

# Sabr, Silence and Struggles:

*Extended Family Abuse in Muslim and BME Communities in Scotland*



Written by Elisa Sajed



Reg in Scotland No: SC432921  
Scot Charity No: SC027690

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# Dedications

**This report and the research it conveys is owed to the diligent efforts and unwavering commitment of colleagues and board members at Amina - The Muslim Women's Resource Centre and Syma Ahmed, BME Women's project worker at Glasgow Women's Library. This research has been at times both personal and painful for many of our colleagues, so our sincerest thanks must be extended to the wonderful women who keep Amina MWRC afloat. We are also profoundly thankful for the invaluable guidance and support which is always generously extended by our sisters at The Daisy Project, Glasgow Women's Library, Clydebank Ethnic Minority Women's Group, Glendale Women's Café and Falkirk Rainbow Women's Group.**





# Foreword

This report sheds light on the challenges faced by women from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in the context of domestic abuse. While abuse like forced marriage and honour-based abuse are better understood within gender-based abuse discussions, extended family abuse is commonly overlooked as not being part of the domestic abuse women from ethnic minority communities can experience.

Extended family abuse can be prevalent among women from South Asian cultures, and it is often perpetrated by other women including the victim/survivors mother-in-law and sister-in-law for example. However, it's crucial to recognise that this abuse is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures, aiming to exert control over every aspect of a woman's life.

The coercive control and abuse experienced by women at the hands of their partners' extended family mirrors the patterns of control observed in abuse perpetrated by partners or ex-partners.

It is imperative that Scotland's definition of domestic abuse is genuinely intersectional and gendered. The prevailing understanding of domestic abuse through a European lens does not adequately address the unique challenges faced by women living in the margins.

The abuse experienced by many women from South Asian communities from their spouses, partners, or former partners' extended families has been insufficiently studied and reported on. Many organisations dedicated to addressing violence against women aren't equipped to inquire about or assist women dealing with the control and abuse perpetrated by multiple individuals who are connected to their intimate partner.

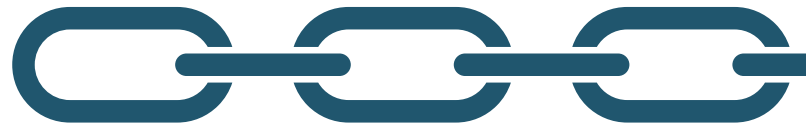
We aim for the definitions of domestic abuse to capture the experiences of all women more accurately in Scotland. The definition of domestic abuse in Scotland should recognise that abuse from extended family members can be a continuation of the domestic abuse originating from a woman's current or former partner.



**Mariam Ahmed**  
*Amina MWRC CEO*



# Executive Summary



**Amina- The Muslim Women's Resource Centre (MWRC) is an intersectional organisation based in Scotland, committed to empowering and supporting Muslim and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women. Since our inception in 1997, we have been dedicated to offering comprehensive services tailored to the often complex needs of Muslim and BME women, while simultaneously advocating for improved policies and practical support on their behalf.**

**This report is the outcome of research undertaken by staff at Amina MWRC and Syma Ahmed, BME women's project worker at Glasgow Women's Library. The research conducted on in-law and extended family abuse, as experienced by Muslim and BME women in Scotland is the first of its kind. Through compiling survey data, hosting workshops and undertaking one-to-one interviews with marginalised women, this research explores the ways in which Muslim and BME women experience abuse from extended family members and in-laws, and how this abuse impacts their lives, relationships and access to justice.**



# Executive Summary



The findings of this research support the need for practice and policy to adopt an intersectional framework when addressing and responding to domestic abuse, coercive control and gender-based violence more widely. Currently, The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act (2018) identifies perpetrators of domestic abuse and coercive control as intimate or ex-partners only. This raises questions of not only of representation, but of efficacy, given that extended families play a significant role in the lives and relationships of Muslim and BME women. Furthermore, this report identifies shortcomings in the criminal justice system's response to such incidents, which in turn increase victim/survivor vulnerabilities to further abuse and other life changing outcomes.

Amina MWRC continues to adopt an extended definition of domestic abuse, based on the needs of this community of women and our service users. This report is testament to the duality that forms a central pillar at Amina; the reason why we do the work that we do. Through illuminating the experiences of marginalised women within a Scottish context, we therefore call upon policy makers to ensure that practical support, provisions and policy are both inclusive and representative for Muslim and BME women who experience domestic abuse.



*I was **never allowed** to live without fear.*

*I was **never allowed** any privacy.*

*I was **never allowed** to have friends.*

*I was **never allowed** to keep my hard earned money.*

*I was **never allowed** to miss a call.*

*I was **never allowed** to contact my own family.*



# The Hidden Perpetrators

Domestic abuse is a pervasive issue worldwide; experienced by women from every race, religion and community. It has significant implications for women, both individually and socially. Behaviours experienced by victims/survivors are not limited to physical incidents. They may be coercive or controlling in nature, which is currently criminalised in Scotland through The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act (2018). Our organisation has worked tirelessly to support Muslim and BME women facing domestic abuse from perpetrators outlined in legislation, as well as perpetrators who are overlooked within legal frameworks in Scotland.



In Scotland, we benefit from a gender-based analysis of violence against women and girls, which underlines the gendered dynamic in women's experiences of abuse. The Scottish Government have therefore implemented the *Equally Safe* strategy, which intends to deliver a framework that prevents and takes action on all forms of violence against women and girls, given that gender-based violence is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. While there is mention of intersectionality (the idea that women are not a homogenous group and they may have multiple, or distinct, barriers due to their identity) within the policy framework, there is limited commentary on what marginalised women's experiences may look like and what implications they have.

## What is coercive control?

**Coercive Control** is recognised form of Domestic Abuse in Scotland within an intimate relationship. It is where a person seeks to dominate and control another through various tactics such as:

**Isolation**

**Surveillance**

**Manipulation**

**Humiliation**

**Intimidation**

DELIVERING  
**EQUALLY SAFE**







# The Hidden Perpetrators

## ***We at Amina adopt a broader interpretation of Domestic Abuse***

which extends beyond the confines of the definition provided by the Scottish Government. Currently in Scotland, perpetrators of Domestic Abuse are only considered to be such if they are a partner, or ex-partner of the victim/survivor. Our service users have highlighted to us the insidious role that extended family members can have in their experiences of Domestic Abuse. This is not just in terms of complicity and complacency when experiencing abuse, but also their role as *perpetrators*.



In our research, and academic research more widely, this is most apparent in South Asian Muslim communities. This can involve control and coercion over the daughter-in-law's daily life, including access to her own children, domestic servitude and other exploitative tactics. Other research in this area has indicated that after marriage, the responsibility for monitoring behavior and controlling space often falls on the mother-in-law and sister-in-law, as the male family members are typically occupied with work.



This control method limits the victim's freedoms, making them highly susceptible to abuse. The sudden empowerment of those traditionally without power is seen as a strategy that benefits male interests, aiming to create divisions among women to sustain male dominance and patriarchal values [2].

***Abuse from extended family members, more specifically, in-laws, is often purposeful and strategic***



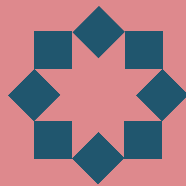


# The Hidden Perpetrators



In Scotland, legislation focusing on partners and ex-partners overlooks Muslim and BME women's experiences due to distinct living arrangements and community and family ties.

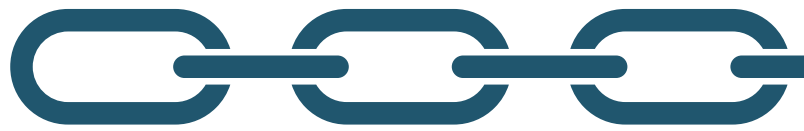
This poses a significant challenge when measuring or defining Domestic Abuse in these communities, as we know this type of abuse goes unreported, and perhaps even undiscovered due to legislative characterisations. This also sets the precedence on the response (or lack of response) from organisations and institutions to such abuse.



***Based on the needs of our community and the women we support, we have undertaken our own research to find out the ways Muslim and BME women experience extended family abuse and the implications that arise from it.***



# Methodological Lens



## Why are we doing this?



As an organisation, we support Muslim and BME women who experience this abuse on a daily basis. We believe the law and policy should represent everyone in Scotland, and to do so, we have to consider the experiences of marginalised communities. We are limited in the support we can offer due to funding constraints and the fact that abuse like this isn't recognised as Domestic Abuse. A charge of Domestic Abuse offers particular protections to victims and survivors that goes beyond the support we can offer at Amina. Many of us who work for and with Amina come from marginalised communities, we know that women from this background often suffer in silence, as their experiences of abuse aren't seen as such, both socially and institutionally.

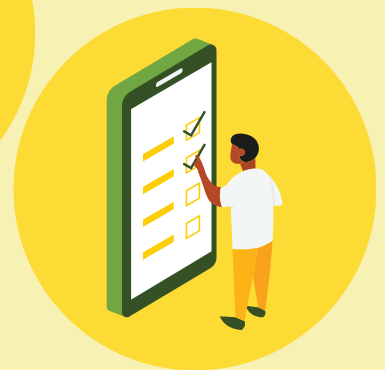
## How did we do this?



*1-1 Interviews with Amina clients*



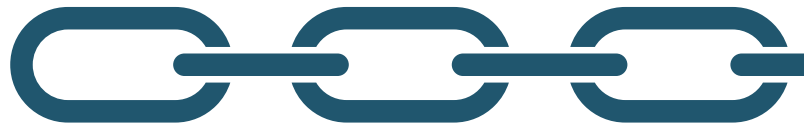
*4 Workshops*



*Online Nationwide Survey*



# Methodological Lens



Our workshops were kindly facilitated by:



## Who was involved?

The Glendale Women's Cafe



13 Interviews



21 Survey Responses




59 Workshop Attendees


## Why did we do it this way?


### Workshops


### Survey & Interviews

 encouraged dialogue among women

 reached women who didn't or couldn't join our workshops/interviews

 women listened and interacted with each other on this sensitive, often hidden, topic

 survey led to options for women to get interviewed to share their experiences in-depth

 our staff facilitated the conversations



93  
Muslim and BME  
women participants  
the largest in Scotland to date

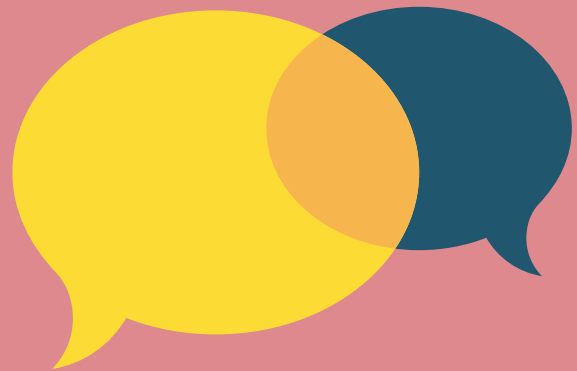




# Workshop Findings

***We conducted 4 workshops which had a total of 59 attendees across Scotland***

During the workshops, attendees were given two activities - a series of value statements and questions to discuss in groups. We posed a series of statements to each group, which stimulated dialogue between the women who attended. The value statements were composed by considering common community expectations and assumptions.



We found that in addition to making generalised observations about the wider community, women were sharing their own experiences of abusive behaviour they experienced from their own in-laws.





# Workshop Findings

The first activity was designed to encourage workshop attendees to consider their values and concerns in the context of their own experiences and of others around them.

## ***Women should be obedient to their in-laws***

This statement initiated a lot of discussion on ideals of honour and respect to elders. Typically, *honour (izzat)* and *shame (sharam)* are two cultural concepts within South Asian communities that hold significant value and that have been known to subjugate women into submission [3]. Since the majority of our participants throughout this research did have South Asian heritage, these concepts were discussed, and criticised, many times.

“  
The family system is set up that way.  
- workshop attendee  
”

Many of our workshop attendees agreed that women should be respectful towards their in-laws, but they shouldn't feel obliged to be obedient if their in-laws are particularly difficult towards them. A number of attendees discussed the issue of international spouses when it came to being obedient. It was agreed that women who emigrate for marriage have additional barriers which may influence their interactions with their in-laws, particularly as they are isolated from their comforts so may feel the need to obey their in-laws demands and expectations.



## **Activity One: Value Statements**





# Workshop Findings

*A daughter-in-law should ask her mother-in-law's permission before leaving the house*

*“ Not telling your mother-in-law when you're going out makes her feel like she's losing control.*

*- workshop attendee ”*

Workshop attendees overwhelmingly agreed that telling your mother-in-law when you're leaving the house should be done in order to show respect to her. This emphasises the role that the mother-in-law plays in the lives of married women in that she is owed respect.

It was also agreed that letting family members know when you're leaving the house is crucial for safety purposes, given the social and political climate. The women who attended the workshops also agreed that permission should not have to be sought for grown women who wish to leave the house, for any purpose.



## Activity One: Value Statements

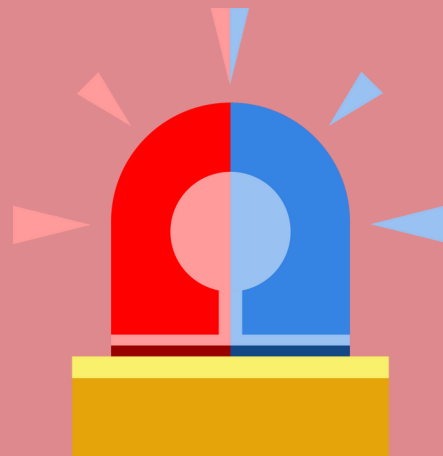




# Workshop Findings

## ***Mother-in-laws who mistreat their daughter-in-laws should be punished***

This value statement prompted a lot of discussion and debate amongst workshop attendees. While there was a general consensus that abusive behaviour should not be tolerated, there was difficulty in deciding what a suitable punishment looks like. Some workshop attendees voiced that physical abuse would be the only reason for involving the police, while others found difficulty in accepting emotional abuse and coercive control as viable reasons for involving outside agencies.



*“Getting the police involved brings too much shame, family matters are private.”*

*- workshop attendee*

There was also confusion in the protection that the law offers when it comes to in-law abuse. Many attendees believed that daughter-in-laws would be protected under Domestic Abuse legislation and were shocked to find out that in Scotland this is not the case. Many of the attendees explained that reporting abusive behaviour from mother-in-laws would have significant repercussions to women's health and wellbeing, especially if they have a positive and healthy relationship with their spouse.

## **Activity One: Value Statements**

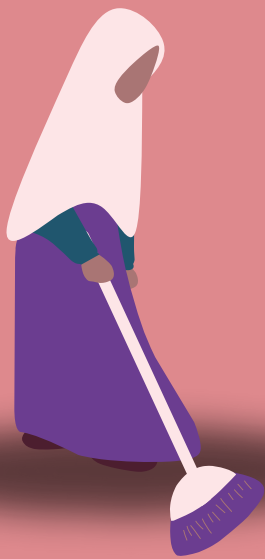






# Workshop Findings

***It is the daughter-in-law's duty to look after her husband, his family and the house***



Workshop attendees agreed unanimously that everyone living in the extended family household has a role to play in looking after and caring for elderly parents. Many workshop attendees discussed that even if the daughter-in-law was reluctant, or forced to care for her husband's parents, she would still receive good deeds for doing this. The idea of good deeds was further echoed by some attendees who claimed that if daughter-in-law's were treated unfairly she would still receive good deeds for persevering.

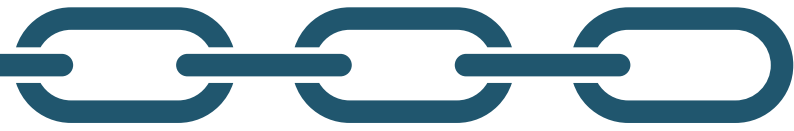
The concept of *sabr* [patience] was frequently mentioned by workshop attendees. While some agreed that *sabr* was crucial to cope with abusive in-laws, others outlined that *sabr* is used to keep women in difficult situations. Some workshop attendees attributed daughter-in-law duties to cultural patterns and intergenerational trauma, as their mother-in-law's would have been subjected to similar treatment.

*“We expect too much from our daughter-in-laws, we expect her to serve her in-laws.”*

*- workshop attendee*

## Activity One: Value Statements



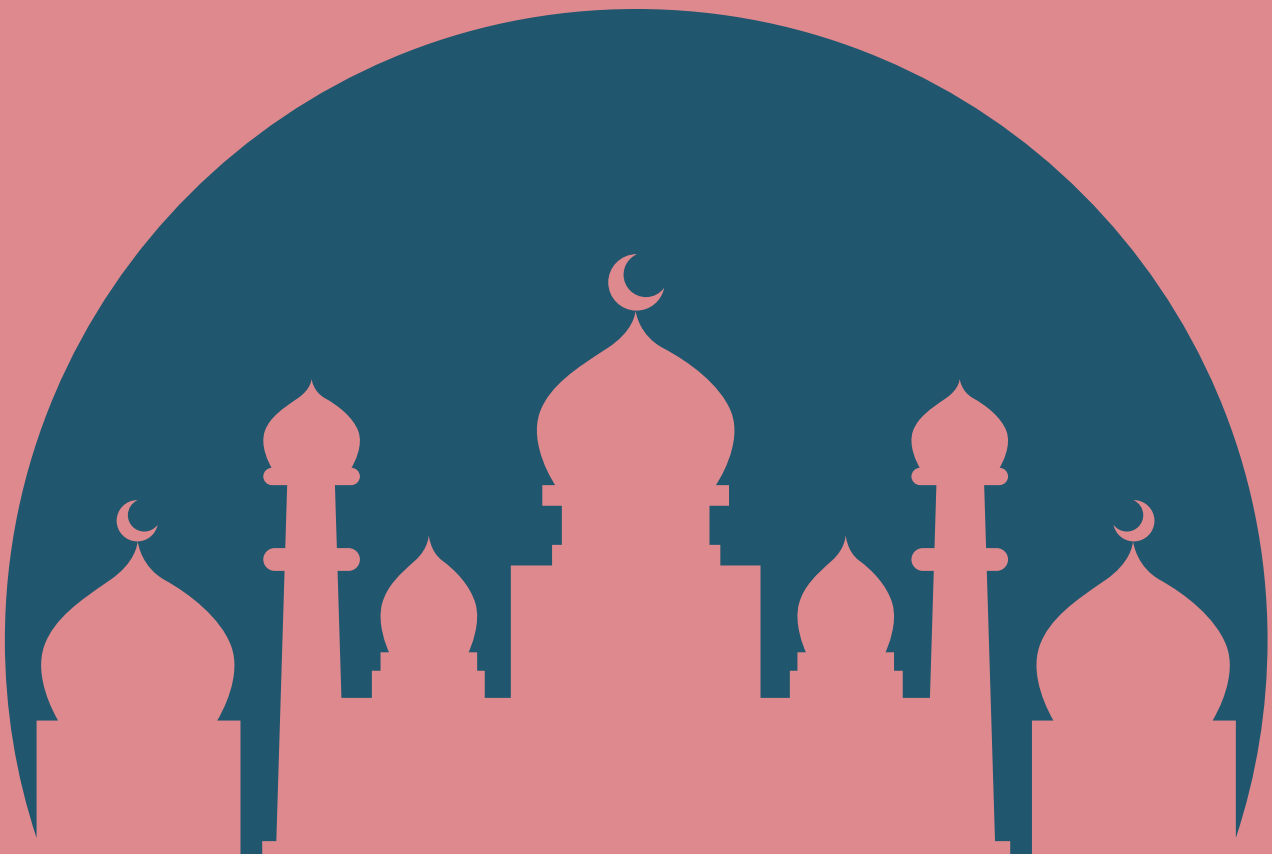


# Workshop Findings

While the value statements were helpful, we found that the women who attended our workshops were keen on discussing these issues further. One of our attendees had commented on this, mentioning the taboo associated with speaking of

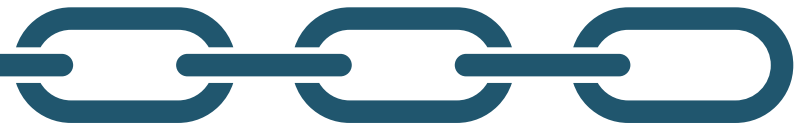
'private' matters in public. **What became very apparent through discussions was the intersect of culture and religion when it came to the treatment of daughter-in-laws and the damage that misinterpretation of religious duties can do to their health and wellbeing.**

Upholding religious values was an important consideration to our workshop attendees, but most of the attendees voiced that this can be used to exploit and manipulate women into doing things they do not want to do.



## Activity One: Value Statements





# Workshop Findings

We asked our workshop attendees three questions in relation to in-law abuse and family relationships. This sparked extensive discussion amongst workshop attendees about abusive behaviour, eliciting conversations about their personal experiences and perspectives on relationship dynamics in extended family homes.

## What tactics can be used by in-laws to keep their daughter-in-laws under control?



## Activity Two: Questions and Discussion





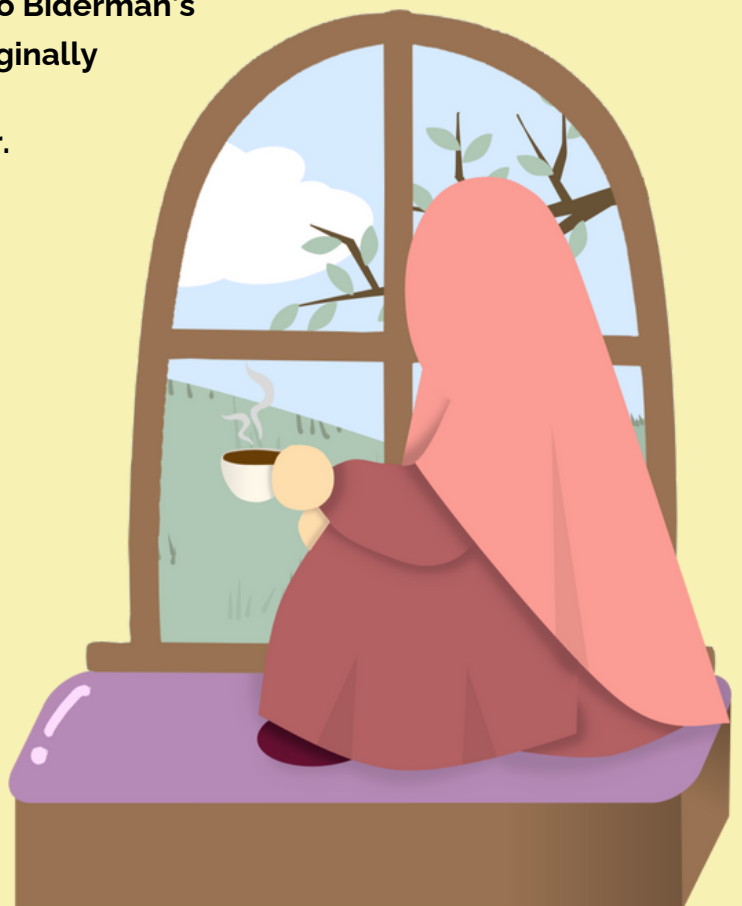
# Workshop Findings

*What tactics can be used by in-laws to keep their daughter-in-laws under control?*

These tactics can have significant implications for women who experience them. Traditional gender roles here have been utilised to contribute to abusive behaviours and reinforced damaging patriarchal structures within the community. By restricting access to family and friends, in-laws are able to control access to support networks leaving them isolated, vulnerable and dependent on their abusers. Many of these experiences shared closely relate to Biderman's framework of coercion[4], a tool originally designed to demonstrate coercive methods to torture prisoners of war.



Of particular importance is the *exhaustion method*, which many attendees could relate to, or knew of someone who could. This technique relies on the abuser employing specific strategies to wear the victim down both physically and emotionally to demand their time, energy and ultimately, complacency.



## Activity Two: Questions and Discussion

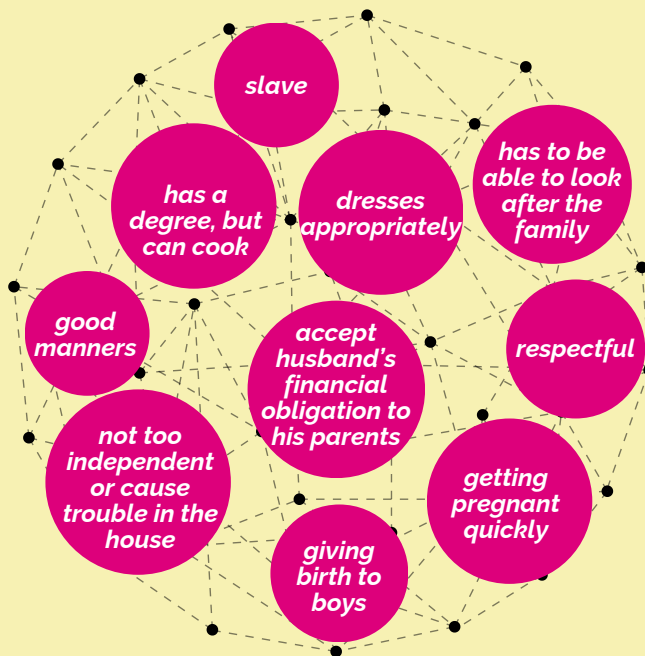




# Workshop Findings

## *How do in-laws view the role of the daughter-in-law, and what are their expectations?*

These expectations reflect social and cultural gendered norms within Muslim and BME communities. They highlight potential areas where power imbalances and abusive dynamics can emerge. Understanding and challenging these expectations is crucial towards addressing and responding to Muslim and BME women's experiences of Domestic Abuse.



Many attendees were in fact a mother-in-law themselves, but had perhaps experienced this behaviour themselves or knew someone's daughter who was experiencing these behaviours currently. Attendees consistently mentioned women's domestic roles as both an expectation and as a tactical expression of abuse. This emphasises the gendered nature of abuse from in-laws, and how domestic servitude is used as a very specific abusive tool within this community.

## Activity Two: Questions and Discussion

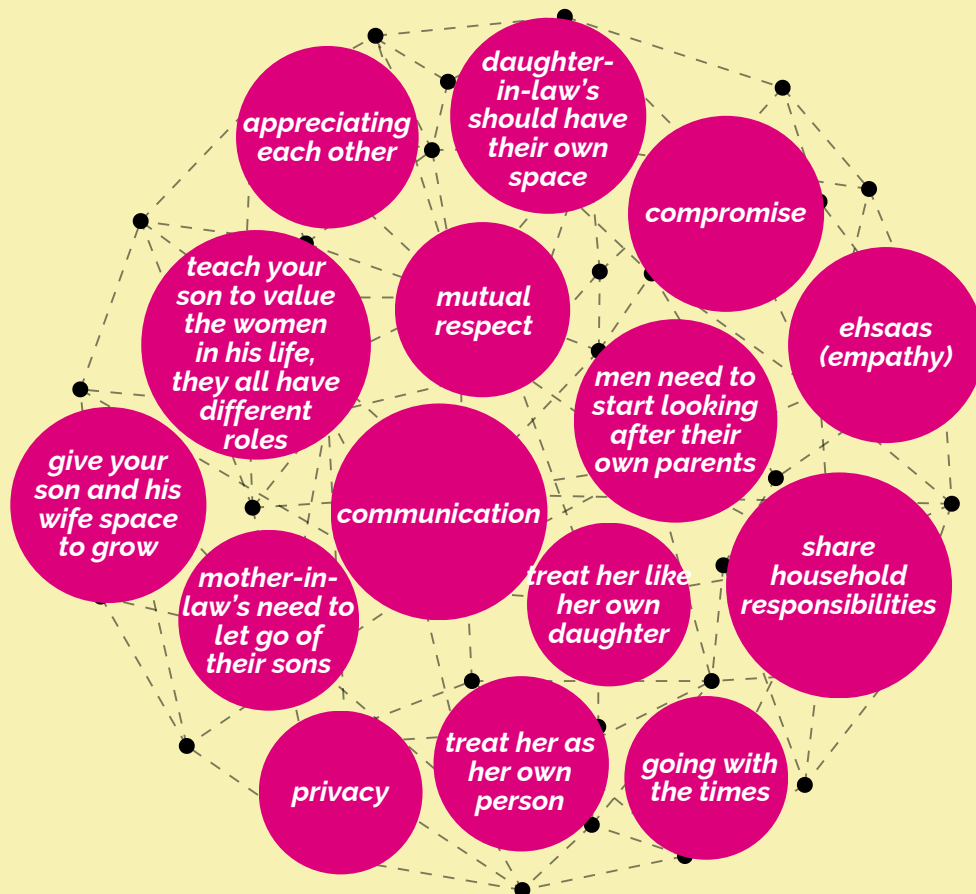




# Workshop Findings

## What does a healthy relationship look like?

Many of our attendees advocated for privacy and personal space for married couples. They noted that interference from in-laws can amplify experiences of interpersonal abuse, in addition to abusive behaviour from their spouses parents. Some of our attendees in different groups mentioned that religious and educational interventions would be appropriate to repair relationships within extended family households.



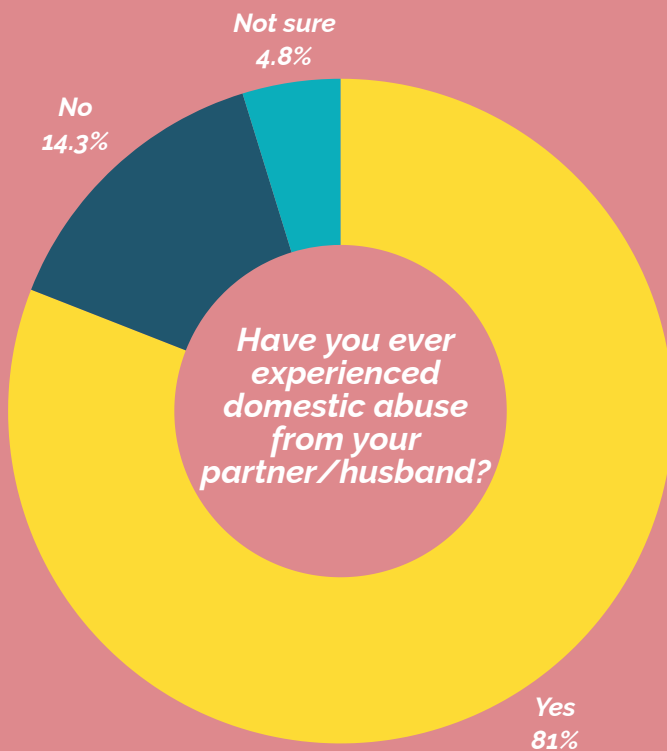
## Activity Two: Questions and Discussion



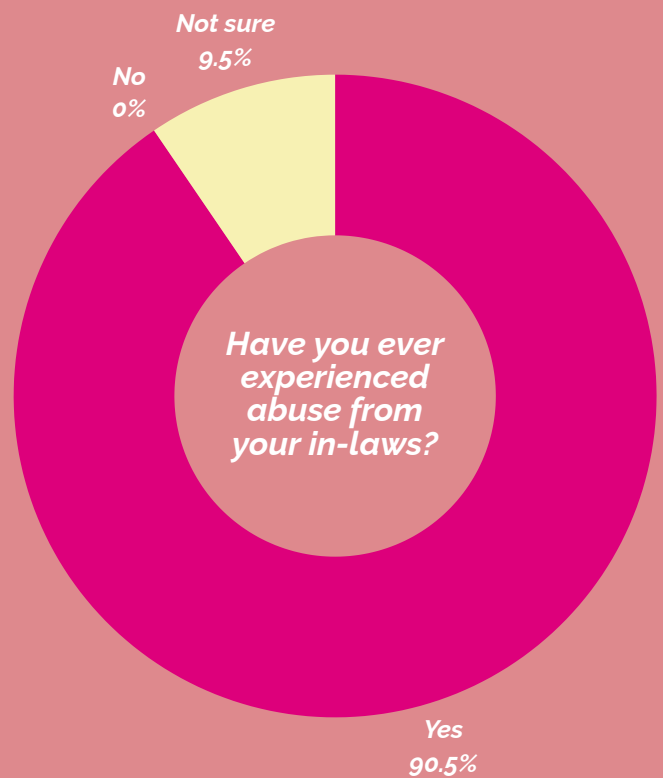


# Survey Findings

We created a survey which was advertised through our social media channels. The survey was intended to give us a better idea of the nature and extent of in-law abuse in Scotland. We had 21 responses from the survey.

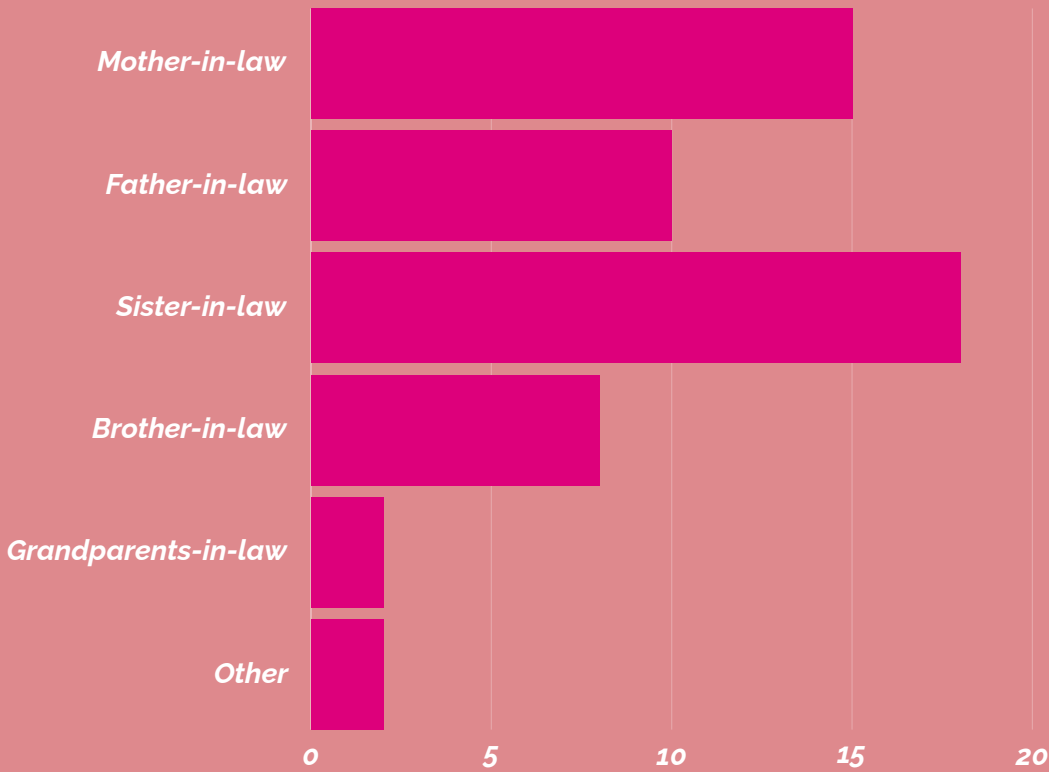


Most of the women who took part in the survey had experienced abuse from both their husbands and their in-laws.





# Survey Findings



Please tell us which member(s) of your in-laws side have been abusive towards you?  
Select all that apply.

Respondents had the opportunity to select more than one option for this question. From these results, abuse is perpetrated by many members of the extended family, **but more likely from other female members.**



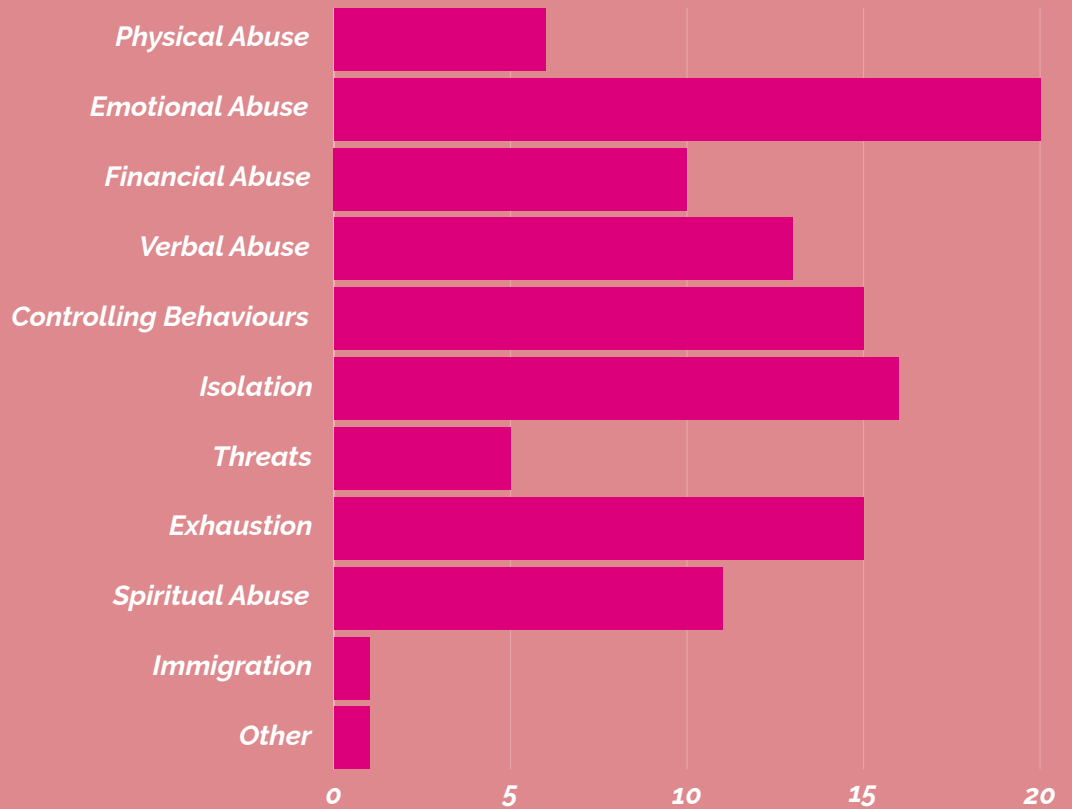




# Survey Findings

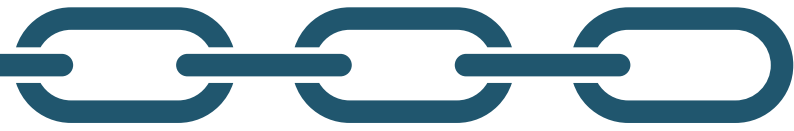
*What are the main types of abuse you have experienced while living with your in-laws.*

*Select all that apply.*



Our respondents were also able to choose more than one option for this question. Women who responded to our survey indicated a wide range of abuse that they experienced. Most women we asked experienced some form of coercively controlling behaviour from their in-laws. Exhaustion techniques, as previously mentioned in our workshops, were also very common. Physical abuse did take occur for 6 of our respondents, **but the majority of women experienced coercively controlling behaviour and emotional abuse from their in-laws.**





# Interview Findings

*Through 13 interviews with Amina MWRC service users and clients from sister organisations, we uncovered 8 key themes relating to their experiences of extended family and in-law abuse.*

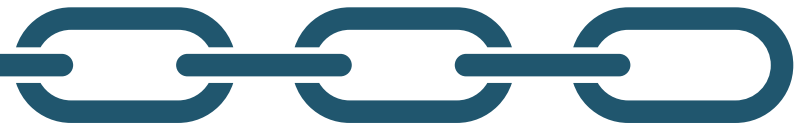
We started off this report with statements made by our interviewees. We found that throughout the interviews, women detailed that their in-laws would never allow them to do certain things, which ultimately infringes on victim/survivor autonomy and human rights.

*Never Allowed*



**Exposing  
In-Law Abuse**





# Interview Findings

## Perpetrators

*All interviewees had mentioned their mother-in-law as being a perpetrator of abuse.*

*Many women also detailed their sister-in-law's involvement as either a main perpetrator or complicit towards their mothers' perpetration.*

*Some of the women also identified the roles that parent-in-laws' extended family play in their experience of abuse, which often amplified abusive situations, due to their involvement.*

*Some interviewees mentioned incidents of sexual abuse from male family members.*

*My sister-in-law interfered in my marriage, caused problems, and taunted me.*

*My husband's aunts were involved too.*

*My father-in-law would sexually harass me and touch me inappropriately.*

*All of my in-laws abused me, because my mother-in-law controlled the entire household.*

*My sister-in-law's husband would make sexual advances towards me. I was abused by everyone.*



## Exposing In-Law Abuse





# Interview Findings

Many of the women detailed how their spouses would overlook their parents abusive behaviour towards their wives.

## Spousal Complicity

*My husband was forced to be verbally and physically abusive to me by my in-laws.*

*My mother-in-law encouraged my husband to continue his affair with his girlfriend.*

*My sister-in-law encouraged him [husband] to hit me harder during an argument.*

***Some women shared how their in-laws would use their sons to inflict abusive behaviour on to their daughter-in-laws, even if their husband hadn't necessarily been abusive to them before.***

*My mother-in-law would force my husband to show me that he was a man, and tell him how to keep a woman under control.*

***For the interviewees who had abusive husbands, many experienced complacency from their in-laws in addition to an amplification of abuse.***

*If I did anything wrong my husband gave his family permission to hit me.*

## Exposing In-Law Abuse





# Interview Findings

**Domestic Servitude**

*I was like a remote control. Everyone controlled my life.*

*I had to iron everyone's clothes, clean a big house and cook every day. There was 13 of us in the house.*

*I was told I was unskilled and because of that I deserved abuse from my husband.*

*I was childcare for my sister-in-law. She had a job. I wasn't allowed.*

*The first thing my mother-in-law said to me after marriage was that I must take kitchen responsibilities, every day, all day.*

**As anticipated, forcible domestic servitude was a very common experience amongst our interviewees, regardless of their nationality or immigration status. This often intersected with other abusive behaviours, such as humiliation, gaslighting and degradation.**

## Exposing In-Law Abuse





# Interview Findings

## Specific Controlling Behaviours

*She [mother-in-law] found my [contraceptive] pills. I had to have kids straight away so had these taken from me.*

**Controlling sexuality & reproductive control**

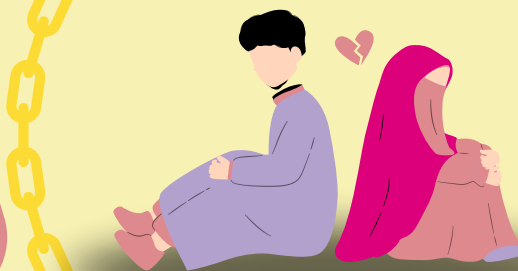
*I was only given one meal a day.*

**Regulating eating patterns & dietary restrictions**

*I needed approval to have marital relations with my husband.*

**Controlling access to the English language**

*The fridge was kept locked from me. I wasn't allowed to eat what and when I wanted.*



All of the women we spoke to experienced traditional forms of coercive control, but perpetrated by their in-laws. Some interviewee's detailed specific behaviours that aren't widely spoken of in mainstream understandings of coercive control.

## Exposing In-Law Abuse





# Interview Findings

## Accessing Justice

Most women felt that police involvement was an appropriate intervention. For women that did contact the police or had active criminal justice proceedings against their husbands, *they were told, often very abruptly, that their in-laws interference and abusive behaviour would not be considered.*

The refuge didn't ask me or care about the abuse I experienced from my in-laws.

I called 101 to report an incident and was told "If you're reporting domestic abuse, what's your in-laws got to do with it?"

An officer took my statement and said "We're only focusing on the abuse from your husband. The stuff with your in-laws is just muddy water."



I reported my brother-in-law's threats to the police. He keeps turning up at my house. They noted this behaviour but they haven't done anything.

My in-laws reported me to the police for stealing their gold. They came to see me in a refuge, I told them everything. He was later arrested, but he told the police this is cultural and not abuse. He wasn't charged.



## Exposing In-Law Abuse





# Interview Findings

## Spirituality, Faith & Accountability

*"I left it to Allah."*

*"They told me I have a duty as a Muslim to my husband's family and to be obedient."*

*"They weren't going to change my connection with Allah. It's the one thing I had that they couldn't take."*

*"They [in-laws] said I gave my husband bad nazar [evil eye]. They blamed me for bad things that happened because of this."*

Many women we spoke to made reference to perpetrators being held accountable by Allah [God] if they were not reprimanded in this life. This idea of divine justice in the afterlife bought a lot of comfort to our interviewees and often presented as a coping mechanism when experiencing abuse from their in-laws.

***We also found that abuse was often justified through incorrect interpretations of religious texts.***



## Exposing In-Law Abuse







# Interview Findings

## Impact

*I've not had a home telephone for years because the anxiety of them [in-laws] calling me.*

*I have a constant feeling of fear.*

*I can't get close to anyone, I feel like I'm being spied on.*

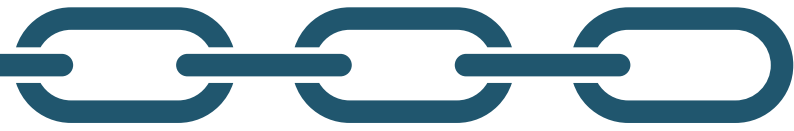
*23 years later, I am still trying to break these invisible chains.*

The women we spoke to talked in great depth about the impact in-law abuse had on their lives, health and future goals. **Many of the women spoke about the impact abuse had on their mental health and subsequent relationships.**



## Exposing In-Law Abuse





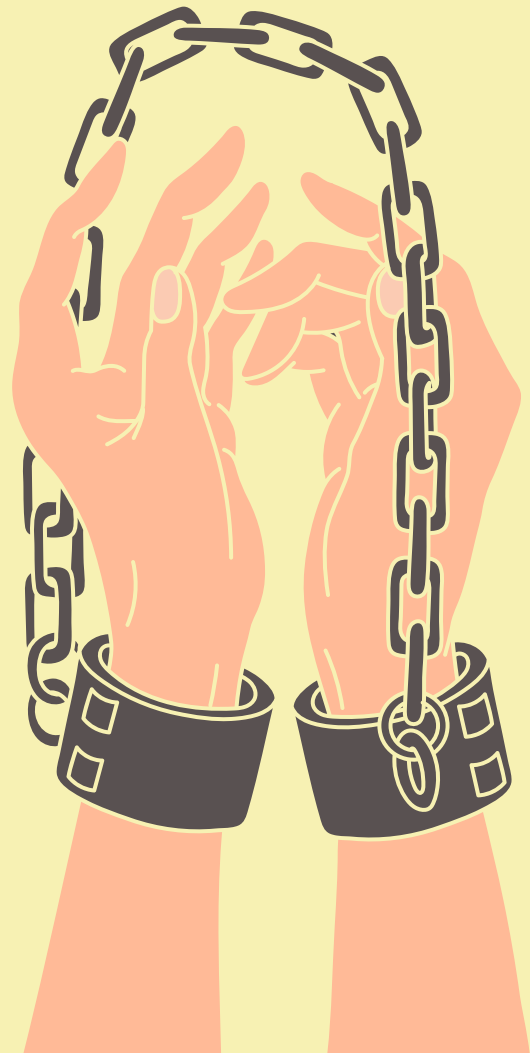
# Interview Findings

*As with more widely understood interpretations of domestic abuse and coercive control, no two experiences of in-law abuse are the same.*

Kelly's continuum of violence [5] helps us understand these occurrences by highlighting the motivations behind perpetration. While we are not here to provide an overarching theory to why in-law abuse happens, we know from our previous research on intergenerational trauma [6] that there is a cycle of abuse that happens within our communities, often due to suppression of female expression and the presence of patriarchal family and cultural values.



Given the importance that family and wider communities have in Muslim and BME communities, it is vital that law, practice and policy recognise this type of abuse, without separating it entirely from all women's experiences; which can do more harm than good.



## Exposing In-Law Abuse



# Ameera's Day



During one of the interviews, one of the women we spoke to, \*Ameera shared her daily routine with us. Ameera's day is a prime example of how exhaustion is used as a coercively controlling technique by in-laws.

## Ameera's Gruelling Daily House Routine

**6am:** Tea had to be made for my husband.

**8am:** I had to get up before my mother-in-law (MIL) and make her breakfast every day.

**9am:** Then my father-in-law (FIL) would wake up and expect breakfast. He would expect tea first. Then he would have a shower, after which a full breakfast was to be made for him.

**11am:** Fruit and snack time for my MIL and FIL.



*\*Name has been changed to protect Ameera's identity*



## Case Study

# Ameera's Day



## Ameera's Gruelling Daily House Routine

**12:30  
pm:**

Lunch time for them both. And if I was late with serving them lunch, I was accused of making them late for their afternoon prayers.

**3pm:**

I was allowed to go for a walk daily as I was suffering from high blood pressure.

**5pm:**

Serve tea with more snacks for both my MIL and FIL, and if my husband was home by then, this included him too.

**7pm:**

Dinner would need to be served and had to be a different meal from lunch.



*\*Name has been changed to protect Ameera's identity*



## Case Study

# Ameera's Day



During one of the interviews, one of the women we spoke to, \*Ameera shared her daily routine with us. Ameera's day is a prime example of how exhaustion is used as a coercively controlling technique by in-laws.

## Ameera's Gruelling Daily House Routine

**9pm:**

More tea and snacks for my MIL and FIL, including getting their medicine and water. I had to physically place the tablets in their mouths at times.

**10pm:**

Evening washing, and full house clean up. If I went to rest in between, I was accused of not spending time with them.

**11pm:**

I would be expected nearly every evening to give my MIL a foot massage as she was tired. If I would refuse, she would cry to my husband, complaining of how tired she was.



*\*Name has been changed to protect Ameera's identity*



## Case Study

# Ameera's Day



**What are we seeing here?**

## **Lack of Autonomy**



Ameera's experience of domestic servitude has resulted in a loss of personal autonomy. Her life has become dictated by the demands and expectations of her in-laws, leaving little to no room for independent decision making and self-expression.

## **Power Imbalance**



Coercive control involves a power imbalance, which is evident from Ameera's daily experiences. This power dynamic has led to exploitation and has created an environment for further abuse to manifest.

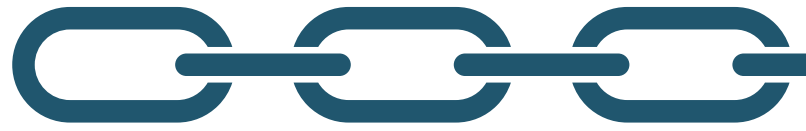
*I was expected to make different, fresh dinners every day. Dinner was often with his whole family including his sisters and their children.*

*It came to a point that no one in the family would even move a glass or lift a finger and I was expected to do everything.*



## **Case Study**

# Ameera's Day



## What are we seeing here?

*I would often just want to rest but they would accuse me of exaggerating the work I did all day.*



### *Emotional Impact*



Ameera's constant subjugation has several emotional consequences. It has led her to feel powerless, isolated and has contributed significantly to mental and physical exhaustion. Ameera is also accused of exaggerating, a form of gaslighting which is extremely detrimental to her health and wellbeing.

### *Violation of Human Rights*



Domestic servitude is an infringement of human rights. Ameera is in a situation where she is coerced into providing services against her will. This is a violation of her fundamental rights to live free from exploitation and abuse.



## Case Study

# Conclusion

*Our research highlights that The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act (2018) doesn't fully recognise or respond to the experiences of Muslim and BME women in Scotland.*

These women often face abuse from a range of perpetrators within their extended family homes after marriage, highlighting the limitations of current Scottish legislation for this community. ***The findings emphasise the need for a more comprehensive approach in responding to and addressing domestic abuse,*** considering the impact of extended family dynamics, ***particularly the role of the mother-in-law in perpetuating abuse.*** Our study suggests that a single-dimensional explanation of domestic abuse is insufficient and is not working for women from these communities.

We have always advocated for an intersectional understanding to address the distinct structural challenges faced by Muslim and BME women, and the cultural complexities that shape their experiences. An intersectional approach acknowledges the influence of cultural and traditional gender roles and power dynamics, therefore ***it is crucial legislation recognises and supports women's multiple social identities within this community.***





# Recommendations

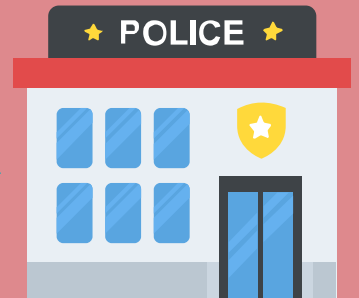
We call for a meaningful review of *Equally Safe*, to include culturally specific forms of abuse, such as in-law abuse, so that women are adequately supported and victims/survivors are able to recognise their experiences as abuse. A mention of 'intersectionality' is not enough. We need to understand the impact that this type of abuse has for women and how best to respond to it.

DELIVERING  
EQUALLY SAFE



We urge all of our sister organisations and mainstream women's aid services to offer training to staff on in-law abuse and the complex dynamic of Muslim and BME women's family and community relationships. We can help with this!

We recommend that when using the Domestic Abuse Act for coercive controlling behaviour, when charging an intimate partner, that an additional aggravation be available in relation to extended family abuse.



We believe that preventative measures are extremely important and that spiritual leaders have a responsibility to educate communities on correct interpretations of religious texts that promote equality and safety for all women.



# Recommendations

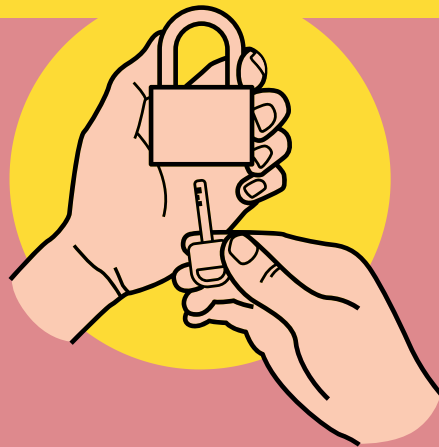


We invite academic researchers to explore Muslim and BME women's experiences of coercive control, in-law abuse and spiritual abuse. In Scotland, there is limited academic research on these communities and their experiences. Academia and policy have a close working relationship, so a wider evidence base is necessary in order to address and respond to these problems.



Lastly, in consideration of all of the above, we ask The Scottish Government to extend the definition of domestic abuse to include perpetration from in-laws.

In Scotland, we have a gendered analysis of domestic abuse, and throughout this report we have attempted to illustrate how in-law abuse is driven by gendered motivations, thereby characterising it as a manifestation of gender-based violence. Muslim and BME women face some of the highest rates of marginalisation in every aspect of life in Scotland. We must recognise and respond to the needs of women from this community without separating their experiences of violence and abuse entirely.



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**#NeverAllowed**  
to contact my family



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to leave the house without permission



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to spend time alone with my husband



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to have my own privacy



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to keep any of my hard-earned money



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to be unwell without being called a drama queen



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to rest until I completed all the chores from 6am until 10pm everyday



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to miss a call



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to eat 3 meals a day



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to go out with my friends



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to decide when I wanted children



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to finish my studies and pursue my dreams



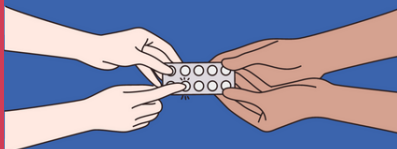
End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to go a day without massaging my mother-in-law's feet



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to give my father-in-law his medication in his hand, I had to put it in his mouth



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to feel good about myself



End extended family abuse NOW.

**#NeverAllowed**  
to live without fear



End extended family abuse NOW.



# AMINA

The Muslim Women's  
Resource Centre

Amina the Muslim Women's Resource Centre

**Helpline: 0808 801 0301**

**Office Number: 0141 212 8420**

**Office Address:  
McCormick Business Centre,  
50 Darnley Street  
Pollokshields  
Glasgow G41 2SE**

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