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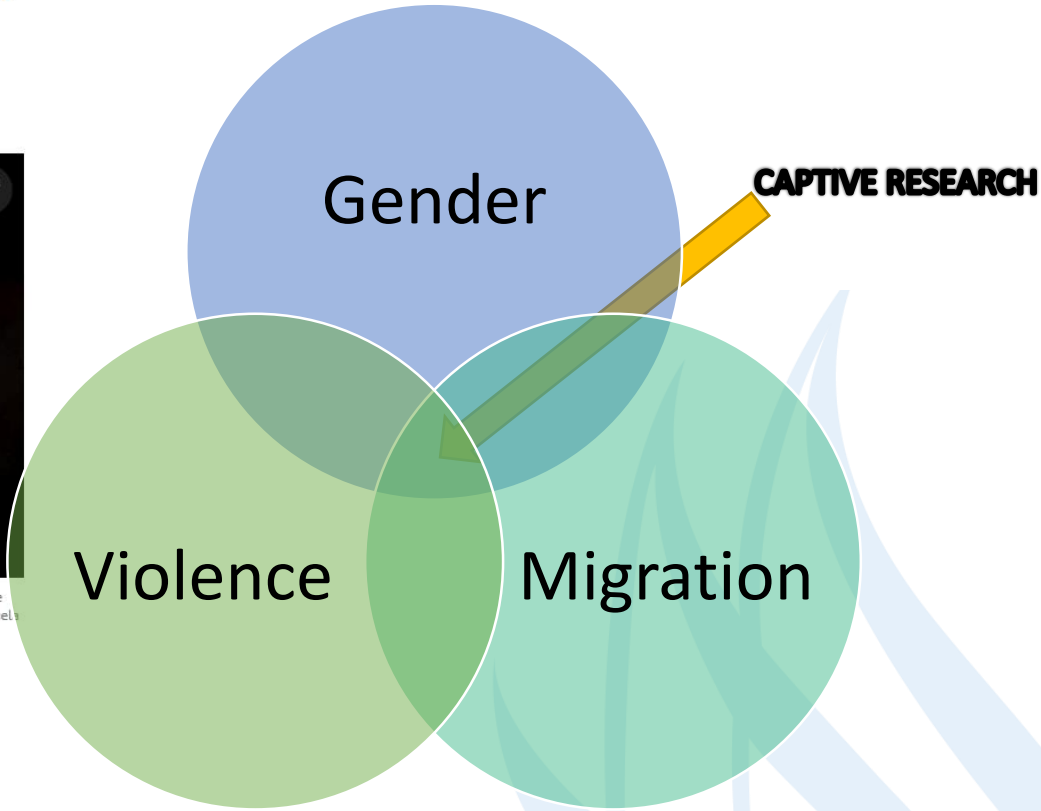


# Rohingya girls as young as 12 compelled to marry just to get food

Allocation of food rations by household means refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar are marrying off children as young as 12 to create new family circles



1 This 14-year-old girl, who arrived in Bangladesh just over a year ago after fleeing military violence in Rakhine state, is betrothed. Her father says rice rations are not enough to feed a family of 10. Photograph: Antolín Avezuel



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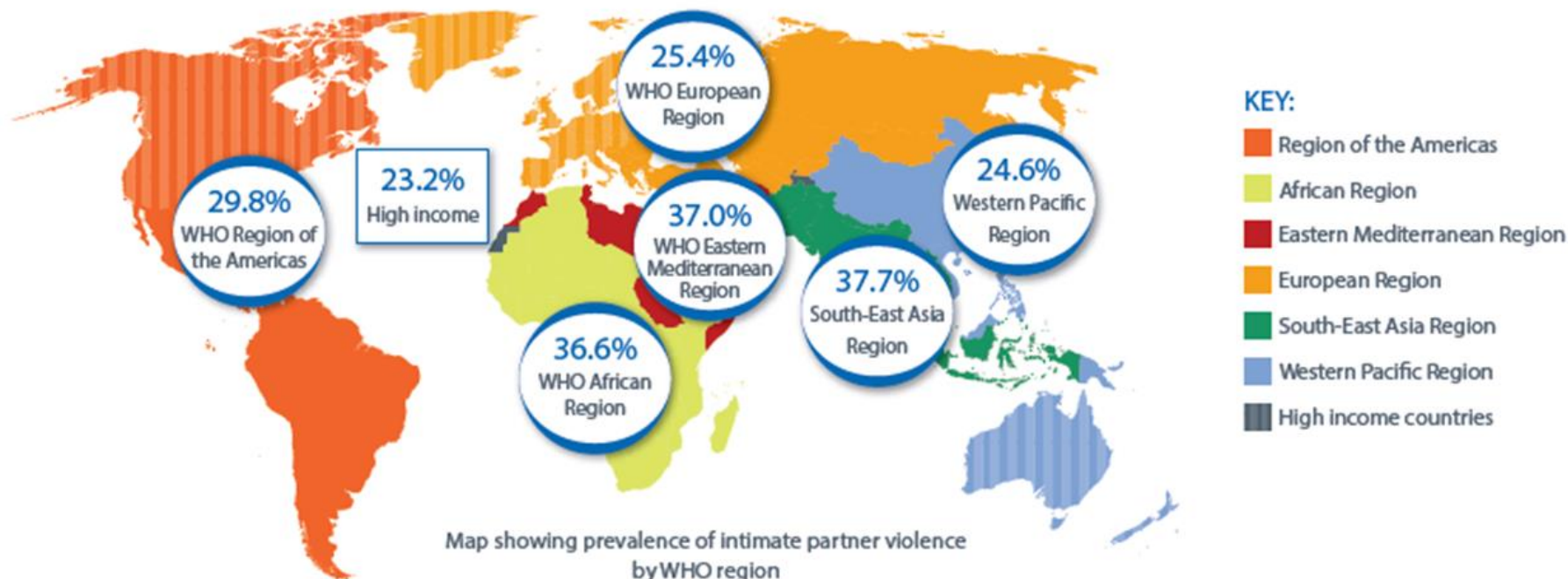
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## PREVALENCE →

# 1 in 3 women

throughout the world will experience physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or sexual violence by a non-partner



## Countries of origin include 'high risk' global locations



**i** A girl from Kavumu in DRC who was abducted from her home and raped. Since 2013, 49 young children in the town have been raped. Photographs: Ruth Maclean for the Guardian

Peterman et al. American Journal of Public Health (2011)

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# Purpose of the research and synthesis

- Highest levels of displacement on record
- Gender and violence intersect in important ways with migration decisions, experiences and outcomes
- Migration is an everyday event in the lives of many people and its ever-changing nature presents social, cultural, economic, political and health challenges
- Need for high-quality research and evidence upon which to develop and deliver interventions to support migrant survivors as well as train service providers
- Multi-country studies enable comparisons around risk, experiences and best practice responses



# Methods: national studies

- Participants: women 18 years+ who identified as migrant, refugee or asylum seeking person, were survivors of any form of GBV and were currently residing in one of the six countries
- Identified through (i) community organisations that support migrant women survivors, including shelters, (ii) migrant reception centres and (iii) snowballing through community members
- Ethics approval for undertaking any primary research with survivors was obtained at three institutions (Coventry University Ethics; University of Malta Research Ethics Committee; University of Seville)
- Interviews were conducted in first language of partner country, in English or using an interpreter
- Each country had one primary interviewer. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed
- It was explained to women that we were hoping to gain a better understanding of women's experiences of getting help in the destination country for experiences of violence in their lives
- Story-telling (Atkinson, 1998) is linked to broad narratives, interested in exploring in-depth lived experiences, including contexts, identities, different stages of life and ways of sharing personal and collective experiences.

# Methods: synthesis

- Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was selected to analyse the findings from the 6 primary studies; sufficiently flexible to apply to any theoretical approach whilst at the same time enabling rich, detailed description
- Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) was employed as a theoretical framework. It allowed examination of the various ways in which migrant women talked about oppression based on a relational web of factors that includes gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, social class, nationality and immigration status
- Multiple readings of reports of findings, seeking clarifications from authors and organising the data from the six studies into overarching 'first-order' categories
- Coded data to these broad categories and identified sub-themes to which we further coded data, retaining those that were dominant (as 'second order' themes)





## A collage of images showing students in various settings: studying, traveling, and socializing. The images are arranged in a diamond pattern, featuring students in classrooms, on a boat, and in social settings.

- 



# Findings: countries of origin & interview setting

Country of origin	Number of participants (setting of interviews)
Morocco	6 (2 Spain; 1 France; 3 Italy)
Mexico	1 (Spain)
Tanzania	2 (UK)
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2 (1 France; 1 UK)
Pakistan	2 (UK)
Sri Lanka	1 (UK)
Indian	2 (UK)
Uganda	1 (UK)
Tunisia	3 (2 Italy; 1 France)
Nigeria	10 (Italy)
Cambodia	1 (France)
Cameroon	1 (France)
Algeria	1 (France)
Turkey	1 (France)
Philippines	1 (Malta)
Montenegro	1 (Malta)
benin	1 (France)

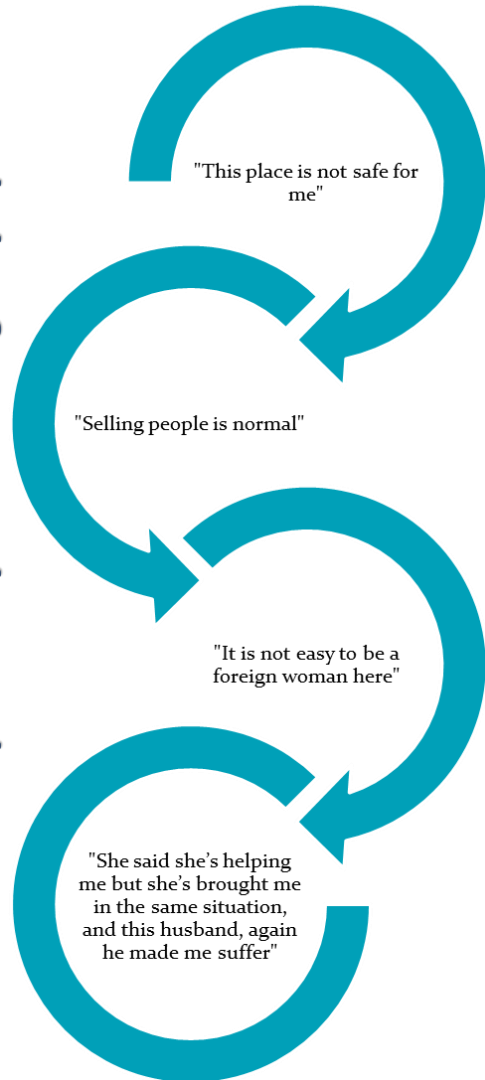


# Overarching categories

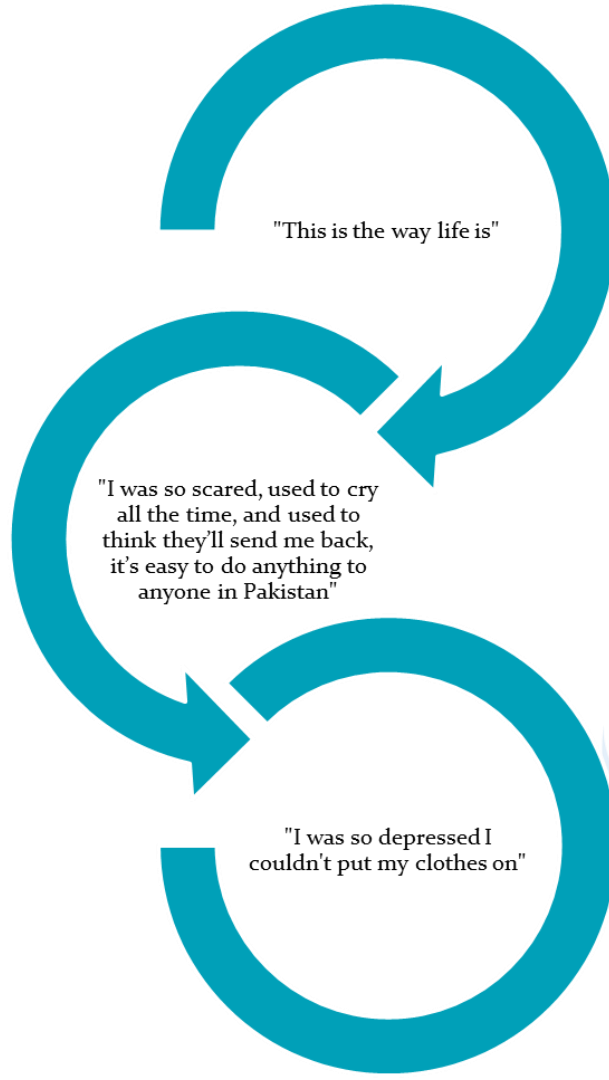
- (i) gender-based violence - an inescapable reality of women's migratory experiences ;
- (ii) barriers to help-seeking and mental health crisis as a turning point
- (iii) what women say about the responses they received
- Within these categories, 10 themes were identified as central to expressing the experiences of the migrant female survivors of GBV



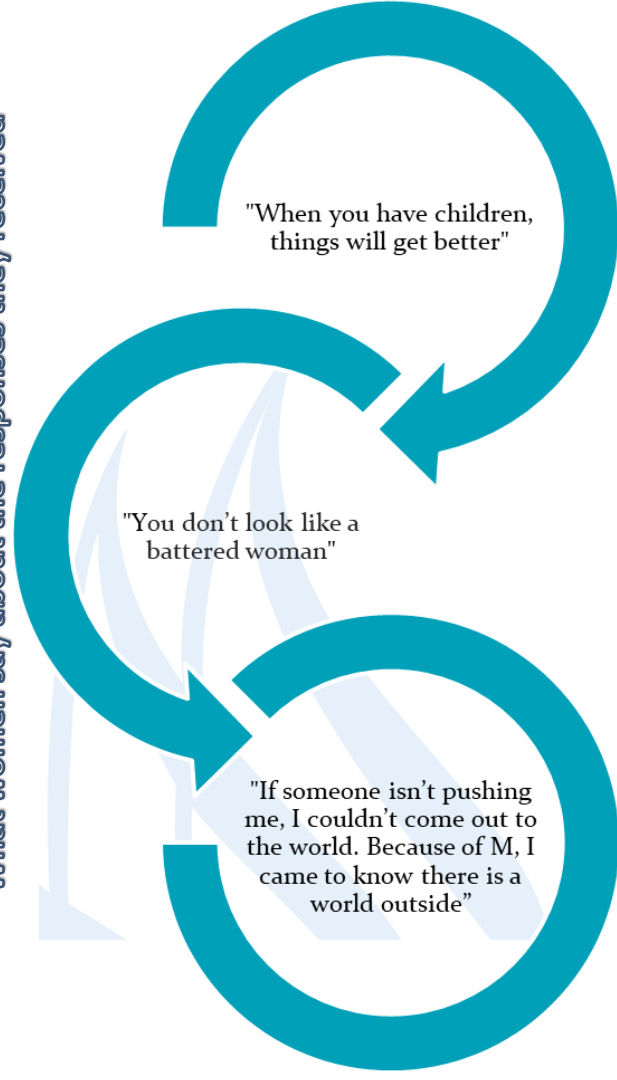
## GBV - an inescapable reality of women's migratory experiences



## Barriers to help-seeking and mental health crisis as a turning point



## What women say about the responses they received



## ***Pre-migration: “this place is not safe for me...”***



- ‘Pull’ factors include increased economic prospects, quality of life and chances of educational and career achievement

« At that time I thought I just wanted them to be proud of me, to see that I can do different from others and it doesn't matter that I'm a girl. I could sense that one day they are going to change their minds and just believe that a woman's place is in the kitchen. So yeah, graduated well, but inside me I thought 'this place is not safe for me' » 03 Tanzania (UK)

« Our families force us to get married. If anything happens to you, you cannot tell your parents. It's a problem » B. Morocco (Spain).

- For these women economic prosperity was stated as the main driver for leaving their country of origin

## ***Pre-migration: “this place is not safe for me...”***



- Push factors: socioeconomic reasons (unemployment, poverty), lack of safety and security, lack of services, and man-made events (conflict). Migration as necessity to escape IPV, poverty or due to the risk of social or political persecution including the cumulative impact of persistent normalised violence and harmful cultural practices

« I did not know what it was, the excision; one night my grandmother picked me up, I was afraid, I was told nothing, they took all the girls of the village. They took us in a big house; when the girls entered, I could hear them screaming. I was afraid, I wanted to run away but they brought down to the ground me, held my arms and my legs, and they cut me. There was very old woman who did not even see what she made, I had a lot of pain and a lot of blood.» F. Ivory Coast (France)

« My parents began to offend me, to beat me, to treat me [for being] lesbian. They attached me in a backyard, and asked to my uncle to re-educate. He came several times to submit me sexually » J. Uganda (France)



## ***Pre-migration: “this place is not safe for me...”***



- Participants from the DRC, interviewed in France and the UK, shared how they fled to avoid politically-motivated violence and persecution, and told of experiencing rape as a weapon of political repression.

« When they arrested me, they brought me and locked me into a house. We saw nothing, windows were filled, there were just plastic bags and an iron. It stank of death. When I struggled, they burned me with the iron » H. DRC (France)

## ***Pre-migration: “this place is not safe for me...”***



Forced, early, and arranged marriages were common among participants

« I did not want to get married to this man, he was older and had other woman. I was in love with another man, but it wasn't Basa, it was Bamiléké, I am Basa, then my family did not want. My parents brought me strength of a big wizard, he knifed a chicken and banged me with the body, I had blood everywhere, I was very afraid. This is the way I accepted, I was attached to my husband » B.Cameroon (France)

- However, it appeared that most of the women accepted the requirement to accompany husbands internationally or to be united with husbands already abroad
- There were also examples of women trafficked - 3 of the 10 interviewed Nigerian women reported being forced across borders - and smuggled - in the case of a Sri Lankan woman, incarcerated, raped and tortured and later smuggled into UK
- Thus, for over half the sample, gender-based violence or war and conflict in countries of origin precipitated their departure. For others, migration marked the beginning of violence in their lives

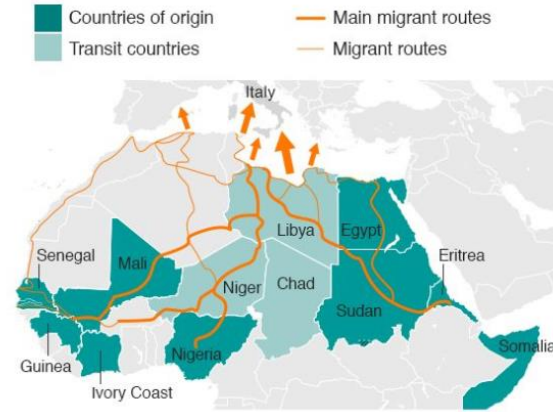
## ***Violence as a feature of the journey: “selling normal in Libya” A. Nigeria (Italy)***

- Violence particularly prevalent in sub-Saharan women, exercised by armed groups, militias, bandits, traffickers, agents of the Moroccan or Libyan police and the army, and other migrants and men
- Accounts of physical violence and maltreatment expressed towards groups of migrants and a substantial proportion is sexual violence.

« In Libya, the traffickers take women, oblige them to put themselves naked, and verify their anus and vaginas to take their money; because the women roll up the money and put in them. The young men also, are searched by their body » H. Angola (France)

- Women are frequently detained before sailing to Italy. For many, sex work isn't a choice. It represents modern slavery, enforced by vicious gang leaders who threaten the women with physical violence and deportation if they refuse to comply.

« If I had reported him to the police, my family would have been in great danger » Confirm Country (Italy)



# ***Encounters with gendered violence and abuse in destination settings: “it is not easy to be a foreign woman here...”***



- Range of vulnerabilities to GBV experienced by women and girls as they arrived and settled into the destination country and this, in several ways, relates to how they have entered the host country.

- As Moroccan women interviewed explained:

« It is not easy to be a foreign woman here, and I knew lots of Moroccan women who suffer violence in their homes, from their husbands, without denouncing them because they think that there is nothing that can be done » A. Morocco (Italy)

- An added layer of vulnerability in regards to forced marriage when it entails international movement

« I didn't even know what my rights were, and what I can do here, my husband used to say "I can send you back, you're in my control, the law in this country [is such that] when husband calls a wife here, he can do anything to her and she has no rights" » 09 Pakistan (UK)

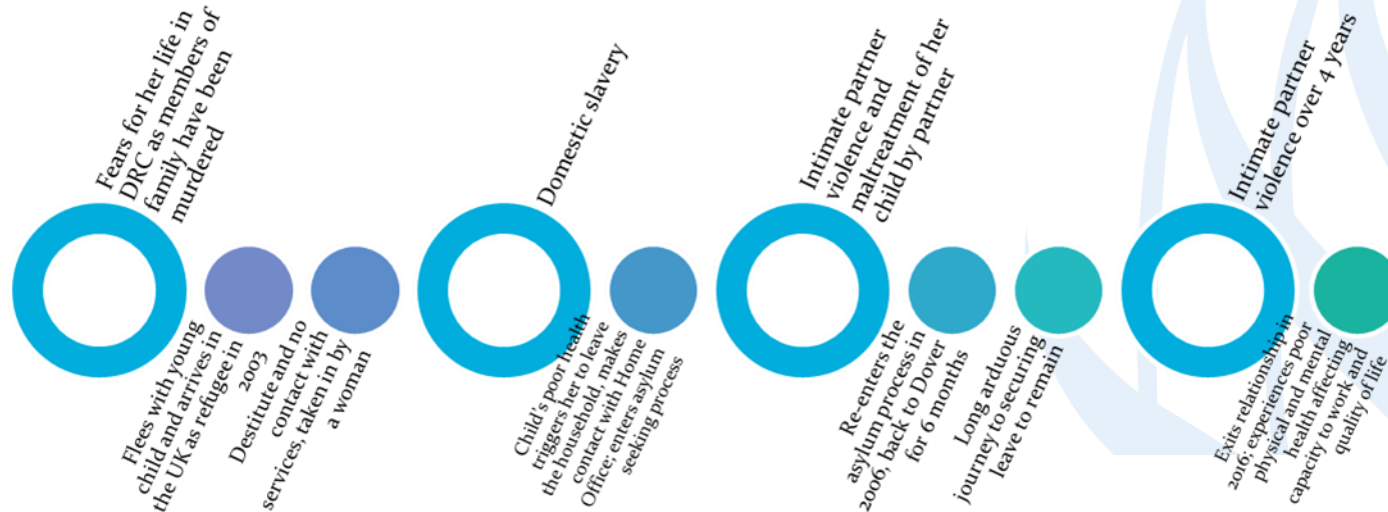
- Risks extend beyond domestic and relationship contexts

« We, the housekeepers don't have any rights. Because if I don't work, I won't renew my documents and the pressure... you know? The pressure is the first thing. A woman puts up with many things. I was raped at my job and I didn't tell. For surviving. I've borne what nobody can bear" » C. Morocco (Spain)

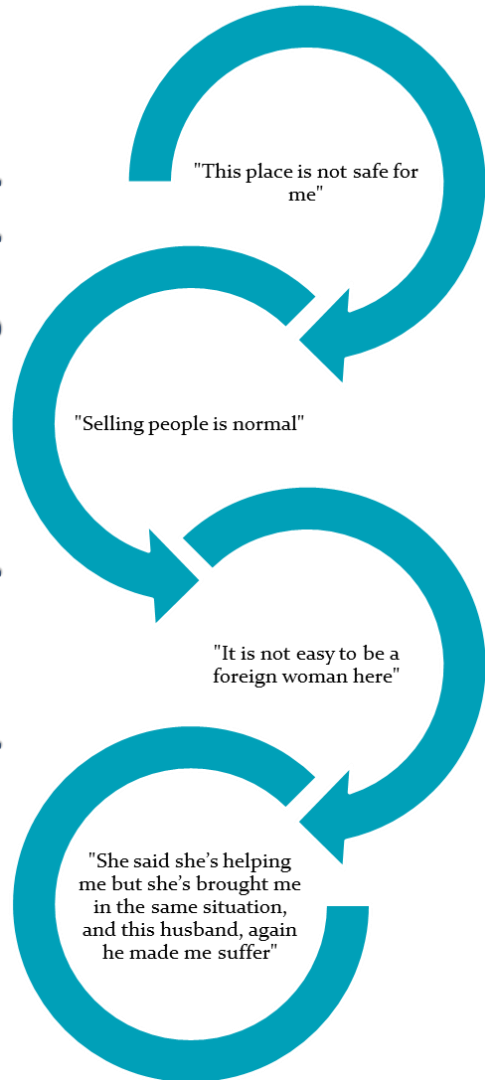
## Stories of polyvictimisation “this woman, she said she’s helping me but she’s brought me in the same situation, and this husband, again he made me suffer. When I ran from that house, I just ran”



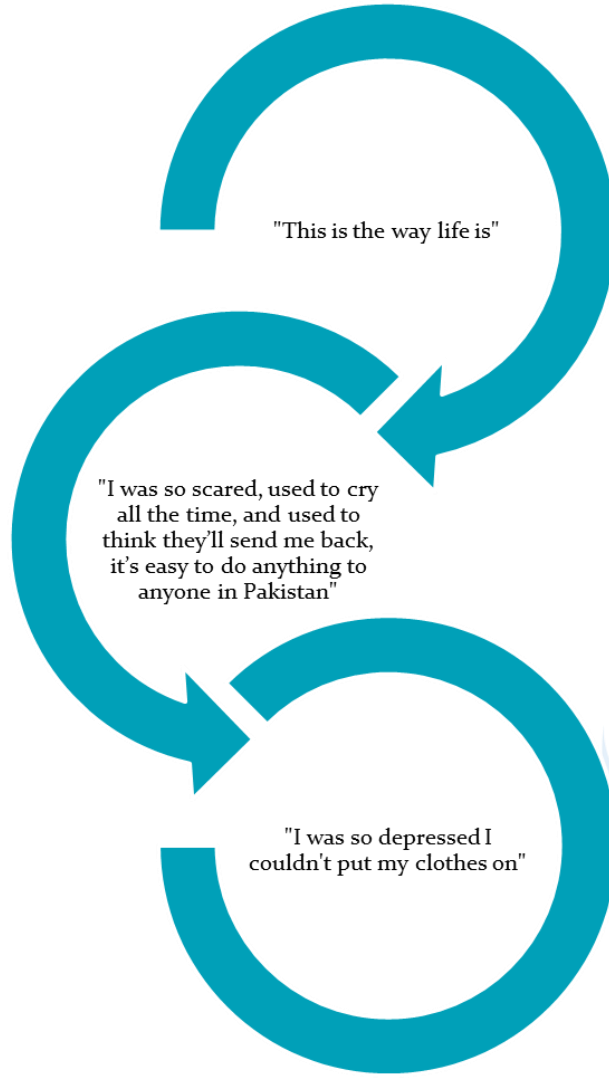
- It was rare that exposure to abuse and violence occurred in isolation. Our interviews tell tragic stories of persistent and severe abuse in intimate and family relationships, and across home and work settings in the host countries and countries of origin



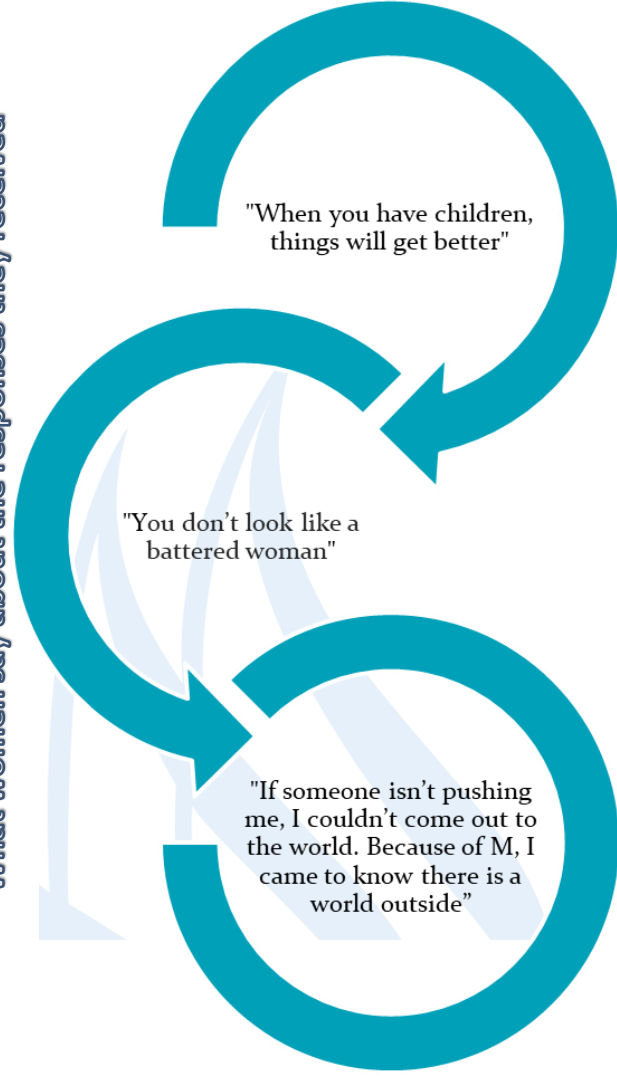
GBV - an inescapable reality of women's migratory experiences



Barriers to help-seeking and mental health crisis as a turning point



What women say about the responses they received





# ***Primary barriers to recognising abuse and seeking help “this is the way life is”***



- The power of cultural norms around control of women demonstrated in story of a woman residing in the UK since youth yet closed off to any external influence, which serves to exacerbate her risk after marriage:

« When I got married, I don't know how to live with a husband, it was when I was 17. I had an alcoholic husband; he forced me to smoke and drink, if I didn't, he used to pour alcohol in my mouth. I used to cry, he started beating me, and few days later, he brought his girlfriend directly to bedroom at midnight... I felt this is the way life is like. Like, movies, husbands always dominate wives. Even my sister's family too, I used to see the domination, that's what will happen. 05 India (UK)

- When she sought help within her own family and amongst members of her husband's family with whom she shared a home, she was blamed for the problems and told she was 'demon-possessed'. For two years, she endured physical, psychological and sexual violence.

« I was very depressed, and thought, “why am I still alive? I just want to die.” But I was scared to take a step. I didn't know how to commit suicide. I couldn't sleep for a while. I could only remember the bad things. I had many medicines, anti-depressants. »

# ***Primary barriers to recognising abuse and seeking help “this is the way life is”***



- Findings consistent with the literature on readiness for change with regard to abuse and violence (Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013); migrant women move through different stages of recognising the abuse and understanding the (un)acceptability of violence and abuse within relationships and the family and in community, workplace and migration contexts.
- However, even when women reach a point of recognising their need for help, they will encounter several related barriers. They encounter far more complex and entrenched barriers to escaping violence than native women. These include individual level factors such as language and lack of procedural knowledge. For example, one woman, who moved to Malta to escape the Bosnia war, experienced abuse from her husband for several years before separating. Her lack of Maltese and English language skills undermined her help-seeking efforts by increasing her isolation:

« All day alone in Malta, I could not speak at all, since I did not know English » A. Montenegro (Malta)

***A double-edged sword: escape violence but at what cost? “I was so scared, used to cry all the time, and used to think they’ll send me back, it’s easy to do anything to anyone in Pakistan”***



- There are always costs associated with escaping violence (O’Doherty et al., 2016) but migrant women face a particularly limited set of options
- They are compelled to weigh up the costs of staying with the abuser (e.g. persistent/escalating abuse) and costs of leaving (e.g. loss of right to remain in destination country). This problem extends beyond the family/partner context to include employers and work settings also:
  - « Maybe the woman suffers more [than men] at work. I have suffered a lot at work. On one hand, you feel calm because you are legal here but, on the other hand, I have to endure too much to keep my documents in legality. » C. Morocco (Spain).

## ***A double-edged sword: escape violence but at what cost? “I was so scared, used to cry all the time, and used to think they’ll send me back, it’s easy to do anything to anyone in Pakistan”***



« We were walking from 3 o'clock til 9 o'clock. If you see my daughter's legs, they were very swollen and she was crying “mummy I can't make it anymore” and I have to put her on my back and walk with her and when I am tired I say “I have to drop you now”, that's what we do 'til we get there. And by the time we get there, they said “we close at night”, at 9 o'clock they stop taking people » 02 DRC (UK)

« He [husband] knew about the rape, but told me to keep quiet. If he supported me at that point, I could have gone ahead. He didn't want to talk about it. Later, he told me not to go to the police about rape, I said “I need to do something as it's killing me inside, I reported and he left me. » 04 India (UK)

- Women struggle hugely with this double-edged sword of wanting to escape violence locally and their realistic fears about destitution, detention, deportation, loss of children, family and partners/husbands, and even in relation to violent reverberations for family members back home:

« If I had reported him to the police, my “family would have been in great danger” said one of them but thanks to Sister [Maria] I succeeded in doing it. Now, I'm still anxious, but free and confident » Letter Country (Italy)

## ***Crisis as a turning point “I was so depressed that I couldn’t put my own clothes on”***

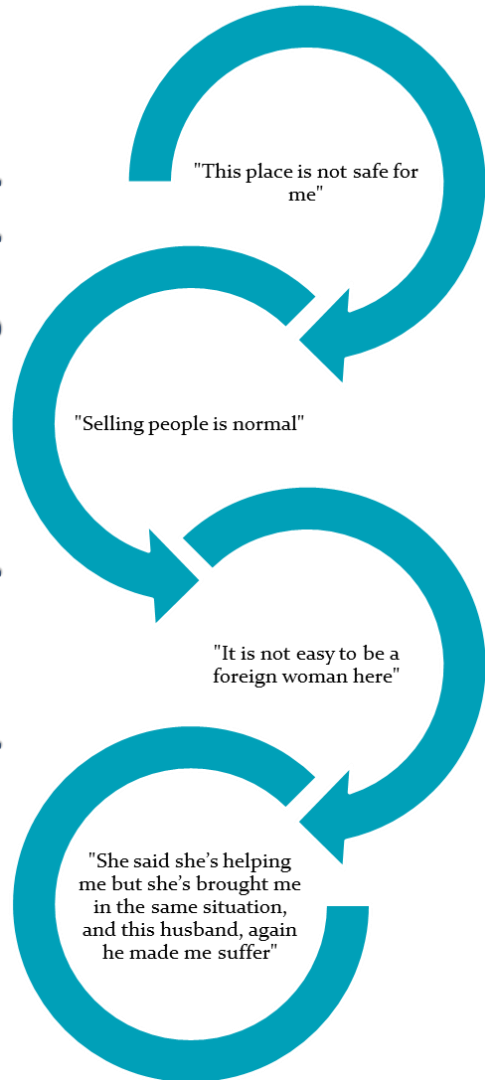


- Despair was a common response to the abuse and the extensive barriers women faced. Lacking capacity to exercise control over their circumstances and with no options for increasing their safety, many women in the study reached a point of crisis. Consequently, several women we met had attempted suicide:

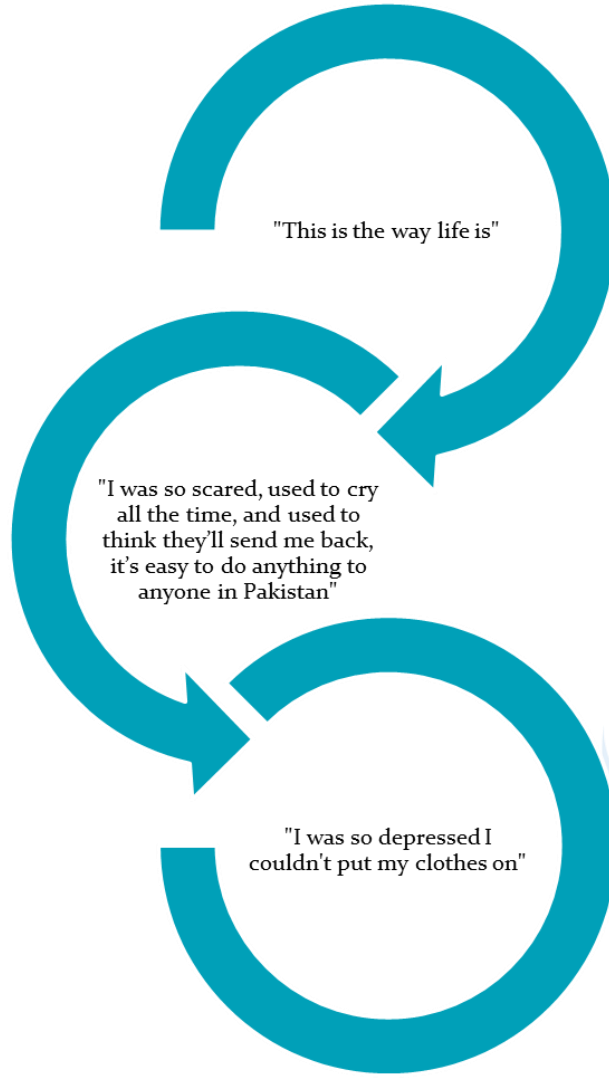
« I felt I was happier in hospital than in my brother’s house. I got involved with the other patients, and nurses were coming often to take my blood pressure. I had a good response from nurses. » 07 Sri Lanka (UK)

- The turning points differ somewhat to those reported by native women (Chang et al., 2010). It is unacceptable for any person to experience abuse but there is clear evidence that migrant women are more at risk of repeated, severe abuse, multiple perpetrators and types of abuse, extended phases and secondary victimisation

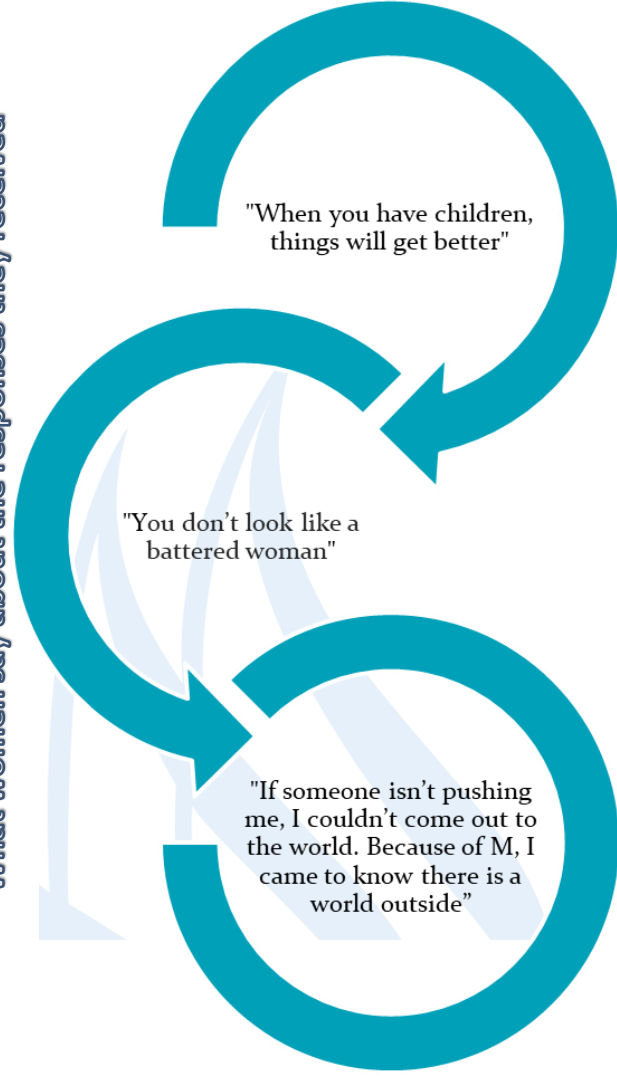
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## ***Poor quality response from informal networks***

***“when you have children, things will get better”***



There was some evidence of women receiving support from other women in similar situations and from members of the community:

« Women have always been present in my life, Spanish and migrant women. They invited me to live with them, to share a room, [to stay together] at Christmas, they accompanied me to know the resources » A. Mexico (Spain)

« A family in Sliema helped me a lot - they gave me money to pay insurance, food boxes, they bought me a washing machine. I relied a lot on the community to help and the church. Government agencies are not very active with the exception of Appogg. » A. Montenegro (Malta)

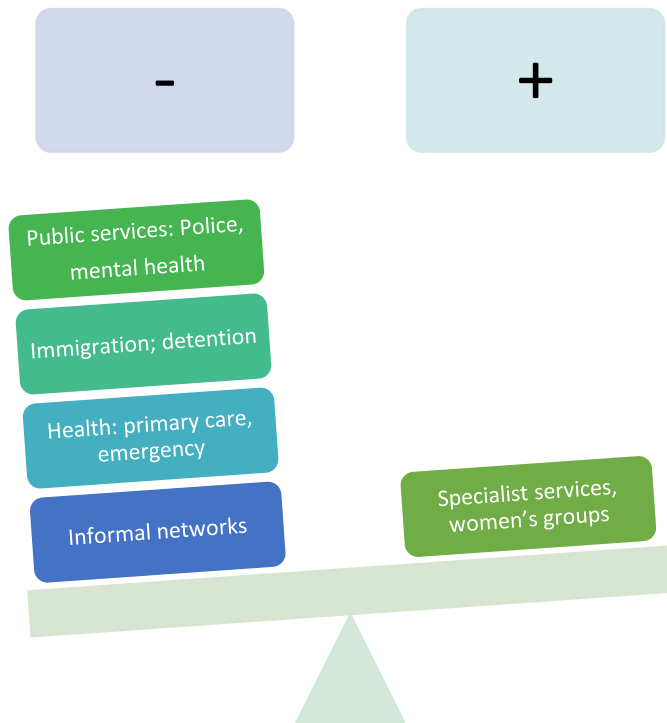
## ***Poor quality response from informal networks***

***“when you have children, things will get better”***



- Harmful responses including that abuse should not be reported or that it is her fault, in the case of rape
- Similarly, women were blamed for IPV or were told they should tolerate it and that it is a normal response to conflict in relationships
- It was particularly difficult for women who were abused and exploited by several members of a household, as was the case for several women of South Asian origin
- The Spanish study highlighted how the two Moroccan women interviewed had no support from family and friends, which may owe to cultural normalisation of abuse in some sections of Muslim communities (Anton-García, 2003; Verde-Diego, 2014).

# Service strengths and gaps



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## ***Harmful responses from institutions & organisations “you don’t look like a battered woman”***

***B. Morocco (Spain)***



- Wide evidence of practices that lack gender and cultural sensitivity:

« I went to the GP when my difficulties started. He said “Why are you wasting your time and my time? You are fine, [there’s] nothing wrong with you.” I collapsed so many times at home. I wanted to know what was going on, I knew it was stress » 04 India (UK)

« One day went there to sign in, and four or five police officers handcuffed me. Having my husband helped a little bit; if I was alone, God knows what would have happened, all police officers were men; I was so scared of the men. » 04 India (UK)

## ***Harmful responses from institutions & organisations “you don’t look like a battered woman”***



- Lack of understanding & empathy, and judgemental attitudes:

« Once, I found a young worker scolding me because I had brought my little daughter to Spain by the illegal way. That happened because he wasn't informed. Women travel or emigrate due to precarious circumstances in our countries, looking for better living conditions. And he was scolding me because I dared to travel with the girl and in this situation of vulnerability. » A. Mexico (Spain)

« The social worker said “But your appearance is nice, you don't look like a battered woman...” [...] If she doesn't see you as a victim, she doesn't help you either listen to you » B. Morocco (Spain)

## ***Harmful responses from institutions & organisations “you don’t look like a battered woman”***



- Poor responses reverberated across public mental health/psychological services. Two women who immigrated to Spain with their children reported that the supports offered by specific services for migrant women were not adapted to their needs. Centres offered psychological or legal help, but their basic needs were not met:
  - « They just offered me a psychologist. I could break down to cry or tell my story... but that did not serve me. I needed resources [...] » B. Morocco (Spain)
  - « These group therapies are great but it’s a small group of no more than 20 women and only for 6 months [...]. It is not enough. There is a significant distance between the institutional discourse and the reality of what they offer. » A. Mexico (Spain)

## ***Harmful responses from institutions & organisations “you don’t look like a battered woman”***



- Furthermore, and perhaps most concerning, is how some women’s organisations and agencies to support victims of DV and SV make support contingent on reporting the abuser, despite there being no specific protocol to assist women to do so and international recommendations against mandatory IPV reporting (e.g. WHO, 2013).

« If you do not denounce they do not support you. There is no support for them. They are excluded. [...]. Some women cannot give a solid argument or have not evidences to convince their condition of victims... In this cases Public Institutions do not receive them, for example, in shelters ... Public Services of [placename] are all the same. They scold them... » A. Mexico (Spain)

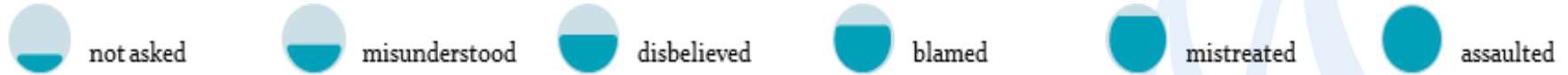


## ***Harmful responses from institutions & organisations “you don’t look like a battered woman”***



- There was little evidence of women achieving justice following their experiences. One of the few cases that did mention attending court highlighted the inadequacies of the criminal justice system for migrant victims of GBV:  
« I was in court for a long time. I find it discriminating being non-Maltese. He used to threaten that the court was a waste of time. (...) I feel that the court did nothing to confront a man who abused so many women. » B. Philippines (Malta)

# Differentiating inadequate responses to survivors



***Positive response from ‘specialist’ SV sector –  
culturally competent and trauma-informed  
“if someone isn’t pushing me, I couldn’t come out to the world.  
Because of M, I came to know there is a world outside as well”.***



- Despite the majority of women findings inadequacies in the way they were treated as they sought help for violence in their lives and its consequences, one woman describes overcoming the fear that afflicted her for a long time thanks to help received from support services:

« I am living on my own and at least now I am not scared; I was scared to get out of the room and could not stand to stay in a room for a meeting if more than 2 people were present » A. Philippines (Malta)

- Migrant women interviewed in Spain identified several charities that were hugely supportive at different stages in their journeys. One of the women from Morocco also highlighted the value of showing positive regard for others, an experience that has been sadly lacking in lives of all women we met through this research.

« You find a person in the reception... the first the smile in his face [...] that makes you feel that you are at home. That you feel that... I don’t know, I can’t express... well, exceptional. I have a really good treatment by many people around me” » C. Morocco (Spain)

## ***Positive response from ‘specialist’ SV sector – culturally competent and trauma-informed***

***“if someone isn’t pushing me, I couldn’t come out to the world.  
Because of M, I came to know there is a world outside as well”.***



- The poor treatment of survivors from refugee, migrant or minority ethnic groups is increasingly recognised to lead to secondary victimisation, further isolation, abuse and delayed recovery
- In settings where these issues are addressed, the response from migrant (and minority group) survivors is overwhelmingly positive
- « Since I knew [counsellor], my life changed because I was feeling like I am going to die, I was almost dead because my husband did so many things to me and when I cannot get help, whom to tell about my problems. Yeah but since I knew M I was crying, crying, feeling very down, but she used to encourage me. Then I get my life back. I was almost dead. » 06 Uganda (UK).
- « Before this service, I was blank. I tried to commit suicide many times, but better now because I know there is someone [from a specialist service] with me. » 04 India (UK)

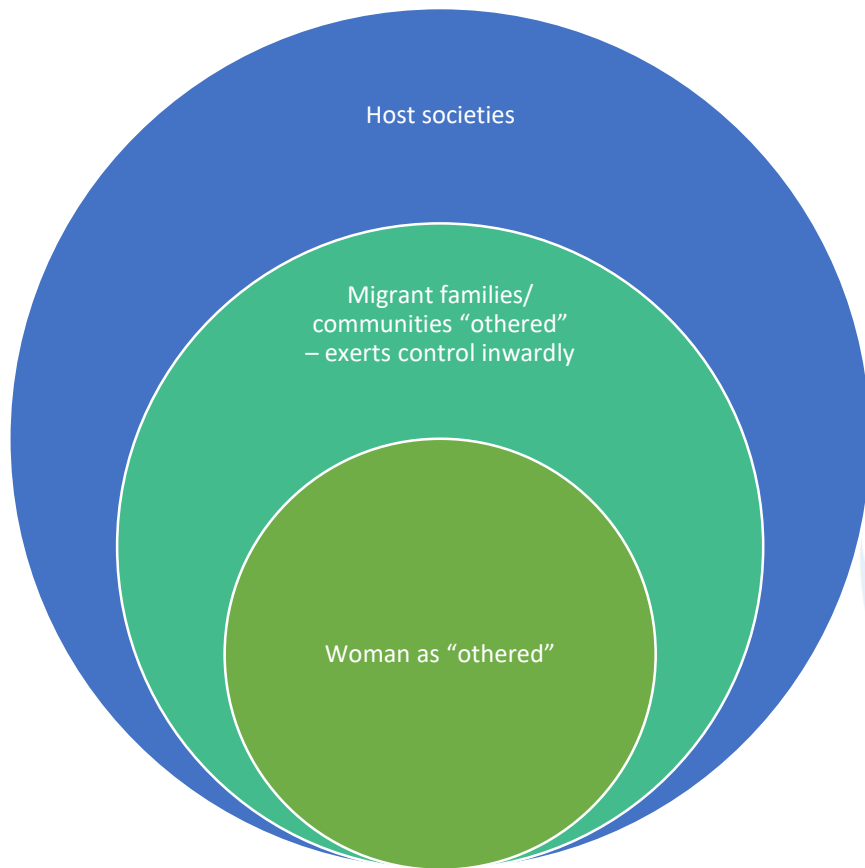
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# Key findings & implications

1. Exposure to multiple forms of gender-based violence was reported by majority of participants. This included pre-migration conflict-related sexual violence, IPV across the lifespan, from childhood 'witnessing' to consistent exposure patterns in pre- and post-migration settings; child maltreatment (in relation to self and own children); forced and early marriage and the threat of so-called 'honour'-based violence; sexual assault and rape by strangers, acquaintances, partners and officials; and human trafficking and domestic servitude;
2. Factors like conflict, poverty and gender dimensions underpinned early exposure to violence (in home countries) and the nature of vulnerability shifted substantially as women entered new geographical, social and cultural spaces and 'became migrant';



# Overlapping systems of subordination associated with the many different identities



# Key findings & implications

3. The location of migrant women at the intersection of race, immigration and gender makes the actual experience of SGBV qualitatively different from that of White or native-born women. The experience of multiple subordination, coupled with institutional expectations from police, immigration agencies, health, housing and other public services, including those aimed at supporting women survivors of SGBV, based on inappropriate non-intersectional contexts, shapes and ultimately limits the opportunities for meaningful support and intervention, and recovery;
4. It is therefore crucial that there is understanding and awareness among frontline professionals and service providers about multilayered and routinised forms of domination that often converge in these women's lives, and hinder their ability to create alternatives to abusive relationships and the other forms of violence and abuse they experience;
5. Improved training may also alleviate the high levels of burnout experienced by providers/professionals who attempt to meet the needs of migrant women victims;





# Key findings & implications

6. Not only do those working with migrant persons across sectors need increased understanding of the intersectionality phenomenon, but services need specialist reach including staff that share language and cultural backgrounds; capability around responding to disclosure and handling referral safely and sensitively; cultural competence and confidence to challenge harmful community norms; access to trained interpreters; options for migrant/women to exercise choice (e.g. can request female interviewer for police or immigration interviews); trauma-informed practice across contexts in which migrant people/women present;
7. The relative invisibility of migrant women's role in Europe's workforce and the associated insecurity faced by participants in domestic and other work environments, regardless of legal status, underscores the need for gender sensitive policies on migration and employment, and to progress legislation to protect against modern day slavery;
8. Multiple avenues for informing newly arrived and current migrants must be explored and used to enable better access to information on risks, rights and services which could be promoted through community groups, early intervention, immigration and border control agencies engagement with survivors and those at risk.



**I used to feel like a leaf who would fall down when  
the wind would blow....now I feel stronger**