

Race on the Agenda (ROTA) on behalf of the Female Voice in Violence (FVV) Coalition

Submission to the Office of the Children's Commissioner: Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in gangs and groups (CSEGG) – Call for evidence

January 2012

About ROTA

ROTA is a social policy and research organisation that focuses on issues impacting on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. Our policy priorities are health, education and criminal justice. We are a membership organisation with over 20 years of experience. We host four networks – MiNet, the Transformative Justice Forum, the Female Voice in Violence Coalition and the Winning the Race Coalition, with a combined membership of over 3,500 organisations and individuals.

About the FVV Coalition

The Female Voice in Violence Coalition has been created by ROTA to:

- Monitor progress by government against the recommendations identified in the FVV report
- Identify good practice in the third and statutory sector in relation to serious youth violence and females
- Deliver training on the issues raised by FVV to policy-makers, commissioners and other statutory stakeholders
- Capacity-build and support the third sector to engage in the development of practice and policy to address the issues raised by Female Voice in Violence.

The FVV Coalition is led by ROTA and delivered in partnership with Imkaan.

Consultation Response

ROTA welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in gangs and groups (CSEGG). ROTA currently hosts the Female Voice in Violence (FVV) Coalition, a collection of organisations interested in serious youth violence and the women's sector. The submission is on behalf of the FVV Coalition and outlines the nature of what is happening to girls and how it happened, as highlighted in research conducted by ROTA. The submission also outlines the current and proposed impacts from a ROTA survey of

service providers within serious youth violence and women's sectors. ROTA is particularly grateful to Foundation4Life who provided case studies to support the submission.

Methodology

The submission is informed by:

- 1) 'This is it. This is my life.....' Final Female Voice in Violence (FVV) Report, 2011.
- 2) The Female Voice in Violence Coalition is a collection of organisations interested in serious youth violence and the women's sector. It produced an Annual Report for 2010-2011 which focused on a survey of service providers, assessing their awareness of systems meet the needs of girls and women gang associated. Twenty three surveys were returned from a variety of service providers from across the country.
- 3) Foundation4Life provided 10 case studies of girls affected by gang association to support the submission, some of which illustrate points within the submission, with all case studies being attached in Appendix 1. Case studies were taken from three projects at Foundation4Life:
 - a. Heart: The aim of the HEART programme is to promote healthy relationships, and the programme will seek to address intimate partner sexual exploitation and violence between young people. In this programme, we are targeting 720 young people over a period two years. 320 young people will be referred on to the targeted and 360 young people will be referred on to the universal programme.
 - b. Exodus: F4L's intense 12 week programme is aimed at young people with gun/ knife related offences or considered to be in gang culture or gun/ knife related activity. The group workshop brings together prisoners working out on Licence, reformed ex-offenders/ perpetrators of gun and knife crime, reformed ex-gang leaders, victims and their families including "Mothers against Guns and the police including 'Operation Trident'.
 - c. Community against gangs, guns and knives: Targeting young people who are involved in gangs and at risk of being involved in crime including knife related violence. The delivery of the programme is based around our EXODUS programme. We are working with three boroughs including Ealing, Lewisham and Croydon.

Evidence Requested by the Commission

Scale and Scope

- 1) **How many children have you worked with, or been notified or concerned of, in the past 14 months who are victims of:**
 - a) **Gang-associated child sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse**
 - b) **Group-associated child sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse**

- 1 'This is it. This is my life.....' Final Female Voice in Violence (FVV) Report, 2011, interviewed a total of 349 participants, through focus groups and one to one interviews. The age ranged from 13 to 60. Of the participants a total of 221 were between 13 and 18. The gender breakdown of young people interviewed was 139 girls and 82 boys. Total – 221, Girls – 139, Boys – 82.
- 2 The Female Voice in Violence Coalition Report for 2010-2011 which focused on a survey of service providers. Twenty three surveys were returned from a variety of service providers from across the country.
- 3 Foundation4Life provided 10 case studies of girls affected by gang association to support the submission.
- 4 **If you are able to provide a breakdown of victims by the following characteristics the please do so:**
 - a. **Age**
 - b. **Gender**
 - c. **Ethnicity**
 - d. **Disability**

We do not have a breakdown of figures; the breakdowns below are from 'This is it. This is my life...' FVV Report only.(Please note the figures below are the total number of participants interviewed and not exclusively the young people identified above).

a. Age

Age	Females	Males	Total
13-15	83	34	117
16-18	56	48	104
19-25	51	26	77
25-40	18	8	26
40-60	8	1	9
Prefer not to say	2	7	9
Not completed	0	8	8

b. Gender

	Female	Male
TOTAL	217	132

c. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Total
African	19
Asian UK	14
Asian Other	4
Bangladeshi	8
Black UK	41
Black Other	11
Caribbean	52

Irish	9
Mixed Race Other	10
Pakistani	13
White UK and Asian	1
White European	2
White UK and Black Caribbean	20
White UK	128
Other (Afghanistan)	1
Not Completed	11
Prefer not to say	5

d. Disability

Disability	Total
Yes (not specific)	10
Dyslexia	11
ADHD	8
No	290
Prefer not to say	21
Not completed	8

3) How many people (of all ages) have you worked with, or been notified of, in the past 14 months who are perpetrators of:

- a) Gang-associated child sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse
- b) Group-associated child sexual exploitation, victimisation and abuse

4) If you are able to provide a breakdown of perpetrators by the following characteristics then please do so:

- a) Age
- b) Gender
- c) Ethnicity
- d) Disability

Where possible please provide, on a separate sheet, the initials and date of birth of all individuals counted in your submission. This will assist us in avoiding counting any individual twice. This information will be securely protected in line with our ethical procedure and will not be made public. If you are unable to provide us with this information please still make your submission.

5) Nature

Where you have further details please provide us with information on the nature of the exploitation, victimisation and abuse that took place:

5a) What happened? (i.e. what type of violence and abuse was experienced, was the child moved to different locations, over what length of time did the abuse take place, was the child known to any other agencies etc)

The final report 'This is it. This is my life...', 2011, found that the nature of exploitation, victimisation and abuse faced by girls included domestic violence, stalking, rape, sexual violence, confusion regarding consent and inability to influence a relationship. Female relatives were at risk of physical and sexual violence, and repeatedly cited threats to their homes. In relation to sexual violence, sisters discussed the threat of rape when rivals were looking for brothers, when they were duped into relationships with rivals or when their relationships were restricted to their familial gang loyalty or area.

Sexual exploitation was also identified by the research interviewees in relation to girls being passed around as property by criminal gangs, sold between gangs to settle disputes, used as sexual currency to pay off drug debts and forced into formal and organised prostitution. For young women, their lack of confidence in services to respond appropriately to the sexual violence they experienced within and outside of criminal gangs meant that they would rather keep such issues to themselves.

Key findings from the boys' interviews included:

- Lack of awareness regarding consent, sexual violence and coercion: Participants' discussion of sexual relationships, consent and sexual violence were confused. When phrases associated to sexual violence such as rape were explicitly used, participants found discussions difficult and often became defensive. And yet, when such language was not explicitly used participants spoke openly about coercive and violent sexual relationships. For many participants, this appeared to be the first opportunity they had to consider any of these issues and to have conversations on this topic.
- Coercion: When discussing scenarios where girls may have sex with more than one person at the same time, responses within and between the groups were extremely varied. Some participants felt that this was completely unacceptable, with some saying that it did occasionally happen. Different standards applied for boys and girls when talking about multiple partners. Respondents reported that certain 'types' of girls had sex with more than one person at the same time.
- When presented with coercive scenarios, most groups became confused, often changing their mind part way through a sentence or saying conflicting things. Some of the participants reported that a girl always had a choice to have sex. Some participants seemed unable to differentiate between choice and coercion. Girls were assumed to have consented to sex by their actions, in lieu of giving direct and vocal approval
- Rape: All the groups were extremely critical of the term rape. Yet when presented with sexually violent situations where the term rape was not used, the boys did not perceive the situation as rape. The risk of rape was usually perceived as a result of gang rivalries or initiation rituals. Some of the groups did not think gang association resulted in rape. Again, sex was perceived as the responsibility of girls. Often, they were accused of deceiving the boys. For the majority of the groups, rape was thought to be the girl's fault. This was because they assumed she was aware of the risk of rape once she became involved with gangs. A small number of participants placed the responsibility of rape with boys and gangs.
- Domestic Abuse: Participants also discussed other forms of violence within friendships and intimate relationships. The majority of group participants told us that girls were sometimes violent towards boys. The groups reported that girls were violent for a variety of reasons. All the groups reported that boys were violent towards women. Only a few participants felt that it was always unacceptable to hit a girl. Some participants stated that they would only ever hit a girl for a 'serious' reason.
- Extreme violence was referred to, in and outside of a gang context, and the limited acknowledgment of their participation that the boys and men gave to this was alarming. In reference to sexual relationships, girls were expected to behave according to traditional assumptions around purity and chastity. Girls who had sex outside of committed relationships were typecast as 'dirty' or 'slags'. Male sexual behaviour, by contrast, was not reported to be regulated by the same rules. Participants reported that it was acceptable for boys to have sex without repercussions.

5b) How did it happen? (i.e. how was contact made, did the perpetrators know the victim before grooming took place, had perpetrators been victimised by others, how was the child groomed, how did the child disclose if at all, were the perpetrators of the abuse known to statutory or other agencies etc)

The final report 'This is it. This is my life....', 2011, found that the nature of exploitation, victimisation and abuse faced by girls happened in a variety of ways and included drawing on feelings of love and fear which could subsequently lead to domestic violence, coercion, sexual exploitation, stalking, rape, sexual violence, confusion regarding consent and inability to influence a relationship.

Key findings from the girls included:

- Engagement in offending: Girls engaged in offending behaviours alongside male peers or partners for two distinct reasons, love and fear. Whilst there was some overlap, most colluded with partners because they were in love with them and wanted to protect them, or due to fear for themselves or their family. Fear was a key driver for offending. Participants claimed to be fearful of kidnap, torture, sexual violence, threats to life, threats to home, isolation and punitive responses by authorities to their offending
- 'Bad boys' and risk: Participants had confused and conflicting definitions of what a 'bad boy' would be like, with the most common descriptor being that he could offer a level of protection. Given the confused response by participants, it would seem that the assumption that 'some girls like bad boys' should not be used to explain away their association with criminal gangs and serious youth violence.
- Relationships: Domestic violence, stalking, rape, sexual violence, confusion regarding consent, and an inability to influence a relationship were issues raised by participants across the country. However, those who were gang-associated also disclosed experiencing all forms of violence from their partner and his peers/other gang members. Girls also struggled to describe healthy relationships but could describe unhealthy relationships in detail. Girls also believed that there was a lack of services available to them, particularly those under 16, where refuge provision was only available to adult women.

Key findings from the boys included:

- Male understanding of impact of Serious Youth Violence on women and girls: Nearly all the male participants had a good understanding of the possible consequences for girls. Although, few seemed to appreciate the reality of the situation for girls, or indeed that many of them were responsible for placing girls in those situations.
- However, while participants had been clear that gang-association was a choice for females, quite a few of the participants became confused when asked why a girl might commit offences such as carrying a weapon or providing an alibi. Many could not see a situation where a girl would not do such a thing and there was a clear expectation that she would. Some participants indicated that if a girl did not do as expected, then there would be repercussions (see case study 7 see below).

The Female Voice in Violence Coalition is a collection of organisations interested in serious youth violence and the women's sector. It produced an Annual Report for 2010-2011 which focused on a survey of service providers, assessing their awareness of systems meet the needs of girls and women gang associated.

The survey contained 20 specific questions about the type of organisation and the nature of the survey. These were broken into 4 themes of whether women and gangs used the service; whether disclosure of gang activity happened and were there specific services for girls; what are the barriers to monitoring these issues; and if there were any future plans to train or deliver along FVV objectives. Within each of these themes were a selection of closed questions with specific answers, such as if an organisation is statutory, private or voluntary and community sector; to open questions requesting any information on the services provided. Twenty three Surveys were received from a variety of service providers from across the country.

The answers were coded after all had been received. Open questions did not directly refer to the same processes so answers were coded based on common key phrases that described core processes.

The findings:

- Service providers who responded 14 were in London Boroughs; 4 in Leicestershire and the other 5 spread across Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield. All 23 had women or girls using their services to some extent.
- 11 service providers don't identify gang association of girls using services at all. The rest do monitor through a variety of methods mostly in assessment of service need
- Just under half had no method for identifying gang association. Another 12 used either initial assessment or information sharing with other agencies or both. This covered a range of service providers and was not specific to one sector so the lack of awareness
- 10 Service Providers don't answer how they manage disclosure. The others mainly through partnership protocols but two services had girl specific responses in relation to gangs.
- Even with 13 services knowing of the issue 15 organisations didn't collect any data on users. Of the other 8 they had between 1 and 35 services users, 3 organisations served between 10-16 service users but inconsistent from 1 per year up to 35. Indicates a significant issue is specialist service is identifying a top end of 35 girls in need in the last year. That's more than 1 a fortnight even when underreported and problematic disclosure. Many of these are indicated as below 18 years of age.
- Only 2 of 23 services had specific funding around women and violence associated with gangs. These were both for over £60000 annually.
- Three services described their services for girls as similar in delivering intensive victim care, risk management and signposting.
- Specifically funded organisations had 1 year funding and 3 year funding respectively
- When asked why no monitoring, 8 gave no answer, 8 stated lack of awareness but alarmingly 2 gave the reason the lack of remit to the service and 3 because of no KPI or supervision requirement. These indicate the need for this issue as a strategic priority/need to be addressed for services.
- A range of barriers were given for no data collection range from too much data collected already and this affects service users, to a reluctance to disclose, confidentiality, male focus of service and resource limitations. This range and low response indicates there is no dominant reason and a lack of awareness built into processes.
- The knowledge of what to do with the information is limited among respondents. 9 didn't answer so showed no relevance to their services. 5 specifically stated that they didn't know what to do with the information. Others would provide child protection or another referral or use the information to inform strategic partnerships on youth violence.
- Only 2 of 23 organisations trained in FVV objectives, dealing with girls and women gang associated, whilst 5 of 23 organisations do plan to train staff in FVV objectives – Which shows improving awareness of the issues. 3 organisations want to train staff. 2 organisations have 1-3 staff but a more specialist organisation would like to train their total contingent of up to 15 members of staff.

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