



Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Committee

Uncorrected oral evidence: Domestic Abuse Act post-legislative scrutiny

Thursday 23 April 2026

10.40 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (The Chair); Baroness Gerada; Baroness Gohir; Baroness Neate; Lord Polak; Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede; Baroness Rafferty; Lord Russell of Liverpool; Baroness Sugg.

Evidence Session No. 9

Heard in Public

Questions 74 – 84

Witnesses

I: Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss, Senior Lecturer in Law, Manchester Metropolitan University; Dr Hannana Siddiqui OBE, Director of Policy, Campaigns & Research, Southall Black Sisters; Ghadah Alnasseri, Executive Director, Imkaan.

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Examination of witnesses

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss, Dr Hannana Siddiqui and Ghadah Alnasseri.

Q74 **The Chair:** Welcome everyone to this public session of the Domestic Abuse Act review that is being conducted by this House of Lords committee. I would also like to welcome a number of witnesses who are attending today to give us the benefit of their expertise.

This is what is called post-legislative scrutiny. We are looking at a piece of legislation that was introduced in 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act, which was to really deal with the prevalence of and challenges there are to the legal system around dealing effectively and justly with domestic abuse. A lot of new learning went into the creation of that piece of legislation. What we are looking at is how effective it has been, what the impact has been, and whether there are any gaps that need to be filled.

I will start by introducing our panel. We have with us today Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss, known as Dr Maz. He is a senior lecturer in law at Manchester Metropolitan University. His research focuses on honour abuse and forced marriage and how this affects male victims, because men can be at the receiving end of this kind of abusive behaviour within families and communities too. We know that when it comes to domestic abuse, by and large it falls on the shoulders of women far more than men, numerically speaking, but we know that there are male victims too. It would be very interesting to hear from you about all that, Dr Maz. You have published a number of books, such as *Men, Masculinities and Honour-based Abuse*, on the whole issue of how that affects the Islamic community.

We also have with us—in body and soul—Dr Hannana Siddiqui, who is the director of policy, campaigns and research at Southall Black Sisters, a long-standing organisation founded in 1979. It is a charity that provides advocacy, legal support and national campaigning, grounded in an understanding of the experiences of the black migrant and other ethnic minority communities. Thank you for coming, Dr Siddiqui, and for bringing your expertise to this session.

We also have Dr Ghadah Alnasseri, the executive director of Imkaan, who has over two decades of expertise in domestic abuse, forced marriage and honour-based violence. Imkaan is the UK's only nationally-led black and minoritised feminist umbrella organisation dedicated to addressing violence against BAME—I hate that expression, personally—women and girls. Ghadah, thank you for coming and giving us the benefit of your experience, because you have an enormous amount of practice in this arena.

We are reviewing this piece of legislation to see whether it is working. I just wanted to have your views. I am sorry, I know that each of you could speak for an hour, but I cannot afford you that time. Please give me a sense of how this legislation is affecting the communities that you are most engaged with. Has it lived up to our hopes and expectations? If

not, why not and how can we do that? Please answer in three minutes or something; I am sorry to do this to you. Is it working? What are the things that are working? Where do you think perhaps some more effort or change is needed? I am going to come to you, Hannana, because you are sitting in the room, and we can then turn to our other guests.

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: The Domestic Abuse Act was very welcomed. The picture is mixed. It has raised awareness around domestic abuse and maintained the focus on the issue. However, given the time I have, I want to focus a bit on what was not in the Act that should have been in the Act because there was a lot of discussion about it during the parliamentary debates, which is around the issue of no recourse to public funds.

The Chair: You are going to have to explain for members of the public who might not be familiar with the meaning of that language.

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: If you are insecure in this country, you may be subject to a condition of no recourse to public funds, which basically means that you cannot claim most social security benefits or social housing from the council. Women who come in, often on a dependent spousal visa but also on other visas where they may be dependent on a violent partner, may be trapped in a violent relationship because the alternative would be that, if they left, they would have no recourse to public funds. That means that they cannot get housing from the local authority and they cannot get social security benefits.

They have this stark choice between domestic abuse and destitution. Some also have the stark choice between domestic abuse and deportation because they have insecure immigration status in the country. This prevents a lot of women from leaving abusive relationships—not only women but also their children. It may also force them back into an abusive relationship, if they are destitute or facing insecurity.

The Chair: I am going to ask you a question that might be in the minds of people who are listening: if a woman is here and has not yet established a permanence in this country but has come in a marriage and maybe has had a baby with her partner and has been subjected to abuse, surely the first thing they would want to do is to get back home to be with their own families, their own mothers, and their own people back in the place from which they have come. People often ask me, "Why would they not want to do that?" I think that you have an answer to that.

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: They are often not able to return. They have often come from cultures where it is not acceptable for women to separate from their husbands or families. They are accused of bringing shame and dishonour on to their families for doing so. If they return to their country of origin, they are subject to harassment and abuse, which ultimately can lead to honour killings and other forms of crimes against them. It is not really safe for them to go back. Usually, when they come here to join a partner or be with someone here, they are expecting to live

here. Their families have broken ties with them because, upon marriage, their cultural expectations are that they will be looked after by their husbands. Any kind of deviation from that means they can get rejected, ostracised, or even killed. A lot of the time, women do not have the option of returning.

Under the Domestic Abuse Act, the Government did not change the law. We asked for women, regardless of their immigration status, to have access to benefits, public funds, and the right to remain here in the UK. Those on spousal visas may have the right to remain here. They can now have the right to remain here if they can show domestic violence, but those on non-spousal visas still do not have the right. The access to public funds is still a problem for both groups because when they are entitled to public funds under the spousal visas it is limited to only three months. Many others do not have any rights at all, which means that they are facing total destitution.

The Government introduced a pilot scheme after the Act, called the Support for Migrant Victims scheme, which is funded by the Home Office and is provided nationally by Southall Black Sisters. However unfortunately, there is not sufficient funding. We do not have enough money to pay for women and children for long enough to be able to support them in housing and accommodation until they get any kind of status in this country. We can go to social services if they have children or a vulnerability but social services' responses have always been very inconsistent. Under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, they have a duty, but they often say, "Well, we have a duty only to the children and not to the mother". They threaten to separate them, or they say that the children can go back to an abusive father, or they give illegal immigration advice. Often it is the wrong advice, such as "Claim asylum" and usually that is not correct for them.

An example of the situation is the case of Harshita Brella. She was killed and her husband is suspected to be the killer. He fled the country after allegedly killing her. Harshita had an insecure immigration status. Her family in India are very concerned that migrant women are being neglected in Britain through the immigration laws that prevent them from leaving an abusive relationship. We want a change in the law so that, regardless of their immigration status, they should be allowed to stay in the country and access public funds.

Q75 The Chair: Dr Maz, is this kind of thing happening the other way around, perhaps to gay men who come from abroad and have been forced into marriages? Does that happen with any frequency? Perhaps you will be able to inform the committee.

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: Yes, it certainly happens to male victims. I was once a trustee of the Elm Foundation based in Chesterfield, which supported male victims experiencing domestic abuse or types of violence. A distinct category it also supported was male victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriages. Yes, I have heard accounts of men coming to the United Kingdom, also on a spousal visa, marrying

British nationals—women—but then being subjected to abuse, almost akin to modern slaves. When they have tried to leave such abuse, they have been met with discrimination.

I fully agree with Dr Siddiqui's analysis of the impact that the no recourse to public funds policy has had on female victims, but equally, I would say it has a significant impact on men. I have heard of accounts of men on spousal visas reporting abuse, and the police come to investigate. Those men have been accused of lying, with people saying, "You're fabricating abuse in order to secure immigration status". In addition to that, there have been examples of men seeking support through the domestic violence scheme that Dr Siddiqui was referring to. Even then, there have been allegations by people I know, who work within the professional areas of domestic abuse, who have said, "The application process is much longer for men because the Home Office views them with greater suspicion". This is a direct quote from somebody I know quite well, who will remain nameless. When doing an application for women, it gets processed; it is not a problem. When there is an issue concerning male victims, it can take months and months before anything is actually resolved and agreed upon.

Absolutely, it happens to male victims. I would argue that the barriers men face are more significant because men are perceived to be the main perpetrators in these types of crimes and not necessarily victims. It has a major impact on the social constructions around the way in which men are perceived and how perpetrators are perceived.

Q76 The Chair: Ghadah Alnasseri, is there anything you would like to add to this? In this area where immigration coincides with abuse, the system seems to not be perfected yet.

Ghadah Alnasseri: Yes. I just want to really echo what Hannana just mentioned about how the Act has not fully lived up to expectations. The biggest gap is the systematic exclusion of migrant women with no recourse to public funds, which really creates a two-tier system of protection and support. When the Act came into place, we hoped it would genuinely improve protection for all survivors, but it is not for marginalised women and women who are black and minoritised.

We really welcome having new duties placed on local authorities to provide safe accommodation. However, despite that duty, there is still a response barrier to accessing housing for black and minoritised women. There are also the realities of the "by and for", which is the term we use in our sector to represent work by organisations such as Imkaan—by black and minoritised women, and for black and minoritised women which work to end violence against women and girls.

The reality since 2021—it has now been five years, and it is still shocking—is that the whole sector is chronically underfunded. It really illustrates a widening gap between specialist provision and needs. There is definitely an issue around how when women go to a local authority to access accommodation, they will be faced with institutional disbelief.

There is no holistic support, as we call it, which is specialist support that is related to their culture and background, which specialist by and for organisations provide. There are barriers to accessing housing and justice.

Q77 Lord Russell of Liverpool: One of the key aims of the Act was to define in law some different elements within domestic abuse. Three of those definitions were financial abuse, emotional abuse, and the definition of “personally connected”. If you look at each of those three, could you say how effectively those definitions are working for the communities you represent and work with? I would like to start off with Dr Maz.

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: That is a very interesting question. With the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act, I was surprised that there was no definition of honour-based abuse included, given that we have been discussing this issue both at government level and academic level for the past 20 to 25 years. In my opinion, that seems to have an impact on dealing with honour-based abuse as a particular form of abuse.

You mentioned something about personally connected. Of course, there will be cases of honour-based abuse where the perpetrators are personally connected to the victim. From the honour-based abuse perspective, the inclusion of the definition of domestic abuse within the 2021 Act will be very helpful. However, it does not go far enough because there are a number of different types of perpetrators who may exist within the honour-based abuse context. That can include extended family members and extended community members, known and unknown, including bounty hunters. In my opinion, they do not fit the definitions of domestic abuse and personally connected. Therefore that creates problems with protection under the 2021 Act.

I am aware that the Crime and Policing Bill 2025 is currently being debated, and there is discussion of including a definition of honour-based abuse. I have written a paper specifically on this, which hopefully will be published later on this year. One of the main criticisms of that definition is that there is still a focus on a single perpetrator. I am very well aware of the Interpretation Act 1978 and Section 6, which states that any statement about a singular person can be interpreted in the plural. However, given that the Act is a public Act and will be accessed by members of the public and professionals working in the sector who are not necessarily legal experts, the danger is that honour-based abuse within the Crime and Policing Bill will be seen purely as a singular perpetrator act.

I am calling for greater recognition of and focus on honour-based abuse to recognise multiple perpetrators in that field. I would even go a little more extravagant, a little more radical, and say that we need to appreciate the fluidity of such cases. In some instances, I believe that honour-based abuse fits the definition of serious organised crime. That is where we are at today. The existing definitions and parameters of the Domestic Abuse Act do not go far enough.

Lord Russell of Liverpool: Ghadah, could I ask you for your reaction to those three definitions? How well do you think they are working?

Ghadah Alnasseri: Expanding the definition of domestic abuse is very important, especially the inclusion of emotional abuse and financial and coercive control. However, we published a report with the Centre for Women's Justice called *Life or Death?* in 2024, and it really highlights how government agencies are failing to support or identify black and minoritised women with experiences of coercive control. The research shows that, similar to the local authority issues, there is still disbelief, institutional bias and stereotypes, which often lead to survivors not being believed. Coercive control is being misunderstood as well as minimised. There is an assumption that these women are less vulnerable, which is really having an impact on it in practice. There is the introduction of the law, but then the implementation and the practice are not matching it.

We work with the sector and with Southall Black Sisters. There is a need for trauma-informed training for all employees and government agencies around working with survivors of VAWG. This training needs to be about not only the mental health impacts but all forms of violence against women and girls, especially with the dynamics of coercive control and specifically around intersectional and cultural contexts for black and minoritised women, as Dr Siddiqui mentioned in her opening, as well as systemic racism and unconscious bias.

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: The definition of domestic abuse covers a lot of areas. However, it needs a review for the things that are missing and for consolidating things that have happened afterwards, such as the definition of honour-based abuse, which we have been involved in drawing up and the Government are going to introduce. I am not sure I totally agree with Dr Maz that it does not include multiple perpetrators. It does, but it does not go far enough. The statutory guidance is really important there to explain it.

The personally connected issue is a problem because it does not really deal with the other perpetrators who are not relatives. You need to expand the involvement of the wider community, even in domestic abuse, because a lot of the cases we deal with are both domestic abuse and honour-based abuse. In terms of economic abuse, things such as dowry abuse and no recourse to public funds—immigration abuse—are missing, because these are both connected with economic abuse as well.

The Chair: How does dowry abuse work?

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: It is basically the expectation that, upon marriage, the woman's family gives a dowry to the groom's family. Usually, it is meant for her security, for her future, particularly if they divorce. It is something that she would then rely on as financial security. However unfortunately, when there is domestic abuse, women often find they get a lot of harassment before or after the marriage to bring in a dowry. If the family cannot afford it, it is expected to bring in a dowry. If it does not bring in enough dowry, then there is harassment to bring in

more dowry. It can lead to the harassment and abuse of women upon marriage. It can be tied up with all sorts of expectations: it can be very expensive; it can involve properties, cars, or gold; it could be about a woman's education because the assumption is that if a woman is educated, then she can bring in more income from the family. That becomes part of the dowry package.

If a woman cannot meet the expectations, or if there is a divorce, she loses that. The in-laws and the husbands tend to keep the dowry. She is then financially not well off as a result. That is particularly important for migrant women. There needs to be more recognition under family law. There have been legal cases where it has been acknowledged that it should be given back to the bride, but there is still more to do on that. There may also be a need to look at the crimes that might be committed in dowry abuse in this country. In relation to no recourse to public funds, that is also a form of economic abuse, because women are tied to an abusive partner because of their economic dependency.

Finally, I would just like to say about emotional abuse that coercive controlling behaviour is supposed to cover the emotional abuse side of it and give more detail to it. It is part of a different Act, but that needs to be consolidated into the Domestic Abuse Act. Even that needs to be reviewed because, for example, in the case of Michelle Sparman, who killed herself as a result of domestic abuse, the coroner eventually recognised that there was a link to the domestic abuse. However, her family's legal team could not argue that it was intentional coercive controlling behaviour. They could not use "coercive controlling behaviour"; they used the word "abuse" because of how to show intention. We need to look at that issue of intention under the Act. If there is repeated abuse, it shows some kind of intention is formed. Even if it was not formed initially, it might have been formed later because it is repeated abuse. That needs to be addressed.

Q78 **Baroness Gohir:** I just wanted to pick up on what is missing. In terms of transnational marriage abandonment, which is not mentioned in the Act, does that Act work for those victims? Are perpetrators held to account? The other point I wanted to pick up on was what Dr Maz said about when men say they have been victims of domestic abuse and the police say that it is a false allegation. Recently, there was an article in the BBC saying that sometimes people make false allegations. Does it happen? Also, if we widen the criteria for public funding, is there a risk that some people may abuse the system? How can we mitigate that?

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: We have been working with the Home Office on tightening up the evidence base in terms of how you prove that you are a victim of domestic abuse. That has not come out in the media and that has been published. That is to try to minimise fraudulent claims. The other thing that the media did not really break down properly was that it said that the number of applications under the spousal visas under the domestic abuse route had gone up. What it had not taken account of was that there has been an increase in the types of applications you can make under that route. For example, with the transnational marriage

abandonment issue, you can now make a claim from overseas to come back into this country if you have been abandoned overseas. That was not happening before so naturally the figures are going to go up.

There obviously is a problem of fraudulent claims, which are predominantly by men, by rogue advisers and immigration lawyers. It is not a big problem. It is a small problem because those figures did not show how many were fraudulent claims. We are trying to tighten up the procedures so that it makes it harder for people to make fraudulent claims. Of course there will be more male victims, because there may well be more victims of domestic abuse that are recognised. They are not necessarily fraudulent claims because they are men.

We should not exaggerate what is happening. If we widen up no recourse to public funds to a wider group of people, a great benefit is that we could capture more victims of abuse who at the moment are not getting any help, with different types of visas and better access to support. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner estimates that there were about 32,000 victims of domestic abuse with no recourse to public funds. The BBC was quoting a figure of around 5,000. The fact is that is a fraction of genuine victims that should be getting support. The problem is lack of provision rather than an increase in fraudulent claims.

Q79 Baroness Gerada: I just wanted to follow up with Ghadah about training. The training you described sounds pretty comprehensive and detailed. In the local communities where this is most prevalent, what is the knowledge? I do not mean knowledge in terms of competency framework. Is this talked about? Honour-based violence, forced marriages, dowry, abuse: is this something that is part of the discussions women and men possibly have as they grow up?

Ghadah Alnasseri: I am talking probably from the front line, from a specialist organisation that works with the women directly. It supports the women with these kinds of cases and issues. It is very knowledgeable because it is from the community and works with the community. It works with them and supports them with these different nuances, depending on the background and culture they come from. Yes, Imkaan's experts are knowledgeable because they deal with that day to day. They work in a trauma-informed way, which is also holistic and specialised. Holistic means they are basically using their knowledge culturally to support the women—

Baroness Gerada: Sorry to interrupt but those are women who have already been victims; what about women who are not yet victims?

The Chair: Ghadah, what is being asked of you is: is the community talking about this? Are young women talking to their mothers, aunties, and cousins about the fact that putting these kinds of requirements on women is unacceptable? Is there a debate going on in the communities? That is what we want to know.

Ghadah Alnasseri: The work we do with Southall Black Sisters is really creating that knowledge and awareness in the young generation, bringing that activism and working around understanding that knowledge. I would say the sector is working with the community and the women. There is that notion of women being really cautious and trying to understand. For example, a lot of the research Imkaan and Southall Black Sisters do is actually being taught in universities and colleges. Young women will read that research. When they have the experiences with their own community, then they will understand.

The Chair: Thank you. I am going to move it to Hannana. Do you think that this is now becoming much more understood in the communities? Is there a cultural shift taking place in the communities, understanding honour-based pressures and the coercive ways in which these things work, and a willingness to talk more about domestic abuse and violence as well as the other forms of abuse?

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: There are two trends happening at the same time. First, young women in particular are becoming more empowered and informed about their rights. That is a tribute to the women's movement that operates within those communities—the by and for services. However, there is no widespread or mainstream discussions of these issues in schools or colleges, for example. Professionals do not get enough of this information in their training.

At the same time, within the community, the community leadership, which tend to be male, conservative, and religious—often with very conservative views on religion—are going in the opposite direction, which is about trying to maintain more control over women. The rise of religious fundamentalism, not just within Islam but all religions, has increased pressure on women to conform to more traditional gender roles. The development of other alternative dispute resolutions, such as religious courts, the sharia courts or the Sikh courts, have been a more recent development of a way in which the community religious leadership are trying to control female behaviour. That is also happening at the same time.

The tendency is that we hold our hands up, we do not get involved, and we are culturally or religiously sensitive. The state needs to actually get involved and work with women's organisations. There needs to be a buy-in for organisations that are challenging these attitudes and practices within the community. Give them more funding and political support, so that they can then challenge the leadership and empower more women in the community.

Q80 Baroness Sugg: I would like to ask something briefly about honour-based abuse. Thanks for your comments on that. I share your frustration, Dr Maz, on not having multiple perpetrators explicitly referenced in the Crime and Policing Bill. That is something that the Chair and I tried to make an amendment on. As Dr Siddiqui says, obviously the Government have recognised that it includes that, and so it is really important we get that statutory guidance right. They have also assured us they will be

working with experts such as yourselves to do that. That is definitely a work in progress.

The Chair: It is very interesting, and I could not attend the actual discussion on it, but the Government were maintaining that nowhere in law was, "persons"—the plural of person—ever used. It is just not true. In the early part of my career, I acted in a case in which people were being challenged for conspiring to bring down the Government. The conspiring was certain named people with persons unknown. It became known as the "Persons Unknown" trial—plural—because it was understood that there was a whole group of anarchists who wanted to overthrow the Government. It was actually used in an indictment. To say that it was not possible to do this was a nonsense. However, we are stuck with what we have. We have to get the regulatory framework to say that it means groups.

Dr Maz, you said something that I meant to pick up on. Did you mention that there were bounty hunters in this field? When there have been allegations within the community of honour-based behaviour, that someone has dishonoured their family, are there people who can be paid bounties to go and seek out those who have done this?

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: Yes, Baroness. Absolutely. I can refer the committee to a *Guardian* newspaper article by Nadeem Badshah in 2010. He explicitly interviewed a bounty hunter in a case of a forced marriage where the victim—a female—fled the family home. He was paid £5,000 in order to locate that victim. The perpetrators—the family—provided a photograph to the taxi driver and said, "If this woman ever comes into your taxi, lock the doors and bring her back to us, and we will give you £5,000 in bounty". You can imagine the types of networks and the sophistication that exists in these types of cases.

Baroness Sugg: We have talked a bit about coercive control and the difficulty of investigating that. I wanted to just touch on the courts and how they are implementing the provisions in the Act, in your experience; obviously coercive and controlling behaviour but also the special measures in the courts that the Bill brought in. How do you think they are doing on that? What more should they be doing?

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: We have very few cases of domestic abuse or honour-based abuse that go through the courts. A lot of the time women are either too frightened to report the abuse—particularly if they have insecure immigration status because their data will be shared with immigration enforcement—or the police have not taken the report seriously enough. A lot of cases are not actioned.

There are still problems with the risk assessment process. We need to review the DASH risk assessment in particular but also the new DARA one that the response officers use. In some respects, the DARA one is slightly better because it asks questions of women in a way they understand it, whereas the risk assessment is more of a tick-box exercise. However, it also does not ask significant questions for black and minoritised and

migrant women, such as the immigration abuse that they may be experiencing, such as dowry abuse, or other things that they could be picking up on. Honour-based abuse can be treated in one of two ways. Either they read that it is honour-based abuse in every case, if it is black or minoritised women, or they ignore it and dismiss it. It can happen both ways with honour-based abuse.

Not many cases actually get to court for us. The cases that get to court are the more extreme and serious cases that the police pursue, such as honour killings. We want to see changes, obviously, along the whole journey within the criminal justice system for victims. At the other end, in terms of the courts, when they get there, they do not necessarily understand it. The Crown Prosecution Service or the police do not actually argue the case that it is an honour killing within the courts. Even if there is an element brought in, or there is an understanding that there is honour-based abuse, it is not recognised in the final sentencing, for example.

Under the current sentencing guidance, you can include domestic abuse and honour-based abuse and give a higher sentence but actually they are never, ever applied in either case. We have been campaigning for what we call Banaz's Law. You know this because we have talked about it, and I know you have raised it: it would have honour recognised as an aggravating factor more often than it is. There needs to be more specific and explicit guidance. The Women and Equalities Committee actually recommended it but the Sentencing Council has not taken it forward. It says that honour already is there but actually, from my experience, nothing is implemented, so more needs to be done there.

The Chair: Ghadah, can you keep it really short? I really want us to get through because we have only a short time left.

Ghadah Alnasseri: No problem. There is definitely a poor use of protective measures for black and minoritised women, especially the notices and orders, and the lack of data collection around ethnicity. There are also gaps in the consistent use of specific measures in court, which as we heard, can affect the survivor's ability to safely give evidence and their migration statuses. I also just want to mention something very important around the lack of data collection around ethnicity. Some police forces' systems have a really large proportion of victims' ethnicity fields left blank because they are not mandatory fields. That definitely does not give us the real picture of black and minoritised women who reach police.

There is another really important point I want to mention around ethnicity categories. When it is recorded, it is extremely basic. For example, there is no category for some groups, such as Latin Americans or Iranians. There is not even a breakdown between groups with similar appearances, with differences such as black British, black African, or African Caribbean. For example, a black British woman whose parents were born and raised in the UK has the same categorisation as a Somali refugee woman who has just arrived in the UK; they definitely have different experiences. This definitely does not give us the reality and

nuances that victims and survivors have when they come, and what support they need.

Q81 Lord Polak: Children have been recognised as victims since 2021. In the areas that you are all working, how does the Act address these issues? What could be done to improve them? Are the children who needed it benefiting from this? That is to all or any of you.

The Chair: Who would like to come in on that? How is this impacting children? It was a big breakthrough to get children included and recognised as being themselves victims of domestic abuse because of what happens even as someone who is in the presence of and living within a household where abuse is taking place.

Ghadah Alnasseri: I will definitely just mention that the recognition of children is very significant. We welcome that step but there is still the issue of parents with children who have no recourse to the public funds. As we talked about, they are denied accommodation and they are failing to be supported by social services, for example, with mother and children together. Basically, Section 3 of the Act explicitly says that “a child who ... sees or hears, or experiences” domestic abuse is a victim. However, a child with no recourse to public funds because of their immigration status does not have the same entitlement in terms of accessing refuge and financial support. As mentioned before, this is where we are creating a two-tier system.

There are also language barriers sometimes with parents, or with the mother, which sometimes means that children may act as interpreters to describe the abuse to the police, which leads to the children being exposed more to victimisation and trauma. There is also a pattern within the black and minority communities around expecting children to be more adult. There is a pattern of adultification of migrant children. More broadly, they are not being given the same level of protection.

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: Ghadah has covered the issue around migrant children, which I support. There are two things here. First, under the Domestic Abuse Act, there is a bit of confusion about what a child is and what a victim of domestic abuse is. A child is defined as anyone under 18 but a victim of domestic abuse is anyone over 16. They just do not match much. There has been a problem in some immigration decision-making around that because of that inconsistency. It needs to be sorted out.

Secondly, there is an issue with girls and young women who may be experiencing a forced marriage. We need to look at how we implement the forced marriage protection orders far more effectively, particularly if the young victim decides to stay at home or returns home with an order, because there is actually no one monitoring the situation. Often those orders may be breached but then there is no reporting of that breach. For example, Somaiya Begum was a young woman who was being forced into a forced marriage. She got an order, went back home, but was then killed by her uncle because she refused the forced marriage. The court order just did not work there. We need a body or an agency that is going

to be responsible for monitoring these orders, particularly with children and young people who may not get the same access to help.

The Chair: Dr Maz, I can see you nodding in relation to that. How can you help us on this?

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: The enforcement of protection orders is not working. The case of Somaiya Begum is a prime example of that. I just want to add a bit more to the discussion on what Ghadah said about disparities and inequities. As a trustee of the Elm Foundation, I have come across cases where men have escaped abuse from a female perpetrator and have taken the children with them. The Elm Foundation was ill equipped to find accommodation because its male refuge houses only men who are single victims. There is this disparity, and there is difficulty in supporting victims who have children. This is something that needs to be addressed.

Q82 **Baroness Rafferty:** That flows very neatly into the question that I was keen to ask, which is around the duty upon local authorities to provide accommodation and refuges for victims and children. You have just identified an anomaly there, Dr Mazher, for men who take children with them. First, I would love your views on how well this is being enacted in practice. Secondly, what other types of gaps might there be in the provision of this important resource?

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: It is very difficult because what we have here is a lack of male support services and refuges for male victims. When I was working at the Elm Foundation as a trustee, there were only about 10 male refuges in the country. Victims were calling from London to Chesterfield to see if they could occupy a bedroom space only to be turned away because the Elm Foundation did not have sufficient refuge space for male victims. Of course, I agree with what has been said today that the overwhelming majority of victims are women but there is a substantial minority of male victims who need to be supported. This is something that I would like to see changed and addressed in due course.

The Chair: Dr Maz, what was the name of the foundation you were referring to that was having these difficulties in finding accommodation for male victims?

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: The Elm Foundation.

Q83 **Baroness Neate:** Can you tell us the most pressing issue that you would like to raise today that has not already been raised in relation to the Act and the community that you advocate for?

The Chair: Hannana, the first thing you said was that you were very concerned about the business of no access to public funding, but is there any other issue that you feel is big like that which gets lost in the great clamour?

Dr Hannana Siddiqui: Yes. There is a great concern about the high rate of femicide, which is the killing of women, both through homicide and

abuse-related suicides—women who are driven to kill themselves as a result of abuse. Some evidence shows that actually abuse-related suicide is probably underestimated. According to Domestic Homicide Project statistics, the suicide rates are now higher than the homicide rates. There is a whole thing around mental health but also ensuring that barriers are overcome so women do not feel they have to kill themselves, and to prevent the murder of women.

One of the things we would like to see is an independent public inquiry on femicide. We have put forward amendments for the recognition of abuse-related suicide to be recognised as homicide, as murder. That needs to be introduced as a new law now because even though the Crown Prosecution Service and the police can prosecute for manslaughter or murder for abuse-related suicide, there are very few successful cases where they have done that. They have actually taken forward very few cases as well because they never treated it as a crime in the first place because they just saw it as suicide, so they never collected the evidence.

Within that context, black, minoritised and migrant women are probably over-represented both in homicide and suicide. They are definitely over-represented in things such as honour killings, specific forms of killings, but also in homicide more generally and suicide. There was some evidence from the police Domestic Homicide Project, which showed recently that black and minoritised women represented a quarter of their sample, which was an over-representation if you compare it with the population size of black and minoritised women. There seems to be an over-representation. Some evidence in London also shows an over-representation for black women. Some previous evidence—we do not have up-to-date evidence—showed that south Asian women were three times more likely to kill themselves as a result of domestic abuse.

We need to look at what is happening with femicide. Why is it so high? Considering that we have had the Domestic Abuse Act and a whole range of other legal and policy changes, we still have such a high rate. The independent inquiry will help us to look at the whole journey that women go through because obviously prevention is far more important. We work very closely with bereaved families, and they all want those legal changes, the policy and training, but they want prevention. They do not want these things to happen.

We look at the poor responses of the police, social services and agencies, and for black and minoritised women, under the forced marriage guidance we helped to develop the “one chance” rule. The “one chance” rule basically says that an agency, a person, or a bystander may have only one chance to intervene. If they suspect abuse, if they hear about abuse, then they should act immediately. That helps to prevent abuse. Early intervention is important. However, in some research I have done and in evidence we have gathered, we have seen that in cases of femicide, it actually escalates over time. There is a whole range of interventions or lack of interventions that led to that death. I have also looked at what could happen the opposite way. What could have

happened as best practice? What works? We need to look at both those areas.

The Chair: Let me just say that I remember it being raised and we tried to have it included in this Bill. I understand the idea of having a specific inquiry in relation to it because it is a much more complex thing than what will be included in the report from this committee, which relates specifically to this legislation. I hear very clearly what you are saying. We will certainly have it communicated to the powers that be, if you like, that there ought to be a much closer examination of the preventative steps that can be taken to look at that whole issue of homicide of women. Is there anything that either of our other two witnesses would like to come in on—very quickly, because I am really on my last minute?

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: Yes, please, if you do not mind.

Q84 **The Chair:** All right. Is there anything that has not been covered?

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: Yes. Just following on from what Dr Siddiqui said, I held a conference at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2025 calling for a new offence of suicide aggravated by harassment, abuse and violence. This is something that should be addressed to deal with domestic abuse-induced suicides and honour-based suicides.

The Chair: If there was going to be an inquiry into domestic homicide or homicide more generally of women, then the suicide issue would have to be included in it. Is there anything else?

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss: I just wanted to add two more points very quickly. First, the guidance under the Domestic Abuse Act needs to include express reference to male victims. Secondly, given that men are currently subsumed within the violence against women and girls strategy under the Home Office decision in 2022, that needs to change. If you are going to validate and make male victims more visible, we need a separate violence against men and boys strategy.

The Chair: We will give consideration to that.

Ghadah Alnasseri: I would like to just echo Hannana's point but also mention the specialist services that actually support the women, to save their lives so that they do not end up killed by their partners. It has been proven that, when women go into mainstream, it takes them over a year to be able to be supported. When they go to specialist services and by and for, it is immediately identified and women's lives are being saved. There is also a complete decommissioning and underfunding of the sector. There is literally a lack of understanding from local authorities about the importance of commissioning bed spaces for women. We are very concerned about the diminishing of the by and for sector and not being able to sustain its services to support the women and end femicide.

The Chair: I was going to ask you finally, through Baroness Gohir, about recommendations that you would want to make. All I can tell you is that your recommendations have become clear to us in the course of your

giving evidence today. I want to thank all three of you for coming and participating in this session. Your evidence is invaluable. You will of course be in touch with us. If there is anything that you think of when you get back home, when you have that wakening in the night and say, "I forgot to say," put it in writing and send it through to us and we will include it in the evidence. Dr Siddiqui, thank you very much for being present live. Thank you very much. I am going to now conclude this part of the sitting.