

**A RIGHT TO EXIST – A PAPER LOOKING AT THE ERADICATION OF
SPECIALIST SERVICES TO BAMER WOMEN AND CHILDREN FLEEING
VIOLENCE**

Experiences of BAMER Refugees

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Questions and Challenges Facing Specialist BAMER Domestic Violence Services

IMKAAAN is a National, second-tier organisation that supports and advocates for Black, Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) refugees that provide services for Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) women and children experiencing domestic violence (DV) and abuse. Imkaan has conducted research that highlights the acute lack of funding towards specialist BAMER services and a growing trend which is leading to funding cuts, closures and merger of a number of long established community based specialist women's organisations.

Amongst Imkaan's membership across the UK there are 25 South Asian women's refuges, 16 BAMER refuges and 10 generic refuges that offer a specialist service, which means, they have one BAMER worker.

The service that has been longest in existence is over 30 years old and specialises in supporting South Asian women and children.

Recent research indicates that less than 1 in 10 local authorities has a specialist BME service (Map of Gaps, EVAW)¹.

Mergers may to some organisations represent a positive move towards a stronger future, combining resources within a natural operational fit. However Imkaan is critically aware that for many BAMER refuges, mergers are more threatening and represent a challenge to identity, flexibility and autonomy, and they are in fact 'takeovers' as opposed to mergers. This paper shows that merger is not the solution in all cases, it highlights concerns that refuges may be under pressure to move towards merger before other organisational or collaborative options have been fully explored.

This paper documents some of the concerns of our member groups many of whom are facing funding cuts, closures, takeovers and mergers. The Government's proposals for the future funding and delivery of domestic violence services are leading to a number of worrying trends;

- A loss of specialist outreach and therapeutic services for BAMER women and children which are key to helping women and children to recover from the physical and emotional trauma of violence.
- A lack of consultation with long-established BAMER refuges to establish the service needs of the women and children they support.
- An increasing number of Local Authorities are actively encouraging takeovers and mergers between grass-roots voluntary sector groups and large mainstream providers with no expertise or history of delivering services to BAMER women and children experiencing violence.
- Commissioning decisions are made on the basis that generic services can meet the needs of all women including BAMER women despite a plethora of evidence and experience which confirms the fact that BAMER women and children are more likely to access BAMER led community-based organisations rather than mainstream services. These decisions endanger the lives of BAMER women and children.

¹ Map of Gaps 2007 Published by End Violence Against Women, available at http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/documents/Map_of_Gaps.pdf

- There are reductions in service and safe spaces for BAMER women and children as a consequence of cuts and mergers within an already under funded and fragile sector.
- A lack of regard and application of equalities and duties legislation.
- A lack of recognition of the refuge and other service needs of BAMER women and children within Local Area Agreements which will dictate LA targets and funding allocations in the future.

1. Supporting People Policy

Supporting People (SP) was introduced in 2003 as a programme which sought to co-ordinate and simplify funding arrangements for accommodation-based services.

Unfortunately the implementation of Supporting People led to a more streamlined process of funding but at the cost of placing a large administrative burden on providers and a series of funding cuts that require organisations to deliver fewer services or the same but at a reduced cost. Furthermore, the restrictive funding criteria of Supporting People did not acknowledge the need for holistic services such as health, advice, advocacy, outreach and services for children and young people all of which are essential to helping women to escape and rebuild their lives as a consequence of violence.

In July 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published the National Supporting People strategy, ***Independence and Opportunity: Our Strategy for Supporting People***. This strategy integrates Supporting People into Local Area Agreements (LAA's) and therefore devolves increased responsibility and decision making powers to local authorities. Each Local Authority will need to have a Local Area Agreement (LAA) in place by June 2008 which reflects the indicators set by the Government. Funding will no longer be ring-fenced within the specific themes and blocks e.g. Safer Communities and money will be pooled with the intention of streamlining commissioning processes and with the aim of providing Local Authorities greater flexibility and freedom to set their own priorities in response to what they assess to be local need. The position of domestic violence services within LAAs is already a key concern for the violence against women sector. The previous 11 measures which specified the need for refuge provision amongst other targets has been replaced by the national indicator 'preventing DV murders'. It will be up to Local Authorities to decide on whether there should be additional domestic violence targets set over and above the national priorities. Not only does this make the future funding and delivery of DV support services more precarious than it already remains but also places an emphasis on criminal justice interventions as the way in which LAs will ultimately be monitored on their performance in addressing DV.

Given that two thirds of SP funded providers are voluntary and community organisations it is encouraging to see that one of the four key areas of the national strategy is "building on the already successful partnerships with the Third Sector". Third sector issues addressed in the national strategy include capacity building for providers to meet the requirements of Supporting People, three year funding, compact compliance and full-cost recovery. All of which the Government states are necessary to ensure an 'equal playing field' amongst providers and a diverse 'market'.

2. Addressing gender and race

Incidents of racial violence in particular the tragic death of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 reignited feelings of anger and injustice amongst BAMER communities across the UK. These events rightly prompted the Lawrence Inquiry which exposed the failures of the state in the context of institutional racism. Consequently,

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 Section 2(2) was introduced in order to hold public authorities to account where they are charged with the responsibility to rebuild trust and demonstrate fairness, by eliminating unlawful racial discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations.

The Gender Equality Duty which aims to promote gender equality came into force in April 2007, paving the way for change across the whole public sector. The duty affects public bodies such as local government. Under previous laws, action could only be taken against public bodies after they discriminated on grounds of sex. Now public bodies must take proactive steps to promote equality between women and men. This means they must take account of the different needs of women and men in policy and service planning rather than react to complaints when things go wrong. The Women and Equality Unit Gender Impact Assessment paper states,

“Incorporating a gender perspective into policies means not thinking about users as a homogeneous group but as distinct groups with differing needs, characteristics and behaviours who might need different approaches if equality of opportunity is to be achieved for all. The business case for doing so is user or customer satisfaction. However the customer base is diverse: women and girls comprise 51% of the population and men and boys 49%, and within this division are segments covering minority ethnic groups, those with disabilities, age, religion and sexuality. In order to deliver results, understanding the user is a necessary part of policy-making, with user satisfaction being a key measure of how services are performing”²

Given the aspirations of various Government commitments and policies as outlined above with reference to the Supporting People Strategy (DCLG), and existing race and gender legislation it seems contradictory that recent policy developments have in reality led to an unequal playing field for many smaller specialist BAMER organisations that are struggling to maintain their services in an increasingly competitive environment and one which favours larger service providers without regard to a track record of delivery, commitment and expertise in issues of race and gender. These issues are highlighted in more detail below.

3. Impact of the Supporting People – QAF assessments

Since 2003, Imkaan has been disproportionately consumed with requests for support on SP related issues, whether this was a concern about potential merger with a mainstream organisation, SP funding cuts or support to deal with the onerous administrative burdens of the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) framework. These concerns prompted Imkaan to conduct a more detailed piece of research with Dr Ravi Thiara at the University at Warwick. Of the two reports produced by the work in 2005, the first report, “Supporting Some People” looked at SP and its impact on the sector whilst the second report, “The Need for Specialist Domestic Violence Services for Asian Women and Children” explored the value and need for specialist services. The outcomes from the research also contributed to the ODPMs national consultation exercise on Supporting People in 2006.

The research highlighted a lack of cultural competency and understanding amongst SP officials and the process itself which had a detrimental impact on the way in which the performance of BAMER refuge projects were assessed as part of the performance framework. Not only did it illustrate a lack of effective consultation with service users but judgements were also made on the basis of comparing specialist services with mainstream projects. Below is a summary of some of the key findings:

² Women and Equality Unit (2007), Gender Impact Assessment available at http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/equality/gender_impact_assessment.pdf

Interpreting:

The feedback from the SP QAF process from BAMER refuges highlights that interpreting and translation costs were not deemed as essential during SP review processes. This led to women with language barriers being excluded from the review process, especially in relation to consultation processes.

The cultural awareness of SP officials:

Overall, it was found that SP officers often lacked awareness of BAMER specific issues and organisations.

It was found that there was inappropriate application of equality criteria with groups being asked to diversify and broaden their services at the expense of retaining their specialist expertise.

Quotes from refuge workers:

We have one service being reviewed by questionnaire, with little regard to literacy skills of women to be able to fully participate in this

Users were interviewed without staff present and without an interpreter

QAF Framework / National Outcomes Framework

The Quality Assessment Framework and the new National Outcomes Framework are seen as 'one size fits all' quality tools that do not appreciate the specialist nature of the work conducted with BAMER women and children experiencing DV. Work conducted by refuges responding to service-users needs is not accounted for by these tools and in some instances actively discouraged by SP officers and SP teams, for example, staff interpreting, translation and accompanying women to appointments.

Value for Money comparisons

Specialist refuges have had little opportunity to make meaningful comparison to other like services, and therefore rely on inconsistent SP judgements regarding best value and value for money. This dictates the best value judgements made by SP officers, which ultimately means that BAMER refuges are not being compared fairly.

Quotes from refuge workers:

A lack of understanding and inclusion of the additional costs of providing specialist services when making value for money assessments

Some SP teams have not adopted a uniform approach to cost-cutting and have taken on board specialist needs however refuges remain concerned about what may occur in the future.

4. Impact of SP – takeovers and mergers

Whilst a number of our members approached us for support on the practical aspects of SP in relation to monitoring and policy information an increasing number of refuges began to approach us with real concerns about the future sustainability of their services under SP. As a follow-up to this piece of research, Imkaan carried out a survey in June 2007 to further explore the issues related to decommissioning and merger

arrangements within the BAMER refuge sector. Some of the main observations from the research suggest that existing policies are contributing to the loss of more and more grassroots services managed by the BAMER sector, especially those working with communities that mainstream providers do not have the specialist expertise to work with effectively.

- The funding pressures faced by Local Authorities appear to be having a disproportionate impact on specialist BAMER women's services. In particular, small refuge providers – a number of these have been BAMER organisations. SP teams have and continue to place pressure on BAMER refuges to merge with large mainstream Housing Associations as a consequence of ongoing national cuts to SP budgets across the UK.
- As part of making efficiency savings Local Authorities are actively seeking to reduce costs and what they perceive to be administrative burdens by administering funding contracts to a smaller number of organisations - in some cases a single large provider rather than a range of smaller scale organisations that target specific and different communities and needs. As such this has led to a trend of decommissioning some services and proactively encourages mergers between 3 or 4 refuge providers. This is having a disproportional impact on BAMER refuges.
- Over the last three years, at least seven refuges have been taken over by larger providers.³
- Evidence, both documented and anecdotal, points to the fact that Supporting People teams prefer to contract with large mainstream charities to deliver BAMER services rather than continuing funding arrangements with smaller agencies that evidence a long history and expertise in working with BAMER women, even where these organisations performed well in SP terms.
- Tendering processes favour larger organisations that have the time and resources to complete long and complex tender applications – the reality is that smaller organisations lack the resources and staffing capacity to be able to submit bids that are competitive.
- The importance of retaining gender based and culturally specific services has not been adequately recognised or addressed within commissioning processes despite statutory obligations around race and gender– in effect this is increasingly leading to BAMER women's services being handed over to mainstream organisations that lack expertise and community based experience in relation to services for BAMER women and children.

In the following section we present a series of case studies that we have been involved in advocating for and responding to, in order to highlight the key issues and impact of SP. None of the cases have been or are under performing in SP terms. Regardless of Quality Assessment Framework grade or levels of improvement, services have been cut or pressurised to change or merge

4.1 Closure of specialist services

As the nature of refuges is to work across local authorities for safety reasons and whilst so few local authorities provide a specialist DV service, the closure of a specialist service is a loss not just to one local authority but to a minimum of 10 local authorities.

During 2007, IMKAAN became aware of the closure of two specialist BAMER refuges and two services attached to a specialist refuge. Case study A highlights a lack of consultation, a disregard for fair tendering

³ Women's Resource Centre (2007) *Funding to London Women's Refuges: Report for London Councils*.

processes and compact compliance whereby decisions were made about the future delivery of BAMER services but without involving the existing BAMER service that would clearly be affected by these changes.

Case Study A

Refuge A was a service for Asian women and children. A was considered to be a good service and this was reflected by the fact that they managed to improve their SP Quality Assessment Framework⁴ grades from C to B within two years. There were no issues with voids as this was a small yet in demand refuge. However, the local authority decided to open a larger BME service in the area and therefore put the service out to tender. However, Refuge A was excluded from the process and only heard about the Local Authority's plans by chance through a third party. Eventually, the local authority decided to give an interim contract for delivering the BAMER service to a Social Registered Landlord with no background or history of providing specialist BAMER DV services. Refuge A was clearly concerned about the situation and the potential loss of their service and therefore they managed to put together a bid for the new service in time. Unfortunately, the Registered Social Landlord won the contract and are now responsible for delivering the BAMER services in the Borough. Refuge A felt excluded from a process that seemed unfair and that did not allow them an opportunity to prepare. They are concerned about the impact on services for Asian women and children in the borough

Essential specialist services are being cut – not only refuge provision but also outreach and therapeutic services which are currently in short supply but also crucial to helping women to recover and move-on from the trauma of violence.

Case study B highlights the closure of two services, a therapeutic service and an outreach service that were part of the holistic range of services offered by Refuge B. The closures have been imposed since the implementation of SP in favour of tendering out different services that target generic not specialist needs.

Case Study B

Service B has been active in the Borough for more than 21 years and provides three refuges with a total of 19 bed spaces which can accommodate 6 children. B also manages a specialist resource centre (not funded by SP) which was the base for a non-verbal therapy service.

The closed non – verbal therapy service

The therapy service was vital for women who could not cope with or benefit from 'talking' therapies, either because of the impact of the trauma of domestic/sexual violence or because they could not access qualified, female counsellors conversant in Asian languages and cultures, who also understood and were sensitive to the impact of domestic/sexual violence. Children of all ages were also able to benefit because of the focus on non-verbal activities. Women and children were also more likely to use the service because they didn't have to worry about cost, location or safety issues. The service was key to their holistic approach to helping those women dealing with the immediate trauma of violence and worked in the longer-term by helping to empower women to move on and re-build their lives.

Initially, SP funding provided the project with some level of albeit short-term financial stability. SP then imposed cuts by arguing that women would be able to access similar counselling services through their GP. However, it

⁴ The Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) sets the standards expected in the delivery of Supporting People services. As well as setting these standards, the QAF also identifies methods of evidencing achievement and a tool for ensuring continuous improvement. - Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - March 2004

takes time to register with a new GP in this busy city Borough and the current waiting list for counselling is a minimum of 8 weeks. Furthermore, there is no reassurance that women will be able to access culturally specific counselling which is key to recovery. Unsurprisingly, since losing the services the project has observed the detrimental impact to women from not receiving immediate therapeutic intervention.

The closed outreach service

Due to the specific way in which domestic violence impacts on BAMER women and children and the different pathways that are open or closed to them, access to outreach services is vital. Outreach service B was initially funded by Social Services, then by SP. The closure of the outreach service occurred at about the same time that the Local Authority decided to develop a new generic borough-wide floating support scheme for all cases of domestic violence. Owing to the recent cuts they had faced Refuge B felt that SP had redirected funding from their project and two other generic refuges in the local authority to fund the new floating support scheme. Refuge B attempted to put in a joint bid for this service with other two refuges in the hope of maintaining the service. However, the partnership fell through when one of the other generic refuges itself was merged with services in another part of the region.

5. The impact of takeover, merger or partnerships on a BAMER organisation and the women that access services

The key findings from Imkaan's survey (2007) illustrated the concerns of BAMER refuges that have been taken over by a larger organisation. In many cases groups do not have a choice and fear loss of funding if they challenge LA decisions:

One worker told us:

We know that if we do not consider a merger we will risk being decommissioned at some future point and if and when we merge, we will face cutbacks – there seems to be no special consideration that these services cannot be provided through mergers – they will be lost.

Once a takeover, merger or partnership has taken place, it has been argued that when small service providers are part of larger charities and Housing Associations it may save them some of the administrative burden applied by SP. However, this is off-set by small services having to divert time from frontline work towards discussing, negotiating and justifying why the 'one size fits all' policies, procedures, business plans and publicity of the Housing Association are not appropriate to refuges in general and specialist refuges in particular and where permitted, to develop new ones. *"The policies and procedures of a HA may be dominated by mental health issues and the design of mental health projects – refuges have to spend time discussing, negotiating and justifying why these are not appropriate for refuges."*

Groups told us about the following concerns as a consequence of mergers and cuts;

- Fewer numbers of specialist staff working in the refuge
- Reductions in provision for interpreting
- A lack of advocacy support offered to women, as some refuges have been told that advocacy should no longer be provided as part of the service.
- A dilution of the service so the refuge no longer caters for specific groups, e.g. Asian women and children, but broader BAMER groups. In other situations, the service becomes generic with loss of bedspaces for BAMER women and children.

- A lack of commitment from the parent organisation in ensuring that the specialist BAMER service is maintained and further developed.
- A pressure for specialist BAMER refuges to merge as the only option for their survival.
- A lack of understanding and appreciation of the specific needs of particular groups, e.g. South Asian women and children, which in turn leads to undue pressure for individual frontline staff to educate senior managers and the organisation as a whole on BAMER needs.
- A misinterpretation of mainstreaming BAMER issues whereby local authorities have a preference to contract BAMER services to mainstream service providers rather than BAMER service providers that have an established history and expertise. This includes situations where the refuge has performed well by SP review standards.
- A lack of consultation with BAMER managers during the merger process.

The following case-study highlights the concerns of one refuge manager;

Project C was an independent domestic violence refuge that provided an Asian staff team and was well connected with other Asian women's services both within the local authority and beyond. C provided 5 bed-spaces for women with and without children. C worked with women who had no recourse to public funds as well as offering additional services including basic counselling, telephone support, advocacy to help women access local legal and community based services, support with interpreting, confidence-building workshops. C was taken over by a large, mainstream Housing Association which provides generic support services to a diverse range of client groups including mental health and offenders schemes. C became more financially stable as a result of the merger however important aspects of the specialist service provision have been deprioritised in a bid to reduce voids and fulfil the parent body's budgetary requirements for the organisation as a whole.

As a consequence, reductions were made in the Asian staff team. C now operates with one Asian language-speaking worker with an understanding of Asian cultural practices and needs. No resources have been allocated to cover for interpreting and translation costs. Caseworker time is spent on administration rather than essential face-to-face work. Advocacy is no longer regarded by SP as an essential part of a worker's role therefore staff are discouraged from accompanying vulnerable and frightened women with children to appointments. The policies of the refuge have now been widened to reflect the needs of all of the client groups that the parent body services through applying generic policies and standards. For example, the generic risk assessment for all client groups is inappropriate for this specific group, does not take account of BAMER needs in the context of domestic violence and specialist support requirements and therefore leaves women and children at risk. Now, there is also no acceptance of women without any recourse to public funds and their children.

All these changes have diluted the service so that it no longer caters specifically for Asian women and children but in practice caters for women from a BME background with a variety of needs not necessarily related to domestic violence. Project C states that broadening the service has had a detrimental impact on the health and well-being of women and children living in the refuge who valued the specialist service provided, because it offered familiar and appropriate services that catered for their specific cultural needs and circumstances which helped them to build a rapport with both other women and staff.

Project C has become more isolated. There is less contact with other Asian specific services as C is no longer able network on equal terms. At the same, C is no longer able to promote or publicise their service independently from general and mostly inappropriate information about the Housing Association. Unsurprisingly, the number of cases that have moved on successfully from the project has decreased. However, it is unlikely that the SP officer who conducts the next review of this service will account the reasons given outlined.

Project D feels that SP doesn't understand the specific issues of Asian women affected by domestic violence and the fact that the work can be more complex than those of generic refuges. For instance, those referrals come with higher support needs, including practical daily living skills taken for granted by users of generic refuges. In addition, SP has told this project that workers should not accompany women to appointments as this is regarded as care or advocacy work. However, the needs of the women who access this service are such that being accompanied is a necessity in order to ensure they can access appropriate advice.

Despite having a void allowance of 10% and never having voids of more than 5%, the project is critically aware that the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are cutting out traditional providers and that the project's bed spaces will be targeted for reduction.

The current ethos and practice of Housing Associations and larger charities with no or little background in domestic violence work, leaves women, children and frontline staff at risk and treated unequally or inappropriately in terms of support and consultation in comparison to existing services within the Housing Association. It is left to the small provider to bring up issues such as the necessity to keep the location and identity of refuges and service users confidential throughout the organisation and for the crisis nature of domestic violence refuges and the need for safety, child care and language services to be considered when consulting service-users and developing staff.

Services facing current pressures from their Local Authorities to merge

Groups are facing real pressures as Local Authorities conduct strategic reviews and make decisions about whether they consider services to be, in their own terms, viable and necessary. These workers are having to divert enormous amounts of time away from delivering front line towards negotiating with officers, attending meetings and defending their right to exist whilst the future of their service remains uncertain.

Below is an account from two refuges that are currently in this situation (Both groups are happy to be named in the interests of raising awareness of the issues they are facing):

Saheli Limited, Manchester

Saheli service achieved a Grade B in their last QAF review and as a result was led to expect steady state funding from Manchester City Council. Despite continuous improvement in service, this has not been awarded to date. In addition, on 12th December 2007, Manchester SP team reviewed Saheli's outreach service up to grade C only. It passed with all grade Cs and received lots of praise for the work completed but was not assessed by SP for Grade B.

Manchester City Council (MCC) conducted a local authority wide review of all DV provision in Manchester City and the surrounding areas and concluded that they wanted all refuge services to merge. Currently, the services consist of four generic refuges, one BME service and Saheli. which is the only Asian specific DV service in Manchester. MCC proposed keeping some of the refuges as they were, developing a large block of self-contained units to replace some of the smaller refuges and planned to introduce a local authority wide floating support scheme.

"We were told that Manchester would now just have one single provider, no results have come through about service reviews but Manchester City Council has decided to go ahead with the tender. The final decision will now be taken on 6th February 2008. Our service users have said they would like to live and be supported in an Asian Women's Project. Research conducted by Saheli and Manchester Council for Race Relations has provided further evidence on the importance of having services targeted at Asian Women to ensure that services meet cultural and language needs and empower Asian women. We have been working for 30 years

and the Asian population in Manchester is about 25% but we only have 6 bed spaces for Asian women – we need more Asian Specific services not less. We are told that Asian women will be housed by the generic providers but this is not how Asian women will escape. This is not a response to what Asian women need but a cost cutting exercise.”

Saheli and one of the generic services decided they didn't want to merge and were open about this with the other DV services in Manchester and MCC. After this, Saheli noticed a significant decrease in the amount of information and speed at which they received information from the local authority and other services in comparison with that received by the four services that had started negotiations on a merger.

Later, one of four other services pulled out of the merger. At the same time, MCC appeared to abandon the idea of merging all services. Instead they introduced the idea of putting all DV services in Manchester out to tender and have said that they will favour bids by single providers.

All DV refuge services met and discussed a proposal that from Saheli's perspective is little different from the merger proposal. Each service was then left to decide whether to join the other DV services in a partnership bid, bid with non-domestic violence agencies or prepare to be taken over or decommissioned.

All services felt rushed by MCC and just before Christmas 2007 one of the other services decided to challenge the authority on the basis of Compact consultation timelines. This led to MCC extending the deadline for declarations of interest. They have now informed us that the decision to tender is awaiting final approval from Commissioners and the proposed time table will look at services being put to tender by early May 2008.

The negotiations between DV services continue to date and as with the merger proposal, Saheli continues to be under pressure to change in order to fit in with the partnership bid which appears similar to the merger.

We were doing so well and were told we were good value for money; we won't be decommissioned and will receive a steady state contract. Saheli is an excellent resource for Asian Women in the city of Manchester. But then we found out from our Housing Association that Supporting People is looking into converting some of the refuges in to one bed self-contained flats. They are also looking into tendering the services – it didn't even come to us directly – that they (LA) will definitely be tendering. In six months! How much time does that leave us to get the expertise? There has been one four-hour workshop on tendering – that's just not enough.”

Roshni, Nottingham Asian Women's Aid (NAWA), Nottingham City Council

Similar to Manchester City Council, Nottingham City Council (NCC) has carried out a local authority wide review of domestic violence services and stated that the average unit cost of services in Nottingham is too high in comparison with other local authorities. There are five domestic violence refuges in Nottingham; all are generic except one; Roshni, Nottingham Asian Women's Aid (NAWA) which is a specialist refuge for Asian women and children.

NCC initially conducted a "Homeless families and Domestic Violence Interagency Homelessness Strategy Review" in March 2007 for which Roshni NAWA offered feed back. This resulted in a summary that pointed out Nottingham's BVPI⁵ is the highest in comparison to core cities.

This led to the domestic violence refuge review. The official review appears fair until it is read from Roshni's perspective. This is because NCC are choosing to apply blanket policies and rules across all services without taking into account Roshni's unique position, the specific needs of their service-users or the specialist service

⁵ BVPI is Best Value Performance Indicator = no. of bed spaces per 10,000 of the population.

offered by staff from a similar background as the clients. NCC has made it clear that they wish to commission a generic service.

Insecure SP funding and commissioning process itself disrupts services so that they are unable to make long term plans and provide staff consistency when forced to regularly give out redundancy notices or let temporary staff go. For example, Nottingham SP funding was up for review in March 2007 – without adequate notice Roshni NAWA lost permanent staff between January and March 2007. An extension of funding to the service was granted by SP until June 2007 at which point Roshni recruited temporary contracted staff. An extension was granted at the last minute to September 2007 and again to March 2008. This has negatively disrupted and impacted both staffing and the service, significantly.

Partnership or Merger?

Partnership is clearly an important and valuable aspect of delivering services and provides the opportunity for sharing skills, knowledge and resources between different organisations. Partnership when structured effectively should provide an equal playing field where each partner can make an equal and real contribution to the success of the project. Some of the groups we have spoken to understand the benefits of partnership and in fact operate within this framework already however their experience suggests that partnership is being presented to groups but with the ultimate aim of merger within which their needs and services become marginalised.

Groups feel that under Local Area Agreements developments more and more specialist services are being asked to bid with generic services. As a result they have raised the following concerns:

- They fear that merger “cuts through the back door”, resulting in a loss of services to BAMER women and children.
- The decision-making structures in any partnership may not adequately represent BAMER women, whose concerns may no longer be seen as a priority.
- Where there is a power differential between a larger and a smaller organisation, often a specialist service, the partnership can be far from empowering.
- Procurement and tender process is splitting previous good working relationships between refugees.

“In a recent partnership bid, a mainstream women’s refuge was a lead agency and we all agreed that we would all get a certain number of staff from it. When it came through, the generic refuge wanted to employ all the staff and they wanted us to refer any South Asian women that came to us to the generic worker. We would have no control of or say in how the services were delivered, what support was available – it was hardly a partnership.”

The impact of mergers on supporting women with no recourse to public funds

Adequate support and safety for women with no recourse to public funds continues to be a major concern. Large numbers of women and children still have no access to housing and subsistence support despite vulnerability. Where refugees have agreements with their SP team and Social Services to fund the support element, they struggle against considerable odds to meet the housing and subsistence costs for this vulnerable

group. Local Authorities remain inconsistent in how they apply statutory criteria, where support for no recourse remains very much a post-code lottery being dealt largely by specialist and some mainstream refuges.

Refuges are continuing to struggle to meet the rental costs of women and thus only able to accommodate a quota of 2 per refuge per year, at most. A number of refuges have told us that they have to turn away women because of a lack of space and resources to accommodate them. Overall, many quote numbers ranging from 20 women to as large as 60 – 100 per year.

We have turned away about 50 women with no recourse to public funds in the last year from our three refuges

As refuges are being taken over by mainstream Housing Associations and other types of organisations a further pattern is emerging. These parent bodies are generally not willing to support women with no recourse to public funds. Our survey indicates that of the refuges that responded 'no' to taking women without recourse to public funds, all without exception were managed by or working in partnership with a Housing Association.

Our two Housing Associations do not let us take on women with no recourse to public funds. In the past, we used our reserve funds and the Women's Aid Last Resort Fund. These are no longer available. In the financial year 2006-2007, we had to turn away 29 women with no recourse to public funds and their children (this is 17% of our total refused referrals).

As a consequence of having to operate quotas, the lack of state support in terms of housing, many women are being turned away and have no option but to disappear, return home or be deported to their Country of origin where they face further danger from family and associates.

Project F is the only BAMER service in this area where there is a larger-than-average Asian population of 11500 7.7%. The SP team and the Housing Association have worked very actively with the local DV forum, which is very supportive wanting a BAMER project.

"It has taken two years of my pushing behind the scenes to get the service up and running. However, I have been told that the project will not take women with no recourse. We know that we mustn't talk about ways to challenge the Housing Association about no recourse in front of other Housing Association staff. I feel very lonely especially as the only BAMER worker and I need help with pushing this issue forward as well as specific BAMER training for the new staff that I will be inducting, that my Housing Association is not able to provide".

FUNDING OF BAMER SERVICES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

A recent report by the Women's Resource Centre for the London Councils highlights the level of funding that has been invested in refuge services:

The report states:

Over £12.1m of boroughs' Supporting People grants have been spent on services for people at risk of domestic violence (as the primary client group) in 2007/08. Domestic violence Supporting People contracts are the single most important source of funding for refuge providers, accounting for, on average, over half of providers' annual income.

The report also identifies the need for Supporting People to recognise the additional support provided by BAMER groups:

Supporting People needs to look at culturally specific projects and in-house activities and services for women and children and the extra support hours needed to provide a language specific service to women who do not understand English – the value for money principle.”

Furthermore there are also other government directives that further will further jeopardise the future sustainability of BAMER refugees. For example the new grant funding proposals to increase community cohesion could trigger a funding crisis for BAMER community groups. The recommendation of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion report published in June 2007, that single-group funding suggests that it should be "awarded on the basis of a particular identity, such as ethnic, religious or cultural" should be the exception not the rule for funding bodies" The report says such funding fosters a "sense of separation" and is "a hangover from old identity politics - with groups encouraged to shout loudly about their own individual needs rather than being encouraged to come together to access funding for shared activities".

However it will undoubtedly undermine progressive policies related to the current post Cattle⁶ drive towards community cohesion policies. Our experience in observing this rhetoric to date is that there are direct contradictions between liberal benevolence towards accommodating diversity and difference and protecting the rights of vulnerable women who are often at risk of gender-based violence and yet are alienated from access to specialist public services by the lack of political will of state institutions to create adequate routes to safety and justice. Imkaan's experience is that where BAMER refugees support women and children this lays the foundation for these women and children to be able to take part in mainstream society. Small, targeted groups often sow the seeds for wider community participation, and there are religious and cultural reasons why some BAMER women do not immediately access mainstream support.

BAMER women face multiple disadvantages it is well documented that their needs and experiences are complicated by inequalities they face on the basis of both race and gender operating simultaneously (Gill, 2005; Thiara, 2005; Wilson 2006). The gaps faced by BAMER women are particularly stark. These inequality gaps undermine community cohesion by marginalising women, and BAMER women in particular.

This funding crisis in terms of BAMER frontline services is worsening. Existing resources for combating violence against women is being diverted to statutory and Criminal Justice initiatives such as MARACs⁷, specialist courts, IDVAs and sanctuary schemes but without providing equivalent level of resources for frontline community based crisis and prevention services (Gill & Banga, 2008). These initiatives do not address the different and specific pathways to care and support for BAMER women and children. They are also not monitored in terms of their effectiveness and applicability to BAMER women and children. Service planning also does not take account of new migrant communities who have different needs that cannot be met within existing BAMER or mainstream projects.

For instance, more than 30% of IDVA⁸ clients are BAMER women (CAADA 1st National Conference, 2007), yet BAMER services consist of only 18% of total DV provision. The appropriateness of the IDVA service for BAMER women has been questioned by both BAMER services and BAMER service users. We are also aware of IDVA clients being referred to BAMER services where there is an expectation for specialist advice and support but without a commitment towards resourcing this time and expertise.

Outreach and therapeutic interventions are generally not funded by Local Authority Supporting People (SP) Teams. Women from South Asian/ BMER communities will not necessarily access refuge services therefore these types of intervention are crucial to enabling women and children to access some of level of support. Research by Thiara (2003), Imkaan (2005) and The Fawcett Society (2006) highlights that women from

⁶ Thiara & Gill (In press)

⁷ MARAC – Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference; IDVA – Independent Domestic Violence Advocate

⁸ IDVA – Independent Domestic Violence Advocate

BAMER communities are more likely to endure violence for longer periods of time because of a lack of awareness and access to mainstream services, further confirming the need for outreach services. I

The move by L.A.s towards 'floating support schemes' (for only those service users with tenancies) has led generic outreach services to work with more vulnerable women. These are more likely to be BAMER women and women with nrpf. This leaves the few outreach services provided by the specialist sector under threat of closure. BAMER women are more likely to access an outreach service rather than a refuge but this situation leaves them without the expert assistance that they need, For example, one generic project is providing an outreach service that works with all service-users that do not access the L.A.s floating support scheme. The Asian worker has been given £22,000 budget to cover all overheads, costs and salary. Her work hours are supposed to be 11 hours a week (she frequently puts in more than this) and she has a live caseload of 43 clients. She says that she does not receive. Our own survey (Imkaan, 2007) highlights that there are only thirteen outreach and five floating support services Nationally for BAMER women and children experiencing violence. Additionally, there is a distinct lack of BAMER services that support children and young women, those with mental health needs, substance misuse issues, issues around self-harm.

Conclusion

The current picture shows that is a dearth of BAMER DV services and provision. Unfortunately new funding regimes also do not recognise or support the different pathways to care and support for BAMER women and children escaping violence and abuse.

LAA do not specify the need or set targets for DV refuge or other service provision for either generic or specialist projects, funding of these services will be based on the discretion of Commissioners. Historically DV has not been on the national or Local Authority agenda and now that it is included it is the narrow domain of the Criminal Justice System interventions. Priorities have been set in terms of a reduction in murder targets but without regard for any of the practical and ancillary services that will be needed if they are enabled and empowered to approach the CJS.

These issues are further compounded for the BAMER refuge sector where current practice indicates that equality and COMPACT principles are not being adhered to. When commissioners are addressing the service needs of BAMER women and children escaping DV.

The community cohesion agenda further undermines the position and future of the sector.

LAA's herald the end of ring-fencing of SP funds for domestic violence frontline housing and support services. This will inevitably impact on the safety of women and children, it may appear to save money and time in the short term but in the long-term women are likely to return back to services as their specialist support needs will not be addressed. Will VFM assessments cost more lives?

Summary of recommendations

Imkaan are calling for the following actions.

Mergers/Services

- Develop national guidelines for Commissioners on the value and need for holistic services for women and children experiencing violence with a specific reference to BAMER led specific provision.

- A need to make an adequate investment in specialist services including preventative, educational, accommodation-based, outreach, children's and therapeutic services as crucial pathways of support for BAMER women and children
- Produce a specific benchmarking tool for BAMER services which takes account of the additional services and support provided.
- .
- A need for ring-fenced funding to secure the need for independent community based women's services including specialist BAMER services.
- Takeover and mergers of BAMER refuges by mainstream HA should be an exception rather than the rule and need to be actively discouraged by Local Authorities, the Housing Corporation and Government.
- A need to develop services that address service gaps across the UK for BAMER women and children.
- Training for Local Authorities to understand the nature and need for specialist BAMER community based services for women and children
- A need to maintain current levels of BAMER women led services with specific reference to BAMER refuges and invest in the development of further specialist services that recognise the specific needs of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, Lesbian and Refugee communities.
- A clear government directive to Local Authorities and funders to recognise the need and value of single issue funding targeted for BAMER women and children experiencing violence.
- Resources to assist small groups with tendering processes.
- Local Authorities need to be monitored and held accountable with regard to breaches of the Compact and equalities legislation.

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