

# DOMESTIC HOMICIDE PROJECT SPOTLIGHT BRIEFING ON ETHNICITY

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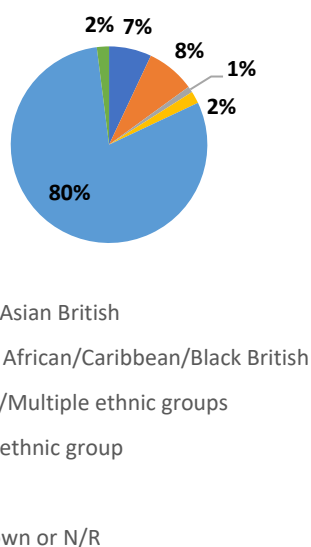
The onus is too often placed on survivors from minoritised ethnic groups to navigate a system that has not been designed to take account of their needs, rather than addressing structural barriers that prevent their access to support. For organisations seeking to strengthen their intersectional approach, it is important to consider behaviour and approach within the organisation as well as within partnerships and multi-agency structures.

Imkaan (2017)

## BACKGROUND

The Domestic Homicide Project, based in the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) and funded by the Home Office, was established by National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing in May 2020. The Project collects, reviews, and shares quick-time learning from all police-recorded domestic homicides and suspected suicides of individuals with a known history of domestic abuse victimisation (hereafter 'victim suicide'), to establish the impact of Covid-19 and restrictions on domestic homicides and learn lessons from every tragic death to seek to prevent future deaths. All police forces in England and Wales submit notice of relevant deaths to the Project shortly after the death occurs. More detail, including key findings and recommendations, can be found in our first report, 'Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides During the Covid-19 Pandemic 2020-2021'.

Data from the Project's first report found that, compared to data from the 2011 National Census, individuals from minoritised ethnic groups were over-represented as both victims and suspects in domestic homicides, with some variation by case type. Norwegian research (Vatnar et al, 2017) concluded that factors such as high rates of unemployment, racism and related social disadvantage may be as, or more, salient than ethnicity in itself in relation to vulnerability to domestic homicide. UK research by Chantler et al (2019) determined that whilst the proportion of domestic homicides amongst minoritised ethnic groups appeared to be high, further research was necessary to establish the role of ethnicity. This briefing helps to address this gap by sharing new evidence around domestic homicides and ethnicity and discussing implications for risk assessment and practice.



## ETHNICITY BREAKDOWN

This briefing draws on 18 months of project data comprising 294 domestic homicides (murder by an intimate partner or family member) and suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse. 80% (n=235) of victims were white, 8% (n=24) were black, 7% (n=22) were Asian, 2% (n=5) were recorded as 'other', 2% (n=5) were of an unknown ethnicity, and 1% (n=3) were of mixed/multiple ethnic groups. As demonstrated throughout this briefing, it is important to look at each ethnic group separately to account for any cultural variances. This briefing focuses on Asian, black and white victims and suspects. Mixed/multiple and other ethnic groups were excluded due to small numbers which did not allow for reliable analysis. The small overall number of cases in the dataset mean that all numbers should be interpreted with some caution.

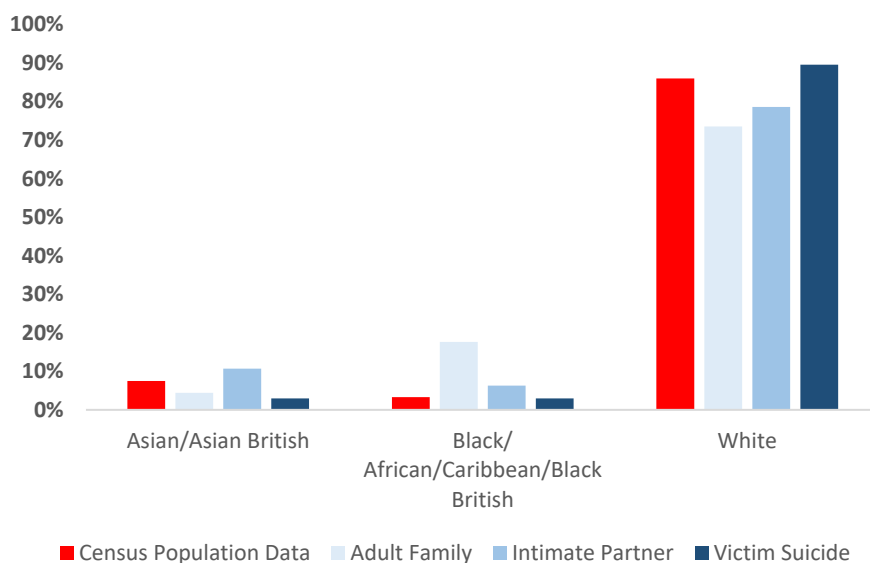
According to the 2011 Census data (ONS, 2018), the population of England and Wales has the following ethnicity breakdown: **86% white, 7.5% Asian, 3.3% black, 2.2% mixed/multiple ethnic groups and 1% other ethnic groups.** The UK Annual Population Survey data (2021a) for 2020/2021 shows similar population proportions by ethnicity grouping to the Census 2011 data. In this briefing, the data from the Project is compared with Census data which can be found [here](#).

## TYPOLOGY AND CHARACTERISTICS

Minoritised ethnicity individuals who are experiencing domestic abuse have historically formed part of a ‘hidden’ group, by which we mean a group which is less well served by the response available in the UK. There is therefore a need to focus on their particular experiences and additional barriers they can face when identified as victims (or perpetrators) and providing safe and appropriate services.

Safelives (2017)

### Victims by Ethnic Group and Typology



Overall, most victims were of white ethnicities. Comparing the representation of different ethnicity groups with Census data shows that Asian and black ethnicity victims were over-represented in domestic homicide deaths (intimate partner homicide and adult family homicide) whilst white victims were over-represented in suspected victim suicides. Victims of Asian ethnicities were more common in intimate partner homicide, whilst victims of black ethnicities were more common in adult family homicides.

Overall, the majority of victims were female (73%), with suspects predominantly male (81%). Of note, adult family homicides had more male than female victims of black (58%) and Asian (67%) ethnicities, although all suspects in these cases were male.

For suspected victim suicides, white victims were more likely to be female (93%) than male; Asian victims were equally as likely to be male (50%) or female (50%), whilst all victims of black ethnicities in suspected suicide cases were female. All suspects of the preceding abuse in suspected suicides of Asian and black ethnicity victims were male, as were the majority of white suspects.

The overrepresentation of black victims and suspects in adult family homicides is supported by findings from this Project’s Second Spotlight Briefing on adult family homicides (Nguyen Phan et al., 2021). Around a third of victims (30%) and suspects (33%) in adult family homicides were from a minoritised ethnic group. This is higher than minoritised ethnic group representation in the general population (14%) and in intimate partner homicides (20% of victims and 21% of suspects).

Where statistical significance is used in this briefing, this was determined with a chi-square test, with a p value of <.05



## SUSPECT RISK FACTORS



**Identified alcohol use was higher in white suspects with 34% of white suspects having alcohol misuse recorded as a risk factor, compared with 20% of Asian suspects and 17% of black suspects.**

The 2014 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (ONS, 2021c) found that white British adults were generally more likely to drink at harmful or dependent levels, compared with adults from all other ethnic groups. The Institute of Alcohol Studies (2020) also found that people from ethnic minority groups generally drink less and are more likely to abstain from alcohol than their white British counterparts.



**Black suspects were significantly more likely to have mental health problems recorded by police compared with other ethnicities. 44% of black suspects were identified by police as having a mental health problem, compared with 36% of white suspects and 20% of Asian suspects.**

Rethink Mental Illness (2021) found that black women were more likely than white women to experience a common mental illness such as anxiety disorder or depression. It also found that black men were more likely to experience psychosis, and black people in general were four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act.

Memon et al. (2016), however, found that people from ethnic minorities were less likely than their white British counterparts to contact their general practitioner about mental health issues, to be prescribed antidepressants or referred to specialist mental health services, suggesting that rates of mental health illness amongst individuals from ethnic minority groups may be under recognised, at least prior to crisis point.



**Low numbers of honour-based domestic homicides and suspected victim suicides were identified. Of the two cases that were identified as honour-based, both related to Asian victims and suspects.**

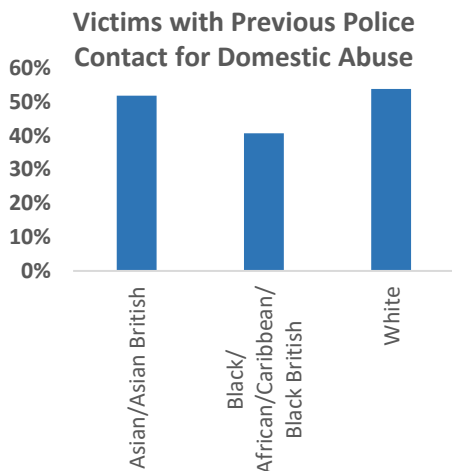
Cases of 'honour'-based violence (HBV) have been identified in a wide range of populations (Safelives, 2017). The vast majority of cases seen by the Forced Marriage Unit are associated with South Asian communities (FMU, 2020). This is likely to be partly due to the large South Asian community in the UK, as well as the tendency for agencies to identify HBV cases as occurring primarily within these ethnic groups.



**More homicides involving Asian victims and/or suspects had Covid-19 restrictions recorded by police as having had a possible influence on the circumstances of the death (24%), compared with 11% of white victims and/or suspects and 7% of black victims and/or suspects. Qualitative reading of the cases shows no clear explanation as to why Asian ethnicities might be overrepresented.**

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (POST, 2020) reports that, compared with white British men, Bangladeshi men were four times, and Pakistani men three times, more likely to have held jobs in industries forced to close during lockdown. Pakistani men were over 70% more likely to be self-employed compared with white British men. A survey by The Runnymede Trust (2020) found that 14% of adults in Britain reported that "social isolation is making relationships at home more difficult than usual". This figure was higher within minoritised ethnic groups, especially in older populations, at nearly one in five.

## PREVIOUS CONTACT WITH POLICE/OTHER AGENCIES



Fewer black victims were previously known to police as victims of domestic abuse: 41% compared with 52% of Asian victims and 54% of white victims.

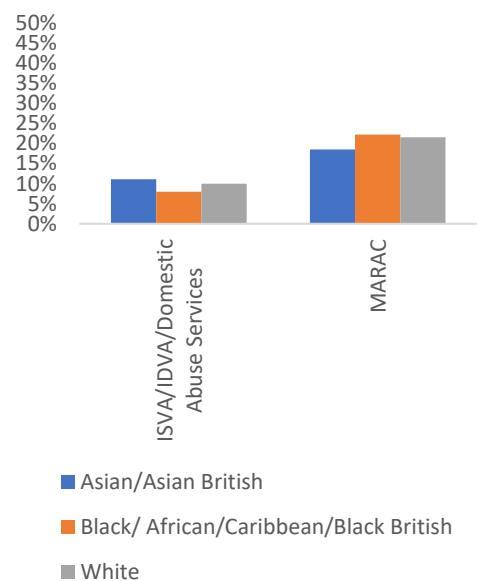
White victims and suspects were more likely than black and Asian victims and suspects to be previously known to agencies other than police: 63% of white compared with 55% of black and 44% of Asian victims and suspects.

Asian (11%), black (8%) and white (10%) victims were similarly likely to have been involved with Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA), Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA) or other domestic abuse services.

Whilst Asian (19%), black (22%) and white (22%) victims were known to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) in similar levels, black suspects (14%) were less likely than Asian suspects (20%) and white suspects (20%) to have been through a MARAC process.

Taken together, these figures suggest that, whilst black victims were less likely to have previously reported domestic abuse to police, they did seek help from independent domestic abuse advocates in equal numbers to victims of other ethnicities.

**Victims Previously Known to Domestic Abuse Services or MARAC**



Findings by Imkaan (2015) have confirmed that minoritised survivors need and value specialist services. Many survivors are more likely to access services specifically catering to ethnic minority groups, and they are often a woman's first point of contact with any formal support provider, particularly for women who encounter multiple barriers to mainstream services.

Minoritised women face additional barriers to receiving help, possibly because victims may be reluctant to involve police and may wish to protect their partner (and community) from police intervention due to fear of institutionalised racism. Research has found that in situations where the victim is mistrustful of the police or other enforcement agencies, health professionals may be seen as more benign or supportive individuals from whom to receive help. (SafeLives, 2017; Women's Aid, n.d.).

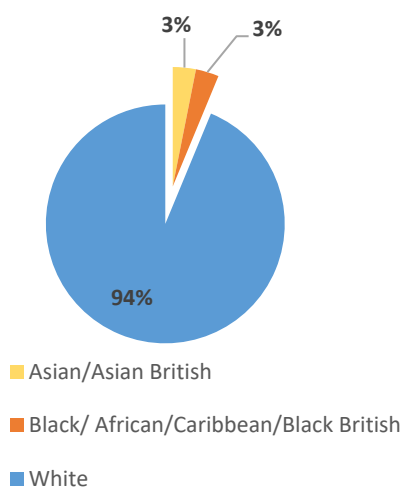
The 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS, 2021b) found that a lower percentage of black people had confidence in the police (64%) than white (74%) or Asian people (77%). Over the preceding two years, black people's confidence in the police dropped considerably, whilst white and Asian people's confidence remained steady.

## FOCUS ON SUSPECTED VICTIM SUICIDE

A clinical awareness of the link between domestic abuse and suicide, in both higher and lower income settings, has emerged, but ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees have been positioned as more susceptible to domestic abuse suicide, as a consequence of cultural practices, concepts of honour and shame, and language or community barriers that prevent them seeking help.

Southall Black Sisters (2011)

### Victims of Suspected Victim Suicide by Ethnic Group



Overall, 94% of the 64 victim suicides involved white victims (n=60), whilst just 6% (n=4) involved victims of Asian and black ethnicities.

Whilst suspects of black and white ethnicities were similarly likely to have been through a MARAC process, no suspects of Asian ethnicities were known to MARAC.

In total 37% of white victims in victim suicide cases were previously known to domestic abuse services, compared with no black or Asian victims.

Whilst caution should be practiced in drawing generalised conclusions from these data due to low numbers, it seems noteworthy that: suspected victim suicides after domestic abuse

were more commonly identified where the victim was white than other ethnicities; Asian suspects were less known to MARAC; and Asian and black victims of suspected victim suicides were not previously known to domestic abuse services.

Research by Munro & Aitken (2020) into suicide after domestic abuse did not find suicidality to be significantly correlated with age, gender or ethnicity; however, they did observe a correlation between suicidality and those who described experiencing so-called 'honour'-based violence.



### KEY LEARNING THEMES

#### Points of note #1 – Suspect Risk Factors

- Identified alcohol use was higher in white suspects
- Honour-based domestic abuse was only identified with Asian suspects and victims
- Black suspects were significantly more likely to have mental health problems recorded by police compared with other ethnicities

#### Points of note #2 – Covid-19 Impact

Asian victims and/or suspects were more likely to have the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions recorded by police as having had a possible influence on the circumstances of the death (24%). This difference was statistically significant, compared with only 11% of white and 7% of black victims and/or suspects.

#### Key Message #1- Cultural Competence

Asian (11%), black (8%) and white (10%) victims were similarly likely to have been involved with Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA), Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA) or other domestic abuse services. But fewer black victims were previously known to police as victims of domestic abuse: 41% compared with 52% of Asian victims and 54% of white victims.

#### What does this mean?

This suggests that, whilst black victims were less likely to have previously reported domestic abuse to police, they did seek help from independent advocates in equal numbers to victims of other ethnicities.

#### Practice Point #1

To identify a possible history of domestic abuse, it is vital that police link in with local domestic abuse services when considering domestic homicides and victim suicides, as these services may have information police do not. It is crucial that officers develop the cultural competence to understand how behaviours may be exhibited or experienced differently by perpetrators and victims with minoritised backgrounds.

The College of Policing has specific products to support forces to equip officers and staff to be able to deal with such incidents appropriately.

#### Key Message #2 - Identifying potential victim suicides

94% of suspected victim suicides involved white victims, whilst Asian and black ethnicities accounted for just 6%. No victims of black or Asian ethnicities were previously known to domestic abuse services. Whilst rates of suicide may naturally vary between ethnicity groups, recent research suggests that suicide following domestic abuse may in fact be more likely amongst those of South Asian ethnicities (Munro & Aitken, 2019).

#### What does this mean?

This analysis presents new evidence to suggest that suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse amongst black and Asian victims may be less viable to police compared with those amongst white victims, perhaps because black and Asian victims are less known to police previously for domestic abuse.

#### Practice Point #2

To ensure that all suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse are identified, it is important that police work closely with IDVAs and other domestic abuse services, as well as victims' friends and family members, to determine any domestic abuse history that may have otherwise been missed.

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