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Joint Briefing by Imkaan and the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)

Adjournment Debate: Black Women and Domestic Abuse – 30 June 2020

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Key Stats

- BME and migrant women experience higher rates of domestic abuse related homicide and are 3 times more likely to commit suicide than other women in the UK.¹
- 50% of Black and minoritised specialist refuges have been forced to close or been taken over by a larger provider due to lack of funding in the last decade.
- There are only 18 specialist 'by and for' Black and minoritised women's refuges for the whole of the UK.
- Almost half of all the women that struggled to find a refuge space in the past year (identified through Women's Aid NWTa project) were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds.
- Just 5% of refuge spaces listed last year were accessible to woman with No Recourse to Public Funds.
- 25 Black and minoritised women and girls' services shared an annual income of £10 million in 2017 (averaging £400,000 per organisation). 10 non BME specialist women's services shared an income of £25 million (averaging £2.5 million per organisation).

Introduction

Black and minoritised women face numerous intersecting inequalities that contribute to a higher risk of experiencing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Black women are also disproportionately 'victimised' with women who identified with Mixed/Multiple ethnicities statistically more likely to have experienced partner abuse in the last 12 months

¹ UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. Statement at the conclusion of a country mission to the United Kingdom 2014, UN <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14514&>

(10.1%) than any other ethnic group.² BME and migrant women experience higher rates of domestic homicide and are 3 times more likely to commit suicide than other women in the UK.³ Additionally, 50% of BME women victims of violence experience abuse from multiple perpetrators.⁴

Black women are known to face significantly higher barriers to reporting sexual violence and domestic abuse, accessing refuges and other critical support. Research has shown that Black and minoritised women remain trapped in violent relationships for longer than white British women.⁵ Factors such as immigration status, language difficulties, and race-based discrimination have all been identified as additional barriers for Black and minoritised survivors to exit violent relationships. These women are commonly barred from accessing safe accommodation due to a lack of appropriate refuge spaces and suitable longer-term affordable housing, as well as issues with homelessness assessments, housing allocations and insufficient provision for women with insecure immigration status.⁶

Black and minoritised women are more likely to report inappropriate professional responses from statutory and voluntary agencies, including responses based on cultural, ethnic and religious stereotypes.⁷

Since 2010 government austerity measures have disproportionately impacted the lives of Black and minoritised women. For BME women, gender inequalities intersect with and compound racial inequalities making these women particularly vulnerable to cuts to benefits, tax credits and public services.⁸ Local Authority cuts to women's domestic abuse refuges and services have created a context of increasing and unequal competition in local commissioning processes, and these have impacted the Black and minoritised women's sector the hardest.

Black and minoritised women have built a set of specialist 'by and for' VAWG support services across the UK over decades, which are expert in understanding and responding to

² *Women most at risk of experiencing partner abuse in England and Wales: years ending March 2015 to 2017*, ONS

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/womenmostatriskofexperiencingpartnerabuseinenglandandwales/yearsendingmarch2015to2017>

³ *UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. Statement at the conclusion of a country mission to the United Kingdom 2014*, UN

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14514&>

⁴ *Vital Statistics*, 2010, Ravi Thiara & Samanta Roy, Imkaan

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_MKSoEcCvQwdHhTMnpWUTc1NjQ/view

⁵ Imkaan (2010). *Vital Statistics*. London: Imkaan.

⁶ *A Roof, Not a Home: The housing experiences of Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence in London* (2019) Latin American Women's Aid & London Black Women's Project

⁷ *Intersectional Interventions to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in BME Communities* (2020) Professor Aisha K. Gill and Gurpreet Virdee

[file:///Users/andreasimon/Downloads/WGN_Intersectional%20Interventions%20Briefing_Gill%20and%20Virdee%20\(2020\)%20\(1\).pdf](file:///Users/andreasimon/Downloads/WGN_Intersectional%20Interventions%20Briefing_Gill%20and%20Virdee%20(2020)%20(1).pdf)

⁸ *Intersecting inequalities: The impact of austerity on Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK* (2018) Women's Budget Group and Runnymede Trust

the specific needs of different Black and minoritised women. However competitive tendering processes favour larger organisations and contracts above comparatively smaller, specialist women's services who are expert in meeting survivors' needs, meaning specialist services run 'by and for' BME women are systemically disadvantaged by these procurement arrangements.⁹

The result has been that in the last decade, 50% of Black and minoritised specialist refuges have been forced to close or been taken over by a larger provider due to lack of funding, whilst others continue to operate without any local government support.¹⁰

The current Domestic Abuse Bill has been described as a 'landmark' Bill, however the VAWG sector has consistently expressed concerns about its narrow focus on domestic abuse rather than VAWG, as well as the exclusion of minoritised women especially those with insecure immigration status from protective measures.

Because of the persistent challenges facing the BME ending-VAWG sector, Imkaan published an Alternative Bill (2018)¹¹ which outlined a gendered and intersectional response to VAWG that moves away from a focus on criminal justice and policing and focuses instead on sustaining and resourcing expert 'by and for' women's organisations. It remains essential that any future funding system for domestic abuse support in the Domestic Abuse Bill, ends existing structural funding inequalities, and dedicates ringfenced funding to services run 'by and for' BME women to ensure these critical resources are available to will meet the needs of survivors.

Black women and access to refuge

According to 2018 data, there are only 30 specialist 'by and for' Black and minoritised women's refuges for the whole of the UK, 15 of them located in London.¹² This amounts to a mere 325 bed spaces for Black and minoritised survivors, representing only 8.5% of national provision (at 3,649 refuge bed spaces). In 2015, only 154 out of 733 Black and minoritised women that sought a refuge bed were successful, amounting to a 79% rejection rate.¹³ An average of 1 in 5 referrals to women's refuges are declined due to lack of space¹⁴ this number rises to nearly 4 in 5 of Black and minoritised survivors being turned away.¹⁵

Women's Aid Federation England's No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project which provides dedicated support to women who face barriers in accessing a refuge space, reported in June 2020 that almost half of the women supported by the NWTa project were from Black and

⁹ Imkaan, *From Survival to Sustainability: critical issues for the specialist black and 'minority ethnic' ending violence against women and girls sector in the UK*, 2018

¹⁰ Imkaan (2016). 'Capital Losses'. London: Imkaan

¹¹ Imkaan (2018) *From the Margin to the Centre Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls Alternative Bill*

¹² Women's Aid (2017) *Nowhere To Turn Findings from the first year of the No Woman Turned Away project.*

¹³ Imkaan (2015). *State of the Sector 2015*. London: Imkaan

¹⁴ Women's Aid (May 2017). *Routes to Support is the UK violence against women and girls database of service and refuge vacancies*

¹⁵ Imkaan (2016). 'Capital Losses'. London: Imkaan.

Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds (105 out of 243; 43.2%).¹⁶ This highlights the systemic racism and discrimination that Black and minoritised survivors of domestic abuse continue to face when trying to access places of safety.

No Recourse to public Funds

The situation is even worse for those women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), just 5% of refuge spaces listed last year were accessible to woman with NRPF¹⁷ and they have an average rejection rate from refuges of 93%.¹⁸ Most refuges cannot afford to accommodate women with NRPF as they rely on housing benefit as an income stream. Some women with NRPF may be eligible for support under the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession however, there remain several challenges to accessing this route. As Southall Black Sisters have highlighted the DV Rule and the DDVC do not extend to migrant women with non-spousal visas and who are subject to NRPF. This includes women on student or other types of visas such as work permit holders and domestic workers. They remain at risk of re-victimisation by their abuser(s) and/or destitution and exploitation due to increased dependency on friends, acquaintances and strangers or because they are forced to find other means of survival.¹⁹

Black and minoritised survivors who are disproportionately unable to access refuge accommodation are forced into situations such as remaining with their abusers, or being pushed into exploitative and often unsafe private shared housing, sofa surfing or rough sleeping. These options are dangerous and carry a high risk of repeat victimisation for survivors of abuse.

Challenges with housing

Housing experiences of Black and minoritised women survivors of abuse revealed by the Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) project²⁰ found Black and minoritised survivors sometimes had to stay with friends or sleep rough before moving to a refuge, because they often did not know about available support or were waiting for a refuge space and/or funding to be secured. Others had to move into other forms of unsuitable emergency accommodation, such as mixed gender B&B-style accommodation or generic refuges. A catalogue of evidence of systemic and institutional failures and discrimination by public authorities when dealing with Black and minoritised women's cases of violence is detailed in the WAHA report 'A Roof not a Home'.²¹ This includes cases of the police, when responding to domestic violence reports involving minoritised women, failing to remove perpetrators from the house and/or fulfil their statutory duty to refer them to housing authorities. As a result of this, some women in this study reported having to sleep at a police station, walking the streets at night and feeling that they then have no choice but to return or stay with the perpetrator.

¹⁶ <https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Nowhere-to-Turn-2020.pdf>

¹⁷ Women's Aid, 2020. The domestic abuse report 2020

¹⁸ Women's Aid (2017). Nowhere To Turn Findings from the first year of the No Woman Turned Away project. London: Women's Aid.

¹⁹ Southall Black Sisters (2019) *Briefing Paper 2 The Domestic Abuse Bill and Migrant Women*

²⁰ *A Roof, Not a Home: The housing experiences of Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence in London* (2019) Latin American Women's Aid & London Black Women's Project

²¹ Ibid

The value of specialist Black and minoritised services

Imkaan defines the ‘by and for expert sector’ as specialist services that are designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve. These services are vital and often provide much needed expertise and advocacy in issues such as multiple perpetrators in a family and community pressure; forced marriage and so-called honour-based violence; immigration advice; child custody disputes; foreign language specialisms and faith contexts.

‘By and for’ expert services are trusted by local communities and the women they support due to their recognition and understanding of intersectionality and the multiple forms of discrimination and additional barriers faced by women from marginalised groups. These services provide vital lifelines and a safe space for Black and minoritised women. They have uniquely high rates of self-referrals as many Black and minoritised women prefer to seek support from ‘by and for’ services over mainstream support services.

Imkaan research has detailed how Black and minoritised women’s experiences of violence and abuse encompassed wider contexts, and multiple perpetrators. The briefing ‘Key findings on sexual violence and Black and minoritised women’s interactions with the Criminal Justice System (Reclaiming Voice, 2020)’²² found the majority of victim-survivors in the study were subjected to sexual violence within a domestic violence context. The Women’s narratives revealed the ways in which sexual violence intersected with ‘race’/racism, immigration status, age, and poverty to create complex trauma and needs. They were not only dealing with the consequences of sexual violence but also uncertainty about their futures in the UK, homelessness, unemployment and ill health. The depth and breadth of the violence endured by Black and minoritised women highlights the importance of specialist practitioners with an understanding, experience and skills in providing wide-ranging support that responds to all of their needs.

Imkaan also reports on the importance of women ‘seeing themselves’ in the services they accessed. Whilst being able to communicate in their language was crucial for those who did not speak English, ‘relatability’ was also an important dimension to support and provided women with a sense of safety. Being within BME spaces reduced women’s isolation and provided opportunities to forge alternative supportive friendships; these family-like relationships made the absence of family support and other social networks more tolerable for women and helped them in their healing and recovery.²³

The Home Affairs Select Committee has recognised the value of BME services as lifelines during two Domestic Abuse Bill inquiries as well as its recent inquiry into COVID-19 and domestic abuse²⁴. Yet, the current funding system for domestic abuse is not set up to

²² Dr. Ravi Thiara, University of Warwick & Sumanta Roy, Imkaan (2020) Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence Key Findings (2020)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Home-Affairs-Select-Committee-COVID-19-Preparedness.pdf>

acknowledge this specialist knowledge and experience, meaning that these lifelines are routinely left in a financially precarious positions or at risk of closure.

Black women and the structural inequality of the domestic abuse funding landscape

Domestic abuse support services run “by and for” Black women have been subjected to years of austerity, competitive tendering and commissioning which have all had a significant negative impact on the sector. Policies such as gender neutrality which challenged women only services to open to men and a “one size fits all” approach introduced economies of scale that resulted in housing associations and generic providers entering the sector and competing for services, to the detriment of grassroots “by and for” Black women’s organisations. Tendering and commissioning introduced competition which resulted in one-third of refuges managed by Black and minoritised women and girls’ services being decommissioned by 2017, resulting in a reduction of 50% bed space capacity.

The result of this structural inequality is stark - 25 Black and minoritised women and girls’ services shared an annual income of £10 million in 2017 (averaging £400,000 per organisation). By contrast, ten generic women’s services shared an income £25 million (averaging £2.5 million per organisation).²⁵

EVAW member organisations have reported being excluded from tender opportunities on the basis that their focus is on gender and Black women’s specialism. Where gender specific services have been included in tendering, Black women’s specialist focus has often been excluded.

EVAW members throughout the UK, but particularly those providing services for BME women, have reported trends away from commissioning specialist services towards cheaper services from non-specialist housing associations and generic charities, as well as private companies such as G4S that do not have the same experience or track record of supporting women and girls, especially those with complex needs.

BME specialist women’s services face discrimination within the commissioning processes, where there is a failure amongst commissioners to recognise the particular needs of BME women. Another detrimental impact on Black women’s specialist services, is their exclusion by mainstreaming criteria, on the basis that Black women’s services should cater to all women and the incorrect assumption that specialism does not represent value for money.

COVID-19: The Dual Pandemics

BME women are over-represented in ‘at higher risk’ COVID-19 groups, and are already impacted by racial inequalities in our healthcare system. They are more likely to live in

²⁵ Imkaan. 2018. From Survival to Sustainability. Black Services Matter

poverty (40% of BME women live in poverty) which has profound effects on health, accessibility of healthcare and health outcomes.²⁶

Over the past few months it has become very apparent that Covid-19 is anything but a 'leveller', with Black people four times more likely to die from a COVID-19-related death than white counterparts.²⁷ The reluctance to openly investigate and develop a response to this has been thrown into stark light by the #BlackLivesMatter movement, as women's experience of racism is not separate to their needs when seeking support, justice and protection from abuse.

The Dual Pandemics of COVID-19 and VAWG²⁸ have exacerbated the dire funding situation for domestic abuse services run "by and for" Black and minoritised women. These services tend to be small, local, needs-specific charities, and as such are less cushioned from shocks and less able to suddenly raise emergency funds during crises. They are also among the most challenged in having to make a swift transition to working from home and phone/web services; one EAW member is currently operating a whole service in a town where no other BME service is available with just four mobile phones.²⁹

At the start of the lockdown when restrictive measures were introduced to control the spread of COVID-19, BME organisations were already underfunded by 39%³⁰ and had an estimated shortfall in refuge spaces in services led 'by and for' BME women of 1,172. As a result 'by and for' BME women's services have had to invest as much as £1,000 from reserves to support women in refuges with emergency food and other essentials which is highly unsustainable.

Imkaan report that 40% of women who used services in these organisations were destitute due to insecure immigration status and socio-economic circumstances. This means that Black and minoritised women and girls' organisations were supporting complex intersectional issues with fewer resources. In the first month of lockdown, management capacity was stretched by 50% for BME organisations, meaning that half the organisations had no capacity to do emergency fundraising as managers were pulled to deliver frontline support.

A quarter of these organisations feared that they would not survive another 6 months under the COVID-19 crisis. Specialist refuges for Black and minoritised women, as a result of funding structural inequality and reduced capacity, were already full at the start of lockdown. These capacity issues have been exacerbated by the need to provide additional space for women needing to self-isolate.

²⁶ *Poverty Pathways: Ethnic minority women's livelihoods*, Zohra Moosa with Jessica Woodroffe, The Fawcett Society, 2009

²⁷ ONS. 2020. Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales: 2 March 2020 to 1 April 2020.

²⁸ Imkaan. 2020. VAWG COVID-19 Series Position Paper Impact of the Dual Pandemics on Violence against Women and Girls and COVID-19 on Black and Minoritised Women and Girls

²⁹ EAW. 2020. Rapidly Compiled – Initial Briefing on the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Duty to Prevent Violence Against Women & Girls

³⁰ Sheil, F. 2020. Calculating the Cost of Domestic Violence and COVID-19 on Specialist Services for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls in England, Scotland and Wales.

Furthermore, structural funding inequalities have not been addressed by the domestic abuse emergency funding from the Ministry of Justice or Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government which have not ringfenced funding for services for Black and minoritised women and which are only intended to cover the period up to 31 October. This will result in a funding “cliff edge” and does nothing to address the long-term impact of structural funding inequality, nor will it provide the sustainability needed for these lifesaving services to survive and support Black women in the various “surges of demand” expected following the easing of lockdown restrictions in the medium-long term.

The impact of COVID-19 means that many specialist Black and minoritised services can expect not only multiple surges in demand, but also an increase in the complexity of cases, and public health requirements requiring an ongoing “mixed provision” of remote and in-person services. This will have ongoing significant impacts on the resources of Black and minoritised services that will not be addressed with short-term funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Ring-fenced funding for VAWG services run ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised women**
- **Abolish the No Recourse to Public Funds Condition which prevents migrant women with insecure immigration status from accessing vital, often life-saving support and routes to safety.**
- **Use the Domestic Abuse Bill to ensure migrant women are no longer left behind and have access to the same protections regardless of their immigration status by introducing:**
 - **a principle of non-discrimination in line with Article 4(3) of the Istanbul Convention to ensure all victims of domestic abuse have equal access to protection and support regardless of immigration status;**
 - **a provision to establish safe reporting mechanisms and an end to data-sharing for immigration enforcement purposes between vital public services and the Home Office, to ensure all survivors can safely report abuse to police and other services without fear of immigration control;**
 - **extension of eligibility for the Domestic Violence (DV) Rule and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC), so that every migrant survivor can access routes to regularise/confirm their immigration status and can secure public funds (which must be provided for at least six months) while doing so;**
 - **a provision to ensure all victims of domestic abuse can access public funds and vital, often life-saving support and routes to safety; and that no survivor, whatever her immigration status, is treated as being in breach of her leave conditions for accessing those funds.**

About the End Violence Against Women Coalition

The End Violence Against Women Coalition is a UK-wide coalition of more than 85 women's organisations and others working to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) in all its forms, including: sexual violence, domestic violence, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, FGM, stalking and harassment. We campaign for improved national and local government policy and practice in response to all forms of violence against women and girls, and we challenge the wider cultural attitudes that tolerate violence against women and girls and make excuses for it. Our trustees include women who are globally renowned for their pioneering work in setting up the first domestic and sexual violence crisis services, for their academic research in this area, and for having successfully campaigned for considerable legislative and policy change in the UK to end and prevent abuse over the last four decades.

About Imkaan

Imkaan is an intersectional black feminist infrastructure organisation supporting the frontline black and minoritised women and girls' sector. Our main purpose is to eradicate violence against women and girls by elevating their voices and representations in the work we do. A key focus of our work is addressing systemic racism and structural inequality by confronting additional barriers that prevent access to safe pathways. We do this by protecting the rights and resources of women and girls and enhancing their representation by moving them from the margin to the centre. We provide capacity building and sustainability support to members, undertake strategic advocacy, and research and policy work. For over two decades, Imkaan has been the only national second tier support organisation for Black and minoritised women and girls with membership in England, Scotland and Wales.