

Institution: University of Warwick		
Unit of Assessment: C 21 Sociology		
Title of case study: Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls and Protecting Survivors Through Legislation and Practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 – Ongoing		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Ravi Thiara	Associate Professor	2000 – Present
Cathy Humphreys	Reader	1994 – 2006
Audrey Mullender	Professor	1996 – 2009
Agnes Skamballis	Research Assistant	2002 – 2005
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 - 2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>An interconnected body of research on violence against women and girls (VAWG) by Dr Ravi Thiara has directly informed changes in law and practice to prevent VAWG and protect survivors internationally. Thiara's research has been used by campaign groups and statutory bodies in Uganda and the UK. Her findings have informed legal changes in Uganda making it easier for women to leave abusive marriages, and changes in the UK Family Court procedures introduced in the 2019 Domestic Abuse Bill. As a result of Thiara's findings, professional practice has changed, through the development of an innovative approach to joint mother-child interventions, and in protection of disabled women in domestic abuse situations.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Thiara's original work has identified and addressed gaps in knowledge around domestic violence, from methods of supporting repair of the mother-child relationship, to specific barriers faced by disabled women experiencing abuse, to addressing post-separation violence and tackling the link between bride price and domestic violence. Thiara's expertise is respected nationally and internationally in academia and has changed legislation and practice.</p> <p>2.1. Talking to My Mum</p> <p>This research found that direct and indirect abuse strategies are used by domestic violence perpetrators to undermine the mother-child relationship; that 'readiness' to repair the relationship on the mothers' part was critical to strengthening fractured relationships; that there is a lack of joint interventions with mothers and children in current practice, precluding opportunities to address the breakdown of mother-child relationships; and that 'organisational readiness' (capacity/willingness of services to carry out joint mother-child support work) was key to 'joint work' being developed (3.1, 3.2).</p> <p>2.2. Disabled Women and Domestic Violence: Making the Links</p> <p>Conducted in partnership with Women's Aid, a national umbrella for domestic violence services in England, this was the first national study on women with physical and sensory impairments. The key findings (3.3, 3.4) highlighted the greater intensity and breadth of domestic violence faced by disabled women, often linked to their impairments; the role of multiple contexts (institutions and homes) and perpetrators (partners, carers and family members) in creating greater complexity in experience; the greater barriers encountered in accessing support; and the failures of agencies to respond positively. That disabled women 'lose out on both counts' –</p>		

experience greater abuse but are failed by services – has become a key message for practitioners.

2.3. Bride Price, Marriage Rights and Domestic Violence in Uganda

This British Academy funded research was jointly conducted with MIFUMI, a women's rights NGO working on VAWG and poverty alleviation. The findings (3.5) highlighted the important link between bride price, domestic violence and poverty; showed how the customary practice (payment for the bride by the groom's family through animals or cash) commoditised women and was used as a justification for violence against women (*I have paid for you and I can do what I like*); that in the context of rural poverty, bride price is used by families as income leading to child or early marriage and is used by rich older men to 'buy' young girls; and that it leads to widows becoming dispossessed and homeless and to the perpetration of violence against them by entire families.

2.4. Domestic Violence, Child Contact and Post-Separation Violence: Issues for African-Caribbean and South Asian Women and Children

Funded by the NSPCC, this first UK national study generated evidence of the particular issues faced by minoritised groups in relation to child contact in the context of domestic violence. The findings (3.6) highlighted the current emphasis by the courts on fathers' rights and 'culture' rather than the safety of women and children when making contact orders; and a failure to understand complex contexts and to address the specificity of minoritised women's experiences of violence/abuse. Consequently, rather than safety being ensured through professional responses, the space for abuse and control was expanded; the report called for a review of guidance to judges to ensure greater safety in court processes.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The references below represent a small selection of publications spanning the topics described above, a fraction of the high quality research undertaken on VAWG by Thiara and colleagues at the University of Warwick since 2000. The references below include four articles in peer reviewed publications, and have been cited in academic work over 350 times (data from Google Scholar, 29/08/19).

(3.1) Thiara, R.K. and Humphreys, C. (2017) 'Absent Presence: the on-going impact of men's violence on the mother-child relationship', *Child and Family Social Work*, Volume 22, No.1, pp. 137-145. <http://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12210>

(3.2) Humphreys, C., Thiara, R.K. and Skamballis, A. (2011), 'Readiness to Change: Mother-Child Relationships and Domestic Violence Intervention', *British Journal of Social Work*, 41, 166-184.

(3.3) Thiara, R.K., Hague, G., Ellis, B., Bashall, R. and Mullender, A. (2012), *Disabled Women and Domestic Violence: Responding to the Experiences of Survivors*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN 9781849050081

(3.4) Thiara, R.K., Hague, G. with Mullender, A. (2011) 'Losing out on both counts: disabled women and domestic violence', *Disability and Society*, Volume 26, (No. 6). pp. 757-771. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2011.602867>

(3.5) Hague, G., Thiara, R.K. and Turner, A. (2011) 'Bride-price and its links to domestic violence and poverty in Uganda: a participatory action research study', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 34, pp. 550-561. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2011.06.008>

(3.6) Thiara, R.K. and Gill, A. (2012) 'Domestic Violence, Child Contact and Post-Separation Violence: Issues for South Asian and African-Caribbean Women and Children: a report of findings' London: NSPCC

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

By successfully identifying and filling gaps in evidence and practice, Thiara's research has informed legislative change in Uganda and the UK, led to greater understanding, and generated innovative practice **to prevent VAWG and protect survivors**.

4.1 Informing legislative change

Uganda

In Uganda, 68% of women aged 15 to 49 have experienced domestic violence. Levels of violence linked to bride price in rural areas are particularly high [5.14], trapping women in abusive marriages if they cannot afford to 'pay back' their bride price. Aimed at raising awareness of this issue, and gaining support for constitutional change, the women-led anti-domestic violence organisation MIFUMI used Thiara's research (3.5) for an information campaign, distributing the findings to thousands of individuals in Tororo, Bukedi and the East of Uganda, areas that suffered the highest levels of domestic violence according to the Uganda Demographic and Health Surveys 2011 and 2016 [5.14]. This resulted in greater reporting of violations to MIFUMI, and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics has twice in succession found these areas to have the highest reported incidence of VAWG. MIFUMI has stated that they believe this represents an increased awareness and intolerance of domestic violence due to Thiara's research and MIFUMI's work with her [5.1]. The Executive Director of MIFUMI said:

"Following the dissemination of the research findings [...community] members started to question and critically examine [...] the practice of payment and refund [of] Bride Price." [5.1]

A constitutional court petition led by MIFUMI to lobby against bride price drew heavily on Thiara's research (3.5), and in response the Ugandan Supreme Court, in August 2015, ruled to make the refund of bride price illegal across Uganda [5.13]. This legislative change marked a huge advance for women in Uganda, enabling them to leave abusive marriages, and reducing the threat of violence, destitution and impoverishment.

UK

Based on findings detailed in 3.6, in 2016, Thiara wrote a report titled 'Safe Not Sorry' (with Dr Christine Harrison, University of Warwick) [5.2] for Women's Aid on child contact and domestic violence. Women's Aid used the report to support its Child First campaign, which called for practice and policy changes in the Family Court to ensure greater safety in the court process for victims of domestic violence. Numerous publications by Thiara were cited in the report 'Nineteen Child Homicides' [5.3], to provide an evidence base supporting the Child First campaign. Evidence from 5.2 was given by Thiara and Harrison to the *All Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence* in February 2016, and their finding 'complex and traumatic impact [on children] of exposure to domestic violence, which may result in a range of emotional, social, psychological and behavioural responses with short and longer-term implications' is drawn on directly in the resulting parliamentary report [5.4, p18], and directly relates to the final recommendations of that report, particularly Recommendation 5:

The Ministry of Justice, President of the Family Division and Cafcass must ensure Judges and court staff in the family court, Cafcass officers and other frontline staff in other related agencies receive specialist face-to-face training on all aspects of domestic violence - particularly coercive and controlling behaviour, the frequency and nature of post-separation abuse, and the impact of domestic abuse on children, on parenting and on the mother-child relationship. [5.4, p5].

In September 2017, the President of the Family Division of the Courts Judiciary announced that "in the light of the recommendations made by the All Party Parliamentary Group ... and by Women's Aid" [5.5] (both of which were supported by Thiara's research [5.4, 5.3]), Practice Direction 12J, which applies to all judges across the Family Court and High Court, had been amended so that in any on-going risk identified to a child there will be no contact with the abusive parent, and that courts would have to provide special protection measures to guarantee the safety of survivors in court. In line with recommendations from 5.2, the new guidance holds judges more accountable for their decision-making in domestic abuse cases.

The Public Affairs Officer for Women's Aid stated:

"Safe not Sorry... underpinned the campaigning and influencing work that has led to real and tangible changes in relation to the family court's treatment of survivors of domestic abuse..." [5.6]

In March 2018, Women's Aid responded extensively to a Government consultation [5.7], citing Thiara's research and reiterating the calls from 5.2. Based on this consultation, the Government subsequently included provision for special protection measures and for a ban on cross-examination by perpetrators in the Domestic Abuse Bill, which in March 2021 is going through the Report Stage in the House of Lords [5.8].

4.2. Improving knowledge and shaping practice

Disabled women and domestic violence

Thiara's research (3.3, 3.4) created national evidence that disabled women 'lose out on both counts' – experience greater abuse but are failed by services – and has been widely cited in guidelines for practitioners, including joint guidance for practitioners and managers from the Local Government Association (comprises 339 of the 343 councils in England) and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (comprises directors and deputy/assistant directors in 152 local authorities in England) on adult safeguarding [5.9], and Public Health England's report *'Disability and domestic abuse'*, which provides guidance on this issue for the first time to public health services [5.10]. The research is also used by the Women's Aid National Training Centre [5.6], with the Policy and Research Officer stating:

"It is used by Women's Aid as the evidence base for work with disabled survivors... [and] by the National Training Centre at Women's Aid; for example, it was used in the training for adult social care... commissioned by the Chief Social Worker, Lyn Romeo... Women's Aid referenced findings from the study in our response to the Government's Domestic Abuse Bill consultation and we also refer to the findings in policy briefings on health and disability for policy-makers and politicians." [5.6].

Mother-child relationship

Thiara's development of the conception of domestic violence as an attack on the mother-child relationship and the importance of joint work with mothers and children [3.1, 3.2] has become a key practice and policy message that assists professionals in recognising that women need to be supported to rebuild/strengthen the relationship with children. With her research collaborators, Thiara published two workbooks (Humphreys, C, Thiara, RK et al (2006) *Talking About Domestic Abuse: A photo activity workbook to develop communication between mothers and young people*, London: Jessica Kingsley; and Humphreys, C, Thiara, RK, et al (2006) *Talking To My Mum: A picture workbook for workers, mothers and children affected by domestic abuse*, London: Jessica Kingsley), providing tools for professionals nationally and internationally, enabling them to use research-informed tools with families to repair the mother-child relationship. Over 12,500 workbooks have been sold since 2006 in the UK, Australia and USA, and they have been translated into Serbian.

The workbooks have been recommended by the Department of Health in their toolkit for frontline practitioners, *'Improving safety, reducing harm: children, young people and domestic violence'* [5.11]. An example of joint support work based on the research is the development by the NSPCC of *Domestic Abuse Recovering Together* (DART), a 10 week, 20-hour programme, based directly on the *Talking to My Mum* research [5.12]. The programme, evaluated in 2015-16 and again in 2020, was scaled up by the NSPCC and is currently delivered by 30 local services across the UK. The positive impacts on women and children have been evidenced in two NSPCC reports (2016,2020):

“after the programme, mothers had significantly greater self-esteem, more confidence in their parenting abilities and more control over their child’s behaviour.” and children experienced “fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties” as the joint “activities enabled children to share their experience of the abuse, which in turn helped mothers understand how the abuse had affected their child”. [5.12]

“The current evaluation revealed a number of statistically significant improvements in all key outcomes measured for mothers and children accessing the scaled-up DART services Mothers had greater self-esteem, felt more supported and satisfied in their role as a parent and there were improvements on several aspects of the mother-child relationship. Children also had reduced emotional and behavioural difficulties” [5.12]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Statements from MIFUMI Executive Director
- 5.2 ‘Safe not sorry: Supporting the campaign for safer child contact’ (Bristol: Women's Aid, 2016)
- 5.3 ‘Nineteen Child Homicides’ (Bristol: Women’s Aid, 2016)
- 5.4 Domestic Abuse, Child Contact and the Family Courts (report from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence)
- 5.5 Announcement from President of Family Division on amendment of Practice Direction 12J
- 5.6 Testimonial Statements from Women's Aid
- 5.7 Women’s Aid’s response to Domestic Abuse Bill consultation
- 5.8 HM Government Consultation Response and Draft Domestic Abuse Bill
- 5.9 ‘Adult safeguarding and domestic abuse’ (guide from Local Government Association and ADASS)
- 5.10 ‘Disability and domestic abuse’ (report by Public Health England)
- 5.11 ‘Improving Safety, Reducing Harm’ (Department of Health toolkit)
- 5.12 (a) Evaluation of Domestic Abuse, Recovering Together (DART): final report, Emma Smith, 2016, NSPCC; (b) Impact Evaluation of the scale-up of Domestic Abuse, Recovering Together, Smith, Belton and Cooke, 2020, NSPCC.
- 5.13 News coverage of the MIFUMI Supreme Court Case
- 5.14 Uganda Demographic and Health Surveys 2011 (a) and 2016 (b)