

Hackney
Women's
Forum

Community Conversations

**Violence against women and
girls in Hackney**

Hackney Women's Forum
11th March 2010

domestic violence

rape 'honour' killings

dowry/bride price

efforced marriage

psychological abuse

trafficking

gang violence murder

female genital mutilation

stalking incest

sexual violence

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“As long as any woman anywhere in the world is bought or sold – none of us are free.”

Andrea Dworkin

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from the Community Conversations event which was held on 11th March 2010. It was based on the contributions of 86 women from diverse communities living in the London borough of Hackney who shared their stories and personal experiences in the hopes that their voices would contribute to enhancing the understanding of decision makers and service providers as well as break the silence about the suffering women and their families face from domestic abuse and gender violence.

Aims

- To name the forms of violence against women and girls prevalent in Hackney.
- To identify the barriers to services.
- To explore the impact of domestic violence and gender violence in general as well as the role culture plays in particular on women's views of violence.
- To identify the support women require and the strategies that will help to address domestic abuse and gender based violence.

Methods

Research data on women's experiences of domestic violence and gender violence were collected through eight focus groups. While we were successful in recruiting participants from diverse communities it is important to highlight that our sample is not fully representative of the local population in Hackney.

Main Findings

- The full spectrum of violence against women and girls (VAWG) was discussed. Focus group participants identified the specific types of violence that manifest from their cultural backgrounds, e.g., so called "honour killings", female genital mutilation and forced marriage.
- Violence against women and girls cuts across the diverse cultural and religious communities in Hackney.
- Many communities exerted tremendous family and community pressure for women and young girls to remain silent and not disclose the violence they experience. For many the

consequences of such disclosure were life threatening for the woman or young girl.

- Barriers such as fear, immigration status and financial dependency made it difficult for women to escape the violence. Women's lack of awareness of their rights and local services contributed to their difficulty in escaping the violence.
- All the focus groups identified mental health problems as having a negative impact on women and girls who experienced domestic violence or other gender-based violence such as forced marriage or honour based crimes.
- There was widespread recognition that violence in the family had a negative impact on the children many of whom witnessed violence in the home.
- There was a low level of awareness of services available locally for women and children affected by violence.

Conclusions

The Community Conversations event demonstrated that violence against women is a persistent and ongoing problem. Focus group participants shared experiences and views about the nature and consequences of gender based violence and abuse in Hackney. Violence against women and girls was seen as not just a criminal justice issue but a public health problem and violation of women's human rights.

It was recognised that violence against women was an impediment to women's equality. Gender based violence is perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. It both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the life, health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.

Focus group participants illustrated the life cycle of violence against women and girls. The participants viewed violence against women and girls (VAWG) as a societal problem rather than a private family matter. VAWG is a problem that affects individual women and girls, families, communities and society as a whole.

Violence can have direct consequences for women's physical and mental health and it can increase women's risk of future ill health. DV and VAW erode women's self esteem. Besides causing injury, violence increases women's long-term risk of health problems, including chronic pain, physical disability, drug and alcohol abuse and depression. Women with a history of physical or sexual abuse are also at increased risk for unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Despite awareness raising campaigns women and girls are not getting the help that they need for what often underlies their behaviour and symptoms when they present to health services, for instance, is undiagnosed gender based violence. Thus if the gender based violence is undetected and untreated the health intervention will not be effective. One of the focus groups spoke about the fact that GPs are not trained to recognise and address gender based violence, e.g. domestic violence. And that this was a significant gap in services.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented here for reducing and/or preventing violence against women are based on suggestions from focus group participants themselves as well as interpretation of the data. The recommendations are organised into three categories:

- Public sector level
- Service level (community based services provided by statutory and/or voluntary sector or both)
- Community level.

Public Sector Level

Nationally

- Appoint a 'Violence Prevention' Minister.
- Define domestic violence as a specific crime in law.
- Reduce barriers to using the criminal justice system for marginalised women; lack of knowledge of the system, lack of trust, racism, historic relationships and fear of stereotyping are all barriers to using services.
- Provide state protection for those women with insecure immigration status, i.e. abolish the rule of no recourse to public funds.

Locally

- Produce a violence against women and girls strategy for Hackney based on equality and human rights principles.
- Identify the elimination of DV/gender violence as part of LB Hackney's equality duties, e.g. tackling domestic violence and gender violence as an objective in the gender or single equality scheme.
- Form a No Recourse to Public Funds Task Group to explore options for supporting women and children affected by this rule and promote and share good practice with local service providers.
- Support the investment in specialised services in the women's voluntary sector.

- Take an integrated and joined up approach that ensures there are sufficient services for women and children affected by DV/VAW, such as honour based violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage.
- Develop a public health approach to violence against women – collecting data to accurately define the problem and develop and pilot interventions to address the needs.
- Offer specialised training for professional staff working with DV/VAW victims/survivors, e.g. training GPs to identify early signs of domestic violence, cultural awareness training to understand the needs of the culturally diverse communities.
- Devise programmes for working with perpetrators.
- Carry out preventative work in the schools.

Service Level

- Ensure prioritisation and allocation of resources that protect women and children, i.e. refuges, rape crisis centres.
- Support community-based, culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Such services are a viable model for serving Hackney's increasingly diverse population.
- Raise public awareness of services available for DV/VAW victims/survivors.
- Invest resources and funding for preventative projects, e.g. parenting projects that include the education of boys and young men.
- Fund same culture and language support groups to serve as a forum for survivors to organise themselves and their communities against gender based violence and reach out to other victims.
- Provide options for all women. Mainstream services must make their services more accessible to all victims/survivors by reaching out to women from under-represented communities.
- Develop multiple strategies for outreach in communities, including cultivating networks of survivors to do word-of-mouth outreach and advertisement in community newspapers, on buses and through women's groups and community organisations.
- Enable DV/VAW victims/survivors to access education, jobs and training programmes enabling them to acquire the skills to support themselves and their children.
- Provide ESOL classes for non-English speaking women.

- Offer educational programmes on DV/VAW for boys and men.
- Provide counselling and therapeutic services for those affected by DV/VAW.
- Address gaps in services for children affected by DV/VAW.
- Expand and support women's specialist services, e.g. refuges, rape crisis centres.

Community Level

- Further develop women's organisations to advocate for the needs of DV/VAW survivors.
- Develop and deliver lifelong learning programmes to educate community members, i.e. education and sensitisation of communities. These awareness raising programmes would range from early education in the schools to community education within the diverse communities.
- Organise empowerment workshops/programmes for women.
- Support women's specialist services to provide holistic services to women affected by DV/VAW.
- Provide specialised training for professional staff working with DV/VAW victims/survivors.
- Incorporate ways to address the extreme isolation many victims are experiencing.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why a Community Conversation?

The Community Conversations event was organised by Hackney Women's Forum to find out about:

- (a) The forms of violence experienced by women and girls in the inner London borough of Hackney;
- (b) The specific ways in which women from diverse cultural and religious background experience gender-based violence;
- (c) The barriers that prevent women from seeking help to escape the violence;
- (d) The impact on women and children experiencing domestic violence and gender violence;
- (e) Practical ideas for reducing or preventing gender based violence.

For the past year Hackney Women's Forum has been working with members and local partnerships advocating for a wider understanding of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

This report describes the findings from the eight focus groups carried out with 86 women from different cultural and religious backgrounds in Hackney. The focus groups were carried out on 11th March 2010 in order to explore women's experience of, and views on, violence against women in Hackney.

This report was based on the contributions of 86 women from diverse communities living in the London borough of Hackney who shared their stories and personal experiences in the hopes that their voices would contribute to diminishing the suffering of women and their families from violence.

This research provides a snapshot into the experience of domestic violence (DV) and violence against women and girls (VAWG) amongst women from diverse communities in Hackney. This report is based on qualitative research, the purpose of which was to understand the depth and complexity of women's experiences of violence within their cultural context.

We organised focus groups according to cultural backgrounds for the following reasons: (a) to explore the impact of culture on women's views of domestic violence and other forms of gender violence and; (b) to understand the impact of domestic and gender violence within the diverse communities in Hackney. Focus groups were classified as follows:

- African women
- Asian women
- Caribbean women
- Celtic and Jewish women

- Turkish and Kurdish women
- Women from diverse cultures.

This event gathered information on four specific topic areas:

- 1) The experience of domestic violence/violence against women (DV/VAW) for women from different cultural groups
- 2) The barriers facing women experiencing DV/VAW or at risk of DV/VAW
- 3) The impact of violence on women and girls
- 4) Ideas for what can be done to reduce or prevent DV/VAW.

1.2 Our engagement approach

Hackney Women's Forum exists to promote women's equality and well being. The Forum holds bi-monthly meetings where members discuss issues of concern, such as domestic violence, gender equality, and poverty.

Our approach involves:

- Supporting the active participation of women and women's organisations in activities like Forum meetings and events that provide a focus for community engagement.
- Through participation developing understanding about core issues that present barriers to and opportunities for constructive change – in this instance, domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.
- Through this understanding, identifying ways in which constructive change can be achieved.
- Exerting influence over agencies and stakeholders to implement constructive change, e.g. partnership working with Team Hackney, London Borough of Hackney's Domestic Violence Policy & Operations Group.
- Sharing the experience with others to learn and contributing to the public engagement cycle.

The Forum brings together women's organisations to work together and support each other. By advocating our needs collectively we hope to be in a stronger position to influence local policy and resources. We also aim to enable women in Hackney to have a stronger influence in the decision-making processes that affect women's lives in Hackney.

1.3 Report Structure

The report is structured in the following sections:

- Methods – the organisation of the focus groups
- Findings and analysis of focus group discussions
- Conclusions and implications
- Recommendations.

2. Methods

2.1 Sample Profile

Research data on women's experiences of domestic violence and gender violence were collected using focus groups. Women were recruited to the focus groups through:

- Email invitations from Hackney Women's Forum
- Publicity leaflet
- Community networking
- Word of mouth and referrals from Forum members.

Eight workshop leaders were recruited to facilitate the focus group discussions.

Research participants had experienced or knew women or girls who experienced gender based violence. The eight focus groups took place with the following participants:

- 8 Asian women
- 12 African women
- 15 African and Vietnamese women
- 16 Caribbean women
- 8 Celtic and Jewish women
- 7 Kurdish women
- 12 Turkish speaking women
- 8 women from diverse cultures.

The total number of women who participated in the focus group discussions was 86. After the focus groups there were taster sessions in Tai Chi and aromatherapy, which attracted another 16 women. Thus, the total number of women who participated in this Community Conversation was 102.

It is important to highlight that our sample is not representative of the local population in Hackney.

2.2 Research Questions

At the beginning of the focus group it was explained that the purpose was to hear women's experiences of and views on the nature and extent of violence against women and girls. It was emphasised that:

- What was said during the group was confidential;
- In the report individuals would not be identified, no one outside the group will know what each individual said during these discussions;
- If there was any question women did not want to answer then they did not have to.

Workshop leaders led the focus groups and a recorder took notes. Assurance was given that only the report author would process the notes. The focus groups lasted 85 minutes.

Afterwards lunch was provided. Women who attended received a payment as a token of appreciation for their time. The following questions were asked of all eight focus groups:

1. What forms of violence are women and girls from your cultural background experiencing or at risk of experiencing?
2. What are the barriers facing women and girls who experience violence?
3. How does violence affect women and girls?
4. What can be done to reduce or prevent violence against women and girls?

2.3 Limitations

As with any focus group discussion, the findings come with the caveat that they represent the opinions of the participants involved. These focus group participants all represent women who were safe at the time of the focus group. There were domestic violence survivors in attendance that had separated from the perpetrators.

Another limitation is that this study does not fully reflect the diversity of Hackney's population.

3. Analysis of Focus Group Discussions

3.1 Defining Violence Against Women and Girls

(1) *What kinds of violence are women and girls from your cultural background experiencing or at risk of experiencing?*

Participants reported many forms of violence including domestic violence, emotional abuse, psychological violence, all types of physical violence, sexual abuse, rape, lack of access to money and resources, and isolation from family and friends.

Focus group participants discussed the experience of domestic violence/violence against women for women from different cultural groups and their responses have been grouped under headings that emerged from the issues they raised. Table 1 gives the specific responses according to cultural group.

Physical abuse and violence

The focus groups identified many different forms of physical abuse, including:

- Hitting, kicking, pushing, punching, pinching, pulling hair, slapping, burning, cutting, breaking household items, hitting pets and children
- Beaten up/beating
- Excessive discipline used at home against young people.

"Violent behaviour seen as 'normal'."

Domestic violence

All the focus groups described a range of abusive behaviours that domestic violence experienced by women in their communities. There was recognition that domestic violence encompassed physical violence, sexual assault, rape, financial abuse and psychological violence. Some of the issues highlighted:

- Women feel shame
- Generation of violence
- Submissive to cultural expectations, that is, women denied their human rights.

"Domestic violence is not a cultural thing; women need to educate their children."

One group indicated the role that poverty stress (that is, lack of finance, unemployment, recession) and misuse of alcohol resulted in increasing levels of violence in the home.

Emotional abuse and violence

Forms of emotional abuse included:

- Mentally controlling
- Bullying
- Blackmail – threatening to report woman without legal status to the police or immigration
- Confinement/isolation – not being allowed to socialise with others/ social isolation
- Submissive to cultural expectations, that is, women denied their rights
- Having affairs outside the marriage
- Verbal abuse/abusive language
- Mental abuse – intimidation, threats, humiliation, sarcasm
- Men do not take responsibility and stay out late.
- Infidelity by their husbands/partners, lying and cheating,
- Bullying, mental and physical – can be worse/different, long-term, not always recognised
- Intimidation – road/street race, stress
- Scared of authority
- Men jealous of children
- Stop girls from getting an education or employment.
- Verbal: language used
- Insult, disrespect, scorn, swearing are the verbal abuse that women face by male.
- Negligence of the male to his wife and children, cheating on his partner are other forms of verbal abuse. For instance, Kurdish men have the cafe culture, where they go, play cards and other betting games and spend time. This mostly makes them spend their time in the cafes.

“The man is seen as head of the household – controlling women’s mind, body and soul.”

Female Genital Mutilation

Both African women’s focus groups described female genital mutilation as an issue within the community. There is strong community pressure within African communities for girls to be circumcised, particularly those from Islamic backgrounds.

Financial abuse

One of the ways that a man can control his partner is by financial abuse. There are many difficult forms of financial abuse, including:

- Husband/partner has control of the money/finance
- Not allowing women to work; cultural pressure for women not to work
- Banning women from working and/or not giving them money to survive on: Women are sometimes told by their partners or by other family members and members of the community however they are scorned once they find employment.

“If a woman works she gets power and her dependency on her husband decreases”.

"If he gambles there is no money to pay the rent or mortgage."

- Women and children are left hungry if the husband is involved in gambling, drugs or alcohol, extramarital affairs.
- Poverty stress, alcohol: finance, unemployment, recession → increase in violence!

Forced marriage

The African, Asian, Celtic, Jewish Kurdish and Turkish focus groups identified forced marriage, where women are expected to marry the person selected by their family. This expectation manifested in the following ways:

"Girls are forced to get married to someone who they do not want although they are in love with someone else."

- Emotionally forced into marriage – any abuse: feel guilty, scared, reduced confidence.
- Young Asian women fear forced marriage so they stay at home. They are isolated and are under family and cultural pressure.
- Through introducing the partners by arranged marriages, video tapes and photographs this is mainly done by the male in the UK to arrange a wife from their country of origin (Kurdish).
- Families do not want to share finance with others. Girls are not getting enough education. When the girls reach certain age they feel under cultural pressure and get married. In the UK children are expected to get married to someone from same culture or same ethnicity or religion.

Dowry or bride price

One of the African women's focus group identified dowry and bride price as an issue for the community. Family honour is at stake if the correct amount of dowry or bride price is not paid or refunded if the marriage breaks down. There is community pressure especially for those women from Islamic backgrounds to comply with the cultural practice of bride price. This group discussed gender discrimination and cultural beliefs and attitudes that reinforce the low status of women.

Honour killings and honour crime

Both the Turkish speaking and Kurdish women's focus groups identified so-called honour killings as a form of violence experienced by women and girls. They made a distinction between honour killings and honour crimes. Honour killings is another form of violence Asian young women also experienced

Grounds on which so-called honour killings are committed:

- Losing virginity before marriage.
- Any act which the family does not approve.
- Talking with boys.

- Cultural norms and girls are being exploited in the community
- In some areas women cannot divorce their husbands.

The types of honour crimes committed against young women and girls:

- Acid thrown in their face and threat to kill to them
- Cutting nose and ear
- Rape
- Stalking
- Physical assaults
- Socially isolated them. Girls are not allowed to see friends. Some of the girls are not allowed to attend school. Isolate and shame women. Keep them locked inside the house.

"You are not allowed to see friends."

Forced domestic labour

The African women's focus groups highlighted forced domestic labour of women and girls:

- Children brought into the country to work but not allowed out. These children are physically abused and beaten.
- Women forced into domestic labour.

Both children and women suffer confinement and isolation; they are not allowed to socialise with other people.

Psychological abuse/violence

Participants spoke about psychological violence and how often times this is a form of violence that is not always recognised. It can go on for a long time. The forms of psychological abuse and violence covered:

- Jealousy
- Shouting
- Underdetermining women's self esteem; low self esteem internalised
- Stalking
- Social isolation.
- The psychological violence is namely emotional violence that equals up to jealousy and control. The more educated the perpetrator the more the violence happens on a psychological level than a physical level. The fear that a women may work in a greater status forces the male to practice psychological violence.

"If the man says you are fat, you cannot do it, you are ugly. Women do not eat."

"Violence is an attack on the mind, body and soul."

Objection of women and girls

The women of diverse cultures focus group discussed the sexual objectification of women and girls and the impact that it has on how they are treated by their boyfriends, partners and peers. Some of the objectification involved:

- Degrading imagery of women and girls in the media, publishing and music industries
- Girls/young women (aged 8-18) – are dressed half naked and images of girl children more sexualised are increasingly shown in the media as normal. The glamorisation of girls and young women are thought acceptable without consideration given to the link between pornography and the sex industry.

Sexual violence

For many communities sexual violence is a taboo subject. For example, Asian women and girls feel shame and cannot speak about sexual violence and abuse. It is seen as an extremely private matter. Concern is about the fact that the girl is not a virgin after being raped.

Forms of sexual violence highlighted:

- Incest: fear to talk because religion does not allow it.
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual violence in the schools/in the playgroups/on the housing estates/on the streets
- Rape/rape attacks
- Forced sex, e.g. young women who are grabbed in parties and forced to perform degrading sexual positions and sexual acts
- Forced sex in marriage
- Prostitution/sex slave
- Sexual denial/deprivation.

"Stay at home or I'll break your legs."

The Asian women's group discussed the consequences for women if they became pregnant: forced childbirth if married; forced abortion if single. The decision is taken by the family, not the woman. Sex is a right for men but women are not allowed sexual freedom. Young women cannot be seen with boyfriends.

Trafficking of women and children

The African, Kurdish and Turkish speaking women focus groups highlighted the plight of women and children who are trafficked into the sex industry.

- Women being forced into the sex industry as sex slaves.
- Forced sex/rape/prostitution.

Gang violence

"Girls are sexually used and exploited by gangs."

The Celtic and Jewish women focus group and the women from diverse cultures focus group discussed gang violence as a growing problem. They spoke about the involvement of girls in gangs. Many of these young women suffer emotional abuse and low self esteem. The motivation for these young women joining gangs is to achieve a sense of belonging and group identity. However, these girls are then sexually used and exploited by the gang members.

Institutional violence

The women from diverse cultures focus group raised the issue of what they called 'institutional violence', where groups of vulnerable women are subjected to abuse by state agencies:

- Peer groups and in relationships
- Single women/mothers vulnerable in their homes/lack of housing management
- Abusive state officials.

Concluding Remarks – Forms of Violence

All the participants highlighted domestic violence and other forms of violence that women and girls experience in Hackney. The widespread nature of violence against women and girls was understood to encompass but not limited to physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of children, dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation and violence related to exploitation; physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the community, including rape, intimidation and assaults in schools and elsewhere; trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

Participants reported multiple forms of domestic violence including emotional abuse, all forms of physical violence, sexual abuse, rape, lack of access to money and resources, and isolation from family and friends. Unique features for these women included threats based on immigration status, threats against extended family, using minority status and English language competence against women, and pressure to accept abuse and not seek help outside of the community. These issues compounded the difficulty women experience in seeking help. Even if help is available, and women know about it, it is often not culturally or linguistically appropriate, which is a further barrier to gaining assistance.

Violence against women is an area which suffers acutely from under reporting and it is difficult to fully gauge the extent of the problem. Much of the evidence is obtained from statutory or voluntary bodies engaged in survivor support.

Focus groups identified the following are key concerns:

- African women group 1 – Female genital mutilation and forced marriages are as pressing issues for women and children. Lack of awareness about local services and women’s legal rights are barriers preventing women from getting out of violent situations.
- African women group 2 – Female genital mutilation, child labour, beating and sexual abuse are of increasing problems within the African communities. Cultural and language barriers make it more difficult for these women to access support and services.
- Asian women – There are many types of violence experienced by Asian women, not just domestic violence. There is a need for the provision of Asian women’s refuges and counselling services. Isolation and women being house bound are priority issues.
- Caribbean women – The psychological violence played a major part in women internalising low self esteem. Furthermore, black women are seen as black rather than as women so their needs are not recognised. This is reinforced by discrimination from the police.
- Celtic and Jewish women – Violence is an attack on women’s mind, body and soul. The crime is intensified because of denial by the victim, abuser, community and whole society. Women’s lives are totally ruined.
- Turkish and Kurdish women group 1 – Family and cultural pressures on women are subjecting them to forced marriage and ‘honour killings’. Women are afraid of being socially isolated and ostracised if they do not behave in accordance with the family and community rules.
- Turkish and Kurdish women group 2 – So called “honour killings”, honour crimes and forced marriage are increasingly putting Turkish and Kurdish women’s lives in danger. Educational, financial and language barriers are making it very difficult for women to escape the violence. This was particularly the case for women with no recourse to public funds.
- Women from diverse cultures – The media were viewed as playing a crucial role in shaping the image of women and girls and that the degrading images must be changed. Fear of discrimination was another factor which kept women and girls in their place. This group pointed out the vicious cycle of violence

from parents to children to older people (i.e. elder abuse). See Figure 1.

Table 1. Forms of violence against women and girls

	African women group 1	African women group 2	Asian women	Caribbean women	Celtic & Jewish women	Turkish & Kurdish women group 1	Turkish & Kurdish women group 2	Women from diverse cultures
Emotional abuse	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical abuse/violence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sexual abuse/violence	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Incest						✓		
Verbal abuse		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Financial abuse	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Psychological violence		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Forced domestic labour/child labour	✓	✓						
Dowry/bride price	✓							
Domestic violence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Female genital mutilation (FGM)	✓	✓						
Forced marriage	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Honour crime						✓	✓	
Honour killings			✓			✓	✓	
Trafficking/sexual exploitation	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Gang violence					✓		✓	✓
Rape	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Objectification of women/ girls								✓

3.2 *Barriers to services*

(2) *What barriers facing women and girls who experience violence?*

While there are barriers that are particular to individual cultural groups, there are also commonalities across the groups, for example, women's financial dependency on their spouses. In this section we present the barriers identified by each cultural group in detail. Table 2 summarises these barriers.

African Women (Group 1)

This group identified the following barriers facing women and girls experiencing violence:

- Poverty
- Lack of knowledge to access services and help
- Low self esteem and confidence
- Fear and insecurities
- Cultural taboo
- Immigration status
- Language barriers
- Gender discrimination
- Lack of culturally appropriate services
- Religion/beliefs/faith
- Lack of proper support from agencies – i.e. taking the blame, past experience with agencies meant there was a lack of trust.

“Bride price ties women to abusive relationships... the practice reduce women to chattel or property.”

This group also highlighted the role that culture played in creating and maintaining barriers for women and girls, including: domestic violence is a cultural taboo, language, beliefs and attitudes, gender discrimination and the bride price. The bride price is the cultural practice of paying for the bride with cows (or equivalent money). The practice requires that the money be refunded if a marriage breaks down. This often ties women to abusive relationships because they cannot afford to pay the refund. Bride price reduces women and girls to the status of chattel or property and leaves them open to domestic abuse with far reaching social, economic and human rights implications.

African Women (Group 2)

This focus group identified the following barriers facing women and girls affected by violence:

- Language
- Stigma of domestic violence
- Illiteracy
- Poverty/financial dependency on spouse/woman not working

“Immigration status and threat of deportation – these women have no recourse to public funds.”

- Man's role as head of family, the 'boss'
- Lack of trust in organisations, the systems, people, whoever
- Fear
- Religion – misinterpretation by individuals/society. No religion condones domestic violence.
- Lack of knowledge of services
- Lack of confidence
- Family and community pressure to remain together
- Gender discrimination
- Cultural – keep it within the family, "conflict of cultures".

This group identified lack of awareness of women's rights and knowledge of local services as the main barriers for African women experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of violence, such as female genital mutilation or forced marriage.

Asian women

This group identified the following barriers facing women and girls experiencing violence:

- Language barrier
- No freedom to speak – young women respect parents/elders. They must not get into any arguments with them.
- Fear – afraid to go out, fear of bad reputation/allegations made about woman, may lose children,
- Not aware of help available
- Men control women – they control women's time and movement. Women must account for everything. Women cannot tell men anything.
- Women → conditioning by home/culture, that is, women's job is housewife → home is all female responsibility. Total devotion to husband.
- Man is king, like a hotel.
- Mistresses

"He cancelled flight ticket for me to visit family. He always refuses his permission."

This group mentioned the traditional role and low status of women in the culture and the family and cultural pressures to conform to those expectations. Fear played a significant role in keeping women and girls in their place. Besides domestic violence other forms of sexual violence were highlighted: incest, rape, forced sex in marriage, forced abortion, forced childbirth. Women and girls are expected to adhere to specific rules to ensure the 'honour' of the family.

Caribbean Women

This focus group discussed the following barriers for women affected by violence:

- Fear of retribution
- Financial dependence on partner
- Embarrassment to family and friends
- Discrimination from police and other groups
- Lack of trust in people to confide in
- People who have no documentation (no recourse to public funds)
- Lack of education
- Terrible mother-in-laws (culture).

The police were not seen as a source of help but as a barrier. Caribbean women did not feel they would turn to state agencies such as the police for protection from domestic abuse or other forms of violence. This was especially the case for women with insecure immigration status because they could not access public services, i.e. the no recourse to public funds rule.

Celtic and Jewish Women

This focus group described the following as barriers facing women affected by violence:

- Shame: fear of reaction and of not being believed
- 'Mother' role: protecting kids and perpetrator
- Denial: by victim and the community
- Seen as a failure: 'I told you so'
- Ostracised/stigma: community reaction and rejection
- Perceived as a 'threat' or 'poor' soul
- Fear of consequences
- Reasons to stay outweigh the reasons to leave
- Law on the side of the man
- Violence against men
- 'Ladette' culture
- Media stereotypes
- Acknowledge anger is an emotion
- Finance: don't know where to go; scared of going to an unknown area
- Language and cultural barriers: lack of communication and information.

"Violence is normal – seen everywhere in the media, e.g. cartoons."

"Not sure what to expect in support: lack of funding for women's shelters."

Turkish and Kurdish Women (Group 1)

This focus group discussed the following barriers for women facing violence:

- Family and cultural pressure
- Fear
- Low level of education
- Embarrassment
- Lack of awareness of local services
- Language barriers
- Gender inequalities.

"Women are embarrassed that their names will be stained if they oppose any of the traditions."

Family and cultural pressure – The cultural pressure and the Family pressure towards women and the feudal values within the society stops the women from acting on the violence they face. Many women accept the violence of male towards them due to these feudal values.

Fear – The group described how fear curtailed the lives of women affected by violence:

- 1) Fear from the partner
- 2) Fear of Social Isolation
- 3) Financial difficulties
- 4) Fear of being left alone
- 5) Fear of not being understood by anyone
- 6) Fear of being deported
- 7) Fear of losing their children
- 8) Fear of being killed

Low level of education – Most of the older women came here with either no or very little formal education. They do not know how to react and are taught to do as they are told and believe they have no other alternative.

Shame – The group stated that the women are traditionally taught to be embarrassed from anything that the community does not agree with this includes opposing your partner or a male member of your family.

Lack of knowledge on how the system works – Kurdish women lack information on how the system works. They do not know where to go and who to turn to for help. Women do not trust the authorities.

Language barriers – Many of the older women do not speak English and therefore are not able to approach any agency on their own. They are dependent on their relatives who speak English.

Gender Inequalities – Women are seen as second class people. Women are treated as second class humans. This is accepted by the society in the name of cultural traditions.

Turkish and Kurdish Women (Group 2)

This focus group identified these barriers faced by women affected by violence:

- Financial
- Psychological
- Family and cultural pressure
- Immigration
- Language
- Not aware of their rights and services
- Not confident
- Threats to hurt and kill them
- Level of education
- Feelings of shame and guilt
- Religion
- Love.

"Fear of losing their life, their safety, their children, their homes and rights."

Women from Diverse Cultures

This group discussed a range of barriers including:

- Lack of positive alternatives
- Values
- Lack of education
- Fear
- Low income
- Language barriers
- Fear of discrimination of cultural discrimination
- Lack of support.

Table 2. Barriers faced by women affected by DV/VAW

	African women group 1	African women group 2	Asian women	Caribbean women	Celtic & Jewish women	Turkish & Kurdish women group 1	Turkish & Kurdish women group 2	Women from diverse cultures
Poverty/ financial dependency	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Language barriers	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Family/ community pressure		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Cultural taboo/barriers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Religion	✓	✓					✓	
Immigration status	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Gender discrimination	✓	✓				✓	✓	
No awareness of services	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Lack of confidence		✓	✓				✓	
Lack of culturally sensitive services	✓		✓			✓	✓	
Uncertain of support from agencies	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
Fear/ fear of losing life	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stigma/shame/ embarrassment		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Media stereotypes					✓			✓
Lack of education		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

Concluding Remarks – Barriers

Poverty was a significant barrier mentioned by seven out of eight of the focus groups. Lack of money and low levels of education and/or skills served as barriers for women seeking services or leaving a violent relationship. We heard frequently that lack of safe and affordable housing often keeps women in violent relationships. Many women expressed a desire for education and training so that they could develop the skills they required to live independently and free of violence.

Women reported pressure not to go outside of the family or community with what is considered a private family matter. Some women had difficulty labelling the behaviour of their abusive partners as domestic violence and were sometimes confused about identifying themselves as the victim or survivor.

Many factors contributed to the silence of women who are affected by violence. Focus group participants mentioned the role that fear plays in keeping women silent and viewing their experience as a private matter, one that should not be discussed publicly. Survivors themselves have been silenced not only by the perpetrators of violence but also by the community and society. They are told by the community, for instance, that the violence is their fault, that they must have done something to deserve it, that no one will believe them if they do tell or else they are frightened into silence by threats of more harm. Gender based violence has even been rationalised as something that is acceptable on the basis of culture for men to do women.

Many participants said that abuse and violence eroded women's self-esteem and that personal embarrassment and shame kept them from seeking assistance. Moreover, responding to violence was made more difficult because of the perpetrators' threats against them, their children and those that might help them. Lack of material resources was a significant barrier for women seeking safety, particularly for non-English-speaking women and those who have not previously worked outside of the home to support themselves and their children.

Across the groups, respondents described personal feelings of shame and humiliation, belief that violence is "normal", a commitment to keeping the family together, lack of economic resources, and the inability to speak English, all of which add significantly to the complexity of dealing with a domestic violence situation. Women in focus groups repeatedly said that they had nowhere to go when they experienced violence, had few personal economic resources to draw upon and had difficulty finding out about culture-and language-specific DV/VAW services in Hackney.

Women often reported seeking help when they reached a "breaking point", when they found out about resources or services, when the violence escalated, or when they perceived themselves or their children to be at increased risk.

For ethnic minority women additional barriers were described: threats based on immigration visa status, threats against extended family and pressure to

accept violence and not seek help outside of the community. These issues compound the difficulty women from black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee communities experience in seeking help. Even if help were available, and women knew about it, it was often not culturally or linguistically appropriate, which was a further barrier to gaining assistance. For refugee and migrant women, lack of knowledge about women's rights and resources to help with safety, immigration and legal issues were all seen as major barriers.

Despite all the pressures not to tell, women do want to break the silence about the violence in their lives. A few women might be able to speak out on their own but most need to be asked about it.

3.3 Impact of domestic violence and violence against women

(3) How does violence affect women and girls?

This section details the responses to the issue of how violence affects women and girls. Table 3 summarises the focus group responses that covered the health effects of three forms of violence: childhood sexual abuse, rape and domestic violence. Table 4 categorises the most common impacts described by the participants.

Table 3. Health effects of gender based violence

Types of Violence	Reproductive, Behavioural Effects
Childhood sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early pregnancy, unwanted pregnancy High risk behaviours Sexual transmitted infections Self harm Substance misuse Re-victimisation Suicide Death
Rape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unwanted pregnancy Abortion, Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS Suicide Death
Domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor nutrition Substance misuse Broken bones, injuries Chronic pain Unprotected sex Gynaecological problems Suicide Death

African Women (Group 1)

The group described the following impacts of violence on women:

- Kills confidence and self esteem
- Loss of friends and relatives
- Loss of community – lose sense of belonging
- Family breakups
- Ongoing trauma, depression – withdrawn, isolation, mental health problems
- Effect on children – life style, behaviour, education, beliefs
- Effects on sexual and reproductive health – loss of sexual interest, childbirth, death, risk of contracting infections
- Submissive acceptance.

"Kills confidence and self esteem."

This group emphasised the impact of domestic violence on the mental health and well being of women. The effects described were: women's submissive acceptance of the violence, depression, isolation, experiencing trauma, lack of confidence, low self esteem, poor parenting capacity and effects on social status of the woman (diminished sense of belonging in the community and social isolation).

African Women (Group 2)

Effects of violence on women and girls were as follows:

- Family breakup, that is, violence destabilises the family unit. Domestic violence/violence is life setback
- Domestic violence can lead to murder
- Ritual abuse of children
- Impact on children's achievement: education, social, etc.
- Loneliness/unwanted/undervalued/rejection
- Career prospects damaged
- Loss of partner/companion
- Ill health/suicidal feelings
- Loss of earnings/financial problems
- Prostitution
- Lack of communication
- Loss of dignity/social standing
- Lack of trust in future relationships
- Lack of confidence/low self esteem
- Isolation
- Depression, stress/mental health problems/breakdown.

"Ritual abuse of children."

This group discussed the negative consequences that result from domestic violence or other forms of violence from the break-up of the family to loss of livelihood to mental breakdown. Depression and death were highlighted as consequence of violence. The group noted how domestic violence also affected the children negatively.

Asian women

The group discussed the mental health problems that Asian women and girls' suffer. These ranged from depression to self harm to suicide as a result of the violence. The group also mentioned the negative impact of violence on the children.

Specific impacts included:

- Self harm
- Mental health – fear, isolation, anxiety, depression, suicide
- Guilt- cannot tell anyone
- Physically sick
- Ill but no 'symptoms'
- Blame mother
- Children suffer – mother afraid they will be taken
- mother cannot help them
- Lack of education
- Miss experiences because they cannot go out
- Girls and boys become violent towards mum – they have behavioural problems
- Feel not capable - no self esteem, alienated from friends and society
- Don't value own opinion
- Lack of confidence.

"Girls get ostracised by family and community. You are dead to us."

Caribbean women

This group discussed the following effects on women experiencing violence:

- Low self esteem
- Lack of confidence
- Fear
- Depression
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Homelessness
- No independence
- Emotional blackmail (threats)
- Aggressive behaviour (shouting, slapping children).

"Unable to form meaningful relationships with others."

Celtic and Jewish women

This group mentioned the following impacts on women experiencing violence:

- Low self esteem: feelings of worthlessness and shame.
- Traumatizes us into silence: self harm is one way in which this trauma is expressed.
- Reaction to fight back: one example is taking things out on others, e.g. children.

"Violence traumatises us into silence."

- Abuse by children: totally ruins their lives.
- Lack of trust: women with disabilities.

Turkish and Kurdish Women (Group 1)

This group described the following impacts:

- Mental ill health: depression, withdraw to herself, insanity; suicide attempts and aggressiveness towards their children.
- Physical effects include: fractures, scars, bruises, brain damages.
- Social effects → social exclusion
- Girls running away from home because of parental pressure
- Early and wrong marriages to be save themselves from family violence
- Isolation from the society and social activities. Women locking themselves in the house and not wanting to be a part of the society.

“Early marriages to save themselves from family violence.”

Turkish and Kurdish Women (Group 2)

The effects of violence on women affected by DV/VAW included:

- Unhappy
- Psychological problems
- Depression/mental health
- Not confident
- Isolation
- Physical effects
- Anger
- Neglect towards themselves
- Cannot concentrate
- Suicide
- Losing life
- Trafficking
- Drug and alcohol substance misuse
- Losing home and children
- Hunger
- They can become violent.

For Turkish and Kurdish girls there are additional burdens. These were:

- Cultural clash
- Family pressure from family
- Peer pressure
- Gang members/group pressure
- Murder
- Suicide
- Young women running away
- Drugs misuse.

“Girls cannot share experience with family.”

Women from diverse cultures

This group discussed the involvement of young women and girls in gangs and the effects on them including:

- Low self esteem
- Lack of knowledge
- Teenage pregnancy
- Low educational attainment for young girls
- Low expectations due to anger and frustration
- Inability to develop healthy relationships
- Young women are cold, cynical and suspicious of others
- Physical, mental, emotional, social demands expected without tangible value.

The group spoke about the need to change attitudes to tackle gender based violence.

Concluding Remarks – Impacts

The effects shared by most of the focus group participants centred on: low self esteem, loss of family and community ties, mental ill health, poor reproductive health and negative impact on children. Loss was a common theme which ranged from loss of family connections, friendships to community. The net result was social isolation and loneliness.

Women across the groups spoke of a profound need for social support when they are experiencing DV. Since isolation is so often a tactic of perpetrators and many women are already isolated by virtue of limited or no English language ability and insecure immigration status, the participants' emphasis on social support cannot be overstated. Some women thought of support in terms of a non-judgmental provider, often someone who had survived DV and could help a woman think and talk through her situation. Others described wanting social support in community settings in which groups of women could come together for mutual support and combat loneliness and isolation.

Women's mental health was severely affected by the trauma of the violence they experienced. Additionally, their worries extended to their children who in many cases witnessed the violence in the home and suffered psychologically and behaviourally.

Table 4. Impacts of violence on women and girls

	African women group 1	African women group 2	Asian women	Caribbean women	Celtic & Jewish women	Turkish & Kurdish women group 1	Turkish & Kurdish women group 2	Women from diverse cultures
Lack of confidence/ low self esteem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Loss of friends/ family contact/ ostracised/ isolation	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Fear				✓	✓			
Anxiety/ depression	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Mental ill health/ breakdown	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Self harm			✓		✓		✓	
Loss of earnings/ financial problems	✓	✓						
Lack of trust in relationships		✓		✓	✓			✓
Negative impact on children's behaviour	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Low expectations /not achieving in school	✓	✓						✓
Unwanted pregnancy	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Teenage pregnancy								✓
Early/wrong marriages						✓		
Physically ill		✓	✓			✓		✓
Substance misuse/drugs or alcohol							✓	
Girls runaway						✓	✓	
Homelessness				✓				
Suicide/attempted suicide		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Murder/death		✓					✓	

3.4 Proposals for supporting survivors of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence

(4) *What can be done to reduce or prevent violence against women and girls?*

The participants identified strategies for tackling violence against women and girls.

African Women (Group 1)

This group suggested the following actions for addressing violence:

- Education/sensitisation
- Empowerment
- Networking
- Advocacy
- Counselling
- Work/socialise/integration
- Awareness programmes
- Working with perpetrators (abusers)
- Women's groups, workshops, training
- Working with schools and communities to raise awareness
- Improve funding for refuges and shelter services
- Adhering to confidentiality within the centres/services
- Awareness programmes for men, women, family and community
- Working with local service providers, i.e. GPs to identify early signs of domestic violence.

"Encourage women to speak up and seek services."

This group felt that education and awareness raising were the best strategies for reducing or preventing domestic violence and abuse. The audiences for awareness raising included: abuser, abused and service providers, such as refuges, shelters, social services and GPs. Advocacy and community programmes were identified together with cultural appropriate services. The group emphasised encouraging and assuring confidentiality for DV survivors.

African Women (Group 2)

The group suggested the following of actions to reduce violence:

- Raise awareness in the community of the impact of domestic violence.
- Raise awareness in schools, include in the school curriculum.
- Offer educational programmes for men and young men.
- Mandatory training for police to focus on domestic violence, not immigration status of victim.

"Many community organisations exist, e.g. African, Vietnamese, they can work to make domestic violence awareness compulsory."

- Counselling services for those affected by domestic violence, female genital mutilation and other forms of gender based violence.
- Ground government policy/resources/money into services e.g. refuges
- Government should make domestic violence a crime.
- Take positive action against perpetrators – make them accountable, that is, legal action/ prosecution.
- Organise educational programmes for perpetrators.
- Campaign and promote domestic violence support services available and in appropriate languages.
- Raise awareness of women and inform them of their rights (legal, welfare, etc).

This group concluded that specific action needed to be taken to reduce DV/VAW, including:

- Resources to ensure the protection and safety of women and children (refuges) and funding for women’s organisations to support survivors.
- New legislation to make domestic violence a criminal offence.
- Protection for women with uncertain legal status protection from domestic violence. At present these women are unable to obtain protection from the state if they suffer domestic violence or other form of gender-based violence. Many African women are suffering because they cannot seek help from the state because their immigration status overrides their human rights.
- Recognition of the specific needs of different cultures. The situation of African women is made more complex by cultural expectations about preserving the family and protecting one’s community. Finding the resources that are culturally appropriate and which stress confidentiality were important first steps for African DV survivors.

Asian women

Ways forward suggested by this group were:

- More advice centres – need language/culture help, small place is better
- Open more therapy, emergency counselling services; referrals should be easier
- Preventative work with men – make them see what they do. Not prison – men should be made accountable.
- Intervention work with men; men come out of prison and are worse. Also have mental health problems.
- Less medication, more therapy specifically addressing Asian women and violence. Women sent to mental hospitals away from family.
- Settled families need help.
- Funding for services
- Educate GPs – *'Not all in your head'*
- Early education with children and mothers
- Classes for empowerment.

“Less medication, more therapy specifically addressing Asian women.”

What we need:

- Help fast, i.e. faster referral, helpline
- Refuge – hostel
- Education and awareness campaign – so we can talk about it. Leaflets are not as good as people. More awareness of services available.
- Language interpreters
- Funding.

Caribbean women

Ways forward suggested by this group for reducing violence were:

- More services and forums.
- Better links with police and Domestic Violence Unit.
- More publicity and information.
- Educating women and girls about the risk of violence.
- Parenting skills – education of young boys and men
- Education and information.

Celtic and Jewish women

The group suggested the following actions to address violence against women:

- More advertising: good signposting, everyday channels across all media
- 'Violence Prevention' Minister
- More resources and funding for preventative projects
- Education: start from 3 years (nursery) learning respect
- More information on what violence is; cover all areas of violence and abuse
- Stopping violence in the schools.

"Men don't need counselling. Misconception of only 'poor' women being affected."

Turkish and Kurdish Women (Group 1)

Proposals for addressing violence against women and girls included:

- Greater opportunities need to be provided by local authorities for the Kurdish and Turkish speaking women taking into account our cultural sensitivities,
- A workshop of this type to be carried out with men.
- More educational opportunities for women with childcare facilities that will enable women to develop themselves,

"A workshop of this type to be carried out with men."

- Support from the local authority for the socialisation of the women,
- Facilities to raise awareness and the consciousness of men,
- Men to be recruited onto parenting programmes,
- Special counselling services for professionals, such as the Police and GPs to understand the specific needs of the community.
- Local authority to provide special courses to enable women to access sustainable employment,
- More free ESOL classes with childcare facilities in the area,
- Training to be provided in our language on domestic violence,
- Full page articles on ethnic minority newspapers (Turkish and Kurdish) on what domestic violence is, its punishments for the perpetrators and what needs to be done when a women faces with domestic violence.

Turkish and Kurdish Women (Group 2)

Ideas suggested for addressing DV/VAW are as follows:

- Awareness workshop in communities: education in communities in relation to their needs, i.e. time, childcare, financial help. *“Employment opportunities for women.”*
- More women organisations
- More social activities.
- Employment opportunities for women.
- Employment support for women domestic violence survivors. *“Education on domestic violence for children as they are the direct or silent witnesses of domestic violence.”*
- Services should be women only, customised, holistic in addressing needs of Turkish speaking communities.
- Women only activities, such as training, health awareness workshops, trips, exercise, fun clubs, knitting, floating services, childcare.
- More awareness and education about domestic violence towards men.
- Domestic violence awareness training for police and other professionals (housing, Home Office, Job Centres).
- Tackling racism in agencies; many are not aware of cultural needs.
- Abolish the no recourse to public funds rule which denies protection to women with insecure immigration status. This rule leaves women experiencing domestic violence and organisations in bad situations.
- More strict rules from the courts for injunctions and on non-molestation orders. It should be speedier.
- Address language needs.

Women from diverse cultures

The group highlighted the following actions for tackling violence against women and girls:

- Introducing equality and human rights into primary school learning, i.e. early year's education.
- Promoting health in women – contraception – healthy choices, healthy eating, exercise
- Learning one's rights
- Single sex classes in schools for education
- Intergenerational training
- Cross-conversation within in housing estates (multicultural conversations
- Redistribution of wealth/alternative money systems/creation of new wealth by women
- Alternative skills – teaching sustainable values learning to articulate objectively
- Self healing/herbal medicine (aromatherapy, reflexology, nutrition, yoga, tai chi).

"Lifelong learning to express our rights and responsibilities."

Concluding Remarks – Proposals for Change

Figure 1 highlights the participants' ideas for responding to domestic violence and gender violence against women and girls.

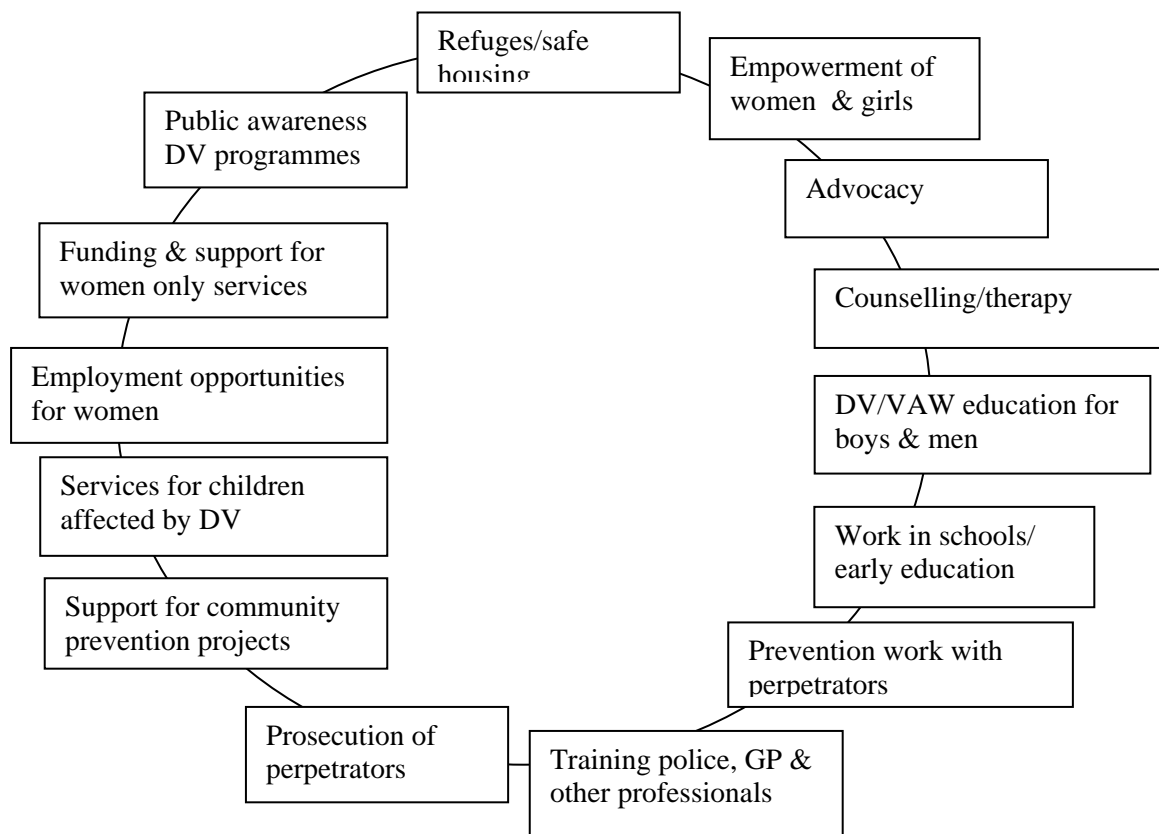


Figure 1. Responding to Gender Violence

Participants saw themselves as enabling other women and their communities to address domestic violence. There was a strong desire to get together with other women and organise themselves and their communities against gender violence and abuse. Participants envision safe gathering spaces for women, such as women's centres or other community spaces for survivors to receive support. Women would provide each other with support, help to reduce isolation and learn new skills for securing financial independence.

Improving understanding of and access to services, such as refuges, police, legal services was very important for helping women to escape abuse and find safety. There was recognition of the needs of children in relation to family violence. Participants wanted enhanced service provision and additional support in the community to assist those children who have witnessed domestic violence. Participants also saw education of children and young people as central to stopping violence; they called for teaching young children models of healthy relationships and how to live violence-free lives.

Participants across cultural groups called for greater focus on preventative work, including work with perpetrators. Culturally appropriate community education was suggested as a way to increase awareness about violence against women and girls and provide information to survivors on support services available in the community. Local women's organisations were seen as central to this effort.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

This Community Conversations event demonstrated that violence against women is a persistent and ongoing problem. Focus group participants shared information about the nature and consequences of gender based violence and abuse in Hackney. While many women from diverse cultures participated in the focus groups, commonalities of experience across cultural groups emerged: all the participants shared a common vision for eradicating domestic violence and violence in their lives.

Violence can have direct consequences for women's physical and mental health and it can increase women's risk of future ill health. DV/VAW erodes women's self esteem. Besides causing injury, violence increases women's long-term risk of several other health problems, including chronic pain, physical disability, drug and alcohol abuse and depression. Women with a history of physical or sexual abuse are also at increased risk for unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Figure 1 illustrates the life cycle of violence against women and girls as described by the focus group participants. As the diagram shows women can face different forms of violence at different stages of their lives. Thus, gender violence and abuse can reoccur or continue throughout their life.

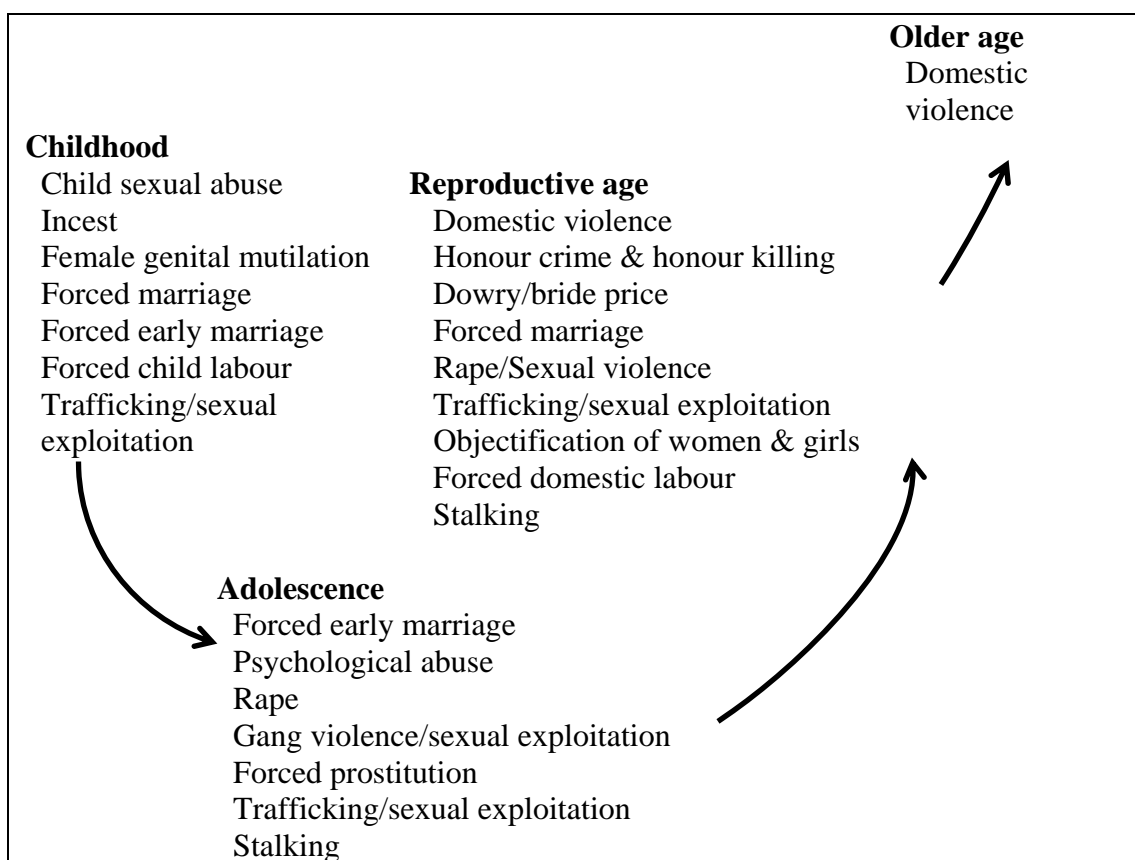


Figure 2. Life Cycle of Violence Against Women

Table 5 presents the fatal and non-fatal consequences of violence against women and girls detailed in Section 3 of this report and why there is a need to focus on violence against women. Policy makers and service providers require a clear understanding of the nature and severity of violence against women and girls in order to develop effective responses. Generic programmes meant to address violence in society risk failing to adequately address women’s experiences of violence. Moreover, gender-specific data can pinpoint areas where there the need for support services is different for women and men. It is also important to disaggregate data, that is, by ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation to fully understand the situation for different groups of women.

Table 5. Violence against women is a public health issue

Fatal Outcomes		Non-fatal Outcomes	
	Physical	Sexual & reproductive	Psychological & behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suicide • “Honour” killings • Murder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broken bones • Multiple injuries • “Honour” crimes, e.g. acid thrown in the face • Sexual assault • Rape • Gang rape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV • Unwanted pregnancy • Teenage pregnancy • Gynaecological complications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Depression • Mental illness • Drug and alcohol misuse • Poor self esteem • Stress • Post traumatic stress disorder • Self harm • Suicide attempts

In addition to the negative effects for women themselves, the violence women experience at the hands of their intimate partners can have profound effects on their children. Children who are exposed to violence in the home suffer from emotional trauma, have poor educational outcomes, and are at increased risk of using violence to solve problems. Women experiencing domestic violence are sometimes forced to flee their homes with their children, which can result in unstable living situations and additional negative impacts on children.

It was recognised that violence against women was an impediment to women's equality. Gender based violence is perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. It both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the life, health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.

While women from the diverse communities included in this report identified the types of violence that are similar to those reported in the mainstream literature, it is clear that there are specific types of violence that Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee women face, e.g. so called "honour killings", female genital mutilation.

Barriers to equality are rooted in long-standing attitudes and cultural traditions not only about women, but also about race, age, sexual orientation, disability, etc. In particular, the life situations for women without immigration status are quite different. For them, the path to equality has been, and continues to be, even more difficult since they cannot seek protection from the state. Equality for all women will come about only as these attitudes, imbedded in the family, community, institutions and society are challenged and begin to change. To achieve true equality, actions must be taken that take account of the differences in experiences and situations between women and men, and among women, and that correct the systemic nature of inequality.

4.2 Recommendations

The recommendations presented here for reducing and/or preventing violence against women are based on suggestions from focus group participants themselves as well as interpretation of the data. The recommendations are organised into three categories:

- Public sector level
- Service level (community based services provided by statutory and/or voluntary sector or both)
- Community level.

Public Sector Level

Nationally

- Appoint a 'Violence Prevention' Minister.
- Define domestic violence as a specific crime in law.
- Reduce barriers to using the criminal justice system for marginalised women; lack of knowledge of the system, lack of trust, racism, historic relationships and fear of stereotyping are all barriers to using services.
- Provide state protection for those women with insecure immigration status, i.e. abolish the rule of no recourse to public funds.

Locally

- Produce a violence against women and girls strategy for Hackney based on equality and human rights principles.
- Identify the elimination of DV/gender violence as part of LB Hackney's equality duties, e.g. tackling domestic violence and gender violence as an objective in the gender or single equality scheme.
- Form a No Recourse to Public Funds Task Group to explore options for supporting women and children affected by this rule and promote and share good practice with local service providers.
- Support the investment in specialised services in the women's voluntary sector.
- Take an integrated and joined up approach that ensures there are sufficient services for women and children affected by DV/VAW, such as honour based violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage.
- Develop a public health approach to violence against women – collecting data to accurately define the problem and develop and pilot interventions to address the needs.
- Offer specialised training for professional staff working with DV/VAW victims/survivors, e.g. training GPs to identify early signs of domestic violence, cultural awareness training to understand the needs of the culturally diverse communities.
- Devise programmes for working with perpetrators.
- Carry out preventative work in the schools.

Service Level

- Ensure prioritisation and allocation of resources that protect women and children, i.e. refuges, rape crisis centres.
- Support community-based, culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Such services are a viable model for serving Hackney's increasingly diverse population.
- Raise public awareness of services available for DV/VAW victims/survivors.
- Invest resources and funding for preventative projects, e.g. parenting projects that include the education of boys and young men.
- Fund same culture and language support groups to serve as a forum for survivors to organise themselves and their communities against gender based violence and reach out to other victims.

- Provide options for all women. Mainstream services must make their services more accessible to all victims/survivors by reaching out to women from under-represented communities.
- Develop multiple strategies for outreach in communities, including cultivating networks of survivors to do word-of-mouth outreach and advertisement in community newspapers, on buses and through women's groups and community organisations.
- Enable DV/VAW victims/survivors to access education, jobs and training programmes enabling them to acquire the skills to support themselves and their children.
- Provide ESOL classes for non-English speaking women.
- Offer educational programmes on DV/VAW for boys and men.
- Provide counselling and therapeutic services for those affected by DV/VAW.
- Address gaps in services for children affected by DV/VAW.
- Expand and support women's specialist services, e.g. refuges, rape crisis centres.

Community Level

- Further develop women's organisations to advocate for the needs of DV/VAW survivors.
- Develop and deliver lifelong learning programmes to educate community members, i.e. education and sensitisation of communities. These awareness raising programmes would range from early education in the schools to community education within the diverse communities.
- Organise empowerment workshops/programmes for women.
- Support women's specialist services to provide holistic services to women affected by DV/VAW.
- Provide specialised training for professional staff working with DV/VAW victims/survivors.
- Incorporate ways to address the extreme isolation many victims are experiencing.

APPENDIX 1. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Child sexual abuse:

Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts.

Domestic violence:

Is any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

Dowry/bride price:

Dowry involves a payment, in goods or money, given by a bride's family to the groom or his family. Bride price is the payment, in goods or money, by the groom to the bride's family.

Child/early marriage:

Marriage of girls below the age 16 of and, in some cases, below the age at which they become sexually mature.

Empowerment:

The ability, or the process of developing the ability, to achieve one's full potential in society and shape one's life according to one's own aspirations. The process of empowerment involves changing existing power relations and the forces that marginalise women in society.

Female genital mutilation:

Removal of all, or parts, of the external female genitalia.

Forced marriage:

Any situation in which women and girls are coerced, enticed, induced or tricked into marriage. The marriage is conducted without the valid consent of both parties where duress (emotional pressure), coercion or force is involved. It may involve abduction of the woman/girl or be organised with explicit or implicit involvement of her family.

Gender violence:

Violence which jeopardises fundamental rights, individual freedom and women's physical integrity'.

Honour based violence:

Is a crime or incident, which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community. Examples may include murder, unexplained death (suicide), fear of or actual forced marriage, controlling sexual activity, domestic abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse), child abuse, rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment, threats to kill, assault, harassment, forced abortion. This list is not exhaustive.

'Honour' Crime:

Acts of violence committed usually by male family members against female family members who are perceived to have brought dishonour upon the family.

'Honour' Killings:

Murders within the family in which women are killed for perceived immoral behaviour which is deemed to have breached the honour codes of the family and/or community.

Incest:

Is any sexual behaviour imposed on the child by a family member. It can include fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, oral or anal sex, masturbation, photographing naked children, or child prostitution. Incest takes on the added psychological dimension of betrayal by a family member who is supposed to care for and protect the child.

Rape:

Is the vaginal, oral, or anal penetration by the penis or any other object without consent of the other person. The invasion is committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power.

Sexual Assault:

Non-consensual sexual contact that is obtained through coercion or the use or threat of force. Sexual assault is a deliberate act of gender-based violence and an expression of power, control and domination over another.

Sexual violence:

Is an overarching term used to describe any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. It can be any unwanted sexual behaviour that causes humiliation, pain, fear or intimidation. Sexual violence includes rape and attempted

rape, and such acts as forcing a person to strip naked in public, forcing two victims to perform sexual acts on one another or harm one another in a sexual manner, mutilating a person's genitals or a woman's breasts, and sexual slavery.

Stalking:

Involves uninvited and consistent following and/or non-sensual communication of another person. The communication can be verbal, written or implied threats or a combination that would cause a high level of fear in a person being stalked.

Trafficking:

Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability or of the giving payments or benefits to the person in control of the victim for the purpose of exploitation, which includes sexual exploitation, forced labour/domestic servitude or the removal of organs.

Violence against women and girls:

Means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women or girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

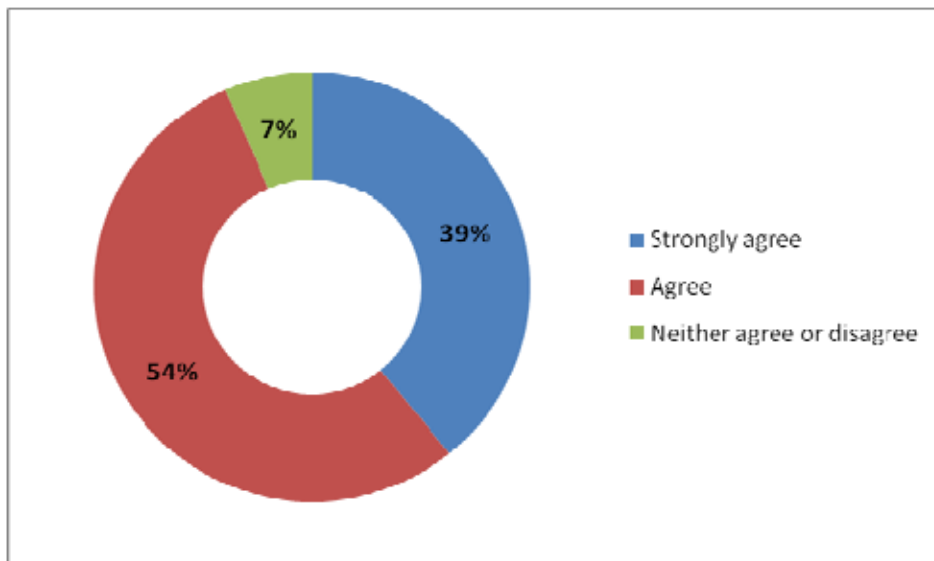
APPENDIX 2. EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

1. Was the event useful to you?

An overwhelming majority of women found the Community Conversations events useful to them.

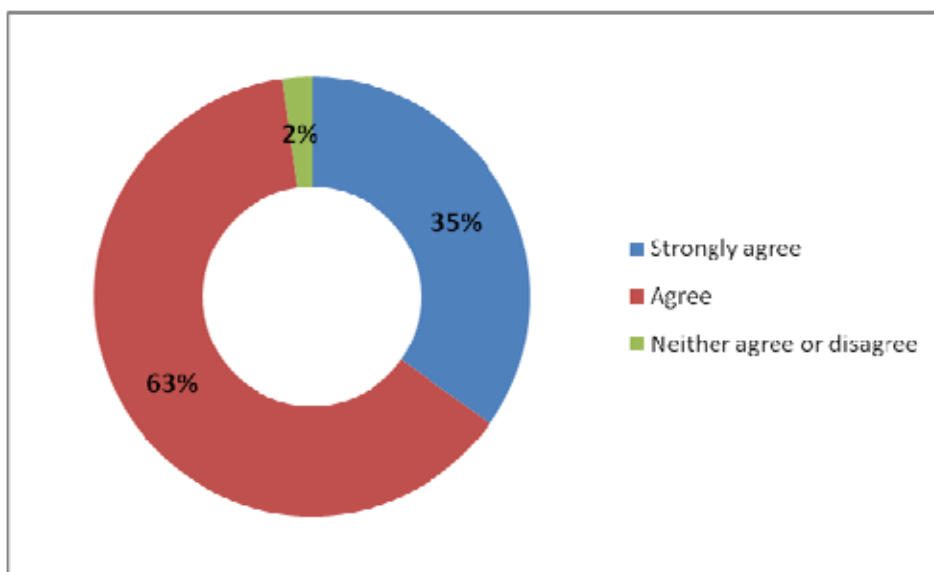
Excellent discussions, learnt more about other violence affecting women.

A great day and worthy subject.



2. Were the speakers clear and informative?

More than two thirds of the women agreed that speakers were informative.

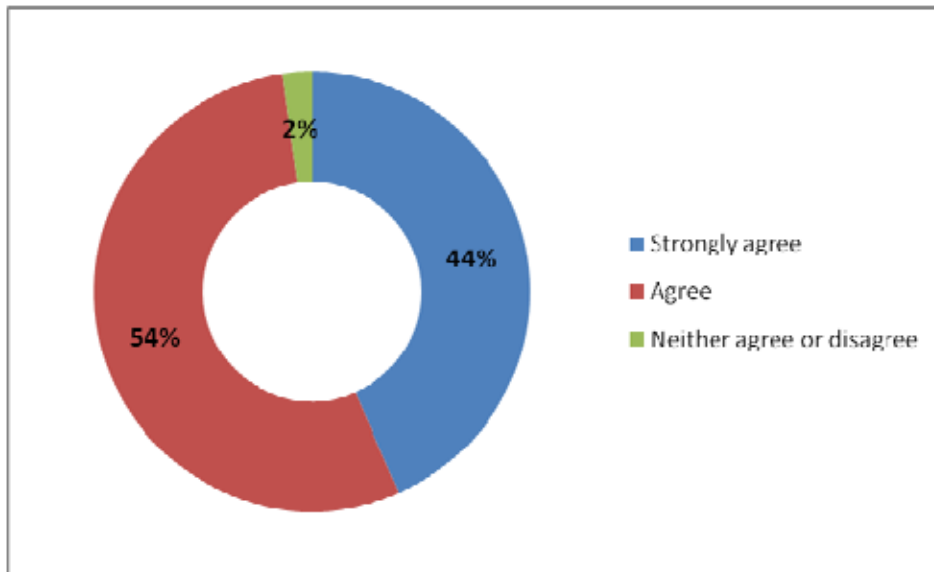


3. Were the workshops useful and well facilitated?

Besides the focus groups in the morning there were workshops on tai chi and aromatherapy in the afternoon. More than half agreed (54%) that the workshops were useful and well facilitated; almost an equal number strongly agreed (44%).

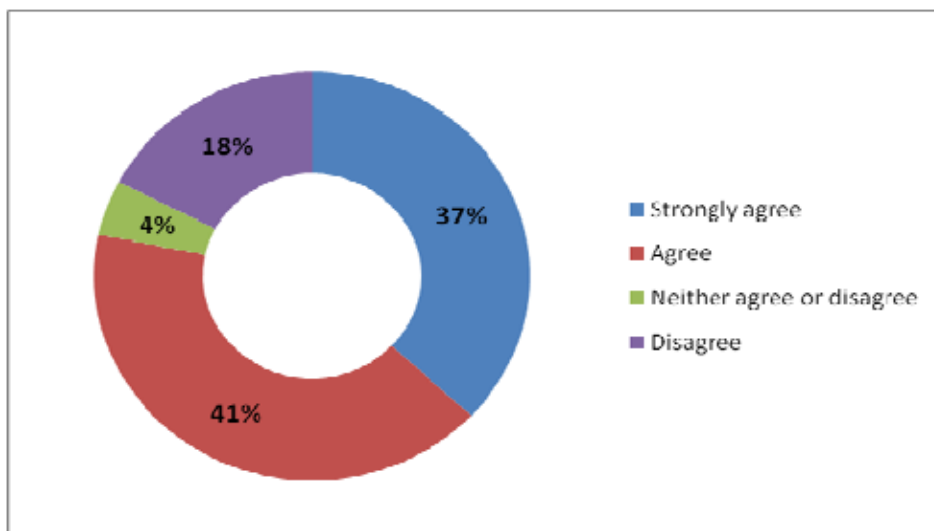
Excellent stimulating day.

Session was good but I feel it was a bit rushed; perhaps more time for more discussions on the issues of domestic violence and violence against women and girls.



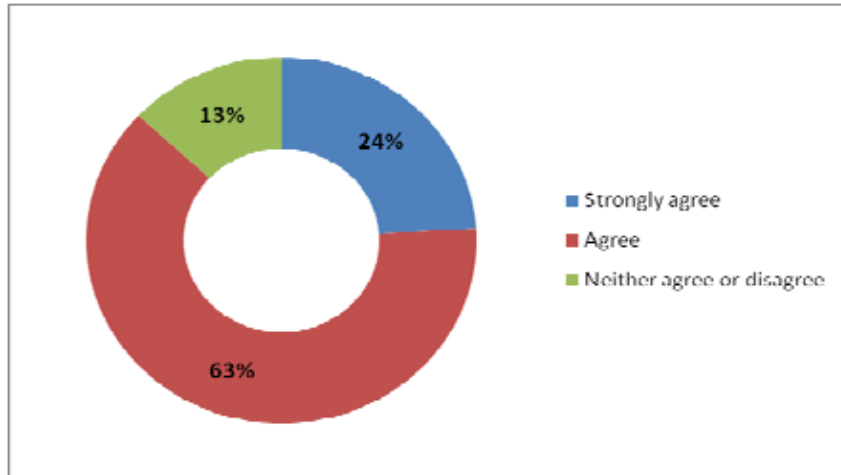
4. Was there adequate opportunity for networking?

Although most women thought they had sufficient opportunity for networking 18% disagreed with that view. There was no time allocated on the event's programme for networking so it is not surprising that almost a fifth were not happy with networking opportunities.



5. Were you happy with the refreshments?

Most participants were very satisfied (24%) or satisfied (63%) with the refreshments and lunch supplied at the event.



6. Was the venue acceptable to your needs?

Most of the complaints about the event had to do with the venue. Women were unhappy about the cold (i.e. lack of heating in the room and the poor acoustics, which made the room quite noisy).

Room was too cold for us.

The room was big enough but could have separate rooms for the different workshops/focus groups would be enhanced.

I think separate rooms for the various groups would enhance the session.

Acoustics terrible.

