

Al-Aman toolkit for professionals



Domestic
Violence
Intervention
Project



DViP Services
For Arabic
Speaking
Communities

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Al-Aman is DVIP's service for Arabic speaking communities. We work to stop domestic violence and to reduce the harm it causes to women, children & families.

This toolkit is for anyone who comes into contact with Arabic-speaking families affected by domestic violence. This may include professionals from both statutory and voluntary sectors, community organisations, community workers and cultural centres.





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About Al-Aman

Al-Aman is the Arabic speaking service within the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) which works to support victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in London's Arabic-speaking communities (ASC).

Al-Aman aims to:

- support Arabic-speaking women and children who experience domestic violence
- support Arabic-speaking men and women who may otherwise face significant barriers to accessing mainstream domestic violence support programmes.
- work with Arabic men who are perpetrators of domestic violence, in a way which prioritises the safety of women and children
- enable Arabic men and women to access other mainstream services more easily
- raise awareness of domestic violence within Arabic communities
- raise awareness within mainstream services of the needs and issues facing Arabic communities in relation to domestic violence
- work with local community organisations and mainstream organisations to improve professional responses to domestic violence in Arabic communities

NOTE: Not all Arabic speakers are Arabs/Muslims. However, the majority of Al-Aman's clients identify as Muslims. Some clients speak Arabic but do not ethnically identify as Arabs (Somali, Eritreans, and some Sudanese). However, all Arabic speaking clients share almost identical cultural attributes.

The authors:

The Al-Aman team who produced this tool kit include both perpetrator and women's support workers, who have over 20 years of experience between them working in the field of domestic violence and abuse, the majority of which has been spent working within an Arabic speaking specialism.



Domestic violence definition as used by Al-Aman:

Any incidents of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

This includes issues of concern to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities such as so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

Furthermore, throughout DVIP's work, both in Al-Aman and its other services, it is evident that the vast majority of domestic violence is perpetrated by men against women, within patriarchal structures and traditions, and in effect violates, impairs, or nullifies women's rights and their exercise of fundamental freedom.

Why is this toolkit needed and who is it for?

Domestic violence transcends all social classes, ethnicities, and religions. However, clients from minority cultural backgrounds already face more challenges in everyday life than those from more dominant cultures; it is our responsibility as supporting agencies to make the effort to work through cultural differences to best support each client in need.

An understanding of specific cultural and the religious issues underpinning domestic violence and abuse within Arabic-speaking communities (ASC), enables practitioners to have more confidence in developing effective risk management strategies to protect women and children within those communities.

Every abuser brings their own excuses and reasons to justify their use of violence and abuse in relationships. The central principle for practitioners should always be that domestic abuse is not acceptable under any circumstances. Every case of domestic abuse is different and there is usually not one single solution. The aim of this toolkit is to suggest some practical tools to use in order to improve the way we work with the ASC.

We have developed the toolkit in response to the frequent requests from professionals who attended Al-Aman training sessions, seminars and workshops, as well as those professionals who use Al-Aman as a resource to seek advice when dealing with Arabic speaking clients.

What this toolkit is not

This toolkit is not claiming to be a comprehensive and exhaustive manual to working with ASC, nor is it an information toolkit on Islam or the Islamic faith. It is a modest attempt to share with fellow professionals and colleagues our combined professional experience of over 20 years of working with ASC and domestic violence.





Challenging justifications for violence and abuse.

One of the questions frequently asked by professionals is:

How much can I safely challenge deeply held religious and cultural beliefs that appear to justify domestic violence with Arabic speaking clients?

Here we offer some responses that we use within our perpetrator and women's work at Al-Aman. These do not have to be read out as a script, you can find your own words around these themes, but they are suggestions designed to help the men recognise there are alternative ways of thinking and acting that still respect cultural or religious practices.

Perpetrator Perspectives

“My religion gives me the right to discipline my wife and children”

Possible responses:

- Domestic violence is a crime in the UK. No matter what you did back home or what you believe in, while you are here, you have to abide by and respect the laws of the country.
- Even if you believe that Islam gives you the right to hit your partner, it is my understanding that you have a choice not to exercise that right if you want to and it is upsetting your partner and children.
- Do you believe it makes you more religious to beat your partner?
- I might not know a lot about Islam, but I know that your Prophet (peace be upon him) was never known to hit any of his wives, servants, or even animals. I wonder if that is something you want to aspire to?
- The Prophet (pbuh) also said: “The best of you is the one who is best with one’s household (in treatment) and I am the best of you with my household”. In what way does this fit with you hurting your wife or children

“This is the way that I have been brought up”

Possible responses:

- Using violence is a conscious choice. If you learnt that behaviour, like any other behaviour it can be unlearned if that's what you want.
- Your wife/partner is an adult with her own rights not to be hurt. Violence and abuse are unacceptable under any circumstances.
- You must have loved her at some point; at least enough to marry her; why would you choose to abuse the ones you love?

“If I am seen by members of my community not to be in control of my family, I will be ridiculed and be thought of as weak, not a proper man”

- So to share an equal role with your wife, whom you say you love, is unmanly? Is that something you genuinely believe, or are you saying the views of the community are more important than the wellbeing of your wife and children?
- Does every man within your community use violence or control towards his wife or children? What do you think you can learn from those men that choose different ways to manage their family life?
- When you hurt your family through violence or control, and you see them cry or be in fear of you, is that respectful behaviour? Would community members agree you should be disrespectful towards your family?

Survivor Perspectives

“If I disclose DV, my children will be removed”

- Is this something your partner or other members of your family / community told you? If so, this might be to avoid drawing attention to his abuse, but it doesn't have to be the case. The aim of support agencies is to help you and your children stay safe. The more we know about what you have to deal with, the more helpful a response we can put in place for you.

“I'm on a spousal visa, if I disclose DV, my husband will take away my children and send me back home”

- At the moment you are in the UK and you do not have to live with DV. There is support available here for you and your children if you choose to leave the abusive relationship.
- There are specialised Arabic speaking support agencies that can support you by exploring possible options.

(see section on *No Recourse to Public Funds*)

Other challenges of working with Arabic speaking communities and domestic violence

The following information may be useful to keep in mind when considering the victims survivor's perspective and the obstacles that need to be overcome to support her and her children's safety:

Language barriers:

- For some survivors, their limited or no use of English is one of the biggest barriers for them to seek help. These women cannot just walk into services or pick up the phone to report abuse or tell their story. Following an incident, their first point of contact would probably be a relative or a friend that might not encourage them to disclose to mainstream agencies. This may explain why in some cases it might take survivors years before deciding to disclose abuse.
- In some cases, it is the perpetrator who speaks on behalf of the survivor. For example: he will be accompanying her to the GP, be present during agencies' home visits, etc. Sometimes, he will even translate for her when she attends A&E following a DV incident. In these cases, the women will obviously not disclose the abuse.
- Survivors might be reluctant to rely on friends or other community members to translate for them for fear of breach of confidentiality. Over the years, Al-aman has accumulated numerous cases that are consistent with the above, including a case where a female family friend refused to translate at a GP appointment because she feared for her own safety.
- There have been other cases where the perpetrator was the one who called the police and took advantage of the survivor's limited or no use of English to give a distorted version of the incident. By the time the survivor had succeeded in telling her side of the story, she would have had endured a difficult period of stress and trauma and in some cases may end up being treated as a suspect.
- In many cases, children are inappropriately used as interpreters either to report an incident or to help mum with communication in various settings.

Marriage and divorce:

- The purpose of marriage in Islam is to foster a state of tranquillity, love and compassion. Divorce is discouraged in Islam. The Prophet Mohamed (pbuh) said: “Among lawful things, divorce is most disliked by Allah” but it is permitted and can be initiated by either party. However, there is a difference between men and women initiating divorce proceedings. While the man can divorce his wife at will, a woman has to invoke Talaq (divorce) on specific grounds. This includes long absence of husband without any information, long imprisonment, and refusal to provide for wife or impotence. If a woman cannot satisfy any grounds for Talaq, she can apply for Khulu, where she will be the contract breaker and will have to pay back her dowry to end the marriage.
- Even though Islam has given the woman the right to ask for Khulu, it is not always easy to get, especially if she lives in the UK.
- Many Muslim countries do not allow women to apply for Khulu and therefore would not accept the Khulu if the woman manages to get into the UK. This is one of the main issues for Muslim survivors in particular as this right is often used by the perpetrators to continue controlling the survivor.
- Perpetrators sometimes talk their partner into going back home with him for a holiday following reconciliation. Once there, he might use various means to prevent her and the children from leaving the country including taking their passports away.(please see section on abduction on page 15).



Case study:

Divorce under British Civil and Islamic law

- Nada is a 34-year-old Arabic-speaking Muslim woman. She was married to husband Noah for 8 years under both British civil law and Islamic law. They have 2 children aged 5 and 2.

Following a long history of DV by Noah against Nada, Social Services ordered Noah to leave the matrimonial home. Nada filed for civil divorce, to which Noah did not object. Support agencies saw this as evidence of co-operation from his part. However, from the perpetrator's point of view, as a Muslim man, as long as he does not grant Nada an Islamic divorce, he still considers himself to be legitimately married to her. From his and the family's perspective, Nada was still his wife and should not refuse him access to the family home, the children, or deny him his marital rights. Therefore Noah continued to visit the family despite Nada's protests.

Implications for professionals:

In order for agencies involved in Nada's case to develop effective risk management and support strategies, they need to take into consideration the following:

- Many of Al-Aman's women clients are in similar situation to Nada's as they might be married to the perpetrators under both British civil law and Islamic law.
- Nada was torn between complying with Social Services' instructions and what she believes as her religious obligations under the Islamic law.
- Nada was also under pressure from her family and community to take Noah back.
- By not wanting Noah in the home, Nada was ostracised by the family and community for being a 'disobedient wife.'
- By insisting on divorcing her husband, this could be viewed as disrespectful to the family and Nada may be vulnerable to honour-based crimes.
- Although Noah had agreed to civil divorce, as long as he refuses to grant Nada an Islamic divorce, she has very limited options to obtain an Islamic divorce. (Please see below)
- Noah can continue to refuse a divorce but he is allowed to marry another woman under Islamic law; on the other hand, Nada cannot marry another man until she gets her Islamic divorce from Noah.
- The children also suffer as they continue to be exposed to domestic violence.

Forced marriage:

- Despite the Islamic requirement of express consent, some Muslims force or pressurise their children into marrying a partner approved, and usually chosen by, the parents.
- Children who even suggest defying their parents' wishes, may suffer penalties supported by the community. These penalties include ostracism; disinheritance; desertion; various forms of physical, mental and emotional abuse; abusive derision and can extend to honour killings.
- International awareness, campaigns and organizations such as the UK's Forced Marriage Unit, have recognized the severity of this human rights issue and their rescue and support services extend beyond the borders of UK territories.
- Some countries have instituted prison time for parents who try to coerce their children into such unions.¹

Isolation:

- Perpetrators, whatever their backgrounds, tend to use isolation as an effective method for gaining power and control. The woman is more easily manipulated without social contact and support, as the less contact she has with other people, the more dependent she becomes on the perpetrator and sometimes relies on him as her sole source of emotional nurture and practical help.
- It is particularly hard for Arabic speaking women to flee their own community in which they have found refuge from things like racism and marginalisation and which usually offers cultural and religious support. In addition, it is not usually easy for family members living abroad to visit the woman survivor to offer support, as it takes time and money to apply for a visa as well as travel costs.
- In addition, survivors' limited or no use of English will significantly reduce their chances of integrating outside of the ASC

Abduction:

- Perpetrators often use abduction as a threat to control their partners and discourage them from leaving the abusive relationship, or as punishment when the woman decides to leave.
- Many Muslim countries (most of the countries where Al-Aman's clients come from) are not signatories of the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. Unfortunately, this means that there are no mechanisms to facilitate dialogue and rapid resolution of abduction issues.
- Research has shown the long-lasting effects of abduction on all members of the family: abducted children, parents left behind and the abducting parents.²

Immigration and Asylum Issues:

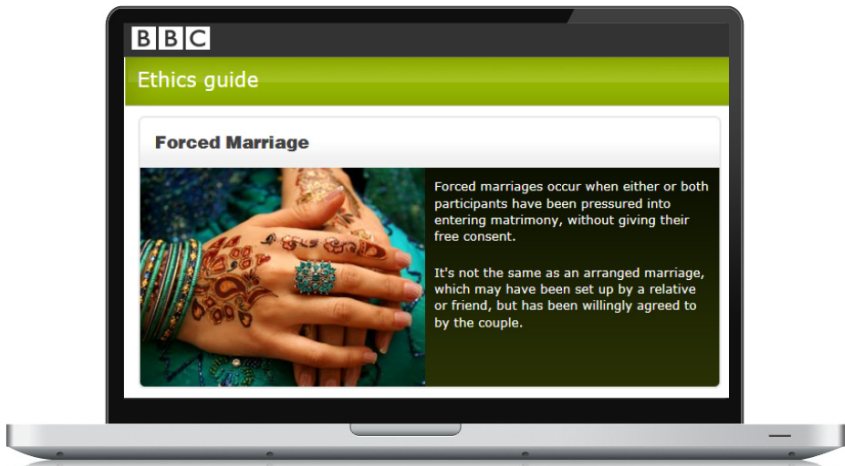
A snapshot of data taken from limited research into asylum-seeking women experiencing domestic or other related violence (eg: forced marriage, female genital mutilation) in the host countries.³

- Approx. 500-600 women were experiencing violence alongside immigration and asylum issues in the host country
 - Out of 429 women who wanted help to leave only 9% were re-housed
 - A quarter of women accessing refuge provision had insecure immigration status
 - For 92% of women threats of deportation were a common part of abuse
 - 70% of women seeking asylum reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence.
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- A number of Al-Aman's female clients have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) because they came to the UK on a spousal visa, as students, or because they have temporary entry permits. The rules around this prevent them from claiming benefits such as Housing Benefit or Job-Seeker's Allowance during the initial 2 years of their stay.
 - This means that if any woman with NRPF experiences domestic abuse while she is in the UK, she will be unable to access a place in a refuge unless she can fund it herself.
 - Back in April 2012, the Government launched a pilot project called Leave Outside The Rules (LOTR). Through this project, women who have entered the UK on a spousal visa and have suffered domestic violence can have access to Income Support, Housing Benefit, and other support for a limited period of three months while they apply for leave to remain in the UK.
 - Unfortunately, the LOTR project does not protect survivors who have entered on other types of visas.
 - In addition, the Government has recently changed the immigration rules extending the probation period for women on spousal visas from two to five years. This new change will unfortunately cause many women to be trapped with violent and abusive partners for even longer.

To conclude, keep the following points in mind when working with Arabic-speaking clients experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence:

- As a worker, focus on the domestic violence as an unacceptable behaviour that harms women and children in the long term, but can be changed
- Understand and acknowledge cultural and religious differences, but do not become drawn into these as any form of excuse or justification for violent or abusive behaviour
- Recognise the immense barriers that women from all cultures experience when trying to end abusive relationships, more so the additional challenges for Arabic-speaking women living in the UK. Be patient if she is unable to make changes as quickly as you would like, or if she appears to collude with abuse perpetrated against her.
- Recognise the internal and external pressures on male perpetrators to remain in control of their situation and their family, especially when they have become entrenched over time in misinterpreting their culture or religion to justify domestic violence. Be firm and boundaried with him but recognise that genuine change takes time and that some perpetrators may choose never to change.
- Seek additional information advice and support where possible when working with Arabic-speaking or any other minority ethnic or cultural group that differs from your own.

Useful links:



www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/forcedmarriage

www.slideshare.net/FEANTSA/m-larasi-and-sroy-seminar-6

www.reunite.org/pages/effects_research.asp

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/domestic-violence

References:

¹ Marriage in Classical Islamic Jurisprudence: A Survey of Doctrines, in the Islamic marriage contract: case studies in Islamic family law 11, 19, Asifa Quraishi & Frank E. Vogel eds, 2008.

² International Child Abduction-The Effects, Marilyn Freeman, 2006.

³ A Place of Safety?: Making the links: BME women, gender-based violence, homelessness & migration-a UK perspective, Marai Larasi & Samantha Roy Imkaan, 2011.

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www.dvip.org



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