



*From Her,
Kings are Born*

The impact and
prevalence of domestic
abuse and sexual
violence in the UK Sikh
panjabi community

November 2022

Authors: Sukhvinder Kaur, Sahdaish Pall BEM, Rita Chadha

Dedications

The authors would like to thank:-

The SafeLives research team for reviewing our survey and giving feedback.

Our funders and partners, for supporting and believing in our work.

Gurdwara Aid for helping with getting our work, and survey disseminated to Gurdwaras and for believing in our work and giving us a platform to speak to Gurdwara management committees.

Dr Gurpreet Kaur for her contributions to the report.

The team at Turiya Charity for providing our team access to high-quality religious texts as part of our faith research.

To our proof-readers and staff for all the valuable feedback and comments.

Our wonderful families held the fort whilst this publication was put together.

Finally, the team at Sikh Women's Aid would like to express its gratitude to every single participant who engaged with our survey and our brave and courageous service users that are still fighting every day for a life free from abuse. It is down to your frank and honest engagement with us that has allowed this report to be presented to the Sikh Panjabi community and sector partners.

We dedicate this report to all victims of abuse. To those mothers and sisters whose lives have been lost to domestic violence and the beautiful daughters of Mandeep Kaur, a young woman who died by suicide after citing 8 years of domestic violence at the hands of her husband. May you both know a world of love and kindness free from violence.

All mistakes are ours, all praise we place at the feet of Mata Sahib Deva and Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

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Nicole Jacobs

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

'The Impact and Prevalence of Domestic and Sexual Violence in the Sikh Panjabi Community in the UK' is a welcome resource for all those working in the Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Sector. Not only does it evidence and characterise the nature of abuse, but it provides an insight into the nature of perpetrators and the reaction of support agencies. It is to be welcomed.

The report received responses from 839 women, 62 per cent of whom said they saw themselves as survivors of domestic abuse. Nevertheless, only 32 per cent reported the abuse to the police. Where disclosure happened, they were with family (79 per cent) or friends (65 per cent).

Just under one-third of respondents (32 per cent) reported being subject to sexual abuse. When asked if they experienced it as an adult or a child, 62% reported the abuse being experienced as a child. These statistics are very worrying, and we need to do more to help victims to report and access appropriate support services.

This report also highlights concerning narratives around sexual abuse, particularly in relation to children. The report makes it clear how abuse has gone largely and tragically unnoticed. The cases illustrating the survey's findings make for harrowing reading; this report recommends what is needed to address the abuse. Education and awareness are essential to help communities understand the ramifications of abuse and that most offenders are from the same background as the victims

I was particularly interested to read about the profile of perpetrators within the Sikh Panjabi community and the level of female perpetrators abusing women. I know that Sikh Women's Aid is already talking to the Drive Project about culturally specific perpetrator programmes, so I look forward to seeing how this progresses.



As the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, I want to support specialist organisations around the country to tackle these issues and how they impact adults and children. I recognise that these problems must be tackled at the heart of communities. It is vital that 'by and for' services are suitably commissioned to ensure appropriate provision and support is available for all victims and survivors, particularly for those who face additional barriers. It is a priority of mine to ensure that services are sustainable so they can carry out this much-needed work.

Safeguarding vulnerable women and children from abuse should be a top priority for all, and I thank Sikh Women's Aid for this report I congratulate them on this vital step forward and look forward to working with them to tackle domestic abuse.





Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP

Member of Parliament for Romsey and Southampton North

Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee

There is a stark truth that abusers respect no faith, no culture, and no ethnicity. Domestic abuse happens in all communities, behind closed doors and protected by silence. And it is predominantly women who suffer.

That is why the work of organisations like Sikh Women's Aid is so crucial. To give voice and support to those women who have nowhere else to turn.

We must be prepared to be bold, to challenge assumptions and to make sure Committees in Parliament are able to take evidence from survivors and those professionals who have assisted them. The Women and Equalities Select Committee are launching an inquiry into so-called “honour-based violence”. I use that term but reject the notion that violence can ever be anything to do with honour. We have to re-double efforts to stamp out these abhorrent crimes and speak up for the victims.





Rt Hon Jess Phillips MP

Member of Parliament for Birmingham Yardley

Shadow Minister for Domestic Violence and Safeguarding

The work of Sikh Women's Aid in tackling domestic abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation are critically important. Their mission to support victims and survivors, and to shine a light on the experiences, characterisation and prevalence of the abuse suffered by Sikh Panjabi women and girls, is crucial in our collective fight against VAWG.

We know that minoritized women and girls can face intersecting forms of discrimination and additional barriers to accessing support and protection. To ensure we are protecting all women, 'by and for' services like SWA that deliver for the specific needs and experiences of women from these groups, and elevate their voices, are vital. And we must have sustainable funding and commissioning processes that allow such organisations to continue to provide quality support and advocacy services that ensure all women are seen, protected, and supported.

This annual report is a crucial contribution to the mission of exposing and ending violence against women and girls wherever we find it. The saying 'we count what we care about' rings true; before we can tackle an issue, we need to know and understand it. That is why the research and analysis carried out by SWA are so important.





Sahdaish Pall - CEO

As CEO of Sikh Women's Aid, I stand at a landmark moment, recently appointed as the first CEO of Sikh Women's Aid. Twenty-six years is a long time to be working in the domestic abuse sector. I want to begin the introduction by giving testimony to the challenges that lie ahead against a backdrop of the evolution of abuse and all its forms.

I began my career volunteering at a South Asian women's domestic abuse refuge.

The first client I supported was a Bangladeshi woman who was eight months pregnant. She had been reported to the police by a member of the public as she walked along a railway track. When the police brought her to the refuge, I struggled to communicate with her because she did not speak English, and I did not speak Bengali. From that first encounter, I learned the importance of quality support services and having intimate cultural and language knowledge and expertise to provide an effective service.

Being new to the world of 'victim support,' I remember thinking that she had been selfish in trying to take her own life and her child's life. In the following years, I underwent a mammoth journey of learning about support provision and understanding how domestic abuse impacts victims and survivors. I learned to recognise and challenge my assumptions about abuse's psychological and emotional impact on victims.

After more than two decades of working on the front line directly with victims and then in the management of refuge services, I joined forces with other Sikh Panjabi women and set up Sikh Women's Action Network. Fast forward another seven years, and Sikh Women's Aid was launched, and I have not looked back since.

Despite my experiences and interactions with many victims and survivors from the South Asian community, I did not fully realise how hidden domestic and sexual abuse was within the Sikh Panjabi community.

The Sikh community often presents itself to the world as a very progressive, giving, hardworking and integrated community. Everyone knows about the selfless service delivered by Sikhs; we do this because it is one of the core pillars of our faith. All the above is true, but despite this positive persona, some in the



Sikh Panjabi community hide the reality of what is happening in people's homes, covering up the abuse and oppression of women and children.

Much of the research and statistics in the public domain do not consider the needs or concerns of racially minoritised communities. Data is understood in broad homogenous terms like Black or South Asian. There is no breakdown by faith or religion or specific ethnicities. The absence of data can allow some communities to deny that issues such as domestic and sexual violence exist in their community. This has undoubtedly led to abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community running rampant with little challenge and continuing undetected.

An issue I witnessed after the launch of our first report and survey results in 2021 is that even with community-specific data, sections of the community deny abuse exists. The publication of our first Sikh Women's Aid report in 2021 was widely welcomed by women and girls and the grassroots Sikh Panjabi community. However, disappointingly, a few voices from a small number of Sikh organisations used their social media and other platforms to claim the report was flawed. This criticism has driven us to ensure that our 2022 survey report is even more comprehensive and robust.

The importance of shame and honour within the community means that some 'honour killings' continue to be justified by family and community members associated with the perpetrators who are held in high regard in the community. The case of Surjit Atwal is one such example. Surjit Athwal was a married mother of two. She was 27 years old and originally from Coventry. She was killed in India in 1998. Her mother-in-law Bachan Athwal and Surjit's husband, Sukhdave Athwal, of Hayes, West London, were jailed at the Old Bailey in 2007 for arranging her murder. Surjit Athwal was killed during a trip to the northern Indian state of Punjab in 1998. Her body was never found. Reporting around the criminal trial of Surjit's perpetrators revealed that she was planning on leaving an abusive relationship with multiple perpetrators and that she had met someone else.

Surjit Atwal was believed to have been the victim of an 'honour killing' because she allegedly had an affair, and many internal discussions in the community applauded the killing. I believe that women are forced to bear the weight of upholding the family 'honour.' In contrast, men carrying out acts of abuse or violence are not seen as dishonouring the family or community. They are not held to account in the same way. I have always put a question to my community which seldom, if ever, gets a response. "Why are women and children enduring abuse seen as upholding the family 'honour'? Nevertheless, when a perpetrator rapes a child or beats his wife or does not give her financial autonomy, why are their actions not considered dishonourable?"

Whether it is domestic and sexual violence or faith and exploitation, Sikh Women's Aid will not stop seeking answers and advocating for abuse victims. We have a long road ahead to ensure we do not lose another generation to abuse, shame, and so-called 'honour' while perpetrators walk free. We are ready for the challenge.



2. Executive Summary

When Sikh Women's Aid undertook its first survey in 2021, we intended to test our understanding and experience of the casework service. A year on from the furore of the first report and seeing the desperate need for a specialist 'by and for' service for the Sikh Panjabi community, we have decided to make this an annual survey.

The survey expands on the questions asked last year, and this amounted to some 33 questions that looked at everything from the nature of the abuse (including this year, more questions on sexual abuse) and who the perpetrators were to disclosure and the responses of public services, and solutions and remedies as offered by legislation.

Once again, the findings make for grim reading. They reiterate the feeling of a 'crisis of abuse' and reveal emerging issues to contend with, such as the appropriateness of mental health service provision, the rise of 'mother-in-law' abuse, and the need for further research.

The findings will be challenging for everyone. However, we are also adamant that we must be able to address such challenges through a better understanding of the faith. Our reference to the faith context this year has been extended to provide a deep-dive analysis into how the prevalence of abuse is counterintuitive to the teaching of Sikhi.

The report ends with a series of recommendations that strike at the root causes and the remedies that are needed to counter the silence of domestic and sexual abuse. The recommendations make clear the need for a wide range of stakeholders to engage in the debate.

We hope the research will be a valuable platform and a starting point for a better understanding of the prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community and that more agencies and individuals will become allies in the fight against domestic and sexual abuse.

3. Introduction

Sikh Women's Aid (SWA) was launched in 2021 and is a 'by-and-for' support service for Sikh Panjabi women and children in the UK who are experiencing domestic, sexual abuse and exploitation. SWA is based in the West Midlands, but demand for our services is nationwide.

Due to our growing reach in the Sikh Panjabi community, SWA now receives several calls to the helpline from abroad. These have come from countries such as Canada, America, and Dubai, where Sikh Panjabi women and girls are experiencing abuse.

Sikh Women's Aid's vision is to see a world where there is an end to the violence, abuse, and oppression of Sikh Panjabi women and children. Our mission is to ensure that all Sikh Panjabi women and children are safe and protected from harm in the home, community, and broader society and can live their best lives.

Victims and survivors can access our services via a dedicated helpline. We regularly receive referrals from statutory support services.

We operate

- At an individual level – by developing and delivering sustainable quality information, advice, and support services for Sikh Panjabi women and children.
- At a societal and community level - we are raising awareness of the characterisation and prevalence of domestic abuse within the Sikh Punjabi diaspora community and among professional colleagues.
- At an organisational level – by being a high-quality, fit-for-purpose organisation that works collaboratively and seeks to innovate continually.

SWA consult with Sikh Panjabi women and girls each year concerning the prevalence and impact of domestic and sexual violence within the community. Similarly, to last year, SWA is alarmed at what we are seeing and hearing from women and girls in our community. The report lifts the covers and reveals insights not previously published and makes for a distressing read.

Whether at an individual, community, or broader societal level, Sikh Panjabi women and children are being let down. SWA will use our research and casework findings to advocate for change and disrupt and challenge the warped community narratives that we believe are one of the root causes of the Sikh Panjabi community's current abuse crisis.

Our thanks to our funders and partner agencies, especially Imkaan, for their unwavering support as the country's only Black feminist organisation dedicated to addressing violence against minoritised women and girls.



4. Methodology

The discussion of domestic abuse and sexual violence remains taboo in many communities. The anger over the publication of our first report made it clear that anyone seeking to discuss the issue must prepare themselves for a high level of intimidation and harassment.

For the staff, trustees, and volunteers of Sikh Women's Aid, our collective experience taught us that the experience of Sikh Panjabi women and children could not be subsumed into the broader category of discussions around 'South Asian.'

It is important to remember that the 2021 survey was never intended for dissemination. It was an attempt to take a temperature check against our lived experiences and the casework we saw. However, we were also quite taken aback by the level of support and engagement with the survey from the grassroots community, especially women and girls.

The success of the survey in terms of responses (674) and subsequent discussion was well received by many organisations (public and civil society) in the Domestic Abuse (DA) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector.

The two main criticisms that were levied at our research in 2021 were:

Firstly, we had inflated the level of domestic abuse and sexual violence within the Sikh Panjabi community, which implied that our findings suggested a higher-than-average prevalence within the community compared to other communities. Our report did not set out to suggest that the Sikh community has a higher-than-average prevalence of abuse. However, it did seek to report the experience of respondents' abuse faithfully. We did report that the findings were shocking in their own right. If one single woman is the subject of abuse and violence, that is one too many.

Anyone working with Black and minoritised communities on such sensitive issues knows that getting people to respond to surveys and consultation exercises can be hugely challenging. We drew from a vast network of Sikh organisations, working nationally, regionally, and locally. We approached many Gurdwaras across the country, sought coverage in the Sikh Panjabi media, and used well-established networks of in-person, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups. None of these groups were domestic abuse charities; they were organisations and forums that advocated for the Sikh community on various issues.



The second criticism of the survey was that it was not credible because the Muslim community supported it, which was concerning due to the racist undertones and also an attempt at stoking inter-community tensions. The issue of violence against women and girls needs as many allies as possible, regardless of their religion or ethnicity. We welcome the support of our Muslim sisters and brothers. SWA will not allow racism to divert our attention away from the serious issue of domestic and sexual abuse.

This year to ensure we are methodologically robust, we have invested a significant amount of time and resources in improving both the scope and the reach of the 2022 survey. The greater yield of responses and the broader scope of questions has provided us with some invaluable data to support the strategic and operational development of both our services and our campaigns. We are also eager to share our findings with policymakers and commissioners. The issue of domestic and sexual abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community is not something anyone can ignore.

In June 2022, we developed a research framework based on one already developed by the Women's Aid Federation of England, a mainstream UK DA/VAWG charity. We have also worked closely with partner agencies such as SafeLives. The SafeLives research team reviewed and gave feedback on our survey before it was launched. SWA has invested in an agile research tool that allows us to draw down far more easily interim findings to ensure a representative sample of the community overall.

- Total number of responses = 839
- Total number of questions = 33
- The average time taken to complete the survey = 6 minutes

As in last year's survey, the free text options throughout the survey allowed respondents agency and gave an opportunity to verify responses and added richness to the discussion.

Our work here is not yet done, but we remain resolute that we will not be silenced. The findings from 2022 speak for themselves.

Limitations

We recognise that due to the very nature of our work, respondents to our survey are more likely to be victims of abuse than not. To mitigate this and ensure a broad sample from the community, we provided clear guidance on our target audience, Sikh Panjabi women and girls aged 16 and above who lived in the UK. We also made this clear within the survey introduction itself. In the completion guidance attached to the survey, we informed respondents that they did not need to be victims of abuse to participate.



Another 'limitation' is that there is no way of checking the authenticity of the person completing the questionnaire as it was an online survey. We gathered no personally identifiable data to assure respondents that they could be as open and honest when completing the survey. Therefore, there was no direct contact with the individuals who responded to it. However, this is true for all questionnaire-based research that takes place online, and there is no way to check this. To mitigate this, we asked respondents to self-identify their gender and whether they belonged to the Sikh Panjabi community. Those who answered 'no' to either question could not continue the survey.

This year, we targeted the survey to women and girls only. We recognise that Sikh Panjabi men and boys are also victims of domestic, child, and adult sexual abuse, but due to the gendered nature of our work, our services are for women and children. Due to the 'by-and-for' nature of our work and understanding of cultural barriers that prevent victims from leaving abusive situations, if we receive calls from male victims we offer over-the-telephone guidance and signposting to appropriate services for men.

Concerning the survey itself, we recognise that when asking respondents about the types of abuse experienced, there were no specific options for dowry abuse, caste-based abuse, or grooming gangs. Instead, this was picked up in the 'other' category. For example, one respondent reported being abused by a grooming gang.

We also put out a Panjabi version of the survey and translated all corresponding guidance, but it only received three responses. Next year we will look at better engagement methods with non-English speaking Sikh Panjabi women through focus groups, 1:1 interviews, and paper-based surveys.



5. The importance of commissioning 'By and For' services

SWA believes that 'by and for' expert services are crucial in a multicultural society. Imkaan defines the 'by and for expert sector' as specialist services designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve. These services are vital and often provide:

- much-needed expertise and advocacy in issues such as multiple perpetrators in a family and community pressure;
- forced marriage and so-called honour-based violence;
- immigration advice;
- child custody disputes;
- foreign language specialisms and faith contexts.

'By and for' expert services are trusted by local communities and the women they support due to their recognition and understanding of intersectionality and the multiple forms of discrimination and additional barriers faced by women from marginalised groups.'

Mainstream specialist domestic abuse providers have previously supported many women supported by SWA. The women have turned to us because they do not feel they are receiving the proper support. Women have felt misunderstood or misjudged and in some cases, experienced what they described as racism. In some cases, providers prioritise numbers and outputs over outcomes. When women are no longer at high risk or move into an area where they are away from the perpetrator, they are signed off by some providers. However, supporting victims and survivors to cope and recover from the abuse they have been subjected to is more than just about safety. Many survivors have no English language skills or no knowledge of how to navigate systems and services independently. Some lack the skills, confidence, and positive mental health to help them cope and recover, which could increase the risk of victims returning to abusive relationships.

Due to the current cost of living crisis, SWA is seeing some survivors reaching out to their perpetrators when they are struggling financially. It is SWA's intimate knowledge and understanding, combined with the cultural and language barriers victims are up against which has supported navigation in ways that a generic support service may find difficult. This cultural competency exists at all levels, from strategic management to support staff to volunteers. Our entire team is working with victims and their families until their needs have been met and they are safe from harm.

One example of excluding 'by and for' services from commissioning frameworks and opportunities comes from Sandwell Council. We respond to a significant number of queries and referrals from the area.

The 2011 UK census states that Indians make up the second highest ethnic group (after white) in Sandwell (10.2 per cent), and the second highest faith/religion (after Christianity) in Sandwell is Sikh (8.2 per cent). Presumably mid-year projection figures since the census have proved consistent.



Sandwell has a diverse and vibrant population with a vast Sikh Panjabi community in the Smethwick, Oldbury, and West Bromwich areas. However, Sandwell council has decided not to commission a 'by and for' domestic abuse/VAWG service.

The Sandwell DA Needs assessment states that:

'It is apparent from the consultations carried out that Black Country Women's Aid (BCWA) is delivering a high standard of care that is clearly valued by most survivors who engage with the service. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that multiple stakeholders consulted felt that there was a service gap in relation to Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. This is contested by BCWA, with a representative stating that they worked intensively to promote awareness and provide training in grassroots settings and places of worship. The organisation now also has a specific Hard to Reach Communities manager to extend this further. It should also be stated that the preceding data analysis relating to ethnicity in the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA1) cohort does show good representation that reflects Sandwell's diverse population. Interviews with survivors from a range of ethnic and religious backgrounds who had engaged with BCWA (including Sikh and Muslim) revealed no specific issues in relation to the support that they had received. However, some respondents cited concerns about the levels of expertise, awareness, and language skills available to work with various minority ethnic communities.'

The report goes on to say:

'BCWA stated that they would welcome opportunities for partnership working to increase access to disparate communities but feel that a dedicated Black and Minority Ethnic service is not required. Ethnic minority services could reinforce cultural traditions and would lead to survivors feeling judged and shamed.'

It is essential to understand that in the context of working with 'vulnerable people' relational activity and, in particular, the relationship with key workers, the visual representation of the organisation, the ability of staff to empathise due to 'lived experience' is pivotal to the delivering of sustainable progressive outcomes. The issue is not one of integration or mainstreaming; it is one of survival.

Thankfully, some councils can more readily distinguish between the need for targeted and mainstream services. Birmingham City Council, for example, has committed to commissioning specialist 'by and for' services to access the 'hard-to-reach' communities and ring-fenced grant funding for specialist work.

With specialist funding, suppose the lives of more women can be saved from abuse. In that case, commissioners need to understand that investing in 'by and for' is pivotal to enabling Sikh Panjabi women to come forward, enabling prevention activity, and addressing the entrenched long-term issues within the community.



6. Headline Data and Analysis

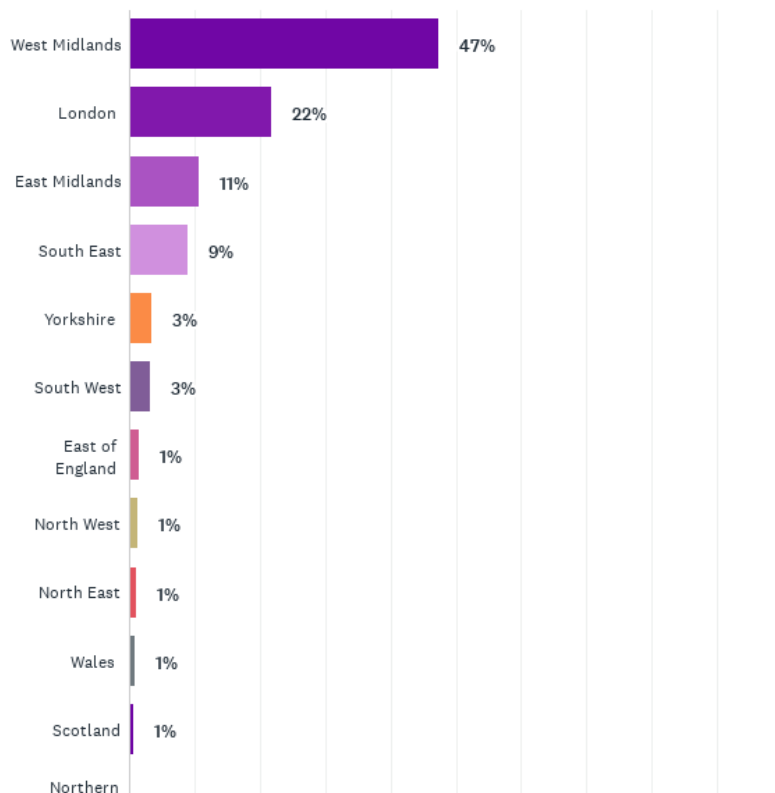
Building on our learning from last year, we were keen to improve our filtering of respondents to understand better who engages with a community-based survey like this. Our distribution list was far and wide, and we drew upon our many connections, organisations, and networks within the Sikh Panjabi faith and cultural sector, as well as women's networks. We were conscious of moving beyond the strong allyship of organisations working in the DV and VAWG sectors to include more generic women's organisations. In future years, we hope to broaden our reach by also convening in-person focus groups and 1:1 interviews with victims and survivors to harness more of the lived experience of those affected.

The survey made every effort to be trauma-informed, with SWA providing respondents with contact numbers to a range of specialist support services at the beginning of the survey and again once the respondents had submitted their responses as part of the 'thank you' message all respondents received upon completing the survey. This included the SWA Helpline number and email address.

This year we can report

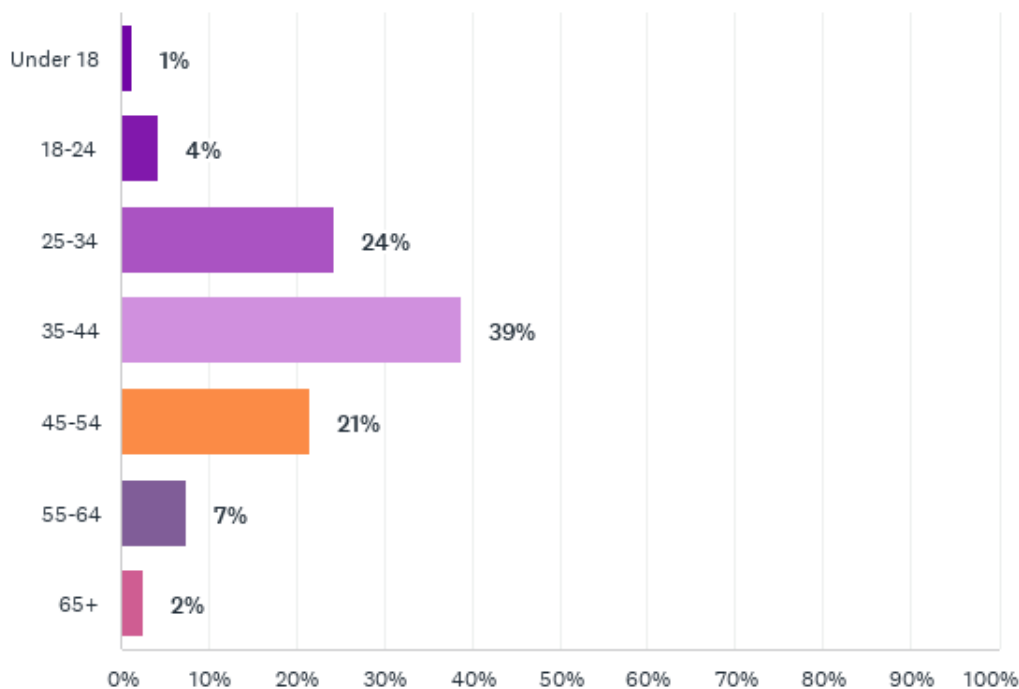
- We received 839 responses compared to 674 in 2021.
- 97% of respondents this year were women (79% last year)
- 99% identified as Sikh/Panjabi (this question was not included in the 2021 survey)

a) Fig.1: Regional distribution of respondents



The regional variation across the country of responses is broadly in line with the main population concentrations of the Sikh Panjabi community in the UK. In areas with a small response, the need for a specific by-and-for service can be even more acute, as mainstream providers may lack the skills and capacity to provide culturally responsive and appropriate services. It is also more likely that survivors may be even more reluctant to come forward in situations where there is no visible 'go-to' organisation.

b) Fig 2: Age profile of respondents



The conventional view in researching domestic abuse is in intimate relationships between partners. Sikh Women's Aid 'by and for' approach has also brought attention to different types of abuse. We have built on our initial findings from last year and drawn from our casework service to look at the age profile of Sikh/Panjabi women affected by domestic abuse. This is to understand the different forms of abuse experienced at different ages and the changing perpetrator profile as the victim ages.

This year we also wanted to highlight the abuse suffered by young girls and women. While the number of respondents under the age of 24 is relatively small (5%), coupled with our casework service and our Healthy Relationships work in schools, we have seen more young girls and women approach the service for assistance with coercive and controlling behaviour from parents and in some cases also physical violence. The tensions arising from code-switching between two different cultural contexts, i.e., The Sikh family household culture and the non-Sikh wider western society, can pressure young girls and women even before they enter intimate relationships.

Anecdotal evidence and a trauma based approach suggest that domestic abuse is intergenerational in some situations. In asking the question about age, we have, for the first time, been able to try to test the idea that domestic abuse is an intergenerational experience.

c) The LGBT Sikh Panjabi Community

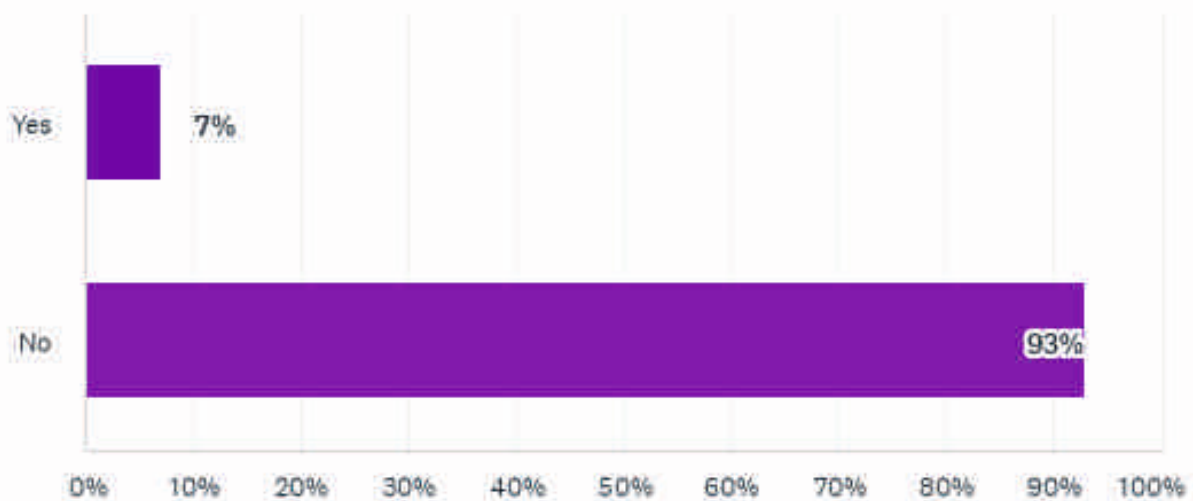
The question of sexual orientation was not asked in the 2021 survey. It is a challenging issue within the Sikh-Panjabi community. We expected a higher dropout response rate at this question and/or a more significant level of 'prefer not to say.' Two hundred and four respondents chose to skip this question. SWA believes that visibility is essential, and those who identify as either Lesbian or Bisexual must see themselves and their potential concerns represented in our work. We will seek better engagement with Sikh Panjabi LGBT groups to ensure they feel confident in approaching SWA for support.

At this stage, the sample is too small to stratify against the type of abuse women who identify as lesbian and bi-sexual may have encountered. However, we will continue looking at how our services can be accessible to all.

d) Fig 3: Respondents with a disability

7% of women described themselves as having a disability.

Studies have shown that disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse and are also twice as likely to suffer assault and rape (SafeLives, 2017).



Asked to define the nature of their disability further, we noticed that just under half reported a physical disability, and just over a quarter reported mental ill health. In the latter's case, mental ill health can also be used as an alleged 'justification' for abuse, stating that the survivor should not have any autonomy because she is 'pagal' ('mad').

A survey respondent commented:

'I didn't have friends or family to help and if anything, I have ended up looking like the mad wife who has attitude, I don't want to be involved in the community, but I felt as an outsider and he looks like the victim with a wife that has mental issues? No one helped'

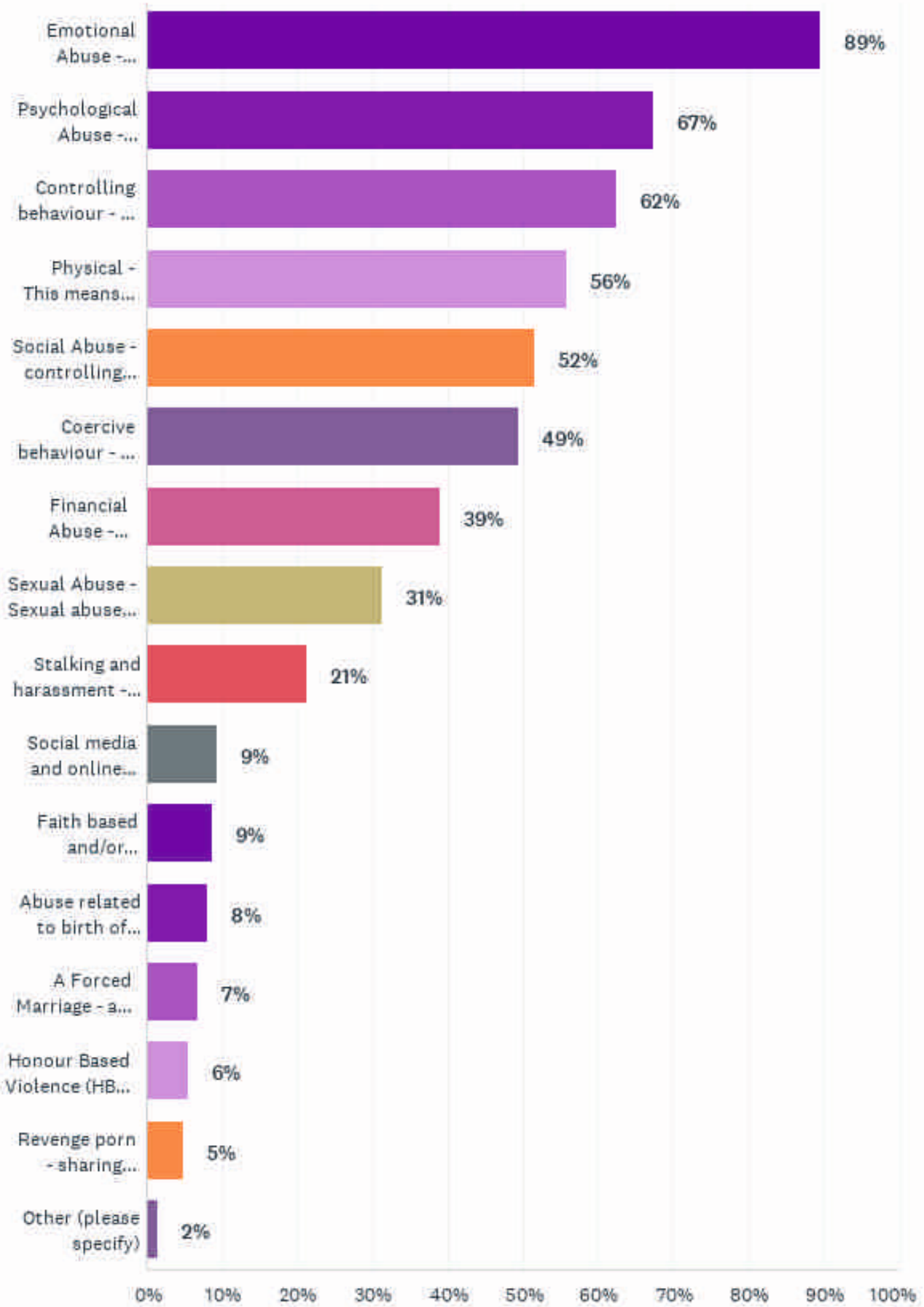
e) The Survivors

Have you ever experienced domestic abuse- physical, emotional, economic, sexual or coercive control?

2021	2022
Yes – 70%	Yes – 62%
No – 25%	No – 36%
Maybe – 5%	Maybe – 2%

Given the larger respondent pool this year and the better filtering of initial questions, this remains consistent with our findings in 2021. Of those who responded, almost 2/3 said yes to experiencing domestic abuse.

f) Fig 4: Type of domestic abuse experienced by respondents



Respondents were asked to select all the types of abuse they had been subjected to. Respondents answering this question highlighted the impact on an individual's mental well-being with high levels of psychological (67%) and emotional abuse (89%) and controlling behaviour (62%). Allied with such abuse is the act of coercive behaviour (49%), with almost half of all respondents reporting being subject to such abuse, as well as physical abuse (56%) and social abuse (52%). The options described each form of abuse so respondents could accurately identify and name what they had/are experiencing at the time.

Where opportunities for personal feedback and additional comments were available in the survey, these often included a statement noting that this was the first time they had been asked about their experience of abuse or violence. Once again, proving that opportunities for sharing and discussion are rare and virtually non-existent. For SWA, awareness raising and enabling brave spaces for disclosure and discussion is critical in addressing the prevalence of abuse and violence in the community.

According to the British Sikh Report 2022, 32% of British Sikhs said they were finding it difficult or very difficult to pay bills (40% of women and 25% of men). 75% reported that their gas and electricity bills had increased, and 20% said that their rent or mortgages had increased. Over 70% reported seeing an increase in food and fuel prices, with 35% shopping around more than before to find the lowest prices.

These statistics and many other research studies on the economic position of women at moments of national financial crisis demonstrate the disproportionate impact of a downturn in the economy on women. Such deprivation is compounded for those who are subject to domestic abuse as they also battle to keep themselves and their children safe from harm. For some women wanting to exit violent and abusive relationships, it is not only the cost of everyday living but the additional financial burden of legal fees for divorce, protection orders, child contact, and the dip in household income that can make leaving very difficult and sometimes impossible.

Given the higher levels of representation amongst the professional classes of the Sikh Panjabi community, it is unsurprising that many women were also subject to financial abuse (39%).

Financial abuse is a trend running through SWA's casework service. It is not uncommon for SWA to see some women post-separation being subject to financial agreements and debt that they were unaware of. Added to this is the common fear of destitution, as a couple splits due to familial wealth being held by the husband and, in some cases, his family.

Post-separation abuse and the family court system can add to the financial pressure on women. In several SWA cases, service users have had to fight their perpetrators in court for access or custody of the children. If a survivor's name is on the deeds of a property or if they are a medium or high-income earner, they will not be eligible for legal aid. A custody court case can easily cost tens of thousands of pounds.

Some women do not have high-paid jobs or independent income and have to borrow money from family and friends for legal fees and court costs.

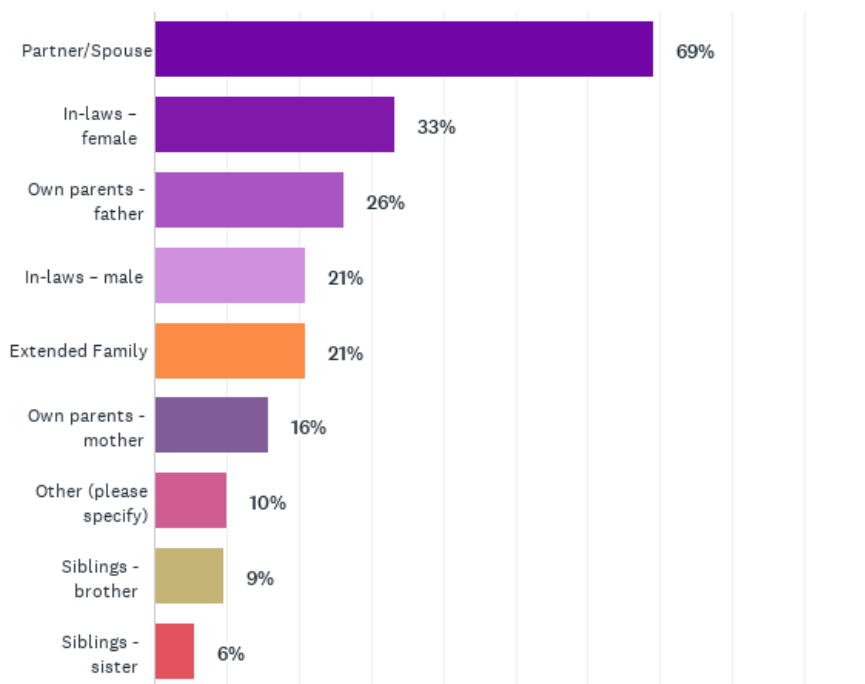


Several service users have come to SWA for support after losing their children to the perpetrator, as the court has not taken the disclosures of abuse into account or where the court has dismissed the abuse allegations due to lack of evidence. The resulting lack of confidence in the criminal justice system has forced some women to return to the perpetrator and find themselves devoid of agency.

Another feature of abuse that has always concerned SWA is female infanticide. While the Sikh faith is very clear on the importance of equity between men and women, the cultural manifestation of this as a living value is heavily laden with British South Asian cultural values commonly articulated as misogyny in some pockets of the community. Eight per cent of respondents who engaged with the question reported abuse concerning the birth of a daughter. It is also a feature of our casework service and calls to our helpline. Abuse because of giving birth to a daughter is a specific characteristic of some sections of Panjabi/Indian culture.

Throughout this survey, we are consistently reminded of the high levels of psychological and emotional abuse. Such abuse is reliant on cultural and distorted faith-based practices. It is impossible not to conclude that in addressing such practices, there is a need for culturally sensitive services that are unflinching in their condemnation of such horrific practices and are led and delivered with 'by and for' organisations.

g) Fig 5: The abusers



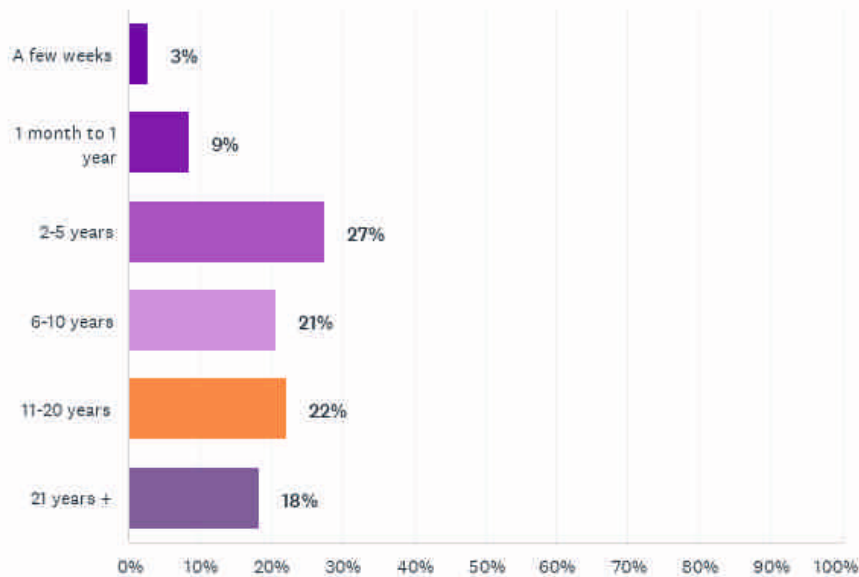
This year we were keen to look at the role of Sikh Panjabi females as perpetrators of domestic abuse. It is not a new or emerging trend. While the overbearing and interfering 'mother-in-law' who does not like her son's new wife is the basis of many films, comedies, and jokes, the seriousness of it is rarely discussed or acknowledged. Work is needed to understand why 33 per cent of women and girls are telling us they are being harmed by other women in their post marriage setting.

The subject of female perpetrators is a complex subject for the DV and VAWG sectors to comprehend and challenge. It runs counterintuitive to the commonly held euro-centric/white narrative of women as survivors and males as perpetrators. It is the experience of SWA via victim support and personal lived experience that some of these women are coerced or find cultural norms pressurising them into such behaviour. It could also be learned behaviour due to the difference in the way they have been treated by their mothers and the difference in the value of females compared with males in their family. However, once again, we find ourselves having to explain a cultural phenomenon that, while not unique to the Sikh Panjabi community, can only be addressed through a culturally bespoke response and interventions.

46% of all respondents who experienced domestic abuse had more than one perpetrator. Multiple perpetrators feature heavily in our casework. The founding members of SWA saw this manifest during the COVID-19 lockdowns. We saw a significant increase in Sikh Panjabi women reaching out for help due to being trapped in their homes with multiple perpetrators. For many of the women reaching out, there was no escape because if one perpetrator left the house, another was there to continue to abuse, and victims told us that this had a profound impact on their mental health and well-being.

h) Fig 6: Duration of abuse

Over what period has/is the abuse been taking place?



Data suggests that, on average, victims experience 50 incidents of abuse before getting effective help (SafeLives, 2015). The statistics acknowledge the accumulative pressure of abuse within the Sikh Panjabi community and the hesitancy over divorce to save the family's honour. Therefore, it is unsurprising that more than a fifth of respondents reported abuse lasting 6 to 10 years, and another fifth reported abuse lasting 11-20 years. A further 18% reported abuse lasting for more than 21 years.

A global outcry came from women and men within the community following the high-profile suicide case of a Sikh Panjabi domestic abuse victim, Mandeep Kaur: 'better to have a divorced daughter than a dead daughter.' Below is a small selection of the thousands of social media messages during the aftermath of Mandeep Kaur's death. Mandeep Kaur's case is expanded on later in the report.

Navneet 🇺🇸 @NKJa... · 20/08/2022 ...
Mandeep Kaur was an example of a community's failure because we don't talk about **#DomesticAbuse**. We don't think it's a problem even though we all know a Mandeep. When will we learn to stop pretending there is no problem? Or thinking "it's their private matter"?
#JusticeforMandeep

PIX11 News 📰 · 20/08/2022
A mother's suicide has jolted her Queens neighborhood — and the global South Asian community — deeply. pix11.com/news/local-new...

Thread
Amardeep S Dhillon · 04/08/2022 ...
This is the reality of our culture, our "values" - gendered violence, ignored and enabled, downplayed and normalised. The underbelly of a society obsessed with izzat is a society invested in shame and her blood is on our hands as surely as it's on her husband's. **#JusticeforMandeep**

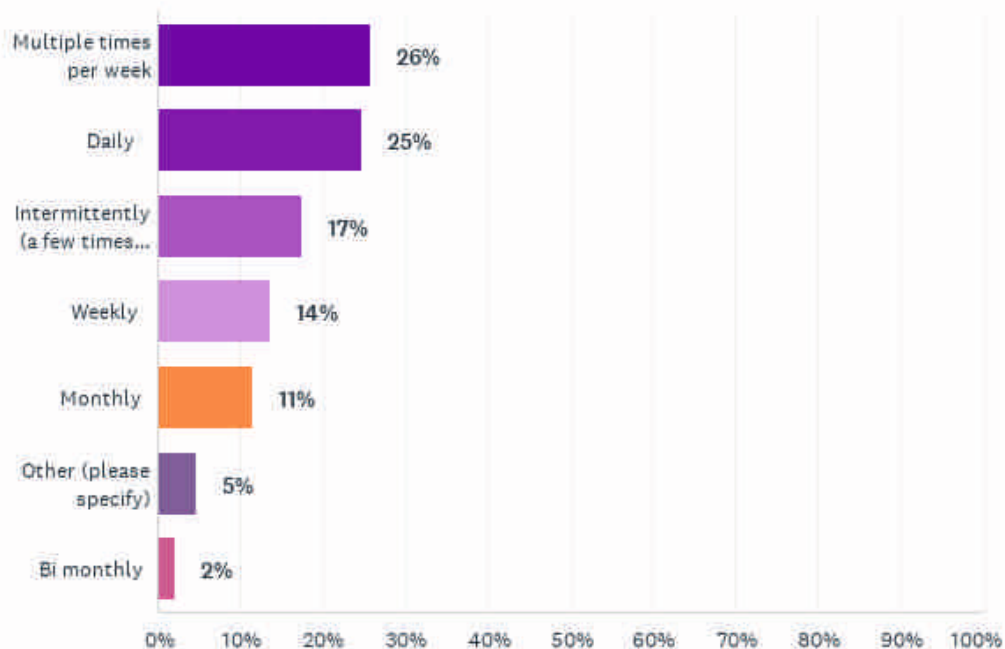
Hardeep Kaur B... · 04/08/2022
TW: DOMESTIC ABUSE, SUICIDE
Ranjodhbeer Singh Sandhu (he does not deserve to be called a singh) abused his wife for the past 8 year...
[Show this thread](#)

Jas Oberoi | ਜੱਸ ਓਬਰੋਏ · 14/08/2022 ...
What makes an 'abused daughter' more acceptable than a 'divorced daughter'?

Simran Kaur Sandhu / ਸਿਮਰਨ ਕੌਰ / ... @SSsandhu1
Replying to @JasOberoi @tuhanu_ki and 6 others
The emphasis our society lays on 'norms' set by a patriarchal society. Why is a man not killed for "dishonoring" his family? Why is his 'virginity' not mandatory? Why is a divorced man still coveted & a divorced woman an "easy" target for roving males?
This mindset must change

#JusticeForMandeep

i) Fig 7: Frequency of abuse



When asked about frequency, 51 percent of those who reported experiencing abuse, reported experiencing domestic abuse daily or multiple times a week. SWA views this as a crisis of abuse within the community.

Investment needs to be made into ensuring that those who have contact with women on a more regular basis, e.g., Schools, employers, friends, places of worship, and community centres, become not only more attuned to spotting the indicators but also signposting to specialist organisations who can provide advice and guidance.

j) Disclosing domestic abuse

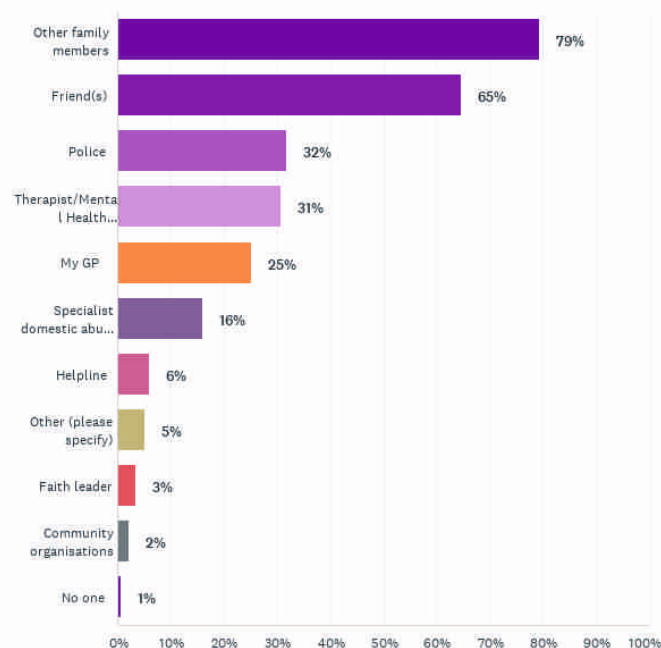
Does anyone know about the abuse you suffered/are suffering?

- Yes –80%
- No – 13%
- Not sure – 7%

The fact that women are talking about their abuse is positive. It demonstrates a generational shift where older abuse survivors tended to have more significant restrictions and had very few support networks as first-generation immigrants. Many respondents commented in the report about the active silence and culture of suppression when domestic abuse occurred in the 80s and 90s.

k) Fig 8: Who else knows about the abuse ?

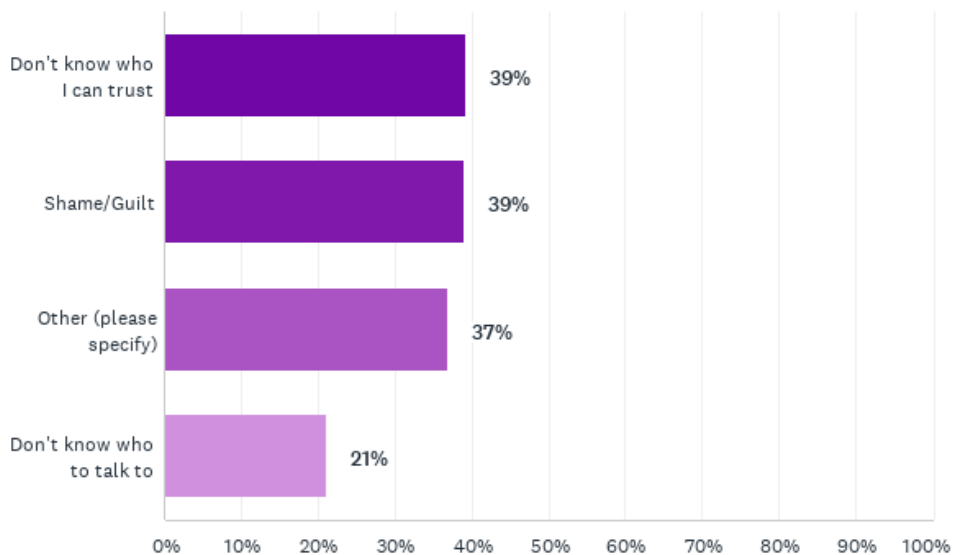
The findings suggest that family members and friends are still more trusted than some public and existing domestic support services. SWA believes the absence of confidence in faith leaders and community organisations reflects the Sikh Panjabi community leadership's failure to engage the community, specifically about domestic (and sexual) abuse, which is also evidenced by the failure of high-profile cases like the Derby Gurdwara case which is still unresolved.



When asked whom they would turn to for support, 79 per cent went to family members, and 56 per cent confided in a friend(s). Thirty-two per cent had engaged with the police. However, there needs to be higher levels of engagement with most public and third-sector providers: victim Support (15 per cent) and IDVAs (6 per cent). There may also be cultural barriers to accessing support services. The low take-up of our 2022 survey in Panjabi (3 respondents) suggests that language barriers for the community are limited. However, confidence in the cultural competence and the anti-racism stance of the organisation may provide hidden barriers to engagement. The lack of response to the Panjabi survey could also be related to a need for more confidence in using an online platform. We will address this in our 2023 survey, where we will host focus groups and 1:1 interviews to complete paper-based surveys. If there is buy-in from places of worship, we will also look to engage with Gurdwara congregations to broaden our reach.

Therapists, mental health professionals, and GPs remain another group women have chosen to confide in, yet it is unclear if this results from self or agency referrals. Several respondents have also alluded to a failure to break down the relationship with mental health practitioners. This could indicate the absence of culturally specific mental health support and the euro-centric/western models of talking therapies and CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy), often deployed unthinkingly for South Asian communities.

I) Fig 9: What is stopping you from sharing your situation with others?



There remains a real fear of retribution and reprisals that prevents women from disclosing that they have been or are being abused. Psychological safety is essential for women who have been subjected to abuse. It remains the case that too many Sikh Panjabi women feel entrenched in situations not of their choosing but where they feel culturally compelled to either conform to what is expected or remain silent. Trust is pivotal to getting women to recognise themselves as abuse victims and come forward for assistance.

Data shows that underreporting is even more acute within minority communities. Imkaan (2020) findings strongly suggest that BAME women were more likely to stay in abusive relationships due to the barriers associated with leaving. SafeLives' (2020) dataset (with 42000 clients) showed that 'BME clients suffered abuse for 1.5 times longer before seeking help compared to those from a white British or Irish background'. Research shows that a woman facing domestic violence has to make 11 contacts with agencies before getting the help she needs; however, this rises to 17 if she is BME' (Brittain et al, 2005).

When asked about the types of abuse they experienced, 'honour'-based abuse was selected by only 6 per cent of respondents. However, when looking at the reasons that prevented them from disclosing their abuse, shame and guilt were selected by 39 per cent of respondents, and so-called 'honour' featured heavily in the 'other' responses.

One respondent remarked: -

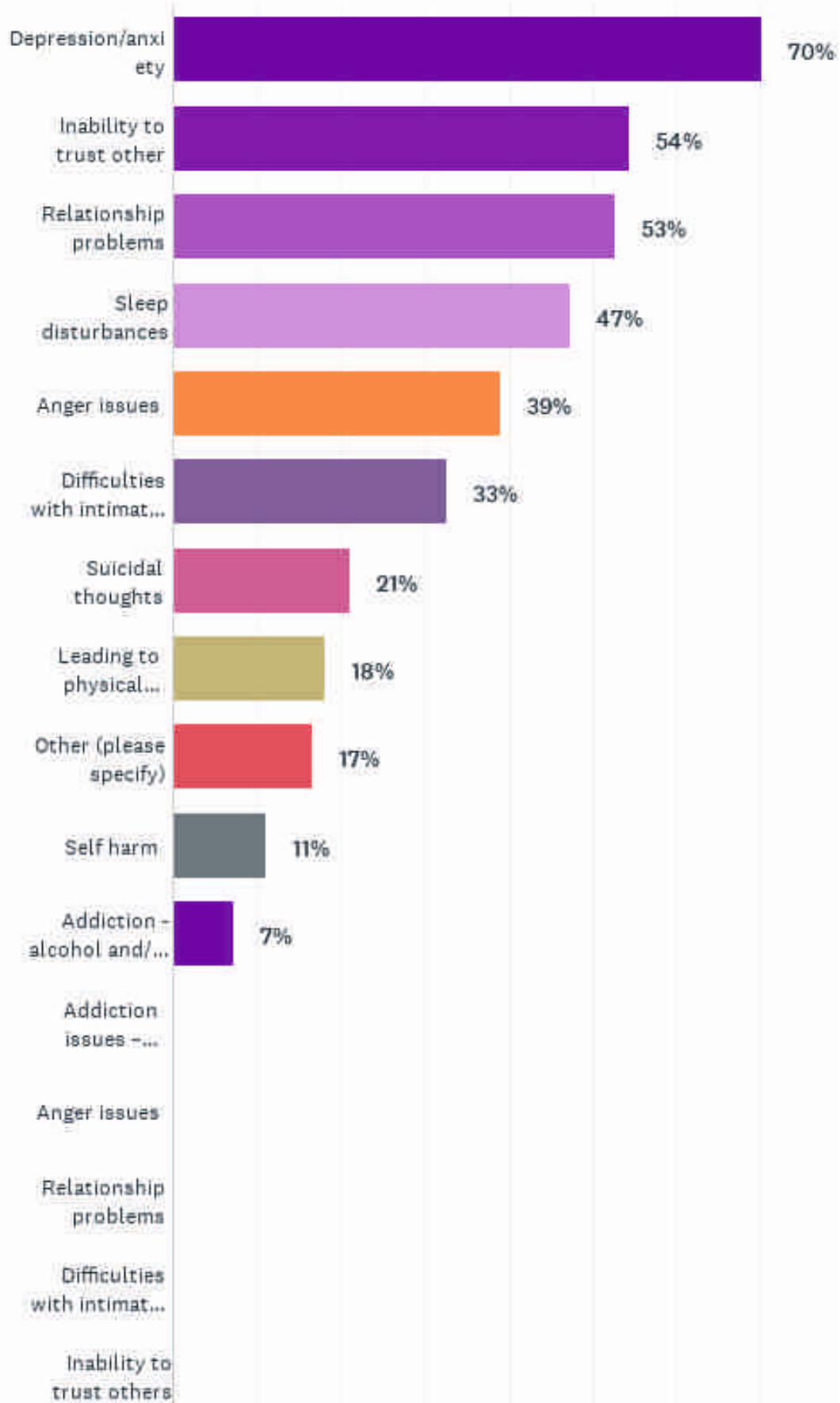
"I would have nowhere to live if I report my parents, I found it difficult to hold down a job due to my mental health so didn't know how I would survive so I would save everything and leave when I could." - Survey respondent 326

"As the culture dictates, you "just get on with it" and don't say anything. It's uncommon to do anything about this, in the period of time I've grown up. Also, if you want to deal with this in a certain way (e.g., therapy or counselling) it's not always possible to engage all parties" - Survey respondent 386

"When I did talk openly and made others aware, because he was a <removed> and was very public in the UK, everyone said I was lying and making it up and I got slandered for it, even when my family were involved in the matter and so were the police." - Survey respondent 567

SWA believes that terms like 'honour-based abuse' is the terminology used by professional agencies and not something Sikh Panjabi women and girls commonly could identify with. This would explain the discrepancy where respondents engaged with the question around the types of abuse, they had experienced; honour-based violence was reported at a much lower level (6 per cent) than the reasons that prevented victims from disclosing their abuse, shame, and guilt at 39 per cent.

m) Fig 10: Impact of domestic abuse



Domestic violence significantly impacts women's health and well-being in the immediate and longer term, often continuing even after the relationship has ended. The psychological consequences of violence can be as severe as the physical effects. Exposure to violence and abuse can lead to poorer mental and physical health. Seventy per cent of respondents reported experiencing depression and anxiety, and 47 per cent reported suffering from sleep disturbances.

Sleep and health are firmly related, poor sleep can increase the risk of having poor health, and poor health can make it harder to sleep (Mental Health Foundation 2011). This can impact every aspect of day-to-day living, such as attention, concentration, drive, motivation, and connection. Mothers who are abused will inevitably be less able to be fully present for their children, which will impact another generation. Children will be directly and indirectly impacted by less attentive mothers, which can compound effects (Kaur, 2022).

Below are additional comments from respondents who engaged with the question:-

“My sisters and I find it difficult to stop being defensive. We are starting to understand that our nervous system is constantly on which is exhausting. We are anxious individuals and suffer from depression. We know we can achieve in life and are intelligent, but the lethargy lets us down and we all require so much effort to do basic everyday tasks. We can do them but have to push ourselves so much every single day.” - Survey respondent 831

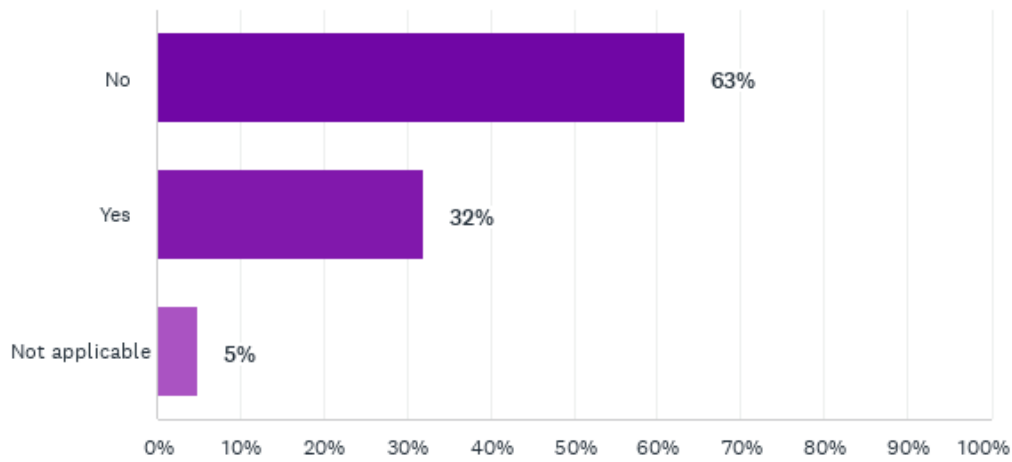
“A lost sense of belonging, struggle to speak coherently and deal with the symptoms of trauma and depression daily, alongside borderline personality disorder.” - Survey respondent 718

“I have changed as a person. I used to be bubbly, outgoing now I've withdrawn from everyone and everything. I don't know who I am anymore.” Survey respondent 627



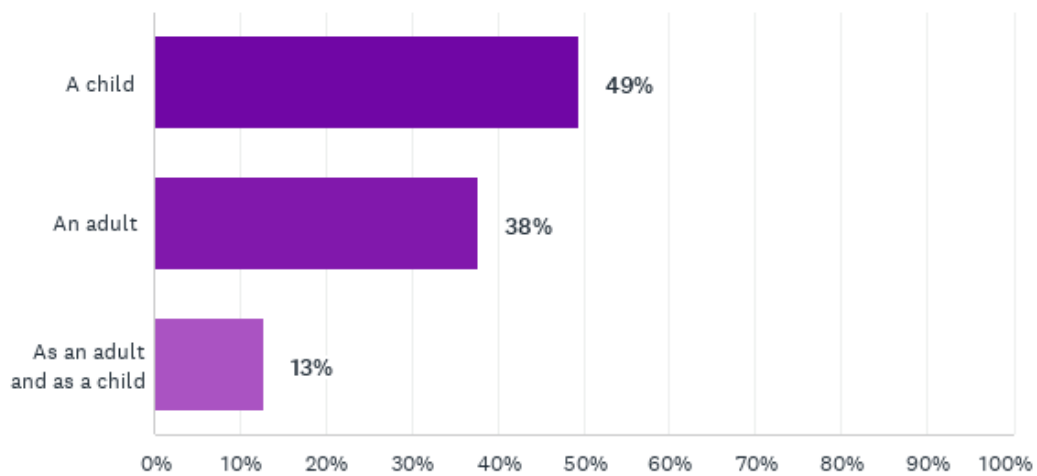
Sexual abuse

n) Fig 11: Have you experienced sexual abuse in the past?



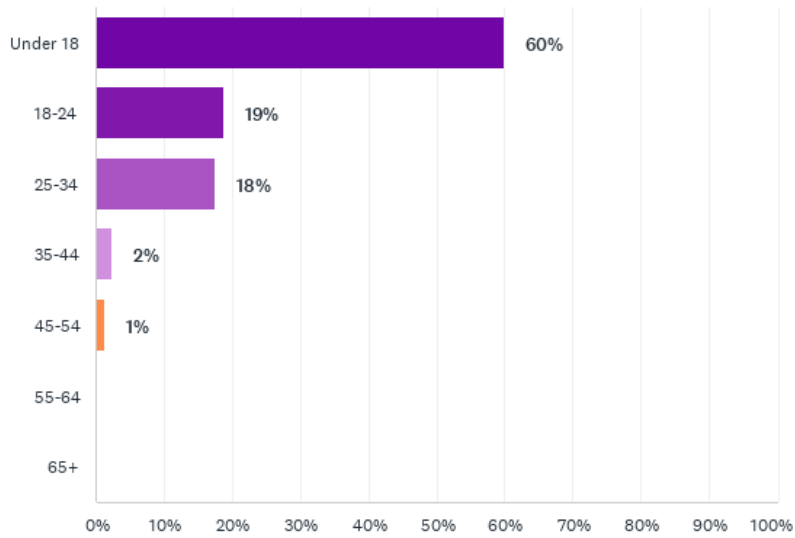
The fact that almost 1/3 (32 per cent) of respondents to this question have experienced sexual abuse in the past is an issue of acute concern. While SWA's focus to date has been on domestic abuse as we develop our services, it is clear that the issue of abuse is broader in the community.

o) F12: Have you experienced sexual abuse?



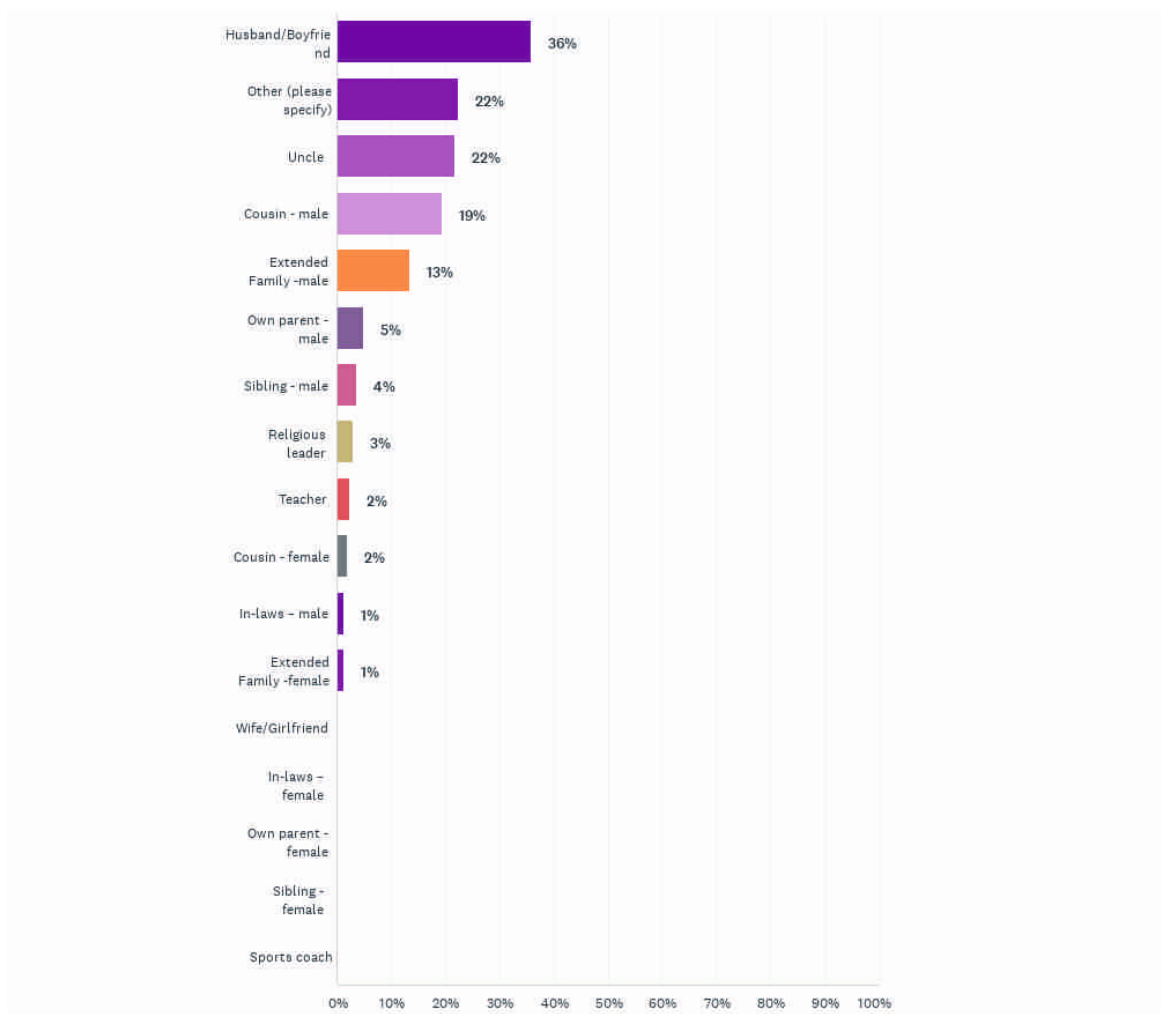
49 percent of respondents who reported experiencing abuse, experienced sexual abuse as children, and 13 per cent experienced sexual abuse as adults and children. As this was a question where you could only opt for one answer, 62 per cent of respondents who had experienced sexual abuse experienced it as children.

p) F13: How old were you when the sexual abuse first started?



Survey respondents were asked when the sexual abuse first started. Cross-referenced against other questions, it is clear that the initiation of sexual abuse toward children is an issue.

q) Fig 14: Who was the perpetrator of the sexual abuse?



Our survey results demonstrate that a critical characteristic of abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community is the role of the family, either as perpetrators or as silent bystanders. Sikh Panjabi women and girls have informed us that our community has a problem with child sexual abuse.

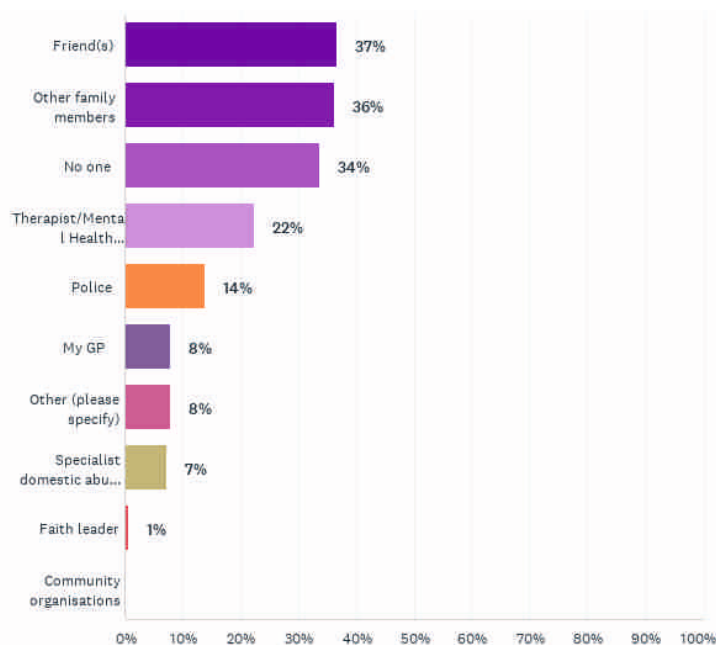
Sixty two per cent of those reporting sexual abuse were children. Therefore, as uncomfortable as that may be, it is not surprising that sexual abusers are identified as the top three perpetrators as husband/boyfriend, uncle, and cousin. This should be something of acute concern and something as a community that needs to be addressed from a historical sense. This cohort of survivors, need mental health support and support for historical sexual abuse, which understand the cultural backdrop.

Noticeable is the consistent trend from immediate family. However, we also need to discuss female abusers (2 per cent).

'Other' was joint second highest. When looking at the responses from Sikh Panjabi women and girls who engaged with this question. A summary of perpetrators mentioned in order of prevalence was:

- Family associate/friend
- Next-door neighbour (male)
- Shared housing/house owner
- University students

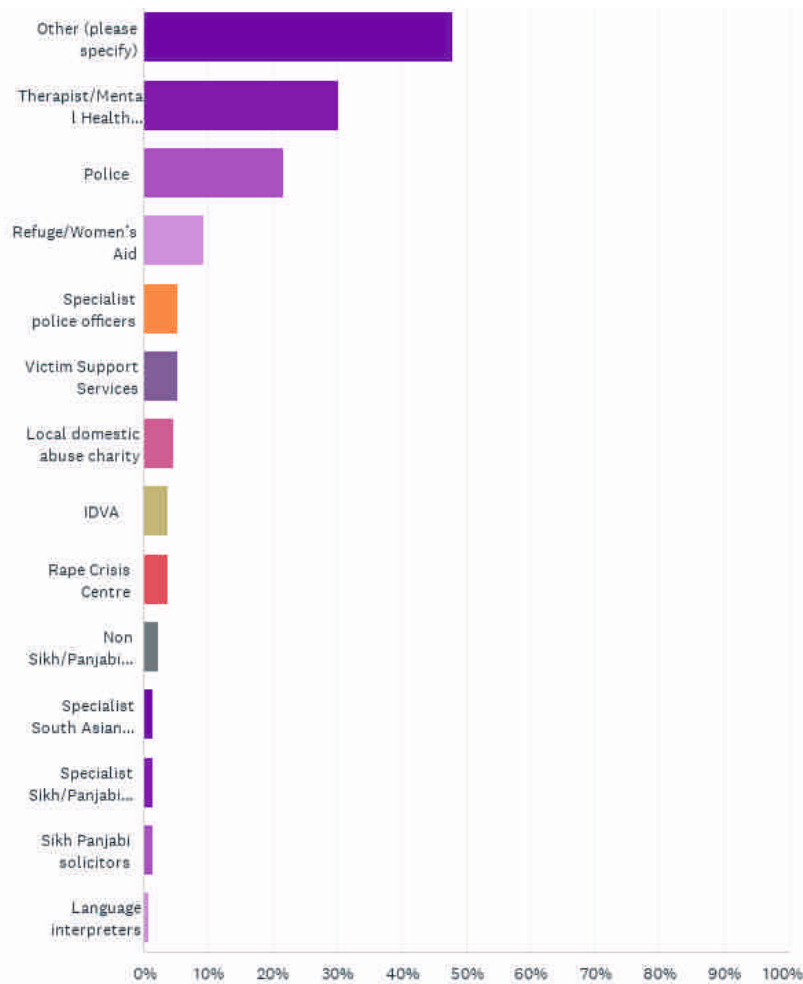
r) F15: Who else knows about the sexual abuse?



Once again, we asked which other individuals or agencies knew of the sexual abuse, and once again, family members and friends featured as the most common answer alongside 'no one.'

Issues of trust and fear of family turmoil prevent women from disclosing.

s) Fig 16: Which if any of the following have you had contact with relating to your experience of sexual violence?



Survivors were asked whom they had contact concerning their experience of sexual abuse.

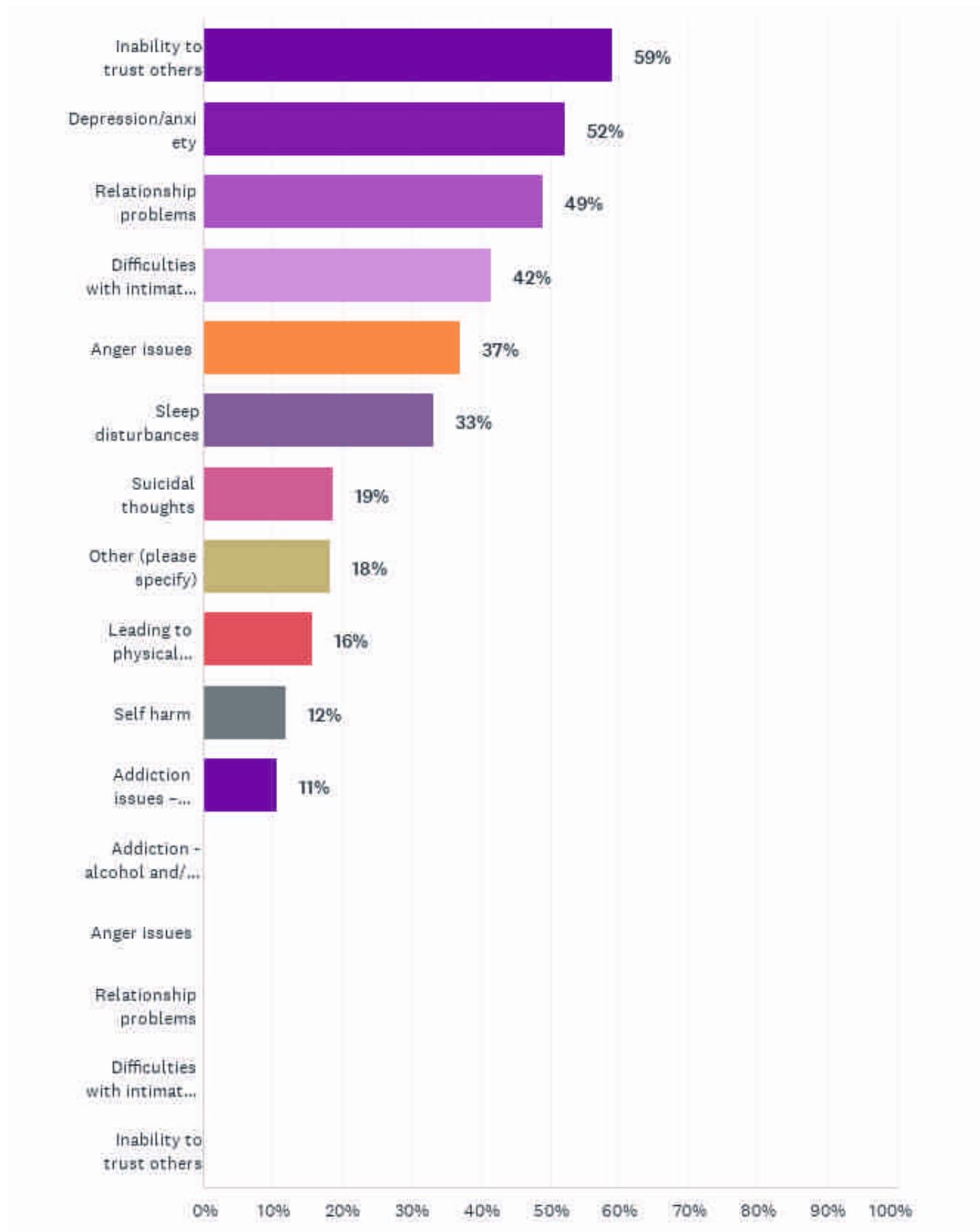
Under the 'other' category, 48% of those who had experienced sexual abuse had not disclosed or sought discussions with any agency. 22% contacted the police, and 30% with mental health practitioners or therapists.

Survey results clearly show that victims of sexual abuse are more reluctant to disclose and report their experiences when compared to victims of domestic abuse. We must work collectively within the Sikh Panjabi community to create a safe and non-judgemental culture of disclosure on all forms of abuse.

Currently, discussions about sexual abuse have been hijacked by religious leaders and male-led community organisations in aid of fuelling tensions between different faith communities. That is not to say that women and girls are not experiencing abuse where perpetrators are from different communities. However, the survey evidences how abuse is being perpetrated by male relatives already known to the victim. We must first look inward toward the community to help protect Sikh Panjabi women and girls. Again, this is an uncomfortable truth that needs to be urgently addressed for future generations.

Once again, looking at the impact of sexual abuse, survivors shared similar impact descriptors.

t) Fig 17: What impact is the sexual abuse (current or historic) having on you at the moment?



The impact of sexual abuse can be enormous for victims. Repressing such important life events and bearing the weight of such a heavy secret is likely to exacerbate shame and guilt, two common feelings victims of abuse carry with them. By not disclosing the abuse, these feelings cannot be explored or challenged, which means these women will carry a lifelong weight that was imposed on them. (Kaur, 2022)

Respondents were given the option 'Other' to capture anything not listed; other impacts highlighted were:-

- PTSD
- Constant fear. ADHD
- Eating disorder

- “All of the above at the time it happened”
- “Paranoia with my own children, don't trust anyone with my children”
- “None - It was a one-off rape in which I froze, lasted a few mins, no other violence occurred”
- “I feel I have buried the memories and suppressed the feelings so none of the above”
- “Weight gain, disordered eating, stopped studies”
- “It's parked up and don't wish to talk about it”
- “Problems with working with men in safeguarding roles”
- “Difficult memories and flashbacks to the event sometimes”
- “No impact at the moment, although have suffered with depression/anxiety & sleep disturbances”
- “None, just thoughts and memories. still unable to disclose”

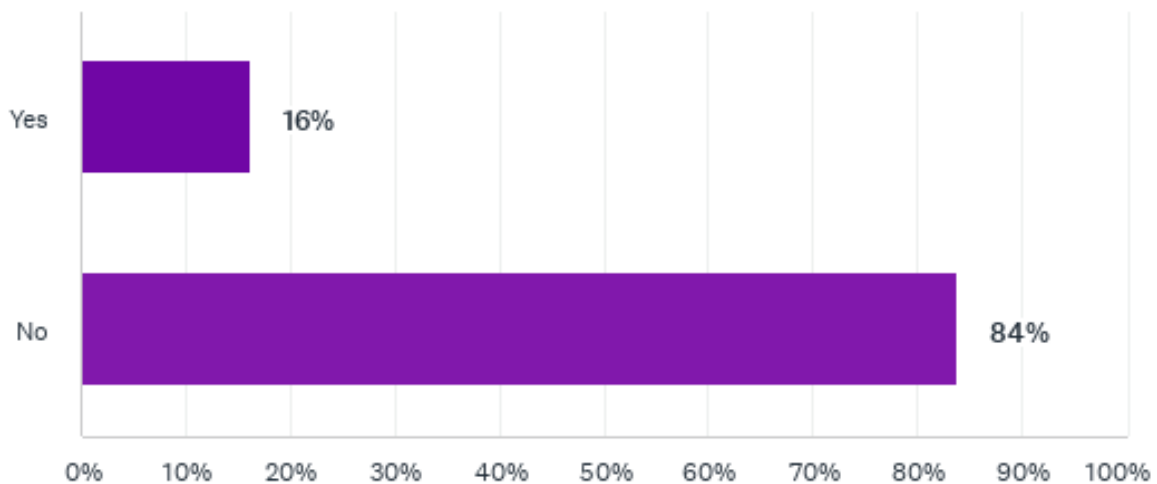


u) Remedies and solutions to domestic abuse

In a year that has sought to initiate considerable legislative change within the domestic abuse sphere, we were eager to understand respondents' views and attitudes towards many of the new measures and updated policies related to the new Domestic Abuse Bill/Act.

It is noticeable that the three most popular remedies all centre upon systems to support the exiting of relationships. The plan going forward for survivors once they have decided to exit a relationship/situation can be complex. Any reassurance offered under such circumstances is to be welcomed. -

v) Fig 18: Are you aware of the Victims Code?



We asked how many respondents were aware of the Victims Code. Only 16 per cent were aware of the code and their rights under it. The fact that 84 per cent are unaware suggests significant work to be done to ensure that Sikh Panjabi women and children can understand and trust the criminal justice system.

w) Victims Voices

This question, like last year is for victims to share anything not covered in the survey. This year we received 200 comments in addition to the formal responses to the survey Below are a small section of these comments

1. Issues relating to DV are a cultural issue. There needs to be more awareness in gurdwaras. Materials provided in Punjabi and English. Appropriate signposting. The shame is still there and the elders not wanting to talk about it.'

2. I pray the legal system acknowledges psychological abuse leads to suicide and perpetrators are sentenced to murder'. The mental and emotional abuse from my sister-in-law and my father-in-law. I



moved from London to Birmingham to live with my husband and his family. After 3 months of constant rejection and silent treatments from 5 other adults in my husband's family, I decided to go to the local faith leader, where my father-in-law did daily seva at the Gurdwara. I come from a loving family and have been brought up knowing how to respect others and especially our elders. I was hoping that talking to the faith leader would be a step in the right direction, and maybe he would encourage the two families to meet and talk about any issues. But instead, he said, it was all to do with my past life, and their treatment towards me was my karma. I was absolutely shocked at his flippant statement. I am a very spiritual person and I read and write Punjabi & Hindi, I was born and bred in Punjab until the age of 10. I am cultured, traditional, educated to a post-graduate level, I'm a professional. My in-laws did not choose to get to know me, instead they chose to dismiss, reject and blame me for their insecurities. Till this day, I still want to go and ask this faith leader - why did he not help me when I came to him for advice. This was 24 years ago.'

3. Child abuse - as the second daughter in the family I was subjected to neglect, physical and mental abuse at the hands of parents and grandmother.'

4. Education for the Punjabi community targeted for all ages. How they can better support their children/grandchildren. How to deal with bullies in the community and set boundaries. Actually, live Sikh values and not cultural. Re-educate and encourage equality, to encourage inclusion and learn about unconscious bias. Making support more accessible for people who don't speak/read English. We need emergency housing to be available for people who are suffering from domestic abuse. The abusers should be removed from the home. The process is all too slow and needs funding and specialist support with people who can be trusted and not nosy aunties who you know gossip (sorry!).'

5. When I reported my sexual abuse to the police, they made me feel it was my fault even though I had been kidnapped'

6. Gurdwaras must do more. Perhaps have a committee member specific for domestic abuse that can be trained and aid any sangat going through issues. It's hard as people worry what community will think as most Indians can't remain confidential but this is where DA needs to be talked about and shame for women removed. It's awful what we go through. Also, I've seen it happen to men too so reversed. Not sure, but I assume there are more cases for females.'

7. Now know never to hide and show the world what I wanted them to see but to tell them when it 1st started as I was married for under 5 years but had left him several times thinking that he would change.....but he would change then go back to his ways as he got a kick out of being controlling. Nobody knows what goes behind closed doors and you don't know a person until you Start living with them as when you are dating you don't see their true side.'

8. Cultural change is needed and education. Gender of baby is determined by the male, not female - teach this to the old women giving their daughter in laws hard time. It is their son that has too many X sperms and not Y sperms. Saddens me that this is still happening, I remember when I was little the Sikh woman who killed her mother-in-law, set her husband on fire, smashed her 8-month-old daughter against the wall



and luckily the 3-year-old girl got out.' You can't imagine what she must have been going through to do that - all I know is That they gave her a hard time for having a daughter and it was even worse after having a second daughter. Why is this still happening over 20 years later? Create safe place for women and children to escape to without judgment. Support their rehabilitation through education, employment opportunities and counselling. It is vital for a woman to have income to stand on her own two feet and not go back to that abuse. Free childcare until the woman is financially stable to provide a home for her children. Teach the in laws not to interfere!'

9. Training on DV withing the community needs to be delivered to local faith leaders.'

10. The role of the extended family, particularly the women eg mothers in law, sisters in law. Every case I have seen involves them as the perpetrators and the men as being unable to stop them as they are emotionally made to feel they must support their family. Misplaced loyalty. The wife is seen as the outsider. The lasting impact, trauma this leaves on the children involved. More cultural awareness and education needed in schools as part of safeguarding of children in education.'

11. Very good initiative. We need to make our fellow Asians aware of Domestic abuse in the community and not normalise some of the behaviours we see passed down by generations. Alcohol in Punjabi communities are at a high and we need to teach our young boys and girls to not just drink our issues away. More talking therapies and more advocates for the Sikh community.'

12. We need to see more successful abuse awareness campaigns, criminal prosecutions and support for victims.'

13. Domestic Violence/ sexual abuse information needs to be explained Schools and colleges with support groups made available. at least students can have access where their family members may not or be aware. Also, I think it's important that Sikh temples are also able to provide information on domestic abuse even though i am aware that this issue has been shunned and certain members of the community will not, or refuse to address or even mention the issue, even though they may be aware that it is going on. This would be a very important step if pushed for.'

14. My abusers are dead, but the trauma is not, I may not recover but I will learn to accept that which no one did anything about. The hardest will be struggle with intimacy, which I may be old now the void as result of the trauma will take decade to recover from - I suppose I have said to myself in the next life it be different. At least the abusers are now dead and now some 60 years on I can start to assemble that which is broken and learn to love myself. Why was this important to say - well there are many who never spoke who never had space to heard dont forget them please.'

15. The normalizing of abuse in our community is just staggering. We are literally raising women to endure abuse and when they leave EXTREMELY abusive situations we shame and exclude them instead of applauding them. We should normalize protecting young children from abuse and giving women a viable and supported exit strategy. I don't know how I survived this long and most of the places you mentioned in



this survey (despite their best intentions) didn't help me escape or put a roof over my head/food in my belly when I needed it. Sorry, just being honest.'

17. Majority of young Panjabi have suffered some abuse, but they have kept quiet all their lives. This has encouraged perpetrators to carry on.'

18. Make DVA a crime. Raising awareness of the damaging effect of DVA with diverse communities directly i.e. at the gurdwara. Make women perps aware of the adverse effects they can cause when supposedly promoting negative cultural practices e.g. forced marriages, HBV, concept of izzat, supporting misogyny, and male privilege.'

19. Support in gurdwaras and awareness groups should be hosted within gurdwaras they are NOT doing enough for their local communities or sangat.'

20. People are very scared or feel humiliated revealing the abuse. I know people will never believe me as my husband is so well respected in the community and with family. My children have also experienced trauma and required training. My husband does recognise his behaviour as he is also a victim of abuse as a child, but this doesn't stop him exploding from time to time. He says he loves me, but he has anger issues. things have improved but they are not perfect. I will die in this situation, and no one will ever know what I experienced.'

21. I found that the police were racist in their attitudes. The first time I reported my ex, the police officer at the desk called the DV Officer saying not sure how you're going to deal with this one she's Asian. That put me off. At hospital I asked for a social worker who told me that because of my culture it would be better if there was no intervention as it would make things worse. I am an educated professional woman, if these are the barriers I faced, it must be awful for women who don't speak English or understand that rights. Thank you.'



7. Faith and exploitation: The Sikh Faith and hypocrisy

In our first publication, SWA set out the faith narrative around the role of women and how women should be treated. SWA evidenced the harmony across Sikh scripture, Sikh history, and the Sikh code of conduct which states that domestic violence, female infanticide, child sexual abuse, and sexual abuse of vulnerable adults are all deemed worthy of contempt. The spectrum of Sikh scriptures is unflinching in their commitment to the positive role of both genders in society when both are engaged in regular faith study, meditation, and practitioners of correcting one's weaknesses of mind and emotions.

The Sikh scriptures repeatedly discuss falling prey to hypocrisy and warn devotees to be wary of those who may look spiritual and holy, but their actions are anything but. Sikhs are always encouraged by faith scriptures to explore people they encounter with patience and depth and whether their actions match their words.

Inwardly polluted and outwardly pure.

Those who are outwardly pure and yet polluted within,
lose their lives in the gamble.

They contract this terrible disease of desire,
and in their minds, they forget about dying.

In the Vedas, the ultimate objective is the Naam,
the Name of the Lord; but they do not hear this,
and they wander around like demons.

Says Nanak, those who forsake Truth and cling to falsehood,
Lose their lives in the gamble. ||19||

Guru Amar Daas Ji - Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji - Ang 917

'It's your bad karma, that's why he abuses you.' – The Karma Philosophy and its link to abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community.

It is the experience of SWA, through our victim support work, there is a theme emerging amongst Sikh Panjabi women where warped Karam philosophy is used to justify abuse perpetrated against them. At best, it provides a context for understanding why difficult or unfair life circumstances must be endured. At worst, it is used as a guilt-induced stance to prevent victims from leaving abusive households "it was your karma to be married to each other, if you leave him now, he will come back into your next life too." This is especially the case where connotations of Faith are practiced and enforced in the victim's household and extended family.

'According to the law of karma, every action, physical or mental, has its consequence which must be faced either in this life or in the lives to come. The Gurus accepted the doctrine of karma not as an immutable law but as a system of nature subject to Hukam (Divine Order) and Nadar (Divine Grace), two



concepts that might be described as Guru Nanak's distinctive contribution to Indian religious thought.'

'It is important to note here that Sikhism does not stipulate heaven or hell wherein good and bad actions of humanity are rewarded or punished after one has passed away. Moreover, according to Sikhism, human birth results from God's favourable will and past actions. Further, past actions do not determine the caste or status of a soul taking birth. All human beings are born equal. "Good" deeds are actions that help an individual's quest for liberation from the cycles of birth and death, which, in Sikh philosophy, is the aim of a human.' The Sikh Encyclopaedia (2014)

The Sikh Encyclopaedia (2014) further states that 'the adverse effects of karma can be obliterated by a proper understanding of Hukam and proper conduct in accordance with that understanding as well as by God's grace. Instinctive responses to environmental stimuli mostly regulate the actions of other species. The human is endowed with a superior brain. He, therefore, has the mechanisms to develop a proper understanding of Hukam and choose a course of action (Karma) favourable to progressive spiritual growth, which is the foundation of good safe decisions in all aspects of life.'

SWA has supported victims where Sikh spiritual philosophy has been used to subjugate further women and girls who disclose domestic and (child/historical) Sexual Abuse. Such as "you are the cause of your abuse due to bad karma," which results in untold harm.

A baptised Sikh service user recently reached out to our team and said:-

"Everyone tells me 'it is (the abuse me, my siblings, and my mother experienced at the hands of our father) 'Guru's Plan' and Hukam, which makes me think He (Guru) hates me more. The reincarnation of Satan is in my house, and no one cares."

However, when abuse is disclosed by many Sikh Panjabi women, irrespective of the setting the abuse took place in, it is our experience that the same level of scrutiny and interrogation of karmic action is not levied at perpetrators. This directly conflicts with the high values repeatedly set out in Sikh scriptures.

You will leave this body and form you are so attached to.
And you will have to reap the fruits of the actions you have performed.
Having followed the commands of your mind,
you must now suffer the pain of your chosen path.
Naked in the inferno, you are terrified at the sight of your true,
exposed, monstrous self.
In the end you will regret the crimes you have committed. ||14||

Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Ang 470-471



Sexual abuse of adults and children in the Sikh Panjabi Community.

This year's survey figures allude to the sexual abuse of children being the prevalent form of sexual abuse Sikh Panjabi women and girls have been subjected to. With perpetrators being predominantly from within the immediate and extended family setting, SWA's opinion is that there is a greater risk to Sikh Panjabi women and children from intimate partners, cousins, and uncles who feature as the most common form of perpetrators than perpetrators from outside the community. Abuse by a faith leader (3 per cent) is significantly lower than abuse perpetrated by relatives.

IICSA: The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse concluded its seven-year investigation in October 2022. The Inquiry conducted a thematic investigation into Child protection in religious organisations and settings. In total, 38 religious organisations, including those representing Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, new religious movements, non-conformist Christian denominations, non-trinitarian Christian denominations, Paganism, and Sikhism, provided evidence to the Inquiry.

The final report highlighted the catastrophic failings of places of worship. 'The report evidenced that there were 'significant barriers to effective reporting of child sexual abuse, including victim-blaming and notions of shame and honour. Children are not taught about sex or sexual relationships in some religious traditions and communities. The Inquiry was told by representatives of some faiths that in some languages, there were no words for rape, sexual abuse, or genitalia.' (IICSA, 2022)

'Not all religious organisations had adequate child protection policies, despite the advice readily accessible in the public domain. Safe recruitment practices were not always followed, and there was limited uptake of child protection training offered by local authorities. While some religious organisations had effective systems for responding to child sexual abuse, this was not the case across the board. Very few had arrangements to provide counselling or therapy sessions for victims and survivors.' (IICSA, 2022)

As part of the IICSA inquiry, The Truth Project collected the experiences of survivors of sexual abuse as children in faith settings. One story was by a Sikh woman named 'Hema.'

Religious leaders in the Sikh temple Hema's family attended were revered by the community, making it impossible for her to tell her family that one of the religious leaders was sexually abusing her.

Hema explains that her parents would sometimes leave her and her sibling in the care of religious leaders at their temple. One of these men would offer Hema sweets and ask her to hug him in return. She was six or seven years old when this began, and she remembers that the 'hugs' seemed to last longer and longer and feel pretty forceful.

One day, he asked Hema to go upstairs to a quiet room. The religious leaders sometimes slept in the temple, so there were beds. He started to kiss her and 'grobe' her. Then he showed her some pictures of naked females, which she described as 'page 3-type' images. He asked her if she liked them and if she would pose like that.



Our 2022 survey figures revealed that only 1 per cent of respondents considered themselves faith leaders who had encountered domestic abuse amongst their congregation. Unfortunately, none of the faith leaders who responded to the survey knew what to do when confronted with domestic abuse. Given that only Sikh Panjabi women and girls completed the survey, this indicates a long-held assumption that the Faith leadership structures are devoid of capable, trained Sikh women and girls who can be a positive conduit for a culture change in our places of worship.

SWA recognises the efforts of the newly established Gurdwara Aid UK. Gurdwara Aid was set up in 2019 by the late Gurdeep Singh and Mandip Singh. Since then, the work of Gurdwara Aid has grown organically in supporting Gurdwaras with charity registrations, gift aid, policies, disputes, border agency registrations, and other activities. During the pandemic, Gurdwara Aid brought Gurdwaras together via monthly online meetings to discuss how best to deal with Covid19 and its impact on communities.

During 2022 and considering the IICSA Inquiry into Abuse in religious settings, Gurdwara Aid have put Safeguarding at the heart of their agenda in providing support to Gurdwaras to ensure they are legally compliant in their duties. Gurdwara Aid has arranged face-to-face Safeguarding training, accessed by around 40 Gurdwara since 2019.

SWA work closely with Gurdwara Aid and has supported all four of their 2022 regional (Birmingham, Leeds, Leicester, and London) conferences, where Safeguarding has been a central theme. For the first time, the training allowed us to engage directly with gurdwara management committees from across the country to address the issues around safeguarding and the broader context of domestic and sexual abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community. SWA welcomes the slight shift in some gurdwara management committees in recognising the stain of domestic and sexual violence perpetrated in the community. Collective action is needed to shift outdated attitudes, habits, and behaviours that have no foundation in the Sikh Faith.

SWA believes that, although Sikh places of worship are a lifeline to many of the communities they serve, and many Gurdwaras are exemplary in their conduct and running of a faith setting, too many are not doing enough to safeguard their congregations. Gurdwaras and faith settings should be treated with caution when seeking support for domestic or sexual abuse by victims. Reporting must always go through agencies such as the police with the support of female-led culturally specific support services with a credible history, expertise, and professionalism in supporting victims alongside a tailored package of mental health and therapeutic support in the aftermath of abuse.

Role of faith settings in victim support

The World Economic Forum (2020) describes the role of Faith in today's society; "Faith permeates our world, providing a moral and ethical compass for the vast majority of people. Evidence shows that –beyond individual religious practice – Faith is increasingly moving into the public sphere and may affect various aspects of economic and social life. More and more often, people of Faith are becoming critical partners in organisations that tackle various global challenges – a sign of the vital role of faith leaders and



communities in bringing about social change.

Boyer et al (2022) comment on how 'In most societies, religious leaders play an influential role in the construction of gender norms... If leaders offered a more progressive religious interpretation of gender roles during these courses, emphasizing the need for men to improve their relationships by balancing power and decision-making with their spouses, violence would reduce.'

Sadly, SWA has witnessed a steady increase in victims disclosing historical and recent sexual abuse and other forms of abuse where a faith leader, worker, or setting is involved. However, varied the case studies have been, SWA has witnessed a consistently poor response that has caused more harm to victims.

Hema's encounter provides further evidence:

'Recently, Hema wrote a letter to the current leader at the temple and told him about the abuse. She was invited to the temple, supposedly to talk about what had happened, but the religious leader tore up her letter when she got there. She says, 'These men are like gods. Hema's life has been significantly affected by the abuse she suffered. As well as being abused further by her husband, she has depression and anxiety, finds sexual relationships difficult, and is unable to challenge inappropriate behaviour by men.'

SWA has advocated for several cases where sexual abuse and misconduct were alleged to have taken place or exacerbated in Gurdwara and faith settings. Case studies are cases where the SWA team has provided direct support to victims via a support worker.

Examples from such case studies have found: include: -

- Gurdwara management committees admitted they do not carry out DBS checks on its Granthis (priests) and Kirtanis (hymn singers) despite the close contact they are likely to have with children and vulnerable adults as part of their congregation. This was clear in the IICSA Enquiry evidence-gathering sessions, where two major UK Gurdwaras stated they (at the point of giving evidence) relied solely on references to ensure high moral character.
- Gurdwara management committees fail in their safeguarding duties when victims come forward to disclose sexual violence/misconduct on Gurdwara premises involving staff, management, or trustees.
- Some Gurdwara management committees are not reporting cases of child sexual abuse by congregation members to the police and hold male-led 'community meetings to address issues.
- Some Gurdwara management committees are moving Granthis (priests) and Kirtanis (hymn singers) (Granthis) and hymn singers (Kirtanis) where allegations of sexual misconduct have been raised, to different gurdwaras where alleged perpetrators were given 'good' character references.
- Children and young adults witnessing/experiencing violence and abuse at home, who are reaching out



to the Gurdwara management for support and community intervention, are being shunned or given false assurances that support will be provided.

- Some Gurdwara management committees and, Granthis tell abused women and children that they must bear their abuse due to bad karma.
- In some cases, Gurdwara management committees have been known to recruit volunteers convicted of domestic abuse.
- Gurdwara management committees conduct unregistered marriages where vulnerable young girls, often with complex backgrounds and or learning needs, are having wedding ceremonies with undocumented migrant men where no parents or loved ones are present (from the girl's side). No safeguarding or paperwork checks are carried out to ensure the marriage is safe, and no coercion has taken place.

There have been many high-profile cases of Sikh priests perpetrating sexual abuse and Gurdwaras acting as settings where child sexual abuse and the abuse of vulnerable adults has taken place.

Here are some examples.

- Two Sikh priests were jailed for 12 years for raping a 26-year-old Glasgow prostitute after she refused to have sex with them. Gurnam Singh, 30, was sentenced to seven years, and Sukhdev Singh, 36, to five. Both will be placed on the sex offenders register indefinitely. The Singhs, married and with three children, each still living in India, had been in Scotland only a short period – to work at the temple in Glasgow's St Andrews Drive – before the attack in the city centre in April. (BBC News, 2012)
- A married father, Gurbinder Ghuman, 41, who tried to sexually assault a teenage girl at a Sikh temple during a wedding, has been jailed for more than four years. He targeted the 13-year-old at the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara in Gravesend, Kent, when she had gone to the toilet to adjust her scarf. As well as his custodial sentence, Ghuman has also been banned from going to any religious places, and his name will appear on the sex offender's register for life. It is not the first time he has been punished for crimes of a sexual nature – he was convicted of indecent assault in 1995, jailed for two years under an extended sentence in 2004 for a similar offence, and convicted of exposure in 2006. (MailOnline, 2015)
- UK Sikh preacher Sukhjeevan Singh, a self-styled UK-based Giani (Sikh preacher), published a controversial yet damning report titled 'An investigation of the institutional responses to alleged sexual abuse at a Derby Gurdwara' in January 2022. At the heart of this case was a vulnerable woman who began engaging with her local Gurdwara and quickly became one of its core volunteers. Following a marriage breakdown, she began residing at the Gurdwara complex due to familial abandonment after she disclosed her domestic violence. The victim alleged multiple rapes, assaults, and sexual harassment by two resident Granthis.



- The victim disclosed her abuse to the management committee of the Gurdwara, whose entire handling of the situation was recorded in the report, which highlights "The gurdwara management committee carried out an internal investigation in July 2019. No outcomes of this investigation have emerged. A second complainant also came forward with allegations of sexual harassment against (the second accused priest, "G2". No action was taken.
- The matter was reported to the police, but no further action was taken due to insufficient evidence. The report indicates that both Granthis denied the allegations and then when questioned by police, admitted to sexual activity on the Gurdwara premises but emphasised that the acts were consensual, something the victim denied. It is important to note here that insufficient evidence does not mean the incidents of rape did not take place.
- The report by Singh also gave no outcome to this specific case. He did not meet with the victim or the management committee of the Gurdwara where the incidents took place, nor did he meet the alleged perpetrators, and the report gave no mention of any faith sanctions for the faith violations carried out by both priests.

One of the most persistent defences used by Gurdwara management committees and some in the UK Sikh leadership is that without seeing a successful prosecution of a suspected perpetrator, the leadership cannot/refuse to take any action.

In the year leading up to March 2022, police recorded the highest number of reported rapes at 70,330. The vast majority (83 per cent) of women are raped by someone they know, while half of the rapes against women are carried out by a partner or former partner. However, this number is likely the tip of the iceberg: one in four women will experience rape or sexual assault as an adult, as will one in 20 men. Five in six female rape survivors will never report to the police. Of the rapes reported in 2021, only one in 100 was charged that same year. Prosecution rates for rape are at an all-time low: in 2020-21, there were 1,557 rape prosecutions in England and Wales compared to 67,125 rapes recorded by the police. Norris (2022)

It is the opinion of SWA that a 'smokescreens and mirrors' strategy is routinely adopted when disclosures of abuse are made in the community. It is insincere and deeply problematic as the code of conduct (Rehit Maryada) provides faith leaders with appropriate sanctions and safeguards to discipline those abusing their position of trust in faith settings that are also compliant with the law. SWA is witnessing through our survey responses, casework, and broader community-led discussions that many faith leaders fail to address sexual abuse in faith settings. SWA believes a dangerous combination of a broken justice system that fails to prosecute rape effectively and unsafe UK Sikh Gurdwara management structures is letting down survivors of sexual abuse.

It is the case that although Sikh places of worship are a lifeline to many of the communities they serve, and many Gurdwaras are exemplary in their conduct and running of a faith setting, too many are not doing enough to safeguard their congregations. Gurdwaras and faith settings should be treated with caution when seeking support for domestic or sexual abuse by victims. Reporting must always go through



statutory agencies such as the police with the support of female-led culturally specific support services with a credible history, expertise, and professionalism in supporting victims alongside a tailored package of mental health and therapeutic support in the aftermath of abuse.



8. Service users and emerging themes

The following section provides examples of some of our work.

Shame and Honour

The CPS definition of Honour-Based Abuse as:

An incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion, or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial, or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour.

FSA research explored the themes of shame, subordination, and entrapment. They found that the 'concept of family shame (izzat) played a powerful role in Asian women's experience. Their discourses offer rich insights into the nature of these processes and their complex inter-dependencies. The fear of bringing shame to others, called 'reflected shame' (Gilbert, 2002), was linked to socially defined rules and prescriptions for reputation gaining and maintaining via culturally transmitted systems of honour (izzat). To lose honour (by the actions of another) or to bring dishonour is to be externally shamed, lose status in the eyes of others, or even be disowned by the family and community. This theme pervaded the conversations far more than notions of personal shame, which was taken as failing in roles and loss of identity.' (Gilbert et al., 2004)

SWA believes that shame ('sharam') and so-called 'honour' (izzat) underline the absence of disclosure of abuse within the Sikh Panjabi community. The prevalence of shame and honour is seen predominately in extended and in-law family settings but can also be reinforced by some community members to keep survivors trapped in abusive relationships.

Sadly, survivors' parents and extended family are sometimes more concerned about what other people in the community will think and how that could impact their daughter's marriage prospects; when a daughter wants to leave an abusive relationship, parents will often cite the negative impact on the marital prospects of any younger siblings. Hence shame and honour are given greater importance than the life and happiness of their daughter/sister.

SWA believes that shame and so-called 'honour' and the absence of culturally appropriate safe spaces for discussion, is what keeps the community silent. It allows perpetrators of domestic and child sexual abuse to walk freely, with some holding positions of trust within the community and the wider civic society. Perpetrators remain unchallenged because to do so would require recognition of the problem.

Over the last 18 months, SWA has supported several honour-based violence survivors.



- Victim A had a love marriage and was abused by her in-laws because she was of a different caste to the family she married into, and the family was ashamed of the caste of their daughter-in-law.
- Victim B's parents disowned her because she had married against the parent's will, and now she was being abused. The parents wanted nothing to do with her and blamed her as it was "her choice" to marry him.
- Victim C had given birth to a daughter, and the husband felt ashamed that he did not have a son. He began treating both mother and child poorly as a result.
- Victim D had endured years of abuse but had not left because she was told being a divorcee would bring shame to the whole family, so she continued to stay in the relationship and now has very poor mental health.
- Victim E was sexually assaulted as a child, and her parents refused to report the incident or seek any help for the victim because they were more concerned about people finding out about what happened. They believed this would then bring shame to the family. Now she struggles in her intimate adult relationships and suffers from poor mental health.
- Victim F separated from her perpetrator, who began spreading malicious rumours about the victim to humiliate them and ensure that community members do not believe anything the victim said about his abusive behaviour towards her.
- Victim G was a baptised Sikh. She had been coerced into marriage with someone after she had divorced. She had been manipulated into the marriage by her local faith community as she was made to believe that without the protection of a man, her honour would be at risk, and all men will consider her promiscuous and loose.

Girl Child abuse

Over the last few years, our experience has seen an increasing number of women reporting experiencing abuse at the hands of their husbands, mothers-in-law, and sometimes, sister-in-law due to giving birth to a girl. Some families go into a state of mourning when a girl is born, which is in direct contradiction to the high moral values of the Sikh faith, what it stands for, and the messages that the Gurus delivered to his followers.

Basic biology teaches that the sex of the child is determined by the male sperm, not the female eggs, yet this abuse continues. We have supported cases of men leaving their wives when they have had several daughters who remarry other women (often much younger than the ex-wife) to secure a male child.



Victim H

I had a happy childhood growing up in a Punjabi Sikh family. We followed conservative Punjabi Sikh values and culture. We did not have much money but had a happy childhood in a close-knit family. We experienced childhood poverty as my dad lost his family business due to an accident, but overall, it was a happy childhood full of love.

I met my husband at a family wedding, and a cousin introduced me. I was already married but going through a separation, and I was in a vulnerable state, and he pursued the cousin for an introduction. My mum fell ill, and she put pressure on me to get remarried.

When I got pregnant, I heard his mum on the phone, saying to a relative, 'rab chungji jeej deve,' 'God give us something good. I was walking past I heard that and asked my mother-in-law, what if it is not good? What if it's bad? Do I leave it at the hospital? I was really hurt by it. What does it mean? What is good and what is bad?

I did have a scan to see what sex the baby was and then when I found out it was a girl, I knew I had to be prepared. Abuse further escalated when I gave birth to our first daughter, which he was not happy about. They made her wear blue all the time and wouldn't let me put her in pink.

After the birth of our second daughter, he became more distant and did not acknowledge our daughter for months. Shortly after, he suggested going to Spain for a gender baby to have a boy. His mum was horrible, especially after I'd had a miscarriage. I was practically a housewife. His mum was not happy about having two girl babies in the family. I was not allowed to put pink on our daughter. Otherwise, the mother-in-law would complain, "the whole house has become pink." The Mother-in-law would verbally abuse me throughout the marriage.

Female perpetrators of domestic abuse

A discussion about female perpetrators in domestic abuse situations needs to be had. The survey results show that female in-laws were abusers in the case of 33 per cent of respondents. From the case studies and the additional comments made by respondents, it is evident that the prevalent female perpetrator is the female-in-law.

However, it is worth noting that some mothers-in-law will have experienced abuse and oppression and firmly believe that what they display is normal behaviour. Unhealthy and toxic behaviour patterns are passed down and continue to thrive in large parts of the Sikh Panjabi community due to the lack of challenge. The abuse perpetrated by the mother-in-law is in no way justified or acceptable.

Many of our service users have talked about verbal and mental abuse perpetrated by their mother-in-law. Our service users have experienced being put down and silenced, and in some cases, they have been physically assaulted by their mother-in-law. In the case of Surjit Atwal mentioned earlier in this report, the



mother-in-law was involved in arranging for her to be murdered. It is reported that she boasted about it afterward.

Service users have also told us that some mothers-in-law interfere in the relationship, which manifests as an unhealthy co-dependency that seeks to exert control and influence over their son to ensure a distance between their son and his wife remains. As this co-dependency has been in place since infancy, we see men who struggle to form secure attachments to their wives for fear of upsetting their mothers. The aim here is to control the daughter in laws ability to form a secure bond with her spouse after marriage. If this happens, some mothers-in-law feel like they have lost their sons.

Our service users have informed us that domestic servitude is one of the most common forms of abuse perpetrated by their mothers-in-law. This includes being forced to cook, clean, and work around the house, sometimes day and night. Many service users have informed SWA that when they have complained about abuse perpetrated by their husbands, the response they get from their mother-in-law is that they too, went through abuse, so why can't she [the daughter-in-law] simply handle it?

Women and girls are often brought up to conform to traditional roles, centering upon their husbands, running the family home, and raising children. When a woman is pregnant, this begins a stressful period for some Sikh Panjabi women where the pressure to have a son to satisfy the demands of in-laws wanting a boy-child first intensifies.

There is a saying in Indian folklore – 'bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another's courtyard.

- Victim I – after 17 years of marriage, our service user spoke up to her mother-in-law to defend herself. Our service user was well-educated, had an excellent job, and had always put up with her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law called her son (the service user's husband) and told him to pack her bags and throw them out on the streets. He did as his mother had ordered. Our service user slept in hotels and B&Bs for a short while before renting a place. She tried to make it work with her husband, went to couples counselling, and even went on holiday where they played happy families, but when they returned, the husband dropped her back to her rented apartment and went home. He could not go against his mum's wishes.
- Victim J – Our service user runs a business in a small village. Initially, the business was owned by her husband and her father-in-law. After the father-in-law passed away, the 50 per cent ownership of the business was transferred to the mother-in-law. Recently our service user's husband, who owned the other 50 per cent of the business, also passed away, leaving his share to his wife (our service user). The business is worth over £1 million. The mother-in-law and her daughters started abusing the survivor and tried to force her to sign over her 50 per cent share to the sister in laws. They claimed that because our service user was still young, she would meet someone and get married, which meant they would lose the business.

- Victim K – the service user had a love marriage against her parents' wishes. They were unhappy with the match as the husband was out of caste. When our service user moved into the property, her mother-in-law made it very clear that they did not like her and treated her differently than the other daughter-in-law. Every aspect of our service user's life was controlled. What she wore, where she went, and whom she spoke to. When our client had her first child, the child was removed and cared for by the MIL, therefore not allowing our service user to bond with the child. When our service user told her parents about what was happening, they said they did not want to know. They told her she 'had made her bed and now had to lie on it.'

Unregistered marriages

The last twelve months of running a dedicated support service have unearthed numerous unregistered marriages in the Sikh Panjabi community. Many women have contacted us for help and support as they have been abused, assaulted, and exploited.

Some women had insecure immigration status in the UK. Some are married to men from the UK on spousal-dependant visas, and others are married to men who also have insecure immigration status. One of the key themes is that women have been threatened because of their immigration status. Many have been forced to participate in activities they do not want to, including prostitution.

Some of these women entered these unregistered marriages willingly, stating that they felt they 'only needed the blessing of their Guru. This was especially the case where this was a second marriage. It was also a common theme amongst survivors where the faith was practiced in a domestic setting.

Women have contacted us after the breakdown of an unregistered marriage, distraught as they were unaware that their marriage was not recognised in common law.

- Victim L reported her domestic abuse to the police, and because the family property was not in her name, she was asked to leave while the perpetrator remained there. She did not realise that because she was not legally married - she had no right over the property, even if she supported paying the mortgage.
- Victim M is a vulnerable young woman with a low-level learning disability who was exploited online. She disappeared from home and had a religious marriage without a legal marriage under UK law with a man with no legal immigration status in the UK. Therefore, he would not be eligible under UK law to marry legally. She knew him for weeks, and he befriended her online, and they married secretly with none of her friends and family present. This was all reported to the police. However, they felt she could decide whom she wanted to marry, and her learning needs and vulnerabilities, which included previous incidents of grooming and rape, were not a cause for concern. The family of Victim M are completely distraught. They do not know what to do. Victim M will not reveal where she is. Her mum has begged her to come and see her.



The gurdwara that carried out the Anand Karaj (Sikh religious marriage) was paid to carry out the ceremony. The lack of questioning has made them complicit in the exploitation of a vulnerable young person. The mother of the young woman contacted the gurdwara and questioned them. They responded that 'they carry out many marriages this way because they do not want their community women going outside to marry.' By this, they mean that they do not want young Sikh women to marry outside of their religion, faith, community and, in many cases, caste. The deployment of caste in Sikh philosophy history is further solidified in the Sikh code of conduct.

Gurdwaras management committees are in a critical and influential position with access to many in the Sikh Panjabi community. They need to take responsibility for what they could be doing to educate, support, and direct the community. Through our casework, we have identified Gurdwaras management committees that carry out religious marriages without ensuring a legal marriage are situated all over the country. We have identified Gurdwaras in Birmingham, Sandwell, Southall, and Nottingham.

SWA believes this is the tip of the iceberg.

Child-to-parent abuse

SWA has several cases of where adult children are abusive to their parents, and sometimes these are very frail and elderly parents. Case examples are:

- Victim N is an elderly woman who was physically assaulted by her son and daughter-in-law and then thrown out of the home. When our team met with her shortly after the incident took place, she had extensive bruises all over her body and cried constantly. She was in shock that her son could treat her in this way. Although we encouraged her, she refused to report her son and daughter-in-law to the police, so even after everything he (her son) had done to her, she still protected him.
- Victim O was another elderly woman, her son had married a woman from India, and after a few weeks of the (daughter-in-law's) arrival, her son's attitude and behaviour began to change towards his mum (Victim O). The property Victim O lives in is 50% owned by her and the other 50% owned by her son. Her son and daughter-in-law treated her so poorly that they would not allow her to put on the heating and made her pay rent for a house she partly owned. Victim O was accused of not contributing to the home. At an age where she should have been able to retire, Victim O still works full time so that she does not have to be in the home with her son and daughter-in-law all the time.
- The son and daughter-in-law are trying to get the mother to sign over the house to them. Other family members were distraught and told us that no one was helping them. This included the police. The extended family supporting Victim O claimed that the police had said they could not do anything unless there was evidence of physical abuse

Someone being treated in a controlling way, which has a negative impact, demonstrates a breach of Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 - Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship. This law clearly states that controlling or coercive behaviour is where, within an intimate or family relationship, it causes someone to fear that violence will be used against them on at least two occasions, or it causes them serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on their usual day-to-day activities.

The behaviour, in this case, falls within the scope of this law, and we are unsure why the police are not acting, so we continue to support the victim by challenging this decision.

Police response to Sikh Panjabi victims of abuse

SWA recognises the vital roles of the police in the journey of a victim of abuse. When done well, the victim's safety is prioritised, the correct procedures and referrals to supporting agencies are made, and a victim is contacted promptly. Victims are also given feedback at each stage of the process.

However, our service users and support staff are telling us that the responses and attitudes they receive from some police officers are inconsistent and often fail victims. At SWA we are forced to make regular and repeated contact with senior officers for appropriate action to be taken on behalf of victims. Sadly, even when escalating situations, we are not getting positive outcomes for the victim.

As a support service, SWA depends on the police to do their job well because victims' lives can often depend on it. SWA has a positive working relationship with senior officers at West Midlands Police. It is worth noting, however, that the need to escalate for follow-up action can be a waste of valuable resources.

Examples of service users contacting us about poor police responses are as follows:

Victim P's husband had assaulted victim P and her mother, and the police came out and took a statement from both victims and witnesses. Shortly after the incident, the victim chased the police by phone and used the online web chat system numerous times. Moreover, after five months of not hearing anything, she contacted SWA. We contacted a senior officer, which resulted in immediate action from the police, and an update was provided to the victim. The case then went to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Victim Q is a woman who was physically assaulted by her husband and called the police. She was told they would send police when they had officers free. The woman had a bruised eye and bruising on her arm. She contacted SWA five days after the assault because the police still had not come out. We contacted a senior officer, and it still took another three days before the police contacted her to say an officer would come and see her. It took a week for the police to go out and take a statement from this woman. This is simply unacceptable. The victim was in constant fear when assessing the risk of further abuse coupled with the genuine threat of fear that her husband would come back and kill her.



Service users are routinely telling us that officers have minimized minimise their abuse and have little to no understanding of domestic abuse that is trauma informed. Their attitude towards victims can come across as very dismissive or even aggressive.

This needs to be improved.

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Family courts

SWA has always encouraged victims to report abuse to the police and to take matters through to CPS to get justice. However, more recently, staff have had a very different conversation with victims. Staff are still encouraging them to report, but we have to be realistic and help victims manage their expectations. Unfortunately, our families are experiencing more negative outcomes than positive ones via the judicial CPS system.

Some victims are not entitled to legal aid because their name may be registered to a property, they have no control over, or they may be working for a living. These families are begging and borrowing thousands of pounds to fight their perpetrators in court. Women are getting into more and more debt, and post-separation abuse is having a horrific impact on women and children.

It is the view of SWA that many judges and magistrates have very little awareness or understanding of domestic abuse and its impact. We want to rejoice when a victim we are supporting, has a case heard by a judge with a good understanding of domestic abuse.

- Victim R has experienced more than ten years of emotional, psychological, and financial abuse, coercive control, and oppression. A judge recommended mediation to resolve child contact. This is shocking, asking a victim of such sustained and severe domestic abuse to mediate with their perpetrator. The agency employed to carry out this task also clearly has had no understanding or concept of domestic abuse. The agency put together a Parent Working Agreement , which the victim and perpetrator had to sign and agree to.
- Our team was horrified when Victim R sent her an SWA support worker a copy of this agreement. SWA was shocked when we read through the contents, which contained 'NO MORE CONFLICT,' which is capitalised in the agreement by the agency involved. The agreement is written to imply that the victim has some control over the relationship with the perpetrator. The victim is being forced to tell the children that they should engage with their abusive father despite the children being terrified of their father. The level of 'gas lighting' in this agreement is appalling.
- After attending several sessions, Victim R informed SWA that she no longer wished to continue the mediation due to finding out that her perpetrator had breached the agreement.
- SWA staff sat in on the conversation with the agency when the victim disclosed to the agency that she no longer wished to engage with this process. The agency staff told Victim R:



'If you do not engage in this process, I will have to tell the court, and in two years, you will be ringing me and telling me that your children have gone off the rails, they are glue sniffing or have eating disorders.'

The lack of self-awareness of this agency and its staff is shocking, and we continue to support and advocate for Victim R.

Other emerging trends we are seeing regarding SWA's casework around family courts and post-separation processes are:

- Court orders children to be removed from their mothers and placed with their fathers because the father is more financially stable and deemed the more suitable parent.
- Perpetrators secure prohibited steps orders so mothers (victims) cannot remove children from their current schools. In this situation, women are not safe from the perpetrator.
- SWA staff have been seeing increasing numbers of court cases related to child contact for more than two years due to CAFCASS not reporting on time to the courts, and the perpetrators are also dragging out cases.
- Children are being used to continue the abuse after separation or divorce, which can go on for years.

It begs the question; how do survivors start their journey to recovery if the abuse continues?

The suicide of domestic abuse victim, Mandeep Kaur

Mandeep Kaur died by suicide in New York in August 2022 after being subjected to repeated domestic abuse by her husband for close to eight years. Mandeep had posted an online video in which she described years of physical and mental torture at the hands of her husband. It was what led to her taking her own life. In the video, which went viral on social media, Mandeep is heard saying that her husband beat her daily. She is seen crying and distressed, saying she cannot take the abuse anymore.

Showing her bruises in the video, she continues, "I am really very sad. It has been eight years. I have tried my best. I was beaten up every day. I have been suffering him and his beatings, thinking that he will improve someday. But no, he beat me up for eight years. Had extra-marital affairs. We lived there (in India) for the first two-and-a-half years, and it was hell."

"Then we came here. He would get drunk and beat me up. Sometimes he would beat me even without being drunk. He would beat me and, on top of that, be with other women. I tried to put up with it for my children," she added.



In another video that surfaced on social media, she is heard saying, "I refuse to take this anymore," as her husband pushes her down on a bed and chokes her. In the video, you can hear her two children screaming and crying, "Papa, na maaro mamma nu (Papa, stop hitting mom)," while she is being assaulted.

This story sent shockwaves worldwide across the Sikh Panjabi and broader South Asian communities. Furthermore, it also led to an increase in reporting to the SWA Helpline. Hundreds of people watched an Instagram Live video between the Chair of SWA and our Ambassador Ravita Pannu where the case was discussed, and there was no shock about what happened. However, there was a lot of anger and pain because domestic abuse is so common in the community, something our data, helpline calls, and casework all bear witness to daily.

The extreme abuse that leads a woman to take her own life is not new. According to the Home Office (2021), the overall number of domestic homicide deaths from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 was 163. This is slightly higher than the previous year (152) but in line with the 15-year average (Home Office police-recorded homicide data). There were additionally 38 suspected suicides of victims of domestic abuse reported in the same period. We believe these statistics do not realistically represent the number of women taking their lives because they can no longer cope with abuse from their husbands and extended family members.

Rather than admit to the presence of abuse, it is often alleged that the woman's mental ill health led to the suicide. The 2022 survey finds that almost one in five (19 per cent) respondents have had suicidal thoughts. It is not surprising that 70 per cent of respondents who have experienced abuse have suffered from anxiety and depression, with 13 per cent reported to have self-harmed.

- SWA has supported victims who have attempted suicide. SWA's team made an emergency visit to the home of Victim S, who threatened to take her own life.
- Our support staff worked with Victim T, who was saved by her family, turning up at her place of work where she had passed out after having tied a noose around her neck and attempted suicide. Fortunately, the ambulance had already been called and arrived just in time. We provided the family and the victim with continued support and options for dealing with the perpetrator and accessing mental health support.
- Victim U is a young person having suicidal thoughts due to the family suffering a lifetime of physical and mental abuse by their father. Their mother will not leave him due to notions of shame and honour and despite the father being arrested multiple times for the abuse he has inflicted.

The results from the 2022 survey show that far too many women are not reporting abuse. Thirty-two percent reported the abuse to the police. It is not uncommon for fathers to claim 'parental alienation in the family courts when mothers have not reported the abuse. As there is no recorded 'evidence' of domestic



abuse, the father gains access to children despite children being terrified of their father.

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR)

The CEO of SWA is currently a panel member on two DHRs and has advised on another. All three victims were Sikh women. Our community needs to get a grip on the fact that domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and controlling and coercive behaviour is taking place in the Sikh community, and it is being perpetrated, often by multiple perpetrators (46 percent had more than one perpetrator).

In conclusion, SWA's casework service has walked alongside survivors and victims over the last eighteen months. It has provided insight into the lives of Sikh Panjabi Women and children who experience abuse. Abuse does not only start as women and girls get older or are married into a family. In some cases, it starts pre-birth, with sex-selective abortions or abuse of the mother after daughters are born. The abuse is further exacerbated by the family and community surrounding the victim, acting as barriers to exiting abusive relationships.

High levels of mental anguish and distress are seeing Sikh Panjabi women and children living with acute levels of distress. In the more extreme cases of abuse, women are dying, murdered by the perpetrator, or undertaking suicide. To believe that death is the only way out of a situation is a sad indictment of the collective failure of the Sikh community to address the silence that lies behind domestic and sexual abuse. We must do more together today and every day to challenge abuse.



9. Conclusion

The responses in the survey reflect Sikh Panjabi women and girls' experiences concerning the impact and prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse.

Our findings remain consistent with the results of 2021. The depth and breadth of current and historical abuse Sikh Panjabi women and girls are experiencing is alarming and is evident through our casework and the survey results.

Key findings from the 2022 survey data revealed: -

- 62% of respondents said they had experienced domestic abuse.
- 46% of respondents who experienced domestic abuse had more than one perpetrator.
- 1/3 of respondents had experienced abuse from their 'female-in-laws' with the mother-in-law being prevalent female abuser, followed by sister-in-law, which is a big increase from last year (19%)
- Of those respondents reporting sexual abuse (32%), 62% reported they had experienced the abuse as children.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse

- 69% partner/spouse
- 33% in-laws – female
- 26% own parent – father

The danger to victims is all within the immediate family setting, which poses significant risk and little to no opportunity for exit.

Type of abuse experienced.

50% - 90% of respondents experiencing abuse identified the following:

- Emotional abuse – 89%
- Psychological abuse – 67%
- Controlling behaviour – 62%
- Physical abuse – 56%
- Social abuse – 52%
- Coercive behaviour – 49%



20% - 40% of respondents experiencing abuse identified the following:

- Financial abuse – 39%
- Sexual abuse - 31%
- Stalking and harassment - 21%
- Faith / spiritual abuse – 98%

Duration of Abuse

- 43% reported that the abuse they experienced lasted between 6 and 20 years.
- 18% reported that the abuse went on for more than 21 years.
- 51% of victims reported they experienced abuse daily to multiple times a week.

Impact of abuse on Sikh Panjabi women and girls

Domestic Abuse		Sexual Abuse	
Anxiety & depression	70%	Inability to trust others	59%
Inability to trust others	54%	Depression & anxiety	52%
Relationship problems	53%	Relationship problems	49%
Suicidal thoughts	21%	Anger issues	37%

In understanding that domestic and sexual abuse occurs in the Sikh Panjabi community, we need to accept that the Sikh community is neither unique nor alone. However, our response to this community pandemic must be owned and delivered from within and by the community.

To find that 32 per cent of women are accessing therapy but far fewer are disclosing to official bodies suggests a crisis of confidence in public agencies. Fifty-six per cent have disclosed to friends or those closest to them as compared to victim support services (15 per cent), local domestic support services (8 per cent), and or IDVA's (6 per cent).

The gender bias in domestic abuse means we seldom talk about female perpetrators. We need to understand that in Sikh Panjabi households, the actions of those living in the extended family (even when



not physically living with a couple) can sometimes initiate and amplify abusive behaviours. At the other end, we are also bearing witness to growing concern over female infanticide and abuse as the result of the birth of a daughter. Taken together, we must support women and girls to feel a part of the Sikh Panjabi community and broader society. Their full integration into the structures of the Sikh community (including Gurdwara management committees) is a powerful defence against individual and gender-based abuse.

Child Sexual Abuse

There has been no substantive research into sexual abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community in the UK. We hope our profiling here contributes to a broader debate within the community and policy and decision makers at all levels.

Almost a third of all respondents (32%) have experienced sexual abuse.

- 49% of the above respondents experienced it as a child.
- 38% of the above respondents experienced it as an adult.
- 13% of the above respondents experienced it as a child and an adult

When asked about who the perpetrators of the sexual abuse were:

- 36% of those respondents said it was their husband or boyfriend
- 22% of those respondents said it was their uncle
- 19% of those respondents said it was their male cousin
- 3% of those respondents said it was a religious/faith leader

The levels of sexual abuse perpetrated against children in the Sikh Panjabi community are alarming. Perpetrators hide in plain sight due to an absence of disclosures and reporting. We must tackle the cultural norm that uses shame and places the family's honour before the needs of individual victims. When some victims do disclose, they can be shunned, not believed, or told to stay quiet for fear of embarrassment and the impact on the broader family and the family and perpetrators' reputation and position in the wider community. These warped community attitudes only seek to empower and embolden perpetrators, raising the question of how safe our community and home settings are when voices are silenced. It is no understatement to say that the Sikh Panjabi community is amidst an abuse crisis.

SWA's continued work on community engagement, victim support, the work with policymakers, and representation on Domestic Homicide Reviews and our campaigning - is the best antidote to this year's depressing survey findings.

We are witnessing the manifestation of abuse and its impact daily when little or no specialist support is



available. The response from non-specialist providers is often too little, too late, and of little relevance to the emotional and cultural needs of Sikh Panjabi women. We need a better intersectional and culturally competent response from mainstream organisations, alongside an ability to broker equitable and meaningful partnerships.

With high-profile cases such as the suicide of domestic abuse victim Mandeep Kaur, there is a spotlight on the Sikh community concerning how we shape and develop a professional quality response to the needs of survivors.

When survivors of domestic and sexual abuse finally find the courage to disclose and exit abusive situations, our research and casework have found they are still subject to prolonged post-separation stress, where the abuse continues, due to problems with the court system. Coupled with low trust amongst women and racialised communities in the police system, too many Sikh Panjabi women just endure.

If we are collectively genuinely committed to addressing the surge of domestic and sexual abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community, we need to muster together as a community and find the will to work together, broker steadfast relationships with allies and find the resources to turn back the tide of normality that it says abuse is just another feature of being a woman.

Our faith and wider society demand better. Sikh Panjabi women deserve better.



10. Recommendations

Sikh Women's Aid and DV and VAWG sector allies

1. Heighten awareness and research into female-on-female domestic abuse in a domestic setting. This discussion needs to be held more broadly in the women's sector.
2. Raise awareness of the issue of sexual abuse/violence. The long-term impact on survivors, which continues to resonate, must be supported with trauma-informed, quality advocacy and robust community support.
3. Work in partnership with academia and reputable research agencies to grow the body of evidence and data on the issue of domestic and sexual abuse in the Sikh Panjabi community.
4. Broaden research to include more qualitative understanding by running in-person focus groups for the research.
5. Enable Sikh Panjabi women to develop a better understanding of the criminal justice system and their rights.
6. Ensure the provision of culturally appropriate training and domestic abuse awareness for the police and the magistrates.
7. Support commissioners to better understand how domestic abuse services should always reflect the demographic profile of the local community. This must include 'by and for' services as appropriate.

Political entities

1. Ensure the inclusion of 'by and for' specialist agencies in local and national Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls statutory, strategic boards/fora to enable the voices of racialised communities like Sikh Panjabi women to be heard.
2. Support the development of services and commissioning bodies to invest in early intervention and prevention of abuse, especially as it relates to the abuse of young girls by parents through their teenage and early adult years
3. Understand the impact of domestic and sexual abuse within the Sikh Panjabi community from a trauma-informed perspective that allows for articulating intersectionality and cultural competence.
4. Ensure legal aid is available to all victims of domestic and sexual abuse. Government.



Sikh community/faith leadership and Charities Commission

1. Ensure that more gurdwaras are aware of their safeguarding obligations and the moral duty to create a safe space for disclosure. This should be a core part of the mandatory training on safeguarding for Gurdwaras.
2. Encourage annual qualitative reviews of the safeguarding culture of gurdwaras in keeping with the findings and recommendations of the IICSA report. This must include the sharing of whistleblowing procedures for all staff, volunteers, and trustees.

Public health and therapeutic service providers

1. Ensure that mental health and therapeutic services are designed to embrace the cultural values and norms of the Sikh Panjabi community as opposed to a universal Eurocentric model of counselling.
2. More work needs to be done to understand the link between poor health and prolonged abuse of Sikh Panjabi women and children.



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APPENDICES

A1: Case study 1

A2: Case study 2

A3: Case study 3





**IT'S NOT CONSENT
IF YOU'RE AFRAID
TO SAY NO**

A1: Sikh Women's Aid - Case Study 1

When I was young, I was very happy. I loved India and miss my childhood days.

My family arranged my marriage to my husband.

The abuse started when he slapped me on my wedding night. He was drunk.

He would regularly drink and take drugs. My Sister-in-law was very interfering in our marriage.

When we separated, he didn't want to know. He never really supported me or our daughter. My daughter doesn't know who her father is. He has had no contact with her.

I heard about Sikh Women's Aid at the temple. They were talking to someone about their work. It made me cry and I reached out. My heart felt heavy, all my feelings came up and I cried.

Sikh Women's Aid have provided me with emotional support. I feel I have someone to talk to and don't feel alone





**LOVE
SHOULD NOT
HURT**

A2: Sikh Women's Aid - Case Study 2

I had a happy childhood growing up in a Punjabi Sikh family. We followed conservative Punjabi Sikh values and culture. We did not have much money but had a happy childhood in a close-knit family. We experienced childhood poverty as my dad lost his family business due to an accident but overall, it was a happy childhood full of love.

I met my husband at a family wedding, and I was introduced by a cousin. I was already married but going through a separation, and I was in a vulnerable state, and he pursued the cousin for an introduction. My mum fell ill and she put pressure on me to get re-married.

The abuse started almost immediately in forms of small issues, e.g. him lying, being distant and uninterested. But to be honest if I think back, it actually started before we got married, when I started dating him. I even called the wedding off, 2 months before the date, because he would call me thick, and say things like I can play dot-to-dot on your face. But then he apologised, and he assured me he wouldn't do it again, and I put it down to his drink.

After marriage he would come home drunk, start shouting and display aggressive behaviour. He would say that he didn't want to marry me, and he only did it for the family.

When I got pregnant, I heard his mum on the phone, saying to a relative, 'rab chungji jeej deve', 'God give us something good'. I was walking past, I heard that, and asked my mother-in-law, what if it's not good, what if it's bad, do I leave it at the hospital? I was really hurt by it, what does it mean, what is good and what is bad?

I did have a scan to see what sex the baby was and then when I found out it was a girl, I knew I had to be prepared. Abuse further escalated when I gave birth to our first daughter which he was not happy about. They made her wear blue all the time and wouldn't let me put her in pink.

It turned out that he was having an affair throughout the marriage. Since it was my second marriage, I put up with the abuse due to the stigma of divorce and not bringing shame to the family.

The rest of the family turned a blind eye to the abuse. They knew of the affair but ignored it. After the birth of our second daughter, he became more distant and did not acknowledge our daughter for months. Shortly after, he suggested going to Spain for a gender baby to have a boy. His mum was horrible, especially after I'd had a miscarriage. I was practically a housewife. His mum was not happy about having two girl babies in the family. I was not allowed to put pink on our daughter, otherwise the mother-in-law would complain, "the whole house has become pink." The Mother-in-law would verbally abuse me throughout the marriage.



Eventually I moved out of the in laws house. My husband then carried on with abuse after moving into our own house. Coming home drunk, being aggressive verbally and physically. It was down to the frustration of not being with the girl he was having an affair with and having two daughters whilst all of his best friends had boys. There was constant control throughout the marriage.


The abuse continued after we separated. He carried on abusing me mentally for four years post-separation. Controlling coercive behaviour, manipulation, and mind games. Since he is a solicitor, he put on false legal cases against me, adding further to the abuse.

I have been through the court system for 4 years and not yet obtained a divorce as he is using his legal background to embroil me in legal jargon. The children were used as a way of prolonging the court process so that the issue of financial settlement could be put on back burner. The court involved external mediation agencies paid for by him, which only added to the abuse by the agency siding with him and bullying me in the process.

I reached out to SWA as it is a Sikh organisation and needed culturally specific advice and support. I felt that SWA would understand the circumstances, especially around the girl child issue and the stigma of divorce.

My support worker not only helped in gaining practical help, but supported me mentally and emotionally, understanding the abuse, family background and the cultural barriers. The support she provided me went above and beyond





**EK CHUP,
SAU SUKH**

A3: Sikh Women's Aid - Case Study 3

I met my partner when I was very young, but we never married because he was of a different community.

The abuse started soon after the relationship started, but I was too frightened to leave him at first.

I experienced abuse from my ex-partner (perpetrator) for many years.

I had 3 children and although I separated from my ex-partner, he still forced his way into my life, by accessing the children.

He would phone the children, especially the boys and try and coerce and manipulate them into his way of thinking. He would encourage the boys to question their younger sister, where she was going, who she was seeing even though she was too young to date. My ex encouraged the boys to try and control the younger sister and I had to spend time talking and explaining to my children to undo what my ex was teaching them.

Although my ex never paid any child maintenance for the children etc, he would purchase gifts for the children to try and buy their loyalty and pull them to his side.

It was hard for me, because I was living in a property which was owned by the ex.

I worked part time and provided for the children which meant finances, at times could be stretched.

I couldn't afford to move, otherwise it would have meant leaving my job and claiming universal credit because I couldn't afford to pay rent on the part time income I was on.

So, I stayed in the property with the children, so that I was able to continue working and provide for my children.

There would be times when my ex-partner would leave the family alone for months on end, and the family would live in peace but then he would turn up and all hell would break loose.

I went to generic domestic abuse services to apply for housing so that I could get property through the council, but this went on for months and the application didn't even get processed. After numerous mistakes with the processing, I gave up on them.

When I asked the generic DV provider about refuge, they point blank refused. Because I had older boys, I was told that no refuge would accept me, and I was not willing to leave my boys behind.



During an incident in the home when the perpetrator turned up and assaulted me, me and my daughter hid in the bedroom and texted my support worker at SWA stating I needed 'help'. They called me back straight away, offered to call the police, but I was too frightened to get the police involved. They remained on the phone with me until the perpetrator had left the house.

Since Covid19, the ex had tried to manipulate the children even more. He's been saying that the children need to spend time with him, because he could die of Covid19. He has tried to manipulate the children using guilt.

The support SWA provided to me was mostly emotional. SWA also informed me about my rights as a victim of abuse, so that if I needed to take out an injunction etc, I understood the process and who to contact.

SWA helped me to rebuild my confidence, to stand up to the perpetrator and deal with my own inner imposter self.

To date the perpetrator is still trying to manipulate the children, but the children are now old enough to see through the lies.

Although I am still dealing with the impact of trauma, I am in a much better and stronger space, and am looking at self-help options to move forward.

I have family around me who support me and positive role models in my brothers who have a positive influence on my sons.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black floral-patterned top, is shown from the chest up. She has several visible injuries: a bruise on her forehead, a bruise on her cheek, and a bloody wound on her chin. She is holding a white rectangular sign in front of her chest with both hands. The background is a solid purple color.

**YOUR SILENCE IS
THEIR GREATEST
WEAPON**



Sikh Women's Aid

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ISBN 978-1-7392322-0-7



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