



THE ROLE OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS IN DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEWS (DHRs): GUIDANCE FOR BY AND FOR AGENCIES.



Guidance for By and For Agencies on the Role of Expert Panel Member

Since November 2023, a group of by and for agencies, supported by the Coaction Hub, have come together to discuss the role of by and for agencies as expert panel members in Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)[1]. It has become evident from discussions, and echoed in research by IMKAAN and the CWJ[2], that specialist by and for agencies are not consistently being recruited to be expert panel members. This leaves a clear gap in understanding of victim's experiences, a key aspect of learning lessons in DHRs. Furthermore, when these specialist agencies are sitting on panels in this role, they are often undervalued, for example not being paid for their time and expertise, having their specialist knowledge dismissed and only being asked to advise the panel later in the process, as opposed to being full panel members. We also heard from the group that expert panel members have in some cases been made to feel that they are not 'deserving' of the role, or are having to justify their attendance.

The way in which by and for agencies are often treated within the DHR arena is a reflection of the wider systemic issues within the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector, including the underfunding and undervaluing of these specialist agencies. It is imperative that by and for agencies are key players in the Co-ordinated Community Response (CCR) to domestic abuse and harmful practices in order for all victims to be safeguarded. This includes learning from DHRs in order to make future victims safer. For DHRs to be successful there needs to be a nuanced and holistic understanding of the victim's narrative, which requires the input of specialist agencies who have this expertise.

One of the issues which has been clearly been highlighted is that the process of DHRs is often overly mystified to agencies, but this particularly can be the case for agencies who are not routinely sitting on DHRs, such as by and for agencies. Part of the work of the group has been around demystifying processes and attempting to create transparency around topics such as what to expect when sitting on a DHR, the role of the expert panel member and renumeration.

- ▶ *This guidance is based on experiences of the group, and the aim is to support other by and for agencies who take on this role.*



[1] A full list of these agencies can be found at the end of this guidance.

[2] <https://www.imkaan.org.uk/updates/2022/525apx0ic5yyqalsvvj6ixuy0m4qm7-7wmtp>

The Context: Domestic Homicide Reviews/ Domestic Abuse Related Deaths

DHRs take place when a death, including a suicide, of a person aged 16 years or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by a relative, someone from the same household or someone the person has been in an intimate relationship with. Since 2011 Community Safety Partnership (CSPs) have had a statutory duty to carry out a DHR following a domestic abuse related death. The aim of the DHR is to:

- Bringing agencies together to create a more cohesive co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse
- Learn lessons in a reflective and open environment
- For agency practice and policies to improve responses to victims
- Recognise the victim and understand their experience
- Provide some resolution and solace to the family



For more information on DHRs, please see the statutory guidance [here](#)

Referring a death to a Community Safety Partnership (CSP) for a DHR:

Although this is often carried out by the police, any agency can refer a case to a CSP, including by and for organisations. As by and for agencies often work with service users who may not engage with and /or disclose abuse to other agencies, by and for agencies may have knowledge about a history of domestic abuse which is not freely known. This may be particularly important in the case of suicides or deaths seen as accidental where the police or other agencies may not link the death to domestic abuse. This might also include deaths where a victim has been taken abroad and killed, but previously experienced domestic abuse within the UK.

Role of the Expert Panel Member:

The Home Office Multi Agency DHR guidance states that the DHR Chair and Review Panel should consider whether an expert should be consulted to help understand crucial aspects of the homicide: '*For example, a representative from a specialist BME, LGBT or disability organisation*'. The guidance also states that *The narrative of each review should articulate the life through the eyes of the victim (and their children)*'.

Expert panel members are crucial to understanding the experiences of victims, including the barriers they may have faced in seeking support. Therefore, in relevant cases, this role is not an add on, but an integral part of the DHR.

However, research by IMKAAN and CWJ found that only 35% of relevant cases had a by and for agency on the panel as an expert panel member, and that in many cases 'cultural experts' sitting on panels had no background in domestic abuse or VAWG. We are clear that by and for agencies are crucial to the success of relevant DHRs, and have seen numerous reviews which could have benefited from their knowledge.

By and for agencies are uniquely placed to support panels to understand the experiences of victims, and in some incidences children and perpetrators, due to their expertise in both domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG, cultural competency and an understanding of systemic barriers which are faced by victims from different communities.



The expert panel member can provide:-

- A cultural understanding of any barriers and challenges faced by the victim in accessing services or support
- A nuanced understanding of the context of the victim's experiences, for example for victims from the global majority this might include migration experiences, the context of the country of origin, experiences of the diaspora in UK, as well as the individual and intersectional experiences of the victim
- A nuanced understanding of domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG such as harmful practices, placed in a cultural and religious context
- An ability to support the review of policy and service delivery through a cultural competency lens
- Support in ensuring that issues around equality, diversity, and intersectionality are highlighted and foregrounded
- A holistic and critical look at the bigger picture
- Being a voice of the victim from a cultural perspective
- Support in engaging with friends and family
- Support in understanding the extent and appropriateness of participation from family members (e.g. in cases where there are multiple perpetrators)
- To be able to refer friends and family to specialist support
- Reading through and analysing relevant reports through an intersectional lens
- Ensuring that the Overview report and executive summary give due consideration to specialist issues
- Making recommendations of further learning/actions for panel members
- To share research, evidence and best practice to support report findings
- Where needed, to challenge myths, stereotypes and problematic attitudes and beliefs in the DHR process. This may require asking 'difficult' questions.

What this looks like in practice:

Ideally we would like to see expert panel members involved throughout the DHR so they are integral to all aspects of the process. However, we are aware that this is not always the case for several reasons. Firstly, chairs are often unaware of the protected characteristics and needs of the victim prior to the 1st panel meeting, and therefore expert panel members may be brought in after this is established. In addition, given the chronic under funding of by and for agencies, many do not have sufficient capacity to be able to attend all aspects of the DHR. Some agencies may only become involved when requested to comment on the draft overview report, which means that the panel will not have benefited from their expertise throughout. We would like to see greater efforts to include Expert Panel Members from the beginning of the process in order to ensure that an intersectional approach is embedded in the DHR.

Agencies have found that one of the biggest challenges of the role is ensuring that cultural nuances are accurately understood, communicated, and integrated into the final report while navigating potential resistance, biases, and the complexities of cross-cultural interpretation. Balancing cultural insights with the legal, social, and institutional frameworks that guide the review is particularly challenging. The limited scope of time and influence of the cultural expert can make it difficult to fully reflect these considerations in the final report. Therefore, the more that expert panel members input in the review, the more these issues can be tackled.

Ways in which agencies may be involved in a DHR can include some or all of the following:

- Attending all panel meetings (approximately 3 hours each)
- Attending all panel meetings and having access to all reports
- Involved in family meetings (could include more than one family member)
- Presenting to the panel on culture/ faith/ historical contexts, harmful practices, anti-racism or other relevant topics (would include preparation time)
- Reading and commenting on the report
- Consideration should also be given to the time that the Expert Panel member will need for research, preparation and reflection.

Renumeration:

This group has clearly highlighted that there is a wide disparity in renumeration for the role of expert panel member. Some by and for organisations have never been paid for this role, despite contributing considerable time and expertise. Others have received financial renumeration, but have been unsure what 'the going rate' should be. There has also been a disparity between those who were paid a day rate and those who received a flat fee. Receiving a fixed fee can be problematic as the volume of work involved can be under estimated.

It is essential that all agencies fairly paid for their work as expert to the panel, and we call for a greater transparency around this topic.

Based on information from by and for agencies, current rates vary from approximately £400 per day to £600 per day.

Importance of Expert Panel Members Accessing, Reading and Commenting on the Draft Overview Report:

In some cases expert panel members have attended panel meetings, or provided expertise to the panel but are not given access to the Overview report at draft stage. We would recommend that all agencies ensure that they have the opportunity to read and comment on the report. As experts will usually be named in the report, it is crucial that they are aware of the content of this before publication. This also gives agencies an opportunity to challenge aspects of the report and provide additional information.

If the expert panel member does not agree with aspects of the report they can ask the chair or author to make this clear. If agencies are not satisfied with the outcome of this, or feel that relevant points are not taken on board we would recommend that they contact the CSP who commissioned the report.

Importance of Expert Panel Members Inputting on Recommendations:

DHR recommendations are created by the DHR panel in response to lessons learnt, and should be focused and specific. The expert panel member can ensure that recommendations foster ongoing cultural awareness, not just within the case under review, but as a systemic improvement.

When to sit as an Expert Panel Member and when not to:

There may be times where agencies are approached to sit on a DHR but feel that another agency might be more appropriate or have particular expertise in this case. In these cases, the agency can signpost to the relevant organisation. There may also be times where there is limited capacity to engage with the DHR. This could result in signposting to an appropriate agency, but in some instances more than one organisation can collaborate in the role.

Providing advice on perpetrator's experiences:

CSP's can commission expert panel member's to advise on a perpetrator's culture, heritage or faith when this differs from that of the victim.

An expert panel member can provide invaluable advice on dispelling myths and stereotypes, and support the panel to understand that culture and faith are never justifications for abuse. However, if an organisation does not feel comfortable in this role they may prefer to recommend an alternative agency.

Children:

Expert panel members can provide invaluable information on children and how they may have been impacted by the abuse, but also potentially the cultural and/ or religious context in which they were living. This is increasingly important in the light of the DA Act and children being classified as victims in their own right.

Glossary:

- By and for agency: The definition of a Black and minoritized by and for agency can be found on the IMKAAN website: <https://www.imkaan.org.uk/by-and-for>
- CSP: Community Safety Partnership. CSPs bring together local partners to formulate and implement strategies to locally manage crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. Agencies include police, fire service, local authorities, health, and probation. CSPs are responsible for commissioning DHRs.



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