

“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

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This is a summary of a report that discusses the experiences and support needs of South Asian women, children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse, the barriers that deter them from seeking help, and the gaps in current service provision.¹ It draws on the findings from existing literature on the subject as well as interviews with service providers in England and Wales and data from NSPCC helpline services.² The findings of the report clearly point to a need for a more targeted and culturally-appropriate approach to responding to the specific issues and barriers that exist in these communities. It is published by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and can be downloaded from: <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform>

The term “domestic abuse” is used in this report instead of “domestic violence”, in line with the Welsh Assembly Government definition, which recognises the impact of domestic violence on children and is explicit about the coercive and controlling behaviours associated with domestic abuse which many victims experience.³

The lack of official data and policies relating specifically to domestic abuse in South Asian communities, and the impact it has on women, children and young people in these communities, illustrates the fact that the experience of domestic abuse is still by and large regarded as the same for all those affected, irrespective of cultural context. While there is no evidence to suggest that South Asian women are more likely to be subjected to domestic abuse than other population groups in the UK,⁴ and the types of abuse - physical, sexual, financial, psychological, emotional and controlling behaviour - generally mirror those experienced by other ethnic groups, the research shows that the way South Asian women perceive and experience it is in many aspects unique to their community.⁵ This relates to culture, language, family structures, racism and in some instances the insecure immigration

¹ The Government guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (HM Government, 2006) suggests that “children who are experiencing domestic violence may benefit from a range of support and services” and that “supporting a non-violent parent is likely to be the most effective way of promoting the child’s welfare,” reflecting the view that the experiences and needs of women and children in such situations are closely linked. For this reason this report has a clear focus on both children and women’s needs and experiences. While South Asian men can be victims of domestic abuse, this report focuses on children and their mothers, as women (rather than men) are the most heavily abused group (Walby and Allen, 2004). The NSPCC services involved in the research had not had any referrals of South Asian adult males suffering abuse from their partners.

² The research was 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. A list of organisations that took part in the research is included in the full report.

³ The term “domestic violence” does however appear in references to published research that used this terminology.

⁴ Walby and Allen (2004)

⁵ Gill (2004) and Batsleer et al. (2002)

status of abuse victims, all of which have a direct bearing on how women and their children cope with the abuse, as well as on the help and support made available to them.⁶

The Home Office definition of domestic violence does not acknowledge the effects it may have on children, referring only to abuse “between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality”(Home office, 2005). However, section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 recognises the potential for it to cause significant harm to a child, and the Department of Health statistics refer to 750,000 children being directly affected by domestic violence each year.⁷ As the Welsh Assembly Government defines it, domestic abuse can in fact “include violence perpetrated by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim/survivor” and it “can also include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children.” Moreover, the effects on children “can be linked to poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance abuse, mental health problems and homelessness from running away”(Welsh Assembly Government, 2005).

Children of South Asian mothers who are caught up in an abusive relationship may witness the abuse, and may even suffer abuse themselves. This can range from being used as “pawns” in a wider family context to being abducted and taken abroad by a parent or relative. Yet it is their right to be protected from such experiences: 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) and to “take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad” (Article 11[1]) (United Nations, 1989).

The practice of parents forcing children into marriage – as distinct from arranging a marriage – is also highlighted in the report as a significant concern and an important dimension of domestic abuse in South Asian communities. It predominantly affects South Asian adolescents and young women, although there are cases of children as young as 12 and 13 being forced to marry.⁸ 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).

⁶ Thiara (2005)

⁷ Department of Health (2002)

⁸The 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).

Barriers to seeking help

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 NSPCC Asian Helpline

She says no one will understand her. They don't know what it is like for an Asian girl.

Service practitioner

Practitioners [in mainstream services] 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

Women from black and minority ethnic communities take an average of ten years before leaving a violent relationship.⁹ 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]).

In South Asian communities, fear and lack of awareness run like a current through the way some women, children and young people perceive and cope with domestic abuse. The patriarchal constructs of Izzat (honour) and Sharam (shame) are very powerful, fuelling fears about potentially incurring the wrath of the extended family and losing access to children. Even if an abused woman manages to break free from her (extended) family, she may fear being relocated to an unfamiliar area, or may face separation from children or deportation if her immigration status is insecure. Added to this are fears of racism, often backed by actual experiences. This can result in abused South Asian women being very apprehensive about contacting the appropriate authorities. Even if they want to, they may not be aware of what services exist, or may lack the confidence to approach them because they do not speak fluent English.¹⁰ Fear of a racist backlash and stereotyping within the wider society often exacerbate the situation and as a result South Asian women, children and young people may choose not to highlight the abuse.¹¹

Although cultural barriers tend to be most pertinent to first generation South Asian adults, this research points to notions of honour and shame also preventing second and third generation South Asian young people from seeking help. Children are socialised not to talk to other

⁹ Patel (2003)

¹⁰ Thiara (2005)

¹¹ Gill (2004) and interviews with managers and practitioners.

people about domestic abuse which creates a great sense of isolation, while seeking help through internal structures such as approaching family or extended family can carry its own risks and does not necessarily have a positive outcome.¹²

There is a general lack of awareness among South Asian children and young people about the implications of disclosing abuse to outside agencies, and how services will respond. They fear being responsible for breaking up the family and worry about the possibility of their siblings being taken into care. Many young South Asians also have negative perceptions of services, and are therefore less inclined to approach them for help.¹³

Services for victims of domestic abuse: gaps in level and quality of provision

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

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 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

Currently, two-thirds of local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland offer a specialised service to women who are victims of domestic violence; one in ten (46 out of 434) has a specialised BME (black and minority ethnic) service for abused women.¹⁴ These are mainly in England (95 per cent), and almost half are in London.¹⁵ There is a gap in knowledge about the extent and geographical coverage of services for BME children affected by domestic abuse.¹⁶

Of the estimated 400 refuge support services in England, 28 are specialist Asian refuges, providing a total of 265 bed spaces.¹⁷ Asian women's refuges are however among the most marginalised organisations within the voluntary sector,¹⁸ even though such refuges and other

¹² From interviews with managers and practitioners.

¹³ From interviews with managers and practitioners.

¹⁴ A total of 57 BME domestic violence projects were identified across the UK.

¹⁵ Coy et al. (2007)

¹⁶ There are no recent studies on the extent and geographical coverage of such services.

¹⁷ Thiara (2005)

¹⁸ Thiara (2005)

voluntary organisations often provide the only appropriate option for South Asian women and children seeking an immediate escape from abuse in the home, especially if they are shunned by extended family members. However, even the specialist Asian refuges do not necessarily offer adequate living space and conditions for whole families.¹⁹ To make matters worse, some of these refuges are increasingly under pressure from local authorities to diversify by merging with mainstream provisions, while others are threatened with closure because they are not seen as cost-effective.²⁰

For women whose immigration status is insecure the situation is even more precarious, as they often have limited or no access either to refuges, or to legal and financial assistance.²¹

The UNCRC recognises the right to “the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health” (Article 24) and to “take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery” of a child victim of abuse (Article 39) (United Nations, 1989). However, service provision for children and young people affected by domestic abuse has not increased even in the wake of recent legislation.²² Furthermore, anecdotal evidence from the managers and practitioners interviewed for this research highlights particularly the lack of culturally appropriate specialist services for South Asian children. Statutory funding for work with children in refuges is minimal and in some areas non-existent.²³ The Welsh Assembly Government announcement of £250,000 for children’s workers in women’s refuges across Wales in December 2007 is however welcome.

Equally limited are pastoral support and the availability of counsellors in schools, yet on-site counselling is particularly important for young people who cannot access support outside the school environment.²⁴ The Welsh Assembly Government has however recently published a strategy for developing school-based counselling services across Wales, supported by funding of £6.5m over the next three years. For young people who no longer attend school or who feel uncomfortable about a school-based service, outreach services are also needed in other settings. The availability of counselling should be complemented with primary prevention work to remove the taboos around domestic abuse and give all young people the confidence to seek help. Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), which could be a

¹⁹ From interviews with managers and practitioners.

²⁰ Roy (2008) and interviews with managers and practitioners.

²¹ Hague et al. (2006) and Roy (2008)

²² Adoption and Children Act 2002; Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004; Rivett and Kelly (2006)

²³ From interviews with managers and practitioners.

²⁴ From interviews with managers and practitioners.

suitable vehicle for the delivery of such prevention programmes, is currently not a statutory requirement for primary or secondary schools in England.²⁵

Experiences of inappropriate intervention by practitioners and professionals dealing with South Asian women and children affected by domestic abuse is an ongoing problem, which is a serious concern particularly in the context of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the UNCRC, which clearly requires that States should ensure children’s rights “without discrimination of any kind” (Article 2) (United Nations, 1989). This research indicates that some professionals (police, social services, and teachers) in both England and Wales engage reluctantly with South Asian cases because of concerns about political correctness and fears of being labelled racist. There are also concerns about poor intervention in cases of young adolescents being forced into marriage.

Finally, domestic abuse is a complex phenomenon that needs to be tackled through a multi-agency response.²⁶ However, interviews with service managers and practitioners indicate that the level of multi-agency cooperation varies, with some public agencies simply passing on a referral to the specialist voluntary agency and then leaving them to work independently. There is also a lack of representation from South Asian groups on domestic violence forums and little attention is paid to the child protection needs of South Asian children.²⁷ The lack of cultural awareness among some partners in MARACs (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) also negatively affects the decisions taken to protect both South Asian women and children.²⁸

Improving service provision: engaging with South Asian communities

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

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.

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

²⁵ Personal and Social Education (PSE) is a compulsory subject in Wales.

²⁶ Hester and Westmarland (2005)

²⁷ This is based on Minhas et al. (2002) findings of a questionnaire response from half of UK domestic abuse forums.

²⁸ From interviews with managers and practitioners.

The cornerstones of “good practice” in responding to domestic abuse in South Asian communities can be summarised as follows:

- Within South Asian communities the lack of awareness about services and the reluctance to seek help outside the immediate family must be addressed first. This can happen through advertising, which can also help educate the community about various types of abuse, as well as through community and school-based initiatives. Routine inquiry in health care settings will also increase the chances of identifying women affected by domestic abuse.
- Specialist Family Support Services such as NSPCC Humsaath and NSPCC Bal Raksha that offer universal services (including mother and toddler groups and Asian women’s groups) are well placed to identify women and children in need of help and to offer appropriate support.²⁹ They also provide the opportunity to educate women about domestic abuse and how to seek help. They are easily accessible and provide women and children with a culturally sensitive, safe and confidential environment. They can work with women as well as families affected by domestic abuse, providing services across a spectrum, from prevention to therapy. Such services need to be complemented with school-based and outreach services for those unable to access support outside the home.
- Therapeutic support, counselling and support groups developed within a culturally sensitive framework can provide South Asian children and young people with an environment that is similar to their home surroundings. Given the choice, many South Asian young people prefer support from a practitioner from their own cultural background. These practitioners have the cultural knowledge to understand family and community dynamics, and experiences of racism and discrimination. South Asian practitioners are also able to approach the family in a sensitive manner and to work flexibly with parents who may be suspicious of services. Support services are most successful when based on a user-led model that gives young South Asian people a voice and a sense of ownership.

²⁹ Case studies of NSPCC Humsaath (We together) and NSPCC Bal Raksha (Protection of children) are presented in the full report.

- Faith and religion play an important part in the lives of many South Asians. This report highlights that the concerns and worries of South Asians are too often framed by some practitioners around their “problematic culture” or way of life. Yet for many young South Asians culture and religion are factors that are very much a positive part of their identity and lives. In this light, faith and community groups could potentially play a much larger role in tackling the issue of domestic abuse within the community. However collaboration between the statutory sector, voluntary specialist domestic abuse services and faith/community groups only tends to occur in a piece-meal way.³⁰

Policy recommendations

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, the National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan³¹ 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.

³⁰ From interviews with managers and practitioners.

³¹ This plan is included in: *Domestic Violence – A National Report March '05* (Home Office, 2005).

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 (DCSF), 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.³²

³² 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.

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 experiences of domestic abuse, and develop mentoring schemes for young people, providing South Asian male support workers for boys.

b) Revision of diversity policies and procedures in refuges

Diversity policies and procedures in specialist and generic refuges must be reviewed, fully implemented and monitored regularly. There is also a need for more South Asian support workers and interpreters.

c) Specialist family support services for South Asian women and children

Specialist community-based family support services should be developed to offer culturally appropriate universal services (including mother and toddler groups and Asian women's groups) and therapeutic work for South Asian families affected by domestic abuse.

The framework and processes underpinning specialist services should also be integrated into the structures of mainstream services in order to ensure that these are equally accessible to minority communities.

d) Therapeutic support for South Asian children and young people

Specialist therapeutic support should be developed and available for South Asian children and young people affected by domestic abuse, in parallel with therapeutic work for mothers. This includes support in the form of culturally appropriate individual work, group work and work with mothers to establish the parent-child bond that could have been affected by the abuse.

Support services commissioned by the local authority need to be designed and funded for the long term.

e) School counselling services

Children and young people must have access to a school counsellor. Counselling services should be culturally and ethnically responsive and provide, wherever possible, a choice of a counsellor from their own cultural background. Although physically located in schools, such counselling services should be independent from schools, thus ensuring that difficulties are dealt with separately from a child's education. The opportunity to use such services must be available to all children including those with specific communication needs, such as signing and communication techniques for children with learning disabilities. School-based counselling services should also provide advice and support for teachers and non-abusing parents.

f) Services for South Asian young people

More services should be made available to South Asian young people affected by domestic abuse. Support should be offered through informal spaces such as youth groups, in addition to counselling, confidential helplines, and peer support.

g) Perpetrator programmes

Services that provide a coherent and coordinated approach to perpetrators and young men with violent behaviour should be developed. The NSPCC's Caring Dads, which has received funding from the Welsh Assembly Government, No Xcuses (in Liverpool), the SAFE Domestic Abuse Team (in Barrow) and Changing Places (in Chester) serve as innovative examples of such services. Apart from these, there are currently very few avenues of practical support 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.

Perpetrator programmes should also be developed within a culturally specific framework and made accessible to men from black and minority ethnic communities.

h) Promoting the NSPCC's Asian Helpline

The government in England and Welsh Assembly Government should include NSPCC Asian Helpline information in any publications on domestic abuse. Local authorities should also include these Helpline details in public education material that is sent to general practices, schools and libraries, and promote the Helpline as a useful consultation service for practitioners and professionals who work with South Asian children and young people.

6. Multi-agency and partnership work

a) Collaborative approach

Responses to domestic abuse should be culturally appropriate and sensitive and address the situation of all members of the family, with the aim of providing support and protection for child and/or adult survivors, and challenging perpetrators. This requires the collaboration of local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs), domestic violence forums, local authorities and voluntary and community organisations. Specialist South Asian services should also be involved in the decision making at local strategic partnerships.

Joint work should focus on:

- improving the breadth of culturally sensitive and appropriate service provision
- increasing co-operation and co-ordination between services
- improving practice by developing policy and practice guidelines
- data gathering
- increasing joint initial and ongoing training on diversity issues
- engagement in preventative work.

Local authorities and in particular domestic violence coordinators should develop a number of communication and consultation strategies to ensure that smaller specialist organisations can be involved in the development and delivery of services.

b) Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)

It is essential that members of MARACs are aware of the specific issues and needs of South Asian women and their children when putting in place a safety plan. They should be fully aware of the cultural context in which domestic abuse can take place in order to create safety mechanisms for women and children from South Asian communities who are experiencing domestic abuse.

7. Participation of South Asian children and young people in decision-making processes

Service providers must engage in consultation with South Asian children and young people about the barriers that prevent them from seeking help in domestic abuse situations and how these can be overcome. They should also participate in decision making relating to the development and delivery of appropriate support services.

8. Training

a) Training of practitioners and professionals in mainstream services

Professionals and practitioners in mainstream services should be trained in how they can appropriately help and support South Asian women and children and young people. Training should be integrated into an overall strategy that would include examining employment practices, service development and delivery, and day-to-day operational practices within an organisation.

b) Training for health professionals

All health professionals and staff working in health settings should receive diversity training with a particular focus on enquiring about domestic abuse, and the challenges of discussing the issue in different cultural contexts. Health visitors, GPs and nurses are in a unique position to offer assistance to women affected by domestic abuse, given the few opportunities available for abused women to come into contact with services. Training about routine enquiry should therefore be part of pre-registration curricula and post-registration continuous professional development for all health professionals. Basic awareness training is also important for administrative staff with patient contact, such as general practice and accident and emergency receptionists.

Training should specifically address health professionals' concerns about raising the subject through increasing their understanding of the specific cultural barriers faced by women from South Asian communities, and enable them to provide more appropriate care for their patients. The training should include the importance of using translators where necessary and that they should be alone with the woman when enquiring about domestic abuse. Translators should also have domestic abuse training.

The health service alone cannot meet all the needs of women and children who experience domestic abuse, but it is uniquely placed to ensure that if and when they access their universal services, professionals are able to help identify the situation and help them change it.

c) Safe contact arrangements for South Asian children

Children should maintain contact with both parents provided that it is safe. The child's welfare is the single most important factor for the courts and every court should be guided by what will be best for the child. The judiciary and all practitioners, professionals and volunteers involved in ensuring safe contact for South Asian children who have experienced domestic abuse should be trained in the specific dangers faced by them and their non-abusing parent. The training will help practitioners and professionals to ensure that the dangers are presented accurately and taken into consideration when decisions are made about contact.

Extra funding and resources must be made available for contact centres. It is essential that supervisors monitor the verbal interactions between perpetrators and children when they communicate in a South Asian language. Interpreters should also be available for mothers who do not speak English to enable them to communicate with workers at contact centres.

9. Education

a) Statutory status for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE)

Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) must be made a statutory subject in England. PSHE is crucial in safeguarding children and it is essential that the framework within which it is taught helps them learn about personal safety and improve their understanding of pro-social and respectful relationships, including parenting and family relationships, as well as abusive behaviours. Teachers must also be properly trained in teaching the subject and know what to do if a child discloses abuse or raises concerns about their safety.

In relation to domestic abuse PSHE should:

- help children to identify causes of stress and conflict in the home
- set out that domestic abuse can happen in any community
- make children aware that violence and abuse is unacceptable in any relationship
- encourage children to think about possible solutions and coping strategies
- help children to consider who they would turn to for help and support.

b) Religious education settings

Religious education settings such as madrasas, gurdwaras and temples can also play a role in instructing that violence and abuse is unacceptable. They should also help children and young people to develop coping strategies if they are experiencing domestic abuse at home.

10. Working with faith and community groups

The Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government should pilot partnership projects between local authorities and the voluntary sector to educate South Asian and other BME communities about domestic abuse and make them aware of support services and perpetrator programmes.

11. Forced marriage

a) Criminal offence for forced marriage

A criminal offence for forcing someone into marriage must be introduced. Currently, criminal sanctions apply only to offences associated with forced marriage such as rape, assault, battery, kidnap, and in the most extreme cases, murder. From autumn 2008, when the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act is enacted, civil remedies will enable third parties to apply for injunctions on behalf of young people to prevent a forced marriage. A criminal sanction will however send a clear message to communities where this takes place that the practice is wrong and illegal.

Any new offence, as well as existing legislation that can be used to prosecute the practice or threat of forced marriage, should be extended through legislation to bear extra-territorial applicability.

b) Training for practitioners on forced marriage

We welcome the statement that the DCSF will be revising existing forced marriage guidance and place it on a statutory footing in autumn 2008.³³ However it is also important that professionals working with young people receive thorough training about what to do if they come into contact with a young person at risk of or living in a forced marriage. This report has demonstrated 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.

c) Support for young people at risk before or after fleeing forced marriage

Support must be made available for young people who are at risk or have been forced into marriage and have left the situation. Young people fleeing these situations (often under duress) can feel guilty because of the emotional, psychological and physical abuse they may have experienced. There should be better refuge provision for young women aged 16–18 years who have fled from a forced marriage, to enable them to develop an independent life without their family or community support. They also need intensive support and counselling from practitioners and access to peer support groups.

³³ Kevin Brennan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families in *Hansard written answers*, 22 April 2008: Column 2035W.

12. Research

a) Mapping current service provision

The Home Office and Department of Health in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government should conduct a comprehensive mapping exercise of specialist therapeutic services in England and Wales for South Asian children and young people affected by domestic abuse in order to identify the gaps in current provision and to highlight good practice.

b) Engaging faith and community leaders

The Department for Communities and Local Government in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government should conduct research into how faith and community leaders can best help to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse within their community. This should then be shared and guidance reviewed to ensure that the learning is implemented by service agencies at all levels.

c) Children's support needs

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) should conduct research with South Asian children and young people affected by domestic abuse to develop an in-depth understanding of their experiences and support needs.³⁴

Front cover:

The quote "I can't tell people what is happening at home" is from a young person calling the NSPCC Asian Helpline (p.3).

³⁴ It was beyond the scope of this report to interview South Asian children and young people due to the sensitive nature of such work, and the ethical and practical issues that would need to be considered.

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The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has a vision – a society where all children are loved, valued and able to fulfil their potential.

Our mission is to end cruelty to children.

The NSPCC is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children. For over 100 years it has been protecting children from cruelty and is the only children's charity with statutory powers, enabling it to act to safeguard children at risk.

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