Good Practice Briefing

Communicating about violence against women and girls (VAWG)

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ASCENT - Support services to organisations

Ascent is a partnership within the London Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Consortium, delivering a range of services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, under six themes, funded by London Councils.

Ascent – Support services to organisations, is delivered by a partnership led by the Women's Resource Centre (WRC) and comprised of five further organisations: AVA, Imkaan, Respect, Rights of Women, and Women and Girls Network.

This second tier support project aims to address the long term sustainability needs of organisations providing services to those affected by sexual and domestic violence on a pan-London basis.

The project seeks to improve the quality of such services across London by providing a range of training and support, including:

- Accredited training
- Expert-led training
- Sustainability training
- Seminars
- Special Events
- Equality Act 2010 Workshops
- One-to-one support
- Newsletter
- Best practice briefings
- Sector Conversations

Best practice briefings

The purpose of the best practice briefings is to provide organisations supporting those affected by domestic and sexual violence with information to help them become more sustainable and contribute with making their work more effective.

For more information, please see: www.thelondonvawgconsortium.org.uk

London
VAWG
Consortium

Imkaan

Imkaan is a London based Black and 'minority ethnic' women's organisation. We are the only UK based, national second tier women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and 'minority ethnic' (BME) women and girls. The organisation holds nearly two decades of experience of working around issues such as domestic violence, forced marriage and 'honour-based' violence. We work at local, national and international levels, and in partnership with a range of organisations, to improve policy and practice responses to BME women and girls.

Imkaan works with our members to represent the expertise and perspectives of frontline, specialist and dedicated BME women's organisations that work to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. Imkaan also delivers a unique package of support which includes quality assurance; accredited training and peer education; sustainability support to frontline BME organisations; and facilitation of space for community engagement and development. Our research activities support the ongoing development of a robust evidence base around the needs and aspirations of BME women and girls, as well as promising practice approaches to addressing violence.

Imkaan is at the forefront of programmes and initiatives relating to forms of violence that disproportionately affect BME women and girls.

This briefing

The briefing paper draws on Imkaan's own communications work, as well as the communications work of the BME ending VAWG sector and the diverse social justice activists and thinkers who together make up our collective ending VAWG movement. We do not attest to knowing a perfect or 'right' way to communicate about violence against Black and minoritised women and girls, but in this briefing we present methodologies of purpose and integrity that are rooted in an intersectional approach through fundamentally centring the voices, experiences, and demands of Black and minoritised survivors of violence.

As with our previous briefings, this is not a technical 'how-to' guide or an in-depth research piece. This paper has been written with a view to provoking thought and dialogue within and between organisations and individuals, with the hope that this will help to strengthen our work as a sector, and contribute to moving us closer to our vision of a safe and equal world.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

"Gender-based violence is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately"
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1992

""Violence against women" is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"
Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2011 (known as the Istanbul Convention)

VAWG is a pervasive manifestation of the unequal position of women and girls globally, and is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. National laws and international conventions to which the UK is signatory recognise that VAWG exists as a spectrum of abuses, including but not restricted to domestic violence, sexual violence, so-called 'honour-based' violence, forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), psychological abuse and coercive control, online abuse, harassment in public spaces, and economic abuse. An intersectional approach to addressing VAWG is rooted in an understanding of women and girls' lived experiences as existing at the intersection of different oppressions along lines of, e.g gender identity, race, class, sexuality, disability, age and immigration status. The concept of intersectionality, as defined by Black feminist academic Kimberlé Crenshaw, articulates the way in which women and girl's experiences of oppression 'crash together' or intersect, meaning that our experiences of violence are distinct and demanding of tailored service responses.

In the UK, the specialist BME ending VAWG sector delivers support services 'by and for' Black and minoritised women and girls facing violence. Our sector has over four decades of experience providing lifesaving support to women who are marginalised, including within the broader landscape of women's support services. Our sector has struggled against successive years of public funding cuts, and fought to keep our doors open in order to support women who cannot or do not wish to access other avenues of support. Due to prohibitive immigration laws, funding limitations, a lack of specialist knowledge and understanding in mainstream organisations, and racism and discrimination both subtle and overt at sector and state level, many BME survivors are met with insufficient support and inadequate service responses.

A hostile media environment

BME ending VAWG organisations are operating in a climate where our specialism and expertise as a sector is frequently overlooked or erased, and our voices and experiences are marginalised and co-opted. Due to funding limitations, the overwhelming majority of BME women's organisations do not have a dedicated Communications worker. Communications work, which might include managing press and public relations, and devising and delivering both offline media and digital media content, may be a role or task that is performed by a worker in addition to their duties, or performed informally by staff members both inside and outside of their paid hours of work.

With modest capacity for planning or proactive communications work, commonly BME women's organisations are forced into a space of delivering communications work that is primarily 'reactive'. This may take the form of responding to news stories about VAWG or giving comment when contacted by another organisation, publication or broadcaster. The difficulty with this approach is that the framing of narratives around VAWG are therefore prescribed by media platforms that often do not have an understanding of VAWG and intersecting issues such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, Islamophobia and border violence, and most likely do not configure their work through a commitment to addressing and ending inequality.

As Black and minoritised women, in some ways we are hyper-visible in national and international news media, but our voices are frequently unheard. Knowing that the UK journalism industry is 94% white and 55% of workers are men, it is statistically unlikely that a journalist covering a story about BME women and VAWG will have a nuanced and/or personal connection to the topic and our communities. This means that BME women's organisations are pushed into a space of weighing up the impact of complicity in the perpetuation of misrepresentations of us and our experiences of VAWG, or not engaging with mainstream media outlets at all, which means our voices continue to be unheard.

Extensive research into UK media representation has documented how the hyper-visibility of Black and minoritised communities in recent years is linked to a 'crisis of national identity'. This issue is compounded by the mono-culturality of UK newsrooms: for example, less than 0.5% of journalists in the UK are Muslim. Recent news coverage relating to the case of Shamima Begum, for example, provides a pertinent illustration of racist, sexist and Islamophobic framing of a news story about grooming, child marriage and possible sexual abuse and exploitation. In 2015, after being groomed online, 15-year-old Shamima Begum left East London and travelled to Syria to join the Islamic State. A week after her arrival she was married to an ISIS fighter, and she gave birth to three children in the four years that followed. After being found in a Syrian refugee camp in 2019 and asking to return to Britain, Begum's British citizenship was revoked by the UK Home Office. Headlines in national publications have variously referred to Begum as a "[jihadi bride](#)", an "[ISIS bride](#)", and a "[pregnant IS teen](#)". This victim-blaming language overlooks Begum's inability to consent to a marriage ceremony at the age of 15 under UK law, and consciously overlooks the fact that she is likely a survivor of grooming, and under UK law also potentially a survivor of statutory rape.

This strategic process of 'othering' attempts to call into question the 'British-ness' of Black and minoritised communities in the UK, destabilises our right to reside, and in the most violent cases, seeks to undermine our humanity. This 'crisis' has coalesced around issues and incidents such as public healthcare crises, terrorist attacks, and unemployment and housing shortages. These contexts are then utilised by politicians across the spectrum to launch calls for intensified immigration controls, including the construction of a 'hostile environment' and where possible the silent but systematic re-classifying of Black and

minoritised people as non-citizens, as occurred during the 'Windrush scandal'[1]. These political maneuvers have significant impacts on our daily lives: the steep rise in racist hate crimes during and following the EU referendum is widely evidenced, including by our member organisations across the county.

It is clear, then, that media narratives both respond to and fuel public opinion and behaviours and state-level decision-making. It is crucial, therefore, that BME ending VAWG organisations are resourced to do appropriate and relevant communications work, which is so critical for shaping public attitudes. Knowing that our sector currently has a miniscule amount of resource to utilise within a hugely challenging environment, there are particular strategies we can employ to raise the profile of our voices and narratives. In spite of the context we are working in, many small BME women's organisations are successful in delivering a high level of communications output and strategic media engagement. This briefing seeks to share some of the techniques we can employ, and to provide a tool for workers delivering communications to make the case for this work, as a fundamental strategy within 'prevention' responses to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls.

Preparing to communicate about VAWG

"As we seek to create a different world, it is crucial that we grasp the importance of media to that process. We will not easily change attitudes, without the use of the media. We will not tell the truth about VAWG in wide, accessible contexts, without the use of the media."

Marai Larasi, UN Women Expert Group Meeting on the
Prevention of violence against women and girls, Bangkok 2012

Most small BME women's organisations who are not resourced to deliver communications work may not have the capacity to formulate a communications 'strategy'. Reflecting on the below questions, however, can be helpful for providing focus so that communications work is optimised, targeted and effective.

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[1] The 'Windrush scandal' in Britain in 2018 marked the exposure of Home Office profiling of British Caribbean elders for deportation, as part of attempts to meet net immigration targets.

Why do you want to communicate?

Effective communications work has a clear purpose. It may be useful to refer to your organisational 'mission' or charitable aims outlined in your governing documents as a starting point for crafting communications aims and objectives. Visioning clear aims, such as "address the harms of women's criminalisation", or "support minoritised women to achieve automony and self-determination" means that communications work can be used to amplify and add value to all of your programme streams, rather than being 'bolted on' as an afterthought.

What is your message?

Your message is the information you want to share with an audience, which could include outlining a particular action you want your audience to take. Consistent messages might include, for example, informing the public about: Black and minoritised women and girl's experiences of VAWG; the value of specialist 'by and for' services, and communicating that funding cuts to BME ending VAWG services leave women and girls with nowhere to turn. An 'action' to invite your audience to take might include donating money to your service, or contacting their MP to raise the issue of underfunding of BME women's services.

Messages that are voiced in a consistent style help to define a distinct voice for your organisation. The tone of your message can be adapted to suit the channel; on social media it is appropriate to be a little more informal and light-hearted than you would in a print article or on your website.

Who are you communicating with?

It can be helpful to perform an audience 'mapping' or 'segmenting' exercise to establish the key stakeholders that you wish to reach and engage with your messaging. Audience segments might include: government ministers and policy-makers, local or council-level decision makers, public services workers (such as doctors, teachers, social workers, judges), funders, donors, commissioners, survivors at different stages of their journeys, high-profile commentators, journalists, and the general public. It can be useful to consider

how much influence and relevance these segments have to your aims, and to what extent you are already successfully engaging with them.

For BME ending VAWG organisations, a key audience segment will likely include BME survivors of VAWG and their friends and family members. It can be entirely useful and appropriate to direct your messaging to the survivors in the audience who might need to hear what you're saying (for example, that a survivor didn't "deserve it", and that survivors deserve dignity, justice and support).

<u>How are you communicating with your audience?</u>

Through conducting an audit of your current communications channels you may discover that some channels are less effective in engaging with your audience. You might decide to deactivate or deprioritise less fruitful channels, and engage in more streamlined but focused communications work on the channels where you are achieving most engagement.

Planning content might involve:
- First and foremost noting **significant moments to communicate about within your organisational calendar**, such as: a milestone of anniversary for a programme or piece of work, the publication of a report or briefing, a key moment to share case studies or updates about the impact of your work, or to welcome the arrival of a new member of staff. This process helps to ensure your communications output is embedded in and guided by your organisation's wider work.
- Taking note to watch out for **key dates which are likely to generate discussion** about the issues you work on, such as high profile court case dates and planned changes in policy and legislation relating to violence against women and girls.
- Noting **national and international celebration and memorial days, weeks and months**, such as Black History Month, LGBT History Month, 16 days of activism to end VAWG, Disability History Month, Indigenous People's Day, and more. These markers can provide a meaningful 'hook' and a platform for your communications and social media campaigns.
- Combining resources and sharing the load by **partnering with another organisation/s to co-produce content** such as a blog series or Tweetathon.

- Considering **what types of content you have the capacity and resource to create**, and what content will ensure optimum engagement with your intended audience. Short video content can be quick and easy to produce on a mobile phone; equally asking questions in a post, using social media 'polls', and sharing relevant and appropriate photos can be a simple way to engage your audience.

What does success look like?

Sometimes there is a tendency to rely on metrics such as the number of 'Likes' or 'Followers' your organisation may have on any given platform, or the quantity of coverage you receive in national publications with a high readership. However, these measurements may not be the most appropriate metrics for your work. If you are trying to raise awareness of funding cuts to a local specialist 'by and for' VAWG service, your communications may be more 'successful' in reaching their audience if you secure coverage in local newspapers and community newsletters. Similarly, if you are trying to engage with MPs about amending a piece of government policy, posting Tweets that secure comments or Retweets by key commentators, even if you have a small 'Following' on Twitter, might be more effective in encouraging their engagement.

The following principles may be helpful when measuring the 'success' of communications:

- **Test and experiment:** it is sometimes difficult to draw exact correlations between your comms output and, for example, unexpected high or low levels of social media engagement or visitors to your website or blog. If you test out posting different types of content at different times of day you might start to be able to pinpoint which content is more 'successful' and you can draw some conclusions as to why.
- **Quality not quantity:** rather than blasting out lots of quickly made content on social media, or emailing a press release to 100 journalists, try taking a very targeted approach. Send a short (no more than a few lines) personalised email or Direct Message on Twitter to 10 trusted journalists who write for publications that are relevant to the audience you are seeking to engage with, and you may find you are much more likely to get a response.

- **Focus on engagement and outcomes:** if you are measuring metrics, focus on engagement and outcomes such as donations, and meaningful feedback and comments on your content, rather than 'Likes' and 'Favourites'. You may only get a small amount of engagement on a piece of content, but if a key stakeholder in the audience you are seeking to engage with responds to your content, your content has had a significant impact. Google Analytics is a free tool you can use to gain insight into your website visitors and their behaviour, such as whether they are reading and engaging with your content. Other platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Medium also have their own inbuilt 'insights' or analytics' functions that you can use for free to find out how your audience is engaging with your content.

Shaping our messages

One approach to communications work within the broader women's sector is that of 'Strategic Communications'. Approaches within this umbrella term seek to shift public attitudes on issues in ways that are informed by an understanding of what people already think and feel about an issue. The 'audience' is typically segmented into people who agree with a position, people who disagree with a position (and are unlikely to be moved from their position), and anyone in between these two points who are termed the 'undecided' or 'persuadable' middle. The 'strategic' element of this methodology involves determining what the 'undecided middle' think and feel about a particular issue, and coaxing them along the spectrum towards your position. This process inevitably involves a degree of compromise; of 'meeting' the audience segment where they are, and holding space for their ideas and beliefs.

The reality of this approach is incredibly compromised for BME organisations, considering the current socio-political and media landscape. As organisations whose work is rooted in social justice and Black feminist anti-racist politics, we are not willing to divert our energy and resources towards ameliorating positions that are for example overtly racist, xenophobic, transphobic and Islamophobic. There is privilege in being able to hold space for positions that may be dehumanising and in fact a mandate for violence and murder for a marginalised group.

Particular examples of this include messaging around forms of VAWG such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which is known to disproportionately affect women and girls from Black and Minoritised communities. Popular media has been known to use terms like "barbaric" and "savage" to describe the practice of FGM. It is crucial to recognise that this messaging whilst seeking to highlight the abusive nature of FGM, at the same time works to reinforce a racist narrative which locates FGM in certain groups and communities because of religion, tradition, and 'culture', rather than recognising FGM as a form of VAWG which disproportionately affects women and girls because of gender inequality and systems of patriarchy. Resisting the languaging of FGM in this way pushes back against attempts to depict Black and minoritised communities as inherently 'oppressive' and 'violent'. Focus groups of young Black and minoritised women convened during research conducted by Imkaan in 2011 stated that "the sensationalisation of female genital mutilation by the media was considered to be unhelpful in preventing female genital mutilation". It was felt that journalists who wished to reshape the debate around FGM would "help to portray the right kind of messages in a way that presents the reality but does not stigmatise communities at the same time".

Black feminist struggles necessarily involve rupture and disruption, and guiding public attitudes through learning processes will involve a degree of uncomfortability. For us, communicating with 'strategic' messages does not mean perpetuating language and narratives that are a hindrance to our collective struggles for equality. Instead, we work from an uncompromising Black feminist 'survivor-centred' approach to communications, which prioritises the voices and needs of Black and minoritised women and girl survivors of violence.

Furthermore, when we are asked to work with media outlets amid an environment of hostile reporting, our response and comments *can be an act of resistance*. It can be powerful to acknowledge the violence and dehumanisation of public narratives in our communications work, and to provide firm, simple statements that reassert the dignity and humanity of survivors and victims of violence.

An example of this approach is outlined in Imkaan's contribution to a guideline for media outlets to use when reporting on domestic violence deaths produced in 2018 by the feminist

campaigning organisation Level Up. The murder of women and girls by a family member, partner or former partner (known as 'domestic homicide'), often attracts media coverage. However, domestic homicides are commonly not reported in ways that are constructive, sensitive, and framed through the needs and voices of survivors of VAWG. Level Up's guideline includes practical tips to help journalists and editors prioritise dignity and avoid common pitfalls when reporting on VAWG.

An overview of our practice of survivor-centred communications approaches is outlined in the help sheet below.
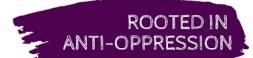
imkaan

ACCURATE & ACCOUNTABLE

SURVIVOR-CENTRED APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATIONS

Effective communications around violence against women and girls (VAWG), particularly when focusing on particular incidents or cases, include clear articulation of the perpetrator/s of violence. It is crucial to create narratives and work with media platforms that do not attempt to excuse, minimise or 'explain away' the actions of a perpetrator. The inclusion of details such as, a woman starting a new relationship which 'angered' her former partner framed as 'leading to' abuse, or a woman experiencing sexual assault being attributed to her being under the influence of alcohol, largely has the effect of 'victim-blaming'. The impact of this is that women and girls consuming these media narratives are not supported to identify an experience as VAWG, and are less likely to seek support.

When communicating about forms of VAWG that disproportionately affect Black and minoritised women, often mainstream media narratives locate 'blame' for certain forms of abuse with a whole community, religious, 'cultural', or 'minority ethnic' group. This profiling acts to further stigmatise, 'other' and criminalise Black and minoritised communities. Narratives that instead examine wider structures of inequality, including those reinforced by the state, are helpful when explaining the root causes and contexts for VAWG.

ROOTED IN ANTI-OPPRESSION

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS TO SPEAK OUT

The services that many 'by and for' BME ending VAWG organisations provide have emerged out of the feminist and anti-racist movements, and this positioning is a core aspect of the sector's ability to influence, innovate and evolve [1]. Similarly, our communications work is necessarily guided by social action and social justice. When we create communications output it can be helpful to ask:

- Does this piece of content actively support our aims and objectives?
- Is our commitment to justice and healing for survivors of VAWG compromised by engaging with this piece of content?
- Is the language being used sensitive, non-oppressive, and non-sensationalised?
- Which voices are present in our communications output, and who is missing? Are LGBT survivors, disabled survivors, undocumented and migrant survivors, and young survivors central to our communications output? How can we meaningfully bring in a wider range of perspectives?
- How will this content affect survivors who engage with it; do we need to include Trigger/Content Warnings, and signpost with contact information for our service and/or other relevant support services?

Communications work has a role to play in effectively giving a platform to survivors' voices. This process can be challenging; if survivors are not adequately supported there is a significant risk of re-traumatisation. Working in solidarity with survivors involves:

- Being **led by the expertise** and needs of survivors
- Upholding survivors' **right to anonymity** and **entitlement to withdraw** from any communications projects at any time
- Offering **wraparound support** to survivors throughout the process of any piece of communications work, including **dedicated support in the event of any harassment or trolling** that might follow a public media interaction

Challenge: "Often partners and journalists want to 'use' survivors to get a message across. Sometimes our story gets dropped, which wastes survivors' time and energy."

Survivor-centred approach: Consider creating your own platforms and media content such as films, blogs, and podcasts where you have control over the method and messaging.

TARGETED & INTENTIONAL

You can target your communications work by deciding which publications to work with. You might choose not to engage with publications which routinely publish discriminatory content. If you do engage with problematic media outlets, you can research journalists' previous work (ie by looking them up on Twitter) to get a sense of their tone and approach, and request 'copy approval' (the ability to read and sign off the final draft of the article).

Challenge: "Often we will be approached by other organisations to contribute to stories or press releases, at short notice, to insert a 'BME women' detail or perspective"

> "You don't have to answer every request: be selective."

Survivor-centred approach: Expect to be central to the formulation of communications campaigns at planning and strategic levels, so that our voices aren't utilised or co-opted. If you are not involved at the planning stage, ask why?

[1] Marai Larasi with Dorett Jones (2017) *Tallawah: A briefing paper on black and 'minority ethnic' women and girls organising to end violence against us.* London: Imkaan

These recommendations were developed with reference to Level Up (2018) *Dignity for dead women: Media guidelines for reporting domestic violence deaths.* London

Take back the timeline: reclaiming the power of social media

In the early days of social media in particular, digital platforms were viewed as a relatively trivial and whimsical addition to charity communications; currently only 32% of charities and non-profits have a written social media strategy[2]. Consequently, tasks related to social media have historically been delegated to staff members with less status or accountability, often younger members of staff who are in more junior positions, including volunteers or interns.

As the value and credibility of social media has grown, social media management has been ascribed more status within the communications field. In an under-resourced women's sector, recognition of this shifting landscape has meant that high-level members of staff, often the Director or CEO, have become active and engaged with social media content creation and planning. This has led to an unusual practice of informal strategic collaborations between very senior and very junior employees, with varying degrees of 'success'. This circumstance is one of opportunity: for young women to utilise their specialist knowledge as *de facto* skill leaders in this area. A potential limitation is that young women do not have the status or leverage within their organisations to implement their skillset, and furthermore that senior staff members are over-cautious or lack trust in young women's specialist expertise.

Using social media platforms to push out original content enables women's organisations to control and define narratives around VAWG, which we know shape public attitudes and behaviours. The case studies below are examples of Imkaan's recent social media content which centre the voices of Black and minoritised survivors of violence.

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[2]
https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2018/jan/10/post-truth-world-charities-connectivity-social-good-media-chatbots-mobile-optimisation

imkaan

SURVIVOR-CENTRED APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATIONS: CASE STUDIES

Imkaan's #16blogs for #IDEVAW series, which was co-produced with Fawcett Society, published content every day during the 2017 '16 days of activism to end violence against women and girls', and has been viewed over 1,000 times to date.

CASE STUDY: IMKAAN'S MEDIUM BLOG

The series began on 25th November 2017 (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) and ran until 10th December 2017 (Human Rights Day). Contributors included grassroots community organisers, workers from the UK ending violence against women and girls sector, as well as international experts.

Imkaan's ongoing #ShapeTheMovement blog series, presented on on the online publishing platform Medium, seeks to create space for sharing ideas and approaches for movement building to end violence against women and girls. Building on dissemination strategies that worked well in our #IDEVAW series, the five pieces in this series have already been viewed over 2,000 times to date.

"You don't need the BBC to come with their good microphone; the things you have already can be harnessed to get your voice heard"

Young BME woman,
Purple Drum's Rewind and
Reframe project

CASE STUDY: PURPLE DRUM'S FILMS

In December 2017, Purple Drum published a new short film on its Facebook Page which centres the voices of young Black and 'minority ethnic' queer women speaking out about harassment in public.

The post which announced the film reached over 11k people on Facebook, and was shared 36 times including by the Everyday Sexism Project (31k Likes), Jewish Women's Aid (936 Likes), and Amnesty UK Women's Action Network (926 Likes). To date the film has been viewed 3.7k times.

"I've only reported one incident to the police. I was followed by this guy, and he started to call us 'dykes'. Eventually he ran after us with an empty vodka bottle and he said "I'm going to kill you", and lots of people in the park called the police. He was charged under the public disobedience act, or something like that, and he was fined"

"In a nightclub, men would want to dance with me. What is hard is that I explicitly have to say, and put it out there: "I'm a lesbian". One time, my partner had to come between me and someone and clearly say "she's not free", and at that point I thought a fight would start"

It is also important to recognise that digital and social media platforms themselves can be a site of harm, and that perpetrators use digital media and technology to stalk, surveil, harass and abuse women and girls, and to promote and circulate abusive and harmful misogynistic content. We know that as with Black and minoritised women and girls' experiences of harassment in offline public spaces, online sexually harassing content will often also be racialised. Women and girls from all walks of life are subjected to online harassment; research conducted by Amnesty UK found that almost half of online abuse directed at MPs in the weeks preceding the 2017 snap general election were aimed at one black woman MP: Diane Abbott. Urgent engagement is needed, therefore, to ensure social media companies begin taking responsibility for meaningfully addressing how their platforms are used.

Conclusion

Offline and online communications platforms pose an opportunity for BME ending VAWG organisations; we can harness these mediums to take up space and shape our narratives which have historically been overlooked an misrepresented by mainstream media. With limited resources to dedicate to this work, we must necessarily be careful and targeted when deciding what content to create and engage with. Referring back to our organisational aims ensures that we do not 'drift' from our objectives in pursuit of platforms and audiences that are not a key strategic priority for shaping social norms and leveraging systemic change.

As workers living at the intersection of different oppressions, meaning that the violence and harassment we experience is compounded along lines of gender identity, race, class, sexuality and more, we can also recognise that the process of delivering communications work can mean engaging in a site of violence. BME ending VAWG organisations might consider implementing specific wellbeing policies around communications work, to ensure staff are given appropriate breaks and debriefing opportunities when engaging with difficult and triggering content, and are supported to report abuse when necessary.

Much more needs to be done to operationalise effective processes to ensure that harmful content is being removed from online spaces, and that appropriate action is being taken to

hold perpetrators of online abuse accountable for their actions, so that women and girls are not pushed out of the online realm. It is insufficient to have the functionality of a platform which supports us to raise awareness about Black and minoritised women and girls' experiences of VAWG, if we are met with harassment and abuse when we speak out.

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