
SUPPLEMENT

ISSUE 2 2011

**BAME
Women's
Sector**

**Fighting for
survival**

rota
Race on the Agenda

SUPPLEMENT

ISSUE 2 2011

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CONTENTS

3 Contributors

4 Editorial
Elizabeth Henry

5 Policy
Marai Larasi MBE

8 London
Baljit Banga

11 Wales
Dr Mwenya Chimba

13 Nottinghamshire
Rahni Kaur Binjie

15 Female genital mutilation
Naana Otoo-Oyortey MBE

18 Trafficking
Heather Harvey

21 Schools
Case study

Terminology

ROTA uses the term Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) to refer to all groups that are discriminated against, including (but not exclusively) people of African, Asian, Caribbean, European and Eastern European, Irish, Greek, Turkish, Jewish, Roma and South East Asian descent, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

In Supplement 2, the terms Black and minority ethnic (BME), Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), Black, minority ethnic and refugee (BMER) and Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee (BAMER) are used throughout the publication by different contributors, in keeping with their own professional usage within the continuum of race equality. This principle of professional usage also applies to the use of 'practice' and 'practise' in relation to female genital mutilation.

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CONTRIBUTORS



Marai Larasi MBE . Director . Imkaan

Marai is an activist, campaigner and leading voice around violence against women, gender and race. She has worked in the field for over 16 years and is widely known for her passion, commitment, leadership and expertise.



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Baljit has been Director of NAWP since 2008. She has a long commitment to ending violence against women and girls. Baljit is focused on the sustainability of the sector and is developing projects to address sexual abuse and exploitation.



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Mwenya has over 12 years experience lecturing in universities and providing training in Africa and the UK. Mwenya's research interests include feminist media and cultural studies, gender, women and democracy, and social representation of minority groups.



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Rahni has worked in the voluntary sector for over 21 years. In her career she has delivered frontline services, been in senior management and governance, worked with young people affected by HIV and in community development.



Naana Otoo-Oyortey MBE . Executive Director . FORWARD

Naana has been the Executive Director of FORWARD since 2007. For the last 20 years Naana has worked in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights and women's issues as an activist, trainer and mentor with a specific interest in gender-based violence.



Heather Harvey . Lilit Research and Development Manager . Eaves

Heather has over 15 years experience working on women's human rights, equality and development in the public and voluntary sectors, both in the UK and overseas. This includes managing Amnesty International UK's Stop Violence Against Women Campaign.

EDITORIAL

BAME WOMEN'S SECTOR

Black, Asian and minority ethnic women's organisations are once again fighting for survival amid inadequate funding, discrimination and policy short sightedness. Elizabeth Henry asks why policy makers keep failing to meet their needs.



Elizabeth Henry
Chief Executive
ROTA

If the 'big society' is the coalition government's vision for the future of the community sector, it has a long way to go to challenge the reality facing the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women's sector.

Hard times

Tales of redundancy and scrapped programmes, for women as a whole, circulate with such frequency that we needn't look to Charles Dickens for woeful scenes of depression. The Fawcett Society, during their 2010 campaign for a Judicial Review on the gender-bias of the government's funding cuts, revealed that 72 percent of the cuts would be met from women's income as opposed to just 28 percent from men's.

With only half of BAME women in employment, more heading single parent families than on average¹ and more suffering from higher rates of poverty², cuts to programmes like Sure Start and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) could exacerbate existing inequalities.

Level playing field?

Historically under funded³, crucial specialist support is all the more important as the Equality Act 2010, an important tool to mitigate disproportionate policy impacts, weathers frequent attacks, most notably in the form of the government's Red Tape Challenge.

In policy, the frequency of contacts ROTA has received throughout our Female Voice in Violence Programme demonstrates the lack of national support for local organisations to confidently respond to complex forms of gang-related and serious youth violence. The gap in policy guidance in the violence against women and girls sector is mirrored in the lack of funding support for many BAME women's organisations.

Common themes

The fight for specialist services, amid a continued lack of understanding, is a common theme in many of the articles featured in this publication. Another theme is that despite the pressures, these organisations have no intention of going anywhere.

The Poppy Project at Eaves and Roshni in Nottinghamshire are developing fundraising plans. Newham Asian Women's Project recently secured money to keep their counselling service temporarily afloat. Imkaan and the Black Association of Women Step Out show the value of being strategic, vocal and campaigning.

FORWARD continue to expand their programme of work into different communities where the unlawful act of female genital mutilation is practised. And a school trust for girls in the North West of England works to ensure that their students, who are at risk from

gang-associated violence, are supported.

Complex realities

So why do these realities continue to evade the eye line of policy makers and funders? Perhaps, as some smaller BAME organisations have recently suggested, in times of recession, potential funders may favour projects with a wider, more popular appeal.⁴

Whatever the case, the reality that a Black or Asian baby born in Britain is twice as likely to end up in poverty compared to a white baby cannot be wiped away⁵. All the while these organisations continue to meet the needs and make a difference. ■

-
1. Poverty pathways: ethnic minority women's livelihoods, Zohra Moosa with Jessica Woodroffe, Oxfam and the Fawcett Society (June 2009) <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/Povertypathways.pdf>
 2. Equal Opportunities Commission (2005), Ethnic minority women and men, http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/ethnic_minority_women_and_men_briefing.pdf
 3. Davis, S and Cook, V. Why Do Black Women Organise? A Comparative Analysis of Black Women's Voluntary Sector Organisations in Britain and their Relationship to the State (2002) Policy Studies Institute: London
 4. The Impact of the Economic Downturn on BAME Education Services (May 2011), MiNet
 5. Listening to Black and ethnic minority women's voices, Seminar Report (June 2005) Fawcett Society

POLICY

SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION

As a second tier national organisation supporting the Black, minority ethnic and refugee-led violence against women and girls sector, Imkaan is aware that member organisations require greater levels of direct support. Which means being ‘uncompromising’ to protect their future, says Marai Larasi.



Marai Larasi MBE
Director
Imkaan

Imkaan is a national second tier organisation dedicated to the development of the Black, minority ethnic and refugee (BMER) led violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector. We have over 13 years of experience working in the area of gender-based violence, which includes domestic and sexual violence, forced marriage and honour-based violence.

The organisation’s history, development and experience is grounded in the grassroots experiences and needs of service providers, and the views and voices of the women and children they support. The organisation’s main areas of work are training, research, capacity building support and strategic advocacy.

As the only national second tier organisation which focuses exclusively on supporting the BMER-led VAWG sector, Imkaan’s role is invaluable. The organisation works to support the sustainability of the sector and to influence the policy and commissioning landscape, through informing thinking, policy and practice.

Current challenges

Like many third sector organisations, Imkaan is constrained by limited financial and staffing resources. The organisation has a core staff team of four, and at any one time a maximum of six staff members. However resources bear no direct link to demand for

our services. More than ever, there is a need for Imkaan’s work.

The current political and economic climate has increased the fragility of our member organisations who occupy a space that has historically been a socio-political wasteland; one that exists in the intersection between gender and marginalised ethno-cultural identities. Where practitioners attempt to address other areas of structural inequality, for example around sexuality, they have rarely been able to do so in any meaningful, systematic way as they often become anxious about adding further layers to their marginalisation.

In the last 10 years, the BMER-led VAWG sector has been decimated, with funding streams such as Supporting People providing a platform for services to be taken over by larger mainstream organisations, or to be fully decommissioned.

Now, in a context of wholesale cuts to services, a focus on localism and the government’s position on multiculturalism, organisations are likely to face increasing threats to their identity, to the retention of autonomy and indeed to their survival.

Evolution

At the same time, Imkaan has been involved in its own evolution. The organisation emerged from the South Asian women’s refuge sector

and has historically been focused on supporting those groups and operating largely within a context of work around domestic violence.

Over the last few years, Imkaan has shifted its focus to a wider BMER brief, which also sits within a broader VAWG context. As such the organisation now engages with issues such as serious youth violence, prostitution and trafficking. These shifts in identity and scope require openness to learning, debate, reflection and the willingness to throw out old ways of thinking.

For this growth to be meaningful, Imkaan has begun the necessary, but resource intensive task of expanding our reach to ensure that we support non-refuge based groups, such as smaller community-based services including unfunded organisations that are a valuable resource for many BMER women experiencing violence. We have also begun to engage in partnerships, for example the Female Voice in Violence¹ project, which supports policy and practice approaches to emerging areas of concern for BMER women and girls.

Such developments, while critical to Imkaan’s own development and ultimately the sector’s, place the organisation’s limited resources under increasing pressure. As such, we have to constantly ensure that we work in ways that are manageable and able to yield results for us and our members.

SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION

Imkaan's approach

As a second tier organisation, we are acutely aware that the 'ante has been upped'. Member groups are likely to need increased levels of direct support while being reassured that Imkaan is engaging in essential strategic advocacy.

The temptation is to be wholly reactive and direct all of the organisation's energies on fire fighting the crisis in the sector. However, we recognise that a key aspect of our work must be the provision of a dynamic body of evidence which speaks to the needs and aspirations of BMER women and girls, and which scrutinises service provision.

In the last two years, Imkaan's research activities have included:

- Vital Statistics - a two-stage survey of over 300 BMER women who had accessed specialist BMER services. Vital Statistics looked at a range of issues from the nature of the violence they had experienced to their perspectives on services². This was the first time a survey of this scale and focus had been carried out in the UK
- A range of focus groups including a series of sessions with young BMER women exploring their experiences of life in the UK³

- Research conducted in partnership with FORWARD⁴, commissioned by the Women's Health and Equality Consortium (WHEC⁵), which examined the sustainability of the BMER-led VAWG sector
- Greater London Authority (GLA) commissioned study looking at harmful practices (often referred to as harmful traditional practices⁶).

Each research activity provides Imkaan with information and perspectives that can then be integrated into our training programmes, ensuring that the training is current and appropriately responsive. However Imkaan's research activities are most useful in the area of strategic advocacy, including working to effect social change with respect to violence against BMER women and girls. As such Imkaan's work can be used by:

- Member groups as lobbying tools, to 'make the case' with policy makers, commissioners and funders
- Policy makers, commissioners and funders seeking to understand (and reference) the needs of BMER women and girls as well as the strengths and vulnerabilities of the BMER VAWG sector
- A range of individuals and agencies to support critical thinking of widely held beliefs and approaches

with respect to violence against BMER women and girls

- Imkaan in regional, national and international lobbying and awareness raising work.

Critical thinking

Imkaan's approach of critiquing assumptions which are made about BMER women and the organisations which support them is an essential aspect of the organisation's practice. For example, when considering the issue of 'harmful practices' during the recent GLA audit, the Imkaan team engaged in important dialogue about the use of language and its impact on women and on society's perceptions of the violence that they experience.

The term 'harmful practice' often has the effect of 'othering' types of violence that may disproportionately affect BMER women. This in turn leads to the 'othering' of BMER women themselves. Practices such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and honour-based violence are not special, even though they require a specialised response. These practices are simply violence against women and girls, and although the context may differ, the root cause (i.e. gender inequality) remains the same irrespective of the manifestation of that violence.

At Imkaan we often point out that domestic violence and sexual violence

POLICY

SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION

are also harmful practices, which may not seem to be endorsed by communities at large, but in effect are a result of gender inequality, which is readily reinforced at societal level.

Engaging in the kind of thinking mentioned above enables staff at Imkaan to be better placed to critically analyse everything, from government consultations to internally prepared papers.

Staff are required to understand and manage the immediate tension between the need to highlight the issues affecting BMER women and girls (and ensure issues are addressed in ways that recognise specialist knowledge and skills in each area), while ensuring that harmful practices are not 'exoticised', connected with the 'other' (and therefore used to further marginalise and stigmatise communities).

Imkaan, like many of our member groups, must walk that tight-rope; constantly critiquing even our own assumptions and offering clear messages that challenge discriminatory perspectives.

Open and dynamic

Imkaan works in ways that are open and dynamic, but we are also a 'difficult' organisation. Ours has the task of bringing challenge, scrutiny and voice where there is none. We constantly balance this with our responsibility

Imkaan works in ways that are open and dynamic, but we are also a 'difficult' organisation. Ours has the task of bringing challenge, scrutiny and voice where there is none.

to ensure that our activities and thinking are informed by grassroots organisations; what we say, and how we say it, must be accessible to practitioners and communities, and must be sensitive to the voices of services and the women they support. While we are gracious, pragmatic, strategic and engaging, we are also uncompromising around the core of our work.

We believe that BMER-led women's organisations cannot afford to be silent in these challenging times. Ultimately, BMER women and girls have the fundamental right to describe and define our own needs and aspirations.

We have the right to design, deliver and lead services, which fulfil those needs

and aspirations. We have the right to speak for ourselves about the things which matter to us, and we have the right to be seen, heard and understood. ■

Visit: www.imkaan.org.uk

1. Female Voice in Violence - project which assesses the impact of serious youth violence, gangs and serious group offending on women and girls. The project is led by ROTA
<http://www.rota.org.uk/pages/FVV.aspx>
2. Vital Statistics: The Experiences of BAME Women and Children Facing Violence and Abuse, Ravi K Thiara & Sumanta Roy, Imkaan (March 2010)
3. Dispelling Myths | Speaking Truths Focus Group Findings on the Experiences, Needs and Aspirations of Young BAME Women Living in the UK (2010)
4. The Road to Sustainability: A review of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee organisations working with women on health and gender-based violence in England, FORWARD and Imkaan. A study commissioned by the Women's Health and Equality Consortium
5. The Women's Health and Equality Consortium is a strategic partner of the Department of Health. Partners are Platform 51, Women's Resource Centre, Maternity Action, Forward, Rape Crisis, Positively Women and Imkaan
6. Published in May 2011 by the Greater London Authority

LONDON

LEARNING TO TALK BUSINESS

When the Newham Asian Women's Project was faced with the reality of possibly losing their counselling service, they quickly learnt the language of business planning, gift aid process and related taxation to regain control. Baljit Banga explains her learning curve.



Baljit Banga
Director
Newham Asian Women's Project

In 1981 a group called the Newham Asian Women's Collective (NAWC) was established to campaign for and support the needs of South Asian women in the London Borough of Newham.

NAWC was also concerned about the gaps in service provision for South Asian women. From evidence that was being compiled at the time, it was clear that generic services either lacked the preparation and resources to support South Asian women, or failed to understand the complexity of their needs.

Racism in the 80s

During the early 1980s, South Asian and other BME communities faced racism and discrimination, and social, political and economic exclusion affected their access routes to necessary services. South Asian women found themselves both unrepresented and isolated.

There were also very few women advocating on behalf of South Asian women. NAWC found itself at the centre of such activity, and challenged the implicitly discriminatory policies and practices that existed with regards to health and social care.

Anti-racism activity was a central theme in the work of organisations like NAWC. However, NAWC was equally concerned with gender-based violence and mobilised itself to ensure that the

basic human rights of women and their children were protected and promoted.

NAWP's launch

From these early developments emerged the Newham Asian Women's Project (NAWP), initially established to provide support, counselling and advice to women and their children fleeing domestic violence. In June 1987, NAWP opened its first refuge to provide emergency accommodation and housing support services.

At the beginning of the 1990s, NAWP articulated a vision for holistic provision to ensure that women were not only protected once they fled violence, but through early intervention and prevention work (developed under a framework of empowerment) women could live in a society free of the violence that afflicted and endangered their lives.

Since its launch, NAWP has developed and grown, providing specialist services to approximately 1,500 women each year in the following areas:

- Accommodation-based housing
- Support services
- Youth work including a mental health advocacy project
- Adult and youth counselling services

- Legal advice and information services
- Services supporting victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

NAWP also undertakes research and capacity building work including specialised training.

Counselling service

For over 10 years, NAWP delivered a counselling service to women aged 18 and above. The service consisted of 12 sessions of counselling delivered to 100 women annually. That is until 31st March 2011 when its three year fixed term contract came to an end when its primary funder, the primary care trust, ceased to exist. The total funding for the service in its last year of operation was just £22,000.

When the service ended, 60 percent of cases presented with severe and long term trauma related to domestic violence including sexual abuse, rape and self harm. Attempted suicide and suicidal ideation rates were also high. The women who accessed the service had complex and multiple needs and had nowhere else to go to access language-specific counselling services.

Value for money

In terms of the Value for Money (VfM) profile, contemporary VfM measures

LEARNING TO TALK BUSINESS

assess the 'value' of services by calculating the total overall cost of delivering the service divided by the total number of sessions offered to arrive at a comparative cost per session. If the human factor was worked into the equation, the total overall delivery cost, divided by the total number of women supported, could be calculated.

Key elements, such as the positive impact of violence prevention, early intervention, empowerment and reduced risk have no quantifiable measures. Yet if such factors are considered in terms of the results, then it is clear that an argument for any savings or cuts is based on a notion of a 'false' economy. Put simply, for 101 women to benefit each year, it would only cost £217 per woman for 12 sessions.

It is not a coincidence that Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee (BAMER) women are over-represented in institutionalised care, and that a common variable present in the lives of these women is an experience of violence.

Escalation of risk occurs in the absence of early intervention and prevention, and leads to higher costs for services and interventions in health, social care and the criminal justice system for example.

In 100 percent of the cases supported by NAWP, the need was assessed as complex and multiple. In close to 20 percent of all cases women had

accessed generic support services, but didn't complete their therapeutic sessions because they found it difficult to convey the nature of the issues affecting their lives. For some, language was also a barrier.

Causes of violence

From NAWP's own research it was found that women had a very clear understanding of the reasons for their problems. They stated that the primary cause of the violence they experienced was patriarchy. They reminded service providers that 'when women leave violent relationships they were not leaving their cultures'. These women articulated their perspective as one where violence and patriarchy were very clearly linked.

Specialist women-only services are essential. They provide a framework to facilitate an understanding of the 'overall' experience these women face, such as cultural factors. They also recognise the identification of patriarchy as a cause of violence against women.

There are a number of erroneous assumptions that underpin strategic thinking in relation to BAMER women. The first is that women will simply take up referrals to generic services. The figure of 60 percent quoted earlier suggests that the majority of women with complex needs and high risk will not follow this path.

Case study evidence suggests that women withdraw from services and wait until the problem escalates and becomes out of control before accessing services, again which creates greater costs.

Another assumption is that services are readily available for women if they choose to access them. There is now less support available to women in need. While short term savings can be produced, over the long term there is a higher probability that the 'problem' will manifest itself again with greater economic and social consequences.

Adapting to change

When the counselling service ended on 31 March 2011, the majority of the service users had either just started their therapeutic sessions or were in the middle of them. With the dissolution of the primary care trust, there was no appropriate alternative that could be identified for replacement funding.

Prior to a discussion on our strategy (focused on research and diversification of funding), NAWP was expecting a three month termination notice from the funder, although it was understood that the fixed term contract would end in March. NAWP didn't receive this notification of the service's termination. This meant there could have been a break in the service leading to a gap in provision for a client group with very high needs.

Strategic approach

Following a two year strategic analysis of case studies and a comprehensive review of case files, it was found that a new project for a dedicated counselling service for younger women addressing issues around sexual abuse and exploitation would be needed. Following a two year fundraising effort, funds were finally secured for a project to begin in April 2011. The knowledge that underpinned our strategy was generated from existing cases, and considered under a strategic framework within a three year 'business' planning process.

NAWP found that many potential non-government funders were shocked that a service such as ours, that cost so little, was totally cut. These donors felt that the funds needed to support the work were not that high. Equally important was an understanding of the need for the service. These two factors converged in a very short period of time and resulted in a successful, albeit short-term, fundraising drive.

As a result NAWP can continue the counselling service for six months due to funds generated from the private sector. While there is a long term strategy to access the private donor market, this particular fundraising drive came as a result of circumstance, not strategy. We got 'lucky'. A long term sustainable funding strategy should always remain the objective.

NAWP has had to embrace, albeit uncomfortably, the notion of business planning. This process has supported the organisation to put in place a forward-looking model...in advance of a detrimental event occurring.

NAWP has had to embrace, albeit uncomfortably, the notion of business planning. This process has supported the organisation to put in place a forward-looking model which, in turn, has enabled decisions to be made by the Management Committee a minimum of six months in advance of a detrimental event occurring.

BAMER organisations must become more knowledgeable of the gift aid process, related taxation, private sources and other measures. Underpinning this thinking is the ongoing assessment

of user need as indicators of service development, internal and external strategic alignment, and risk.

Timely advice

It is important to overcome any avoidance of business planning, contingency models and financial risk assessment. The difficulty is that organisations are not set up in a way to embrace these concepts. For example, organisations do not generate profit therefore there is no framework for an investment plan, which is one of the outputs of financial forecasting. But it is important to adapt your approaches and tools to better assess a three or even a five year forecast in relation to an organisation's survivability rate.

The ongoing commitment to the ethos of women's organisations requires a needs analysis which guides strategic thinking. It is important to the survival of organisations to engage in areas that are contrary to our collective nature vis-à-vis business planning.

A user-led understanding and comprehensive assessment of need and evidence of impact must form a critical part of the planning framework. This is a fundamental stabiliser in a world where a gender-based discourse and specialist provision continue to be isolated from policy. ■

Visit: www.nawp.org

WALES

LANGUAGE OF CHANGE

In Wales nearly three-quarters of Black and minority ethnic women escaping domestic violence have English as a second or third language, yet are the least likely to access relevant services. Dr Mwenya Chimba explains how the Black Association of Women Step Out is making a difference.



Dr Mwenya Chimba
Development, Research
and Information Manager
**Black Association of
Women Step Out**

The Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO) was established in 1995 as an 'All Wales' voluntary organisation providing generic and specialist services to Black and minority ethnic (BME) women and children made homeless through a threat of domestic violence, or fleeing domestic violence. It was set up at a time when there was an apparent increase in the BME population in Wales.

Out of 2.98 million people resident in Wales, 156,100 are from a BME background; 86,300 are estimated to be from mixed, Black, Asian or Chinese backgrounds. These populations are largely concentrated in urban areas including Cardiff, Newport and Swansea.

Service profile

At inception BAWSO mainly provided secure and culturally sensitive refuge accommodation for women and children. Over the years support provision has evolved to become holistic and include other more specialist aspects such as forced marriage, honour-based violence, trafficking and female genital mutilation (FGM). The change in the type of support provided was instigated by the fact that women and children required more than just safe accommodation.

Clearly as diversity increases, the nature of diversity within different groups in UK society is changing and different groups have different experiences and outcomes. Therefore there is a need

for more varied service provision to cater for these different needs. In this instance, although there are Women's Aid organisations in Wales, they are unable to adequately support women and children from BME backgrounds because they lack the understanding of the complexity of domestic violence from a BME perspective.

Barriers

Research by the Regional Youth Work Unit in 2003 shows that BME communities, asylum seekers and refugees experience various forms of social and economic disadvantage, and are often subjected to racism both at the individual and institutional levels. Barriers to accessing services among BME populations are well reported and include low level English language skills, lack of confidence, lack of information, affordability and an absence of culturally-appropriate services.

For instance, some women had never handled money in their lives; their partners controlled all the money and purchased all the provisions. For such women, even after leaving an abusive relationship and securing housing in the community, it is difficult for them to manage their money. This may lead to rental arrears and other debt.

In addition, the women may lack English language skills to enable them to access information about available services.

Through BAWSO's experience, 70 percent of the women who are fleeing domestic violence have English as their second or third language. The organisation works with more than 162 interpreters covering 60 languages. Every month it conducts 120 support sessions which involves an interpreter.

Holistic approach

Over the years BAWSO has supported several BME women who have been confronted with forced marriage, or have been threatened with honour killing, FGM, prostitution and trafficking. At any given time BAWSO supports over 400 women across Wales.

The holistic approach to service provision has led BAWSO to develop projects such as floating support, outreach, language support, education and raising awareness, mentoring for young people and research. More recently BAWSO has established projects to address other aspects of violence against women such as trafficking and FGM. In 2009 it set up the Diogel Project in partnership with the Poppy Project to protect, assist and support victims of trafficking.

Initially the Diogel Project was intended to support five women, at any given time, who had been trafficked to the UK and sexually exploited in the three months prior to referral, in a safe house in South Wales. Due to evident demand for the service, it was extended to

LANGUAGE OF CHANGE

include outreach support to improve the safety and wellbeing of women from all over Wales who have been trafficked and who are in need of short term support and advocacy. More recently the Diogel project received funds from the Welsh Assembly Government to set up another safe house in North Wales.

An FGM Health and Safeguarding Project was set up in 2010 to raise awareness of the practice from the health and human rights perspective following on from research conducted in 2008 by BAWSO. The study entitled 'Female genital mutilation: Examining the practice in Wales' revealed that FGM was still practiced in Wales although people knew it was illegal. However, it is worth noting that women, men and young people were not only willing to talk about FGM, but wanted to be involved in putting an end to it.

Limited access

A major challenge BAWSO has faced supporting women and children experiencing domestic violence, is the no recourse to public funds (NRPF) rules. By curtailing women's access to public funds, it limits their chance of ever leaving abusive relationships. In Wales, BAWSO is the only organisation which supports large numbers of women with NRPF. In 2009 it supported 80 women with NRPF.

Out of the 80 women supported, 60 percent of the women had suffered

The holistic approach to service provision has led BAWSO to develop projects such as floating support, outreach, language support, education and raising awareness, mentoring for young people and research. More recently BAWSO has established projects to address other aspects of violence against women such as trafficking and FGM.

multiple forms of abuse. They were victims of rape, sexual abuse, FGM and honour-based violence. This illustrates that these women not only have the worry about their financial and immigration status, but the trauma of

having undergone other forms of abuse.

BAWSO plays a unique and significant role providing support for BME women and children across Wales as well as raising the profile of BME issues in general. The work that is being done by BAWSO individually and in partnership with other stakeholder organisations creates a more tolerant and diverse society. It stands out as an example of best practice, which could be adopted by other organisations.

All this work stems from a strong ethos which posits that 'every woman and child deserve a place of safety' irrespective of socio-economic or immigration status, gender, race, religion, age and disability. ■

1. Office for National Statistics (mid-2007)

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

COMPROMISING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The move from funding specialist services for Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee women to investing in generic services means a loss of expertise and knowledge, which puts women in Nottinghamshire at a disadvantage, claims Rahni Kaur Binjie.



Rahni Kaur Binjie
Project Manager
Roshni (Nottingham Asian Women's Aid) Ltd

Amid the large scale financial cuts and political shifts, changes are sweeping the country. With these changes come new challenges. The Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee (BAMER) women's sector is faced with daunting new threats to their survival.

The cuts have dried up funding streams and are causing the sector to become more homogenous. The concern now is how to sustain BAMER women's organisations and overcome future threats. These are some of the serious questions that Roshni is trying to find answers to.

Roshni, based in Nottinghamshire, is a specialist third sector organisation that provides services to BAMER women, children and young people experiencing gender violence. The BAMER sector has faced continuous threats to its survival over the past few years.

Roshni has been severely affected by funding cuts, in stark contrast to local generic services within the violence against women (VAW) sector.

Erosion of services

Roshni has been providing specialist, holistic and culturally sensitive services to vulnerable BAMER women and children for 25 years. These services are now in danger of being eroded. As a result, a more mainstream approach to BAMER women is being adopted. Where do

BAMER women and children turn to now? And how can a holistic approach work without taking account of the context in which VAW occurs for BAMER women?

There has been an increase in competition, and a preference for generic provision, under the coalition government. Roshni has to compete with the very same women's organisations that once fought alongside it to campaign and lobby for specialist BAMER services to be delivered by BAMER providers. The aggressive funding cuts that Roshni has suffered have had major implications on all these women's organisations.

The government's procurement and tendering process has forced BAMER-specific services to merge with larger generic providers, or to shut down completely, often resulting in the loss of valuable expertise, skills and knowledge in supporting BAMER women and children.

Less support

These changes to funding have severe implications for BAMER women services nationally. This is not just about services being cut, but the longer term impact on women and children when additional money will need to be spent on health, safeguarding, workforce productivity and output and schools, for example. All of which means that much needed specialist responses will be squeezed out of the equation.

A key resource to the organisation is Roshni's support staff who offer a specialised service through their own cultural insight, training and experience. However, the cuts to the sector have caused a collapse in the level of support staff and hours provided from 120 hours of support to 25 hours per week. This notable decline in the level of support offered to vulnerable BAMER women and children is a major concern. Many of the cases that Roshni deals with involve sensitive and complex issues that BAMER women and girls experience within the context of violence against women and girls, which will not be adequately addressed.

A major part of Roshni's activities involves community-based advocacy work, which is provided by bilingual discernment support staff. Only last year Roshni was able to offer over 100 hours a week to local BAMER communities in Nottinghamshire. With the changes, local communities only receive 42 hours of support. With less support staff to provide the necessary advocacy and support to local communities, this means that BAMER women who are particularly vulnerable and isolated, are cut off from accessing Roshni's services and are being left at risk.

VAWG strategy

Yet despite these challenges there is a contradiction. The coalition government's Violence Against

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

COMPROMISING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy is a significant policy that addresses several issues that Roshni is concerned with. It highlights forced marriage, so-called honour killings, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and trafficking. Though the strategy has raised awareness of the issues, funding cuts across the BAMER women's sector means that these problems will not be adequately addressed.

Furthermore, changes to the process of rehousing BAMER women are currently being overlooked by policy makers. Bilingual discernment support staff help people in Nottingham who have housing problems to avoid becoming homeless. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, they make a risk assessment of an individual's support and accommodation needs so that the appropriate services can be provided.

With the removal of particular funds, priority bands have changed and therefore women are assessed as a lower priority. This ultimately has an impact on women and their children and causes them to occupy refuge accommodation for longer periods of time, increasing the dependency of the women and limiting the availability of refuge space for those at crisis point.

Filling the gap

If organisations such as Roshni, that offer choice and specialism to BAMER

women in the UK, fade away where will BAMER women and their children turn to in times of violence, abuse and racism?

The approach of Registered Social Landlords and generic services are often limited in provision and choice, and overlook cultural nuances and needs, which result in a failure to provide a holistic service appropriate for BAMER women and children. Roshni and other independent BAMER services have the scope and resources to understand and support BAMER women and communities.

Expertise

Roshni is concerned about the loss of expertise and knowledge that women's organisations have to offer BAMER women. BAMER women cannot be dealt with in a homogeneous fashion, and the dilution of the sector is a hugely inefficient action on behalf of the coalition government. The intangible knowledge that has accumulated over decades will have to be rebuilt if Roshni and other BAMER women's organisations continue to decline.

Demand is still high for specialist BAMER services from BAMER women. The question is how to sustain the BAMER women's sector within the 'big society' and how to ensure that women's voices from all communities are represented. What is clear is that BAMER women's voices are not being heard.

Recommendations

Some of the recommendations that Roshni would put forward to government policy makers include:

- Recognition of the growing demand for BAMER women services
- Demonstrate a clear commitment to BAMER women services
- Provision of adequate funding
- Commitment to long term funding
- Establishing a networking system that shares knowledge and information with BAMER service providers at ground level
- Consultation and development of future service for BAMER women and children.

Meanwhile Roshni is tackling the impact of the cuts and decommissioning of Roshni's refuge for South Asian women. Despite these challenges, Roshni is committed to providing its vital refuge service for South Asian women, funded out of reserves and donations. ■

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

CLOSING THE POLICY GAP

Despite new government multi agency practice guidelines on female genital mutilation (FGM), and an integrated policy framework, the lack of coordination, targets and resources for working with FGM practising communities means that women and girls affected remain at risk, argues Naana Otoo-Oyortey.



Picture credit: Unity Trust Bank

Naana Otoo-Oyortey MBE
Executive Director
FORWARD

The prevailing notion that female genital mutilation (FGM) is a problem among minority communities and foreigners seems to miss the point that FGM is a gross human rights violation.

A study in 2007 estimated that over 24,000 girls are at high risk of the most extensive form of FGM in England and Wales, and 66,000 live with FGM¹. However many frontline professionals are unaware of FGM and lack the capacity to respond effectively to women and girls who are affected by this violation.

This situation is often complicated by the fact that FGM affects mainly migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants. In reality FGM is a global problem that also affects British citizens, and the government has a duty to adopt national measures which are coherent, coordinated and comprehensive.

The Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD), a campaign and support organisation working on FGM and rights of African women and girls, is concerned that changing government policies and funding cuts will further marginalise this problem. BAME women's organisations that are already over stretched and under funded will be forced to fill this vacuum.

.....
...human rights violation...
.....

Context of FGM

FGM refers to the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons². FGM is a social norm that is widely valued by many practising communities living in the UK. The practise is enforced through social pressure and sanctions, conferring cultural, ethnic and gender identity.

This is an entrenched and complex belief, with many practising communities not considering FGM as harmful or a rights violation but rather perceiving the practise as beneficial. Therefore, the prevailing view of FGM as a human rights violation, and a form of child abuse, does not resonate well with many practising communities.

The UK FGM law, which was amended in 2003 to include parents who take their children abroad to undergo FGM, carries a 14 year jail term if caught. However, this clause applies exclusively to UK citizens and permanent residents and does not include children born to temporary residents, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. As a result of this loophole, statutory agencies are often at a loss in taking action where girls at risk of FGM are not UK citizens or permanent residents.

There is also no government strategy for engaging FGM practising communities on FGM, but communities are expected to

know that FGM is illegal in the UK. This is the experience of a woman in London:

"When she gave birth to her baby girl they sent her a letter telling her not to circumcise her daughter and that if she circumcised her, it would be against the law and she could go to jail."³

Human rights

While the perceived benefits of FGM are purely cultural, it has life changing implications and is globally recognised as a human rights violation. FGM has featured in many international human rights treaties, statements, consensus documents and resolutions, including reporting bodies of human rights treaties. They require states to take appropriate steps to end FGM.

In 2008, the UK government was asked by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to take action on FGM in response to gaps within the government report to CEDAW. They recommended increased "efforts to design and implement targeted prevention on strategies, as well as education and awareness raising programmes involving community and religious leaders, women's organisations and the general public"⁴ The UK government's next report to CEDAW was in May 2011.

There are many issues unresolved in the current government's response to

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

CLOSING THE POLICY GAP

FGM. The 2003 FGM Act doesn't apply to temporary residents, and is silent on asylum issues. There are no national measures to enforce the law, and no prosecutions to date. Child protection policies on FGM are not uniform, and there are no national standards of care for women and girls affected by FGM.

The government launched 'Multi-agency practice guidelines: Female genital mutilation' in February 2011 to help frontline professionals respond to women and girls affected by FGM⁵. It provides basic information on the signs and actions to take when one detects that either a woman or a girl is affected by, or at risk of, FGM.

While this guide provides good practice models and ideas for cooperation, there are no targets on how this can be done. Without government coordination and a national comprehensive framework for action on FGM, this resource will remain on the shelf.

The first cross governmental strategy to tackle FGM through an integrated approach – 'Call to end violence against women and girls: Action plan'⁶ - is also problematic in that there is no resource allocation, training or measurable actions for working with FGM practising communities on prevention. This is in spite of £28 million of Home Office funding being ring fenced for specialist domestic violence services.

Unreliable data

This challenging policy environment is worsened by a lack of reliable data on FGM. There are no systems for rigorous data collection or national surveys to provide a full picture of the problem. This means that there are no clear benchmarks for assessing progress on policies, or evidence to help design services or prevention work. Current estimates used in the UK are based on statistical estimates. This does not capture the true extent of the problem because they don't include asylum seekers, undocumented migrants or second generation migrants who are born in the UK.

There are currently 16 specialist FGM services in the UK, the majority of them in London. They provide vital health and counselling services to women and girls experiencing health complications from FGM. Unfortunately many women and girls affected by FGM face barriers in accessing these services. These include a lack of information on service hours, language, service restrictions and closures.

There are also no standardised procedures or protocol for operating or setting up FGM specialist services. Many health providers lack cultural competency and an understanding of the issues surrounding FGM. Specialist services and maternity hospitals can provide a crucial avenue for rigorous

data collection on FGM, but no-one has responsibility for overseeing this.

FORWARD's campaign

Within this vacuum, FORWARD has campaigned for over 25 years for strategic action to safeguard the rights and dignity of African women and girls. We have been strategic in policy campaigns, providing evidence and information to inform policy and programmes.

We succeeded in lobbying for the Special Initiative on FGM, led by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Trust for London and Rosa to strengthen community actions. A major challenge is the absence of a national government community strategy. FORWARD's community development strategy recognises that communities are best placed to end FGM and should be central to intervention programmes, but this should be government funded.

Our approach also addresses other gender issues that women experience as migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. This focuses on:

- Leadership, confidence building and empowerment
- Participation, partnerships and bridge building
- Training, mentoring and

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

CLOSING THE POLICY GAP

capacity development

- Evidence generation and awareness raising
- Outreach and community mobilisation.

In the past three years FORWARD has led on a community development programme on FGM in Bristol with support from the primary care trust and other UK foundations. In the view of Jackie Mathers, the Safeguarding lead in Bristol:

*“FORWARD has successfully brought the taboo subject into the community arena and also enabled the women to present their own personal perspectives on training designed for professionals”.*⁷

This model partnership programme was a finalist in the West of England Chartered Institute of Public Relations PRide Awards 2010. However, this project is in its last funding year, and local partners lack the capacity and funding to sustain the project’s achievements.

Our national youth programme, Young People Speak Out, which equips young people to become advocates of change at local level, currently operates in Bristol, Rochdale, London and Middlesbrough and is at risk in refugee dispersal areas. Young people are strategic allies who reach out to their peers in the absence of government strategies for engaging

Young people are strategic allies who reach out to their peers in the absence of government strategies...

girls and young women at risk of FGM.

As a Diaspora organisation, FORWARD also undertakes work in Africa to build bridges, leadership and the capacity of partners to implement programmes. In Europe, FORWARD is a partner of the END FGM European Campaign, led by Amnesty International Ireland, which aims to place FGM on the European Union’s agenda. The campaign advocates for the adoption of a comprehensive and coherent approach towards ending FGM, and identifies five core dimensions for action: data collection, health care, integrated violence against women and girls, asylum and development cooperation⁸.

Strategic players

FGM is a form of violence against women and a human rights violation and governments have an obligation to safeguard at risk girls and support affected women and girls as with

other forms of violence against women. This is only possible within an enabling policy framework that is coherent, comprehensive and adequately resourced.

Diaspora-led women’s organisations such as FORWARD are strategic players and require clear policy direction and funding from central government. Communities hold the key to ending this practise and should have a central focus in any government interventions to end FGM in the UK. ■

Visit: www.forwarduk.org.uk

1. FORWARD (2007) A Statistical Study to Estimate the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales
2. World Health Organisation (2008) Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An Interagency Statement
3. FORWARD (2009) FGM is Always with Us: Experiences, Perceptions and Beliefs of Women Affected by Female Genital Mutilation in London: Results from a PEER study
4. United Nations (2008) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Concluding Observations: Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
5. HM Government (2011) Multi-agency practice guidelines: female genital mutilation
6. HM Government (2011) Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan
7. FORWARD Leaflet: FGM Community Development Project, Bristol
8. END FGM – European Campaign (2009)

TRAFFICKING

FIGHTING FOR A CERTAIN FUTURE

The Poppy Project has an impressive reputation for supporting women trafficked into prostitution or domestic servitude, and for raising awareness of the problem nationally. In the wake of the government's decision to no longer fund the project, Heather Harvey reveals why, and how, the work will continue.



Heather Harvey
Lilith Research and
Development Manager
Eaves

The Poppy Project, which has been the leading government-funded provider contracted to deliver services to trafficked women in the UK, learnt recently that this year's tender had been awarded to The Salvation Army. The coalition government said that it wished to broaden the range of providers of services for trafficked individuals to assist more victims.

Poppy welcomed that intention, and still supports it in principle, but warned that the provision of quality, tailor-made, needs-based, specialist and gender sensitive support to victims of trafficking is neither cheap nor generic. Any increase in service provision needs to safeguard quality, address very specific cultural, race and religious needs, and be matched by an increase in funding.

New model

In fact the government appears not to have heeded that warning. The new model establishes a 'prime contractor' (in this case The Salvation Army) who would then sub contract to other providers and would provide services to any and all victims of trafficking, while not increasing the financial envelope. The amount of government funding that they were providing to support women - from identification to a final decision - which can take anything from a few weeks to a year, would stay the same at £2 million. But now it would cover all cases.

Poppy estimates that in real terms, on the

basis of the type and length of support provided currently, this would represent a cut of about 60 percent per head. It is for this reason that Poppy believes that a comparably adequate quality of service cannot be provided under this model.

Since Poppy was launched in 2003, we have received 1,869 referrals, supported 372 women in our acute service and an additional 487 on an outreach basis; although we have had to turn away many other cases due to the very strict government criteria establishing who we could help. From the outset a majority of the cases referred to us were from Eastern Europe, but over time this profile has changed.

Fresh needs

Currently our highest source country is Nigeria at 17 percent of the cases. The next highest is China with 8 percent of cases. There is an added concern with the Nigerian cases. An independent body (the Anti Trafficking Monitoring Group) published a report last June called 'Wrong kind of victim? One year on: An analysis of UK measures to protect trafficked persons' that found disproportionately high refusal rates for Nigerian cases.

A vital element of the Poppy Project is that although it was funded by the government, it was also independent of it. This was reflected in the fact that Poppy didn't limit itself to telling service users

what their rights were and giving them some listings for lawyers. Key workers would, if required, engage with both lawyers and service users. Sometimes they attended lawyers' appointments with service users to give them the confidence and support they needed to understand what was going on and to make informed decisions about their circumstances.

Seeking justice

Poppy has assisted 41 victims to secure convictions against 61 traffickers leading to sentences totalling 396.2 years in custody. An average of 80 percent of Poppy service users are granted initial positive reasonable grounds decisions, 15 percent higher than the national average. And an average of 86 percent of service users are granted positive conclusive grounds decisions, 18 percent higher than the national average.

Nearly 90 percent of Poppy's service users have been granted some form of leave related to their trafficking situation, either as residence permits for the asylum process, or other immigration processes. Poppy has also successfully advocated for the review of negative decisions issued in error and have had a significant number of negative decisions reversed.

We believe that our independence from the government and our expertise in trafficking enables us to build relationships of trust and confidence with

TRAFFICKING

FIGHTING FOR A CERTAIN FUTURE

service users, which is what provides us with a full, detailed and accurate picture that explains our high success rate. While we are proud of this success, we cannot but wonder if this is one of the unspoken factors that may have increased the desire of government to award the contract elsewhere.

Inequalities

Asylum Aid recently produced a report, 'Unsustainable: The quality of initial decision-making in female asylum claims' in which they found that the successful appeal rate for female asylum claims was disproportionately higher than other appeal rates. This evidently suggests that a higher proportion of wrongful initial decisions were made in the first instance in women's cases.

Their report concluded that decision makers seemed either unable or unwilling to properly understand and adjudicate upon the experiences of female asylum claimants. Those making the decisions in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) are the same team of UK Border Agency (UKBA) staff making asylum decisions. It is not unreasonable therefore to fear that a similar poor quality of initial decision making on women's claims can be found in trafficking cases.

The Ministry of Justice has argued that the NRM officials and an Interministerial Committee will fulfil an independent monitoring role for how trafficking is

delivered. This does not represent independence from government. We understand too that the 'prime contractor' will not challenge NRM decisions and this raises serious concerns as to how they will ensure that victims are genuinely accessing their legal rights.

Cultural respect

By the time they reach Poppy, many service users will have been through a range of service providers. A common complaint is that some providers, in a bid to simplify matters and keep costs down, would organise one bulk weekly shop and then require the women in the accommodation to take it in turns to use these ingredients to cook for everyone in the house.

While this may on the surface make sense, it can actually be very inappropriate and stressful for some women. Of course some women are not confident cooking for others and indeed we all have different tastes and might not like the same thing. But the real issue is that in some religions or cultures there are taboos or prohibitions around certain foods including how, where, when and by or with whom they may be prepared and eaten.

Part of helping women to overcome a trafficking experience is enhancing their own sense of dignity, rights, autonomy, control and self esteem, and ensuring that their rights and individuality are

respected and valued. Giving each woman a small sum to enable her to use that money how she wishes, including buying and preparing what food she prefers, is essential to that process.

Yet this is precisely where some services cut corners and costs. It is remarkable how much the service users feel and resent this approach as we have had so many reports highlighting how disempowering and devaluing they felt this was.

Many services expect service users to surrender their mobile phones, and to only use the pay phone under supervision. They also keep the premises locked, operate a curfew and strictly enforce chore rotas and require service users to explain their comings and goings. This is usually explained as a means of keeping women safe in case they accidentally reveal the location of safe houses, or fall back into the clutches of their traffickers. However it may also be to facilitate UKBA scrutiny of the location of the individuals and allows the police to have unlimited access to women with no regard for their individual preference. This is at odds with spirit and intention of the Council of Europe Convention governing trafficking as it is specifically about enforcing victim's rights and not about criminal and immigration law enforcement.

Whatever the reason, the reality is that such conditions mirror women's

TRAFFICKING

FIGHTING FOR A CERTAIN FUTURE

trafficking experience where they had no freedom of association or movement, all their conversations and comings and goings were monitored, and they had no control over their own lives and choices. Again it is not conducive to a woman's recovery to live under such conditions with rules replicating the very experience they are trying to recover from.

Discrimination

On perhaps a more severe scale, many of the women who come through the Poppy Project are pregnant as a result of their trafficking experience. In some cases the women choose to go through with the pregnancy. In other cases women are considering a termination, which may need to be organised extremely quickly if it is to go ahead. Some service users who have been through other service providers recount how they were not offered advice or support on obtaining a termination.

On the contrary, we have heard of cases where workers had sought to dissuade them, being very critical and sometimes judgemental about such a step. In the same vein, some lesbian service users tell of situations where they have been moved out of such safe houses after being accused of being 'troublemakers'. All of which has gone unchallenged by the service providers.

Poppy identified the need for specialist support to trafficked women and started

.....
...the reality is that such conditions mirror women's trafficking experience where they had no freedom of association or movement, all their conversations and comings and goings were monitored, and they had no control over their own lives and choices.
.....

to provide it before the government had started to fund it. We intend to continue to operate Poppy independently of government funding, even if it is a reduced service to start with. We are undertaking a fundraising drive and have already received considerable support. We expect to still be here and doing this work as long as there is a need for it, with or without government funds. ■

Visit: www.eaves4women.co.uk/Support_Us/DonateOnline.php

FACT FILE

Definition of trafficking

Trafficking is defined by the UN as "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation".

UK signed up to convention against trafficking

The UK ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings in December 2008. This convention is specifically about protecting and enforcing the rights of victims of trafficking. In its preamble and purpose it expressly cites the requirement that trafficking be addressed with due regard to the highly gendered nature of the abuse.

CASE STUDY

PROVIDING GIRLS WITH POSITIVE OPTIONS

Protecting vulnerable girls from gang-associated violence is a problem facing many schools nationally. One acclaimed trust school, based in the North West of England, provides a candid insight into what can be achieved through collaboration, vision, strategic intervention and a commitment to equalities.

We are an all ability foundation and trust school for girls on the outskirts of Manchester. The percentage of students from minority ethnic groups is slightly below the national average, but the percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher.

Our trust is called the Well Woman Trust and the trustees include Trafford primary care trust, Manchester Metropolitan University, the Outward Bound Trust, Trafford Sport and Leisure Trust and SSL International. The aim of the Well Woman Trust is to remove the barriers to achievement through partnership working and increasing opportunities for the girls.

Social issues

The context, like the vast majority of schools in the UK, is that a large proportion of our girls have complex family settings, face significant social issues and, consequently, are vulnerable to serious underachievement in school. Many suffer from low self esteem, a lack of social skills and aspiration, and are seriously at risk of developing significant problems with their emotional health and wellbeing.

Three years ago, before we began our intervention programme, girls were seriously underachieving academically. As a result of our work, the examination results have increased from 49 percent five or more A* to C grades to 82 percent

in 2010, with no underachievement among any minority group.

Our approach has been to try and understand the barriers to achievement and then remove them. This has involved the appointment of key staff and the development of vital partnerships with external organisations. Three years ago several girls had become seriously involved in gang activities with some extremely worrying repercussions including sexual exploitation and abuse, and participation in serious crime and anti-social behaviour.

The impact in the school was that their various gang associations led to confrontation and attracted other gang members to hang around the school, posing a significant safeguarding issue.

Partnership

On this particular issue, the partnership with the Trafford Community Safety Officer has led to our success. Among other things, his role in the local authority is around preventing violent extremism and this includes work in reducing gang violence. The rate of firearms discharge in Trafford has massively reduced as a result of his work.

Working with his team to share intelligence, provide intervention work with individual students (where needed), and to deliver a comprehensive training programme for our staff and

governors, led to the development of a 'Controversial Issues Policy Statement' by the governors in September 2010. This document now provides us with the confidence - and the framework - to proactively challenge any difficult issues affecting the lives of our girls.

Gang association

We have identified gang association as a safeguarding issue and our sole aim is to protect the girls involved and to provide them with safe exit routes. In fact, since we launched our intervention programme three years ago, there are only couple of students at risk of becoming involved in gang activity, and there are no active gang members. In many areas we have found that schools, social services and the police treat gang issues from a criminal perspective. This is where we are different.

Our key members of staff are highly trained with everyone, including cleaners, office workers, support staff, teachers and governors, trained annually in child protection and safer working practices.

In March 2011, Ofsted determined that our:

"...provision and procedures for safeguarding are outstanding..."

"...Care, guidance and support are outstanding and have had an immense impact on improving outcomes for

CASE STUDY

PROVIDING GIRLS WITH POSITIVE OPTIONS

students, such as achievement, attendance and the reduction in fixed term exclusions. External agencies consider the school to be a leader of good practice. The school is passionate in its aim to ensure that individual students' needs are met, whatever their circumstances..."

"...The school is highly effective in its commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination. Its contribution to community cohesion is outstanding..."

Leadership

Both areas are led, at a senior level, by the Director of Care, Guidance and Support (line manager of Learner Services including special education needs) who is not a qualified teacher, but a specialist in emotional health and wellbeing. His work has transformed our approach.

The school is an organisational member of the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP) and is bound by its ethical framework for good practice in counselling and psychotherapy, the ethical guidelines for researching counselling and psychotherapy, and is subject to the professional conduct procedure.

The school's counselling service also works in partnership with Salford University by offering work placements to

their MSc Counselling Studies students. We are able to provide a counselling service to any student, or member of staff, who needs it. Professional and emotional supervision of staff is taken very seriously. Our local child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) now refers girls back into our own service where an individual may be seen within a week, in urgent cases.

Within the senior leadership structure of the school there is a Director of Standards for Learning. Her role is to oversee all of the elements necessary to assure high achievement including behaviour, homework, uniform, use of the daily planner, home support, and support from tutors and heads of house.

Where any student or parent displays behaviours which fall outside of the norm, or if there is a failure to respond to interventions, this will lead to a referral to our Learner Services. A key to our success is that our staff are able to identify these behaviours and understand that this is a symptom of more serious underlying issues that may need specialist help.

Disclosure

Referrals will cover a very wide range of needs, from emotional problems arising from domestic issues to the disclosure of safeguarding and child protection issues. We have found an increase in the number of disclosures; girls feel

confident to tell us about their lives and to ask for help. As a result we have a large number of open cases, but the school views this as an indicator of success. We are not afraid to uncover difficult issues as we are confident that we have the systems and support services available to transform these young people's lives.

Our approach to issues of race and culture is to ensure that staff are able to identify and challenge unacceptable attitudes and behaviour, and that they are able to set the standard and be role models. Any instance of racial abuse or concern, however small, is reported and dealt with. We have worked with various external agencies to provide training for staff on issues, particularly for students of multiple heritage. We have also recruited a more diverse staff over the last three years and while it is beginning to more accurately reflect the diversity of our student population, this remains an area of high priority for the school.

.....
Earlier in the year, a 15-year-old girl was placed in secure accommodation to protect her from serious gang involvement.
.....

CASE STUDY

PROVIDING GIRLS WITH POSITIVE OPTIONS

The school, through the Director of Care, Guidance and Support, takes a whole family approach with the child at the centre and makes full use of the Common Assessment Framework. This is a vital tool, enabling us to bring together any agencies that may be able to help the child and/or the family. One family was even rehoused as a result of this approach.

Earlier in the year, a 15-year-old girl was placed in secure accommodation to protect her from serious gang involvement. This type of action is difficult to pursue, but necessary if we are to make a real difference to individuals and increase their life chances.

Positive impact

We have been told that known male gang members across Manchester and Trafford will now ask which school a girl attends, and if they mention our school then the gang members will not associate with them. This proves that tackling the difficult issues is the right thing to do. Our girls are safe. They are working well in their lessons; taking part in extra-curricular activities. Their futures are more secure as a result. We believe that the future of the community is much safer and more positive as our young girls are the mothers and role models of the future.

Our training with the Trafford Community Safety Officer has taught us that society has a history of criticising its youth:

“What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?”

Plato, 4th Century BC

Lessons

What we have learned is that it is not only possible to uphold our traditional values and safeguard our children, but that they are crying out for it. Our Positive Futures Strategy demonstrates that we don't have to accept the degeneration of the youth of today, but that we have a responsibility to safeguard against it.

Schools working collaboratively with external agencies, including the police, social services, the NHS and others, have the capacity to transform our societies and are best placed to be the guardians of our young through high moral standards, highly qualified staff and a willingness to tackle difficult issues.

We believe that the Positive Futures Strategy is a transferable model that could be used to great effect across the country. ■

SUPPLEMENT

Supplement is a biannual publication for London's Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities and the BAME voluntary and community sector, focusing on a topical policy and practice area to share knowledge, raise awareness and highlight good practice.

rota
Race on the Agenda

Race on the Agenda (ROTA) is a social policy research organisation that focuses on issues impacting on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. As a BAME-led organisation, all ROTA's work is based on the principle that those with direct experience of inequality should be central to solutions to address it. Our work is actively informed by the lived experiences of BAME communities and their organisations.

Race on the Agenda (ROTA)

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