



Ascent

imkaan

Good Practice Briefing

What does Imkaan mean by community engagement?

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Introduction

ASCENT - Support services to organisations

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

ASCENT – Support services to organisations, is delivered by a partnership led by the Women’s Resource Centre (WRC) and comprised of five further organisations: AVA, IMKAAN, RESPECT, Rights of Women, and Women and Girls Network.

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

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

- Accredited training
- Expert-led training
- Sustainability training
- Borough surgeries
- BME network
- One-to-one support
- Policy consultations
- Newsletter
- Good practice briefings

Good practice briefings

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

For more information, please see:

www.thelondonvawgconsortium.org.uk



**London
VAWG
Consortium**

imkaan

Background on Imkaan

Imkaan is the only national, black feminist organisation dedicated to addressing violence against women and girls. As a second-tier, human rights organisation, with national membership, Imkaan provides a coordinated strategic voice for frontline BME specialist services that work to prevent, and respond to, violence against women and girls. We act as a conduit between government, statutory agencies, mainstream voluntary organisations and the specialist BME VAWG sector to promote positive attitudes, recognition, and the effective inclusion of BME women's and girls' experiences and needs within service planning, delivery and commissioning. Our work is delivered through strategic advocacy, sector development and support, research, newsletters and publications, accredited training, peer education and consultancy. Imkaan is at the forefront of programmes and initiatives relating to forms of violence that disproportionately affect BME women and girls.

What is it?

Imkaan's Community Engagement Model (CEM) seeks to ethically collaborate and create partnerships with various communities.

We are guided by the following definition of community:

'Supporting approaches to interpersonal violence based in the community. By community, we mean networks of people with whom we live, play, work, learn, organise, worship and connect to each other as community' (Creative Interventions, 2012)

Our understanding of 'communities' takes multiple forms and can include; Black and minority ethnic (BME) women and girls directly affected by violence, groups within protected equality characteristics, to local stakeholders, commissioners, to professionals working across health, social care and the criminal justice system as well as voluntary sector social justice groups.

Our model of working is predicated on existent structures of support, intervention and information sharing. In working to end violence against women and girls (VAWG), Imkaan's CEM comprises of community outreach based work which focusses on engaging young and adult women at a local level. Imkaan's model of capacity building is delivered in various ways including a peer education programme, which adopts a human rights based approach and encompasses learning and education, prevention and appropriate safe interventions for women and girls experiencing VAWG.

Ethical considerations

- **Avoiding a homogenous approach:** In delivering models of community engagement we are conscious of avoiding narratives that 'other', problematise and frame violence against women and girls (VAWG) as exclusively a problem of 'culture'. Instead, our approach is to discuss and challenge VAWG within a wider context. Therefore, we approach VAWG as a cause and consequence of women and girls' unequal status and structures of patriarchy which is at the heart of violence, pervades and manifests in different ways across all our societies and communities.

Notions of who is perceived as having 'culture' or 'community' within VAWG debates are often reserved for women of colour and/or women that practice their faith according to different systems of religious belief. Frequently these discussions are framed within additional problematic racist perceptions and assumptions. As Leti Volp (2000) observes in her study on forced marriage in the US, explanations of forced marriage are often used to problematise whole communities, yet when forced marriage occurs within 'white American society' these actions are rarely viewed as culturally driven in the same way.

Whilst we are acutely aware that targeted approaches have merit in addressing issues that may affect some communities more than others, in our experience, a broader approach to addressing VAWG that is rooted in gender inequality is a much more effective way of challenging those who use cultural explanations to justify VAWG. This provides a route for dialogue but also allows everyone involved to have ownership and a stake in changing attitudes

and behaviours which reinforce VAWG. In practice what this looks like for Imkaan is thinking about how BME women's experiences of violence become distorted and often misrepresented through media and popular culture. Reports in popular print media such as in the November 10th 2013 edition of The Mirror is a common example of how BME women's narratives are homogenised; 'Campaigners and support groups say forced arranged marriage of young British Muslim girls is becoming a bigger problem every day'(OwensandWilkinson,2013).

The tendency of focussing on specific communities that have more of a public profile as being 'the problem', such as in the case of this article, then means that forms of violence such as forced marriage are not addressed or represented through broader perspectives of VAWG, including the numerous ways in which women themselves are likely to experience violence and other forms of oppression.

- **Working with established grassroots organisations:** Imkaan's model utilises the expertise of agencies that have been influential and effective in service delivery and attitudinal change. In our experience, services operating at the grassroots often have historically developed the knowledge, systems and structures for delivering community engagement initiatives in diverse, creative and effective ways. Yet grassroots organisations are often under-utilised or are expected to deliver work with minimal resources. At Imkaan, acknowledging the work of specialist organisations and groups that have expertise and experience of working on VAWG but also have a strong nuanced understanding of how violence impacts on BME women and girls, as well as wider societal and community structures is essential to the process. In addition, forming collaborative partnerships at the grass-roots level encourages and reinforces the importance of diverse spaces; for example that different spaces will be required for adult women, young women and girls, lesbians, bi-sexual women and trans women, work with men and boys and various groups of professionals.

- **Addressing power dynamics:** It is necessary when participating in community engagement models to be aware of the different ways privilege is held, including all the various ways we engage with power. Therefore when engaging collaboratively with communities, knowing that there are varying levels of unequal power dynamics at play, and adopting working practices towards rebalancing this inequality is critical to avoid a 'top-down' approach. We know the success of this practice through our own Peer Education, Community Engagement models (see below model of working).
- **Allowing time and resources for evaluation:** Too often there is an expectation that community engagement can be delivered in a short-time frame and with minimal resources. Frequently, funding is ad-hoc and inconsistent and often resources allocated do not allow organisations to fully evaluate longer term changes (Missing Link, 2011). This work should be more consistently funded and in devising Imkaan Accredited Quality Standards (IAQS), Imkaan have developed service standards for BME women's organisations working to end VAWG, with community engagement as a key strand within the core principle *Prevention*. This aids organisations to continually develop their services and community engagement practices. We also hope that this supports organisations to receive both acknowledgement and more sustainable funding for this core area of work.

An example of Imkaan's current model of community engagement work for Brighton & Hove City Council

'To be a peer educator has taught me and helped me gain more knowledge and insight. I can use this to help friends, family and my community' (quote from peer-educator)

The local authority has utilised Imkaan's CEM and provided funds to form a Domestic Violence (DV) partnership which consists of both voluntary and statutory sector organisations. The partnership focuses on working with women from BME communities to raise the awareness of both voluntary sector and community groups in the area of domestic violence and BME women's experiences. The work also aims to address the lack of specialist BME VAWG services in the locality by also improving partnerships locally and nationally with other grassroots providers. BME women in Brighton and Hove have volunteered to take part in a series of specialist accredited training which increases their knowledge and skills and provides an opportunity for the women to attain a nationally accredited qualification. The women from Brighton who volunteered, and went through the programme have since formed a group and plan to continue delivering awareness raising of DV in the area along with support from local and specialist VAWG.

The model has been so successful in its first year in Brighton & Hove that the City Council have since commissioned a second programme which is currently being delivered.

Community Engagement should be central to any integrated strategy on violence against women and girls (VAWG). Ensuring that equalities and ethics are at the core of the design and delivery of community engagement initiatives is imperative to the success and impact of these programmes.

References

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2. Volpp, L. (2000). Blaming culture for bad behavior. *Yale JL & Human.*, 12, 89.
3. Nick Owens, Nazrin Wilkinson <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/forced-arranged-marriage-young-british-2715692#ixzz2xXEfC4n2>
4. Imkaan, Equality Now and City University (2011) *The Missing Link: a joined up approach to addressing harmful practices in London*. London: Greater London Authority

Resources

For further information about Imkaan's peer engagement model and service standards please contact Dorett Jones, Development and Training Manager at Imkaan on Dorett@imkaan.org.uk.