



### Safe at Home in Scotland – Survivor Consultation

#### Migrant and Black & Minority Ethnic victims and survivors of domestic abuse

Throughout the **Safe at Home in Scotland** project, the additional challenges facing migrant and Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) survivors have been repeatedly raised by services. Many of these pre-exist COVID-19. But many have been compounded by the pandemic. Shakti Women's Aid, a specialist domestic abuse service supporting BME and migrant victims, assisted us in setting up an online focus group through which we heard from five women about their experiences during COVID-19. Below is a very brief summary of the key points raised. We have also published a **full write-up of the session**.

#### Summary

Survivors of domestic abuse from migrant and BME communities are often very isolated. Alongside the additional isolation brought by the pandemic, this exacerbated the many challenges of lockdown.

**“I don't have any family or friends here. I'm basically on my own.”**

Health-related anxieties included, for the single parents, serious concerns about the lack of childcare for their children if they became ill.

**“What if anything happens to me? I have nobody. I have nothing, and my biggest fear would be that [child] will be automatically given back to his father...So, that remains a huge scary factor...”**

Safety for some had been compromised during lockdown, but safety was much broader than escape from the abuse. Some of the women had struggled to access food during lockdown. Economic security, appropriate housing options and connectedness were key to feeling safe and were lacking for all.

**“There are so many reasons and factors for us to be scared or feel unsafe. A) my ex-partner, B) our health, C) the lack of...I mean, I was housed in a place I've never lived in before. I had absolutely no clue where I was. I had no internet connection. No interaction with the outside world.”**

The impact of intensified isolation on children during the pandemic and the lack of support caused great anxiety for parents.

**“So, at the time that all of this had happened, his dad had left home unexplained to him obviously. Then we lost our house, lost the car, he stopped going to nursery...Everything that he'd known and loved, had any kind of attachment to, was lost.”**

Domestic abuse services, such as Shakti, were 'lifelines' for the women we spoke to during lockdown and provided vital institutional advocacy to navigate systems and champion rights.

**“They are the biggest support, my immediate family to me. They were always there for me, always, even during COVID. They cannot come face-to-face, but on the phone they were really helping...”**

Some barriers to accessing support were new to COVID-19, but for these survivors, pre-existing and systemic barriers were compounded by lack of service capacity and limited communication.

**“Why it's so hard to stay on the line for hours waiting for someone to pick up the line and give you legal advice? Because it's for free you need to wait and wait and wait. Sometimes you chase them for days. It's so frustrating.”**

There were some concerns about moving to socially distanced support, such as use of face masks inhibiting communication. However, the necessity of safety measures was appreciated, and the isolation of remote support and disconnectedness was more prominent in the discussion.