

“I can’t tell people what is happening at home”

Domestic abuse within South Asian communities: the specific needs of women, children and young people

June 2008

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Front cover quote:

“I can’t tell people what is happening at home” is a quote from a young person calling the NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline (p.23)

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Foreword

This report focuses on the specific experiences and needs of children and women in South Asian communities who have been affected by domestic violence.

Children are often the hidden victims of domestic violence and one in four children will experience violence between those caring for them. The Department of Health estimates that 750,000 children are directly affected by domestic violence each year.

This is the first time that findings from existing research literature, data from NSPCC helpline services, interviews with managers and practitioners and consultations with young people about domestic abuse in South Asian communities have been brought together in one report to press for change among policy-makers, politicians and South Asian communities themselves.

Children are often inadvertently overlooked when responding to families who are affected by domestic violence and as a result services for children are patchy and inadequate. This can compound the damaging long-term effects of their experiences, which may include poor mental health, anxiety and their ability to form relationships.

It is vital that South Asian children should be helped to overcome their experiences of witnessing domestic abuse, helped to protect themselves and empowered and supported in these very difficult circumstances. The report contains a series of recommendations – we urge those who can make policy and practice changes to listen.

Dame Mary Marsh

Director and Chief Executive

NSPCC

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Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Foreword	iii
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the report	1
1.2 Aim and focus of report	1
1.3 Policy context and South Asian communities	2
1.4 Children's Rights	3
1.5 Defining domestic abuse/violence	4
1.6 Framework for the report	5
2 Experiences of domestic abuse	6
2.1 Experiences of domestic abuse: South Asian children and young people	7
2.2 South Asian children witnessing domestic abuse	7
2.3 South Asian children used as pawns in domestic abuse	8
2.4 Direct abuse of South Asian children and young people	9
2.5 Abduction of South Asian children	11
2.6 Consequences of domestic abuse	11
2.7 Consequences of domestic abuse for South Asian children and young people	12
2.8 Impact of domestic abuse on children: lack of awareness among South Asian mothers	14
2.9 Views of South Asian girls and young people	14
3 Barriers to help-seeking	16
3.1 Recognising domestic abuse	16
3.2 Language	18
3.3 Lack of support from extended family	18
3.4 Experiences of discrimination	19
3.5 Insecure immigration status	20
3.6 Cultural barriers	21
3.6.1 Shame and honour	21
3.6.2 The impact of shame and honour on South Asian young people	22
3.6.3 The impact of cultural barriers on South Asian children and young people seeking help	24
3.7 No one to turn to	25

3.8 Lack of knowledge about help available	25
3.9 Perceived barriers: South Asian girls and young women	26
3.10 Perceived barriers: South Asian children speaking to ChildLine	27
4 Challenges in service provision	28
4.1 Level of provision	28
4.2 Nature of provision	30
4.2.1 Provision for older children	31
4.3 Work with perpetrators	32
4.4 The case for specialist Asian refuge provision	33
4.5 Funding issues	34
4.6 Better guidance and practice in working with South Asian families	35
4.6.1 Safe contact with perpetrators post-separation	38
4.7 Multi-agency and partnership work	39
5 Bridging the gaps: good practice	44
5.1 Engaging with South Asian communities	44
5.2 Awareness-raising initiatives	47
5.3 Routine enquiry	47
5.4 NSPCC Child Protection Helplines	49
5.5 Work with perpetrators	50
5.6 Whole family approach	51
5.7 Support for South Asian women	52
5.8 Support services for South Asian children and young people	56
5.8.1 Features of successful support services for south Asian children and young people	60
5.9 Education and awareness-raising initiatives	64
6 Forced marriage	67
6.1 What is a forced marriage?	67
6.2 Incidence of forced marriage	68
6.3 Reasons for a forced marriage	68
6.4 Policy context	69
6.5 Service provision	70
6.6 Issues affecting South Asian adolescent girls within a forced marriage	72
6.7 Appropriate support	74

6.8 Preventative work	75
7 Faith and community groups	77
7.1 Community and religious leaders	77
7.2 Limited domestic abuse work within faith and community groups	77
7.3 Barriers to working with faith and community groups	78
7.4 Partnership work	79
8 Policy recommendations	80
References	90
Appendix 1	
Policy context	95
Appendix 2	
Methodology	97
Appendix 3	
Data from NSPCC Child Protection Helplines	100
Appendix 4	
Case study:	
Seminar with Imams on domestic violence: responding to the needs of Muslim families in Tower Hamlets	102
Appendix 5	
List of people interviewed as part of the research	104

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the report

This report was commissioned in response to the recommendations of the report of the NSPCC conference *Responding to Black and Minority Ethnic Children and Young People Affected by Domestic Violence*, which highlighted the need to raise awareness of these issues at the political level. The conference was underpinned by concerns identified through NSPCC work with over 360 BME organisations about the impact of domestic abuse on BME children and young people and the lack of appropriate support available to them.

The term ‘domestic abuse’ is used in this report instead of ‘domestic violence’. This is in line with the Welsh Assembly Government definition which recognises the impact of domestic abuse on children and is explicit about the coercive and controlling behaviours associated with domestic abuse which many victims experience. The term ‘domestic violence’ does however appear in references to published research that used this terminology.

1.2 Aim and focus of report

This report brings together policy issues, research derived from existing literature, interviews with managers and practitioners, consultations with young people and data from NSPCC helpline services to look specifically at domestic abuse within South Asian communities. The report is restricted to England and Wales as the NSPCC does not have any projects working with South Asian women and children affected by domestic abuse in Northern Ireland or Scotland.¹ Its findings and recommendations will be used to raise awareness and increase understanding within the government in England and the Welsh Assembly Government about the very specific needs and experiences of South Asian women and children.² It will also offer examples of good practice to service commissioners and providers at a local level.

Domestic violence policy and practice must consider that children may suffer both directly and indirectly if they live in households where there is domestic violence. The Government

¹ For a more comprehensive account of the methodology please refer to Appendix 2

² The term ‘government in England’ refers to the Parliament in Westminster and to the administration in Whitehall. The term ‘Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)’ refers to the devolved government for Wales which is responsible for developing and implementing policy in devolved areas including education, health, economic development, social services and local government. However ‘reserved’ areas, which continue to be the responsibility of the government in England, include criminal justice and immigration.

Guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2006) acknowledges that “it is often appropriate for such children to be regarded as children in need and some may need safeguarding from harm.” Furthermore, “there may be serious effects on children who witness domestic violence, which often result in behavioural issues.” For this reason, “children who are experiencing domestic violence may benefit from a range of support and services.”³

It is vital to recognise that the experiences and needs of women and children in situations of domestic abuse are very closely linked. Both the physical assaults and the psychological abuse suffered by mothers who experience domestic violence can have a negative impact on their ability to look after their children (Radford and Hester, 2006). As a result, “supporting a non-violent parent is likely to be the most effective way of promoting the child’s welfare” (HM Government, 2006). This support can assist the parent with understanding the effect of domestic violence on the child, as well responding appropriately to the child’s feelings and managing their behaviour. For this reason this report has a clear focus on both children’s and women’s needs and experiences.

It is important to acknowledge that South Asian men can also be victims of domestic abuse. However, this report focuses on children and their mothers, as women (rather than men) are the most heavily abused group.⁴ The NSPCC services interviewed for this report had not had any referrals of South Asian adult males suffering abuse from their partners.

1.3 Policy context and South Asian communities⁵

There have been a number of domestic violence policy developments since 1997. These include the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children Act 2004.⁶ The British Crime Survey demonstrates that domestic violence is experienced by women across all ethnic groups (Walby and Allen, 2004).⁷ However, the lack of official data and policies relating specifically to domestic abuse in South Asian communities

³ *Safeguarding Children: Working Together under the Children Act 2004* is the Welsh equivalent (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006)

⁴ The British Crime Survey (BCS) is the most reliable national survey that captures the incidence of domestic violence in England and Wales. It estimates that one in five women (21 per cent) and one in ten men (10 per cent) have experienced at least one incident of non-sexual domestic violence since the age of 16. Women however made up 89 per cent of victims that had experienced at least four domestic violence incidents (Walby and Allen, 2004).

⁵ The term South Asian used in this report refers to people with origins in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. This includes both British South Asians and recent South Asian immigrants from the Asian subcontinent.

⁶ The details of these Acts and other policy strategies and action plans (for England and Wales) are included in Appendix 1.

⁷ This is based on the 2001 British Crime Survey (BCS) in which Asian, Black and White women showed similar levels of domestic violence.

illustrates the fact that the experience of domestic abuse is still by and large regarded as being the same for all those affected, irrespective of cultural context. There also remains a large gap in the literature on the experiences of South Asian children and young people affected by domestic abuse. This is despite the fact that South Asian communities represent the largest minority group in Britain today.⁸

By drawing on good practice from NSPCC services for children and young people,⁹ as well as the expertise of a number of well established specialist agencies that provide support for abused South Asian women and children, this report demonstrates how policy and practice need to be developed within a targeted and culturally-appropriate framework in order to ensure that South Asian children affected by domestic violence are identified, protected and supported, as envisioned by the Every Child Matters (England) and Children and Young People: Rights to Action (Wales) Programmes.

1.4 Children's Rights

The Department of Health estimates that 750,000 children are affected by domestic violence annually (DH, 2002). The 2001 British Crime Survey (BCS) found that the presence of children in a household is associated with nearly double the risk of domestic violence for women (Walby and Allen, 2004). In a resident's survey carried out by Women's Aid over half (363) of the respondents said their children had witnessed the violence, with 35% saying they had been traumatised (Williamson, 2006).

Yet it is a child's right to be protected from such experiences. In particular, Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by the UK in 1991, obliges ratifying States to "take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s) or legal guardian(s)." This key Article is lent additional weight by the core principles of the Convention set out in Articles 2 (non-discrimination), 3.1 (the best interests of the child), 6 (the right to life and development) and 12 (the right to express views).

⁸ According to the 2001 Census, people from ethnic minority communities account for 7.9 per cent (4.6 million) of the total UK population. Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people are the largest minority group comprising 3.6 per cent (2,083,759).

⁹ The NSPCC has two specialist family support services supporting South Asian communities; hosts a Child Protection Asian Helpline; and supports South Asian children and young people within numerous other projects.

1.5 Defining domestic abuse/violence

It is important to note that the Home Office definition of domestic violence does not include its impact on children. This is in contrast to the definition of the Welsh Assembly Government which uses the term 'domestic abuse' and recognises the overlap between the abuse of the non-abusing parent and the abuse of children.

The Home Office defines domestic violence in its *National Report on Domestic Violence* (Home Office, 2005) as:

Any incident 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.

The Welsh Assembly Government defines domestic abuse in the *All Wales National Strategy* (Welsh Assembly government, 2005) as:

Domestic Abuse is best described as the use of physical and/or emotional abuse or violence, including undermining of self confidence, sexual violence or the threat of violence, by a person who is or has been in a close relationship. Domestic abuse can go beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, the destruction of a spouse's or partner's property, their isolation from friends, family or other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone, and stalking. It can also include violence perpetrated by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim/survivor. It can also include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. The wide adverse effects of living with domestic abuse for children must be recognised as a child protection issue. The effects can be linked to poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance abuse, mental health problems and homelessness from running away. Domestic abuse is not a "one-off" occurrence; it is frequent and persistent.

In England, the definition of domestic violence was extended to include forced marriage in 2005:

A marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties, where duress is a factor. Duress has been recognised by UK courts to include emotional pressure as well as criminal actions such as assault and abduction. It is a violation of internationally recognised human rights standards and a form of domestic violence. The victims of forced marriage can be both men and women and marriages can take place either in the UK or abroad.¹⁰

1.6 Framework for the report

The following four research questions formed the overarching framework for the report:

Q1. What are the experiences of South Asian victims of domestic abuse – a) children and young people and b) women?

Q2. What barriers prevent South Asian victims of domestic abuse (a. children and young people and b. women) from seeking help in domestic abuse situations?

Q3. What interventions are effective in supporting South Asian a) children and young people and b) women experiencing domestic abuse? Where are the gaps in current service provision?

Q4. What is the role and position of faith and community groups in relation to domestic abuse within South Asian communities?

¹⁰ Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2005) *Forced marriage: a wrong not a right*. London: Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office

2 Experiences of domestic abuse

Her husband always told her she was worthless. He taunted her for years saying ‘you’re mad and crazy.’

Service practitioner

He [husband] kept threatening to kill her. She was desperate to leave with the children but was too fearful he would kill her.

Service manager

He would always use religion against me. He would say “You are going against God. He will punish you and the children if you leave.” His words made me very upset and depressed.

South Asian woman calling NSPCC helpline

Experiences of domestic abuse are constructed within a context that relates to a myriad of factors including gender, class, education, culture, religious belief, age and the geographical origins of individuals, parents and grandparents (Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006).

Managers and practitioners interviewed discussed the full range of abuse experienced by their South Asian clients including physical, sexual, financial, psychological, emotional and controlling behaviour. Some South Asian women were isolated, refused the opportunity to go out of the house, had limited contact with family, and were unable to socialise with friends. Name calling, verbal taunting and ‘mental bullying’ were used to humiliate women. Men who controlled household finances would not provide some of the women with money for their basic needs. A number of perpetrators refused their partners the opportunity to learn English (through education or socialising) and used religion to justify abuse.¹¹

Gill (2004), based on a sample of 18 women in the UK, noted that physical and emotional abuse was more common than sexual and financial abuse. Various tactics were used by their partners to destroy self-esteem and prevent complaining or escape. Dasgupta (2000) noted culturally specific abuse, including threats to ruin a woman’s reputation among relatives, accusing women

¹¹ The Archbishops’ Council is explicit about abuse perpetrated in the name of faith in their definition of domestic violence (in contrast to the Home Office definition of domestic violence). In addition to physical, psychological, financial and sexual abuse and neglect, the guidelines also include spiritual abuse. This is defined as “for example, telling someone that God hates them; refusing to let them worship (e.g. not allowing a partner to go to church); using faith as a weapon to control and terrorize them for the abuser’s personal pleasure or gain; using religious teaching to justify abuse (e.g. ‘submit to your husband’), or to compel forgiveness.” (Archbishops’ Council, 2006, p.6).

of being a traitor to her culture and community, and forcing women to give up their traditional ways, clothes and language, so that they would appear Westernised.

Although domestic abuse tends to focus on intimate partner violence, in the case of many South Asian women other members of the perpetrator's family are cited as being involved in the violence (Minhas et al., 2002; Gill, 2004; Gangoli, et al., 2005; Raj et al., 2006). Violence connected to dowry can often underpin the extended family's involvement in the abuse (Dasgupta and Warriar, 1996).¹² In some cases women are murdered or commit suicide because of dowry demands (Singh et al., 1999).

Domestic violence can also manifest in so-called 'honour killings'. These can be the result of women and adolescent girls being seen as transgressing family and community concepts of acceptable behaviour and consequently being punished for damaging their family's honour. Killing is not the only crime perpetrated in the name of 'honour' but being the most violent and extreme, it often receives the most media attention (Gill, 2006).

2.1 Experiences of domestic abuse: South Asian children and young people

South Asian children and young people may witness domestic abuse, be used as pawns against their mother or suffer direct abuse themselves. Based on the interviews for this report, this occurs primarily at the hands of the perpetrator, although just under a quarter of practitioners and managers also noted extended family being involved in the direct or indirect abuse of children.

2.2 South Asian children witnessing domestic abuse

I see dad hitting mum all the time. He blames her for anything, like if he can't find his watch, or if the food is a bit cold. Yesterday he kicked her down the stairs and then made her hide in the bedroom when someone came over. I dread to wake up every morning – I don't know what will happen next.

Young South Asian person calling ChildLine

¹² The practice of dowry-giving varies among communities. In this context dowry can be defined as a gift of money or valuables given by the bride's family to the groom and his family. If the dowry a woman brings to the family is not regarded as adequate, it can become a cause of abuse for a woman following marriage (Imam, 1999).

He would describe dad making mum sleep on the floor and he drew a picture of dad in the bed and mum sleeping on the floor, as well as dad being physically violent because he ripped mum's ear and there's a picture of him having bitten mum's ear off.

Service practitioner

We had a three-year-old that talked about what she had seen dad do to mum...that's something I'll never forget.

Service practitioner

Practitioners and managers noted that the South Asian children they worked with were aware of the domestic abuse in most cases. Children described witnessing various traumas and disruption, fearful about their safety along with the safety of their mother and siblings. In some instances children were in the same room when the domestic abuse was taking place. In other cases, they overheard the verbal abuse, name calling and physical/sexual assaults on their mother from another room. In cases where the couple lived with extended family, lack of space meant parents and children shared the same room. This situation increases the likelihood of children witnessing domestic abuse, including violence in the form of physical and sexual assaults.

Children also witnessed domestic abuse by extended family including mothers-in-law, brothers-or sisters-in-law, and uncles. Children and young people were also used to control women by members of the extended family, where the in-laws would withdraw children from their mothers, as though they were their property, even to the point of not allowing a mother to breastfeed. The mother could also be forced to keep to quite a strict routine or regime in relation to the child, and face having the child taken away from her if she did not 'behave'. Extended family took responsibility for child-rearing, which often involved inappropriate parenting and disciplining. The mother was forced to watch and had no control over the situation. If a woman chose to leave the household, she was expected to leave her children with her in-laws.

2.3 South Asian children used as pawns in domestic abuse

Dad was physically abusive so mum split up from him. Mum stayed in the family home, but now he [dad] drives past the house every day and beeps his horn so the kids see him and they run up to the window. He does it to play with their minds. Mum's finding this very difficult to control because she's still coming to terms with it all.

Service Practitioner

The father says "Oh your mum's like this, your mum's like that; she's not buying you this" which obviously creates problems for her [mother] because then he'd [child] start playing up, having tantrums and it causes difficulties.

Service Practitioner

Domestic abuse is about power and control, and perpetrators use whatever means they can to control the victim or survivor, even their own children, to continue the abuse. Once a mother leaves a violent situation or is forced out, some perpetrators take children away from their mother to preserve their 'honour'. Fathers who manage the finances in the family can use this as a means to manipulate children through bribing, enticing them with gifts and portraying the mother as the guilty party after separation. For example, fathers may confuse children by telling them that 'mum doesn't love you' or 'she doesn't care for you or want to see you'.

When the entire family is involved in the abuse, the child can be turned against the mother, especially when the position of the woman and her role in the family is presented to the child in a very demeaning and negative way, with a view to them seeing the mother as worthless. In some cases, mothers were exposed to the same humiliating language from their children, who had heard the same language being used by others. Managers and practitioners described how children were even encouraged to put their mothers down through verbal name calling. Two cases cited by practitioners involved a husband actively teaching the child to hit and verbally abuse the mother.

When South Asian women and children left the abusive situation, children were psychologically distressed and needed therapeutic support to rebuild the relationship, especially when the mother had never had a chance to bond with her children.

2.4 Direct abuse of South Asian children and young people

We had a case of a young girl who had been abused by her dad for a long time. She once asked her dad if she could take up extra curricular activities in school. He responded by trying to suffocate her. He put a pillow on her face and sat on it until she would say "Ok, I don't want to do the extra activities". Her mother was also being physically abused but didn't seek any help. The girl said her abuse started from the age of seven but she only came to us for help at the age of 21.

Service practitioner

She was really affected by her father's abusive behaviour. After she left with the mother, he posted her a letter saying she was no longer his daughter and he never wished to see her again. In the sessions she never referred to him as "father", only as "him" or "that man".

Service practitioner

Around two-thirds of the interviewees mentioned that in many cases South Asian children are direct victims of domestic abuse. Mothers told practitioners that babies they were holding while

the perpetrator was physically abusing them were also hit. Children were injured when the perpetrator expressed his anger by throwing objects around the room. Older children were hurt trying to physically stand in the way of the perpetrator to stop the fighting. Practitioners noted cases where perpetrators physically abused children, including hitting them with objects such as shoes and slippers. A few domestic violence situations were described as complex, involving cases of child sexual abuse perpetrated by the father or members of the extended family.

Emotional abuse was sometimes aimed directly at children in the form of psychologically demeaning verbal abuse. Young people mentioned that their father had uttered sentences such as ‘You are dead to me’; ‘You and your mother have shamed me’; and ‘I never want to see you again’. Young people were controlled and isolated along with their mothers. Their access to the outside world was limited with the exception of going to and from school. They were not allowed to have friends come to the house and were excluded from community events.

Children also were exposed to emotional abuse from extended family. Some in-laws abused the mother through insulting comments about her children, such as their skin colour being too dark or their hair too thin which, in the presence of the child, were extremely hurtful. References to children were included in the verbal abuse and included comments such as ‘We can get children from anywhere’; ‘You and your children are just dirt under my feet’. This resulted in children feeling very guilty and confused about the ill-treatment of their mother and themselves.

In-laws might also treat one child differently from another, even ill-treating them and blaming them for no apparent reason. At family functions and religious festivals such as Eid and Diwali, they might be excluded from receiving gifts, new clothes and the feelings of belonging to a family and community, and they may not be allowed to take part in extracurricular activities or visit friends. However, gender discrimination, with abuse being directed exclusively at either girl children or boy children was not common in the experience of practitioners.

Children have an absolute right to be protected from all forms of abuse. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which has been ratified by the UK, clearly requires the State to protect children “from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse” (Article 19) as well as from sexual abuse (Article 34).

Case study

Neelam was suffering from domestic abuse at the hands of her husband. One day her husband decided to throw her out of the house, threatening to kill Neelam if she came back. While Neelam was applying for a residence order for the children, the perpetrator got the children to copy out letters to Neelam saying that she was a horrible mother and that her family was disrespectful. After completing the task he rewarded them with sweets, toys and trips to amusement parks. When Neelam obtained the residence order, only two of the four children went back to her, the older two having been manipulated by their father into hating their mother.

2.5 Abduction of South Asian children

Article 11(1) of the UNCRC obliges ratifying States parties to “take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad”. Practitioners and managers noted that fear of abduction and the threat of abduction were commonly used to control women and prevent them from seeking help.

Court orders obtained in the UK for the return of abducted children are not enforceable in countries within the Indian subcontinent (Patel, 2003). This is especially pertinent in those countries where the father’s legal rights dominate. Interviewees noted that fear of abduction also resulted in mothers being extra-protective of children which, in turn, would be interpreted by children as controlling behaviour, as they were not allowed to play outside or see friends on their own. In one case, a mother blocked her children’s passports to prevent them from leaving the UK, thus also preventing herself from leaving the country to see family or to go on holiday. Abduction was also feared in the context of post-separation contact visits, organised by the courts for the perpetrator to see their children.

2.6 Consequences of domestic abuse

Research studies have shown that South Asian women affected by domestic violence suffer confusion and anxiety and develop feelings of shame and guilt, all of which affect their confidence and self-esteem. They suffer depression which can be so severe that it borders on mental illness, with a large number contemplating or attempting suicide (Southall Black Sisters, 1994; Gill, 2004; Sook et al., 2006; Hurwitz et al., 2006). According to the voluntary organisation Imkaan, specialist refuges are seeing an increasing number of South Asian women

with mental health problems and substance misuse, as well as South Asian young women with self-harming behaviour (Thiara, 2005).¹³

Women's mental health issues directly affect their parenting capacity and their ability to bond with and look after children. Five practitioners noted cases of young women who had to assume the responsibility of becoming a family carer either because their mothers were suffering from mental health problems, or had left the house, or been hospitalised because of domestic abuse.

2.7 Consequences of domestic abuse for South Asian children and young people

Domestic abuse has a detrimental effect on children and young people, regardless of their ethnic origins. This is well documented in research, with studies demonstrating both short- and long-term consequences.¹⁴ The impact of witnessing or being a direct victim of domestic abuse will however vary for each child or young person.

The 16-year-old was just off the rails. He was being excluded from school. He was always being picked up by the police because he was always on the streets. He just didn't want to go home. There was no respect for mum at all. He would punch her and hit her, just like dad had done.

The oldest girl was 15 at the time and the youngest son was four. The daughter was really withdrawn, but the son was really aggressive – they both displayed two extreme forms of behaviour.

I see behavioural issues that relate to the mental health. It might manifest in things like eating problems or toileting problems...it might be some kind of protective mechanism for them.

I'm working with one girl who has mental health problems and self-harms. She buys pain killers and collects them – she says it makes her feel safe.

Most of the girls that come [into a refuge with their mothers] have some problem like self-harming or an eating disorder.

Service practitioners

The impact of domestic abuse manifested itself in multiple ways: physical, behavioural, and psychological. Practitioners spoke of children bed wetting, biting nails, speech impairments, eating disorders, poor toilet training skills and developing stress-related eczema and asthma.

¹³ Other UK research has found that young South Asian women (16-24 years) are 1.5 times more likely to self-harm than white women (Cooper et al. 2006). Chantler et al. (2001) found that South Asian women attempted self-harm and suicide after experiencing sexual and physical abuse, domestic violence and racism.

¹⁴ For a review of the literature on the impact of domestic abuse on children see Hester et al., 2007.

Older children developed mental health problems, depressive moods, psychosomatic illnesses and displayed self-harming behaviour.

Children and young people may have very complex relationships with parents, family and friends. Some become very protective towards their mother. Young children can become very clingy and distressed when they are not in the company of their mother. Others may develop a love-hate relationship with their mother because they blame her for not stopping the domestic abuse.

Practitioners described their behaviour as either very aggressive or withdrawn. Both young children and teenagers displayed very disruptive behaviour because of their trauma. This included bad behaviour towards their mother and siblings, including hitting, pulling hair and biting, making unreasonable demands, manipulation and threatening to run away, as well as mimicking the perpetrator's behaviour.

Educational progress and development were often affected. Children and young people found it very difficult to concentrate in school. They lashed out and behaved violently towards teachers and peers, or became very quiet, isolated, and developed low self-esteem and low self-confidence. In some cases, their social circles changed or they chose not to mix with other children.

There were a number of cases of young South Asian women living in homes with domestic abuse exploring or entering into early marriage or a relationship as a mechanism for escaping from their situation. This was also used as a means of overcoming the rejection faced by their fathers or other family members. Practitioners had concerns that the young women were entering into marriages that were not appropriate or suitable and had the potential to be abusive.

It might not be someone forcing you into a marriage, but escaping the horrors and difficulties of home would force you into a marriage that was not appropriate or suitable.

Service manager

2.8 Impact of domestic abuse on children: lack of awareness among South Asian mothers

It's surprising the number of women who come to us and you're sitting, for example, in A&E with them because she suffered a beating last night and their eight-year-old son has wet his trousers and you say to them "look, this is not normal" and she will say something as simple as "Oh I forgot to put a nappy on him".

Service practitioner

Practitioners felt that there was a lack of awareness among South Asian women, as with women from other ethnic backgrounds, of the impact domestic abuse was having on their children. Often mothers thought their children had not witnessed any of the abuse, claiming that they had been playing or sleeping. The women were described as being too preoccupied with trying to make sense of and cope with their own abusive situation. They did not have time to think about what was happening to the child as they tried to shelter and protect them. Once they came out of the situation, they had varying levels of depression and mental health problems that affected their parenting skills.

In some cases, mothers did have an awareness of the negative impact domestic abuse was having on their child, but this level of awareness varied. Some did not recognise that there could be short- as well as medium- and long-term impacts on a child, or thought that the child would simply forget about it. They had not linked some of the behaviour that children displayed with the abuse they had witnessed. For example, when boys hit their mothers or bit their sisters, mothers thought it was just 'boys being boys', rather than seeing it as a possible coping mechanism or expression of distress.

2.9 Views of South Asian girls and young women

Sixteen South Asian girls and young women were consulted in the Teens programme at the Newham Asian Women's project.¹⁵ They felt that the impact of living in a household with domestic abuse on young South Asian people included:

¹⁵ See Appendix 2 on methodology.

- low self-confidence, low self-respect, low self-worth and no confidence
- being physically injured and harmed
- mental illness
- self-harming to cope
- taking alcohol and drugs to cope
- being aggressive and harmful to others
- affecting their studies – not achieving academically
- becoming isolated
- running away from home
- committing suicide.

3 Barriers to help-seeking

Although some South Asian women do take action to deal with abuse, research suggests that Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women including South Asian women put up with abuse for a longer period of time and are more reluctant to access services (Thiara, 2005). Southall Black Sisters estimate that it takes BME women an average of 10 years before they leave a violent relationship (Patel, 2003). Furthermore, the longer the abuse goes on or as the severity of the abuse continues, the less likely South Asian women are to disclose to others or to leave (Yoshioka et al., 2003; Gill, 2004). This means that their children grow up in an unsafe and unhealthy home environment, further denying their right to a healthy life and development, enshrined in the UNCRC (Article 6[1]).

3.1 Recognising domestic abuse

Communities have different definitions of abuse, and conceptualisations of domestic violence vary across communities and from one country to another (Fernández, 2006; Midlarsky et al., 2006). If women do not recognise a situation as abusive, they are less likely to seek help. Batsleer et al., (2002) found that while BME women were experiencing various forms of abuse (financial, sexual, and controlling behaviour) it was perceived as domestic violence only when the abuse became physical.¹⁶ Dasgupta (2000) noted that South Asian women recognised physical abuse but were more reluctant to acknowledge sexual abuse. Gill (2004) found that South Asian women downplayed the violence they experienced and were in denial about it.¹⁷ All 18 women in her study commented that men were seen as superior to women in the Asian community, and that it was culturally acceptable for a man to hit his wife. The women mentioned that while they recognised the behaviour was wrong and not normal, their husbands/partners did not.

Practitioners and managers interviewed as part of this research felt that children born into households where domestic abuse was common grow up to see it as a normal pattern of life. At

¹⁶ The term BME includes South Asian women throughout the report.

¹⁷ According to Gill (2004) "...months and years may pass before an Asian women victim of domestic violence defines her experience as part of an ongoing pattern of oppression and intimidation" (p.474). Women had simplistic definitions of domestic violence, mainly described as physical violence. They described emotional abuse but found it difficult to explain. However as the women narrated their stories their definitions of domestic violence expanded. The terms they used included 'living in fear' 'getting the beats' told they will 'be killed, told you're mad, being watched (Gill, 2004, p.471).

a young age, they are aware that something is wrong, but it is difficult to comprehend because their level of understanding has not fully developed. It is very confusing, as children see their mother upset but do not understand that this should not be taking place. Older children are more able to recognise that it is not normal behaviour but nevertheless do not know how to stop it.

Often the perpetrator justifies his actions by misusing cultural and religious terms of reference. Children and young people see domestic abuse as a normal part of the way relationships operate in their community. Boys witnessing their fathers' behaviour grow up believing that it is acceptable to control women. In some cases, practitioners working with young people have to explain that religion does not condone violence, and find that young people are surprised to hear this information.

The terminology of abuse was also identified as a problem. Managers and practitioners felt that young people didn't associate the abuse they were witnessing or experiencing with 'domestic violence'. A few practitioners noted that in discussions with young South Asian girls, they were not always able to identify actions as domestic abuse. This made it more difficult for them to speak out or seek help.

Women assume that DV is the black eyes and the bust lips. They do not consider the hidden stuff around sexual assaults, financial and emotional abuse, abuse from in-laws...if it doesn't have a name, they can't ask to be signposted [to a service] as they are not sure what they are asking for.

Service Manager

A lot of women are going through abuse but they don't recognise it. They don't name it as abuse. If a child says something to me about their parent's relationship, I can quickly pick up that this is emotional abuse. If you're not aware of what the issues are and you've known nothing else in your life, you're going to think that's quite normal practice and that's how relationships are meant to work.

Service Manager

From the girls I am seeing, it is about looking at whether they identify domestic violence because we have done DV workshops and some girls say it's fine, so I think it's about defining it for them. They don't realise that it's wrong because it's all they have seen growing up.

Service practitioner

As a Muslim she thought that this was acceptable [for her dad to hit her mum] and was surprised to hear that it was against the teachings of the Qur'an.

Service practitioner

3.2 Language

According to managers and practitioners, language was not a barrier for the majority of South Asian young people as they tended to be bilingual, though there were exceptions: for example, children who came from a family where English was not the first language and entered the school system as pre-schoolers with poor English skills, as well as older children who had recently emigrated from the Asian sub-continent. While some schools had bilingual support staff, this was described by practitioners as a limited resource. This lack of communication with children can make it very difficult to establish if there are any concerns around domestic abuse and can hamper early intervention.

Not being fluent in English acts as a huge barrier preventing South Asian women from seeking help and accessing services. They are unable to access written information about services, and interpreters are not always readily available (Thiara, 2005). Interviewees noted that many abused South Asian women were only allowed out of the house to take their children to school. Thus contact with teachers and other school staff would be one of the few opportunities women had to seek help. The lack of bilingual staff also made it difficult for non-English-speaking mothers to establish a relationship with teachers, which would inhibit any attempt at seeking help.

3.3 Lack of support from extended family

South Asian women tend to approach their family for assistance.¹⁸ Seeking help from outside is always a last resort (Yoshioka et al., 2003; Gangoli, et al., 2005, Sooch et al., 2006). Approaching family and friends can however be very difficult (Gill, 2004). In many instances South Asian women are advised to stay in their marriage rather than leave the abusive situation (Gill, 2004; Yoshioka et al., 2003; Adams, 1999). Women who leave may be pressurised by family to go back to their abusive husband (Gangoli et al., 2005).

Mullender et al. (2002) found that Asian children had higher expectations of family and friends providing help rather than agencies. The majority of the children considered extended family to be most helpful to their mothers and themselves. Positive social contact with the wider family

¹⁸ In an American study that compared the experiences of South Asians, African American and Hispanic women, they found that all women seek help from their family network, although this was higher among South Asians, who were also more likely to disclose the abuse to their fathers and brothers. (Yoshioka et al., 2003).

was also a strong factor in helping children cope with getting through their experience of domestic violence. It was apparent that when a family condemned the actions of the perpetrator and sympathised with the women, they were a great source of help. In situations where women were blamed and ostracised by extended family, children and mothers felt very lonely, isolated and were more vulnerable to racism.

The majority of the managers and practitioners interviewed as part of this research spoke of a lack of support for women and their children from extended family; it was seen to be the exception rather than the norm.

[According to members of the community] she should do whatever it takes to make that marriage work. So if part of it is putting up with the violence, she should because the family structure is the main priority and so when a woman leaves everybody feels it's their duty to make her feel she shouldn't have done it and part of that is the children.

You will be seen as a bad woman for leaving your abusive husband. People won't come to your house, kids can't go to parties, you will not have that social network of people coming around, you lose that connection with own community, you are more exposed to racism. Without support it's impossible for them to leave.

Service practitioners

3.4 Experiences of discrimination

I think in the current political climate [post 9/11 and 7/7] there is a need to engage more with South Asian women because they might be more reluctant to access services.

Service manager

South Asian women affected by domestic violence may choose not to highlight their abuse for fear of a racist backlash and stereotyping from wider society (Gill 2004). Male community leaders avoid dealing with sensitive issues such as domestic abuse to prevent negative representation of their community in wider society (Puri, 2005). Hostility towards immigrants as reflected in the media can also put women off seeking outside help, for fear of how they may be responded to (Gill 2004).

In the 1990s, Imam (1994) found that while there had been some improvements in the voluntary sector with regards to challenging racism, change in the statutory sector was limited and based on individual cases, rather than formal policies developed to tackle structural racism. More recently Mullender et al. (2002) found that all the South Asian mothers in their research talked about racism. This was reported at both the individual and the institutional level, from

professionals and agencies. Batsleer et al. (2002) also provide examples of women's experiences of sexism and racism from service providers.

The presence of racism in mainstream refuges has been the subject of a number of research studies over the past two decades, and was again highlighted in a recent research study (Chantler, 2006) which found it to be operating at three levels: among service users, among the workers, and at state level (for example through immigration policies that prevent women from accessing services or public funds).

About a third of practitioners interviewed as part of the research spoke about children's experiences of racism and bullying from other children, members of the public, public services and refuges. This was especially relevant to families who relocated to predominately white areas after escaping an abusive situation. A few practitioners noted that verbal bullying and name calling also reflected the current political climate, for example with references to children as 'terrorists' or 'bin-laden'. There was also a sense that young people felt marginalised in the post-9/11 political climate. This also caused them to mistrust professionals, especially the police, and made them reluctant to seek help from outside agencies.

One girl went home and asked her mum to bleach her face so she could be like the other girls at school.

Service practitioner

He didn't like his new school because they bullied him for being different and it made him feel more isolated and lonely. He kept complaining to his mum that he wanted to go back to their old home so he could be with his friends and cousins.

Service practitioner

3.5 Insecure immigration status

The majority of managers and practitioners interviewed for this report highlighted their concerns for the welfare of children whose mothers have insecure immigration status. This relates to South Asian women entering the UK as wives of British citizens, who must remain in the marriage for two years before they can apply for permanent residence.

During this period they must depend financially on her husband or find employment, and they have 'no recourse to public funds'; they are not entitled to welfare benefits, council housing or the use of publicly funded facilities such as refuges, unless they can pay for these services. Following this period, their application for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) must be supported

by their spouses, so if the marriage breaks down within these two years, they will be faced with deportation unless they can provide evidence of domestic abuse under the Domestic Violence Rule (Joshi, 2003).¹⁹

Access to public funds cannot be obtained until their immigration status is confirmed.²⁰ For women with children, funding can be obtained under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 as this covers the provision of services for the child's carer, but this is also not easy to obtain. Furthermore, evidence suggests that some local authorities have a narrow interpretation of this legislation, refusing to support mothers. In the worst situation the local authority may support the child by offering to take them into care (Batsleer et al., 2002; Roy 2008; Amnesty International UK and Southall Black Sisters, 2008; Anitha et al., 2008). This makes immigrant women particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse, as the alternative to putting up with it is potentially to be separated from their children, or deported.

3.6 Cultural barriers

3.6.1 Shame and honour

Two very pertinent social and cultural patriarchal constructs used to control and silence women are *Izzat* (honour) and *Sharam* (shame). Both men and women are supposed to uphold family and community honour, but the responsibility tends to fall mostly on women; they retain their honour through conforming to prescribed roles and practices and may attain dishonour through their 'transgressions' (Imam, 1999; Gill, 2003). The concept of honour and shame for the victims of abuse becomes a form of social control designed to protect abusers (Haider, 2002), while female oppression is often – wrongly – justified by men on the basis of religious beliefs (Imam, 1999; Rahim, 2000).²¹

Women are taught that the public image of the family is more important than individual safety. Honour and respectability are dependent on a successful marriage, and women fear the dishonour and rejection from their community if their marriage should fail (Women's National Commission, 2003; Gill, 2004). They also fear that their dishonourable actions will have

¹⁹ Hague et al. (2006) found that none of the women interviewed had been able to use this policy. Anitha et al. (2008) also found that only a small minority of women were able to provide the evidence required.

²⁰ According to Southall Black Sisters this can take an average of six to 24 months (Amnesty International UK and Southall Black Sisters, 2008)

²¹ Rahim (2000) examined sacred text from the Muslim and Hindu faiths to demonstrate that there is no justification for violence, including abuse directed by men towards women. She further emphasises the positive use of sacred texts that call for dignity, equality and kindness between partners and families.

consequences for other family members including children and daughters in particular (Imam, 1994; Choudry, 1996; Gill, 2004). Thus women remain committed to their marriage and tolerate abuse (Gangoli, et al., 2005).

The notion of Asian culture being used to account for personal and social problems can however be dangerously over-simplified or taken out of context.²² Oppressive practices exist within all cultures, yet oppressive and misogynistic cultural practices are often associated with minority groups (Almeida and Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999). Many cultural ideologies advocate respect for women and these can be used to prevent or decrease abuse. For example, Asian culture is based on collectivism. This can act as a protective force, as shared responsibility can make a woman less vulnerable, because an attack on her could be seen as an attack on the whole family (Mullender et al., 2002; Midlarsky et al., 2006).

3.6.2 The impact of shame and honour on South Asian young people

I think the South Asian community is programmed from birth to know that there are things you don't say outside the house, and domestic abuse is one of them.

Service manager

Practitioners and managers interviewed spoke about the family's position within the context of the wider community. The family needs to maintain a level of honour (*izzat*) and children and young people are also a part of that structure. Although boys and girls are affected by honour (*izzat*), interviewees felt that it is a more significant constraining factor for young girls.²³

Silence around domestic abuse is a barrier for all children, but managers and practitioners felt it is probably more so for South Asian children and young people, though the extent varies from one individual to another. For some young people notions of shame and honour are not significant in their family structure. Practitioners noted cases of South Asian children who were very forthcoming about talking to teachers or other adults about what was happening at home. For others, having a large extended family and being well known in the community were significant factors in not disclosing domestic abuse. Mullender et al., (2002) also found that

²² For example, Marshall and Yazdani (1999) criticised practitioners' assumptions that distress expressed through self-harm was a consequence of the notion of 'culture clash'. The pressures created by notions of shame and honour should be seen in the context of maintaining distress and making it difficult to disclose distress. It was interesting to note that while South Asian service users located their experiences of abuse within their distressful circumstances, service providers were too easily ready to develop an explanation that pathologises Asian culture.

²³ This confirms previous research that also found that girls were the ones responsible for upholding family honour (Eade and Yunas, 2002; Mullender et al., 2002).

their sample of South Asian children talked least with each other and wider society about domestic violence.

I can't tell people about what is happening at home. I've a large extended family and if anyone finds out they will tell dad. I always feel trapped like there is no way out for me.

Young person calling Asian NSPCC helpline

You have instincts that something is going on. Some of the things you see or behaviours, something is clearly wrong. I reiterate time and time again that it is ok to talk to us, it's confidential, but something holds them back and it's only later that they say "I've been told not to speak about this, it's nobody else's business and my family do not want anyone else to get involved".

Service practitioner

I remember a case where the grandmother was saying, "oh don't tell the authorities this, don't" and then the young person won't. They won't because they're scared of the implications and the sharam (shame) as we call it, the embarrassment to the family name and these sorts of things.

Service practitioner

Notions of shame and honour were also used by perpetrators to control young people, who insisted that the community would think ill of their family if they found out what was taking place. In a few cases, mothers who were the victims of domestic abuse also told their children not to disclose for the same reason. South Asian children and young people worried that if the community found out their family would be shunned, made outcasts, and exposed to shame. They were burdened with the thought of being responsible for bringing dishonour and disrepute on the family.

Although cultural barriers were seen to apply more to first generation South Asian adults, the general consensus was that for many second and third generation young people cultural factors were still a barrier that made help-seeking very difficult. There were however concerns that the concept of cultural barriers can be taken too far. Practitioners felt that South Asian young people are affected by the same issues as their peers from other ethnic backgrounds, though South Asian young people face added barriers, including shame and honour. The concerns and worries of South Asians are however too often framed by some practitioners around their 'problematic culture' or way of life, and yet for many young South Asians culture and religion are positive influences in their lives, and part of their identity.

Surprisingly enough some girls will be born and brought up here but because they had these cultural values instilled in them they think that some forms of abuse are okay so it is about us [workers] challenging them.

Service practitioner

At a young age children are helpless to help. But even once they get to an age where they can help the mother leave or tell someone, they don't because they worry about what the rest of the extended family and community will say.

Service practitioner

3.6.3 The impact of cultural barriers on South Asian children and young people seeking help

Managers and practitioners noted that South Asian children and young people are often brought up to believe that problems within the family should remain in the family. This creates a great sense of isolation as children are socialised not to talk to other people about domestic abuse. This caused conflicting feelings in the young people they dealt with, who wanted the abuse to stop, but to speak of domestic abuse would be shameful and disclosing it an act of betrayal. They also believed what the perpetrator was doing was wrong, but felt powerless to act.

South Asian young people tried to find solutions through internal structures such as approaching family or extended family. However due to the stigma of domestic abuse and the denial about the problem in the South Asian community, help-seeking attempts did not have a positive outcome. In many cases the family was complacent about the problem and told the young person to accept the situation, or blamed them by saying that they were the trigger for their father's abusive behaviour. Relatives told them not to say anything and keep it a secret. This included threatening behaviour that prevented them seeking help from others.

Practitioners support and counsel pupils in schools. Confidentiality agreements often help South Asian pupils to be more open about their difficulties but they can still be guarded and more careful about what they disclose. A few practitioners mentioned cases of young people talking about their parents arguing and fighting and the distress of witnessing this. When the practitioners suggested making contact with the families, young people often did not want their parents to find out they were accessing support at school. Although they wanted to help their mothers, they were scared to talk to parents about support services, or take information leaflets home, due to the stigma attached to seeking help outside the immediate family.

3.7 No one to turn to

I've spent my whole life living with violence, watching my dad hit my mum. I was scared and never felt I could speak to my family. I'm too frightened to do something like call the police.

Young person calling ChildLine

Finding someone to talk to can be very difficult for them [young people]. When we ask them who they would go to for help, very rarely do they name professionals such as GPs or teachers. Within the Asian community there can be a 'family doctor' so young people fear that it will get back to their parents. With teachers there is something attached to being the authoritative figure, and the fear about social services getting involved, and making the situation worse.

She has never spoken to her tutor or anyone else. She says no one will understand her. They don't know what it is like for an Asian girl.

I think the main thing is they don't speak about it. They don't have that release or outlet and nobody knows what is going on for them.

Service practitioners

Managers and practitioners felt that young people had no one to turn to for help; young South Asians think they have no voice, that adults do not have time for their concerns; that they cannot trust them, and that adults of a different ethnic or cultural background will not understand the cultural circumstances surrounding their problems. A couple of practitioners spoke of a number of cases where teachers did not believe what their Asian pupils were telling them. Young people also did not want their peers to find out about what they defined as their embarrassing and shameful situation, and worried about being bullied.

3.8 Lack of knowledge about help available

According to managers and practitioners, South Asian children and young people do not know where to go for help in domestic abuse situations and lack information about services that offer support. There is also a lack of knowledge and awareness about the implications of disclosing abuse. Young people fear the consequences of telling an adult about the abuse and how services will respond.

For example, in a number of incidents young South Asian people wished to leave abusive situations but worried that the service would not be able to respond to their needs or protect them. In one case, a South Asian girl wished to leave a violent household but was convinced her family would find her as the community was well connected. She felt her only option was to

remain at home and put up with the violence. In other instances, young people feared that their siblings would be taken into care and they would be held responsible for breaking up the family.

3.9 Perceived barriers: South Asian girls and young women

The sixteen South Asian girls and young women who were consulted in the Teens programme at the Newham Asian Women's project²⁴ summarised the barriers to seeking help as follows:

- Many women are trapped in violent situations due to the pressures from the community
- People may be scared to talk because the situation could get worse
- Rumours spreading in the community and fears of what others may say
- People may not believe them or think they are stupid
- Fear of community opinions
- Fear of perpetrator – threats to family and friends
- Trust issues and not being able to speak about abuse
- No services available
- Not aware of services
- Fear of not being understood
- Issues around izzat and sharam for Asian families²⁵
- Some women may not seek help because of fear of losing children.

²⁴ See Appendix 2 on methodology.

²⁵ Both groups were reported to make similar comments. The Teens group (16–19-year-olds) did however place more emphasis on the perceptions and fear of the community as a barrier to help seeking, compared with the Girls Aloud group (10–15-year-olds).

3.10 Perceived barriers: South Asian children speaking to ChildLine

Between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007, two thousand children spoke to ChildLine about domestic violence, representing an increase on the previous year by 12 per cent.²⁶ Anecdotal evidence from ChildLine confirms that some South Asian children affected by domestic violence find it difficult to seek help outside their family networks. Their mothers put up with the domestic violence, not wanting to leave the abusive relationship for fear of bringing shame on the family. South Asian children talk about feeling guilty for not being able to help and also worry about bringing shame on the family or getting them into trouble. They worry about media stories that mention honour killings, and fear police and social services involvement.

²⁶ 313 children spoke to ChildLine about domestic violence as their main concern. 879 children spoke to ChildLine about domestic violence as an additional concern. 739 spoke to ChildLine about domestic violence as a problem for a significant person in their lives

4 Challenges in service provision

4.1 Level of provision

One third of local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have no specialised service for dealing with domestic violence.²⁷ Furthermore, nine out of 10 local authorities have no specialised BME service for abused women.²⁸ Those who do are mainly in England (95 per cent), and almost half are in London (Coy et al., 2007).

An evaluation of Children's Centres' response to domestic abuse in England found that, apart from the translation of leaflets in some languages, there were no specific services for BME communities (Ball and Niven, 2007).

Asian refuges are among the most marginalised organisations within the voluntary sector (Thiara and Hussain, 2005). Out of an estimated 400 refuge support services in England, 40 are of a specialist nature, of which 28 are Asian refuges providing a total of 265 bed spaces (Thiara, 2005). There are even fewer bed spaces for women with insecure immigration status.²⁹ Imkaan (2003) found that in the previous year 251 women with no recourse to public funds were referred to one of eight refuges in England. Of these only nine were successfully housed. Chantler (2006) also noted cases of women in Manchester with insecure immigration status being unable to access a refuge and having no proper legal advice. According to Roy (2008) support from local authorities to women with no recourse to public funds is fragmented, short-term and in many cases non-existent, although there are small pockets of good practice.

In the absence of any recent mapping research, the extent and geographical coverage of service provision for South Asian or BME children affected by domestic abuse can only be gleaned from anecdotal evidence from managers and practitioners interviewed for this report. They highlighted major gaps in service provision in both England and Wales, referring particularly to a lack of culturally appropriate specialist services for South Asian children. Overall, children's services were seen to be stretched, with few resources and few interpreters.

²⁷ From a recent mapping exercise which included women's voluntary/third VAW sector (refuges, community domestic violence projects, rape crisis centres, sexual violence support services) and those specialised services within the statutory sector that provide significant support (Coy et al., 2007).

²⁸ A total of 57 BME domestic violence projects were identified across the UK.

²⁹ Many refuges have a policy of not housing women with no recourse to public funds. Some refuges have a quota to support a few women, mostly those refuges with the most limited resources (Imkaan, 2003).

I'd say that there's an absolute lack of therapeutic services for all children around issues of domestic violence – that's within the statutory sector and the voluntary sector as well.

Service manager

I have to say there is a very big gap within therapeutic services for children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.

Service manager

I think there need to be more services aimed directly at children and young people. There's not enough. I know we've got the NSPCC and excellent work is being done, but I think we need to do more work with young people. I'm just trying to think of other services that work with young people, but other than the NSPCC, there's not a lot around for young people.

Service practitioner

In a study carried out in 2000, it was found that 12 per cent (29) of refuges in England and 14 per cent (10) in the rest of the UK could not provide services for children due to lack of funding. Forty-two per cent (106) and 60 per cent (44) respectively depended on volunteers to sustain their work with children. There was also a lack of specific services for BME children and young people, with only 12 per cent of refuges in England and four per cent in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland offering culturally appropriate services for children and young people. (Humphreys et al., 2000). Half a decade later, Thiara (2005) similarly concluded that children's work in refuges was marginal and poorly funded.³⁰ In the same year, research conducted as part of Home Office Crime Reduction Programme also noted the lack of intervention for children and young people in many parts of England and Wales (Hester and Westmarland, 2005).

Despite increased awareness of the impact of domestic violence on children and young people, and the legal recognition that witnessing domestic violence qualifies as 'significant harm' there has been no increase in public services or funding to address the needs of children and young people affected by domestic violence (Hester et al., 2007). The UNCRC clearly recognises children's right to "treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health" (Article 24), and requires States to "take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery" of a child victim of abuse (Article 39). Yet over the past two decades, the voluntary sector and refuges in particular have been the main providers of services for children affected by domestic

³⁰ Children's workers are very important and are needed to help children overcome the trauma they have witnessed, deal with challenging and disruptive behaviour and run group therapeutic play sessions with the children. Mullender et al. (2002) noted that children spoke highly of having children's workers in refuges as it gave them the opportunity to share their experiences and helped them begin to relax and enjoy life through the various activities that had been arranged for them. Children who did not have this provision in their refuge due to lack of funding or staff shortages spoke negatively about their experience of the refuge.

violence, unlike other countries such as the USA and Canada where such services are now backed by government funding (Hester et al., 2007).

Even in schools, access to pastoral support and counsellors is very limited. Practitioners interviewed highlighted the importance of outreach work in schools particularly for young people who cannot access support elsewhere; the Welsh Assembly Government has now published a strategy for developing school-based counselling services across Wales, supported by funding of £6.5m over the next 3 years. But such services are also needed in other settings, for those not attending school or uncomfortable with a school-based service.

4.2 Nature of provision

Several studies have noted that refuges are overcrowded, lack space to accommodate women and children, lack basic facilities and remain under-resourced (Rai and Thiara, 1997; Mama, 2000; Chantler, 2006). Representatives from refuges in England and Wales who were interviewed as part of this research told of women having to share a room with up to three or four children of different age groups, which is clearly inappropriate, and small communal spaces with other women and children.³¹

They also felt that even the specialist refuges do not provide adequate services for children and young people. Although four of the five refuges interviewed employed a children's worker, references were made to other refuges which did not. Even where a children's worker was employed this was dependent on funding. Lack of space in refuges to conduct individual and group therapeutic work was also raised as a barrier to effective therapy.

The majority of refuges don't have domestic violence workers purely for children. If a refuge can access a local service [they will], and refuges do try very hard, but to be honest this is a campaign issue...there just isn't enough provision for children at all.

Service manager

In relation to children's services, it's incredibly difficult to fund. Given that children make up a large part of the refuge population, it's very problematic. A lot of the funders don't seem to recognise the work we do in relation to children.

Service manager

Here we have crèche facilities but no worker. If the children are not at school it is difficult for the mother to have the children all day long; she can't receive the support she needs with us as she has to look after her children. She can't go to appointments, counselling or ESOL training.

Service practitioner

³¹ See Appendix 2 on methodology for details of refuge representatives interviewed as part of the research.

Of all the organisations interviewed, only the NSPCC provided culturally appropriate therapeutic support, with other agencies referring children and young people to other services even if these are not culturally sensitive or appropriate for children who have witnessed domestic abuse (e.g. Sure Start). Some practitioners made reference to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), while others noted that CAMHS would not get involved because it was not seen as a mental health issue.

Re-housing women and children continues to be problematic especially in places where there is a lack of housing stock, and families sometimes end up staying for much longer periods of time which is very unsettling for the children. Sometimes housing (in England and Wales) is only available in a predominantly white area that is less welcoming to Asian women and children, and lacking in cultural amenities such as mosques and/or gurdwaras; even shops that sell particular foods.

4.2.1 Provision for older children

Practitioners noted that very few refuges accept 16- and 17-year-olds fleeing from domestic abuse or a forced marriage, and that most would only accept male children up to the age of 14, though sometimes even younger boys would not be accommodated.

We shouldn't have accepted her [16-year-old] because she can't hold a licence. We were trying to get the social services involved to get them to take responsibility but they weren't willing to do anything. They couldn't take guardianship. She was self-harming and became pregnant.

Service practitioner

I've worked with a young woman who was 15 when she arrived at the refuge with her mother. They were both fleeing from the young woman's boyfriend. Because the young woman was under 18, she couldn't be issued with a licence agreement. We couldn't work with her and offer her a caseworker. We ended up in a really silly situation where we had to fill in a file for the mother and offer her a caseworker. The young woman's needs were left unmet because we couldn't access an appropriate service in the borough.

Service practitioner

I've worked with 16- and 17-year-old females coming in to the refuge who might be fleeing a forced marriage or may have experienced abuse because they had a boyfriend the family didn't approve of. They have brought their boyfriends into the refuge and I have personally had to evict them because it's against the rules. It's apparent to me that there is a great deal of need amongst female South Asian adolescents to be educated on building healthy relationships.

Service manager

In cases where a boy living in a refuge reached the upper age limit, he would have to leave the refuge. There were instances in which women had been reluctant to access the refuge service because they could not accommodate their son(s). They had to rely on a relative to look after their son, but this was not always possible. Finding temporary accommodation to keep the family together, for example, through the Homeless Persons Unit, was also difficult. Lack of space meant adolescent boys of 12 or 13 years had to share a room with their mother. This created tensions and problems and did not help in building relationships between mothers and sons.

A few interviewees mentioned that South Asian boys affected by domestic abuse do not have appropriate male role models, and that more male practitioners are needed to support boys. A representative of one refuge noted that boys were becoming very isolated. Female support workers were not approached by the boys in the same way as they were by the girls. In response to this, the refuge set up a mentoring scheme for young boys. The aim of this was to put them in contact with positive male role models, to help them overcome the negative view many of them had of men, to develop routine, and to address some of their behavioural problems.

Refuges are very small, they're buildings that have been donated, very run down and usually mothers and children will share the same room. We recently had a case of a young lad of 13 in the refuge with his mother. It was a very uncomfortable situation for a growing boy. He wasn't very happy and needed his own space. The staff were also aware that in a month's time he would be 14 and would have to move on.

Service manager

We get a lot of calls from agencies wanting to refer families of different age groups but we can't accept them because the boys are over ten.

Service manager

4.3 Work with perpetrators

Most perpetrator programmes are for men who have been through the criminal justice system.³² There are currently very few avenues of practical support especially for perpetrators who recognise they have a problem but have not been convicted of an offence and would like to change their behaviour or programmes for young men to challenge their violent behaviour before it becomes entrenched.

³² Most perpetrators of domestic violence never, or only infrequently, come into contact with the police, let alone the courts and the probation service. Very few perpetrators have thus had the opportunity to be referred to a perpetrator programme.

During the interviews, managers and practitioners noted that work with the perpetrator was important. However there is a lack of services, including culturally specific services for South Asian and BME men.³³ A number of concerns were however raised by a few interviewees who worried that attention to perpetrator programmes would shift the emphasis and funding away from direct help for women and children.

The Welsh Assembly Government has awarded the NSPCC Domestic Violence Prevention Service (DVPS), a three-year funding agreement to deliver a programme for non-court mandated men to challenge and change their domestically abusive behaviour within a family context. The programme will be based on the 'Caring Dads' programme, which has been successfully piloted and evaluated by the NSPCC in Cardiff since May 2006.

4.4 The case for specialist Asian refuge provision

Mullender et al., (2002) found that the accessibility of a specialist refuge acts as an incentive for Asian woman to leave a violent relationship. Many South Asian women would not use a mainstream service, even if a specialist service was not available (Thiara and Hussain, 2005). The need for a sense of belonging to a community based on cultural and religious identification, which can be found in a specialist or inclusive mainstream refuge, is very important to them.

However, three of the six refuge representatives interviewed for the research raised concerns about the pressures placed on specialist refuges to achieve better 'value for money', resulting in threats of closure or the need to merge with other non-specialist organisations in the local authority. There were also concerns about the funding process, which is complex and requires joint bids with other services. Thiara and Hussain, (2005) noted that Asian women's refuges described the Supporting People process as a threat to their independence and existence, as they come under increasing scrutiny because of higher costs incurred as a result of the specialist nature of their work. This leads to increasing pressure to diversify by merging with mainstream provision in a bid to reduce costs.³⁴

³³ According to Southall Black Sisters, perpetrator programmes are non-existent for abusers from minority communities. Furthermore, perpetrator programmes not have the cultural knowledge and expertise to address abuse perpetrated by men from minority communities (Home Affairs Committee, 2006). Regan et al (2007) also noted lack of local perpetrator programme with voluntary entry in Tower Hamlets, and that culturally appropriate programmes would be welcomed.

³⁴ The Supporting People programme puts in place an integrated planning and funding framework for housing related support services for vulnerable people. This includes services such as refuges for women escaping domestic violence.

Refuges acknowledged that all women and children who have experienced domestic abuse have similar needs, but that South Asian women and children have specific needs related to their language and culture, and felt that the demand for such services should be recognised. Merging with other organisations would dilute the services and would reduce the effectiveness of advocacy work for women and children. It would further reduce the opportunity to publicise particular issues and offer the right type of support.

Two managers, one in Wales and another in England, noted that their respective local authorities recognised the need for specialist services and were supportive about their existence. Other interviewees felt that the government in England should exert pressure on local authorities to preserve South Asian-specific refuges and services.

4.5 Funding issues

In a climate where all services for children are strained, I think it's more unlikely for South Asian families to get appropriate cultural support.

Service manager

Managers and practitioners felt that the profile of children affected by domestic abuse needs to be raised at government level (in England), and that the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people is lost within the wider domestic violence agenda: although the government talks about women and children experiencing domestic abuse, there are few direct services for children. Although children have been formally recognised as victims of domestic abuse within the Welsh Assembly Government's definition of domestic abuse and in their strategy for tackling domestic abuse, this has not translated into the delivery of services.

Services to help children and young people who have witnessed domestic abuse are poorly funded (Barron, 2007). The Every Child Matters agenda and framework set out a new vision for the delivery of services in England, but it did not release additional funding. Managers and practitioners interviewed for this report felt that new government initiatives and priorities are resulting in financial cut-backs in domestic abuse support services at the local level, and services for children or women commissioned by local authorities have the disadvantage of often being short-lived.

There are also concerns around financial support for refuge provision.³⁵ At present there is little statutory funding for work with children in refuges, as Supporting People funding does not cover children's work. All representatives of refuges interviewed as part of the research stated that getting funding for children's workers is a challenge. It is up to each individual refuge to manage their own situation, which means spending time and resources trying to locate alternative funding. In addition to children's workers, refuges also mentioned the lack of funding for crèche facilities and crèche workers to give mothers time to engage in activities such as counselling, or going to the GP or job centre. Practitioners felt that Supporting People funding should be restructured as a family support fund to include children.

In December 2007, the Welsh Assembly Government pledged £250,000 for children's workers in women's refuges across Wales.³⁶ However there is still a need for a strategy that includes children's workers in all refuges across England and Wales on a sustainable basis.

4.6 Better guidance and practice in working with South Asian families

In Wales, the domestic abuse strategy acknowledges that there is a need to improve service provision in Wales for BME communities,³⁷ and this was generally reflected in the views of practitioners interviewed there. In their view, BME cases are generally regarded as the responsibility of specialist voluntary sector organisations, and the public sector lacks ethnic minority staff who can help mainstream the needs of diverse communities. Young People's Partnerships in Wales are now beginning to ask the BME sector about gaps in service provision, though much more work is needed in this area. In England, the response of children's services in areas with large South Asian communities – especially those employing specialist workers with a good understanding of cultural and religious needs – were generally regarded as good, but elsewhere much seemed to depend on chance.

³⁵ In 2006, the government in England removed the ring-fencing of Supporting People funding for domestic abuse (Coy et al. 2007). The allocation for the Supporting People grant will also be reduced over the next few years and there are concerns that Local Area Agreements will divert funds from refuge services (Anitha 2007, Roy, 2008). The Women's Aid Last Resort Fund, supported by the Home Office, ended in 2005 due to lack of continued funding. Welsh Women's Aid is lobbying to ring-fence funds for domestic abuse services, to ensure Wales maintains its current provision and services.

³⁶ National Assembly for Wales. The Record of Proceedings: Response to Brian Gibbons AM (Minister for Social Justice and Local Government) to an Oral Question on 12 December 2007. URL: <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=68725&ds=12/2007#a4> [11 February 2008].

³⁷ *Tackling domestic abuse: the all Wales National Strategy* was published in 2005. It states: "There is currently a need to improve the service provision available in Wales to meet the needs (cultural and religious) of victims from BME communities..." (Welsh Assembly Government, 2005, p. 12)

Working Together to Safeguard Children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (HM Government, 2006) provides statutory and non-statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. *Safeguarding Children: Working Together under the Children Act 2004* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006) is the Welsh equivalent. Both acknowledge that child abuse must not be excused for religious and/or cultural reasons; that service providers need to be aware of institutional racism and racial discrimination, and that they need to guard against myth and stereotype.

Crucially, these documents do not address how the guidance can be translated into practice, or how to equip practitioners to work confidently with BME families. This is a main factor contributing to inappropriate service response.

I think they don't act upon it until the abuse is really bad. I think they're happy to go along the protection line because they know what to do. But when it's prevention services, I think they don't know how to intervene because they might feel, "Oh is it cultural? Are we doing the right thing?"

Service practitioner

The whole PC thing, it's a cultural thing, you can't interfere, you can't tell people from different communities what to do, from parenting through to domestic violence, so some people are reluctant to interfere with a situation where they suspect there's domestic violence taking place for fear of being labelled racist.

Service manager

Practitioners see the colour of skin and automatically see a cultural barrier that they don't recognise and will turn a blind eye because it is too difficult for them.

Service manager

There was a case of domestic abuse. Social services were very aware of the situation. They would just go and visit and say everything is under control. They never actually did anything to help this couple and one day after a couple of years, the situation got out of control and they took the kids.

Service practitioner

Many practitioners and professionals working with South Asian women and children affected by domestic abuse undoubtedly do so in an appropriate and helpful manner, but unfortunately this is not always the case. Article 2 of the UNCRC clearly states that States will ensure the rights to each child “without discrimination of any kind”, while Article 3 of the UNCRC obliges that “the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration”. Gill (2004) concluded that South Asian women suffer a great injustice, neglected by both family and also external agencies, including the police and health agencies. Anitha et al. (2008) found that the majority of South Asian women with ‘no recourse to public funds’ were dissatisfied with Accident and

Emergency Services, GPs, the police and social services. Batsleer et al. (2002) notes that practitioners in statutory organisations often feel they are not qualified to deal with BME cases, while a lack of interpreters makes services also less accessible. According to Gangoli et al. (2005) decisions not to interfere, such as in the case of forced marriages even when the girl was aged 13 or 14, were defended on the grounds of ‘respecting cultural differences’.

Minhas et al. (2002) pointed to a lack of cultural knowledge and fears of being labelled racist preventing agencies from dealing effectively with cases involving South Asian women and children. They noted that while police response to domestic abuse has improved over recent years, there remains a lack of cultural knowledge among frontline officers. Representatives of domestic abuse forums noted that there remains an urgent need for ‘good practice’ guidance for all professionals and practitioners working with abused South women and children.

This is backed up by the views of service professionals interviewed for this report, who highlighted several cases where the response from public sector agency staff (police, health, education and social services) reflected uncertainty, lack of awareness and the fear of ‘doing the wrong thing’ or being labelled racist.

Case study

A health visitor was visiting a South Asian mother for over a year to provide her with support for her newborn twins. The mother was not coping well and domestic abuse appeared to be taking place. There were four other children in the family including a 15-year-old girl. Whenever the health visitor arrived, she found the 15-year-old daughter was always in the house. The health visitor did not report this to the local authority as she did not want to interfere in the family’s cultural practices. It later transpired that the husband did not want the daughter to go to school or get an education and he was planning to force her into a marriage when she turned 16.

Case study

A South Asian woman called the police having experienced physical abuse at the hands of her husband. When the officer arrived, she was standing there with a baby in her arms. The perpetrator was also there with a two-year-old boy. The couple were not married according to English Law and the father did not have parental responsibility. This information was not ascertained by the officer. The officer said he could take her to a refuge with the baby, but left the two-year-old boy with the father. Within a few days the father had travelled out of the country using another child’s passport. The child was taken to a remote area in Pakistan that was not covered by embassy legislation. There were no directions to enforce return of the child.

Several other research studies (Gangoli et al., 2005; Puri, 2005) also point to the need for workers in the health sector (GPs, health visitors), legal services and the judiciary to become more aware of cultural differences and their relevance in terms of domestic abuse. GPs can in

fact play a vital role in first identifying the need for help: Gangoli et al., (2005) found that the GP was the first point of call for four of five abused South Asian women.

The recent National Evaluation of Sure Start and domestic abuse services also points to a need for workers to remain objective, regardless of what cultural background they themselves are from. In this evaluation, it was found that some South Asian workers in their outreach work with Asian families were reluctant to report and deal with abuse for fear of threatening the relationship they had with the families (Ball and Niven, 2007).

Imkaan (2003) demonstrated that for women with insecure immigration status the situation is made worse by a lack of knowledge about immigration issues in the agencies that are supposed to deal with domestic abuse, which may in the worst cases result in children being taken into care, separated from their mothers.

It's quite traumatic for the women. Sometimes men and extended family members turn up at the contact centre and they can be quite abusive in their own languages, and they use the children as a way of abusing the mother.

She felt that even though this was supposed to be a safe place, he would take the children from there and leave the country...that was a big fear of hers.

Mothers who don't speak English and don't understand the systems go there [contact centres] and can't explain themselves and they've been shunned by the workers [at contact centres] because the father is more articulate than they are.

Service practitioners

4.6.1 Safe contact with perpetrators post-separation

Contact between perpetrators and the victims of domestic abuse after separation can have safety implications.³⁸ The NSPCC believes that children should maintain contact with both parents providing it is safe. The child's welfare is the single most important factor for the courts and every court should ask 'what would be best for the child?' and the answer should guide what contact should be arranged.

³⁸ The British Crime Survey found that one third (36%) of the women who saw the perpetrator after ending the relationship had been exposed to threats or abuse to themselves or their children (Walby and Allen, 2004). Southall Black Sisters have seen many cases of BME women and children killed through contact (Patel, 2003).

Practitioners interviewed for this report drew attention to the fact that family court judges are not always aware of the dynamics involved in Asian extended families, which can lead to potentially disastrous misjudgements when perpetrators are granted contact that severely compromises the safety and mental wellbeing of mothers and children.

They also noted that during contact sessions, children are vulnerable to manipulation, conflicting messages and emotional or psychological abuse as family members revert to their own Asian language, which English-speaking supervisors cannot understand. This is clearly demonstrated in the following case study.

Case study

A member of staff from a voluntary specialist organisation escorted a South Asian child to a supervised contact centre, as it was deemed unsafe for the mother to take the child. The contact centre worker met them at the centre. The father began by hugging the child and offering a gift. The father demonstrated how to use a toy and in what appeared to be a playful manner, began asking the child in Urdu if his mother was in the building and where she was living, while playing with the toy. He then went on to say that his mother was stopping him from seeing him. Although the child began to show signs of distress the visit was only halted because of the intervention of the member of staff from a voluntary specialist organisation who was also fluent in Urdu. The mainstream staff had not picked up the clues, thus jeopardising the safety of the mother and causing distress to the child.

Cases were also mentioned where children did not want contact because they were afraid of the perpetrator, yet were pressured and persuaded otherwise by extended family members. Practitioners therefore felt children need to be given a stronger voice in determining the level and frequency of contact they have with the perpetrator, and that some children would benefit from sessions with practitioners to help them explore their feelings about their father.

4.7 Multi-agency and partnership work

We've seen a lot of services being merged with generic organisations that have little or no expertise in the particular issues that Asian women and children face. So they lose out and it's kind of a downwards spiral from there.

Service manager

Many refuges are small. They're not generally able to compete with larger organisations that have the infrastructure to manage bids or tenders and engage in the commissioning processes.

Service manager

Domestic violence is a complex phenomenon that needs to be tackled through a multi-agency response (Hester and Westmarland, 2005). Two of the NSPCC services and longstanding

women's domestic violence specialist agencies located in boroughs with a sizeable South Asian population have developed multi-agency working arrangements and have become part of the formal structures within the public sector, working in conjunction with children's services around child protection concerns. Despite this, it was noted that there is still room to further develop better communication and joined-up working. For a few others, in both England and Wales, good partnership working is regarded as a continual challenge, with the specialist agencies simply passing on a referral to the specialist voluntary agency and then leaving them to work independently. Practitioners felt that joint work needs to be based on an integrated approach to ensure the protection of children and the mainstreaming of the specific needs of BME communities.

Partnership working does not come from the ground up and South Asian's women's services are grassroots.

Service manager

We have some excellent DV services, but we are not thinking joined up at the moment. DV is still seen as an adult issue and often they are forgetting the children involved.

Service manager

I think there's a role and room for all of us and we need to be doing it together. The voluntary sector could be a bridging service between the public sector and communities. We can facilitate that dialogue so that the public sector can learn about the needs of South Asian women and children.

Service manager

We were going to fundraise for a children's worker from the council, but first we were late and secondly the requirement was for a joint application by three boroughs or more. It is very hard when you talk about children's services based at a refuge for it to be across the three boroughs. You have to do a lot of partnership working and really work out the details.

Service manager

Domestic violence forums

Domestic violence forums were set up to facilitate effective multi-agency networking on domestic violence and abuse between practitioners, by providing an opportunity for gathering information about other services. As domestic abuse is a large part of the two NSPCC family support services interviewed, both attend their local domestic violence forums. The longstanding women's specialist agencies are also involved in the forums as well as in the strategic planning of services. However, according to the interviewees many other specialist organisations lack staff time availability to attend such meetings and develop interagency work. In a survey of domestic violence forums, Minhas et al. (2002) found that there was a lack of

representation from South Asian groups,³⁹ with little attention being paid to the child protection needs of South Asian children.⁴⁰

Managers felt that if the local authority is developing a strategy, a review or an action plan, it is important to talk to the practitioners and seek their views on what the priorities should be. In some areas, the makeup of domestic violence forums means that local authorities may simply consult with a few generic or statutory bodies. The onus should be on local authorities, and domestic violence co-ordinators in particular, to develop other methods of communication and consultation to ensure the voice of the voluntary sector is heard in the development of strategy and service delivery.

A couple of interviewees mentioned that more BME staff should be included on Local Strategic Partnerships. This is especially important now under the new commissioning framework for voluntary sector organisations in England with the move towards priorities being set and funding allocated at the local level (Barron, 2007).⁴¹

I always have to make sure children are on the agenda. Whenever anyone makes a point, I have to say 'How does that fit into children's services?' When we did the domestic abuse campaign I said 'what has that got to do with children?' I wanted the campaign to feature a picture of a pregnant woman on it, or children.

Service practitioner

There's still very little focus on children in domestic violence forums, let alone on minority children.

Service practitioner

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) are part of the Home Office's National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan. The MARAC is used to identify victims of domestic abuse who are most at risk of experiencing violence. A risk assessment is carried out by the police for all reported incidents of domestic abuse. Those identified as high-risk are subject to a multi-agency response to promote the safety of women and children. The MARAC is a new initiative and is still being piloted, with a view to it being rolled out across the country.

³⁹ This is based on questionnaire responses from half of UK domestic abuse fora.

⁴⁰ Responses from half of UK domestic violence fora indicate that only 19 per cent had discussed social work and only 15 per cent had discussed child protection issues in relation to the needs of South Asian women and children.

⁴¹ Barron (2007) notes that the lack of participation of women's organisations on Local Strategic Partnerships means that the needs of women and children will not be prioritised in planning and funding strategies.

The two NSPCC Family Support Services that took part in the research were not involved in the MARACs, as they had not been set up in their area. In Wales, one of the NSPCC practitioners from the Cardiff Domestic Violence Prevention Service attends MARAC meetings. Some of the South Asian women's organisations and refuges are involved in MARACs, although they are there primarily to represent South Asian women. According to Anitha (2007) only one BME service out of the 25 they spoke to participated in a MARAC.

There was a mixed response to the MARACs by those involved. Some of the women's organisations had been directly involved in a MARAC and identified the process as an excellent method of identifying high-risk cases of South Asian women. However, a number of concerns were raised by some of the interviewees. The lack of cultural awareness amongst some partners on the MARAC was seen to impact on the decisions taken. Some interviewees felt that the MARAC system was not sensitive to issues of honour-based violence. One interviewee felt that there is a need for a specialist risk-assessment model that specifically captures the risk factors linked to honour-based violence. Anitha (2007) also has concerns over the use of generic models of risk assessments used by MARACS and that the exit-centred focus of MARACS is not appropriate for BME women who require more support to leave a relationship.

Case study

During a MARAC-style multi-agency meeting, specific cases of honour-based violence, forced marriage were being discussed. The police response was that the positive action policy needed to be applied. This meant an arrest being made. However other specialist agencies had concerns about whether this was going to benefit the overall safety of victim, family and community. The chair of the meeting requested that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) be contacted as they would have the final say about whether a charge would be brought or not. The victim had already stated that she would not be pressing charges. Without substantial evidence the CPS would not be able to bring charges, leaving the perpetrator free. The practice of honour codes would inevitably bring a backlash in the form of revenge tactics. Having spent a considerable amount of time discussing this, it was agreed that the positive action policy be applied. This was based on the national police force policy guidelines.

On a practical level, MARACs can be very long meetings, which is problematic in terms of resources. Staff from refuges found it difficult to sit through a full day of conferences on cases not related to them. Smaller organisations did not have the infrastructure to release someone from the work for the time required. It was interesting to note that in South Wales "mini MARACs" involving South Asian victims, were held separately with selected agencies because many of the organisations involved in the MARACS had little understanding of honour-based violence and forced marriage. It also takes longer to discuss the issues and to safeguard the

victim and their children, as well as examine all the members of extended family that could prove to be a threat to the safety of the victim.

Finally, the nature of the MARAC means it is only women who come to the attention of the system who benefit from this approach. By their very nature, they exclude women who are less likely to disclose domestic abuse and, as outlined before, South Asian and BME women fall into this category.

5 Bridging the gaps: good practice

The following chapter offers policy-makers an insight into the importance of culturally appropriate initiatives and support services for South Asian women and children affected by domestic abuse. It is important that evidence from these services guides policy and practice development. At a local level it offers service commissioners and providers examples of how service provision needs to be constructed in order to successfully engage and support South Asian women and children affected by domestic abuse.

5.1 Engaging with South Asian communities

Effective engagement with BME communities requires a well planned, strategic approach.⁴² Practitioners and managers noted that it can be very threatening for South Asian women and children affected by domestic abuse to contact agencies for help and support. They felt that the public sector needs to develop creative ways to make services more accessible, and that there needs to be flexibility in how services are constructed and delivered. The structures and practices operating in some of the voluntary sector organisations taking part in the research, such as the NSPCC Humsaath and Bal Raksha projects, enabled these services to reach out and help South Asian women affected by domestic abuse.

⁴² In the recent national Sure Start evaluation (of services in England), the report stated that “Sure Start had failed to address the question of ethnicity with sufficient rigour and sensitivity”. Over half of the Children’s Centres examined did not have a strategic or effective approach to working with BME communities. Staff did not consider guidance or evidence on how best to reach and work with BME communities. The authors noted that a universal service which operated on the assumption of being open to all communities did not mean all communities would be able to access it. This approach failed to reach minority populations and resulted in disproportionate under-use by minority communities (Craig et al, 2007).

Good practice case study

NSPCC Humsaath (We together), Bradford

In 2000, the NSPCC recognised that given the diverse communities in Bradford, there was a need to develop more targeted services to help achieve its mission to end cruelty to children. The starting point was the introduction of universal services with the aim of diminishing misunderstandings about what the NSPCC represented, and to engage with the community. A toddler group and an Asian women's group were set up, while the service also received individual referrals. It very soon became apparent that the biggest area of work, particularly in the South Asian community, revolved around parenting skills. It was the case that parenting was often compromised due to concerns around domestic abuse. Consequently domestic abuse has become an important area of work over the years.

Domestic abuse is not a hidden subject in Humsaath. When you enter into the building it is clear that this is a service that recognises that domestic abuse is a concern for many women, and that it is a subject that is acceptable to talk about and discuss. In the sitting room there is a big display on domestic abuse which includes information and statistics on the impact of domestic abuse on women and children. The wall display is regularly updated so that it does not become a form of 'wallpaper'.

Domestic violence is examined and defined in workshops. It is often the case that women do not recognise the emotional and financial aspects of domestic abuse as well as the role of sexual abuse within marriages. The work also includes a section on protective measures and how women and children can keep safe. Women are educated and equipped to seek help for themselves, families or friends.

Humsaath has developed an atmosphere of confidence and trust. This has made a significant difference in that women have been willing to talk with service practitioners about domestic abuse knowing that it is a confidential space and the information will not be passed to their family and community. Today women come here through 'word of mouth' or because their friends have been to one of the groups or accessed the service. Sometimes it is the experience of others that is crucial in women taking the first step.

Recently a multi-agency, informal partnership called Daisy Chain has been set up by Humsaath. This initially developed to offer a 'drop-in service' for women where they could have access to advice from police, health, housing, Sure Start and legal representatives. A review of the initiative has resulted in piloting work around women and children's safety in Asian women centres, as many do not access local services. The aim is to engage with women and develop a relationship of trust, give them the information, so that even if women have not been directly affected by domestic abuse, they might pass it on to other women or family members.

Good practice case study

NSPCC Bal Raksha (Protection of children), Leicester

Bal Raksha is a Family Support Project that serves the South Asian community in Leicester. The manager at the project estimates that 90 per cent of the work they do with children and families has an element of domestic abuse. The service promotes accessibility by offering children and families the opportunity to work in their home, at school or at the service. For example, school-based work is convenient for children who have difficulty travelling to the service, and is accessible to mothers who live in the area around the school.

Bal Raksha recognises that women find it difficult to open up and speak about the problems they are experiencing at home. In order to engage with women, the service operates a drop-in parent and toddler group five days a week. This is based on self-referral, and operates on a first come, first-served basis. This is mostly attended by mothers but they have had fathers and the occasional grandparent. Many of the parents or carers will attend two or three days a week.

The drop-in provides women with an opportunity to get out of the house, meet other parents and engage in free play activities with their children. Practitioners often pick up on signs of children behaving aggressively (for example children shouting at dolls) or mothers being completely disengaged from the child's play. Often women come and 'test out' the services. As the trust builds up between women and practitioners, it is easier for them to talk about their problems. Many of Bal Raksha's domestic abuse referrals come from the drop-in group. The service can then offer support and help to women and their families.

On Monday mornings they have a *Chai Masala* (tea) morning and provide crèche facilities to enable parents to have time on their own. Workshops are also run during this time on a wide range of subjects such as parenting, personal safety, child protection and domestic abuse. The drop-in is thus used to raise awareness and educate the group about the various types of abuse, that it happens in all communities, and who to turn to if parents or carers have concerns.

Specialist family support services which offer universal services with a domestic abuse focus are well-placed to both identify women and children in need of help and to offer appropriate support. They also provide the opportunity to educate women about domestic abuse and how to seek help. The evidence suggests that they are easily accessible, and provide women and children with a culturally sensitive, safe and confidential environment. Furthermore, the practices in these services enable families affected by domestic abuse to be identified and supported at an early stage.

Other organisations that offer skills and training opportunities for women also create a safe space for them to feel confident to talk about personal difficulties including domestic abuse.

Minority Ethnic Women's Network (MEWN) Swansea for example has been operating for 10 years offering BME women opportunities to gain skills in English, IT, sewing and cooking. Initially women would not disclose their experiences of domestic abuse. However, after the first case five years ago, women have gained confidence in the staff and begun to realise that they can offer help and support. Casework around domestic abuse has become central to their work.

5.2 Awareness-raising initiatives

Practitioners noted a need for co-ordinated publicity and awareness-raising, specifically targeted at South Asian communities. This could take the form of media campaigns each year, with advertising messages culturally constructed to enable South Asian communities to relate to them on a personal level. One example cited was the TV advertisements produced to mark the fifth anniversary of the NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline. These were set within the context of South Asian family life and produced in two of the Asian languages.⁴³ The aim of this was to raise awareness of abuse and encourage members of the Asian community to contact the helpline if they had concerns for the safety of a child. The advertisements simultaneously helped to educate the community about various types of abuse – physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect. Another example was a local domestic abuse campaign carried out by a local authority which included multilingual adverts in bus stops and on buses. However one drawback of this method was that it relied on South Asian people being literate.

Information could also be made available in places where other services are accessed such as mother and toddler groups and doctors' surgeries. Practitioners felt this was especially relevant to South Asian women, as many of them can only leave the house to take children to schools or to go to the doctor.

5.3 Routine enquiry

Health professionals are in a unique position to be able to offer assistance to women experiencing domestic abuse. Routine inquiry involves asking all women using a service about domestic abuse, which can increase rates of identification. In an evaluation of Children's Centres in England, families living with domestic abuse were brought to the attention of Children's Centres mainly through their health staff (Ball and Niven, 2007).

⁴³ Over a one-month period, the advertisements were shown on 10 UK Asian TV stations: Zee TV, Sony, Star Plus, B4U Music, MATV, ARY Digital, Prime TV, Channel S, Bangla TV and the Islam Channel.

The National Domestic Violence Plan encourages the use of routine inquiry in primary health and social care. According to Department of Health guidelines for health professionals (DH, 2005) “all Trusts should be working towards routine enquiry and providing all women with information on domestic abuse support services”. Research has noted that routine enquiry needs to be combined with good multi-agency relationships and referral systems (Hester and Westmarland, 2005).

The *All Wales Pathway* was launched in 2005 across Wales, to ensure that health professionals practice routine enquiry of domestic abuse within the ante-natal period. The *Pathway* is now being extended into Accident and Emergency services. As part of an evaluation conducted in 2007, one of the barriers to implementation noted was that it is difficult and costly to organise translation for women who cannot speak English. It was recommended that the *Pathway* should work with BME women’s organisations to address issues of language and cultural barriers.⁴⁴

Although this research did not set out to investigate the frequency of routine inquiry, several practitioners (from services in England) felt that routine health inquiry about domestic abuse by health visitors, midwives and GPs needs to occur more systematically. One health visitor working as part of NSPCC Daisy Chain spoke of her experience supporting a client base of predominately South Asian women (over 95 per cent). She noted that while routine inquiry about domestic abuse was part of her practice, this was not necessarily enough. In her experience, it was important to build a trusting relationship with the women for them to feel encouraged to disclose the abuse. This could be difficult if the woman did not speak English and an interpreter was used. Furthermore, it might not always be possible to use the same interpreter for each visit. Privacy was also a concern as some South Asian women felt under surveillance when living with their in-laws. Educating women about domestic abuse was important as many simply associated it with physical abuse. It was also useful to speak about domestic abuse as an issue that might be affecting family members or friends and providing them with phone numbers and relevant information. Lack of information about services and the fear of how the women would be treated if they disclosed the abuse was a significant barrier. The health visitor found that recent South Asian women immigrants did not even know about health visitors.

⁴⁴ Evaluation by KM Research and Consultancy Ltd, 2007.

5.4 NSPCC Child Protection Helplines

The number and nature of calls to the NSPCC helplines made about domestic abuse within South Asian communities were examined for this report.⁴⁵ This was based on all calls from South Asian people (Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi and other Asian) over a three-month period (September to November 2007). The exercise revealed that on average one in five calls by South Asians to the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline and NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline over the three-month period reported an element of domestic abuse. It is possible however, that this figure does not wholly reflect the extent of domestic abuse as a contributing factor to child abuse. This is because domestic abuse may not necessarily be mentioned by a caller, especially if this information is not elicited by the practitioner during the telephone conversation. A detailed analysis of the calls can be found in Appendix 3.

An examination of the calls demonstrated the importance of the helpline service and in particular the unique nature of the NSPCC Asian helpline. A number of callers requested to speak to someone who could speak in one of the South Asian languages. Bilingual practitioners were able to provide both a language service and the cultural knowledge to relate to the barriers South Asian people faced. The majority of the calls were however in English. This suggests that the service was valuable to English-speaking, British South Asians who were seeking advice within a particular cultural context.

The stigma and shame attached to seeking help about abuse is especially relevant in South Asian communities, often preventing those affected from contacting a helpline. In order to facilitate this process, the government in England and Welsh Assembly could include the helpline numbers in any publications on domestic abuse, and promote the NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline as a useful consultation service for practitioners and professionals who work with South Asian children and young people.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline is a 24-hour service which covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The service is provided by 10 teams based in London, Salford and Bangor. The NSPCC has also developed the NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline, which was launched in November 2001. The service provides counselling, information and advice in Bengali/Sylheti, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and English.

⁴⁶ For an example of how the NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline has been promoted to the public, see Section 5.2 on awareness-raising initiatives.

Good practice case study

Calls to the NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline

Sara was a young mother of a three-year-old boy and expecting her second baby. She had recently left her husband as he was physically and emotionally abusive towards her and threatened to physically harm their young child. She had moved into her parents' home. Her husband however knew this address and had visited the property on several occasions, threatening his wife and their child. Sara wanted to get an injunction placed on her husband. She was, however, scared of contacting Social Services as she feared her son might be removed from her care because she allowed him to live in a violent home and would therefore be deemed an unfit mother.

Shabnum was a divorced mother with three children between four and 12 years of age. She left her ex-partner as he was physically and emotionally abusive towards both her and their children. Shabnum had confided in a friend that she suspected the husband was also sexually abusing their daughter. Their divorce proceedings were being heard in court and the custody/contact arrangements were being finalised. Shabnum worried that the court might grant her ex-husband unsupervised contact with the children. She feared that her ex-husband would abuse his contact rights and did not trust that the children would be safe while they were with him.

5.5 Work with perpetrators

Both the NSPCC Cardiff Domestic Violence Prevention Service and the NSPCC Liverpool Child Protection Team work with perpetrators. The services from both teams are in demand and they have a large number of self-referrals from men. They have also worked with several South Asian men who found the service very helpful, helping them to change their abusive behaviour.

Good practice case study

Work with a perpetrator

A young Pakistani man had recently come over to the country. He had met an English woman and had two children with her. He was referred to the NSPCC through social services because he was a perpetrator of domestic abuse. Based on his own cultural beliefs, he felt he had the right to control his partner and stop her going out. He was also physically abusive when he felt she did not behave in a proper manner. He did both individual and group work. He learnt about what was acceptable and unacceptable and worked at changing his behaviour. Crucially, the practitioner was understanding of his values and beliefs and was not disrespectful of his culture. He subsequently changed his behaviour and went on to have a third child with his wife. Social services are no longer involved in the case.

5.6 Whole family approach

NSPCC Family Support Services offer a holistic family approach to tackling domestic abuse with the aim of changing the behaviour of violent men, while also ensuring safety for the women and children concerned. Practitioners work with mothers so they can identify domestic abuse, learn how to protect themselves and find out what support services are available. Fathers examine the impact of domestic abuse on women and children and the legal issues around domestic abuse. Sessions with children include talking about their experiences and learning about protective behaviours.

One day an Asian man knocked on the door asking about what we do. So we said “we offer services to Asian children and families”. So his wife started attending the drop-in. Soon after we noticed that her child was very aggressive and couldn’t settle down, couldn’t take instructions and this was due to the domestic violence. So we ran individual sessions with mum, sessions with mum and dad, and then a family session with the child. It was a really intense piece of work. It helped him recognise that the way he was behaving towards his wife had an impact on not just her but on the children as well.

Service practitioner

We did a couple of joint sessions with mum and dad but there was just too much bickering. If mum said something, dad would have a go. If dad said something, mum would have a go. So we just had to separate them and work with them individually. It was good to do the joint session because we got an insight into what was going on. They wanted to stay in the relationship, so they had to learn how to maintain it and carry on with it and stop the domestic violence.

Service practitioner

There was a case referred to us to support a South Asian woman recently estranged from the relationship. She had two young children and was considering going back to her partner. During the sessions it transpired that it was the extended family that was perpetrating the violence and forcing the husband to hit his wife. The husband was also physically abused when the family found out he was planning to reunite with his wife. We did work with them both about how they could protect children from abuse they had suffered and the impact this would have had on them. They grew in confidence, learnt to manage their children’s behaviour, some of which was a result of witnessing the violence, and they decided to move away together to another city.

Service practitioner

5.7 Support for South Asian women

South Asian women affected by domestic abuse need particularly high levels of specialist support (Rai and Thiara, 1997; Gangoli et al., 2005; Chantler, 2006). Service managers and practitioners interviewed as part of this report described the following crucial elements:

Confidentiality and a sensitive approach

Practitioners working with mothers need to give women the space to speak about and make sense of their experiences of domestic abuse, acknowledging that South Asian women have very different backgrounds and experiences without making any assumptions. At every opportunity practitioners always checked that the client had understood the situation properly. Confidentiality is very important; in many instances South Asian women were worried that the community would find out that they or their children were accessing support. Some women wished to preserve their anonymity even once they had left the abusive relationship because they saw it as a continuation of shame.

A lot of women say please don't tell anyone because they expect you to tell everyone, but what they do not realise is that this is a service and we do not cross that boundary...so it's about constantly reinforcing the policy of confidentiality.

At one time she was keen for her son to come to the children's group, but then backed off very quickly saying that she was very worried that the news they were coming to the children's group would get back to her mum and her sister.

Service practitioners

Facilitating access to services

Practitioners in specialist services mentioned the use of different methods to help women overcome the barriers that prevent them from seeking help and accessing support. Professionals in the public sector could similarly adjust their approach to encourage South Asians to access services. If a woman is reluctant to contact police even as her safety is being threatened, getting a non-uniformed officer to explain to her what would happen if she were to contact police may well increase her confidence, which can help her overcome this barrier. Similarly, in cases where an Asian woman is contacted in writing and asked to respond, there could be a number of explanations why she doesn't: she might not be able to read English; other members of the family may prevent her from doing so; she might have concerns about attending the appointment due to the stigma, or she might worry about reactions from the community.

Offering a multi-lingual, multi-cultural counselling service

Many South Asian women service users do not speak English, while others who do have a good understanding of English may still prefer using their own language. Communicating fluently in the client's language and understanding the cultural dimensions of a woman's life is crucial in communicating with women and respecting them as individuals. Practitioners who can speak Asian languages as well as English are in a much better position to empathise with women's experiences of oppression, the perpetrator's family, and racism from wider society. Practitioners felt that only professional interpreters should be used and that they should have some training in child protection issues.

Some services taking part in the research were managed by staff from a South Asian background. This sent a strong positive message to service users and helped to make the services more accessible. A number of practitioners did however mention that within mainstream services, there was a lack of Asian staff in positions of management and senior management.

Although it helped to be from the same culture, it was not only Asian people who could work with Asian women and children, especially as many Asian women speak English. One specialist service employed a white practitioner who had extensive cultural awareness and was able to work effectively with English-speaking South Asian women.

Tackling shame and honour

South Asian women who receive counselling to overcome the negative impact of domestic abuse need consistent messages of support. Although each woman's experience varies, discussing the notions of honour and shame and how these impact on the way women operate and function are important parts of the recovery process. Equally important is that they do not hold themselves responsible for shouldering family honour in this manner, and that the shame applies to the perpetrator for inflicting the abuse; not to the woman who tells of it.

No one is saying it's wrong to have those feelings of sharam and izzat. They are traditions that have been part of our lives for generations. Let's not get rid of them, but let's think about what shame actually means and ask which individual is bringing the shame on the family. It's about trying to transfer the shame to the actions of the perpetrator.

Service Manager

Faith in a woman's life can be very important. As a worker it is about putting the person first, not judging but listening to them and their needs. For one Hindu woman, her spiritual needs were part of her recovery and part of her strength.
Service Practitioner

We re-examine the Quran...so it's about interpretation and understanding and saying that this is not what the Quran says. By leaving your husband you continue to be a good Muslim...it's about transferring the shame to him. He is the one that has breached the ideologies of the faith and the Book.

Service Practitioner

When we talk about domestic abuse, we relate it back to the cultural context. We've used Bollywood films, for example, so that the women can relate to the situation.

Service Practitioner

In cases where religious conviction is central to a woman, faith is an important tool in the process of recovery. From the client's point of view, prayers give them strength to cope with their pain and helps them build confidence and move forward in life. Some South Asian women have a poor understanding of their rights and think that violence in a relationship is acceptable. This results in enormous feelings of guilt and being judged for being a bad Muslim/Hindu/Sikh or a bad wife. Practitioners used religious frameworks as a reference point to restore confidence in the women and assure them that they had not acted against the principles of their faith.

A national service of cultural/religious counsellors, fully trained in Western counselling but also fully informed about the cultural and religious context of South Asian women's experiences of domestic abuse was suggested as the way forward.

Offering practical support and promoting independence

Women need long-term practical support in addition to counselling. In many cases, the perpetrator will have control over the family finances so women need to learn about managing their finances and budgeting. Other women require help in filling out benefit forms and applications for housing. Others may wish to attend college to gain basic skills such as improving their literacy and numeracy, or learning to read and write in English. Professional women can be supported to regain their self-esteem and confidence so they can return to the job market and feel confident in looking after their children.

Group therapy

A number of the organisations interviewed offered domestic violence support in the form of closed groups. These were tailor-made to support the needs of South Asian women, so that women could talk to each other, share their experiences and develop a supportive network. This reduced the isolation and helped women recognise they were not alone in their experiences.

Bal Raksha for instance runs a single mothers' group called *Shanti* and although not advertised as a post-domestic abuse group, the majority of the women have experienced domestic abuse and are separated from their partners. Many of the women, being preoccupied with their own immediate concerns (housing, getting the children to school etc.) may neglect the emotional and developmental needs of their children. The aim of the group is to enable them to network with other women, help resettle them into the community and support them in looking after their children. It is a needs-led group, with a programme based on consultations with the women. A recent group had wanted to increase their awareness of courses and education, for instance, so the group facilitator had invited speakers from the local college to talk to them about their options. They also did work to raise confidence and self-esteem among the women. Newcomers to the group are often supported by previous members.

Advocacy and legal support

Advocacy, the practice of an independent person helping women secure their rights and entitlements, representing them in criminal or civil proceedings, is crucial particularly for women from minority communities.⁴⁷ One practitioner spoke highly of the Home Office Croydon Advocacy Project, in which a One-Stop-Shop for women has been developed where they can access a solicitor, police officer, housing officer, and benefits adviser at the one venue, greatly facilitating access to such services which women appreciate. The importance of advocacy underpins the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs).

Helping them through the court process is very much a hand holding approach... finding a good family law solicitor who understands the issues faced by South Asian women, attending all the appointments, finding a supporter from the same ethnic or religious background to be at the court, explaining what will happen on the day and making sure they understand all the technicalities.

Service practitioner

⁴⁷ Advocacy can be distinguished from support work where women are offered information, advice and safety planning (Parmar et al., 2005). Advocacy can take place within many contexts, including in relation to helping women securing services from the statutory sector such as benefits and housing.

Her husband tried to stop her from pressing charges by threatening her. Due to all the extra safeguards, we were able to convince her that she would be safe from the moment she walked into the building and right the way through until she left.

Service practitioner

Outreach services

Many South Asian women are reluctant to come into a refuge anyway. They would much rather access an outreach service. That's another issue because we're very short on funding for outreach services as well as children's services.

Service manager

Women who are reluctant to leave their home may prefer to access an outreach service.⁴⁸ If it is safe for a mother and her children to stay put, such a service can avoid the 'stigma' of leaving home, thereby potentially securing more support from the community and enabling the children to remain in their own environment. One voluntary outreach service interviewed for the report (in England) reported that more than 30 per cent of women accessing the service were South Asian. An outreach service can range from installing panic alarms, changing door locks and fitting window locks, to advocacy, legal advice and emotional support.

5.8 Support services for South Asian children and young people

Therapeutic support services

In the experience of practitioners interviewed, the impact of domestic abuse on children varies considerably from one child to the next. An initial assessment of a child or young person will determine the level of support required and the development of a programme tailored to their individual needs, which can involve either short-term support or longer-term intensive therapeutic work. This takes the form of individual or group work, or a combination of these and can include engagement through talking, play or other media including art work.

One of the consequences of domestic abuse derives from its impact on a mother's relationship with her children and the ability to bond with them, and joint work with the mother and the child may be necessary. Practitioners helped mothers build relationships, parent and support their children and manage problem behaviour.

⁴⁸ This can be provided through the government's Sanctuary Scheme, or from a voluntary organisation or refuge.

Research has shown that children prefer to talk to peers who have similar experiences rather than adults (Mullender, et al., 2002). The NSPCC also offers recovery work in the form of group work with children; some groups solely made up of South Asian children, others incorporating different ethnic backgrounds. One practitioner who ran a mixed group felt that the commonality of experiences of domestic abuse overrides issues relating to race, though it is important that children from different backgrounds are not marginalised, and any discriminatory behaviour is challenged.

Such group work helps children to ‘break the silence of abuse’ through sharing their experiences, helping them recognise that they are not alone. One group made up of South Asian boys focused on dealing with anger and aggression, as this was one of the main problems. Sharing their experiences with other Asian boys was a very positive experience for them.

Individual and group work share the aims of making children aware of domestic abuse and unacceptable behaviour; helping them to protect themselves by learning about safety measures; learning about accessing help and using support services; learning what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour; exploring problem behaviour and how it can be managed; developing self-esteem and confidence; and empowering them to think about and make their own choices.

School counselling

The NSPCC delivers support services in a number of schools across the country. The service highlighted in this research was school counselling in the form of a drop-in service or a series of counselling sessions.

School counselling services give children and young people access to an adult who can help them if they are experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse. It can give them the tools to help themselves and build their resilience and self-esteem and also refer children to more specialist help, such as therapeutic services, if needed.

Young South Asians had approached counsellors about problems with family or extended family, falling out with friends, parents’ expectations around their future careers, having too many responsibilities, and relationship difficulties, including having a boy/girlfriend from a different ethnic background. The five practitioners that worked as counsellors in schools in England noted that domestic abuse was rarely raised directly as an issue; pupils were guarded about disclosing even if there were indications of domestic abuse. This means that young people need to be educated about domestic abuse.

Support groups for South Asian girls and young women

The Teens group at Newham Asian Women's Project (NAWP) was established in response to a need for culturally specific support services for South Asian young women in the light of high levels of reported self-harm, attempted suicide and violence in the home. The project offers young South Asian women a non-threatening, confidential and non-judgemental social space to meet, share experiences and learn.⁴⁹

Group work is used to facilitate dialogue and discussion among the young women around issues such as domestic abuse. They can talk about their experiences of pressures from the community or wider society, and the impact this had on their lives. The main focus is on helping and supporting them in dealing with the issues in their own settings and own families. They can challenge each other and engage in healthy debate, while practitioners challenge certain notions that some young people hold, for instance that violence is acceptable within their culture. Residential trips are very successful because they give young people the opportunity to have some free space with their peers away from their everyday surroundings, providing a more relaxed setting in which they can disclose their problems and experiences.

MEWN Swansea also offers a youth group for young women including those who have escaped a forced marriage. The group gives young women and girls the opportunity to mix with peers from a similar background, to gain skills, and to increase their confidence and self-esteem.

⁴⁹ Initiatives provided through the Teens project include two weekly youth groups, one for 10–15-year-olds (called Girls Allowed) and another for 16–19-year-olds (called Teens Group). The youth group programme consists of workshops and activities as well as residential trips. Other work involves sexual health advice, work in schools, capacity building and training for professionals

Examples

NSPCC work with South Asian children and young people

Work with a South Asian child

We worked with the children through play to teach them about normal interaction and behaviour. The three-year-old would nip, and pull your nails and would then smile and stroke you. We worked with her very calmly and taught her about what is appropriate and what is not appropriate.

Work with a South Asian teenage girl

She wanted to marry this person who didn't have a permanent status in the country. She used me to think out loud. She would say "do you think this would be a consequence?" and I would say "do you think this would be a consequence?" "Like do you think my mum will ever talk to me again?" and I would say "what do you think?" and she would say "she won't talk to me for this long but then [she] will be ok with me. I want him to come and live with me and my mum" and I would say "what would he say to that?"- I just tried to make sure she was well-informed of all the issues, raised her mother's concerns, spoke about the importance of her education. She just needed a platform to think out her thoughts and make sense of her situation.

Work with a South Asian teenage girl

It's about explaining that shame exists in our society. But, you know, if you were getting beaten up or if your mother was getting beaten up, there's no shame to talk about it. Because if you don't go and get help it will just continue and the only way to put a stop to it is actually to be brave and talk about it.

Work with South Asian teenage boy

The things that he came out with related to what he had seen, like mum being beaten up and marital rape. You know he had seen all that and he says "well if she can take it from everybody else, why can't she take it from her children?" It was really hard because this is what he had learned. He thought this was normal. So just trying to explain that this is not right and it shouldn't happen. He was 16 and was into relations with other girls so we had to work with him around maintaining relationships and staying in relationships.

Work with a South Asian boy

We had to work with him around identity issues. His mother left her abusive partner and also gave up her partner's religion. This was very confusing for the child as he did not know if he was a Muslim or a Sikh.

Group work with South Asian boys

There was a lot of fear [in the group]. One of the things that the group was encouraged to do was share their experiences. Children could see that they were not the only ones who had experienced domestic abuse. They were shocked to find out that there were other children who went through similar experiences. Often they tend to think that they are the only ones and this can be an isolating experience.

5.8.1 Features of successful support services for South Asian children and young people

Specialist services

The therapeutic support, counselling and support groups provided to South Asian children and young people discussed in the previous section were provided within a culturally sensitive framework. Work done within the Family Support projects provided children with an environment that was similar to their home surroundings, which helped them to relax and be comfortable. To accommodate specific cultural and religious needs, support for South Asian children and young people also took into account factors that included how children were brought up, the pressures they faced, incidents of racism and discrimination, their parents' background, and their parents' own experiences of racism and discrimination. In some cases, especially with older children, practitioners needed to explore issues around identity, community pressure and notions of shame and honour. These were examined by exploring themes such as identity, roles and responsibilities.

Two practitioners quoted local surveys and consultations which showed that most young people prefer support services and counselling to be delivered by someone from a similar cultural background. Some young people may prefer not to speak to a South Asian practitioner and therefore this option needs to be available. On the other hand, in a number of cases, young people were more confident and comfortable to engage with their families through a South Asian practitioner because they felt the parents would be receptive to someone from the same background.

I think it helps being South Asian. I think they're more likely to open up because I can understand where they're coming from and I know the pressures related to living with extended family as well as having an understanding of their culture.

Service practitioner

This one school was very eager for us to go in and support them. They have recently had issues with their Asian pupils around behaviour and truanting. They specifically called us and said they are trying to help these pupils, but at a cultural level they may not be able to understand or empathise with them.

Service practitioner

Teachers don't understand. None of them are Asian. I need to speak to someone from a similar background so they can understand what is happening to me.

Young person calling NSPCC helpline

She didn't want to go to mainstream youth groups because she wasn't brought up in within mainstream social life. She felt she needed to be around other BME girls that had been through similar experiences.

Service manager

Trust, confidentiality and empathy

Based on practitioners' experiences, young South Asian people need to be able to identify people they can trust and speak to in confidence. This is especially important given the pressures not to speak about problems outside the family. Reassuring them about confidentiality is particularly relevant in relation to them accessing culturally specific support services, to allay any fears they may have about South Asian practitioners breaching their trust out of loyalty to the community, which acts as a barrier preventing young South Asian people from benefiting from a culturally-specific service.

Young people prefer the informality that can be provided by NSPCC practitioners, youth workers, Connexions advisors and others outside their school environment. Although some young people may confide in teachers, often they are seen as representing authority and therefore not approachable.

Practitioners interviewed mentioned that many young people had not had the opportunity to speak about their experiences and feelings. During individual one-to-one sessions, practitioners supported children and young people by giving them the space to express their experiences, during which they actively listened and empathised with them. The process included helping children understand their experiences and make sense of their feelings which included anger, sadness, fear, anxiety and confusion.

They will come and say something like I had a bad dream yesterday but not really open up. Once the trust is there, they will tell you what is really going on.

It's about building a relationship with them. So speaking to them informally in the refractory, having more general discussion about issues that are important to them. They end up passing your name on to their friends.

Service practitioners working in schools

Some South Asian young people will not want to speak to an Asian practitioner because they have heard stories that it will get back to the family. It's all about ensuring confidentiality. Once a young person is sure that the conversation is confidential, then often they do want to speak to someone from their own background.

Service manager

Service accessibility

Support Services need to be available in a number of settings so they can be easily accessed by South Asian children and young people. Schools are an essential place to target young people. Practitioners felt it was important to be more proactive in developing direct links with young people, for example, through schools and community centres, rather than expecting them to be referred to services through the more formal avenues. Young people should also have the option of having formal support provided in their homes.

Children can also act as a vehicle to enable women to get help. Two NSPCC practitioners working in schools noted that mothers were often interested in meeting Asian professionals who can speak their language. Schools therefore provide women with one of the few opportunities to receive information and support.

Image of services

Specialist services need to be built into a mainstream framework rather than presented as a separate provision. One project targeted specifically at Asian young people created curiosity among pupils about why a service was targeted at one particular group to the exclusion of others while another, aimed at Polish pupils, provoked racism because they were seen to be getting special treatment.

Schools need to create an atmosphere that enables children to recognise that if they are experiencing a problem, there is someone to talk to. This can be done through raising awareness during assemblies and classes, aiming to reduce the stigma attached to support and counselling.

Consultations with young South Asian children and young people

Practitioners felt that support services for young people are most successful when they are based on a user-led model, giving young South Asians a voice and a sense of ownership. Consultation is an important part in the process of developing services for them. Article 12 of the UNCRC confers on children the right to participate in decisions that affect them, in accordance with their age and maturity; children and young people should be given the opportunity to participate in decision making on the development and delivery of support services.

As part of the research, Newham Asian Women's Project conducted consultation sessions with sixteen South Asian girls and young women through their Teens programme.⁵⁰ They suggested the following support services for young South Asian people affected by domestic abuse:

- confidential young person's helpline with peer support
- more organisations like Newham Asian women's project, but also run by peers
- counsellors in schools
- services that are non-judgemental and welcoming to young people – young people-friendly
- informal spaces to reduce the stigma attached to such issues e.g. youth groups, not crisis services
- chat rooms run by professionals to support young people experiencing violence
- free counselling services
- mentoring/buddy schemes.

Engaging with parents

Service managers and practitioners noted that it is important to work with parents and build trusting relationships. There were instances where schools had faced resistance from parents when referring young people to support services, so it is important to approach the family in a sensitive manner and to work flexibly with parents to get them on-side.

One initiative included attending parent's evenings and chatting to parents about the services they offered to remove myths about NSPCC services. In another project, service providers spoke about how they maintained rapport with parents and kept them informed. They were also reassured by the service being culturally sensitive, and the systems that are put in place to ensure the safety of the young people. As a result parents were very supportive of their children accessing the service. In another example, a South Asian girl accessed the NSPCC service within her school. However when they spoke to the girl's mother, she said she did not want her child to access the service. The practitioner was then able to engage with an extended family member who was able to convince the mother that the service would help her daughter.

⁵⁰ See Appendix 2 on methodology.

It's about being flexible. Normally you want to call the parents and speak to them. If they are not available or not interested, it is about finding out if there is anybody else in the family that could be approached that might be more successful at engaging with the parent.

Service practitioner

We are speaking to young people about issues and informing them about their rights. Parents say you are teaching my daughter this and you should not, but it is about building rapport with them and giving them information about the support service, and getting them on board.

Service practitioner

5.9 Education and awareness-raising initiatives

Primary Prevention Programmes for children and young people

The importance of primary prevention work was highlighted by the majority of the interviewees taking part in the research. Practitioners acknowledged that schools today are under increasing pressure to perform academically and to raise standards. The focus on delivering the National Curriculum and meeting targets means many often have less time to do pastoral and primary prevention work. However, Article 19 of the UNCRC calls on States to take appropriate action to protect children from abuse, and this includes the use of 'educational measures'.

Practitioners noted that primary prevention work around domestic abuse was taking place in some schools, but that it was piecemeal and mainly provided by the voluntary sector and refuges. There were also initiatives to teach staff in schools about domestic abuse but again this was not consistent across all schools.⁵¹ However, in Wales the *All Wales Schools Programme* now includes a module on domestic abuse.⁵²

For primary prevention work to be effective practitioners felt that it should be delivered through a whole-school approach and implemented across the curriculum. Research has in fact shown that one-off interventions may only have short-term impact (Hester and Westmarland, 2005). Personal, social, health and economics education (PSHE) in England, and Personal and Social

⁵¹ A number referred to the Domestic Violence Forum producing an education pack (under the previous BVPI 225 indicator) but that schools were under no obligation to use them. References were also made to the second series of 'Watch Over me'. This was produced and distributed by the government to secondary schools to educate young people about domestic abuse.

⁵² Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. Domestic abuse strategy: progress on delivery on 22 March 2007. URL:

[http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-second/bus-committees-second-sjr-home/bus-committees-second-sjr-agendas/1d0234307c3f671ec364188bfd84a98f.pdf?langoption=3&tll=SJR\(2\)-05-07%20Paper%20%20%3A%20Domestic%20Abuse%20Strategy](http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-second/bus-committees-second-sjr-home/bus-committees-second-sjr-agendas/1d0234307c3f671ec364188bfd84a98f.pdf?langoption=3&tll=SJR(2)-05-07%20Paper%20%20%3A%20Domestic%20Abuse%20Strategy) [5 June 2008].

Education (PSE) in Wales, were particularly regarded as good vehicles for the delivery of primary prevention programmes, but currently is not a statutory requirement for primary and secondary schools in England.

Practitioners commented that educating young people about domestic abuse should start at a young age and be part of a programme of protective behaviours that cover safety as a general concept, safety at home, bullying and experiences of discrimination and racism. Delivering workshops and lessons to young people will help them to learn about healthy and respectful relationships, to recognise domestic abuse, to reduce the stigma associated with talking about domestic abuse and to learn about support services.

The lack of awareness about domestic violence in schools means that children and young people will feel isolated in their experiences.

Issues such as domestic abuse, self-harm, and mental health have not until recently been covered in school. If no one speaks about it, how can we expect them [young people] to seek help.

Work around bullying complements work around domestic abuse. Once children understand the concept of bullying among peers, they can begin to understand bullying among family members.

Preventative work in schools needs to start a lot earlier than is being proposed at the moment. I actually think even nursery schools, trying to teach about what is healthy and what is not. Primary school pupils should be looking at power and the balance of power. As children get older they get an impression of good relationships, and if they're not seeing that at home, they will know where to go for help that there are people to talk to.

Practitioners noted that the demographics of schools, whether they are mono-ethnic or mixed, need to be considered in relation to any work around domestic abuse. Programmes need to acknowledge domestic abuse as an issue that affects all children and that it is not acceptable in the name of any faith or culture. One manager commented that in the present socio-political climate, with experiences of marginalisation among some South Asian young people, it is important that schools promote South Asian culture in a positive way within the curriculum to help pupils develop a positive self-image and confidence before they raise awareness about domestic abuse.

It's about presenting domestic violence as an issue that happens across the board. I've seen some great comic books that could be used where you're not using actual people, so those figures could be anybody, from any background.

Service manager

They need to realise that domestic violence is not acceptable in any culture. No one has the right to lock their mums up or stop them from going outside.

Service practitioner

If her dad is not letting her out of the house, only dropping her off at school and picking her up, she needs to recognise this is domestic abuse.

Service practitioner

Training for teachers

Any primary intervention programme will require teachers to be trained to handle disclosures from children and young people and making referrals to domestic abuse professionals. Training about domestic abuse must also include an element of diversity; practitioners interviewed as part of this research had to tackle staff misconceptions about young Asian people. This included the idea that problems stemmed from a 'problematic' culture or way of life, and that difficulties were managed within their families.

They often think that the issues they face are completely different, but it's about having that understanding that many issues are the same, but that there are certain cultural aspects that make it harder from South Asian young people to access support.

Service practitioner

The willingness on the school's part to undertake such work depends on the enthusiasm and commitment from those in charge, and whether it fits into the curriculum. One practitioner recalled a head-teacher of a school based in a South Asian catchment area who allowed some programmes to be delivered in the school, but was reluctant to include a 'sensitive issue' such as domestic abuse, fearing that parents would not be happy and that this would cause problems within the community.

6 Forced marriage

My dad has said 'I can't hit you now but wait until I get you to India. I will beat you. You have given me all this grief and shame. You just wait until I get you there.'

Young South Asian girl calling the NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline about a forced marriage

Forced marriage is a significant concern mentioned by most of the interviewees. It was noted as a problem that affected some young South Asian adolescents and young women, mostly aged 16 and over, although there are cases of children as young as 12 and 13 being forced into marriage.⁵³ The UNCRC however calls on all ratifying states not only to protect children from all forms of abuse while in the care of parents or legal guardians (Article 19), but – especially important in this context – to protect their right to participate in decisions that affect them in accordance with their age and maturity (Article 12). Forced marriages are also condemned by all the major faiths and cannot be justified on religious grounds.⁵⁴

6.1 What is a forced marriage?

In 2005, the Home Office definition of domestic violence was extended to include forced marriage:

A marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties, where duress is a factor. Duress has been recognised by UK courts to include emotional pressure as well as criminal actions such as assault and abduction. It is a violation of internationally recognised human rights standards and a form of domestic violence. The victims of forced marriage can be both men and women and marriages can take place either in the UK or abroad.⁵⁵

A forced marriage is different from an arranged marriage in which choice is exercised and both parties give their free consent to the marriage. Although marriage patterns are changing among

⁵³ The increase in forced marriage cases can be related to the demographics of South Asian communities as increasing numbers of young people are reaching marriageable age (Eade and Yunas 2002).

⁵⁴ Consent is a prerequisite of Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh marriages (Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2005).

⁵⁵ Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2005) *Forced marriage: a wrong not a right*. London: Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

South Asians, arranged marriages continue to be practised successfully and are valued by young people (Eade and Yunas 2002; Alam and Husband, 2007). In some instances arranged marriages can however have elements of force which are not recognised by women.⁵⁶ Mullender et al. (2002) found that the practice of arranged marriage could be abused by fathers to control young girls after the mother had left, or after they had separated.

6.2 Incidence of forced marriage

Forced marriage is not particular to the South Asian community, but also occurs in West African communities, European communities including Greek and Turkish communities and the travelling communities (Sen et al., 2003). There are few reliable figures on the number of forced marriages taking place (Eade and Yunas, 2002). The Forced Marriage Unit at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) deals with around 250 to 300 cases a year, of which 30 per cent are children. Southall Black Sisters also deal with around 300 cases per year (Siddiqui, 2003). Although it is predominately girls who are affected, men and boys can also be victims of forced marriage.⁵⁷ In a census day survey on 2 November 2005, 106 women and 180 children fleeing forced marriage were provided with domestic violence services from Women's Aid in England (Williamson, 2006).

6.3 Reasons for a forced marriage

The factors that motivate parents to force their children into marriage are complex, but control of sexuality and independent behaviour seems to be common. The importance of family honour and the onus on girls and women to uphold this may explain why forced marriages are more common among female members of the community (Eade and Yunas, 2002). According to the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, other reasons include attempts to preserve cultural identity, strengthen community links, preventing relationships that are not considered suitable and responding to pressure from other family members (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005). Forced marriage is unique in that perpetrators justify their actions in terms of their duty of welfare towards their children and therefore may be supported by others within and outside the family (Khanum, 2008).

⁵⁶ For example, in their interviews with 23 Asian women, 11 of the 16 cases of marriage defined as arranged had elements of force which came out during the interviews. One of 16 men described their marriage as forced, but elements of coercion, and emotional abuse by parents emerged in the narratives of five other men (Gangoli, et al., 2006).

⁵⁷ Fifteen per cent of victims are male (Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005).

6.4 Policy context

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) was set up by in 2000 by the Foreign Office. It was relaunched as a joint unit with the Home Office in 2005. The FMU employs specialist caseworkers to offer support and guidance and also signposts victims to local agencies and the voluntary sector for help with accommodation, legal advice and therapeutic support. In 2005 the Government's definition of domestic violence was extended to include forced marriage, and it is also part of the *National Action Plan for Domestic Violence*.

Forcing someone into a marriage is not currently a criminal offence.⁵⁸ The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act which will be enacted in autumn 2008 introduces a set of civil remedies including third party injunctions, which will allow third parties to apply for injunctions on behalf of young people to prevent a forced marriage.

The NSPCC believes that although there are criminal sanctions and civil injunctions currently in place that can be used to prevent forced marriages taking place, a criminal offence for forcing someone into marriage must be introduced to send a clear message to communities where this takes place, that the practice is wrong and will be dealt with through criminal sanctions.

Non-legislative measures have been introduced to combat forced marriage and include implementing best practice within the statutory sector and increasing training of professionals. The Forced Marriage Unit has produced a number of guidance documents for social workers, police officers, and health and education professionals in England. The Department for Children, Schools and Family recently announced that the forced marriage guidance will be reviewed by the government in England and placed on a statutory footing this autumn.⁵⁹

In Wales, Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO), Henna Foundation, and Minority Ethnic Women's Network (MEWN) were equal partners in placing forced marriage on the

⁵⁸ Prosecutions are brought under existing legislation including kidnap, false imprisonment, assaults, harassment, child cruelty, sexual offences, failing to ensure attendance at school and murder. In the case of children, Section 31 of The Children Act 1989 provides for care and protection orders on application by a local authority, to place a child under the care of that local authority (Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005).

⁵⁹ House of Commons Written Ministerial Statement by Kevin Brennan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families on 31 March 2008. URL: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080331/wmstext/80331m0002.htm> [5 June 2008].

political agenda. In order for local authorities to act on forced marriage it was regarded as the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government to take the lead on tackling the problem. In February 2008, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government agreed to a three-year action plan that outlines a number of ways in which the Welsh Assembly Government can take forward work regarding forced marriage and honour-based crime.⁶⁰ This will include the development of a forced marriage sub-group of the All Wales Domestic Violence Working Group and the dissemination of forced marriage guidance to all key agencies and professionals throughout Wales.

6.5 Service provision

I don't think they [victims of forced marriage] feel like they can go anywhere to seek help. There's a lack of understanding all around. I know it's an issue that has been raised more recently, it's a bit more at the forefront but there's still a long way to go. Schools aren't aware and the statutory bodies or service providers only become aware when it's too late.

Service Manager

Social services ruined everything. They came to my house and I lied to their face about the forced marriage since my parents were there. I don't have a social life any more. I get dropped off and picked up from school. I can't see my friends and have no privacy.

Young girl calling NSPCC helpline

Fewer than one in 10 local authorities have specialised services for BME women dealing with forced marriage (Coy et al., 2007). Gangoli et al. (2006) found that only 7 out of 49, or 11 per cent of statutory and voluntary agencies in Newcastle, Sunderland and South Tyneside have a policy on forced marriage. Most agencies were not even aware of policies and existing guidance on forced marriage and thus are not equipped to deal with it. A recent study of forced marriage in Luton also found that national guidance on forced marriage was not being followed effectively (Khanum, 2008). Furthermore, victims of forced marriage were reluctant to approach statutory agencies, preferring to seek help from women self-help groups that were run by women who understood the cultural context of their situation.

⁶⁰ Welsh Assembly Government. *Forced marriage and honour based crime in Wales: three-year action plan*. URL: <http://wales.gov.uk/dsiltg/publications/commmunitysafety/forcedmarriage/actionplane.pdf?lang=en> [5 June 2008].

These findings were confirmed by the practitioners interviewed for this report, who felt that the response of public services to incidences of forced marriage varies considerably across England and Wales. They also mentioned that many professionals are not aware of the forced marriage guidelines, while others lack training on their implementation. NSPCC practitioners, including those on the NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline, noted that lack of knowledge and poor assessment has led to some young people not being protected by social workers or schools. In the most extreme cases, the young person has disappeared and the service has lost contact with them. Awareness of forced marriage within education and schools is especially lacking, due to hesitation around how to deal with the issue as well as resource constraints.

Some local authorities in England and Wales do not have a policy on forced marriage, a situation that clearly needs addressing. Although the South Wales Police have made a number of improvements in their approach to forced marriage and ‘honour’-based violence, overall it was felt that more work needs to be done, including the implementation of the forced marriage guidance for various public sector bodies to help them identify and support girls faced with the prospect of a forced marriage.

Case study

Neelam is 17 years old. Her parents have been forcing her to marry an Indian man they have selected to be her husband. Initially Neelam’s parents used emotional abuse to try and force her hand. They accused her of being selfish and of turning her back on their culture and traditions. Neelam tried to challenge her parents but this only led to her father using verbal abuse and then physical abuse to control her. Neelam disclosed her situation to the geography teacher at school. The teacher was very concerned about Neelam’s welfare and reported her parent’s actions to Children’s Services. Within a couple of days a social worker was sent to Neelam’s house and told the parents that they should not force their daughter into a marriage. On returning home from school, Neelam was physically abused by her father for speaking out, and the following day she was withdrawn from school. Although the teacher managed to make contact with Neelam and help her develop a safety plan with the police, Neelam felt incredibly let down by the system which in her eyes had simply exacerbated her situation and compounded her difficulties.

6.6 Issues affecting South Asian adolescent girls within a forced marriage⁶¹

Fearful situations

Young people being forced to marry are very vulnerable, having experienced various forms of abuse, and are desperate to get out of their situation. Practitioners also cited cases of girls who did not wish to enter the forced marriage, but simultaneously did not wish to leave their families or bring them into disrepute through shame and dishonour. Young people worry that they will face rejection from their community for speaking out against the forced marriage. They also fear having to leave their family and live in a form of exile. They hear the media horror stories of girls trying to flee unsuccessfully and it dissuades them from seeking help.

Lack of knowledge of services

Practitioners highlighted that service provision was unknown territory for young people affected by forced marriage. They are not aware of support workers who specialise in forced marriages and honour-based violence. Those that are aware of organisations can be held back from accessing them because they do not know what was going to happen to them once they disclose their situation. Young people are also afraid to tell adults, including teachers, about their situation because they feel embarrassed and think they will not be understood. Several practitioners noted that they come across women in their early twenties who were forced into a marriage at a young age, who sought help only after they had had one or two children.

Safety

According to practitioners, the biggest risk of forced marriage is the safety of the victim. If a young person runs away from their home, the family will go to any length to get them back. South Asian networks are used to locate the young person; this can be through Asian shops or the South Asian taxi network. Sikh or Indian families can hire a group called Sherab Punjab that traces girls as part of their work. As a result adolescent girls tend to flee to another geographical area to get as far away from the family as possible.

⁶¹ Forced marriage is also a concern for some South Asian young men although interviewees did not have experience of such cases and therefore the issues affecting them could not be included in this report.

Accommodation

Children's Services take responsibility for under-16s providing financial support and catering to their needs, including finding a foster home and providing education. The voluntary sector tends to cater for women aged 18 and over. It is however young people aged 16 to 17 years who experience the most difficulty in terms of service provision, as most refuges will only take women aged 18 and over. Two practitioners seeking accommodation for adolescent girls mentioned that they could only locate a limited number of refuges that accept women between the ages of 16 and 17. They are also disadvantaged under the state welfare system, having only limited access to benefits and housing. Some forms of temporary accommodation are unsuitable for adolescent girls, especially when they have to share facilities with other women and possibly men.

Independent living skills and healthy relationships

In some cases, forced marriage is triggered by parents finding out that their daughter has a boyfriend. The young person may then flee with the boyfriend. This can be problematic as refuges will not accept them as a couple. Adolescent girls who leave their families need intensive practical support because in many instances they are not equipped with independent living skills and have no knowledge of applying for benefits, budgeting, or paying for rent and bills. One practitioner noted the case of a young person who wished to continue her education and go to university, but did not have the financial means to do so.

Isolation

When we go to visit young girls in the refuges who are fleeing forced marriages, it's a totally different picture. You see very lonely, upset, sad girls who you know within days they will go back. It is too lonely for them there.

Service practitioner

Once a young woman moves into her own accommodation, she can keep occupied with education or employment. In the evening, when she is home alone, there is a real sense of isolation that she doesn't have her family.

Service practitioner

The fear of isolation for a potential victim of forced marriage and the reality of isolation for a survivor of forced marriage is a considerable barrier to seeking help. For some South Asian families, an individual's life is centred on their family and the feeling of being part of the community. Once a young person leaves they may experience a major shift in lifestyle, from

having a family network and support system, to being isolated. Refugees can also be very isolating for young girls, as many accommodate mainly older women. According to two practitioners, a specialist refuge can cater for their cultural and religious needs, but without a peer group they can be isolated.

6.7 Appropriate support

Multi-agency work

Practitioners noted that it is the responsibility of the state to protect and prevent young people being forced to marry. Support needs to be delivered through a properly planned multi-agency response that can support a young person at any stage of a forced marriage.

Professionals need to be able to respond swiftly and sensitively to each case in conjunction with other agencies, including the police. They need to be able to give support to the young person in confidence, and empower them to make their own decisions. In instances where a young person may not wish to leave their home and there is no immediate danger, it would be important to help develop an appropriate safety plan to prepare them for any eventuality. The police for example can put a block on the passport if there is a possibility that the young person will be taken abroad. The consequences of a young person fleeing a forced marriage for her siblings also needs to be considered. In a few cases practitioners provided support in schools to sisters of forced marriage victims.

Practitioners noted that ‘mediation’ was not seen as a solution to a forced marriage, but could put the young person in further danger. They had concerns that mediation would work in favour of parents and would look at fixing the situation from their perspective. Given the complexities around forced marriage with some young people not wanting to leave home in such circumstances, more research needs to go into preventative work and the role of culturally appropriate support services in facilitating this work.

I had two sisters that came up to me in the college and said they didn't get on with their parents and worried about the possibility of a forced marriage. Following a risk assessment we decided it was safe to invite the parents in and talk to them about the problems they were having with the girls. There were obviously a lot of communication problems between them all and forced marriage had been raised as a threat if they misbehaved. As a South Asian practitioner I was able to facilitate the discussion and also highlighted the legal consequences. Although we didn't think the girls were at risk, I think the fact that the parents knew that the school was aware of the girls' circumstance and we would be keeping an eye on them also acted as a deterrent and made the parents more cautious.

Service practitioner

Counselling

Some young people can be physically and mentally distressed as a result of continuous emotional and psychological abuse they experienced from being forced into a marriage. There is also the guilt that comes from recognising that the consequences of escaping a forced marriage and the implications of their actions on their parents and other siblings. They worry about how their actions will affect their parents' behaviour towards their other siblings, how it might affect their siblings' marriage opportunities and the family's position in the community. They also experience anxiety about their own safety. As part of the recovery process some adolescent girls need counselling to overcome their experiences of abuse, and a lot of reassurance from practitioners.

They have this huge amount of guilt that they deal with on a daily basis and it can eat them up inside. It's our role as support workers to let them understand that it is a breach of their human rights, [that forced marriage is] not correct in Islam, in Hinduism or Sikhism. Letting them know that they have not done anything wrong by leaving. [We'll say] "It's your parents that were wrong, it was the community that was wrong".

Service practitioner

Appropriate accommodation and peer support

South Asian adolescent girls need access to specialist culturally appropriate refuges. They also need the opportunity to socialise with peers who have been through similar experiences. Youth groups for Asian adolescents offer the opportunity for girls to meet peers from a similar cultural background. They also help girls rebuild a sense of family and develop a new network of support and reduce feelings of isolation.

6.8 Preventative work

Education and raising awareness

There is a need to identify young people at risk through active engagement to enable early intervention. A couple of practitioners felt that some South Asian girls were conditioned to think that a forced marriage was normal, or that it was part of their fate and therefore they accepted it. Schools had an important role to play in raising awareness of forced marriage. This was especially pertinent for children and young people who could not distinguish a forced marriage from an arranged marriage. The Department for Children, Schools and Families has

recently announced that in conjunction with the Forced Marriage Unit, they will be developing materials on the issue of forced marriage specifically for use by schools and tailored to young people.⁶² As part of the Welsh Assembly Government's three-year action plan on forced marriage, leaflets and posters targeted at young people and families will be disseminated. In the long term, the topic of forced marriage will also be included in the All Wales Schools Programme.⁶³

There's not enough being done to target this particular group to show them there are other options to a forced marriage. I don't think there's enough posters in schools. There's not enough people going into schools and speaking to girls. It would help if we could get into the schools and let them know that there's a young Asian female youth group just making them aware that there are people they can turn to for help.

Service practitioner

Community education

According to Eade and Yunas (2002) elderly men and women, unlike young people, are in denial about forced marriage. They worry about interventions that enable young people to become less dependent on their families for support. Practitioners and managers interviewed felt that education of young people must be juxtaposed with education for parents and communities that cannot distinguish between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage. Parents need to recognise that forced marriage is a violation of human rights and against religious teachings. Parents also need to be aware of the legal consequences of forcing their child into a marriage. This needs to be done in a culturally sensitive way, with the messages being delivered in conjunction with community leaders.

⁶² House of Commons Written Ministerial Statement by Kevin Brennan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families on 31 March 2008. URL: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080331/wmstext/80331m0002.htm> [7 April 2008].

⁶³ Welsh Assembly Government. *Forced marriage and honour based crime in Wales: three-year action plan*. URL: <http://wales.gov.uk/dsjlg/publications/commmunitysafety/forcedmarriage/actionplane.pdf?lang=en> [5 June 2008].

7 Faith and community groups

7.1 Community and religious leaders

The support system for many South Asian women is founded in their community and their faith group. There is however a lack of research on the role of faith and community groups in tackling domestic violence (Potter, 2007). A few studies have noted that domestic abuse is not addressed by community and religious leaders, who are predominately male and tend to simply deny the existence of abuse (Macey, 1999; Gill, 2004; Gangoli et al., 2006). To compound the situation, they also reinforce the idea that abuse should remain within the family (Women's National Commission, 2003; Raj and Silverman 2002). Haider (2002) noted that women need tangible help rather than mediation that would compromise her safety. He also believed that women are let down by service providers who fail to see the important role faith can play in tackling domestic abuse.

7.2 Limited domestic abuse work within faith and community groups

There was a local imam around the corner. He was British and had a good command of English. We spoke to him about DV and he did a Friday kutbah [sermon] on the rights of women. He was very helpful and wanted to engage with services, but he moved on to another area.

Service practitioner

There are people in the community that we use whenever they're a domestic case and the woman doesn't want to leave her husband. We take them to an influential community leader and get them to do a talk to the husband with the wife. He'll talk to the husband to say "Look you can't do this according to your religion." They highlight that what they are doing is wrong and the legal consequences of their actions.

Service manager

The majority of practitioners and managers interviewed felt that faith and community groups are an integral part of South Asian communities and therefore have a large role to play in tackling the issue of domestic abuse.

Examples of positive work in faith and community groups were noted by some interviewees, but overall this was described as very limited and short-term.⁶⁴

Lack of resources and funding means that work between the voluntary specialist domestic abuse services and faith/community groups is piece-meal, tending to being restricted to networking and delivering training rather than genuine partnership work. A number of the specialist domestic violence services had for example delivered training to community groups on various issues including gender abuse, domestic abuse, child abuse, self-harm and suicide.⁶⁵

7.3 Barriers to working with faith and community groups

I'm on a committee at the Kithara, but I'm the only woman and I'm the youngest out of all of them, so getting them to take on domestic abuse is very difficult.

The imam [male prayer leader in a mosque] is usually a recent immigrant who is dependent on his job for his immigration status, and dependent on the mosque committee who are employing him. If he starts saying things which may actually be attacking the people who are employing him, he's likely to lose his job.

We have approached community leaders at temples. They talk to their communities about domestic abuse and about putting the blame on the perpetrator rather than the woman... a lot of time people hear the talk, go away and nothing changes.

Service practitioner

In addition to lack of resources and funding, practitioners felt it can be very difficult to engage with community and faith leaders and raise awareness about domestic abuse. In their experience some groups had been open to receiving training while other groups had been quite resistant. One practitioner could not get community groups to advertise perpetrator programmes in their community centres. Religious leaders who had engaged with the issue had faced criticism from their own communities. Management committees in some religious institutions prevented the participation of women and marginalised the issues affecting them. Insecurities within

⁶⁴ One service provider mentioned that they get referrals from community and faith groups. Another mentioned a mosque that employed a professional domestic violence practitioner. Practitioners also cited cases of imams (male prayer leaders in mosques) who would do sermons on the rights of women. A few practitioners mentioned that they were aware of the statutory sector engaging with faith communities, but this was around child abuse, rather than domestic abuse. The BBC also reports that a Sikh temple in Hounslow, West London is tackling the issue of domestic abuse. URL: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6290868.stm> [5 June 2007].

⁶⁵ Other examples: the Henna Foundation noted that they were collaborating with a new think tank of highly regarded Islamic scholars, with the aim of educating the community about domestic abuse from a religious perspective. Another organisation mentioned having a huge response from mosques to a seminar on domestic abuse, but there was no follow-up or long-term plans.

communities meant that it was easier to ‘sweep the issue under the carpet’ than to acknowledge the problems that existed. There were also concerns that local authorities did not engage effectively with faith and community groups and when local authorities consult with local communities, this often translated into speaking only to the men.

7.4 Partnership work

We need to first work with the service providers and make sure the support provision is there for BME women. Then I think we need to work with the community and raise their awareness of what is right and what is wrong and this needs to be done in partnership with the service providers.

Service manager

In order to better engage with faith and community leaders it was felt that more partnership work between local government, voluntary organisations and faith/community groups is needed.⁶⁶ Interviewees noted that minority communities are often marginalised. The onus should therefore be on local authorities to support communities in tackling domestic abuse.

It is important for the message to be conveyed by influential people in the community: religious leaders, community leaders, local councillors, and influential business people. They are key players who have a duty to start up the debate: talking about domestic abuse, acknowledging that it is taking place in the community, and supporting abused women who need help. Faith leaders also have an important role in reinforcing the message that domestic abuse is not acceptable in the name of religion.

Working with communities is a complex process with no easy, ‘one-stop’ solution. The planning of programmes will need to take into account the diversity that exists within communities, and the different barriers that need to be overcome.

A case study, *Seminar with Imams on domestic violence: responding to the needs of Muslim families in Tower Hamlets*, is given in Appendix 4.

⁶⁶ One example is the London Community Partnership Project which set out to engage with local minority ethnic communities and faith groups through personal outreach to help them safeguard their children. The work focused on four areas of abuse: female genital mutilation, honour-based violence, abuse linked to belief in spirit possession, child trafficking and exploitation. The project was very successful and one of the key recommendations was for this type of work to be sustained and promoted. It was also recommended that domestic abuse also be added to the list as it was an issue raised by communities (London Safeguarding Children board, 2007).

8 Policy recommendations

Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was ratified by the UK in 1991, clearly requires the State to protect children “from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse”. The findings of this report show that there is a need for the government in England and Welsh Assembly Government, along with service commissioners and providers of domestic abuse services and services for South Asian communities, to improve policy and practice so as to respond more effectively to South Asian women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

The following recommendations are based on the evidence presented in this report, which is drawn from existing literature on domestic abuse as well as interviews with service providers in England and Wales, and data from NSPCC helpline services.

1. Recognition of the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people (England)

Although some political priority has been given to domestic violence, we recommend that further policy developments should focus on the impact it has on children living in abusive households. While legislation and the National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan and the Progress Report contain specific targets relating to children who witness and experience domestic violence, the government in England must extend the current definition to include the impact of abusive behaviours, and to ensure that greater attention is given to the impact of such behaviours on children and young people when developing policy.

2. Upholding statutory duties under The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

In accordance with *The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*, all local authorities, statutory organisations and public bodies must ensure that domestic abuse policy and practice is based on a clear commitment to race equality and diversity, recognising the rights of all children. Domestic abuse service providers must fulfil their duty under the Act and make a commitment to take positive action to seek out discrimination and to take action to address this within their local area.

3. Abolition of the ‘no recourse to public funds’ requirement

We welcome the Home Office announcement that people who receive a positive determination with respect to their indefinite leave to remain (ILR) will be able to apply for housing and living costs retrospectively for that period up to the determination of their ILR. However, the Home Office must ensure that the decision-making process involved in granting ILR is speeded up to ensure that the immigration status of women affected by domestic abuse is decided quickly, efficiently and fairly.

While the introduction of this new measure will benefit abused women who are granted ILR, it will not benefit those who have ‘no recourse’, requiring refugees to take the financial risks. It is therefore important that the ‘no recourse to public funds’ which applies to women with insecure immigration status is abolished. Until this happens, The UK government should introduce emergency funding sources to provide accommodation and support for women and their children who are victims of domestic abuse.

The Home Office and the Department for Children, Schools and Families, in partnership with the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Welsh Assembly Government should also develop guidance for local government agencies on immigration law and how it affects South Asian women and children affected by domestic abuse. This guidance should include information on sources of legal and practical support.

4. Interpretation of Section 17 of the Children Act 1989

Local authorities must implement their duties under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who have experienced domestic abuse by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children’s needs, regardless of their mothers’ circumstances.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 states that “any service provided by an authority...may be provided for the family of a particular child in need or for any member of his family, if it is provided with a view to safeguarding or promoting the child’s welfare.” The subjective interpretation of this by some local authorities however means some women with ‘no recourse to public funds’ are not being supported under this legislation.

According to the Local Government Association et al. (2006) this should include:

- Joint planning and commissioning arrangements with other key partnerships that have responsibilities for addressing domestic violence in conjunction with local domestic violence partnerships;
- A single plan for how to identify the needs of children experiencing domestic violence and their plans to meet those needs; and
- An implementation plan that identifies the key priorities for improving outcomes for children affected by domestic violence in the context of improving outcomes for all children.⁶⁸

5. Support Services

a) Funding and resources for specialist refuges

Specialist refuges are a vital service for South Asian women and children experiencing abuse and should be recognised as such, through the provision of specialist services and increased funding to support women and children. This includes:

- Funding for purpose-built specialist refuges that can cater for South Asian women with large numbers of children.
- Alternative accommodation provision and services for older male children who are not allowed into refuge accommodation with their mothers.
- Intensive levels of support for South Asian abuse victims in the form of counselling, advocacy and outreach work.
- Practical support to smaller specialist refuges to help them to tender for providing services, as this can be both complex and time-consuming.

Funding such as the Supporting People fund (England and Wales) should be widened to help children as well as women at risk of domestic abuse to live independent lives after leaving a violent situation. We acknowledge that the Welsh Assembly Government has provided further funding for children's workers within refuges in Wales, but the programme must also include funding for crèche facilities and specialist children's workers who can provide therapeutic support for children, facilitate opportunities for children to talk to each other about their

⁶⁸ Local Government Association; Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS); Women's Aid; CAF/CASS (2006) *Vision for services for children and young people affected by domestic violence: guidance to local commissioners of children's services*. London, Local Government Association.

