

Scope Document

Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Brent – Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriages and Honour Based Violence

1. Why are we looking at this area? Have there been recent legislation/policy changes? Are there any performance or budgetary issues?

Violence against women is an illegal, intolerable act and is a human rights violation. It is both fundamentally wrong and has wider affects in preventing women from fully contributing in; and as part of society. Violence against women is both a barrier to equality and an effect of inequality.

Brent is recognised as *the* most ethnically diverse local authority in the country; and a significant proportion of Brent's communities have religious and cultural ties to the practises' of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Honour Base Violence (HBV) and Forced Marriages (FM). These practises are prevalent in more than 28 African countries, some Asian and South American countries and Afghanistan, Iraq and some Kurdish communities. All of the offenses that we wish to tackle with this review are considerably under reported, and it is imperative to raise awareness, provide advice and support our communities to tackle inequality and violence; and prosecute perpetrators when ever these offenses occurs in Brent.

In September 2012, The Home Office announced that the definition of domestic violence be implemented in March 2013 and states: "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: Psychological, Physical, Sexual, Financial and Emotional".

"Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

"Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim". * This definition of controlling behaviour, which is not a legal definition, includes so called '**honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage**, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

In June 2012 the Prime Minister announced, forcing someone to marry will become a criminal offence in England and Wales. The decision to create a specific offence of forced marriage follows a 12 week consultation which took views from the public, victims, charities and frontline agencies. The new law will be accompanied by a range of measures to increase protection and support for victims and a continuing focus on prevention.

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) – involves the complete or partial removal or alteration of external genitalia for non-medical reasons. It is mostly carried out on young girls at some time between infancy and the age of 15; and its extensive harmful health consequences are widely recognised.

'Honour' based violence – violence committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family and/or community. Women, especially young women, are the most common targets, often where they have acted outside community boundaries of perceived

acceptable feminine/sexual behaviour. In extreme cases the woman may be killed.

Forced Marriage – One or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning or physical disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. The pressure put on people to marry against their will can be physical (including threats, actual physical violence and sexual violence) or emotional and psychological (for example, when someone is made to feel like they're bringing shame on their family).

2. What are the main issues?

1. Reducing Violence against women and Girls - Prevalence

Violence against women

London has the highest rate of female victimisation in England and Wales.¹ Compared to the rest of the country, London has the lowest percentage of successful outcomes (measured as convictions of prosecuted cases) for violence against women offences (only 62 per cent were successful last year compared to 72 per cent nationally).²

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

An estimated 6.3 per cent of pregnancies in inner London³ and 4.6 per cent in outer London are to women with FGM.⁴ There have been no convictions for FGM since it was outlawed in 1985, compared to 100 in France.

FGM has been illegal in the UK since 2003 and is prevalent in 28 African countries as well as in parts of the middle East and Asia. FORWARDⁱ estimated that over 20,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of FGM and 66,000 women in the UK are living with the consequences.

'Honour' based violence (HBV)

Nationally, there are around 12 so-called 'honour' murders a year.

The Metropolitan Police recorded 256 incidents linked to 'honour' in the year 2008/09, of which 132 were criminal offences. This is a 60 per cent rise for the year to April 2009.

Forced Marriage (FM)

January to May 2012⁵ - 594 cases where the FMU has given advice or support related to a possible forced marriage. 14% of calls involved victims below 15 years old, 87% involved female victims and 13% involved male victims. Countries of Origin: Pakistan (46%), Bangladesh (9.2%), UK (8.7%), India (7.2%), Afghanistan (2.7%), Within the UK the geographical distribution of instances was as follows: London (20.9%), West Midlands (16.7%), South East (10.4%), North West (5.1%), 25 instances involving those with disabilities (23 with learning disabilities, two with physical disabilities and two with both) were brought to the FMU's attention. Seven instances involved victims who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT).

2. Highlighting Awareness and Under reporting of Violent Offenses

FGM, HBV and FM are all criminal offenses which carry jail sentences, however many women and girls are unaware of this fact. With all three of the issues that we wish to review there is significant under reporting; as these subjects are highly sensitive, often secretive and often experienced by groups who are hard to reach using traditional approaches.

"Female Genital Mutilation is a taboo; Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriages are suffered in secret"

3. Perpetrators should be prosecuted

The Crown Prosecution Services (CPS) announced in November 2012 its 10 point action plan on improving prosecution for FGM. This will involve looking at existing reporting duties for **medical professionals, social care professionals and teachers** in referring possible FGM cases to the police. As part of the action plan the CPS will explore whether evidence to prosecute offences under other legislation is possible and may be easier to support; such as section 5 Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (DVCVA) 2004, as amended by DVCVA 2012, which creates an offence of causing or allowing a child or vulnerable adult to die or suffer serious physical harm. In March 2010 the Mayor of London launched his strategy “The Way Forward”ⁱⁱ Taking action to end violence against Women and girls, using a pan London approach.

3. What should the review cover? Brief outline of what members could focus on, which partners to engage with, how residents/public can be involve.

1. Highlight and educate communities about reporting

Highlight the prevalence of violence against women and girls and educate our communities about reporting violent crimes. We want to make violence against women and girls a priority for service providers.

2. Improving access to support - Mapping existing services

Consider how to improve the safety, wellbeing and freedom of women and girls through better access to improved Brent and partner services that meet the needs of individual communities. Promote integrated support services for the most marginalised and at-risk females.

3. Addressing health, social and economic consequences of violence

Reduce the long-term consequences of violence for women who experience it, improve their life chances and support them in rebuilding their lives.

4. Protecting women and girls at risk

Ensure that council services are aware of all the risks and can identify women or girls that may be at risk, with clear guidelines and paths to follow. Working in partnership with key statutory and voluntary sector support services to improve the support, safety and satisfaction of victims.

5. Getting tougher with perpetrators

Consider how to stop perpetrators and hold them to account. Perpetrators must be deterred from violence against women and girls.

Potential Service Partners

FORWARD (The Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development) - Was established in 1983 in the UK, in response to the emerging problems caused by female genital mutilation being seen by health professionals. Since this time FORWARD has been working to eliminate the practice and provide support to women affected by FGM; and also tackles child and forced marriages

IKWRO (Iran and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation) - The Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation provides advice and support to Middle Eastern women and girls living in the UK who are facing 'honor' based violence, domestic abuse, forced marriage or female genital mutilation.

Ashiana Network – Provide refuge and outreach services to South Asian, Turkish and Iranian women aged 16-30 who are experiencing domestic violence, forced marriages and /or sexual violence. Ashiana also provide generic training, counseling and support services for adults and young people affected by domestic violence.

Daughters of Eve - Daughters of Eve is a non profit organisation that works to protect girls and young women who are at risk from female genital mutilation (FGM). By raising awareness about FGM and sign-posting support services we aim to help people who are affected by FGM and ultimately help bring an end to this practice.

White Ribbon Campaign - The WRC is unique as the first male oriented organisation to oppose violence against women. The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) is the UK branch of the global campaign to ensure men take more responsibility for reducing the level of violence against women.

Local Partners

Brent Safeguarding Children Board/ADVANCE in Brent

Provides guidance and information to all professionals that work with Children in Brent. ADVANCE is a specialist project that supports survivors of intimate partner domestic abuse and honour based violence / Forced marriages.

Brent NHS – Northwick Park and Central Middlesex Hospital Midwifery units (African Well Women clinic) Specialist clinics that are also linked to the antenatal clinics. Most clinics are run by specially trained doctors, nurses, or midwives who understand FGM and are able to treat some of the medical problems caused by it.

Brent Police - The MPS adopts an intelligence-led approach, identifying individuals at risk - such as a girl talking about going abroad with a relative for a 'special procedure' - and, with other agencies, will intervene. There are powers to remove at-risk children from families.

Potential Best Practise Partners

Bristol City Council - The Bristol CC has been leading a multi-agency effort for several years to raise awareness of the issue and train professionals to spot signs that a girl might be vulnerable to FGM. This has included an information campaign which has supported public health funding for a contract for FORWARD to work with community groups, train local advocates, talk to young people, run a drop-in advice centre and provide feedback and training to health workers.

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBDB) - One of the first London boroughs to develop and produce a FGM strategy. The strategy acknowledged that FGM is a form of violence against women and girls. The strategy outlines how LBDB aim to prevent FGM from happening, improve borough services and professionals responses to women and girls who have undergone or are at risk of FGM, and ensure sensitive specialist support, information and advice is available to them.

Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBKC), LB Hammersmith & Fulham (LBHF) and Westminster City Council (WCC) – Tri borough – These three neighbouring boroughs are working together to deliver awareness training on FM, HBV and FGM. Awareness of Cultural Practices and Safeguarding Women and Children, is delivered by the IKWRO (Iran and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation) one of the leading charity in this area and a very creditable source.

London Borough of Lambeth (LBL) –Based on the LBL's approach to violence against women and girls; are rolling out awareness courses for FGM. The course aims to assist professionals to recognise indicators that a person is at risk, and what actions they should take to prevent and intervene where they suspect that female genital mutilation is a concern. It will also raise participants' awareness of legislation (Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003) and national government guidelines. The course places FGM within a child protection framework.

Central Government Partners

The UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health - The group aims to raise awareness on population, Development and reproductive health issues, providing a forum for facilitating negotiations between key stake holders and parliamentarians and encouraging initiatives that increase access to and improve reproductive and sexual health programmes worldwide.

Home Office - Violence against women and girls is the government department responsible for leading the national effort to protect the public from these crimes

Foreign and Commonwealth Office - Protecting British nationals who are at risk of being taken overseas for the purpose of FGM and forced marriages.

Engaging with the Public

Public events to raise awareness, sending a very clear message that community engagement, including men and boys, is the best way forward to tackle any ingrained views about these practice and that we will use the law to protect women and young people at every opportunity. The general public should be encouraged tackle inequality whenever and however it arises.

4. What could the review achieve? Influence policy change? Improvement to service delivery? Budget savings? Develop partnerships?

1. Highlighting areas where there is the potential to reach women and girls at risk, from domestic violence.
2. Work with partners to ensure that pathways for reporting risks and offences committed are clear, easy and stress free for women and girls.
3. Educate our uninformed communities about the changes in law, the human rights breaches and the consequences of such breaches – through Schools, GP's partners and voluntary groups such as FORWARD and IKWRO.
4. Identifying any funding available to support partners with work they are currently doing within Brent, providing support to reach more affected women and girls.
5. Empowering communities to inform and provide support from within; targeting hard to reach (underground) areas of some communities.
6. Inform the Brent VAWAG strategy currently being developed
7. Support the work being carried out by the Brent FGM Steering Group
8. Inform the Health and Wellbeing board and Community Safety Partnership
9. Best Practise for other London boroughs to follow, through recognition of local authority responsibility to address these issues, and could hence establish Brent as an example of good practice in this area.

Endnotes

1. Home Office, 2004-8, British Crime Survey. Analysis of data comparing London rates with overall findings
2. Crown Prosecution Service, 2009, Violence against women Crime Report 2008-2009, p.70
3. These figures come from the only study in the UK that seeks to estimate prevalence. The research was funded by the Department of Health and undertaken by the Foundation of Women's Health
4. Forward, 2007, A Statistical Study to Estimate the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales
5. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) May 2012

ⁱ FORWARD, 2007, A Statistical Study to Estimate the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales

ⁱⁱ The Way Forward is the Mayors of London strategy to end all forms of violence against women in London launched in March 2010