

# SIKH WOMEN'S AID REPORT 2024



## *Gender, Power, & Abuse:*

Examining Domestic, Sexual and Spiritual Violence  
in the Sikh Punjabi Community

Sahdaish Kaur Pall BEM | Sukhvinder Kaur | Dr Mandeep Kaur Marwah





# DEDICATIONS

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

**This report, Gender, Power and Abuse: Examining Domestic, Sexual and Spiritual Abuse in the Sikh Panjabi Community**, is dedicated to the courageous women who completed our survey and shared their stories. Your voices, your strength, and your trust in Sikh Women's Aid have been the foundation of this work.

**To the survivors** who placed their faith in us: your resilience inspires us every day. You are the reason we continue to push boundaries, break silences, and fight for justice.

## **To our valued partners:**

A special thank you for standing with us, amplifying our work, and helping us bring about meaningful change. These are:

- Imkaan
- Women's Aid Federation of England
- The Circle NGO
- Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse
- Karma Nirvana and Hope Training and Consultancy
- Faith & VAWG Coalition
- Asian Women's Resource Centre

*Together, we are building a future where women are safe, respected, and free.*

**And to the sisterhood** that has stood by Sikh Women's Aid: your unwavering support and solidarity remind us of the power of collective action and shared purpose. In unity, we find the strength to challenge oppression and create a brighter, safer tomorrow.

This report is a testament to all of you. It reflects the pain and struggle but also the hope and determination that define our shared journey. May it spark the change we all long to see.

**With gratitude and solidarity,  
Sikh Women's Aid**

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# FOREWORD

**By Gaurav (20) and Simran (14)**



In December 2022, our lives changed forever. Our mother, Kamaljeet Kaur, was brutally taken from us by the man who was supposed to protect and love her. The weight of this tragedy is something we will carry every day, our family torn apart, our hearts shattered, and our world forever altered.

Our mother was our light, our guide, and our greatest strength. She was a kind, compassionate woman who always put others before herself. Losing her to such unimaginable violence has left us with a void that can never be filled. It has made us question everything we once believed about safety, family, and trust.

The grief of losing our mother is compounded by the stigma and silence surrounding domestic abuse in our community. Too often, the pain of women like our mother is dismissed, their cries for help unheard. This is why the work of Sikh Women's Aid is so vital.

Sikh Women's Aid has been a beacon of hope and support for women like our mother, and for families like ours who are left to pick up the pieces after such devastation. They provide a voice for the silenced, a safe haven for the vulnerable, and a path toward healing for those who have been deeply scarred. Their culturally sensitive approach is not just necessary; it is lifesaving.

In the face of our loss, we have found some solace in knowing that Sikh Women's Aid is fighting to prevent tragedies like ours. They are educating communities, supporting survivors, and challenging harmful attitudes that perpetuate violence and silence. We dedicate this report to the memory of our mother, Kamaljeet, and to every woman who has suffered in silence. We hope it serves as a wake-up call for our community to confront the realities of domestic abuse and to support the transformative work of Sikh Women's Aid.

Our mother's story should never have been written in blood. It is our deepest wish that her legacy, and the work of Sikh Women's Aid, brings about the change needed to save lives and protect futures.

**With gratitude and hope  
Gaurav and Simran**

# FOREWORD

**Kirith Entwistle MP**

**Labour MP for Bolton North East  
Member of the Women and Equalities Committee**



There is an undeniable truth: domestic abuse does not discriminate. It transcends faith, culture, and ethnicity. Behind closed doors, in whispered conversations, and under the weight of silence, too many women suffer in isolation.

As a Sikh woman and a newly elected Member of Parliament, I am deeply aware of the unique barriers faced by women in our community. For far too long, cultural stigma, shame, and a misplaced sense of loyalty have silenced the voices of survivors, allowing abuse to continue unchecked. That is why the work of Sikh Women's Aid is so critical.

Sikh Women's Aid provides not just support but a lifeline, creating a space where women can speak without fear, access help without judgment, and begin to rebuild their lives. Their efforts go beyond support services; they challenge harmful norms, educate communities, and ensure that the voices of survivors are heard in places where policies are developed, and change begins.

As a member of the Women and Equalities Committee, I am committed to ensuring that Parliament recognises and addresses the complexities of abuse in all its forms, including domestic, sexual, and spiritual abuse. It is imperative that we listen to survivors and the professionals who stand beside them. These voices are the catalyst for meaningful, systemic change.

The findings of this report, *Gender, Power and Abuse: Examining Domestic, Sexual and Spiritual Violence in the Sikh Panjabi Community*, highlight the urgent need to confront these issues head-on. We must reject the idea that any form of violence or coercion can be justified under the guise of culture or honour. Violence has no honour, and silence has no place in justice.

I commend Sikh Women's Aid for their unwavering commitment to supporting survivors and their courage in shining a light on the realities faced by too many women. Together, we must challenge assumptions, dismantle systemic barriers, and ensure that every woman, regardless of her background, has access to safety, dignity, and justice.

**Kirith Entwistle MP**

**Member of the Women and Equalities Committee**



## A CEO'S REFLECTION

# SAHDAISH PALL BEM

### Leading a national by-and-for support service



This year, in 2024, Sikh Women's Aid turned three years old. In this time, we have travelled an incredible journey, fuelled by courage, resilience, and the unshakeable belief that we can transform the lives of women and children in our community. What began in 2021 with a single part-time support worker has blossomed into a fully-fledged organisation. Today, we are a team led by a full-time CEO, with four dedicated support workers, two compassionate therapeutic counsellors, a community development worker and a part-time volunteer coordinator. We registered as a charity, offering a lifeline to hundreds of women and children each year. We answer 5 to 7 helpline calls and emails every week, each one, a story of pain, of survival, of desperate need. We have given a voice to the silenced.

In 2023 we launched the first ever Sikh Women's Remembrance Day, a solemn and sacred day to honour the memory of every Sikh Panjabi woman who lost her life to domestic abuse. These are women whose lives were taken by their perpetrator, and at times these have been women, who have been pushed to the brink, and felt there was no way back, and took their own lives. These are women whose names may never be known to the world, but they are remembered, cherished, and celebrated by us.

We created, 'A Journey of Resilience,' a project that tells the harrowing yet inspiring stories of 21 Sikh women who have walked through the fires of abuse and trauma and in most cases emerged with their heads held high but sadly, not all. Some women, particularly older Sikh Panjabi women, felt they couldn't leave their abusive relationship. However, what is true for all the stories is, that their voices are no longer whispers, they are roars of strength, and they demand to be heard.

We have hosted two conferences, and this year (2024) will be our third, standing stronger than ever. Each conference has seen us shine a light on the dark and hidden realities of domestic and sexual violence within our community. We launched our survey reports, gathering evidence, data, and most importantly, stories of lived experiences, to expose the devastating impact these forms of abuse have on Sikh Panjabi women. We've taken this fight to the highest corridors of power. We've launched two reports in Parliament and will present a third. We've spoken out at events up and down the country, including in the House of Lords. We have become part of advisory councils, coalitions, and national movements to end domestic abuse. We've built alliances, launched "Phulkari," our podcast, and expanded our reach, but we haven't done it without struggle. It's not always been easy.

After both our 2021 and 2022 conferences, we faced a torrent of attacks, which began on messaging apps, then progressed to an online witch-hunt. The backlash was swift and brutal, encouraging many others to join in attempts to discredit our work and to silence our voices. We were forced to increase security at our homes, to report direct death threats to the police, and our Chair of Trustees had to leave the West Midlands after having her car and property smashed in.

Threats to women's safety is nothing new. We take our lives in our hands, every time we step outside. Challenging the rot in our society should create alliances, not enemies, and it is disappointing when some of the people trying to shut us down, are the so called 'leaders' within the Sikh Panjabi Community and these are men and women. Despite all of this, we did not back down.



We will never back down, because the work we do is not just important, it is life-changing, and in many cases, lifesaving. In the past year alone, we've been called upon to participate in multiple domestic homicide reviews and domestic abuse related death reviews, tragically witnessing the loss of more women in our community. We sit with families, offering them not only practical support but a hand to hold, a shoulder to cry on, and the knowledge that they are not alone as they navigate the unthinkable. We see the impact that domestic homicides have on children. Children who lose their innocence too soon, who are forced to grow up faster than they should, learning how to navigate systems and families torn apart by trauma.

When we were researching case studies for our first Remembrance Day in 2023, we came across the story of Kuldeep Kaur Sidhu, known affectionately as Kully. She was a 25-year-old woman from Birmingham whose murder in 2008 remains unsolved. Her family believes her death may have stemmed from caste-related prejudice, as she was from a caste oppressed community and it is alleged that her husband's family were from a dominant caste community. This is alleged to have been a point of contention in their relationship. Tragically, Kully was six weeks pregnant when she was found strangled and her body set on fire in an apparent attempt to make the murder look like a suicide. This year I spent numerous hours writing to and talking to different individuals within West Midlands Police, or those that may have some influence, about Kuldeep's case, to try and get the case reopened or to possibly view the file but it fell on deaf ears. This work continues.

We live in a world where women are not safe globally. In 2024, women worldwide continue to face profound injustices, underscored by recent tragedies. In India, the horrific rape of a young doctor shocked the world, exposing yet again the relentless violence women endure, even in spaces meant to offer safety and care. This brutality reflects a chilling reality where perpetrators often act with impunity, leaving survivors to seek justice in systems that too frequently fail them.

In India, sexual violence against women from lower castes, particularly Dalit and Valmiki women, is shockingly common. These women are often regarded as socially expendable, facing heightened risks of violence, especially from men of dominant castes. This violence not only exerts control but is used to reinforce caste hierarchies, as so called 'upper-caste' men sometimes see assault as an assertion of power and social supremacy.

If we continue to look at the Global stage, in Afghanistan, the Taliban's oppressive policies have silenced millions of women, stripping them of their voices, education, and autonomy. Afghan women are left unable to work, attend school, or freely express themselves, extinguishing their hopes for an empowered future.

Some people may read this and think, these are examples of what is happening in so called developing countries and this would never happen in the Western world. But we only have to look across the waters to so-called developed countries who are supposedly some of the most powerful in the world. There is talk of government policies that could lead to significant changes that would impact women's rights, protections, and opportunities. Some of these policies around gender equality and anti-discrimination would look to eliminate or reduce statutory support for equality, diversity and inclusion programs. These instances remind us that abuse and control know no boundaries, and the need for change is urgent.

Funding continues to be a battle, especially when our community seems more willing to donate to large, male-led Sikh charities while we, a women-led charity, are constantly applying for local and national grants so we can keep our services going. It's a painful truth, but one we must face head-on.

This year, our survey focuses on the harrowing reality of faith-based and spiritual abuse. It wasn't an easy decision for us to make, especially knowing the personal attacks we've already endured for exposing sexual predators, paedophiles, and charlatan priests. But we cannot ignore what we know. We cannot turn our backs on the women who come to us with stories of unregistered marriages in Gurdwaras, of rape and sexual violence committed in what should be sacred places. We cannot ignore the exploitation by men who wear the cloak of faith but abuse the trust of their positions to harm the most vulnerable in our society. Faith is meant to be a source of comfort, of guidance. But all too often, it has been weaponised by some, to keep women silent, to trap them in abusive marriages, to gaslight them into submission. Scriptures are twisted to discourage women from leaving dangerous relationships, and in some places of worship, senior leadership is complicit in this silencing.



We have made significant progress with some Gurdwaras who have requested and put up our posters on noticeboards. So, we recognise that some Gurdwaras are trying to reform and be supportive of our work.

Too many, however are failing to protect the women and children in their congregations.

Too many are hiding behind the façade of respectability while perpetuating a culture of abuse.

As CEO of Sikh Women's Aid, I am dedicated to driving awareness, support, and action to confront these injustices and advocate for women's rights worldwide. These issues effect all women.

Sikh Women's Aid has become a beacon of hope. We are more than a charity. We are a sanctuary for women and their families, a place where they know they can reach out, drop us a text, or give us a call, and we will be there because we are a Sikh Panjabi women led organisation, set up for Sikh Panjabi women and we understand. We have become a lifeline to so many, and it is an honour to lead this organisation.

**WE CANNOT REMAIN SILENT.  
WE WILL NOT REMAIN SILENT.  
THE RECKONING IS HERE.**







# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The Sikh Women's Aid 2024 Survey Report* investigates the prevalence, impact, and disclosure of domestic, sexual, and spiritual abuse among Sikh Panjabi women in the UK. The survey aims to inform SWA's culturally competent support services and advocacy efforts, addressing the unique challenges faced by the Sikh Panjabi women and girls.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey, conducted biannually, involved 878 participants, with 675 Sikh Panjabi women as the primary focus. Data collection employed quantitative and qualitative research methods through online and print surveys, ensuring anonymity. Responses were analysed across demographics, abuse experiences, and systemic barriers to support.

## KEY FINDINGS

# 1.

### Domestic Abuse

**Prevalence:** 61.48% of respondents reported experiencing domestic abuse, with emotional abuse (22.76%) and controlling behaviour (19.31%) most common.

**Barriers:** Fear of consequences, family dynamics, and stigma were major obstacles to seeking help or leaving abusive relationships.

**Perpetrators:** Partners/spouses accounted for 47.72% of abuse cases, followed by mothers-in-law and parents.

# 2.

### Sexual Abuse

**Prevalence:** 32.89% of respondents reported experiencing sexual abuse, with 69.96% occurring during childhood. Most incidents (68.33%) were recurrent.

**Barriers:** Predominantly male, including husbands in older respondents, uncles, and family friends are more prevalent in younger respondents.

**Reporting challenges:** 83.86% did not report incidents due to shame, fear, and systemic mistrust.

# 3.

## Faith-Based and Spiritual Abuse

**Prevalence:** 8% of respondents experienced abuse linked to faith or spirituality, with male spiritual leaders and “Maha Purshs” (spiritually elevated holy men) being common perpetrators.

**Perpetrators:** Perpetrators were identified in every role highlighting that abusers can function at every level within faith settings and environments.

**Forms of Abuse:** Included sexual assault, coercive control, and financial extortion under the guise of religious rituals.

**Locations:** Abuse occurred in homes, places of worship, and community settings highlighting the various access levels, perpetrators can have to potential victims.

# 4.

## Systemic Barriers

**Support gaps:** Limited access to culturally specific resources and services.

**Reporting Outcomes:** Across all abuse types, most reports resulted in no further action, highlighting systemic failures to bring perpetrators to justice. This not only erodes victims trust and confidence but it also means dangerous perpetrators are thriving in society, free to abuse and cause further harm.

# 5.

## Systemic Barriers

Abuse led to long-term effects, including mental health struggles, social isolation, and strained familial relationships. Many survivors reported depression (314) and an inability to trust others (251).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ring fenced funding streams for By-and-For Support Services.
2. Community Education and Awareness.
3. Inclusion of the experiences of Sikh Panjabi women in Policy Advocacy.
4. Legal Definition of Spiritual Abuse.
5. Understand and develop targeted responses to female perpetrators.
6. Co-ordinated and joined up response to Sikh Panjabi victims/survivors.
7. Community Policing must understand local needs and concerns.
8. Review and adapt risk assessment models to meet diverse needs
9. Screening of perpetrator’s use of drugs and alcohol.
10. Public health routine enquiry to consider underlying issues behind the presentation of poor health in Sikh Panjabi women.



# METHODOLOGY

The Sikh Women's Aid bi-annual survey was designed to gather insights from Sikh Panjabi women and girls across the UK, about their experiences of domestic, sexual and spiritual abuse they may or may not have suffered.

## **The three key areas, we focused on are:**

- The prevalence, impact, perpetrators, disclosure and reporting of Domestic Abuse experienced by Sikh Panjabi Women
- The prevalence, impact, perpetrators, disclosure and reporting of Sexual Abuse experienced by Sikh Panjabi Women.
- The prevalence, perpetrators, disclosure and reporting of Faith and Spiritual Abuse experienced by Sikh Panjabi women.



The survey's aim was to use these insights to inform and enhance the charity's support services and advocacy efforts.

This report will help to educate voluntary and statutory services, local and national commissioners, and public health professionals so that their services can respond to Sikh Panjabi women and girls in a more culturally informed way. This report also seeks to hold a mirror up to the local community, demonstrating that ignoring the truth about the lived experiences of abuse that Sikh Panjabi women face is no longer an outcome that we are willing to accept.

To achieve a broad representation, we invited Sikh Panjabi women, aged 16 or over, from across the UK to participate in the survey through targeted outreach efforts, including community and social networks, professional forums, and in-person events. Of those invited, 878 Sikh Panjabi women responded. Within this group, 675 Sikh Panjabi women completed the survey in full, and they were identified as the primary population of interest for the survey analysis.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

*Participation in the survey was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously to protect participant confidentiality.*

## SURVEY ADMINISTRATION & CONTENT

The survey was administered online in English and in Panjabi, and a print version was made available to accommodate participants' preferences and accessibility needs. The survey included a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions, covering topics such as personal safety, domestic, sexual, faith and spiritual abuse, mental health, trust in support services, and barriers to seeking help.

Multiple-choice questions were used to allow for comprehensive data analysis while providing participants the opportunity to share detailed responses (by selecting 'other' and offering a space to share details). Reporting of these questions is by the number of individual respondents and where the questions required a single response, this has been reported in percentages.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Responses were analysed quantitatively to identify trends and calculate response frequencies and percentages for each item. Specific attention was given to responses from:

- ▶ Disabled respondents and how they compared to their non-disabled counterparts to identify any additional or unique needs in these subgroups.
- ▶ The age group of respondents in relation to the perpetrators they encountered to identify distinctions and experiences around familial violence and abuse, and intimate partner violence and abuse.

The findings will refine Sikh Women's Aid's support services, advocacy strategies, and community outreach efforts and inform policy and decision making.

## LANGUAGE

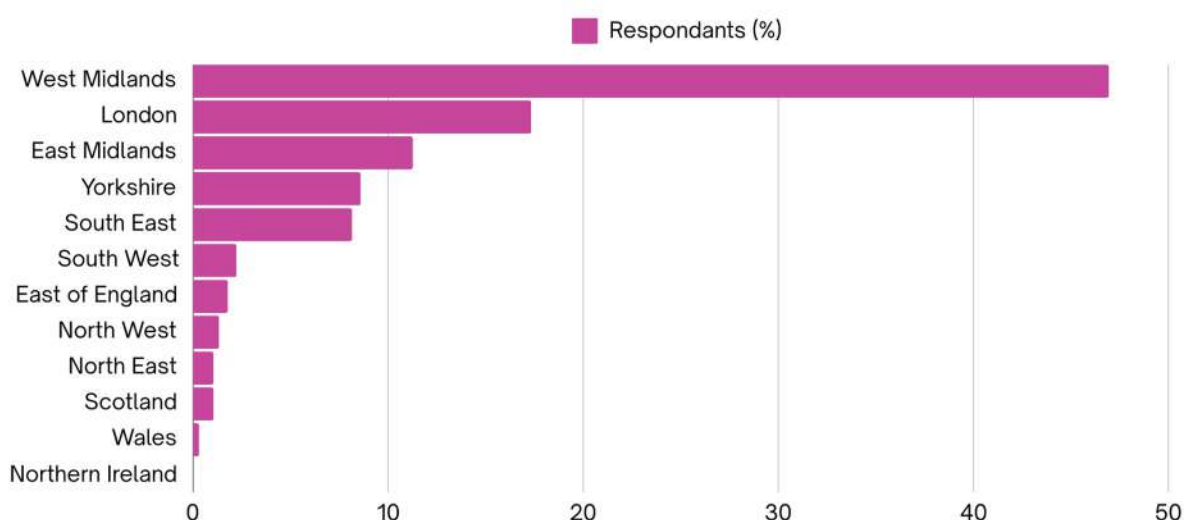
Where the report mentions **"Sikh Panjabi women"**, this is in reference to those who have responded to the survey and experienced abuse, unless otherwise specified. When referring to perpetrators, this is in the context of those who were identified as abusers, Sikh Women's Aid knows not all men are abusers and we are grateful to all our male allies who are supporters and advocates of our work.



# ANALYSIS OF DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

*The survey collected demographic information relevant to understanding the specific needs of Sikh Panjabi women, including factors such as disability status and parental responsibilities.*

## In what region are you currently living in?



The majority of respondents (46.96%) currently reside in the West Midlands, indicating a strong concentration of individuals from this region. London follows with 17.33% of respondents, and the East Midlands accounts for 11.26%. Yorkshire (8.59%) and the South East (8.15%) also represent significant portions of the population surveyed. Smaller percentages of respondents are located in the South West (2.22%), East of England (1.78%), North West (1.33%), North East (1.04%), and Scotland (1.04%). Wales has a minimal representation with 0.30%, while no respondents reported living in Northern Ireland. This regional distribution highlights that the majority of individuals surveyed are based in the Midlands and London, with less representation from other regions. 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.

The vast majority of respondents (92.15%) identified as British and UK-born citizens, reflecting a significant level of established residency within the UK among those surveyed. A smaller portion, 2.22%, reported holding Indefinite Leave to Remain as former Indian nationals, while 1.19% indicated they had Indefinite Leave to Remain with EU Settled Status, and an equal percentage were on Tier 2 visas as skilled workers.

Individuals with Tier 4 visas for adult students comprised 1.04% of respondents. Other immigration statuses included former African nationals with Indefinite Leave to Remain (0.30%), asylum seekers (0.44%), and Tier 1 migrants (0.15%). Notably, no respondents identified as Tier 3 unskilled workers, Tier 5 temporary workers, or undocumented migrants. Additionally, 1.33% selected "Other" to specify a different immigration status, highlighting some diversity in residency and visa types among the respondents. Abandoned responses featured nearly 200 respondents who after identifying themselves Tiered Migrant workers or undocumented migrants.

## ABANDONED RESPONSES

*It is pertinent to note that during the data cleaning process, there were 203 abandoned responses identified. It was a concern for us that the majority of abandonment happened in Section 1 of the survey after the question around migration status was asked. The dominant respondent type that abandoned the survey, fell into three groups, which are arranged in order of prevalence:*

- 1: Non-UK born respondents who were living in the UK on Tiered Visas*
- 2: Respondents aged 16 –18*
- 3: Respondents aged 50+*

Abandoned responses by non-UK-born Sikh Panjabi women may suggest that some migrant Sikh Panjabi women felt insecure about disclosing abuse after they had confirmed their immigration status. There was an analysis piece of work carried out by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office about migrant victims of abuse with insecure immigration status. The 'Safety before Status' report noted that "Information sharing with immigration enforcement undermines trust in the police and public services and enables perpetrators to control and abuse survivors with impunity. Data sharing in this capacity, however, can put the victim or survivor at risk of immigration enforcement, and, even where enforcement action does not take place can compound the experience of immigration abuse, pushing victims and survivors further away from support."

Sikh Women's Aid is aware that many people coming from abroad have paid large sums of money to access Visas to the UK either as students or Teir 2 Visas. If reporting a crime could lead to visa problems or the client has concerns around their visa being revoked, this could lead to victims not disclosing to authorities. We are already seeing the consequences of this in cases of domestic homicide where women are being murdered by their international partner, and most reviews identify that the victim did not report the abuse, or access any specialist services.

Women with insecure immigration status routinely access services from Sikh Women's Aid. In some cases, reporting domestic abuse, or a crime committed by the perpetrator, has led to the victim's visa being delayed during the time of renewal. One particular client received a letter from the Home Office stating, '...This is because your application raises exceptionally complex issues, and we require further time to consider your case thoroughly and reach a decision'.

The consequence for this client was that her employer was placing a lot of pressure on her to get her visa renewed, even though the process was outside of her control. The financial pressure on this client was also immense as she had her own home, which was mortgaged and her children were in a local school.

The thought of losing everything led to this client routinely considering returning to her perpetrator just to resolve the issue. It was a SWA's targeted intervention and support that led to the visa being renewed, which ensured that our client and her children did not have to reconcile with their abuser.



## AGE OF RESPONDENTS



The age distribution of respondents shows a majority falling within the mid-adult age ranges. The largest group, 32.74%, were between 35 and 44 years old, followed by 27.85% aged 45 to 54. Younger adults aged 25 to 34 made up 18.37% of respondents, while those in the 55 to 64 age range accounted for 11.56%. Only a small proportion of respondents were over 65 (2.22%) or under 18 (1.33%), with 5.93% aged between 18 and 24. This age distribution suggests that the survey primarily reached mid-life adults, providing a broad view of experiences across various adult life stages.

## DISABILITY DATA

8% of all respondents reported having a disability. Respondents identified physical disabilities as the most commonly reported experience, with 24 respondents selecting this option. Mental disabilities were also significant, with 16 respondents indicating such needs. Neuro-diverse conditions were reported by 7 individuals, while 2 respondents noted sensory disabilities. Additionally, 17 respondents selected "Other" to specify unique disabilities not covered by the predefined categories.



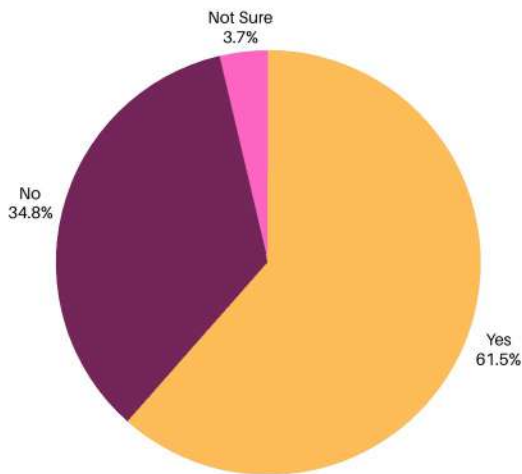
## SEXUAL ORIENTATION



The data on sexual orientation reveal that the majority of individuals identified as heterosexual, accounting for 90.81% of the population. A smaller percentage, 3.7%, identify as bisexual, while 4.59% preferred not to disclose their orientation. Additionally, 0.59% identify as lesbian, and 0.15% identify as pansexual or were unsure of their orientation. These findings highlight a predominant heterosexual orientation, with notable representation of bisexual individuals and a small proportion of other orientations, including those who chose not to specify.

# ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

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



To gather insights into the experiences of Sikh Panjabi women regarding domestic abuse, 675 respondents answered a question on whether they had experienced any form of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or coercive control.

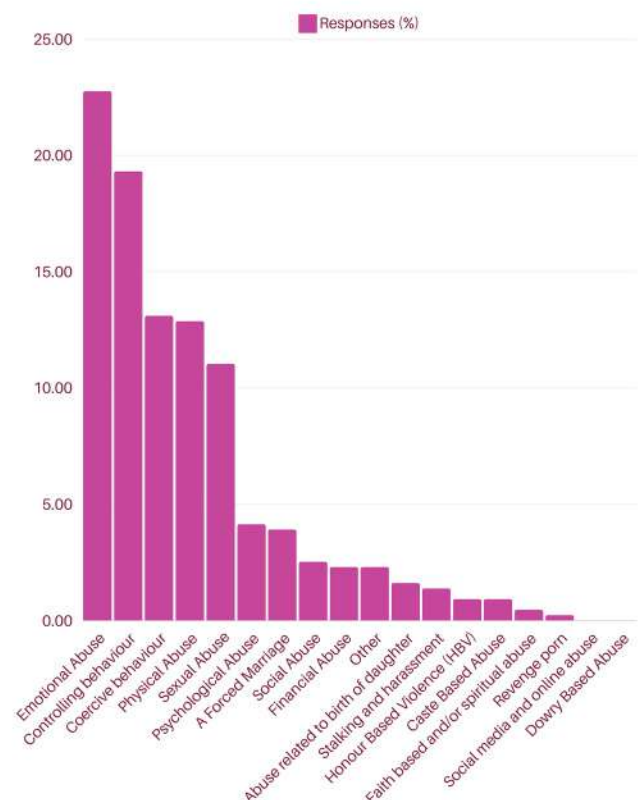
**The majority, 61.48%, reported experiencing domestic abuse, while 34.81% answered no, and 3.70% were unsure. This is consistent with our 2022 survey results.**

The primary forms of abuse reported by respondents included emotional abuse, controlling behaviour, physical abuse, coercive behaviour, and sexual abuse.

**Emotional abuse was the most prevalent, affecting 22.76% of respondents, followed closely by controlling behaviour at 19.31%. Physical abuse was reported by 12.87%, while coercive behaviour and sexual abuse were noted by 13.10% and 11.03%, respectively.**

Additional responses highlighted various forms of abuse, such as psychological abuse (4.14%), forced marriage (3.91%), social abuse (2.53%), and financial abuse (2.30%). Other less frequently reported forms included abuse related to the birth of a daughter (1.61%), stalking and harassment (1.38%), honour-based violence (0.92%), caste-based abuse (0.92%), faith-based and/or spiritual abuse (0.46%), and revenge porn (0.23%).

**If you answered yes, please specify the primary form of abuse you experienced. (Select ONE ANSWER ONLY at this stage)**



Notably, social media and online abuse and dowry-based abuse received no reports from the respondents. These findings illustrate the complex landscape of abuse experiences amongst the respondents, underscoring the need for comprehensive support systems and interventions tailored to address the various forms of abuse identified.

It is notable that when asking respondents to consider faith and spiritual abuse in the context of domestic abuse, it was not widely reported by respondents, but when explicitly asked about faith and spiritual abuse, the figure increases significantly from 0.46% in a domestic abuse context to 8% when respondents are asked specifically about abuse linked to faith and belief.



## SECONDARY FORMS OF ABUSE

Respondents who had experienced domestic abuse were asked to specify any secondary forms of abuse they had encountered. Respondents were given a multiple choice on this question as Sikh Women's Aid looks to explore the breadth and depth of abuse experienced by Sikh Panjabi women.

Out of **441** respondents who reported experiencing abuse or being unsure of their experiences, indicated that 74.83% of them encountered additional abusive experiences beyond those previously mentioned.

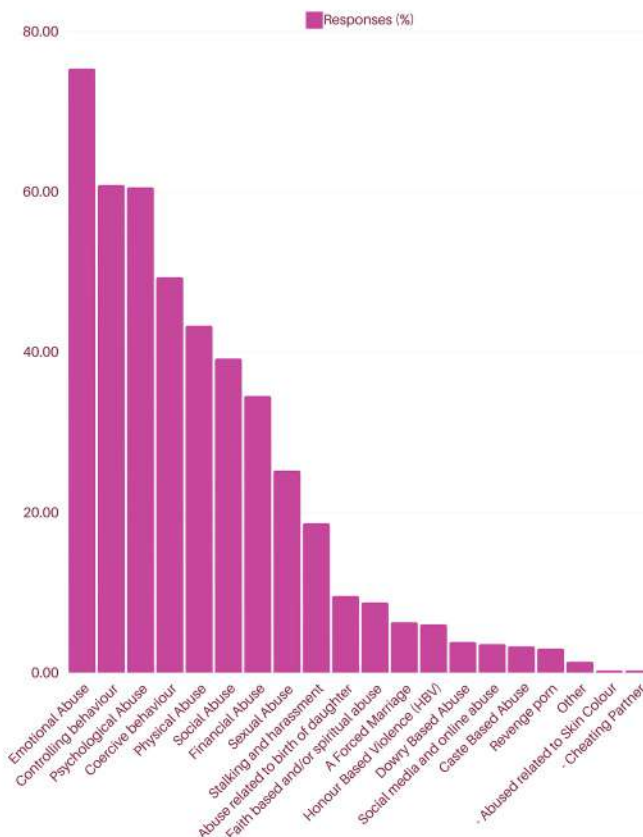
The findings demonstrate **emotional, psychological, and controlling behaviours being the most prevalent**. The most commonly reported form of secondary abuse was emotional abuse, with 274 respondents indicating they had experienced this form of manipulation and control, targeting their feelings. This was closely followed by **controlling behaviour**, reported by 222 respondents, which involves actions designed to isolate the victim and regulate their behaviour, leading to a loss of autonomy. **Psychological abuse** was reported by 220 respondents, highlighting the impact of manipulation.

**Coercive behaviour**, which includes threats, intimidation, and assault, was noted by 180 respondents, further underscoring the tactics used to control victims. **Physical abuse**, involving intentional harm or injury was reported by 158 respondents.

**Social abuse**, which includes isolating individuals from their family and friends, was mentioned by 143 respondents, showing how controlling relationships can limit a person's social connections. Other forms of abuse included **financial abuse**, reported by 125 respondents, where access to financial resources is restricted, and **sexual abuse**, noted by 92 respondents. Sexual abuse includes various forms of assault and rape, with some respondents reporting incidents that resulted in memory loss (women mentioned this in the 'Other' section of responses to this question).

A significant number of respondents mentioned **stalking and harassment** (68 respondents), **abuse related to the birth of a daughter** (35 respondents), and **faith-based/spiritual abuse** (32 respondents). **Forced marriages** (23 respondents) and **honour-based abuse** (22 respondents) were also mentioned, pointing to cultural and societal pressures as factors in abusive situations.

If you answered yes, please specify any secondary forms of abuse you experienced.  
(Please tick all that apply)



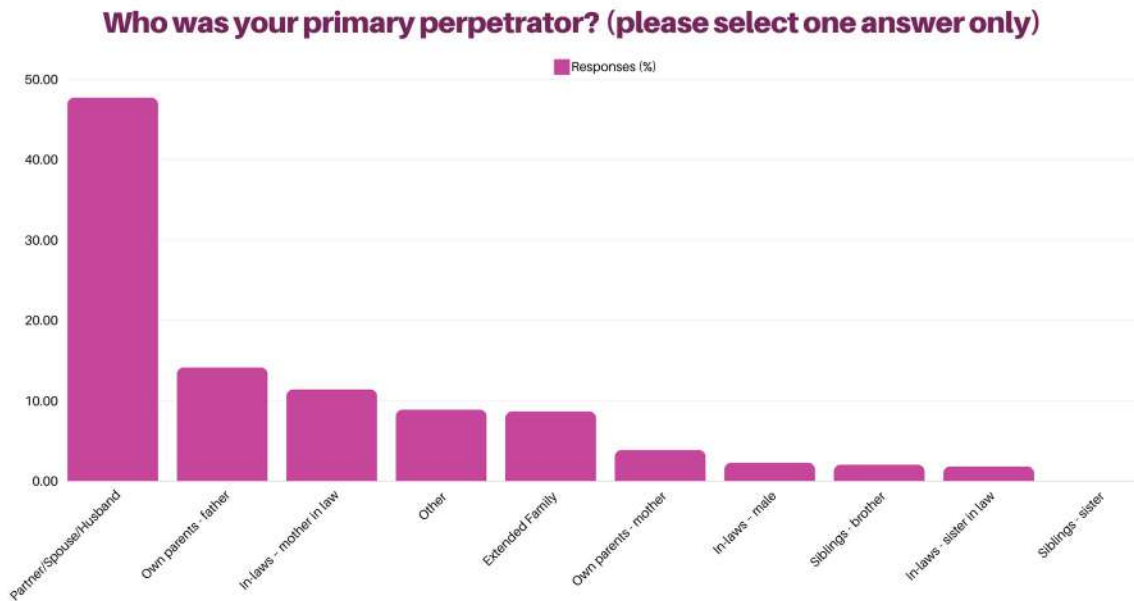
Other forms of abuse, such as **dowry-based abuse** was not reported as a primary form of abuse but was selected as a secondary form of abuse (14 respondents). This was also seen in secondary responses for participants who experienced **social media and online abuse** (13 respondents).

**Caste-based abuse** (12 respondents), and **revenge porn** (11 respondents), were reported less frequently but still highlighted the diverse ways in which abuse manifests in contemporary relationships. A small number of respondents (8) mentioned other forms of abuse not captured in the predefined categories, suggesting that the experiences of abuse can take many different forms.

*This data reflects the multi-dimensional nature of abuse, where individuals are often subjected to a combination of emotional, physical, financial, and psychological manipulation, often compounded by societal or cultural pressures that can also be recognised as 'hidden harms'.*



## PERPETRATORS OF ABUSE



The data on perpetrators of abuse highlights the varied sources of harm experienced by women who completed the survey. The most frequently reported primary abuser was a **partner, spouse, or husband**, accounting for 47.72% of responses, indicating that intimate relationships are a significant context for abuse.

**Own parents, specifically fathers**, were identified as primary abusers by 14.16% of respondents, while **in-laws, particularly mothers-in-law**, were reported by 11.42% of women, showcasing the role of extended family in abusive dynamics.

Other unspecified primary perpetrators made up 8.68% of the responses, reflecting the complexity of abuse scenarios. Other sources of primary abuse included grandparents, stepfathers, cult leaders, and teachers, each contributing 0.23% of the responses. The data also indicates notable differences in the types of abusers, with partners and family members frequently identified as perpetrators across the disabled group and non-disabled. In terms of identifying the types of abusers, there are some stark contrasts between the two groups. Within the disabled group, 38% indicated that their partner or spouse was the abuser, compared to 29.12% of non-disabled respondents. This indicates that Sikh Panjabi women with disabilities are at higher risk of intimate partner violence than Sikh Panjabi women without disabilities.

Further, the data illustrates the distribution of abuse perpetrators across various age groups. As expected, the type of perpetrator varies notably with the victim's age. For instance, in the under-18 category, fathers are the predominant perpetrators, highlighting familial abuse dynamics.

In contrast, as individuals age, partners or spouses increasingly become the primary abusers, reflecting shifting relationship patterns and possibly the complexities of adult relationships. The findings underscore the importance of developing targeted perpetrator intervention and prevention strategies that address the unique characteristics and risks associated with different age demographics.

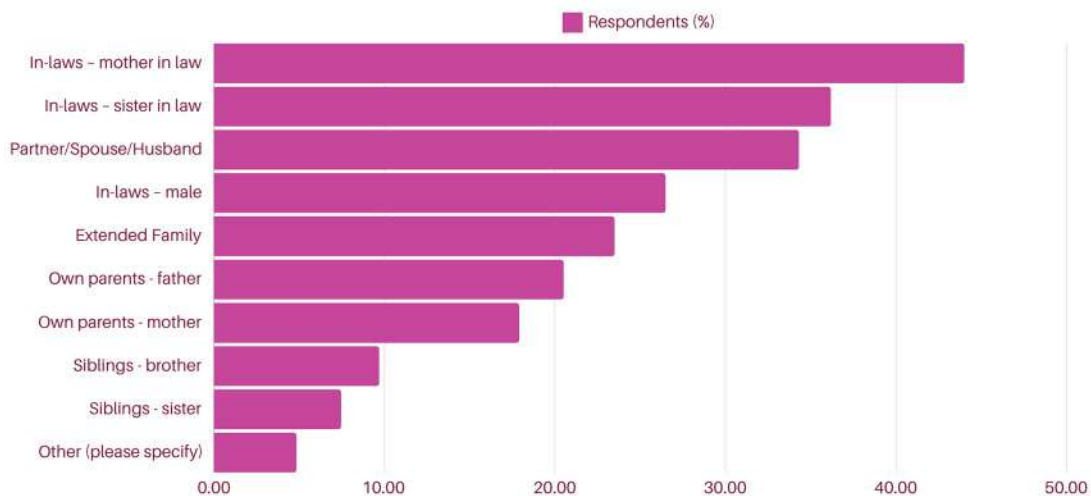
**Extended family members** accounted for 8.68%, and **the victims' own mothers** were noted by 3.88%. Siblings, specifically brothers, were identified as primary abusers by 2.05%, while male in-laws and sisters-in-law were reported by 2.28% and 1.83%, respectively. Notably, sisters were not reported as primary abusers by any respondent.

Additional primary perpetrators included **religious leaders** (0.68%), siblings (0.23%), stepmothers (0.23%), parents (0.23%), and **spiritual healers** (0.23%).



## SECONDARY PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

If you selected Yes to the previous question, please select any secondary perpetrators/abusers from the list below. (Please tick all that apply)



In the survey regarding **additional** perpetrators of abuse, a total of 440 respondents provided answers. **Amongst those who answered, 61.82% reported having other perpetrators in addition to their primary abuser.** This indicates that a significant portion of individuals experienced multiple sources of abuse, further emphasizing the complexity of abusive relationships and the need for targeted support for survivors.

When considering perpetrators, any intervention must also consider targeted responses to abusers who may not be intimate partners, such as parents and in-laws. Therefore, the approach to challenging or disrupting perpetrator's belief systems must also be understood in a familial context.

Other family members, including male in-laws (68 respondents) and extended family members (58 respondents), were reported as secondary abusers. In addition, some respondents identified their own parents as involved in the abuse, particularly fathers (55 respondents) and mothers (48 respondents).

Interestingly, the survey also highlighted that siblings could be involved, with brothers named by 26 respondents and sisters by 20 respondents. When looking at primary perpetrator no respondent identified their female siblings as abusers, but a significant number of female siblings were noted as secondary perpetrators. ***This highlights the prevalence of female perpetrators as co-abusers against their siblings rather than an active perpetrator.***

In the survey, **268** respondents who reported experiencing domestic abuse identified **secondary** perpetrators or abusers. The responses revealed that in many cases, the abuse was not limited to a single individual but also involved other family members or close relations.

The most frequently mentioned secondary abusers were in-laws, with mothers-in-law (117 respondents) and sisters-in-law (92 respondents) being the most commonly reported. Partners, spouses, or husbands were also identified as secondary perpetrators by 90 respondents, underscoring the complex and often intertwined nature of abusive relationships.

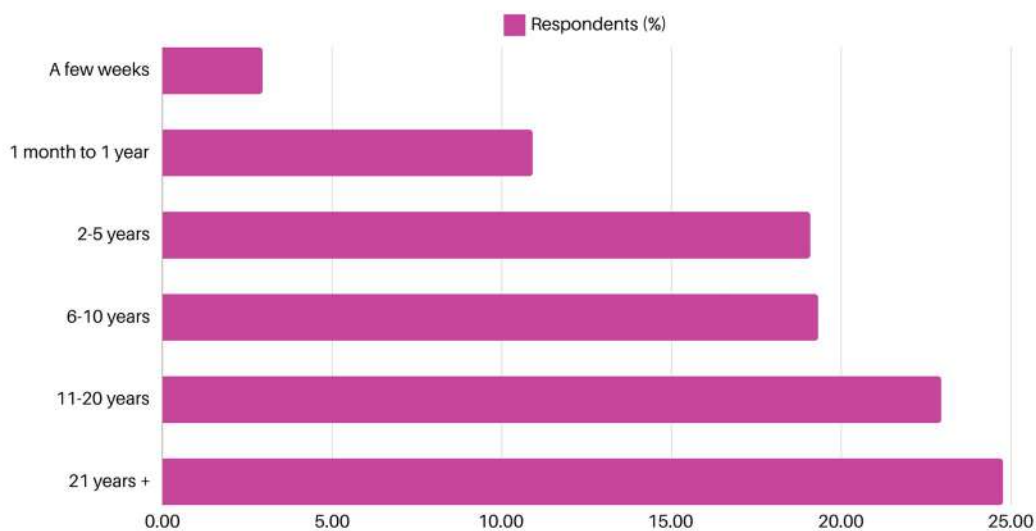
A small number of respondents (33) specified other secondary abusers not captured in the predefined categories, indicating that domestic abuse can involve a wide range of individuals in a victim’s life.

The findings about primary and secondary perpetrators emphasize the diverse range of individuals who can be involved in abusive practices. This highlights the need for better awareness and understanding of the intersecting ways in which abuse can be experienced by Sikh Panjabi women.

**Considering these findings, it is concerning that in some regions, police forces and specialist domestic abuse services use risk assessment tools that omit screening for honour-based abuse and harmful practices.**

## HOW LONG DO SIKH PANJABI WOMEN STAY IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS?

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



Of the 440 respondents who answered the question on the duration of abuse they have experienced, the largest group, 24.77%, reported that the abuse has been taking place for 21 years or more. This was followed by 22.95% who indicated 11–20 years, 19.32% who reported 6–10 years, and 19.09% who reported 2–5 years. Additionally, 10.91% experienced abuse lasting from 1 month to 1 year, and a smaller portion, 2.95%, reported the abuse lasting only a few weeks.

When asked about the frequency of abuse, 26.36% of respondents reported experiencing abuse daily, while 25.45% indicated it occurred multiple times per week. Abuse was reported as intermittent (a few times per year) by 17.95% of respondents and weekly by 13.41%. Additionally, 8.41% experienced abuse on a monthly basis, while smaller groups reported other frequencies (6.14%) or bi-monthly occurrences (2.27%).

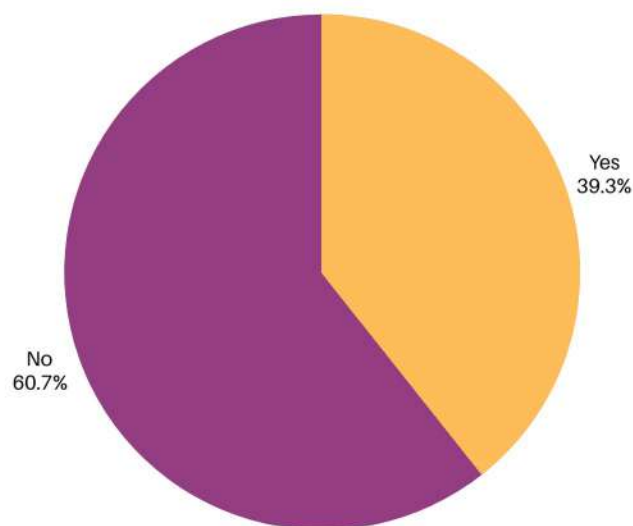
Furthermore, the frequency of abuse experienced by disabled women was generally higher compared to their non-disabled counterparts, indicating a potentially more severe and pervasive impact of domestic abuse within this population. The frequency of abuse experienced also shows notable discrepancies. Among disabled respondents, 34% reported experiencing abuse daily, while 26.36% of non-disabled individuals indicated the same frequency.



These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and support systems that address the specific risks faced by Sikh Panjabi women with disabilities. The data also highlights the importance of raising awareness about domestic abuse in both disabled and non-disabled communities. Comprehensive strategies must be developed to raise awareness, enhance protection, provide resources, and foster understanding of the unique challenges encountered by Sikh Panjabi women with disabilities who experience abuse.

## ALCOHOL/DRUG USE AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

**Is/Was the consumption of alcohol /  
drug intake a contributing factor to the  
abuse?**



**Amongst the 440 respondents who answered whether alcohol or drug intake contributed to the abuse, 39.32% indicated that it was a contributing factor.**

This is significant due to the insights around perpetrators habits and behaviours identified via Domestic Homicide Reviews where Sikh Women's Aid provide expertise. Perpetrators who murdered intimate partners and/or family members feature extensively as having either mental health struggles and/or issues around alcohol and substance misuse. It is vital for this behaviour to be recognised as a risk factor / vulnerability for Sikh Panjabi women.

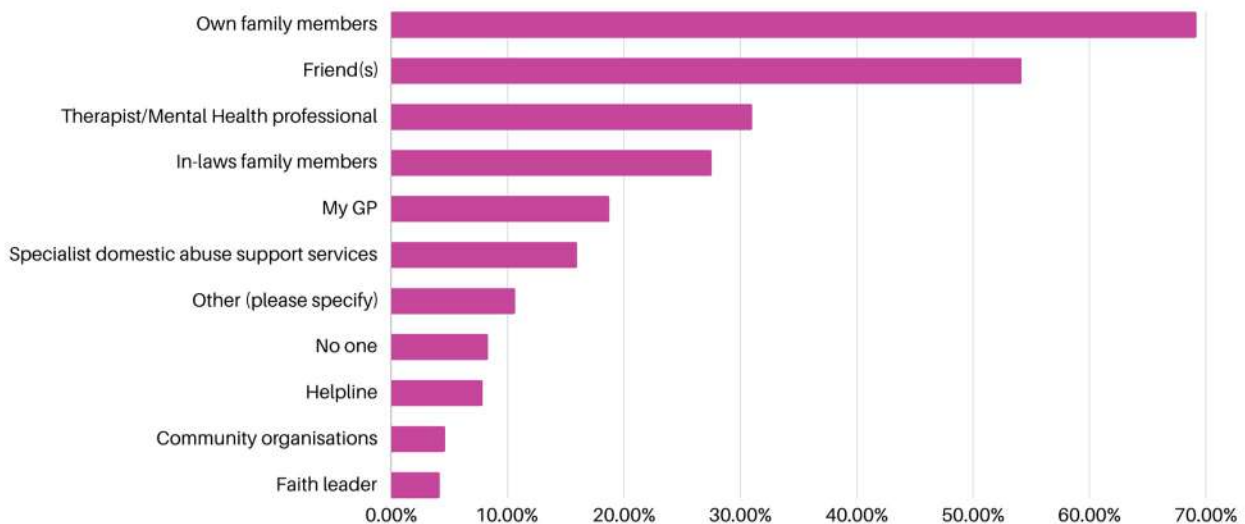
## DISCLOSING DOMESTIC ABUSE



Of the 440 respondents who reported experiencing domestic abuse, when asked if anyone knew about their experience of abuse, 82.50% responded that someone else was aware, while 10.68% reported that no one else knew. A smaller percentage, 6.82%, were unsure if others were aware.

## WHO KNEW ABOUT THE ABUSE THAT SIKH PANJABI WOMEN EXPERIENCED?

### Who else knows about the domestic abuse? (Please tick all that apply)



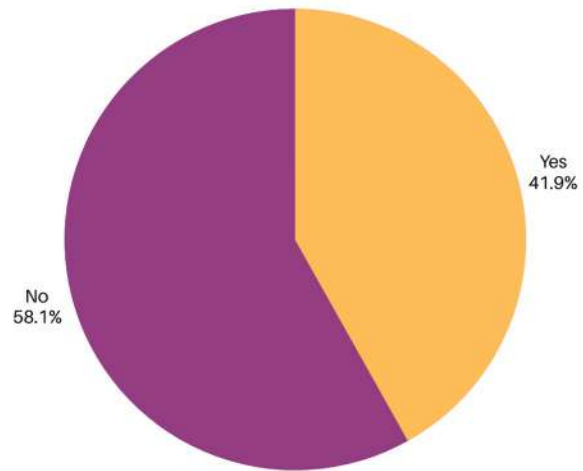
The data indicates that the people most likely to know about the abuse suffered by respondents were their own family members (307 respondents) or friends (234 respondents). A smaller number confided in therapists or mental health professionals (134 respondents) and in-laws were also aware (120 respondents). General practitioners (GPs) were informed or became aware (81 respondents), while specialist domestic abuse support services were involved (69 respondents). 'Other' category accounted for 37 disclosures. Notably, 36 respondents reported that no one is aware of their situation. Helplines were used by 34 individuals, community organisations by 20, and faith leaders by 18 respondents, highlighting that although family members and friends were aware of the abuse, respondents were more likely to access therapeutic services than go to specialist support services or helplines.



## REPORTING DOMESTIC ABUSE

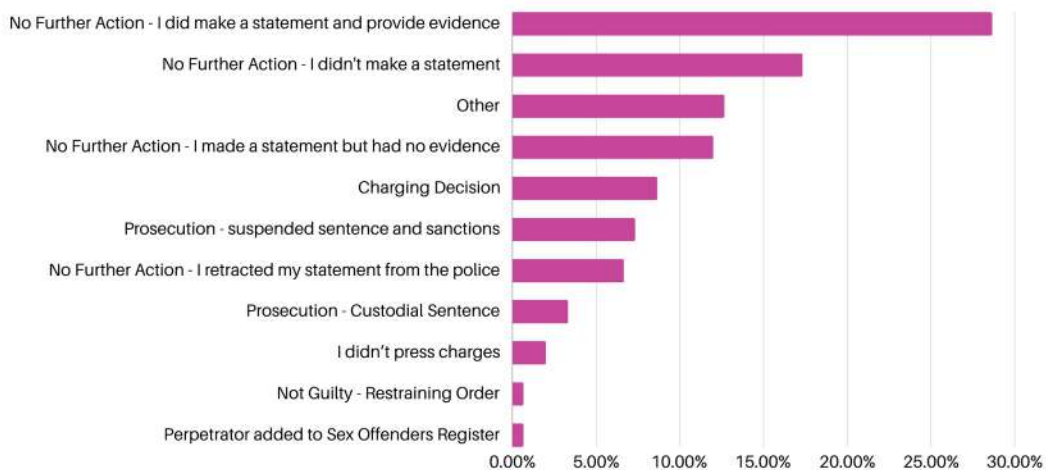
Out of 363 participants who responded to this question, 41.87% (152 individuals) said they reported the abuse to the police, while 58.13% (211 individuals) did not report the abuse.

Have you ever reported the abuse to the police, either recently or historically?



## REPORTING OUTCOMES

Domestic Abuse: If you did report, what was the outcome?

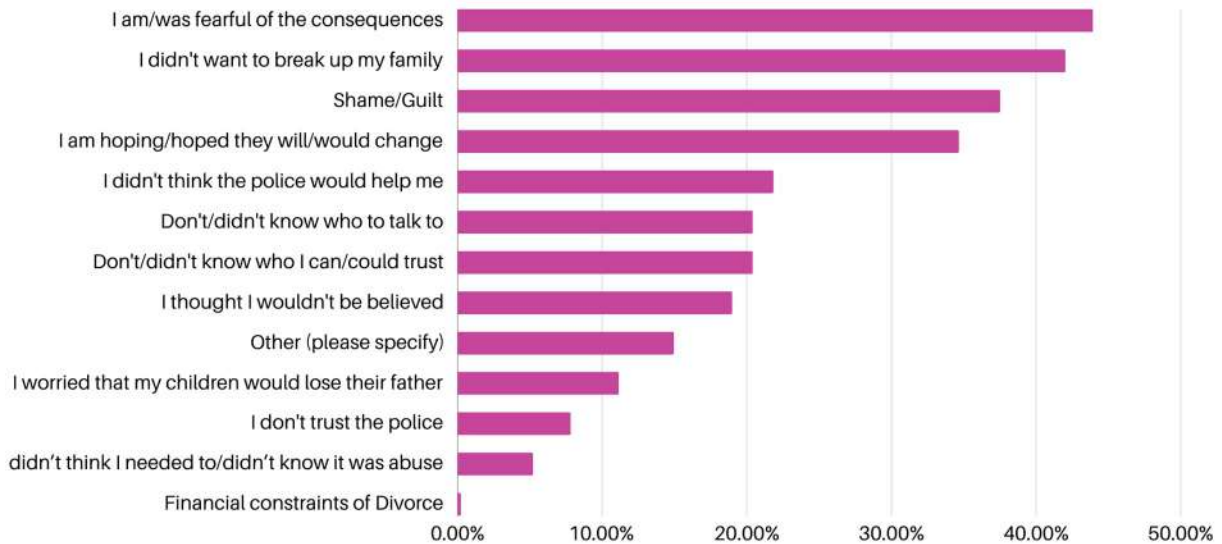


Among the 363 respondents who reported their abuse to the police, various outcomes were noted. A significant (28.67%) indicated that no further action was taken despite making a statement and providing evidence. Additionally, 17.33% did not make a statement at all, while 12.67% selected "other" for their experience. Another 12% reported that no further action was taken because they made a statement but had no evidence.

Regarding charging decisions, 8.67% noted that there was a decision to charge, and 7.33% mentioned a prosecution resulting in a suspended sentence and sanctions. A smaller percentage, 6.67%, stated that no further action was taken because they retracted their statement, while 3.33% faced a prosecution that resulted in a custodial sentence. Other responses included a restraining order (0.67%), being placed on the Sex Offenders Register (0.67%), and not pressing charges (2%).

## BARRIERS TO REPORTING DOMESTIC ABUSE

### Domestic Abuse: What is stopping you/stopped you from reporting (Please tick all that apply)



423 respondents gave 1178 responses to this multiple-choice question which enquired about why respondents chose not to report their experiences of domestic abuse. The top reasons cited were fear of the consequences (178 respondents), followed closely by concerns about breaking up their family (176 respondents). These two reasons point to the emotional and practical barriers that many women face when considering whether to take action in abusive circumstances.

Feelings of shame or guilt were also significant factors, reported by 156 individuals, highlighting the internal struggles that can prevent someone from reaching out for help. Another notable reason was the hope that the situation would improve or that the person causing harm would change, with 146 respondents expressing this belief.

Other factors influencing the decision not to report included a lack of confidence in the authorities, as evidenced by 90 respondents who felt that the police would not assist them, and 86 individuals who were unsure who to trust or talk to about their situation. The fear of not being believed was also a concern for many, with 80 respondents indicating this as a reason not to report.

Additionally, 47 individuals worried about the potential impact on their children, specifically the loss of their father (who is also a perpetrator in this context), while 33 respondents noted a lack of trust in the police as a barrier to reporting.

**1178** RESPONSES



## IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Of 440 individuals affected by domestic abuse, participants were asked to identify all current impacts of abuse on their lives, yielding a total of **1,553** responses. **The most frequently reported effects included depression, anxiety, or stress**, which appeared in 314 responses, and an inability to trust others, with 251 mentions. **Sleep disturbances and familial relationship problems** were each cited 181 times, while **difficulties with intimate relationships** were reported 162 times.

**1553** RESPONSES



Other impacts included **anger issues** (144 responses), **suicidal thoughts (or feelings of wanting to die, reallocated from the Other responses)** (113), and **physical ailments** (73). Additional responses covered **self-harm** (53), **addiction issues** (34), and a range of other effects such as **shame, guilt, social anxiety**, and **panic attacks** (11). Notably, a small number of respondents indicated no current impact (13). Other specific impacts reported included **poor mental health and intrusive thoughts (9)**, **PTSD (7)**, **lack of confidence (5)**, and **disordered eating (2)**.

The range of responses highlight that domestic abuse has a profound and multifaceted impact on the health and well-being of Sikh Panjabi women, intertwining physical, mental, financial and social health challenges. In many cases, the abuse they face is compounded by cultural stigma, familial and community pressures, which then intersect with systemic barriers to accessing support.

These unique challenges amplify the detrimental effects on their health, often leaving them in prolonged cycles of suffering and neglect. It is therefore vital that public health responses to domestic abuse are culturally appropriate and professionals are curious about the lives of their patients and use routine enquiry effectively to safeguard Sikh Panjabi women who face such compounding and intersecting difficulties.

# ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL ABUSE

## EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Of the 675 respondents who answered whether they have ever experienced sexual abuse in the past, 32.89% reported "Yes," while 67.11% indicated "No."

## WHEN THE ABUSE WAS FIRST EXPERIENCED

Among the 33% who answered when they first experienced sexual abuse, 54.26% indicated that it occurred as a child, 30.04% reported experiencing it as an adult, and 15.70% experienced sexual abuse both as a child and as an adult.

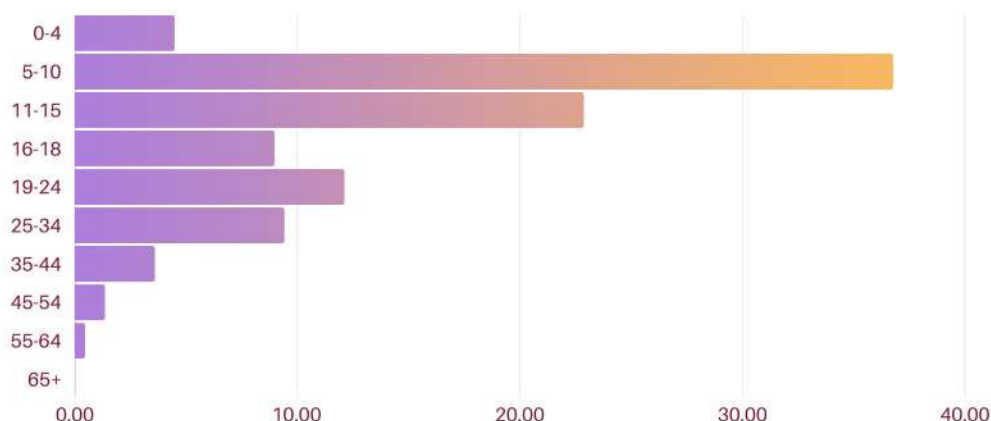
## PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ABUSE EXPERIENCED

Of the respondents who experienced sexual abuse, 31.67% reported it as "a one-off incident," while the majority, 68.33%, stated that it "happened more than once."

This suggests that there is an **alarmingly high number** of Sikh Panjabi women who have experienced sexual abuse as children and the abuse was repetitive. This leads Sikh Women's Aid to believe that there has been an active culture of perpetrating sexual abuse against young Sikh girls.

## AGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED SEXUAL ABUSE

How old were you when you first remember experiencing sexual abuse?



223 respondents reported their age when they first remembered experiencing sexual abuse. The largest group, 36.77%, indicated they were aged 5-10 years old. This was followed by 22.87% who were aged 11-15 years, and 12.11% who were aged 19-24 years. Additionally, 8.97% reported being aged 16-18 years, while 9.42% were aged 25-34 years. Smaller percentages included 4.48% aged 0-4 years, 3.59% aged 35-44 years, 1.35% aged 45-54 years, 0.45% aged 55-64 years.



## PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ABUSE EXPERIENCED

It is interesting that 2.2% of respondents were from the 65+ age group cohort and no respondents of this aged reported being impacted by sexual abuse. However, over the years, Sikh Women's Aid has carried out small scale engagement activities with Sikh Panjabi women over the age of 65. During these sessions, as it was a safe setting, Sikh Panjabi women spoke quite openly, about being forced to meet their husbands' sexual demands and being punished if they refused. Women described examples of their husband's behaviour, which included:

- ▶ silent treatment
- ▶ ignoring grandchildren
- ▶ husbands being unsociable and awkward at family events and the wife being held responsible for his actions ('why is he upset?', 'what did you do?')

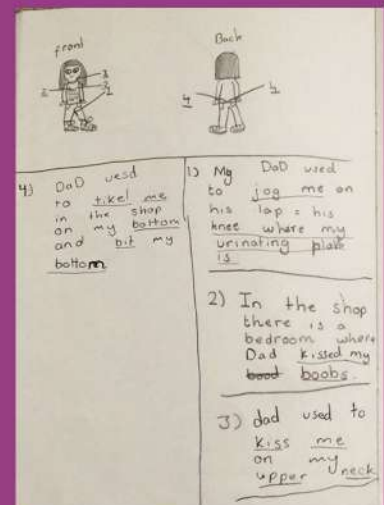
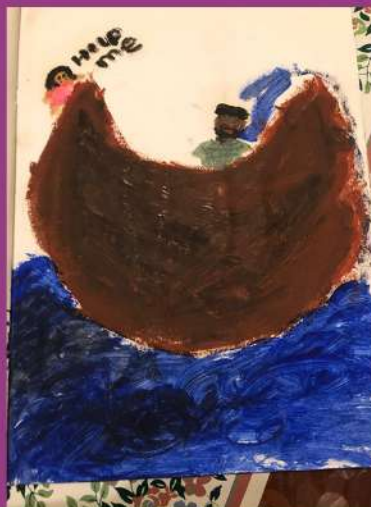
The women did not see this in the context of marital rape, but it was deemed an obligation that their generation of women were expected to consent as a marker of being 'a good responsible wife' and cater to their every whim and need.

**When the responses of participants who were under the age of 18 when they were sexually abused are combined, it equates to 69.96% of this cohort of respondents. This highlights the prevalence of children being acutely vulnerable to sexual abuse within the Sikh Panjabi community.**

## HELPLINE CASE STUDY: **KAJOL**

**SWA has been supporting 'Kajol' since 2023.**

*Here are Kajol's own words about her experience of child sexual abuse that was perpetrated by her biological father. These are shared with Kajol and her mum's permission to give readers a heartbreaking insight into the voice of child.*



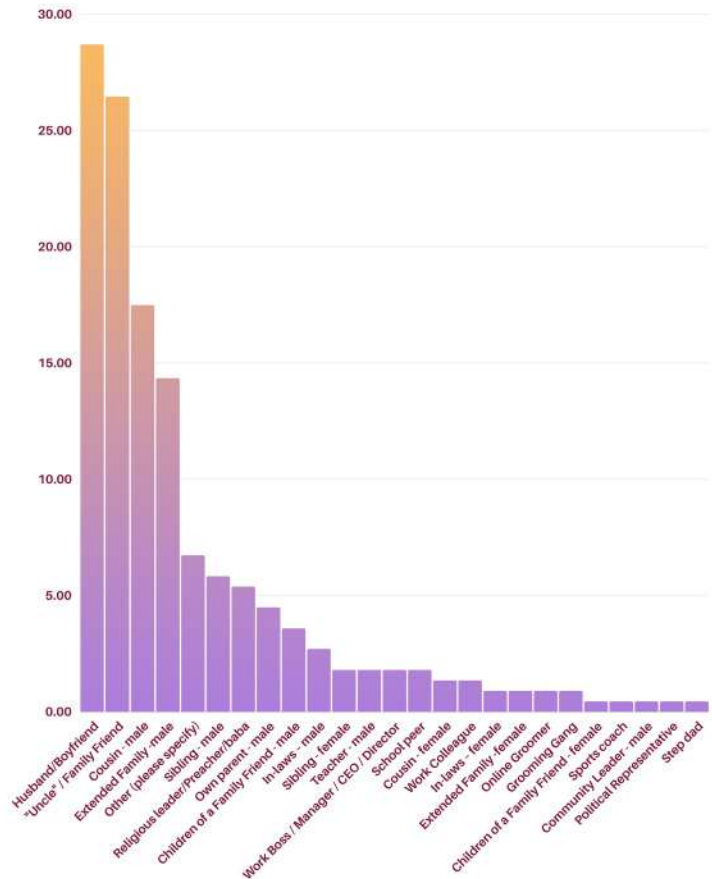
## PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Of those respondents who reported experiencing sexual abuse, a variety of perpetrators were identified, resulting in a total of 286 responses. The most common perpetrators were husbands or boyfriends (64 responses), followed by uncles or family friends (59 responses). Other frequently mentioned perpetrators included male cousins (39), extended male family members (32), and siblings who were male (13).

A range of individuals outside of the immediate family circle were also reported as perpetrators. These included religious leaders, preachers, or Babas (12 responses), own male parents (10), and children of a family friend who were male (8). Male in-laws were identified in 6 responses, while female siblings, teachers, and workplace superiors were mentioned 4 times each. This reinforces that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators are male.

Other less frequent perpetrators included female cousins, work colleagues, female in-laws, and extended female family members (each mentioned 2 times). Specific cases of online grooming and grooming gangs (2 respondents each), and abuse by sports coaches or political representatives were also reported (1 respondent each). Interestingly, female teachers, community leaders, and female parents were not identified as perpetrators.

Who was the perpetrator of the sexual abuse?  
(please tick all that apply)



**Across all age groups, there is a pronounced trend indicating that Husbands/Boyfriends are frequently identified as perpetrators, especially in older age groups. In contrast, as expected, the role of Uncles, Cousins, and Family Friends is more prevalent among younger individuals.**

**This data suggests that as individuals age, the nature of their relationships with perpetrators may evolve, highlighting the importance of further research into the dynamics of these relationships and potential intervention strategies.**

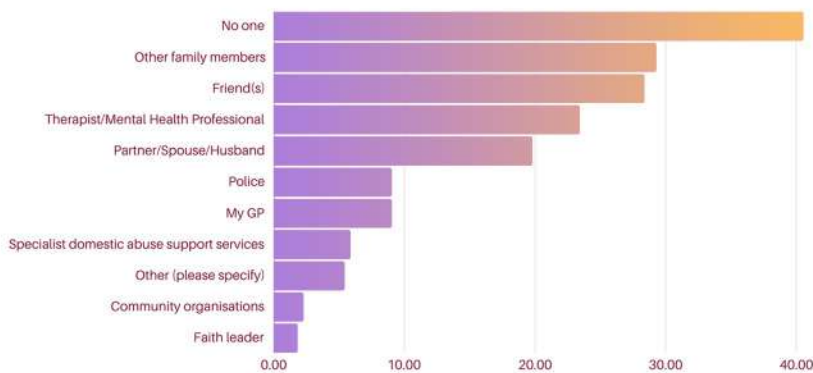




## DISCLOSING SEXUAL ABUSE

**Out of the total respondents (222) to this question, 90 respondents indicated they had not turned to anyone for support.**

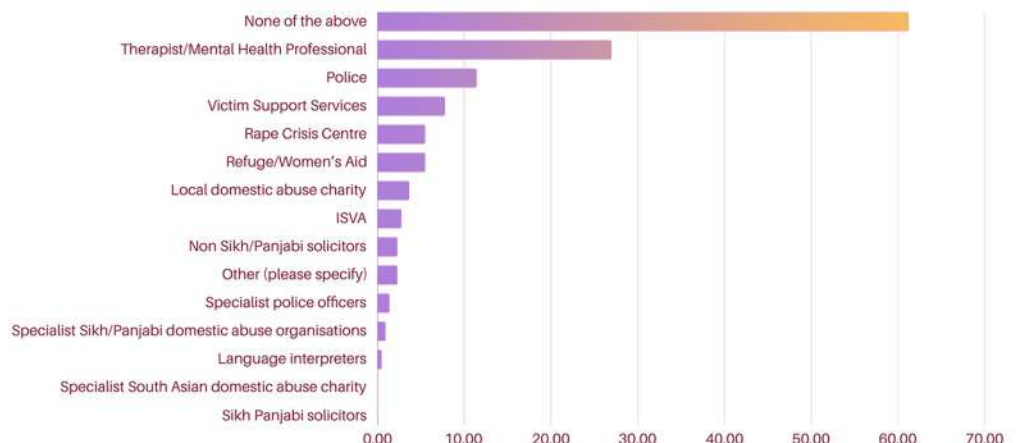
**Who else knows about the sexual abuse?**



The most common sources of support were other family members, (65 respondents), and friends, (62 respondents), being the next most frequent choices. 52 individuals sought assistance from a therapist or mental health professional, while 44 respondents turned to a partner, spouse, or husband for help. 20 respondents each reached out to the police or their GP. 13 individuals accessed specialist domestic abuse support services, and 12 respondents selected "Other" as their response. Community organizations were contacted by 5 individuals, and 4 respondents turned to a faith leader for support.

## ACCESSING SUPPORT SERVICES IN RELATION TO SEXUAL ABUSE

**Which, if any, of the following have you had contact with relating to your experience of sexual violence? (Please tick all that apply)**



**Out of the 219 individuals who responded to this question, 134 (61%) respondents indicated they had not had contact with any support service relating to their experience of sexual abuse.**

Among those who did seek support, the most common contact was with a therapist or mental health professional, with 59 respondents reporting this. 25 individuals reached out to the police, while 17 accessed victim support services. 12 respondents each had contact with a rape crisis centre or with Refuge/Women's Aid. 8 individuals sought help from a local domestic abuse charity, and 6 received support from an ISVA. 5 respondents each had contact with non-Sikh/Panjabi solicitors or selected "Other" as their response. Specialist police officers assisted 3 respondents, while 2 individuals reached out to specialist Sikh/Panjabi domestic abuse organisations. Language interpreters were involved for 1 respondent.

## DID YOU REPORT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL ABUSE TO THE POLICE?

Out of the 223 respondents, 16.14% (35 respondents) reported that they had informed the police about their experience of sexual abuse, while a significant **83.86%** indicated that they had not reported to the police.

**83.86%**



## POLICE OUTCOMES OF REPORTING SEXUAL ABUSE



*Among the 35 respondents who reported their experience of sexual abuse to the police, only 5 respondents reported their disclosure resulted in a prosecution and custodial sentence, which equates to 2.25% of the total number of women who said they experienced sexual abuse in the survey.*

8 respondents indicated that there was no further action taken after they made a statement and provided evidence. Additionally, 7 respondents reported no further action after making a statement without evidence. Another 7 respondents mentioned other unspecified outcomes. Furthermore, 4 respondents stated that no action was taken because they did not make a statement. There were also cases where a charging decision was made (2) and the prosecution resulted in a suspended sentence and sanctions (2).

## WHAT IS STOPPING YOU FROM REPORTING THE ABUSE?

Of the 219 respondents to this question, there were 457 responses across these options. Several key reasons were identified as preventing individuals from reporting their experiences of abuse. **The most frequently reported reason was shame or guilt** (103 responses), followed by **fear of the consequences** (77 responses). Many respondents also reported that **they didn't know who to talk to** (66 responses). Other factors included feeling that **they didn't know who they could trust** (51 responses), believing that the police wouldn't do anything (41 responses), or they did not trust the police (18 respondents), and **experiencing family pressure not to report** (28 responses).

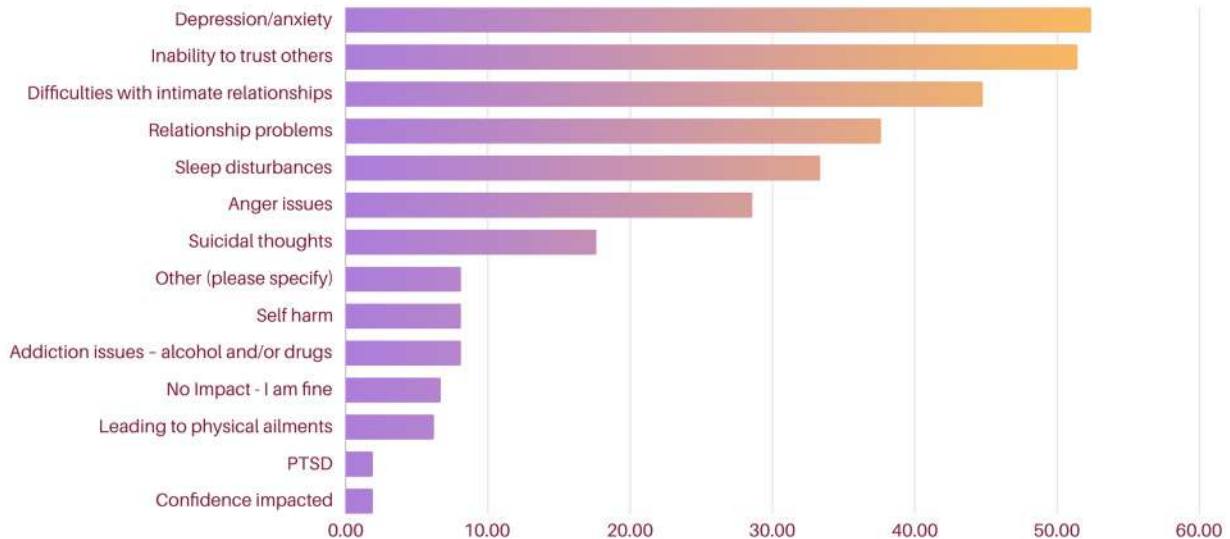
Additionally, 21 respondents indicated that **they didn't know it was abuse at the time**, and 17 respondents expressed the hope that the perpetrator would change.

*These figures illustrate the confusion and lack of awareness some individuals may face in recognising abusive situations. This reflects the complex and multifaceted barriers to reporting sexual abuse, which include psychological, social, and cultural factors.*



## IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE

**What impact is the sexual abuse (current or historic) having on you at the moment? (please tick all that apply)**



When examining the impact of sexual abuse on respondents, a range of emotional, psychological, and physical effects were reported. The most common impacts included **depression or anxiety** (110 responses) and **inability to trust others** (108 responses). Many respondents also indicated experiencing **difficulties with intimate relationships** (94 responses) and **relationship problems in general** (79 responses).

**Sleep disturbances** were reported by 70 respondents, while **anger issues** were identified by 60 respondents. Other emotional and psychological effects included **suicidal thoughts** (37 responses), **self-harm** (17 responses), and **addiction issues related to alcohol and/or drugs** (17 responses). A smaller number of respondents noted that the abuse led to **physical ailments** (13 responses), while **PTSD and lack of confidence** were mentioned by 4 respondents each.



*Interestingly, 14 respondents indicated that they felt the abuse had no current impact on them, and 17 respondents described the impact as something they categorized as "other".*

*This highlights the complex and intersecting ways in which individuals are affected by sexual abuse.*

# ABUSIVE PRACTICES LINKED TO FAITH, RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY AND BELIEF

The subsequent questions were designed to gather detailed insights into abuse linked to faith, spirituality and belief. The goal is to understand its manifestation, perpetrator profile, victim-survivor responses and, if any, barriers to seeking support and justice. This, in turn, will help Sikh Women's Aid tailor its responses to this cohort of clients.

By disseminating this data, we seek to inform voluntary and statutory services about the prevalence, impact and risk of abuse linked to faith, spirituality and belief. It is the experience of SWA that this type of abuse is one of the least understood by services and policy makers.

SWA has witnessed services respond with fear and concerns that interventions in a faith context may be seen as racist or targeted. Therefore, we routinely witness a reluctance to challenge and disrupt perpetrators and faith settings that support such individuals by ignoring or dismissing reports of safeguarding concerns.

## HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ABUSE IN RELATION TO RELIGION, FAITH OR BELIEF?

*Out of 675 respondents, 8.00% reported having been subjected to abusive practices linked to faith, religion, spirituality, or belief. This figure is consistent with survey results from previous years. This equates to 54 Sikh Panjabi women who responded to this survey.*

38.00% of this cohort indicated that the abuse they experienced was a one-off incident, while a larger proportion, 62.00%, reported that the abuse occurred more than once or repeatedly.

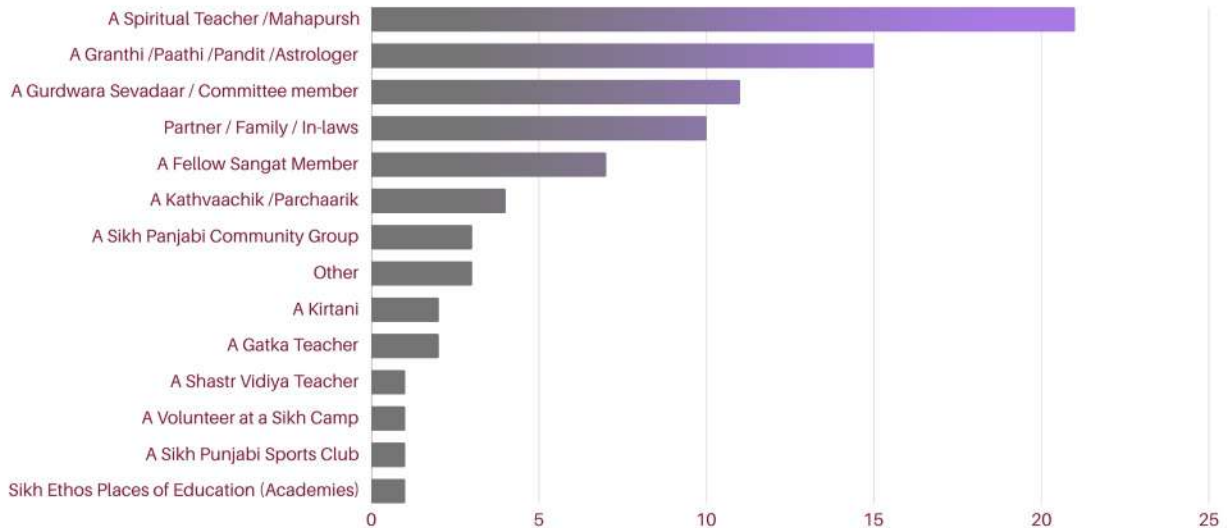
Respondents who reported the gender of their perpetrator, the majority identified the perpetrator as male, (87.76%). A smaller proportion reported the perpetrator as female (12.24%).





## PERPETRATORS OF SPIRITUAL AND FAITH-BASED ABUSE

### Spiritual and Faith-based abuse: Who was the primary perpetrator?



*A notable feature when analysing perpetrators of faith-based abuse was that every role that we listed as holding important positions of authority and trust in a faith setting, was reported as a perpetrator. This data evidences that perpetrators can operate at every level within a faith setting or faith leadership structure.*

**THE MOST COMMON PERPETRATORS WERE SPIRITUAL TEACHERS OR MAHAPURSH (21 RESPONSES).**

For context, In Sikh traditions, the concept of a Mahapursh holds a significant place, but it is distinct in its application in comparison to Vedic traditions. A Mahapursh is not seen as divine but as a spiritually advanced individual who strictly adheres to the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh holy scripture). They are recognised for their deep understanding of Sikh philosophy, exemplary conduct, and dedication to seeking union with The Creator (the Western term for this would be God). A Sikh Mahapursh is often revered (**but should never worshipped**) for their ability to inspire others to follow the path of the Gurus and encourage Sikhs to find The Creator (God) within themselves.

The next cohort of perpetrators were *Pandits* (Prayer conductors of the Hindu faith), *Astrologers*, *Granthi* (priests), and *Paathi* (Sikh Scripture Reader), who can serve as religious custodians in a Gurdwara (15 responses).

Other perpetrators included **Gurdwara Sevadaars (volunteers)/ Committee members** (11 responses) who are regular volunteers with specific responsibilities at the Gurdwara. **Partners, family members, or in-laws** were also identified as perpetrating faith and spiritual abuse (10 responses). Additional perpetrators included **fellow Sangat** (religious congregation) members (7 responses), individuals who are part of the same Sikh circles, and *Kathaavaachiks / Parchaariks* (Sikh historians who act as religious story tellers in Sikh faith settings) with 4 responses.

Other less frequently mentioned perpetrators were individuals from various Sikh community groups, including **Kirtanis** who are religious hymn singers with 2 responses, **Gatka Teachers** (Sikh performative martial arts instructors) with 2 responses, and *Shastr Vidiya Teachers* (Sikh self-defence instructors) with 1 response. A small number of respondents also identified perpetrators as **volunteers at Sikh camps**, members of **Sikh Punjabi sports clubs**, and individuals associated with Sikh ethos educational institutions each with 1 response. 3 responses were categorised as "Other," indicating unspecified perpetrators within the community. This data highlights the diverse range of perpetrators within the Sikh Panjabi community, many of whom hold positions of authority or power, influence, or regular interaction within religious or community spaces.

## FORMS OF ABUSE EXPERIENCED LINKED TO FAITH AND BELIEF

In total, there were 97 responses from the 54 individuals who experienced abuse linked to faith and belief, as this was a multiple-choice question, with some participants identifying more than one form of abuse.

**THE MOST COMMON FORM REPORTED WAS SEXUAL ASSAULT, INCLUDING PENETRATIVE SEXUAL ASSAULT, INAPPROPRIATE TOUCHING, AND GROPING OF INTIMATE AREAS (29 RESPONSES).**

Notable forms of abuse included **coercive control by a person of authority** (16 responses), and **grooming and manipulation** (14 responses). Other forms of abuse reported by respondents included **financial extortion** (asking for large sums of money or valuable items, including gold, for rituals or prayers) with 11 responses, **domestic abuse through coercive control** (7 responses), and being forced to work long hours for the benefit of the perpetrator under the guise of selfless service. (7 responses).

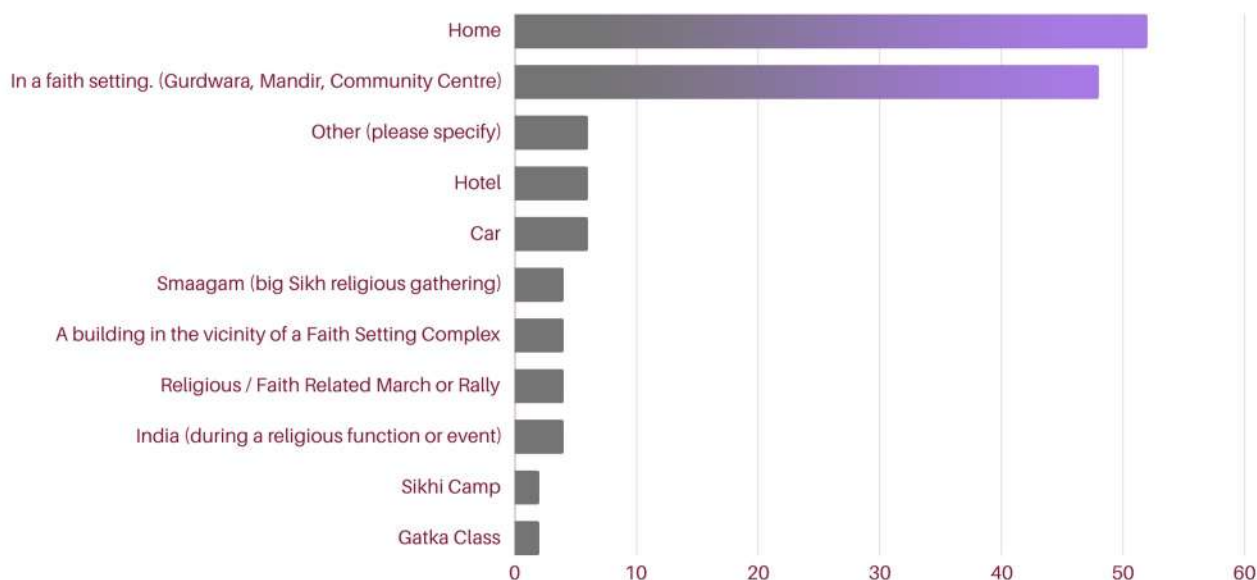
In some cases, respondents reported **exorcism-related abuse, where the perpetrator would hit, beat, or assault the victim in an attempt to remove an alleged evil spirit** (5 responses). Additionally, **online harassment and grooming** was reported by 3 respondents.

*This data highlights the diverse and often intersecting nature of abuse, which can take many forms beyond physical violence, including emotional, psychological, and financial manipulation under the guise of deep-rooted Sikh concepts such as selfless service.*



## FORMS OF ABUSE EXPERIENCED LINKED TO FAITH AND BELIEF

### Spiritual and Faith-based abuse: Where did the abuse take place?



When examining the locations where abuse occurred, respondents reported a range of settings. The most common locations included, home (26 responses) and faith settings such as **Gurdwaras, Mandirs, or community centres** (24 responses). This data suggests that perpetrators who operate under the guise of faith can leverage their position of trust to gain access to worshippers homes where they have accessed and then gone onto abuse Sikh Panjabi women.

Other less frequent locations included **hotels, cars, and other large Sikh religious gatherings** (involving hymn singing and preaching), each with 3 responses.

Furthermore, buildings **in the vicinity of a faith setting, smaagham** (large-scale religious program of speeches, hymn singing and a community kitchen), **religious or faith-related marches or rallies**, and incidents that occurred **in India during a religious function or event**, were each reported by 2 respondents. Other locations mentioned by respondents included **Sikhi camps and Gatka** (performative martial arts) classes both with 1 response.

**This data highlights the diverse settings where abuse occurred, ranging from personal spaces like the home to public and religious spaces, suggesting that abuse can happen in a variety of environments, including places that are often associated with trust and spiritual safety and comfort.**

## FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH A PERPETRATOR OF SPIRITUAL AND FAITH-BASED ABUSE

The majority of respondents (50 total) reported **encountering the perpetrator through attendance at a religious venue** (30%) or through their **parents** (20%). Encounters via **family members, such as grandparents, siblings, partners, or children**, were also common, reported by 20%.

**Friends** accounted for 10% of introductions, while **extended family (including aunts, in-laws, and uncles)** represented 6%. Additionally, 4% encountered the perpetrator through **social media or online platforms**. No encounters were reported through advertisements or leaflets. 'Other' was selected by 10%.

## WHO ELSE KNOWS ABOUT THE ABUSE?

Out of 50 respondents, a total of 91 responses were recorded across various support options. The majority, 27 individuals, reported turning to **other family members** for support, while 18 people sought help from **friends**.

12 respondents indicated they **confided in no one**, and 10 reached out to a **therapist or mental health professional**. Three respondents selected "Other" as their answer, and five noted that they relied on **other congregation members for support**.

Additionally, 4 individuals sought assistance from **specialist domestic abuse support services**, while 3 each reached out to the **police, a faith leader, or community organisations**. Only 2 respondents consulted their **GP**, and one turned to **faith setting management or committee members**.

## POLICE REPORTING OF SPIRITUAL AND FAITH-BASED ABUSE

Out of the total respondents who answered this question, 5.09% said they had reported their abuse to the police, while a significant 84.91% indicated that they had not reported their abuse. Among the 8 respondents who reported their abuse, 50.00% indicated that there was **no further action taken after they made a statement and provided evidence**. Additionally, 25.00% reported that **no further action was taken after they made a statement but had no evidence**.

**A charging decision** was noted by 12.50% of respondents who reported, as well as a **prosecution resulting in a suspended sentence and sanctions**, which was also noted by 12.50%.

**No respondents reported a custodial sentence.**

**NO  
FURTHER  
ACTION**





## BARRIERS TO REPORTING SPIRITUAL AND FAITH-BASED ABUSE

Among the respondents who shared their reasons for not reporting or sharing their situation, the most common concerns included a **belief that the police would not understand**, cited by 17 respondents, and **fears of not being believed**, reported by 15 respondents.

# FEAR

Additionally, 15 respondents expressed **fear of the consequences of reporting**, while 14 felt that **the abuse happened a long time ago, leading them to believe there was no point in reporting now**. Other reasons included **uncertainty about who to talk to** (13 people), **feelings of shame or guilt** (13 people), and a **lack of trust in others** (12 people). A notable concern was the **fear of losing their community by speaking up**, reported by 11 people, as well as **being informed that reporting to the police would mean they are going against their faith** (7 people) and **fears for their safety** (7 people). Finally, 5 respondents indicated **they do not trust the police**.

## REPORTING OUTCOMES OF DOMESTIC, SEXUAL AND SPIRITUAL ABUSE

### NO FURTHER ACTION

SPIRITUAL | 50.00%  
DOMESTIC | 28.67%  
SEXUAL | 22.86%

The comparison of abuse reporting and outcomes across domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and faith-based abuse reveals significant differences. Domestic abuse was reported more frequently, with 41.87% of respondents reporting to the police, compared to 16.14% for sexual abuse and 15.09% for faith-based abuse.

However, across all types, the majority of respondents did not report the abuse. Among those who did report, faith-based abuse had the highest rate of *no further action* despite providing evidence (50%), followed by domestic abuse (28.67%) and sexual abuse (22.86%).

### EVIDENCE WAS PROVIDED

In contrast, *sexual abuse had the highest likelihood* of resulting in a custodial sentence (5 respondents), while no faith-based abuse cases led to such an outcome. Faith-based abuse also had a slightly higher percentage of charging decisions and suspended sentences compared to sexual abuse, though the overall number of reported cases was lower. These differences highlight a significant variation in reporting frequency and criminal outcomes based on the type of abuse experienced.

# SUMMARY OF RESULTS ANALYSIS

## DOMESTIC ABUSE

### INTIMATE PARTNERS



### MOTHER IN-LAWS



### NON-REPORTERS



The survey highlights the pervasive and intersecting nature of domestic abuse among Sikh Panjabi women in the UK. Emotional abuse (22.76%) and controlling behaviour (19.31%) emerged as the most prevalent forms of abuse, with significant secondary abuses such as coercive behaviour, psychological manipulation, and physical violence.

Abuse was predominantly perpetrated by intimate partners (47.72%), followed by familial figures as secondary/supporting perpetrators such as mother-in-laws (63.66%) sister in laws (34.33%) and parents (14.16%). These findings emphasise the role of patriarchal norms and matriarchal familial structures in perpetuating abuse. The long duration of abuse experienced by many respondents (24.77% enduring over 21 years) reveals deeply entrenched cycles of violence.

Barriers to reporting abuse included fear of consequences, familial stigma, and mistrust in authorities, with 58.13% of respondents choosing not to report their experiences. These findings point to the urgent need for systemic reforms in police responses when Sikh Panjabi women report abuse to rebuild trust and confidence.

## SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse, reported by 32.89% of respondents, disproportionately affected children, with 69.96% of survivors experiencing abuse as a child. This statistic highlights an alarming vulnerability of Sikh Panjabi girls to recurrent abuse, as 68.33% of incidents were not isolated. Husbands, uncles, and male cousins were frequently identified as perpetrators, revealing a disturbing pattern of sexual exploitation within familial and close social networks.

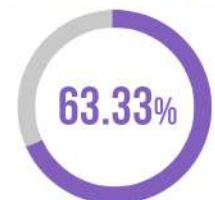
Reporting rates to the police for sexual abuse were notably low (16.14%), with outcomes rarely resulting in significant legal consequences. Shame, fear, and a general lack of understanding and awareness of who to report to were cited as primary barriers to disclosure and seeking justice. The impact of sexual abuse on survivors included profound psychological distress, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, alongside challenges in forming trusting relationships.

These findings stress the need for community-specific education, stronger preventative measures, and greater accessibility to specialised mental health and support services tailored to the needs of Sikh Panjabi women who are survivors of sexual violence.

### REPORTED TO POLICE



### RECURRING ABUSE



### ABUSED AS A CHILD





## FAITH-BASED AND SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Faith-based and spiritual abuse affected 8% of respondents, a significant increase when explicitly asked about abuse linked to faith compared to when framed within domestic abuse contexts (0.46%). Perpetrators often held positions of religious authority, such as spiritual leaders and Gurdwara volunteers, reflecting an abuse of trust in familial, religious and community spaces.

Forms of abuse ranged from sexual assault (29 responses) to coercive control, grooming, and financial extortion under the guise of religious practices. The abuse often occurred in homes (26 responses) and places of worship.

Barriers to reporting this type of abuse were profound, including fear of community ostracization, mistrust in authorities, and concerns about dishonouring religious values. Reporting outcomes were poor, with no cases leading to custodial sentences and many resulting in no further action despite evidence.

*The analysis reveals intersecting patterns of abuse across these categories, highlighting systemic issues such as cultural stigmas, lack of awareness and understanding, and insufficient legal outcomes. Each type of abuse has unique and compounded impacts, necessitating targeted interventions that address cultural and religious sensitivities.*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## RING FENCED FUNDING STREAMS FOR BY-AND-FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

1.

*Recognition of and sustainable funding should be commissioned for specialist support organisations like Sikh Women's Aid, that contribute to the wider risk reduction and positive personal outcomes for victim survivors. Services like Sikh Women's Aid also deliver significant social return on investment. These culturally competent services empower survivors, break cycles of abuse, and reduce strain on public systems. Sustained funding ensures tailored support, safer communities, and lasting positive outcomes for victim-survivors and society as a whole.*

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

2.

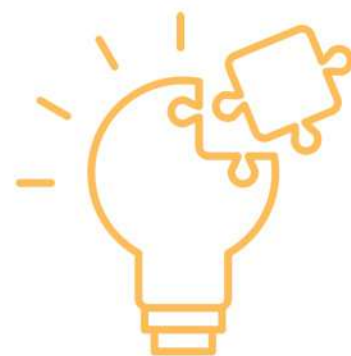
*There is an urgent need for a collective community response within the wider Sikh Panjabi Community in tackling all forms of abuse and disrupting perpetrators.*

*Approaches can include educating the community and raising awareness about abuse dynamics, red flags which will encourage reporting through targeted outreach provision.*

## POLICY ADVOCACY

3.

*Ensure the voices of Sikh Panjabi women are heard at every level of policy and strategy development, locally where applicable, and nationally.*



## LEGAL DEFINITION OF SPIRITUAL ABUSE

4.

*Improved understanding and awareness of Faith and Spiritual abuse, and the development of a legal definition so that perpetrators can be held to account.*

*Mandatory reporting of safeguarding incidents within faith settings should be introduced alongside legal sanctions for non-compliance.*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## UNDERSTAND AND DEVELOP TARGETED RESPONSES TO FEMALE PERPETRATORS

5.

*Improved awareness and understanding of female-on-female abuse by funding the development and delivery of an education package that seeks to address the complex notions of gender bias/oppression in the Sikh Panjabi community.*



## CO-ORDINATED AND JOINED UP RESPONSE TO SIKH PANJABI VICTIMS/SURVIVOR

6.

*Developing holistic, wrap around, and joined up community responses between the voluntary and statutory sector that a victim survivor will encounter at the point of reporting abuse and seeking support.*



## COMMUNITY POLICING MUST UNDERSTAND LOCAL NEEDS AND CONCERNS

7.

*Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's), must work with grassroot community organisations where female community leaders are included to develop a local Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Action Plan to safeguard victim survivors and disrupt perpetrators.*



## REVIEW AND ADAPT RISK ASSESSMENT MODELS TO MEET DIVERSE NEEDS

8.

*Risk assessments tools that are currently used need to be adapted to include screening for risk from honour-based abuse and harmful practises. Currently this is not the case in all regions where there are high concentrations of minoritised communities.*

- Screening of perpetrators use of drugs and alcohol needs to be recognised as a risk factor for victim survivors.
- Public health routine enquiry to consider underlying issues behind the presentation of poor health in Sikh Panjabi women. Routine enquiry must be professionally curious and ask questions that go beyond diagnosing presenting symptoms.

# KEY EMERGING THEMES – CASEWORK AND SERVICE DELIVERY

## FAITH & SPIRITUAL ABUSE IN UK FAITH SETTINGS

***The SWA survey reported that 8% of all respondents had been impacted by spiritual and faith-based abuse.***

**OUR HELPLINE DATA SHOWS THAT BETWEEN NOVEMBER 2022 AND NOVEMBER 2024, ABUSE LINKED TO FAITH, RELIGION AND BELIEF MADE UP 16% OF ALL CASEWORK.**

***This figure is double what our survey respondents identified and suggests the hidden nature of this type of abuse. Our casework and survey show that Faith and Spiritual abuse is a prevalent form of secondary abuse and it intersects with more commonly known forms of abuse to further control and silence victims.***

*The following section seeks to inform practitioners who come into contact with victims to help inform their responses that recognise perpetrators in the guise of 'religious holy men'.*

The phenomenon of 'godmen' in India is notable for its deep historical roots and significant social influence. Self-proclaimed spiritual leaders and 'godmen' often claim to bridge the gap between the divine and ordinary individuals, attracting millions of followers across socio-economic classes from around the world. This context is important to understand because the influence of such 'godmen' extends to the UK where alleged and known perpetrators are known to amass followers in addition to their established bases in India.

The Sikh faith is unique in that it encapsulates the teachings of not just the Sikh Gurus but also spiritually elevated men from Hindu and Muslim spiritual disciplines. This was done where teachings aligned. One common theme of aligned teachings in Sikh philosophy is the complete rejection of 'godmen' and the false notion that an individual who seeks to form a relationship with The Creator (God) needs another human being to act as a gatekeeper or conduit. The main reason Sikhs are continuously instructed to adhere to written scripture is to highlight that a seeker does not need to depend on another human being for divine instruction to govern one's conduct, behavior and spiritual practice. The opposite is true as the Sikh faith clearly, repeatedly instructs Sikhs to go within themselves to find The Creator (God).



Sikh Gurus continuously highlight to Sikhs not to make them the object of their spiritual efforts or endeavours. Here Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Guru clearly states:

***Whosoever shall call me the Lord, shall fall into hell.***

***Consider me as His servant. In this do not have any doubt. 32.***

## **Pg 137 – Sri Dasam Granth**

There are many spiritually elevated souls across all faiths, including the Sikh faith, who, in a personal capacity, seek to support others in understanding scripture and spirituality more generally. These people are not to be confused with 'godmen'. 'Godmen' have a predictable and sometimes predatory method of operation that is well known amongst many of the Indian diaspora.

The work of Sikh Women's Aid has always recognised the intersection of faith, religion and belief with domestic abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation. SWA is one of the few by-and-for support agencies that offer direct support to victims of spiritual, faith and ritual exploitation as part of their wider support service. SWA's previous publications set the scene on the Sikh faith perspective of violence against women and girls.

### **MAHALAA CHAUTHHAA ||**

*Gur satigur kaa jo sikh akhaae su bhalake uth har naam  
dhiaavai ||*

*Audham kare bhalake parabhaatee isanaan kare a(n)mirat sar  
naavai ||*

*Upadhes guroo har har jap jaapai sabh kilavikh paap dhokh leh  
jaavai ||*

*Fir charai dhivas gurbaanee gaavai bahadhiaa uthadhiaa har naam  
dhiaavai ||*

*Jo saas giraas dhiaae meraa har har so gursikh guroo man  
bhaavai ||*

## WRITTEN BY THE FOURTH SOUL-BRIDE - (SATGUR RAAM DAAS JI) ||

The Sikh (Sikh means a spiritual learner/student) who calls himself a Student of a 'Guru' (which is Divine Consciousness) and 'Satgur' (those who connect with the Divine Consciousness inside themselves and reveal those encounters) that Sikh shall arise (from ignorance) and contemplate on The One Creator of All.

Upon arising (now awakened from ignorance), he is to bathe and cleanse his internal consciousness in the pool of Divine Knowledge.

Following the instructions as given via divine knowledge, he is to meditate on the One Creator who resides within himself. (As a result of this continued practice) All sins, misdeeds and negativity shall be erased.

As the day begins with the Sun rising, he (The God Conscious Person) is to sing Gurbani (Divine Instruction from Sikh Scripture); whether sitting down or standing up, he is in continuous connection the One Creator.

One who meditates on The One Creator, Har, Har (The One who resides in all), with every breath and every morsel of food - that GurSikh (A Sikh who embodies The One Creator's teachings) they become pleasing to the One Creator who is the source of all divine knowledge.



*In no part of the above scripture is there reference to worshipping a physical human being acting as the conduit. The focus is on divine instruction as revealed by the Sikh Gurus which is written in text. Sikhs are instructed to apply the instructions and transform internally as a result.*



# TRUE BELIEVERS V MAKE BELIEVERS

In 2023, Colin Bloome published the first-ever report on how the Government (led by Rishi Sunak at the time) engages with faith communities and people. This report made a powerful distinction between those who serve their communities with respect and humility and those who exploit and seek personal gain from the power afforded to them in a faith and spiritual context.

TRUE  
BELIEVERS

NON-  
BELIEVERS

MAKE-  
BELIEVERS

There are three types of believers. The first are 'true believers' who, regardless of their faith, are sincere, devout and peaceful....The second are 'non-believers' who, like true believers, are generally sincere, peaceful and decent. True believers and non-believers are part of the solution to improving society. The third are 'make-believers'. Make-believers are generally the cause of most of the problems..... ***Make-believers are often motivated by ego, money, prestige or power and abuse their position to promote themselves or their causes, clothing them with religion to give them 'divine legitimacy'. Make-believers are a problem for government and the communities they claim to represent."***

SWA comes across 'make-believers' routinely as part of our casework when supporting victims. The make-believers are also co-conspirators in the harm, oppression and abuse of women and girls globally. This is also true of the Sikh Panjabi Community. There is a man-made culture of so-called saints, holy men, and, more importantly, many dedicated followers of these 'godmen'. There is also a growing trend of 'godwomen' who have emerged from Vedic practices where Goddesses are revered and these charlatans claim to be reincarnated forms of Goddesses.

These followers can be men or women, who are the "middle management" of the 'godman' setup. These followers often play a key role in recruiting people to become engaged with the 'godmen', often using themselves as examples of a 'perfect devotee'. In the experience of SWA, these people are also very much involved in the coverup of abuse and exploitation. They stand between the so called, 'godmen', and the voluntary and statutory services set up to protect victims. Sadly, young men have also been victims of faith based or spiritual abuse and have approached our service, however, these calls are far less frequent than the women and girls who have reached out.

## SETTING THE SCENE

### SEARCHING FOR GOD BUT FINDING 'GODMEN' INSTEAD.

*Godmen exist in all faith communities and cultures around the world. Like many practitioners across the Faith and Violence Against Women and Girls Sector, SWA has witnessed the rise and fall of self-styled 'godmen' who have been implicated in scandals worldwide in relation to the exploitation of their followers. These scandals often involve allegations of abuse of followers, particularly women, children, and vulnerable individuals.*

*There has been heightened awareness and media scrutiny around spiritual leaders who amass considerable influence, wealth, and loyal followings under the guise of offering healing, spiritual enlightenment and/or salvation. These individuals often manipulate their followers' devotion to establish control, which can lead to exploitative or abusive practices.*

The unsaintly blockhead shall never understand.

He babbles on and on, but he is infatuated with external temporary pleasures.

Blind and ignorant, he shall never be reformed. ||2||

In this age, salvation comes only from contemplating the One Creator who resides within.

*Guru Amar Daas Ji - Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji - Ang 160*

## PETER BALL



A current example (2024) that seems to dominate the headlines in the UK is The Church of England safeguarding crisis involving allegations of large-scale child abuse within its ranks.

Reports from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) published in 2020 have shed light on extensive failures within the Church's safeguarding practices. IICSA's findings reveal that for many years, **the Church neglected its duty to protect children from abuse**, with cases of sexual abuse by clergy and others in positions of trust.



Notably, high-profile cases such as those involving former Bishop Peter Ball and widespread abuse within the Diocese of Chichester highlighted systemic issues, including a *lack of accountability, internal reporting deficiencies, and a culture of prioritising the Church's reputation* over the safety of vulnerable individuals. The inquiry also found that *the Church often failed to support survivors*, and when complaints were made, they were frequently *dismissed or inadequately investigated*.

The report also made specific recommendations aimed at reforming the Church's safeguarding protocols, including mandatory reporting, better record-keeping, and more robust disciplinary measures for clergy involved in abuse or cover-ups. The Church has since pledged to implement these recommendations and enhance its safeguarding practices to prevent future incidents.

Four years after the IICSA Report was published, both the previous (Conservative) and current (Labour) Governments have yet to act (2024) on any of the recommendations.

## INDIA 'GODMEN' CASE STUDY: NITHYANANDA

While some 'godmen' promote messages of self-empowerment, mental discipline, and spirituality, many have also been implicated in serious criminal activities, including financial exploitation, sexual abuse, rape and murder.



*The influence of 'godmen' extend beyond India, particularly into diaspora communities in Western countries, where their followers include people of Indian heritage seeking spiritual guidance, community, or relief from personal hardships. SWA sees this as an emerging threat to some of the most vulnerable across society. Faith and religion have no borders or boundaries in how they are practised.*

Several recent high-profile cases exemplify the darker side of the 'godmen' phenomenon. Nithyananda, a self-styled 'godman' from India, is a controversial figure known for establishing his own supposed nation called the "United States of Kailasa" (USK) after fleeing India in 2019. He faces multiple charges in India, including allegations of **rape, sexual assault, and kidnapping of minors**.



These charges prompted him to leave the country, after which he claimed to have created a new sovereign entity. USK is portrayed as a "spiritual" haven for Hindus and is reportedly situated on an island off the coast of Ecuador. However, Ecuador has denied hosting him and refuted claims that he is in their territory.

Nithyananda has not made any public appearances since 2019, though videos of his sermons are regularly released on his social media channels. Interestingly, Nithyananda has significantly changed his appearance and the deity he now claims to embody. The Guardian reported last year that Nithyananda's UK representative had attended "a glamorous Diwali party at the House of Lords" at the invitation of two Conservative members.

Sikh Women's Aid is concerned that alleged perpetrators who are wanted in other countries for their alleged crimes, are legitimized, welcomed and hosted by this country's parliamentarians.

## UK 'GODMEN' CASE STUDY: SURINDER SINGH

In 2022, our helpline was contacted by multiple people (male and female) regarding a self-proclaimed "Sant Baba" 'godman' named Surinder Singh, also known as Fauja Singh. Surinder Singh from the West Midlands area, stands accused of exploiting his position as a religious leader to engage in inappropriate and exploitative relationships with female members of his congregation. Surinder Singh allegedly used his influence and status within the Sikh community to manipulate and pressure women into sexual relations, presenting himself as a divine or spiritually enlightened figure to justify his actions.

Victim survivors who contacted our helpline disclosed years of coercive and controlling behaviour with Surinder Singh claiming he was a reincarnation of a famous Sikh Martyr, and these followers were "Chosen Ones" because their lives served a divine purpose in helping him. His victim survivors disclosed financial abuse which included people being asked to donate items made of gold which would be melted down for the creation of a Sikh Scripture with gold lettering and encasement. It is alleged that millions of pounds worth of gold, money land and property assets were demanded by and given to Surinder Singh all in the name of Service to God.

Surinder Singh's exposure came when a video showed Singh clearly walking half naked with a married woman from his congregation with whom he was allegedly having sexual relations with. The local all-male Sikh community leaders confronted him. During this meeting, Surinder confessed that his behaviour was a direct violation of the Sikh faith and codes of practice that all baptised Sikhs are required to adhere to. He vowed to stop his preaching within any Gurdwara setting. Not long after, rather than the community making any reports to the police or the local authority, Surinder Singh was allowed to leave the UK to the relative security of Punjab, and there he immediately put out a video claiming that he was the victim of a kidnapping, fake video, and forced confession. Surinder Singh remains at large in India and still commands a significant following and continues to deny he has done anything wrong.



## HELPLINE - CASE STUDY 1: SARA

*Sara contacted our helpline as she was pregnant by her ex-partner who identified himself as a baptised Sikh man. Sara thought she was in a relationship with a deeply spiritual man who would share her enthusiasm for spiritual learning and development. By the time the relationship ended, she was beaten, raped, and her perpetrator attempted to force her into a marriage to secure his immigration status in the UK.*

Sara met her perpetrator while attending her local Gurdwara. Subsequent disclosures with her case worker revealed that Sara's ex-partner was an *illegal immigrant who was employed in a position of trust* (granthi/priest) by the local Gurdwara. He was a central part of the Gurdwara and was liked and respected by the local community. Sara explained, because her perpetrator was a man of faith, she trusted him based on the respect afforded to him by other congregation members and she was reassured of his supposed good character.

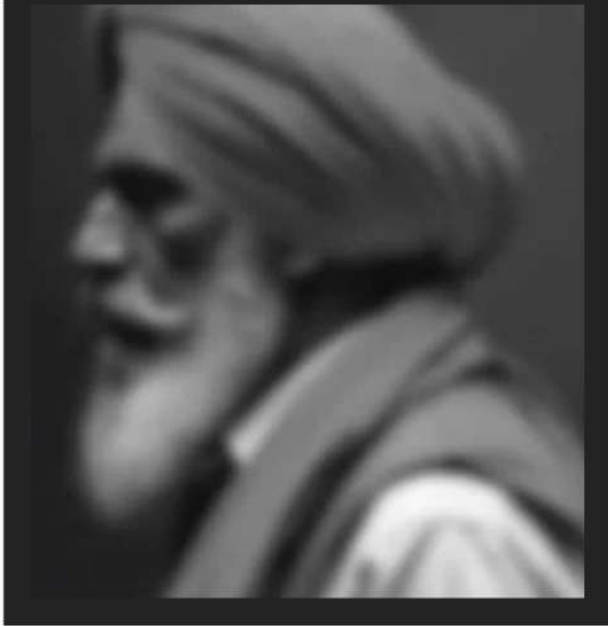
Sara had been in a violent relationship previously and due to a poor response from police when a non-molestation order was breached, she had very little trust in the police. Sara's SWA case worker supported her in making a report to both immigration and the police. Sara requested bail conditions be applied to the perpetrator before stating that she feared for her life and was at risk of an honour killing.

The police force she reported to, refused to offer any protective measures upon the arrest and subsequent release of the perpetrator, and proceeded to blame Sara for being "difficult and uncooperative", and dropped the case. The case was filed as 'No further action as victim refused to provide a statement' when this was not accurate. Sara simply wanted reassurances that the perpetrator would not find her and cause her harm after discovering she had reported him to the police. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) was also made aware of this, but due to the lack of a police investigation or outcome, it could do nothing to remove the perpetrator from the gurdwara. They required police intervention for them to act in a safeguarding capacity.

This incident came to us at the beginning of 2024. Despite reporting the perpetrator's illegal migration status to the Home Office, *no action has been taken to remove him*. The perpetrator is still (at the time of writing this report, 2024) employed and working at that Gurdwara and has regular access to women, children and the wider congregation.

***Sara was left to safeguard herself and forced to leave the locality for her own safety.***

## UK GODMEN CASE STUDY: MAKHAN SINGH MAUJI



*A Sikh Granthi has admitted to committing historical sexual offences involving children, preying on them at a Gurdwara. Police revealed that he used his position to abuse his victims. Admitting to sexual offences involving children committed in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. Makhan Singh Mauji had previously denied the claims during his trial at Cambridge Crown Court.*

A wide-sweeping investigation uncovered that the 71-year-old had preyed on his victims at a Gurdwara. On November 14, 2024, Mauji admitted to:

- ▶ ***The attempted rape of a child under 16***
- ▶ ***Two counts of gross indecency of a child under 14***
- ▶ ***Eight counts of indecent assault against a child under 14***
- ▶ ***Two counts of indecent assault against a child under 16***
- ▶ ***Another charge of indecent assault against a child under 14 who was ordered to lie on file***

These offences were committed between July 1983 and August 1987. They occurred at several places in Hitchin, including at a Gurdwara. Mauji was a Granthi, someone who leads daily worship services.

Cambridge Crown Court heard the Sikh Granthi took advantage of his role to invade the Mauji was released on bail and will be sentenced on December 20, 2024. A judge imposed several conditions on his bail agreement. This includes Mauji surrendering his passport and obeying a curfew.

***Detective Inspector Justine Jenkins, from the BCH (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire) Major Crime Unit said:***

*"I cannot praise the brave victims who have come forward to bring Mauji to justice enough. "This trial would have been difficult for the victims discussing incidents that have had long-lasting impacts on them.*

*"I hope that seeing Mauji being sentenced for his abhorrent crimes will help bring some closure to them."*

*"We know it can be incredibly challenging to come forward to report incidents of sexual assault.*



## HELPLINE - CASE STUDY 2: RANI

*"My dad was an alcoholic for nearly 20 years until we encountered 'godman'. My family encouraged us to visit him as they all had seen his "powers" and how he healed others and could set fire to water. My family were intrigued and desperate, so we decided to visit this man because we were desperate for my dad to stop drinking as this was having a huge impact on my family. I was 13 at the time.*

Over time my dad was asked to make gold statues of a Hindu deity and leave it by a river at a certain time, we were told this was part of my dad's 'healing ritual'. We did this several times at a cost of thousands of pounds. Slowly dad stopped drinking and we became convinced this man was the real deal.

We were born into a Sikh family but the Gurdwara didn't want to help my dad and offered us no support to help Dad stop drinking. My mum used to go weekly and ask others for help with Dad, we felt liked we were judged and were told it was our bad karma and we have to accept "Hukam" (God's Will). This didn't help us so we kind of changed our religion and started attending godman's Mandir on a weekly basis.

At first, it was amazing, we were welcomed and there was no judgement about my dad's problems. We would listen to 'godman's' sermons where he would preach that he was a reincarnated Higher Being sent to Earth to do God's work and heal the suffering. We were told to do 'seva' (seva is voluntary service) of him as it was akin to doing seva of God. We believed this because he demonstrated his 'powers'.

After a few months, I was sought out by 'godman', he had a small room in the mandir where he held private 'spiritual guidance' sessions with his 'special followers'. I was invited to his room one day and felt very excited and privileged to have the opportunity to do personal seva for him. In my eyes, he had convinced me he was God, he said he could hear my thoughts and feelings no matter where I was. So, I felt like I was doing God's service.

He began asking me to massage his feet, I had seen others do this, so this was normal for me at this stage. But as time went on, he asked for massages on his legs, then his upper thighs and then to his groin area. ***This then led to me being sexually assaulted and I was forced to perform sexual acts on him, all in the name of service to God.*** This lasted many, many years.

After nearly a decade of being in this cult like congregation, ***I was nearly destroyed mentally, physically and emotionally*** because I could not take the abuse anymore and decided I wanted nothing to do with godman and his people. I'm still trying to escape them; I am still harassed for speaking out and will likely live in hiding all my life."

## SUMMARY

*Legal recognition of spiritual abuse in the UK is nascent, and the legal framework tends to subsume it under broader categories like domestic abuse or coercive control without addressing the unique aspects of spiritual manipulation. Though there is legal precedent for addressing undue influence in cases involving financial exploitation, cases of religious or spiritual coercion impacting women's autonomy and free will often remain unaddressed.*

*This gap in legal specificity can render women and girls more vulnerable, as spiritual abusers can argue that the victim's choices, such as staying in a particular marriage or submitting to ritual practices, were made "of their own free will" (Human Rights Pulse, 2021). While followers may appear to act of their own volition, the unique power dynamics between 'godmen', local community leaders who hold position of trust and their loyal devotees cast doubt, on the authenticity of this "free will."*

**SWA believes there is a pressing need for legal and societal frameworks to acknowledge and address the complex nature of consent in contexts where spiritual influence and manipulation undermine genuine autonomy.**



# FEMALE PERPETRATORS OF FAMILIAL VIOLENCE

*Female-perpetrated abuse, particularly from mothers-in-law toward daughters-in-law, remains a sensitive and often overlooked issue in today's society. While several organisations across the UK focus on supporting male victims of domestic abuse, some of whom report female perpetrators, the type of female-perpetrated abuse highlighted here is specific to harmful cultural practices, especially the mistreatment of daughters-in-law within family structures. This form of abuse is often shrouded in stigma and silence, yet it affects countless women.*

In Sikh Women's Aid's recent survey, we asked about primary and secondary perpetrators, allowing us to gain a clearer picture of the different individuals involved in abuse. After three years of service and data collection, we have found a significant pattern of abuse stemming from female family members, most notably mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. This form of abuse is not unique to the Sikh community; it occurs across all South Asian cultures and, indeed, in many communities around the world. However, it is an issue that requires more discussion and intervention than it currently receives.

## CULTURAL DEPICTIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF FEMALE-PERPETRATED ABUSE



*Popular culture has at times trivialised mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflicts, with films like *Monster-in-Law* portraying these tensions for comedic effect. However, the tactics used by the mother-in-law character in the film, including undermining and sabotaging the protagonist's relationship, mirror real, harmful behaviours that women face. In reality, such actions go beyond petty disagreements and can escalate into coercive, manipulative, and even violent behaviours, causing significant harm to daughters-in-law.*

We have also seen this negative portrayal of mother in laws in South Asian dramas on satellite television, but these stories are rarely told in a realistic way.

### *Common forms of female-on-female abuse in a familial abuse context reported to Sikh Women's Aid include:*

- ▶ *Encouraging sons to physically or sexually abuse their wives*
- ▶ *Manipulating sons against their spouses through constant criticism or "whisper campaigns"*
- ▶ *Physical assault against the daughter-in-law*

- ▶ *Taking control of the care of grandchildren, often from birth, to reduce bonding between mother and child*
- ▶ *Preventing daughters-in-law from breastfeeding to undermine mother-child attachment*
- ▶ *Putting down the daughter in law and blaming her for giving birth to a female child and sometimes treating the girl child in an abusive way*
- ▶ *Turning grandchildren against their mother, encouraging them to disrespect and defy her.*
- ▶ *Spreading lies or false stories about the daughter-in-law to isolate her or prompt her husband to remove her from the home*



*Our survey data reveals that a high percentage of women experiencing abuse within the marital home face multiple perpetrators, with mothers-in-law being a recurring primary or secondary abuser. In the 2024 survey, it is important to note the emergence of the sister-in-law as a secondary perpetrator in the abuse of Sikh Panjabi women.*

## PERSONAL ACCOUNTS FROM SURVIVORS ABOUT FEMALE PERPETRATORS

### RESPONDENT NUMBER 115 SAID:

*"My dad and his mother spread bad rumours around the community about my mum. So, a lot of her family now believes that she is a bad person married to a bad person. But my dad is the one and only bad person. My mum is innocent, was thrown away by her parents and left to be abused for 24 years, now discarded by him and her family doesn't want to help. I just wanted to share my story to really prove the point of how abusers can completely ruin your life and how the community doesn't do anything. But we will be okay. I will help my mum."*

### RESPONDENT NUMBER 316 SAID:

*"As well as coercive control, I have experienced my husband and in-laws trying to financially control me, isolate me from friends and family and using honour and gender to try and force me to do things I am not happy with."*



## RESPONDENT NUMBER 335 SAID:

*"The first year of my marriage was fine. My in-laws were nice. My husband was brilliant and still is. The perps were my in laws, they took an instant disliking to me because their son actually cared for me, and they don't like that. They also took a disliking to me because I follow Hinduism as well as Sikhi, I was born here, my family (parents) are from the city (in India) not the village. My in laws are from the village back home. I never made an issue out of this, never even mentioned that your family are from the village, but for them it was an issue. They are all super fair skinned, my complexion is slightly darker, this was also an issue for them.*

*My sister in-law (husband's brothers' wife) is jealous that I have a good relationship with my husband, and for this reason she started turning my mother-in-law and my father in-law against me. I had a good relationship with my husband's sisters too, the sister-in-law was jealous of this too, she turned them against me too. She would tell everyone that because I was born in the UK that I would corrupt their children, I never had even one thought like that, I connected really well with all the kids. As a result, we were cut out, cast aside. Purposely not included in family get togethers, just so that we would react. But we didn't.*

*I suffered emotional abuse, a lot of gas lighting".*

## SUMMARY

*Despite the frequency and severity of mother-in-law abuse, it is rarely addressed within domestic abuse interventions. Abuse perpetrated by female family members is often minimised or dismissed, and prosecutions are exceedingly rare. The reluctance to recognise female abusers can allow these harmful dynamics to persist unchallenged, leaving daughters-in-law isolated in their suffering.*

*Female-perpetrated abuse, especially from mothers-in-law, is a significant yet under-acknowledged issue within the Sikh and South Asian communities. It is time for society to recognise the impact of this abuse and ensure that daughters-in-law receive the protection and support they need to live free from harm.*

# DOMESTIC ABUSE RELATED DEATHS AND SUICIDES

*Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) were established under the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and became a statutory requirement on 13th April 2011. In recent years, the increasing number of DHRs and Domestic Abuse-Related Death Reviews (DARDR's) in the UK has highlighted the severity of domestic abuse and the profound risks faced by women within the Sikh Panjabi community.*



DHRs are conducted to examine the circumstances in which a domestic homicide occurs, or a suicide where domestic abuse is suspected to have been a contributing factor, with the goal of learning from these tragedies to improve future responses and potentially prevent other deaths. The scope and frequency of these reviews, have surged, exposing deeply rooted systemic failures and gaps in protective services. For Sikh Panjabi women, additional cultural factors complicate their access to help. Issues such as shame and honour, language barriers, social stigma, family and community pressures, insecure immigration status and distrust of mainstream services can all contribute to these vulnerabilities.

However, despite the existence of DHRs, many cases reveal ongoing issues in identification, reporting, and early intervention. In some cases, women never reported the abuse to anyone. Their concern for their own and their family's reputation, their honour or their immigration status became the reason for their silence. We also know that, for Sikh Panjabi women, the choice to report abuse often comes with significant personal risks. In some cases, survivors are ostracised, shamed, or pressured to remain silent by family, community members and even places of worship. This "silencing" effect is particularly pronounced in cases where women are married into households that reinforce patriarchal expectations, making it even more challenging for them to escape abusive relationships. The victim's own maternal family can also pressurise her into silence. Tragically, these cultural barriers often prevent women from accessing early help, contributing to the high prevalence of domestic abuse-related deaths.

Since its inception, SWA has built a professional reputation of its organisation and staff, and this has led to increased requests for SWA staff to advise at the DHR's of Sikh Panjabi Women. In the last year alone, SWA has supported 6 reviews by being invited to attend as expert panel members, with a further number of reviews waiting to get underway.

**BREAK  
THE  
SILENCE**



Since the launch of the SWA reports back in 2021, DHR Chairs now routinely read and cite from these reports, to help increase their knowledge and understanding of Sikh Panjabi women's lived experiences of abuse within the Overview Reports and wider review processes.

SWA has long believed that Sikh places of worship would be ideal for raising awareness, but unfortunately this is still proving to be difficult although we have seen a slight shift in the tide, as a handful of Gurdwaras have reached out asking for posters and leaflets.

*By spotlighting these unsolved cases, we hope to honour the memory of these women and advocate for a comprehensive, culturally informed approach to resolving cases of domestic abuse within the Sikh Panjabi community. Their stories must serve as a catalyst for change, pushing for systemic reforms that not only resolve these cold cases but also ensure that all women, regardless of cultural background, have equal protection under the law.*

We are also concerned about the disturbing pattern of unresolved cases which has left many families without closure and justice. These unsolved murders not only underscore the intersecting complexities and cultural sensitivities surrounding cases of domestic abuse within the Sikh Panjabi community but also expose gaps within the criminal justice system.

In several tragic cases, perpetrators remain unaccounted for. Despite evidence and known histories of abuse, families are experiencing ongoing trauma knowing their loved ones' murderer is still walking around free.

## **SURJIT KAUR ATHWAL (1998, LONDON):**

*Surjit's case is one of the most well-known cases of an honour killing after she disappeared after traveling to India with her mother-in-law. Investigations revealed she was murdered in a so-called "honour killing," but her body was never recovered. While her husband and mother-in-law were convicted, the case remains partially unresolved due to the absence of her remains and the perpetrator who committed the murder was never brought to justice.*

## **KULDEEP KAUR SIDHU (2008, BIRMINGHAM):**

*At 25, Kuldeep was found dead in her burning home, with evidence suggesting her death was staged to appear as a suicide. She was believed to be 6 weeks pregnant at the time. Despite indications of foul play, her case remains unsolved. Her family believed that she was murdered because she was of a different caste to her husband and Kuldeep's family have stated in interviews that her husband's family were not happy with the union. SWA have written to West Midlands Police numerous times and to tried to seek help from different officers to ask the police to reopen the case and allow SWA staff to see Kuldeep's file, but the requests have been repeatedly denied.*

## SEETA KAUR (2015, INDIA):

*A British national, Seeta died under suspicious circumstances at her husband's family home in India. Her family were aware that Seeta was in a difficult marriage and suspected that she was murdered in an honour killing. When the family heard about Seeta's death, they flew to India to retrieve her body to bring it back to the UK. However, whilst Seeta's family slept at night, Seeta's husband, took the body and cremated Seeta. The family have desperately made many appeals to the police and to the British government, however, thorough investigations have not been conducted, leaving the case unresolved. Seeta's Husband and children are still in India, and Seeta's family have not seen Seeta's children for years.*

SWA believes that Sikh Panjabi women are disproportionately represented in DHRs and DARDs, and this underscores the critical gaps in our current systems. Addressing these challenges requires a focused, culturally sensitive approach that prioritises both early intervention and long-term support for Sikh Panjabi women at risk.





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# SIKH WOMEN'S AID

## REPORT 2024

### *Gender, Power, & Abuse:*

Examining Domestic, Sexual and Spiritual Violence  
in the Sikh Punjabi Community

#### **Sikh Women's Aid: Supporting Sikh Panjabi Women and Children**

*Sikh Women's Aid (SWA) was founded by Sikh Panjabi women in 2021 as the first national female led 'by-and-for' charity set up in England dedicated to supporting Sikh Panjabi women and children affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence, and faith-based exploitation and abuse. Based in the West Midlands, SWA is a vital lifeline for women and children in the Sikh Panjabi community, offering culturally sensitive and trauma-informed support.*

*Our services include a confidential helpline, advocacy, counselling and emotional support, and access to practical resources for victims and survivors. We work closely with statutory agencies to ensure holistic care and provide a bridge for women who may otherwise face cultural and systemic barriers to accessing help.*

*Our vision is to see an end to violence, abuse, and oppression, enabling Sikh Panjabi women and children to live safe, empowered lives.*

*If you or someone you know needs help, please reach out.  
Together, we can break the silence and build a future free from abuse.*

Contact 0333 090 1220 or email them at [info@sikhwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:info@sikhwomensaid.org.uk) or visit

[WWW.SIKHWOMENSAID.ORG.UK](http://WWW.SIKHWOMENSAID.ORG.UK)

*Remember, you are not alone; help is available.*

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