



ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE FOR ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Responding when harm has occurred

Discussion document 3 of 4: November 2019



Shama Hamilton Ethnic Women's Centre Trust
info@shama.org.nz

Introduction

This discussion paper reports on the third session of the Connections! Hui: responses to sexual violence, including early interventions, responding to disclosures from children and dealing with perpetrators (see Appendix for questions that were used to prompt group discussion).

Previous papers in this series include two papers about sexual violence prevention, and a following paper that describes what participants feel is necessary in the development of a therapeutic service.

During this session of the Connections! Hui, participants were in focus groups with people with whom they shared an aspect of similarity, whether that be ethnicity, religion, gender, migration journey or sexuality. The information from the groups has been summarised, and aspects that related to particular groups are highlighted. 12 different groups fed into this discussion document. It is structured as follows:

- 1) Society and Community responses
- 2) Immediate responses needed for adult sexual assault
 - a) Personal responses
 - b) Specialist responses
- 3) Responses to historical sexual abuse
 - a) Personal responses
 - b) Specialist responses
- 4) Disclosures from children
- 5) Dealing with harmful behaviour

We have used the term victim/survivor for this section, to acknowledge both the victimisation and trauma of sexual violence, and the promotion of resilience to facilitate and empower community members.

Society and Community Responses to sexual harm

For this session there were specific societal issues identified by many groups that were described as impacting responses to sexual violence for ethnic communities. Many groups discussed a **lack of ethnic specific research, funding and resources** for addressing sexual violence inside ethnic communities. It was noted by one group that the financial cost of sexual violence is huge, so the government needs to address this issue from the grass roots in ethnic communities.

Some groups inside ethnic communities were noted as being **particularly vulnerable**, including women who were not fully conversant in English, international students, former refugees with less resources and ethnic people living in remote, rural areas.

Whether **sexual abuse happened in New Zealand or overseas** makes a difference in terms of rights to services, with negative impacts for ethnic victim/survivors. In particular, the ACC Sensitive Claims process does not currently provide support for sexual abuse experienced outside of New Zealand. It was noted that the personal and social cost of trauma from sexual violence is counted within New Zealand society if the victim/survivor is living here - irrespective of where the harm happened.

There was also a belief that “mainstream” specialist services could benefit from a **national cultural safety training approach** and the setting up of a national register/directory of ethnic based counselling and professional services. This included components of the criminal justice system such as the New Zealand Police and social services such as Oranga Tamariki. Another area mentioned specifically were national helplines. National cultural safety for ethnic communities must also support responses to Rainbow ethnic community members.

Migrant orientation programmes providing legal rights advice in New Zealand about sexual violence would be helpful in assisting ethnic victim/survivors to seek help.

Wider cultural norms and values were mentioned by several groups as contributing to the silencing of ethnic victim/survivors. This included resistance to sex education for young people leading to many young people learning about sex and relationships via social media; distancing of ethnic communities from incidents of sexual assault, and patriarchal and other power systems and entrenched views which privilege men over women and minimise men’s violence towards women, such as seeing rape within marriage as acceptable. It was also noted that ethnic victim/survivors in the Rainbow community were at risk of having their sexuality or gender identity treated as the outcome of sexual abuse.

Many groups expressed interest in **culturally appropriate restorative and resolution options** for families and communities. Project Restore was mentioned as a “mainstream” specialist service working in this area. Groups wanted mediation to be done by trained community members who could work with those affected by sexual harm to determine what community accountability should include.

Participants noted the **gaps in knowledge and understanding of response services** and what legally can happen after a sexual assault has occurred - what services are available, what supports are already in place and who can be connected with.

Finally, several groups noted that there are currently gaps all across the response “system” and what is needed is the **ability to bridge all the systems** together.

Immediate responses needed for adult sexual assault

In this section, participants were responding to the question “If someone from your community tells you that a sexual assault has just happened to them, what do they need to happen now?”

Personal Responses

Most groups commented first on the ways they thought it would be good to respond personally, including the importance of not panicking and making sure they were the best person to support the person. Most groups also discussed the trauma associated with experiencing sexual violence means it is important to create a safe, private and confidential environment free of moral stigma, judgement or guilt when someone discloses. In particular, many groups were concerned about:

- Prioritising the **safety of the victim/survivor** to speak out – emotional, physical and spiritual – including a safe place to go to recover. For some groups, this included making a safety plan including risk assessment with the victim/survivor, including if their life will be in danger if information about the assault reaches their family or community. The importance of cultural safety was a strong part of this.

- Showing they **believed the victim/survivor** eg “I’m sorry that happened” and validating their understanding of the assault eg “Thank you for telling me,” and addressing guilt eg “It’s not your fault.”
- Ensuring the response was **victim centred** and offering **victim/survivors options and choices**. Checking in with the victim/survivor, listening to them, giving them space and time to decide about actions and support options, asking them what they need, supporting the decisions they make. The victim/survivor may want nothing more than to describe what has happened to them – and making sure **the victim has control of the process** was mentioned by many groups.
- Following and understanding **New Zealand law** was seen as important
- **Information about options** for the victim/survivor to address their needs were seen as important. Many groups commented that not all communities knew about existing support services and how to access them. In particular, groups wanted victim/survivors to know about their rights after sexual assault, where resources are available and where to go including:
 - Victim support services including crisis intervention, longer term support and counselling
 - Medical care for injuries including for possible unwanted pregnancy as a result of sexual assault. The importance of gathering forensic evidence.
 - Legal options including reporting to NZ Police – this was particularly felt by many groups to be a process that required time for victim/survivors to consider.
 - Using the existing helping systems such as ACC, Talking Works and Safe to talk.
 - Community and whānau can be a resource for support, particularly in the context of gaps for ethnic communities
 - Housing and financial support options

On participant review of the notes from the hui, it was noted that many of these **personal** responses sit inside a **professional** response. This is true, and as part of growing an appropriate culturally responsive service for ethnic communities there are two facets of work that need to be done - clarification of boundaries and responsiveness of services. It is likely that unresponsiveness of services over many years has meant that boundaries for what friends vs. professionals can provide is blurred.

It is also important that these personal responses be supported to be the best they can be. For example, responding to a friend with a ‘safety plan and risk assessment’ seems like a professional response, but should also be part of empowering all community members to talk with their friends and families about safety and risk - at a community rather than professional response level. This is not meant to take the place of a professional response, rather to enhance the personal response.

Lastly, participants noted the tension between following professional ‘best practice’ for victims who have reported to police, in particular not contaminating evidence by talking about it, and providing personal support for friends or family.

1. **Specialist Responses**

The next major area with considerable discussion and agreement across different focus groups

was the expectations and needs of ethnic victim/survivors from professional, specialist helping agencies. Current challenges included:

- Lack of culturally safe, aware and competent services
- Potential of a specialist response which does harm and revictimizes people if it is not culturally appropriate
- Lack of understanding of ethnic groups
- Language barriers
- Lack of confidentiality eg with interpreters

Most groups also discussed what they wanted in terms of specialist “mainstream” services responding to the needs of ethnic victim/survivors in a consistent way across the country. It was suggested that in order to address cultural competencies specific training and monitoring was required. Groups wanted:

- Ability for all ethnic victim/survivors to access culturally safe, aware and competent specialist “mainstream” services. This is the responsibility of the “mainstream” service, not the victim/survivor.
- “Cultural safety,” which is a higher level of cultural competency that includes “mainstream” services and professionals:
 - Showing a non-judgmental approach
 - Being aware of your own culture, and not knowing about others
 - Acting and behaving in a way that ensures the victim/survivor feels safe with the specialist agency/professional
 - Asking the right questions
 - Confidentiality and sensitivity eg. with interpreters, or for minorities within ethnic minority eg Indian Hindu victim/survivor, Nigerian Rainbow survivor
 - Drawing on ethnic expertise existing within the community - specialist services to have relationships with ethnic communities, including community leaders
- Diversity counselling, using models that are culturally appropriate vs western psychological models eg. small support groups to talk for non-crisis situations
- The importance of collective strength and ideas for ethnic victim/survivors
- Ongoing commitment to learning about the ways sexual violence happens in ethnic communities by keeping up-to-date with research
- Using ethnic-based counselling and professional services, including therapists and professionals with language competencies
- Choice for victims, including online/overseas based vs in person therapeutic responses
- Language and culture matches if that is wanted by victim/survivors

- Online counselling options
- Ensuring existing good practice is followed eg TOAH-NNEST Good Practice Guidelines
- Culturally safe services which advocate for the needs of ethnic victim/survivors with other systems and support through these processes eg police, medical support
- Safety plans and risk assessments which acknowledge specific cultural related risks eg of suicidality in cultures with taboos for leaving a marriage, even if this is after rape. Cultural safety must include implications and repercussions of interventions.
- The ability to access a register or directory of ethnic professionals for support

Responses to historical sexual abuse

Participants were asked the question “If someone from your community tells you they were sexually abused as a child, or some years ago, what needs to happen now?”

1. Personal Responses

Groups identified many of the same needs to create a safe, private and confidential environment free of moral stigma, judgement or guilt when someone discloses after historical abuse. In addition, these areas were discussed slightly differently, due to the historical nature of the abuse:

- Being **victim-centred for historical abuse** included being aware that people may disclose for different reasons than immediately after sexual violence. Eg, they could be raising awareness, or have been re-triggered and need help.
- Following and understanding **New Zealand law** with respect to historical abuse and where the abuse took place. Understanding that options around reporting may be different, particularly for abuse overseas.
- **Information about options** for the victim/survivor to address their needs were important. Many groups commented that not all communities knew about existing support services and how to access them, particularly for historical cases of sexual abuse. In particular, groups wanted victim/survivors to know about their rights after sexual assault, where resources are available and where to go including:
 - Victim support services including longer term support and counselling
 - Legal options including reporting to NZ Police – there is no time limit on reporting sexual violence in New Zealand.
 - using the existing helping systems such as ACC (if appropriate), Talking Works and Safe to talk.
 - Community and whānau can be a resource for support, particularly in the context of gaps for ethnic communities
 - Housing and financial support options

2. Specialist Response

Groups identified many of the same challenges and needs for culturally safe, aware and competent specialist “mainstream” services in responding to historical abuse as they had for immediate response. In addition to the issues noted above, these areas were raised by groups:

- Culturally safe services will help address the legislative gap for ethnic victim/survivors who have experienced historical abuse in a different country, because there are less protections and access to services for this group
- “Mainstream” services and professionals must offer responses that assist ethnic victim/survivors to access trauma memory eg with non-verbal therapeutic options
- For Rainbow ethnic victim/survivors, sexual violence services need to understand complex relationships around gender, sexuality and trauma. In particular, it is critical that services do not reinforce stereotypes that sexual violence and trauma “makes” someone queer or trans
- Long term recovery services may be less accessible to ethnic communities than immediate responses, as they involve slow and steady relationship based work and therapy, which may have both cultural and language barriers. PTSD, grief, loss, anger and depression were all recognised as factors which may impact ethnic victim/survivor’s recovery.

Disclosures from children

Participants were asked “If a child in your community tells you they are being sexually abused, what needs to happen now?”

There were fewer comprehensive responses to this question, but several areas in which responses differed than those for immediate abuse of adults or historical abuse. In addition to issues raised above, specific issues raised for this question were:

- Groups felt that it was important to **listen carefully to gather accurate information** before reacting. There were concerns about over-reacting because of misunderstanding the child’s story, and many groups raised that dealing with children is a completely different set of skills than responding to adults
- The need to **support the parent and child relationship** as a site of recovery – interventions should help the parents to help the child. This might include finding other safe adults in the family to support the child eg Aunty, Grandma.
- **Therapeutic options** needed to be available for both parents and children. Children do not understand the same language as adults, so this work was seen as specialist.
- Assessing **safety** included assessing safety at home, including if sexual abuse is happening due to incest, or from extended family members.
- Making a **notification to Oranga Tamariki** was widely discussed as an important option, but a number of concerns were raised by groups:
 - Important that notifications support child, parents and whānau

- Foster care provided by Oranga Tamariki was not seen as working very well for ethnic communities
- The possibility of foster parenting inside ethnic communities was discussed if it was deemed necessary for child to live somewhere else because sexual abuse was happening in the home
- The possibility of reviewing Oranga Tamariki decisions for ethnic communities was mentioned by one group
- Accessing other services such as **Youthline and Kidsline** were mentioned to support children and young people

On participant review of these notes, it was noted that there had not been significant discussion about the importance of responding to disclosures from children, and the importance of listening and reporting what the child has said, but not discussing it in depth with them. Understanding how to respond to children who disclose is an area that needs much more education in mainstream communities as well as ethnic communities, and work done with ethnic communities in this area will have to address the concerns raised above.

Dealing with harmful behaviour

Participants were asked 'If the person who caused the harm is someone within your community, what actions or processes does your community need to address the harmful behaviour of the person?'

This question received diverse responses from different groups, but included many groups asking for strong male leadership, and strong community leadership to ensure that perpetrators received responses that held them accountable, kept victim/survivors safe and did not isolate them or their families from their community. Several groups wanted a zero tolerance to abuse inside ethnic communities. However, excluding perpetrators, or their families, from community was considered a risk factor which would not assist ethnic communities to respond to sexual violence and could lead to communities failing to acknowledge sexual abuse.

Several also groups noted:

- The importance of **following New Zealand law**. To facilitate this, **community education** was seen as necessary to facilitate adjusting to the legal and cultural framework in New Zealand to avoid behaviours that could cause misunderstanding or break the law here.
- **Community education** to recognise power dynamics between perpetrators and victims was also seen as important, including highlighting "grooming" behaviour. Providing guidelines to stop perpetrating behaviour in religious and other cultural places would support this community education.
- **Community services** offering non-judgemental, intensive, specialist support for the perpetrator to allow them to acknowledge and change their behaviour. This work was described as very difficult by many groups as it would need to change toxic normalised behaviour. Any existing "mainstream" services would require cultural competency and cultural safety training in the same ways as agencies working with victim/survivors.

- **Safety planning** to assess the risk of re-offending for perpetrators, and remove the perpetrator if necessary, from environments where they pose a risk to others. This should include understanding the cultural background of the perpetrator, and offering support to any victim/survivors to seek support
- **Confidentiality** around perpetrator disclosures has some additional issues to those discussed earlier. Groups wanted the immigration status of the victim/survivor to be assessed, and the wishes of the victim/survivor to be considered.
- **Reporting to New Zealand Police** was described by several groups as important, including via discussions with Ethnic Community Liaison Officers to increase community awareness. This could be via anonymous reporting if necessary. Groups talked about the importance of allegations being investigated.

Final words

This document is a collation of minutes taken in the third session of the Connections! Hui. For any questions or comments, please contact Bex Fraser on 021 084 20952 or rmfraser.rf@gmail.com

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The Shama staff, Board and Advisory group members worked incredibly hard to create a space that was safe, respectful and nurturing for this discussion. We look forward to seeing the seeds of it grow.

Appendix 1: Questions to guide this discussion

- If someone from your community tells you that a sexual assault has just happened to them, what do they need to happen now?
- If someone from your community tells you they were sexually abused as a child, or some years ago, what needs to happen now?
- If a child in your community tells you they are being sexually abused, what needs to happen now?
- If the person who caused the harm is someone within your community, what actions or processes does your community need to address the harmful behaviour of that person?