

**STANDING  
together**  
against domestic violence

# **Voices of Experience**

*Consultation with Survivors of Domestic Violence in the London Borough  
of Hammersmith & Fulham in 2003/4*



## **Voices of Experience**

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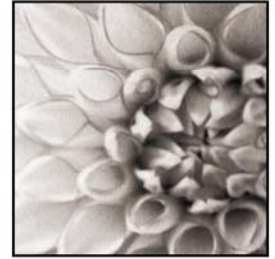
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# Chapter One

## Introduction and Lessons Learnt



### Why we carry out consultation with survivors

There are several reasons why Standing Together carries out consultation with survivors of domestic violence:

- We aim to be accountable for the work we do and to keep the voice of survivors at the centre of that work. These voices provide the grounding for the reality of that work. Survivors of domestic violence are directly experiencing the interventions made by agencies.
- Standing Together aims to increase survivors' safety and to improve their experience in using the services targeted in Standing Together initiatives. Partner agencies need to hear whether their initiatives have made a difference for the better, and if not, how they can make improvements. Many of these improvements will be made up of small detailed changes in safety and information and communication. The details are most effectively identified by survivors themselves and it is then the responsibility of Standing Together to see that our agency partners hear this, and seek to implement changes for the better. Where changes are not possible in the near future, Standing Together is committed to going back to the survivors we consulted to explain why.
- At a national level, Standing Together actively lobbies Government for legislative and procedural change that is needed. In responding to government consultations, we aim to involve and be informed by survivors' experience.

### Summary of some lessons learnt during the consultation

#### 1. About organising the groups and supporting the participants:

- There must be sufficient time allowed for preparing for the consultation, contacting women, and acknowledging the practical realities for single parents of arranging child care.
- We know from our own experience that it takes a great deal of work to contact and recruit women survivors to take part in discussion groups. Many, many individuals have to be spoken to directly in order to get together a small group, and the process of contacting women who may not be safe at the moment can be complicated and labour-intensive. Setting up an inclusive process is valuable and cannot be rushed. It is also a heavy demand on the limited resources of voluntary sector organisations.
- For the women who take part, wherever they are in the process of surviving and recovering from domestic violence, speaking out in front of others can produce a strong reaction. They therefore have the right to expect support after the consultation from the agencies they know or, if previously not supported, from the ones they choose to contact.

## **2. About how to make effective use of what the women tell us:**

- In training: For example, after this year's consultation, we can talk to the police we train about the fact that there is a significant Filipino Community in West London, that these are some of the problems that Filipino women have said may prevent them from using the police, and we can increase their understanding of the specific cultural concerns Filipino women may bring to their contact with the criminal justice system.
- We can also provide well-grounded and consistent key messages in our contact with a wide range of agencies based on the survivors' perspective on, and needs of, the systems they have to interact with. These can then become embedded in the agencies' practice, and have legitimacy because of the source.
- We recognise the importance of having effective structures into which we can feed the survivors' views, for example the Court Management Group, and the Operations meetings, as well as the training with practitioners in health, police, the courts and victim/witness support agencies. This means that we have often been able to discuss and make a decision on what to do about an issue raised in the consultation within a short space of time, and let the women know the results.
- We have been able to collaborate with our partner agencies in 'problem sorting and problem solving' in a way that recognises the autonomy and constraints of each organisation. So if the survivors have told us that a certain practice makes them feel less safe, we have been able to identify with the agency concerned the nature of the problem, and a range of possible and realistic ways of tackling it, which may not be exactly what the survivor herself suggested, but may be more likely to be implemented quickly for example, and will address the same problem.

In chapter 2 we have given more detailed information about what we have done about the issues women raised during the Court consultation.

## **Credits and Special Thanks**

### **Thank you to all the women who took part**

As in previous years, we have been impressed by the generosity, bravery, and commitment of the women who took part in each of the consultations described in this report. The work of Standing Together and all its partners is richer and more focused because of their contribution, and we thank them loudly for that.

### **Editing and design**

This report has been compiled and edited by Peta Sissons, Training and Information Officer, Standing Together.

Design and layout by Shasca Foster and Iain Anderson

### **Facilitators**

Standing Together owes a debt of gratitude to Vicky Grosser who developed the consultation process with the partnership, and who facilitated it between 2001 and early 2003. The work of Standing Together continues to benefit from the good practice models written up in her reports and in her recommendations, informed, as they are, by the respect for survivors' experience which is fundamental to her work. Standing Together also recognises the contribution of Bhupinder Virdee of DVIP Women's Service to the implementation of this

work, and her part in making consultation a positive experience for all those who were involved.

Standing Together would like to thank the facilitators this year:

- i. In the Court consultation (chapter 2) they were Beryl Foster, Director of Standing Together, supported by Tracey Green of Hammersmith Women's Aid.
- ii. The telephone survey of Court witnesses was carried out by Lauren Marsland who analysed the transcript and interview responses and wrote up both processes. Standing Together is indebted to her for her work and her generous gift of time and expertise.
- iii. The consultation with Filipino women (chapter 3) was carried out by Peta Sissons, Training and Information officer at Standing Together and Carmila Legarda, a Filipino consultant. We are very grateful to Maria Gonzalez and her colleagues at the Centre for Filipinos for their help in planning and publicising this session.
- iv. The work to enable survivors from Hammersmith & Fulham to take part in the government's consultation on the Safety and Justice White Paper (chapter 4) was carried out by Debbie Seaborn, Nic Hunter and Victoria Hill from Standing Together.
- v. Finally a big thank-you to ADVANCE for all their hard work in making contact with women to invite them to take part and for providing ongoing support to many of the women.

### **How the report is structured**

The report is divided into 5 chapters, one for each element of the survivors consultation work carried out between April 2003 and March 2004. At the end of the relevant chapters are the details of the questions discussed with women, and other materials relevant to that consultation.

Throughout the report, we have used the women's own words wherever possible, and these are in italics and quotation marks. We have added context, commentary and information as appropriate.

### **If you are interested in reading more about this work:**

Earlier reports on survivor consultation published by Standing Together against Domestic Violence:

***Survivors Speak.*** A report on the findings of consultations with survivors of domestic violence, 2001-2

***Heard But Not Judged.*** Consultation with survivors of domestic violence in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, 2002-3

***One Year On.*** The First Annual Review of the Specialist Domestic Violence Court at West London Magistrates Court, 2004

***Lines of Communication.*** Telephone Survey of ADVANCE clients, November 2002. by L.Marsland, 2003, published by ADVANCE and Standing Together. This report should be ordered directly from ADVANCE (price £5) by email:

[admin@advanceadvocacyproject.org.uk](mailto:admin@advanceadvocacyproject.org.uk)

Further information about Standing Together's aims and partners can be found on our website

[www.standingtogether.org.uk](http://www.standingtogether.org.uk)

A full list of Standing Together's publications with prices is available on the website.

### **Funders**

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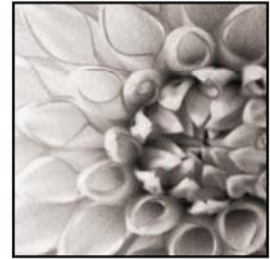
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# Chapter Two

## Survivors' views of using the Specialist Domestic Violence Court



### Background

Standing Together co-ordinates the Specialist Domestic Violence Court at West London Magistrates Court. The Court was launched in October 2002, as the first in London and the first in the country to take domestic violence trials. It has been established with as one of its key aims "increasing the effectiveness of the judicial system in providing protection and support to victims and witnesses of domestic violence, appropriate sanctions for perpetrators, and by reducing delay through effective case management".

The Court was reviewed by Standing Together with partner agencies after its first 3 months of operation, in February 2003. As part of this process, Standing Together took the Survivors' Consultation Group, made up of women from the area who had experienced domestic violence, on an observation visit to the Court. The women's concerns, feedback and recommendations were written up as part of the report on survivors' consultations held in 2002/3, 'Heard but Not Judged'. Standing Together decided to follow up this process at the end of 2003, by consulting with women who were using the new Specialist Domestic Violence Court (referred to as SDVC), and to use this consultation process to inform the first Annual Review of the Court.

The Court Review took the form of a day's consultation with practitioners in partner agencies, and was held in November 2003. Consultation with survivors took place during December 2003, in a discussion group and by phone. The results of both were summarised and presented to partner agencies and to a wider audience in February 2004, at the launch of the report of the Review, entitled 'One Year On'.

In this report 'Voices of Experience', we have included a more detailed report on the December 2003 consultation with survivors, using their own words.

### Introduction

Attending court as a victim/witness, or with someone close to you, can be a stressful and intimidating experience. When the person you are giving evidence against, or accompanying to court, is the person who has hurt or threatened you, but with whom you also have a complex history and ties, then the whole process is even more confusing, and hopes and fears for the outcomes more heightened. Looking at the results of this consultation, we acknowledge that however many practical steps are being taken in and around the Specialist Domestic Violence Court to make it safer and less confusing, we, and the Criminal Justice system generally, cannot make it all come right, or meet all the women's needs.

What we can do, and have consistently done since Standing Together started, is to ask survivors for their views, listen carefully to what women say about how the operational details

of the court process affect their feelings of safety, and then pass that detailed information straight on to the partner agencies, together with practical proposals for change. We then go back to the women who have so generously shared their experiences, and let them know how the agencies have responded to the proposals. The two consultations described in this chapter are another stage in that journey towards change.

### **How the women were brought into the consultation**

As with previous consultations with survivors, the method for contacting and inviting women to take part was set up to be as safe and inclusive as possible, and involved many staff hours. It is worth describing this process, as it is one that we believe cannot be rushed or truncated. Among the lessons we have learnt from a number of consultations over the years is the importance of personal contact with each woman invited and then again with those who agree to attend or take part. Offering a choice of ways of being involved, on this occasion by taking part in a small discussion group or a telephone interview, enables more women to take part and be heard.

We set out to contact, through ADVANCE, which is the Advocacy Project based in Hammersmith & Fulham, a number of women who had actually used the SDVC during its first year of operation. We knew that some women might also have had experience of other courts, and could have experience of West London Magistrates Court that had started before the Specialist Domestic Violence Court was set up. This was, in fact, what happened, and the women's comments below cover a range of courts.

Bear Montique, the Manager of ADVANCE, went through their own Court Book for the year and came up with 120 names of victim/witnesses who had criminal court proceedings going on since Oct 2002. She identified 86 women whom it was safe and /or possible to phone. She spoke to 75, as approximately 10 did not reply, or their mobile numbers were no longer working. One third of these asked her to speak to them later, as they had an appointment or family visiting, or were at work.

Bear explained to the women about the consultation, and asked whether they preferred day, evening or either and whether they would like help with childcare. Travel costs would be provided. Eight women agreed to come to a consultation group, during the day, with a crèche, and four agreed to be interviewed by phone (this number later grew, see below).

Some days later, Beryl Foster, Director of Standing Together, who was to facilitate this group, followed up these eight women to introduce herself, to give details of the venue and to check on any concerns they might have about the consultation. Out of the eight women, one had made an appointment on the day of the consultation, two were ill, one did not answer the phone or respond to several messages, two said they would prefer to be interviewed by phone and two said they were coming. The two who were ill said they would try to come.

Beryl then phoned nine women from the previous year's consultation group, or 'core' group. Of these, four said they would come and one agreed to be interviewed by phone.

On the morning of the consultation, one woman from the new contacts came, one came briefly but could not stay, and three women from the core group came. Four women therefore stayed for the full two hours of the group. The group went well, all the women contributed and the 'core group' women were very supportive and welcoming towards the 'new' and

much younger woman whose case was ongoing. The women's views are given below in section 2 – 'Discussion Group'.

Ten women agreed to be interviewed by telephone. The telephone survey was carried out for Standing Together by Lauren Marsland, an experienced researcher who had earlier carried out a major telephone survey of ADVANCE'S clients in 2003. (See Chapter 1 for details of the report). The questions asked and the results of the phone interviews are recorded below under the heading 'Telephone Interviews'.

Standing Together gave the women who took part in the discussion group a gift voucher as a small token of appreciation for their time and contribution.

## **Section 1. Telephone Interviews**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the telephone interviews was to explore women's experience of the West London Specialist Domestic Violence Court. Out of the ten who had agreed to be interviewed, seven women participated and all but one of the interviews took place during the last week of December 2003. The interviews were carried out by Lauren Marsland.

The interviews consisted of six basic and subsidiary questions that had been discussed and agreed with Standing Together. Each telephone interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The first question provides the information for a brief overview of how five women came into the court system, the charges against their abusers and a timeframe. The remaining 5 questions and the women's responses follow below.

All the five women whose words appear here have had some experience of the Specialist Domestic Violence Court (referred to as SDVC). Two of them also have experience of their abusive partners being prosecuted in other courts.

### **Summary of each woman's situation**

#### **Q.1) When was your contact with the DV courts and what were the charges?**

Woman A: The charges being handled in the Magistrates Court were: threats to kill, criminal damage, and assault on police officers. Her case was delayed and she had not yet been into the Specialist Domestic Violence Court (as the victim/witness). She felt edgy and nervous about the delays, as she was not sure if he was being held in custody. She felt that she couldn't relax. There was extreme violence and she hoped that the delays were due to a thorough investigation being done by the police. She didn't need more information from the police but would like clear, concise information from the courts.

Woman B: The charge of Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) was reduced to Common Assault as there was not enough evidence for the original ABH charge. This was the first and only time that the woman had experienced partner violence. The case came to the SDVC. Her partner was convicted, served time in jail and had since been released. They have a child and she had seen him a few times. Her partner was diagnosed with mental health problems, but was off his medication at the time of the assault. Her experience with the courts was for the most

part positive. She was, however, very disappointed that there was no mechanism in place to help her partner deal with his mental health problems, which she felt was the root cause of his violence. She believed that *“he needs to take responsibility for himself”*; however, she thought his sentence was too short, and she had wanted him to have a mental health assessment early on in the process of case preparation. *“I would have liked him to get help.”*

Woman C: One man was charged with ABH but failed to appear at court in November. The judge issued a warrant for his arrest and the woman went home. She later found out that the defendant had showed up at court at 3:30 and the warrant was revoked. She was angry that no one phoned her and told her the reasons for his late appearance. The trial was moved to a later date. This was the first time that she had used the courts.

Woman D: One man launched a sustained campaign of terror. He had stalked, threatened, harassed and terrified the woman. She was finally, after repeated requests, moved by Housing Services five months later. He followed her and the harassment had continued. She had been at court four times in the previous year and had used the video link at the Crown Court. The defendant was charged with criminal damage after throwing a rubbish bin through her large front window. He had been in court three other times on charges of harassment.

Woman E: One man, who had a self-acknowledged drinking problem, wanted to be ordered into a drinking programme. However, the woman, who agreed that the offender needed help, found the probation officer *“absolute rubbish.”* The officer did not return calls from the offender. She found this very annoying as despite extreme violence, she saw the violence as all drink-related. Both she and the offender wanted to see him in a rehabilitation programme and they felt upset and thwarted by the inefficiency of the probation officer to respond to repeated requests for referral to an alcoholics programme. The offender was sentenced to 18 months for a non-domestic violence-related GBH and 4 months for a common assault on her. He served five months. She was angry because this was not sufficient time for him to attend a 26-week rehabilitation (violence prevention) programme.

Two other women also shared their experiences of using the Family and Civil courts whilst experiencing domestic violence (see below)

## **Q. 2) Have you used any other courts? How did the Specialist Domestic Violence court compare?**

The women's experience with court varied: those who had been before, even on non-related domestic violence cases, usually felt more comfortable with being in the Specialist Court:

*‘I’ve been to other courts but I felt pretty safe (at the SDV court). He pleaded guilty because he didn’t want to put his son and me through it. If he’d pleaded ‘not guilty’ I think it would have been different.’*

*‘I was in court with a friend about five years ago. I went into the (SDV) court and have sat in the box. But it all keeps getting put back. I want it over and done with.’*

*‘I’ve been in court as a witness and as a juror, so I felt quite comfortable.’*

*‘Each time was a very frightening experience.’*

Time delays and adjournments have an impact on women's feelings about the court. And, as one woman makes clear, when defendants prolong cases, returning to court does not necessarily get easier:

*'I was quite angry. I was there until 2:30. I would have liked to know what was going on (defendant failed to appear but she was not told why her case, scheduled for the morning, was delayed). I was even more angry that they didn't tell me why he'd shown up late...he's just dragging his heels and they (the courts) let him.'*

*'I am absolutely distraught. It's been adjourned five times now. Everybody told me that when I moved I'd be able to put this all behind me. But it just goes on and on.'*

*'I am angry that no one made him explain why he was late. I'm angry that no one told me the reasons and that this is now dragging into the New Year. I just want it over.'*

### **Q. 3) Did you feel safer? Less safe? How could it be improved?**

For one woman the experience was positive in regards to safety:

*'For me the experience (going to court) was easy. I think it would be okay for people who are terrified because there is a glass container around the dock. Also the ADVANCE worker met me at court.'*

One woman felt that safety should begin from the moment of reporting.

*'The police need to have a special DV unit that is open 24/7. You need to feel safe before you can make any decisions and know what to do.'*

Safety was also compromised when there was a lack of timely information from the courts:

*'I'm not satisfied. It's all been adjourned. He's gone home. I had to leave my home.'*

The physical layout of the courts was the one thing that the women seemed almost unanimous on - they did not feel safe in the corridors or in the courtroom.

*'I sat in the hallway all day... (Interviewer: Would you have preferred to be in a separate room?) No, I think that would have been worse, being in a small room. I was so nervous.'*

*'I had to go in and out the same door (as offender). There was no separate waiting room.'*

*'I had to use the toilet and had to pass him. He wasn't allowed to talk to me but, you know, the eyes say it all. I was terrified.'*

*'I wouldn't have wanted to walk past him in the hall. I'm glad I didn't see him (in the hallway).'*

*'I don't know about the glass box (around prisoner's dock). We're on friendly terms so I wasn't scared; but I think it would be scary if it weren't amicable. I can imagine that it would be intimidating to have him only inches away from you.'*

*'He was mouthing things to me in court. (Interviewer: What happened- what did the judge or lawyers do?) Oh, nothing- it was very sneaky, you know. (Interviewer: Did that scare you?) No, he was saying stuff like, "Thanks for coming" and "I love you and*

*the kids.” He was smiling (long pause) but he could have been frowning... that would have been bad.’*

**Q. 4) Did you know who the court personnel were?**

All of the seven women except one felt that they had been supplied with enough information about who the court personnel were. They were positive about their meeting with court staff, but added that there were certain circumstances that made them feel uncomfortable:

*‘The (court) personnel were very good. I was introduced to everybody. However, I was a little uncomfortable because somebody I used to work with was there (in courtroom).’*

*‘Oh, the prosecution was good. She introduced herself and explained what was going to happen. But then he just didn’t because he just didn’t show up. That was when I got angry (that no one came to speak to her).’*

*‘I’ve been in court five times now. I appreciated going in and seeing it (the court) prior to the case. It’s good to know where you are.’*

*‘Yes, everyone introduced themselves. I knew who they were anyway...I don’t want to be treated like a victim of DV. I am actually a survivor. It happened and I dealt with it right away...I’m a single black woman and I feel like I was stereotyped and that what happened was trivialised. I personally, and this is just my own way of thinking, I felt like just another statistic.’*

*‘No, I don’t need more information from the police- they’ve booked him for an assessment. I’m not sure what the (court) lawyers are doing or who they are. I’ve had no phone calls.’*

**Q. 5) Sentencing: Was the offender referred to a perpetrator’s programme? How was that?**

Domestic violence offenders found guilty and sentenced at the SDVC can, when appropriate, be sentenced to attend the 26 week Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP), provided in Hammersmith and Fulham by Domestic Violence Intervention Project for the Probation Service. Magistrates at West London Court have been given information about the group programme during the training Standing Together provides, and Probation Officers have received training in how to assess domestic violence defendants, and, when appropriate, make recommendations about IDAP as a suitable sentence for this crime.

One woman was not satisfied because, in spite of her husband being diagnosed with mental illness, no psychiatric assessment had been done when the case was being prepared. This led to a three week delay in sentencing and he was released on bail conditions, which he then breached. Another comment, often made by domestic violence survivors, was that the women did not want their partners punished, but wanted them to be offered treatment directed at underlying problems that they thought helped cause the abuse.

In two cases this question about sentences was not applicable as the cases had been delayed.

*'In spite of being on remand, there was nobody available to do the (psychological) tests. I'm trying to make sure that he can't hurt me or my child. I keep getting told that he's dangerous. I only saw his nasty side once but once was enough. So I'm very disappointed and dissatisfied that no tests were done.'*

*'Electronic tags don't work- he's stayed out (overnight) at least twice and was late home about nine times. That's while he's on probation and they have done nothing.'*

*'He (offender) is not getting the help he needs. We need for probation to make the referral and it's just not happening.'*

As one woman said:

*'Look, I know that he has to take responsibility for his (violent) behaviour. I agree that he has to do it himself. But he needs help as well.'*

One woman, whose partner was excluded from the Probation-run domestic violence prevention group programme because he was so aggressive with the group tutor, stated:

*'He's sent me harassing letters and I've given them to the police. He's been tagged and just switches the machine off- I've seen him do it. I still jump whenever I hear a noise. That fear will never go away. As soon as he comes out it will start over. I've changed my mobile phone number but I've had three calls from the ambulance [when he is injured in fights] because he lists me as his next-of-kin. He needs to be locked up 24/7. It's horrible to say, but I wish he were dead.'*

Another said:

*'I would like the violence to stop but not to see him in jail. I have no feelings for him as a husband but I feel for him as a human being.'*

#### **Q. 6) Was there any thing that the Court could do better? Anything that was not good?**

Some of the women wanted more information about how their cases were progressing.

*'I feel like a worm at the end of a fishing rod - just dangling.'*

They also felt strongly that the courts must operate in conjunction with other agencies.

*'They (housing department) can only re-house me in my old borough. It's not safe for me. The courts need to tell them (housing) that it's not safe. You know, the left hand does not know what the right is doing.'*

They explained that sharing information between agencies would save them having to repeat their story over and over.

*'There are too many people handling the case. I'm tired of it all. I have had to tell so many people and they have no sympathy.'*

Some felt that cases are not prepared carefully enough, especially those where safety concerns are pressing and where the offender may have a long record of violence.

*'I was let down by the courts - nobody had done their homework. Also he knew the judicial system. He knows it's not effective and knows the loopholes and how to get around in the system. It's only because of the psychiatric problems that I could get*

*him sectioned via Mental Health. I only had three months' respite. (He had been released after three months on remand). He should have been sent from the prison straight to the hospital.'*

*'It (DV court) was easy to get to but it was difficult to take the kids there and see daddy.'*

*'This isn't about the courts but I think that it's important to say. I could never have done it on my own. Thanks to ADVANCE I can move on. Police need to make women aware that help is available.'*

The Advocates from ADVANCE attending the Thursday court knew all the women who took part in the consultation, even if they had not worked intensively with them, and they reported a number of comments made to them by some of the women, even when their cases didn't achieve the result they had hoped for:

*'You do make a difference.'*

*'Someone on the end of a phone made all the difference.'*

*'It was not as bad as I thought it would be. If I'd known that beforehand I wouldn't have worried so much.'*

One woman did not have to go in to the court to give evidence because her partner finally pleaded guilty, while she was kept safe:

*'It was a brilliant experience, and I thought it would be awful.'*

### **Two further narratives**

Interviews were also carried out on the telephone with two women who shared their stories with us, but who either did not fall into the scope of this particular consultation with women who had been victim/witnesses in the criminal court, or where details of the case cannot be included here for safety or legal/procedural reasons. However, both have raised important issues that Standing Together has taken up at the confidential monthly Operations meetings (involving the police, ADVANCE, CPS and Standing Together), and that will be used in an anonymous way when training magistrates and police officers, with the women's permission.

### **These two women' stories inform us that:**

1. Perpetrators themselves can and do make use of the courts to continue the abuse often at strategic times such as when custody and contact issues are going through the family courts. They do this by falsely accusing their partners of crimes such as child abuse, fraud and assault. Or they use the threat of revealing 'secrets' to agencies with power to judge the abused woman, and hence silence her.
2. Financial abuse, such as being kept short of cash at times of illness or crisis, can push women into a situation where they can fall foul of the very agencies they need to seek help from, such as the Benefits Agency and housing authorities.

## **Conclusions**

As a result of the interviews, and the issues raised in the discussion group described in the next section, Standing Together has taken a number of practical steps to address the issues and problems identified. These are detailed in the concluding paragraphs to this chapter.

In the next section we report upon the discussion group held with women, which focused on similar questions.

## **Section 2. Discussion Group about the Specialist Domestic Violence Court, December 2003**

In December 2003, Standing Together held a discussion with a group of five women survivors of domestic violence, about their experiences with the West London Specialist Domestic Violence Court, and other courts in London. The women had very different backgrounds. None of the women had experienced a whole case, from first hearing through to trial and sentencing, going through the Specialist Court, although they all had experience of using the criminal and civil courts in relation to their experience of domestic violence.

Three of the women had visited West London Magistrates Court, and observed the Specialist Domestic Violence Court (SDVC) in progress. Although we were not able to ask the women about the detail of their knowledge and views specifically as victim/witnesses going through the SDVC, their experience in other courts of the detail and reality of what safety 'looks' and feels like to survivors is very valuable information, and we have recorded a number of their comments here.

The group was made up of one Scandinavian woman in her early 20s, one Chinese woman and two white English women in their 40s. An African woman came to the group but had to leave early as the worker with her was not able to stay.

### **What the women told us**

The major themes that developed out of the focus group consultation are discussed below. We have also added some comments and suggestions from Standing Together about possible solutions to the problems women identified, and to research findings about the same issues. Procedural and legal issues, such as the difference between injunctions and restraining orders, and who is responsible for which bit of the system as the victim/witness experiences it, are complicated and can be difficult to follow. When women have not had a chance to receive an explanation from the advocates and support workers before embarking on the court process, it can be very disturbing.

### **Using the Law - Injunctions and Restraining Orders**

Many women who use the criminal justice system have also used the civil law to get injunctions (Non Molestation Orders, or Occupation Orders). They are applied for by the woman, she may have to pay a lot of money for legal advice if she is working or does not get

Legal Aid, and although there is no maximum period for which a Non Molestation order can last, they are often for 6 months at first and she will have to apply for extensions.

Restraining Orders can be made as both criminal matters under the Protection from Harassment legislation and as civil matters, although in the SDVC so far we have only come across criminal cases. They are applied for by the Crown Prosecution Service, imposed by the criminal court and could last for the lifetime of the offender.

Conditions can be attached to both.

There has been much discussion and some research into the effectiveness of injunctions and restraining orders for women experiencing domestic violence. The women in the group had these comments on their experience of injunctions and restraining orders:

*'I have got a five years restraining order, but in August he came at me with a knife again, and I was absolutely petrified because I didn't have my restraining order and my mobile phone with me, because I had just gone over to get cigarettes in the off licence and he lunged at me.'*

*'I have got a restraining order and he's broken it twice, I have been up to court and he has walked away. I've done the video link and he has still walked away. I have got to see him everyday; there is no restriction on it. I don't even know the restriction but I have got to carry it everywhere I go with my mobile phone. A five-year restraining order!'*

These experiences raise questions about whether a central national agency or location should be developed where data on Injunctions/Restraining Orders are logged so that the information is immediately available to the police. It also suggests that violent offenders should be made responsible for carrying a copy of the necessary paperwork about court orders against them, to prove that they have the right to be in the area. The onus should not be on the victim to provide proof that the offender should not be near her.

## **Video Links**

In the UK the use of video links in adult courts is a relatively new procedure, although the method has been used in youth courts for some time, and in Crown Courts it is available for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. The video link allows the victim/witness to be interviewed on camera in another space rather than in court where the defendant is. However as technology moves forward the use of video links will probably become more widespread. In the Specialist Domestic Violence Court we have pressed government Ministers and the Department of Constitutional Affairs to allow the court to make use of the video link before the method is rolled out nationally. West London Magistrates Court hopes that the video link will be available from September 2004, as a pilot site.

The use of screens, and being able to give evidence in private in a closed court, have been in place from June 2004. At a national level, the Criminal Justice Performance Directorate is planning to introduce live video link for evidence-giving from April 2005.

In the Specialist Domestic Violence Court, we want to be sure that when this method is used, that it is done well, with attention to the detail that will affect the sense of safety experienced by the women with whom it is used. Thus the women's comments from this discussion group are particularly pertinent. They will help us to ensure that when video links are used, there is

a detailed check on who can see what, who can move around, and when. Given the heightened stress and fear of seeing a defendant when the women may not have seen them since the assault, these details do matter.

*'I had never been on any of this (video link); I'd seen it on television, in America.'*

*'(I was) absolutely damned disgusted with the video link, you're not meant to see them. He was up walking about I could see him. I can't see the jury, they can see me, I can't see them. I can only see the judge, the prosecutor and him. I could see him at the back and he was waving, I mean if that's not intimidation, I freaked, and I had to get a tranquilliser.'*

*'He can still see the woman, what difference is it to a normal court, because the whole thing is that they freak you out.'*

*'I thought that a video links were meant to be just so the judges could see, so the fact that he was allowed to be walking around in the courtroom (is unacceptable).'*

*'Twenty minutes before I go on video link and (I had to) make another statement and I thought, I don't believe this. I started to get confused, my hands were sweating and my nerves, really a nervous wreck and it was just disgusting.'*

In the particular situation described by one woman (that took place in a Crown Court) the defendant was in custody and was allowed to stand up in enclosed dock, but was not allowed to walk around the court room. However it is important for us to listen to the way in which the incident was actually experienced by the woman herself. Although there is not meant to be a camera on the defendant when the woman is giving her evidence and being asked questions on video link, it can happen and in this case she did see him.

### **Time Problems/Delays**

The problems of delays in the court process, and the subsequent attrition and dissatisfaction amongst victims about the way that they have been dealt with are well documented. It is difficult for some survivors to understand why, even after the perpetrator has pleaded guilty, there is no instant response from the courts. Others thought that the time delays were orchestrated by the defence to wear them down.

*'I'm all new to the system; I am from northern Europe so it's a bit difficult, but God it's taken such a long time. He pleaded guilty, can't they just do something?'*

*'If they plead guilty they should just bang them up at once.'*

*'I just want something to happen now, to go faster.'*

*'But the courts make it a lot worse for you. They almost make your life worse, don't they? (because of the delays).'*

*'They make a fortune, the criminal defence barristers (by delaying cases).'*

*'You know how long it takes the law to grind, the law is truly an ass and how the courts are run'.*

*'It is really frightening (agreement from others), people don't understand all that court process. I have often said; though he was such a shit, if I had my time again I don't*

*know if I would even agree (to going to court). I don't know if I would, simply because that opened such a can of worms that went on through 2001, 2002 and up to the beginning of this year in court, all different courts. Two and a half years of courts because of it.'*

### **Physical safety in the Court Building**

Courts are not only frightening in that the processes are difficult to follow. Research tells us that the actual layout of the courts and waiting areas are experienced by victim/witnesses as physically unsafe for women to be. Victims may face a number of problems both inside and outside the courts. Waiting may have to be done in a corridor where the accused is also waiting or in ill-equipped rooms. Even going to the bathroom may feel like 'running the gauntlet'.

*'It's such a horrible experience in court really because as soon as you walk in and you've got to go in the witness box and you know they just stare at you and you really feel like you can't control your bowels. You never lose that feeling.'*

*'They sit just in the corridors, so when you need to go to the loo, I would send (someone) down to look if he was there... The whole thing they do is, they all do this, the staring at you, the catching your eyes, you know that look that means, "When I get you home you'll be fucked". You know that look, where you're really going to wet yourself.'*

*'You're waiting to go into court, and you're all in the same area and you could pass him; I just think it is all really dodgy.'*

*'At (a London Crown Court), you have to send your lookouts, even when I wanted to go for a smoke.'*

*'(The Old Bailey witness service) is very good actually because you are on a totally different floor.'*

*'The witness room is like a waiting room with a coffee machine.'*

Once inside, the courtroom may feel no safer to the women. When the women went on the visit to look at the Specialist Domestic Violence Court, they noticed a number of important points:

*'(He's) on that diagonal in the corner; they give you little looks, you know. He was giving us nasty looks. The men (other defendants) were up there sitting in that dock. There were other people that never should have been in that court, were actually sitting waiting, so they were hearing everything. That shouldn't be allowed.'*

*'It is disruptive (other defendants being in court at the same time). It is bad enough seeing him without two or three other men waiting and looking at you like you are some kind of freak, someone who shopped them. Like, 'Here's another bitch who's shopped this poor guy.' They're all lumped together, those men in my eyes, and also it is very disruptive all the coming and going.'*

Another woman's experience of the physical reality of being in court:

*'He got up (after a successful appeal) and he actually walked by, and the man sitting there said, "You're shaking". It was actually very hot, it was that hot, but I kept my jumper on because I knew that he could see me and I didn't want him to see any of my flesh. He went free.'*

## **Court Orientations - Knowing Who's Who**

It has been documented both in North America and the UK that victims who are supported, feel informed about and a part of the court processes are more likely to proceed with the prosecution process. It is also known that victims who feel that they have been involved, consulted and listened to will regard the process more favourably no matter what the judicial outcome. Comments over the past year to ADVANCE by victim witnesses using the SDVC have included a number of positive responses about the Court personnel and the way they were given information (see the section above about the telephone interviews).

*'I think that every woman should be able to go in and visit that court first to see the layout because it is petrifying if you have never been in court before. It was helpful to be able to go in there when it was quiet.'*

*'Just to sit and watch a case, not a domestic violence case - that's a bit hairy - before you go. (It's useful) to walk around the empty court to feel your place, so that when you actually (get to court), that awful moment when you have to follow the guy into the court, you are not feeling that you are going to have diarrhoea because of the fear. You feel that you have control, at least you would know what to expect - where the judge would be, and that you'll be asked questions here (in the witness box) and he'll sort of be in your view behind his barrister. You'll be told all that and that's important. The nice thing at (a London) Crown Court is that you could walk around while it was empty.'*

*'We went to watch at the court and I learnt there; you see the procedure, what was going on. It was good'*

In the discussion group some of the women had had negative experiences in a range of courts.

*'Yeah, they don't label (seating) clearly so you don't know who they (court staff) are; that is the main thing I remember. It was confusing.'*

*'I didn't even know who my prosecutor was; they didn't even have my statement.'*

Court orientations can provide women with the knowledge that they need to feel more confident, and are actively encouraged by the advocates working with the women. However, they cannot temper the fear that violent men can induce by 'simply staring.'

*'I knew where he was standing but it was so frightening because his eyes were intimidating me.'*

## **Being Kept Informed**

Being informed is not only a necessity for women's satisfaction after going through and staying with the prosecution and the court system, no matter how long or arduous. It is often essential for her safety at all stages in the court process.

*'I thought the solicitors would be able to help me as well, but it doesn't feel like it; they never call me back.'*

*'I am speaking on behalf of maybe a lot of women here. The police, they should actually phone you up. When he got sentenced and again on the other one, I never even got a phone call. I had to phone the court myself and I was shaking.'*

*'They never tell you anything after the case; they never write to you or say anything.'*

*'After the case no one tells you. No one officially sends you a letter and says this is what happened, even when he was convicted.'*

*'Crown prosecution tell you nothing, I can't get anything from them. We don't know what we are doing; we don't know what barristers are going to do. The defence and CPS are using taxpayers' money so they should make an effort (to inform survivors).'*

*'I found out that morning when I walked out to Safeway's, I was shocked, he was standing there.'*

## **Sentencing the Offenders**

One of the women in the discussion group had experience of her partner being found guilty and sent on to the violence prevention programme:

*'It (the violence prevention programme) made him worse and I know lots of women in my situation and most of them say the same. I really think they learn tricks. He learnt lots of other tricks and much worse, playing mind games with me. I know some other women in my support group have agreed and said exactly the same, they learn, they pick them up, the really sneaky clever ones that have knives in your mind learn a lot.'*

*'I suppose it's like that syndrome that you put someone to prison for a very minor offence and they come out an expert.'*

## **Problems with Courts – other concerns**

A number of other concerns and criticisms of courts and criminal justice system in general were made by the women in the discussion. The comments show the strong feelings these women hold about a system that they have not felt able to trust.

*'It is so ham-fisted, these courts. I just think that organising things, you know they are so bureaucratic; they don't have any common sense. Anyone normal, an ordinary person, (would know that) you don't want this man near her.'*

*'Of a hundred cases, that go there (appeals court) of a similar sort and appealing against conviction, 90 per cent are upheld by the judges. That's so dodgy.'*

*'The bloody law is run by men and they do tend to sympathise with them (defendants). Even nice men will; there is always a touch of, "Well she's a woman..."'*

*'I think that anything that is done at home, whether it be domestic violence or child abuse that's the sneakiest, most lowly cowardly. It is to a greater extent protected by the legal hierarchy.'*

*'The police often do a lot of background work and the courts let them down. It's not the police that are at fault, they put a barrister there that had never done a domestic violence case, for his appeal against his conviction.'*

*'How can you leave your home if you live in a housing association flat and he has his name on the tenancy? Why should you give up your home, you're not the criminal? There are so many women who do this, women I know, they'll go into refuges and they've lost their homes.'*

*'He's going to be out there now on the rampage drinking alcohol as an excuse to come (back).'*

*'I have called the police so many times since August, they can't do anything. What am I to do, take the law into my own hands?'*

The ordeal that going to court can be for survivors of domestic violence was powerfully expressed by one of the women:

*'I was two and a half hours (on the stand). I don't know where the strength comes from; I don't know where it comes from.'*

### **What Standing Together has done about the issues raised in the Court consultations**

As a result of issues raised during this and earlier court consultations, Standing Together has taken a number of practical steps, and passed information on to our partner organisations, so that they can act upon the problems identified.

1. In March this year, we held a day of safety planning and safety auditing of the court building with all the victim witness support agencies who are signed up to the Court Protocol. This involved a detailed consideration of both hypothetical scenarios, and a physical walk through the court building, imagining ourselves in the shoes of a victim/witness before, during and after coming to the court. The proposals for ways of increasing safety were agreed and passed on to the Court Management Group, and to the Head of Legal Operations and building manager in the court. They responded to each proposal, and some changes were put in place at once.
2. Because of the women's concerns about there being several defendants sitting with their lawyers in the domestic violence court at the same time, waiting for their cases, it has now been limited to one.
3. The issue of mental health assessments for defendants has been discussed further with specialist officers at the court. Defendants in custody are able to access a specialist mental health worker at the court.
4. The victim/witness support agencies actively encourage women to come to the court before the case for an orientation visit.
5. The results of court hearings, both in terms of bail decisions and sentences, or re-arranged dates for hearings, are processed very quickly by the Standing Together

representative sitting in court every Thursday. The procedure that has been established and refined with experience, is as follows:

If the victim is being supported by either ADVANCE or Eaves Women's Aid, the worker will leave the courtroom and notify them of the result by phone, including bail conditions, details of adjournment or sentence.

For those victims who are not in contact with a support agency, the result form is faxed by the Witness Service to the relevant police (CSU) officer dealing with the case, and a police officer contacts the victim with the result.

Restraining Orders are photocopied and passed to the victim via the police or support agencies.

6. A number of the issues have been raised during the training we do with magistrates and police in the borough, and the experiences of survivors are used to give depth and realism to the training.
7. The national launch of the report of the first year of operation of the Specialist Domestic Violence Court - 'One Year On' - included information directly taken from survivors' feedback and concerns, and their positive comments about the differences the court had made. Our evaluations of the effectiveness of the Court are made up of monitoring figures, observations of the court in action, practitioners' feedback from all the partner agencies, and the views of survivors. All perspectives and sources of information are seen as essential. The evaluation information goes to government departments, and to other courts who are thinking of setting up specialist domestic violence courts.
8. A member of the Survivors Consultation 'core' Group has now become a Trustee and Director of Standing Together.

## **Conclusion**

As with previous consultations Standing Together has carried out with women survivors, their voices provide context, eloquence and experience. They strengthen the work of the partner agencies in West London who are trying to improve and make safer, in practical ways, the experience for survivors of using the justice system. They also complement and give depth and further detail to a number of pieces of academic research over the past three decades.

# Appendix 1

## Meeting Plan: Topics for discussion in the Consultation about the Domestic Violence Court

The questions covered in the group discussion were: (this is a brief version, as more information was given to the women whilst asking the questions, for example about bail, and the Court personnel).

1. What has been your contact with the Specialist Domestic Violence Court at West London Magistrates Court?

For example, awaiting the trial; as a witness in a trial; as a visitor with Standing Together  
OR

have you been to another Court?

have you been to the West London Court before the Specialist Court was set up?

2. Can you tell me one or two good things about the Specialist Domestic Violence Court?

3. Bail issues:

Do you know whether Bail was set in your case, and whether it was set by the Police or the Court?

Were Bail conditions satisfactory to you?

Who told you about the Bail conditions?

4. Your contact with Court personnel and victim/witness support agencies:

Can you tell me about your experiences of any of the following staff?

Reception; Security; Court Room Staff; Prosecutors; Magistrates; the Witness Service; Advocates from ADVANCE.

5. Was your partner or ex partner sentenced to a Violence Prevention Programme?

That is, a Probation order to attend a group to work on stopping him from using violence to get his own way in his relationship with you, or with a woman generally.

If so, have your needs been met by this programme?

Have you been offered support while he was on this programme?

6. What happened when the case was finished in Court? Who did you speak to, and was it helpful?

7. Would you go to Court again?

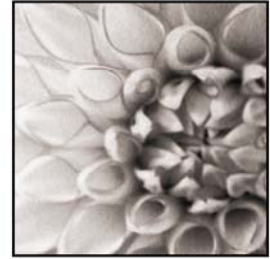
If not, what are the barriers to you going to Court again?

Would you recommend a friend in a similar position to go to Court?

8. What would be helpful and make you safer to go to Court?

# Chapter Three

## Consultation with Women from the Filipino Community February 2004



### Introduction

In recognition of the sizeable Filipino community living and working in Hammersmith and Fulham, and the well-established community Centre for Filipinos (CF) based in Fulham, Standing Together collaborated with the Centre early in 2004 in organising a discussion and consultation with women from the community about domestic violence issues.

Taking a slightly different approach from the consultations we have run with (known) survivors, for this consultation we agreed to invite to this discussion a number of Filipino women who were providing services and support to Filipino women in the borough, either as paid workers in hospitals and other health sites, or as volunteers and workers in community organisations within the Filipino community. Whilst we assumed that a number of the women who participated might themselves also be survivors (and this assumption was correct), they were asked to join this discussion group because of their understanding of the possible needs and barriers to seeking help that are being experienced by Filipino women living and working in the UK, whether temporarily or permanently. They would also be able to bring to the discussion the added dimension of their knowledge of the health service and other agencies and their ideas about how their agency's practice could be improved in relation to Filipino survivors of domestic violence.

The co-facilitators for this group were Carmila Legarda, a Filipino consultant working in the UK, and Peta Sissons, the Training and Information Officer at Standing Together, who had spent two months working on an EU funded project on Violence against Women and Children in the Philippines in 2003.

Early discussions were held with Maria Gonzalez, the Co-ordinator of the Centre for Filipinos, about both the issues facing women from the community in relation to domestic violence, and the best way of inviting women to take part in the discussion. The Centre staff and volunteers were very helpful in both organising and taking part in the discussion group. Domestic violence has been an issue that the Centre has taken on board in the past in order to raise awareness within the community.

### Practicalities

Because of the working and shift patterns of many Filipinos, the discussion was held on a Sunday afternoon, and a hot lunch was provided. Food is an important part of both work and community gatherings in the Philippines, and we were lucky enough to have the cooking skills of a woman involved with the community centre! We held the discussion in a meeting room attached to a church next to the centre, and it was a quiet and comfortable space.

A flier inviting participation (see Appendix 1) was widely distributed to nursing staff in the

hospitals in the borough, to organisations working with survivors of domestic violence, and to paid and unpaid workers in community organisations serving the Filipino community. Information about the consultation was also distributed by the Centre by word of mouth to Filipinos living and working in adjacent boroughs. A number of health service managers and senior nurses in the local hospital took responsibility for distributing the invitation to their staff. We considered placing the flier in Catholic churches in the area because attendance at church is high within the community, but felt that it would not be possible in the time available to meet the priest in every church in order to explain the consultation process.

Although two staff nurses had confirmed they wanted to take part, unfortunately in the end the group did not include health workers from the area. This was a disappointment because of the important role played by Filipino women in the NHS. We expected seven women to attend, and in the end, four Filipino women attended, one of whom was the co-facilitator who brought her own experience of supporting survivors.

It was a small group, but a very detailed and useful discussion was held, and the participants had experience, both professional and personal, of the issue in both the UK and the Philippines, which informed their practical ideas for change.

Because of our working assumption that there were likely to be survivors amongst those who volunteered to take part, we applied the same protocol and levels of confidentiality, safety and personal contact with the participants in advance of the session as we would do for a consultation with survivors. Disclosure of personal experience was certainly not an expectation of participants, but in fact, as so often in any group where the participants feel safe to do so, participants shared information based upon their own experiences.

### **The topics for discussion in the group**

Three main questions were posed for discussion in the group:

- What do you think Filipino women experiencing domestic violence might need from the police, from the health service, from the courts in the UK, and from the community?
- Can you identify anything that might prevent them getting what they need?
- What suggestions do you have about practical ways of overcoming these barriers, and providing information and services to Filipino survivors of domestic violence?

(See Appendix 1 for the Meeting Plan)

### **Abuse of domestic workers**

We decided not to consider the issue of abuse and exploitation experienced by Filipino women working as domestic workers experiencing abuse in the home from their employer – an important issue that has received attention by the media and the community, but outside the remit of Standing Together. This was made explicit in the invitation to join the discussion.

## **The context: some points about the Philippines and domestic violence**

In preparing for the discussion group, a number of assumptions and expectations about the issues for Filipino women were explored in advance by the co-facilitators and with the Co-ordinator of the Centre for Filipinos:

There is a range of situations for Filipino women living in the UK, and the group participants and the women they have worked with could come from any of these backgrounds:

- Women who have settled and have their families in the UK and intend to stay here for a number of years
- Women who came to the UK on the basis of marriage to British men
- Women who are the children of migrant workers who arrived several decades ago
- Women working in the UK as migrant workers for a limited period of time, often working in public service such as the health service, maintaining close links and economic ties with their families back home, expecting to return there. Often they are here without their husbands/partners, and have left their children in the Philippines with their families. They may well be the main or only source of income for their family back home. Because of their temporary status, they may not identify closely with or intend to integrate themselves into the UK community, and the presence of a well-identified Filipino community in London may be their main source of social and cultural support and information about their legal rights.
- There are others who are working temporarily or have settled in the UK, and whose husbands have joined them, but may not yet themselves have employment
- Another group is the domestic workers whose employment and immigration status are closely linked
- English is likely to be spoken by the majority of Filipino women with varying levels of fluency.

## **How domestic violence is viewed in the Philippines**

In relation to domestic violence, the expectations Filipino women experiencing domestic violence have of the criminal justice system and other people's responses to survivors in the UK will be influenced by their knowledge of the role of the police, courts and the community back in the Philippines, where:

- Domestic violence is widespread but under-reported
- The vast majority of domestic violence incidents are not reported to the police
- The community justice system is based upon mediation of disputes by a community leader, and is as far as many domestic violence cases get. A high level of injury is required before there is a trigger for a referral on to the criminal courts.
- Historically, domestic violence has consistently been blamed on the woman. Prior to a landmark ruling in 2004 by the Philippine Supreme Court, all Filipino women who killed their husbands in self-defence were considered murderers and were sentenced to death

or life imprisonment. The “Battered Woman Syndrome” has only recently been recognised as a defence by the Philippine Judiciary.

- There is no welfare support for single parents
- The family and marriage are powerful institutions, reinforced through the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Victim blaming is highly prevalent and common explanations for domestic violence, even amongst organisations doing very good work with survivors, range from domestic violence being ‘caused’ by alcohol (by perpetrator), poverty, underemployment, or unemployment, not enough food, and by the woman ‘nagging’ her partner. “ Keep quiet and put up with it”, “don’t upset your husband if you want to reduce the violence”, are common messages given to women.
- Initiatives and crisis services around domestic violence are often sustained by unpaid workers/volunteers, with scarce resources, and there are hardly any refuge spaces for women and children fleeing abuse.
- Women survivors may be ‘rescued’ from a dangerous situation by neighbours, but the lack of other options – housing and economic – mean that they may have to return within a few days, particularly to look after their children.
- There is very little work done with perpetrators of domestic violence by Probation or others, for example in order to assess and manage risk, or to carry out re-education violence prevention work with domestic violence offenders. Prison is the only option for the relatively small number of perpetrators who are prosecuted.

Sentencing domestic violence offenders with imprisonment penalises the victim, because the main source of income for the family effectively vanishes whilst the husband serves his prison sentence.

### **Barriers to reporting**

Discussion with key informants from the Filipino community, and the research carried out by one of the facilitators in the Philippines, highlighted a number of cultural and legal issues that might affect Filipino women’s likelihood of reporting domestic violence, and their use and expectations of a range of agencies in the UK:

- Lack of public education and general awareness about the issue of domestic violence
- Lack of understanding that the end of violent behaviour does not necessarily mean the end of the marriage
- The influence of the Catholic church on views of marriage and divorce
- Some messages from religion – “blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek”, “it is better to suffer than to sin...”
- Divorce is not legal in the Philippines
- The concept of shame (Hiya), which we explored during the discussion (see below)
- Self-blame by survivors
- Blame from ‘support systems’ – “you must stop nagging your husband, you should do your duty to him...”

- Lack of education for both men and women
- Lack of recognition about the human rights and responsibilities of each partner
- Blaming the violence on high levels of alcohol consumption and “forgiving” the husband
- Staying and suffering “for the sake of the children”
- Staying and suffering because the husband sends money to her family in the Philippines
- Fear of being deported if the husband is imprisoned.

## **The results of the discussion**

### **Women’s Needs**

#### **Question 1: What do you think Filipino women experiencing domestic violence might need from the police, from the health service, from the courts in the UK, and from the community?**

The following points were made in answer to this first question. Some of the women’s words are then included to expand the points further:

#### **What Filipino women may need from all agencies, and from their community:**

The group raised the importance of being able to disclose domestic violence to, and ask for help from, other members of the Filipino community. They also talked about the quality of the response they thought survivors would need from any agency they approached.

These include:

Reassurance that she is correct in reporting domestic violence, and to feel that she is not alone

- Contact with those who understand what she is going through, who will offer a sympathetic ear, space to talk about the experience, and who will listen carefully
- Counselling
- Support that confronts or challenges the husband

Interestingly, the needs expressed by the women in the group are very similar to those that emerged in Dr. Liz Kelly’s work consulting survivors in Hammersmith & Fulham in the late 1980s. This led to the useful model of the “Process of Help Seeking” for victims of domestic violence – a model which has informed inter-agency work in the borough for many years, and which emphasises the importance to survivors of being listened to and believed, as well as the practical help offered.

#### **What they need from the Police:**

- The police doctor to be asked to come to her home to document the injuries
- Someone to interpret her needs to the police in the first place, so that she can make the 999 call

- The police should not go away if they are called and the woman does not talk to them – she may need an interpreter now
- To be informed of her rights to be in this country, eg if she leaves her abusive partner
- However, the police should keep the immigration issues and domestic violence as separate issues and should make it clear to the woman at the time that she is not at risk of being deported if she reports her husband to the police.

### **On the need for interpreters**

*'If a woman is abused or hurt but she still doesn't like to call the police, maybe its because she cannot explain herself, so they need to arrange an interpreter to speak up for her, and to come as soon as possible. She has been hurt, she is scared, she needs to call the police, but let's say the police cannot make proper communication with her. If she called the police but she cannot talk, the police shouldn't go away, they should acknowledge there's something wrong, that's why she called.'*

### **Immigration status and experience of racism**

*'Another barrier for Filipino woman stopping Filipino women calling the police would be if their immigration status in the country was not secure. We have seen that happen many, many times, so they are worried that the marriage will break down (and they will lose their right to stay).'*

*'When we (Centre for Filipinos) do get somebody come to us for help, we explain the law and what could happen, and we find out all the details about that person's immigration status as well. We do say, if you're experiencing domestic violence, it is your decision what to do, but we are supportive. Clearly it is such a serious thing, your own life and health is at risk, so we say: don't hesitate to call the police and report it.'*

*'If she is insecure in her immigration status, clearly the police also have to know what the immigration law states about such things, what the compassionate grounds may be, and to be supportive about that as well. They should not really tie the two together, if it is domestic violence that is happening, then the police should take care of that, because they are not immigration police anyway.'*

### **What they need from health professionals:**

- GPs should ask probing questions and be able to recommend support such as counsellors, social workers. However, this must be handled sensitively, and the GP/Doctor/person asking has to be well trained and know what to do next, and should not make assumptions.
- GPs should arrange an interpreter if the woman's English is not fluent
- GPs should suggest she comes back for another visit with a trusted friend to talk further about the issue.

## On disclosing domestic violence to GPs

*'You don't want people to start looking at you and making conclusions about what happened to you, so you don't want your GP to make automatic assumptions about it. I think the questions about domestic violence should be asked because it will then encourage the person if they are experiencing domestic violence to speak out, but the question just has to be very sensitive.'*

## What the women said was not needed by Filipino women:

- To be told to *"just stick it out..."*
- The refuge house was noisy and unhygienic, she couldn't stay so she returned home
- Police were called and told her husband if he did it again he would be taken away, but they didn't arrest him the second time and she was placed in a refuge
- Racism had been experienced from the police, so Filipinos may not be prepared to ask for help from them
- A lesbian's experience: during the period of abuse she felt she could not go to the police. She was afraid of being 'outed', and afraid of having her name down on the police records, which might harm her future.

## Challenging the attitudes within the Filipino community about domestic violence

One of the facilitators talked about her recent experience working on domestic violence in the Philippines:

*'People we worked with in the Philippines were saying that domestic violence is caused by women nagging, poverty, unemployment and drink, those were the four things people said to us were the main causes. We had a long discussion with many people and talked about the exercise of power and control, that this is not about women nagging, that the perpetrator is responsible for what they do. The response was almost always: that is an interesting and very different way of looking at the problem. But the messages that survivors were receiving from many in their communities in the Philippines was "just keep quiet, if you keep quiet it won't give the husband an excuse for doing what he is doing". They were not saying that what the husbands were doing was right, but they were saying "if you keep quiet and put up with what is happening – don't challenge him about money, don't challenge him about food, don't challenge him about being out all night - then you won't get hit".'*

*'The message that gives survivors is that they are responsible for what is happening to them, and as such it is a damaging message, so I think a key message is for people to be clear about who is doing what to whom, who is responsible for what is happening.'*

### **One woman's story and views about experiencing domestic violence in the Philippines:**

One of the women in the discussion group had left the Philippines and could not go back because of domestic violence. She ran away in the middle of the night. Nobody helped her, only the neighbours. She said that sometimes if you run to the neighbours they just want some gossip from you and from your husband, they just want to know what was happening. Sometimes they would push you to go back to your husband. She did not agree when people say that the woman is nagging, because she didn't have to say anything to her husband: as long as he came in through the door he would punch her.

*'If my ex-husband and I were fighting he would use some abuse and use some violence to me and then he would say to me that he will kill me. So I told him – okay if you kill me don't give me life, make sure I am dead, otherwise I'm the one whose going to kill you, I don't mind even if I go to the jail, this is what I told him. That is the motto, this is what we said all the time in the Philippines.'*

Facilitator: 'You must have been very frightened to say that.'

*'Yes, he is very violent, until now, that it why I am staying here, I cannot go home because he is threatening me that he will kill me, I don't know what to do, I am still stuck here.'*

In the Philippines there is a problem for women migrant workers who have stayed abroad and have separated from their Filipino husbands in the Philippines. The women are often scared to go home for a holiday because their husbands threaten and may hurt them.

## **Barriers To Help**

### **Question 2: What are some of the barriers that may prevent Filipino Women (experiencing domestic violence) getting the help they need?**

#### **From the POLICE?**

The extent to which a Filipino woman is integrated into UK society, and a related lack of knowledge about their rights in relation to the police and justice system, were seen as possible barriers preventing women calling the police:

*'Not knowing what the police can and will do for you'.*

*'I think if you are a person who has been here a while, and maybe really integrating into society so that you are aware, then yes, you might call the police. But there are also women who may have been here a while but are still not so clear of their rights, and then there are the newcomers who will definitely not know. If you haven't integrated then you are not aware of your rights and what's available.'*

A key theme during the discussion about barriers was that of shame, in particular the shame and dishonour of telling the police about 'private' and secret family matters. It was felt that many would feel a strong desire to keep the matter within the Filipino community. This is explored further below.

Other barriers identified were: immigration status, language barriers, racism, and previous bad experiences of calling the police, a concern about whether the police understand and are sensitive to the experience and cultural issues for Filipino women.

### **From the COURTS?**

Some members of the group knew about the Specialist Domestic Violence Court in this borough. There was concern about the public exposure involved in going to court, and about the fact that the prosecution process has a momentum that may not be expected.

One experience we had last year with a Filipino woman whose case went to court. She was so surprised that it happened that way and in fact she didn't want it to go to court. She wanted the case stopped but it was out of her hands already and her reaction was that she was surprised that it was going to that level. She wanted to give her husband another chance and was worried that reconciliation was not going to be possible after this (court case). She felt, okay it has gone through the system already, she had experienced not living with the husband, and of course she started to miss him and thought what had happened wasn't so bad, so she wanted to rewind it if it was possible, and didn't want to pursue the courts anymore.

The fear of even greater public exposure as a result of going to court, and the possibility of cases getting into the newspaper, were seen as barriers for Filipino women, and the issue of public shame was raised again by the group.

### **Interventions with perpetrators**

The impact of going to court on the future of the relationship was a key concern, and the following questions were raised:

Is reconciliation with the abusive husband/partner possible after the court process?

Does this mean divorce and the end of relationship? Do women know about the violence prevention programme for perpetrators (to help them stop the abuse)?

Fear was expressed about what would happen to the husband/partner as a result of going to court:

*'It's another underlying barrier isn't it, because there is a belief that the husband or partner will change in some way, after going through all that the idea that there may be a reconciliation at some point, there is still this hope.'*

We discussed why we focus in Hammersmith and Fulham on the use of violence prevention programmes as a way of stopping the perpetrators doing what they are doing. This is in recognition of what many survivors say they want too, for the perpetrators to stop what they were doing and a chance of having their partner back if they feel he is not going to be abusive any more:

*'People feel that if they went to the police and the police said that they are going to try and work on it, a Filipino woman will worry about the end of the marriage. Especially with the Filipino values of Hiya and no divorce, she will need someone to explain to her the fact that the perpetrator can work on stopping the behaviour but not necessarily stopping the relationship. Historically in Filipino culture, the two are not necessarily seen as separate things. Sometimes you see it as – well this is the end of my marriage because I have now reported my husband to the police.'*

### **From the HEALTH SERVICE?**

It was felt that there would be fewer barriers for Filipino survivors going to the GP than the police:

*'I think that GPs would be the most convenient port of call, the easiest compared to police and the courts, because with the GP you have a relationship with them about your health and well being, so it would be logical that you could tell your doctor if you didn't want to tell a stranger or anybody else.'*

*'I think that in the Filipino community the GP doesn't have the same stigma of authority that the police would have, so her immigration status wouldn't come into it. As a Filipino you are more likely to talk to your GP if you are given the time because you won't fear that immigration status will get in the way.'*

Shortage of time for GPs to talk to patients could be a barrier in other ways:

*'Because you do feel like you are being processed when you go and see your GP, and if you are suffering from domestic violence, if you are suffering from any trauma and you see the queue outside you just don't feel that you can talk.'*

*'What could stop you from talking to a GP could be if your GP was a guy. It could be difficult to talk about it, you know, because if it was a woman doctor, it would be easier to say it was a personal problem.'*

Other concerns included the need for interpreters in the Health Service who can work with the complex issues of domestic violence, and transport for disabled patients who are experiencing domestic violence.

### **From OTHER sources – including the Filipino community**

What women might need from the Filipino community itself, from Filipino support agencies, and from their family here and in the Philippines emerged as an important theme in the discussion about barriers and was picked up again later in discussing some possible solutions.

### **The concept of shame – Hiya**

The concept of Hiya or shame, was one that we discussed at some length in the group and which the women thought had an impact at several levels upon Filipino women experiencing domestic violence and trying to decide whether to seek help in the UK. The group members explained that the concept of Hiya is a strong cultural value for the Filipino community:

*'The cultural value of Hiya – it's embarrassing its shameful, and Hiya actually drives us with our values. One of the worst things you can actually tell someone is: "you have no shame, you do what you like without any concern for other people..." I think perhaps the shame could be a bigger factor (in domestic violence cases).'*

*'There are almost two types of shame (in relation to domestic violence) aren't there? The personal shame, and then there is the shame towards the Filipino community.'*

They spoke about the fear of being judged by other women in the community:

*'(As an adviser) I've experienced - not from the woman experiencing the violence themselves but from other Filipino women who know that these problems happen - those women thinking that it is embarrassing and it is a stigma for Filipino women to call the police, and brings shame upon the community.'*

They reflected upon how current concerns about the public image of the Filipino community might become a barrier for survivors needing to disclose domestic violence and seek help:

The links with the extended family, and fears about the impact, economic and otherwise, of exposing domestic violence on the family back in the Philippines was raised:

*'What's stopping women from speaking out about domestic violence is that they have families in the Philippines who expect that they are happily married here, that it's working out and that you are happy.'*

*'Yes, and it is also related to shame, they would be ashamed to let their families in the Philippines know that such a thing has happened to them, or such a thing is happening now.'*

*'Following on from that I know a Filipino woman who was being abused by her husband but was sending money home, so she didn't want to say anything because her family were all dependent upon her, so she thought she would sacrifice herself for her family.'*

*'And I think that this is part of the training that was talked about earlier, if the GPs and the police are trained to realise that this idea of shame is a deep-rooted issue for Filipinos, then the way that they are posing questions needs to be covered in training. So they can understand that these are very sensitive issues for the individual woman.'*

#### **Other barriers identified included:**

#### **Feeding the stereotypes**

Fear of feeding in to the common public stereotypes of Filipino women:

*'The image of the Filipino community is a big thing for other Filipinos here in the UK. There are certain stereotypes of Filipino women as being obedient and subservient, as women who have come to the UK through mail order agencies. This has been written about and documentaries have been made. Because of this, some women in*

*the Filipino community think that it is lowering our image in this country, particularly if you think that in the Philippines some people are already saying domestic violence brings shame. Over here in the UK, where there are even fewer Filipinos and it is a smaller community, the stigma is even worse when it happens.'*

*'An individual woman will be aware that there is stereotyping going on, and that's what I was also referring to earlier about the negative side of things, that people make certain judgements, because the stereotyping is out there, and it does affect women in speaking up.'*

### **Barriers for lesbians experiencing domestic violence**

*'It is important to make sure that it is called domestic violence, regardless of the gender of your partner. It applies to both lesbian and heterosexual relationships.'*

*'I had a call from a lesbian in an abusive relationship who said "but my partner is another women, it is not a man", because most people have this assumption that it is always a man who is the perpetrator and if it is the same sex relationship then it doesn't count.'*

### **The important influence of the Catholic Church**

There is no divorce in the Philippines. For women living in the UK, divorce is available in the UK but is not recognised in the Philippines. It is possible that this could lead some Filipino women living in the UK, and married to non-Filipino men, to believe that the divorce rights available under UK law does not apply to them.

## **Practical Solutions**

### **Question 3: What suggestions do you have about practical ways of overcoming these barriers, and providing information and services to Filipino survivors of domestic violence?**

The women in the group suggested many practical ways in which the Filipino community in the UK, and the key agencies of police, health and the courts could address the concerns of Filipino survivors of domestic violence.

#### **What can the community of Filipinos do?**

Recognising that the most likely first place women would go to talk about domestic violence would be to other Filipinos, we focused on the important question of how to develop and enhance the capacity of the community to respond well and safely to anyone who discloses to them.

The Filipino facilitator asked:

*'It has been said already that the first place that Filipino women experiencing abuse go to may be the Centre for Filipinos (CF), or the organisation 'Filipino'. Given that,*

*what can we do as a Filipino community to help when someone approaches us? And what can we do to make sure that we know exactly what we need to do to help, for example in terms of whether we are giving them the right information, advice and support? So in terms of what our community can offer before she goes to the police, or to the health service, what can we do?’*

The group produced a checklist of some **action points**:

- Tell women there is a place they can go to ask for help, such as the Centre for Filipinos
- Let survivors know their rights
- Improve our knowledge of the facts ourselves as a community, and how to help survivors
- Produce a user-friendly information sheet in Tagalog and English to be distributed within and outside London, through Filipino organisations
- Use Filipino newspapers and the Filipino TV channel to place awareness-raising articles and useful phone numbers
- Use the community billboard as part of a public service announcement to talk about domestic violence and say: contact the Centre for Filipinos for help
- Carry out awareness raising within the community, and provide other Filipinos with good practice ideas for how to help
- Get key messages out about domestic violence, such as: “It’s not your fault” and “It happens regardless of gender and sexuality”
- Provide information about services for abusive men to help them stop
- Encourage Filipino men to start talking to men in their community in order to challenge abusive behaviour and beliefs, and help to stop domestic violence
- Talk to the Priests – find out what is their approach now, and hold a dialogue with them, followed by training.

The group was also concerned about the situation for women outside London:

*‘There are even fewer support services within the Filipino community out there in the rest of the country, where people can feel more isolated and vulnerable.’*

## **Friends ad Family**

In relation to good practice by friends, neighbours and family members, the facilitators suggested that:

*‘One of the purposes here might be to say to the members of the Filipino community that if you have a friend who approaches you and tells you that she is experiencing abuse, these are some of the good things you could do to help, and here is some of the information you could pass on to her. How else do we know what is good practice in responding to a friend say who comes forward? As you said earlier, women don’t want to be told, ‘you must do this, you must do that,’ if they are not ready to do it. So if we had something which tells members of the community that a good, safe response might be a, b, and c... do you think that that sort of thing might be useful? We are*

*talking here about much more than information about legal rights - it is about good practice.'*

The women agreed with this:

*'Yes, I think that there is the awareness-raising component of the issue of domestic violence that needs to get out there. We need Filipino women (who hold) certain religious convictions to stop being automatically judgemental about those who are surviving abuse, and to stop saying things like: go back to your husband. This requires more public education, not just giving information. However, providing information and rights awareness of their rights is the more immediate thing you want to bring out there into the Filipino community, so that people will use those steps and those services if people go to them for help.'*

*'We need to get messages out to survivors, to say you are not to blame, it is not your fault, there are agencies that can help you, you are not alone. Also a message about working on the (abusive) behaviour and not necessarily ending the relationship.'*

### **The role of Priests in the community**

Given the importance of the church for many Filipinos, and the role of the priests, the following suggestion was made:

*'I wonder whether it could also be one way of communicating the information to our Community, we have a number of Filipino priests based here in London. I know that people go to priests when they have problems and the majority of these priests are men and Catholic.'*

*'There is an assumption in the Catholic Church about the sanctity of marriage, but I don't know what the priests' approach would be if women who are in that situation go to them with problems like domestic violence. What is their priority – the women's well-being or the sanctity of marriage? It would be good to talk to them, hold a dialogue first and then offer training...and for all I know they may be very progressive.'*

### **Awareness campaigns**

Other suggestions the women made were for awareness raising weeks run by the local police, with banners etc on the street, geared towards the Filipino community:

*'They could focus on key messages such as: your immigration status will be treated as a different issue to the domestic violence issue, the fact that you are looking at changing the behaviour, not ending the relationship, you know those sort of key messages, and the police can then be seen as a more user- friendly port of call for Filipino women, rather than the last resort.'*

It was felt that there was a need for both translation of materials and content directed at the Filipino community because:

*'Sometimes there is a tendency for Filipinos to think – that is only for British people, that's not for us.'*

## **Practical Suggestions for Overcoming Barriers in Relation to Agencies**

### **The Police**

Raise police officers' understanding of specific cultural concerns for Filipino women experiencing domestic violence in the UK. For example: Hiya/shame, and the woman's fear of being deported, which can lead to victims not reporting the husband to the police, or not proceeding with the domestic violence charge.

The local police also need to know that there is an organisation in the borough - the Centre for Filipinos - that works with Filipino women.

### **Health Service**

Posters and leaflets translated into Tagalog and with a focus on Filipino women's concerns

### **Courts**

Information is needed about what support and intervention is available for abusive men, for women, and for women in an abusive lesbian relationship.

### **Work with domestic violence offenders/perpetrators**

In the Philippines, there is very little work being done with abusive men to re-educate them in relation to their abusive behaviour. If a case does get as far as the courts, and that is much rarer than in the UK, then prison is the likely sentence. There are some Probation officers supervising domestic violence offenders, but they do not appear to be working to any systematic curriculum or analysis, or running group programmes.

The women in the discussion group felt that it was important to publicise the fact that an optional sentence in the UK is to attend a violence prevention programme such as the Probation Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme in London and elsewhere.

*'We need to let Filipino women know that going through the police and the courts doesn't automatically mean there has to be a divorce, and it doesn't automatically mean that their relationship is going to end. That's really up to the perpetrator whether he stops doing what he is doing but there is help available, so we need to supply information about interventions with the perpetrators, re-education, violence prevention programmes, work with abusive men, and what's available for abusive men.'*

## **Perpetrators work in the Philippines**

One of the facilitators had spent time last year learning about a project doing innovative work with perpetrators of domestic violence.

*'In the Philippines a group of men are working with other men in their community to train them in how to challenge domestic violence, and informing them that it wasn't the women's fault, it was the abusers fault. They have an organisation based in Davao City, Mindanao called Mr GAD – Men's Responsibility for Gender And Development. It is a very well run organisation where doctors and community workers work with men in the community to enable them to talk to other men about violence in their relationships. They started from within a hospital and they said – Let's get this community of men to say to other men- their neighbours, brothers, fathers, and friends - stop, don't do it it's not acceptable.'*

*'I am wondering, given that you have a number of Filipino men living here to, if there is something that could be done here to raise this idea with those men, about talking to other Filipino men to say it's not acceptable behaviour.'*

*'Many of the women we spoke to in the Philippines said – I'm going to get my husband to do some work like that!'*

*'MR GAD works closely with women's organisations but they say it's our responsibility as men to talk to other men. They keep other women's organisations working with survivors informed about what they do. I thought that was very exciting initiative. It doesn't happen in the UK that the men get together in informal peer groups and talk to each other about stopping their violence. It would be breakthrough if it did.'*

## **Inter agency issues – lack of knowledge about roles and services of Centre for Filipinos**

*'One of the difficulties we have experienced here (in the Centre for Filipino) is liaising with the different Agencies about domestic violence. For example, not so long ago we received a referral from one agency that should have actually been doing their job of finding a place for the Filipino woman themselves. I am not sure what happened, but they sent her here, in fact a discussion is going to take place between that agency and our organisation, because our job is to make sure that people who have rights of access to services and benefits get them because they have a right to them, and that agencies don't think that just because there is a Filipino organisation, and this is a Filipino woman, so they'll take care of her. We are not a refuge, so I think information about each other's agencies, what we do and what services we can provide has to be clear.'*

## **Suggestions made later**

Since the discussion with the Filipino women took place, the Filipino co-facilitator and one of the women who took part have reflected on the discussion, and made further practical suggestions and comments about the Filipino cultural dimension. These are included below.

### **Some of the additional barriers identified for Filipino women are:**

- Low self-esteem
- Lack of assertive behaviour for many Filipino women
- Low levels of knowledge around basic human rights
- Low levels of knowledge about basic rights and responsibilities
- Little understanding of how police, health and other authorities work. Many Filipinos believe that such services exist only for British people, and not for migrant workers or even permanent residents from the Philippines.

### **Some further ideas for action are:**

- A Freephone number that a woman can phone for advice and support preferably with a Filipino speaker
- Awareness that reporting domestic violence will not affect her statutory rights, i.e. she will not be deported
- Education and awareness of the high incidence of domestic violence generally
- Education and understanding that the distinction between end of violent behaviour does not necessarily mean the end of the marriage
- Raising awareness through organising art and cultural events, such as the Vagina Monologues, which raised awareness and funds to improve education around domestic violence not only in the Philippines but also in all major cities around the world.

## **Health**

GPs should ask for an interpreter if the English is not fluent or if he/she is not getting a logical flow of events GP should suggest another visit with a friend she trusts to talk with him again.

**Priests** could give seminars to men about how to be a good husband and father and what it means to be a man in the 21st century.

## **Conclusion**

This was a very interesting discussion, and raised important issues about the role the community – friends, neighbours, extended family – can play in supporting survivor, opening doors to further help, and challenging perpetrators. Ideas about how to build the capacity of the Filipino community to do so can inspire work with many other communities, and we are grateful to the Filipino women who shared their views and enthusiasm with Standing Together.

# Appendix 1

## Meeting Plan for Consultation with Filipino Women, February 2004

### Purpose

We would like to discuss three main questions with you:

- ❑ What do you think Filipino women experiencing domestic violence might **need** from the health service, and from the police and the courts in the UK?
- ❑ Can you identify anything that might **prevent** them getting what they need?
- ❑ What suggestions do you have about **practical ways** of overcoming these barriers, and providing information and services to Filipino survivors of domestic violence?

We will be focusing on domestic violence from a partner/husband or ex, rather than from an employer.

### Timetable

The session is to last two and a half hours, and points made will be recorded on flipcharts, and taped if agreed. Participants arrive, welcome, eat lunch together.

Setting up:

- ❑ Introductions (anonymity if preferred)
- ❑ Contract for the day – Confidentiality, assumption about there being survivors present.
- ❑ Ask them to say eg have they come across clients (Filipino or others) experiencing domestic violence?
- ❑ What Standing Together against Domestic Violence does, why running consultations, how we have used info from consultation in past and how we will use the info from today
- ❑ Tell them about the core survivors group
- ❑ Taping the session if agreed
- ❑ Language, interpreting and defining the terms used
- ❑ Some issues observed by the facilitator during her work in the Philippines on domestic violence
- ❑ The focus of today. Do they also have things they would also like to cover or information they need?

Information to be provided about domestic violence services in West London and Standing Together and its health and police/court work.

**Discussion questions:**

**1. What do Filipino survivors need from:**

- i. **Health services**
- ii. **Police and courts**
- iii. **Others**

**2. What might be barriers to them asking for and receiving help, and disclosing domestic violence?**

**3. What might be some practical ways of overcoming those barriers?**

Any other information they want or issues they want to raise. Tea, thanks, vouchers and farewell.

## Appendix 2

The flier distributed to workers in hospitals and to community organisations

# STANDING together

against domestic violence

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING THE FILIPINO COMMUNITY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?**

- **Would you like to take part in a discussion group to help improve the responses to survivors of domestic violence?**
- **Are you a Filipino woman working in the Health Service, or a volunteer or worker in a Filipino community organisation?**
- **Do you have practical experience of working with survivors of domestic violence and/or views about what support and information is needed by Filipino women survivors of domestic violence living in Britain?**

**If so, we would like to invite you to take part in a small discussion group (women only) to be held on Sunday February 29th** in the afternoon, in West London. It will last for about three hours, including time for food.

**This information will be used to inform the key agencies working with survivors of domestic violence in Hammersmith & Fulham.**

### **What will be discussed?**

We will explore Filipino women domestic violence survivors' expectations and needs of the health services, the police and the courts. We are also keen to hear your ideas about how to overcome any barriers you think may currently prevent Filipino women from seeking help. When we talk about domestic violence, we mean 'intimate partner' abuse, where a woman is experiencing physical, emotional, financial or other forms of abusive and controlling behaviour from a partner or ex-partner. *Although the issue of abuse of domestic workers by their employers is a very serious one that affects a number of Filipino women, it is not the subject for this discussion group.*

The discussion group will be entirely confidential and no names will be used.

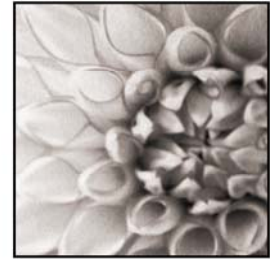
### **What next?**

The discussion group will have a limited number of places, so if you are interested in taking part, or would like to find out more before deciding, please contact Standing Together as soon as possible, and by mid-February if possible. Contact details below. We will then provide those who agree to take part with a written confirmation with details of the venue and time, and the sorts of issue to be covered in the discussion. Please let us know how and when we can contact you confidentially. Filipino food will be provided, and childcare and transport costs paid to and from the venue.

A Tagalog interpreter can be provided (Please request in advance).

# Chapter Four

## Influencing Government: Women's National Commission Domestic Violence consultation with women survivors of domestic violence.



In the middle of 2003, the Government set out to consult, for the first time, with survivors of domestic violence about the proposals for new domestic violence legislation contained in the consultation paper 'Safety and Justice'. The Women's National Commission (WNC) organised this for the Government, and they sought the advice of Standing Together in designing and carrying out the process, because of the good practice developed by Standing Together during consultations in Hammersmith and Fulham over the past few years. Members of the Standing Together Survivors Consultation Group were able to attend the 'Safety and Justice' consultation in London and felt very positively about their experience being valued at the highest levels in Government. As a partnership, we were pleased to be able to build upon our local consultations and to influence the way the national consultation was carried out, and to share our experience and protocols.

The consultation exercise was a national initiative that involved one hundred women who had experienced domestic violence, and it has been written up in detail in the report *Unlocking the Secret (published by DTI/WNC, HMSO 2003)*. The stated aims of the consultation were:

- *To present the government's proposals and build support from stakeholders*
- *To get feedback on the proposals to make sure they are workable solutions to real problems*
- *To find out if we have missed any key proposals.*

For Standing Together, the purpose of becoming involved in this consultation exercise was two-fold. The main aim was to ensure that the authentic views of women survivors of domestic violence were recorded, so that this information could be fed in to the Government's domestic violence consultation paper. This exercise also helped Standing Together shape our partnership's consultative response to this important paper. From listening directly to survivors' accounts, the group was able to work in a supportive and collaborative manner to help identify gaps in the current system and suggest what improvements could be made.

Nic Hunter and Victoria Hill from Standing Together attended the consultation on July 15 2003, with two women survivors of domestic violence. Sally Steadman from ADVANCE and Bhupinder Virdee from DVIP also attended.

## **Issues Debated**

It was important that all participants were able to share their experiences and thoughts with the consultation group. There was a wide-ranging debate on issues around women's and children's safety and justice; the benefits of inter-agency and partnership working; what could be done to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their behaviour, and whether there should be a specific criminal offence of domestic violence on the statute book.

In the July session, amongst the issues considered by the participants to be a priority to be addressed by the government were: the widely experienced problems with bail and licence conditions (such as enforcement, communication and how these are devised in order to ensure safety), and how the progress of the case is communicated to the victim. The survivors themselves suggested that a way forward would be to ensure that there is a named contact at the Police Station who can ensure that the woman is always up to date with the offender's movements and case progress. In addition, communication channels across the criminal justice system could be improved if the deadline dates for pre-sentence report submission was extended, as this would help provide the depth of communication and liaison that is needed, so that all relevant information can be properly assessed by the courts.

The complex issues of child contact and the links between the civil and criminal courts were also considered as areas that needed to be changed. Child contact visits should be properly supervised by skilled staff, so that the child is protected. The group welcomed the proposals around improving education to young people about relationship skills as this would hopefully work as a preventative tool. Health screening of domestic violence was also regarded as a positive proactive step, but gaps in health provision for domestic violence victims were identified, in particular the availability of suitable counselling services for the diverse range of people that have experienced abusive relationships.

## **Some observations on the consultation process and lessons learnt**

- The time allowed for preparing for the consultation, contacting women and acknowledging the practical realities for single parents was not felt to be realistic. Organisations working with survivors may want to spend time talking with the women beforehand to help them feel empowered to take part.
- We know from our own area that it takes a great deal of work to contact and recruit women survivors to take part in discussion groups. Many, many individuals have to be spoken to directly in order to get together a small group, and the process of contacting women who may not be safe at the moment can be complicated and labour-intensive. Setting up an inclusive process is valuable and cannot be rushed. It is also a heavy demand on the limited resources of voluntary sector organisations.
- For the women who take part, wherever they are in the process of surviving and recovering from domestic violence, speaking out in front of others can produce a strong reaction. They therefore have the right to expect support after the consultation from the agencies they know or, if previously not supported, from the ones they choose to make contact with. The Government consultation has not provided financial resources for follow-up support to be available when women need it, for example from advocacy services or Women's Aid.

- The size of the group (approximately 20 women) for the WNC consultation Standing Together attended may have been too large for some to feel able to speak out, however carefully the facilitators encourage participation.

This national consultation initiative was an important innovation for the Government, and we hope that it will be a process that continues as domestic violence policy and legislation evolves on this issue, and that the voices of experience of survivors will ring loudly in the Government's ears.

# Appendix 1

## Background Paper on Safety and Justice Consultation, 2003

The WNC circulated the following paper to provide information about the Government consultation:

### Objectives

- To present the government's proposals and build support from stakeholders
- To get feedback on the proposals to make sure they are workable solutions to real problems
- To find out if we have missed any key proposals.

With the workshops, we are above all concerned with the second and third of these objectives: to ascertain from people who have suffered domestic violence whether the proposed measures would help, and whether there are additional measures we should consider. Clearly establishing this in group discussions may involve posing a number of yes/no questions and walking through the experiences of one of the victims to identify the points at which more could have been done for them. We would like each report and the final summary report to give as clear an indication as possible of the group consensus (as well as any dissenting views) on these issues.

### Background

*What is domestic violence?*

The Home Office defines domestic violence as:

*“Any violence between current and former partners in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever the violence occurs. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse.”*

Some Government agencies and parts of the voluntary sector use slightly different definitions to fit their particular needs. For example, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) definition includes other family members as well as partners; and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) definition includes any criminal offence arising out of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse between current or former partners or family members.

*How prevalent is domestic violence?*

Incidents of domestic violence are extremely common: it accounts for nearly a quarter of all recorded violent crime. Victims are likely to suffer repeated incidents of the crime before they seek and get effective protection and support.

We know that:

- one in four women and one in six men will be a victim of domestic violence in their lifetime;<sup>1</sup>
- one incident of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute;<sup>2</sup>
- domestic violence has the highest rate of repeat victimisation of any crime;<sup>3</sup>
- on average two women per week are killed by a male partner or former partner; nearly half of all female murder victims are killed by a partner or ex-partner;<sup>4</sup>
- of all murders of men, about 8% are murders in a domestic context (about 30 men are killed by a female partner or former partner each year – but some of these may be in self defence following a history of abuse by their partner);<sup>5</sup>
- among women, risks of domestic violence do not differ significantly by ethnic origin;<sup>6</sup>
- people in the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) communities experience domestic violence in a similar proportion to the rest of the population (about one in four);<sup>7</sup>
- more than a third of children in a violent home know what is happening. That figure rises to up to a half if the violence is repeated.<sup>8</sup> Children may attempt to stop the violence and so put themselves at risk.<sup>9</sup>
- domestic violence occurs across society, regardless of gender, race, sexuality, wealth and geography.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Flood-Page and Joanna Taylor (eds.), *Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002: Supplementary Volume* (London: Home Office, 200s), p. 55.

<sup>1</sup> Catriona Mirrlees-Black, *Findings from a new British Crime Survey self-completion questionnaire*, Home Office Research Study 191 (London: Home Office, 1999), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Stanko, 'The Day to Count: A Snapshot of the Impact of Domestic Violence in the UK', *Criminal Justice* 1:2 (2000), available at:

[http://www.domesticviolencedata.org/5\\_research/count/count.htm#police](http://www.domesticviolencedata.org/5_research/count/count.htm#police)

<sup>3</sup> Chris Kershaw et al, *Home Office Statistical Bulletin 18/00* (London: Home Office, 2000), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Claire Flood-Page and Joanna Taylor (eds.), *Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002: Supplementary Volume* (London: Home Office, 200s), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Claire Flood-Page and Joanna Taylor (eds.), *Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002: Supplementary Volume* (London: Home Office, 200s), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Catriona Mirrlees-Black, *Findings from a new British Crime Survey self-completion questionnaire*, Home Office Research Study 191 (London: Home Office, 1999), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Laurie Henderson, *Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Lesbians and Gay Men: Data Report to Flame TV* (Portsmouth, 2003), p. 6.

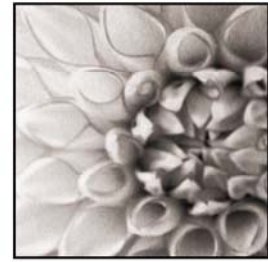
<sup>8</sup> Catriona Mirrlees-Black, *Findings from a new British Crime Survey self-completion questionnaire*, Home Office Research Study 191 (London: Home Office, 1999), p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> *Domestic Violence: A Childline Information Sheet*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Catriona Mirrlees-Black, *Findings from a new British Crime Survey self-completion questionnaire*, Home Office Research Study 191 (London: Home Office, 1999), pp. 27-34, 61-62.

# Chapter Five

## Speaking skills workshop for women from the survivors consultation group



Over the past three years, a number of women in Hammersmith and Fulham have generously shared their experience and ideas with Standing Together in the various consultations we have carried out. Some of them have also spoken at meetings, talked to the media, and made themselves available to other organisations seeking the views of survivors. We wanted to be able to offer something practical back to the women last year, and to support them in developing skills which they thought would be useful.

With this in mind, in July 2003 Standing Together organised a Speaking Skills Workshop for the women who had participated in the previous survivor consultation panels. This workshop was to thank them for their commitment to participating in the consultation work and to help them improve their own communication skills.

The workshop was an all day event held at the Irish Centre in Hammersmith. Three survivors attended, as well as staff members from Standing Together and DVIP. The course was delivered by Angie Konrad from Voice Waves Training.

The objectives of the day were to:

- Overcome anxiety
- Develop and enhance confidence in all speaking situations
- Ensure your message is heard
- Be understood and remembered.

The day started with work on the importance of breathing, relaxation, posture and body language. The group identified the feelings that they experience when they are asked to speak in public, such as feeling nervous and stressed. This was helpful in learning effective ways to calm down and prepare a talk. Each member of the group had to utilise these skills when they were asked to give a two-minute talk to the whole group on a subject of their choice. This was particularly daunting for all involved, but everybody participated and the feedback from the tutor and other course participants meant that confidence in the group increased as the day progressed. The facilitator worked in getting the group to understand how to connect with their audience and how to go about establishing interest. The story-telling exercise was entertaining and fascinating, in particular one woman's account of the classic story Swan Lake!

Angie went through the aspects of voice projection, diction and tone in order to ensure that the message being delivered is interesting and remembered. Exercises in pairs on questioning and assertive responses helped the women to identify ways of resolving difficult situations as well as developing and practising active listening skills. The trainer gave practical tips and things that could be easily practised at home, in order to improve speaking

confidence and ability. The women who attended this training said the day was hugely enjoyable and beneficial with lots of helpful advice. Some said that they now felt less intimidated by the prospect of speaking in public.