

**FIS0060 Written Evidence: Financial Inclusion Strategy
submitted by Dr Punita Chowbey and Dr Clare Wiper**

CHOWBEY, Punita <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8400-468X>> and WIPER, Clare

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<https://shura.shu.ac.uk/37353/>

This document is the Published Version [VoR]

Citation:

CHOWBEY, Punita and WIPER, Clare (2026). FIS0060 Written Evidence: Financial Inclusion Strategy submitted by Dr Punita Chowbey and Dr Clare Wiper. UK Parliament. [Other]

Copyright and re-use policy

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

Written evidence submitted by Dr Punita Chowbey and Dr Clare Wiper

Dr Punita Chowbey, Senior Research Fellow, Sheffield Hallam University

Dr Clare Wiper, Assistant Professor in Criminology, Northumbria University

1. Professional Expertise

Dr Punita Chowbey's research focuses on women's economic well-being, particularly economic abuse among South Asians in the UK and South Asia. She has led several research projects (e.g. funded by NIHR, GCRF) as Principal Investigator (PI) on economic abuse in the UK and South Asia. Her research investigated women's access to resources and led to the first peer-reviewed paper on economic abuse in the UK (Chowbey, 2017a), arguing that policy and practice must consider cultural and structural forms of economic abuse to be inclusive. She is the producer and director of a trilogy, *SPENT, EARNED, SAVED: Economic Abuse in India*, of which the first two films have been completed. She actively engages with media on issues of economic abuse. Her research has informed policy and practice nationally and globally, including Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs).

Dr Wiper has been researching and advocating for improved responses to domestic and economic abuse for over a decade. She is the academic lead of the EPSRC/UKFin+ funded project Designing Out Economic Abuse in the UK Banking Industry (Royal, Wiper & Barros Pena, 2025) and the British Academy funded project The Role of Coerced Debt in the Context of Domestic Abuse (Wiper & Glinski, 2025; Wiper & Finnegan, forthcoming). She evaluated the Economic Abuse Evidence Form (developed and piloted by Money Advice Plus in partnership with Surviving Economic Abuse) (Wiper, 2023) and is currently leading a pilot project about credit union responses to economic abuse.

2. Introduction

2.1 This submission welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Treasury Select Committee on the Government's recently published Financial Inclusion Strategy.

It addresses the following question set out in the Terms of Reference:

Should the Strategy include measures to address particular challenges related to financial exclusion only faced by those with certain protected characteristics?

2.2 Through this submission, we argue that the Financial Inclusion Strategy must tailor its policies and practices to meet the needs of minority ethnic women experiencing economic abuse. Our evidence is based on Chowbey's extensive experience of working

with minority ethnic women particularly South Asian women across the UK (e.g. Qureshi & Chowbey, 2025; Chowbey, 2020; Chowbey, 2017a; Chowbey, 2017b; Chowbey 2016) and Wiper’s experience of researching women’s experiences of economic abuse, which includes minority women’s experiences in the UK context (e.g. Royal, Wiper & Barros Pena, 2025; Wiper & Glinski, 2025; Wiper, 2018; Wiper & Finnegan, forthcoming).

- 2.3 Our submission demonstrates how minority ethnic women’s lived experiences of economic abuse intersect with financial exclusion in ways that are not sufficiently addressed in the Strategy.

3. The financial inclusion strategy identifies economic abuse as a cross-cutting theme but is insufficiently addressed in the strategy, particularly regarding specific needs of minority ethnic women.
 - 3.1 Understanding minority ethnic populations' interactions with financial services must be situated within a wider investigation of other mediating factors, such as migrant status, ethnicity, poverty, education, gender and labour market position (Wiper & Finnegan, forthcoming; Qureshi & Chowbey; 2025; Chowbey, 2020; Chowbey 2016; Khan 2008, Atkinson 2006). These structural inequalities not only shape financial behaviours but also increase women’s vulnerability to economic abuse, particularly where women are financially dependent on partners.
 - 3.2 Several migrant and minority women that Chowbey interviewed and migrant victim-survivors that Wiper interviewed (who did not have leave to remain in the UK) spoke about the implications of not being able to open a bank account – something they are legally prevented from doing because of their immigration status. It is important that migrant victim-survivors are permitted to open a basic bank account, apply for certain forms of credit (e.g., small loan, credit card) and are eligible for “flee funds” whilst awaiting the outcome of their visa application, otherwise they will remain financially dependent on abusive partners and unable to escape.
 - 3.3 Several women Chowbey and Wiper interviewed struggled to open a bank account when they joined their spouse’s following marriage and ended up having joint bank accounts. In most cases the situation did not change even after several years of living in the UK. Some women reported child benefit money going to the husband’s account to which they had no access. A first-generation Pakistani woman Chowbey interviewed said, “My husband used to take benefits at that time, and he had control of everything. He used to give me my pocket money.” Some of Chowbey’s participants reported that their husbands monitored spending through joint accounts and objected to them opening accounts in their own names and having independent credit or debit cards. One first-generation Gujarati woman reported her husband getting angry when she wanted to apply for a credit card in her own name. She recalled, ‘So, I said I need these documents [to apply for credit

card] and he just lost it, “How dare you think of taking a credit card?”. Another of Chowbey’s participants described how, although there were no financial issues early in her marriage, her husband later purchased a house with his second wife who he had married recently, leaving her with no control over finances and unable to leave the marriage.

- 3.4** Issues of trust, safety and belonging also shape minority ethnic women’s financial decisions around savings and borrowings. These issues mirror the wider minority groups experiences and not just women; however, they may leave migrant and minority women with fewer legal protections (Chowbey 2016; Khan 2008, Atkinson 2006). Both Chowbey and Wiper found women to rely on informal borrowing from friends and extended family and informal community savings schemes or ‘committees. This makes it more difficult for women to resist or escape economic abuse. Chowbey also found that some South Asian women preferred to save in form of gold jewellery. In Wiper’s research, two women loaned money from friends and family members and described the breakdown of these relationships when they were unable to pay them back: “I will never recover from this loss”. One Indian woman (on a spousal visa) loaned money from a community leader who forced her to repay via domestic servitude: “He said still more cleaning ... for weeks and weeks ... for a £100 loan”.
- 3.5** Lack of access to safe credit may also force women in dangerous situations. In Wiper’s research, one migrant woman was coerced into selling drugs and sex to make repayments to a well-known loan shark in her community. She also was coerced into having sex with her landlord in exchange for reduced rent. The inability to access credit and loans via safe, formal routes thus exposed immigrant and migrant women to new forms of abuse and social harm (Wiper & Finnegan, forthcoming).
- 3.6** Minority ethnic women face unique challenges including linguistic challenges and fear of deportation. These can increase their financial dependence and make it difficult to be financially included. For example, Chowbey and Wiper interviewed several women who could not read English and could not therefore understand what they were consenting to in financial transactions. A Moroccan woman (on spousal visa) interviewed by Wiper reported, “He’d tell me to sign it, that it would be very beneficial for me, I could not understand [read] it but I trusted him at the time”. Women who could not speak English were also prevented from talking to banking services without the perpetrator acting as an interpreter. The victim-survivors were therefore unable to disclose abuse, highlighting the importance of culturally competent domestic abuse training for banking staff, which should include recognising when a customer may need interpretation support. That said, one victim-survivor explained that she would not have disclosed abuse even if she could speak English or had an interpreter due to fear of deportation: “I had no choice, we have children together ... he said he would no longer sponsor my visa ... if I went against him”.

- 3.7** Stigma was also a huge barrier to disclosing economic abuse. In many communities there can be strong expectations that financial matters remain private within families, making disclosure to banks feel like a betrayal of these values. For instance, two British South Asian victim-survivors interviewed by Wiper described wanting to avoid bringing shame on their family and therefore did not disclose the economic abuse, including the coerced debts, for a long time: “I was so embarrassed ... I was so ashamed of the [coerced] debt”. They also feared losing support of their family and community if they disclosed this information to their bank or creditor: “My father would disown me”. There is clearly a need for destigmatisation, of increased education, of better detection of coercion.
- 3.8** Chowbey found that migrant and minority women’s exclusion from financial services can also facilitate exclusion from transnational investments (Chowbey & Qureshi 2025; Chowbey 2017a). For example, lacking bank accounts or National Insurance numbers forced some women to work cash-in-hand for small businesses. In addition to low pay and exclusion from pension and NI contributions, women spent their earnings on daily household expenses while spouses were able to save and invest. In some cases, these investments were made overseas without women’s knowledge or inclusion. One of Chowbey’s participants, a first-generation Pakistani woman who worked in a factory for many years helped build two houses in Pakistan but was not included in ownership of either. She felt unable to challenge this and relied instead on the hope of mediation by relatives.
- 3.9** The Strategy must also account for different household financial arrangements and compositions, such as “joint family” finances common in some South Asian households (Chowbey, 2020; Singh & Bhandari, 2012). In joint households, women – particularly daughters-in-law – often have little involvement in financial decision-making. Lack of access to and understanding of financial services can further entrench exclusion. One of Chowbey’s participants, a first-migrant Gujarati woman who did not speak English and had overstayed her visa worked cash-in-hand as a domestic worker. She reported asking her employer to tell her mother-in-law that she earned £2 less per hour, enabling her to retain a small portion of her wages. She wanted to buy a gift for her husband on his birthday and some small items for her daughter from time to time. She said, ‘I want to buy a surprise gift for my husband...I feel bad ... when we go to shops my daughter wants things... I feel bad I can’t buy’. She was required to hand over her income to her husband’s older brother, who controlled all financial decisions.
- 3.10** Concerns about Black and Asian women facing higher rates of account refusals, more stringent identity verification requirements, and assumptions of financial incompetence from banking staff were raised by some of the domestic abuse advocates Wiper interviewed. One advocate explained that when Black and Asian women try to escape economic abuse and establish independent finances, they encounter “racist barriers” that

white British women do not face, creating additional hurdles to financial recovery.

4. Key Recommendations

- 4.1** Community-based, culturally responsive organisations are essential for achieving financial inclusion but are not sufficiently resourced or prioritised in the Strategy. These organisations need to be resourced and strengthened to support migrant and minority women's financial inclusion.
- 4.2** Banking materials and services are predominantly in English-only which exacerbated migrant and minority women's inability to understand the nature of financial transactions, particularly when made online. This highlights the need for policies and terms and conditions to be available in a range of languages.
- 4.3** The government must enable migrant and minority ethnic women experiencing economic abuse to access formal, regulated credit and banking services regardless of immigration status, recognising that exclusion from legitimate financial services directly exposes them to exploitation, modern slavery and further abuse.
- 4.4** The government must require financial institutions to identify and respond to economic abuse through mandatory economic abuse training for frontline banking staff and developing clear pathways to identifying supporting women experiencing economic abuse. It is essential that women are supported to have independent accounts, contest coerced debts and repair credit damage. Economic abuse needs to be sufficiently considered into financial regulations and consumer safeguards recognising financial inclusion as a preventative and protective measure to prevent abuse for those at risk.
- 4.5** It is important that the government should consider implementing culturally competent financial inclusion interventions that address transnational financial practices within migrant households. For example, funding specialist advice services to support migrant women to understand and protect their financial contributions to overseas investments. Financial institutions need to be aware of these practices to be able to provide necessary guidance and support to minority and migrant women.
- 4.6** Financial inclusion strategies often assume households to be nuclear and financial control to be a matter of individuals. However, there are a variety of household composition and financial practices exist especially for those from minority and migrant backgrounds. It is important to acknowledge joint and extended household financial arrangements in policy design as well as to ensure that financial inclusion initiatives do not stereotype or reinforce existing unequal financial relations within the households.
- 4.7** Without targeted, intersectional, and adequately resourced interventions, the Financial Inclusion Strategy risks reinforcing existing inequalities faced by British minority ethnic women. Therefore, we urge the government to consider the specific challenges faced by

women from minority ethnic backgrounds including especially for those who are first-generation migrants.

5. REFERENCES

- Atkinson, A. (2006). Migrants and Financial Services: A review of the situation in the United Kingdom. A research report from the Personal Finance Research Centre, University of Bristol. Working paper, available online:
- Chowbey, P. & Qureshi, K. (2025) The need for adequate consideration of transnational legal context for supporting minority ethnic women suffering economic abuse through marriage, separation and post separation in the UK. Written evidence (VAWG0065) committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/138298/html/
- Chowbey, P. (2020) Economic justice, economic abuse and household resources among South Asian in the UK and South Asia, PhD thesis, Sheffield Hallam University
- Chowbey, P. (2017a). Women's narratives of economic abuse and financial strategies in Britain and South Asia. *Psychology of Violence*, 7(3).
- Chowbey, P. (2017b). What is Food Without Love? The Micro-politics of Food Practices Among South Asians in Britain, India, and Pakistan. *Sociological Research Online*, 22(3), 165-185.
- Chowbey, P. (2016). Employment, masculinities, and domestic violence in 'fragile' contexts: Pakistani women in Pakistan and the UK. *Gender & Development*, 24(3), 493-509.
- Khan, O. (2008). Financial inclusion and ethnicity: an agenda for research and policy action. <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/FinancialInclusion-2008.pdf>.
- Qureshi K, & Chowbey, P. (2025) Relational logics of child maintenance and post-separation economic abuse in minoritized British South Asian post-divorce families, *Sociological Research Online*.
- Royal, K., Wiper, C., and Barros Pena, B. (2025) *Designing Out Economic Abuse in the UK Banking Industry: A Call To Action*. Northumbria University. <https://doi.org/10.25398/rd.northumbria.30499676.v1>
- Singh, S., & Bhandari, M. (2012). Money management and control in the Indian joint family across generations. *The Sociological Review*, 60(1), 46-67.
- Wiper, C. (2018) *Feminist Anti-Violence Activism in Austerity Britain: A North East of England Case Study*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Available at: <https://researchportal.northumbria.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/177419049/ClareWiperThe sisUNN>

Wiper, C. (2023) *Economic Abuse Evidence Form: Early Impact Evaluation*. Surviving Economic Abuse and Northumbria University.

Wiper, C., and Glinski, J. (2025) 'The Role of Banks in Addressing and Preventing Coerced Debt in the Context of Intimate Partner Abuse'. *British Journal of Criminology*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaf078>

Wiper & Finnegan (forthcoming) 'Coerced debt in the context of intimate partner abuse: the immediate and lasting implications for women's physical and economic safety', in L. Trickett, I. Zempi & J. Smith (eds.) *Palgrave Handbook on Violence Against Women and Girls*.

January 2026