



# Thames Valley BAMER Project Final Report

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By Agya Poudyal  
Foreword by Liz Jones and Wendy  
Walker  
Edited by Becci Seaborne



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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.

## **Liz Jones**

Domestic Abuse Lead for Oxford City Council, and  
Founding Member of the Thames Valley Domestic Abuse Coordinators Network

## **Wendy Walker**

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

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# 1. Overview of the project

## 1.1. Context

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a global pandemic that affects females from all socio-economic backgrounds. In the UK, one in four women are domestically abused by a partner, ex-partner or other family member, and one in five women are sexually assaulted by a perpetrator during their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Violence and abuse perpetrated against Black, Asian, ethnic minority and refugee (BAMER, or ethnically diverse) women often go unreported and are hidden due to systemic socio-cultural and institutional factors. It is, therefore, hard to ascertain what percentage of women who are domestically abused and/or sexually assaulted come from ethnic minority communities. Consent and rape within marriage are not recognised concepts among many cultures.

Among other forms of violence against women and girls which are specific to ethnically diverse women, 137,000 women and girls who have migrated to England and Wales are living with the consequences of female genital mutilation (FGM).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, in 2018 the Forced Marriage Unit supported 1,764 people via its public helpline and emails.<sup>3</sup>

Although existing VAWG services are open to women from all backgrounds, abuse and violence perpetrated against women from ethnic minority backgrounds often vary in form and context from those more prevalent in the dominant culture. The surrounding issues have multiple layers which prevent them from being able to engage with services or make disclosures. Even after gathering the courage to approach services and make disclosures, there are many institutional and policy-related hurdles women must overcome to receive effective support. Such barriers extend to issues surrounding immigration law, not having access to public funds, dominant cultural beliefs embedded in patriarchy and colonialism, and not being able to speak the language. It is also important to consider that ethnically diverse populations are not a homogenous group and additionally there are cross-cutting issues of gender, race, caste, and class from within ethnically diverse populations, and services should reflect and understand these intersectional dimensions.

The Thames Valley BAMER Project was developed against this background with the aim of enabling and empowering women from different ethnicities, experiencing various forms of abuse and violence to approach, access and receive needs-led support from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The project recognises the need to develop and strengthen VAWG services for different strands of abuse and violence faced specifically by ethnically diverse women, and to ensure that the support available meets their specific and unique needs as informed by women from ethnic minority communities.

The Thames Valley BAMER Project was a two-year project running between April 2018 and March 2020 and was funded through the Home Office 'Violence Against Women and Girls Transformation

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<sup>1</sup><https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/07/violence-against-women-and-girls-and-male-position-factsheets/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/fgm-female-genital-mutilation-uk-girls-number-doubles-year-england-wales-a8660036.html>

<sup>3</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/869764/Forced\\_Marriage\\_Unit\\_Statistics.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869764/Forced_Marriage_Unit_Statistics.pdf)

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Fund'. The project was managed by Thames Valley BAMER Board, chaired by the OPCC with representatives from Local Authorities and local VAWG services.

The Thames Valley BAMER Project recognises this report is focused on a broad generalisation of needs and acknowledges that each community is different and should be studied in more detail going forward. Some groups of women see BAMER as an othering term whereas some felt that the distinction is necessary to cater to the distinct needs and demands of different ethnic communities.

## 1.2. Aims and objectives

The Thames Valley BAMER Project aims and objectives were set out in the bid to the Home Office, and the stated aims were to:

- Assess, improve, and better coordinate the multi-agency response to violence against women and girls in ethnically diverse 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 ethnically diverse 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; and
- Ensure that women from ethnic minority 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.

These aims were to be achieved by the following 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 ethnic minority 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' ethnically sensitive 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 ethnic minority 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 ethnic minority communities; and
- 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.

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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 Thames Valley BAMER Project operated across the Thames Valley Region, which is constituted of the three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire. These are further divided into Local Authority areas. The Local Authorities work jointly with other statutory bodies to form Community Safety Partnerships, who are formed across the Thames Valley as illustrated below.



The Thames Valley BAMER Project was primarily delivered by six BAMER Support Workers; two in each county. These roles were employed by four different VAWG service providers who were appointed through open competitive tendering by the relevant Local Authorities on behalf of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. They were coordinated by the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Officer who oversaw the project operation across Thames Valley, and was hosted by Oxford City Council as an independent statutory body. The project itself was managed by the BAMER Board, which was made up of representatives of the following organisations:

- Office of Police and Crime Commissioner – Bid author, fund-holder, Chair of the Board
- Oxford City Council - Bid signatory, host to Strategic Officer
- Reading Borough Council - Bid signatory
- Slough Borough Council - Bid signatory
- Buckinghamshire County Council - Bid signatory
- Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council - Bid signatory
- Bracknell Forest Council - Bid signatory



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- West Berkshire Council – Bid signatory
  - Oxfordshire County Council – Bid signatory
  - Wokingham Borough Council – Bid signatory
  - Milton Keynes Council – Bid signatory
  - A2Dominion Domestic Abuse Services (Delivering Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, ODAS) - Host to two BAMER Support Workers (Oxfordshire County Council area)
  - MK-ACT - Host to two BAMER Support Worker (Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire County Council areas)
  - Hestia - Host to one BAMER Support Worker (Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough, and Bracknell Council areas)
  - Berkshire Women’s Aid – Host to one BAMER Support Worker (West Berkshire, Reading Borough, and Wokingham Council areas)
  - Oxford Against Cutting – Bid signatory, key stakeholder, collaborator
  - Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre – Bid signatory, key stakeholder, collaborator

Additionally, the Thames Valley BAMER Project commissioned an independent project evaluator to assess the process and initial impact of the project operation.

## 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

This report is written based on The Thames Valley BAMER Project’s experiences of talking to women from ethnic minority communities, supporting clients through casework, data gathered from voluntary and statutory services, and outcomes of the project activities. The project was completed in two stages and this report encapsulates the activities and outcomes of these processes.

The project, however, has been more complex and larger than it was initially envisaged. The project uncovered more complexities which are outside the scope of this project and need a more targeted project approach in the future. Many of the achievements of the project are not easily quantified. Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the activities, approach, and the methods of collecting information for this report.

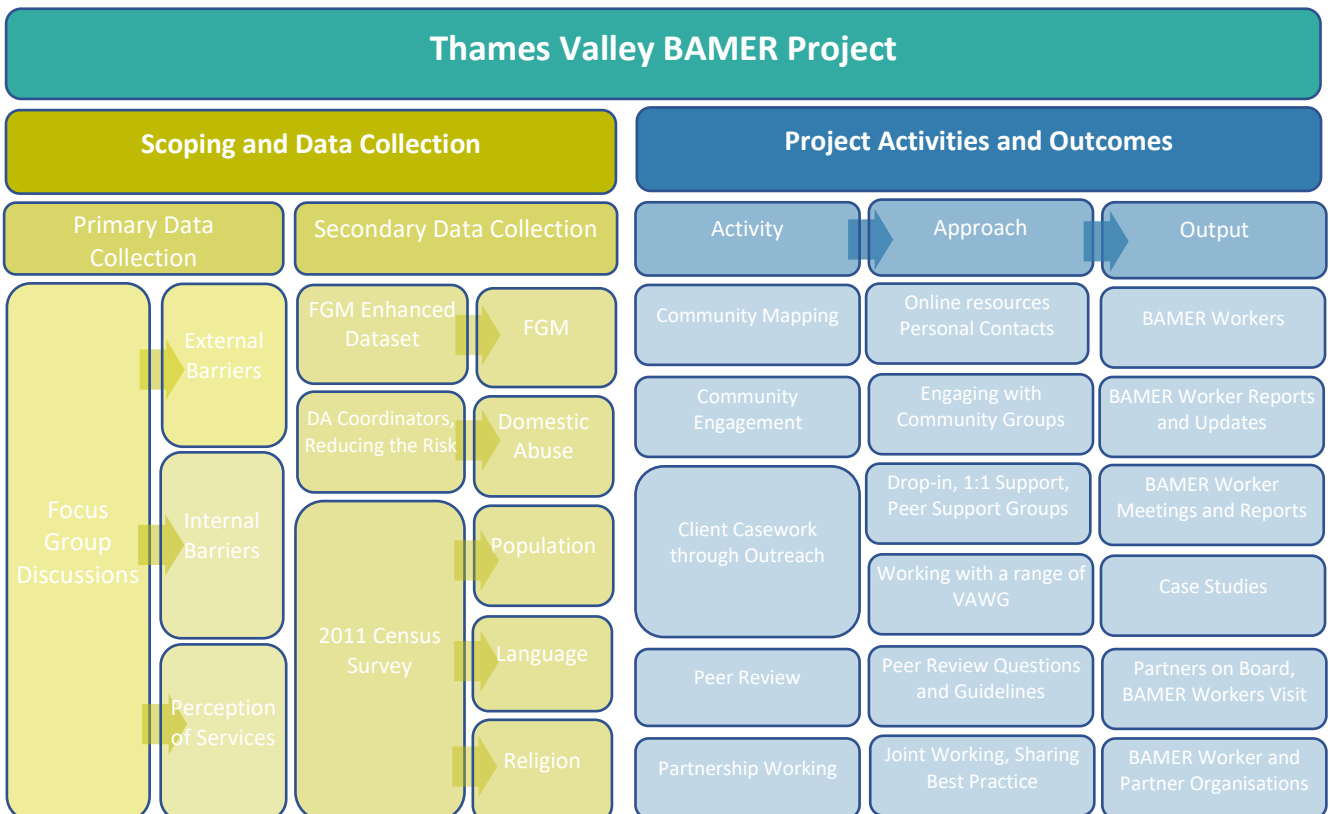


Figure 1 - Project Activities, Methodology and Outcomes

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## 2.1. Key project concerns

The nature of this project required all activities to be completed whilst giving due concern to the following issues.

**Confidentiality and safety** were given considerable discussion and care by the BAMER Support Workers when designing and delivering focus groups, so that the activities did not pose additional risks to the women or their families. This was especially taken care of during group discussion activities where women feel vulnerable in exposing their situation to other women. For focus group discussions and individual interviews, women were informed about the purpose of the project in advance and asked for voluntary explicit consent which they could withdraw at any time. Full confidentiality was always maintained. In some cases, audio recordings were not consented to but note taking was.

**Language** was a key factor; focus group discussions and individual interviews were generally conducted in English and where possible the first language of the client. All the BAMER Support Workers and the Strategic Officer spoke two or more languages, including English.

The project operated in three core stages explored below; scoping, activities, and measuring outcomes and impact, the first two of which were completed simultaneously.

**Partnership working** was a major component of the project and provided some significant learning experiences. The outcomes of this, collected from BAMER Support Workers, is included in the report.

## 2.2. Scoping

The scoping of the project was to establish a current state analysis of reporting and responses in relation to violence against women and girls amongst women from different ethnic backgrounds. To do this, it was important to understand the demographics of populations in different parts of Thames Valley and how the national statistics compared with the local situation. This scoping review provides a starting point for a more comprehensive review. Both qualitative and quantitative data were reviewed to understand issues faced by ethnic minority women concerning violence against women and girls, but data analysis methods have largely been qualitative.

The scoping was carried out in two ways:

### 2.2.1. Primary data collection

Primary data for scoping was collected to understand the following issues faced by women from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This was achieved via focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews which grew out of the community engagement (see below):

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

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

The discussions were conducted by BAMER Support Workers after engaging with different community groups over time, to build a rapport. The different approaches undertaken with the focus groups is discussed in more detail below.

### **2.2.2. Secondary data collection**

Secondary data was collected for understanding the context with different strands of violence against women and girls. Data was gathered as follows:

- 2011 Census survey was used to analyse data on population, religion, and language to understand the demographics within Thames Valley<sup>4</sup>,
- Data on female genital mutilation was collected through the female genital mutilation enhanced dataset, a repository for individual level data collected by healthcare providers in England,
- Information on forced marriage was obtained through reports from the Forced Marriage Unit,
- Domestic abuse data were received from the region's various Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), from domestic abuse services and from some sexual violence services,
- Data from domestic homicide reviews were received from the Community Safety Partnerships in Thames Valley, and
- Honour-based abuse data was collected through Karma Nirvana, a national charity.

### **2.2.3. Data interpretation and dissemination**

Data interpretation and dissemination required analysis of both primary and secondary data collected through focus group discussions and online research. This included understanding internal and external barriers and other information obtained through the BAMER Project activities:

- Analysing project data received, drafting interim reports and the final report,
- Using data analysis to inform ongoing engagement with communities, and
- Providing recommendations on how to make services more approachable and accessible for ethnically diverse women, based on the project activities.

## **2.3. Community activities**

The second operational aspect of this project involved the community-based activities, as outlined below.

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<sup>4</sup> It is acknowledged the information from this Census will not accurately reflect the situation in 2018-20

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### 2.3.1. Community mapping

Activities were carried out by both the Strategic Officer and the BAMER Support Workers by exploring existing contacts, online information, and snowballing information about existing services. Mapping was recorded in a spreadsheet.

### 2.3.2. Community engagement

The community engagement activity for the project took place over two years in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and West Berkshire, and one year in East Berkshire. Activities were carried out by BAMER Support Workers engaging closely with existing community groups mostly run by women:

- Raising awareness by engaging with existing community and women's groups and developing new ones,
- Mapping ethnic communities, community groups and existing services across Thames Valley,
- Assessing needs and identifying issues through focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews, and
- Engaging with women who have used VAWG services and women who have not, to map casework and services, and to understand barriers to access.

### 2.3.3. Outreach

Outreach activities ensured that BAMER Support Workers were available for one-to-one support with clients who wanted support around experiences of abuse following the community engagement work. In all but one area this was offered by the BAMER Support Workers; in one area (covering three local authority areas) the BAMER Support Worker focused on community engagement work and referred or signposted women to appropriate services.

Where the BAMER Project's outreach service was available it was also offered to women who were referred into the established VAWG services in the usual way and were assessed as likely to benefit from the specialist approach from BAMER Support Workers.

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:

- Two areas offered specialist, ethnically sensitive group work programmes.
- Three areas offered a traditional outreach service through an arranged appointment system with a specific allocated BAMER Support Worker over a period of time.
- Two areas provided drop-in surgeries where women could attend between defined times for an impromptu appointment with the covering BAMER Support Worker. This was often as a one off, although this could be repeated or lead into the more traditional outreach service.

- 
- Two areas facilitated peer support opportunities.

Referral routes into the service varied across the areas and service providers. In general, referrals were either received and put forward via established helplines and referral routes, were proactively identified by BAMER Support Workers from the engagement with community groups or were received from those groups themselves.

Information on outreach was collected through updates in the Thames Valley BAMER Project operational meetings and reports sent in through BAMER Support Workers. Not all BAMER Support Workers had client work as part of their job description but learning was still identified when supporting clients in different ways. Information on client work was collected through BAMER Support Workers, case studies and interviews.

### **2.3.4. Trainings and presentations**

BAMER Support Workers trained professionals and community groups on different strands of VAWG:

- Training helpline staff in VAWG services on engaging with clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds,
- Developing a training package to support agencies in addressing the barriers that ethnically diverse women face in accessing services through the New Bridges programme (a collaboration between Oxford Against Cutting and Sunrise Centre, Banbury),
- Developing training for front-line workers who engage with clients from diverse ethnic backgrounds,
- Completing Ilam-El-Hifzat training to enable delivery of a culturally sensitive version of the Freedom Programme for ethnically diverse women (MK-ACT BAMER Support Workers in Milton Keynes),
- Advising local domestic abuse strategy groups of the project's progress and findings through presentations at meetings, and
- Presenting an introduction of the project to the Crown Prosecution Service.

### **2.3.4. Peer review audits**

Although these were not part of the original project brief, the project decided to carry out peer review audits to understand how existing providers were set up. Several agencies providing support around violence against women and girls were asked to complete an internal audit questionnaire on their approach to supporting ethnically ethnic minority victims and survivors. They were then visited by a BAMER Support Worker from another organisation for one day to talk about processes, procedures, and anything else which needed more clarification. This highlighted the service providers' perspective on supporting women from different ethnic background.

## 2.4. Measuring outcomes and impact

### 2.4.1. 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.

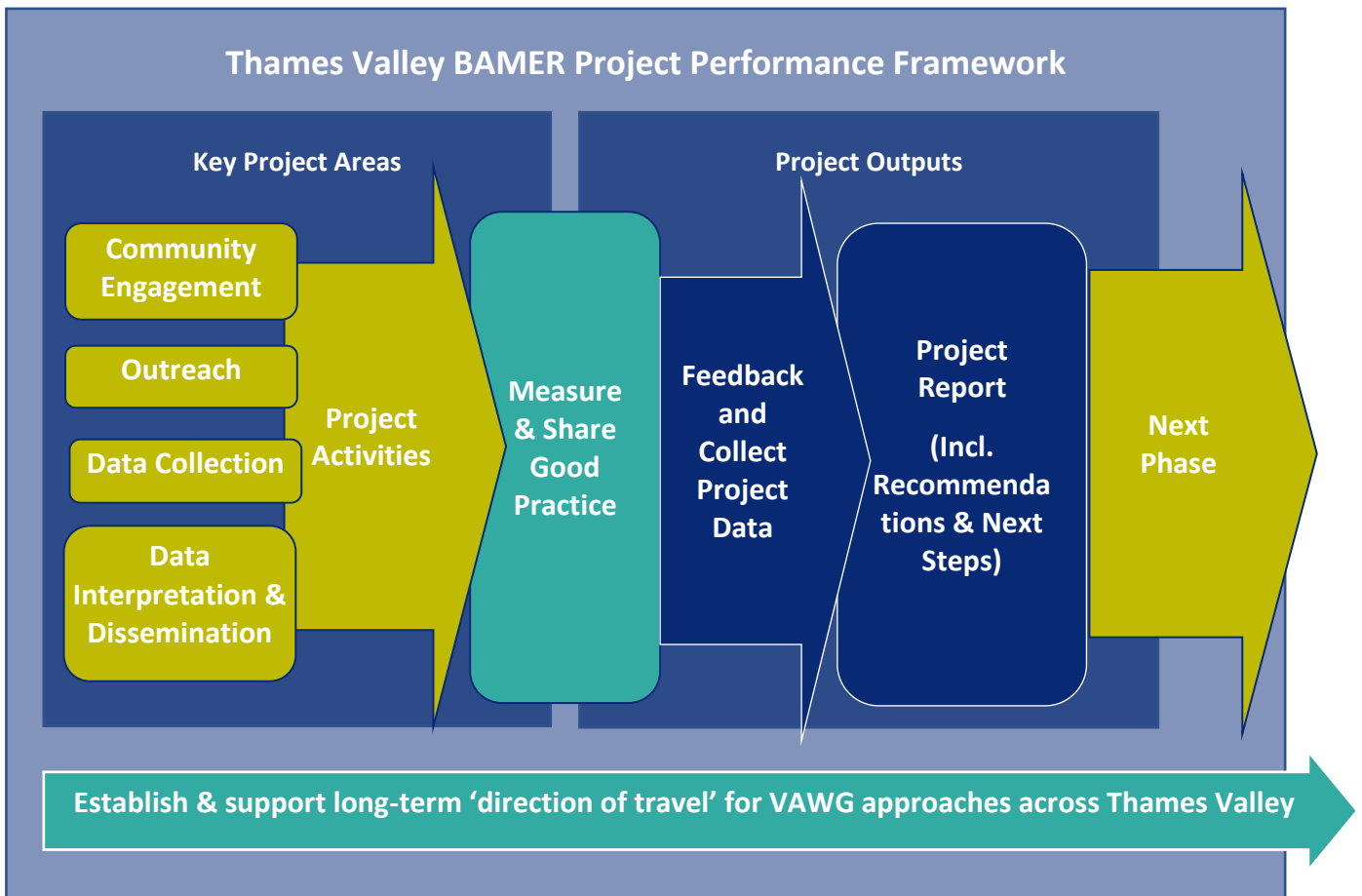


Figure 2 - The Thames Valley BAMER Project Performance Framework

### 2.4.2. Theory of change

The following theory of change framework (Figure 3) was designed by the project group and based on the Department for International Development (DFID) theory of change model to measure the outputs and outcomes of the project. Two years is a short time to measure the impact of any project of this nature, but there is evidence of initial progress towards the end goal of meeting the needs of ethnically diverse women. The impact mentioned in this theory of change framework below is the aspirational goal for the project which can only be fulfilled by continuing and further developing the work done by the Thames Valley BAMER Project.

# Theory of Change Framework for Thames Valley VAWG BAMER Project

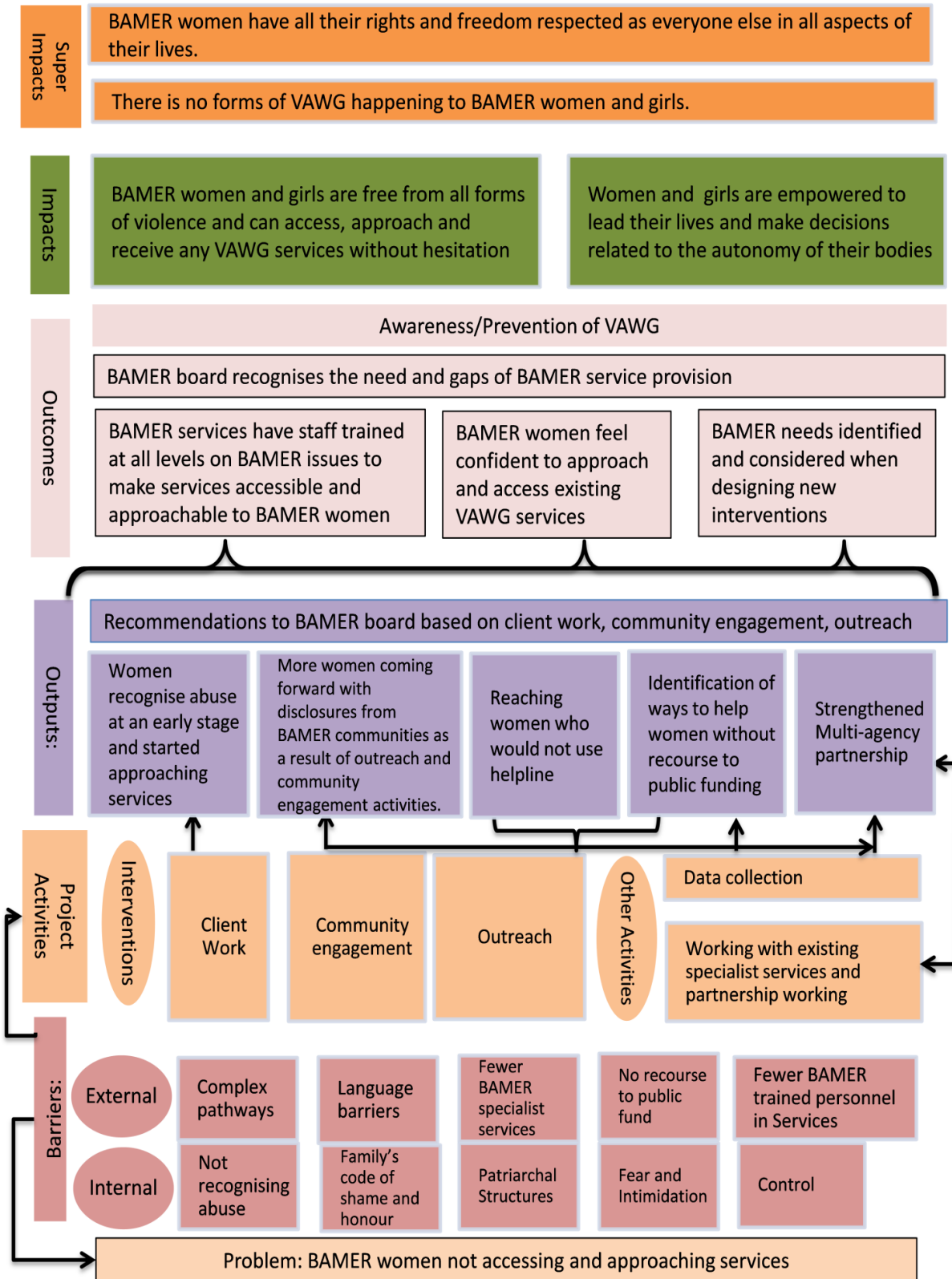


Figure 3 - Theory of Change Model for the Thames Valley BAMER Project



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## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Findings on population demographics in Thames Valley

#### 3.1.1. Ethnicity

##### *Defining and identifying ethnicity*

There are challenges in identifying the ethnic identity of populations who hold European passports. For example, many Brazilians hold Portuguese, Spanish or Italian passports and are counted as Portuguese, Spanish or Italian and not Brazilians. It is similar with East Timorese populations who are also here on Portuguese passports. This can make it difficult for service providers and statutory agencies to easily assess any likely needs arising from ethnic identity, or appreciate that there is a difference between the two identities.

In addition, some minority communities are not captured in the 2011 Census as they arrived in the United Kingdom from war torn countries in the past 9 years, for example Syrian and East Timorese refugees. In most areas where ethnicity data is recorded, those with Black African or Black Caribbean heritage are recorded under the Black population umbrella which does not acknowledge the differences between these two groups.

##### *Minority ethnic representations in Thames Valley*

Census survey data from 2011 were used to understand the demographics in Thames Valley, which has a population of 2.1million with approximately 25 percent from minority ethnic communities. The Thames Valley has a rich and diverse population featuring a few urban areas of higher population density, alongside some smaller rural towns, and some very rural and more isolated populations, and ethnic make-up varies greatly across the region. The areas with the highest ethnically diverse populations are the more urban areas:

- Slough (Berkshire) with 54.3 percent
- Oxford (Oxfordshire), 36 percent
- Reading (Berkshire), 35 percent, and
- High Wycombe (Buckinghamshire) with 32.8 percent

The highest population of ethnic groups in Thames Valley are:

- Pakistani with 65,156 (3 percent)
- Indian with 55,623 (2.6 percent)
- African with 37,764 (1.8 percent)
- Polish with 25,140 (1.2 percent)

County: Local Authority Area:		Berkshire					Buckinghamshire		Oxfordshire	
		Bracknell	Reading	Slough	Windsor & Maidenhead	Wokingham	Bucks	Milton Keynes	Oxon	
<b>Ethnic Identity</b>										
Africa	African (mixed)		802	607			1,098	1,597	1,557	
	African		6,087	7,548			4,032	13,058	7,039	
Asia	Indian		6,087	21,922			11,368	8,106	8,140	
	Nepali	1,014	2,614			143			796	
	Afghan		153	814			222	304	316	
	Filipino		630	940			1,107	758	1,938	
	Pakistani		6,967	24,869	4,238		21,236		7,846	
	Bangladeshi		695	549			1,089	1,989	2,491	
	Chinese		1,603			1,203	2,554	2,722	5,618	
	Thai		198				397	234	544	
	Turkish		157		145		159	108	327	
	Iranian		100		87		169	105	281	
	Europe/ Eurasia	Russian		362		263	179	150		1,113
		Polish		3,495	7,621			3,924	3,164	6,936
Eastern European			890	644			1,602	796	2,910	
Latin America	Caribbean		3,279	3,096			5,175	2,524	3,070	
	South Central America		190		170		289	162	550	
	Caribbean (mixed)		3,279	1,667			4,573	2,243	3,759	
	Brazilian		69		53		106	65	356	

<5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-15,000	15,001-20,000	>20,000
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Table 1 - Ethnic Population Distributions across Thames Valley

### 3.1.2. Language

Lack of or low proficiency in English can affect a person's ability to access health and other services. It can also have a detrimental impact on access to wider community and support networks, and on social and cultural capital in terms of understanding how systems and institutions operate.

At the time of the 2011 Census survey there was a total of 5,500 people in Oxfordshire who could not speak English or speak English sufficiently. Of these the largest numbers were in the working age groups 25 to 34 and 35 to 49. Data published as part of the annual school census in January each year shows an increasing proportion of pupils at primary schools in Oxfordshire with a first language other than English. In January 2017 it was slightly higher than the regional South East average at 14.4 percent in Oxfordshire compared with 14.3 percent in the South East region. Given that refugee and migrant populations continue to arrive in the Thames Valley it is reasonable to assume that this pattern is replicated in the other counties, but the data was not available. The following table gives a picture of the major languages spoken across Thames Valley.

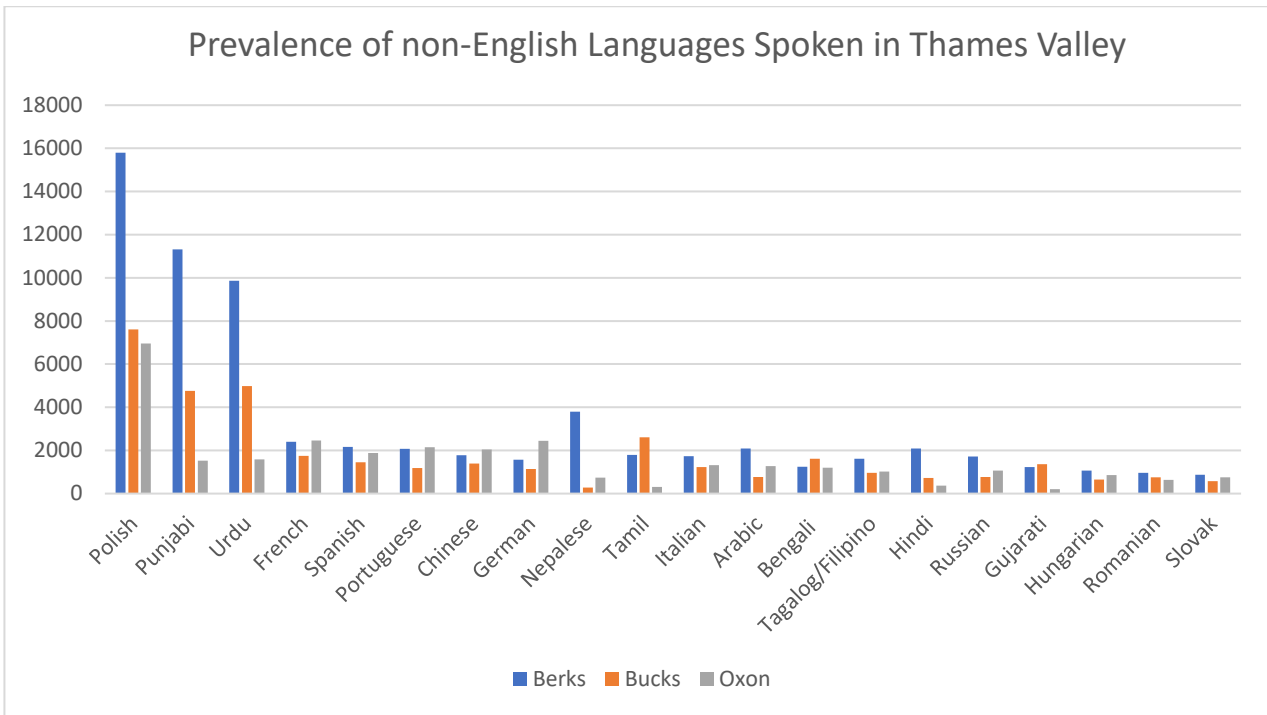


Figure 4 - Prevalence of non-English Languages Spoken in Thames Valley

### 3.1.3. Religion

Thames Valley hosts a range of places of worship, which reflects the diverse religious backgrounds of the populations residing in the region. According to the 2011 Census the largest religious group in Thames Valley are Christians, with others represented as shown in the following table. It is worth noting that some members of the dominant white culture in the Thames Valley will also form part of the Christian religious group, so it is hard to understand what proportion might be made up from minority ethnic communities.

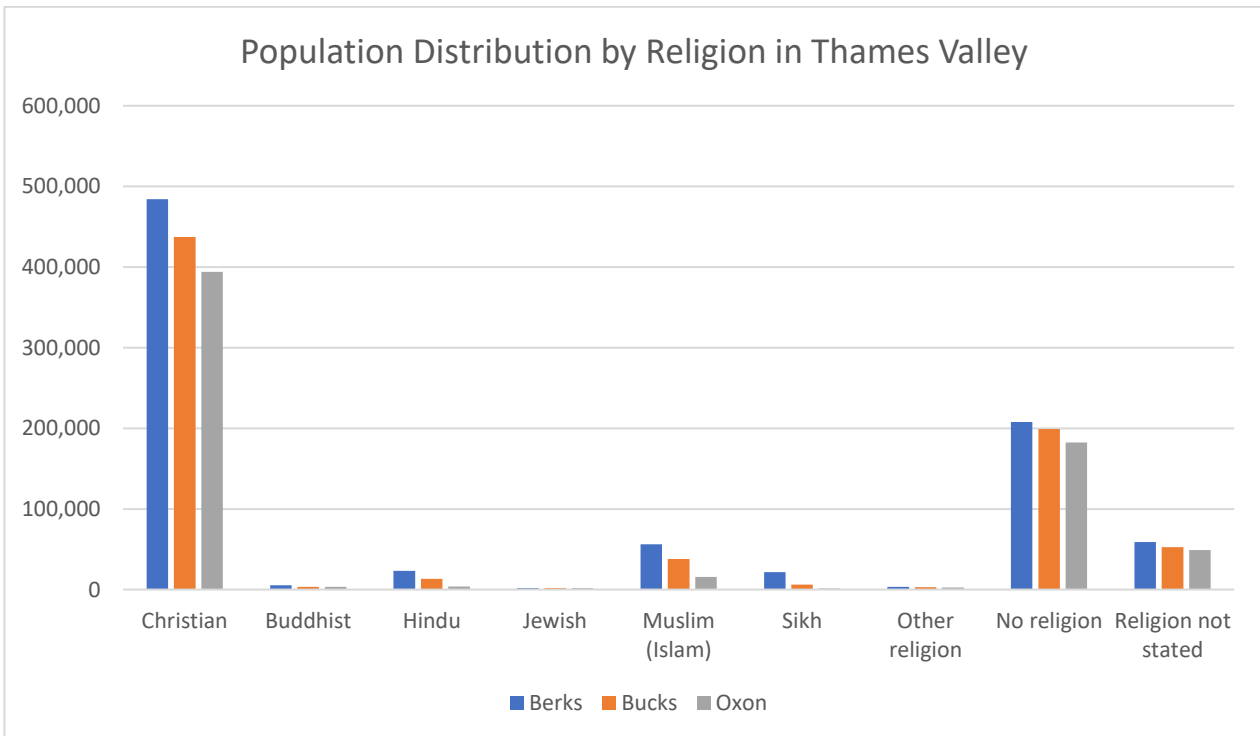


Figure 5 - Population Distribution by Religion in Thames Valley

## 3.2. Findings on statistics relating to violence against women and girls

### 3.2.1. Female Genital Mutilation

Official data on female genital mutilation is reported in the female genital mutilation enhanced dataset, via healthcare providers across England. The current data show extremely low numbers on female genital mutilation. The accuracy of this data is contested by many as it is onerous to gather accurate and exact information regarding the prevalence of female genital mutilation due to the nature of how, where and when the violence takes place. In 2018-2019 a total of two defendants were prosecuted for female genital mutilation; one was convicted and the other acquitted. The Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order is also very useful in preventing non-medical cutting. Between July 2015 when they were introduced and June 2019 there were 375 applications and 418 orders made in England and Wales.<sup>5</sup> There have been no prosecutions for breaches of a Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order so far. The following is the representation of the numbers in Thames Valley.

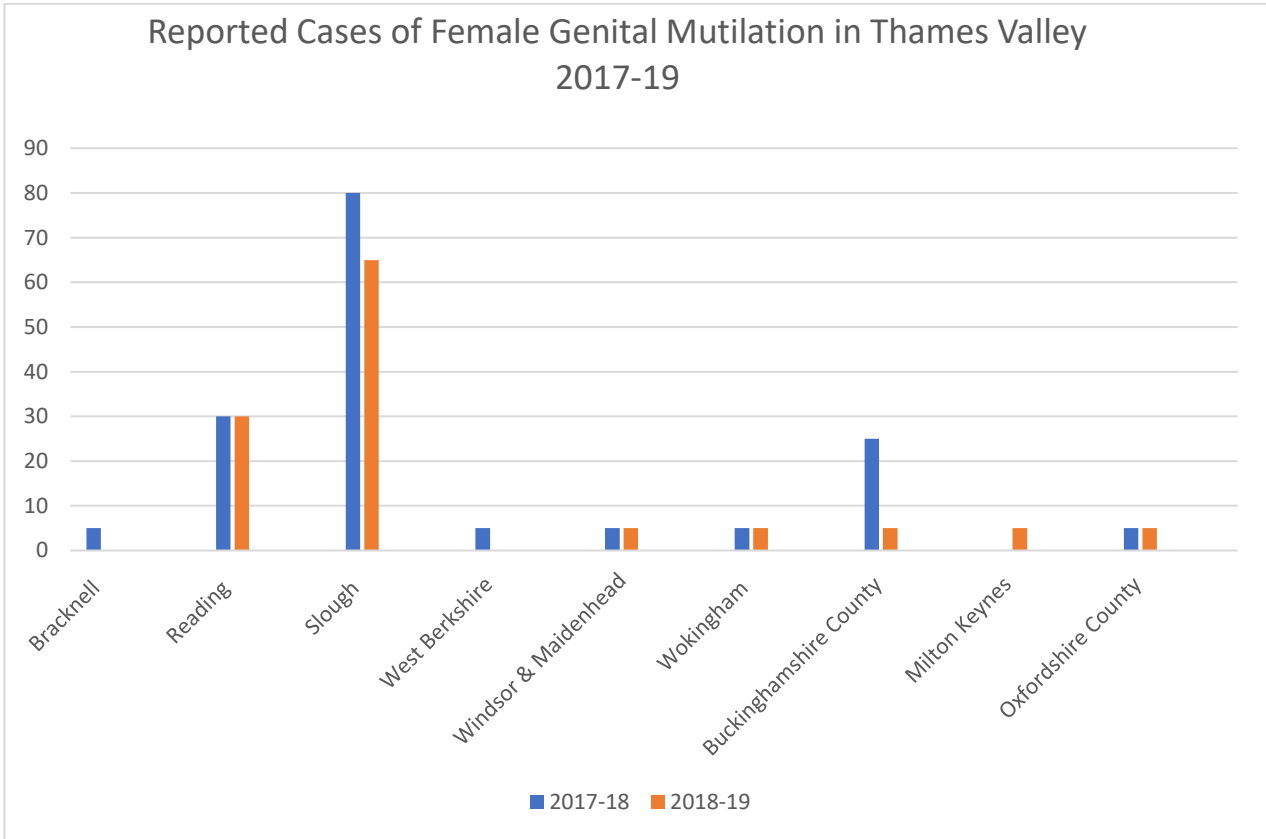


Figure 6 - Reported Cases of Female Genital Mutilation in Thames Valley 2017-19

<sup>5</sup> Family Court Statistics Quarterly, England & Wales, April-June 2019; Ministry of Justice

The above data are based on the numbers reported to the NHS. Of all the countries where female genital mutilation is performed, the largest diaspora populations in the UK tend to reside in Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Reading, Thurrock, Manchester, Sheffield, Northampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Slough, and Milton Keynes. This picture is not reflected in the NHS enhanced female genital mutilation dataset, which leads to questions being raised about the accuracy of the data. The prevalence rate in Oxfordshire, for example, is often challenged for its low numbers and lack of accuracy. Additionally, the number of women who are recorded in this database is low when compared with the number of women who have reported to the specialist female genital mutilation Rose Clinics in Oxford and Reading, raising further questions about its accuracy.

*“Patients disclose sensitive information when a safe, confidential space is created. It can take years for women with FGM to seek medical help. Clinicians are concerned that mandatory collection of confidential information without consent will damage trust in the doctor-patient relationship and discourage women with FGM from seeking medical attention. Separate and detailed data collection systems do not exist in other areas such as domestic abuse and rape.”*

In identifying potential reasons for the under-reporting, Dr Brenda Kelly of Oxford Rose Clinic writes why reporting female genital mutilation cases could jeopardise the confidential relationship between patient and doctor, discouraging women from seeking medical help.

The mandatory disclosure by health professionals of female genital mutilation identified in health consultations may prevent women with female genital mutilation complications from engaging with doctors for fear of repercussions such as being criminalised.

Many communities that practice female genital mutilation continue with the practice despite this being a criminal offence since 1985. While framing this kind of violence within the legal context might deter some from performing female genital mutilation, advocacy work, awareness raising

activities, campaigns and work on prevention must complement the legal framework.

Legal changes demonstrate a commitment to end the dangerous practice, but not involving communities’ voices in making legal reforms could result in alienating those communities. Including community voices in any kind of female genital mutilation work allows communities to take ownership of prevention projects, giving better prospects for impact. The number of women and girls who have been subjected to female genital mutilation may show the magnitude of the problem, but there is also a need to collect data on those who are *at risk* of female genital mutilation in order to focus work on prevention activities. Awareness raising activities, advocacy and campaigns must also focus on women and girls who have just arrived in the UK from countries practising female genital mutilation. It is considered that 20,000 girls are at risk of female genital mutilation every year but how this number translates in Thames Valley is difficult to explore.

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### 3.2.2. Domestic Abuse and Violence

In the year ending March 2018, 2 million people in England and Wales aged 16-59 experienced some form of domestic abuse. Out of this, 1.3 million were women. The police recorded a total of 599,549 cases of domestic abuse, which is an increase of 23 percent from the previous year.<sup>6</sup>

Across the Thames Valley region there has been a steady increase in reports of domestic abuse to the police; 46,904 in 2017-18 up to 50,600 in 2019-20. In 2019-20 there were 24,292 domestic abuse related non-crime occurrences and 26,308 domestic related crime reports, which amount to 10 percent of all recorded crime in the area.<sup>7</sup> Ethnicity breakdown is not currently available.

Thames Valley MARAC data for 2017-18 and 2018-19 records 1,651 high risk cases (764 in 2017-18 and 887 in 2018-19). MARAC cases from ethnically diverse backgrounds represented 25.5 percent of all cases which is what would be expected given the make-up of the wider community, which is 25 percent. However not all agencies accurately recorded ethnicity so the percentage may be even higher.

#### *Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)*

Despite significant attempts it was not possible to obtain comprehensive and comparable data for each area within the Thames Valley. Since 2011, when they were introduced, there have been 35 domestic homicide reviews in Thames Valley within the areas who responded to requests for this information. Of these, 12 involved either a victim or perpetrator from an ethnically diverse background, or both. The table below shows the distribution of domestic homicide reviews involving people from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

### 3.2.3. Forced Marriage

Women who are forced to marry have no agency to decide on what they would like to do with their lives. In some cases, traditions are more strictly observed in the diaspora than they are in their countries of origin, and many forced marriages take place under the pretext of arranged marriage which is a cultural norm for many minority ethnic communities, the social and emotional duress to comply being interpreted as consent. The Forced Marriage Act (2007) introduced the Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO) and is a well-intended piece of legislation. Following their introduction in November 2008, there were 17 applications for FMPOs and 25 orders made in in the first quarter of 2009. Ten years later in the first quarter of 2019 there were 95 applications and 167 orders made<sup>8</sup>, demonstrating a steady rise but not to a high number. This may be due to agencies not recognising a person is at risk of forced marriage and indicates that more training could increase understanding of the triggers and dynamics which may lead to forced marriage. The peer review undertaken by this project also highlighted a gap in training around this, which would also assist in preventing the isolation of whole communities that practice forced marriage. As with female genital mutilation, this piece of legislation alone is not enough to fight

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018#domestic-abuse-recorded-by-the-police>

<sup>7</sup> Crime Summary for Thames Valley, Rolling 12 months, Thames Valley Police

<sup>8</sup> Family Court Statistics Quarterly, England & Wales, April to June 2019, Ministry of Justice

the practise of forced marriage. The discourse needs to go beyond that of legality and should be simultaneously considered against the concepts of honour and shame, consent under duress, sexual chastity, purity, pre-marital sexuality, and virginity. There needs to be more investment in prevention and abuse recognition both at the community level and among services.

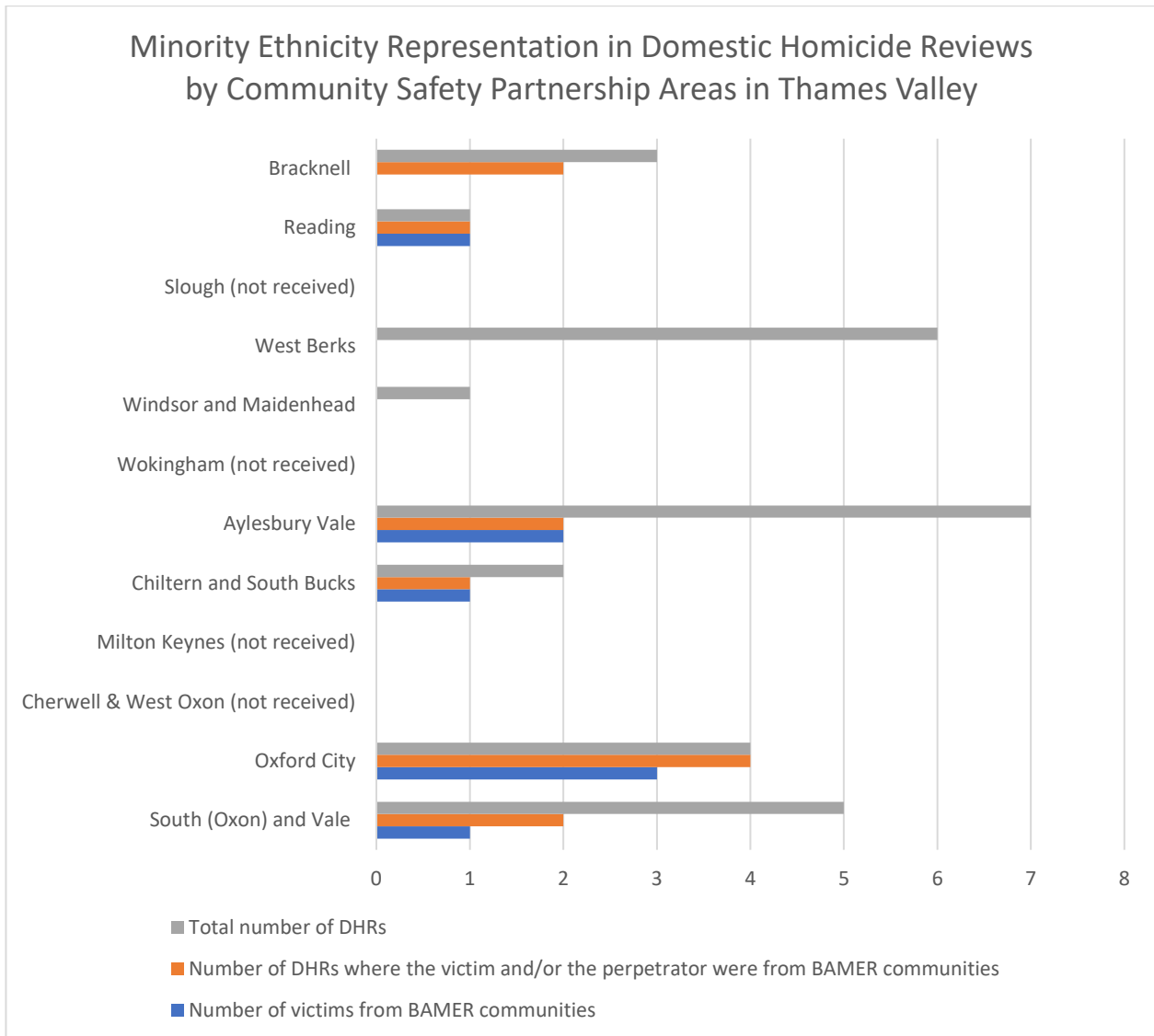


Figure 7 - Ethnicity Representation in Domestic Homicide Reviews by Community Safety Partnership Areas in Thames Valley

Data on the prevalence of forced marriage in this report are based on the cases known to the Forced Marriage Unit. Within the scope of this project there was no capacity to estimate forced marriage cases that had not come to the attention of the Forced Marriage Unit, voluntary and statutory agencies. The sensitivity of the issue poses challenges on data collection limiting the analysis of this report to only numbers that have been recorded by the Forced Marriage Unit. A lot of forced marriage among men is not easily identified or recorded, and as with women many of these take place under the pretext of consensual arranged marriages.

The Forced Marriage Unit had 1,355 cases in 2019, of which 80 percent were female and 19 percent male, and the gender was unknown in 1 percent. The numbers of cases coming to the Forced Marriage Unit have remained steady since 2011. 41 percent of cases were linked to Pakistan, 11 percent to Bangladesh, 5 percent to India, 4 percent to Afghanistan, and 2 percent to

Iran, Somalia, and Romania. There was a total of 66 countries related to potential forced marriages in 2019.

In 2018-2019 there were a total of four offences of forced marriage charged by the Thames and Chiltern Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). There were four defendants prosecuted and three of them were convicted.

### 3.2.4. Honour-based abuse

Although honour-based abuse is extensively seen around the world, the true scale of the problem is not known. There are 17,000 reported incidents of honour-based abuse in the UK each year<sup>9</sup>. At least 12 murders happen in the name of honour each year in the UK<sup>10</sup>. Karma Nirvana host the national helpline for victims of honour-based abuse.

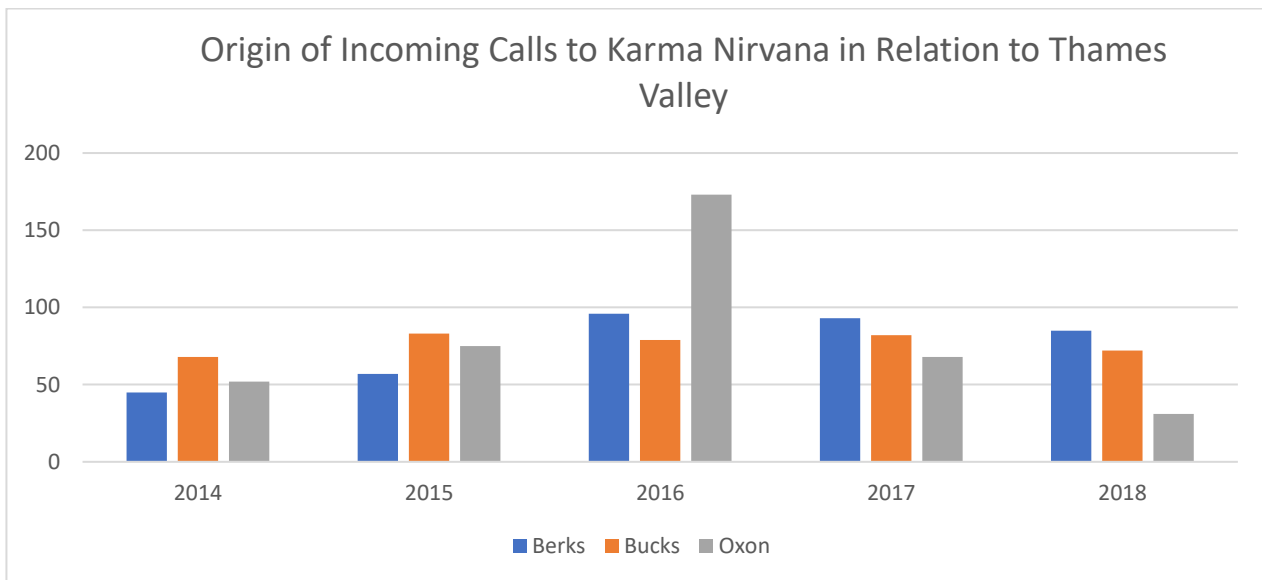


Figure 8 - Origin of Incoming Calls to Karma Nirvana in Relation to Thames Valley

Usually in the case of honour-based abuse, perpetrators are related to the victims or their families. In many cases there are multiple perpetrators, who could be a victim's own parents, brothers, uncles, and other extended family members. This often leads to victims wanting, or feeling compelled, to protect the perpetrators, resulting in hidden crimes, due to under-reporting.

There were 72 prosecutions in the Thames Valley relating to honour-based abuse in 2018-19, with 41 convictions and a conviction rate of 56.9 percent.<sup>11</sup>

113 occurrences were identified as being honour-based abuse or forced marriage related offences between April 2016 and March 2017. This was an increase from 86 in 2015/16. A further 279 non crime occurrences were identified as having concerns in respect of honour-based abuse or forced marriage but where no offences were identified; an increase from 202 in 2015/16.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.reducingtherisk.org.uk/cms/content/so-called-honour-based-abuse>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, as 9

<sup>11</sup> CPS, 2019



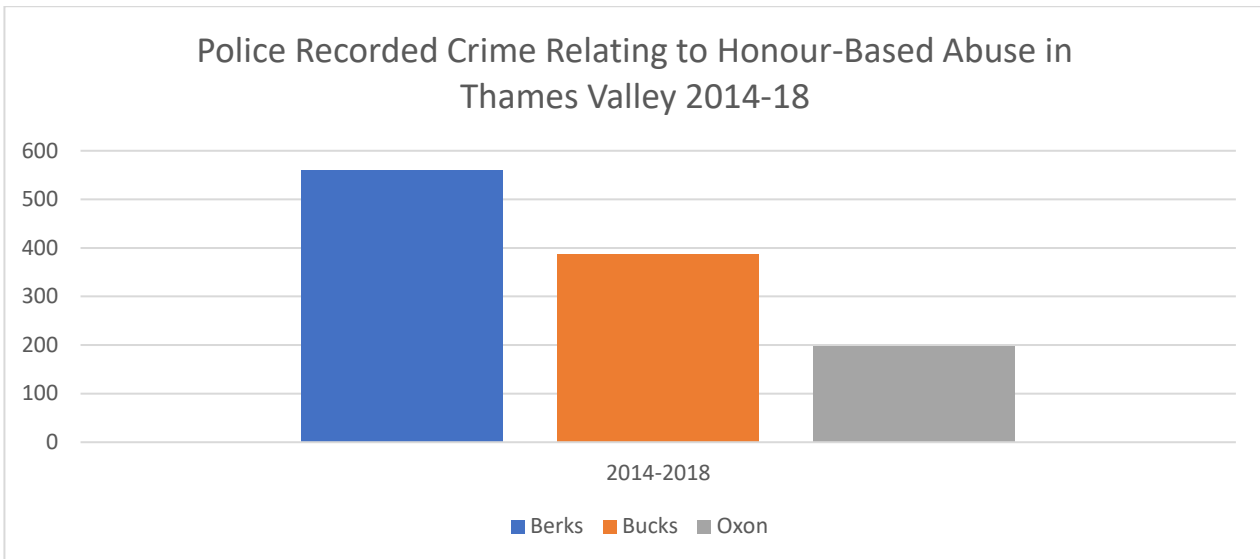


Figure 9 - Police Recorded Crime Relating to Honour-Based Abuse in Thames Valley 2014-18

Victims are often from a Pakistani background, but the crime spreads across different ethnicities as illustrated in the following tables. Officers are more conscious about this issue in South Asian communities which could be the reason their higher representation.

Some challenges in collecting data relating to honour-based abuse and forced marriage are as follows:

- Analysing honour-based abuse and forced marriage occurrence data vis-à-vis outdated population data may be somewhat restricted;
- Accuracy of the data gathered is hard to ensure because victims' and perpetrators' ethnicities are not recorded in all cases; and
- Quality assurance and guidance on gathering this data needs to be updated and reviewed.

### 3.2.5. Sexual violence and abuse

Sexual violence is significantly under-reported, with studies saying anything between 10 and 20 percent of victims and survivors actually come forward and disclose.<sup>12</sup> There are multiple reasons for this, including, shame, fear of not being believed, victim blaming culture, fear of exposure, and fear of the criminal justice system.

Thames Valley Police recorded 4,776 sexual offences (1,783 rape and 2,993 non-rape) in 2017-18; 5,447 sexual offences (1,838 rape and 3,609 non-rape) in 2018-19; and, 5,825 sexual offences (2,105 rape and 3,720 non-rape) in 2019-20.<sup>13</sup> Ethnicity breakdown is currently unavailable.

The Thames Valley Independent Sexual Violence Advisory (ISVA) Service had 367 referrals in 2017-18, 40 (11 percent) of which were clients from ethnic minority communities and in 2018-19 there

<sup>12</sup> <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/about-sexual-violence/statistics-sexual-violence/>

<sup>13</sup> Crime Summary for Thames Valley, Rolling Summary, Thames Valley Police

were 496 referrals, 55 (11 percent) were from such communities<sup>14</sup>. Whilst this is not the only ISVA service within Thames Valley, their data provides some sense of the picture. Ethnically diverse communities make up 25 percent of the Thames Valley population, which suggests there may be underreporting. However, ethnicity is not recorded in approximately 50 percent of cases therefore the actual amount of people from ethnically diverse communities may be much higher.

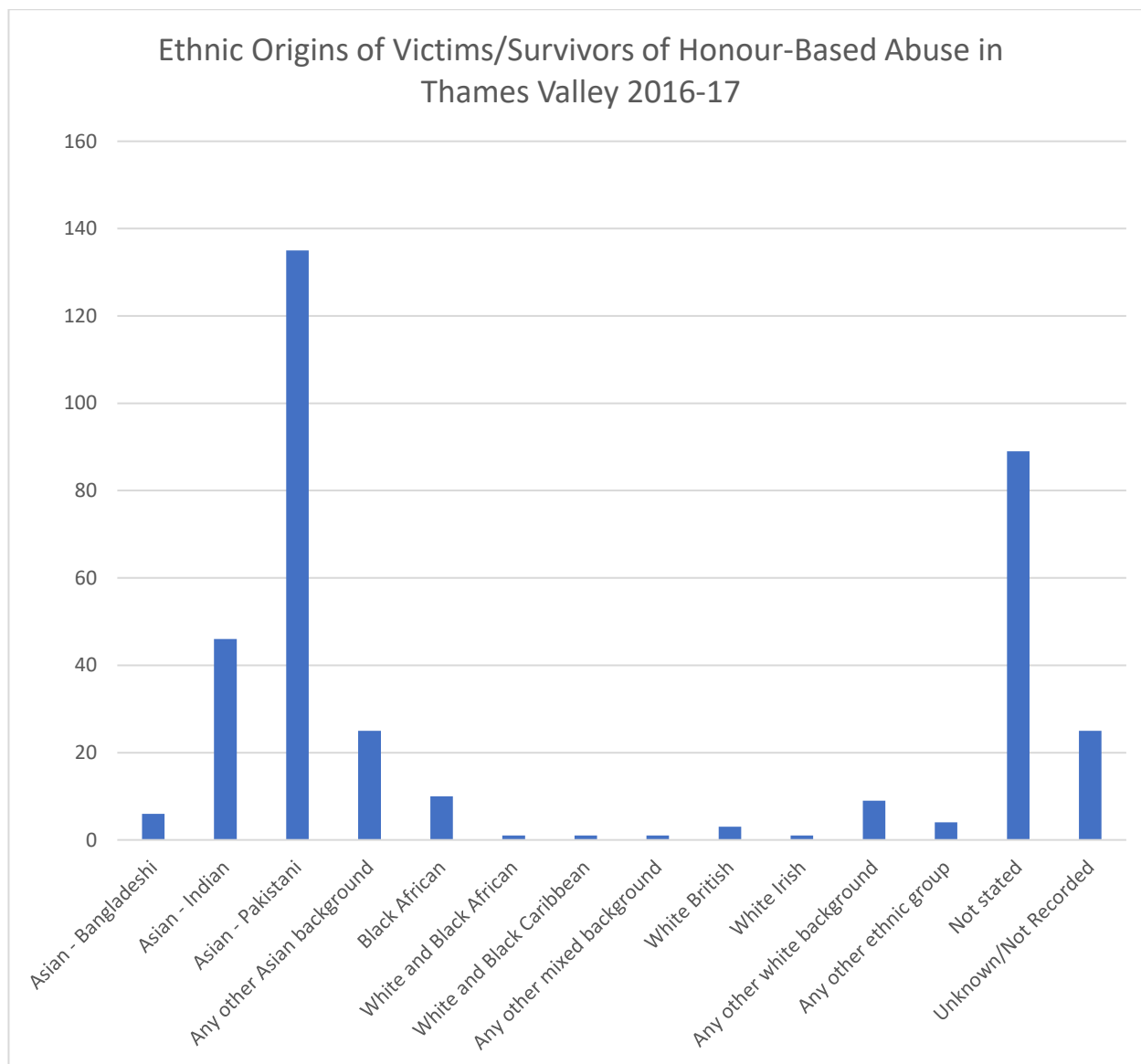


Figure 10 - Ethnic Origins of Victims/Survivors of Honour-Based Abuse in Thames Valley 2016-17

### 3.2.6. Stalking and harassment

Stalking is a high-risk factor in domestic abuse cases yet very few agencies capture data making it difficult to determine how common it is for abusers to stalk their (ex-)partners. The National Stalking Helpline received 1,560 calls from the Thames Valley region in 2018, 30 percent (468) were from ethnically diverse communities which is a higher than the 25 percent in the wider population. This data will have covered all types of stalking, although domestic related stalking is the most prevalent. It is difficult to determine if stalking is under-reported, incorrectly recorded or not recorded.

<sup>14</sup> Thames Valley Performance Report, 2017-18, 2018-19, Refugee ISVA Service

### 3.3. Findings of focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews

The focus group questions were structured around how communities felt about the support they were accessing and what agencies could be doing to enable ethnically ethnic minority victims to access them. The focus group questions aimed to gather information on the experiences from within community; on how and when they approached the services, and the extent to which they felt their needs were being considered in the delivery of these services. A holistic approach was needed to understand the issue of violence against women and girls. Working in this area involves working in tandem with multiple services ranging from health, education, housing, courts, interpreter services and many others with equal attention given to each of these needs.

The focus group participants were also asked about their views on what they would like to have in place to make the services more accessible to them and how a more holistic approach could be developed to address these issues. The focus group discussions explored the issues of the 'BAMER' group as a whole and where possible has investigated issues faced by particular ethnic minority groups. The participating women in the focus groups represented women who had been subjected to violence or abuse, women who made disclosures of violence or abuse perpetrated against them during the project, as well as women who had no disclosed experience of abuse or violence.

		County:	Berks	Bucks	Oxon
		Number of Focus Group Discussions:	9	4	7
Ethnicities represented			Berks	Bucks	Oxon
Africa	Eritrean				✓
	Somali				✓
	Sudanese				✓
	Tanzanian		✓		✓
	Zimbabwean				✓
	Mixed African				✓
Asia	Bangladeshi		✓		
	Chinese		✓		
	Indian		✓	✓	
	Iranian				✓
	Nepali		✓		
	Pakistani		✓	✓	✓
	Syrian		✓		✓
	Turkish				✓
Mixed (Kurdish)				✓	
Europe	Portuguese		✓		✓
	Spanish		✓		
Latin America	Brazilian				✓

Table 2 - Focus Group Discussion Held across Thames Valley

### 3.3.1. Barriers to accessing and approaching services

“

*Maidenhead mosque really works hard to challenge these attitudes.*

...

*My husband did not allow me to work as he wanted to control my finances. I couldn't ask him for money, and I couldn't stand up for myself. I didn't know that this was being abusive.*

...

*I used to cry and forget and forgive and offer many chances. Due to being threatened and accused of sleeping with others constantly. He used to believe that I was only with him in order to remain in the UK and his parents believed that I got married to him to be able to live in the UK.*

”

#### *Internal Barriers*

**Fear and intimidation** from perpetrators, family members, and agencies was a common experience for many ethnic minority women, which keeps them in the abusive relationship. This fear and intimidation manifests in a number of ways:

- Fear of disgracing the family by leaving an abusive relationship,
- Feeling intimidated to approach services as they are concerned they would not be able to explain the abuse they have suffered,
- Scared of being left a destitute and not be able to provide for children as they are economically dependent on partners,
- Fear of being separated from the children or being taken back to the country of origin if abuse is disclosed, or
- Many women fear the data of their immigration status would be shared amongst the statutory services and the Home Office.

**Control** is a prominent feature in the lives of many ethnic minority women. Women from different ethnic groups shared that after moving to the UK on spousal visas, it took time for them to make friends in a new place. Many do not have a proper social support system to seek help enabling spouses or family members to control aspects of their lives. Control among women can be seen in various forms:

- The control of movement under the pretext of providing protection, often preventing women from seeking employment or going out unaccompanied.
- The need to seek permission from in-laws to visit friends.
- Being denied access to mobile phones.
- Abusers withholding access to passports.
- Women being permanently accompanied by husbands and dependent on them for information on their legal status.

Many women on spousal visas are controlled with threats of deportation and are taken advantage of because of their insecure immigration status and the fact this means they have no recourse to public funds. Some groups agreed that women are discouraged from going out and about without being accompanied. This resulted in control of mobility for a lot of women.

One group felt however that this attitude is changing with the help of community leaders.

**Failure to recognise abuse** is common and many women stay within an abusive relationship remaining silent and tolerating the abuse that they go through because the violence has not been 'bad enough' to warrant leaving. The patriarchal structures on which societies are built implicitly expect women to endure abuse even when this has been disclosed to her family, friends, or neighbours. Elder generation family members would not see control and 'occasional hitting' as domestic abuse. Some expressed that they probably understand this to be domestic abuse but do not want to accept it as that would bring shame to the family. Discussions highlighted that women only think of violence against women and girls as physical abuse and do not see financial abuse, emotional abuse and controlling behaviour as violent or abusive.

**Consent and rape within marriage** is a relatively new concept even in the dominant white culture. Among many ethnic minority women sex was something that could be demanded by the husbands once they were married, and this was not perceived as rape. There was a huge gap in understanding the concept of consent in these situations.

**Language** caused additional vulnerabilities where women could not speak or understand English. The abusers may have a better grasp of the English language and therefore they use it to exploit the vulnerability of their partners who may be less articulate.

Abusers, especially if they are white British, will tell victims that no one will believe them because they are 'foreign and do not speak English well'. Women reported that agencies are biased towards those who speak better English.

**Codes of shame and honour** were highlighted as ways of silencing victims. Consistent with available research, focus group discussions reiterated the oppressive use of honour and shame. What constitutes dishonouring differs from one community to another or from one

“

*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.*

...

*When you go to the GP, again you get stuck because of the language. You have to depend on another person to make an appointment for you. You also have to take them with you because how would you explain things to the doctor. So going to the GP is a so much of an effort. It is also awkward to ask for help from the same person so many times.*

...

*I tell people that I am widowed instead of divorced to avoid being judged. I think people will respect you more if I say widowed instead of divorced.*

”

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family to another, but some behaviours that are considered breaking a family's honour code are:

- Divorce,
- Identifying as belonging to a LGBTIQ+ group,
- Wearing makeup,
- Holding hands or kissing someone of the opposite sex in public,
- Having a boyfriend, or
- Saying no to a forced/arranged marriage

These could result in various forms of violence such as forcing the person to be married, isolation, mental and emotional abuse, physical and sexual assault, and as divorce is shameful, it is used as a tool for intimidation. Many women do not want to make disclosures about abuse or violence because they feel the shame of exposing their problem to the rest of the society.

### *External Barriers*

**Insecure immigration status and no recourse to public funds (NRPF)** are prevalent issues amongst ethnically diverse women. A woman with a less secure immigration status, abused by her partner and family is more likely to be isolated than others. Women who fall under this category include:

- Refugees who have been given legal status but do not have the required documents to claim welfare benefits,
- Refused asylum seekers,
- People who entered the UK without permission or were trafficked,
- People who have lost their documentation who can remain on the condition of no recourse to public funds,
- Visitors, students, and spouses who have been granted leave to remain but can no longer do so because of a change in circumstances (requiring legal representation to remain in the UK), and
- Undocumented migrants.

Insecure immigration status is not just an issue among women who have migrated to the UK on a spousal visa, but also among students who find themselves in abusive relationships. When insecure immigration status interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities of women at home, threats of deportation are frequently used by family members. Although many of these threats are not substantiated, this is used as a tool for intimidation and control in many cases.

In some situations, some minimal support may be available for migrants with insecure immigration status while in others the support is simply non-existent. For asylum seekers facing destitution, there is a separate system of asylum support in the form of housing and financial support that the government provides under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Women from the EU do not feel the pressure of immigration laws to the same extent as women from outside the EU because of they have eligibility to receive benefits under certain EU conditions. There is uncertainty regarding how this scenario would change upon the UK's formal exit from the EU.

The process to secure an immigration status which allows access to welfare benefits became more complicated for women on spousal visas when a two-year probation rule was increased to five years for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK. This has adversely affected women who have

“

*I was involved in a very abusive relationship with my boyfriend who continued to beat me up for 2 years. I was unable to receive support as I had no recourse to public funds in the UK because of my immigration status.*

...

*[A participant reported a doctor saying]*

*You Asian women don't take your medication.*

*You fast and ruin your health.*

...

*I tell people that I am widowed instead of divorced to avoid being judged. I think people will respect you more if I say widowed instead of divorced.*

”

already completed their two-year period in the UK who now need to wait three more years to secure this status. Many women fear cancellation of their spousal visas in situations where their own immigration status is tied to their husbands. That gaining indefinite leave to remain is an extremely expensive and lengthy process is a further barrier. This financial burden increases for women who are not economically independent.

There is limited provision across the country for women fleeing domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds. If they are in receipt of the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession fund, they are able to access public funds and have refuge spaces. There is often a delay in this process which on occasion could result in homelessness and impact on mental health which may lead to the women choosing to remain with the abuser.

**Racism and unconscious biases** are embedded in the white dominant culture of the UK. Discourse on racism might seem to obscure the realities of violence against women and girls but it would be myopic not to look at the interaction of the two to see why abuse and violence perpetrated against ethnic minority women is so underreported, and the impact it has on support services.

Many different forms of blatant and structural racism, and unconscious bias in daily lives affect the ways in which services interact with ethnically diverse women, and how these women form their ideas about these services. Discrimination and stereotypes faced by women in other spheres of life, and ideas formed about their religion or outlook prevents a lot of women from approaching services. Even in situations where services have acknowledged the problem, they have faced a backlash for prioritising the needs of ethnic minority women. In February 2019, Wycombe Rape Crisis faced a backlash from racist groups for encouraging ethnically diverse women to approach their services. These kinds of experiences leave many services helpless to offer more relevant and accessible services even in the most well-intentioned situations.

As women in the project asserted that accent is becoming the new race, findings suggest that second generation women who have British accents are more comfortable approaching services than women who have just moved to the UK.

During discussion in a focus group, first generation women expressed being conscious about their accent when considering approaching services, as it was often commented on.

Some also talked about the remarks and words that may not be meant with malice but could be offensive not just to the person experiencing it but to others who hear it as well, preventing them from approaching well intentioned services. Some see it as a form of othering.

**Accessibility to services** takes a physical form and for many women this was a major concern. Travel time is longer for women who do not drive, and in focus group discussions held with women from different African communities, women expressed that getting bus passes would be their main priority to take them to the services. Regional services can be difficult for ethnically diverse women to access if they are not able to drive or do not have the economic means to use public transport, or if their partner will not allow them out unaccompanied.

Another factor that affected accessibility was women's understanding of living in the UK and familiarity with the systems. New migrants were a lot less confident compared to earlier migrants when it came to accessing available support. Second generation migrants have more in common with white British populations, whereas new generation migrants often find themselves uncertain about cultural identity, pulled into two different directions.

Complex referral pathways cause problems even for women from white British backgrounds as well as for ethnically diverse women because of several cross-cutting themes and issues. Some women can go through severe distress and could be re-victimised as they are signposted from one agency to another trying to explain their stories multiple times in a second language. In some cases, women expressed they had found speaking

“

*Hate crimes towards Muslim women in the media affected the desire to disclose for one woman in our discussion. Other women in this discussion agreed and have heard stories of being attacked, hijabs being ripped. Many stated that they fear going out of their home.*

...

*I struggled to find a rented accommodation when my husband and I arrived in the UK. We saw a room advertised but when they met us we were told the place is gone. I don't think it is as blatant these days but there used be advertisements saying, 'No Asians' thirty years ago.*

...

*We experienced racism when we first came here, but just when we thought we have moved on from that, people have started using the word immigrant [pejoratively].*

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multiple times about their experiences of abuse empowering, in particular if they are believed by each agency. Often, though, women have experienced going from one service to another, repeating their stories in a second language and found themselves entangled within different working models, ethos, and principles of the various organisations. Multi-agency working and reliance on non-statutory services seem unusual to many women from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Additionally, although multi-agency working aspires to a holistic approach to providing services, there are loopholes and pitfalls which need to be tightened to provide better experiences for ethnic minority women.

The pathways ethnic minority women rely on to access services are different than those used by the white British population. For example, many expressed they did/would not use the helpline as their first point of contact with services or health professionals because they are unable to speak confidently in English. Ethnic minority women face additional social hurdles to those faced by women from white British backgrounds to access the same level of support. Referral pathways are already complex and challenging, even for someone who understands the broader systems at play, but for someone who is not able to speak the language, pathways tend to add more complexities and barriers. Some women expressed that they do have some particularly good experiences with services, while for some, any kind of engagement with services has caused more distress to their wellbeing. This usually depends on the professional concerned on a case-by-case basis, and their sensitivity to ethnic and cultural issues.

The diagram below (figure 11), demonstrates how complicated the pathway is for victims and survivors, and with the additional barriers faced by those from minority ethnic communities it becomes even more confusing.

“

*The local mosques are trying to educate people that domestic abuse is not right, and this is helping.*

...

*Some women do not know there are groups that exist and therefore they do not receive any information.*

”

**Lack of information** prevents informed choice, and ethnically diverse women in some focus groups advised that there is lack of information about services in general. They expressed that information on VAWG services was lacking in different languages including in braille and sign languages specifically targeting minority ethnic populations. General awareness raising activities on the available services for women who have been subjected to violence or abuse, and on different strands of violence against women and girls were recognised as a gap. Women who are unable to work or socialise outside of the home will have fewer, if any, opportunities to hear the messages about where they can access support. Women agreed that in some communities, perceptions of services have started to change due to engagement activities carried out by the BAMER Support Workers in this project and by some local mosques. Participants stressed that information passed on through community groups travels quickly and could reach women who do not engage with community groups through word of mouth.

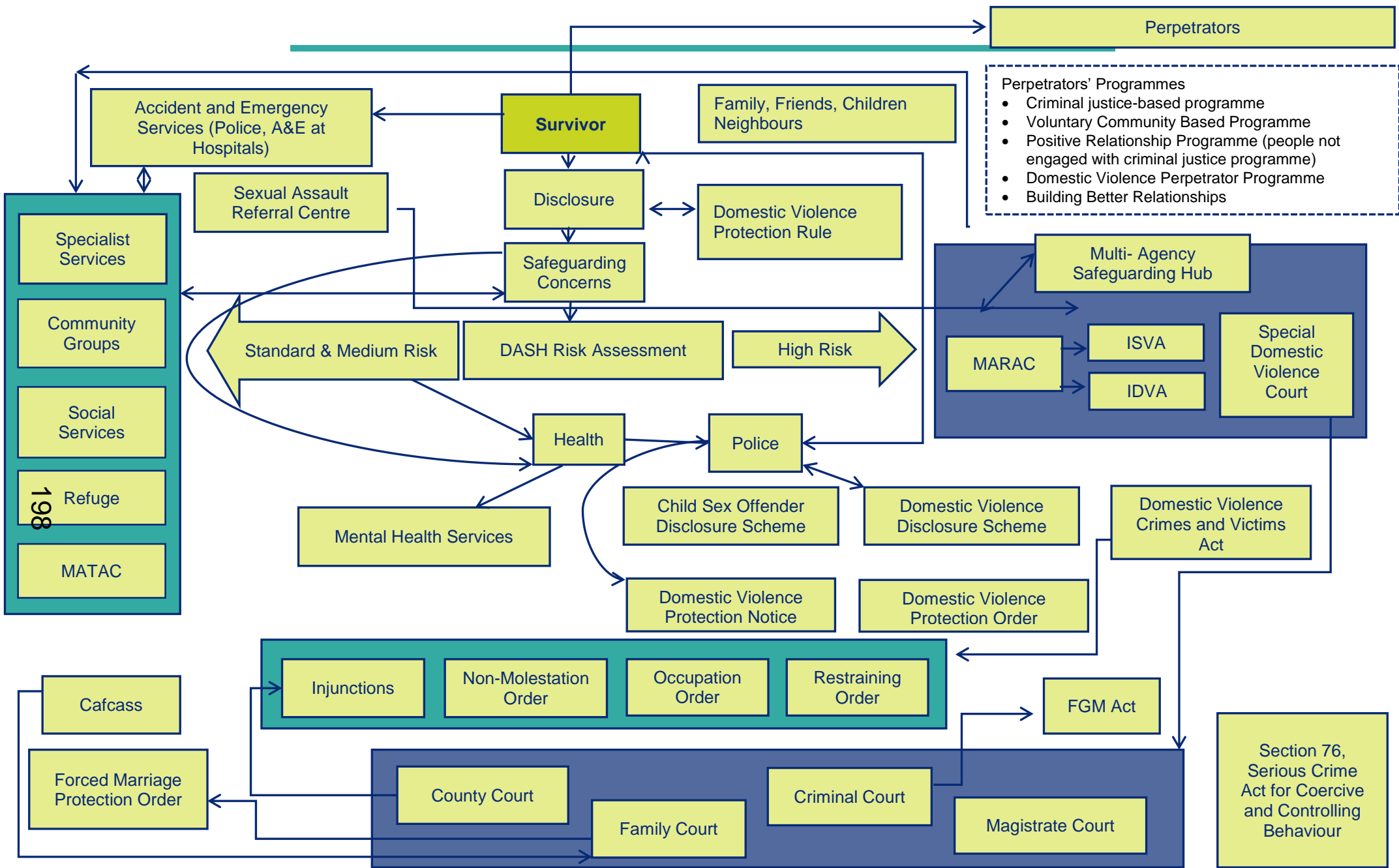


Figure 11 - Domestic Abuse Pathways for Survivors

Information and awareness are also lacking for perpetrators, for men, for wider family and community members (in-laws) and for adolescent school children both in terms of fostering healthy relationships as well as for raising awareness about the issues and services available.

### 3.3.2. Perceptions of services

#### *Community groups*

Engaging with communities on an intimate level has the power to give communities the agency to fight issues of violence against women and girls from within. Externally proposed solutions to violence and abuse against ethnic minority females is a missed opportunity for sustainable and transformative change to put a stop to crimes such as honour-based abuse, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage by and for such communities. Community engagement groups play a pivotal role in bringing awareness on issues of violence against women and girls as well as about the services available for ethnic minority women in general, all of which play a crucial role in tackling such abuse and violence holistically.

Women expressed that community engagement groups enable them to integrate into society better, helping to build confidence to seek support, and enabling access to services. For many women, community groups were important for providing emotional support, a reason for women to socialise, and a good break from the usual routines their day-to-day lives require of them. For some it is a good space to learn about what is happening and a safe space to make disclosure. Women from ethnically diverse backgrounds tended to seek help from people from their own communities before contacting statutory or voluntary services because there was less chance of being misunderstood. Although women are happy to join a women's community group, in some instances, spouses or other male family members may prevent them from attending such groups.

“

*At community groups, we get to learn about our rights here, we make friends, and it is talking space for us without judgement.*

...

*We learn many things in the groups such as taking public transport. It allows us to share feelings that cannot be shared in our own families because women in the groups tend to understand you better.*

”

“

*Our bad experiences with police in our home countries make it difficult to engage with services despite their good intentions.*

...

*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.*

...

*We know police are available to intervene but the community does not want to go to the police because this would result in the situation being out of the families' control and cause an embarrassment to the families. Sometimes you just need someone to talk to*

”

### *Police*

Police are the first port of call for victims entering into the criminal justice system therefore their experience needs to be positive and empowering to promote confidence amongst others to come forward. Most women felt that the police respond adequately to their needs with the caveat that at times there is a long delay in initial response.

Some for whom English is a second language, however, are not offered interpreters. Even when a person's English appears to be good, reporting sensitive information to the police can be frightening and stressful, which impacts a person's understanding and ability to process information. Women in these circumstances need to feel confident they have a full understanding of what is being asked and the information they are being given, so provision of an interpreter at all times is important. Women also describe a variability in response depending on the police officer that you are talking to and their sensitivity towards cultural differences. An assumption that the police in the UK are like the police in the countries of origin of keeps them intimidated by the police system and prevents reporting. Many women who engaged with this project lacked familiarity with the police systems in the UK and often have impressions of justice systems based on their knowledge and experience elsewhere.

One woman expressed that having a domestic violence police officer has been helpful, although anecdotally there was fear of rejection from the police because of minority ethnic identity. Women reiterated the need to have a diverse police force where their cultural nuances are understood. Caution should be taken as this is not the same for each community.

## Employment

In most cases, women expressed that seeking an immediate solution to the various forms of abuse and violence they face is only part of the problem. Many women who seek protection are unemployed and express that agencies have often found it difficult to deal with other multi-layered structural forms of abuse and violence, hindering their ability to create alternatives for them to end abusive relationships. Ethnically diverse women are burdened by lack of financial resources, child-care responsibilities, and the unemployment and a lack of employment opportunities.

In engaging with Syrian families, it was identified that there is a huge need for employment and job opportunities for women. Even income generation activities at smaller scales have been very well received by the community. At a community group run in East Oxford Community Centre women were engaging in sewing and knitting activities which allowed members to develop small scale income generation. In a Pakistani women's group, members expressed that this kind of activity allows them to earn and handle petty cash to either buy things for themselves or their children instead of depending on their partners for all their financial needs. In some situations, the income could be used by the group to book the venue or to invest other group activities to make the community groups more sustainable.

Amongst those women from diverse ethnicities who were working, many who have skills and qualifications to do skilled jobs were working in unskilled labour. Some women who participated in the focus groups had degrees, for instance in engineering. Many others had experiences, skills and expertise but had not been able to get into employment at all. In almost all the focus group discussions, a recurring theme was a strong desire to find work. Many women who engaged with the Thames Valley BAMER Project also stressed that language is the biggest hurdle for them in terms of getting a job, and some expressed that in their community women taking up certain jobs is considered to be shameful.

## Classes in English as a second language

All focus group discussions talked about the importance of being able to speak English to live in the UK. Language skills have affected almost every aspect of the life of people from different ethnic heritage in the UK. For some this has been a major hurdle in finding a job, while for others accessing health or any other services, has been more difficult because of the language barrier.

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*I could only apply for factory jobs as my English was poor, but they could not allow me to work with a saree on as there were many machines*

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

”

“

*Also asking evidence of the case when you can't produce it is tough. If you don't bring evidence your application can be refused.*

”

### *Courts and justice*

Where there is abuse there often follows interaction with the criminal justice system and/or family courts, either through divorce proceedings or social services intervention around child protection. The women who engaged with this project described a number of concerning issues regarding their experiences with courts and justice.

Women reported conflicting decisions made by family courts in relation to the decisions made by criminal courts, especially in terms of child custody. This is a hindrance to many women seeking justice. Many women approaching court services are concerned about the possibility of

Cafcass recommending unsupervised contact between their children and the perpetrator. There is also a pervading concern that social services will simply remove their children from them.

The cost of court services is high and for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds who are dependent on their partners or families for finances, this is prohibitive. The proof of domestic abuse required in court for the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession is hard to find for women who do not come forward and disclose, for all the reasons previously explored here.

### *Health professionals*

The responses that women receive from health professionals were crucial in understanding the confidence they had in contacting other services, particularly those related to violence against women and girls. Engagement with ethnically diverse women highlighted the fact that pro-active screening processes in accident and emergency departments are helpful in preventing abuse and violence from getting worse. While it is helpful to have professionals from diverse ethnic backgrounds in services, it must also be recognised that not all patients might want to make disclosures to professionals within the same community for fear that news of their abuse might spread to the wider group, or that perpetrators might be alerted to the disclosures, especially where entire families or communities are involved in the abuse. Some women felt that talking to a white British person made them feel more comfortable than talking with someone from their own background.

Diversity in the healthcare workforce does, however, ensure that there are options for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds who want to engage with ethnically diverse medical professionals. The majority of women in this project said that their experience with GPs would be better if there were no language barriers. Most women understood that it was difficult to include representation of all ethnic groups in all GP practices, but said that having a face from one or more ethnically diverse community in the practice makes them feel there is someone who understands their cultural context better than white British/Western professionals.

Women also talked about how, in addition to cultural nuances, it would be helpful for GPs to take consideration of the experiences that they have had in their home countries. Many expressed that some doctors are really good, but you don't receive immediate services.

Women in the project also spoke about Health Visitors and agreed that one of their functions is to ensure that women are kept safe, which requires building trusting relationships with women.

### *Mental health services*

Mental health issues are taboo in many ethnic minority populations. Inability to identify mental health concerns, and taboos around this were the main issues discussed by the women in terms of not seeking relevant health care. Language, child-care, access to transport and taboos around mental health were all significant barriers to accessing mental health services. Women felt an easier point of contact for emotional support was generally family, friends, religious leaders, or the community groups because of the stigma linked to mental health issues.

Knowledge of mental health support services was typically limited to going to the GP with little knowledge about tertiary care or charity, voluntary and third sector services as alternatives. Where there have been poor experiences with GPs, this will mean women are unlikely to seek support for mental health issues.

Additionally, there was an overall fear amongst participants about being prescribed anti-depressants. Many of them said that doctors do not respect their reluctance to be on medication. Many of them just wanted emotional support from mental health practitioners, family, friends, and community.

Immigration status is a serious concern in relation to mental health issues for recent migrants and women who have faced abuse and are without recourse to public funds due to concerns that this may negatively impact their applications. This interacts with lack of awareness of non-statutory mental health services to increase the impacts of these barriers.

*It doesn't matter whether he is white British or from a migrant background, if he understands what you are trying to explain to him.*

...

*I think this is because of my Hijab but I can't be sure why people are sometimes rude.*

...

*I would like service that intervene before things get bad. For example: When I had a baby I was depressed and oblivious to it. I was new in the country and did not know anyone. My health visitor help me by referring me to groups that were helpful before I get worse.*

...

*I came from war torn country. I still go through a lot of PTSD. I used to hear people and get flashbacks of the incidents that happened to me during the war but didn't find a doctor who would understand that background.*

*Our relatives are not open to it. They are too scared of it, and hesitant to support us openly. They are only supportive from behind the scenes.*

...

*It takes about ten days to see my GP even in an urgent situation but once I arrived five minutes late, and had called them to let them know but my GP just refused to see me. All this TV show about health care do not tell the truth behind GP service experience.*

...

*Case of 'love marriages' a woman may have gone against her family to marry someone of her choice and would not feel able to tell their parents if abuse is happening. She said that the men take advantage of this fact and know that she will not go to her family for help and therefore they think they have license to do what they like forcing them to stay in abusive marriages affecting their mental health*

Women expressed that mental health problems with men were even more hidden than among women and that they are expected to deal with it themselves and be strong. For example, men are expected to take the financial burden of the family so do not express the feelings of stress they experience around this; this then manifests through other behaviours such as alcohol consumption.

Women experiencing mental health issues may be more vulnerable to abuse or at higher risk when abuse is taking place, so reaching women from ethnically diverse communities is vital. Women in this project noted that those in their communities often face disadvantage with reduced opportunities which also makes them susceptible to mental health issues and abuse.

Emotional support networks from family and friends were considered important aspects of dealing with mental health issues; and women were clear that this was not to be replaced by professional services. In many focus groups women said they felt isolated and did not have a circle of family and friends, especially when they were first generation migrants. Second generation migrant women seemed more aware of mental health issues compared to women from the first generation. This is an important aspect to consider when designing programmes around mental health, as more tailored and targeted information may be required to reach first generation migrant women, and they may have different needs.

Individuals perceive symptoms in different ways, which affect how they engage with services. Mental health issues are taboo in some cultures which causes women to delay seeking help and fail to access treatment. Participants understood language as a barrier to communicating their needs, and how not being able to express their symptoms has led to further distress. Culturally sensitive, holistic mental health services are key to improving mental health outcomes for people from ethnically diverse backgrounds and enhancing their experiences and confidence in accessing support.



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Women in one of the focus groups felt that a stress management course they were attending is an invaluable service and is a place they can get all sorts of information and advice. They can discuss problems and know it will be dealt with professionally by the facilitator. They felt more women should attend these groups as they help to educate people, and this is what can empower them in their own personal situations.

### *Domestic abuse refuges*

Effective housing provision should be accessible for all women facing domestic abuse in order to secure their safety; housing is a significant factor in domestic abuse, as a lack of housing options acts to keep women trapped in abusive situations. Focus group discussions highlighted some of the experiences of ethnically diverse women on this issue. Many women also felt that those who have recently migrated may find it acts to keep women trapped in abusive situations. Focus group discussions highlighted some would find it harder to settle in a domestic abuse refuge environment because of their sheltered upbringing and lack of experience of systems in the UK.

Women were concerned about being placed in a refuge far away from home which is common practice because of the risks posed to survivors from the perpetrator(s) and their associates in the home location. For many not being able to speak in English and not living in close contact with their cultural communities can be very isolating. One participant stated that alienating someone isn't going to help them in the long run; although she understood refuges need to keep women safe from the perpetrator(s), she felt women should be near to their support networks. This issue would put people off approaching refuges.

Participants in one focus group discussion had little idea about how refuges operated or what they were for. Two Indian participants in one group had a negative image of a refuge, which they imagined to be as dorms or like a prison or refugee camp.

On asking if there should be refuges solely for ethnic minority women, participants had a mixed response. Some did not mind because they could learn from other people and other cultures, however some felt it would be better to have a culture-specific service because the people would understand each other's behaviour better.

In most focus group discussions participants identified they would not want to share facilities with other families, especially if they or others had children. They would not want to be sharing with other domestic abuse survivors, as they stated their own issues were quite difficult to deal with. A Chinese British participant knew some Chinese individuals who were living in refuges who

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*We were told about the refuges by our social workers but were never clearly explained. My friend thought that she needed to share a room in the refuge.*

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had positive comments about their experiences and are learning new skills and cooking together. Women in the project felt that specific refuges for particular ethnic backgrounds were a good idea, especially for those who have to come to the UK from overseas. Having language and similar lifestyles in common would help them bond and create friendships – people from the same culture can relate to each other and be more sympathetic. Some suggested prayer rooms should be incorporated into refuges. In one focus group discussion, a Chinese participant asserted that being with other Chinese people who can speak the same language would be important.

### *Social services (local authority Children's Services)*

Women in the project spoke considerably about 'social services', the term commonly used when discussing the local authority Children's Services which fall within the Social and Healthcare teams. Focus group participants highlighted that there were multiple problems in accessing and engaging with Children's Services. Fear of social services taking away the children was a major concern for women which was often used by abusers as a tool for manipulation. They identified a need to bring an awareness raising programme. Some women noted that they see other families with child protection issues but no social services involvement, but once social services become involved their case seems to become more and more complicated.

Having a specialist BAMER Support Worker was regarded as one of the most important aspects of receiving a fully helpful and supported experience for many women.

Participants seem to have the understanding that social services were more likely to support women who had children. This is because under section 20 of the Children's Act, women are eligible to receive certain benefits if they have children depending on them, and so in their experiences this is often a

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

...

*I was too overwhelmed and lacking in confidence to do what the social worker was asking me to do.*

...

*My husband had a support [social] worker and [who] felt that whatever he says and does is right. I was scared of him. It was actually my son from my previous marriage who spoke up and told the hospital staff about the situation at home. He told the staff that my husband was beating him. This is the first time we felt supported.*

”

*A woman said that they would go to their local temple (gurdwara) noticeboard to look for information on domestic abuse and violence.*

...

*In my religion if someone is behaving badly towards you, you should ignore it and eventually the instigators should realise themselves that you are not retaliating and should back off.*

*However, when you take this approach for 11 years and it doesn't work, it is hard to go back to the parents or stay with the in laws.*

reason for involvement. Women also felt that social services tended to prioritise their children's needs before their own, meaning that their needs were not seen as a matter of importance.

One woman stated that social workers are replaced frequently, and this is a problem as no one ever knows her case properly because it keeps getting passed onto new workers. She felt they make mistakes because of this, yet it is the mothers who suffer the stress and have sleepless nights.

On the other hand, one participant explained how her social worker was helpful in the case where her daughter was complaining about her; the social worker helped to explain to the daughter how the mother does care for her. Another woman also stated that social workers were helpful and offered support when she gave birth by caesarean-section and had four other children to care for.

Children's Services do not get involved in cases unless there are safeguarding concerns. In some focus groups there were discussions about unannounced home visits by police and CSC and women asserted that proportionate and sensitive management was important.

#### *Local authorities and housing departments*

A Pakistani women's group asserted that the local authority – usually referred to as the Council – need to support funding for their group. Women on spousal visas and without recourse to public funds reported finding it difficult to receive support from the local authority and having no option but to return to the abusive relationship. Others expressed that that they find it difficult to produce evidence of abuse when it is

not physical which makes it difficult for Local Authorities to understand what was actually happening and respond appropriately.

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### *Religious institutions*

Women mentioned how religious institutions can provide solace to victims of domestic abuse just as they do to those otherwise oppressed and broken. There was a common understanding among women that no religion sanctions abuse in any circumstances, and one participant stated that religion does not promote staying quiet and taking abuse. However, some women also talked about non-interventionist approaches, and the mediation and reconciliation roles that religious authorities sometimes played without understanding what victims go through. Quite a few women were also found to be self-policing themselves for fear of reprisals. Churches, mosques, and temples have been places where women tend to go to seek guidance, support, and mental peace. It was noted, however, that only men are the leaders of temples and mosques so the women were not confident in the extent to which they would understand problems from their perspective.

*Any ban on Sharia council must provide an alternative solution for people who have had religious marriage but no civil registrations.*

Many women who followed Islam preferred to seek help from a learned Muslim who would follow the guidance of the Quran in giving advice on abuse and violence against women and girls, and felt that they would not advise her to take actions against her faith and belief. Some women expressed that they would seek solutions within their religion but would be equally open to receiving support from secular VAWG services (Berkshire Women's Aid in their cases).

### *Sharia Law and its legality in the UK*

For many Muslim women marriages are only conducted within the religious framework of a Sharia council and not the civil, legal framework within the UK. Hence, if there has only been a religious marriage under Sharia law, seeking recourse through civil law is not always possible, and marriages cannot be considered terminated without a religious divorce. There has at times been talk nationally about a ban of Sharia councils, but they can play a significant role in assisting women trapped in abusive marriages.

### *Counselling*

Women in one focus group said that they did not receive adequate help to leave their marriage and many of them had to suffer in silence. Many women refused to go to the police for not wanting to escalate the problem and would rather start off with emotional support.

Relationship problems in many households within ethnic minority communities are suppressed at initial stages, escalating to a further level, and leading to violence. Furthermore, many ethnic minority women who have recently migrated on spousal visas do not have networks to talk about these issues confidentially. They also noted that people are reluctant to help women in these situations because of the backlash from the community. They would not want to be blamed for breaking up marriages and families particularly as they are not confident in their own advice. One participant said that she did help a woman whose mother-in-law would beat her, however, they eventually 'reconciled' and both blamed the participant for interfering and

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*I did the Freedom Programme and that help me recognise all that was going wrong in my relationship. Then had courage to speak to Mum and big sister about what was happening. Would be better if BAMER needs were included in it.*

...

*We tend not to speak to families back home about our issues because they have their own issues and there is nothing they can do to help you. We feel that we will be just worrying them. [Those] back home think that when you are in the UK you have everything. Because we come from war torn countries, sometime families rely on you for financial support.*

”

therefore she would be hesitant to help again. Most of the women said that they offered support to others by talking to them and allowing them to talk about their issues; they felt talking helps their mental health, at least.

### *The Freedom Programme*

Although the impact assessment<sup>15</sup> of the Freedom Programme on ethnically diverse women needs further attention and analysis, communities have received the programme well across the region, with requests to tailor it to the needs of women from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Within this project one of the agencies developed a group work programme specifically for ethnic minority women, based on the Freedom Programme, to empower them to identify abusive behaviours. Named Ilam-El-Hifzat, anecdotal reports from the facilitators indicate this program was well received by the beneficiaries who were supported on it. Another area in the Thames Valley ran the Freedom Programme specifically for Punjabi and Urdu speakers.

### **3.3.3. Other findings**

#### *Newly recognised forms of abuse*

Focus group discussions revealed forms of abuse and violence against women and girls which are only newly recognised within white Western societies. Such issues discussed in these sessions included as transboundary abandonment, breast ironing, and black magic. In one of the focus groups, women said that some girls are married in India and are then left there with their in-laws

and are not given a chance to come to the UK. In the same focus group, in participants also talked about patterns within their community where men dupe girls in India into getting married to someone with an alcohol dependency, or somebody who is already in a relationship with

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.thegriffinssociety.org/system/files/papers/fullreport/research\\_paper\\_2009\\_01\\_watkins.pdf](https://www.thegriffinssociety.org/system/files/papers/fullreport/research_paper_2009_01_watkins.pdf)

someone in the UK. Women also talked of issues of polygamy where only one of the marriages were registered in the UK and unregistered marriages took place and their wives are made to work for their in-laws. In many cases this would amount to modern slavery, and potentially also trafficking in the UK.

### *Social support networks*

When talking about social support networks, it is important to note the transnational nature of migration. Many communities' lives are not just impacted by their own or by their close family members but by their social circles, relatives, friends, and extended families who do not live in the same continent. Gender roles are affected by social structures and cultures in many contexts.

Lack of established social support networks in the UK was a key reason given for why ethnic minority women did not have the courage to leave an abusive relationship. Many women said they cannot return to their parents as it is common to be asked to reconcile with the perpetrator because divorce brings shame. In one focus group women discussed how in some arranged marriages, couples marry without knowing each other properly and the woman can find herself trapped in the UK in an unhappy or abusive marriage, unable to return home. Additionally, many women said that they would refrain from asking for help from the community for fear of being talked about and feelings of embarrassment.

Some women stated that although they might receive support from their marital families, they would still be unwilling to disclose their abusive relationship because this results in the families having negative attitudes towards the husband in the event of any reconciliation. For

*We tend not to speak to families back home about our issues because they have their own issues and there is nothing they can do to help you. We feel that we will be just worrying them. [Those] back home think that when you are in the UK you have everything. Because we come from war torn countries, sometime families rely on you for financial support.*

...

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

...

*I had never thought I would marry someone in the UK, and had no idea of available support. My husband was abusive and I wanted to separate but when I approached the council to understand support available to me, I did not receive any help. I was told I would not get help with housing benefit, and I could not financially support my two children. I felt as though I had no choice but to return to my husband and later had two more children with him.*

“

*My sister in law is in physically and mentally abusive marriage for 30 years. If there were any problems the couple would go to elder family members to resolve issues. The family would encourage her to make the relationship work. They would help resolve the issues, but it remained within the family. She couldn't think of receiving any other forms of support.*

...

*Even here I am expected to live with my parents-in-law and this is accepted as normal. I lived with them for 6 years before finally moving out.*

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other women separation may lead to being stigmatised within their community. Marriage gives many women status which some have said is more important to them than the abuse they receive from their husbands.

### *Confusion around cultural expectations and identity*

The BAMER Support Workers noted a range of experiences amongst different generations. For example, speaking and understanding English language was not a problem for second generation ethnically diverse women. Some participants felt that they were stuck between two generations and cultures. Some of the second-generation children felt that the push for them to hold onto some aspects of their culture, language and family relations were stronger in their families when compared to families in the country of origin.

### *Patriarchy, family, and child-rearing*

Some ethnic minority women expressed that toxic masculinity and patriarchal structures are reinforcing traditional gender norms which keeps women at a disadvantage. Some said that excessive pampering of male children makes them dependent on their wives later in life and also makes them feel entitled.

For some, children were used as tools of manipulation to keep them in abusive relationships, which not only put them at risk, but also impacted their children emotionally. One woman stated that there are safe houses for women that want to leave abusive situations, but you can only go there if you are willing to cut ties with all your family and community. She felt that compared to her generation who 'suffered in silence' many younger girls will not 'take it' and they would leave abusive relationships as they are more empowered.

One participant said that while growing up her mother made her, and her sisters do the housework while her brothers were not asked to. She was taught that girls should be subservient to males; the boys also learnt this message. Others agreed that this was normal practice and women noted that males are socialised in such a way that they cannot communicate and express their emotions or trauma openly. This can result in any emotional issues impacting their behaviour towards their partners.

The group also talked about how parents-in-law could be abusive towards their daughters-in-law. One participant acknowledged that sons nowadays would not even listen to parent's opinions and can also be rude and aggressive towards parents.

The family dynamic is significant, and one participant felt that there is less domestic abuse happening within the younger generation, and that families are less involved in resolving marital issues strictly within the family context. The group acknowledged, however, that family support is crucial to give victims the emotional and physical support required for their wellbeing.

The group believed the parents are in a difficult situation, because it is seen as their duty to look after their children and they do not want people to gossip. While most women felt controlled by their mothers-in-law, in some situations mothers-in-law felt that there is a degree of role-reversal happening currently, with harassment taking place the other way around. It is worth considering whether this is the reaction of women who are not used to females asserting themselves or being independent and non-subservient, and therefore are interpreting their behaviour as disrespectful.

Some communities have cross-cousin marriages which brings not just two people, but previously connected families together, which makes it complicated for women to disclose about abuse in a relationship. This would also bring further shame to the family and breakdown in numerous relationships within the wider family.

Victim blaming was one of the main issues when participants talked about family dynamics and can be seen in many of the discussions and testimonies in this section. Feeling indebted to the abuser was also common, with many women on spousal visas feel beholden to the abusers for bringing them to the UK, whilst others were just sad to be leaving their home countries.

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*My relative's son's marriage broke down because of his temper and he moved back in with his parents but now he makes life hard for them; he controls his parents and doesn't let them do what they want and [they] are helpless because they are worried that he might take his own life if they do not allow him to do what he likes to do.*

...

*My husband used to tell my son that he was the 'Boss' as he is a male.*

...

*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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*He used children to manipulate me and this had an impact on the children. My eldest son was prevented from travelling abroad with me and this way he controlled my movement as well because I wouldn't go anywhere without my child. Although I opened about it to my relatives, they were too scared and hesitant to support me openly. They only seem to empathise behind the scenes.*

...

*My in-laws did not support me and called me stupid and therefore, put the blame on me. It is difficult when the mind-set that women should carry on regardless persists. If my son does something like this and I know of it, it is my duty to tell him that he is wrong.*

...

*Now children will not talk to extended family and decide for themselves on how to go ahead with their lives.*

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## 4. Outcomes

### 4.1. Community mapping

#### 4.1.1. Approach

Community mapping was achieved mainly through the word of mouth and rigorous online research on what services and agencies are available. The exercise aimed to identify existing 'BAMER' and non-'BAMER' services in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire and to look at community groups. The exercise provided an understanding of:

- The prevalence of existing community groups and their ethnic representation,
- The location and spread of 'BAMER' and non-'BAMER' services, and
- Community priorities and the gaps.

Self-help and support groups, forums, and organisations for groups from ethnically diverse backgrounds were available across the Thames Valley region. This project collected details of some of the agencies and organisations working on violence against women and girls, and although significant efforts were, the list is not exhaustive.

It is difficult to ascertain total number of community groups that are actually providing support around abuse and violence against women and girls within ethnically diverse communities because it is hard to identify groups operating in an informal setting. Most ethnic minority communities in the region with a larger population have their own community groups that meet occasionally. Currently 99 community groups were identified in Thames Valley, but the number could be higher given the large area and the diverse population make-up of the region.

#### 4.1.2. Outcomes

The number of diverse ethnic specialist groups focusing on issues relating to refugees and asylum, and English language support are on the rise, however there are gaps in the number of organisations focusing on forced marriage, honour-based abuse, and female genital mutilation. Although this kind of support is being provided at the national level through organisations like Karma Nirvana, the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation, Latin American Women Rights Service and Southall Black Sisters, at the local level very few diverse ethnic specialist services exist. The Rose Clinics in Reading and Oxford, and Oxford Against Cutting are operate around female genital mutilation, but there are no diverse ethnic specialist support services at a local addressing honour-based abuse or forced marriage.

Many services focusing on south Asian women were identified in Slough and Milton Keynes. More services for African women were recognised in Oxford. Translation services for East Timorese population and other smaller groups of population could not be identified. Most

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diverse ethnic services relating to violence against women and girls were identified at a national and regional level and to a lesser extent in some local areas in Thames Valley. Of the services identified at local level, most were located in those areas with higher concentrations of ethnic minority populations in: Slough, Reading, Oxford and Milton Keynes. Although Slough has some Polish community groups, there are very few within Thames Valley despite their population being quite high.

## 4.2. Community Engagement Activities

### 4.2.1. Approach and process

The community engagement activity of the Thames Valley BAMER Project took place over two years in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Berkshire. It provided learning about different needs and aspirations of communities regarding existing statutory and voluntary services in Thames Valley, and assisted in developing responses to these. An important factor considered for engagement was building meaningful relationships with ethnically diverse and underrepresented communities from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Within a twelve-month period of the project 33 community groups were engaged with. The purpose of community engagement activities was to explore avenues to inform community groups of existing VAWG services, raise awareness about violence against women and girls, and gain an understanding of women's experiences in accessing services through focus group discussions. The project engaged with women by through on-to-one sessions involving them in activities at group sessions. This involved collaborating with communities to find joint responses to issues of abuse and violence that arise within different communities by considering alternative methods and approaches to enable women to approach and access services.

The BAMER Support Workers recognised at the outset that meaningful community engagement requires connections with the communities that would require significant time and investment. One of the key strategies of community engagement activities was to make it easier and more convenient for more people to participate. Therefore, engagement efforts were focused on exploring relationships with existing community groups instead of forming new ones. BAMER Support Workers collaborated with community groups and participated at community events to build trust and offer opportunities to exchange experiences and ideas to create accessible and approachable VAWG services for different ethnic communities. This made it easier for women to engage without having to attend a separate meeting.

Focus was centred on an intersectional approach, accounting for multiple, layered inequalities within ethnic minority populations. Consideration was given to disabilities, gender, and class/caste differences within the groups. These efforts focused on reaching as many different women from ethnic backgrounds as possible to offer information about violence against women and girls in a targeted manner.

Region	Stated Group Identity	Berks	Bucks	Oxon	Totals
African and Caribbean	African and Caribbean			①	1
	African Women			①	1
	Caribbean		①		1
	Kenyan, Somali, Ethiopian groups		①		1
	Mixed ethnicities from Africa			①	1
	Somali, Eritrean and other East African group	①			1
	Sudanese	①			1
	Swahili	②			2
	Tanzanian	①			1
Asian	Indian	②			2
	Indian and Pakistani	②		①	3
	Indian, Pakistani, South Asian heritage		①		1
	Filipino	①			1
	Nepali	①			1
	Pakistani	①		①	2
	Punjabi	①			1
	Indian and Pakistani heritage Urdu speakers	①			1
European	Polish			①	1
Middle Eastern	Kurdish Women			①	1
	Syrian		②	②	4
Roma, Traveller and Gypsy	Irish Traveller	①			1
	Roma	①			1
	Traveller community			①	1
Mixed	Arabic	①			1
	Jewish women of mixed ethnicities		①		1
	Kurdish, Pakistani women	①			1
	Learning disabilities (ethnicity not defined)	①			1
	LGBT community (ethnicity not defined)			①	1
	Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius, Sudan, Uganda	①			1
	Mixed ethnicities	①⑦	⑨	②	28
	Mixed ethnicities - asylum seekers			①	1
	Mixed ethnicities - children			①	1
	Mixed faith		①		1
	Muslim	①			1
	Muslim - children	①			1
	Muslim - LGBT			①	1
	Refugees from different regions			①	1
	Sexual health support young adults	①			1
	Women from FGM practising communities	①			1
Not defined	Not defined	②		⑤	7
<b>Totals</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>81</b>

Table 3 - Community Groups Engaged with by the Thames Valley BAMER Project

Community engagement efforts included the following activities:

- Individual engagement
- Group engagement
- Art and craft workshops
- One-to-one support
- Training and presentations provided to community groups
- Organisation of seaside day trips
- Cooking sessions
- Eid celebrations
- Honour Killings Memorial Day
- Christmas meals
- Walking activities
- Ethnic diversity empowerment event through speakers
- Trip to the House of Commons (Freedom Programme for Urdu and Panjabi speakers in Hestia)

Community engagement activities took place in different stages:

- Level 1 Identification of community groups
- Level 2 Approaching the community groups by phone and email
- Level 3 Meeting the organisers or leaders of the groups
- Level 4 Meeting the group members, attending the group meetings
- Level 5 Training, joint working, and organising community events
- Level 6 Drop-in sessions, one-to-one support, focus group discussions
- Level 7 Putting referral pathways in place

One of the most significant outcomes of the community engagement activities was the emotional and wellbeing support it provided to the women who attend these groups. On average 10-12 women attended the community groups every week. Although the primary purpose of such groups was not defined in terms of providing emotional support, many women identified this as a benefit of attending. Women described receiving emotional support in a culturally appropriate manner as one of the driving factors for them attending the informal self-help community groups. Other outcomes are outlined as below.

## 4.2.2. Outcomes

### *Awareness raising*

The community engagement activities have helped bridge the gap between the service providers and service users, increasing the capacity for women and girls among different ethnic groups to identify signs and symptoms of violence against women and girls. Most women engaging with the community groups had little prior knowledge of domestic abuse with only a few recognising non-physical acts as abuse. Coercive control, among other strands of violence against women and girls, were less talked about and training on these issues by BAMER Support Workers proved

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effective in terms of raising awareness. Many women did not know how to respond when someone in the community made disclosures. The community engagement activities trained women in how to respond and access support, offering signposting and links to support and relevant helpline numbers.

One of the main advantages of working with community groups is being able to spread the message of different forms of violence against women and girls and available support through word of mouth, overcoming any language barriers.

### *Improved service delivery*

Improving the quality of VAWG services and being responsive to the needs of ethnically diverse women cannot be done without their participation in the process and in services. As a result of community engagement activities, BAMER Support Workers anecdotally identified a rise in the number of ethnically diverse clients accessing domestic abuse services. This was also supported by anecdotal reports from community group facilitators who expressed appreciation for the support provided to group members by the BAMER Support Workers.

Although the project was meant for women, it identified that male victims of domestic abuse in minority ethnic populations often chose not to disclose for reasons of shame and honour. Community engagement activities played a crucial role in informing the communities that the VAWG services in Thames Valley served both male and female clients. This was evident in the anecdotally reported increase in the number of male clients in two of the BAMER Project provider services.

### *Increased participation*

Communities have come to know about Thames Valley BAMER Project and have seen increased participation with BAMER Support Workers. The positive effect of the engagement is underscored by the fact that communities do not want the BAMER Support Workers roles to end.

The project engaged with groups that already existed, but one provider also developed some community groups themselves to engage with women. The groups provided cooking sessions as a backdrop from which to offer emotional support to women with a range of issues. For many women this allowed them to come out of their homes to fight isolation without sessions being explicitly about their experiences of violence or abuse.

Continuous engagement with community groups helped develop trust between clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds and services. Groups expressed a desire for ongoing engagement because of the benefits they have gained so far. The project was able to touch base with communities that were overlooked by services.

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### *Other issues in communities*

There is a complex relationship between abuse and violence against women and girls, and other issues experienced within communities. Exploration of this is beyond the scope of this project, but important observations were made in relation to some of these wider issues.

Suicide rates are three times higher in ethnic minority populations compared to the white British population. It was noted that there is poor awareness around suicide and mental health issues amongst some groups. Issues of stigma around abortion were also talked about in the community engagement activities as were issues around consent and the concept of rape within marriage, both of which require more awareness and understanding.

## **4.3. Client Casework through Outreach**

### **4.3.1. Approach**

Specialist ethnically and culturally sensitive one-to-one outreach support was developed in various forms in response to the community engagement work but was also provided for ethnically diverse clients approaching the domestic abuse services through previously established routes, such as helplines. Some of the providers recognised the need to develop personalised, individual support and safety planning in response to the interest and engagement brought forward through work with community groups. As a result, specialist ethnically sensitive outreach services were offered by five of the six BAMER Support Workers, across Berkshire East, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire. Those supported in this way included women who had been subjected to all or any of the forms of violence against women and girls, often those who had previously been unable to identify or describe abuse being perpetrated against them, and those with insecure immigration status and/or without recourse to public funds. Frequently, women accessing the outreach support were experiencing multiple, intersectional, and complex issues.

### *Intensive and holistic support*

The support differed from the outreach support otherwise provided by the domestic abuse services by offering direct and responsive access to a support worker who was specifically focused on their intersectional experiences within the context of violence against women and girls, with specialist knowledge of the issues faced by ethnic minority women to support this approach. It was often more frequent and intensive than other outreach support, incorporating contact several times a week to assist clients with understanding correspondence, attending appointments, signposting to services, and advocating with agencies such as local authority Children's Services (social services), housing departments, solicitors and legal services, police, courts and so on. In this sense the specialist ethnically sensitive outreach service was able to offer holistic support incorporating intensive emotional and psychosocial support alongside practical advocacy.

Provider:	Berks East (Hestia)	Berks West (BWA)	Bucks/Milton Keynes (MK-ACT)	Oxon (ODAS by A2Dominion)	
Number of Clients Supported by Outreach:	N/A	14	27	27	
Ethnicities represented	Berks East	Berks West	Bucks & MK	Oxon	
Africa	African (non-specific)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	British African	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Egyptian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Eritrean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Moroccan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nigerian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Sierra Leone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Somali	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Sudanese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tanzanian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Zimbabwean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Mixed African	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	White African	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Asia	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bengali		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Iranian		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nepali		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Palestinian		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pakistani		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sri Lankan		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Syrian		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thai		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Turkish		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Vietnamese		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Europe	Estonian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Hungarian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lithuanian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Polish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Portuguese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Romanian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Latin America	Brazilian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mixed	Arab	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Kurdish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Strands of VAWG Supported	Berks East	Berks West	Bucks & MK	Oxon	
Domestic Abuse		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Honour-Based Abuse		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Forced Marriage		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Stalking	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Table 4 - Clients Supported Through One-to-one Work (Outreach/Casework) through the Thames Valley BAMER Project



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These outreach programmes did not operate a waiting list, and in some areas they were designed so that women were able to access them directly, without having to go through the helpline which is usually the single point of access for domestic abuse services. Within the BAMER Project, the overall approach to client casework through outreach was:

- Reaching women who needed support through continuous engagement with community groups,
- Aiming to intervene at an earlier stage when the risk from abuse or violence was assessed as 'standard' or 'medium', to prevent escalation and crisis,
- Working sensitively to gain further information, often identifying higher or more nuanced risk factors than those perceived by other agencies, enabling more appropriate responses and interventions, and
- Offering counselling sessions via trained professionals to ensure that clients had access to emotional support where there were intense and complex issues present.

This work was primarily undertaken through the following activities, which were put into practice in specific ways by each provider:

- Group work – two of the BAMER Project providers offered group work programmes.
- Ongoing scheduled one-to-one support – all three providers offering outreach across Berkshire East, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire provided a traditional form of outreach but tailored for the client group as previously described.
- Drop-in surgeries – one of the providers developed this form of support, offering three surgeries per week; on average two-three women attended each surgery.
- Peer support sessions – one of the providers facilitated a group where roughly eight women met for 1.5 hours per week. Additionally, an established peer support group in the same area saw an increase in membership of women from ethnically diverse communities following the launch of the BAMER Project.

### 4.3.2. Outcomes

#### *Empowerment*

**Information and rights** – The specialist outreach work supported ethnically diverse women to feel empowered by providing information and enabling them to understand and access their rights, and their entitlement to welfare benefits. In particular, clients were supported to:

- Review their eligibility to access public funds,
- Access to immigration solicitors,
- Apply for immigration status in the UK,
- Resolve immigration issues and gain secure status,
- Apply for the destitution domestic violence concession, and

“

**BAMER Support Workers**

*We get better response from authorities when we accompany our clients to the services. We are better able to explain their situations and stories without them having to repeat their stories to multiple services.*

...

*One BAMER client who I went to for child protection meetings did not know what to say and had no understanding of what the meeting was for, how it impacted her and her children and what to say. Accompanying women like her has a big effect on what the outcome of the meeting will be.*

”

• Work in partnership with social services, Local Authorities, the criminal justice system, and police to keep themselves and their children safe.

**Language and connection** – The outreach service supported women who speak different languages either through direct interpretation or through the Language Line telephone interpretation service. The outreach work could provide one-to-one support through transition from community groups to outreach support services and, in reverse, was able to connect women to existing community groups. When the outreach activity started, numbers were low, but the community groups began making referrals and those accessing outreach support increased. Outreach sessions have empowered women to overcome internal barriers which prevented them from approaching services and making disclosures of abuse.

**Awareness of abuse** – Women victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities are more aware of the layers of abuse and ongoing issues beyond the one incident which brought them to services. Through such discussions, BAMER Support Workers have also identified honour-based abuse cases and how this can manifest in different ethnicities and cultures.

**Disclosures** – Many women involved with the project did not previously know where or how to report abuse. Any kind of engagement with women from ethnic minority communities requires building trust, and the BAMER Support Workers have built strong relationships in this regard. They have enabled women to gain the confidence to discuss their experiences of abuse with other agencies, and at times to report their issues to the authorities. Women involved with this project who were initially unwilling to disclose have subsequently felt able to discuss their abusive experiences during their involvement with the project.

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### *Advocacy – improved experiences for women*

One of the greatest strengths of the BAMER Project's outreach support was to improve women's experiences with the other services and agencies they interact with. BAMER Support Workers achieved this by assisting women to considerably reduce the amount of times they are expected to retell their stories to multiple agencies and by accompanying them to appointments with different services and advocating for them. When clients attended with the BAMER Support Workers, they reported that services were more responsive, and actions were completed more quickly.

**Bridging gaps** – BAMER Support Workers have also bridged the gaps between services and women from ethnically diverse backgrounds through such advocacy, which they have appreciated. Many clients are not able to write statements when required, or do not understand what they are expected write. Many cannot explain what is happening due to their lack of English, and others are in too much distress to explain themselves effectively. Women from ethnic minority communities are mostly distrustful of engaging with Children's Services for fear that their children will be removed but were more receptive after receiving further information about the Social Worker's remit. Clients feel more confident in approaching services with the support of BAMER Support Workers. The project was also able to connect women from minority ethnic communities with English language classes to help reduce the barriers and isolation they were experiencing. The BAMER Project focused on intersections within the client populations, carefully considering and supporting male clients, LGBTIQ+ clients and clients with disabilities, all of whom tend to experience greater barriers in accessing services.

**Navigating pathways** – BAMER Support Workers have helped women to navigate pathways in and around services relating to violence against women and girls. One of the most beneficial services the Thames Valley BAMER Project provided was accompanying women and advocating for them at local authority, police, and court appointments. Navigating pathways and interactions with agencies becomes especially challenging when the client is not able to speak English.

### *Safeguarding women without recourse to public funds – safe and secure accommodation*

Outreach support also provided a crucial safety net, safeguarding women from ethnic minority communities and ensuring they were not left destitute by supporting them to access safe accommodation.

The BAMER Support Workers empowered women to understand their eligibility for public funds and their rights and responsibilities in the UK. They helped clients to find urgent temporary accommodation as well as finding more permanent solutions to support women who do not have any recourse to public funds. In doing this the Thames Valley BAMER Project has formed new partnerships with agencies who are working with women who have insecure immigration status.

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One of the BAMER Support Workers supported a Syrian woman on a spousal visa who had fled abuse from the north of the country. She was helped by a friend within Thames Valley initially, but once the friend was no longer able to host her, she had nowhere to go. She slept on the streets of a large town in Thame Valley for one night, but on accessing the BAMER Project a Support Worker found her a safe space through the Sanctuary Hosting scheme. Meanwhile, the BAMER Support Worker pursued a destitution domestic violence concession application, and as a result was able to secure funding and find a space for her in a domestic abuse refuge in the longer term.

All BAMER Support Workers were trained by Project 17 in how to support women without recourse to public funds to enable them to better support women who are ethnically minoritised around these issues.<sup>16</sup>

### *Reunions with children*

Work undertaken by one of the provider services in the BAMER Project has reunited mothers with their children in three separate cases. This was achieved in close partnership with Reunite International who work on reuniting families with children abroad. In one case the BAMER Support Worker advocated for and supported the work of Reunite International to bring a child from a Senegalese background back to the UK who had been taken abroad. The child was being forced to go through female genital mutilation but was safely reunited with her mother because of the work undertaken.

### *Safeguarding ethnic minority women*

BAMER Support Workers have prioritised the safeguarding of women from ethnically diverse backgrounds and providing emotional and psychosocial support has enabled women to gain confidence to leave abusive relationships to protect themselves and their children.

Many women without recourse to public funds have underlying mental health issues because of experiences relating to this. Compounded by abuse these experiences could lead to severe distress and potentially to self-harm or suicidal behaviour. A Syrian woman who had no recourse to public funds had been referred to a community mental health service based at a specialist hospital in the Thames Valley. She tried to commit suicide whilst at the hospital but was helped by the nurses who then referred her to the local domestic abuse service. She engaged with the BAMER Support Worker in the service, who then worked together with the mental health services to understand and reduce her distress and to find safe accommodation for her.

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<sup>16</sup> Project 17 is an organisation working to end destitution among migrant children. It works with families experiencing exceptional poverty to improve their access to local authority support.

### ***BAMER Support Workers***

*One client's passport was under the control of the perpetrator. Clients who are on spousal visas find it difficult to flee because of their insecure immigration status.*

...

*Providing immigration support is very time consuming and could be very limiting if we only stick with one client. With BAMER work, we have been able to get other members in the team to work on immigration issues in order to enable support for more clients.*

...

*Home Office takes six months to respond. Everyone says that she is an over stayer because it has been three months she made an application since the expiry of her leave to remain. If we weren't providing any support she would have been without any money. It really doesn't help that the Home Office doesn't provide any documentation to show that her application is being processed.*

### ***Immigration support***

BAMER Support Workers have worked with clients where their insecure immigration status has been used as manipulation as part of the abuse, and to keep them trapped in the relationship. They have helped women to obtain immigration solicitors and legal aid, which is difficult to access due to complexities in the system and stringent limitations on funding for legal support.

Immigration support provided by BAMER Support Workers has mainly been in terms of supporting them to apply for the destitution domestic violence concessions by connecting to professionals trained and licensed in providing immigration advice, however this is not always without challenges.

### ***Supporting clients with newly recognised forms of abuse***

The Thames Valley BAMER Project has worked with clients on various other forms of abuse which are more recently recognised within Western societies, such as:

- Transboundary abandonment
- Breast ironing, and
- Issues of black magic

Among forms of abuse that are more recently coming to the attention of Western professionals, one of the services worked with a client where her husband had switched off his phone and failed to collect her from the airport when she came to join him to live in the UK. When the police subsequently approached him about this, he said he did not want anything to do with her. It transpired that she had previously managed to flee to the UK when she was being forced to have female genital mutilation performed against her in her home country, and he did not want to be with her because the procedure had not been

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completed. Similarly, BAMER Support Workers mentioned that there are cases where wives are left abandoned with in-laws in South Asia after marriage.

### *Supporting male clients*

Agencies have anecdotally reported an increase in male clients from ethnic minority communities, although these remain low overall. During the project, four male clients were supported by BAMER Support Workers in two of the services. One of those agencies has also strengthened their relationship with a male refuge in Birmingham to support male clients better in future. Of services who were not involved in delivering the BAMER Project, Oxfordshire Sexual Assault and Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC) offer advocacy to male university students in Oxford who have been subjected to sexual violence. Other (national) resources to support male clients include, the Men's Advice Line (run by Respect), the ManKind Initiative, and Survivors UK.

## **4.4. Partnership working**

### **4.4.1. Approach**

Violence against women and girls in ethnic minority populations is a problem with multiple complexities. It requires both intensive and holistic support from different agencies working in different sectors to bring together resource, expertise, and ideas. Therefore, there is a need to unify efforts from all agencies to provide a better service whilst gaining clarity about different pathways.

Through the BAMER Project, multiple agencies came together to work in partnership with one another to support ethnically diverse women, to identify good practice, and to advocate for survivors from diverse ethnic communities as appropriate. The project brought together different domestic abuse services, Local Authorities, and voluntary sector organisations. Partnership working aimed to achieve the following goals:

- Effective communication between partner agencies to provide support to victims,
- Awareness raising and information sharing (e.g. local schools),
- Signposting clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds to other agencies to meet specific needs, and
- Effective communication strategies to ensure reduce the need for clients to go through multiple agencies repeating their stories of abuse.

### **4.4.2. Outcomes of partnership working**

#### *Holistic and intensive support*

The project built improved relationships with partners working with women without any recourse to public funds and those with insecure immigration status. Providers in two different areas worked in close partnership with Sanctuary Hosting to temporarily house clients with no

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recourse to public funds until a more permanent solution is found. One of those providers has also linked with their local authority to develop a formal referral pathway to ensure that access to this scheme is embedded into practice.

One of the domestic abuse services worked closely with a local mental health hospital to pick up alerts to safeguard women with mental health issues. Agencies have also worked in close coordination with Karma Nirvana to distribute leaflets on honour-based abuse. Similarly, opportunities to develop partnerships to support women subjected to abuse were also explored with Rights of Women and Solace Women's Aid.

One agency's partnership with Reunite International helped bring three children back from abroad to their mothers where they had been separated because of controlling/abusive behaviours by the perpetrator.

Engagement with statutory agencies has also improved significantly, and BAMER Support Workers report that social services are aware of their work and often ask for their involvement in cases.

There has also been work with immigration lawyers to pursue options for pro-bono work which is free to the client.

### *Networking opportunities*

BAMER Support Workers have joined forums to meet other professionals in the field. Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Forum, and Windsor and Maidenhead Domestic Abuse Forum have been useful spaces to share ideas and network with other professionals working with ethnic minority women. These groups have provided platforms for sharing information on what is happening in the area, new legislation, and systems that are in place. Windsor and Maidenhead Community Cohesion Partnership was helpful for networking with professionals, community leaders and charities working on abuse and violence against women and girls, among other issues.

### *Workshops and trainings*

BAMER Support Workers collaborated with their local VAWG charities to develop trainings and workshops. They provided training on domestic abuse with extensive discussions about the violence and abuse perpetrated against women and girls from ethnically diverse communities.

BAMER Support Workers have been working in collaboration with each other to share information about events, workshops, and trainings. All BAMER Support Workers were trained by Project 17 in how to support women without recourse to public funds, and the knowledge, networks and resources from this training was widely used by the BAMER Support Workers in their work.

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### *Leveraging resources and funding*

Two of the provider agencies working in the BAMER Project collaborated with local charities and organisations to gain funding and develop projects within the community that supported or complemented the work of the BAMER Project. One such partnership has offered financial support for furniture, child-care, and travel costs for female survivors from ethnic minority communities; another has been collaborating to represent survivors in court regarding welfare and benefits rights.

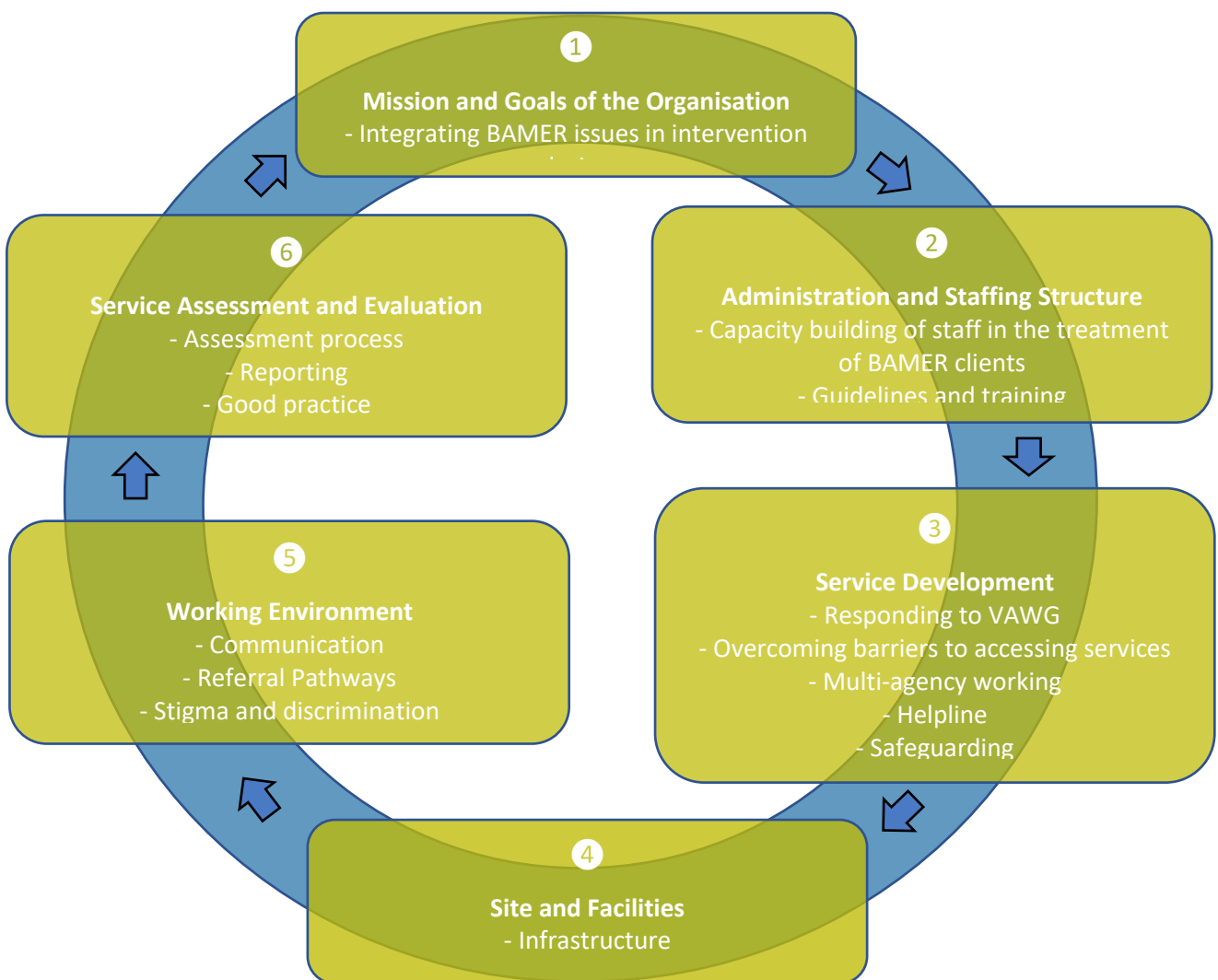


## 5. Peer Review Audit

The Thames Valley BAMER Project used a peer review audit to collect information on the nature of agency responses to ethnic minority women who have been subjected to abuse and violence in Thames Valley. Seventeen specialist services across the region were asked to complete a comprehensive questionnaire and where possible provide evidence to demonstrate their responses. Five agencies returned their completed questionnaires; three of which had BAMER Support Workers within this project. The information gathered should be viewed alongside that presented elsewhere in this report for a more accurate analysis of the situation.

- MK-ACT
- The Thames Valley ISVA Service
- Wycombe Women’s Aid
- DASH Charity
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service

The audit was divided into six thematic sections, as shown below.



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The survey consisted of questions under several themes which are set out below along with an exploration of the findings.

## 5.1. Mission and goals of the organisation

All five organisations confirmed they have an equality, diversity, and inclusion plan in place, however there was a variation in the approach for ensuring that the plan was being implemented. Two agencies are active in ensuring this agenda is being reviewed regularly through:

- An independent consultant review and development of action plans annually,
- Working on building strategic partnerships with groups representing those from diverse ethnic communities,
- Community events targeting women from diverse ethnic backgrounds,
- Active participation of ethnic minority women to acknowledge and celebrate cultural events, and
- Having honour-based abuse and forced marriage statements in place.

Plans were made in terms of the creation of a ‘BAMER survivors’ panel’ to improve services and increasing the number of self-referrals ethnic minority communities.

All organisations participating recognise that women from ethnic minority communities are not a homogenous group and that their needs are different and that intersections within their specific ethnic community must be considered while providing services.

Three of the participating organisations said they currently conduct needs assessments of the issues faced by ethnic minority women that feed into decisions made at higher levels.

One of the specialist services was within a Not for Profit Organisation and therefore does not have a Board of trustees. Ethnically diverse representation on the Boards for the four charitable organisations varied considerably, from all white British boards to one which has 33 percent representation from members from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Only two organisations stated they have an agenda item on inclusivity and experts by experience who regularly attended Board meetings. Management teams are also predominantly White British however all the participating organisations have operational staff from ethnic minority communities.

Although the staff within each of the organisations are all trained on equality, diversity and inclusion and plans are in place, the ability to provide an effective holistic service to ethnic minority women is significantly reduced in a less diverse team.

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## 5.2. Administration and staffing structure

The participating organisations all reported their operational staff are confident in responding to the needs of clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds and when to refer/signpost them to services with specific expertise, for example immigration solicitors. In addition, confident in recognising institutional barriers in other organisations which can deter access to appropriate support. This was established through recruitment processes which ensure there are operational staff from ethnically diverse communities who speak multiple languages which match local need, clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, inclusive policies, robust inductions with extensive training and case management supervision.

The participating organisations understand the importance of training to personally develop their staff. Safeguarding, EDI and Unconscious Bias training are mandated for all. Operational staff in all five organisations are trained in the different strands of VAWG (including risk assessment and powers to prevent further abuse) and Guidelines on the Use of Translators, in four of them it was mandated for all staff. The organisation which does not mandate all their training ensures that some of their operational staff are trained on all aspects, this is due to the fact they work specifically with victims of sexual abuse and violence. Only two organisations said their operational staff are trained on Sharia Law. The BAMER Support Workers did suggest there should be training on breast ironing, acid attacks and the understanding of the motivation behind cases with multiple perpetrators.

## 5.3. Service development

All the participating organisations report they are confident their staff identify signs of different forms of violence and abuse experienced by their ethnic minority clients and can respond and support appropriately. This is due to the level of training the staff have received and the shared learning in team meetings and supervision. Referrals into the services come from other agencies as well as self-referrals. One organisation stated their electronic casework management system is specifically designed to trigger professional curiosity and questions around different types of VAWG and recognise specific needs from women of different backgrounds. In addition, ethnically diverse clients can access support workers from ethnically diverse communities in all of the participating organisations, including those who do not have specific BAMER Support Workers. The additional benefit of having a BAMER Support Worker is the fact they proactively engage with community groups where there are women who would not approach a local service if they were being abused.

Referral pathways are understood by the staff of the participating organisations. The pathways are described by some staff as complicated to use due to interconnectedness of the agencies involved in responding to abuse and violence against women and girls in ethnic minority communities. There is a common understanding that agencies require specialist knowledge of pathways and ethnic or cultural specificities to correctly identify and respond to risks. There is potential to strengthen the development of capability among the staff of participating agencies

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in this regard. Responses indicated that the interconnectedness of abuse and violence against women and girls with the modern slavery agenda was deemed important.

Provision of support group programmes specifically for those from ethnically diverse backgrounds varies across the organisations, from not having any, to facilitating peer support groups, engagement with community groups and a programme specifically designed for ethnic minority women. Many of the support group programmes available are White British centric, for example the Freedom Programme. That is not to say some women from ethnically diverse communities find the programmes not appropriate for their needs, but that they are not applicable to everyone or address some of the additional issues raised by ethnically diverse women, for example honour, and multiple perpetrators.

The focus groups delivered by the BAMER Support Workers for this project identified women were not confident in approaching existing specialist services, did not feel they met their needs or were not aware of the services. The participating organisations in the Audit were asked what they were doing to break down the barriers faced by ethnic minority women. The responses varied. All the organisations offer face to face support, and as mentioned above, clients could be supported by staff from ethnic minority communities. Two of the organisations offer drop-in surgeries which are helpful to women from ethnically diverse communities especially if English is not their first language. Ethnic minority women in the focus groups said they did not feel confident talking over the phone because of their accents and found it easier face-to-face. In the current climate, with meeting restrictions due to Covid it is not possible to provide drop-in surgeries.

All the participating organisations have resources to raise awareness of their service which they distribute in their local areas via campaigns, briefing or training sessions, stalls, events, and community engagement. Most of the leaflets and posters are only available in English, with only one agency having leaflets in different languages. The leaflets are very much centred on either domestic abuse or sexual violence and heavily branded by the organisation. There are no leaflets produced which focus purely on honour-based abuse. This lack of inclusivity may reduce accessibility for ethnic minority women.

Two of the participating organisations use social media regularly (Facebook and Twitter). Whilst setting up a Facebook or Twitter account is free the resourcing of them requires additional funding which small charities do not have; again, the posts on social media were in English. The BAMER Support Workers community engagement broke down some of the barriers to reporting as they would see the women face to face and assisted in building confidence.

The participating organisations regularly seek feedback from clients to improve their service delivery and communications. This is done by distributing questionnaires, on-line surveys, feedback forms and focus groups.

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Partnership working is essential when supporting women who have experienced abuse and/or violence. The participating organisations work in close partnership with a variety of agencies, including but not limited to police, health professionals, Local Authorities, and other charities to ensure there is a holistic response. In addition to working with partners with a particular client the participating organisations attend multi-agency forum such as MARACs, Operational or Strategic Boards, working groups, Child Protection meetings. It is at the forums where the representatives from the participating organisations can advocate on behalf of their ethnically diverse clients which assists the other agencies in developing their understanding of the needs of those client groups. A key part of effective partnership working is information sharing. Information sharing takes on some specific and nuanced risks in relation to abuse and violence against women and girls, especially within ethnic minority communities. For example, an honour-based abuse case may have multiple perpetrators, known and unknown therefore it is vital that information shared amongst agencies is on a strictly needs to know basis to mitigate any further risk to the client.

The obvious way in which to access support is to call or email the organisation; commonly known as the helpline. For the purposes of this section of the report 'helpline' refers simply to the main access point for self-referrers. One of the participating organisations does not have a direct number as the overwhelming majority of their clients are referred in by agencies and self-referrers access their support via a different channel. The other four participating organisations helplines are staffed with specific helpline workers. Only one of the organisations had a helpline worker from an ethnic minority community, however all helpline workers in each of the organisations can access advice from staff from ethnic minority communities within the organisation. Furthermore, there is on-going training and peer group discussions around language use for the staff who only speak English. The BAMER Support Workers report that clients often contact them directly using their mother tongue. The participating organisations all have access to an interpreter service which they use in face to face meetings or on telephone calls and in addition bi-lingual staff are made available to interpret if necessary. Care is taken to ensure that the interpreter is not known to the family or extended family to ensure confidentiality.

The participating organisations all have safeguarding policies and procedures which are reviewed yearly. Staff receive mandatory regular training on safeguarding and feel confident in raising concerns. Two of the organisations who have a Board have safeguarding as an agenda item and one said they will suggest it is included.

## 5.4. Site and facilities

The participating organisations have main offices, all but one are centrally located and on a main bus route where clients can attend on an appointment basis. Generally, clients are met in safe local community venues such as children centres or GP surgeries, where they feel comfortable and not overheard as confidentiality is a priority. Risk assessments on the venues are carried out and lone working procedures are followed. Meetings with clients from BAMER communities

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tend to be during office hours, and as stated above clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds preferred face to face meetings. The audit revealed two of the organisations offered 24-hour telephone support but only for clients in refuge, this is mainly due to financial constraints.

The audit was completed before the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and subsequently, due to social distancing, face-to-face meetings are now the exception. The participating organisations rely on phone calls and on-line meeting rooms to talk to their clients but can only do this if the perpetrator(s) is not in the home, therefore limiting the opportunity to offer accessible support. One area has developed a digital application ('app') which can be discretely used to by the clients to send messages to their support worker. This works well for ethnic minority clients who can read and write English, but for those that cannot there are fewer options to engage with support services.

## 5.5. Working environment

The Audit demonstrates all staff in the participating organisations receive training on unconscious bias and it is regularly considered and addressed within supervision or internal group discussions.

The participating organisations share anonymised data with their stakeholders and funders. It is essential to collect ethnicity data for ethnically ethnic minority victims to commission, plan and provide relevant, tailored services.

The Audit reveals the referral pathways and mechanisms into the participating organisations services were in place, were clear and understandable. However, when referring to external services staff have a good understanding of the pathways, but it can be challenging and confusing for ethnically diverse clients. All the participating organisations report having a separate pathway for clients who were victims of honour-based abuse, female genital mutilation and forced marriage, although the pathways were not shared in the audit.

Self-referrals were accepted by all participating organisations, as well as referrals from community or voluntary organisations, social workers, and other statutory agencies.

The participating organisations all have Equality & Diversity, GDPR and Confidentiality policies in place.

## 5.6. Service assessment and evaluation

The Audit asked the participating organisation to clarify whether they carry out needs assessments and did they include ethnically diverse women in the process to ensure their voices are heard. Although all five said yes only one clearly demonstrated they do include women from ethnically diverse backgrounds in the process and this was done through focus groups. Two of

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the organisations misunderstood the question and stated they used the Safe Lives Risk Indicator Checklist and where relevant use the additional HBA questions.

Two organisations state the outcomes for ethnically diverse clients are regularly recorded and analysed to improve the quality of the outcomes. Reports are produced which include information on clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds as part of the contract monitoring of the services.

With the focus coming from the BAMER Project the participating organisations recognised gaps in their data collection and have made improvements. One organisation also state they have introduced additional questions in relation to assessing risk and needs based on the research and expressed experiences of ethnic minority women.

Feedback from one organisation highlights that the community engagement part of the BAMER Project has helped to address the isolation of women as well as raising awareness of abuse and support to recognise it. It has also supported women to maintain their culture and share it amongst other women; word of mouth awareness raising is often used within ethnic minority communities. Respondents also acknowledge that the project has impacted on some of the domestic abuse services and encouraged wider staff members to take an interest in how aspects of violence against women and girls relate specifically to ethnic minority women. This has assisted with improving existing services.

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## 6. Challenges

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*She said that in the past [the] job centre offered to make her the payment. Then husband found out, got very angry and asked for the payment to be switched back to him.*

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### 6.1. Universal Credit

The single payment policy of Universal Credit (where only one recipient can receive the payment on behalf of the whole household), has a negative impact for ethnically diverse women who have been subjected to abuse or violence, particularly there has been financial abuse and/or they have no independence. These issues were significant even before this policy was introduced and are now compounded by it. Any exemption to this payment policy is only given at the request of *both* parties, which makes it difficult to safeguard victims where there is no cooperation from, or risk posed by, the perpetrator(s).

### 6.2. Communication

Many ethnically diverse clients are unable to respond to BAMER Support Workers phone calls for various reasons such as restrictions placed on them by spouses or family members, monitoring from perpetrators, child-care, and housework responsibilities. In these situations, it is challenging for BAMER Support Workers to get updates from the client despite trying to maintain regular contact.

It is equally challenging to obtain responses from other services, especially statutory services, where professionals operate with high caseloads, stretched resources, and competing priorities. It could also be that lengthy bureaucratic procedures cause delays, resulting in BAMER Support Workers often having to follow-up with services several times before gaining responses. BAMER Support Workers note that risk can escalate very quickly in cases with clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds, making timely responses from other agencies a critical factor in keeping clients safe and meeting their needs effectively.

The project has also found engagement with community groups; BAMER Support Workers reported approaching groups but not receiving any response or feedback. Many ethnically diverse community groups did not respond at all and obtaining responses was especially challenging at the start of the project. One community group only agreed to communicate by email, and any mention of a meeting would be met by a non-response. Non-responses were explained by BAMER Support Workers as groups being closed or self-sufficient, wanting to operate without interaction or interference from elsewhere. Many faith communities take a lot longer to respond.



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In some situations, BAMER Support Workers found it challenging when women came to them with issues that went beyond the project remit. Finding themselves in difficult situations, women were asking them for help with utility bills, which workers found hard to decline. In one situation the facilitator of the group wanted the BAMER Support Workers to make leaflets for the group. A BAMER Support Worker said, “You want to engage with them at all levels possible, but where do you really draw the line.” This is especially relevant given the limited resources available for the project in terms of money, time, and capacity of the effectively workers.

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***BAMER Support Workers said:***

*She wanted me to promise that I will not speak to anybody about this. I said that I cannot promise this. I said I will record what she told me and speak to my colleagues to make sure that I am supporting her correctly. She said she is really scared that husband will find out and her family as well. She said she is scared as her brother and mother would phone up and be angry with her.*

*There was a case who wanted to just call me to say hello during the weekend. It was very difficult to not talk to her at the time*

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### 6.3. Attachment to BAMER Support Workers

BAMER Support Workers frequently found that clients would refuse to engage with any other professional. This was often because of the relationship of trust built up with the BAMER Support Worker through the use their shared language. Ethnic minority women needed emotional support to deal with isolation and BAMER Support Workers provided this in many situations, but they also faced dilemmas in balancing their responses to numerous client requests against issues of safeguarding which were considered a priority.

BAMER Support Workers reported that often women whose cases were closed wanted to maintain contact with them because they had developed a positive relationship and had on-going emotional needs resulting from the abuse. The BAMER Support Workers found this challenging as the remit of their roles was to prioritise safety and managing risk and did not allow for providing on-going emotional support once the abuse had ended. Some of the community groups had the capacity and skills to provide this on-going support to the women.

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## 6.4. Emergency Accommodation

For asylum seekers, the Home Office provides accommodation to men and women to prevent them from destitution.<sup>17</sup> One of the clients referred into this accommodation service found it difficult to live in accommodation that did not have a separate space for women. In this situation it was difficult for BAMER Support Workers to offer support because neither staying in the accommodation nor leaving it were viable options for the client in the immediate situation. This accommodation is not available for women with no recourse to public funds, and BAMER Support Workers experienced significant challenges in trying to achieve safe and stable, culturally appropriate accommodation arrangements for women in this situation (see below for more detail on this).

## 6.5. Recording data

Agencies, both from the voluntary and statutory sectors collect different data and the recording of ethnic groups varied. There was no consistency across the region, for example only a few of the support agencies recorded religion, and one support service would not ask ethnicity and only recorded it if it was voluntarily given. Determining a woman's immigration status is important when managing risk both practically to determine if they have recourse to financial assistance, and emotionally to gain an understanding of how extensive her support network is. There is, however, a reluctance amongst some agencies to ask and record this information. The MARAC data provided showed significant gaps in recording ethnicity, particularly by the police. That is not to say the police do not record ethnicity on their systems but if and when they do, this is not shared. Without robust and precise recording of ethnicity data it becomes more of a challenge to strategically plan interventions which tackle inequalities and raise awareness, as well as provide individual, needs-led support.

A key source of data around domestic abuse were the MARACs across Thames Valley. The database used to support the MARAC function is known as MODUS and access is restricted due to confidentiality and the highly sensitive nature of the information stored. BAMER Support Workers did not have access to MODUS so if they needed to refer a client to MARAC, they required assistance from staff on the helpline to input information. Due to high caseloads and high work volumes on the helpline, this created additional pressures here, impacting on waiting times.

In one of the agencies delivering the BAMER Support Workers, ethnically diverse clients could access the service directly through the BAMER Support Workers rather than through the standardised 'single point of access' provided by the helpline. This meant that initial client data recording normally undertaken by helpline staff fell to the BAMER Support Workers, creating additional time pressures. Additionally, in this service, when ethnically diverse clients did contact

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<sup>17</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/821324/Pack\\_A\\_-\\_English\\_-\\_Web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/821324/Pack_A_-_English_-_Web.pdf)

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the helpline, BAMER Support Workers supported the staff with their specialised skills in assisting clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This will be a gap when the BAMER Project ends.

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

BAMER Support Workers found it challenging to support clients whose risk had been assessed as 'standard' through the DASH RIC because of the lack of any VAWG services available for this group. Additionally, they reported concerns that due to cultural barriers such as language, cultural beliefs, and knowledge of systems, women from ethnic minority communities may not disclose information that those from the dominant white culture would determine as risk factors. This means they are then assessed as standard risk, and BAMER Support Workers often found that taking a more culturally sensitive approach, would bring forward information which would significantly change the assessment of risk; sometimes to medium or even to high risk. They also observed that they would become aware of wider background information (linked to family or community) which would not be addressed through the DASH RIC but would significantly impact the risk and the dynamics of the situation. Hence lack of awareness of these issues was seen to be preventing other professionals from accurately understanding the risk faced by women who were being supported by the BAMER Project. In this and other regards, the broad range of services that ethnic minority clients deal with need better representation from ethnically diverse communities in frontline roles, who have a deep understanding of the different cultural issues and contexts.

The BAMER Project did not operate a waiting list which enabled responsive support in containing, referring, managing the risk, and providing emotional support to victims. At times BAMER Support Workers could have used additional help especially when it came to dealing with immigration issues which had to be dealt with promptly, but for which there are limited, already stretched, resources.

It was also challenging to find an appropriate venue for meeting ethnically diverse clients. BAMER Support Workers reported using children's centres as being safe for women to enter without being judged.

## 6.7. Cafcass

Ethnically diverse women and BAMER Support Workers found working with Cafcass challenging as they tended to separate women's experiences from their children's experience rather than employing a holistic approach. They often had little understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse, and therefore the risks or impacts.

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## 6.8. Interpreting services

BAMER Support Workers reported that agencies frequently use family members or acquaintances for face-to-face interpreting. This should be immediately addressed; significant caution should be employed in such situations due to the family and community involvement in the perpetration of abuse in some cultures. Even in the absence of such factors, victims will be reluctant to disclose or discuss sensitive matters if a family member is involved in the conversation. This is particularly the case for healthcare appointments.

Using interpretation services over the phone presents its own challenges in terms of the flow of the conversation and can prevent the interpreter from being able to observe body language. The process is not as nuanced and holistic as it would be in person. Not all communities express abuse in the same way and face-to-face interpretation is the best way to capture the full meaning of a woman's narrative. Some BAMER Support Workers found it easier to interact with victims with limited English by themselves rather than being dependent on phone interpretation.

Cost is a factor in using interpretation services, and face-to-face services are significantly more costly than telephone services. This is likely to deter agencies from using this option, or potentially from using interpretation services at all. One Syrian client described how she had a bad experience with trying to gain interpreter services for a meeting with an agency who assured her of such services. Despite significant efforts from her BAMER Support Worker, the agency in question could not afford it, and her experience with the meeting was not satisfactory. Having access to interpreters as BAMER Support Workers is essential for improved service delivery.

In community engagement activities, BAMER Support Workers often relied on the group facilitators for interpretation. In these circumstances, much of what is being communicated gets lost in translation. Sometimes, facilitators may limit what the women are communicating and how they say it as they are not bound by the same professional standards as professional interpreters who adhere to a code of conduct and are independent from the participants.

## 6.9. Working with clients without recourse to public funds

One of the most significant challenges facing BAMER Support Workers was the limited number of services available for clients with no recourse to public funds. In several situations this left BAMER Support Workers working long into evenings and weekends to ensure clients did not have to sleep on the streets. In many situations, reassuring victims that immigration services and social services are not threats was challenging because of information that was spread by word of mouth in their communities.

Budgets within support services are limited and are tightly managed, so most do not have funds to rent a hotel room if no other accommodation can be found. There are examples of police placing a woman who is fleeing domestic abuse with no recourse to public funds in a hotel for one night and advising them to speak to the Council the next day. The Council are unable to provide

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accommodation due to legislation, and the only other safe alternative is a domestic abuse refuge. Finding suitable refuge space is limited as very few will accept a woman without recourse to public funds until they have successfully applied for the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession status. The process can take several days, or often many weeks. In the meantime, the woman is still without safe accommodation, and it is unsurprising the only other option is to return to the abuser.

## 6.10. Partnership working

As a brand-new project, the BAMER Project took quite some time to build rapport with existing services and at times other services were reluctant to provide support due to lack of adequate resources. Partnership building with schools was challenging and so more work in this area is important. The project accepted that given the number of ethnic minority communities, the geographic spread, and the complexities of the work, it would not be possible to find the resource to develop a thorough approach to partnering with schools at this stage. The introduction of training around abuse and violence against women and girls in schools requires careful design and continuous engagement with schools to build trust and confidence.

Partnership working also requires an understanding and commitment to the work of the other agencies; whilst this is often easy enough on a superficial level, tensions and conflicts can develop when organisations operate from distinct value systems or from different theoretical frameworks. Role clarity and accountability need to be addressed explicitly when engaging with multiple partners. Confusion can arise regarding decision making processes and specific task allocation, particularly where these may need to shift over time. There are, however, very good examples of partnership working across the Thames Valley. MARACs are fully embedded in each area, managed by MARAC Coordinators who are police civilians and where victims and survivors are supported by qualified IDVAs. On average 45 percent of referrals to MARAC across the Thames Valley are from agencies other than the police. MATACs are being developed and rolled out across the Thames Valley. Whereas the objective of MARACs is to ensure the safety of victims and survivors, the purpose of a MATAC is focused on the perpetrator. Within MATAC, agencies work in partnership to engage serial domestic abuse perpetrators in support, to take enforcement action where required, and to protect vulnerable and intimidated victims through holding perpetrators to account appropriately.

Funding and resources are issues when talking about providing holistic and intensive support through partnership working. Partners may be reluctant to engage with some issues or conversely may seem enthusiastic with others. This can be due to restrictions placed on them around aspects of their funding or because funding is highly competed and/or unavailable for work within the VAWG and ethnically specialised sectors.

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## 6.11. Scarcity of services and community groups

The mapping exercise attempted to identify organisations working on any of the elements of violence against women and girls, and organisations working with one or more minority ethnic community groups. This enabled us to identify areas where there are presently few organisations working in either of these issues. All the support services incorporate honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation services as part of their service. Third sector agencies supporting women affected by any of the VAWG strands in the Thames Valley do not have staff who only worked with victims from ethnic minority communities, with the exception of the host organisations for the purpose of this project. At the end of the project, two areas have further commissioned a BAMER Support Worker who will provide outreach work and community engagement. Organisations working at the national level provide some relief, however there is a need for ethnic minority women to have VAWG services, who specialise in working with their specific needs, at a more accessible level.

Very few specialist ethnicity-oriented services working on honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation were identified. There are very few specialist services in the VAWG sector for ethnic minority women to approach and access support. The number of ethnically specific refuges in the whole country is almost non-existent.

Few services working on prevention were identified. There are responsive/reactive services but very few focusing on prevention work, especially those that focus on work with men and boys.

The mapping exercise identified only one community group for those from traveller communities. More Polish and Chinese groups are believed to exist but very few were identified through this project.

## 6.12. Diversity of the client and engagement groups

The Thames Valley BAMER Project engaged with many community groups of mixed ethnicities, however, these were mostly mixed ethnicities from one continent. Although many of these groups were open for women from all backgrounds, there were more South Asian women if the group leader was from South Asian origin, and more African women if the group leader was from an African ethnic background. Despite there being a few groups from Chinese or Latin American backgrounds, they were not as actively engaged as African, Caribbean, and South Asian groups.

Although diversity is a strength, when undertaking community engagement activities, it could also prove challenging. Bringing women together on an equal footing, when some were empowered and others did not feel as empowered, was challenging in terms of the messages that BAMER Support Workers wanted to disseminate. For example, in one group there were second generation women who were very good at English and had knowledge of domestic abuse, alongside women who only spoke a few words of English and did not recognise any forms of abuse.

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## 6.13. Scope of the BAMER Project and its Work

It was difficult to cover the three counties within the project with only two workers per county. The possibilities were endless in terms of the different localities looked at, the issues dealt with, and ethnicities and communities engaged with. Practically, it was impossible for BAMER Support Workers to cover all of groups and ethnicities identified.

For four BAMER Support Workers who were also doing client work, the community engagement work was time consuming and attention could not be divided equally to all community groups. It was difficult to maintain this balance.

Significantly, BAMER Support Workers stated that professionals such as Social Workers and Police Officers started to call them directly for help with all the complicated cases they were receiving which added to their work load.

## 6.14. Distrust and disengagement

Many groups did not wish to engage with the Thames Valley BAMER Project when they realised that funding for the project had come from the Home Office. Any mention of the Home Office would make them suspicious of the project because of fear in the communities relating to immigration authorities. It required significant effort from the BAMER Support Workers to overcome this barrier.

## 6.15. Supporting male victims

There is a significant gap in support for ethnic minority male victims because there is very little understanding among services about their needs, issues and the dynamics within the family as it centres on males. Male victims reported domestic abuse were supported during this project, although some statutory agencies were suspicious about their authenticity and vulnerability. Training and awareness raising tends to focus more on female victims, as they are in the majority.

## 6.16. Funding issues

Funding within the violence against women and girls sector is generally low but specialist services for ethnically diverse clients operate on particularly scarce resources to deliver safe and appropriate services. Translations of services literature are expensive and many existing community groups that provide safe spaces for women to make disclosures and receive emotional support have limited funding and venue space for long term operations. Specialist BAMER Support Workers in domestic abuse services in this project had high workloads despite not having a secure work contract in most situations, being employed on fixed term contracts for the duration of the project funding. Even with the provision of this project with clear aims and

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skilled professionals, there is not much funding to support women with insecure immigration status, which has rendered many well-meaning efforts futile. As identified previously, resource constraints also negatively impact on the availability of preventative work and perpetrator programmes.

Finally, funding affects the existence and sustainability of the community groups at the heart of this work. There is not comprehensive representation of ethnicities within existing groups, and those who are represented rely on groups who operate on a hand-to-mouth basis with uncertain funding and futures.

## 6.17. Data collection

Data collection has been one of the most challenging aspect of the project. On many occasions lack of data on ethnicity made it difficult to understand the context of the situation. At other times, non-response from agencies proved a hindrance to understanding and analysing the latest, most relevant information on different strands of gendered violence. Often these data gaps were underpinned by issues of confidentiality and data protection measures, which is understandable when sharing sensitive information.

When analysing MARAC data, it was observed that there were categories being collected by some agencies that were not by others. This might mean that we need to bring agencies together to make data collection more consistent and uniform across all agencies.



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## 7. Lessons identified

### 7.1. Identities

There is a need to recognise the difference between and within African and Asian ethnicities and not assume all African and Asian women share the same experience. There are also significant cultural and traditional differences between Black Caribbean and Black African women which need to be acknowledged when supporting them. Not all Black women identify as coming from an ethnic minority background and there are white women from African backgrounds who need to be identified and acknowledged as belonging to this heritage. In doing this work the Thames Valley BAMER Project has broadened and deepened its understanding of different ethnicities, groups, and nationalities.

### 7.2. Scope of the BAMER Project work

At an early stage, BAMER Support Workers recognised the vast scope of this project in terms of breadth of the Thames Valley area, the number of diverse communities within it, and the different strands of violence against women and girls faced by the communities. This required a considerable narrowing of the focus of work to smaller groups, allowing for more intense discussion and engagement. BAMER Support Workers believed this would lead to building greater trust and would bring more candid discussions with the women; this proved to be the case.

### 7.3. Solution-focused approach

Groups were open to engagement when BAMER Support Workers were more transparent about what they were wanting to do. The groups wanted this to be a process of give and take. In most cases people wanted solutions to their problems and this ranged from things like explaining their utility bills to helping contact a service. Engagement was smoother with this approach. Communities want to be empowered from within to ask for help outside of their community groups.

### 7.4. Acceptance of domestic abuse as a community issue

Commonly some groups were resistant to accept that domestic abuse happened in their communities, but when the topic was introduced alongside positive relationship modules, it helped women be more receptive to talk about issues more openly. BAMER Support Workers observed it is difficult for some women to leave the house so when they do attend such community groups it is vital to engage with them fully.

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## 7.5. Dependence and empowerment

It was clear that ethnic minority clients want to engage with the BAMER Support Workers who they began their journey with and built trust with.

This was true in the case of a BAMER Support Worker who was on holiday but had difficulty explaining to women about contact during these times. There are issues here of dependency versus empowerment. If your starting point is so much more oppressed, the journey to empowerment can take much longer, especially if women are culturally socialised to be dependent. Our understanding of working with culturally specific ideas about dependence needs to be enhanced.

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*A BAMER Support Worker said:*  
*She waited a long time to be able to see me as she was away in the summer to see her unwell mother in Jordan. I was off sick for a while after that and I told her that she could speak to any of my colleagues, but she said she only wants to speak to me.*”

## 7.6. Language, interpretation, and translation

Statutory agencies should always ask anyone disclosing abuse and/or violence if they require an interpreter if English is not their first language. Spouses and family members should never be used as interpreters. At its least harmful this practice creates a barrier for women to discuss sensitive topics, at worst it denies any opportunity for women to disclose abuse. In cases where there could be significant risk to her and/or her children this could be very dangerous.

There are often different dialects within the same language. For example, Arabic has numerous dialects and finding an interpreter in niche languages can be challenging due to their scarcity. Additionally, using interpreters in smaller population groups can pose difficulty in finding an interpreter who is fully independent from the victim and their community. In one case, for example, a Pakistani client required an interpreter, and the BAMER Support Worker discovered they were a friend of the client's mother-in-law. Services should always prioritise the use of face-to-face interpreters where possible when engaging with clients, but must remain alert to the possibility that interpreters may know or recognise the victim.

Posters, information on VAWG services, audio and video materials, and campaigns about violence against women and girls need to be translated into languages that ethnically diverse women from all backgrounds can understand. One of the most significant needs identified for ethnically sensitive work is language. Community groups could usefully link with services that could translate for them, but as previously noted, there is often cost associated with this.

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In providing English language classes, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) service providers need to recognise the range educational backgrounds which can impact the speed and ease of learning. Regular ESOL classes may not be right for some, who might require a different approach to improve their language skills. ESOL classes have considerable potential to enable the coming together of different communities to explore avenues for working with domestic abuse services to design preventative work around violence against women and girls.

## 7.7. Domestic abuse refuge

In domestic abuse cases where women are fleeing to a refuge it is accepted practice for services to place women away from their previous location in unfamiliar area. This project has noted that sometimes placing ethnically diverse women far away from their previous home is counterproductive as this might push her further into isolation. These nuances must be acknowledged when working with survivors of abuse and violence from ethnically diverse communities, whilst balancing them against the need for safety, and looking at the specific risks in each case.

## 7.8. Helpline

Many ethnic minority women are unable or do not want to call helpline services due to barriers around language, including but not limited to: a lack of knowledge about what support they will be given, fear of being reported to immigration authorities, and concern about confidentiality. The number of women who wanted to engage with the BAMER Support Workers started to increase every week after the introduction of outreach activities. Many felt more confident approaching BAMER Support Workers in person or via their community group facilitator instead of calling a helpline.

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*He had been telling me about how stressful he finds it that he is not able to provide for the family. I can't go to work otherwise who will take care of the family. .*

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## 7.9. Financial pressure

Ethnic minority men have financial stress and pressure in respect of supporting the family while the women in their families are not allowed to work. This created the dual issues of both pressure for men and isolation for women in many situations.

## 7.10. Perpetrator programmes

Our community-based interventions for perpetrators are centred round a white Western view of what constitutes a

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perpetrator, their motivation and belief systems. The female role in perpetrating honour-based abuse and female genital mutilation tends to be ignored and less understood. There are no community-based interventions for females. There is an absence of any theme running through a community-based programme for males which addresses honour/shame.

### 7.11. Risk level

The risk from abuse faced by ethnic minority women should not just be seen in terms of the DASH RIC risk score, but in the context of the complexities within and around their situation. BAMER Support Workers have noted that recognising the point of risk escalation is not clear cut in such cases. They have frequently observed that cases appearing to score lower for risk factors can escalate very quickly, or that risk can be misunderstood and underestimated due to lack of cultural awareness by professionals completing the DASH RIC.

BAMER Support Workers have reported experiences where clients have scored medium risk on the DASH RIC, but that due to other information provided by the client, not covered through that assessment, the workers have felt the risk is high and they have felt compelled to intervene to address the client's safety.

### 7.12. Women from the European Economic Area (EEA)

Women from the EEA are not always considered or seen as ethnic minority and are therefore often overlooked. They also face the hardships of immigration as they are required to reside in the UK for three months before applying for benefits, and after that criteria is met they need to meet a minimum earnings threshold to determine whether a person can be classed as a worker. EEA nationals do not have the benefit of any specific domestic violence provision and are not eligible for the destitution domestic violence concession. They must rely on exercising their rights as European citizens to continue to reside in the country. The difficulties for EEA national women start when the spouse stops exercising their treaty rights by leaving work or leaving the UK, as this will cause the residency rights of their family members to cease. The same is true if they divorce. Non-EEA nationals living with EEA nationals face extreme economic hardship and deportation when the relationship ends as they become illegal over-stayers and have no recourse to public funds or support. In addition, EEA nationals residing in the UK as the family member of a UK national, and who are being supported by the spouse, are likely to face significant hurdles in accessing their rights via the abusive spouse for the purpose of obtaining welfare benefits. The requirement for victims to start work or take up self-employment is often exceptionally difficult to meet for vulnerable women, whose ability to find work is impacted by the trauma of domestic violence, fleeing home and often a language barrier or the need to provide childcare.

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## 7.13. Childcare facilities

Child-care is a barrier for many women from ethnically diverse backgrounds to engage with services, where for many ethnic groups the mother always has sole responsibility for the children. With the closure of many children centres there are fewer opportunities for women to engage with services as the children centres provided a safe space and crèche facilities.

## 7.14. Criminal justice system and civil courts

Ethnically diverse women, especially first-generation migrants, have very little understanding of the criminal justice system or how civil courts operate. Solicitors' fees can be out of reach for many women and legal aid is very difficult to access. FLAGDV and the National Centre for Domestic Violence offer pro-bono work for victims of domestic abuse, which is free to them as the client. However, women are often not aware of this unless they engage with support services, so awareness raising to promote knowledge and understanding of the different options available to them would be beneficial.

## 7.15. Mental health issues

Taboos and stigma around mental health issues create barriers to women speaking out about their experiences. Mental health issues are prevalent where there is abuse and violence; this project found that raising awareness and engaging with communities is an important way to empower women to come forward with their issues.

Mental healthcare practitioners do not have information available in different languages, and they often seemed to lack understanding of cultural issues.

At times participants shared that having professionals from one of a range of ethnically diverse backgrounds, regardless of their region of origin, made it easier to communicate. Having more staff from such communities helps develop an understanding of the need for a more culturally sensitive response for clients.

## 7.16. Health

Some women and men from ethnically diverse backgrounds seek support from other members of their community to set up appointments, which will prevent them from approaching health services altogether if it is about sensitive or private matter. Some also need to be accompanied to GP and hospital appointments for assistance with communicating, further compounding this barrier. Any kind of independent accompaniment or advocacy service that can be provided for ethnically diverse women would be empowering, and there are indications that training to improve awareness and nuanced understanding could produce a better response from staff in healthcare

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settings, particularly in recognising that signs of may differ from those seen with white British people.

## 7.17. Housing

The lack of affordable housing in the Thames Valley is highlighted when women from ethnically diverse communities need to or do flee domestic abuse. Women in the focus groups explained that leaving an abusive partner is very difficult when they have no alternative home to take their children and remain safe. Even if they are considered a priority for re-housing by the local authority, it can take time to find suitable accommodation which leaves the women and children open to more danger, as leaving a partner is when they are most at risk. Refuge space is often given as the only option; however, this requires them to leave everything behind, including secure tenancies. This can and does have a negative impact on the wellbeing of both the mother and children. Some have stated that remaining with the abuser is preferable to being temporarily homeless, without possessions and facing a very uncertain future. The abuser remains in the family home with very little inconvenience. Ethnic minority women can present to Local Authorities in other areas when fleeing domestic abuse on condition they have evidence of the abuse, however evidence can be hard to obtain and some get turned away, having no choice but to return to the abuser if they have no family or friends who can assist them. If the woman does not have recourse to public funds, the options are even more limited.

## 7.18. Police

Victims have a range of experiences with the police, yet there are some aspects in common. The project heard that positive experiences with the police ensure women will be more likely to them again call again. Being able to approach the criminal justice system, to talk and feel understood, all play a significant role in ethnically diverse women feeling able to seek support from the police.

Women from ethnic minority communities reported they had a significantly better experience when police kept them updated on the case and the process, including outcome, was explained fully. This helps to develop more confidence in the police, and this will be extended by word of mouth through the communities.

Patience is necessary when engaging with ethnically diverse clients as many, especially those with language barriers, cannot always make themselves easily understood when explaining their circumstances. In one example, a Syrian woman who had been wrongly accused by the perpetrator had her children removed and they went to live with him. The woman moved to a small room in a multi-occupation property and was supported by a BAMER Support Worker. They then worked together to help police and social services to understand her side of the relationship. Although it took time, the children are back living with the mother and they are all safely housed. The intervention of the BAMER Support Worker allowed the truth to come out.

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## 7.19. Social services

Women expressed that it is intimidating when social workers visit them accompanied by the police. This feeds into doubt and mistrust, preventing them from opening up about their issues. When social services present in an authoritative manner, it creates an oppressive environment, discouraging cooperation and disclosure. It often produces anxiety which could impact a woman's ability to express herself.

The women engaging with this project reported feeling intimidated by Social Workers' authoritative manner which leads to mistrust preventing them from opening up about their issues. Children are the priority for Social Workers however the women said they would feel more confident to cooperate if they took a more holistic and person-centred approach. The women also said they would feel more comfortable in meetings if they had a McKenzie Friend from their community with them.

## 7.20. Banks

It is for victims and survivors challenging when joint bank accounts are controlled by the perpetrator, or in situations of financial abuse. When banks work sensitively with the ethnically diverse women, they report feeling less distress, and feeling empowered and liberated from abuse far more quickly. In one situation a BAMER Support Worker had to help the victim to open a new bank account because her current account was associated with the address of the perpetrator.

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## 8. Developments

### 8.1. Ilam Programme

Ilam-El-Hifzat (shortened to Ilam) – translated means “knowledge of protection”. It is a 10-week programme developed by MK-ACT to explore the domestic abuse “Power and Control cycle” within ethnic minority communities. It takes into account language barriers, differences between religion and culture, sexual abuse and rape, honour-based abuse, forced marriage, self-harm and wider family and community dynamics.

The Ilam Programme examines the roles played by attitudes and beliefs on the actions of the abuser and the responses of victims and survivors. The aim of the programme is to help the clients make sense of and understand what has happened to them, instead of the whole experience just feeling like they are in the wrong. Ilam also describes in detail how children are affected by being exposed to this kind of abuse and very importantly how their lives are improved when the abuse is removed.

This programme has proven to be effective in achieving positive outcomes for women and children in building self-esteem and confidence, empowerment, understanding of the effects of domestic abuse cycle and the benefits as well as the importance of breaking this cycle. Ilam offers ethnically diverse clients an opportunity to learn how to re-build a safe and secure future by having discussions in a comfortable environment with women from similar backgrounds.

### 8.2. New Bridges

A collaboration between Oxford Against Cutting and the Sunrise Centre in Banbury, the New Bridges initiative looked at closing the gaps between those who are subjected to abuse and violence, and those who offer support and other services in response to this.

#### 8.2.1. Workshops

Full day workshops were organised by Oxford Against Cutting, called ‘Reaching Services’, for women from minority ethnic communities to address “internal” barriers that prevent them seeking support following sexual abuse. A leaflet was created to support families within ethnically minority communities to recognise what constitutes sexual abuse and highlight services; this was developed together with young people and adults from such communities.

The ‘Delivering Services’ workshop was delivered to specialist sexual violence workers to support them to address structural “external” barriers which may prevent victims coming forward. To support this, a short film was produced of a drama created by Asian girls (aged 12-16) to



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highlight key issues around sexual violence in these groups to support the content and aims of the 'Delivering Services' workshops.

The workshop activities with women reported a positive impact, with 100 percent of participants who either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that their understanding of sexual abuse had improved as a result of the workshop. These also led to some useful learning for the facilitators, in relation to the challenges of working with translators and ways to work with small groups in terms of the space available and addressing different cultural and language needs.

The outputs from the project have, to date, had some limited dissemination. The report has been shared to support academic study and was also shared with BAMER Board for this project. At the date of preparing this report the film had 23 views, with the leaflets being distributed widely to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Rape Crisis services.

### **8.2.1. Data Master Workshop**

The workshop delivered in January 2020 focused on data relating to honour-based abuse and received positive feedback and recognition of its usefulness in developing an initial understanding the need for this data, and also the difficulties in collecting, collating and sharing this.

Feedback identified the importance of collecting data on honour-based abuse for a wide range of reasons including being able to identify where abuse might be predicted and to provide focused support. Ideas and good practice were shared on the day, and there is potential to form a cross-Thames Valley working group to build on this learning. The final BAMER Project report will potentially feed into terms of reference for such a working group.

A similar format for exploring issues relating to data may be useful for addressing some of the issues relating to data collection elsewhere in the project, particularly given the period of sharing and overlap which has taken place. Given the importance of understanding data for evidence of need and identifying what has been delivered, this is an area which would benefit from being revisited. Further data workshops might therefore be explored, potentially in collaboration with any working group on honour-based abuse if this is established.

### **8.2.2. Film**

The film was developed by a group of young women who were existing participants of Sunrise's youth group. As the project timetable was so tight, production was unable to take place before the workshops were piloted, so the resource will contribute to any future delivery.

The girls' group included 12 girls, aged 12-16 years, from four different secondary schools, all of whom identify as British Pakistani.

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The project aimed to create a film to support learning during the delivery of the 'Reaching Services' and 'Delivering Services' workshops. There is a considerable lack of short film resources that address the issue of sexual violence against ethnic minority women and girls, particularly the barriers to these groups reaching support services. The film needed to be suitable for secondary school children and older.

The film has been described as "*light touch*", which may be preferable for young girls who need confidence to start talking. Feedback on this has also identified that the materials might be developed to include further scenarios. The impact on the girls who scripted and made the film, and the process they went through to do this is also itself an "outcome".

The film, called 'Be Safe, Be Strong' can be viewed here:

<http://www.sunrisemulticultural.org.uk/index.html#About>

### 8.3. No Recourse to Public Funds Pathway Development

For a woman on a spousal visa with no recourse to public funds, fleeing domestic abuse is extremely difficult as they do not have access to any form of benefits which would enable them to stay in a safe place. Sanctuary Hosting who operate across the Thames Valley provide temporary accommodation with trained hosts to people with NRPF whilst they secure leave to remain in the country. Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service and Sanctuary Hosting came together to develop a pathway for women fleeing domestic abuse whilst they wait for the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession, which would enable them to access benefits, including housing.

The pathway was successfully piloted with women accessing legal advice and accommodation within 2-3 days. The women, supported by the domestic abuse service are placed with a trained host from Sanctuary Hosting whilst they wait for their DDV application to be awarded and then move into refuge provision where they can start the process of applying for leave to remain. The pathway will be rolled out across the Thames Valley to assist more women on spousal visas who need to flee domestic abuse.

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## 9. Recommendations

### 9.1. Developing specialist, ethnically sensitive VAWG training

The principle of treating everyone fairly is often conceived as treating everyone the same. Whilst this is helpful in some respects, the issues faced by ethnically diverse women, such as their experiences of abuse and violence, are fundamentally different to those faced by white British populations. This ought to be recognised and services tailored accordingly. This can be assisted by training staff in aspects of cultural differences to provide support and develop skills to work with clients from a range of backgrounds. Some training areas to develop for services are:

- Unconscious bias,
- Understanding of family dynamics within ethnically diverse households and awareness of community groups that women access for support on these issues,
- Training on different strands of violence against women and girls particularly affecting ethnic minority communities, and not as a sub-set of domestic abuse. These should include, but not be limited to: the concepts of honour, shame, and izzat; female genital mutilation; forced marriage; honour-based abuse,
- Training on intersectionality within the whole range of ethnically diverse populations and cross-cutting themes of race, gender, class, caste, disability through the lens of empathy and nuanced understanding, and
- Issues linked to multiple perpetrators must be developed and incorporated in training.

Community members themselves should be central in developing and delivering training to ensure that the nuance of complex cultural issues is fully understood and explored. All frontline staff and managers in VAWG services should be trained in matters of ethnic and cultural sensitivity to have a shared understanding and knowledge base, and to implement policies around these issues effectively into practice.

### 9.2. Delivering workshops for community groups

From the focus group discussions, the project identified areas where communities said they needed a better understanding; this included, but was not limited to:

- Mental health awareness,
- Sexual health awareness,
- Consent and consensual relationships (particularly in challenging existing conservative norms, and myths consent and rape),
- What constitutes toxic masculinity, why it is dangerous and how communities can play a part in addressing it,
- How to access education and the job market, and income generation,

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- Financial literacy, managing budget,
  - Accessing support services such as domestic abuse services, Citizens Advice Bureau etc. to develop confidence in navigating choices, and
  - The criminal justice system and civil courts, how they work and what to expect.

### 9.3. Consistent data collection, reporting and sharing

The data collected on ethnic minority communities varies greatly across the region and between agencies. There is little consistency and significant information is often not collated, which prohibits a clear understanding of the extent of abuse faced by women from all and any ethnically diverse backgrounds. Recommendations include the following:

- Gaps in recording ethnicity data and consistency issues must be bridged by agencies through collecting ethnicity data and recording it appropriately.
- VAWG services should collect data where appropriate on honour-based abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, and stalking.
- VAWG services should consider collecting data on other forms of gender-based abuse and violence such as breast ironing, menstrual taboos, acid attacks, transnational abandonment, and attempted suicide, amongst other issues.
- Data collection ought to be consistent across the different services, and all services should record ethnicities of survivors to understand the different context, type and nature of abuse experienced.
- Commissioners should bring all stakeholders together to facilitate this shared fullness and consistency, and to develop a more centralised data collection system.

### 9.4. Delivering ethnically sensitive preventative work and awareness raising

Consideration should be given to developing a toolkit for preventative measures and awareness raising activities across the Thames Valley. The toolkit should include but not be limited to:

- Resources to raise awareness which can be replicated across the Thames Valley so local facts and figures can be used whilst maintaining consistent messages.
- Information on how to fund, set up and develop a Women's Group.
- Guidance on how to engage and work in partnership with Women's Groups to ensure their needs are prioritised.
- Guidance on how to talk about and understand the concept of honour/shame/izzat, which will assist in building respectful relationships between victims and professionals.
- Information on the women's rights.
- Ensuring that any awareness raising or education on healthy relationships in schools should also be relevant to children and young people from ethnic minority communities.

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- Regular awareness campaigns which are aimed at women in ethnic minority communities and the specific issues they face. These should be coordinated with other agencies for example Thames Valley Police to ensure non-duplication and consistent messaging.

## 9.5. Developing clear pathways for ethnically ethnic minority victims and survivors

Victims with no recourse to public funds who are assessed as ‘high’ risk are given priority over those assessed as ‘medium’ and ‘standard’ risk for the limited provision available, which results in those clients not receiving adequate support. A pathway should be developed to ensure that all victims without recourse are appropriately supported.

Generic support services and specialist VAWG services should develop platforms through which the extensive knowledge and experience of issues relating to female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour-based abuse, and other niche areas can be shared and built upon.

Higher priority should be given, both strategically and operationally, to working in partnership with refugee and asylum seeker support services to better understand how clients may need to access and interact with VAWG services.

## 9.6. Improving responses from VAWG services for ethnic minority clients

- VAWG services should consider developing and offering alternative access routes for those ethnically diverse women who are not able or do not wish to use telephone helpline services.
- VAWG services should consider providing drop-in surgeries where appropriate for ethnically diverse women in venues which they are comfortable accessing.
- VAWG services should engage with community groups on a regular basis to maintain trust and information exchange.
- VAWG services should actively and explicitly encourage applications from ethnic minority communities when recruiting to ensure there is diversity within staffing.
- VAWG services ought to consider regular peer reviews to ensure their policies and procedures guarantee women from ethnically diverse backgrounds have fair treatment which meet their needs.
- VAWG services should consider the challenges faced by ethnic minority women who have young children when designing and offering services, and be flexible with the times they can engage with them.

## 9.7. Improving engagement with women’s community groups

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Strategic and operational support should be offered for community group facilitators to feel confident in responding appropriately to community members in relation to abuse and violence.

Consideration ought to be given to how to engage with and support Traveller communities since they are particularly under-represented in services and in community groups and are therefore a group that is engaged with less at present.

There is a need to identify more interfaith groups and work with them in collaboration.

Specialist ethnically sensitive programmes with gender transformative approaches would help in developing a sense of empowerment in many ethnic minority women. Community groups could explore this component through various activities, working with the voluntary and statutory sectors.

Community outreach activities must invest time and resources in developing relationships of trust, and should be committed to bridging the gaps between services and community groups where this is in the best interests of community members.

## **9.8. Commissioning VAWG services with specific support for ethnically ethnic minority victims and survivors**

Commissioners of VAWG services should consider the inclusion of BAMER Support Worker posts in the service specifications that providers are expected to meet. These specifications would also benefit from criteria in relation to agencies working in tandem with community groups. One way of achieving this might be to embed specialist, ethnically sensitive programmes in local authority funding strategies and reviews.

Consideration should be given to developing and funding support groups specifically for ethnically diverse communities, for example the adapted Freedom Programme, Ilam-El-Hifzat developed by MK-ACT.

## **9.9. Ensuring issues experienced by those who are ethnically minoritised are heard at strategic and operational boards**

Chairs and representatives on strategic and operational domestic abuse boards and forums should develop structures and systems to undertake case reviews, and share good practice, challenges and lessons identified in respect of issues experienced by those from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Strategic domestic abuse boards and forums should ensure the needs of ethnically diverse women are always considered when action planning and awareness raising.

Such forums should have membership from ethnic minority communities and/or specialist ethnically sensitive agencies, and strategic plans should include working with ethnically diverse

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community groups and raising the profile of the needs of women from any and all of these groups. The learning and recommendations from this report should be incorporated into strategic and operational work.

## 9.10. Developing a detailed VAWG service directory

Strategic boards ought to oversee and facilitate the development of a comprehensive service directory to maximise access to information and support for women from ethnic minority communities. This should be done by and for all ethnically diverse communities with input from professionals with specialist, VAWG and ethnically sensitive knowledge, and should include:

- A full list of services and the types of support offered, including the organisation name, location(s), and access facilities,
- The criteria needed to access the support,
- Local, regional, and national services (e.g. national helplines, ethnically specialist refuges out of area),
- Versions available in all major languages, with options for braille in those languages,
- An online version,
- An advertising and social media campaign to raise awareness of its existence, promotion through community groups and community venues, and
- Regular review and updates.

There are lessons to be learned from ethnically focused community groups that have ceased to exist, through contrasting how some specialist groups and services have survived where others have not.

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## 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 if further:

- In depth work in reviewing statutory agencies policies and procedures on responding to different abuses which have affected ethnic minority women,
- 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.



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## 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’

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- 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.

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**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.

**LGBTIQ+** – 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.

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**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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