Briefing: Why Domestic Homicide Reviews/Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews are failing Black and minoritised women.

Key Findings and Recommendations from Coaction Hub

Coaction Hub: July 2026



“We welcome this briefing’s call for greater recognition of, and meaningful involvement from, specialist by-and-for organisations and Expert Panel Members throughout the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) process. In particular, we recognise the important role that specialist Black and minoritised by-and-for organisations play in supporting effective, equitable and culturally informed reviews.

Our own work, including a developing project in partnership with a specialist by-and-for organisation, is exploring the barriers faced by Black and minoritised families when engaging with DHR processes following a domestic abuse-related death. Our work highlights the value of embedding culturally informed expertise throughout the DHR process to support genuine family participation, strengthen analysis and learning and ensure that reviews better reflect the experiences and needs of diverse communities.

We have seen first-hand how this expertise can help build trust with families, improve engagement and enable reviews to more effectively capture and learn from their experiences. We therefore support measures to ensure that specialist by-and-for organisations and Expert Panel Members are consistently involved throughout the review process, with their expertise recognised as integral to effective practice, accountability and learning.”

- Frank Mullane MBE
CEO of Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA)

Contents

- Overview
- DHRs/DARDRs
- Key Findings from Coaction Hub Research: Learning from Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews
- Feedback from Sector Partners
- Recommendations from Expert Panel Members
- Recommendations from Domestic Homicide Review Chairs
- National Context and Policy Opportunity
- Coaction Hub Recommendations
- Appendix
- References
- Bibliography

Overview:

This briefing has been developed by the Coaction Hub, a project based on equitable partnership between Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) and AWRC (Asian Women's Resource Centre.)

It reflects research undertaken that demonstrates the overrepresentation of Black and minoritised victims in Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)/Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs), but the underrepresentation of Black and minoritised expert panel members and DHR/DARDR chairs. As a result, DHRs/DARDRs are consistently failing to appropriately reflect experiences of Black and minoritised victims and develop appropriate and culturally informed recommendations to prevent future deaths.

DHRs and DARDRs are intended to identify learning to prevent future deaths. However, evidence from Coaction Hub demonstrates that reviews frequently fail to recognise the impact of racism, culture, faith, immigration status, and other intersecting inequalities on victims' experiences, resulting in missed opportunities for meaningful learning and systemic change. This highlights the need for meaningful involvement of specialist by and for organisations and Expert Panel Members throughout the review process. Their expertise can strengthen analysis, identify systemic barriers and lead to better recommendations to help prevent future deaths.

It is intended to inform the **Home Office's current update to the Domestic Homicide Review/Domestic Abuse Related Death Review Statutory Guidance**, as well as the **Government's commitment to deliver *The Home Office Oversight Mechanism*** for recommendations made in Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews.

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)/Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs)

Since 2011 Community Safety Partnership (CSPs) have had a statutory duty to carry out a DHR/DARDR following a domestic abuse related death.

The purpose of a DHR/DARDR is to:

- Recognise the victim and understand their experience and the circumstances that lead to their death.
- Develop recommendations to address system and agency failures that may have prevented a domestic abuse related death.
- Bring agencies together to create a more cohesive co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse improve responses to victims.
- Provide some resolution and solace to the family.

Key Findings from Coaction Hub Research: Learning from Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews

Building on research undertaken by the Centre for Women's Justice and Imkaan [1], Coaction Hub's research on domestic abuse related deaths has also demonstrated that DHR/DARDRs are currently missing critical opportunities to learn from the deaths of Black and minoritised victims; because race, faith, culture, and structural inequalities are too often treated as peripheral rather than central to understanding domestic abuse and preventing future harm.[2]

Race, Faith and Culture are not embedded in reviews and structural barriers are ignored

More than half of reviews (52%) did not identify race, culture or faith as a significant factor, and these issues were often considered only superficially or confined to equality and diversity sections rather than being explored throughout the review.[2]
The research found that important factors such as faith, immigration status and language barriers were frequently under-recorded or insufficiently analysed. ***While 70% of reviews included some reference to race within their terms of reference, almost one-third did not, despite involving individuals from racially minoritised communities. [2]***

Lack of specialist expertise

A further concern was the lack of specialist expertise within review panels. Forty-two per cent of reviews did not include an expert panel member, and where experts were involved, they were not always specialists in violence against women and girls (VAWG) or in supporting Black and minoritised communities.[2] This limited panels' ability to understand the cultural, structural, and systemic barriers that can affect victims' help-seeking experiences and access to support.

Expert panel members (EPMs) are crucial to understanding the experiences of victims, including the barriers they may have faced in seeking support. [Please see Appendix for more detail on expert panel members].

However, research by IMKAAN and CWJ found that only 35% of relevant cases had a by and for agency on the panel as an expert panel member, and that in many cases 'cultural experts' sitting on panels had no background in domestic abuse or VAWG.[1]

Feedback from Sector Partners

In addition to reviewing DHRs/DARDRs, we have also consulted our network of EPMs and DHR/DARDR chairs and surveyed them about their experience working as part of DHR/DARDR panels.

We were particularly interested in how DHR/DARDR panels reflected and understood the experiences of Black and minoritised women, what work was undertaken by CSPs (Community Safety Partnerships) to ensure that the commissioning of DHRs/DARDRs is intersectional, what meaningful engagement DHR/DARDR panels had with EPMs and whether training and guidance appropriately facilitated intersectional and equitable delivery of DHRs/DARDRs.

Their responses reflected the same barriers and issues, identified within research:

- Panels have limited understanding of the cultural, structural and systemic barriers faced by Black and minoritised communities.
- Racism, misogyny and power imbalances create barriers to the meaningful involvement of expert panel members, particularly those from by and for agencies, despite their specialist knowledge.
- DHRs/DARDRs are not appropriately reflecting the identity and cultural background, or the barriers that they may have prevented them accessing appropriate support. As a result, DHRs/DARDRs are failing to develop recommendations that can meaningfully address the failings and structural barriers that lead to a victim's death.

Recommendations from Expert Panel Members:

Centre the Victim's Lived Experience

DHRs/DARDRs should:

- Reconstruct the victim's lived experience through multiple sources of evidence (detailed chronologies, records of agency contact, and information provided by family members and friends)
- Focus on understanding the victim's experiences, not just agency actions.
- Consider whether the victim felt heard, believed, supported and safe.
- Identify missed safeguarding opportunities and understand how services were experienced.

Domestic Homicide Review Expert Panel Members noted:

> "Reviews should refer to the victim by name and demonstrate genuine interest in who they were as a person, including how they lived, their aspirations, relationships, and experiences. This approach reinforces the humanity of the victim and prevents reviews from becoming solely procedural exercises."

> "DHRs should not solely focus on whether agencies followed procedures or completed risk assessments. Reviews should also consider how professional interventions were experienced by the victim, including whether the victim felt heard, believed, supported, or safe."

Promote Accountability and Specialist Expertise

DHRs/DARDRs should maintain a clear focus on perpetrator accountability, while drawing on specialist expertise to strengthen understanding of risk, culture and context. DHRs/DARDRs must:

- Identify and hold perpetrators accountable within the review process, but exclude perpetrators from participation in the review.
- Routinely involve Black and minoritised 'by and for' agencies in relavent DHRs/DARDRs.
- Focus on understanding how perpetrator actions created risk and how agencies responded to those risks.
- Ensure panel members, Chairs, and report authors demonstrate cultural competence and are willing to examine systemic bias and institutional failings.

As one Expert Panel Member observed:

> "Specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) can provide culturally informed advocacy, contextual understanding, and identify missed opportunities that mainstream agencies may overlook."

- Domestic Homicide Review Expert Panel Member

Strengthen understanding of risk and abuse dynamics

DHRs/DARDRs should:

- Compare professional risk assessments with the victim's perception of risk.
- Recognise victim's knowledge of perpetrator behaviour and escalation patterns.
- Give specific attention to coercive control, fear, Honour Based Absue, and harmful practices
- Examine how dynamics influence help seeking and perceived 'non engagement'.

An Expert Panel Member highlighted that:

> "Although Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) services generally operate with positive intentions and safeguarding objectives, there are cases where the victim's voice is misrepresented or inadequately captured. The DASH risk assessment tool does not always identify the full range of risks present in HBA and harmful practices cases."

Improve communication and access:

Independent language and advocacy support is essential to ensuring victim and family member's experiences are accurately understood and represented.

DHRs/DARDRs should:

- Use independent professionally trained interpreters where language support is required
- Provide access to independent advocates throughout the review process.
- Avoid using family members or community members as interpreters.

As highlighted by an Expert Panel Member:

> "The use of family members or community interpreters can significantly compromise disclosure, confidentiality, and the accurate recording of victims' emotions, fears, and wishes."

Embed intersectionality throughout the review process

DHRs/DARDRs should:

- Deliver an intersectional analysis, not as an additional consideration, but as a core framework for understanding the victim's life.
- Examine how factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, migration status, disability, and socioeconomic circumstances shape victims' experiences, access to support, and interactions with agencies
- Engage families and communities is essential for this process, recognising them as holders of insight rather than just contributors of information.
- Ensure the experiences of Black and minoritised communities, whose experiences of systemic barriers, racism, mistrust of services and cultural context are often insufficiently explored.

One Expert Panel Member commented:

> "The victim's voice is too often diluted, reconstructed, or interpreted through a professional lens that does not fully account for intersectionality, race, culture, or heritage.
> While DHRs and DARDRs aim to centre the victim, the reality is that the narrative is frequently shaped by agency records rather than by a deep understanding of the victim's lived experience.
>
> For Black victims and those from minoritised communities, this gap is even more pronounced. Cultural context, systemic barriers, mistrust of services, and experiences of racism are often underexplored or treated as peripheral rather than central to understanding risk, vulnerability, and help-seeking behaviour. As a result, the victim can become invisible within the very process designed to learn from their life and death."
>
> -Domestic Homicide Review Expert Panel Member

Recommendations from Domestic Homicide Review Chairs:

Strengthen the development and support of DHR/DARDR chairs

DHR/DARDR chairs should be required to and provided access to:

- Ongoing professional development and training.
- Independent professional supervision and reflective practice for Chairs and authors.
- Identify and address personal development needs throughout their appointment.
- Actively engage with local networks, community organisations and multi-agency partnerships to inform reviews.

> "There should be an expectation of commissioning CSPs that the chair and author is receiving independent professional supervision and support and that areas for personal development are identified and worked upon."

Embed meaningful family engagement

DHR/DARDR processes should ensure:

- Every DHR/DARDR has a dedicated panel meeting just with the CSP and the family of the loved ones.
- Engage families early and throughout the review process.
- Recognise families as key holders of information, insight, and expertise regarding the victim's lived experience.
- Ensure family contributions meaningfully influence analysis, findings and recommendations.

Involve specialist VAWG organisations from the outset

- The role and equitable involvement of VAWG sector organisations should be considered from the earliest stage of a DHR/DARDR, with appropriate compensation.
- Dedicated funding should be allocated within CSP budgets to support specialist sector involvement.
- Specialist organisations should be appropriately compensated for their expertise and contribution.
- VAWG sector perspectives should be embedded within review planning, analysis and learning.

DHR chairs noted:

> "There should be an expectation at the scoping phase that if there is a requirement for support from VAWG organisations that the CSP factors in a budget for the cost of that expertise."

> "There should be written memorandums of understanding between these sectors to ensure they can effectively engage in these processes.
> These can set out the parameters of information sharing.
> These sectors can offer a different perspective and insight and should be engaged through the whole process."

National Context and Policy Opportunity

The findings from the Coaction Hub research into what DHRs/DARDRs tells us about the experiences of Black and minoritised victims [2] align closely with concerns recently raised by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, with both calling for a stronger focus on the victim's lived experience, better use of specialist expertise, the importance of intersectionality. Both advocate for systemic, not individual responses.

The Commissioner's 2025 Report, *'Learning from Loss: Ensuring the lessons from domestic homicide reviews lead to change' [3],* highlights wider systemic issues in accountablity, implementation and resourcing that must be addressed if DHRs/DARDRs are to deliver meaningful change.

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office's *'Learning from Loss'* report made three recommendations to the UK Government:

1. Funding for the continued piloting and national roll-out of the Domestic Abuse Related Deaths Accountability and Oversight Mechanism.

2. Improving the Government's response to and implementation of its own recommendations from DHRs/DARDRs

a. Respond immediately upon receipt of a DHRs/DARDRs recommendation, with each individual Government department taking clear responsibility for implementation of any recommendations made to them.

b. Share updates on implementation of their DHRs/DARDRs recommendations with CSPs directly, promptly, and transparently.

National Context and Policy Opportunity cont.

3. Improving capacity and resourcing to deliver DHRs/DARDRs locally. The Home Office provides dedicated funding to local areas for DHRs, which should include costs related but not limited to the costs of:

a. Chairs and authors

b. Expert panel members

c. Specialist service engagement (as experts) including 'by and for' services

d.. Coordination, management, and governance of reviews

e. Support for families to engage with the process

f. Dissemination of learning

Coaction Hub Recommendations:

Embed an Intersectional and Anti-racist Approach:

- An intersectional and anti-racist approach should be embedded throughout the DHR/DARDR process, ensuring race, faith, other protected characteristics, needs, and vulnerabilities are considered at every stage of the review.

Strengthen Statutory Guidance:

- DHR/DARDR guidance should include specific considerations to the role of faith, culture, and race, and how these elements can intersect and compound a victim's experience of support, and the barriers to support.

- DHR/DARDR guidance should specify that Expert Panel Members sitting on DHR/DARDR panels must not only have expertise regarding the role of faith, culture, and race, but also have an in-depth understanding of VAWG, and VAWG as an intersecting factor.

- All DHRs/DARDRs need to include specific questions in the terms of reference which explore the intersection of race, help seeking behaviour, cultural barriers, faith related barriers, experiences of discrimination, domestic abuse and intersections with other protected characteristics and needs.

- All panels and chairs to scrutinise, and where necessary challenge, Individual Management Review (IMR) responses to specific questions in the terms of reference on race and the intersection with domestic abuse and other protected characteristics and needs.

Strengthen Statutory Guidance:

- Training for DHR/DARDR chairs should explore topics of race, culture, faith, and the importance of expert panel members with expertise in VAWG and intersecting factors.

- Training for DHR/DARDR chairs on faith, culture, harmful practices should be developed and delivered by 'by and for' organisations offering specialised support in these areas.

- Additionally, we recommend specific consideration and training on Harmful Practices should be included in all training for DARDR chairs.

- Additionally, we recommend specific consideration and training on how faith can impact victims' experiences, and their experiences of VAWG.

- EPMs from ending VAWG 'by and for' organisations should be included on all panels and adequately compensated for their expertise.

Strengthen Quality Assurance:

- The new DHR Quality Assurance (QA) Board should include training on the importance of expert panel members with expertise in VAWG and intersecting factors.
    - Additionally, any review of previous DARDRs should include specific consideration of the role of expert panel members.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Expert Panel Members

Coaction Hub, The Role Of Expert Panel Members In Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs): Guidance For By And For Agencies, (2024).

In 2024, the Coaction Hub published 'The Role Of Expert Panel Members In Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs): Guidance For By And For Agencies'.

This guidance sets out a framework for the 'By and For' agencies to meaningfully engage with Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)/Domestic Abuse-Related Death Reviews.

The Coaction Hub's guidance cites the Home Office's Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews (2016):

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

Appendix

Appendix 1 cont.

The Coaction Guidance also sets out what an expert panel member can provide to a DHR/DARDR panel:

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

References

1. Almkaan and Centre for Women's Justice, Life or Death? Domestic Homicides of Black and Minoritised Women, (2023).

2. Coaction Hub, DARDR Programme Learning: What do DARDRs tell us about the experiences of Black and minoritised victims?, (2024).

3. Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 'Learning from Loss: Systemic Issues in accountability, implementation and resourcing that must be addressed if DARDRs are to deliver meaningful change (2025).

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