic abuse-related death. The importance of continuing to integrate specialists *by and for* services as facilitators in the delivery of the training and events was viewed positively by participants. This was also suggested as a useful mechanism for mirroring promising practice to encourage future DHR panels to be inclusive through expert input from Black, minoritised VAWG professionals. Those accessing expert panel member training also highlighted the value of one-on-one support/mentoring opportunities for EPM.

*I think workshops or 1-to-1 coaching for community members who are guest expert panel members or asked to review reports would be of benefit, too. (trainee)*

A suggestion was made by one of the learning respondents to provide more in-depth training on the experiences of specific groups, for example, Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller groups. This was suggested in order to provide a more diverse perspective and prevent dominant racialised stereotypes about the nature and impact of 'harmful practices'/VAWG and to also provide more context about specific experiences of institutional discrimination and injustice. The same respondent also recommended the need for an in-depth piece of work on DHR/DARDRs and Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller groups, drawing on the learning from reviews also highlighting a lack of visibility within ethnicity monitoring.

*Training should include modules on specific communities like the traveller community to ensure the review process is meaningful and fair (trainee).*

*I would like to collaborate on research in the future where we analyse Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller DHRs as well as those who have no ethnicity recorded and perhaps use it to launch a campaign on the importance of ethnicity monitoring across agencies (trainee).*

An important consideration for the Coaction Hub going forward in the co-design of training and/or resources will be how to balance and amplify diverse voices and experiences in ways that do not reproduce harmful, pathologizing messages about individual communities/survivors of VAWG. An intersectional lens is critical to creating a nuanced training approach, and there could be further exploration of training with an emphasis on the statutory systems operating within the CCR and their role in perpetuating harm and discrimination against minoritised communities.

Other suggestions for the development of future training included expanding training to support bereaved family members to understand investigation processes; strategies for dealing with poor practice from mainstream VAWG providers who claim to deliver 'culturally competent' provision; and sessions that support the emotional wellbeing of Chairs and panel members.

*how to deal with challenging panel members, those that are from generic services that claim to deliver culturally competent services but may have failed victim (trainee)*

*How the well-being of panel and chair members is addressed, especially where a case can go on for a long time and where traumatic or graphic evidence is heard/seen (trainee)*

## 7. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

**Outcome 1:** The ability of professionals to respond to the needs of minoritised survivors/ victims in statutory processes will increase

**Outcome 2:** *Efficiency and responsiveness of the CCR model for Black and minoritized survivors will be better understood and acted upon*

### 7.1 Programme of work

The Coaction Hub's work regarding MARACs aligns with its broader grant objectives of critically reviewing aspects of the CCR, including risk assessment tools and DHRs to evaluate their effectiveness for Black and minoritised victims/survivors of domestic violence and harmful practices. This initiative collaborates with organisations led by Black and minoritised women, whose voices have historically been marginalised and continue to be within the CCR, alongside various other agencies. The Harmful Practices Strategic Partnership plays a crucial role in this, further explored in the context of the Coaction Hub in the following section 5.

This section of the learning review focuses on the Coaction Hub's work through developing key research, tools, and training to critically assess and challenge the effectiveness of MARACs in meeting the needs of Black and minoritised women.

The Coaction Hub's work is grounded in an understanding of structural racism and how age, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and other social identities experience multiple intersections of oppression and discrimination. Holding this perspective is crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of the multiple and complex impacts of violence, the help-seeking journeys, and the responses of white-led and mainstream agencies toward Black and minoritised women who fail to recognise this.

Over the life of the project, the Coaction Hub has conducted in-depth research via a world café event, focus groups, interviews and a survey to assess MARACs and their effectiveness for Black and minoritised women experiencing harmful practices and domestic violence within a range of contexts. Space was created within the research to hear the voices of *by and for* agencies separately from other agencies in acknowledgement of the unequal power dynamics that exist between *by and for* and white-led agencies. Participants included:

- 14 *By and for* agencies
- 6 VAWG agencies
- 3 DA workers based in local authorities
- 3 VAWG Leads based in local authorities
- 5 3rd sector workers with DA specialisms
- 1 Activist
- 50 MARAC co-ordinators

This research focussed on those who are involved in the development, commissioning and coordination of MARACs in England and Wales and resulted in a substantial paper

titled: **Are MARAC's helpful for Harmful Practice Cases?** An executive summary is also available. Grounded in an understanding of HP VAWG, it sets out key themes and findings across 5 areas<sup>15</sup>:

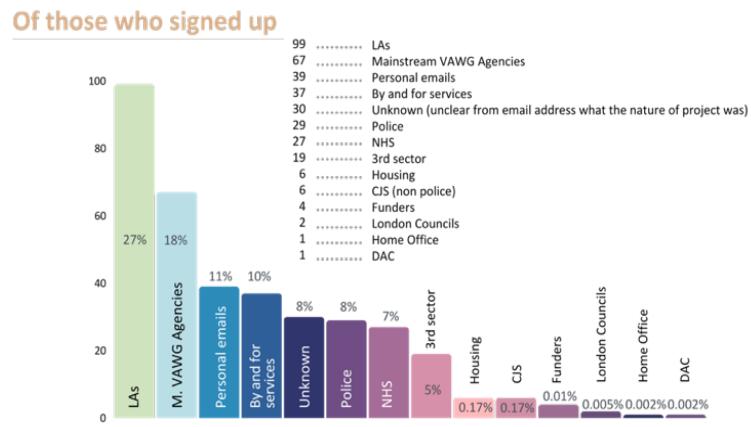
- Professionals Understanding of Harmful Practices in MARAC Settings
- The Value of *By and For* Agencies to MARAC and how this Impacts Harmful Practices Cases
- Reconsidering the Structure of MARAC for Harmful Practices Cases
- Harmful Practices as a Referral Criteria for MARAC
- The Value of Collecting MARAC Data on Harmful Practices

The paper also contains a comprehensive set of recommendations for MARAC Coordinators, VAWG leads, steering groups and Commissioners<sup>16</sup>.

To amplify this work, the Coaction Hub ran a webinar highlighting the key findings<sup>17</sup>. Of the 367 people who signed up, just over 56% (n=207) attended: this speaks to the cross-sector interest there is in understanding more about the ineffectiveness of MARAC's, in their current form, in supporting Black and minoritised women experiencing harmful practices and other forms of domestic violence. Whilst formal feedback after the event was not sought, feedback via the learning review indicates it was well received. As one respondent commented:

*Yes wow, there were so many people on the webinar, I don't know maybe 80-90 or more?... It was great to see how many people were interested and wanted to learn more.. it shows the value of holding webinars like this, we need more.*

Grounded in the research findings outlined in their report, the Coaction Hub has developed a harmful practices toolkit that complements the research paper and serves as an excellent resource for policy makers, commissioners and VAWG agencies, offering information and good practice guidance in effectively responding to survivors and valuing the work of *by and for* organisations who support them. *By and for* agencies can also use these resources to challenge poor practice. The toolkit includes<sup>18</sup>:



<sup>15</sup> Read a summary of these here:

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/6620195811de084bb3af8726/1713379682175/MARAC\\_and\\_Harmful\\_Practices\\_Exec\\_Summ.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/6620195811de084bb3af8726/1713379682175/MARAC_and_Harmful_Practices_Exec_Summ.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/6641f6b918188e3257f59050/1715599037502/MARAC\\_and\\_Harmful\\_Practices\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/6641f6b918188e3257f59050/1715599037502/MARAC_and_Harmful_Practices_Report_FINAL.pdf) (p 51)

<sup>17</sup> Available at <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/maracresearchcoactionhub>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.awrc.org.uk/knowledge-hub/marac-and-harmful-practices-toolkit>

- MARAC and HP case studies with good practice points
- MARAC model guidance
- Guide to HP models and area case studies
- Guidance for MARAC Reps, Chairs and Co-ordinators
- Data collection guidance, including templates and a case study

The Coaction Hub has presented on MARAC and harmful practices in various venues, influencing and educating professionals on their research findings and associated good practice guidance. Examples include presentations at NHS England and Crossing Pathways forums for healthcare professionals on how harmful practices present at MARAC and how health services can enhance their responses to these cases. The Coaction Hub has also met with the DAC Office to discuss their research on MARACs, emphasising the importance of focusing on harmful practices affecting survivors, who are often overlooked in policy and practice.

## 7.2 Project Impact<sup>19</sup>

Year 3 of the Coaction Hub's work focused on disseminating the MARAC research paper and findings through a training programme targeted at MARAC Coordinators. The Coaction Hub has emphasised the importance of providing training that is rooted in an ongoing process of engagement and consultation, centering the voices of Black and minoritised women and *by and for* organisations:

*Our MARAC work is absolutely research based on the experience of by and for... Then it's something that we've gone and trained... MARAC coordinators on. It was really specific training, we weren't coming and giving them harmful practices training we were giving them training really specific to MARAC and it was based on the research, and what we'd learned in that research and the voices of by and for (organisations). (Coaction Hub partner)*

A total of 116 Marac Coordinators were trained between July and November 2024, with 94 participating online and 17 in person. Notably, the participants came from a wide range of services, including the police, local authorities, specialist VAWG charities and Youth Justice. Geographically, the training attracted an impressive diversity of participants from over 26 countys across England and Wales.<sup>20</sup>

The aim of the training was to address a key finding from the MARAC research paper, which indicated that only 56% of participants felt confident in their understanding of harmful practices. The research also revealed that 42% of coordinators had not attended training on harmful practices. Among those who had, many reported that the training they received focused on only one or two specific forms of abuse, most commonly 'honour'-based abuse or forced marriage.

Additionally, the research highlighted feedback from specialist agencies expressing concerns that MARAC coordinators did not always grasp the complexities of risks associated with harmful practices and did not consistently respect their professional

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<sup>19</sup> Although not formally identified, cohorts also contained MARAC Chairs, or MARAC admin workers.

judgement when referring cases. In line with these findings, the training was specifically tailored to address this feedback and the unique nature of the MARAC coordinator role to support them:

- To be able to identify a broad range of harmful practices across different communities
- To understand how harmful practices cases might present at MARAC
- To understand the role of expert *by and for* agencies at MARAC
- To consider possible MARAC actions for harmful practices cases

As part of the training process, the toolkit, accessed via a weblink and the MARAC paper, was shared in the welcome email, during the session, and in the follow-up email after the sessions had taken place. The Coaction Hub evaluated the training through a form that asked participants to rate their experiences and learning outcomes from the training. Of the 116 attendees, 81% (n=94) provided feedback. The key outcomes and themes that

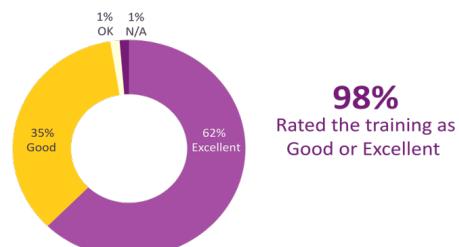
#### Key figures

- 98% rated the training as good or excellent
- 98% have a better understanding of harmful practices
- 99% have a better understanding of how harmful practices might present at MARAC
- 99% feel more confident in identifying a range of harmful practices as the present at MARAC
- 90% have a better understanding of the role of the *by and for* agencies at MARAC.

emerged from the learning are outlined below.

#### 7.2.1 Creating effective learning spaces

Effective facilitation is essential for creating learning spaces that foster engagement, collaboration, critical reflection and empower learners to take ownership of their learning through active participation<sup>21</sup>.



Participants overwhelmingly found the training valuable and appreciated the skills, knowledge and passion shared by the facilitators. Descriptions of the training approach included: brilliant, interactive, informative, extremely useful, fantastic and informative, engaging, and practical. They also said:

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.roffeypark.com/articles/what-are-facilitation-skills-and-how-do-you-facilitate/> Maguire, P. (2001) Uneven Ground: Feminisms and Action Research, in Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (eds) *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage Publications pp. 59 -69

*Great trainers - kept everyone engaged and they are clearly passionate about their roles.*

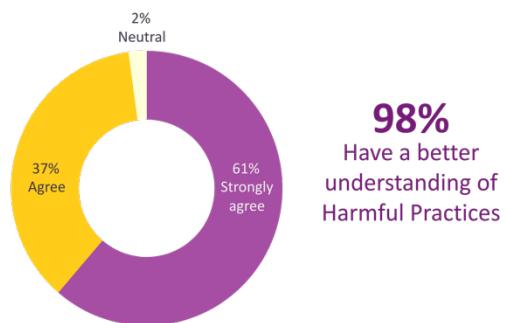
*Thank you for a very interesting training session. The hosts delivered the session very well.*

*I found the training extremely useful; thank you for your time and for sharing your knowledge.*

The high quality of facilitation in delivering the training content maximised its impact on participants' learning, awareness, and the implementation of this knowledge in their roles as MARAC Coordinators.

### **7.2.3 Increased awareness of harmful practices**

98% of respondents agreed they now have a better understanding of harmful practices. This learning emerged as a key theme from the training and addressed an important knowledge gap identified in the MARAC paper. This gap was mirrored in the feedback and was directly referenced by nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents:



*This was a very informative course. It made me think more deeply about harmful practices that I probably hadn't identified before.*

*I had a very limited understanding prior to the training. The training during the session was extremely useful and insightful.*

Participants also shared the impact the training had on increasing their awareness of the definitions and range of harmful practices within the envelope of DA:

*Finding out the many forms of harmful practices that I was totally unaware of prior to the training, such as CASTE Based abuse, Spiritual abuse and corrective rape.*

*The range of harmful practices - lots I had not even considered before.*

*The overview of broader harmful practices - especially honour based violence.*

*Understanding examples of harmful Practices and how they extend beyond HBA/FM/FGM.*

### **7.2.4 Value of cross-pollination**

The feedback strongly emphasised the importance of sharing knowledge and learning with other MARAC Coordinators, which should be recognised as a key element of the Coaction Hub's positive impact in this context. Over a quarter of participants felt that one

of the most beneficial aspects of the training was the opportunity to interact with colleagues and learn about similarities and differences in their practices.

*It was interesting to learn more about harmful practices and also getting the views from other MARAC Co-ordinators from other areas.*

*The discussions from all agencies across the country. Some similarities in understanding and some excellent ideas on HP in MARAC.*

*It has been useful to hear the differing approaches in different areas and interconnecting this with expertise delivered.*

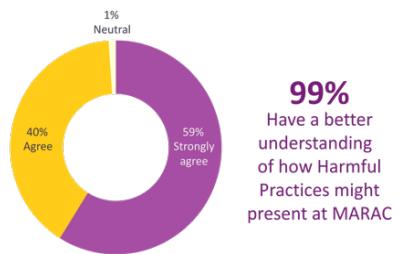
The use of case studies in the training further supported shared knowledge and learning:

*I liked being around the other MARAC co-ordinators and hearing others experiences and the case studies.*

*Taking part in case studies is always helpful, so I particularly enjoyed that bit as the group were able to get talking.*

### 7.2.5 Awareness to Action

This increased awareness of harmful practices as forms of gender-based violence and domestic abuse against women and girls, arising from power and control within intersectional experiences of oppression, has led to a better understanding and greater confidence in identifying a range of harmful practices as they present at MARAC. This has translated into key actions participants feel more confident in taking to improve the MARAC process and response for Black and minoritised women who have experienced harmful practices in the context of DA.



Several respondents emphasised the different approaches they will adopt in reviewing referrals for MARAC due to this training. This is a significant impact point to acknowledge, as it aligns with the findings of the MARAC paper, which identified inconsistencies in referral criteria and an under-identification of all forms of harmful practices perpetuated by racist stereotypes, inadequate risk assessment frameworks, and a lack of knowledge and understanding among many mainstream agencies. As respondents commented:

*I will use the information when vetting the referrals into MARAC and also for a deeper understanding of what is presented may have more to it than it initially seems*

*When reviewing referrals for MARAC I will be more aware of cases that have harmful practices within them and use my new knowledge to share with my colleagues to make them see it from that point of view also.*

*When reviewing a referral, I can confidently raise any Harmful Practices that may flag up and discuss this with the Chair.*

Respondents also highlighted the training's impact on considering different types of MARAC formats, particularly closed MARACs, when responding to referrals involving

harmful practices. This was another important point raised in the MARAC research paper, which cited the advantages referenced by *by and for* organisations regarding alternative models for harmful practice cases, along with two good practice case studies (available via the Knowledge Hub)<sup>22</sup>.

*I triage many cases as they come through, so today's training will help me better determine whether a hearing needs to be closed.*

*Interesting to hear other coordinators views about the HBA closed MARAC meetings. Will be taking this back to our Steering Group.*

*I found the discussion on closed MARAC's and different authorities and how they respond (useful). This is something that we in Kirklees are reviewing and looking at how best to move forward with sensitive cases.*

Respondents also reported increased confidence in considering the actions required to effectively support a MARAC case where harmful practices have been identified:

*I also found it helpful seeing what kind of Marac actions you recommend for a Harmful Practice Marac case - as it gave me confidence that I am considering the same sort of actions.*

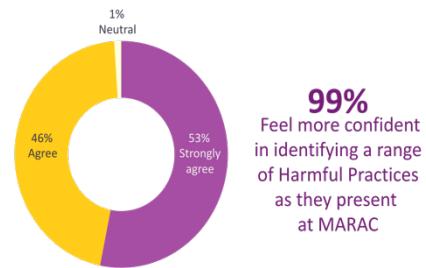
MARAC Coordinators are keen to share their increased awareness and confidence with their colleagues and team to improve their response- another positive impact point emphasising the training's broader reach and its value in raising awareness among a wider group of individuals and agencies involved with MARACs. Two respondents provided specific examples of their next steps:

*I will share what I learned with the team and partnership so that we can be aware and mindful of harmful practices. I will encourage partners to seek specialist advice from Karma Nirvana for all cases where harmful practices are present as a standard to ensure we are responding to the victim's needs appropriately.*

*In a report to our strategic board regarding Lincolnshire's current process for harmful practice cases at MARAC, what we need to implement moving forward for best practice.*

### **7.2.6 Challenges and considerations for the future**

Respondents from the learning review highlighted several key areas for ongoing development. Importantly, this included holding STADA accountable for its continued commitment and actions to dismantle structural racism and asymmetrical power structures within MARAC (and more broadly across its involvement with CCR).



<sup>22</sup>

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/6641f6b918188e3257f59050/1715599037502/MARAC\\_and\\_Harmful\\_Practices\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/6641f6b918188e3257f59050/1715599037502/MARAC_and_Harmful_Practices_Report_FINAL.pdf) (p 51)

The need for ongoing learning of how systems of white supremacy are maintained within white-led VAWG organisations to activate anti-racist practices and effectively support Black and minoritised survivors was highlighted by a respondent working within STADA:

*I implemented making MARAC anti-racist (a) regularly occurring meeting, because I find that I mean, this is kind of a result of just living in the UK. Really, but a lot of well, all of the mainstream services, basically are specifically designed for white British women with secure citizenship...so I really wanted to kind of sit down with the team at regular intervals and kind of discuss how we could better support black and minoritised victim (and) survivors.. But I think, especially when it comes to kind of wanting to improve MARAC...I think, yeah, stronger ties between coaction work would be (good?). The team (at STADA) developed an anti-racist charter / grew out of BLM/ George Floyd.*

As co-partners, it is crucial for STADA to reflect on their own anti-racist practices, embed them across every aspect of its work, and clearly communicate their expectation that all professionals involved with MARACs do the same, using the valuable findings of the produced report as a guiding document.

This was echoed by other respondents who stressed the importance- as emphasised in the MARAC paper produced- of adopting an intersectional lens and recognising the crucial role of specialist organisations, such as those supporting Black and minoritised, LGBTQ+, and Disabled people through MARAC. They highlighted the need for these organisations to receive actionable recommendations, adequate resources to implement them, involvement in both casework and the system itself, and raising awareness and understanding of harmful practices within a VAWG context. As one respondent stated:

*There is a lack of adequate knowledge... I'm concerned about uninformed individuals with influence at MARACs participating in panel discussions and missing things, sharing misinformation, stereotypes etc about BME women and HPs. I think ongoing training and support is needed and actually assessing people's knowledge levels.*

This was reflected in the training feedback, where 40% of respondents highlighted the importance of rolling it out to MARAC chairs. As one respondent noted, including MARAC chairs in this training is crucial, as '*they are key to assessing risks, safeguarding and assigning actions to be carried out to reduce outstanding risks*'.

Furthermore, although 90% of the respondents reported having a better understanding of the role of the *by and for* agencies at MARAC, there was no qualitative data to evidence this or examples of how MARAC Coordinators would use this increased understanding to make positive changes in their practice. This notable absence stood out among the rich feedback provided about the impact of the training and is something to consider for future training, learning, and development. Further recommendations sit in the Executive Summary of the Coaction Hub's Research Paper<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> [https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/cdn.webfactore.co.uk/7982-marac\\_and\\_harmful\\_practices\\_exec\\_summ.pdf](https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/cdn.webfactore.co.uk/7982-marac_and_harmful_practices_exec_summ.pdf)

## 8. Risk assessment

*Outcome 1: The ability of professionals to respond to the needs of minoritised survivors/ victims in statutory processes will increase.*

### 8.1 Programme of work

The work on risk assessment was developed in direct response to concerns about the efficacy of current standard forms of risk assessment and the extent to which tools such as Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) used by statutory and specialist VAWG providers address the specific contexts of violence and abuse for Black and minoritised women and girls (Imkaan, 2011<sup>24</sup>, Centre for Women's Justice & Imkaan, 2023<sup>25</sup>).

The need to explore gaps in risk assessment arises from the fact that *by and for* organisations have also developed their own unique systems and approaches to risk and safety planning, based on many decades of in-depth VAWG knowledge, practice, and expertise. Aligned with the Coaction Hub's intention to embed an intersectional, feminist and anti-racist approach, a detailed exploration of practice within the *by and for* sector is crucial to building a nuanced understanding of current practice and inconsistencies to inform more effective, inclusive, and comprehensive risk management.

The original intention of the risk assessment research was aimed at utilising the learning from different systems of risk assessment to inform the development and piloting of a new risk assessment tool. However, wide-ranging consultation with *by and for* organisations and learning partners also revealed that a number of *by and for* organisations are piloting different forms of risk assessment. Within this context, the importance of not duplicating existing efforts but rather investing more time in identifying existing knowledge and '*establishing a solid learning framework*' was seen to be necessary and more beneficial to informing the future development of a new risk assessment tool. As highlighted by the Coaction Hub leads:

*Our aim is to bring meaningful change, fostering a culture of accountability and proactive responses, and we feel this approach will be more beneficial and effective in developing a knowledge framework and improving practice within the VAWG sector in addressing the needs of Black and minoritised victims/survivors. This is much needed for improving knowledge and enhancing important cultural competency in carrying out risk assessment. Instead, our focus will be doing an overview of different risk assessments, exploring the gaps, showcasing main issues from the focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and surveys, as well as highlighting issues via case studies and also showcasing good practice.*

The approach adopted to gather insights from practitioners in the field included:

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<sup>24</sup> [Missing Link, Imkaan, Equality Now & City University, 2011](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Life or Death? Imkaan & Centre for Women's Justice, 2023](#)

- Fourteen online survey responses from *by and for* agencies who are also members of London's partnership project, Prevention and Action through Community Engagement and Training, Ending Harmful Practices Project. The survey was designed to examine the effectiveness and applicability of risk assessment tools used with survivors in *by and for* organisations
- A World Café consultation event with 25 practitioners from 10 organisations from the *by and for* and mainstream domestic abuse sector.
- This was supplemented with two focus groups with ten participants from nine organisations in London and five one-to-one interviews with senior leaders and practitioners from specialist *by and for* organisations working across England and Wales.

## 8.2 Project impact

A World Café event was coordinated with *by and for* organisations and other VAWG practitioners committed to improving VAWG support responses to Black, minoritised women/girls. The discussions highlighted an overall concern about gaps within current risk assessment practice. Some of the key themes emerging from these discussions are summarised below:

### ***Multi-agency collaboration***

Meaningful engagement with Black/minoritised led *by and for* organisations is key to effective risk assessment practice.

### ***VAWG context***

Standardised approaches to risk assessment lack a nuanced understanding about the interconnected nature of different forms of VAWG, including domestic and sexual violence, immigration-based abuse, 'honour-based violence,' forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM).

### ***Systems-based approach***

Specialist risk assessments should be integrated into a comprehensive, holistic *by and for* led response, rather than viewed as a standalone tool, ensuring a multi-faceted approach to safety and support.

### ***Inclusive approach to understanding risk***

Include questions that are inclusive to all and which reflect the global majority lived experience and the needs of women across different intersecting protected characteristics. Consider different contexts for conducting risk assessment.

The support provided through *by and for* specialist VAWG services requires bespoke forms of needs and risk assessment, differing from those of statutory organisations, due to the holistic, longer-term, trauma-informed nature of the support provided.

### ***Trauma-informed / accessible***

Make risk assessment process trauma-informed and accessible/not lengthy, and consider the use of different ways to communicate in ways that are inclusive and cater to different languages, e.g., the use of visual aides.

### ***Survivor-informed***

Risk assessment tools/practice should be improved to center and integrate survivors own understanding and assessment of risk.

Other themes arose from discussions which have relevance to the way current risk assessment processes operate. For example, concerns were raised about inadequate risk assessment and missed opportunities for early intervention which consequently led to Black/minoritised women being referred into MARACs '*far too late*' and when the risks of homicide are high. The need for early coordinated intervention and risk assessment training, and access to holistic *by and for* support which supports agencies to implement preventative actions, was emphasised by learning review respondents.

One of the interviewees described the development of a standalone MARAC in one local area that was specifically designed to respond to 'harmful practices/VAWG'. A key component of establishing the MARAC was the commissioning of a *by and for* organisations in advising on the approach and providing statutory agencies with an understanding of violence and abuse and its specific impacts on Black/minoritised victims/survivors. This initiative was considered to have a positive impact on statutory agency competency and MARAC referral pathways; however, the importance of available, funded, holistic *by and for* support was emphasised alongside training and awareness-raising initiatives. In this particular borough, securing sustainable funding to support dedicated services for Black, minoritised women/girls subjected to violence and abuse has been identified as a key strategic priority going forward.

The service gaps and needs generated by the Coaction Hub work were seen to provide an important opportunity to influence future commissioning, particularly in areas where specialist *by and for* services do not exist. The importance of improvements across other parts of the statutory system, in particular health, was identified by one interviewee:

*In terms of the percentage of referrals coming in (to the MARAC) from minoritised women has increased. But for me, the issue still is, it's coming to us at a point where it's already at high risk. So I think that's something I need to explore locally in terms of why the number is so high at a MARAC stage where something has happened to the point where someone's at risk of homicide ...whereas actually, what we want to do is make sure that you know those women are able to speak to their GPS, or whoever it is at a level when that incident first took place, or where the risk is not as high (Local authority)*

The findings of the consultation and research have informed the development of a learning paper on risk assessment, which will be launched by the Coaction Hub at a seminar with key stakeholders. The research has identified a number of gaps and areas for improvement in current risk assessment practice which includes a stronger

understanding of all forms of VAWG including harmful practices; a trauma-informed and trust-centred approach with survivors which is critical to disclosure and engagement; taking a wider intersectional lens to risk to expand beyond the narrow focus on short-term, physical risks and a greater consideration of the mental health impacts of violence and abuse. The report also calls for centreing survivors' voices; sustained investment in the specialist Black and minoritised *by and for* VAWG sector; a review of DASH risk assessment and collaborative action to review and improve risk assessment frameworks.