

## **Bromley & Croydon's Women's Aid and Croydon BME Forum**

**Report on: Improving access to domestic abuse support  
for BAME Women and Children in Croydon**

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## Introduction & Background of Bromley & Croydon's Women's aid

Domestic abuse can affect an individual's mental wellbeing and over time can have a wearing effect on someone's mental health (Sane UK- 2008). For this research project, Bromley & Croydon's Women's aid collaborated with Croydon BME Forum to investigate the barriers that BAME women in Croydon face in accessing and accepting support for domestic abuse and the affects this has on one's mental health.

Bromley & Croydon's Women's Aid as an organisation aims to protect women and children and provide the best possible services to empower and support them, provide a place of safety offering women-sensitive services, recognise and meet the needs of children and increase the awareness of the causes and extent of Domestic abuse. Bromley & Croydon's Women's Aid seek to achieve these aims by ensuring that the needs of women and children are kept at the heart of everything they do and that their services are opened with direct access in the community, for the community. The overarching aims for BCWA are:

- To reduce the incidents of domestic abuse and violence in Croydon from BAME communities to access support services.
- To identify and assess potential gaps and barriers for BAME women and children accessing support services
- Strengthen engagement and partnership with local BAME organisations.

Since opening a refuge in Croydon and branching into the borough, Bromley & Croydon's Women's Aid are wanting to find out how they can adapt and improve their supporting services specifically for BAME Women as they are the new cohort in Croydon.

## Project Aims:

The further aims of this project are to:

1. Improve the access of domestic abuse support for BAME women and children in Croydon.
2. To find ways of supporting BAME women affected by domestic abuse who are not aware of the support, or perhaps whose first language is not English.
3. To establish whether domestic abuse affects women's mental health.
4. To challenge the notion that 'one size fits all' in terms of services provided.
5. Challenge the stigma that is attached to support services
6. Investigate how to achieve effective communication with service users
7. Work closely with existing BAME service providers who support women with domestic abuse and mental health.

## Purpose:

London Borough of Croydon remains in the top 3 highest in terms of volumes recorded for domestic abuse crimes. Croydon's female population for over 16's stands at 149,189 (ONS 2013). This means there are possibly 37,297 likely victims based on 1 in 4 women experiencing domestic abuse. This project also supports the notion of Croydon's Domestic Abuse and sexual violence Strategy 2015-2018 states that Croydon's vision is for those living and working in the borough to eliminate and reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

## Methodology

This project has conducted 5 focus groups to engage both men and women from the BAME community in Croydon. The focus groups were held at Croydon BME Forum and one held at the Faith Regen Foundation. In total, 32 women were consulted for the focus groups and 2 men were consulted.

An older women's focus group, two working aged women's focus groups, a men's focus group and a focus group held at the Zakia Centre (Faith Regen Foundation) were conducted in total. Each focus group were asked a series of questions. The questions for the men's focus group was tailored to fit the audience's need; this focus group was

regarding men's perspectives of domestic abuse experienced by BAME women in Croydon, however the 2 male participants who attended were from respected domestic abuse organisations.

**The questions for the Women's focus groups:**

- 1) What is domestic abuse to you? And what do you think are the effects on Women's mental health?
- 2) Do you know of any supporting services for domestic abuse?
- 3) What kind of support would you like to see in the Croydon Borough for Women and children affected domestic abuse?
- 4) Are you aware of the different types of domestic abuse BAME women may face?
- 5) How can we better the services for BAME women and children affected by domestic abuse?
- 6) How would local organisations improve on mental health support for women affected by Domestic abuse?

**The questions for the Men's focus group:**

- 1) What is it that could go wrong in a relationship?
- 2) How do you think Women deal with arguments and abuse in relationships?
- 3) Do you think Women speak to anyone?
- 4) If a women is experiencing domestic abuse, how do you think this impacts on their mental health?

**The questions for the older women's focus group:**

- 1) What is a healthy relationship for you and what is domestic abuse?
- 2) What help could be given in connection with domestic abuse and in making things better? Who should become involved in the above?
- 3) What help is available?
- 4) What else would be important (what is missing)?

Notes during each of the focus groups were carried out by the facilitators and some focus groups were recorded by dictator phone and were then transcribed by the Community Development Worker. A qualitative analysis was carried out on the responses by the attendees. The most common responses for each question is highlighted in the domestic abuse section and mental health section below.

## Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse in women within Croydon has become a major issue for the Borough. Domestic abuse comes in various forms including but not limited to psychological and emotional abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse and threats and stalking behaviours. Domestic abuse affects all women regardless of ethnicity however, it is also known that in some communities' women face additional barriers when experiencing domestic abuse. Women from Black and Asian or minority ethnic communities may face abuse in different forms, from FGM, breast ironing to spiritual abuse, and by multiple perpetrators at a time, which some service providers may not be equipped to deliver suitable support to.

It is important to acknowledge the core essence of these issues and understand why such barbaric acts are carried out on women, and is normalised until today.

The Home Office acknowledges that domestic abuse includes culturally specific forms of harm, which impact on BAME women and which, among others, include:

- Forced marriage - marriage contracted without the valid and free consent of one or both parties involving physical and/or mental duress;
- Dowry-related abuse - violence, abuse or harassment perpetrated in order to obtain money, property or goods upon marriage;

- Female genital mutilation (FGM) - female circumcision comprising procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organ whether for cultural, religious or other non-therapeutic reasons.

Cultural trends like FGM and breast ironing are often mistaken to be a religious act. However, FGM and breast ironing is not a religious factor but a geographic one. It is practised in many countries and tribes in Africa, regardless of their religious beliefs.

The United Nations (UN) states that Breast Ironing affects 3.8 million women around the world and has been identified as one of the five under-reported crimes relating to gender-based violence. As well as being painful, it exposes girls to health problems including abscesses, cysts, infection, tissue damage and even the disappearance of one or both breasts. In the UK there are no laws against breast ironing, however it is a form of physical abuse.

This also includes Dowry crimes and forced marriage, with both acts going against any religious beliefs and Islamic inheritance laws.

The United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women defines dowry-related violence or harassment as “any act of violence or harassment associated with the giving or receiving of dowry at any time before, during or after the marriage.”

The most common forms of dowry-related violence are battering, marital rape, acid throwing, wife burning, and other forms of violence. Perpetrators may also use methods of starvation, deprivation of clothing, evictions, and false imprisonment as a method of extortion. They often use violence disguised as suicides or accidents, such as stove or kerosene disasters, to burn or kill women for failing to meet dowry demands.

Using one's religion against them is a form of abuse many BAME women face from their partners and even family. This includes but not subject to, harassment and humiliation. This apparent misuse of religion and its essential message of peace and equality, have women subjected to despicable acts and physical violence, which is being justified as “religious and cultural beliefs”.

## Context of domestic abuse in Croydon

According to the Croydon's Domestic Abuse and sexual violence Strategy 2015-2018, the impact Domestic Abuse has on Croydon costs the borough £37.4 million with the human and emotional costs at £64.5 million.

Croydon Clinical Commissioning Group reported (2016) in Croydon, there are estimated to be 3,480 females in Croydon who have been affected by FGM at some point in their lives, which is equivalent to one in 104 females. It is estimated that 180 females aged under 16, 2,250 females aged 16 to 49 and 1,050 females aged over 50 in Croydon are affected by FGM.

The majority of recorded victims of domestic violence and abuse in Croydon are women aged 21-30 years (586 allegations) and women aged 31-40 years (426 allegations), these figures are from the Croydon Domestic abuse and sexual violence strategy 2015-2018. For those aged 21-30 years, 31-40 years and 41-50 years, most victims and accused belong to the same age band.

The Metropolitan Police Service (September 2013- September 2014) has also shown an increase in reported Domestic Abuse offences from 2,567 to 3,180 which is an increase of 23.9%. In more recent times, the violence and sexual offences reported crimes in Croydon (2016-2017) was 1033 (according to Croydon metropolitan police).

## Focus Group questions – domestic abuse

The facilitators asked questions around the issues of domestic abuse and the reasons behind women not coming forward for support. The main responses raised were as follows:

### 1) WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE FOR YOU?

- Verbal or physical. Domestic abuse can become more frequent like when there is stress or tension in the family or it can be monetary, or any other types of stress and then people lose their patience.
- It happens more frequently in the home. Children have many stresses, and if they watch their parents fighting, it can make them be like their fathers if they are seeing the abuse.
- Domestic abuse can be verbal, physical, and sexual. It's not just physical. The mental part actually lasts longer, the physical leaves bruises and they go but the mental side, lasts longer and doesn't go away.
- Some people think because they are married, they are obligated; and some women don't realise that it may be sexual abuse, but the man thinks it's his right.
- Some Women go along with it. It's because of the culture, it's definitely not Islam. Women may have seen their dad being aggressive, there's many underlying issues.
- Financial abuse is another one, that's actually one of the big issues, if you don't have your own money, what will you live on?

### 2) HOW ARE WOMEN FROM BAME COMMUNITIES IN CROYDON SUPPORTED WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

- 50% of women that come forward to the family justice centre are from BAME backgrounds.
- Croydon voluntary action perhaps?
- Forums? Online?
- The voluntary sector needs to spread the word of what is out there in terms of support.
- Again there is an issue with interpreters where English is not the first language of the person being abused – may feel ashamed to say it to an interpreter who is of similar background to then pass on to professionals/ support services
- Building capacity and making it everyone's business.

### 3) HOW DO BAME WOMEN ACCESS SUPPORT AND WHERE WOULD THEY FIND IT?

- Maybe Women call the police for support? 'Would the police know where to signpost a women who was experiencing domestic abuse?'
- Maybe a BAME Women may go to her GP as they may want to tell someone they are being abused and may feel that they are able to pick up on these signs (verbal, psychological abuse, bruises).
- 'There is evidence that women seek support for domestic abuse from nurses during confidential appointments.
- Nurses may be able to pick up on the unexplained symptoms.
- 'Do GP's have training on what the symptoms and signs of Domestic abuse are?' should this be incorporated in GP training?
- Victim support- they have IRIS Training for looking at signs of domestic violence.
- They find support at Family justice centre
- They find support within Asian resource centre and BME Forum
- We need to find out how we can get support and awareness information to BAME women without repercussions.
- In the London borough of Lambeth GP surgeries have survey's in the waiting room and asks the question 'are you affected by domestic violence? Do you know anyone that is affected' could we replicate this in Croydon?
- Chemists – Chemists could also ask/ should ask 'how did you sustain those injuries? Could we enable chemists and give them more power to push this forward? However there is an issue with data protection.

'There should be more Women chemists available to push for more information and to distract a partner from the person being abused'.

#### **4) WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS WHY BAME WOMEN DO NOT COME FORWARD IN TERMS OF ACCESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?**

- Language barrier
- Family members acting as translators may be the perpetrator and therefore not be relaying accurate messages back to the Women, or could also stop the women who wants to express her experiences of DV as the interpreter may say 'no you cannot say that about your husband' and not pass on the translated message. This could also happen when using an external translator.
- The person experiencing the abuse may not realise that it is abuse.
- The person experiencing the abuse may see it as 'normal'
- Faith – acts a barrier as it is the man that is in charge of the house.
- We need more women staff and more women champions
- The word victim is a barrier in itself.
- Controlling partners
- Consequences of coming forward- the women do not want a paper trail back to the women
- The women may not want to be the reason why the husband is in handcuffs
- Guilt
- Gains and losses- the losses may outweigh the gains of leaving (children, roof over their heads, money)
- May depend on who the perpetrator is- How do you tell your community that your son may be the perpetrator?
- The Women perhaps doesn't want to disrupt Christmas/ Ramadan
- The Women perhaps doesn't want to upset the family or children or disrupt family
- Might lose connectivity of their faith
- Loss of identity
- May not want to be seen as a victim
- Importance of being a Mrs something. There may be a mentality that being a Mrs is better than being alone.
- 'Shame' 'tainted goods'.
- Fear of coming forward and losing their children.

#### **5) WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS THAT BAME WOMEN FACE FOR ACCESSING SUPPORT WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?**

- That's one of the barriers why women would not leave, there is no-where for them to go. Your family would just hide it.
- If they knew they had somewhere to go, where they wouldn't feel embarrassed, they would go definitely. Some of the ladies from back home that have come here, literally have nowhere to go. They would go if they knew there were refuges and it was a safe place, they would take advantage of that situation.
- Ask the question! - are you safe?
- Hidden lip balm or aids that have discrete contact numbers for domestic abuse support
- Clute events that may look like a coffee morning but actually are domestic abuse support groups/ somewhere to seek support and advice.
- Double purpose tools to seek advice (small business cards, things to put in women's bags
- Being Listened to and understood
- The secrecy and confidentiality of their faith
- If a women's status is questionable, it may be a lot harder for them to come forward (Refugee, no papers, no leave to remain).

## **6) HOW COULD LOCAL ORGANISATIONS MAKE DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR BAME WOMEN OF ALL AGES?**

- Raising awareness of what domestic abuse is in schools for male and females from a young age and in children's centres and churches.
- Start by raising awareness of Domestic abuse affecting BAME communities.
- Put leaflets in places like mosques because women and men are separated at the mosque. Mosques do mediation and family support but some people are embarrassed to do that.
- Have more advice and support and guidance translated in local languages.
- Places that can boost women's confidence- support groups.
- Seeing photographs of what a refuge looks like would help – a lot of women have an idea of what a refuge looks like and it's scary.
- Hidden lip balm or aids that have discrete contact numbers for domestic abuse support
- Subtle events that may look like a coffee morning but actually are domestic abuse support groups/ somewhere to seek support and advice.
- Double purpose tools to seek advice (small business cards, things to put in women's bags
- Being Listened to and understood
- DVD's/ videos of case studies of what domestic abuse look like, awareness and where to seek help
- Distractions from partners so that the victim can be asked in confidence – specifically in chemists
- Toolkits from family justice centre (lip balms)
- All professionals should ask the question 'are you safe?' dentists, GP's, nurses, chemists.
- Targeted advertisement and support to any specific BAME group that we are seeing trends of domestic abuse/ honour based crime.
- Champions who have lived experience and are survivors of domestic abuse to empower other women in the community similar to themselves.
- Collaboration between voluntary sector organisations and domestic abuse statutory services
- Explain and raise awareness to everyone on what is NOT acceptable in relationships
- Explaining the law to people- that domestic abuse, FGM and honour based crimes in the UK are illegal. The perpetrator is therefore committing a crime.
- Third sector and statutory organisations must be aware of the terminology they use for specific communities and ages – the word victim for example and 'abuse'. We should use the word that the person is comfortable with 'person experiencing abuse'.
- Voluntary organisations and statutory organisations should focus on the behaviour not the person.
- Raising awareness! Knowing what is out there.
- We need to engage community leaders to raise awareness to the people they are in contact with – church pastors, mosques, places of worship.
- Providing more Women's groups for awareness, counselling services, educating on domestic abuse.
- Assertive workshops for women and adapt to specific BAME communities
- Being objectified – 'how can we build the confidence up for women who have been experiencing domestic abuse' or increase the self-esteem of the women- subjectively see how we can support the person being affected.
- St Marys school workshops for boys on how to treat females and acting out scenes.
- GP's having domestic violence champion training programme for GP's.
- Dedicated domestic violence advocates and leads (proven that there has been a 41% increase when Specialist advocates for Domestic abuse).
- The use of Social media

## **7) WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN CROYDON**

- Healthy exercise classes help. A lot of the women don't want to go home afterwards (exercise makes you feel good and you can see the confidence of the women when they come out of class) the men can see this on the women and the men get kind of scared. Because when they are indoors all the time, they lose their confidence, but if they go out and have somewhere to go, their self-esteem will increase and they may feel empowered to tell someone.

- They can talk it in a different setting, and something that gets them out the house. At least then they can make friends and they can know they can get help. The main thing is that you have to get them out.
- Somewhere for Women who have experienced, or experiencing domestic abuse victims to go.
- Activities for Women such as; walking, cook and eat club, sewing; activities to get them out the house.
- The staff the victims are trying to reach but understand them, they must speak the language, not even the language but the culture where the victim is from- they must understand what she is going through.
- Attendees mentioned Mulsar-sarr, an organisation in Tooting which is somewhere BAME Women go to where they can sort out a multitude of issues i.e. accommodation, domestic abuse and benefits.
- An excuse to come out of the house, have a chat, talk to other women.
- Champion volunteers- collective strong women, for a super group from different BAME communities. Someone that the BAME women have to talk to and can be signposted inform B&C women's aid what kind of support the women need, all person centred.
- The phone call staff need to be sympathetic and understanding- I called once and she didn't help me and it knocked my confidence and I didn't call back again. It's like you can't breathe man.
- Success stories, seeing where survivors have overcome their domestic abuse experience.
- Denial- if they talk to someone like you, they will talk about it with you. We know that a lot of the BAME communities are closed and secluded.
- English classes- being able to speak the language and give women the confidence to speak up and ask for help.
- Specialist refuges- No resource to public fund refuge (NEET specialist support worker starting soon).
- It's a good idea for Women to know what the Refuge looks like! It reduces the fear factor.

## The effects Domestic abuse has on Women's Mental Health

Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between experiencing domestic abuse and this affecting women's mental health. The effects of domestic abuse has far-reaching consequences for families, children, communities and society as a whole. The extent of the problem is shocking and intolerable.

### Research studies have found that:

Sane UK (2008) - Domestic violence commonly results in self-harm and attempted suicide, particularly for BAME women. For example, 50% of Asian women who attempt suicide or self-harm are domestic violence survivors.

Another study looked into 60 South Asian women's experiences of domestic abuse and violence through questionnaire surveys, interviews and one focus group and found:

- 55% had directly experienced domestic abuse: 46 from their husbands and 10 also from their mother-in-law
- 85% recognised the link between domestic violence and mental health problems
- All women identified impacts on their mental health, particularly depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts
- 73% were unaware of services available to support South Asian women who experienced domestic violence
- 83% felt there were language barriers preventing South Asian women seeking help for domestic violence problems
- Immigration status impacts upon help seeking behaviours; women feel unable to report domestic violence from fear of deportation.

Research also suggests that BAME women may use mental health services differently. A review of 38 studies showed that:

- Black people have more complex pathways, seeing at least three professionals before a specialist.

- Black people are less likely to see a GP before presenting as an acute patient at A&E; they are less likely to be referred to mental health services by their GPs; and more likely to be admitted by police.
- Asian people use inpatient facilities less than white people.
- Black women and young Asian women might be at considerably more risk of self-harm, with prevalence ratios ranging between 1.6 and 2.5 times that of white women.
- Suicide rates among Asian women between the ages of 16 and 35 are up to 3 times the national average.
- Domestic abuse is a factor in 49% of suicide attempts made by black women compared to 22% of suicide attempts by white women.
- BAME women may be wary of involving the police/legal system or other services because of racism within institutions.
- Migrant women may fear losing their right to stay in this country if they separate from their husband and may have been threatened with this. They may also fear that their partner's immigration status might be used to threaten them to not speak up about the abuse they are experiencing.
- Women with insecure immigration status and without recourse to public funds are among the most vulnerable members of society. They may fear that their partner may seek to abduct their children to take them abroad. Legal advice should be sought.

### **Croydon statistics for mental health and domestic abuse- Family Justice Centre**

Year	No. BME women	No. self-reported MH	%
April 2012 - March 2013	180	1	0.01
April 2013 - March 2014	381	5	0.01
April 2014 - March 2015	323	26	0.08
April 2015 - March 2016	299	61	0.20
April 2016 - September 2016	128	30	0.23

*The table shows the number of BAME women who have visited the Family Justice Centre and those with mental health issues.*

### **Focus group questions- mental health:**

The facilitators asked questions around the element of mental health support and how women's mental health is affected by domestic abuse. The questions raised were as follows:

#### **1) HOW WOULD LOCAL ORGANISATIONS IMPROVE ON MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR WOMEN EFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE?**

- More awareness of mental illness and the link between domestic abuse and mental health.
- Joint working with local authorities, voluntary sector, courts so Women get support for both Domestic abuse and mental health.
- Awareness when working with the individual affected by domestic violence and mental health and where they come from and their background so they can clearly understand how to support them.
- Language they use terminology specifically adjusted for BAME Women
- Building a rapport
- Conversations empowering people talk about mental health
- Community leaders in churches, places of worship to teach others about mental health and signpost to mental health support groups

- Professionals need to be aware that people with mental illness can be affected by domestic abuse (as they are vulnerable) and that people affected by domestic abuse can then experience mental illness.
- Importance of sharing stories of mental health and domestic abuse and sharing lived experiences to better support one another and those affected by both mental illness and domestic abuse.
- Looking at the Law and immigration concerns and those affected by mental health.
- Empowering landlords to be aware of mental health and domestic abuse and know how to report this accurately and to the right people. But being mindful that Private landlords are harder to reach and raise awareness to them about mental health and Domestic abuse.
- 'It is hard to report on someone you are concerned about as the authority pass you on to other agencies and the reporting process is hard to complete' - it should be easier and quicker to report concerns of mental health and domestic abuse. You normally report one or the other (either mental illness or domestic abuse).
- There is a concept that BAME communities believe that mental health means schizophrenia or psychosis not anxiety or depression or other issues. They may only be aware of the severe mental illnesses (over-eating, OCD, alcohol abuse, drug misuse).
- There needs to be support for people affected by drugs and alcohol and domestic abuse (it could be that self-medicating helps the individual cope with the abuse). This tandem needs to be addressed and looked into.

## **2) WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE EFFECTS ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH?**

- Suicidal thoughts - Sometimes you want to just kill yourself
- Isolation
- Needs not met (in Croydon)
- Depression and anxiety
- 'The support for mental health was not there, there was no links made between domestic abuse and mental health'. The awareness of mental health in domestic violence cases is not there.
- 'Domestic violence support services do not link in with mental health services'
- 'You feel safe because you are away from the perpetrator but mental health needs are not being addressed'.
- The Family Justice centre do have Crisis interventions for victims experiencing a Mental illness.
- 'Professionals do not ask about your mental health if they are investigating a domestic violence, and vice versa.
- Additional barriers are faced when experiencing both domestic abuse and mental illness- complex cases.
- Housing allocations need to be considered when placing individuals in safe places i.e. if a person is suffering from domestic violence and mental health, they should not be placed next door to an arguing couple as they will be re-living the trauma.
- Experiencing Paranoia
- Emotional paralysis- this could be limiting the conversation with professionals and could lead to missed information about how the individual is feeling/ what mental health problems they are experiencing.
- Fear of coming forward and saying 'I am experiencing a mental illness'.
- The Family Justice Centre are recruiting community volunteers.
- There needs to be a collaborative community spirit in supporting individuals who are experiencing both a mental illness and domestic abuse
- Professionals in social care services need to have the ability to relay hard to hear messages but with an attitude of being supportive, being honest and openly discuss issues and options available to the Women.

## Recommendations

Following on from the focus groups and consultation with BAME women of all ages who reside in Croydon; it is proposed that the following main recommendations could be carried out by local organisations that support BAME women in Croydon with domestic abuse and mental health support:

### 1. To establish a BAME Women's Support group and more safe spaces for

women- this will allow BAME women of Croydon to have somewhere to go to that is discrete, safe, non-judgemental and allows women to open up and talk freely about their experiences and support one another emotionally and practically. It is recommended that the support group meets fortnightly of a week evening in a mutual, safe place in Croydon that is non-conspicuous.

### 2. To recruit BAME Champion volunteers within the Croydon Borough- these

volunteers will be responsible for ensure information i.e. leaflets and awareness posters are displayed or discretely displayed in areas where BAME women meet i.e. places of worship, clinics, ladies toilets. BAME Champions should be trained by Bromley & Croydon's Women's Aid on domestic abuse awareness and safeguarding training to spot the signs of the different types of abuse and how to signpost and support BAME women. The Champions will also be responsible for chairing the fortnightly women's support group (additional in house training will be delivered for the Champions regarding chairing these groups). BAME champion volunteers will be responsible for attending women only events to promote services and information, and will be able to assist with the collaboration of communication between service providers and BAME communities.

### 3. To increase the awareness of domestic abuse facing BAME women in Croydon for staff who support women from various organisations (statutory and voluntary sector)-

project workers and BAME champion volunteers to support Bromley & Croydon's Women's aid to adapt the in-house training for staff members to include more BAME specific domestic abuse awareness and how to better support BAME women facing domestic abuse.

### 4. More awareness and visibility of services for the BME community- BME women to

be made more aware of the services that are available in Croydon for receiving support for domestic abuse and mental health. This could be achieved by BCWA BME Champion volunteers to raise awareness in their communities by visiting places they usually do to advertise and promote supporting services, signpost to organisations and support groups and to promote materials distributed in women only areas. There is also a need for more information and leaflets written in community languages such as Urdu, Tamil, Gujarati and Polish.

### 5. Increase the awareness of mental health in relation to domestic abuse and how to support women who present with both-

it has been found that a lot of Women who experience domestic abuse, also experience mental health issues. It was expressed during the focus groups that many women who were receiving support for domestic abuse, were not receiving support for their mental health. It is recommended that staff supporting women with domestic abuse, should have mental health awareness training so as to sign post and acknowledge the signs of mental illness. This can be delivered by BAME Community Development Workers. It would also be recommended that women are offered counselling and support for their mental health when entering into support services for domestic abuse (e.g. through the NHS, or trainee counsellors at Evolve housing).

**6. Information Hub for housing support and advice, legal advice, money advice, benefit advice-** it is recommended that a Hub or one stop shop is created within a mutual place in the community; a place where all women can go to and seek advice and/or support for their needs. This also needs to be advertised to the right crowds of individual's i.e. Family Justice Centre, Victim Support, Croydon BME Forum, Women's Aid, Croydon Refugee drop in, places of worship, so that women are aware of where they can get domestic abuse advice and information (e.g. Housing advice, legal advice, child protection services advice, money advice from Caribbean credit union). This 'Information Hub' should occur at least once a month in a mutual setting in the Croydon Community.

**7. Women should be offered additional long term development to reduce the risk of domestic abuse occurring again-** this could be delivered in the form of one off workshops, including specific areas of personal development such as 'Confidence building workshops' and 'Assertiveness Workshops'. Local organisations that already supply and deliver these types of personal development training have been established and could potentially work alongside Bromley & Croydon's Women's Aid and other domestic abuse support organisations.

**8. Women should be offered personal development opportunities to increase independence and improve quality of life-** voluntary opportunities and employment opportunities should be incorporated into the recovery journeys of all Women who are experiencing and have experienced domestic abuse. There should also be opportunities for women to be signposted to local community groups and activities that may be of interest (the BAME Champions can signpost and inform women using the Croydon Emergency contacts/ activities contact sheet of the local activities and services available).

**9. Domestic abuse awareness training on BME related abuse to be offered to the Croydon community-** Supporting agencies could employ a BME training officer to deliver awareness training alongside other training and awareness officers within the community. This should include more awareness of the difference between Cultural trends and Religious rights. This will allow black, Asian and minority ethnic women in Croydon to have the choice of attending the awareness training which is specific and relatable to themselves.

**10. Personalisation of support-** for Bromley & Croydon's Women's aid and perhaps other supporting agencies could create and adopt a BME framework within their services following a clear pathway on how to support BAME women from the beginning of their journey, right up until leaving the refuge and afterwards (after care).

## **OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL SERVICES SUPPORTING WOMEN WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE, MENTAL HEALTH BOTH STATUTORY AND VOLUNTARY**

- Dedicated domestic violence specialist advocates and leads (proven 41% increase)
- Specialists training and awareness officers
- Cultural differences needs to be addressed and understood by EVERYONE
- Language barriers needs to be addressed
- BME specialist services.

As a community, we all must work within partnership to work together to:

- Challenge the notion that women are betraying their communities by reporting their abusers

- Challenge the notion that respect for family life in different cultures should deter women from enforcing the law against DV
- Challenge the notion that the strong commitment to children in ethnic minority families should be a reason to tackle domestic violence- NOT a reason to cover it up
- Challenge the notion that ANY religious faith excuses any form of abuse

In order to really make a change to our BME women and children of Croydon.

## Closing remarks

This report sits within this context of domestic abuse affecting the BAME community in Croydon, at a time when the economic climate is resulting in tough times for all. The voluntary sector is going through significant changes, facing increasing demand for their services alongside decreases in funds and cuts to local services. On the backdrop of this, Croydon's domestic abuse services need to take responsibility for ensuring that all the community in Croydon is catered for in terms of the supporting services for domestic abuse and mental health.

The findings of this report strongly supports the case which illustrates the importance for the existence and continuance of BAME specific Domestic abuse support, also highlights the very complex relationship between commonality and difference and suggests that this relationship require intensive attention and analysis.

Organisations such as Bromley & Croydon's Women's aid, Family Justice centre and Victim support to name a few, are respected and recognise in their own right by the role they play in supporting the Croydon community with domestic abuse, however, this report also urges the wider community, including practitioners, service providers and commissioners, to implement the recommendations for the improvement of BAME women's access, knowledge and support into domestic abuse services and mental health service provision in Croydon.

We would like to thank all the local organisations who have supported with this project, including the Faith Regen Foundation, Still I Rise, Croydon Food bank, Thinking Forward, Glowing Futures, IMKAAN, Victim Support, mighty men of Valour and for the members and participants who attended the focus groups.