



Thames Valley BAMER Project

Final Report –
Executive Summary

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Foreword

There is a wealth of research and knowledge around the needs of women who have suffered abuse at the hands of partners, families, and strangers. The Thames Valley Domestic Abuse Coordinators were receiving increasing anecdotal evidence of women from Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee (BAMER) communities not feeling confident to disclose abuse and being reluctant to approach services, both statutory and voluntary, which were viewed white British, and therefore unable to meet their needs. In addition, Thames Valley has seen an expansion in diversity, particularly in larger towns and cities over the last 10 years, which one could assume means more women were not having their support needs met. Together with the Domestic Abuse Coordinators, and third sector charities, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner successfully applied to the Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Transformation Fund to run a two year project to determine what the needs of local women from BAMER communities were and take the learning to improve responses and support.

At the time of the application for the funding the acronym BAMER was in everyday use and became the title of the project, and you will see it used throughout this report. We are very much aware now, after speaking to women from diverse communities, the use of the acronyms BAMER, BAME, and BME are not acceptable and there is a preference from some for Black, Asian and ethnically diverse (BAED) or minority ethnics, and this is further changing still. If the term BAMER makes you uncomfortable, please accept our apologies and be assured that outside of this report we have stopped using it. We also recognise when we talk of BAMER communities they are not a homogenous group, a fact which has been highlighted through our work.

This report will not be the end of our work. We, the Domestic Abuse Coordinators, OPCC, third sector charities and the seven wonderful women who were employed to speak to and support women across the Thames Valley, are all very passionate about equality, improving lives, tackling abuse in all its forms and making things safer. As such, we have formed a BAED Partnership Group to take forward the recommendations in this report.

We would like to acknowledge the courageous, amazing, insightful, eloquent women who engaged with this project, the community group members, and community facilitators. We are incredibly grateful to all of them for sharing their lives and experiences and we in turn will do our best to ensure those who come forward in the future receive support which meets their needs.

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Thames Valley BAMER Project Report

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1. Overview of the project

1.1. Context

The Thames Valley BAMER Project was funded by the Home Office VAWG Transformation Fund for two years from April 2018 to March 2020 and was supported by the nine Local Authorities in Thames Valley and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The project set out to identify the barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who are subjected to abuse or violence when needing to access support, and to identify lessons for improving service responses. This would be achieved by the aims and objectives set out in the bid to the Home Office, outlined below.

1.2. Aims and objectives

Aims:

- Assess, improve, and better coordinate the multi-agency response to violence against women and girls in BAMER communities across the region
- Generate and map localised knowledge and networks to facilitate systemic change, and to provide a robust evidence base to inform future commissioning and support third sector grant applications
- Improve awareness of issues relating to violence against women and girls in Thames Valley's BAMER communities; engage and empower these communities to identify and challenge these abuses, and to ensure they know where and how to access timely and appropriate support
- Ensure that women from BAMER communities in Thames Valley who have abuse and violence perpetrated against them have their needs met through improved and better-informed service provision and pathways

Objectives

- Recruitment of three strategic roles across Thames Valley (one per county) with a remit of working with communities and professionals to pull together localised key issues and learning for working with the BAMER communities across the region. They will also assess current service provision, identifying gaps and leading practice, drawing on national examples of excellence and lessons learned.
- Production of a 'by and for' BAMER public information campaign to increase awareness of issues relating to violence against women and girls.
- Training of community champions to encourage and enable early intervention for those from BAMER communities at risk of or currently experiencing violence or abuse.
- Training for frontline professionals to respond appropriately to incidents of abuse or violence perpetrated against women from BAMER communities.
- Recruitment of six multi-lingual specialist community outreach workers (BAMER Support Workers) across Thames Valley (two per county) to both add onto and enable access to mainstream services.

The funding achieved was less than applied for which accounts for the reduced capacity and resources in relation to the scope of the project, as described below.

1.3. Structure

The project was delivered via a network of six BAMER Support workers employed by four domestic abuse service providers across the authority areas, and coordinated by a Strategic Officer, hosted by Oxford City Council. The project was overseen by the BAMER Project Board, to whom the Strategic Officer reported, chaired by the OPCC, and consisted of representatives from six of the nine authorities, each of the provider organisations and supporting organisations, as outlined below.

Area	Organisation Represented	Role in Project
Thames Valley	Office of Police and Crime Commissioner	Bid author, fund-holder; Chair of the Board
Berkshire (East)	Bracknell Forest Council	Bid signatory
	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council	Bid signatory
	Slough Borough Council	Bid signatory
	Hestia	Provider organisation, host to one BAMER Support Worker (Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Bracknell Council areas)
	DASH Charity	Collaborator, key stakeholder
Berkshire (West)	Reading Borough Council	Bid signatory
	West Berkshire Council	Bid signatory
	Wokingham Borough Council	Bid signatory
	Berkshire Women's Aid	Provider organisation, host to one BAMER Support Worker (West Berkshire, Reading, and Wokingham Council areas)
Buckinghamshire	Buckinghamshire County Council	Bid signatory
	Milton Keynes Council	Bid signatory
	MK-ACT	Provider organisation, host to two BAMER Support Workers (Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire County Council areas)
	Wycombe Women's Aid	Collaborator, key stakeholder
	Aylesbury Women's Aid	Provider Organisation, host to one BAMER Support Worker

Oxfordshire	Oxford City Council	Bid signatory; host to Strategic Officer
	Oxfordshire County Council	Bid signatory
	A2Dominion Domestic Abuse Services (Delivering Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, ODAS)	Provider organisation, host to one BAMER Support Workers (Oxfordshire County Council area)
	Oxford Against Cutting	Bid signatory, key stakeholder, collaborator
	Reducing the Risk	Collaborator, key stakeholder
	Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre	Bid signatory, key stakeholder, collaborator
Thames Valley Services	SAFE!	Collaborator, key stakeholder
	Victim's First	Collaborator, key stakeholder
	Refuge ISVA Service	Collaborator, key stakeholder

2. Methodology

The Thames Valley BAMER Project worked in relation to the following strands of abuse and violence across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire:

- Honour-based abuse (HBA)
- Forced marriage (FM)
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Stalking and harassment
- Domestic abuse (DA)
- Sexual violence

Safety, confidentiality and language were key considerations throughout the project.

2.1. Scoping

2.1.1. Primary data collection

The project set out to establish the current picture in terms of primary data which was gathered through engagement with women to understand:

- Internal barriers BAMER women faced in approaching and accessing VAWG services,
- External barriers BAMER women faced in approaching and accessing VAWG services, and

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- Perceptions of BAMER women regarding different statutory and voluntary services in relation to VAWG issues.

2.1.2. Secondary data collection

Secondary data was collected from nationally published sources, and from provider agencies and public bodies in Thames Valley to understand:

- Demographics within Thames Valley
- Prevalence of all the forms of violence and abuse against women and girls in Thames Valley

2.1.3. Data interpretation and dissemination

All data collected was analysed and disseminated to:

- Deliver interim reports
- Inform ongoing work and engagement
- Develop recommendations

2.2. Community activities

Simultaneously the project undertook a number of community activities to find and hear the voices of ethnic minority women in respect of abuse and violence against women and girls.

2.2.1. Community mapping

The Strategic Officer and the BAMER Support Workers investigated online resources and professional contacts to establish a picture of the existing services available for ethnic minority women in Thames Valley, including VAWG services.

2.2.2. Community engagement

A range of approaches were taken as different organisations and areas responded to their specific environments:

- Engaging with community groups
- Focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews

Such work was undertaken to raise awareness of issues relating to violence and abuse; to map ethnic communities and community groups; to identify needs and issues asserted by women from these communities; to identify and understand barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who have needed to access support services in relation to violence or abuse.

2.2.3. Outreach

Three of the four providers offered outreach across all but three of the nine local authority areas in Thames Valley. Apart from group work programmes, outreach support was always in the form of one-to-one casework, although the format for this varied and was provided in the following ways:

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- Two areas offered BAMER-specific group work programmes.
 - Three areas offered a traditional ongoing outreach service through client appointments.
 - Two areas provided drop-in surgeries where women could attend between defined times, either as a one-off or for a series of sessions.
 - Two areas facilitated peer support opportunities.

Referral routes into outreach could be directly from community groups to BAMER Support Workers, or through the established pathways of the workers wider organisation and support services (often an established helpline and referral service).

2.2.4. Trainings and presentations

At varying stages different training events, programmes and presentations were developed and delivered, both to community group members and to groups of relevant professionals. Such events included:

- Training helpline staff in VAWG services on engaging with BAMER clients,
- Supporting agencies to addressing the barriers faced by women from ethnic minority communities when accessing services,
- Developing training for front-line workers who engage with BAMER clients.
- Developing culturally sensitive group work programmes for victims and survivors.
- Presenting findings and updates to local domestic abuse strategy groups.
- Presenting an introduction of the project to the Crown Prosecution Service.

2.2.4. Peer review audits

A peer review was designed, and an audit undertaken to gain understanding of how ethnic minority women were considered in service design and delivery in the current set up of relevant organisations delivering services.

2.3. Measuring outcomes and impact

2.3.1. Performance framework

The performance of the project was reviewed by developing and completing a performance framework to understand the achievements of the project. This also helps describe the project and illustrates the project cycle.

2.3.2. Theory of change

The project group developed a theory of change model, based on that of the Department for International Development, to provide an aspirational goal for outputs and outcomes for the project, since two years is a relatively short time in which to achieve high impact in such a complex area.

3. Findings

3.1. Findings on population demographics in Thames Valley

The scoping and review of secondary data found that Thames Valley is a diverse area, with particularly high proportions of minority ethnic groups within the urban areas of High Wycombe, Oxford, Reading and Slough. Those groups most highly represented were Pakistani, Indian, African, and Polish, and over 134,000 non-native-English speakers spoke more than 20 languages. Thames Valley is made up of a number of religious communities, the most prevalent being Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh, but with a significant proportion of people who are non-religious.

3.2. Findings on statistics on abuse and violence against women

A review was undertaken of the available Thames Valley data for:

- Female genital mutilation,
- Domestic Abuse
- Forced marriage
- Honour-based abuse
- Sexual abuse and violence
- Stalking

The review concluded that all forms of abuse and violence against women and girls are prevalent across the entire Thames Valley, including those areas with significant ethnic minority populations. It also concluded, however, that official figures are unreliable due to under-reporting, and inconsistencies in recording between areas and/or organisations make meaningful analysis difficult. Furthermore, official data from statutory bodies often did not break down the figures based on ethnicity, although some provider agencies did. This compounds the challenges in building an accurate picture on which to base an understanding of the issues or plan responses.

3.3. Findings from focus group discussions

The project completed 20 focus group discussions across the Thames Valley which incorporated participants who were members of community groups representing a range of African, Asian, European and Latin American heritages: Eritrean, Somali, Sudanese, Tanzanian, Zimbabwean, Mixed African, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Nepali, Pakistani, Syrian, Turkish, Mixed (Kurdish), Portuguese, Spanish, Brazilian.

The focus group questions were structured around experiences of accessing services and views on what is needed to make agencies and services more approachable.

3.3.1. Internal barriers to accessing services

Women in the discussions identified a number of cultural factors which hinder them from seeking help:

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- Honour and shame are highly important concepts in many cultures, and the consequences of dishonouring family or community by disclosing abuse are significant (often disownment and destitution, and sometimes death).
 - Fear and intimidation based in other, wider cultural expectations and the consequences of breaking these norms (often disownment and destitution).
 - Control by abusive partners preventing social interactions, reaching out for help from agencies, or accessing other resources.
 - Failure to recognise abuse due to cultural normalising or minimisation of abusive behaviours.
 - Language is a significant barrier, creating a fear of not being understood.

3.3.2. External barriers to accessing services

Other barriers the women identified are routed in social/structural factors:

- Insecure immigration status means women have no legal status without their perpetrator spouse; destitution and child separation being the only alternative.
- Racism (overt and subtle, structural racism) and unconscious bias create history of experiences which undermine women's confidence in being taken seriously and receiving support which meets their needs.
- Accessibility presented challenges in a number of ways:
 - Travel to services is costly and time-consuming,
 - Culture affects knowledge and understanding of social systems, and
 - Referral pathways are complex, and especially so for those with less cultural awareness of the systems involved.
 - Information about services is not made available in languages and formats that are accessible and are not targeted at women who are being prevented from engaging in society.

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I feel more comfortable when being examined by someone from my own background. I want to ask you a question, how many BAMER policemen are there actually? We do not feel represented in the police.

...

[A participant reported a doctor saying]

You Asian women don't take your medication.

You fast and ruin your health.

...

We want social workers and services who listens to us and investigates appropriately and sign posts to appropriate services.

...Where I come from women working in a restaurant, bar and pubs is seen as us being unfaithful.

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3.3.3. Perception of services

Women in the discussion groups made a number of observations about services they had or might come into contact with:

- **Community groups** were viewed positively, with women often more likely to disclose issues to a member of their own community as being more likely to be understood
- Women reported adequate support from **police**, but noted delays in responses, and often not being provided with interpreters, which they asserted is essential
- **Employment** is a protective factor, yet women are often culturally prevented from working or taking certain types of jobs. Where they are able to work they are often over qualified but unable to gain work at their skill level. Desire for work was strong; culture and language being the biggest barriers. Women identified language as affected almost every part of their lives; speaking English is important for life in the UK.
- The complexities, inconsistencies and conflicting experiences with **criminal and civil courts** undermines trust in these systems and creates fear, especially regarding the removal of children.
- **Health** professionals were recognised as a potentially crucial access point to more specialist services, highlighting the need for pro-active screening and questioning. Some women asserted a desire for more diverse ethnic representation amongst health staff, whilst others stated reservations about disclosing issues to members of their own community.
- Similar views were expressed around staffing in **mental health** services, whilst women also noted that mental health issues are still highly taboo in many cultures.
- Knowledge of the nature and role of **domestic violence refuges** seemed to be limited, but women felt that refuge would often not be able to meet specific cultural needs. They also noted that existing social isolation created through language and cultural barriers would be further compounded by moving to a refuge away from family and support networks.
- There was a high degree of fear and mistrust towards **social services** within the focus groups, with concerns focusing on a perceived high likelihood of Social Workers removing children from women's care. The women noted that abusers use this to manipulate women, and that raising awareness about the true picture would be beneficial. Rapid changing of staff was observed, creating

difficulties in building a rapport and reducing the likelihood of women raising issues of abuse.

- Women reported difficulties obtaining help and support from **local authorities**, especially the **housing departments**, where there are stringent requirements. Women can often struggle to understand or prove they meet these criteria in order to access safe accommodation.
- Some women looked to the **local authority** (council) to provide funding for community groups. Others had experience with council **housing departments** and felt there was a lack of support in finding safe alternative accommodation; providing evidence of abuse for this is often challenging for women and causes to them remain in abusive situations.
- Women often had conflicting views about **religious institutions**, asserting that no religion condones abuse although they often take a non-interventionist approach, or play a role in reconciling relationships where abuse may be a feature. It was noted that (non-Christian) religious leaders are male and may lack understanding from a female perspective. This may be compounded as some women would only seek guidance for such issues within their religious community.

4. Outcomes

4.1. Community Mapping

The mapping exercise found that amongst services offered for ethnically diverse women, whilst numbers of specialist services focusing on refugee, asylum and English language support were rising, there remain gaps in support on forced marriage, female genital mutilation and honour-based abuse. In general there are few ethnically sensitive/focused services, and those that exist are found in the areas of greater ethnic diversity: Milton Keynes, Oxford, Reading, and Slough.

4.2. Community Engagement Activities

The community engagement work took place for two years across the Thames Valley region. BAMER Support Workers engaged with 33 community groups representing women with heritage from at least eight African countries, six Asian countries, three European countries, three Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities, and 16 from mixed heritages. Engagement incorporated a variety of community-based activities such as cooking or craft sessions, religious and cultural events, trainings, presentations, and one-to-one support.

Engagement work **raised awareness** of abuse so that women were able to identify abusive behaviours and recognise the signs of abuse. It also raised awareness of how to respond when issues of abuse are raised, the support services available and how to access them.

BAMER Support Workers observed **improvements in service delivery** where more women from ethnically diverse backgrounds were accessing services. It is unclear if this is due to greater awareness of services through the project's work or through better cultural sensitivity from services as a result of the work; it could be both. An increase in ethnically diverse men accessing services was also noted anecdotally.

The project saw **increased participation** by ethnically diverse women, particularly where there was engagement with previously overlooked communities. This was accompanied by heightened engagement, where women expressed a desire for this to continue.

Although beyond the scope of the current project, it was also observed that there is a complex relationship between abuse/violence and other **issues within the community** such as suicide and mental health.

4.3. Client Casework through Outreach

Five of the six BAMER Support Workers provided outreach to 68 clients across Berkshire West, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. 37 different ethnic identities were recorded from across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and mixed heritages. An intensive and holistic approach was taken to offer psychosocial support alongside practical advocacy in various forms:

- Group work
- One-to-one community-based support
- Drop-in surgeries
- Peer support

The service offered **empowerment** by providing information, especially regarding women's rights, and by breaking down language barriers through enhanced cultural sensitivity and appropriate use of interpreters. Empowerment was also achieved by raising awareness of abuse, giving 'permission' for women to define abusive behaviours as not acceptable, prompting disclosures.

The outreach service demonstrated how crucial the role of **advocacy** is for ethnically diverse women, and how significantly this improves their experiences of services (especially statutory agencies) by bridging the gaps between women and agency professionals, often building new found

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I thought violence would only be physical. I didn't know it could be going to bed with him even when I didn't want to. I also thought that, because I was married to him, I had to sleep with him, as and when he demanded. I thought this is normal if you are married.

...

I will live with the abuse rather than get divorced. Divorce in my culture means my life is over.

...

Women will always be blamed and asked 'why do you wind him up?' 'That is just how men are.' Their family will also hold similar views and ask them to put up with the situation.

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trust and confidence. This often extended to aiding clients in navigating the complex pathways in and between services.

Significant outcomes were achieved in **securing the safety** of women accessing the service by offering a more nuanced and informed approach to assessing risk. This allowed for more prompt and relevant interventions, including those related to mental health issues. This often went hand-in-hand with tenacious advocacy to secure safe and stable accommodation, especially in cases where clients had no recourse to public funds.

Women participating in outreach support gained considerable support on **immigration** issues, including signposting and brokerage with specialist agencies and legal advice. In one area three mothers were reunited with their children who had been residing overseas and where such residency was being used as a tool for abuse and manipulation.

BAMER Support Workers identified, acknowledged and learned how to respond to forms of abuse which are only recently coming to recognition in white Western cultures. These included transboundary abandonment, breast ironing, and black magic.

Provider agencies in the BAMER Project observed an increase in ethnically diverse men accessing services and noted the need to develop services and responses for male survivors.

4.4. Partnership Working

Close partnership working created an environment for **intensive and holistic** support with significantly improved relationships, and at times creating new and simpler pathways to services. Partnership working enabled BAMER Support Workers to raise the status and profile of ethnic minority women, educating professionals through positive engagement and advocacy.

The relationships arising from this work provided wider platforms to learn from other professionals and share learning with them to enhance the approaches taken by professionals from a range of agencies. It also presented opportunities to offer trainings and presentations to further enhance awareness and develop appropriate responses within partner agencies.

On occasion, partnership links were used to leverage funding and other resources, where provider agencies collaborated with other organisations to identify gaps in provision and pool resources or apply for funding to address local issues, such as funding child care or travel costs to enhance accessibility to services.

5. Peer Review Audit

The audit was structured as a questionnaire around six themes designed to draw out an understanding of how organisations plan and respond to victims and survivors from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Seventeen agencies offering support around abuse and violence against women were approached, and five responded:

- DASH Charity

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- MK-ACT
 - Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service
 - Thames Valley ISVA Service
 - Wycombe Women's Aid

5.1. Mission and goals

All five organisations considered issues of ethnic diversity at strategic and operational levels in a planned way. This was not always pro-active at Board level, and Board memberships tended to be white British. All organisations recognised diversity and nuance within and across all ethnic identities.

5.2. Administration and staffing

All organisations proactively addressed ethnic diversity through recruitment and staff induction and development, ensuring representation and awareness. They all provided training on all aspects of violence against women and girls and on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion; where these were not mandated individually, all topics were covered across the team as a whole. Gaps were noted in respect of deeper specialisations (issues around multiple perpetrators, breast ironing, acid attacks).

5.3. Service development

All organisations were confident the ability of their staff to recognise and respond with cultural sensitivity to all forms of abuse and violence, and were able to offer support to clients from ethnically diverse team members. Respondents noted the need for specialist knowledge of the complex and interconnected pathways for clients and reported this was present in their teams. Provision of ethnically specific/sensitive programmes of support was mixed, some organisations providing none, others offering up to one or two options. Accessible support (i.e. face-to-face, as asserted by ethnically diverse women) was available with workers from ethnically diverse backgrounds in all organisations. All organisations used interpreters, however publicity and service information tended to only be available in English, with only one exception. Information was centred on sexual violence or domestic abuse, and the absence of information relating to ethnically specific issues of abuse could create an accessibility barrier. All organisations sought client feedback to inform practice, and also worked in partnership with other agencies, thereby raising awareness of relevant issues through advocacy, particularly at multi-agency forums.

5.4. Site and facilities

The responding organisations tended to have main offices in central and accessible locations, whilst all offered appointments for clients in convenient community-based locations. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on accessibility for ethnically diverse women as face-to-face meetings are now not taking place; online contact from within the home is often not possible for women experiencing high levels of control. The impact for non-English speakers is even greater as most technology-based alternatives are not feasible for them.

5.5. Working environment

There were clear referral pathways into organisations, who also share relevant information and anonymised data with other agencies in line with regulations, to deliver and plan service provision. All provide ongoing training and staff development in regards to unconscious bias and underpin practice with policies on equality, diversity and inclusion, GDPR, and confidentiality.

5.6. Assessment and evaluation

All organisations stated that they seek and include ethnically diverse female voices in their assessment. Only one organisation supported this with evidence, and two organisations misunderstood the question and referenced their use of individual needs/risk assessments with clients. Responding organisations noted gaps in data collection and recording which would help with assessment and evaluation of services, although two did record and analyse outcomes for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

6. Challenges

6.1. Universal credit

The single payment policy of universal credit is disempowering to women whose spouses are already financially controlling and prevents any opportunity to develop the financial independence required to escape abuse.

6.2. Communication

Availability and capacity of BAMER Support Workers, and of professionals in other agencies can lead to delays and mis-timings in communication. This is especially true when women experiencing abuse through controlling behaviour often have very narrow windows of opportunity to be in contact with professionals.

6.3. Attachment to BAMER Support Workers

The skill and cultural sensitivity of the BAMER Support Workers created a relationship of trust in which women formed strong attachments, creating reluctance to engage with other professionals where the same trust had not been developed. This could create conflicts in time management for workers who had limited capacity, and at times extended to a desire by women to maintain contact with BAMER Support Workers once their cases were closed.

6.4. Emergency accommodation

The availability and timeliness of access to emergency accommodation is limited and this presents significant barriers and risks to women who may choose to remain in an abusive situation because accommodation is not accessible. When available, accommodation may not be culturally appropriate, creating the same dilemma for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

6.5. Recording data

There are significant inconsistencies between agencies (statutory and non-statutory) in collecting and recording ethnicity data. In many cases ethnicity data is not recorded at all, and some agencies are openly reluctant to do so. This makes it impossible to create a holistic picture, to infer accurate patterns, or to perform meaningful comparisons on which to understand what is happening or to plan how to respond. It should be noted that for many agencies there are resource implications for recording, processing, and reporting such information.

6.6. Understanding and assessing risk for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds

BAMER Support Workers found that agencies undertaking DASH RIC assessments with women from ethnically diverse backgrounds would often miss or misunderstand information which was relevant to risk for the individual concerned due to a lack of cultural awareness. Pre-existing risks had gone unseen by agencies involved; this may be due to women not feel safe to disclose to professionals they did not trust, or they disclosed in a way that is not interpreted in the way they intend by professionals from white Western culture. This could result in missed opportunities to intervene and provide appropriate safety planning at the earliest stage, requiring remedial work from BAMER Support Workers.

6.7. Cafcass

Women engaging with the project asserted that Cafcass tended to demonstrate little understanding of the dynamics, risks or impacts of domestic abuse. They also reported a lack of a holistic approach.

6.8. Interpreting services

The use of non-independent (family or local community member) interpreters is common amongst some agencies and is problematic for the disclosure of abuse or discussion of any sensitive topics. When professional interpreters are used nuances of a narrative can still be missed, either due the service being accessed over the phone instead of face-to-face, or because of colloquial differences in language. Cost is often a factor in agency decisions about use of interpreters.

6.9. Working with clients without recourse to public funds

Support services and other resources (e.g. housing) are severely limited for women with no recourse to public funds, which creates significant vulnerabilities for women experiencing violence or abuse whilst in this situation. Where resources are available, access to them is often complex and or time consuming, each compounding the vulnerability and risk faced by women in these scenarios.

6.10. Partnership working

There are inevitable tensions and competing priorities when working with multiple agencies, and developing a shared understanding of a new and complex project amongst a diverse group of agencies takes time. Effective collaboration requires a shared understanding of and appreciation

for the remit, role, values, ethos restrictions and funding arrangements of each agency. In any event the diversity in these matters creates limitations around scope and activity alongside potentially time-consuming processes (e.g. decision-making).

6.11. Scarcity of services and community groups

The mapping exercise found there are few services in Thames Valley specialising in issues experienced by women from ethnic minority communities. Those addressing violence and abuse do not have specialist BAMER Workers (except for within this project), although they do offer support around honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. There are skilled specialised organisations operating at a national level, but there remains a significant gap for women needing to access local specialist services.

The mapping of community groups proved challenging as they often exist as informal groups with no 'formal' footprint, e.g. offices, website, public accounts etc. Some groups that were identified did not wish to engage with the project, and more are believed to exist than those identified.

6.12. Diversity of the client and engagement groups

Many of the community groups had mixed ethnicity membership. At times this presented challenges linked to the disparity in experiences and empowerment when attempting to engage with each participant on an equal footing on issues around power in relationships.

6.13. Scope of the BAMER Project and its work

The potential scope of the project was vast, and workloads required dynamic management. BAMER Support Workers reported that professionals such as Social Workers and Police Officers recognised the value of their roles, evidenced by direct contact requesting advice and assistance with complex cases.

6.14. Distrust and disengagement

Women often did not want to participate in a project funded by the Home Office due to suspicions linked to immigration issues. It required hard work from the BAMER Support Workers to overcome this barrier and gain engagement.

6.15. Supporting male victims

There tends to be little understanding or awareness of male victimhood within ethnic minority communities, which leads to a dearth in support. This project supported a number of male victims, and noted that training is needed, especially to address the scepticism of some professionals around the authenticity of ethnic minority males who disclose abuse.

6.16. Funding issues

Funding in the VAWG sector is scarce, and for minority groups within that, even scarcer. Where funding is available, capacity and sustainability are often significant issues, and resources such as interpreter services or translated written materials are often not acknowledged/permitted in

grants and commissioned services. Additionally, community groups also face funding issues with uncertain futures.

6.17. Data collection

Lack of data has been a significant hindrance in understanding and interpreting the full context for this project. This has been due, at times, to considerations of confidentiality and safety of those concerned, whilst at other times there were simply non-responses. On other occasions it was found that different agencies record information in different ways and categories, making meaningful comparisons difficult.

7. Lessons identified

7.1. Identities

There are numerous variations and distinctions within the ‘categories’ of ethnic identity which have been arbitrarily created for data processing purposes. For example, there are vast differences across the range of Asian, and African identities; in particular Black African and Black Caribbean cultures differ greatly, but are often grouped together in white Western ‘measures’ of ethnicity.

7.2. Scope of the BAMER Project work

The scope of the project was vast and naturally required refining as the project progressed; a focus on meaningful and intensive engagement with women from ethnic minority communities was felt to be most appropriate and impactful.

7.3. Solution-focused approach

Honesty and transparency about ‘agenda’ and the nature of work was key to building trust; women engaged when they perceived a focus on finding solutions to their expressed concerns and issues.

7.4. Acceptance of domestic abuse as a community issue

Resistance to accepting issues of abuse and violence within communities was common, but meaningful conversations arose when these issues were considered in through the lens of positive relationships.

7.5. Dependence and empowerment

The skill and knowledge of BAMER Support Workers enabled them to foster trusted relationships, and it was noted that women formed strong attachments based on this. Issues of dependence versus empowerment arise here, alongside a need to recognise that the journey to empowerment may be more complex and take longer when the nature and degree of oppression is more intense to begin with.

7.6. Language, interpretation, and translation

Language gives the ability to understand, and express oneself, and is crucial particularly in sensitive and stressful situations. Provision of independent interpreters is crucial; availability of information and materials a range of languages is needed to increase awareness and access to services. Access to learning English as a second language is a basic tool of empowerment for women.

7.7. Domestic abuse refuge

There is misinformation about what refuge is, and what is involved in moving to refuge which acts as a barrier to this option for many women from minority ethnic backgrounds. Some misgivings, however, are founded in truth, and much refuge provision does not fully cater to the nuanced and various needs of the range of non-Western cultures.

7.8. Helpline

Traditional helpline services, especially where these are the 'point of access' to other specialist services, do not meet the needs of many women from minority communities; telephone and email contact are significant barriers for those with little or no English, who may not know or trust that a safe and confidential interpreter service can be made available.

7.9. Financial pressure

Strong cultural expectations for males to financially support their family puts pressure on men who do not feel able to talk about the issue, and compounds the isolation experienced by many women.

7.10. Perpetrator programmes

Current provision of perpetrator programmes does not take account of the significant concepts of shame/honour, not the community dynamic which often produces multiple perpetrators within one scenario. They also fail to acknowledge the role of female family members as perpetrators in some (mainly honour-based) cases.

7.11. Risk level

Risk for women from ethnic minority backgrounds needs to be seen through a complex intersectional lens. Currently the DASH RIC assessments being undertaken by statutory agencies often do not reflect the cultural and community dynamics which influence the risk faced by women from such communities. This means risks can remain unidentified, leading to crisis scenarios of 'sudden escalation' when previously unseen risks come to bear.

7.12. Women from the European Economic Area (EEA)

Women from the EEA are often not seen as coming from minority communities and can be overlooked in this respect. Their immigration status can be insecure due to changes in spousal relationship and other technical/legal requirements, creating vulnerabilities which impact their options and choices in response to abuse and violence.

7.13. Childcare facilities

For many ethnic minority communities, women have sole responsibility for childcare, creating a barrier to engagement and access to services.

7.14. Criminal justice system and civil courts

UK legal systems are complex and many women, especially first-generation immigrants, have little or no understanding of they work. This is disempowering and is compounded by the costs associated with court proceedings.

7.15. Mental health issues

Mental health issues remain a highly taboo subject in many minority communities, and as such a culturally sensitive approach is required; the project noted an expressed desire for more ethnically diverse representation in mental health services.

7.16. Health

Those who require spousal or family support with language for health appointments are denied the opportunity to discuss private issues relating to abuse or other sensitive topics with their health professional. This is potentially a crucial access point to specialist services and as such a missed opportunity. It may be further compounded by a lack of awareness amongst some professionals regarding the more culturally specific signs of abuse.

7.17. Housing

There is a long-standing lack of affordable housing across the Thames Valley region, and this creates a significant barrier for women needing to flee from abuse and violence. Where refuge, supported accommodation or local authority housing might be available, processes can be time consuming with negative impacts for women and their children. Often the need to produce evidence of abuse to gain local authority housing is prohibitive, and many women remain in situations of abuse for lack of any safe alternative.

7.18. Police

Women reported that they would be much more likely to call the police if they had previously had positive experiences with them, and stated that when they are kept informed of progress in their case(s), this create a sense of a good experience. Women noted that police need to use patience and professional curiosity to help overcome the language and culture barriers which can otherwise prevent them from gaining a full understanding of the situation from the woman concerned.

7.19. Social services

Women reported feelings of mistrust towards Social Workers which can be further impacted by their authoritative manner, especially if attending jointly with police. This can be experienced as intimidating by many women from ethnically diverse backgrounds and prevents the building of trust which would enable women to open up about their circumstances and any potential abuse.

Women also expressed a desire for a more holistic approach, taking account of their needs as well as their children.

7.20. Banks

Financial control is a common tool in cases of abuse and women stated that changes to the policies of banks would better enable them to gain the financial independence they require to escape abuse and find safety. They also asserted that a more sensitive approach from staff would help to reduce rather than increase the distress of the situation.

8. Developments

A number of projects or programmes have already grown out of the activities and findings of the BAMER Project.

8.1. Ilam Programme

Ilam-El-Hifzat, shorted to Ilam, is a version of the Freedom Programme which was developed by MK-ACT to be culturally relevant for women from ethnic minority backgrounds. The programme explores information about the power and control involved in abusive relationships in the context of specific cultural features such as language, concepts of shame and honour, and community dynamics. It has been shown to be effective and have positive outcomes for participants in rebuilding safe lives and futures.

8.2. New Bridges

Two stakeholder and collaborator agencies, Oxford Against Cutting and The Sunrise Centre (in Banbury) worked together to create some significant activities:

- ‘Reaching Services’ workshop, supported by leaflets, to raise awareness around definitions and signs of abuse and what services are available to provide support,
- ‘Delivering services’ for professionals to understand and address any aspects of services which may present barriers to women coming forward,
- ‘Data master’ workshop, exploring the benefits and challenges to collecting and sharing meaningful data around honour-based abuse, and
- A film created around a drama written by a group of young Asian females, which shares important messages for peer audiences, but is also able to support the ‘Delivering Services’ workshops.

8.3. No Recourse to Public Funds Pathway Development

In recognition of the limited options and risk of destitution faced by women with no recourse to public funds who need to flee abuse, Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service formed a partnership with the Sanctuary Hosting scheme in Thames Valley. The scheme offers temporary, safe, accommodation through placement with voluntary hosts. The three organisations collaborated to form a defined referral pathway for victims and survivors fleeing abuse so that this option is embedded into practice and so that the complexity and timescales

associated with this can be minimised. The pathway has been successfully piloted and will be rolled out across Thames Valley to ensure equal opportunities to access this resource.

9. Recommendations

1. Developing specialist, ethnically sensitive VAWG training
2. Delivering workshops for community groups
3. Consistent data collection, reporting and sharing
4. Delivering ethnically sensitive preventative work and awareness raising
5. Developing clear pathways for victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities
6. Improving responses from VAWG services for clients from ethnic minority communities
7. Improving engagement with women's community groups
8. Commissioning VAWG services with specific support for ethnic minority victims and survivors
9. Ensuring issues experienced by those who are from ethnic minority communities are heard at strategic and operational boards
10. Developing a detailed VAWG service directory

10. Future work

As previously discussed, this project uncovered a wealth of information and issues that were beyond its scope. Of those, some form important areas for future work, either to complement what has been achieved in this project, or to take it further:

- In depth work in reviewing statutory agencies policies and procedures on responding to different abuses which have affected women from ethnic minority communities,
- Exploration of how to take forward the learning from this project which was outside its remit for recommendations, for example mental health services, and the courts,
- Explore ways in which service provider organisations of all types can be supported to develop more diverse workforces, and
- Consideration should be given to viability of the development of a holistic, specialist, ethnically focused support service.

Glossary

Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) – a collective term for people living in the United Kingdom whose heritage is not white British.

Children's Services – often referred to (especially in this report) as 'social services', this is the team within the local government Health and Social Care department with responsibility for child protection and safeguarding issues, and for supporting families.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (known as Cafcass) – Cafcass represents children in family court cases in England. They advise the family courts about what is

safe for children and in their best interests. They make sure that children's voices are heard at the heart of the family court setting.

Community Groups – a grass-roots community-based group or organisation which works for the public benefit and the activities carried out by the group will benefit a particular group of people within the community.

Community Safety Partnership (CSP) – a groups formed from responsible statutory agencies within a Local Authority area who work together to protect their local communities from crime and to help people feel safer. Some Local Authority areas join with neighbouring areas for this function (for example South Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse form the South and Vale CSP).

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) – the principal public agency responsible for conducting criminal prosecutions in England and Wales.

Council – this is the term often used to refer to the local authority, the local government agency with statutory responsibility to implement and oversee certain areas of public services and public life (e.g. housing, waste collection services, parks etc.).

Data Protection – see 'General Data Protection Regulation' below.

Designated MARAC Officer (DMO) – a trained professional who represents their organisation at the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – see also below.

Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) – this allows people who may be eligible to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain under the Domestic Violence Rule to access public funds whilst they make their application, if they can meet the basic initial test for domestic violence and destitution. It lasts for 3 months and during this period they can claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), make a homeless application, or go into a refuge.

Domestic Abuse (DA) – a pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, abusive and violent behaviour perpetrated by a partner, ex-partner, or family member. Such abuse includes: coercive and controlling behaviour, psychological or emotional abuse, financial and economic abuse, physical or sexual abuse, stalking or harassment.

Domestic Abuse Risk Levels – There are 3 levels of risk relating to domestic abuse, which refer to the risk of serious harm posed to the victim and is assessed through the DASH RIC (see below). Serious harm is defined as 'a risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible'

- Standard – there are no significant current indicators of risk of serious harm
- Medium – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The offender is likely to cause serious harm if there is a change in circumstances, i.e. a failure to take medication, relationship breakdown, pregnancy
- High – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious.

Domestic Abuse Stalking and Honour-Based Abuse Risk Indicator Checklist (DASH RIC) – an evidence-based tool for practitioners who work with victims of domestic abuse to assess the risk posed to victims and survivors, and to identify those who are at high risk of harm.

Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) & Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) – this is an emergency non-molestation and eviction notice which is issued by the police following a domestic abuse incident. The Notice is served first, and the police must apply to a magistrate’s court within 48 hours for an Order. The Order prevents the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. Breach of a DVPO is a criminal offence with a maximum sentence of 2 months imprisonment.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order (FGMPO) – it is a legal means to protect and safeguard victims or potential victims of female genital mutilation. Each Order is unique to the individual and can include surrendering a passport or requirements that no one arranges for genital mutilation to be performed. The maximum sentence for breach of a FGMPO is 5 years imprisonment.

Forced Marriage (FM) a marriage where one or both partners is married without giving their consent or against their will.

Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO) – the court can make an Order that can be used to protect the person who has been, or is being, forced into marriage against their will. The maximum sentence for breach of a FMPO is 5 years imprisonment.

Freedom Programme – this is a group work programme for female victims and survivors of domestic abuse to help raise their awareness of the abusive tactics used by their male partners, written by Pat Craven. It has been noted by some that the programme is culturally specific to white Western societies.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – it is a set of rules which gives citizens more control over their personal data held by private and public organisations. These organisations must ensure that personal data is gathered and processed legally and under strict conditions. The organisation is obliged to protect the data from misuse and exploitation, as well as respecting the rights of data owners, including the right to privacy. There are financial penalties for breaching the data protection.

Health and Social Care – the department within a local authority with responsibility for the safeguarding and support of children and vulnerable adults, through Children’s Services and Adult Services, respectively.

Honour-Based Abuse (HBA) – in some communities the concept of honour is extremely important. HBA is a crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community.

Indefinite Leave to Remain – is an immigration status granted to a person who does not hold the right of abode in the United Kingdom but who has been admitted to the UK and is free to take up employment or study.

Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA) – work with victims and survivors who face a high risk from domestic abuse to address and support their safety needs.

Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) – provide specialist tailored support to victims and survivors of sexual violence, irrespective of whether they have reported to the police.

Intersectionality – is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (e.g., gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, height, etc.) combine to create unique, layered experiences of discrimination and privilege.

LGBTIQA+ – stands for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual', and many other terms (hence +).

Local Authority – the local government agency with statutory responsibility to implement and oversee certain areas of public services and public life (e.g. housing, waste collection services, parks etc.).

McKenzie Friend – a person who accompanies a victim to court to help them as a Litigant in Person. A Litigant in Person is an individual who makes a claim without legal representation from a solicitor or barrister. The McKenzie Friend can sit with the victim in court, offer advice and support as well as taking notes. They cannot litigate or file court documents or statements.

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) - is a monthly meeting between statutory and other relevant agencies, who discuss the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and if necessary their children, and draw up an action plan to help manage that risk. Victims and survivors are commonly referred to MARAC but police, but any professional agency can refer.

Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC) – MATACs are to ensure agencies work in partnership to engage serial domestic abuse perpetrators in support, take enforcement action where required and protect vulnerable and intimidated victims. The multi-agency meetings assess and plan a bespoke set of interventions to target and disrupt the perpetrators and/or support them to address their behaviour.

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) - a term used for people who are subject to immigration control and have no entitlement to welfare benefits, to home office asylum support for asylum seekers or to public housing.

Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) – the staff working for the local Police and Crime Commissioner who is an elected official charged with securing efficient and effective policing of a police area.

Refuge – a refuge is a safe house for a person and their children fleeing domestic abuse. Generally, the person fleeing domestic abuse will be housed in a refuge outside of the area in which they have been living for safety reasons.

Sharia Law – is a religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition. It is derived from the religious precepts of Islam, particularly the Quran and the hadith. Sharia law acts as a code for living that all Muslims should adhere to, including prayers, fasting, and donations to the poor. It aims to help Muslims understand how they should lead every aspect of their lives according to God's wishes.

Social Services – an outdated term, but which is still in common use by the general public, to refer to the Children's Services department within the local government Health and Social Care department. It has responsibility for child protection and safeguarding issues, and for supporting families.

Thames Valley BAMER Project (TVBP, also referred to as the BAMER Project) – a two-year project in the Thames Valley area to identify the needs and barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who have been affected by abuse perpetrated by a partner, ex-partner, family member(s) or community.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) – any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Such violence includes: all forms of domestic abuse; sexual assault or rape; child, early or forced marriage; female genital mutilation; honour-based abuse; and, trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation.



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