



# UNDERSTANDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

## RESEARCH TEAM

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Disclaimer .....	5
Preamble.....	5
AIM.....	6
Definitions.....	6
Domestic Violence/Abuse .....	6
Definition of abuse.....	7
Definition of an abuser .....	7
Definition of a victim-survivor .....	7
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	8
Purpose of the report.....	8
Methods .....	8
Results.....	9
ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE/VIOLENCE .....	9
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	10
History of Gender-Based Violence in Canada.....	10
Cultural Relativism and Gender-Based-Violence .....	10
Importance of Intersectionality.....	12
Forms of Family Violence or Abuse .....	13
Methodology.....	16
Primary Purpose .....	16
Overall Findings.....	18
Quantitative Data Analysis.....	18
Section A: Demographic Questions:.....	19
Section A: Forms of Family Violence.....	29
Section A: Awareness of domestic abuse:.....	47

Section B: Victims/Survivor Specific Questions .....	52
Section B: Resources:.....	58
Section B: Survivors Post-Abuse:.....	63
Qualitative Data Analysis Results .....	66
Signs of Abuse/Denial of Abuse.....	67
Children and abuse.....	69
Financial Abuse .....	70
Religious Abuse .....	72
Cyber Crime .....	74
Third-Party Abuse.....	74
Coercive control and Gaslighting .....	75
Infidelity .....	76
Help-Seeking: Support from Family and Friends.....	76
Help-Seeking: Therapy/Counselling/Non-Profit Organizations/Health-care provider .....	77
Help-Seeking: Legal System.....	79
Experiences as Immigrant women.....	80
Suggestions for Change in the Community .....	82
1. Awareness about Resources .....	82
2. Marriage Counselling and Therapy .....	83
3. Muslim men’s role in addressing DA/V .....	83
4. Addressing the Bystander Effect.....	84
Recommendations.....	85
Conclusions.....	91
References.....	92



# Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that the research and compilation of this report was conducted on Treaty 1 Territory and that Manitoba is located on the Treaty Territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Anishinienewuk, Dakkota Oyate, Denesuline, Nehethowuk Nations and the homeland of the Metis nation.

Healthy Muslim Families pays tribute to the **victims and survivors** of Domestic Violence / Abuse (DV/A) and we honour the resiliency of **children and adults** who continue to face DV/A and GBV as well as its many negative repercussions.

We also pay tribute to the **missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls** in Canada who face the harshest forms of violence and prejudice due to systemic factors including settler-colonial racism, socio-political and cultural marginalization, and misogyny among others.

We are grateful to everyone who shared their personal accounts of family violence and spousal abuse for this report, and to stakeholders in the community who shared their valuable input. We honor and deeply respect you.

We want to extend a special thank you to the Healthy Muslim Families **Gender-Based Violence Committee** for giving their time and input for this report; especially Amna Iqbal, Asma Mukhtar Ahmad, Saleha Elshehri, and Abir Chehlaoui.



## Disclaimer

Some readers may find it challenging to interact with the highly sensitive matters covered in this report. Please only engage with the text as much as you are willing to.

## Preamble

Violence against women and girls remains one of the most pervasive and systematic dangers to human rights in the world. Domestic violence/abuse (DV/A), also referred to as intimate-partner violence, spousal abuse, or family violence, is a form of gender-based violence (GBV) that affects every country and culture alike. Many view DV/A as a direct result of societal and cultural attitudes and norms that give men and boys the upper hand over women and girls across the world. Because of the power disparity, women, girls, and children are among the groups that are most susceptible to DV/A, despite the fact that it can affect anybody, including men and boys.

At least one in three women worldwide would have been subjected to some type of physical or emotional abuse, including sexual assault and coercive control by an intimate partner in their lifetime. In 2021 women and girls represented two-thirds (69%) of family violence victims in Canada.

Islam accounts for more than 1.8 million individuals in Canada, or 4.9% of all religions in Canada, coming in second place to Christianity. More than 68% of Muslims in Canada were born outside of Canada, which shows that a significant portion of the country's Muslim population is resettling, assimilating, and integrating. Given that Muslim women are a part of one of Canada's fastest-growing communities, it is alarming that there is a lack of information on domestic abuse within this group. Keeping this in mind, it becomes even more crucial that more attention be given to this issue in order to develop more culturally and religiously sensitive practices in Canada to handle this issue appropriately.



In conducting this research project, Healthy Muslim Families sought to understand and answer the many pressing questions and concerns regarding DV/A and family violence as it relates to the Muslim community in Manitoba.

Topics such as the most perpetrated forms of DV/A, the issue as it relates to religion and spirituality, Muslim (immigrant) women's vulnerabilities to D/VA, the issue in the context of pre-migration and post-migration, socio-cultural differences, awareness and resources for victims-survivors, abuse of children, coercive control, and many others were explored.

Although GBV can manifest in many different forms, this study only addresses one subset, domestic violence/abuse (DV/A).

## AIM

Additionally, in order to provide better victim-survivor-centered solutions for those who are most in need, this research project looked at areas of present services for DV/A victims and survivors that can be improved.

## Definitions

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/ABUSE

The Manitoba Prosecution Service defines domestic violence/abuse DV/A as follows: (A) A physical and/or sexual assault or the threat of the same committed in any relationship where the individuals (regardless of gender) are or have ever been dating, cohabitating, married, separated or divorced;

(B) Any other offense (for example, criminal harassment, mischief, theft, etc.) is committed between individuals described in paragraph (a); and (C) an offense that arises as a result of a relationship described in paragraph (a) even though the offender and victim are not in a relationship (for example, the accused offends against his former wife's new partner).



## DEFINITION OF ABUSE

Abuse is any behavior that scares, isolates, or controls another person. Abuse may be a pattern or a single occurrence. Abuse includes, but is not limited to the following forms:

- ❖ Physical, including assault and forcible confinement.
- ❖ Sexual, including sexual contact without consent.
- ❖ Psychological including threats and intimidation.
- ❖ Coercive control
- ❖ Financial including fraud and extortion.
- ❖ Neglect: consists of the failure to provide the necessities of life, which can cause serious harm.
- ❖ Religious/spiritual abuse

## DEFINITION OF AN ABUSER

An abuser can be male or female. When we talk about abuse in the context of DV/A, we are talking about a person in a current or former intimate partner relationship or a family member, where one person needs to maintain “**power and control**” over another.

## DEFINITION OF A VICTIM-SURVIVOR

The term “victim” in the context of DV/A describes a person who has been subjected to one or more forms of violence/abuse by another person including but not limited to: physical, emotional/psychological (including coercive control), spiritual/religious, financial, and sexual abuse.

A person who considers themselves to be a survivor might not perceive themselves as a victim due to their journey in the process of healing. Moreover, “**survivor**” can be used as a term of empowerment to express that a person



has begun the healing process and may have attained a sense of peace in their life, whereas "victim" is a legal definition necessary within the criminal justice system.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

With more Muslims immigrating to Manitoba, there is an increasing demand for knowledge and understanding. Although many organisations and service providers have made efforts and contributions in this area, there is still a lack of data due to Manitoba's expanding Muslim community. Healthy Muslim Families carried out this study to bring information and nuance to a subject where information is limited. With the use of this report, we hope to continue a meaningful conversation and identify gaps in services that can either be addressed by organizations like Healthy Muslim Families or by working together and cooperating with other organizations, government services, Manitobans, and members of the Muslim community.

### METHODS

A literature review was undertaken at the onset of the research. A mixed methods approach was taken in conducting the research. It included a quantitative survey and qualitative method in the form of one-on-one interviews with victims-survivors as well as Muslim leaders and stakeholders from the community (lawyers, psychologists, physicians, marriage counsellors, Imams, Muslim senior members). The quantitative survey that was developed by the research team was published on the website and spread through social media outlets of Healthy Muslim Families. Similarly, participants were invited to take part in the one-on-one interviews. Data was analyzed from both methods.





## RESULTS

The Muslim population in Manitoba is rapidly growing which has created a need for support and assistance programs catering to this population. All the participants in the research expressed a need for more awareness about the resources that are currently available whether in their own language or easy to read English.

To better understand and assist victims from different cultural and religious backgrounds, those who work with DV/A individuals need to be trained to be more culturally competent and trauma-informed. When evaluating immigrant individuals, it is important to consider post-migration stressors like language learning, financial and employment status, extended family response to their abuse, abuse by in-laws, implicit sexism and patriarchy, beliefs about divorce, and all other factors related to the abused person's ethnocultural and religious background. Muslim ethnic and religious leaders can work together to educate the several ethnic groups present in the community regarding healthy family dynamics, healthy parenting, relationship boundaries, etc.

One of the most significant findings of the report was because there has been such a significant increase in the Muslim population in Manitoba over the past few years, as a result, there is a greater need than ever for Muslim organizations, individuals, stakeholders, etc. to work together more closely in order to adequately understand and assist Muslim victims of DV/A in all their diversity and complexity.

## ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE/VIOLENCE

Although misinterpretations of the Quran mixed with tribal culture and customs express otherwise, Islam holds that there is no religious justification for violence against women, or any other individual. Moreover, Islam repeatedly and decisively prohibits any form of oppression in The Holy Quran.



Looking at violence against women and girls in Muslim communities requires the use of an intersectional feminist analysis if the issue is to be understood correctly. It is too easy, and incorrect, to simply conclude that violence against Muslim women is a result of cultural or religious values that are in some way unique to Islamic communities.

Religious communities and leaders, on the other hand, can provide fundamental resources to raise awareness of the harms and impermissibility of domestic violence and provide support for victims and/or refer them to adequate resources.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **HISTORY OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CANADA**

Gender-Based Violence, or sometimes referred to as Violence Against Women (VAW) disproportionately affects women and girls. GBV refers to violence based on gender norms and unequal power dynamics, perpetrated against someone based on their gender, gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender. It takes many forms, including physical, economic, sexual, emotional (psychological), and religious/spiritual abuse. GBV can affect anyone, however, some groups are more vulnerable to it than others including women and girls, newcomer women to Canada, racialized women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, gender diverse individuals and many other marginalized groups.

### **CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND GENDER-BASED-VIOLENCE**

The idea of cultural relativism states that moral codes, ideals, and practices are inherently different across all cultures in the world. This concept highlights that we should look at distinct cultures based on their own attributes rather than comparing them against one's own. Cultural relativism maintains that



there is no absolute truth when it comes to cultures; be it ethical, moral, or cultural. In theory, this idea is meant to encourage tolerance of other cultures and is helpful because it leads to the appreciation of other peoples' way of life around the world. However, this idea also comes with many negative attributes.

Cultural relativism can be a source of contention when discussing violence against women and girls. Proponents of this theory hold a group-centered view of the world, but they often neglect the fact that many societies place several restrictions and unequal barriers on many of their members including the women in their society. They fail to recognize that what is advantageous for the group, or for the religious or political elites within that group may or may not be in the interest of the individuals belonging to that group or even in the interest of the entire group.

Honor-based killings, (which did not come up in this study) are a prime example of how cultural relativism can lead to grave dilemmas because they expose the harsh reality of how easily an individual's rights can be ignored or even violated in the name of family honour or the safety of the community at large rather than the individual. In this way, culture is used as an excuse for GBV in order to justify some harmful cultural practices around the world.

This issue also raises the point about the role of "culture" in men's control over women, and the degree to which a "culture" should be respected or tolerated in distinct societies when it violates women's human rights.

While cultural relativism on its own merits can encourage tolerance and respect for distinct cultures, it is not beneficial and is rather problematic when accounting for topics like gender-based violence and violence against women.



## IMPORTANCE OF INTERSECTIONALITY

The concept of intersectionality outlines the ways in which our multiple social identities interact with racial and oppressive societal structures. This idea combines various identity markers in an individual, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, etc. to provide a more truthful and nuanced identity.

Intersectionality is an important consideration when accounting for violence against women, especially those belonging to racialized and marginalized groups such as women and girls, individuals with disabilities, indigenous women, gender-diverse people, individuals who are immigrants or refugees to Canada, and many others.

For example, a person who is an immigrant and has poor English proficiency may also be dealing with oppressive experiences and traumas which are more particular of that demographic (in this case, it is the victim's newcomer status), which undoubtedly exacerbate the traumas they have already suffered as a result of being the victim of domestic abuse. All these factors can greatly limit the victim's capacity to seek assistance and have their account heard by law enforcement.

By having a more in-depth understanding of the various ways that an individual is impacted by adversities due to their historical/demographical background, we may better comprehend how such intersectional characteristics affect the victim's abuse and their efforts to seek help.



## FORMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE OR ABUSE

### Physical abuse

Includes assault, and it is the intentional use of force against a person to cause harm. It can cause physical pain or injury that may be long-lasting. It can involve:

- ❖ pushing or shoving
- ❖ hitting, slapping, or kicking
- ❖ pinching or punching
- ❖ strangling or choking

### Sexual abuse

Is any sexual contact with a person without their consent. It can involve:

- ❖ sexual touching or sexual activity without the person's consent
- ❖ continued sexual contact when asked to stop by the person the sexual contact is performed on
- ❖ forcing someone to commit unsafe or humiliating sexual acts

### Emotional/Psychological abuse

Can be defined as when a person uses words, actions, or coercion to control, frighten or isolate someone or take away their self-respect. It can involve:

- ❖ pattern of threats, put-downs, name calling or insults
- ❖ constant yelling or criticism
- ❖ controlling or keeping someone from seeing friends or family



## Financial abuse

Can be defined as when someone uses money or property to control or exploit someone else. It can involve:

- ❖ taking someone's money or property without permission
- ❖ withholding or limiting money to control someone
- ❖ pressuring someone to sign documents

## Abuse by proxy

This is a type of emotional/psychological abuse that occurs in domestic abuse where the abuser inflicts harm upon the victim using a third party. There are four ways that abuse by proxy can be inflicted through: children, family, friends, or pets.

The most common form of abuse by proxy in some cultural backgrounds including South Asian or Arab is abuse by in-laws.

## Spiritual or religious abuse

When the abuser deliberately misquotes religious texts or principles to exert power or control over the victim. The abuser may use religion to excuse or explain his/her abusive behavior.

## Coercive control

Coercive control comes under many types of abuse; however, it is more prominent in emotional/psychological where the abuser carries out a pattern of controlling and manipulative behaviors in a relationship and exerts power over a victim, often through intimidation or humiliation, which can often be hard to spot. The person who exercises coercive control creates a world where the person who experiences it is constantly monitored and criticized; their every move is watched against an ever-changing and unwritten "book of rules".



Men and women both, can experience coercive control, however, this type of behavior takes shape in the prevalence of male dominance and their superiority over women.

In Canada, the government recognizes coercive control as part of the dynamic of intimate partner and domestic violence; however, this form of abuse is yet to be translated into specific offenses of intimate partner violence or domestic violence in the Criminal Code.

## **Children and Family Violence**

Violence and exposure to family violence/abuse seriously threaten the health and well-being of children in their present and future. Children can experience family violence/abuse in the form of physical, psychological, emotional, social, or sexual maltreatment. Witnessing family violence/abuse is as harmful as experiencing it directly and counts as child abuse in Canadian law. It harms or endangers the child's survival, safety, self-esteem, growth, and/or development. It can involve a single act or a pattern of incidents.

Neglect is also a form of child abuse in which the child's basic needs are unmet; it can include inadequate food, shelter, clothing, and medical care, among others.

Children who are exposed to family violence, can suffer both immediate and long-term consequences. Short-term effects of family violence on children can include anxiety, panic attacks, loneliness, isolation, repetitive nightmares, trouble sleeping, etc.

In long-term effects, survivors of child abuse/maltreatment show a higher prevalence of mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD), eating disorders, suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts or ideas) dissociative disorders, substance abuse, becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence in their own intimate/spousal relationship, etc. compared to adults without such a history.



According to the Law in Manitoba, access to a child by parents after separation or divorce is decided based on what arrangements are in the best interest of the child.

Canadian Law grants shared or sole access to a child depending on a number of factors such as the needs of the children, each parent's ability to meet the children's needs, and the relationship between the child and each parent.

Islamic Law is based on similar principles when deciding how much access is granted to parents over their child(ren).

## Methodology

### PRIMARY PURPOSE

To gain a better understanding of DV/A in the Muslim Community in Manitoba and to better **define and address** the cultural/religious complexities that are at play when discussing this topic as it relates to Muslims in Manitoba. Healthy Muslim Families recognizes a dire need for addressing the issue and its consequential and devastating effects on the community as a whole.

Manitoba is home to an **estimated 20,000 Muslims**. The local Muslim community is comprised of a large number of newcomers, racialized and marginalised groups, people with diverse abilities added on to the racialized factors, large number of unemployed women, large number of dependent subgroups including women, children and older parents living with families.

There is **relatively little data** about the incidence of domestic violence among Muslims. Often, Muslims are part of studies of particular ethnic groups (Arab, South Asian) but may not be identified specifically as Muslims. Also, due to the taboo nature of the subject, Muslims are often reluctant to report or speak out about their experiences.





Healthy Muslim Families understands its role as a faith-based community organization in **preventing** this problem, which is through researching and increasing our knowledge about the dynamics of domestic violence and its impact on the family in relation to the various cultural backgrounds that exist in our community and our religion.

At the onset of the project, Healthy Muslim Families created a Gender-Based Violence Committee consisting of witnesses, survivors, psychologists/counsellors, and members of the research team with whom we regularly consulted and implemented a process for developing this report. We conducted a background study which involved a comprehensive review of the literature on domestic abuse/violence, gender-based violence, and domestic abuse/violence as they pertain to the Muslim community in Manitoba and Canada at large.

Tools for outreach and research were created which included: developing a quantitative survey based on the data collected from the studies involving Muslims in Manitoba and Canada facing domestic abuse/violence. The survey was created using Google forms and distributed through online platforms such as the HMF Website, WhatsApp groups, Facebook group, etc. It included the definition of the term domestic abuse, victim, abuser, a trigger warning, and who the questionnaire was designed for and how to answer it. The survey was kept completely anonymous. Due to the sample size being too small, the survey cannot be extrapolated to the larger population.

For the second part of the research, one-on-one interviews were conducted with victims-survivors and witnesses to domestic abuse within the Muslim community in Manitoba, stakeholders, and individuals from various professions to develop the qualitative part of the report.

The interviews were collected through Zoom or telephone. Consents of participation and confidentiality agreements were completed and collected before the interviews. Caution was taken to ensure that the identity of the participants in the interviews was not revealed to anyone outside the research group and GBV committee at any stage. The HMF research team transcribed



the interviews and cross-examined them in order to collect common themes and context among them.

The results of the survey, one-one-one interviews, and suggestions from the community and the practitioners are published in this report.

## Overall Findings

### QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

For the quantitative part of the research, we developed a survey consisting of 45 questions encompassing various topics related to the issue of domestic abuse. First, we conducted a literature review to create our questions and we consulted the Healthy Muslim Families Gender-Based-Violence Advisory Committee at every step of our research for feedback, including the quantitative analysis.

Next, the survey was circulated in our community and published on our website for easy access. Google Forms was used for the survey and the results were gathered anonymously. A total of 23 responses were collected including the Arabic version of the survey.

A trigger warning was included at the beginning of the survey. Due to our survey sample being only 23 respondents, the results cannot be applied appropriately to the larger public, however, they can provide some key recommendations and insight into the issue at hand.

While maintaining the same target population—the victims and survivors of domestic abuse—the survey was developed to get responses from different perspectives. Therefore, we asked people who witnessed abuse to answer the survey as well.

**We divided the survey into two parts: Section A and Section B.** These two sections were further divided into sub-topics.



**Section A** was for individuals who witnessed the abuse but who did not experience it first-hand.

**Section B** was for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

**SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS:**

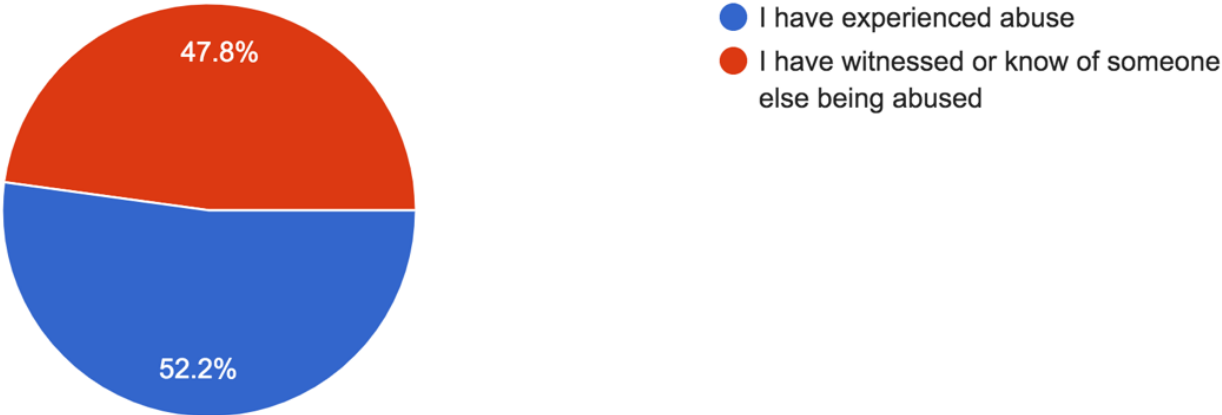
The first part of **Section A** covered demographic profiles of individuals taking the survey. We asked questions related to the victims’ age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, immigration status, etc.

The following questions were asked of the participants:

**Which of the following best describes you?**

**Responses: 23**

**This** question helped us to differentiate between the proportion of respondents who had experienced domestic abuse themselves and those who had just witnessed someone else go through it.



## What is/was the age of the victims at the time of the abuse? (Approximate if the abuse went on for several years)

Responses: 23

The majority of the victims-survivors referred in the study, including self and witnessed accounts were between the ages of 30 and 40 at the time of the abuse. There were victims in other age groups as well but in lesser numbers.

Age in years	No. of victims
Under 18	5 (21.7%)
18-30 years old	9 (39.1%)
30-40 years old	13 (56.5%)
40-50 years old	3 (13%)
Above 50 years old	2 (8.7%)

Comparing national data, police in Canada reported more than 114,000 intimate partner violence victims-survivors in 2021, with victims-survivors' ages ranging from 12 to 55+. Our finding, along with national data demonstrates that domestic abuse is present across all age groups, in younger and older women. Even on a national scale, we can conclude that domestic abuse affects women across the lifespan to some degree.

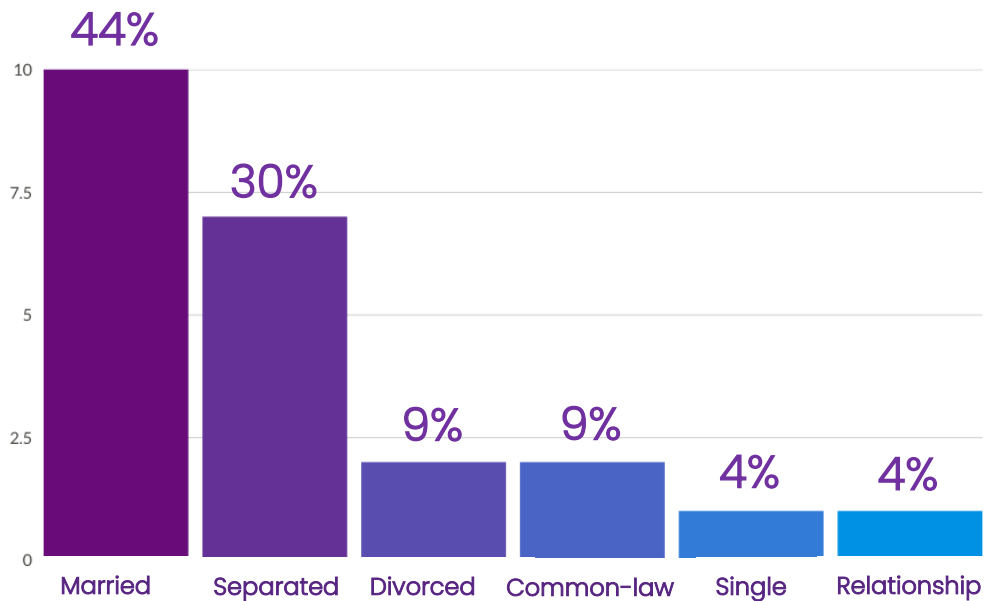


## What is the marital status of the victim now?

**Responses: 23**

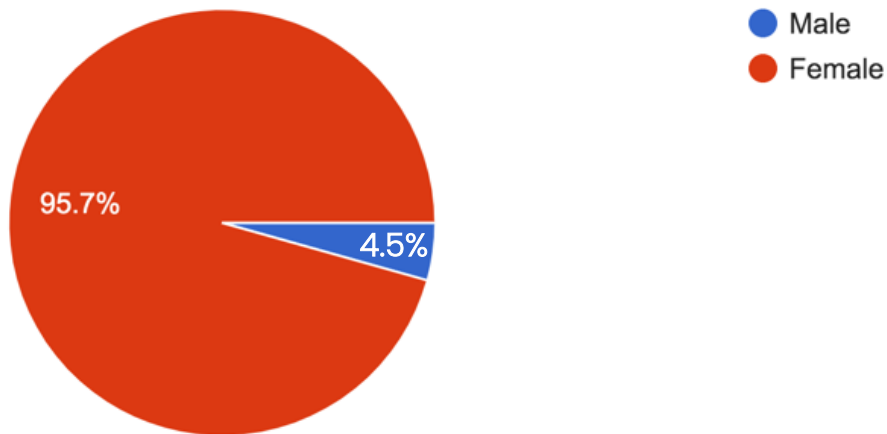
Approximately 44% of the victims-survivors (10 out of 23) were still married at the time of the abuse. The majority of the victims-survivors continued to be in abusive relationships even at the time of the survey.

Compared to other groups of abused populations, Muslim victim-survivors are rarely seen in common-law or other forms of cohabitation partnerships due to their religious and cultural beliefs. Hence, we only had one victim who was in a common-law relationship.



## What was the gender of the victim?

Response: 23



This finding correlates with national statistics from 2021 which reported that women and girls represented two-thirds or 69% of all family violence victims for that year.

Statistically, domestic abuse against women and girls is significantly higher than men and boys. This is true across nations, races, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds. Violence against women is rooted in gender inequality and it negatively affects them more their counterparts.

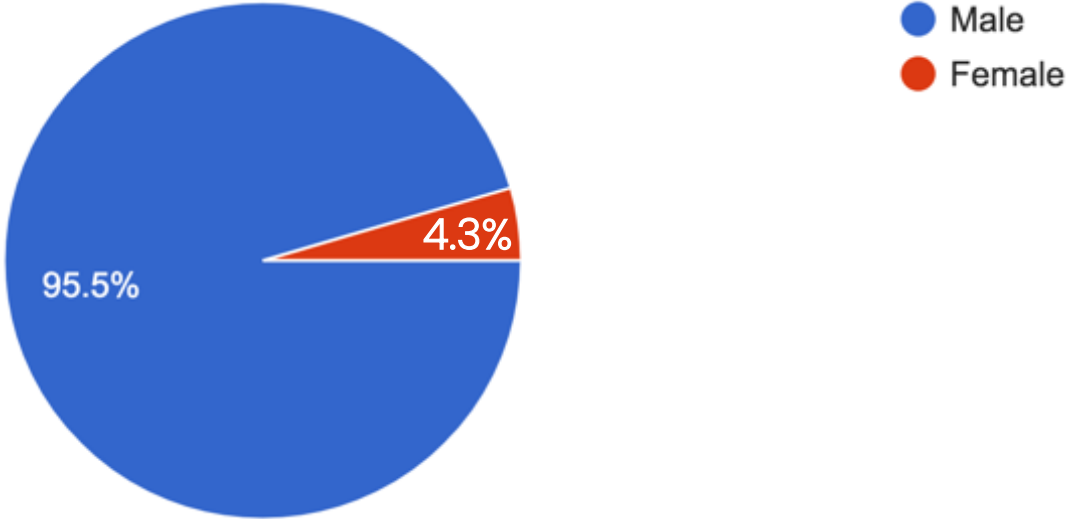
Social injustices in our culture are deeply ingrained and intersect with one another making women and girls more susceptible to abuse.

## What was the gender of the abuser?

Responses: 22

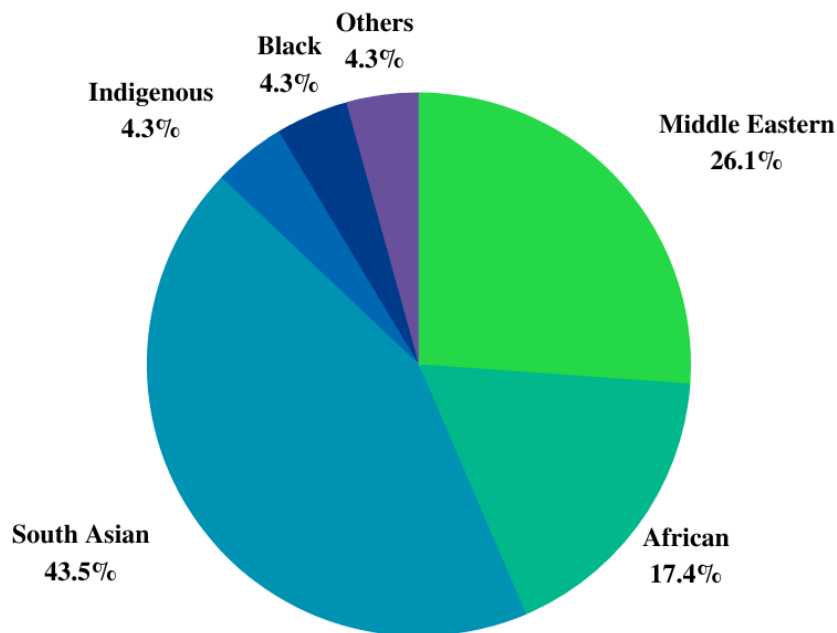
It can be inferred from this result that gender plays a significant role in the persistence of abuse against women. Patriarchal ideals substantially encourage and normalize the notion that men should lead their families and make decisions for their spouse.

Women are often stereotyped as submissive and subordinate to men and the latter regarded as being domineering, aggressive, and tough, particularly in the context of marriage and family. This stereotype strengthens the idea that wives must submit to their husbands and increases the possibility that he will be granted sole power over her free to use coercive control and other emotionally and physically violent tactics to keep her in line.



## What is the ethnicity of the victim?

Responses: 23



Since almost all of the respondents in our survey were immigrants to Canada at some point in their lives, the research team was interested to learn how these individuals' cultural and ethnic norms affected their experience dealing with domestic abuse.

The 2022 Islamophobia report conducted by MIA showed a myriad of ethnicities in the Muslim community. Where it was reported that in a survey of 190 individuals 41% of the respondents were South Asian, 26% were Black, 21% were Middle Eastern, 11% were White, and 1% were indigenous.<sup>1</sup> The findings from the MIA report reflects the diversity of ethnic backgrounds that exist in Manitoba's Muslim community today, which helps to understand why we were able to garner responses from so many different ethnic backgrounds in our

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<sup>1</sup> Webmaster. (2022, September 15). Home. Manitoba Islamic Association. Retrieved November 14, 2022, from <https://www.miaonline.org/>

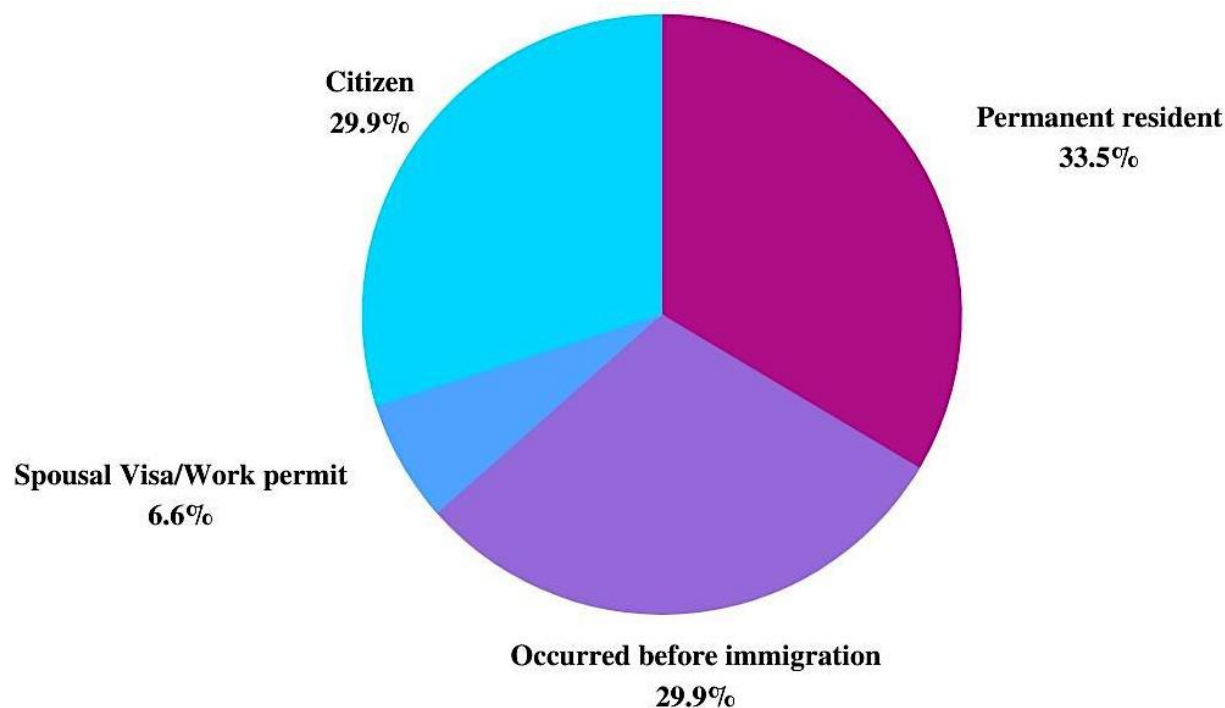




own survey. However, the predominant group was those belonging to South Asia.

## What is/was the immigration status of the victim in Canada at the time of the abuse?

Responses: 23



Knowing the victim-survivors' immigration status in the survey was a critical component in understanding the different factors that may have accentuated the abuse they faced. Studies show that immigrant Muslim women are more likely to experience domestic violence than Muslim women who were born in Canada, with more stressors, less support, a slower process for seeking help, and more severe mental health consequences.

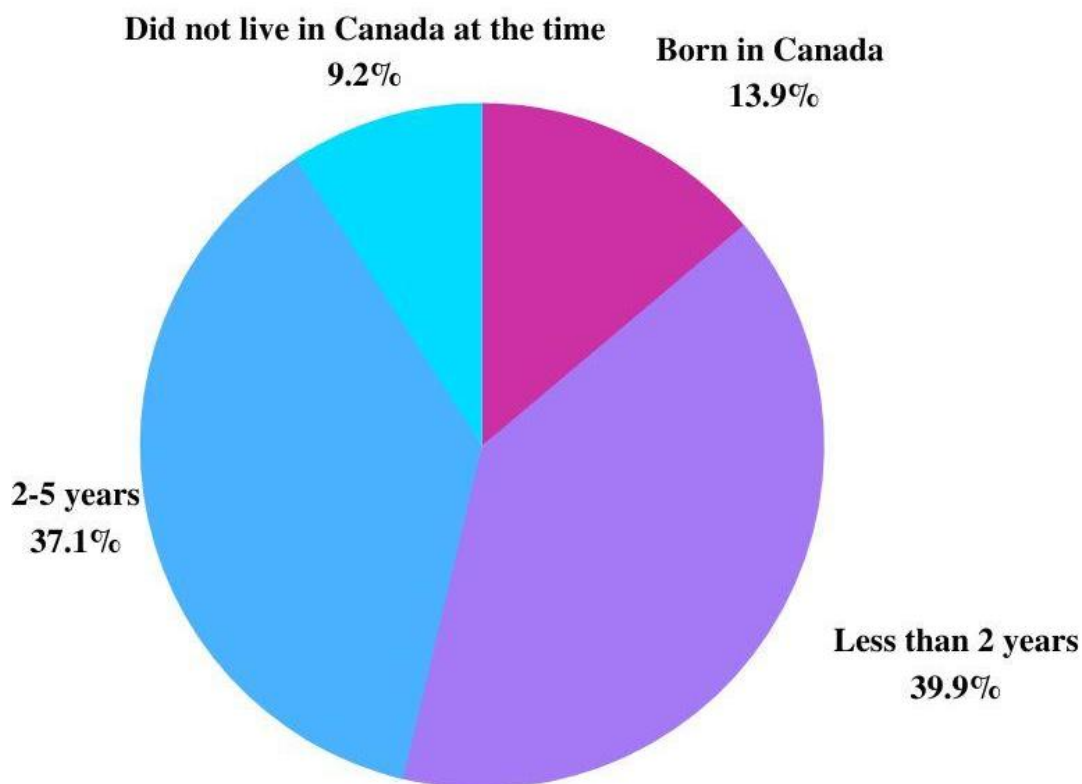
For example, Muslim immigrant women who live in Canada find that they have low levels of social support and face heavy stigmatization from the community when attempting to leave their relationship or report their abuser. They are more likely to put up with the abuse and less likely to report it to the



authorities. In addition, immigrant women could be hesitant to report the violence from fear that doing so will harm their immigration or refugee status. In some cases, if the abuser has already been living in Canada before the victim-survivor, then the abuser can exploit the victim-survivor's immigration status as a means of coercion or control, which can further cement the abuser's hegemonic position over the victim-survivor.

### How long had the victim lived in Canada at the time of the abuse?

Responses: 23



The recency of immigration is an important factor in the abuse that many victims-survivors of domestic abuse endure.

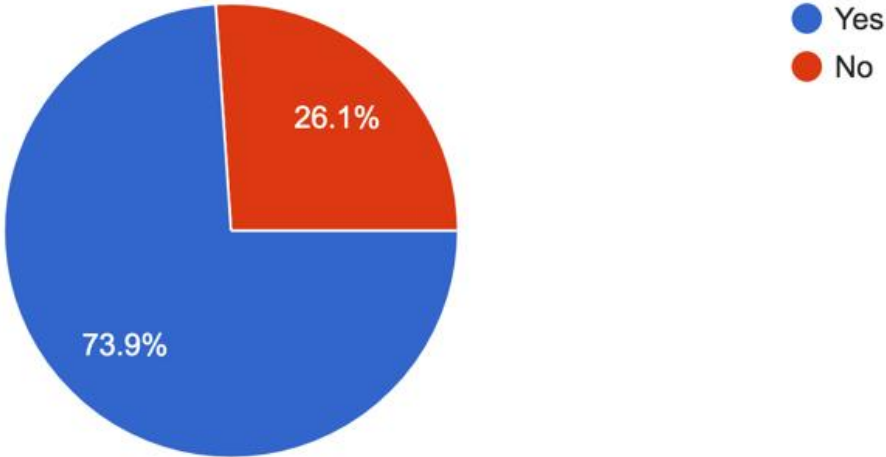
Upon newly immigrating to a foreign country, Muslim familial relationship dynamics go through many significant changes, such as a newly recognized individual autonomy, loss of ethnic and gender identity, financial instability,

shifts in gender roles, shifts in the decision-making process in the household, un-employment, or under-employment are among the factors that are perceived by the male figure of the family as threatening to his established patriarchal status. This increases the violence on the female as a way for the male to compensate for the various changes happening. When accounting for domestic abuse victim from various ethnic and national backgrounds, it becomes vital to factor in the recency of their immigration, because this aspect gives us a deeper understanding of the extent and reach of the abuse that immigrant women have to face.

### Did the victim have post-secondary education at the time of the abuse?

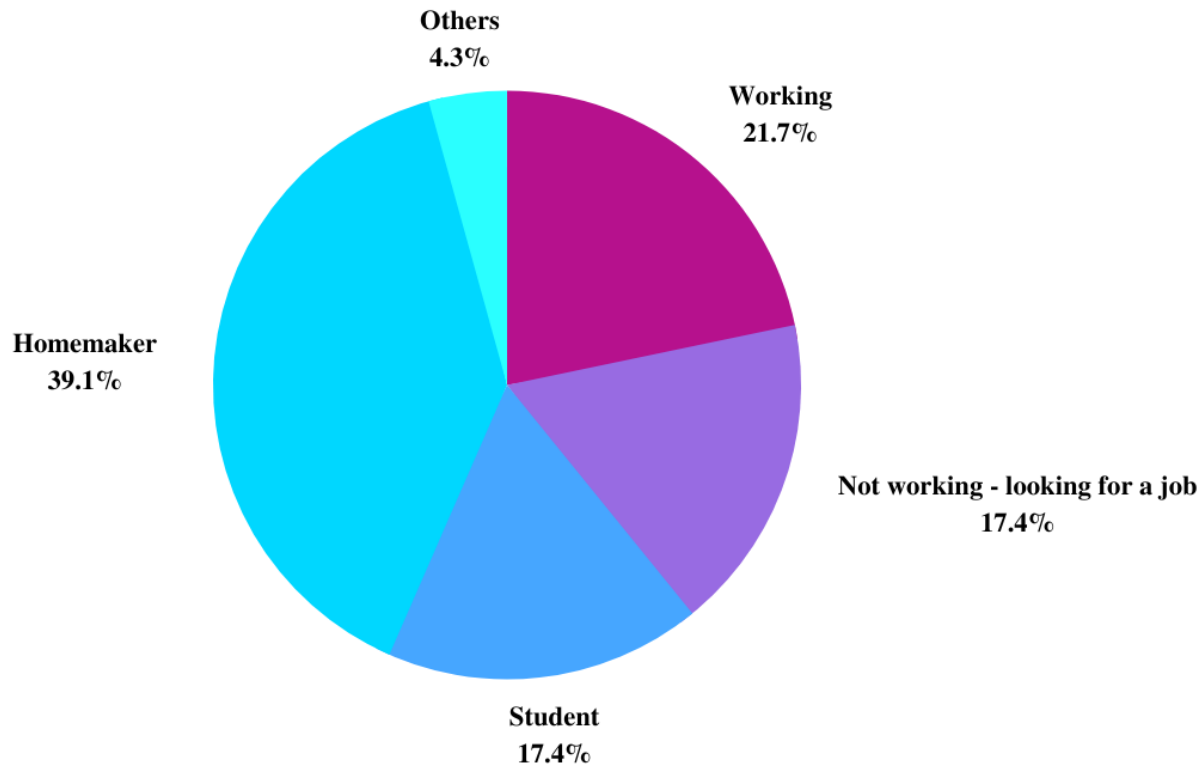
**Responses: 23**

A study highlighted the importance of education in coping with the effects of domestic abuse where it showed that numerous immigrant women who experienced domestic abuse came from highly educated backgrounds and it was found that women with higher levels of education were more easily able to access different resources, employment opportunities, were less dependent on the male figures of the family as compared to women who came from lesser educated backgrounds.



## What is/was the employment status of the victim at the time of the abuse?

Responses: 23



All in all, 17 out of 23 or 74% of the victim-survivors in our poll did not have a job when the abuse occurred. Only 4 out of the 23 victim-survivors claimed to have been working when the abuse took place.

Research shows that underemployment and de-skilling are two major setbacks to immigrant women trying to become financially independent. **Deskilling** is the process through which immigrants lose access to the professions they previously held because their foreign credentials and qualifications are not recognized in the country they immigrated to. Newcomers tend to experience fatigue, frustration, and rising tensions resulting from working multiple and low-paying jobs and/or taking debt to pay for bills. These pent-up emotions often result in conflict and abuse in immigrant families affecting women disproportionately in those relationships.



Additionally, in the post-migration context in Canada, it is noted that the points system of immigration selection favors men and reduces the majority of women to "dependent" status through the family class, which in-turn limits their access to resources and proper employment. Moreover, these two significant factors both increase the likelihood and severity of domestic abuse for immigrant women.

Women have some liberty to get help and support themselves if they have access to money. However, without a job or money they lose their autonomy and are forced to stay dependent on their spouses which results in them staying in abusive relationships.

## SECTION A: FORMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Questions regarding different forms of family violence were covered in the second part of Section A. We asked questions involving physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, and religious/spiritual abuse to gain a better understanding of the forms and prevalence of abuse that the witnesses and victims had experienced,

Although "violence based on so-called honor" is listed among the types of violence in the definition of family violence in Canada, we did not include a question regarding this topic because there are hardly any statistics on this type of violence due to its nature.

The following questions were asked of the participants:



What kind of abuse was experienced or witnessed? Check all that apply.

**Responses: 23**

Type of Abuse	No. of victims affected
Verbal abuse (Criticism, Name-calling, Bad words, etc.)	23 (100%)
Physical abuse (Hitting, Kicking, Punching, Hurting, etc.)	16 (69.6%)
Financial abuse (Controlling victim's money)	15 (65.2%)
Spiritual abuse (Misquoting religious text)	12 (52%)
Emotional or Psychological (Undermining victim's behavior and lived experiences)	21 (91.3%)
Sexual abuse	12 (52.2%)

**Verbal abuse** was experienced or witnessed by all 23 participants in the survey. This finding should not come as shocking given that verbal abuse is one of the most common types of abuse documented across the world that goes unrecognized by victims and survivors for long. Although is it not always the case, verbal abuse can progress to physical violence, and even when it doesn't, it can still have equally damaging effects on the victim-survivor.

**Physical abuse** was reported by a majority of the respondents; and a bulk of them experienced or witnessed financial abuse.

**Spiritual or religious abuse** was witnessed or experienced by more than half of the respondents in the survey. It can manifest in ways such as misquoting of religious text by the abuser in order to manipulate and control the victim-



survivor, denying the abuse, and justifying the abuse using God and religion. In a spiritually abusive relationship, the victim-survivor can be informed by their abuser that disclosing the abuse would violate her Islamic obligation in an effort to protect her husband's privacy.

**Emotional/psychological** abuse was experienced or witnessed by almost all of the victims-survivors in the survey. This type of abuse is heavily prevalent that often gets overlooked due to its frequent normalization. The abuser employs this kind of abuse in an effort to strengthen and/or (re)gain coercive control over the victim-survivor. The abuser also uses emotional or psychological power to dominate the victim’s mental well-being and livelihood.

**Sexual abuse** was reported by just more than half of the respondents in the survey. The definition of sexual abuse transcribed by the HMF research team along with the conventional definition, included the practice of withholding sex, where the abuser restricts or withholds sexual interaction with the victim or survivor. The emotional abuse resulting from withholding of intimacy by an abuser adds to coercive control and makes the victim more vulnerable to ongoing abuse. Due to the survey’s length, sexual abuse was not looked at in more depth. The topic was investigated more in depth in the qualitative one-on-one interviews.

**Has the victim experienced these behaviors leading to physical abuse? This can be with or without injury. Check all that apply**

**Responses: 19**

Type of behavior	No. of affected victims
Pushing or Shoving	16 (84.2%)
Hitting, slapping, punching, kicking	15 (78.9%)



Pulling hair	11 (57.9%)
Using an object to hit	11 (57.9%)
Attempt of strangulation	9 (47.4%)
Burning (by cigarette or hot water)	1 (5.3%)

It was shocking to learn that a large percentage of our respondents had experienced or seen strangulation. Due to its potentially fatal consequences, strangulation is of paramount importance when considering physical abuse. A study found that 43% of women who were murdered in domestic assaults, and 45% of the victims of attempted murder, had been strangled by their partner within the year before. Women who were the victims of completed or attempted homicide are far more likely to have a history of strangulation compared to abused women in the control group.

Has the victim experienced these behaviors? These lead to emotional and psychological abuse. Check all that apply.

**Responses: 23**

Type of behavior	No. of affected victims
Stopped seeing friends and family because of the abuser	16 (66.7%)
Abuser was jealous and accused the victim of having affairs	13 (54.2%)





Victim experienced criticism and embarrassment in front of others	16 (66.7%)
Victim was afraid of making the abuser angry	19 (79.2%)
Victim felt anxious and scared in front of the abuser	17 (70.8%)
Abuser did not believe the victim or thought the victim was lying	12 (50%)
Victim was forced to think they were always wrong	16 (66.7%)
Abuser did not let the victim go out and let them do activities they liked	13 (54.2%)
Victim thought the abuser was difficult to please and what they do is not good enough	13 (54.2%)
Abuser avoided intimacy for extended periods as a form of control	12 (50%)

The majority of domestic abuse victims-survivors in the survey experienced extreme isolation, which included losing contact with friends and family, going outside less frequently, having fewer interactions with other people, and giving up things they enjoyed. In most of the responses, the abuser was highly envious of the victim-survivor, frequently insulted and shamed the victim-survivor in front of others and used their unwarranted mistrust of the victim-survivor to their advantage in order to manipulate and control them.



According to a report from 2022, psychological or emotional abuse was the most common type of spousal violence reported in Canada. Additionally, factors such as isolation and coercive behaviours are often intensified using emotional or psychological abuse. Coercive control, hence, is sometimes referred to as “invisible chains” since this form of abuse is not always visible.

Immigration also intensifies the emotional abuse experienced amongst immigrant families. As a result of adjusting to a new culture, a new language, and practicing Islam in a society that is predominantly non-Islamic, recently immigrated families to Canada may experience emotions such as despair, guilt, anger, and anxiety. Additionally, many recently immigrated individuals often struggle to control their emotions in healthy ways, which in-turn leads to their becoming even more emotionally abusive to their spouse. This point of view is particularly relevant to the research because most of the victims and survivors in the study had immigrated to Canada at some point in their lives, and the recency of their immigration undoubtedly increased the intensity of the domestic abuse they were facing.

**Which of the following behaviours were witnessed/experienced as emotional abuse? Check all that apply.**

**Responses: 23**

Type of behavior	No. of affected victims
Screaming/Swearing/Raging/Yelling	16 (66.7%)
Accusing and blaming, threatening	13 (54.2%)
Using sarcasm, undermining ideas	16 (66.7%)



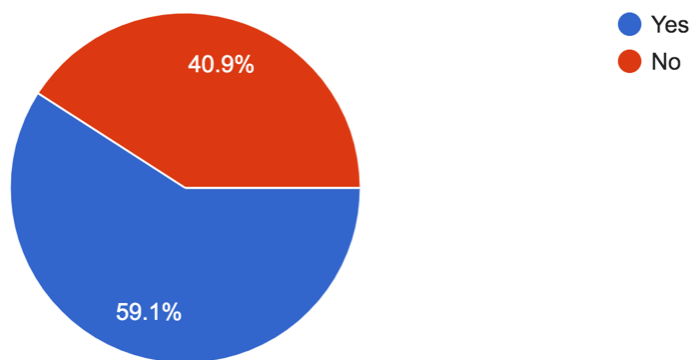
Discounting the victim's feelings, diverting the issue, denial of the blame	19 (79.2%)
Withholding silent treatment	17 (70.8%)

Almost all of the respondents either witnessed or experienced screaming/swearing/yelling/raging; accusing/blaming/threatening; discounting the victim-survivor's feelings or diverting the issue; withholding or silent treatment; using sarcasm and undermining the victim-survivor's ideas.

Emotional abuse may be the most common type of abuse deployed on the victim-survivor because it encompasses a plethora of abusive tactics and measures such as emotional/psychological manipulation, gaslighting, coercive control, verbal insults, humiliation, and many others as seen in our participants' responses. As a whole, emotional abuse can take many different forms and affect victims and survivors in negative ways that persist for a very long time.

### Has the victim experienced emotional abuse by in-laws?

Responses: 22



Abuse by in-laws can come from mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, and extended family. A study by Peaceful Families

reported that immigrants who experience domestic abuse typically live with their in-laws and other relatives, which increases the risk of the victim being exposed to multiple abusers in an abusive family. Abuse by in-laws falls under a type of abuse by proxy, which occurs when the abuser inflicts harm upon the abuser through a family member.

From the in-law's point of view, daughters-in-law are considered outsiders and are tasked with taking care of the son or male members of the household in relation to their basic needs (cooking, cleaning, doing laundry etc.), and are respected mostly in their child-rearing and caregiving roles. Race, class, economic status of the girl's family, and colorism are all factors that add to this kind of power dynamic.

Abuse by in-laws is prevalent in South Asian, Arab, Indian, Asian, and some other cultures. In these cultures, the daughter is viewed as someone else's property after marriage and is never given a permanent place in her family's home. These cultures have an earlier age of marriage as compared to western countries, hence girls don't fully develop the agency and understanding of their rights. This along with immigrating soon after the marriage has an adverse effect on the victim-survivor of domestic abuse.

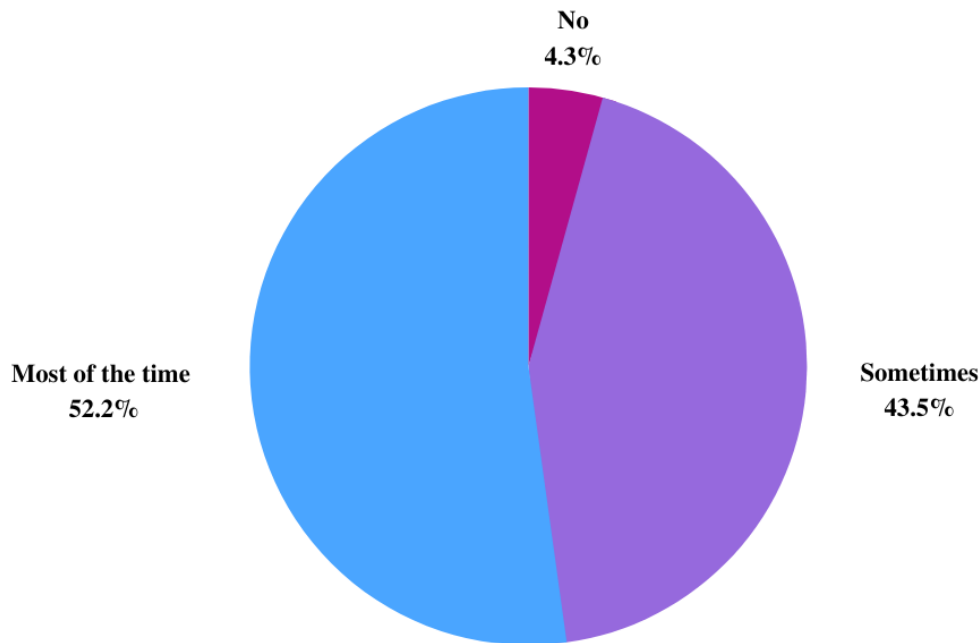
Although abuse in this form can be physical, oftentimes it presents itself as verbal and mental abuse, and it is far worse if the girl is living with her in-laws. Shame and guilt are most commonly used to coercively control the victims of this type of abuse.

Because our survey respondents consisted of individuals who were at some point an immigrant to Canada, most of them immigrated as a nuclear family and so abuse by in-laws was not as common as it would be in their native country.



## Did the abuser have a bad or unpredictable anger?

Responses: 23



Displaying a pattern of unpredictable temper is a major sign of emotional abuse which can lead to physical violence. The abuser oftentimes uses his/her bad temper to threaten and/or control the victim. The unpredictable nature of anger is also used to coercively entangle a person.

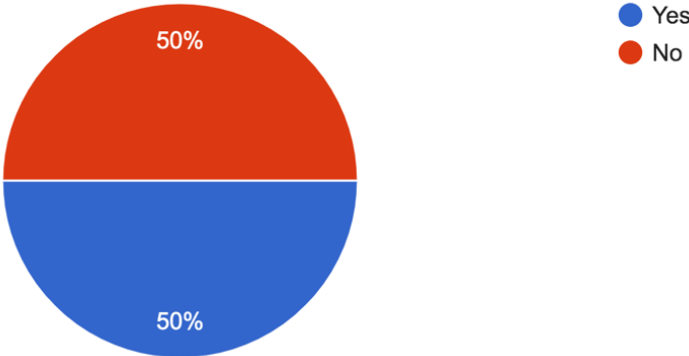
Unpredictability incites fear, which is used to exert control and power and further enable the abuser in gaining more influence over the daily life in the home. Because coercive control is covert, the abuser need not be present at all times to be effective.

Additionally, research has indicated that women are more prone to experiencing sadness or depression in response to stress than men, who are more likely to experience anger. Men are also much more likely than women to resort to physical violence as a way to express their anger, regardless of how absurd or unreasonable.



**Did the abuser threaten to cause harm to the child(ren)? This can include neglectful care when they are with the child. This is a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated incident.**

Responses: 22



An extensive literature review by Van Horn and Lieberman in 2004 indicated that violence against women is associated with greatly increased risk of child abuse. Violence against children can lead to a range of impacts. In 2019, there were close to 70,000 cases of police-reported violence against child and youth victims in Canada; and one-third (32%) of those children and youth were victimized by a family member. In families where one parent is abusing another, children are also physically abused in 50% of those cases.

In the relationship, the abuser sometimes uses the children to control the victim, and if the children are a product of that marriage, then the abuser uses the children to also emotionally harm the victims. Children get victimized even further after separation or divorce due to the statutory default of shared parenting. When the children are in the abuser’s care, they either experience the same physical, emotional and in some cases sexual abuse that the victim was once subjected to.

**Did the victim experience these? These behaviours lead to financial abuse in a relationship. Financial abuse happens when someone uses money or property to control or exploit the other. Check all that apply.**

Responses: 19

Type of behavior	No. of affected victims
Took away the victim’s money or property without permission	12 (63.2%)
Took away or limited the victim’s money to control them	12 (63.2%)
Pressured the victim to sign documents	14 (73.7%)
Forced the victim to sell things or change a will	2 (10.5%)
Affected the victim’s job	5 (26.3%)
Tracked and put limits on the victim’s expenses (multiple incidents/patterns of behaviour)	9 (47.4%)

The implications of financial abuse are significant. In the majority of the responses, the abuser spent, tracked, limited, and/or took away the victim-survivor’s money and possessions without the victim-survivor’s permission.

Close to half of the responders said the abuser affected the victim-survivor’s job. This is also known as absenteeism, which is defined as an employee’s regular absence from their place of employment. Abusers frequently try to



delay or sabotage their spouse's journey to work, making them late or forcing them to miss work and overall, negatively affect the victim-survivor's work performance.

The Government of Canada reported in 2022 that along with the physical and mental effects of domestic abuse, economic vulnerability can further increase the risk of both experiencing and remaining in an abusive relationship which in turn may hinder a woman's ability to maintain employment and further lead to economic dependence on their abuser. It can also be the case where the abuser is not employed themselves, but is in full control of, and reaps the benefits of the victim-survivor's income and employment.

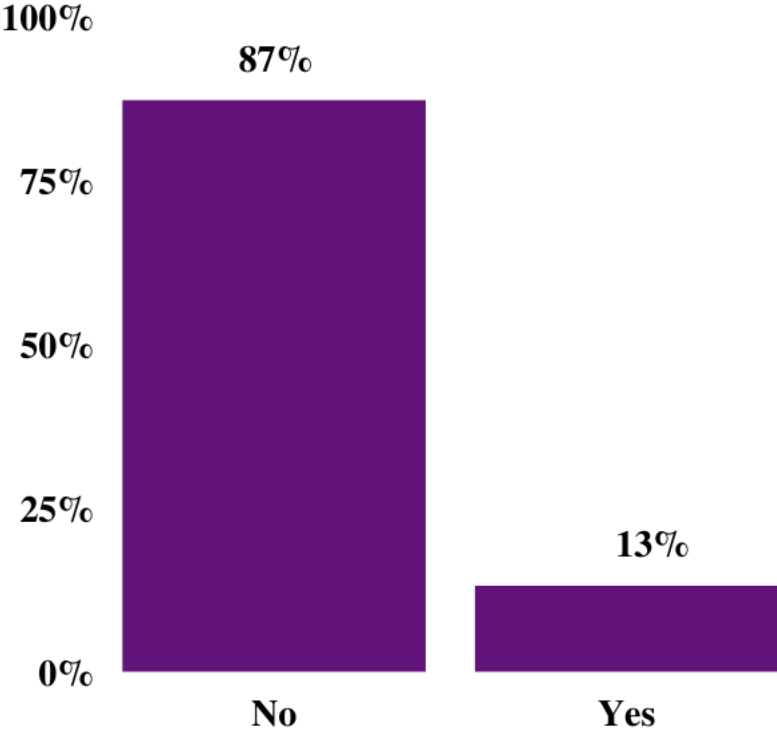
Abusive partners may also repeatedly attempt to interfere with the victim-survivor's job by limiting her ability to make a living or even convincing or forcing her to quit. This makes the woman feel financially dependent on the abuser (even if she is not) and trapped in the relationship. In hindsight, it is easier for the victims to reflect on the reasons for staying in the relationship for longer, but the period of abuse is an extremely confusing situation which makes it harder for them to recognize and leave the abuse.





**Do you think that it is sometimes justifiable to use violence on a partner? If yes, please explain.**

Responses: 23



The above question was included to gain a better insight into what people's perceptions were of using violence in any case or scenario. It was surprising to find that three of the 23 respondents believed using violence against a partner could occasionally be justified. The research team sought to explore the reasoning behind their choice, however, none of the three individuals who answered provided one.

'Violence' is a stronger word and one with a wider meaning. Not much can be interpreted without knowing the reasons why the three respondents chose this option. However, because the survey was answered by people who are aware of the basic definition of abuse, it is a significant finding. It is a reflection of the diverse ways of thinking prevalent in the community in regard to the use of violence on a partner. Even 3 respondents answering that it is sometimes



justifiable to use violence on a partner speaks volumes about the way many others might think regarding this topic.

## **Have you tried to help the victim when you witnessed domestic abuse? It can also mean bringing it to someone's notice if you were a child when you witnessed it.**

Responses: 23

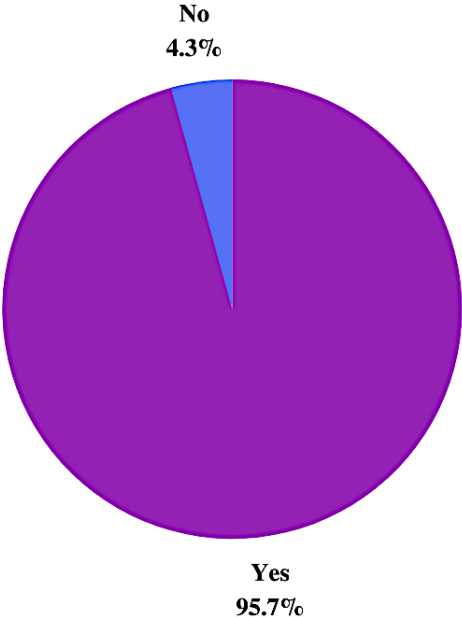


Whether to help a victim or not depends on the situation that the abuse is witnessed in, the safety in contacting the victim, reporting the abuse, the stigma around the issue of domestic abuse, and the individual's own beliefs about domestic abuse or family violence. The conclusion that the majority made an effort to assist is encouraging given that everyone who responded to the survey recognized the situation they encountered was undoubtedly one of abuse.

The fact that half of the respondents are victims or survivors and the majority of them made steps to assist despite their own vulnerabilities and suffering makes this finding all the more remarkable. It can be concluded that the majority of people wish to help the victims of domestic abuse even if they don't have a definite idea of how to do it safely or effectively.

**Are you aware that children exposed to sights, sounds, and stress of DV can be affected as if they are being directly abused themselves and the effects can be long-lasting?**

Responses: 23



This question was added to help raise awareness about the harm that children experience as a result of family violence and to provide important information about it. Lifelong health and opportunities are greatly impacted by childhood experiences. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic incidents to which children and adolescents may be exposed while they are maturing. Some of the leading forms of Adverse Childhood Experiences include experiencing divorce, witnessing violence against the mother, enduring or witnessing emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse (ACEs). These Adverse experiences during childhood can be long-lasting.

**Which of the following reasons can prevent the victim from reporting the abuse? Check all that apply.**

Responses: 23

Reasons given:	No. of Respondents
To keep the family together	22 (91.7%)
Feeling a religious obligation	12 (50%)
Refugee/immigrant status may be affected	7 (29.2%)
Fear of retaliation/revenge from the abuser	17 (70.8%)
Fear of backlash from the community	17 (70.8%)
Stigma/shame and embarrassment	17 (70.8%)
Lack of trust in the legal system	8 (33.3%)
To protect the cultural safety of the children	14 (58.3%)

This question asked poll respondents about various barriers that might have hindered the victim-survivor of domestic abuse from coming forward with information about their abuser.

The majority of the causes for delaying help-seeking were linked to the values and norms established by socio-culture and/or the immigration context. Women's silence and marital/family obligations are most often fuelled by socio-culturally embedded subordinate role of women and the superiority of

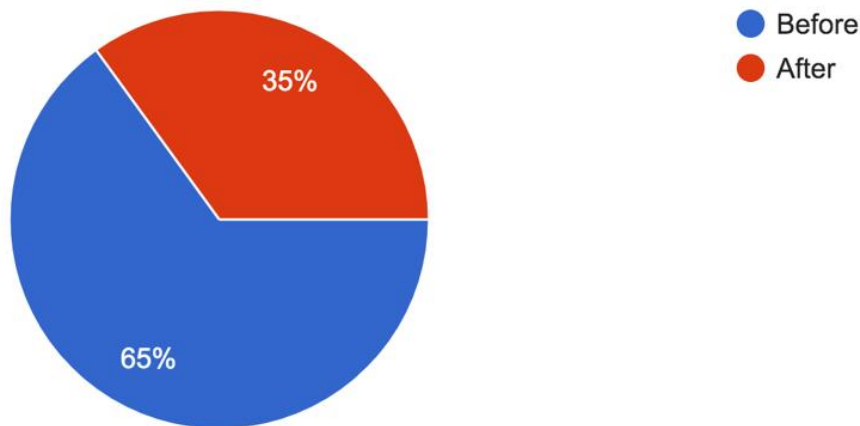


men. Many women, especially from south Asian backgrounds often feel that such a disclosure of abuse would bring suffering and loss of respect for their family and parents. This persistence is exacerbated by the community turning a blind eye to the issue or alienating the women who do come forward about the abuse they face.

**Immigration:** Two questions on immigration and post-immigration specific were included. Although these questions don't highlight the coercive control, if any, experienced by the victims before their immigration, they still give us a good insight into immigration and physical violence.

### **Immigration: Did the abuser start to show violent behaviour before or after coming to Canada?**

Responses: 20



This is a significant finding since it shows that victims-survivors answering the survey were already in stressful situations before their arrival. And upon coming to Canada, they continued to deal with the abuse in addition to other newly surfaced factors such as language barriers, economic dependence, childbearing, culture shock, loss of home and family and friends, extreme weather affecting mental and physical health, lack of knowledge about the local laws and culture, social isolation, etc. after their arrival.

This further adds to their vulnerability and the power dynamics of abuse and from this, we can conclude that if not in a physically violent relationship, the variables mentioned above add a significant measure to the coercion and control and still lead to a significant degree of emotional and psychological abuse.

**Immigration: According to you, which of these factors affect immigrant women experiencing abuse the most? Check all that apply.**

Responses: 20

Options given	No. of Respondents
Financial stress	18 (85.7%)
Adjusting to new cultural circumstances	13 (61.9%)
Loss of connection with family and friends	19 (90.5%)
Changes in gender roles and responsibilities after immigration	15 (71.4%)
Beliefs about divorce – Negative reaction of family or community	13 (61.9%)
Taking care of young children without extra support	14 (66.7%)
Lack of information on the steps to deal with life after separation	1 (4.8%)

The next question on immigration wanted inquired into which factors most affected immigrant Muslim women experiencing abuse. Migration is not



without challenges for immigrant women coming to Canada. These women tend to experience multiple oppressions not only from their own community but also from the dominant society based on their immigrant and ethnic minority status. It is safe to say that immigrant women face some of the worst outcomes of domestic abuse which often follow them for the rest of their lives.

## **SECTION A: AWARENESS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE:**

The final half of our questionnaire's Section A was added for the purposes of raising awareness among survey respondents on the effects of domestic abuse.

**Did you know that one out of three women will be abused in their lifetime by an intimate partner? This staggering statistic applies across race, religion, nationality, age, ethno-cultural and economic statuses?**

Responses: 23

Response	No. of Respondents
Yes	18 (78.3%)
No	5 (21.7%)



**Did you know that it is not just men and children who suffer from domestic abuse but men as well?**

Responses: 23

Response	No. of Respondents
Yes	18 (78.3%)
No	5 (21.7%)

**Exiting a relationship is the most unsafe time for a victim. Did you know that it takes a woman on an average 7 times to leave an abusive relationship before staying away for good?**

Responses: 23

Response	No. of Respondents
Yes	18 (78.3%)
No	5 (21.7%)

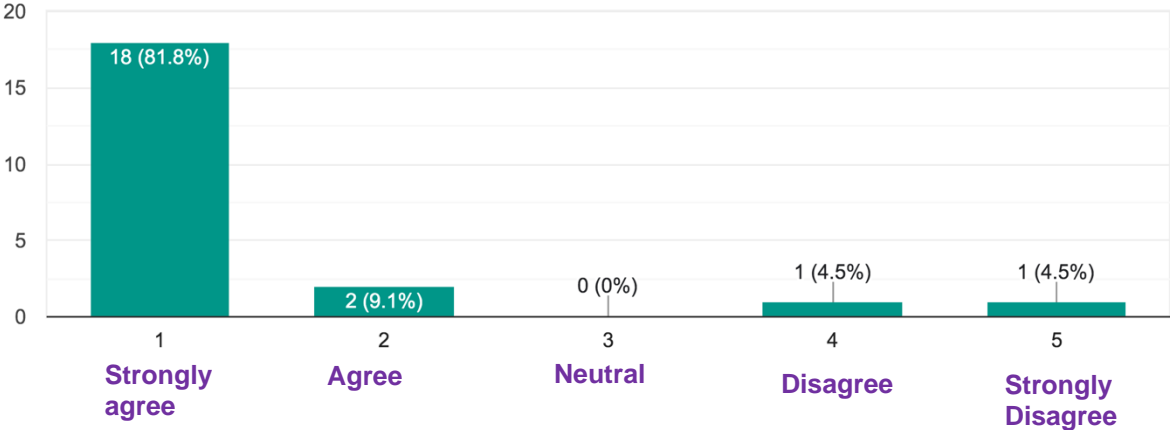
The responses to the previous three questions show that there is a reasonably good awareness of domestic abuse in general. One significant finding to note is that the participants were well aware of the fact that men also are victims of abuse in some situations. This fact was understood better than others. It shows the sensitivity that men and women respondents of the survey have in regard to abuse related to men versus other facts about domestic violence. In turn, this highlights the dominant position of males in the community as a society in general.





**Do you agree that certain cultural practices can be misunderstood and lead to domestic abuse and coercive control? Example: Leadership role of the male in the family may sometimes be used to oppress females in the household although the leadership role of a man in the family is upheld in Islam.**

Responses: 22



The next question sought to gain a better insight into whether the Muslim community in Manitoba equates cultural relativism with religion. In many Muslim households, the line between cultural practices and religion is often times blurred, which the abuser fully makes use of in excusing his abusive behaviour.

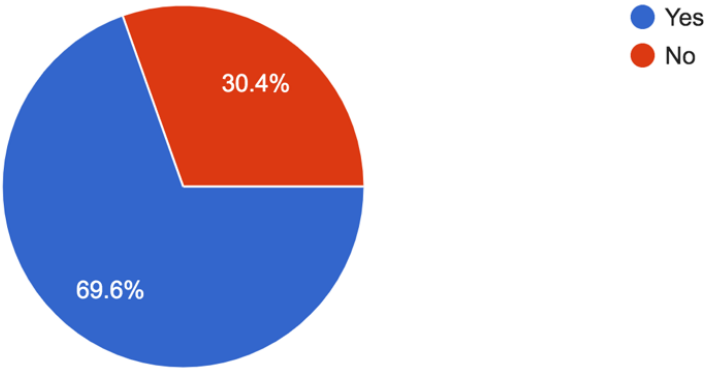
For example, in Islam the male head of the home is regarded as the family's guardian, while the female is in charge of the family's home and the children. This is intended to strike a balance between the two units and foster harmony within the family. However, in Muslim households, cultural norms and traditions frequently distort and misinterpret this idea to indicate that men have complete and utter power over the family as the head. This view is incorrect



and it supports and justifies the violence against women where they are made to suffer the abuse in silence because they do not want to appear disrespectful of their perceived religious obligations.

**Has the abuser used religious text to justify/threaten/force to excuse his/her behaviour?**

Responses: 23

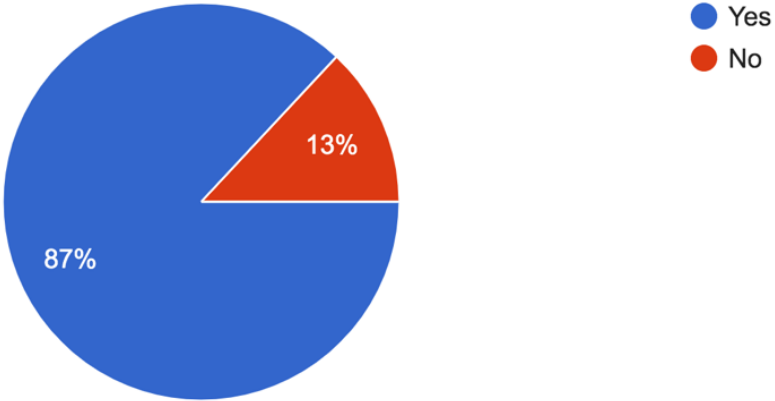


Religious or spiritual abuse is fairly prevalent in immigrant households that creates greater complexities in a domestic abuse case. In order to assert their superiority over the victim-survivor, the abuser frequently misquotes a Quranic verse, makes unsupported claims about the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and occasionally even misrepresents cultural customs with Islam. The line between religion and cultural standards are frequently blurred in households, which the abuser takes advantage of.



# Do you think that children exposed to domestic abuse are more likely to become abusers themselves?

Responses: 23



This is true in that the impacts of domestic abuse go way beyond the immediate reactions. A study found that children who are exposed to domestic abuse are at a higher risk for emotional, social, and behavioral difficulties including PTSD symptoms, cognitive impairment, and peer/social problems and that witnessing violence between parents increases the risk of children perpetrating violence later in their own lives.

# SECTION B: VICTIMS/SURVIVOR SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

This section consisted of questions on the victim's psychological state at the time of, and after the abuse, the ages of their children at the time of the abuse, the length of their marriage, and details about reactive abuse.

**Which of the following have you experienced at the time of and after the abuse? Check all that apply.**

Responses: 20

Options given	No. of Respondents
Hopelessness, anxiety, loneliness	20 (95.2%)
Anger towards self or the abuser	17 (81%)
Self-criticism/self-loathing	15 (71.4%)
Suicidal thoughts	6 (28.6%)
Difficulty in functioning due to stress	17 (81%)
Physical health problems because of stress related to the abuse	17 (81%)
Self-written response: Child developed anxiety on top of ADHD	1 (4.8%)

A majority of the victims-survivors described experiencing feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, loneliness, anger towards self or the abuser, self-loathing, difficulty in functioning due to stress, and physical health problems

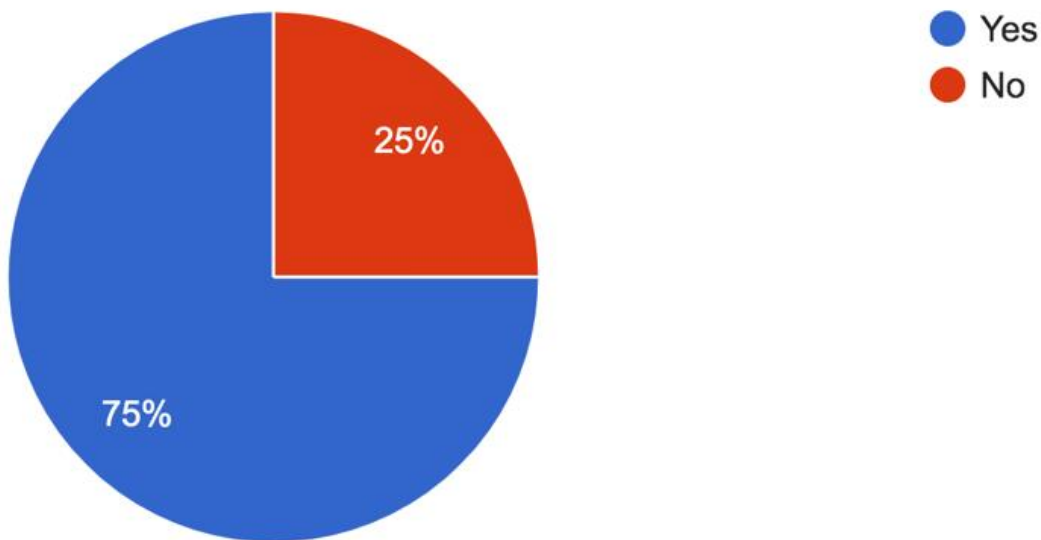


because of stress related to the abuse. Some victims-survivors had thoughts of suicide, and one participant's child developed anxiety on top of their ADHD at the time of the abuse (5%).

After the victim-survivor decides to leave the abusive partner, the impacts of the abuse continue long afterwards. Many times, if victims-survivors do not receive adequate help, they have to deal with the adverse effects for the rest of their life.

**Reactive abuse occurs when the victim reacts to the abuse they are experiencing. The victim may scream, toss out insults, or even lash out physically at the abuser. The abuser then retaliates by telling the victim that they are, in fact, the abuser. Has this happened to you?**

Responses: 20



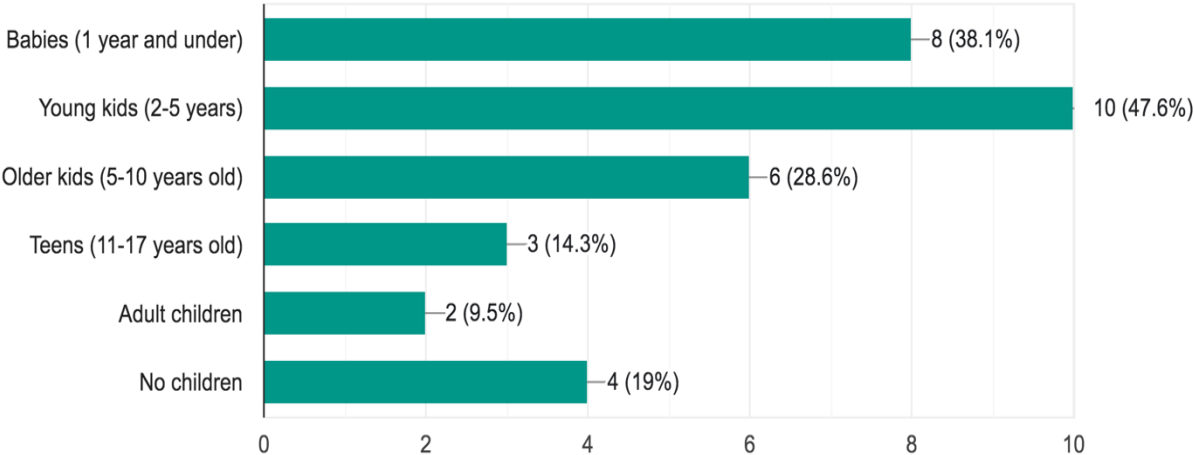
This finding might also be due to the fact that those who witnessed abuse may not have witnessed this aspect in particular. Studies show that reacting to the abuse is like self-defence or violent resistance to coercive control.

Moreover, this supports the conclusion that majority of the victims reacted to the abuse and experienced consequences because of that; and that they only showed violent or aggressive behaviour as a defence mechanism to the abuse they were facing, and/or to ward off the abuser.

The distinguishing points between this self-defence and mutual abuse are that the victim-survivor has not had established abusive tendencies, he/she will feel guilt, he/she will not initiate violence and this behavior is seen only after a breaking point is reached. In many cases victims reacting to coercive control have even killed the perpetrators due to the chronicity of the abuse and extreme control. Though there has been no evidence of this occurring in the Manitoba Muslim community.

### What were the ages of your children at the time of the abuse? (In years)

Responses: 21



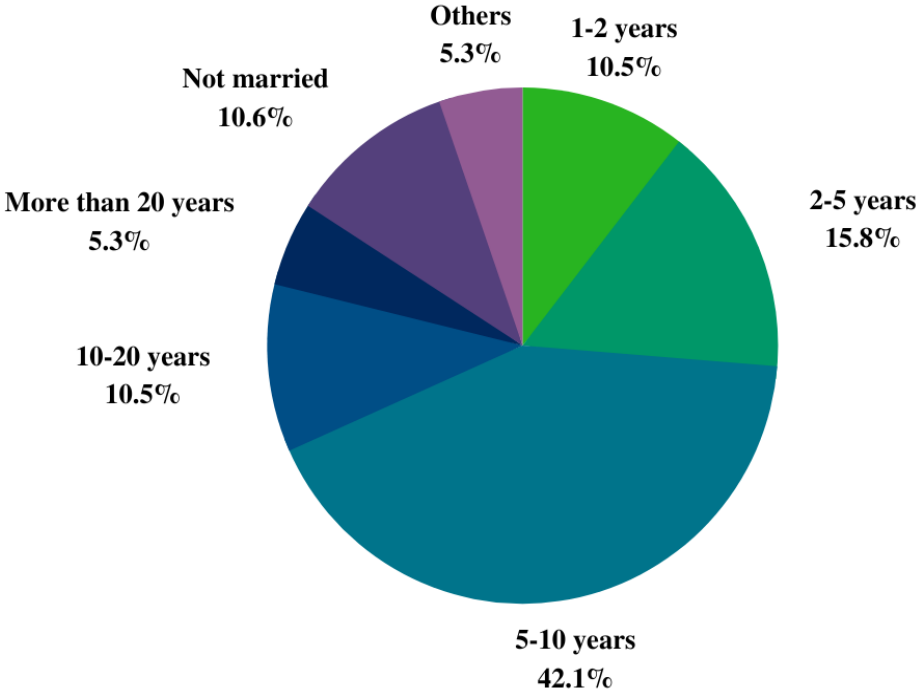
The age of the child is a major factor in the extent of the abuse endured by both the victim and children. Stats Canada in 2021 that younger children had the highest proportion of family violence. More than 71% of victims aged 5 and younger were victimized by a family member. Older children may hold more awareness and autonomy about DV/A and may even try to intervene when they see the abuse taking place.



Whether there are two parents or just one, children thrive in a secure, predictable, and loving environment. One may believe that if their child(ren) never witnesses the abuse, they won't be negatively impacted by it. However, children are also able to hear violent behaviours like yelling and striking, and they are also capable of sensing stress and worry in the home. As a result, even if the child does not witness the abuse, they could still face negative and lasting effects from the violence they are aware of is happening within the four walls of their home.

### How long have you been married or how long did the marriage last if you are currently separated or divorced?

Responses: 19



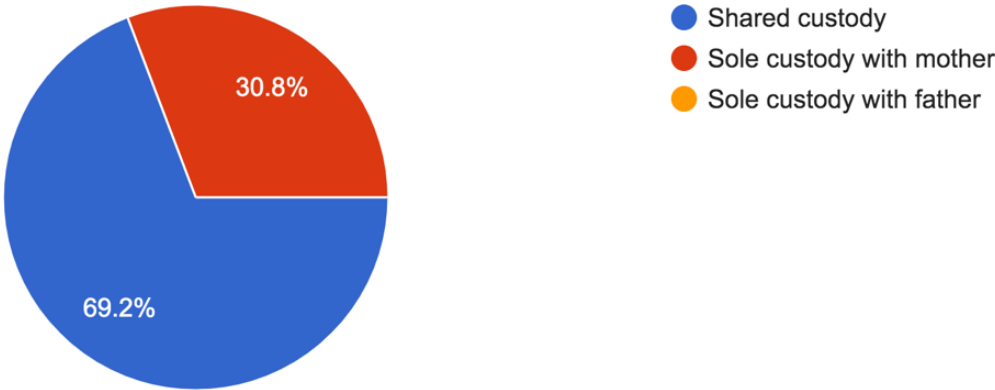
Separation and divorce are major life events that adversely affect entire families and especially children. The initial part of separation is not only dangerous and turbulent but fraught with many significant changes in terms



of child custody and parenting time, legal proceedings, financial strain, and disputes over parenting arrangements and supports. The longer the duration of the marriage, the more disadvantaged the victim-survivor is in terms of healing the trauma and achieving economic stability.

### **What is the status of the children’s custody after separation or divorce?**

Responses: 19



Young children have many needs, and this places an enormous burden on the mother (in most cases). This is especially true in immigrants because of the lack of family support and the nuclear family system. This also adds to the power dynamic of abuse and disharmony in the marital relationship. Most of our responses had children in the early years of childhood. If the abuse is more insidious, psychological, or in a coercively controlled relationship without much physical violence, it’s not uncommon to see victim-survivors tolerate the abuse for longer periods of time for the sake of their children’s education and financial needs. These victims-survivors might separate much later in life. Earlier separations and divorces are also a result of the victim wishing their children not to experience the same physical and mental abuse.





**Which of the following reasons made you seek help? Check all that apply.**

Responses: 18

Options given	No. of Respondents
Increase in the severity of the violence	13 (72.2%)
Your life was in danger	3 (16.7%)
Children’s well-being was threatened	4 (22.2%)

Some responders provided their own reasons for seeking out help in their responses, citing sadness, self-realization, and finally reaching their breaking point.

In a qualitative study on women seeking help for domestic violence situations, women recounted long periods of ambivalence, only disclosing after leaving the perpetrator. In the study most of the help came from police or housing agencies following a crisis such as an assault and rarely from medical providers despite multiple consultations for anxious and depressed feelings.

For some women, protecting the children becomes a priority when seeking help; and for some preventing intergenerational transfer of trauma is a major reason for them seeking help.



## SECTION B: RESOURCES:

In this section of the survey, victims-survivors were asked various questions about the kinds of services and assistance they found useful, the barriers they encountered when looking for those resources, and their views of the resources currently available to victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

### What were some barriers that made it difficult for you in seeking help from specific resources? (Check all that apply)

Responses: 21

Options given	No. of Respondents
Cost of receiving help (legal help)	16 (72.7%)
Childcare is not accessible or too expensive	12 (54.5%)
Transportation issues	11 (50%)
Service location too far away	7 (31.8%)
Language barrier	8 (39.4%)
Fear of going alone/feeling unsafe (Police or court)	14 (63.6%)
Not knowing who to go to for help	1 (4.5%)
No family support, fear of being alone	1 (4.5%)
Chronic pain	1 (4.5%)



While there was a myriad of barriers that respondents faced, 76% of the respondents felt that they faced financial barriers such as the cost of receiving help (legal aid). 62% of the respondents were afraid of interacting with the police or court personals which may have been due to a lack of knowledge about the legal system and no family support during the process.

Studies from Canada show that immigrant victims-survivors of domestic abuse are repeatedly excluded from services owing to humiliation brought on by their circumstances of poverty, unemployment, and related problems. In these situations, the criminal justice system's professionals' lack of cultural and religious nuance and sensitivity makes it increasingly harder for these people to receive the resources and interventions that they may be in dire need of.

Early access to specialized domestic violence and abuse (DVA) services is necessary for women who are suffering (DVA). Many women need an "enabler" to help them gain access, but once they made contact, they felt justified in disclosing their condition to other professionals or to their family and friends.

**Which of the following resources have you used during or immediately after being abused? (Select all that apply)**

Responses: 19

Options given	No. of Respondents
Crisis lines	6 (31.6%)
Police	6 (31.6%)
Women’s shelter	8 (42.1%)
Imam/local masjid	6 (31.6%)



Consulted a lawyer	3 (15.8%)
Protection/restraining order	7 (36.8%)
Non-profits working with victims of domestic abuse	7 (38.8%)
Family and friends	1 (5.3%)
Therapy and counselling	12 (63.2%)

For victims and survivors of domestic abuse, therapy or counselling can be very helpful. Finding the right counselling services is essential for victims and survivors to discuss the effects of the abuse and to rebuild their confidence. The benefits of therapy or counselling for domestic violence victims and survivors include learning to recognize the warning signs of abuse, learning to create a safety plan, expressing your thoughts in a secure setting, and better understanding the many types and patterns of abuse.

Manitoba Islamic Association offers various types of counselling services and resources for Muslims in Manitoba under their program “Mental Health and Wellness”. Services include marriage and family counselling, emotional and spiritual wellness resources and support, and general psychotherapy among others.



**If you have been divorced legally, have you used any additional resources like these? (Check all that apply)**

Responses: 12

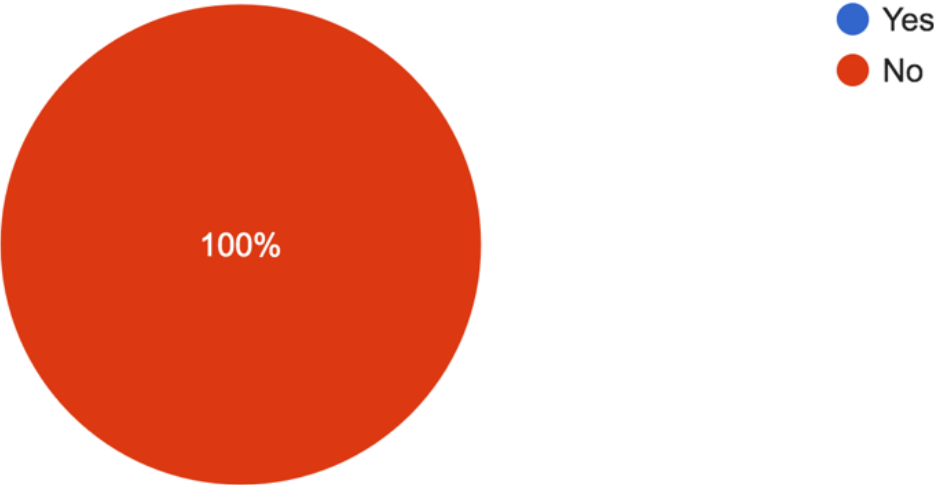
Options given	No. of Respondents
Legal aid	7 (58.3%)
Financial funding/help	2 (16.7%)
Parenting coach	1 (8.3%)
Self-represented in family court	1 (8.3%)
Community legal clinics	2 (16.7%)
Help from friends and women's organizations	1 (8.3%)
Therapy	1 (8.3%)

Victims-survivors were asked to check off any additional resources they may have used at the time of, or after separation or divorce. The majority of the respondents (7 out of 12) used legal aid as an additional resource (58%); 2 participants used community legal clinics (17%), and 2 participants used financial funding/help as an additional resource (17%).



**Currently, do you think that there are adequate support services for domestic abuse victims in the local Muslim community?**

Responses: 22



This alarming figure in the survey, where we found that all respondents selected answer choice 'no' exposes the insufficient support services that currently exist for domestic abuse victims-survivors in the local Muslim community and it highlights the progress that is still needed in this area of consideration.

## SECTION B: SURVIVORS POST-ABUSE:

The survey's final section included questions about post-abuse that we prepared specifically for victims-survivors to complete. Understanding the attitudes and experiences of domestic abuse victims-survivors following their experience with domestic abuse was the purpose of this section. Respondents were requested to write in their own answers rather than presenting them with a choice of options.

The first question in this section asked survivors how many attempts it took them before they were finally able to leave their abuser. Out of the 12 responses that were received; it took 5 victims-survivors more than 10 attempts before they finally left their abuser. 4 out of the 12 victims-survivors stated that it took them about 3 attempts before they finally left their abuser; and for 2 victim-survivors it took them 5-7 attempts before they were able to successfully leave their abuser.

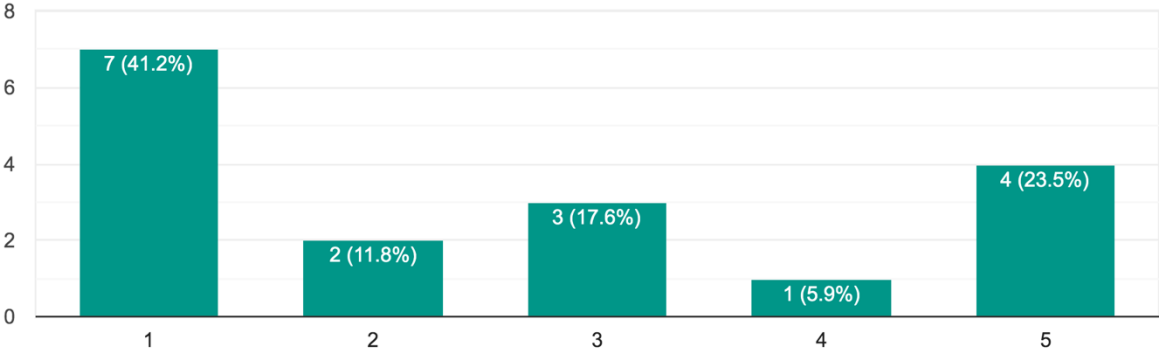
The mean, in this case, is closer to 7 which corresponds to the commonly stated average of 7 attempts required by a victim to leave the relationship.

The main reason women don't leave is fear – fear that they have nowhere to go and no one to turn to for help and resources. Martin et al. (2000) recognized that difficulties in relocation, legal issues, sharing child custody, termination of the emotional connection with the abuser, and disrupted social networks, placed the victim at higher risk of returning to the relationship.



# Do you agree that faith in God and your belief helped you in getting out of the abusive situation?

Responses: 17



Traumatic experiences can have detrimental effects on an individual’s religious outlook. The problems that are most impacted by spirituality and faith in God are those that include making sense of the traumatic experience, guilt over the experience, loss, and mourning. The delivery of services that provide a more holistic perspective acknowledges that each survivor’s experience and path toward recovery from abuse and trauma is distinct. It also emphasizes that the trauma survivor’s spirit, in addition to their physical and psychological wellbeing, requires healing. The grieving and rebuilding processes of victims-survivors of domestic violence can be significantly assisted by faith and spirituality.

Research and clinical observation have highlighted the manners in which spirituality and faith may support victims-survivors in countering their suffering and/or understanding their trauma and life purpose in a favorable way. Even when trauma survivors experience psychiatric problems like PTSD or depression, aspects of spirituality are linked to positive outcomes.

Additionally, studies show that in some trauma populations, a strong spirituality is prevalently linked to decreased levels of symptoms and psychiatric issues. For instance, after experiencing trauma, forgiveness,





spiritual convictions, or spiritual activities may help to subdue rage, anger, and the need for retribution.

The importance of spirituality is maybe especially true for victims-survivors from historically marginalized groups. It may be difficult for advocates and service providers who are not religious or spiritual to understand how important religion is to the lives of survivors of faith. It might be beneficial for nonreligious activists and service providers to consider a survivor's spiritual life and practice as a form of self-care. Spiritual communities may be one area to look for support and direction. For many people, religious and spiritual habits and beliefs are essential to processing, recovering from, and healing from trauma.

We asked survivors what helped to make a difference in their life. For the bulk of the survivors, listening without judgement, being open and available to talk, and having someone opening up to them about similar experiences made a positive difference in their life. Furthermore, this finding highlights the importance of having community support to get through the phases of trauma and healing. Although each individual's situation during separation is different, the process of healing is similar.

Post-traumatic growth emphasizes key sub-concepts such as interpersonal relationships, fresh opportunities, inner fortitude, spiritual development, and life appreciation.

In a study by Laura Senko et al, 7 healing domains were identified: (1) reconstructing identity, (2) reconnecting with the self, (3) regaining power and control, (4) cultivating worthiness, (5) relating to others, (6) rebuilding hope and a positive worldview, (7) finding peace. Their research revealed that in addition to the idea of post-traumatic growth, victims-survivors also underwent healing procedures including self-reflection, including identity reconstruction and reconnection with oneself.



Furthermore, Senko and others highlight that it is crucial to remember that individuals who have experienced interpersonal trauma, particularly those who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV), may need to take different healing considerations into account because the violence they experienced was an intentional violation of their bodily autonomy committed by a specific individual.

## Qualitative Data Analysis Results

For this section of the research, one-on-one interviews were held with individuals from the community in Manitoba including victims-survivors, Imams/Sheikhs, seniors from the Muslim community, Muslim lawyer(s), Muslim psychologist(s), Muslim physician(s), and marriage counsellor(s).

The questions included in the interviews were compiled by the HMF research team from the literature review. All individuals who were interviewed gave a personal account of their experiences and invaluable recommendations regarding this topic.

To compile the qualitative data, a total of 6 victims-survivors and 6 individuals from professional fields were interviewed. Most of the interviews were given in English; with the exception of two, one from a Muslim physician and the other from a senior member of the Muslim community who chose to give their interviews in Urdu. The interviews were manually transcribed from Urdu to English and matched with the other responses for themes and context.

A consideration to note is that all instances of abuse that are mentioned in this section took place in Canada after immigration.



The themes that were brought forward in the qualitative analysis were as follows:

## **SIGNS OF ABUSE/DENIAL OF ABUSE**

Some common initial signs of abuse that victims of DV/A noticed in their abusive relationships was a major theme in the qualitative report.

Some participants expressed seeing an abusive pattern where the abuser would start to exhibit controlling behaviour, manipulate, shame, and/or gaslight the victim-survivor as a means to scare, isolate and/or control them.

Many victims-survivors felt that they were initially in a state of denial for a period of time at the onset of the abuse. Victims-survivors would repeatedly give their abuser the benefit of the doubt and rationalize the abuse or see it as something “temporary”.

One participant expressed that for the first initial years she did not even comprehend she was being abused. *“He gave me the impression of verbal abuse; where he used to abuse me [in that way] and I would take it because I thought it was so normal in our relationship”*

One participant noted: *“I felt like for months I was gaslighting myself, I was in denial, and I thought that my whole purpose of being was just to please him and make him into something and in that process, I forgot to look after my own self”.*

Some participants expressed that as an act of self-preservation they would constantly shrink themselves down in order to cause the least amount of “inconvenience” to their abuser because they felt that by compromising or becoming obedient to their abuser, they would be able to minimize at least some of the abuse they were facing.



In many instances, coercive/controlling measures were undertaken by the abuser over the victim-survivor in order to isolate them from their friends, family, and community.

In one case, the participant noted: *"I felt very isolated and I thought that if I had minimal contact with people [from outside] and just did what I needed to do, then he would accept me and not abuse me anymore".*

The victim-survivor being isolated from their support systems (which is usually the case for newly immigrant women) played an integral part in the perseverance of the abuse they were facing because it is often the case that they do not have people around them they could count on for support which can be detrimental for them in their help-seeking efforts or even recognizing that they are facing abuse.

One participant stated in response to the question *"Because I lived very isolated, there was no one to talk to and remind me that this is in fact abuse that I am facing, no one told me to stop rationalizing my abusive situation and get out of it, and so I kept on putting up with it for a long time".*

Another participant mentioned that her abuser refused to let her work and instead made her stay at home and focus on their children, "Even if I wanted to work from home, he was against that, he just wanted me to give up everything and lose all contact with the outside world"

This is one of the ways how an abuser exercises control over the victim by making efforts to isolate them from the outside world where they could potentially talk to other individuals and get help.



## CHILDREN AND ABUSE

Another theme identified was how children were affected by abuse, separation, and divorce in the family.

A common reason found among the victim-survivors for leaving their abusive relationship was to preserve the safety and well-being of their child(ren). Some participants expressed taking many daring steps that they would otherwise not have considered taking in order to protect their children from potential harm.

In most cases, the victims-survivors only noticed the severity and seriousness of the abuse they were facing when it escalated into physical violence/harm to them or their children.

One participant mentioned: *"I only reached out to a counsellor when I got pregnant and my ex-spouse was still abusing me [in that state]; I reached out because it was not about me anymore, I had a responsibility to someone else who was coming into this world and this prompted me to reach out for help"*

Participant mentioned that it was extremely harder for their younger children to adjust post-separation. *"You don't even realize the pain that young children might be going through during all this because you can't talk to them properly about it and try to figure out what is going on in their head"*

A Muslim marriage counsellor expressed a similar outlook in their interview when in the impact that abuse and separation have on children.

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*"Children during this challenging time become highly confused and fearful of their surroundings, and they start to internalize the fear and confusion going through on inside and this can leave lasting impacts if they don't find the right support".*

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One participant mentioned that her ex-husband, after separation would use her children to threaten or incite fear. *“He [ex-husband] used to poison my son’s mind and tell him false and derogatory things about me so that my son takes his side and goes against me”.*

One participant mentioned that her abusive ex-husband completely stopped spending time with their son after separation *“He would not even share the same room as my son, nothing, no time spent with the child”.*

The same participant went on to express: *“My area of concern in my son’s personality, he has become a lot more aggressive since the separation; and I’m worried because I know that when children are not able to show or explain how they are feeling, it manifests in their behaviour”*

A psychologist who was interviewed noted that children who have been exposed to domestic abuse or family violence show score higher on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) test. This indicates the prevailing aftereffects of abuse on children.

Most of the individuals expressed that their children experienced many negative side-effects of DV/A such as becoming highly anxious, confused, isolated, aggressive, depressed, reclusive, etc. and most of the participants felt that therapy or counselling was necessary in order to help their child(ren) cope with the various negative effects of DV/A.

## **FINANCIAL ABUSE**

Almost all of the victim-survivors who were interviewed said they faced a form of financial hardships by their spouse at some point in their marriage or relationship. This manifested in ways such as the abuser making the victim completely dependent on him/her in an effort to strengthen the power dynamic over the victim, forcing the victim to limit their worktime or lose employment all together in order to cut them off from the outside world,



limiting the victim's expenses, and exploiting or controlling the victim's finances and resources etc.

One participant expressed: *"Even the idea of me working from home was rejected by my abusive ex all because he wanted me to cut all contact with the outside world and not let me have any financial autonomy"*

Having financial autonomy is paramount for victims of DV/A in order to get themselves out of the abusive relationship as soon as possible. By not having financial independency, the victim can suffer many additional consequences due to many different financial barriers and delay their help-seeking process. In many cases, the abuser understands this fully well and keeps the victim financially dependent on him/her so they are not able to leave the abuser.

Another participant mentioned that even though she was employed and was financially independent during her relationship, her ex-husband would still continue to exploit her and make her bear the burden of all the expenses in the household while also being abusive towards her physically and emotionally.

In her interview, the woman voiced: *"I was the one bearing all the expenses, he never paid for anything since we came to Canada and if he did, then he would demand it all back from me"*.

She went on to say *"When it came down to his siblings or parents, he did not even hesitate to give away his or my money but when it came to my son and I he would be unreasonably hesitant or would flat out refuse to spend any money on us...if I ever refused to give him money, he would become hyper and start physically abusing me, this only stopped when I called the police on him"*

Financial abuse can also occur when the abuser refuses to pay for child support. One victim in our interviews revealed: *"My ex often made threats that he was going to stop paying for child support. And many times, he did not*



*pay and only started again around the time when we had an upcoming Court hearing all in order to make himself look good”*

The consequences of financial abuse can negatively impact the lives of those affected even after they have exited the relationship in ways such as:

- ❖ Lack of financial literacy and missed opportunities for seeking employment due to dependence, isolation and control.
- ❖ Unbearable costs of legal proceedings and other help-seeking initiatives.
- ❖ Continuous financial abuse through abusers’ refusal to pay for child support and to drag out family law Court proceedings.

## RELIGIOUS ABUSE

In the interviews conducted, religious/spiritual abuse was a common form of abuse deployed on the victim-survivor.

One victim-survivor noted that she faced religious coercion where her ex-spouse and his family members would force her to watch various religious lectures, videos and texts and **“prescribe to certain religious leaders and their thoughts”** against her choice which she described as another way to control her religious autonomy and only to **“fulfill their purpose”** of dominating over her. Any refusal to listen to certain lectures by the victim-survivor was met with abuse, backlash and shame from the abuser and his family.

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*“I realized how wrong this was because my ex and his family themselves were not the most religious people and rarely ever prayed, but when it came to me, they would dictate any and every religious thing I consumed and if I didn’t comply [with their demands], they would label me as a bad Muslim”.*

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One participant mentioned: *“In our community, my ex-husband and his family were known for being very religious, and people equated it to them being morally righteous and they had no idea about the abuse that I was enduring behind closed doors”*

She went on to say *“Because people in our community did not think of me as a religious person, they were more inclined to side with my ex-husband and his family; and were far more distrusting of me when I opened up about the abuse, they put me through. The community’s distrust created a major barrier for me in seeking help”*

In some cases, the abuser misused religious texts from the Quran or cited inaccurate ‘fatwas’ (a ruling on a point of Islamic law) in order to get the victim-survivor to comply with their demands.

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*“My ex-husband would refuse to let me go visit my family and would say that he is well within his rights to refuse to let me go on the basis of some random Quranic text or fatwa taken out of context which he only brought up to serve his purpose”*

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**Suggestion:** Similar to many other faith-based communities, Muslims' understanding of and response to domestic abuse and violence is shaped by religious and cultural interpretation. However, when talking about the experiences of Muslims who have experienced domestic abuse and violence, it is crucial to recognise how religious and cultural misunderstandings can result in further abuse and the stigmatisation of the victim.



## CYBER CRIME

Cyber-crime which is defined as any crime where the use of internet, computer, tablet, phone has a substantial role in carrying out the criminal offence. Domestic abuse can take place online.

In one case, a participant mentioned that her abuser kept private pictures of her saved in his phone without her consent which he later used as a means to blackmail her with after they were separated.

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*“He constantly blackmailed me with my intimate pictures and threatened to release them to my family members and the community to assassinate my character”*

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Another instance of cybercrime came up in the interviews where one victim-survivor described her abuser taking inappropriate photographs of their son without any consent and then threatening the victim that if she did not comply with his demands, he would use those pictures to incriminate her and say that she is spreading inappropriate pictures of their son.

## THIRD-PARTY ABUSE

Third party abuse was identified in many of the interviews, namely abuse by in-laws. This type of abuse is highly prevalent in South Asian, Arab, Indian, and many other cultures. Abuse by in laws can come from mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, extended family, and many times the spouse is a perpetrator as well.

In one case, the victims-survivors described that her mother-in-law would take total control of the victim’s house and constantly overstep the victim’s boundaries. *“We were living in a one-bedroom apartment and she [mother-in-law] would come to stay with us for months at a time and there was no*



*sense of personal space and if I said anything then my ex and mother-in-law would gang up on me; it was a two against 1 kind of thing”*

One participant described that her abusive ex-husband would hit her in front of his sisters, and that instead of stopping him, they would encourage his abusive behaviour.

## **COERCIVE CONTROL AND GASLIGHTING**

Instances of coercive control and gaslighting were evident in almost all of the participants who were interviewed. *“He would mentally torture me by never calling me by my name and instead using derogatory words to refer to me and did many other things to humiliate me; when I confronted him and told him what he was doing, he would call me crazy and say that I’m making it all up in my head. This was all a part of his mind games that he was playing with me”*

Another victim-survivor mentioned that her husband treated her more as his puppet and not his wife *“I felt that he wanted to have this person that he could dictate to or control for his personal satisfaction; He was the puppet master, and I was his puppet”.*

Gaslighting and coercive control were correlated with psychological abuse, financial abuse, and religious abuse, meaning that the abuser often deployed methods of gaslighting and coercive control to inflict some of the types of abuse mentioned above.



## INFIDELITY

Cases of infidelity (which is defined as the act or fact of having a partner outside of one's marriage) often came up in the interviews.

In one of the accounts, the participant's ex-husband was cheating on her for a long period of their marriage and she only got to find out about it through her ex-husband's sisters.

In another instance, the participant mentioned: *"I had a deep distrust in my ex-husband, because his parents would often call me tell me not to let my ex-husband go to Pakistan alone because he had plans to marry another woman without telling anyone including me".*

Since polygamy is illegal in Canada, it is often the case that men go back to their home country and remarry where it is permissible under the law often without informing their first wife or family members.

Although infidelity did not come up in most of the cases in the interviews, there were still signs and threats of unfaithfulness by the abuser which highlights that infidelity is still existent in the community.

## HELP-SEEKING: SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Another theme was various help-seeking methods that victims-survivors used in their help-seeking process. Some participants sought support and help from their friends and university colleagues.

In recalling her help seeking journey, one participant mentioned: *"One girl I met once who had also escaped her abuser offered me a place to stay and that touched me so much".*



There were also cases where the victim-survivors' parents were supporting them from back home: *"When I had separated from my husband my father from Pakistan supported me with legal expenses and child support, because I had no other way of covering my expenses and his help provided me much relief"*.

Another participant expressed that if it wasn't for her family's support including her parents and siblings, then her children would find it extremely challenging to adjust after separating from her ex-husband. *"Even though we did not have a traditional nuclear family, my children were still growing up in a good environment, around my family members who gave them comfort and support and kept them in touch with their religion and spirituality"*.

## **HELP-SEEKING: THERAPY/COUNSELLING/NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS/HEALTH-CARE PROVIDER**

In the interviews, it was found that women frequently sought therapy, counselling, and support from non-profit organizations for both themselves and their children. A participant remarked that receiving free counselling through her institution was very beneficial in the process of seeking help.

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*"The counselling service really helped me because I got contact for various women's shelters; and I realized that when you are going through abuse, it is very important to have these resources handy even if you don't intend on using them"*.

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One mother said that after escaping her abusive marriage, she enrolled all of her children in therapy and counselling, which she realized was very necessary for them.

Additionally, after witnessing how much therapeutic treatment helped her, one mother voiced her desire to enrol her daughter in therapy. She stated that



counselling had improved her thinking patterns and her ability to stand up for herself during her abuse and after leaving the abuse.

Another woman said that during her healing process, she underwent multiple therapy sessions and finished a course in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), both of which she considered to be extremely beneficial in her circumstance.

The significance of encouraging newcomers to seek out therapy and counselling services was raised as a key point in one of the interviews: *“People who are not supported by family or who don't have family, they need to go to therapy for finding support”*.

Some women sought out help from Muslim organizations such as ICNA, MIA, HMF, etc. One woman found that by getting in touch with Healthy Muslim Families, she did not feel alienated from the community. *“Even receiving small gift baskets from HMF was so heart-warming for my daughter and I because we felt so isolated from everything after separating from my ex-husband”*.

One woman recounted contacting a Manitoba-based Muslim organisation, but they were unhelpful and/or took a very long time to respond to her inquiries about separation and divorce.

She told: *“I would say as someone coming to you for help, don't just judge my entire situation and give me absolutes based on phone conversation without fully hearing me out”*.

A Muslim physician who was interviewed mentioned that the patients she found who were facing abuse at home did not come to her on the basis of the fact that they were experiencing abuse. However, it became evident from other things related to their background that they were in this situation.

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*“On the surface, I can't tell whether one of my patients is going through domestic abuse, but once I get to know them more*



*and they frequent my clinic then I can tell they are facing abuse. Most times I see it among young women who came here recently, who have just gotten married face the most abuse”.*

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## **HELP-SEEKING: LEGAL SYSTEM**

Some women recalled that they sought legal help in Manitoba including legal aid, hiring a personal lawyer, and contacting the Manitoba Court and police personnel for information.

One woman who got legal aid, highlighted that it had been a negative experience and that her lawyer had even attempted to take advantage of her financially. She also mentioned that because she knew so little about the legal system in Canada, she sought advice and support from Muslim community members. However, she found it extremely hard to open up and be vulnerable in front of community members.

This is a common occurrence for many Muslim women who are discouraged from requesting support because of concern that the community will know their personal details and cause the victim-survivor additional problems which will only make their situation worse.



## EXPERIENCES AS IMMIGRANT WOMEN

It is known that immigrant women suffer many additional vulnerabilities to domestic abuse and family violence that get brought on by their immigrant status, resettlement insecurities, and lack of knowledge about their rights and services available for them.

Most of the women who were interviewed had been immigrants to Canada at some point, and through our interviews, it was found that many had grown up in protected families prior to their marriage and immigration.

It was noted that this shift brought on by marriage and immigrating to a new country caused women to face many adversities on top of the abuse they were already facing. This is not uncommon for women from diverse backgrounds such as South Asian, Middle Eastern, North African, etc. who grow up in very sheltered homes and do not develop an adequate sense of autonomy outside of their families.

The participants in our interviews were even more discouraged from seeking help due to inexperience and a lack of confidence and this forced them to become even more dependent on their abusive spouse.

One participant expressed in her interview: *“At my home in Pakistan I had never even travelled alone so I was so scared of being on my own if my ex suddenly decided to throw me out on the street, this was an ongoing fear that I had”*

Another point mentioned by a participant: *“We are brought up in a sheltered environment back home, first its father, brother, uncles, all that, and then we are handed over to our husband to take care of, we are never taught to be fully independent, even though girls are being educated. That doesn't mean they are independent”.*

This is a key consideration because most of the immigrant women who responded to the survey had a post-secondary education (75%). Moreover,





from this it can be understood that education for women and girls is insufficient if they are simultaneously being restricted from building their individual autonomy outside of the family.

In one of the interviews, it was found that one woman immigrated to Canada before her husband and then sponsored him here thereafter. She mentioned: *“When he came to Canada things started changing very rapidly. He was here in Canada waiting for his Permanent residency, so he was showing me a lot of attitude during this time. He kicked me out of the house and initially I didn't even tell my family about this”.*

This point is important because as previous research has shown, some abusers do not first display abusive behaviour until after immigrating, and this behaviour may be influenced by factors related to immigration, such as changed gender roles and norms and atypical power structures within the family where the female has more perceived power and autonomy. The victim-survivor in this case had the upper hand for the time being because she sponsored his entry into the country, which contributed to the spouse becoming abusive in order to restore the power dynamic where he is in control.

One woman responded in her interview that she had a distorted way of looking at the abuse she was facing because of the circumstances brought on by immigration. *“During the period when we were recent immigrants to Canada, I thought, okay maybe he doesn't have a good job right now that's why this is happening, and I couldn't see things the way things were”.*

This is a shared experience for many immigrant women who face abuse, they make attempts to rationalize the abuse due to some external circumstance (i.e., job insecurity) brought on by immigration. This does not mean that abuse should be justified in any circumstance.



# Suggestions for Change in the Community

## 1. AWARENESS ABOUT RESOURCES

Most of the victims–survivors who were interviewed strongly believe that the Muslim community in Manitoba should make better efforts in spreading more awareness about domestic abuse/violence and its implications.

One participant mentioned: *“If more women knew of resources available to them, they would not tolerate the things that they go through in dealing with their abuser, it’s just that we do not even have the knowledge, we do not know where to go if we find ourselves in these situations”.*

Another participant suggested: *“I think we can also use social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram etc.) in many productive ways to spread awareness about different resources and reach more vulnerable people”.* She went on to say: *“For me the biggest thing was not knowing about the right resources which delayed my help–seeking process, and since social media can be easily accessed by anyone, we should make an effort to circulate more resources to the community members”.*

One participant mentioned that her spouse refused to get counselling when it was suggested by her on the basis of the fact that he lacked the general awareness about this resource and therefore was distrustful in it, so he denied it all-together.

**Reflection:** The most important thing for most individuals who were interviewed was that there is a necessity in the community to spread more awareness about the different types of resources that are available to victims. Because there are resources that are there to help, they are just not in the knowledge of those who need it most.



## 2. MARRIAGE COUNSELLING AND THERAPY

The importance of marriage counselling was emphasized in many of the interviews and it was found that women facing abuse were a lot more open to taking marriage counselling with their spouse in order to deal with the issues arising in their marriage while men were less open to it.

One woman mentioned: *“My ex was very hesitant towards marriage counselling because coming from our background we do not really know of these resources or think negatively about them when the reality is, we should not”.*

While the topic of domestic abuse is a much-needed discussion in the Muslim community, it must be done in a way that promotes an open discussion and does not deter individuals away from gaining more knowledge and awareness.

## 3. MUSLIM MEN’S ROLE IN ADDRESSING DA/V

Another suggestion for the Muslim community in addressing the issue of domestic abuse was more educational opportunities for Muslim men in the community on DV/A. One participant suggested: *“I think Imams can help because they are in positions of power and so other Muslim men are more inclined to listen and implement their teaching and stance. Imams could introduce topics of healthy family dynamics and parenting to them which could help to prevent a lot of the abuse that happens in the community”*

Another suggestion made by a participant was that Muslim men shouldn’t come under the pretense of the *“invisible brother-hood”* that they seem to have with other Muslim men, especially when they are approached by a woman seeking help for the abuse she is facing. *“Men often rush to side with the abuser and quickly become skeptical about the victim’s testimony just because the abuser is known in a good light in the community or he goes to*



*the mosque often; all while community members don't even know what's going on at his home"*

While the idea of brotherhood can promote a sense of community and belonging, it can also reinforce toxic masculinity and patriarchal values where the male's side of the story takes precedence over the female. In this way, victims-survivors become discouraged from seeking help out of fear that either no one will believe their story or take the abuser's side.

Another suggestion made in how men can better help to combat domestic abuse is by seeking professional help, *"If men are going through something, they should seek professional help, it becomes much harder to open up to your family members or friends about deeply personal issues because of shame or judgement, but with therapists or counsellors, you don't have these worries since they are trained individuals that are capable of understanding complex issues and helping you through them".*

## 4. ADDRESSING THE BYSTANDER EFFECT

Some of the testimonies from the interviews showed elements of the bystander effect, which is a theory that people are less likely to help a victim in the presence of other people.

One woman related how her ex-husband used to **"beat her senselessly"** in front of his sisters and other family members, who didn't do anything to stop him but rather encouraged it. She said, *"When he would hit me, his sisters would laugh about it and instruct him to hit me where no one could see it."*

Another issue raised by a victim-survivor was that only her father-in-law offered her any support, but he did nothing to stop his son from abusing her and would simply remain silent as it happened in front of him.

**Suggestion:** Surface level support for an abused person is meaningful, but if someone has the power to stop the abuse or help the victim in any way but



still chooses not to, they are acting as a bystander and contributing to the harm that is being done to the victim.

Instead of bystanders deterring from helping the victim who they know is facing abuse, they can instead provide help by making themselves more knowledgeable and trauma-informed on the victim's situation, listening to the victim with empathy, informing the victim about various resources, helping them financially (if feasible), giving them temporary refuge etc. Although providing support to the victim at this time can be emotionally strenuous for the witness, provided to the victim can be paramount.

## Recommendations

To create a more comprehensive list of recommendations on the issue of DV/A in the Manitoba Muslim community, some Muslim practitioners including physicians, therapists, counsellors, and lawyers were contacted. They shared their ideas and perspectives in how to better help abused individuals in the Muslim community.

### Recommendations/Quotes from Muslim Physicians:

- ❖ As a health-care provider it becomes really important to be trauma-informed about these kinds of things [domestic abuse in the Muslim community] so that you are better able to understand individuals' various backgrounds and give them resources and support that is most helpful to them.
- ❖ Since there are numerous smaller Muslim communities in Manitoba, each with its own distinct culture, we must all work together whenever possible to support those who are being abused. For instance, knowing a Somali doctor and referring my patient to them would be useful if a Somali sister came to me and there was a language issue. By doing this, we can lessen the number of victims who are unreported due to problems like language limitations.



### Recommendations/Quotes from Muslim leaders:

- ❖ In addressing domestic abuse in the Muslim community, we should not try to seem like we want to single out the Muslim community as being relatively more violent or abusive because domestic abuse exists everywhere. Rather than singling out our community, we have to address DV/A as a broader issue while also recognizing the factors and key considerations that are more specific to our community members.
- ❖ Premarital counselling can be extremely effective as a preventative measure in domestic abuse. Through premarital counselling we are able to see whether two individuals are compatible, look out for red flags, and make them more knowledgeable on healthy parenting.
- ❖ Children are among the group most susceptible to abuse and the abuse that children face in the family largely goes unnoticed, so we have to put out effort into educating parents and couples on the importance of healthy parenting.
- ❖ For our community, education and [raising awareness] is the most crucial factor to combat DV/A. Our Muslim population is very new to this country, and we come from many different backgrounds. This suggests that our ethnic identity is far stronger than our religious identity. And this also adds to the many barriers already there in properly communicating with one another. This is why it is important for us [religious leaders and organizations] to engage with more Muslim ethnic leaders in Winnipeg and make them more trauma-informed about domestic abuse and family dynamics.

### Recommendations/Quotes from Muslim psychologists:

- ❖ Awareness should be the first step. You cannot prevent something without knowing what it is. Awareness about DV/A in worship places, public institutions, schools, daycares, how to recognize it, knowing about preventative measures, help-seeking methods is an essential first step to combating this issue



- ❖ There is an increase in the number of institutions implementing trauma-informed knowledge and services into their programs such as nursing school, and some work environments. Dealing with DV/A situations either from a legal or psychological perspective requires a lot of knowledge and care especially in our communities as it can be easily for those victims to shut down and ignore their emotions if the support is not deemed appropriate enough. So, it becomes imperative that we individuals who come into contact with victims of DV/A are trauma-informed so that we can provide the right kind of help to the individual.
- ❖ We must educate ourselves on the generational trauma that allows some DV/A patterns to exist and be regarded as acceptable in the relationship which are often supported by cultural practices and religious texts misinterpretation. The normalization of generational trauma enables the suffering endured by the victim to persist. We have to look within our own family structure and history to see what toxic generational teachings we are carrying forward and put a stop to them early on.
- ❖ In order to make Muslim men more open to counselling and therapy, we should offer effective listening, cognitive empathy, and deep understanding for the individuals' issues and for his anger which can be a motivating factor for him to stay in therapy and to understand himself better.
- ❖ Encouraging Muslim men to join men support groups and talk to other men about their triggers and their situations that can be helpful, although it is not for everyone.
- ❖ Because the most important concern for a victim-survivor coming out of an abusive situation is seeking safety for her and her children, with the guidance from organizations like HMF we can make this process smoother for the victim by providing or referring them to various resources. This help-seeking method can be extremely useful because the most dangerous time for a victim of DV/A is when the victim is making attempts to leave.

### Recommendations/Quotes from Muslim Lawyer:



- ❖ One thing that deters Muslim clients in seeking help through the justice system is the financial burden. Muslim non-profits organizations can work with stakeholders to address domestic violence by being advocates for Muslims who need to access system but do not have the means to get access. By helping individuals in these situations financially, we can help them to actually to set their footing in the justice system which is often the hardest part for the victim.
- ❖ “Muslim lawyers in Manitoba should take on more pro bono cases for Muslims because we can greatly reduce the financial barrier and contribute back to the community in this way.”
- ❖ “One thing our community can do is get in touch with city and provincial leaders and stakeholders [Liberal Party, NDP, Conservative Party] and inform them about our community and the problems that affect us. This can be accomplished by visiting their office, speaking with them, getting to know them, and encouraging them to include our community in their agenda. Due to the fact that party members are constantly pushing for popularity and votes, by addressing our needs and issues, they are better positioned to win our community's support while also meeting those needs”.

### Recommendations/Quotes from Muslim marriage counsellor:

- ❖ “In order to bring about authentic change through community organizations for Muslims experiencing domestic and family violence, we should take bold measures, despite how some people in the community may perceive it. We cannot use the same tools or methods and expect a different outcome”.
- ❖ The idea of DV/A is alien to the community, and if community members find it difficult to grasp, they may reject it. We must therefore discuss the idea of DV/A from a comprehensive standpoint. For instance, we must continue to emphasise ideas like family structures, gender roles, and establishing healthy boundaries while also including the idea of domestic abuse within these issues.





- ❖ We can invite individuals with a scientific background, lawyers, psychologists, senior members of the community, marriage counsellors, etc. to speak on topics such as the impact of misunderstanding the family value system, cultural practices, understanding religious teachings, etc.

### **Recommendations from Healthy Muslim Families:**

- ❖ There is a need for non-profit organisations, community service providers, and government employees to become more "culturally competent" and trauma-informed about abused immigrant Muslim women and ethnocultural families, with greater awareness and responsiveness to their strengths, the types of supports they need, and the types of harm being experienced. Culturally appropriate standards and definitions for abuse and neglect are required in order to accurately reflect the kind of harms that immigrants endure.
- ❖ HMF acknowledges the growing need for more Muslims to be represented in professions like parenting coaches, mediators, marriage counsellors, psychologists, and lawyers who may be better able to contextualise and understand the cultural and societal challenges that Muslims face when leaving an abusive relationship and give them the right help at some of the most difficult moments in their lives.
- ❖ According to religious and cultural belief systems and traditions, the concepts of gender equality and power and control in families appear to vary. HMF understands how crucial it is for service providers to better understand immigrant cultures and how these values can differ from or be similar to their own. This can help create effective interventions and support programs in cases of abuse and neglect, for preventing negative preconceived notions, and for not victimising the abused person again.
- ❖ The issue of the language barrier, which prevents victims and survivors from receiving assistance, must be addressed. HMF advocates for the expansion of English language classes to make it more accessible and pertinent to both younger and older immigrants regardless of the



immigration status. This may involve offering classes for free or at a minimal fee.

- ❖ HMF calls for adequate funding to be allocated for interpreter services in all areas of the legal and social services sector to facilitate immigrants' access to appropriate victim support services.
- ❖ More funding and efforts should be put into creating safe environments and support system for Muslim women and girls in order to address the violence they face from within and outside their communities. This can come in the form of transition rental spaces, sharing or healing circles, administering women's and men's support programs, empowerment/healing initiatives, healthy parenting classes etc.
- ❖ HMF highlights that a strong advocacy structure be created so that immigrants can get aid through these legal frameworks, including any review or appeal processes, such as social assistance. Equally crucial is that immigrant assisting organization that serve as information and referral sources have up-to-date, trustworthy information on who to contact for specific benefits and assistance to help the survivor become financially independent.
- ❖ Mental capacity issues for immigrants can arise in the context of deteriorating physical or mental health, or environmental risk factors. It is important to understand the role of trauma for immigrants and refugees, recognize that some may have poor mental health from back home such as PTSD, and recognize how that may affect reactions. It is essential that the assessment process be much more culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive; that includes the assessment tools being used.
- ❖ DV/A is a problem that eventually transcends issues of religious law and has its roots in the personal growth of the abuser and the environment that enables those behaviours (in the abuser) such as patriarchy, toxic masculinity etc. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of various stakeholders, individuals, institutions, and religious communities to offer safety nets for abused people and to inform the community members about the dangers and restrictions of DV/A.



## Conclusions

Domestic abuse/violence is one of the most common, widespread, and far-reaching forms of gender-based violence across the world. The community-based research that HMF undertook aimed to better understand the various complexities, adversities, cultural/religious perceptions, and gaps in resources that currently exist in the Muslim community in Manitoba with regards to domestic abuse/violence and how HMF and the Muslim community at large can work towards building resources and preventative measures. The primary goal of this report was to add data and nuance on a topic where very little research has been done and open a meaningful dialogue that can help Muslims affected by DV/A in Manitoba and Canada.

Furthermore, this research aimed to assist Healthy Muslim Families to work on developing more programmes and key services for those affected by DV/A, and to share a nuanced understanding of this issue in the Muslim community in Manitoba.

A lot can be done to try and reduce violence against Muslim women and girls in Canadian societies. But for any strategy to be successful, racism and sexism needs to be addressed and confronted. Access to social and government services should be easier and more accommodating to language barriers and finally, there should be the creation of safe environments for women and girls to address the violence they face without judgement from within and outside their communities.



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