

Centring Women's Needs: Learning from Feminist Social Work Practice in India



Report

Image description for photo on the cover page: This photo was taken at the Asian Women's Resources Centre (AWRC) during a workshop provided by Surviving And Thriving Project. The object in the photo represents the image of a woman holding her Kintsugi art- the Japanese practice of filling broken fragments with gold reflecting an awareness of the cracks within current systems and a commitment to repair them with care, inclusivity, and strength.



**Sheffield
Hallam
University**



Coaction Hub & Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

May 2026

Research and documentation: Dr. Punita Chowbey,
Sheffield Hallam University with Coaction Hub (AWRC
in partnership with STADA)

Research idea and project management:
Subhaluxmi Mukherji and Aasifa Usmani

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Foreword	2
About Coaction Hub	7
Chapter 1 : Introduction	8
Chapter 2: Domestic abuse in India and the Special Cell for Women and Children	12
Chapter 3 : Aims and Methodology	19
Chapter 4: Findings	21
Chapter 5: Key policy and practice recommendations	46
Chapter 6: Applying Learnings to the Policy and Practice Landscape	51
Chapter 7: Conclusion	56
Annex 1: Reflections from VAWG Practitioners and Stakeholders	57
Annex 2: Special Cell Model	60
Glossary	61
References	64
Resources	68

Acknowledgements

This project was conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Women-Centred Social Work, School of Social Works at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. A heartfelt thank you to all Coordinators and staff members who participated in interviews and provided their expertise and insights.

We would like to thank Dr. Punita Chowbey, Sheffield Hallam University for their research and documentation.

We would like to acknowledge Dr. Trupti Panchal and her team for their valuable support and contributions to the development of this paper. Also to Balwant Singh, TISS for his amazing support.

Thank you to Subhaluxmi Mukherji for her support with this paper, to Aarushi Mahajan at AWRC for her editing assistance and designing the paper and to other staff members who helped with interview transcriptions.

We are grateful to our funder, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, for supporting this work.

Foreword

Domestic abuse is rooted in gender inequality, yet statutory social work responses within children's social care are not gender informed and places primary responsibility for safeguarding and children's well being on mothers who are victim-survivors in disproportionately high numbers, without addressing perpetrator behaviour and holding them accountable (Watson, 2017; Imkaan & Centre for Women's Justice, 2023). This arises due to the lack of professional understanding of coercive and controlling behaviours that perpetrators use, and how they extend those tactics in undermining victim-survivors and manipulating systems that are institutionally misogynistic, racist and ableist, thus impacting the most vulnerable victim-survivors in the worst way.

The Ministry of Justice (2020) identified a strong pro-contact culture, including "selective listening" to children's views and the prioritisation of contact with potentially abusive parents. These practices frequently shift responsibility for managing risk onto women, leaving mothers to manage risk and blame when harm or distress continues. This reflects a wider absence of a feminist lens, where responses fail to centre power, coercive control, and perpetrator responsibility, instead reproducing gendered expectations of mothers as primary risk managers. This context remains poorly understood within social care practice.

As a result, gendered social attitudes that blame women for men's violence can be reproduced, particularly where practitioners do not adequately recognise power, control, and the risks associated with separation. Harm is further compounded where interventions are punitive, victim-blaming, or insufficiently focused on perpetrator behaviour (Stark, 2007; Women's Aid; Humphreys and Absler, 2011).

Evidence from whole-family approaches shows that work with fathers who perpetrate domestic violence and abuse remains uneven and contested within children's social care (Stanley and Humphreys, 2017). Practice has often relied on binary assessments of fathers as either a risk or a resource to children, rather than recognising that men who abuse may occupy both roles simultaneously (Featherstone, 2013; Philip et al., 2019). Such approaches offer greater scope to centre perpetrator behaviour, support behaviour change, and strengthen accountability for ongoing risk (Rivett, 2010; Alderson et al., 2013).

Social work has been slow to integrate men's use of violence into assessments of parenting, particularly within child protection contexts (Smith and Humphreys, 2019). This is concerning given evidence that abusive men frequently retain contact with children post separation, enabling coercive control and harm to continue (Westmarland and Kelly, 2015; Katz et al., 2020). Practitioners consistently report barriers to this work, including fear, uncertainty, and organisational systems that prioritise mothers' responsibility for safeguarding over sustained engagement with perpetrators (Stanley et al., 2012; Olszowy et al., 2020).

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is an approach used in children's social care to involve the wider family in planning for a child's safety, often before care proceedings to explore family-led alternatives. Parents, including fathers who abuse, may be involved depending on risk assessment and safeguarding decisions. The aim is to share information openly, give families a voice, and agree to safety plans, while social services retain statutory responsibility for protecting children. More recently, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill has strengthened child protection by mandating the offer of FGDM, enhancing multi-agency safeguarding, and supporting kinship care, alongside expanded duties for schools and increased Ofsted oversight. The Bill is currently at second reading in the House of Lords and continues to shape the future direction of children's social care.

Guidance and practice experience show that where domestic abuse and coercive control are not properly understood, these meetings can place women and children at risk and reinforce unsafe and patriarchal ideas about responsibility. Practitioners have also raised concerns about sharing power with families in situations where there is violence, fear, and risk, particularly where families do not trust professionals. There are warnings that legislation promoting family-led decision-making without clear principles and safeguards can be dangerous in domestic abuse cases (Bowyer, 2025; Children First, 2023).

This makes it essential that social services staff are trained in violence against women and girls, understand perpetrator behaviour, and clearly recognise fathers who perpetrate abuse within FGDM processes.

Within children's social care, the UK is adopting the Safe & Together model in some local authorities, but implementation is uneven. Funding insecurity, workforce pressures, and inconsistent adoption limit its full integration. There is also limited evidence on long-term outcomes for families from Black and minoritised communities.

A recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) found that, across six local authorities, agencies were doing important work to protect children but placed insufficient focus on perpetrators and relied too heavily on victim-survivors to manage risk. The report highlighted gaps in preventing domestic abuse and emphasised the need for longer-term, perpetrator-focused responses (Government of UK, 2024).

At AWRC, the victim-survivors we support often experience systems that respond in fragmented and short-term ways to long-term harm. Many face ongoing housing insecurity and limited access to trauma-informed mental health support, even after statutory involvement has ended. At the same time, there is little meaningful or sustained support for men who use abuse. This allows harm to continue and places responsibility back onto women and children. These gaps reflect wider failures in social care and safeguarding systems, which are often reactive, time-limited, and disconnected from victim-survivors' experiences.

Within UK social work, a recurring theme is the disproportionate focus on women's actions and responsibilities in situations of violence, alongside limited engagement with those who cause harm. This focus can be further complicated by intersectional inequalities, where factors such as race, class, migration status and disability influence how women are perceived, supported or held accountable within social work systems (Crenshaw, 1991; Featherstone et al., 2014; Anitha, 2010). Research also highlights how child protection responses can place responsibility on mothers for safeguarding children while insufficiently addressing the behaviour of perpetrators (Hester, 2011).

Policies that focus on supporting children and families do not always incorporate a feminist lens or clear pathways for engaging men who use abuse, creating gaps in how families are supported.

As a result, women are often left to manage risk alone, with little access to sustainable financial support or opportunities for longer-term empowerment. This can increase trauma and leave women feeling unsafe and uncertain, limiting their choices and making it harder to plan for the future. These pressures are often intensified where housing is insecure, immigration status is uncertain, or women are caring for children with limited support.

Within many domestic abuse organisations, victim-survivors frequently ask for help so that someone can speak with their abusive partner. Too often, that support is not available. Help for men is usually offered only once harm is acknowledged, leaving families without support at critical moments.

As Devaney highlights, 'social workers do not engage with the men who are the source of the problem; rather, women are held accountable for allowing their children and themselves to be in this situation' (Devaney, 2008: p450).

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022) highlights that the current system is overly focused on crisis intervention, fragmented support, and procedural compliance, resulting in poor outcomes for children and families and rising costs. It calls for practice rooted in relationships, centred on families, and grounded in community, emphasising timely and meaningful support, shared responsibility, and care that is respectful and sustained rather than short-term or crisis-driven.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2025) places greater emphasis on regional working across local authorities, with the aim of improving coordination, sharing resources, and strengthening partnerships with health and justice services.

Limited understanding of domestic abuse and coercive control can lead to unsafe and unrealistic expectations being placed on women, including pressure to manage risk alone or to leave abusive partners without sufficient protection, despite strong evidence that separation often increases danger. In our work at AWRC, as well as across the VAWG sector, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) and caseworkers engaged in institutional advocacy report that women frequently feel unheard by social workers and experience unmet needs. Women describe pressure through the threat of child removal, situations where perpetrators' accounts are believed over their own, and responses such as "you are not so innocent yourself" or "you are choosing to stay – why don't you just leave" (Watson, 2017). Such responses ignore the intersecting gendered, racialised, and structural inequalities shaping women's lives, increasing stress and undermining women's capacity to cope with parenting rather than reflecting a lack of care (Hughes et al., 2015; Gill, 2019).

Although the pro-contact culture formally sits within the family courts and presumption of contact will soon be repealed by the current government, there is a long way to go for institutional culture change. Social workers' assessments and recommendations can reflect the same assumptions, including limited understanding of coercive control and gendered power, contributing to the minimisation of domestic abuse within social care decision-making (Ministry of Justice, 2020).

Research further shows that failures to recognise these gendered and racialised contexts can re-traumatise victim-survivors, compounding harm through statutory intervention rather than offering safety or support (Imkaan and Centre for Women's Justice, 2023).

The evidence points to the importance of embedding an intersectional feminist lens within Children and Families Social Care, so that practitioners better understand gendered power, coercive control, and perpetrator accountability in cases of domestic abuse.

Research consistently shows that domestic abuse is frequently misrecognised within children's social care, leading to responses that prioritise family functioning or parental cooperation over women's safety and perpetrators' responsibility for harm (Hale et al., 2024).

Learnings from feminist practice models such as Special Cells for Women and Children pioneered by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences offer insights into how perpetrator engagement can be approached as accountability-focused, survivor-centred, and grounded in an understanding of coercive control, rather than as mediation or family consensus (TISS 2013).

There are vast contextual differences in women's and children's experiences of abuse, how domestic abuse services are delivered and safeguarding laws across India and the UK – this study aims to understand how feminist social work can be an opportunity for cross learning, and reflecting on practice.

In the UK now children are seen as 'victims in their own right' when they are in a home where domestic abuse occurs (the Domestic Abuse Act 2021). As mentioned earlier, there are imminent wider policy changes to social work practice, and those proposed changes under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools bill will be effective, only if statutory guidance is gender-informed and learns from best practices in feminist social work globally.

Supporting Black and minoritised women and girls in London, at AWRC victims and survivors often tell us that they want services to be needs-led, to have safe pathways of engaging with perpetrators and holding them to account to challenge harmful behaviors, rather than fleeing their homes, and experiencing the disproportionate disadvantages. This means lack of culturally informed statutory support, unstable immigration status and hostile statutory responses to migrant victims and survivors, including children.

Written by
Aasifa Usmani and Subha Mukherji

About Coaction Hub

The project was commissioned by Coaction Hub. Coaction Hub is a partnership project between Asian Women’s Resource Centre (AWRC) and Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) which works to strengthen the Coordinated Community Response (CCR)^[1] to improve responses to Black and minoritised victim-survivors^[2] of domestic abuse and harmful practices. The project aims to create an equitable partnership between a by and for agency^[3] and a mainstream agency working in the ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector.

Each agency brings a range of expertise which complements the other - AWRC as a frontline agency with 45 years of experience working with Black and minoritised victim-survivors of domestic abuse and harmful practices and STADA as a second-tier agency which pioneered the CCR in the UK.

The Coaction Hub examines aspects of the CCR such as risk assessment tools, Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs)^[4], (formerly known as DHRs) and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).^[5] The aim is to assess whether these are effective tools for Black and minoritised victim-survivors of domestic abuse and harmful practices^[6] and considers alternative methods that may be more meaningful and holistic. Key to this work is collaboration with a range of agencies across the sector, most importantly Black and minoritised by and for agencies working to end VAWG whose voices have been historically marginalised within the Coordinated Community Responses (CCR).

^[1] The CCR is an approach to domestic abuse which involves bringing communities together to improve the safety of survivors and hold abusers to account. Often the CCR is used to mean statutory and non-statutory agencies working together, but a successful CCR needs to involve a wide range of communities and individuals. To be effective the CCR needs to work to improve the safety of all victim-survivors, including those from marginalised and minoritised communities. More information: [here](#).

^[2] The terms ‘women’, ‘victim-survivors’, and ‘survivors’ are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

^[3] By and for agencies are organisations which are run by the community they service. In this report we are specifically referring to Ending VAWG By and For Services run by and for Black and minoritised women. Imkaan’s definition of By and for agencies can be found: [here](#).

^[4] In 2024 DHRs were renamed Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews. These statutory Reviews have been conducted since April 2011, to look into the circumstances of the death of a person, where the death resulted from domestic abuse towards the person, within the meaning of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, with a view to identifying the lessons learnt from the death.

^[5] A Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac) is a local meeting where representatives from statutory and non-statutory agencies meet to discuss individuals at high risk of serious harm or murder because of domestic abuse. The meeting provides a safe environment for agencies to share relevant and proportionate information about current risks, after which the Chair will summarise and ask agencies to volunteer actions to reduce risk and increase safety through the development of a tailor-made action plan.

^[6] Harmful practices are forms of violence, often perpetrated against women and girls, that have persisted in some communities and societies for so long that they are considered, or portrayed by perpetrators, as part of accepted “cultural” norms. In these cases, religion, culture, patriarchal codes of behavior, and perceived notions of “honour” are often misused by individuals or groups to justify coercive control, threats, and abuse. Harmful traditional practices occur across all sexes, sexual identities and genders. They are not unique to a culture or religion. To learn more about this framework, visit AWRC’s [Knowledge Hub](#).

Chapter 1

Introduction

This report presents findings from a small peer learning exchange project aimed to examine opportunities and challenges in domestic violence prevention and support services across the UK and India. The report aims to identify key practice insights for learning that can be applied to the UK context. The study does not aim to evaluate the Special Cell for Women (Special Cell), but rather to document some of its unique approaches in supporting survivors while navigating complex familial, social, legal, religious, and cultural dynamics. It documents key practice insights from the model, while acknowledging that these approaches may not suit all UK or Indian contexts.

It is important to recognise that elements of the UK domestic abuse response, particularly safeguarding mechanisms and the women's refuge/shelter provision present valuable learning that could be adapted to strengthen service delivery in the Indian context.

Rationale: Work with the Special Cells within Police location in India

In the UK, multi-agency responses to domestic abuse is predominantly structured around a risk-led model, guided by the standardised DASH risk assessment tool.^[7] However, evidence from by and for organisations, including AWRC, indicates that this model fails to reflect the complex, intersectional realities of Black and minoritised victim-survivors.

While the CCR is designed to shift responsibility for addressing abuse from survivors to agencies through multi-agency collaboration, in practice, survivor voice and agency are often lost within standardised, threshold-based risk management frameworks. This disproportionately fails Black and minoritised women, who face structural barriers such as racism, insecure immigration status, language barriers, poverty, and institutional neglect.

^[7] In May, 2025 Coaction Hub launched a research paper "Rethinking Risk Beyond the Checklist: The Need for a Holistic and Inclusive Framework" which can be accessed on AWRC's page [here](#) and on STADA's page [here](#).

Current UK responses struggle to bridge risk-led frameworks with long-term, needs-led support. As a result, victim-survivors are left without the sustained support needed to maintain safety or rebuild their autonomy. Meanwhile, by and for organisations that do operate from a needs-led perspective are often constrained by short-term funding, outcome-driven frameworks, and the pressure to professionalise in ways that can undermine and sideline their grassroots strengths.

There is clear value in a peer learning exchange between the UK and India to examine how community engagement, perpetrator accountability, and survivor voice are embedded in multi-agency responses.

While the contexts differ, both systems face shared challenges rooted in patriarchal violence, including the persistent struggle to adequately resource feminist interventions that centre survivor needs and rights. Patriarchal norms continue to shape institutional cultures, reinforcing power imbalances and limiting effective responses to violence.

These challenges are further compounded by the rise of neoliberalism and global capitalism, which have shifted the focus of public services from collective care and justice to cost-efficiency, performance metrics, and short-term outcomes. This has led to the defunding of specialist women's services, the erosion of long-term support structures, and the outsourcing of responsibility for violence to overstretched and depoliticised systems ultimately undermining justice for women, particularly those facing multiple forms of marginalisation. Crucially, this exchange creates space to widen the multi-agency responses beyond Eurocentric frameworks and learn from community-rooted, survivor-led models developed in the Global South.

It offers an opportunity to reimagine what coordinated, culturally competent, and needs-led responses to abuse could look like in a UK context grounded in equity, not standardisation.

International learning, understood as the process of engaging with models and practices from other countries to inform and strengthen local responses, offers a vital opportunity to critically rethink dominant approaches. Studies also demonstrate the value of decolonial learning and reciprocal international exchange in strengthening domestic abuse responses (Institute of Domestic Violence, Religion & Migration, IDVRM).

This initiative allows us to reimagine what coordinated, culturally competent, and survivor-led responses could look like in the UK, shaped by diverse frameworks of practice.

India's Special Cells model, launched in 1984 through a partnership between the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and Bombay Police, offers a women centred, rights-based intervention model embedded within the criminal justice system (Special Cells for Women and Children, Maharashtra, Tata Institute of Social Sciences). It centres women's needs through open-ended, survivor-led engagement allowing for meaningful involvement of perpetrators and family members only when desired by the survivor, and using state authority to uphold, not suppress, her agency.

In India, indigenous social work practice is rooted in community engagement, collective care, and locally grounded approaches that integrate cultural values and social justice. Professional social work in the Indian subcontinent has long been enriched by various indigenous approaches, including the religious-traditional approach, which emphasises moral duty, compassion, and community welfare as guiding principles of social action. The Special Cells for Women and Children model, established within police stations, demonstrates how a feminist, rights-based approach can operate within state structures while remaining survivor-centred and community-driven (Panchal & Sriraman, 2019).

In the UK, responses to violence against women and children were largely driven by the feminist movement. During the 1970s and 1980s, grassroots organising led to the creation of refuges and advocacy services (Flaherty, 2017).

However, feminist rights-based approach and ethos were not integrated into mainstream social work. The profession remained shaped by statutory frameworks and welfare state traditions.

Over time, statutory interventions, safeguarding policies, and risk-management cultures have further professionalised and institutionalised social work practice. As a result, practice has become more formalised and risk-led, shaped by accountability systems that limit space for relational and survivor-led approaches. Evidence shows that Black and minoritised women in the UK face particular barriers when engaging with social services, including fears of children being removed, racial bias, and cultural misunderstanding (Women's Aid Foundation, 2021; NSPCC, 2023).

Learning from India's contextually embedded and trust-based approaches could help the UK re-centre its practice on care, cultural competence, and survivor agency. In bridging these contexts, we are reminded that feminist learning takes many forms; each setting offers distinct lessons in resistance, care, and responses. This exchange invites us to broaden our insights and reimagine our systems, creating new pathways for shared learning.

Chapter 2

Domestic abuse in India and the Special Cell for Women and Children

The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, is one of the oldest Schools of Social Work in Asia. TISS initiated the Special Cell for Women and Children (Special Cell) project to address and eliminate Violence Against Women (VAW). This service, provided by trained professional social workers, operates within the police system with the fundamental understanding that VAW is a crime and that the State bears the responsibility to counter and prevent it. The strategic location of the Special Cell within police stations/offices ensures a coordinated, comprehensive, and integrated response to VAW by blending social services with the law enforcement system (Ganesh 2006; 1-2, TISS Mumbai 2013).

The first Special Cell was established in 1984 as a collaborative effort between the Bombay Police and TISS, Mumbai. It aimed to provide professional support to survivors of violence through the placement of trained social workers (teams of at least two, including at least one female social worker) in functional police offices. The Government of Maharashtra institutionalized this approach as a State programme in 2005, and the model has since been replicated in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana as a regular administrative measure (TISS Mumbai 2013).

In 2024, the Special Cells for Women initiative within police system completed 40 years, marking four decades of continuous work in strengthening institutional responses to violence against women. TISS also expanded this approach across the country, working closely with State and Central Government agencies, including the National Commission for Women (NCW), Government of India, State Departments, Central Ministries of Home Affairs (MHA) and Women & Child Development Department, State Police systems and civil society organisations like those led by women's movements, NGOs, Schools of Social Work, and international funding agencies such as UNDP, UN Women/UNIFEM, USAID and Oxfam India.

Following decades of impactful work in Maharashtra, including research, advocacy, and collaborations to address VAW, TISS recognised the need for consolidation. In the financial year 2007–08, it established the Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence Against Women (RCI-VAW), within the Centre for Women-Centered Social Work at the School of Social Work. RCI-VAW was envisioned to strengthen existing Special Cells by addressing training and research needs and contributing to the broader discourse and practices related to VAW in India. This has been achieved through consistent engagement, innovation, and collaboration with various stakeholders to develop effective interventions, train professionals, model response mechanisms, and conduct research to deepen understanding of VAW and interventions to combat it.

As the Special Cells approach continues to expand and replicate, the role of TISS especially through RCI-VAW, has grown to include demonstrating direct and impactful interventions in partnership with police in diverse regional contexts. This includes innovative strategies to facilitate institutionalisation within governmental systems as well as collaboration with non-governmental stakeholders.

To date, over 537 police-based units of Special Cells for Women are operational across the States and Union Territories in India, including Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, and Odisha. Additionally, a Central Scheme for Special Cells for Women, advocating for at least one Special Cell per district across all States and Union Territories, is currently under inter-Ministerial consultation, as submitted by RCI-VAW.

The strategic thrust of the Special Cells model includes the following:

- Raising the **visibility of violence against women** and **validating survivors' concerns and needs**.
- Working at the **individual and systemic level simultaneously**, within the context of trained social work practice.
- Developing a **strategic alliance with the police system for a coordinated, coherent and in-depth response** to the issue of violence against women, with the aim of integrating social services for the violated woman within the police system.

- Working alongside women experiencing abuse, using a **process-oriented approach to build confidence** and support empowered decision-making.
- Operating from the framework of the ethics and values of the profession of social work, through services provided by trained, full-time social workers (Mahthani and Panchal 2004).

Monitoring Indicators

The monitoring indicators have been developed under ten categories, with each category representing an area of work of the Special Cells (Mahthani and Panchal 2004). Each of these areas is further segmented into specific indicators representing social work interventions within a particular area of work. These indicators are to be used holistically and not individually, as each of them represent a part of the work done at the Special Cells. The monitoring indicators that inform the work and approach of the Special Cells can be outlined as follows:

1. *Social work interventions to provide emotional support and strengthen women's psychological wellbeing.*
2. *Social work interventions to negotiate for non-violence with relevant stakeholders.*
3. *Social work interventions to build support systems for women experiencing abuse.*
4. *Social work interventions to engage police support in women's interests.*
5. *Legal aid to support women navigating the criminal justice system.*
6. *Social work interventions to arrange safe shelter and accommodation for women.*
7. *Social work interventions to work with men where appropriate to support women's safety.*
8. *Social work interventions to help women re-establish access to their economic assets.*
9. *Social work interventions to advocate for entitlements and rights on behalf of women.*
10. *Social work interventions to provide development-focused counselling for women.*

It seeks to place the woman client at the centre of its practice and supports her in obtaining 'what she wants'. In a patriarchal culture, where the violation and subjugation of women is a norm, it abides by certain non-negotiables to ensure a just and equitable praxis. These values and principles include:

- a) Respecting and **believing the woman** client and her lived experience;
- b) Understanding and **valuing women's diverse roles, multiple responsibilities and contributions to family and society**;
- c) Recognising the **intersectionality of gender and other identities such as class, caste, disability, religion, sexuality, ethnicity**, which structure social relations;
- d) Recognising and **addressing gendered power relations** in shaping the opportunities available for men and women;
- e) Recognising **women's agency and their capacity to determine for themselves the appropriate action**;
- f) **Challenging men and engaging them in the change process** to stop violence against women (Panchal and Sriraman 2019).

Domestic abuse in India (Dr. Trupti Panchal)

1. Overview and Prevalence

Domestic abuse is one of the most widespread forms of violence faced by women in India. It includes physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse and often occurs within intimate or family relationships. It affects women across all socio-economic, cultural, and regional backgrounds.

According to the National Family Health Survey (Government of India, 2022), about 30% of ever-married women aged 18–49 have experienced spousal violence. However, the real numbers are likely higher, as many cases remain unreported due to fear, stigma, social pressure, or women's financial dependence on their partners.

2. Legal Context

(a) Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 is a landmark civil law that provides protection and relief to women facing violence within their homes. It recognises various forms of abuse- physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and economic and applies to women in all domestic relationships, not just married women.

Key provisions include:

- The **right to reside** in the shared household.
- **Protection, residence, and monetary relief orders** from the Magistrate.
- Access to **shelters, medical care, and counselling**.
- Appointment of **Protection Officers** and recognition of **Service Providers** to assist survivors in accessing legal and social support.
- The PWDVA focuses on providing both **immediate safety** and **long-term support**, but challenges remain in its implementation due to inadequate staffing, weak coordination, and limited awareness among women.

(b) Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023

With the introduction of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, new provisions have replaced certain sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) related to cruelty and dowry harassment against women.

- **Section 85 (Cruelty by Husband or Relatives of Husband)**

This section corresponds to the earlier Section 498A of the IPC. It penalises any husband or his relative who subjects a woman to cruelty. "Cruelty" includes wilful conduct that is likely to drive a woman to suicide, cause serious injury to her life or health, or harass her in connection with unlawful demands for property or valuable security.

- **Punishment:** Imprisonment up to **three years** and fine.

3. Policy and Institutional Framework

Over the years, the Government of India and respective State Governments have established several institutional mechanisms to support survivors of domestic violence and ensure coordinated response systems.

Key institutions and initiatives include:

a) National Commission for Women (NCW)

Established in 1992, the NCW is the apex statutory body at the national level to safeguard and promote women's rights. It receives complaints related to domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other violations, and facilitates redressal through coordination with police, legal aid authorities, and State Commissions for Women. NCW also conducts reviews of laws, policies, and programmes related to women's protection.

b) State Commissions for Women (SCWs)

Every State and Union Territory has a State Commission for Women, which functions as the nodal body to address gender-based violence at the state level. These Commissions receive complaints from women, monitor the implementation of the PWDVA, and support awareness, training, and policy initiatives in coordination with local authorities.

c) Women Police Stations and Crime Against Women Cells (CAW Cells)

Women Police Stations and Crime Against Women Cells (CAW Cells) have been set up in various States and Union Territories to ensure sensitive handling of cases related to domestic violence, dowry, and other crimes against women. These units are staffed by women police officers and often work closely with One Stop Centres, Protection Officers, Special Cell for Women and NGOs to provide a safe and approachable environment for survivors.

d) One Stop Centres (OSCs)

OSCs provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence. They offer medical aid, legal counselling, temporary shelter, and police facilitation under one roof, ensuring immediate crisis intervention and safety.

e) Women Help Desks (WHDs)

Located in police stations, WHDs act as the first point of contact for women in distress. They offer guidance, documentation support, and referral to relevant services such as OSCs or Special Cells.

f) Special Cells for Women (SCWs)

The Special Cells for Women represent a distinct institutional model that embeds trained social workers within the police system (only in 4 States and 1 Union Territory) to provide sustained psycho-social, legal, and referral support. These Cells work on long-term case-based interventions, coordination with agencies, and survivor empowerment, ensuring continuity of care and justice.

4. Gaps and Challenges

Despite the presence of strong laws and policies, several challenges persist in addressing domestic abuse effectively:

- **Underreporting** due to stigma, fear of social backlash, and family pressure.
- **Weak enforcement** of PWDVA 2005 and BNS 2023 provisions, and inconsistent coordination between agencies.
- **Inadequate staffing and training** of Protection Officers and police personnel, who are often diverted to other duties such as *bandobast* (administrative arrangements often involving logistics).
- **Limited access to legal aid, counselling services, and rehabilitation**
- **Economic dependence** of women, reducing their ability to leave abusive relationships.
- **Lack of monitoring and data**, leading to poor policy planning and follow-up.

Chapter 3

Aims and Methodology

This small study was commissioned for practitioners in the UK working with victim-survivors from diverse South Asian backgrounds to learn from some of the successful strategies and interventions being used by the Special Cell in India. The study seeks to propose practice and policy recommendations that can adapt elements from the Special Cell model into the UK's domestic abuse strategy, with a particular focus on better supporting women from the Global Majority, especially those from South Asian communities.

More specifically the study has the following three research objectives:

1. To identify and document the practice insights from the successful elements of the Special Cell model.
2. To assess the applicability and potential benefits of the practice insights from the Special Cells model for the UK context.
3. To develop policy and practice recommendations focussing on improving support for the Global Majority victim-survivors for adapting elements from Special Cell model into the UK's domestic abuse practice and responses.

Following the ethics approval by AWRC management, interviews were conducted during September 2024 to March 2025 in four states of India: Maharashtra, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and Bihar containing nine Special Cell sites. The project began with a workshop with 12 participants from the Special Cell including the project in charge Special Cell for Women and Children, and four members of the UK team including lead researcher and practitioners. The aim of the workshop was to identify relevant points of interventions that demonstrate best practices from practitioners' perspectives and from survivors' perspectives- based on practitioners' accounts.

Findings from this workshop were used to finalise the in-depth interview guidelines for the practitioners. Participants for the interviews were selected to represent diversity based on regions, stages of the interventions and diversity of challenges such as economic development, political stability and employment opportunities.

Following the workshop qualitative semi-structured interviews lasting between 1.20 to 2 hours were conducted with 9 social workers (two men and seven women) from these sites. The interviews were conducted in English and Hindi/Urdu depending on preference of the participants.

Social workers were chosen to be interviewed because their role involves working closely with women on cases such as domestic abuse, elderly abuse, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment at the workplace, and dowry related harassment among others. They are also responsible for individual and group interventions to end violence against women, including social casework processes, empowerment and behavioural change facilitation, referrals and pre-litigation and providing litigation support to women and children survivors of violence and their families as well as outreach, networking and advocacy on issues of violence against women and girls.

In addition, the coordinator of the Resource Centre for Intervention on violence Against Women (RCI-VAW), TISS was interviewed. The coordinator plays an important role in ensuring the effective functioning of Special Cells for Women, typically overseeing around 10 Cells. Their responsibilities encompass developing projects at the State/Region level with a focus on financial accountability, managing the Cells, and fostering linkages with key stakeholders, including the police, Monitoring Committees, and the State Resource Group. Interviews were translated and transcribed verbatim and anonymised by trained staff working in the VAWG sector.

The interviews were conducted by the first author, a dominant caste Hindu academic based in the UK, via zoom. This may have exacerbated power dynamics, potentially leading to selective representation. Participants were sometimes both cautious and curious about the UK context and the interviewer's background and migration history. A long pre-chat interview with each participant was arranged to address any concerns and anxiety and build rapport. The interviews were analysed using a thematic framework. A draft report was prepared and shared with practitioners for feedback (Annex-1).

Chapter 4

Findings

The findings are presented as seven practice insights, highlighting the key features of the Special Cell model that could be adapted to the UK context. These insights take into account differences in social policy, legal frameworks, and socio-economic conditions. Designed to be concise, clear, and easily understandable, they address the complex challenges of supporting Black and minoritised women and provide real-world examples of strategies used to tackle these challenges effectively.

Understanding the Indian Context: Complex Dynamics of Intimate Partner Violence

Interventions in India are deeply shaped by the socio-political and economic dynamics within society. Patriarchal norms and hegemonic masculinity operate through cultural, religious, and traditional structures, often reinforced by superstition, which collectively burden women and maintain their status as secondary and inferior. Women's autonomy, decision-making power, and access to resources are often constrained, making them vulnerable to multiple forms of violence—physical, sexual, emotional, and economic—perpetrated not only by intimate partners but also by extended family members. The historicity and current status of women in India cannot be ignored when designing interventions, as they directly influence both the survivor's experience and the engagement of men in change processes (Panchal and Lazarus, 2017).

Socio-Cultural Location: The Role of Context in Intervention

The social context in which the intervention is located plays a crucial role in shaping how men and women engage with the process of change. Indian society is characterised by interconnected and interdependent social systems, where family relationships, kinship ties, community structures, panchayats, caste, and religion interact dynamically. Women often face societal and familial pressures to maintain relationships, prioritise family honour, or adhere to cultural expectations, even in situations of abuse. These pressures can discourage disclosure of violence, normalise abuse, or limit women's options for seeking support. **Interventions that work with men in isolation risk depoliticising the process, overlooking the broader social, cultural, and familial pressures that influence behaviour and relational dynamics.**

The Special Cell approach navigates these socio-cultural complexities by working with both survivors and their extended social networks—including men, family members, and community leaders to foster accountability, relational transformation, and women’s empowerment. By situating interventions within the broader socio-cultural and familial context, the Cell ensures that strategies remain women-centered, culturally sensitive, and effective in promoting lasting change. Women’s voices, aspirations, and safety are prioritised, and interventions are tailored to their unique circumstances, recognising the multiple and intersecting layers of oppression they may experience within families, communities, and society at large.

Summary of the practice insights

1. The Special Cell has a **subjective understanding of each case** and uses a **self-defined intervention length** to provide support.
2. A key feature of the Special Cell involves **strengthening a woman’s support system** which includes both the natal and marital family and sometimes extended family members.
3. The Cell **promotes women’s economic empowerment** to regain control over their economic lives.
4. The **strategic location of Special Cell** within the police station bridges the gap between law enforcement and women survivors of violence.
5. The Cell has developed **creative outreach strategies** to ensure that women, especially those from marginalised and rural backgrounds, can access the support and resources they need to live free from violence and abuse.
6. The Special Cell adopts a woman centric approach against the complex interplay of culture, religion and law, **working with both community and religious leaders** to support and uphold women’s rights.
7. To address **economic abuse**, the Special Cell works with women to determine the best course of action, including providing legal aid, assisting with the recovery of personal property, and, more importantly, offering counselling to **break the cycle of financial dependence**.

Insight 1: Self-defined and open-ended case support

1. Subjective, self-defined intervention length

The Special Cell has a subjective understanding of each case and uses a self-defined intervention length tailored to the women's needs. It offers two types of interventions: one-time and open-ended. When a woman initially approaches the Special Cell seeking information but does not wish to proceed further, these are considered one-time interventions. At this exploratory stage, she may be assessing her options and may not be ready to confirm her violator. However, many cases fall under long-term interventions, where support continues until the woman chooses to close the case, even if things appear to be resolved.

These are registered cases where an application with all details of the woman and the violence she is facing is made and then the in-depth, sustained intervention process is initiated. Follow-ups are conducted between three to six months, or longer if safety protocols require. The criteria for determining threats are subjective, and women are encouraged to explore and articulate them to navigate the support they need. Participant 1 described the process as follows:

'[after one-time intervention, many], women return on their own or they tell us they'll think about it and come back. If they eventually decide to file a formal application, they become a registered case. In Special Cells, unlike police stations where cases are closed after the intervention unless the person files another complaint, registered cases remain open until the woman herself decides to close them.'

2. The woman, rather than the case, as the central focus

The Cell's approach prioritises supporting the woman rather than simply registering a 'case'. Over time, a woman may face multiple incidents of abuse, which may overlap or be separate, and may involve several perpetrators from both her marital and natal families. For example, one woman in insecure, casual daily-paid work with young children received support to address abuse from two perpetrators: her ex-husband, who left her, and her current partner

At times, the abuse from both men overlapped, and at other times occurred alternately, over several years. Addressing such cases required practitioners to engage in reflective practice by taking time to understand the survivor's unique context, needs, and aspirations.

3. Individualised, Tailored, and Women-Centred Response

Contextualising each woman's experience of violence and determining the appropriate level of intervention for every woman, man, and couple—rather than applying a “one-size-fits-all” approach—has proven beneficial in addressing the unique needs of individuals and couples in both joint and individual work.

The relationships are often complex, and the presence of violence adds further layers to these complexities. **The woman navigating these circumstances is the expert on her own life, and her self-determination is paramount.**

The Special Cell social worker's role is to help her explore and understand her options, while ensuring that her choices remain central to the process. Whether a couple is committed to staying together and seeking reconciliation or wishes to part ways safely and amicably, all possibilities are discussed openly. However, violence remains non-negotiable. This approach is guided by the social worker's ideology of choice and deep respect for women's agency and autonomy.



Individual meeting with a woman at the Cell

Relevance to the UK context

The focus on a subjective understanding of needs and self-defined intervention lengths where the woman's needs and safety are prioritised over the legal 'case' is an approach that could be adapted to better support Black and minoritised victim-survivors in the UK.

This is especially important for women with insecure immigration status and those facing financial barriers to accessing legal support. **The flexibility in intervention length could also strengthen current domestic abuse strategies in the UK by offering person-centred and consistent support, particularly in complex transnational cases.**

In the UK context, the appropriateness and usefulness of the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) model^[8] for all women requires reconsideration, to ensure that victim-survivor's needs are prioritised.

Insight 2: Holistic family and perpetrator involvement

In the Indian context, marriage is often viewed not merely as a union between two individuals but as an alliance between families. Consequently, family members both natal and marital play a decisive role in shaping women's experiences within marriage and in influencing their choices during a crisis. Engaging with families, therefore, becomes an inevitable and strategic aspect of the Special Cell's intervention, enabling both support for women and gradual shifts in the patriarchal gender norms that sustain violence.

1. Engaging extended and multi-generational family including perpetrators

A key feature of the Special Cell involves strengthening a woman's support system which includes both natal and marital family and sometimes extended family members. They play an important role in either supporting or hindering a woman's journey towards safety and empowerment. Women are often discouraged by their family members from reporting abuse or leaving abusive relationships, due to deeply ingrained cultural and religious beliefs and societal pressure that prioritise the sanctity of marriage over the well-being of the woman and any children involved.

[8] For more information on this model, see Ministry of Justice, Government of United Kingdom, Independent Domestic Violence Adviser: Statutory Guidance (2025).

Marital families often support their sons and justify violence on the ground of unmet expectations (e.g. illegal dowry demands, poor cooking, not being obedient) on behalf of women and their family. Recognising these dynamics, the Cell adopts a relational and dialogical approach, engaging both sides of the family to rebuild networks of support rather than isolation. The Special Cell's approach to involve male family members and elders especially mother-in-laws who often hold decision making power and encouraging them to reflect on their actions, beliefs and attitudes as well as educating them on women's rights is essential in challenging patriarchal norms.

Sometimes these meetings are made more effective by involving *panchayats*^[9] or community leaders using their influence to reinforce messages about gender equality, accountability and non-violence. This inclusive approach is not about confrontation, but about shifting attitudes within families and communities that perpetuate gender-based violence. Such engagement helps extend the Cell's impact beyond the individual survivor, making it a community-wide dialogue about rights and responsibilities.

By bringing respected and influential local figures into these conversations, the Special Cell helps to challenge the normalisation of domestic violence and to spread the message that violence is non-negotiable, it cannot be justified as a matter of family honour, discipline, or custom. These leaders play a key role in reframing domestic violence as a crime under the law rather than a private domestic dispute.

When *panchayat* or community representatives publicly acknowledge that domestic violence is a crime and punishable under the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) it sends a powerful message that the community stands with survivors and expects accountability from perpetrators. This not only encourages women to seek help but also enables prevention through deterrence, signalling that violence will not be tolerated or excused.

Participant 1 elucidated: *'In many cases, we have to negotiate extensively with male family members from both sides, as they are the decision-makers in a patriarchal system. A significant challenge we face is that the woman's own family often believes that once she is married, she must continue in the same relationship no matter what. So, a lot of our work involves engaging with men to make them reflect on their actions and beliefs. We conduct separate meetings with the mother-in-law because we often find that the mother-in-law has herself experienced violence in the past.'*

^[9]The word 'panchayat' means 'council of five' and refers to the ancient practice of having five respected community members guide village affairs.

2. Working with perpetrators to change gender ideologies

One of the biggest challenges for the Cell is addressing deep rooted patriarchal beliefs in society and therefore grappling with the question of how not to label every man in a society as a perpetrator.

As Participant 2, articulated:

'The goal is to create an environment where perpetrators can confront their own attitudes and behaviours, recognise their impact on women, and ultimately change.'

The Stages of Men's Change from Violence to Desistance, as described by Panchal and Lazarus (2017), begin with a critical event—typically an act of violence perpetrated by men—that brings them, or their partners, to the Special Cell. Initial responses often involve resistance, anger, denial, externalising blame, or minimizing the severity of the violence. **The feminist social work approach at the Special Cell creates a safe, non-judgmental environment where men can gradually build rapport and trust with social workers, reflect on their behaviour, and develop insight into both the criminality of their actions and the harm caused to their partners. Interventions are individually tailored, including guided communication, empathetic engagement, and challenges to entrenched patriarchal beliefs.** Social workers also identify men's motivations to change, which can range from self-realisation and concern for children, to fear of social stigma, loss of the spouse, or moral and religious considerations.

This process often leads to practical steps such as modifying abusive behaviours, rebuilding trust with partners, and committing to non-violent, respectful ways of relating. Changes are facilitated through multiple individual and joint sessions with couples. Behavioural development is non-linear; setbacks, ambivalence, and partial progress are common, addressed through sustained, iterative interventions and follow-ups. Simultaneously, these interventions generate relational shifts, enabling women to feel safer, validated, and increasingly empowered.

Together, these dynamics foster a gradual move toward a violence-free and equitable relationship. Panchal's model, therefore, emphasises a cyclical, iterative process of accountability, reflection, and relational transformation, guided by feminist principles and social work's values and skills, rather than a fixed, linear sequence of stages.

Participant 5 described dealing with a case of sexual violence:

‘When he wanted sex, she had to participate and be ready. I said I would call her husband and talk. She was worried about the implications, and I reassured her, “There will be no case.” [After several individual and joint sessions] he said he was taught to believe a wife is someone who just does everything for the husband—and the home, look after children, and have sex. He called his wife in, folded his hands and said, “From now on, we both will give consent.”’

The above case exemplifies the Special Cell’s gender-transformative model, which combines empathy, education, and negotiation to foster non-violent, equitable relationships, and demonstrates how meaningful change in men’s attitudes can directly enhance women’s safety, agency, and empowerment.



Meeting with family members- to build a support system for the client

Relevance to the UK context

In the UK context, when disclosures of abuse are made, sometimes women from Black and minoritised backgrounds ask for support not only for themselves but also for their abusive partners or extended family members. While such requests may at times be misinterpreted or dismissed within mainstream service frameworks, they often reflect a desire for the abuse to stop rather than an intention to end the relationship. Many women, even when fully aware of abusive behaviour from partners or in-laws, seek support for those individuals as part of pursuing safety, stability, and family well-being. Importantly, this should not be conflated with mediation; rather, it reflects a culturally- and relationally-informed approach to adequate safety and support. Yet prevailing service models in the UK offer limited provision for such relational forms of support, particularly where children are not involved, thereby constraining more holistic and culturally responsive responses.

The holistic model of engagement with families in India's Special Cells offers valuable lessons for the UK, where systemic and cultural pressures similarly shape women's choices and access to justice, particularly for Black and minoritised victim-survivors. Domestic abuse interventions could be strengthened by developing a shift in practice and resources where trained specialist practitioners have the expertise to safely engage with extended family members and challenge harmful norms, to dismantle justifications of abuse. This approach could also create space for structured reflection and dialogue with male family members who often hold decision-making power.

Insight 3: Women's economic empowerment

The Special Cell promotes women's economic empowerment to regain control over that aspect of their lives by building and strengthening their skills, and linking them with potential employers. It also supports them in ways that enable them to achieve their individual economic aspirations as outlined below.

1. Provision of financial literacy, employment opportunities, vocational training

The Special Cell recognises women's economic empowerment as an essential aspect of supporting survivors to rebuild their lives. Rather than directly seeking livelihood options for women, the Special Cell works with each survivor to identify her individual aspirations, assess existing skills, and explore realistic opportunities within her context.

Through counselling and reflective discussions, women are encouraged to articulate what they want to do, understand the skills and resources they possess, and consider the possibilities available to them. This process not only supports economic planning but also helps women rebuild their sense of agency, choice, and control after experiences of abuse.

In addition to helping women claim their rights within marital relationships such as maintenance, alimony, and child support, the Special Cell focuses on individual economic empowerment through financial literacy, employment opportunities, and vocational training. Practitioners also work with women to build financial confidence and support their aspirations for economic independence. The Cell assists women in accessing financial support from

government schemes, such as the Bihar state government's startup initiative (Startup India, 2026), which provides funds for women's small businesses. These measures directly address the financial challenges faced by women in abusive situations. In the longer term, the goal is to help survivors acquire skills and confidence that lead towards sustainable economic independence for example, through connections with institutions offering vocational training in sewing, tailoring, and beauty care services, enabling women to earn their own income.

Participant 3 provided an example:

'Perpetrator after a phase of supporting the family (with intervention of Special cells) again stopped maintenance. Special cells connected them to District Legal Services Authority where under PWD Act we sorted the claim for maintenance for victim. For the survivor, Cell staff got the developmental counselling for her [to explore what she wants financially for her], she completed her BA and also joined a private school to work as a teacher and is much better emotionally. She is living with her in-laws, Special Cell have also been working with her in-laws and enhanced her support system. Special Cell got the maintenance from court for her children, so life is easy for her.'

2. Empowering women in context of their aspirations

The Special cell empowers women contextualising their individual circumstances and aspirations. It aims to address their specific financial, practical, cultural and emotional barriers. For example, in some cases, women are financially independent in terms of earning income but do not make financial decisions in anticipation of violence or their decisions are monitored and controlled. Or the woman may not be allowed to work by her partner or may be forced to do certain type of employment. Participant 4's account demonstrated that with cultural insights complex situations can be easily managed - here he educates his mother-in-law on a woman's right to work:

'Woman came, she was married, she was a graduate educated and arranged marriage and a year went well. However, afterwards for this Mumbai girl and her in-laws house was from rural background. Her in-laws expectation was for the survivor to work in the fields. She wanted to work and move out. When the survivor had her child, she found it difficult working in the fields. The survivor said she is willing to work and support but would like to do an office job. This became an issue for her mother-in-law became abusive. [The girl approached the cell]. The Special Cell educated the family and the girl that if the wife wants to join a job she should not need anyone's permission. The survivor has recently called and updated that she has got a job offer and plans to be working in a medical company.'

The above case highlights the Special Cell's focus on helping women make self-determined choices, while also engaging with families to challenge restrictive patriarchal gender norms in a constructive, non-confrontational way.

By combining rights awareness with culturally sensitive dialogue, the Special Cell helps women translate aspirations into action—building pathways toward both personal fulfilment and long-term empowerment.



Supporting a survivor to start a food business to meet her day-to-day expenses

Relevance to the UK context

In the UK, some domestic abuse organisations and by and for agencies offer support for women facing financial abuse, but these services are often ad hoc, limited by funding, and constrained by strict eligibility criteria. Women with children frequently struggle to access support due to lack of childcare provision, and these challenges can be compounded by insecure immigration status, impact of trauma, language barriers, and lack of independent income.

The Special Cells model in India offers key lessons: it takes a holistic approach by providing sustained legal and financial support, linking women to welfare entitlements, and addressing economic vulnerability as part of the overall intervention.

Adopting integrated and flexible responses in the UK could improve outcomes for women who want to gain skills and financial autonomy. **A more structural, joined-up approach, that integrates financial, legal, and welfare support into domestic abuse responses as a matter of policy and design, not as optional or peripheral add-ons could be the way forward.**

Crucially, support should not only secure safety and independence, but also create pathways for hope, aspiration, and meaningful participation in society.

Insight 4: Strategic location of the Special Cell

The Special Cell's approach centres creating a safe, non-judgemental and empowering environment where women feel heard and supported. It also works to address the gendered nature of policing to ensure sensitive and survivor-centred responses.

1. Creating a safe, non-judgemental and low-risk environment

The strategic location of a Special Cell within the police station is aimed at bridging the gap between law enforcement and women survivors of violence. Police stations are often viewed as intimidating, masculine spaces where women may suffer further harm and lose control over their situation. However, the strategic location of the cell empowers women to seek support without any fear in a non-judgemental, child-friendly and confidential environment whilst feeling in control of the process. The partnership between the Special Cell and police helps in situations where women may hesitate to file formal complaints or want to take it slowly but still require immediate intervention or support, giving police the option of referring these cases to the Special Cell.

Being physically situated within the police station not only enhances accessibility and immediacy of intervention but also helps in building trust and reducing the intimidation often associated with law enforcement spaces. This location facilitates seamless collaboration between the Cell's social workers, and police officers, ensuring holistic and coordinated support for survivors.

Although the Special Cell is keen to not be associated with power whilst engaging with the perpetrators and in fact works closely with police to ensure that perpetrators are not threatened or assaulted at police stations, the proximity to police ensures that the cases involving severe violence are managed with legal interventions and women are supported to seek justice without compromising their safety. However, it is a slow process and not without challenges.

For instance, participant 2 highlighted some of the challenges in supporting women whilst working with police and the need for the Cell to intervene, advocate and support women:

'While police support is vital, we also acknowledge the challenges women face when engaging with the criminal justice system. The pace at which protection orders are issued can be frustrating, with some cases taking several months to resolve. We advocate for timely and effective intervention by the police, especially when there is an immediate threat to the woman's safety... Our position within the community allows us to support women at a critical juncture: when they first approach the criminal justice system. We assist them not only before litigation but also during and after legal proceedings, ensuring continuous help through various legal frameworks like Section 498A^[10] of the Indian Penal Code and others.'

2. Addressing the gendered nature of police work

The location of the Special Cell within the police station provides a unique opportunity to gradually transform the gendered outlook and practices of policing. This is especially important given the low representation of women in the police force (Indian Justice Report, 2025) and the traditionally hierarchical, masculine culture that shapes police responses to violence against women. (Sukhtankar et al., 2022).

Being co-located within the police premises allows for **everyday interaction and collaboration** between Special Cell social workers and police officers, creating informal spaces for dialogue, learning, and attitudinal change. Over time, these daily exchanges help **challenge entrenched notions of authority and gender**, demonstrating alternative ways of working with empathy and respect for women's agency.

^[10] Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860 criminalized cruelty by a husband or his relatives towards a woman, including physical or mental harm and harassment related to unlawful demands for property or dowry. With the introduction of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, this provision has been replaced by Section 85, which similarly penalizes cruelty by the husband or his relatives with imprisonment up to three years and a fine.

This is especially important in cases of sexual violence where active and non-judgemental listening is the key to women opening up about their experiences. **Sensitising police professionals about women’s needs, the language used and need for a separate space for confidential and empathetic listening is a slow process** but helps to influence traditional power imbalances that often make victim-survivors hesitant to engage with the police. Participant 1 reflected on the changes in police work after years of consistent efforts:

‘For instance, earlier, women were often judged when they approached the police station. But through extensive gender sensitisation and working closely with the police, there’s now a visible change - women are heard with more empathy and care. Now, even the police reach out to us for support if they need help from social workers, legal aid providers, or counsellors, which wasn’t the case before.’

The strategic location of the Special Cell within the police station facilitates this shift, enabling social workers to engage directly with police officers, promote gender-sensitive practices, and ensure that women can seek support in a safe, non-judgmental, and confidential environment.



Flex-Board of Special Cell for Women at the main gate of the Police Station

Thus, working with the police is critical to ensure that women's safety, empowerment, and legal rights are addressed simultaneously. Police often operate within a 'family-first' framework, which can conflict with women's needs for non-violent reconciliation and autonomy. By collaborating closely, the Special Cell bridges institutional priorities and survivor-centered goals, facilitating timely socio-legal intervention, protection, and support, while also sensitising law enforcement to gendered dynamics of violence. This strategic alliance ensures coordinated, effective, and culturally informed responses to domestic violence (Panchal and Lazarus, 2017).

Relevance to the UK context

Many Black and minoritised women do not feel safe disclosing abuse to statutory agencies, including the police. This is often due to fears around racism, immigration repercussions, and a lack of cultural understanding. Risk assessments often miss key contextual and cultural factors.

A key lesson from the Special Cells model is the value of **embedding independent, specialist workers within police settings or collaborating closely with communities and agencies who are trained in the dynamics affecting Black and minoritised women** and who can act as a trusted link between survivors and the criminal justice system. This approach has the potential to build trust, improve the quality of risk identification, and ensure that support is both safe and responsive.

Insight 5: Proactive outreach to engage women

Focus on enhancing accessibility of its services by direct engagement with women and their communities is at the heart of engaging with women especially those from marginalised backgrounds. One of Cell's key strategies is to form allyship with community leaders and men to address social and cultural barriers.

1. Enhancing accessibility to the services through direct engagement

To address the issue of accessibility of the services and raise awareness of domestic violence, the Cell has adopted the practice of outreach strategies to ensure that women, particularly from marginalised and rural backgrounds, have access to support and resources they need to live a violence-free life.

Recognising the geographic, economic and cultural barriers that women face to fight violence, the Cell maps the areas for intense outreach activities and engages with women by making regular visits, setting up helplines and organising travel arrangements in coordination with NGOs.

Reaching women in their own communities with opportunities for generic discussions provides women with vital information about their rights and services available to them and contact details of people they can reach out to. It also opens up discussion about violence amongst women. Participant 1 described:

'For example, in the RS Pura area of Jammu, we noticed a significant number of cases originating from there. Since it's difficult for those women to reach us, we visit their area weekly. In these visits, we engage with women directly. Since rural women may feel intimidated by formal institutions like police stations, we organise community-level awareness programs to introduce ourselves and explain how we differ from the police. We also conduct awareness programs in slum areas and marginalised communities.'

2. Forming allyship with community leaders and men to address social and cultural barriers

The Cell's approach to supporting women is through creating allies and shifting cultural attitudes that normalise violence. The Cell attempts to engage with a wider section of society through programmes and venues catering to the health, educational, religious and cultural needs of a community such as schools, Anganwadi centres^[11] and mosques. These make discussions about violence less threatening and enable engagement with both men and women, young and old. The broader discussion around gender inequalities slowly helps communities understand how traditional roles contribute to inequality and the harmful impacts this has on their families and relatives.

^[11] The Anganwadi Scheme was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development as a part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program in 1975. It focuses on promoting the health and overall development of children up to the age of 6 years, including pregnant and lactating mothers. These centres are located primarily in semi-urban or rural areas and are one-stop hubs, integrating supplementary nutrition, preschool education, immunization support, health check-ups, and caregiver education into a single platform. More information can be found [here](#).

Out of these discussions, it is easier to identify strategies that have potential to reduce violence and increase access to support services to women who need them.

Here participant 7 recounted his efforts to form allyship in a remote and difficult location with high incidence of violence:

'What we realised was that it was easier to mobilise the women and talk about gender-based violence, but it was much more difficult to mobilise the men. So I went to talk to the Sarpanch (the village leader) [and he suggested to hold] the outreach program on a Friday after the prayers and to talk to the Imam, and ask the Imam to tell everyone that "after the prayer nobody is going to leave as we have a social worker from the women's police station, Leh who is going to talk about domestic violence." So that's how we finally got to talk to the male members of the society, and that was in a way very good because we were talking about a violence-free home being a woman's right, inside of mosque, which sent out a huge and important message to the community.'



Visits to remote areas to discuss about the service of the Special Cell

Relevance to the UK context

In the UK, the voices and intersectional barriers faced by survivors of faith are often overlooked or erased. As part the principles of the CCR, it is essential for UK agencies to actively engage all communities, including faith communities, as key partners in addressing domestic abuse. This includes recognising the role that faith can play in both enabling and challenging abuse, and ensuring that faith-informed, survivor-centred responses are embedded within mainstream practice.

Domestic abuse in rural and remote communities in the UK presents distinct challenges that can intensify harm and delay access to support. Research shows that survivors in rural areas are more likely to experience isolation, limited anonymity, and reduced access to specialist services, all of which can be exploited as forms of coercive control by perpetrators (National Rural Crime Network, 2019; Women's Aid, 2021; Welsh Women's Aid, 2021).

Not enough is done to shift narratives, VAWG commissioning remains fragmented, there are limited links to prevention, training and education efforts within faith settings. Faith institutions can be challenging and patriarchal, which contributes to gaps in engagement. However, given the central role these spaces play in many communities, they cannot be overlooked. Faith institutions should be actively engaged and expected to participate in the national responses, with Government setting clear standards and resourcing safe and informed collaboration.

Not enough is done to shift the narrative around violence with men at the community level; **faith and community spaces must also be seen as sites for engaging men and boys in conversations about power, accountability, feminism and gender equality, and breaking patriarchal narratives** if we are committed to embedding a CCR.

Insight 6: Addressing weaponisation of religious and cultural practices

The Cell seeks to challenge religious and cultural justifications for abuse while recognising and addressing how these influences shape women's decision-making. It involves creating space for reflection and change within culturally sensitive and respectful frameworks.

1. Challenging religious and cultural justification for abuse

Using cultural and religious practices to control and abuse women is a common challenge faced by the Special Cell practitioners. Religious and cultural norms are often manipulated to justify abusive behaviour, control women's lives and movements and prevent them from seeking support and legal recourse.

Some of the common problems reported by the participants were child marriages being justified for cultural reasons, using religious leaders' influence to undermine legal actions particularly in the case of divorce and domestic violence protection, preventing women from choosing their partners in name of honour as well as preventing women from reporting abuse as it is considered bringing family into disrepute.

Participant 1 stated that, *'We frequently hear comments like, "She's the first woman in our family to go to a police station, she has ruined our family's honour."*

Participant 1 also described the sensitivity required for dealing with abuse that is justified on religious and cultural grounds:

'In such cases, we have to be culturally and religiously sensitive. Directly challenging cultural norms can sometimes cause conflict. For example, we had a case where a well-educated woman from a good family background married into a Brahmin^[12] family. She faced severe emotional abuse, including being forced to remain fully covered under a veil, even when visiting the police station. Negotiations with family members and community leaders were crucial to addressing this. Cultural norms often restrict women, especially regarding divorce, which is seen as highly negative. Women are expected to endure toxic relationships because marriage is considered a lifelong commitment. Even if a woman faces abuse, she is pressured to remain a 'good wife' and stay silent rather than standing up for herself.'

2. Dealing with religious and cultural influences on decision-making

The Cell adopts a women-centred approach in navigating the complex interplay of culture, religion, and law, working with community and religious leaders to support and uphold women's and girls' rights. These cases are often highly sensitive, and statutory agencies, including the police, may hesitate to intervene due to fears of backlash from a community or being perceived as interfering in religious or cultural practices, alongside institutional and individual biases that may influence decision-making.

^[12] As per the Hindu caste system, Brahmins are the priestly caste that constitute the uppermost caste division. They are referred to as dominant castes because of historic oppression, discrimination and violence meted out to persons belonging to oppressed castes at a structural level. For more information on the caste system in India, Ambedkar (1916), *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*.

One participant highlighted a case involving a 14-year-old girl who had been married to a 31-year-old man and was pregnant. Initially, the police prioritised “preserving the marriage” rather than registering an offence under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. Following sustained engagement and convincing, a case under POCSO was registered, which then needed additional work with the health professionals in line with the statutory requirements of POCSO.

The Cell works closely with religious and community leaders to change these harmful practices, but these are often long-term sustained engagement leading to slow shifts in outlook. Additionally, women themselves are reluctant to challenge these practices for the fear of stigma, fear of undermining their religious beliefs, and practical consequences. In some regions, traditional village councils (*Khap panchayats*^[13]) have been known to impose severe punishment for challenging these norms.

Participant 7 explained the complex interplay of these practices with lack of awareness of legal norms and policies that influenced women’s decision-making:

‘..the women had this notion, that what judgment comes from the court, unless and until it is corroborated by the religious leaders, it does not count as a legal order. So if the religious leader does not agree to approaching the courts for divorce, ... they don’t want to go against the religious leader because they fear that they are going against the will of God.

It’s not that the religious order has more weight, it’s that women don’t have role models – someone who’s already done it and they can look up to them and see they have done it and it’s not wrong. So that’s the challenge that we had to face in the beginning. Once we got one or two cases – in the court and we got a divorce order, we had this reference, we tell the woman, ‘see she [without disclosing identity] has done it, she has gone to court and even the religious leaders can’t challenge this order because this is the legal order and this takes precedence over the religious leaders decision.’

^[13]Khap Panchayats are informal, caste- or clan-based village councils prevalent in northern India (particularly in Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and parts of Delhi). Though they traditionally mediated community disputes, they have been criticized for issuing extra-legal orders that violate women’s rights and for opposing inter-caste or inter-gotra marriages. See: *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* (2018) 7 SCC 192, Supreme Court of India.



Meeting with community members and religious leaders to discuss about patriarchy, gender roles and services of the Cell

Relevance to the UK context

The Special Cells model recognises and navigates the interplay of faith, culture, and gender by working directly with religious and community leaders to challenge harmful norms, support survivors, and shift collective attitudes. Translating this learning into the UK context means investing in faith-literate, feminist, trauma-informed, and culturally competent responses. Policy and practice must centre partnerships with faith-informed by and for organisations who are best placed to navigate these complexities.

The wider VAWG sector has historically engaged minimally with faith settings. The challenge lies in the lack of structured dialogue, collaboration, and commissioning support to meaningfully work with faith institutions, despite their significance in many survivors' lives. By and for organisations such as FORWARD, and specialist faith-informed organisations already operate in these spaces, they are often under-resourced and unfairly expected to shoulder this responsibility alone. **Current commissioning frameworks rarely prioritise or fund work within faith contexts, even where religious identity, practices, and leaders' attitudes shape disclosure, help-seeking, and safety.**

Research from Spirit and Solace (Black Church Domestic Abuse Forum, 2021) shows that while faith spaces can offer community and spiritual support, survivors often encounter minimisation of abuse, limited understanding of legal protections, and pressure to prioritise family or church reputation over safety. These patterns are also echoed in the experiences of victim-survivors from many other faith communities.

Building sustained partnerships between VAWG organisations, faith-informed by and for services, and trusted community figures is essential to co-produce prevention strategies that are culturally grounded and survivor-led. Such **collaborations can strengthen early intervention, challenge patriarchal and spiritual-misuse narratives, and break the silence and stigma surrounding abuse within diverse faith communities.**

Insight 7: Addressing economic abuse

One of the key strengths of the Cell is to recognise economic abuse as a distinct and serious form of gendered harm. The Cell adapts a range of strategies to challenge male control of household finance and to advance women's financial independence and autonomy.

1. Recognising economic abuse

Economic abuse is a pervasive yet often under-recognised form of violence against women. It involves stealing, hiding, destroying and/or controlling certificates, passports, travel documents, or access to digital lockers— a form of economic sabotage that restricts a woman's autonomy.

The exchange and giving of dowry^[14] were criminalised through the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 following national level protests by women's rights organisations against deaths inflicted by in-laws and husbands, often through the 'burning of brides' (Jagori, 2009).

^[14]The legislation defines dowry as any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly— (a) by one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage; or (b) by the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person, to either party to the marriage or to any other person. The practice of dowry is highly gendered, with the expectation of dowry from the bride's side leading to violence before, during and after the marriage.

However, dowry deaths continue to persist as the social and cultural norms justifying the patriarchal practice have not been addressed adequately.

Although economic abuse was recognised in the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 in India, which includes the misuse of cultural practices such as the control of *streedhan*^[15] and harassment related to the unlawful demands for dowry, awareness of economic abuse remains low among both professionals and survivors.

In the majority of cases coming to the Special Cell, there is some form of economic abuse. Often occurring alongside physical and emotional violence, women are manipulated or coerced into financial dependence through direct control of their earnings, control of their *streedhan*, property, loans taken in their names, and other deceitful financial practices within marital relationships.

The abuse continues post-separation or divorce in the form of non-payment of maintenance, child support, and other financial obligations. Financial manipulation at the time of marriage, such as dowry demands and other forms of financial coercion, is also common. The Special Cell works with women to determine the best course of action, including providing legal aid, assisting with the recovery of personal belongings/property, and, more importantly, offering counselling to break the cycle of financial dependence.

^[15] *Streedhan* refers to property or gifts a woman receives before, during, or after marriage, over which she has absolute ownership and control; it is legally distinct from dowry. *Streedhan* is protected under Section 3(iv)(a) of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which defines “economic abuse” to include deprivation or control of a woman’s *streedhan*, property, or other financial resources.

Participant 1 provided an example of supporting a woman facing economic abuse, involving intervention at multiple levels:

'For example, in one case, a survivor had her gold pawned by the respondent to take out a loan. The respondent claimed that they would buy a house in the future using the loan, which was the reason for pawning the gold. The woman was not aware that the respondent had no intention of following through with the promise of buying a house. She found out later that he had cancelled the plan, and he was refusing to return her gold. When this case came to light in the special cell, we intervened, and through multiple meetings, we were able to ensure that the woman got her gold back...she also wanted to ensure that her daughter was supported, and the respondent denied financial maintenance for the child. Legal aid was provided to the woman, and a court order was issued for financial maintenance under the Domestic Violence Act.'

2.Challenging male control of finances and advancing women's financial independence

The patriarchal norm of male control over household finances is one of the primary challenges that the Special Cell faces in addressing economic abuse. Men are commonly viewed as the head of the household, responsible for controlling finances, regardless of women's independent income. Although women may not always recognise this as economic abuse due to its widespread nature, many report cases where their work lives, as well as their earnings, are controlled.



Meeting at community level to discuss domestic violence and economic abuse

The Cell works with women and their families to promote financial autonomy and with the community to challenge patriarchal financial practices.

Participant 6 highlighted the frequent questioning from community members regarding household finances:

‘..they question why would women want money? When we are giving them everything – clothes and food and other necessities. Men, and even when I speak to respondents, it seems as they think ‘why do they (women) need money? Why do they want personal income?’

Relevance to the UK context

Since the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in the UK, attention to economic abuse has increased in policy and practice. However, the **understanding of different manifestations of economic abuse within minority and migrant communities remains limited**. This includes the misuse of marriage-related economic practices, including dowry and *streedhan*, as a means to undermine women’s financial autonomy and exert coercive control.

Additionally, there is limited understanding of household finance dynamics particularly in transnational finance and money management in ‘joint households’ – typically involving multiple generations and more than one married couple forming a single financial unit.

In these households, the daughter-in-laws are often at the bottom of the financial power hierarchy, with older men at the top. Recognising these financial dynamics is crucial to supporting women experiencing economic abuse in South Asian households.

Furthermore, risk assessment must be adapted to reflect the unique manifestations of these forms of abuse and accompanied by targeted training pathways so that practitioners are equipped to recognise and respond effectively.

Chapter 5

Key policy and practice recommendations

The purpose of this study is to document practitioners' perspectives on some of the features of the Cell that are working well in specific states. The findings are based on Special Cell practitioners' perspectives of their roles and the project. It is important to note that there may be diversity in users' experiences of the Cell.

Services are likely to be perceived and accessed differently based on geographic, social and economic location of the users. For example, trust in police services may be lower among people from religious minorities, oppressed caste and other marginalised backgrounds due to prior negative experiences.

Indeed, this was highlighted by the practitioner in Jammu and Kashmir. These factors likely influence some users' willingness to engage with the Cell, however, exploring this was beyond the scope of this project.

1. Engage with family members

Engaging constructively with family members including in-laws and husbands has led to raising awareness and shifting attitudes towards gender roles and violence in Indian context. Perpetrator programmes are often limited in scope, operate on narrow criteria, and fail to address the wider family dynamics that reinforce abuse.

The current bifurcation between work with survivors and work with perpetrators limits the ability of services to respond to the full context of abuse. A more relational, context-specific approach such as that modelled by the Special Cells recognises the wider, complex social and familial influence around victim-survivors and could open up new possibilities for prevention, accountability, and long-term societal change strategies.

2. Shift from time-limited interventions to trust-based, survivor-centred support by adopting need-based tailored intervention lengths

Shift away from rigid, time-limited, risk-led frameworks towards flexible model to support victim-survivors. This is particularly vital for victims-survivors of harmful practices or coercive control, whose safety concerns may not fit standard legal and policy thresholds. However, this approach is only possible with secure, long-term funding.

Current short-term and output-driven funding models often force services to close cases prematurely, based on institutional definitions of “risk” rather than the survivor’s needs. Improved survivor-centred support requires commissioners funding structures for continuity that prioritise trust-building, and cultural competence over short-term outcomes.

3. Adopt a meaningful partnership with community members

In the UK context, there is a clear need for community-engaged approaches that address the collective reinforcement of abuse—particularly where cultural or religious norms are used to justify violence or suppress disclosure. If we are to take intersectionality seriously, we must consider the multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities that shape victim-survivors’ experiences. Working with faith leaders, and community influencers to challenge patriarchal attitudes and promote women’s rights can be a powerful tool for shifting norms and reducing harm. Crucially, this must complement not replace survivor-centred interventions and requires practitioners to be both culturally competent, familiar with feminist values, and trauma-informed in how they engage these complex dynamics. While the **UK’s VAWG strategy** makes important commitments, it does not explicitly recognise the role of faith communities in prevention, awareness, norm change, and support.

In the UK, models like Safe & Together already encourage social workers and schools to focus on perpetrator accountability and partnership with the non-abusing parent. Integrating these approaches with community-based practices, alongside safe and victim-centred use of family decision-making, could strengthen support for victim-survivors of domestic abuse, improve safeguarding practice, and enhance cultural understanding for better support in re-

4. Invest in faith-literate, trauma-informed, and culturally competent responses

The work of the Special Cell as well as the Faith and VAWG Coalition in the UK show that faith can be both a source of strength and a tool of coercion in a victim-survivor's journey. Despite its significance in shaping survivors' experiences, faith is rarely explored in risk assessments or review processes.

This gap reflects a broader failure to engage with the full range of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, resulting in gaps in understanding, missed safeguarding opportunities and a limited ability for multi-agency responses to develop effective, culturally competent interventions.

Addressing this gap is important ensuring that the intersection of faith, gender, and abuse is not invisible in legal reviews and policy development. Work of faith-informed by and for organisations such as the Jewish Women's Aid, Sikh Women's Aid and the Muslim Women's Network UK show how faith informed by and for organisations can address gaps in statutory responses. These organisations hold critical insight, trust within communities, and the capacity to identify and disrupt harm that is often missed by statutory services.

Embedding this approach into safeguarding, commissioning, and multi-agency frameworks will help closing the current data and practice gaps and ensuring faith is no longer invisible in domestic abuse responses.

5. Strengthen male allyship

While the core issue remains male violence, male allyship in the VAWG sector and in commissioning frameworks is significantly under-developed. The VAWG response has been carried predominantly by women's services. Although centring women's and survivors' voices is essential, the lack of systematic male allyship reinforces the idea that ending violence against women is solely women's responsibility. A shift is needed, one that actively involves men and patriarchal actors in challenging patriarchal norms and addressing harm, without displacing survivor-led and women-led approaches.

While the core issue remains male violence, male allyship in the VAWG sector and in commissioning frameworks is significantly under-developed. The VAWG response has been carried predominantly by women's services. Although centring women's and survivors' voices is essential, the lack of systematic male allyship reinforces the idea that ending violence against women is solely women's responsibility. A shift is needed, one that actively involves men and patriarchal actors in challenging patriarchal norms and addressing harm, without displacing survivor-led and women-led approaches.

There are risks if this work is not done intentionally. Without clear expectations and training, "allyship" may become symbolic rather than rooted in meaningful action, reflection, or accountability. Male allyship must be developed with care grounded in feminist principles, community accountability, and a clear commitment to complement, not replace, women's leadership.

6. Adopt sustained culturally responsive counselling services

Domestic abuse counselling services in the UK remain unstable, with community-based support often under threat. There is an urgent need for sustainable investment, as many survivors are turned away due to a lack of resources. This situation is even more critical for faith-informed and culturally responsive counselling services, which are both rare and often excluded from mainstream funding streams. These services are vital for Black and minoritised survivors, yet they remain the least resourced turning access to trauma-informed support into a postcode lottery.

Crucially, this is not just a funding issue but also reflects a broader failure to adopt a comprehensive, intersectional and trauma-informed approach that recognises the specific needs, cultural contexts, and lived experiences of Black and minoritised women.

7. Invest in capacity building of the practitioners

Practitioners need comprehensive training on harmful practices, including caste-based abuse and dowry abuse. Such training can be meaningfully provided by engaging by and for organisations, who have decades of experience, feminist perspectives and practical knowledge around these themes. They also need opportunities to critically assess how the Domestic Abuse Act is being implemented in practice, identifying where gaps remain in protection and support. Simultaneously, training should build practitioners' confidence and skills to ask sensitive questions and respond appropriately. Developing this expertise is essential to ensuring that responses are inclusive, informed, and effective.

8. Integrate a Black feminist lens

A Black feminist lens highlights that Black and minoritised women experience violence through interconnected systems of racism, patriarchy, faith and community expectations, immigration control, and economic abuse and other structural inequalities. Their safety is shaped not only by individual perpetrators but also by institutions and social structures that overlook, minimise, or misinterpret harm. This is consistent with long-standing Black feminist and Indigenous feminist scholarship which demonstrates how state violence, community control and gendered oppression intersect in the lives of racialised women (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2019; Davis, 1981; Mirza, 2015).

In practice, this means moving beyond inclusion and representation towards transforming systems, so they are built around the knowledge, leadership, and experiences of Black and minoritised women. It requires sustained resourcing and whole-systems response where accountability sits with perpetrators and institutions. This is a necessary framework for building responses that are equitable, effective, and rooted in justice and collective liberation.

Chapter 6

Applying Learnings to the Policy and Practice Landscape

Professionals within educational settings are often among the first to come in contact with victim-survivors of domestic abuse and their children. Their role in early identification, intervention, and long-term safeguarding is therefore critical. However, practice on the ground remains inconsistent, with significant gaps in knowledge, confidence, and capacity particularly when it comes to understanding the complex and often invisible dynamics of coercive control and harmful practices.

Too often, the experiences of Black and minoritised women, migrant survivors, and children living with abuse are not adequately recognised or responded to within statutory systems. Practitioners may default to physical risk indicators or focus on incident-based models of harm, failing to pick up on long-term patterns of control, fear, and isolation.

The following policy and practice areas provide key intervention points for applying learnings from this study:

1. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, 2024

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, 2024 (formerly known as the Children's Wellbeing Bill) (UK Parliament, 2024) introduced a statutory duty for educational and childcare agencies to be formally included in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. This is a welcome step toward improving information sharing and joint working across services, particularly where children are experiencing harm at home. Additionally, it seeks to advance pledges from the 2024 manifesto on children's social care.

For children affected by domestic abuse, including coercive control, this shift offers an opportunity to improve early identification and intervention. However, to be effective, it must be accompanied by robust training for school and social care professionals on the dynamics of domestic abuse, especially where children are survivors in their own right, and where the abuse intersects with class inequality, racial discrimination, immigration, and harmful practices.

The Bill’s safeguarding provisions must be implemented in partnership with VAWG agencies and by and for services to ensure responses are culturally competent, trauma-informed, and centre the safety of both women and children. Understandably, schools are managing multiple priorities, and it is often challenging for VAWG agencies to engage meaningfully with teachers and students on these issues.

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s report (DAC, April 2025) shows a critical gap in services for children impacted by domestic abuse. Over a quarter (27%) of services in England and Wales reported that they had been unable to offer children the specialist support they needed because of severe funding pressures. The situation is more complicated for ethnic and minority children due to multiple disadvantages. Ethnic and minority parents face significant barriers in engaging with schools which makes it difficult to prevent harm experienced by children.

2. Mandatory training

All education and social work professionals should receive mandatory training on domestic abuse, coercive control, harmful practices, and cultural competence, ensuring children’s voices are heard and taken seriously.

Evidence from the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Coalition’s 2023 report shows that many teachers feel ill-equipped to address VAWG in schools, undermining prevention and safeguarding (EVAW, 2023). It shows that teachers have not been adequately equipped to deliver Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE)^[16] or respond to disclosures, with government online training materials downloaded by only a fraction of the teaching workforce.

^[16]The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019 mandate that pupils receiving primary education must be taught Relationships Education, pupils receiving secondary education must be taught Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), and that all primary and secondary pupils must be taught Health Education.

The Harmful Practices Strategic Partnership Petition^[17] highlights that the current training offer on harmful practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation is wholly inadequate, with only a minority of statutory workers accessing it (e.g. just 5,209 professionals completed the government's forced marriage training in 2022).

As a result, many social workers, teachers, and frontline staff **report low confidence in identifying or responding to honour-based abuse**, leaving victim-survivors without the safety and support they need. HPSP's petition calls for all statutory professionals to receive mandatory, specialist harmful practices training, led by and for experts, to ensure responses are informed, survivor-centred, and culturally competent.

The Coaction Hub's 'Rethinking Risk Beyond the Checklist' (2025) paper stresses that without specialist training, statutory professionals continue to rely on narrow, incident-based tools like the DASH RIC^[18], and fail to understand coercive control, harmful practices, and the experiences of Black and minoritised victim-survivors.

3. Establish and embed Child Independent Domestic Violence Advocates/Child Independent Sexual Violence Advocates

Establish and embed Child IDVAs/Child ISVAs that are designed around the specific needs of children. These roles must provide sustainable, child-centred support rather than being driven only by KPIs. As pointed above, current provision is severely lacking (Barnardos, 2024; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2025). Without roles dedicated to their unique needs, children now legally recognised as victim-survivors in their own right will continue to face long waits or may receive no support at all.

^[17] The Petition can be accessed [here](#).

^[18] DASH stands for Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour'- based abuse. The DASH risk checklist helps practitioners identify and understand the risk that victims of domestic abuse are facing. You can access it [here](#).

4. Integrated CCR approach and resourcing

Responses to domestic abuse and harmful practices must be embedded within a fully integrated Coordinated Community Response (CCR), linking schools, social care, health, justice, and by and for services to deliver holistic, feminist, and survivor-centred support. This requires ring-fenced, sustainable funding so agencies can work together consistently, rather than relying on short-term or piecemeal projects that can leave children and families at risk.

5. Perpetrator Programmes

There are well established perpetrator programmes in the UK, including Respect-accredited models and the Drive Project.^[19] These programmes provide structured interventions and have shown some evidence of impact, particularly with high-risk perpetrators, when embedded within coordinated multi-agency responses (SafeLives, 2020). The Drive Project has expanded nationally and is working towards more culturally competent approaches, though delivery is often led by larger organisations.

However, there remains limited availability of these programmes especially culturally specific, early-intervention perpetrator programmes and services designed and delivered by organisations rooted in and led by the communities they serve. There is a need for the expansion of culturally competent, early-intervention perpetrator programmes, with equitable commissioning to ensure 'by and for' agencies are meaningfully involved.

Lessons from the Special Cells model highlight the importance of earlier intervention, including working with families and communities to prevent escalation, alongside engaging men and boys as allies in challenging patriarchal norms. This approach emphasises situating perpetrator accountability within a wider ecosystem that centres survivor safety, community engagement, and structural change.

^[19]The Drive Partnership is a partnership between Respect, Safelives and Social Finance that began in 2015 around a shared ambition to change the way statutory and voluntary agencies respond to high-harm, high-risk perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse.

6. Multi-agency panels: Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and Domestic Abuse-Related Death Reviews (DARDRs)

While recognising the expertise and commitment of current professionals, multi-agency panels are often predominantly led by White practitioners. To strengthen decision-making and ensure more equitable outcomes, it is vital to bring in diverse expertise from practitioners with a range of backgrounds and experiences.

Practitioners from diverse and marginalised communities should be supported and empowered to share their knowledge and insights without fear of being dismissed. This is equally important for those who chair Domestic Abuse-Related Death Reviews (DARDRs), where inclusive and culturally competent leadership is essential.

7. No Recourse to Public Funds and immigration rules

VAWG work intersects with immigration patterns and policies and racial justice; policy changes in these areas affect victim-survivor safety and access to support. Immigration rules such as no recourse to public funds^[20] can trap survivors in abuse and reduce safe pathways to protection.

Racial inequities in policy and practice further undermine trust in statutory systems. These interconnected issues require a joint, cross-government approach to ensure that VAWG strategies effectively protect and support all victim-survivors.

Cross-cutting issue: Legal aid access

A critical barrier highlighted across groups was the lack of access to free legal aid, especially for women with insecure immigration status. Victim-survivors often cannot access support in family or immigration courts, leaving them vulnerable to further harm and injustice. This issue urgently needs to be addressed at both policy and practice levels.

^[20] NRPF is a restriction applied to people who are subject to immigration control in the UK. This includes individuals with temporary visas for work, study, or visiting, as well as some people on settlement routes. If a person has NRPF, they cannot claim most public funds, which are benefits or financial support provided by the government or local councils, unless an exception applies. To learn more, refer to the [NRPF Network](#).

Chapter 7

Conclusion

During the course of the study, four Cells were closed down. As of now, no other organisations have absorbed the work. This small study includes the work of those four Cells and provides an opportunity to reflect and adapt some of the strategies that worked in Indian context. Learning and expanding from the Special Cells model, such an approach co-created with by and for organisations would link individual accountability to systemic change while keeping victim-survivor safety and agency at the centre. Crucially, in the UK there remains a clear gap in designing perpetrator models specifically with and for Black and minoritised communities.

Developing structures and support that are responsive to coercive control, economic abuse (including dowry-related abuse), so-called honour-based dynamics, immigration control, and racism and that resonate with community contexts could fill this significant gap and strengthen the UK's Coordinated Community Response. Alongside this, consistent community campaigns are essential. At present, prevention messaging is patchy, postcode-dependent, and inconsistent. Embedding campaigns alongside perpetrator work would send a clear social message that abuse is unacceptable, reduce stigma, and help shift harmful norms within communities.

The Coaction Hub's work on the Special Cells model has prompted rich dialogue across by and for organisations and the broader sector. There is clear appetite for developing models of the CCR that centre victim-survivor needs and cultural relevance; embedding by and for organisations in every stage of the response system and adopting decolonial, feminist, intersectional, and community-led ways of working that move beyond risk alone, in line with the core components of the CCR Framework (In Search of Excellence, 2020).

As one participant framed it:

'None of us have all the answers. But if we centre survivors, stay accountable, and remain open to learning especially from the Global South, we have a better chance of creating something truly inclusive.'

Annex -1

Reflections from VAWG Practitioners and Stakeholders

At Coaction Hub's Learning Event on 30 April 2025, we shared the key findings from the Special Cells model in India. We identified current gaps in the CCR approaches and considered how these lessons could be applied to strengthen implementations within the CCR approaches. The focus was on developing more inclusive and effective ways of working with Black and minoritised victim-survivors.

The workshop was attended by over 25 participants, including representatives from VAWG organisations, by and for agencies, local authorities, activists, and statutory services.

The session was grounded in strength-based learning and peer exchange with an intersectional analysis. Participants were divided into small groups and invited to reflect on key themes to encourage deeper dialogue, shared insight, and collective learning.

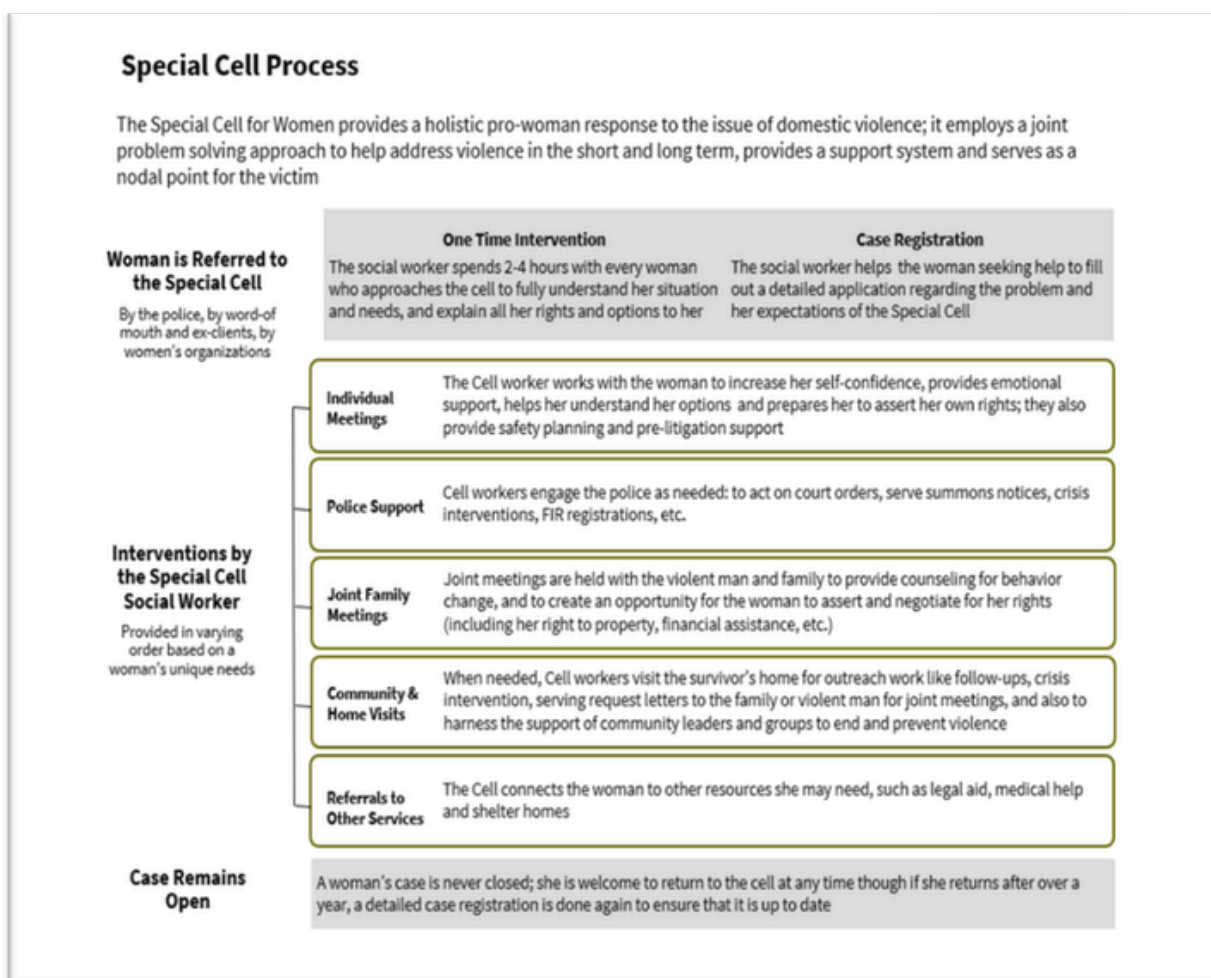
- **Advocacy beyond IDVA models:** The current IDVA-led model is insufficient to meet the complex and intersecting needs of all victim-survivors. Participants emphasised that survivors particularly from Black and minoritised backgrounds require ongoing, holistic advocacy that extends beyond immediate crisis intervention. Sustained, long-term support must be embedded as part of a coordinated and adequately resourced strategy. Short-term pilots or time-limited projects are not enough; investment is needed in models that can evolve, adapt, and respond to achieve meaningful and long-term recovery and support for victim-survivors.

- **From fear to curiosity:** Practitioners often fear “getting it wrong” when working across cultures. This needs to shift to curiosity and openness, grounded in training and reflection.
- **Amplify good practice:** When good models work, they should be shared and resourced. Successes must be documented, made visible, and built into sustainable systems and not left as one-offs.
- **Centre by and for agencies:** This is important as the the by and for agencies are marginalised, this is illuminated by Coaction Hub’s work and in the CCR Framework developed by STADA. (footnote required)
- **Improve learning sharing:** Learning from grassroots and community-led services must be shared more widely with statutory agencies. Likewise, statutory services must widen their learning to include the lived experiences, knowledge systems, and practices of communities most affected by violence. This means shifting away from top-down approaches and working in solidarity with by and for organisations to build responses rooted in trust, justice, and collective care.
- **Rebuild trust in services:** Mistrust of police and statutory services among Black and minoritised victim-survivors is deep-rooted. This must be addressed through transparency, accountability, and culturally safe practices.
- **Integrate Historical Learning into Policy and Practice:** Understand how past oppressions, colonial legacies, and racism continue to shape current systems. Do not repeat the same mistakes.
- **Survivor Centred Language:** Agencies should ensure that the language used in policy, guidance, and frontline practice accurately reflects victim-survivors’ experiences. It should promote understanding and trust by being accessible, inclusive, and empowering.
- **Learning from the Global Majority:** Models such as the Special Cells in India demonstrate how effective interventions can centre communities, engage families constructively, and prioritise victim-survivor choice. These approaches highlight the importance of embedding social and structural accountability within systems, offering valuable lessons for strengthening coordinated community responses in the UK.

- **Better data:** Striving for robust and inclusive data collection is essential to understand who is accessing support and who is being left behind. Data should reflect the diverse experiences of victim-survivors across ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, class background, disability, and other intersecting factors to identify service gaps and inform more equitable policy and practice.
- **Focus on perpetrators:** Systems still place pressure on victim-survivors rather than holding perpetrators accountable. This needs to change.
- **Challenge harmful stereotypes:** Black and minoritised women must not be reduced to cultural tropes. Their diverse identities and strengths need to be recognised and affirmed.
- **Whole-family work:** There is value in exploring family engagement alongside perpetrator work if led by victim-survivors and done safely.
- **Use of Special Cells principles in social care:** Cultural relevance and survivor voice should guide decision-making, especially when social services are involved.
- **Discomfort around perpetrator work:** Some practitioners raised concerns about shifting focus away from victim-survivors when engaging with perpetrators—this must be approached carefully and ethically.
- **Caseload pressures:** The quality of support has dropped as caseloads have increased. Participants remembered when caseloads were capped (e.g. at 14) to allow for deeper, more meaningful work.
- **Integrate by and for agencies into CCR:** These organisations must be embedded structurally, not treated as external consultants or “add-ons.”

Annex- 2

The Special Cell for Women and Children process map



Glossary

Global Majority or migrant and minoritised women

This term is used to refer to individuals and 'groups' other than the majority 'White-British' population who experience discrimination on the basis of their skin colour or real or perceived religious and cultural backgrounds. We acknowledge the significant diversity within and between the many 'groups' and 'communities' that are included under this umbrella term.

Panchayat

A village-level local self-government body or traditional community council (jati panchayat). In the context of the Special Cells for Women, panchayats can help in community awareness, early identification, and referral of cases of violence against women, and work with social workers to support survivors at the grassroots level.

Patil

A village-level representative of the police in Maharashtra who acts as a link between the community and the police. In the context of the Special Cells for Women, the Police Patil helps identify and refer cases of violence against women and supports timely follow-up at the local

Streedhan

Streedhan refers to wealth and property given to a woman during time of her marriage and other occasions for her exclusive use. This includes gifts, jewellery, money and other items by bride's family, groom's family and other relatives and is considered a woman's personal property. It is common in India and is recognised in the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, India.

By and For organisations

By and For organisations refer to the organisations that are created and run by a specific community for the same community. They are established to address unique needs and concerns for a particular group with the direct involvement from those affected in informing leadership and decision making. In this report we are specifically referring to Ending VAWG By and For Services run by and for Black and minoritised women. Imkaan's definition of By and for agencies can be found: [here](#).

Coordinated Community Response (CCR)

The CCR is an approach to domestic abuse which involves bringing communities together to improve the safety of survivors and hold abusers to account. Often the CCR is used to mean statutory and non-statutory agencies working together, but a successful CCR needs to involve a wide range of communities and individuals. To be effective the CCR needs to work to improve the safety of all victim-survivors, including those from marginalised and minoritised communities.

Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs)

These statutory Reviews have been conducted since April 2011, to look into the circumstances of the death of a person, where the death resulted from domestic abuse towards the person, within the meaning of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, with a view to identifying the lessons learnt from the death.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

A coordinated meeting where local agencies (such as police, health, social services, housing, and domestic abuse services) share information and collaboratively plan actions to safeguard victim-survivors identified as at high risk of serious harm or homicide from domestic abuse.

References

- Alderson, S., Westmarland, N., Kelly, L. (2013) The Need for Accountability to, and Support for, Children of Men on Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes. *Child Abuse Review*. Vol. 22. Issue 3.
- Ambedkar, B. R. (1916). *Castes in India: Their mechanism, genesis and development*.
- Anitha, S. (2010) *No recourse, no support: State policy and practice towards South Asian women facing domestic violence in the UK*. British University Press.
- Barnardo's. (2024). *Victims and Prisoners Bill: Provision of child-specific advocates for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence – new Freedom of Information (FOI) data*.
- Bowyer, L., Swanston, J. and Vetere, A. (2015) 'Eventually you just get used to it': An interpretative phenomenological analysis of 10–16 year-old girls' experiences of the transition into temporary accommodation after exposure to domestic violence perpetrated by men against their mothers. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. Vol. 20. Issue 2.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, Issue 32, 513–531.
- Coaction Hub. (2025). *Rethinking risk beyond the checklist: The need for a holistic and inclusive framework*.
- Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as critical social theory*. Duke University Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991) Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*. Vol. 43. Issue 6.
- Davis, A. Y. (1981). *Women, race and class*. Penguin Books.
- Day, A. and Gill, A. (2020) An intersectional approach to improving the efficacy of partnerships between women's organisations and the criminal justice system in relation to domestic violence. *British Journal of Criminology*. Issue 60. Vol. 4.
- Devaney, J. (2008) Chronic child abuse and domestic violence: Children and families with long-term and complex needs. *Child & Family Social Work*. Vol. 13. Issue 4.
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2023) *Children and Young People Subject to Domestic Abuse: Professionals' Insights Briefing*.
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner. (2025). *Victims in their own right? Babies, children and young people's experience of domestic abuse*.
- Ending Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW). (2023). *It's #AboutTime: A whole school approach to ending violence against women & girls*.
- Featherstone, B., White, S. and Morris, K. (2014) *Re-imagining child protection: Towards humane social work with families*. Bristol: Policy Press.

References

- Flaherty, E. G. (2017) The women's liberation movement in Britain, 1968–1984: Locality and organisation in feminist politics (Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow).
- Ganesh, I. M. (2006) The Special Cell for Women and Children: Documenting effective interventions and strategic alliances between Maharashtra Police and Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Centre for Equity for Women, Children & Families, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.
- Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. (2022) National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019–21.
- Government of India. (1860) Indian Penal Code, 1860.
- Government of India. (1961) Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
- Government of India. (2005) Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
- Government of India. (2012) Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.
- Government of India (2023) Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.
- Government of the United Kingdom (2010) Equality Act 2010.
- Government of the United Kingdom (2019) The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019.
- Government of the United Kingdom (2021) Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Government of the United Kingdom (2025) Independent Domestic Violence Adviser: Statutory guidance.
- Government of UK (2022) Independent review of children's social care: final report. Department of Education.
- Government of UK (2024) Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse.
- Hale, H., Bracewell, K., Bellussi, L., Jenkins, R., Alexander, J., Devaney, J., & Callaghan, J. E. M. (2024) The child protection response to domestic violence and abuse: A scoping review of interagency interventions, models and collaboration. *Journal of Family Violence*.
- Harmful Practices Strategic Partnership. (2023) Victim/ survivors of 'honour' based abuse deserve safety [Petition can be accessed at <https://www.change.org/p/victim-survivors-of-honour-based-abuse-deserve-safety-b7a5fa40-798c-4b46-b16a-21084d414662>].
- Hester, M. (2011) The three planet model: Towards an understanding of contradictions in approaches to women and children's safety in contexts of domestic violence. *British Journal of Social Work*. Issue 41. Vol. 5.

References

- Hester, M., Jones, C. A., Eisenstadt, N., Morgan, K. J., Ortega Avila, A. G., & Walker, S.-J. (2019) Evaluation of Year 2 of the Drive Project: A pilot to address high-risk perpetrators of domestic abuse. Centre for Gender and Violence Research, University of Bristol.
- Hughes, J., Chau, S., & Vokri, L. (2016) Mothers' Narratives of Their Involvement with Child Welfare Services. *Affilia*. Issue 31. Vol 3.
- Humphreys, C. and Absler, D. (2011) History repeating: child protection responses to domestic violence. *Child and Family Social Work*. Issue 16. Vol. 4.
- Imkaan & Centre for Women's Justice (2023) Life or Death?
- India Justice Report. (2025). Beyond vacancies: Rebuilding trust in police recruitment.
- Jagori. (2009). Marching together... resisting dowry in India.
- Katz, E., Nikupeteri, A., Laitinen, M. (2020) When Coercive Control Continues to Harm Children: Post-Separation Fathering, Stalking and Domestic Violence. *Child Abuse Review*. Issue 29. Vol. 4.
- Mahthani, R., & Panchal, T. J. (2004) Mission statement of Special Cell for Women and Children. Tata Institute of Social Sciences.
- Ministry of Justice (2020) Harm Panel Report: Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases.
- Mirza, H. S. (2015) Decolonizing higher education: Black feminism and the intersectionality of race and gender. *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, Issue 7, 1–12.
- National Rural Crime Network. (2021) Captive & controlled domestic abuse in rural areas – isolated, unsupported and unprotected: Victims failed by the system, services and those around them.
- Olszowy, L., Jaffe, P., Dawson, M., Straatman, A., Saxton, M. (2020) Voices from the frontline: Child protection workers' perspectives on barriers to assessing risk in domestic violence cases. *Child and Youth Services Review*. Issue 116.
- Panchal, T. J., & Lazarus, S. (2017) The Special Cell for Women and Children: An approach towards addressing violence against women. *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, Issue 78. Vol. 2.
- Panchal, T. J., & Sriraman, T. (2019). Indigenizing feminist social discourse in India: Social work methods redefined through the Special Cells for Women approach. In *Indigenising Social Work Practice in India*. Bloomsbury.
- Pence, E., & Paymar, M. (1993) Education for men who batter: The Duluth model. Springer Publishing Company.
- Rivett, M. (2010) Working with men who use violence: A systemic perspective. In: Alan Carr (ed.) *Clinical handbook of family therapy*. London: Routledge.

References

- Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA)(2020) In Search of Excellence: A refreshed guide to effective domestic abuse partnership work – The Coordinated Community Response (CCR)
- Safe and Together Institute. Available at <https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/>
- Smith, J. and Humphreys, C. (2019) Child protection and fathering where there is domestic violence: Contradictions and consequences. *Child & Family Social Work* . Vol. 24. Issue 1.
- Stanley, N. and Humphreys, C. (2017) Identifying the key components of a ‘whole family’ intervention for families experiencing domestic violence and abuse. *University of Bristol*. Vol. 1. Issue 1.
- Stanley, N., Miller, P., Foster, H. (2012) Engaging with children's and parents' perspectives on domestic violence. *Child and Family Social Work*. Issue 17. Vol. 2.
- Stark, E. (2007) *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*. Oxford University Press.
- Startup India. (2026) *States' Startup Ecosystem Ranking (5th ed.)*
- Sukhtankar, S., Kruks-Wisner, G., & Mangla, A. (2022) Policing in patriarchy: An experimental evaluation of reforms to improve police responsiveness to women in India. *Science*, 377(6602), 191–198.
- Supreme Court of India. (2018) *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.
- Tata Institute of Social Sciences. (2013) [Special Cell for Women and Children: The spirit and strategies to meet the challenges](#). Special Cells for Women and Children & Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence Against Women.
- [The Drive Partnership](#).
- UK Parliament (2025) *Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill*.
- UK Parliament. House of Commons. (2024). *Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill*.
- Watson (2017) Domestic abuse and child protection: women’s experience of social work intervention, *IRISS Insight* 36.
- Westmarland, N., & Kelly, L. (2015) *Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes: Steps Towards Change: Project Mirabal Final Report*. London Metropolitan University and Durham University.

Resources

- Coaction Hub (2025) Rethinking Risk Beyond the Checklist
- Faith and Violence against Women and Girls Coalition (2023), The Role of Faith Leaders; Gate Openers or Gate Closers in Ending Violence against Women and Girls?
- Government of United Kingdom (2024), Domestic Abuse Act 2021: overarching factsheet
- Government of United Kingdom (2024), Draft domestic homicide review statutory guidance
- Refuge, National Domestic Abuse Helpline
- SafeLives (2019), Learning the lessons from Domestic Homicide Reviews
- SafeLives, Dash risk checklist, Dash-risk-checklist-quick-start-guidance.doc
- SafeLives, What is a MARAC?
- Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (2020), In Search of Excellence: A refreshed guide to effective domestic abuse partnership work – The Coordinated Community Response (CCR)
- Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence Against Women (RCI-VAW)
- Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Special Cell for Women and Children: Maharashtra
- Women's Aid, Domestic abuse, the facts
- Women's Aid, resources and reports
- Women's Aid, The Survivor's Handbook



**Coaction Hub & Tata Institute of Social Sciences,
Mumbai**