

‘BAMER’ Project 2018 – 2020

Consultation & Review of Recommendations & Ongoing Needs Analysis

In 2018, Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) was awarded funds by the Home Office VAWG Transformation Fund to support a two-year project focusing on Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) women¹ across the region covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, Thames Valley area. This project was developed in response to low take-up of some VAWG specialist services by BAMER women, and aimed to make such services more inclusive of the needs of, and considerate of the barriers faced by, this population. A key decision in the delivery of this project was to employ multiple workers across areas, managed strategically to avoid a solely police-led approach. Responsibilities varied widely—from outreach and education to case holding. When the project concluded and was reported on in 2020,² 10 recommendations were made to:

- 1 Develop specialist, ethnically sensitive VAWG training.
- 2 Deliver workshops for community groups.
- 3 Collect, report on and share data consistently.
- 4 Deliver ethnically sensitive preventative work and awareness raising.
- 5 Develop clear pathways for ethnic minority victims and survivors.
- 6 Improve responses from VAWG services for ethnic minority clients.
- 7 Improve engagement with women’s community groups.
- 8 Commission VAWG services with specific support for ethnic minority victims and survivors.
- 9 Ensure issues experienced by those who are ethnically minoritised are heard at strategic and operational boards.
- 10 Develop a detailed VAWG service directory.

Between September 2024 and April 2025, Sundial undertook a review in conjunction with the Thames Valley Diverse WORLDS Group of the outcomes of the BAMER project. This was done from the perspective of a range of stakeholders and service providers, most of whom participated in the original project. The aim of the review is to take stock of any progress or opportunities that may be available, tap into potential learning and analyse what is required moving forward to successfully meet the needs of women from diverse backgrounds. It involved:

- A round table discussion within the Diverse WORLDS forum on 27th September 2024 (13 attendees across a range of organisations);
- In-depth feedback from five individuals, either through interviews (lasting approximately 60 minutes) or an online questionnaire. All were key stakeholders and involved in delivering the original project, with two having been actual specialist workers funded by the project.

All counties were represented in the participant group. The detailed questions asked for interviews and the brief questionnaire are shown in an accompanying Annex, and broadly ask what worked well with the project and what were the challenges, what it changed, what has

¹ This was the terminology in use at the time, which we would no longer use and has generally been replaced, e.g., with ‘women from diverse backgrounds.’

² See <https://mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk/documents/s59097/Appendix%205B.pdf>

happened since and what the potential is going forward. We conducted a thematic analysis of the feedback and report on this below. We follow up with a brief review of progress and some comments against the original recommendations.

What worked and did not work with the 'BAMER' project?

Project activities were broadly felt to be effective when the 'BAMER' workers were in place: in supporting community outreach, casework, upskilling colleagues about the intersectional needs of diverse communities; and networking/collaboration among diverse workers and groups. Specialised support, particularly in repatriating children, was highly valued. It overcame bottlenecks in support for women from diverse backgrounds and supported the development of new programmes. It helped with establishing contacts within community groups that were the foundations to identify wider support and the early development of trust building and information sharing. Learning about the cultural needs of diverse groups was incredibly valuable, through the specialist workers getting to know their local communities and also more formally through data collection and focus group discussions. The project fostered strong teamwork and passion in some areas, and helped establish some firm foundations for outreach and contact during the subsequent Covid pandemic.

There was some less positive feedback on the project, for example, some felt that across the project as a whole, the role of the specialist workers was less than clear (described by one as "...kind of muddy") as they took on different roles that were not always easy to explain to others, e.g. to the police.

What happened next?

Although the project had a lot of potential, most felt that a lot of momentum was lost, and *"It's sad that the energy and commitment in the findings have ebbed away, especially from a commissioning perspective."* Common sentiments were: *"I feel like we went backwards"* and *"...I don't know if there has been a huge amount of lasting impact, other than we're trying to move forward the work."* In some localities post-project lack of funding had caused energy and commitment to wane.

All of those who took part attributed some of this to the Covid pandemic, which meant that there were fewer opportunities to nurture the relationships forged during the project. A big challenge, however, was presented by changes in funding structures, shifts in local authority control and the disbanding of regional coordination groups. Community funding that was previously available became centralised through the PCC, adding complexity and making joint working difficult. This limited local capacity to continue roles once the project funding ended. Several participants mentioned how cross-borough collaboration has become more difficult due to differing commissioning structures, local authority priorities, and service frameworks. This fragmentation has led to gaps in service continuity, data sharing, and overall impact, especially for smaller or less diverse boroughs like Bracknell and Windsor & Maidenhead. It was also raised that commissioning structures contain no guidance or mandatory requirement to diversify the workforce so that it is representative of communities, and sensitivity to this is down to the provider. Some argued that there is a need for central government funding due to limited resources for this type of work in an environment of growing diversity and complexity.

Impact and legacy of the project

More positively, despite general agreement that potential was lost post-completion, some felt that aspects of knowledge from the BAMER project had become *"business as usual."* Some networks still persist, with one former specialist worker saying that: *"even after all these years, yeah, I still have so many contacts with communities from that time as well, because you create*

the ties, don't you?." Though all agreed there were and are gaps in services, the project still had a notable impact on some local services and helped introduce new roles, such as development or link workers. MK-Act were successful in maintaining the specialist worker role through funding obtained post-BAMER, and A2 Dominion, though unsuccessful in replacing the role, were able to secure funding that allowed them to continue work from the BAMER project to build trust and community relationships. Several have remained engaged and continued aspects of the work, including specialist helpline support, though implementation was inconsistent across regions and services.

Examples of follow-up successes, which came after and were influenced by the project's work, include webinars aimed at a range of diverse communities and collaborations such as multi-agency workshops (including HBA and data collection and intersectionality), and data-sharing initiatives. Other activities have been highly successful - Project Salama's language group, for example, "*went down a storm*" with participants saying that this was "*a space...we really needed...to talk about things.*" There is also demand for workshops in other languages, which have come from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Zimbabwean communities amongst others. One lasting impact of the original project was the formation of informal networks and better understanding of who is doing what across the region. These relationships have laid the groundwork for ongoing collaboration, including a 'No Recourse' toolkit and regional DA strategies. A2D identified several activities that grew out from the project and influenced their approach, acknowledging that "*community groups that were started initially within the project laid the foundations for the project to develop, whilst building trust.*" Resulting activities by A2D included:

- Creating an empowerment model of support through regular grass roots meetings with the opportunity to discuss experiences that may be abusive with the team;
- Making 'Lived Experience' central to any potential change for people in a meaningful way; and
- Developing a 12-week programme called '*Our Voice*', a domestic abuse recovery support group formulated at the request of the participants as the group work went along, with plans under discussion for group work to be led by members of the community going forward.

Nevertheless, there was consensus that services now provided, in general, do not fully meet the needs of diverse communities, particularly around harmful practices (e.g., 'honour'-based abuse, forced marriage), and often there is not enough cultural awareness to ask the right questions when dealing with culturally diverse groups. As one contributor said: "*...somebody threatening me, that would warrant police call out or interference or investigation. It's very different to threats that other people might get from within their own culture and communities and police aren't very good at recognising that....*" Standard domestic abuse responses, for example, are often white British-centric and fail to recognise cultural nuances and different interpretations of risk. The discontinuation of funding has left a significant gap, as reduction in culturally sensitive work has understandably resulted in less access and engagement from women in diverse communities.

What are the key issues to address?

The following have been raised by various contributors to this discussion:

Funding and resources were identified as a key issue. Though the 'BAMER' project has led to greater awareness of community needs, this has not always translated into tangible service improvements, due to the absence of dedicated workers or pathways.

Data collection and sharing were acknowledged as key factors for identifying harms and abuse, and there are major gaps, e.g., in how ethnicity and harmful practices, such as forced marriage or 'honour'-based abuse, are recorded. Issues cited are that categories are too broad; much is reported under 'other' or 'unknown' and systems across agencies are not standardised. Without consistent and detailed data, it's difficult to assess need, true service reach or make informed policy decisions.

Access to language and interpretation services is problematic, and though Language Line is widely used it remains inadequate for meaningful engagement, especially where cultural understanding is crucial, e.g., to express feelings, or in trauma-sensitive contexts. While there were examples of multilingual staff, language support generally—including sign language—is lacking. Services seldom go beyond minimal provisions, leaving minoritised or disabled groups with limited access to appropriate support. Also, there is a shortage of culturally sensitive interpreters, and communities often distrust interpreters due to confidentiality or social repercussions. It is thought that *"...people know not to use family members, but I think they still do. Or they use friends or whatever, but mostly they use language places like Language Line."*

A greater need for cultural competence in service delivery – with particular areas of concern identified as:

- Services focusing narrowly on domestic abuse incidents without acknowledging clients' broader trauma histories, including war, sexual violence, and displacement, being unable to meet the need for personalised, holistic support tailored to individual cultural and historical contexts.
- Standard office hours service models (9am to 5pm) that do not accommodate the needs of working clients from diverse communities (e.g., limited flexibility, limited out-of-hours support, and bureaucratic work cultures that hinder effective intervention).
- Standard counselling models were often ineffective for diverse ethnic minority communities due to cultural misalignment.
- Services and legal systems mislabelling harmful practices (e.g., FGM, spiritual abuse) as religious. This reflects a broader issue of misunderstanding and oversimplification of complex cultural nuances in professional settings, including courts and the police.
- Training needs/knowledge gaps exist around harmful practices. Cultural awareness is sporadic and often not mandatory. Frontline services are low on specialist knowledge, regarding particular communities, e.g., Traveller communities and also less visible forms of abuse. There is, therefore, an ongoing need for targeted training for frontline services—particularly in areas like immigration and harmful practices. While domestic abuse services had some awareness, social care and related services often lacked confidence and specialist knowledge.
- The justice system, particularly courts, fail to understand the dynamics within certain ethnic communities, resulting in unjust outcomes and a failure to recognise when women are really under threat. Victims are often left unsupported due to cultural ignorance among legal professionals.

- Helpline support being culturally inappropriate for many communities who prefer face-to-face support or guidance from within their community (e.g., religious leaders). The reliance on helplines excludes those whose cultural norms do not align with disclosure via telephone to strangers. Cultural expectations around disclosure, privacy, and relational support are often at odds with standard UK service models.
- No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) cases face significant systemic barriers and in general lack support. Women with NRPF face severe limitations in accessing refuge or housing, including some services turning women away due to their immigration status, despite changes like the MVDAC (Migrant Victims Domestic Abuse Concession). Issues related to pathways for immediate safety remain. Challenges persist with NRPF accommodation and the sanctuary hosting scheme. Limited legal support within services complicates referrals, and fears around immigration status discourage reporting abuse, which “...*can be lengthy and daunting.*”

What should be prioritised now?

All of the discussions supported the view that **a diverse workforce is crucial** in our region for meeting the needs of the increasingly culturally diverse demographic. The success of much of the work of the specialist support workers showed that a more culturally representative workforce can bridge gaps in understanding and improve service accessibility. However, in addition to limited funding for the sector to provide these posts, hiring and retaining diverse staff is hindered by burnout, poor pay, and lack of career progression. There was **widespread support for the return of diverse communities specialist workers** to facilitate these types of initiatives.

It was argued that a key way to understand the needs of women from diverse groups is to **create and support leaders within those groups** so they can advocate from an experienced perspective. **Education for diverse groups** is also essential, for example, sharing understanding of the domestic abuse power and control cycle, and where possible making culturally appropriate adaptations. We were also reminded about the importance of sharing **best practices** relating to diverse communities, and that **prevention** should be an important priority going forwards.

Local services may not have an **integrated approach**, and several contributors to this discussion expressed a need for **more one-stop-shop models**. These might include drop-in spaces within trusted community centres and embedded support roles in councils or housing. Local partnerships and ‘by and for’ organisations are vital, but are often overwhelmed and under-resourced. That being said, working with these organisations is essential due to their combined legal, practical, and cultural knowledge.

Comparing the outcome of the discussions for this review with the 2020 recommendations, we can identify that there has been progress on several of the recommendations, though less in others. A summary is provided below:

1. Developing specialist, ethnically sensitive VAWG training	There have been a number of workshops with Oxford community groups relating to honour and shame and multi-agency workshops and training on intersectionality. However, training is still not mandatory and victims are often dependent on staff’s specialist knowledge, when available, or on the investment in training that services and statutory agencies are able to make.
---	---

2. Delivering workshops for community groups	Some progress here, as the PCC has funded a range of workshops for community groups, some of which were in different languages.
3. Consistent data collection, reporting and sharing	Some progress has been made relating to data through multi-agency workshops and collaboration between some of the agencies, though it is recognised that there is a long way to go. Issues relating to clear guidelines on recording and a standardisation of systems for data collection continue to act as barriers to consistently shared, accurate data.
4. Delivering ethnically sensitive preventative work and awareness raising	This work has stalled in a number of areas post-'BAMER.' Though there has been some progress, there is a lack of specific funding allocated by local authorities.
5. Developing clear pathways for victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities	Services largely remain focused on providing mainstream support that does not necessarily cater for the needs and complexities of ethnic minorities survivors.
6. Improving responses from VAWG services for clients from ethnic minority communities	Despite the legacy and knowledge building of the BAMER project, there is still insufficient response to the needs of clients from diverse backgrounds. As mentioned previously, staff issues such as burnout mean that specialist staff have moved on.
7. Improving engagement with women's community groups	Caseload increase and lack of funding often means that links with community groups are of low priority. However, some services have successfully preserved the links created during the project.
8. Commissioning VAWG services with specific support for ethnic minority victims and survivors	This did not feature in many of the bids awarded in 2023 to DV service providers.
9. Ensuring issues experienced by those who are from ethnic minority communities are heard at strategic and operational boards	A lack of representation still remains in strategic and operational boards. This also reflects onto other structures, such as MARAC, which is aimed at risk reduction rather than addressing both risk and needs/support simultaneously. Current frameworks do not acknowledge the complexity of need in this client group, and some MARACs reject referrals involving harmful practices such as HBA. An approach that can consider and properly assess the risks and needs of these victim-survivors would require adequate training of all professionals involved in the MARAC process, adequate tools for assessing risk and a layer of specialist knowledge added to the current MARAC structure.

10. Developing a detailed VAWG service directory	A VAWG resource list and directory was commissioned by Wokingham Borough Council, which is now maintained by Sundial as an open access downloadable resource.
---	---

As a final note, following the implementation of the BAMER project and the heightened vulnerabilities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Thames Valley region has seen the introduction of several dispersal accommodation initiatives for asylum seekers, including the use of so-called “Asylum Hotels.” These developments have significantly altered the social and humanitarian landscape across the three counties, reshaping both community dynamics and the nature of support required by displaced populations.

National reports—most notably from [Imkaan](#) and [Women for Refugee Women](#)—have identified consistent patterns of abuse, coercion, and re-traumatisation. These include accounts of sexual harassment, unauthorised room intrusions, and degrading treatment by both staff and fellow residents. Such experiences are worsened by institutional practices that mirror coercive control, including enforced curfews, mandatory roll calls, and restrictions on personal movement.

Although local data on incidents of domestic abuse and harmful practices within these accommodations remains unavailable, the Thames Valley BAMER Project report already highlighted that women from ethnically diverse communities often felt unable to disclose abuse or access support due to cultural, linguistic, and systemic barriers. The pandemic and the rise in hotel-based asylum housing have likely exacerbated these vulnerabilities for the **70% of forcibly displaced women** that have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (Imkaan, 2022).

We hope this review provides an opportunity to take stock and refocus and gives a basis for discussion on next steps. It is encouraging that Initial discussions within the Diverse WORLDS group suggest it will be useful in several ways, including providing support for approaching executive boards and for feeding into strategic priorities.

We suggest that it forms a jump-off point for us to re-evaluate the existing ‘BAMER’ project recommendations and agree a set of renewed action priorities to align the work of the Thames Valley Diverse WORLDS group and our colleagues as well as the recommendations of the Domestic Abuse Research Report recently published by the Thames Valley Immigration Alliance.

Acknowledgments:

Many thanks to the following contributors:

Diverse WORLDS group discussion: Aliya Dhalla (Oxfordshire Mind); Becci Seaborne (freelance, formerly ODAS); Binita Morjaria (MK-ACT); Fanuel Ncube (VFSS); Jacqui Mukono (Project Salama); Lula Kithome (Oxfordshire County Council); Namita Prackash (Trust House Reading); Rachel Knight (MIND); Shabnam Malik (Sunrise IDVA); Shajaat Hussain (A2D).

Survey completion: Binita Morjaria (MK-Act); Heather Walls (A2D).

Interviewees: Khadija Shaaban (Hope after Harm); Liz Jones (Oxford City Council); Sophie Wing-King (Bracknell Forest and RBWM).

**Report fact-finding and preparation carried out by
Dr Kate Clayton-Hathway & Vania Martins**

Annex: GOOGLE form questions:

Your Name: Organisation and role: (*these are for our reference and you will not be identifiable in any reporting*)

What was **your own** role in the BAMER (*the term used at that time*)/Home Office project (if any)?

What was the role of **your organisation** in the BAMER/Home Office project and funding (if any)?

Did the BAMER funding support the role/s of specialist workers?

IF Y: Did you manage to maintain this role/s in your organisation at the end of the funding period?

IF Y: how was the role funded?

Can you describe any outcomes of project, in terms of organisational learning/knowledge, development of community relationships, etc

Can you identify any lasting impact in any of these areas?

Where (if any) do you feel there are gaps in provision of abuse services for minoritised women?

Do you have any other comments on what works/does not work in supporting women from minoritised communities suffering abuse?

Going forward, which of the following (if any) would be useful for your organisation for working with women from minoritised groups?

- Diverse Communities specialist Workers
- Language support
- Training for frontline staff on harmful practices
- Training for frontline staff on Honour-based abuse (HBA) in South Asian communities
- Training for frontline staff on HBA in African communities
- Training for frontline staff on HBA and domestic abuse in traveller communities
- Focus on collecting data on HBA and ethnicity for your clients
- Focus on collecting data on HBA and ethnicity other services
- Other (please specify)

Annex: Interview questions

- How did your organisation benefit from the BAMER HO funding?
- Did the funding support the role/s of specialist 'BAMER' (the term used at that time) workers? Did you manage to maintain this role/s in your organisation at the end of the funding period? If so, how was the role funded?
- Do you think there are enough BAMER/Diverse Communities Workers supporting women from minoritised communities in your area?
- Do you think there is enough language support for women from minoritised communities suffering abuse in your area?
- What were the outcomes of BAMER Project, in terms of organisational learning/knowledge, development of community relationships, etc
- Has there been a lasting impact in any of these areas? [include recommendations]
- How many people deliver your frontline abuse service and how many would you describe as belonging to a diverse community? Alternatively please indicate how many frontline staff represent diverse communities as a percentage.