

# **COACTION HUB DARDR PROGRAMME LEARNINGS: WHAT DO DARDRS TELL US ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK AND MINORITISED VICTIMS?**

## Introduction:

The Coaction Hub is a partnership between AWRC and Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) which aims to strengthen the Co-ordinated Community Response (CCR) to improve responses to Black and minoritised survivors of domestic abuse and harmful practices. The project critically examines aspects of the CCR, such as MARAC, Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs) (formerly DHRs) and risk assessment to determine their effectiveness, and explores alternative options.

One of the key components of the project is the DARDR programme, which aims to increase the participation of Black and minoritized women and 'by and for' agencies in DARDRs, via chair mentorship and expert panel member workshops. Currently, by and for agencies, and Black and minoritized women in general are underrepresented as DARDR chairs and on panels, and this project aims to support these agencies and individuals to share their expertise within the DARDR arena. As part of this project we have researched whether Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews adequately consider how race and faith impact on the experiences of domestic abuse victims and survivors. This research has informed other aspects of the programme.

## Context:

The purpose of a DARDR is to highlight lessons to be learned following a domestic homicide, improve service and multi-agency responses to victims, and contribute to our understanding of domestic abuse. The Home Office multi-agency DARDR guidance states that a review should '*articulate the life through the eyes of the victim (and their children)* [1]'. In order for this to occur, the panel needs to take an intersectional approach to the review, understanding both the barriers that may exist for all victims as well as those unique to the specific victim. Consideration should be given to how the protected characteristics of the victim, as well as other needs such as substance misuse, mental health, immigration status, care leaving status, and homelessness intersected with each other and what this meant for the victim's help seeking journey. These lessons are then used to action plan to create improved responses to future victims. An understanding of the perpetrator's experiences is also necessary to examine whether agencies could have intervened to prevent the homicide.

[1] Home office (2016) Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80be88e5274a2e87dbb923/DHR-Statutory-Guidance-161206.pdf>

## The Research:

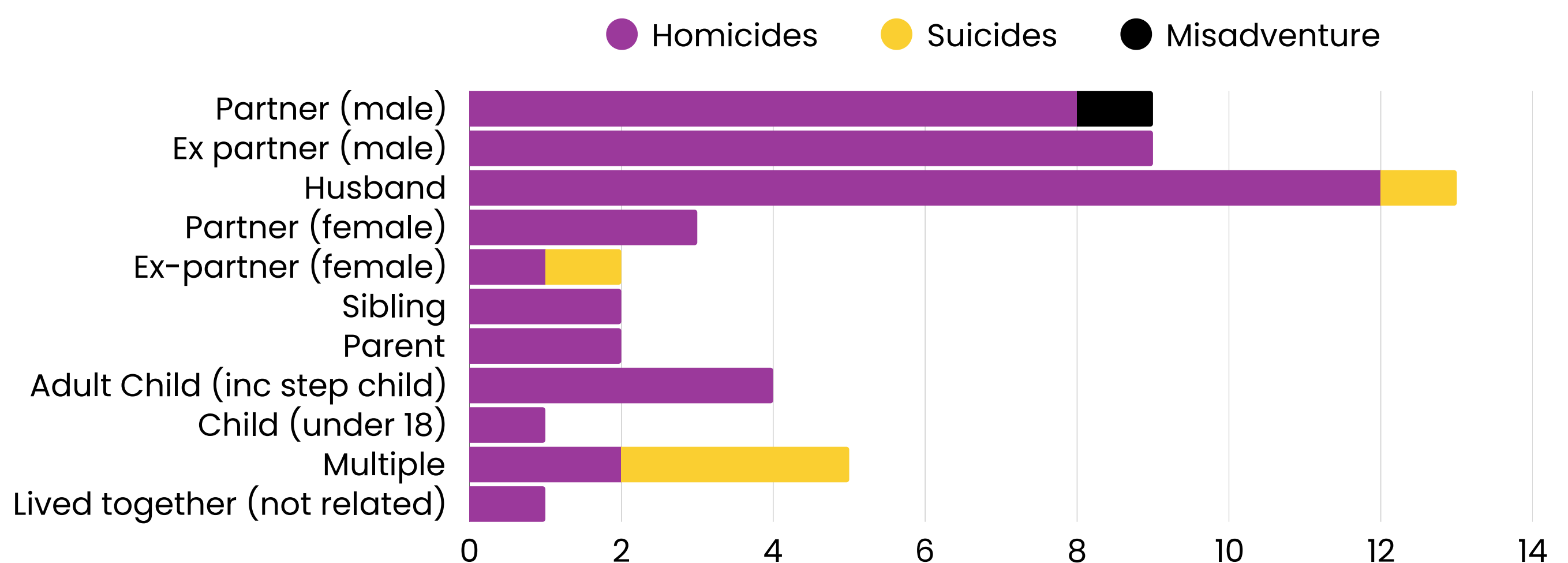
As part of this work we examined 50 DARDs where either the victim or the perpetrator (or both) were identified as being racially minoritized. We were particularly interested in whether there were expert panel members included on review panels, but also the processes of the DARD, including the way in which equality and diversity issues were examined throughout the report.

## Methodology:

We used the home office repository to search for relevant DARDs, applying the filter 'Minority Communities (victim and/or perpetrator)'. This provided 118 cases. After filtering out cases which had insufficient information, 50 cases were chosen at random. Demographic information was extracted from each report, as well as pertinent information including whether there was an expert panel member on the review panel, an equality and diversity section, relevant questions in the terms of reference, and whether the panel had concluded that ethnicity was a barrier to the victim's help seeking.

## Overview:

The 50 cases were made up of 88% homicides, 10% suicides and 2% death by misadventure[2]. A breakdown of these cases in reference to perpetrators can be found below. Multiple perpetrators included a combination of relatives (brother and father, uncle and aunt) and a partner and additional perpetrators (partner and sons, partner and friends).



[2] Death by misadventure is the recorded manner of death for an accidental death caused by a risk taken voluntarily. In the case of domestic abuse there may questions over whether coercive control contributed to the death.

**Demographic Information**

**Sex and Gender:**

The majority of the victims were female (82%) of which one victim was a trans woman. The majority of perpetrators were male (83%). This is similar to national figures for all DARDs.[3]

**Ethnicity:**

Victims were identified as being from 17 different ethnic backgrounds. This included 9 cases where the victim was White British but the perpetrator was from a racially minoritised community. Perpetrators were from 19 different ethnicities, including 9 cases where the perpetrator was White British and the victim from a racially minoritised community.

Ethnicity	Victim	Perpetrator
Black African	8	8
Black Caribbean	3	7
Black British	5	5
Asian Indian	4	5
Asian Pakistani	5	6
Asian Bangladeshi	0	1
Asian Sri Lankan	1	1
Asian Afghan	1	1
Asian Vietnamese	1	1

[3] Home Office (2024) Key Findings from Analysis of Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews: September 2021 to October 2022. Available at : [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-findings-from-analysis-of-domestic-homicide-reviews/key-findings-from-analysis-of-domestic-homicide-reviews-september-2021-to-october-2022-accessible#:~:text=79%25%20were%20female%20and%2021,\(86%25%20and%2088%25\).](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-findings-from-analysis-of-domestic-homicide-reviews/key-findings-from-analysis-of-domestic-homicide-reviews-september-2021-to-october-2022-accessible#:~:text=79%25%20were%20female%20and%2021,(86%25%20and%2088%25).)

Ethnicity	Victim	Perpetrator
Asian Chinese	2	0
Asian (not specified)	3	1
Middle Eastern	1	1
White British	9	9
White European	2	0
Gypsy, Roma or Traveller	2	1
Dual Heritage: White and Black	1	0
Dual Heritage: White and Black Caribbean	0	1
Dual Heritage: Asian and White	1	1
Mexican	1	1
North African	0	1
Dual heritage (not specified)	0	2



Whilst we have been as accurate as possible with these categories, in some cases the ethnicity of the victim or perpetrator was unclear. For example, where the exact ethnicity was not identified beyond referring to someone as 'dual heritage' or 'Asian'. Several of the cases we looked at where the victim or perpetrator was from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community were particularly difficult to ascertain, with confusion between these ethnicities making it difficult to understand the individuals actual identity. This may reflect a lack of professional curiosity by professionals in these cases.

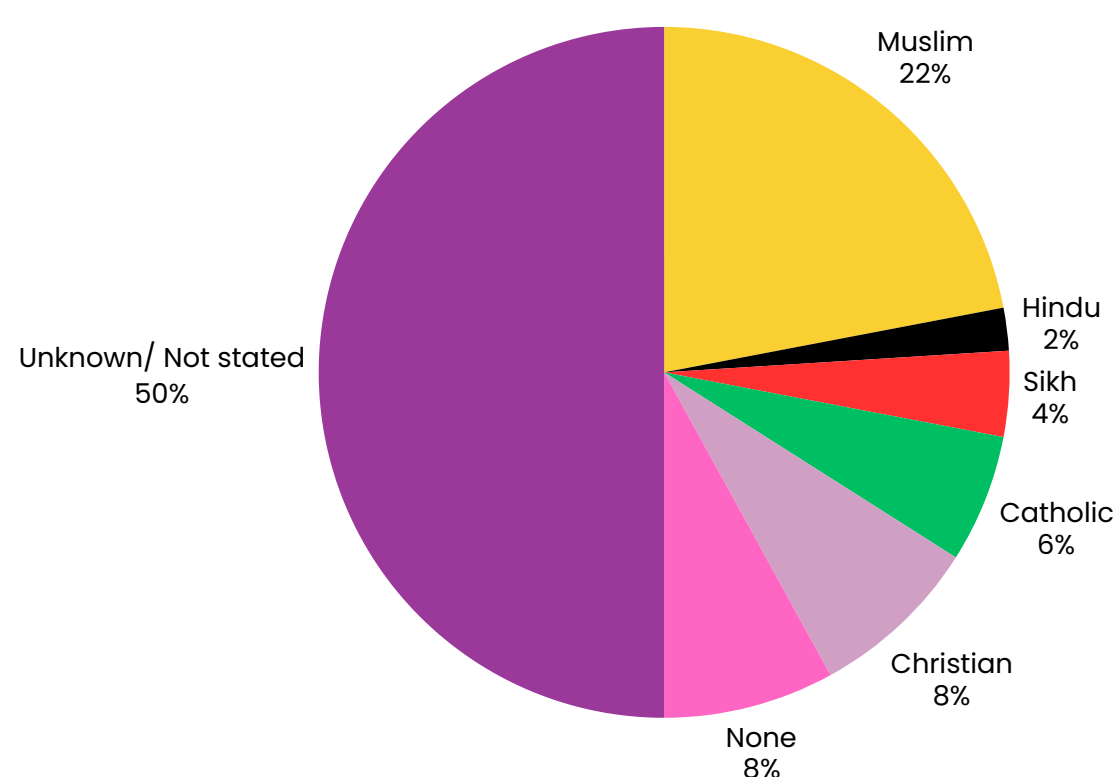
### **Religion:**

The 2021 England and Wales census found that 57% of the population identified themselves as having a religion. At the time of this research the Home Office DARDR repository held 538 cases, of which only 65 victims (12%) were identified as having a religion, and in 84% of cases this was unknown. This suggests that either agencies are not asking victims of domestic abuse about their religion, illustrating a gap in the way in which services respond to victims of domestic abuse, or DARDR panels are not exploring this. The Faith and VAWG Coalition has highlighted the need for a greater understanding of the way in which faith can be both a source of strength for survivors, and a tool used by perpetrators to abuse[4]. Therefore asking victims about faith can support risk assessment and support planning, identify unexplored barriers and illuminate forms of abuse such as spiritual abuse.

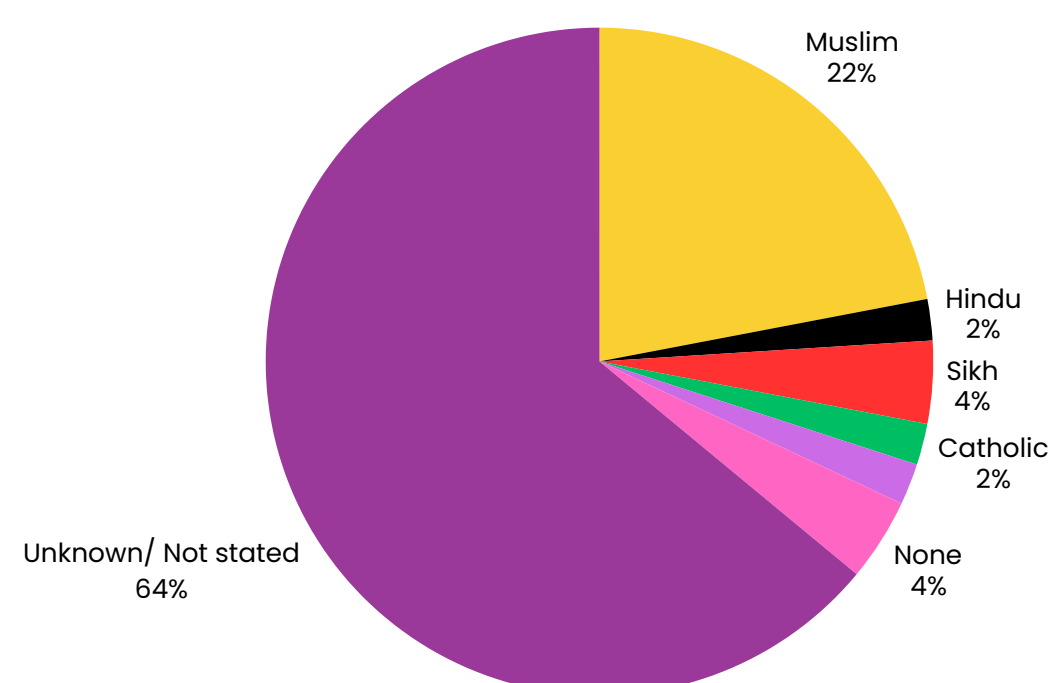
Within our sample group of 50 cases the awareness of victim's religion was much higher, with their faith being known in 50% of cases. The religion of perpetrators was also known in 36% of cases. Of the cases where religion was known, Muslims were identified in much higher numbers than other faiths. This could speak to the racialisation of faith, and alongside this, the invisibility of the faith of white victims. Alternatively it could suggest that victims from racially minoritized communities were more likely to identify their faith to services or, particularly in the case of Muslims, they were more visibly identified as having a faith.

[4] Keeping the Faith: What Survivors From Faith Communities Want Us to Know (2021) Available at: <https://faithandvawg.contentfiles.net/media/documents/KeepingtheFaithFINAL.pdf>

## Victim's Religion



## Perpetrator's religion



## Immigration and Language Issues:

Immigration issues were identified as a factor in 20% of the 50 cases. However, it was not always clear what the immigration status of the victim was, and how this intersected with the domestic abuse occurring. In addition, in 8% of cases there had previously been immigration issues, but it was unknown whether these had been a factor in the domestic abuse. For example, where the victim had come to the UK on a spousal visa but had now received indefinite leave to remain or residency. In 22% of cases it was either unclear or unknown whether there were immigration issues. Language barriers were identified in 22% of cases, although this was unknown in a further 6%.

## Equality and Diversity Issues

### Equality and Diversity Section:

68% of the DARDs in this research included a specific section on equality and diversity issues. In 2016 the home office published DHR Guidance which included an emphasis on the importance of the panel considering the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act (2010). The guidance included an overview report template breaking down the relevant areas, including an equality and diversity section. DARDs examined in this research included reviews which took place prior to this guidance, but in some instances this section existed under another name.

The approach to this section varied between reports. Ways this was addressed in the DARDs included:

- No equality and diversity section at all, and little reference to this throughout the report
- An equality and diversity section which went through the nine protected characteristics and noted which were applicable but with no examination of the relevance of this to the victim or perpetrator's experiences
- An exploration of the nine protected characteristics and other relevant factors e.g. substance misuse, immigration issues etc
- Use of research to illustrate why particular characteristics might be relevant but without relating this to the specific victim or perpetrator
- Use of research which directly illustrated the experiences or possible experiences of the victim or perpetrator

In addition, some reviews focused on equality and diversity issues solely in this section of the report, whilst others used this as a starting point to explore issues throughout.

### **Scope of the Review – Relevant Questions:**

The home office guidance provides key questions to be considered when determining the scope of the review including:

*Are there any specific considerations around equality and diversity issues such as age, disability (including learning disabilities), gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation that may require special consideration? [6]*

70% of the reviews we examined included a relevant question relating to race. 31% of these were either the question outlined above, or a similarly generic question relating to all protected characteristics, 45% were specifically around race, culture, faith and/or language and 23% were specific to the victim and/ or perpetrator in the case. The fact that almost a third of DARDs did not appear to consider race a key factor despite the victim and/ or perpetrator being from a racially minoritized community is concerning, and raises questions as to whether this was considered in the context of barriers to help seeking.

[6] Home office (2016) Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80be88e5274a2e87dbb923/DHR-Statutory-Guidance-161206.pdf>



Whilst a DARDR can consider the relevance of a victim's race without a specific question, it is much less likely that this is given prominence. There is a risk that without this, race, alongside other protected characteristics is seen as an element to be explored solely within the Equality and Diversity section, as opposed to throughout the review. This suggests a lack of professional curiosity on the part of the panel and chair.

The Imkaan and the Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) report *Life or Death: Preventing Homicides and Suicides of Black and Minoritised Women*<sup>[7]</sup> sets out in detail the barriers that Black and minoritised women subject to domestic abuse experience in addition to those experienced by all victims. This includes barriers to reporting abuse and failures by state agencies which make them less likely to report again. It would be advantageous for this report to be required reading for DARDR chairs and panels where the victim was from a racially minoritised community.

### **Inclusion of Expert Panel Members:**

The Home Office 2016 guidance states that as part of the scope of a DARDR the following should be considered:

*Should an expert be consulted to help understand crucial aspects of the homicide? For example, a representative from a specialist BME, LGBT or disability organisation.*

Despite the fact that all of the cases we looked at could have included the expertise of a specialist organisation around race and/ or faith issues, 42% of reviews had no input from an expert panel member. There was only one case of an expert being utilised where the perpetrator was from a racially minoritised community and the victim was White British or White European. The inclusion of an expert panel member was less likely prior to the home office guidance.

[7] *Life or Death? Preventing Domestic Homicides and Suicides of Black and Minoritised Women* (2023) Imkaan and the Centre for Women's Justice Available at:  
<https://www.imkaan.org.uk/updates/2022/525apx0ic5yyqalsvvj6ixuy0m4qm7-7wmtip>

Of those cases that had an expert involved, they comprised of the following:

- 13** Specialist by and for agencies
- 3** Religious leaders
- 2** 'BME Forums'
- 4** BME Agencies' (non VAWG experts)
- 1** 'Prominent community member'
- 5** Leads within a statutory service e.g. 'equality and diversity lead'
- 2** Modern slavery experts
- 1** Expert within a generic VAWG agency

It was not always clear the level of involvement of these expert panel members, for example one review stated that they 'took advice from' the relevant organisation. Some authors made clear that the expert was only involved for part of the review, either because they did not have capacity to be involved throughout, or they were brought in to brief the panel on particular topics rather than being a panel member. Guidance co-produced between the Coaction Hub and specialist by and for agencies further illustrates the issues these agencies experience.

The research by Imkaan and the CWJ referenced above clearly highlights the importance of specialist VAWG ending by and for agencies on Domestic Abuse Related Death Review panels, and we agree on the need for an expert on all DARDR panels involving Black and minoritized women[8]. We would also suggest that this is considered where the perpetrator was from a racially minoritized community, even if the victim was not. This is to support the panels understanding of cultural nuances, such as barriers to perpetrator's help seeking and issues such as victims reluctance to report the abuse for fear of the perpetrator being subject to racist treatment.

### **Were Race, Faith and Culture Seen as Prominent Factors?**

In more than half of cases (52%) the race, culture and faith of the victim was not seen as a prominent factor within the review, and often race and other protected characteristics were explored only in a superficial manner. In a number of cases participating agencies were asked to self-report as part of their Individual Management Reviews (IMRs), with questions such as whether their agencies discriminated against the victim or perpetrator on the grounds of race, or asked to comment on the protected characteristics of the victim.

[8] Life or Death? Preventing Domestic Homicides and Suicides of Black and Minoritised Women (2023) Imkaan and the Centre for Women's Justice Available at:  
<https://www.imkaan.org.uk/updates/2022/525apx0ic5yyqalsvvj6ixuy0m4qm7-7wmtip>



In some cases responses appeared to be limited, and agencies concluded that no discrimination had taken place. In many instances these responses appear not to have been interrogated by the chair or panel. This echoes research by Chantler et al (2023) who found:

*There is wide disparity in the extent to which the DHR panels challenge the narratives provided by agencies. In some reports, missed opportunities regarding equality matters are downplayed or the narrative provided is accepted at face value[9]*

The Home Office guidance states that ‘reviews should not simply examine the conduct of professionals and agencies. Reviews should illuminate the past to make the future safer’ [10]. However, in many cases the focus was merely on whether agencies actively discriminated against the victim, rather than having a deeper examination of their experiences. In many of these cases it was concluded that there were no additional barriers to help seeking. This type of approach fails to understand the experiences of victims and perpetrators from racialised communities and the systemic barriers they face in accessing support.

Typical statements included:

*There is no indication that [victim] or [perpetrator] had any difficulty in accessing appropriate services for their needs.*

*X’s heritage did not preclude him from asking for or receiving services. His first language was English, and he never needed an interpreter.*

More than one report suggested that the victim did not report to the police in part because they did not want to get their partner ‘into trouble’ but did not reflect on how this might be specifically relevant when the perpetrator was from a racially minoritised community.

These quotes suggest a simplistic approach to understanding the complexity of experiences for domestic abuse victims and perpetrators from racialised communities which go beyond whether they are able to speak English or are aware of local services.

[9] Chantler et al (2023) An Analysis of Minoritisation in Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews in England and Wales

[10] Home office (2016) Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80be88e5274a2e87dbb923/DHR-Statutory-Guidance-161206.pdf>

This is concerning given that DARDR findings should lead to learning lessons and actions which improve safety for future victims. Without an in depth understanding of victim's experiences, changes to policy and practice are unlikely, meaning that victims will continue to experience the same failings.

36% of reviews did conclude that race, faith or culture was a prominent factor in victim's experiences of domestic abuse and their access to services. Some clearly identified that agencies failed to understand barriers experienced by the victim e.g.

*. . . . there was a lack of recognition by some agencies of the cultural pressures that [the victim] faced in trying to leave an abusive relationship. Overall, there may have been a reticence on the part of some professionals in enquiring into the dynamics of a British Pakistani family due to a lack of understanding of issues of race, culture and religion.*

Taking a simplistic approach to exploring whether race, culture and faith were prominent factors in the experiences of the victim and perpetrator, means that we do not 'articulate the life through the eyes of the victim' and are less likely to learn lessons from the review. The fact that many DARDR panels fail to explore the intersection of victim's experiences from racially minoritized backgrounds illustrates the need for expert panel members from specialist VAWG agencies to sit on DARDR panels.

### **Conclusion:**

This research illustrates that many Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews have a concerning lack of understanding of Black and minoritized victims experiences. Given that the aim of DARDRs is to learn lessons from domestic homicide and domestic abuse related deaths, this suggests that we are currently failing to do this. The Home Office guidance states that one of the aims of a DARDR is to '*prevent domestic violence and homicide and improve service responses for **all** domestic violence and abuse victims and their children*' (emphasis my own). We therefore need to ensure that there is a greater understanding of the experiences, barriers and help seeking patterns of Black and minoritised victims in order to ensure that we learn lessons from these reviews. The most appropriate way to do this is through the expertise of specialist VAWG ending by and for agencies sitting on review panels as expert panel members. These agencies can bring an intersectional feminist lens to the role, often absent from DARDRs.

[6] Home office (2016) Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80be88e5274a2e87dbb923/DHR-Statutory-Guidance-161206.pdf>



They can also provide training and expertise to DARDR chairs outside a specific case. For example, the DARDR team at STADA have previously commissioned experts to present to their DARDR associate chairs on areas such as faith and the sex industry.

However, as this research shows, a high number of reviews do not include expert panel members, and it is often fulfilled by non VAWG experts. In addition, when specialist agencies are deployed they are not always able to dedicate the necessary time to the role due to lack of capacity. We support Imkaan and the CWJ in calling for guidance from the home office stating that DARDRs involving Black and minoritized women require expert panel members from a by and for agency with domestic abuse expertise. This role needs to be adequately funded and recognition given to the expertise of this role.

**Recommendations for DARDR panels and chairs where the victim and/ or perpetrator is from a racially minoritised community:**

- Race, alongside other protected characteristics and the intersection of these characteristics and other needs and vulnerabilities need to be considered throughout the DARDR, not just in the Equality and Diversity section
- All DARDRs need to include specific questions in the terms of reference which explore the intersection of race, help seeking, domestic abuse and other protected characteristics and needs
- All panels and chairs to scrutinise, and where necessary challenge, IMR responses to specific questions in the terms of reference on race and the intersection with domestic abuse and other protected characteristics and needs
- Imkaan and CWJ Life and Death report to be considered required reading for all chair and panel members
- Expert panel members from ending VAWG by and for organisations to be included on all panels and to be adequately compensated for their expertise