

*imkaan*

## Vital Statistics

The experiences of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic & Refugee women & children facing violence & abuse

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## Project Background

Imkaan is a national second-tier organisation which represents the needs of refuge, outreach and advice services across the UK who provide specialist support and routes to safety for Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic & Refugee (BAMER) women and children affected by violence and abuse. Imkaan aims to strengthen the representation, service and planning responses to, and funding for, the organisations we represent through strategic advocacy, training for frontline professionals, policy development, capacity-building and community-based research.

Monitoring and data collection is crucial for agencies responsible for addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), yet there are few consistent systems of data-collection that provide an accurate and up-to-date analysis of the needs, experiences and pathways to support for BAMER women and children experiencing violence and abuse. Service responses inevitably dictate the choices women have - how enabled they feel to disclose to an agency, seek redress and protection through the criminal justice system and ultimately how empowered they feel to leave a violent or abusive situation. It is only through listening to the direct experiences of women and children and the nature and impact of the violence and abuse that they face, that external agencies will get an informed insight into what women and children want, need and value.

Information on patterns of help-seeking and service responses is inadequate, particularly for those women who are marginalised for reasons of poverty, discrimination, immigration status, cultural factors or gender inequality. Equally, in the current commissioning environment, BAMER specific services face both an ongoing pressure to survive whilst being forced to defend the need for culturally-specific services which offer crucial support to BAMER women escaping violence, within a context that recognises and addresses their needs around social identity, discrimination and inequality.

Furthermore, recent policy initiatives including the Labour Government's national VAWG strategy in 2009 as well as the introduction of specific strategies to tackle Forced Marriage (FM), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), so-called 'Honour' Based Violence (HBV) and the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' pilot, provide an important opportunity for all public bodies to develop more robust methods for evaluating the impact of strategic responses and more significantly whether these efforts are translating into effective, accessible and appropriate service responses for all women and children.

It is for these reasons that Imkaan embarked on a project between 2008 and 2009 with the BAMER VAWG sector to develop and pilot a shared system of data collection. The data toolkit captures information on the profile of BAMER women and children accessing refuge and other support services, the nature and extent of the violence and abuse, specialist support needs, and the factors that may prevent them from accessing external support as well as any outcomes and issues that arise through their engagement with the Criminal Justice System (CJS), housing, legal, advocacy, health and other relevant support services.

**The data toolkit is a groundbreaking project providing information on the largest ever research sample of BAMER women and children experiencing violence and abuse in the UK. 10 BAMER violence against women services from across the UK participated in a 3 month pilot providing detailed data on 124 women who had accessed their refuge, advice and outreach services.**

It is worth noting that since most of the organisations that agreed to participate in the pilot were South Asian services, South Asian women constitute the largest group. Nonetheless, the findings provide extremely useful information about the direct experiences of South Asian, as well as other BAMER groups of women, and help to nuance national research on VAWG which indicates the similarities in prevalence across different communities. It is important that this data is carefully considered to avoid making any general assumptions or to create misperceptions about the extent of VAWG in particular communities on the basis of race or religion.



## The Imkaan toolkit aims to:

- Assist frontline service providers with an improved system for capturing the additional and specialist support they provide to BAMER women and children and a mechanism for identifying and responding to new and emerging needs within their individual services.
- Influence national and local policy and service planning forums in order to improve policy and practice in relation to BAMER women and children.

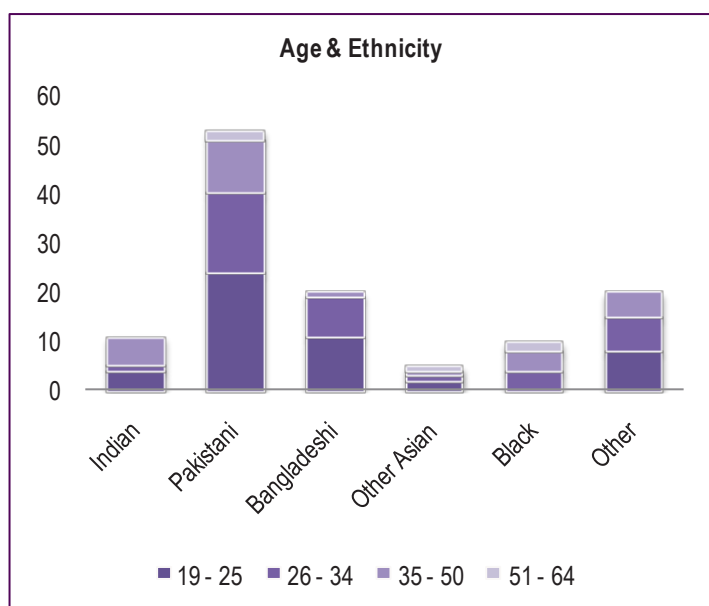
What follows is a summary of key findings from the pilot phase of implementation. The full report will be launched later in 2010.

## PROFILE OF WOMEN USING SERVICES

### Age & Ethnicity

**The largest group of women** (just under three quarters) supported by BAMER VAWG services during October 2008 and January 2009 **were aged below 34 years.**

Just over three quarters of the women were from South Asian backgrounds. This is to be expected as most services were South Asian. Of these, Pakistani women formed the biggest group (44.2%), followed by Bangladeshi women (18%), Indian women (9%), and 'Other Asian' women (4%). A range of diverse ethnic backgrounds were recorded for 15% of women, including Turkish, Black African, Black Caribbean, Chinese and Mixed-Race.



### Insecure Immigration Status

Women who have come to the UK on the basis of a marriage or relationship and then find themselves in a violent or abusive situation are often coerced into remaining in the abusive relationship or face destitution. These women are not able to access public funds and many mainstream agencies are unwilling to support them due to the additional advocacy and cost involved.

However, **over a quarter of the women had no recourse to public funds (nrpf)** suggesting that BAMER services are taking on the majority of these cases which are often more complex, requiring additional time, resources and specialist support.

As anticipated in such cases, **over 80% of these women were aged below 35 years.** The majority of women were on spousal visas.

Almost half had accessed funding through the Children Act 1989 and over a third through Section 21 of the Local Authority National Assistance Act to fund their stay in a refuge.

### Living Circumstances

**Under half were living in BAMER refuge accommodation and a fifth were living in private / rented accommodation.** Of the remaining women, the largest number were living with friends or family; in their own house *without* the partner; in their own house *with* the partner; in a Housing Association and Local Authority general needs tenancy; and a minority in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.





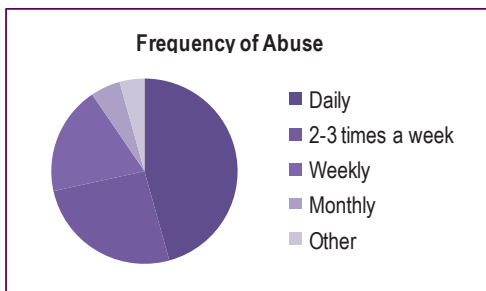
# NATURE OF VIOLENCE & ABUSE

## Length & Frequency of Violence & Abuse

**Over 40% of women had been in the abusive relationship for five years or more;** just under a quarter had lived with the abuse for 5-9 years, and 16.3% had lived with abuse for 10 years or more. 60% of women had lived with abuse for more than two years.

The findings also suggest that **women from Black, Indian, Pakistani and other BAMER communities were likely to stay in abusive situations for longer before seeking help.**

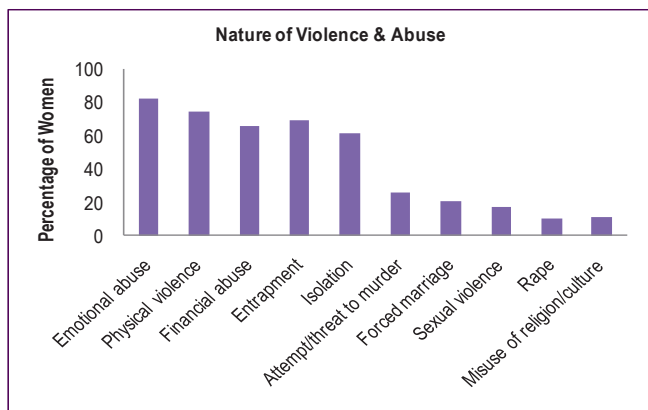
An overwhelming majority (90.5%) of women experienced abuse on a weekly basis or more. Of these, abuse occurred on a daily basis for 46% of women, for a quarter it happened 2-3 times a week, for 18% abuse occurred weekly, and 5% faced abuse monthly.



**Those aged 25 years or under were the largest single group to experience weekly abuse or more (40%).**

## Types of Violence & Abuse

The majority of women (83%) had experienced emotional abuse or psychological abuse alongside physical abuse, financial abuse, and other forms of violence including entrapment, isolation, threats to kill, sexual abuse and rape.



**Women were more likely to experience abuse from multiple perpetrators.** In two-thirds of cases, the perpetrator of abuse was a spouse or partner. However, in over half of the cases, the perpetrators included other family members (most frequently mother-in-law or parents, and in a minority of cases brothers and ex-boyfriends). For a third, abuse had been perpetrated by an intimate partner and many of these are likely to be forced marriage cases. It is important to note that while 21% of women reported that they had faced forced marriage, only 1 woman had applied for a Forced Marriage Protection Order.

**The data indicates that younger women are more vulnerable to higher levels of abuse and multiple forms of violence.**

## Abuse Towards Children

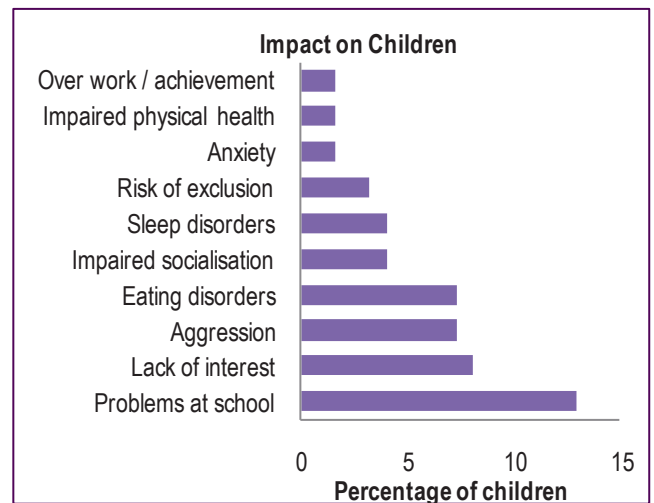
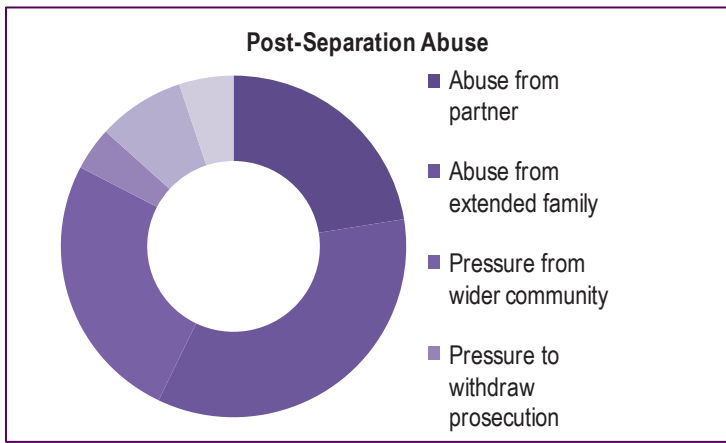
Just under two-thirds of the women had children (64.5%), and **in nearly three quarters of cases, children were aged one or younger (72.6%), a key risk factor in cases of violence.** In the majority of cases, children were living with their mothers. An application to the courts for child contact had been made by fathers in 12.5% of cases, with the paternal grandparents being involved in a fifth of these cases.

**Children were subjected to a range of abuse including verbal and emotional abuse (34%), isolation from peers, friends and family (13%) and deprivation of day to day necessities (6%).** A smaller number of children had been subject to physical (4%) and sexual abuse (4%).

## Post-Separation Abuse

61 of the women were susceptible to post-separation abuse reflecting previous findings which suggest that BAMER women are more prone to ongoing violence after they leave an abusive situation. **Harassment or violence from extended family members was the most common form of post-separation abuse (56%), followed by pressure from the wider community (41%).** Over a third of women had experienced on-going harassment or violence from their partners which included stalking, threats and actual violence. A smaller proportion (13%) had experienced attempted child abduction, 8% faced racism from neighbours or the local community, and 7% had been placed under pressure to withdraw from a prosecution.

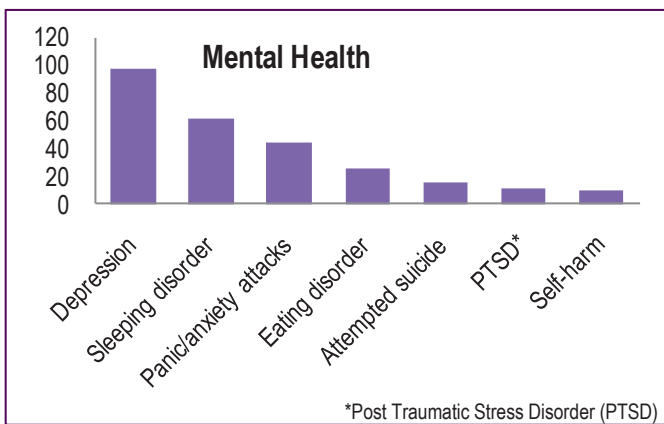




## IMPACT OF VIOLENCE & ABUSE

### Impact on Women

Women across all age groups were likely to experience depression, a sleeping disorder, and panic or anxiety attacks. Around 30% of women were reported to be on prescribed medication, with those aged 35-50 years more likely to be so (46%). Around 13% of women had suicidal thoughts and half of these women were under 25 years. Just over 8% had self-harmed, with 80% of these being under 25 years. Around 13% of women had attempted suicide, with this being fairly evenly split across the 18-50 years age groups.



### Impact on Children

Children were likely to experience a range of problems following exposure to violence. The most common problems related to schooling (25%), a lack of interest or enjoyment of activities (8%), aggression or anger towards adults and peers (7.3%), eating disorders (7.3%), being withdrawn or unable to make friends (4%), and sleep disorders (4%).

## SEEKING HELP

The police, GP, and the Women's Aid Helpline were the top three agencies women contacted (around a third) for help and support at the point at which they were leaving the abuse. A smaller proportion contacted social services, a solicitor, or a housing department.

Women were most likely to speak with friends and family (over half) about the abuse when they were still living within the abusive situation. For the majority of women (three-quarters), this was their first attempt to leave the abusive situation. **A quarter of the women had left before but returned to the abusive situation for various reasons** which included:

- Family convincing them that the abuse would stop.
- Leaving a refuge because it was unsuitable.
- Being abducted by partner and taken home.
- Being told that her partner would change.

## THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

### The Civil Process

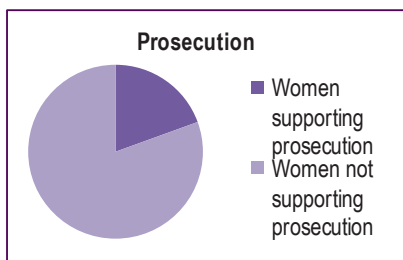
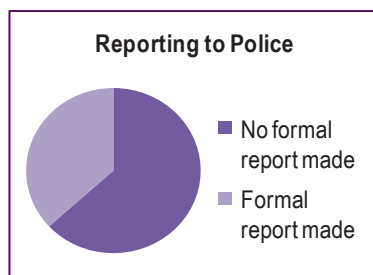
9% of the women had made an application for a non-molestation order and 7% had made an application for an occupation order. Although the numbers are very small, it appears that younger women were more likely to take out a non-molestation order and those aged 35-50 years more likely to apply for an occupation order.



Further details provided for a quarter of the women who had applied for orders suggest that all of them felt safer as a consequence. In particular, incidents of post-separation violence including stalking, attacks in the street and threatening phone calls had ceased.

## Reporting & Prosecution

Where details were given for 106 of the 124 women, **a formal report to the police was made in 37% of cases, in line with national data, and a fifth of women were supporting a prosecution.**



### Reasons for not making a formal report to police included:

- Needed a safe place to stay before formally reporting...*
- Did not want to... Too scared...*
- Not agency wise...*
- Did not want police involvement...*
- Concerns about immigration status...*
- Did not want parents involved or in trouble...*

When asked how the response from the police and the CPS could have been better, the following comments were made:

- Husband should have been arrested rather than cautioned.
- When attending a call, police should not use the woman's family to translate and should speak to the woman in a separate room.
- Police should keep women informed of what is going on with her case.

## Women commented on what made them feel safe through the CJS process:

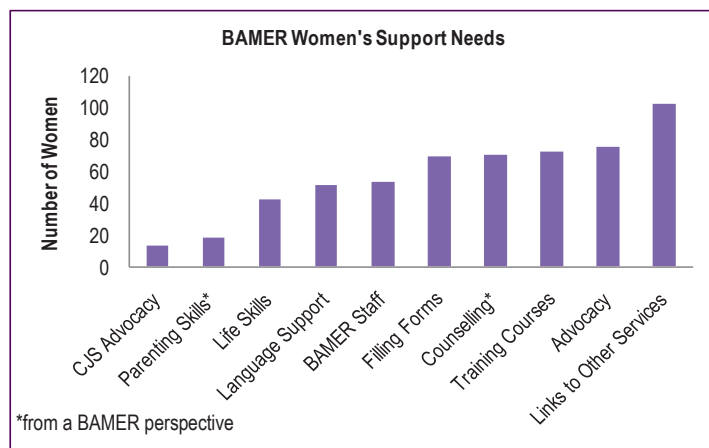
100% of the women stated that being supported by a BAMER service was a key factor in helping them feel safe in accessing the CJS whether this was about reporting to the police, or pursuing a prosecution.

69% said the police or CPS had kept them informed and 19% of women had been linked to Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) services.

In the 37.5% of cases where women had been required to give evidence in court, two-thirds had arrangements made for separate entrances and waiting areas, and a third had screens provided which had enhanced their feelings of safety and confidence in giving evidence.

## SUPPORT NEEDS

**The overwhelming majority of women said they preferred to be in a BAMER refuge service (87%).** Women commented on the type of support they needed and found most helpful from BAMER services to help them remain out of violence.



In addition to support from BAMER support services, just under a third of women had received support from other agencies or professionals.

Of these, **a quarter of women found other agency interventions unhelpful.** Among the reasons given for this, women reported that they were not able to engage with the services; felt that their voices were not heard; and preferred BAMER specific support.



## Implications

The report has produced stark and compelling findings. It is encouraging that BAMER women have more confidence to approach external agencies for help as well as their being an improved awareness generally about existing VAW services and support. However, despite some improvement a large number of BAMER women and children are remaining within violence for long periods of time before they leave. The findings illustrate that BAMER women and in particular young women face multiple forms of violence and abuse and are often trapped in abusive situations for a number of years before they are able to access the support they need.

It is important to stress that early intervention remains a missing link in gender violence work. For example, services which are targeted at younger women and which address their specific vulnerabilities are limited. Yet it is these very services that are likely to provide the access point into mainstream provision. For health and criminal justice outcomes to be achieved, effective, specialist advocacy, accommodation, outreach and training services need to be developed and sustained.

A key priority for policy makers, practitioners and commissioners should be to ensure that future strategies on violence against women recognise and respond to the reality of needs of BAMER women and children. The findings clearly illustrate that a generic approach to addressing need is fundamentally flawed. However a holistic approach which encompasses specialist 'for women by women' services, combined with mainstream support, is most effective in helping women and children to realistically begin new lives free of violence and abuse.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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