



Culturally Responsive Intervention: Summary of evidence

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Preface

The Drive Partnership is working across the domestic abuse specialist sector, public sector partners and beyond to develop sustainable, national systems in England and Wales that respond effectively to all perpetrators of domestic abuse. Our vision is that one day there will be a national approach which sees agencies in all PCC and local authority areas across England and Wales working together with a focus on those who cause harm, the perpetrators, to disrupt abuse and change behaviour, increasing safety for victims-survivors, children and families. The Drive Partnership is committed to ensuring that the perpetrator sector is effective for and accessible to people who cause harm from racialised communities. We believe this requires:

1. Embedding cultural competency ^[1] in more mainstream specialist services, including in Drive services,
2. Supporting by-and-for organisations to develop and deliver culturally specific interventions.

Services that do not operate from a 'by and for' perspective must become culturally competent to provide relevant, effective, and sustainable behaviour change programmes and interventions for people who cause harm, regardless of their background. Included in this is a need to see a significant change in the diversity of organisations delivering services, particularly at leadership levels. The Drive Partnership is committed to playing a leading role in delivering this change.

Alongside this, we firmly believe that culturally specific interventions, led by by-and-for organisations, are central to the aim. To achieve this, the Drive Partnership is exploring how best it can support by-and-for organisations who are currently working across, or would like to join, the perpetrator sector.

Under the National Community Lottery Fund grant, Elaha Walizadeh, a Systems Change and Practice Development Lead, conducted a review of available evidence on culturally responsive interventions for perpetrators of gender-based violence. This review was timebound and was not a comprehensive review of all literature available on this topic. 46 papers were included within this review, including both academic papers and grey literature. This briefing outlines the key findings and recommendations from that review.

Introduction

Harm and abuse disproportionately impact Black, Asian, and racially minoritised communities. Exposure to poverty, racism, xenophobia, and barriers to accessing support often puts racialised people at greater risk of gender-based abuse. There is a limited UK evidence base on programmes working with those using abusive behaviours in their relationships and even less evidence on effective and culturally appropriate interventions for people from racialised communities. To address this gap, the domestic abuse sector has made efforts to prioritise EEDI (Equality, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) for the past two

[1] We are using the phrase 'Cultural competency' as a working term, but are keen to explore alternatives.

years. However, some may argue that this is a tokenistic and performative gesture following the worldwide protests and mobilisation of the Black Lives Matter movement.

A new [Workforce Development and Leadership Programme Report](#), carried out by H.O.P.E Training and Consultancy) and commissioned by Drive Partnership, found that those participating in the research have experienced institutional racism and there is a misunderstanding about the term "privilege" amongst sector leaders. Recognising a lack of diversity in the workforce and inadequate opportunities for professionals from racialised communities as a prominent issue across the not-for-profit sector, the report sets out key recommendations to build capacity and opportunities for professionals from racialised communities working across the domestic abuse perpetrator service sector.

The findings of the review conducted by the Drive Partnership's National Systems Change team show that "cultural competency" is crucial in domestic abuse interventions to maximise the engagement of service users from racialised communities. The term "cultural competence" was first used by Terry L. Cross and colleagues in 1989 in a healthcare context, but it was not until almost a decade later that healthcare professionals began to be formally educated and trained in cultural competence. William and Becker made the term more mainstream in a perpetrator intervention context in 1994 and used it to promote the importance of practitioners developing relevant skills and understanding of the diverse population in the local community. They proposed that organisations must consider matching staff to clients with similar backgrounds, train others to understand the cultures and experiences of racism of the diverse population better, forge links with other relevant organisations; and so on. (William, 1994).

In addition to cultural competency training for frontline practitioners and sector leaders, our findings highlight the importance of culturally tailored services directed by professionals with lived experience of the communities they serve. In her [expert essay](#) in 2015, Thangam Debonnaire built the case for cultural competency to be embedded in all perpetrator intervention programmes and cautioned around culturally specific services given the nuanced identities of racially minoritised communities in the UK. Further research confirms that there is no "one-size-fits-all approach" to intervention and prevention, both between cultural communities and within. Even though every Black, Asian, and racially minoritised community has its own distinct culture, values, and lived experiences, these groups are often lumped together under broad umbrella terms. However, several studies in Canada and the United States have shown that "men who harm" are more likely to participate in services that are culturally specific and run by their own community members, laying the groundwork for culturally specific interventions. (Thandi, 2013).

The research community also suggests that domestic violence prevention and intervention efforts should consider the cultural backgrounds of their clients, but still hold offenders accountable for their actions. An examination of patriarchal community values, such as the sacredness of marriage, the shame of divorce, and the importance of reputation and honour, which restrict not only women's but men's freedoms, may be part of such a set of lived experiences. Understanding the perpetrator's and their partner's day-to-day lives may be aided by asking about their immigration experience, including any responsibilities they may have in regards to their own or someone else's immigration status, as well as the role and influence of extended family.

Key Findings

Although domestic abuse is prevalent among people from different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic classes, cultural and linguistic factors, religious beliefs, social networks, and degrees of assimilation influence the response of a victim-survivor to a partner's abusive behaviour. (Hansmann et al., 2010).

It has been noted in the literature on the effects of a coordinated community response to domestic violence that minorities are disproportionately represented in domestic violence shelter populations (refuges) and perpetrator intervention programs, but that the influence of culture and religion is often ignored or minimised in these programs, and that most domestic violence provisions are geared toward serving white victims. (Almeida, 1999). According to research conducted by Williams and Becker (1994) on domestic abuse perpetrator behaviour intervention programs (BIPs), it appears that the current mandated intervention paradigm makes little to no allowance for the needs of racial minorities. Both the shelter movement and the Duluth model of intervention trace their origins back to predominantly white, upper- and middle-class communities. (Barner and Carney, 2011). Even though the sector has made great strides and a greater emphasis has been placed on inclusion, "by and for" services remain disproportionately underfunded.

An intersectional framework for domestic abuse is essential for understanding higher rates of abuse in communities which endorse traditional gender norms and roles, have unequal distribution of power and resources that favour men over women, and endorse cultural approval of or a lenient attitude towards men who commit violence against women. (Sayten et al., 2021).

Literature establishes unequivocally that violence against women must be understood in the context of ongoing colonisation and intergenerational trauma, while placing the experiences of women and survivors at the forefront of intervention and prevention strategies. However, it is impossible to comprehend these nuances without adequate resources and cultural competence in mainstream interventions. Very few organisations in the United Kingdom provide cultural competency training to their employees. Some organisations view the provision of education about culturally sensitive topics like 'honour-based' abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and other forms of abuse associated with "culture" and religion as evidence of their cultural competence.

Defining key terms used in the domestic abuse sector

From the outset, it was clear that there was a need to summarise and define the key terms that are currently used in practice and academia, albeit, interchangeably, without much thought to theory or practice, in relation to culture, domestic abuse, and perpetrator interventions in the domestic abuse sector.

The following terms are often used when describing interventions aimed at racially minoritised communities:

1. Cultural competency
2. Cultural sensitivity
3. Culturally specific
4. Cultural adaptation

Cultural competency

Williams (2001) defined cultural competence as "the ability of individuals and systems to work or respond effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organisation being served." However, as we dig deeper, we learn that **cultural competency is a learning journey, not an endpoint**. This framework is not the ultimate solution to providing inclusive and intersectional intervention, but if done effectively, it can address a lot of concerns service users may have with mainstream perpetrator interventions. Borchum (2002) described cultural competence as "a non-linear dynamic process that is never-ending and ever-expanding. It is built on increasing knowledge and skill development related to its attributes."

LEARNING JOURNEY OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE a journey, not an endpoint

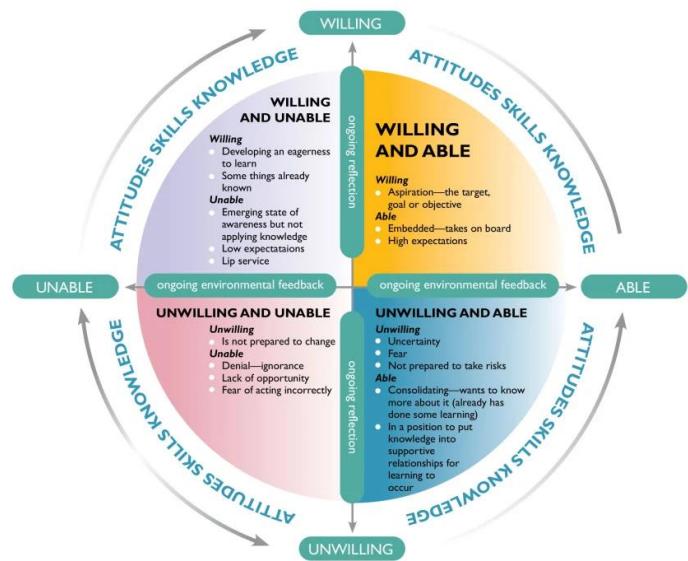


Figure 1 [We Hear You Australia](#)*

Culturally specific intervention

These types of interventions have been up for debate within the sector. Many mainstream, white-led organisations have over time developed services that they call "culturally specific". These services provide frontline support in specific languages to victim-survivors. However, these services are often led by white managers. The Violence Against Women and Girls anti-racism charter, established in 2020, clarifies that culturally specific services are "by and for" services. If mainstream, white-led organisations continue to run such services, then it will lead to further funding inequalities for 'by and for' charities, which are already consistently underfunded.

Cultural sensitivity

As recommended by Walker and Avant (2011), various dictionaries were consulted to complete an initial exploration of how the term "culturally sensitive intervention" is defined and used. A dictionary definition for culturally sensitive intervention was not located. Hence, for the purpose of this work, culturally sensitive interventions are defined as interventions that involve understanding and respect for service users' values, beliefs, preferences, and culture, to promote equity with the end goal of providing culturally competent support.

If cultural competence is what we aspire towards, then cultural sensitivity is the stage before reaching that. It is important to acknowledge that "cultural sensitivity" can sometimes be used to justify the actions of perpetrators. IKWRO, a specialist culturally specific organisation that supports victim/survivors from Middle Eastern, Northern African and Afghan backgrounds, believes that in domestic abuse cases there is often sympathy for victims. However, in the cases of so-called "honour"-based abuse, the sympathy is for perpetrators. It is important to ensure that in conversations on cultural sensitivity, we centre victim-survivor experiences and acknowledge that abuse and violence are not cultural but social issues.

The stages of cultural knowledge and awareness come before cultural sensitivity.

1. “Cultural knowledge” means that you know about some cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviours of another ethnic or cultural group.

2. “Cultural awareness” is the next stage of understanding other groups — being open to the idea of changing attitudes.

3. “Cultural sensitivity” is understanding that differences exist between cultures and respecting but not necessarily implementing long-term changes. It can often feel performative and tokenistic.

4. “Cultural competence” brings together the previous stages—and adds operational effectiveness. A culturally competent organisation has the capacity to integrate many different behaviours, attitudes, and policies into its system and to work effectively in cross-cultural settings to produce better outcomes.

Cultural adaptation

Cultural adaptation is “the systematic modification of an evidence-based treatment (or intervention protocol) to consider language, culture, and the context in such a way that it is compatible with the client’s cultural patterns, meaning, and values.” (Sit et al., 2020). A very good example of this is the [Positive Change Service](#) in Tower Hamlets.

Culturally adapted interventions can be very helpful if they are done right and follow the steps in the chart below. But organisations often think that following a few first steps might be enough to show cultural competency. Cultural adaptation and cultural competency can work well together to help service users from racial minorities get the right help and interventions.

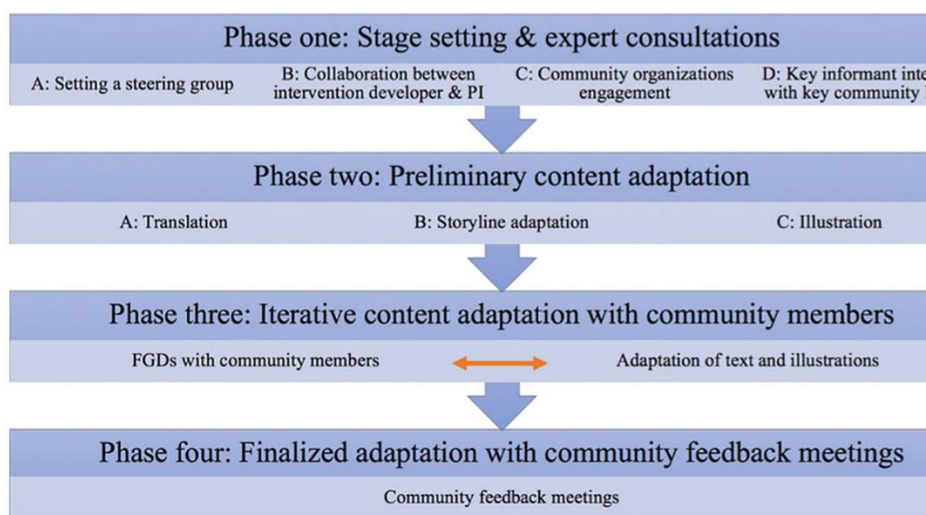


Figure 2 - Hao Fan Sit et al, 2020

Recommendations

- It is clear from our findings that we need cultural competency in mainstream services, and we must also support smaller "by and for" organisations to develop culturally specific interventions. Cultural competency should not be used as an excuse to minimise the work of specialist 'by and for' services.
- Cultural competency needs to be understood in a broader sense for services and professionals to understand and acknowledge the context in which people historically and continually experience systemic oppression, particularly when connected to the criminal justice system. Organisations and services must proactively work to address the harm imposed on racialised communities through discriminatory and biased interventions.
- Peer research prioritising voices from communities should be undertaken to understand what cultural competency means in an intervention context and if there are other frameworks that may be more suitable.
- Development of community-based programmes that address the challenges of the immigration and assimilation processes, including underemployment and discrimination, issues of DV legislation in the UK, and cultural norms concerning relationships (including marriage and parenting).
- Community initiatives that focus on concrete suggestions for how extended family members, community members, friends, and colleagues can skilfully intervene to prevent violence from developing or escalating.
- Practitioners must aim to engage with culture and ethnicity in all aspects of their work. In the absence of such engagement, clients report dissatisfaction or do not appear.
- There is a need for interventions to work with tradition and culture rather than only highlighting them in problematic terms. Instead of imposing ideas that may seem "foreign" to people, change can be achieved by working with cultural values rather than seeking to eradicate them. We need to move away from the Eurocentric and binary discourse that theology, culture, and gender equality cannot work together. It is possible to use religious beliefs and spirituality as drivers toward gender equality.
- Develop approaches that are embedded with or respond to faith, including how to engage and support faith leaders in responding to those causing harm in a way that supports wellbeing and autonomy of survivors.
- Commission research to test and evaluate culturally competent and specific interventions in Britain using a mixed methods approach, seeking both qualitative and quantitative data to identify the impact of tailoring interventions to diverse communities, including barriers and facilitators to potential engagement. (Allen and Adisa, 2022).

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