

Heard and Not Judged

Consultation with survivors of domestic violence in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham 2002–03

“I’ve been heard, and not judged”

— a woman survivor’s verdict on taking part in the consultation

Standing Together Against Domestic Violence

Heard and Not Judged

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- The women survivors of domestic violence who participated in the consultation with such openness and commitment.

Introduction



This is the second report on consultation with survivors of domestic violence in Hammersmith & Fulham. Standing Together agencies found that they were able very effectively to use the report from 2001–02 to impact on improvements in services in the borough, and so raised funds to continue the process over a second year. Most of the women who had first contributed to the consultation participated again, and were joined by other survivors.

The aim of this report is for it to be used towards incorporating women survivors' feedback and recommendations into agency policy and good practice.

- You may be reading this report in order to think about one of the services we have consulted women about. In this case you can read the **findings** in **Section 3** directly which incorporate some of the process by which we worked with the women to hear their views.
- You may want an **overview of the report**, which includes the aims of the consultation, how we put it into effect and the key findings. In this case you will find a comprehensive overview in the **Executive Summary**.
- You may want to set up a similar consultation with survivors of domestic violence, in which case I would recommend you read **Section 2** on the **method of consultation**, including how the process was set up, the way in which we identified the women who participated in the consultation and the roles of the two facilitators.
- You may be most interested in the **concluding comments and recommendations**. **Section 4** will take you through these, including the aspects we think have been most effective in consulting women survivors and some crucial pointers towards achieving the outcomes. You will also find the main recommendations for the services that we consulted the women about, in this section.

If you dip into or read the entire report, you will notice that several of the key aspects of the consultation process and findings are repeated. I hope you will stay with it and consider these occasional repetitions as an opportunity to truly absorb the main components of this report.

Despite many years working with survivors of domestic violence, I have found these consultation sessions very illuminating. I have been both moved and pushed to learn new aspects of how good front-line practice can truly impact on a woman and her children's safety, as well as provide real opportunities to live without violence. The women who participated in this consultation process are the real heroines, and I wish them all well as they rebuild their lives. I would also like to thank them for their generous contribution towards creating a safe and effective community for everyone.

I hope that you will also learn from these women.

Vicky Grosser
Consultant / Facilitator

March 2003

Executive Summary



I. Goals of the Consultation, and partner agencies

A founding principle of Standing Together is “putting the survivor at the centre of the change process”. Standing Together believes that without the involvement of people with current, first-hand knowledge of the issues there is a serious risk that the safety of women and children will be diminished rather than increased by institutional and procedural change.

The Standing Together Steering Group consists of all the criminal justice system agencies, the council and the health service alongside voluntary sector agencies working directly with survivors. All are equal partners in the management of Standing Together.

Early in the development phase of Standing Together a consultation exercise was carried out with survivors themselves, mainly women then living in refuges, and their views directly informed the design of the pilot project which followed. In 2001, funding from the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme enabled Standing Together to carry out a second consultation exercise, which aimed to enable feedback from women who have used the services of the courts, police, solicitors and health services when experiencing domestic violence. It also wanted to hear women’s recommendations for future developments in order to improve the safety of women and children. This latest consultation built on these recommendations, by further consulting women on health services and the courts, but added a specific session with black and ethnic minority survivors in order to generate material which could be used to improve responses from agencies providing legal services. This year’s work concluded with a meeting at which the women were asked to reflect on the process of consultation itself, and how we might change or improve it next year.

This consultation has been made possible by funding from the Camelot Foundation and the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme.

2. Process: how we consulted local women survivors

Standing Together employed me as the consultant for this project. I worked with Bhupinder Virdee from the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP). My role was to design each stage of the consultation, and engage the women in the process so that they could fully speak out about their experiences and views. Bhupinder assisted me in the consultation sessions, in particular providing emotional support to the women as they participated.

The key stages of the consultation included:

- a. Writing to the women to invite them to participate in the consultation, followed by a phone call the week before the sessions.
- b. Planning the sessions, in a manner in which the issues Standing Together wanted to consult on were covered.
- c. Providing four sessions (two in the day and two in the evening) for consultation. These included asking women a series of questions, and with their permission taping their responses as a part of a group discussion.

- d. Writing a report on what the women had said, including direct quotations from the transcripts of each session.
- e. Providing the women with a copy of the report, for their information and if necessary corrections.
- f. Using these reports to inform the relevant service about the women survivors' feedback and recommendations for future developments.

3. What the women told us about the services: strengths and areas for improvement

The women we consulted were all no longer living in the violent relationship. However they had left these relationships between 25 years ago (in one case) and just a few months ago. Services have changed during this time. Some felt more positive about their experiences, whilst others were very concerned about the outcomes of contact with these services.

a) Health — focusing on Midwifery and Health Visitor services

Most of the women who participated in the consultation had used the midwifery and health visitor services when experiencing domestic violence.

With an aim of ensuring that women are really able to receive aware and effective responses when they use health services as a result of domestic violence, they summed up their general views on these services as well as recommendations for the future, as follows:

- Screening all women using these services is a good idea, asking them if they experience domestic violence
- Staff need to be skilled to do this well, so training needs to be provided for them about domestic violence
- Put posters up and leaflets about domestic violence in ante-natal packs for mothers, so women know the issue is taken seriously
- Be aware that women may be scared to disclose, fearing that their children could be taken away from them
- If a woman does disclose, keep records so that they can be used as evidence should she go to court
- Help staff be prepared to provide her with information about support agencies, if she wants it.

b) Black and Ethnic Minority Women using the legal services

All of the women involved in the consultation had used the police services when experiencing domestic violence. Several had found that being believed, taken seriously and put in touch with local support services had been key in enabling them to remove themselves from the violence. This ensured the protection of themselves and their children.

- Women think all police officers should be trained about domestic violence and how not to make assumptions about women from different communities / cultures
- Women want to be asked what happened away from the man when the police arrive

- If the woman's English is limited, she needs to still be taken seriously
- Appropriate interpreters need to be provided when women need them, who speak the correct language and understand domestic violence
- The police need to assist women to find these other resources, so if an officer who speaks the same language as the woman is present they should not be prevented from talking with her in her own language — the police should trust one-another
- Don't assume that minority community organisations will provide appropriate support. They need to know about domestic violence or they can collude with the violence
- When immigration status is an issue for women, they need to be told where to go for advice and support.

c) **The West London Domestic Violence Court**

The women were delighted to be consulted about this new court. Their comments and recommendations went directly into the review process at the three month stage and were greatly appreciated by the professionals who have developed this first 'pilot' domestic violence court in London.

The women commented:

- It is very good that 'ADVANCE' advocacy service is available to support and protect women
- It is good to have female prosecutors and Magistrates. They show women a confident model
- It is good that the staff are trained and ensure that domestic violence is taken seriously
- We think the victim's address should not be read out in court
- Other defendants should not be in the court when another case is being heard. It could condone the behaviour: "he's done it, so I can too"
- The defendant's box (the dock) should be locked, and not in a position where he can intimidate the woman.
- There should be one way mirror rather than glass in front of the public gallery, as men can see who is there — e.g. providing privacy for relatives.
- The Domestic Violence Court should be a 'closed court'
- There should be screens, and a video link would be very good to encourage women to be witnesses.

4. Reviewing this consultation process

In a final session this year we asked the women to let Standing Together know what they think of the consultation process. They considered what they think is good and proposed some improvements for the coming year.

The positive factors

- That the consultation is set up to maintain confidentiality and safety for the women
- That all expenses are paid, including childcare

- That the group is a diverse one, and interpreters are made available to include all women
- That there are two facilitators, one to guide the process and the other to provide emotional support. That they are from different cultural backgrounds and age groups
- That Standing Together can take recommendations using women's own words directly back to influence practice in local agencies
- Being together as survivors has built the confidence of the women, and they are pleased that something has come out of their 'negative experiences'
- This project contributes to putting domestic violence more clearly on the public agenda.

Proposed improvements for next year

- That venues for the meetings are comfortable and welcoming. For one session this year the women were in a room that was cramped and with less comfortable seating. The women request that this is a priority for next year.
- Women would like the sessions to be longer, including time to get to know one another more. They know the aim is not a support group, but think that time to off load together would help them participate in the consultation sessions.

Conclusions from the women

Taking an approach which empowers and encourages the women to state and get their needs met will be safer for women experiencing domestic violence, and for their children. Do not make decisions or act on their behalf.

No agency can make change without hearing the real impact of their actions or services on the women who have experienced domestic violence. No consultation will be 'complete' in the sense that women will have varying views depending on their backgrounds and experiences. However this consultative process indicates that women survivors have a great deal to contribute to improving services to families across the community in the future. Because Standing Together is now able to provide an on-going consultative process with a local diverse group of women, there will be many more opportunities for this group to guide future developments in Hammersmith and Fulham, as well as influence practice across the UK.

5. How Standing Together has used and will use the consultation recommendations

Health Services — focusing on Midwifery and Health Visitor services

Some of the comments women gave during the consultation will enable Standing Together to prepare training materials for health professionals, which directly reflect what women say they want from the service. The detailed feedback given from women will enable Standing Together staff to guide Hammersmith & Fulham Primary Care Trust's strategists, in refining their approach to women's health and service delivery issues. Any future publications and funding applications will reflect the needs expressed.

Black and Ethnic Minority Women's Needs

Standing Together used the points made in the consultation with Black and Ethnic Minority women to inform the training they ran for a range of agencies this year. They also used this material in

meetings with local solicitors, where it contributed to discussions about good practice. Concerns raised in the session about the practice of a local community agency were less easy to follow up. The agency concerned is not in Hammersmith & Fulham and so it is not possible for Standing Together to progress matters in the same way as would have been possible in the borough. However, the women's comments have been drawn to the attention of the agency, and of the domestic violence co-ordinator for the area.

The West London Domestic Violence Court

Standing Together invited the women to observe at the court and then talk about what they had seen, in order to provide feedback to inform agencies at the first review of the court, three months after it had started. These survivors' comments as well as recommendations for improvements were submitted to the review. The professionals considering the future development of this court as a pan-London model very much appreciated this guidance from service users.

Reviewing the Consultation Process

With a more diverse group of women participating in the consultation process this year, Standing Together welcomed the opportunity to directly hear what they see as the strengths of this approach to improving services in Hammersmith & Fulham. Suggestions were also received on improvements for the coming year.

6. The value of doing this consultation

This consultation process was 'empowering' for the women. It enabled them to notice that their expertise is vital to contribute towards future changes that will benefit other women and children as well as contribute to reducing the incidence of domestic violence in the community.

Standing Together staff attended the final session and appreciated the women for their contributions. They were able to receive direct feedback on the value of the consultation process from the women's perspective, as well as give information about how the recommendations have been and will be used to improve services in the borough. Standing Together is now committed to continuing this consultation process with the women over the coming year, and the relationships continue to get stronger. This is likely to lead to even more effective feedback from the women.

7. The women tell us what they got out of being consulted as survivors

A total of 15 women from Hammersmith & Fulham were able to take part. At the end of this series of consultation sessions, they told us what it had been like for them to contribute in this manner.

"It is a good place to challenge things."

"Agencies need to really listen to women, and this is how."

"This is part of changing all societies' awareness about domestic violence."

"It is good the way we included everyone, including X, as she doesn't speak English."

"There is room for improvements: good organisations can make a real difference for women."

"I feel what we say is valued — it goes further than this room."

“I’ve been heard, and not judged.”

“It was good to be listened to.”

“I liked airing my views.”

“It was interesting hearing one another.”

The women are keen to participate in further consultation for agencies in Hammersmith & Fulham. The key I think is for the agency to be willing and prepared to use the feedback it receives. This can really have an impact on future services and resources to families impacted by domestic violence in Hammersmith & Fulham, and therefore to the well being of the community as a whole.

Section One



Consulting Survivors: the Objectives

I.1 Standing Together's aims for the consultation

A founding principle of Standing Together is “putting the survivor at the centre of the change process”. Standing Together believes in empowering women; knowing that where agencies plan change, however well-intentioned, without the involvement of people with current, first-hand knowledge of the issues there is a serious risk that the safety of women and children will be diminished rather than increased.

Voluntary sector agencies working directly with survivors — ADVANCE (specialist advocacy service), DVIP (the Domestic Violence Intervention Project), the Community Law Centre and Women's Aid — are equal partners in the management of Standing Together, on the Steering Group alongside all the criminal justice system agencies, the council and the health service.

Survivor agencies took a lead in the development of Standing Together, alongside the council and the police. Early in the development phase a consultation exercise was carried out with survivors themselves, mainly women who have been living in refuges. Respondents supported the idea of the case going forward to court without the victim's participation if necessary, provided appropriate support and advocacy was in place.

Standing Together will continue to rely on the input of front-line survivor agencies to the management of the project. The work described in this report is Standing Together's third consultation exercise with survivors directly. It has been made possible by funding from the Camelot Foundation and the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme.

To progress the consultation with this group of survivors for a second year, Standing Together set the following aims:

- to build a direct voice for survivors in to the ongoing work of Standing Together, in a way that develops the focus group so that it may continue after this year's work.
- to get to a position where we can consult with an informed group of survivors about our detailed plans **before** we implement them.
- to be directly and practically (and immediately) useful to agencies — this was one of the strengths of last year's consultation.
- to be a positive experience for the women, which respects and validates their experiences and where appropriate offers them opportunities for further involvement in the work of Standing Together, its partners and the community generally. This will include encouraging women to participate in telephone consultations and other processes where the views of survivors will improve agency practice.

I.2 The Consultation Process

Standing Together employed me as the consultant for this project. I worked with Bhupinder Virdee from the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP).

Standing Together asked me as the Consultant for this particular phase of the consultation with survivors to take responsibility for the following aspects:

a) Contacting women nominated by survivor agencies to inform them about the plan for this consultation

Standing Together sent out letters that I drafted, on lines agreed with the survivors agencies who were involved in planning the work. I then telephoned all women who had expressed an interest in continuing to participate in the consultation after last year, as well as those who would be new to the process. I informed this latter group of women that we would be taping the sessions, for the sole purpose of obtaining a good record of their feedback.

b) Meetings with the survivors

This was to include one meeting for women who had expressed an interest in contributing to consultation on Health — focusing on midwifery and health visiting services. The second meeting was for women from black / ethnic minority communities whose first language was not English. The aim of this session was to hear specific issues for these survivors in using the criminal justice system and to bring them into the wider consultation process. The third session involved all of these women being invited to view the new West London Domestic Violence court in progress, so that they could feed into the three month review process in early 2003.

For each of these meetings Standing Together identified the key issues they wanted to ask women about. I would then, with Bhupinder's assistance, formulate a plan for the sessions that included time for women to make additional points on the consultation subject.

c) To document the process — by producing a report of each meeting

I wrote a report shortly after each meeting took place. These reports were then checked with the participating women, so that Standing Together could use them immediately to provide feedback and recommendations to key groups of professionals: police officers, magistrates, solicitors, health service staff and in one case a specific voluntary sector advice agency. So the consultation was able to directly impact on local practice. At the heart of these reports were the voices of the women themselves. Although it was time-consuming to transcribe the session tapes, direct quotations proved extremely effective in reaching the professionals. For example, direct quotations from these women could be read to the professionals reviewing the West London Domestic Violence Court.

d) Establish an ongoing “focus group”.

At the end of these consultation sessions, most of the women indicated that they would like to participate in an ongoing “focus group” which Standing Together would consult on a regular basis. Standing Together aims to get to a position where it is able to consult with this group of survivors about detailed plans **before** they are implemented.

I.3 Time-tabling the consultation process

The three primary consultative meetings with women took place over a period of four months: October 2002–January 2003. Because some of the women could more easily attend daytime

sessions, while others preferred evening, we alternated the sessions in order to include them all on at least one occasion.

We held one further meeting in February 2003, to review the consultation process and provide women with information about Standing Together's plan for the coming year's consultation.

I.4 Venue

Standing Together and I thought carefully about choosing a venue which was accessible by public transport and friendly and private for the consultation. It needed to be somewhere women could come to without it being conspicuous or obvious what they were there for. Because the family support agency we had used the previous year had closed down, we used two different venues for meetings — one a residents' hall and the other a central community centre. The women commented that they find it easier to participate when the venue is warm and comfortable, as well as being private and safe. For the Courts session we were able to use the Magistrates dining room. The women enjoyed this a great deal as it provided an atmosphere of formality whilst also being warm and welcoming. In discussion with the women, a crèche was only provided at one of the daytime sessions, and for the others the women set up their own child minding at home. A range of refreshments were provided for each session, and cigarette breaks built into the programme.

Section Two



Method of Consultation

2.1 Guiding principles

Standing Together established the following guiding principles for the consultation:

- a) This consultation was to be carried out in line with Standing Together principles of best practice, empowering and respecting women at all times; and in line with the protocol which Standing Together agreed with survivor agencies at the start of this project to govern this work (Appendix A). **The safety of women and children is paramount at all times.**
- b) Standing Together wanted to be as inclusive as possible, and recognised the need to make separate approaches to particular communities to encourage their participation.
- c) Standing Together wanted this consultation to be carried out in a way which would develop a focus group in order to carry out future consultation with survivors after this year's work.

2.2 What Standing Together hoped to achieve

Standing Together wanted to consult as wide a range of women as possible — providing a variety of feedback on the services they aimed to assess.

In order to do this they had committed to provide an interpreter if needed, and planned to include not just direct consultation with known survivors, but an additional consultation with under-represented black / ethnic minority women in the borough (contacted through partner agencies) in a manner which would encourage them to join the wider consultation group.

Through this consultation the voices of survivors would reach professionals providing services to women experiencing domestic violence, including their recommendations for improved practice.

The reports resulting from this consultation would be used immediately to inform the practice of Standing Together participating agencies in Hammersmith & Fulham, with the intention of improving the responses and therefore safety of women and children.

2.3 The Participating Women

It took considerable courage and personal commitment from the women to participate in this consultation process. Courage to tell their experiences and revisit them in order to, as one of them said: “do something which could make things better for women in a similar position in the future”. With, unfortunately, painful experiences for many of the women when they had called on agencies to assist them, it took personal commitment on their part to expect that this process could make a difference towards improving them in the future. It is a tribute to the trust developed between the women and the Standing Together partner agencies who referred them to the consultation process that the women were ready to believe that their commitment would be worthwhile. Meeting as a group supported the women in sharing their experiences and thoughts, and provided an opportunity to input a range of recommendations together.

A total of 27 women were invited to participate in this year's Standing Together consultation. Fifteen actually attended the sessions. Of those who did not participate, some chose not to, but the majority were unable to make the dates of the sessions due to work or other commitments.

The women who participated in the consultation included:

- One black Asian woman
- Two Chinese women
- Five black Arabic speaking women (Algerian, Iraqi and Moroccan)
- Seven white Western European women (Irish and English).

The ages of the women ranged from twenties through to fifties, with their experiences of domestic violence being between 25 years (for one woman) and only several months ago.

Most of the women have children.

Two of the women who attended the session for black / ethnic minority women decided not to participate in the wider group. One had a working relationship with a Standing Together partner agency so thought that boundary issues would be compromised. Another was concerned about her safety as her ex-partner is a very violent man who lives in central Hammersmith.

2.4 How the women were invited to participate and the style of consultation

Since carrying out the first stage of this wider consultation process over 2001–02, written material about the process of consulting survivors has been developed to guide agencies and multi-agency forums in this process so that survivors are truly consulted in a manner which respects their needs and expertise rather than using them for others gain or 'professional standing'.

One of the discussions I and Bhupinder had with Standing Together as this consultation developed was to what extent the women could introduce issues relating to service provision that was not on the agenda set by Standing Together itself. We all agreed that women might well raise concerns about, for example, aspects of health provision in addition to questions put forward for consultation by Standing Together in relation to midwifery or health visiting. Perhaps they would ask to have their thoughts on the role of GP's fed into the process. In cases like this, Standing Together would feed survivors' views in to the Hammersmith and Fulham Domestic Violence Forum. My brief as consultant was to keep this in mind as we carried out the sessions.

As the consultation progressed it became clear that important feedback was being gained through this agenda setting by Standing Together, and the views of the women were being effectively passed to relevant agencies through the Standing Together partner agency process.

In January 2003 I turned to a recent publication: *Abused women's perspectives: Responses and accountability of domestic violence inter-agency initiatives* (by Gill Hague, Audrey Mullender, Rosemary Aris and Wendy Dear). They make the distinction between "those (agencies) who consulted solely, through those where service users had some influence over policy, to those where they could exert actual decision making power." (page 8) They then state: "consultation with service users needs to lead to concrete action and policy change in order to be effective and worthwhile." (page 11)

Recommendations from this report endorse the need for resources to meet the needs of women in order for them to fully participate: “for example, the provision possibly of payment, and certainly of childcare, travel, expenses and compensation.” (page 20)

As we came to the end of this series of consultation sessions with women in Hammersmith & Fulham, Standing Together, Bhupinder and I agreed through discussion that, given the particular aims of taking feedback directly to the relevant agencies, the approach we were already taking of providing the women with specific questions to respond to was appropriate for the aims of this particular consultation process. This will also probably be the case for future consultations when Standing Together aims to request the views of survivors towards development of new initiatives. In addition, we agree that at each session space needs always to be kept for women to make additional points to those on the Standing Together agenda. This will ensure that key pieces of the women’s feedback are not left out.

Another recent report on consultation with ‘minoritised’ women survivors of domestic violence has, I believe, confirmed the Standing Together approach this year to make the consultation group more diverse in terms of background and ethnicity. *Domestic Violence and Minoritisation — supporting women to independence* (by J. Batsleer, E. Burman, K. Chantler, H.S. McIntosh, K. Pantling, S. Smailes and S. Warner) states: “Our findings suggest that sometimes generalist (statutory and voluntary) services respond to the domestic violence but fail to attend sufficiently or appropriately to women’s minoritised positions and identifications... Failure to attend to this acts as a major disincentive for minoritised women to access generalist services. Alternatively, culturally specific services are structurally positioned as less likely to attend to, or to know how to respond to, domestic violence” (page 206).

Last year’s consultation included a session with a Black women’s community group (Horn of Africa). This group gave us some general indicators about how statutory agencies could meet the needs of Black women experiencing domestic violence. This year we decided to consult specifically Black and ethnic minority survivors of domestic violence whose first language is not English. The purpose was to improve how both ‘generalist’ and community services in Hammersmith & Fulham can meet the needs of these women and their children when they are experiencing domestic violence.

Standing Together and I thought that this report on consultation with survivors in Hammersmith & Fulham needed to provide detail about what we did and why, as well as about the consultation findings. We hope this will be useful to agencies in the future that wish to consult survivors of domestic violence using the model of structured sessions in this manner with a range of women from different backgrounds and ages.

Standing Together drafted a protocol (Appendix A) setting out their thinking on how to carry out the consultation. The purpose was to develop and then commit Standing Together explicitly to ways of working that would be safe and positive for the women who agreed to share their experiences. Once agreed with the survivor agencies, the protocol governed the consultation process.

Standing Together met with survivor agencies in 2001 and later reviewed the process to inform them about the consultation, discuss the protocol and agree any amendments, as well as seek their agreement to nominate women whom they would approach to invite to participate. The meaning and limits of “accountability to survivors” were also discussed.

Standing Together was delighted that the agencies represented at the meeting agreed the protocol, and proceeded to nominate and contact additional women for this second group consultation. It was

agreed that we would again have a second facilitator who would focus on providing the emotional support to the participating women.

I think one of the strengths of this consultation was that women were asked to participate by one of the local agencies already involved with Standing Together. Each woman was invited directly by the agency she knew, which immediately created some safety and sense of connection with the project. These new women's details were then given (with their permission) to me as consultant, including information about how to contact them (e.g. by phone or in writing). (See example of letter at Appendix B).

It was crucial, I believe, that Standing Together had obtained sufficient funds for this project so that all costs could be adequately covered. Women were able to claim all travel costs, childcare was provided, and each woman received a voucher for a local store as an appreciation of their participation. During each meeting a variety of refreshments were provided.

2.5 Bringing in the Consultants / Facilitators

Standing Together decided to use an external consultant for this work for two reasons:

a) The need for specialist skills.

Standing Together wanted the consultation to be a positive experience for the women, and recognised that this cannot be taken for granted. Asking questions about such a personal, traumatic and long-lasting experience as domestic violence is very different from many other types of "consumer research". It is not the same as talking about personal experience of most other types of crime. Feelings evoked may surface in the meeting and also afterwards, often to an extent which surprises women themselves. Standing Together therefore set up the consultation to be carried out by someone with extensive and specific experience of this work.

b) The need to create distance from the agencies whose work women were asked about.

Standing Together is a partnership of operational agencies. It was important to maximise opportunities for women to speak freely about their experiences of using these agencies, whether positive or negative. It was thought that an external consultant who could genuinely say she was independent of all Standing Together agencies was important. The decision to ask Bhupinder from DVIP to assist in facilitating was made in order to ensure a link back to local support services.

I was appointed by Standing Together as the consultant, due to my experience of working with women survivors of domestic violence as well as involvement in consulting them about service provision in another London borough. My experience of working with women from diverse backgrounds was considered important, as well as my skills in structuring consultations and 'coming up with the goods' in reporting back recommendations to the services concerned.

Whilst believing that clear 'leadership' (one person taking a lead role) is important when carrying out consultation, I also think this type of project works best with a second facilitator. We agreed that I would lead the process and the structure of the consultation meetings, whilst Bhupinder would watch for emotions raised for women and assist them in handling them in a manner that enabled them to stay with the process and fully contribute. My experience has led me to believe that women are able to express emotions as well as continue to participate in consultation. Crying, for example, does not prevent her from also thinking and sharing her views. (unless she

chooses to leave the room). Bhupinder's involvement therefore provided an additional level of emotional support to the women as we received their feedback and recommendations. She has a very thorough knowledge of local services and could often encourage women to use the Domestic Violence Intervention Project or other appropriate services for on-going emotional support.

In this manner we attended well to achieving the aims of the project by establishing a clear structure for consultation of local survivors of domestic violence. However we did not do this at the expense of the women: their feelings could be acknowledged and supported whilst they participated in the process. We were inviting the women to share their personal experiences of using services. They frequently recounted and therefore remembered some of the detail of painful experiences, and at times this would raise strong emotions for some of the women. Two of us provided a great deal more support to the women so that they could say what they really wanted to. They also offered very valuable support and empathy to one another.

From Bhupinder:

“The consultation has been one of the most important pieces of work that I have had the privilege to be involved with. The tangibility of what has been achieved already, with the police, the magistrates and the courts is crucial. This work must be continued, funded and supported. It is incredibly important that we consult and learn from survivors and their experiences and that it is this process in the future that drives policy and practice. I would like to thank Standing Together for all their hard work in making it possible. I would like to thank all the women who participated. They showed immense courage by being open to the process and confronting their own pasts in order to help other women and children. I would also like to thank Vicky for supporting and valuing me and for her commitment to this work.”

Learning from survivors

I echo Bhupinder's appreciation of the women in contributing their personal views from first hand experience of local services, towards improvements for other women and their children living with domestic violence in the future.

This consultation would not have been as successful without Bhupinder's caring and thoughtful support to the women as they participated, and I very much appreciated her contributions towards the planning of each session.

I believe that this second year of consulting survivors in this particular way was a credit to Standing Together. Their use of partner agency support and careful consideration of how the process would be beneficial to the women as well as to improving services is in my view a model of good practice.

As this second year of consultation with these women ends, and Bhupinder and I both complete our time with the project, Standing Together is now considering how best to facilitate the group for a third year. The two key factors to consider are in my view, how to provide some ethnic diversity amongst the facilitators, as well as how to ensure that women are able to fully speak out their views if Standing Together staff are to be part of this facilitation process.

My observation over these two years is that the group itself is now in a much greater position of power than they were at the beginning of the process. The women are confident about the process and able to speak up if it is not working for them. They have experienced having their views respectfully heard and acted on by the Standing Together staff, who have also been present to welcome women to each session. I expect that two women facilitators, even if chosen directly

from Standing Together agencies, that are able to keep checking how the sessions are going for this diverse group of women, will work well for the future development and participation of this group.

2.6 The planning process for consultation with women

Before each consultation session with the women, Standing Together staff met with myself and Bhupinder to identify the questions that would be the focus of the forthcoming session.

Working together in this way proved crucial. Standing Together staff were able to identify what they wanted to achieve from the session. For example, they knew that the West London Domestic Violence Court session could be fed back very soon through the court review process. They therefore needed to frame questions that would combine addressing some areas of concern about the courts process and domestic violence, but not lead the women in their responses. By listening to these aims, I could with Bhupinder frame the questions, ensuring that they were open enough to allow for a wide range of responses from women who have had varying experiences of domestic violence and responded differently in order to protect themselves and their children. On each occasion we chose three to four questions to cover a variety of aspects of the service being consulted about and elicit a range of experiences and views from the women. (See Appendices C to F for session plans.)

As the consultation sessions progressed and women became more familiar with the process and one-another, differing views could more easily be voiced and acknowledged. Alongside this growing confidence I would then sometimes encourage women to proactively propose changes and improvements needed when issues arose which lay outside the direct brief of the session. In this manner I think we were able to hold a framework that could lead to clear reports and recommendations to local services, but build in flexibility that meant that the women were truly heard, especially when they were voicing aspects which we had not anticipated. In essence we always kept our eye on the fact that they are the experts.

2.7 Creating Relationships for effective consultation

Consultation can take place that in effect ‘takes’ from participants, rather than enabling them to build relationships and receive something for themselves in contributing to the outcomes.

The aim of these sessions was to build relationships between the women — both those who had participated last year and those newer to the process — which would aid the following:

- Be more likely to lead to an on-going focus group for future Standing Together consultations in the future.
- Support women to be able to speak up / take initiative and make concrete recommendations to ‘Standing Together’ which will have positive impacts on their work in the future.

The women decided to utilise the same ‘Ground Rules’ as last year, in order to enable each of them to fully participate whilst also thinking about themselves and their needs. These were as follows:

- Each woman can choose how much she wants to say about herself, or not.
- Confidentiality: if we meet outside this group, each woman can choose her response. If one woman doesn’t want to talk, that’s okay. It’s not personal. We will acknowledge one another.

- Listening to one another / taking turns
- Respect one-another's different views and experiences: impacted by age, culture, etc.
- It's okay to disagree with one-another / have a different view.
- Don't interrupt each other.
- Having some fun together!
- No mobile phones on unless needed for emergencies (e.g. children)

It seemed that these groundrules assisted the women to each establish the boundaries which were right for them. It also made space for them to get to know one-another.

At the end of each session we invited the women to tell us how the consultation was going for them. They told us:

"It is a good place to challenge things."

"Agencies need to really listen to women, and this is how."

"This is part of changing all societies' awareness about domestic violence."

"It is good the way we included everyone, including X, as she doesn't speak English."

"There is room for improvements: good organisations can make a real difference for women."

"I feel what we say is valued — it goes further than this room."

"I've been heard, and not judged."

"It was good to be listened to."

"I liked airing my views."

"It was interesting hearing one another."

Section Three



Findings

3.1 Health Services

Survivors experiences and views of Health Services — focusing on Midwifery and Health Visitor services: October 2002

Introduction

Last year the consultation session on health services focused on Accident and Emergency and Walk-in services. This year Standing Together decided to ask the women about services to women either expecting or after having had a baby, so that these views can be fed back directly to midwife and health visiting services.

Participants

As I made contact with the new women for this consultation session several told me a little about themselves and were able to ask questions to prepare themselves for the sessions. I informed them that Bhupinder would assist me, with a particular brief to support women with any emotions that might come up during the evening.

All of the women welcomed the thought which Standing Together had put into childcare and transportation needs. Two women appreciated the offer of money to pay for childcare at home, and all took up the offer of transportation home after the meeting.

A suitable interpreter was arranged for one woman so that she could fully participate.

- Nine of the invited 18 women attended this first consultation session of the series.
- Three women were from Arabic speaking communities, and the other six from white European backgrounds.
- Ages: 20's–50's
- Time since the end of the violent relationship was 6 months to 25 years.

The women who had attended the last series of consultation sessions were pleased to join these sessions, and warmly welcomed the new women.

I spent a short time with the interpreter before the meeting. Recognising that it is a challenge to provide simultaneous translation, I provided her with details of my plan for the evening and stressed that I would be pleased to stop the meeting if she or the woman she was interpreting for needed more time to understand, contribute or 'catch up'.

Facilitators

As with the first series of consultation meetings, I believe that the women benefited from having both a black and white facilitator, spanning different age groups and cultural experiences and styles of communication. Our clarity about my providing the structure of the meeting and Bhupinder

watching for inclusion of all women as well as attending to emotional needs provided, I believe, a successfully safe and inclusive structure to the sessions so that all women could fully participate.

Process of the Meeting

The first half of the meeting included welcoming the women, reminding them why the consultation is taking place, and creating the space for links to be made between them so that we could consult them on specific health services in the second half of the session. We stressed the importance Standing Together places on survivors' input in order to make changes which will directly improve services to women and children experiencing domestic violence in the future.

Standing Together would like an ongoing group of women survivors to consult beyond the 'life' of this series of meetings about specific local services. With this aim in mind, I made plenty of space for the women to get to know one another as the meeting progressed. This included small groups and pairs for the women to tell one another about their lives and if they chose to a little about their experiences of domestic violence. Because half of the women had attended the first series of consultation sessions, they assisted with encouraging the newer women to speak about themselves. The women appeared to all enjoy this time together.

Setting some 'ground rules for working together'

Taking the 'groundrules' from the first consultation, the women agreed to use the same approach to working together for this meeting:

- Each woman can choose how much she wants to say about herself, or not.
- Confidentiality: if we meet outside this group, each woman can choose her response. If one woman doesn't want to talk, that's okay. It's not personal. We will acknowledge one another.
- Listening to one another / taking turns
- Respect one-another's different views and experiences: impacted by age, culture, etc.
- It's okay to disagree with one-another / have a different view.
- Don't interrupt each other.
- Having some fun together!
- No mobile phones on unless needed for emergencies (e.g. children)

Closing the Session

At the end of the session we invited the women to say what they had got for themselves out of the evening. Comments included:

"It is a good place to challenge things."

"Agencies need to really listen to women, and this is how."

"This is part of changing all societies awareness about domestic violence."

"It's good to be back again."

"I like the group and think it will be good."

"It is good the way we included everyone, including X, as she doesn't speak English."

“I hope we can help other women.”

“There is room for improvements: good organisations can make a real difference for women.”

Starting the Consultation Process

I informed the women new to the process: “this is about your comments and recommendations. Standing Together wants to hear your views, and intends to use them to directly influence and make improvements in how services respond to women experiencing domestic violence in Hammersmith & Fulham”.

I reminded the women who attended last year, and informed the new women that in January of this year we did consult about whether Accident and Emergency and ‘walk-in centres’ should in their view ask all women about domestic violence, effectively screening to provide women with an opportunity to ask for help. The group thought it was a good idea to screen all women. (See ‘Survivors Speak’ — Standing Together publication 2002.)

In this session, Standing Together wants to focus on services provided to pregnant women and those with very young children, through the Midwifery and Health Visiting services.

I used some statistics that show that women who are pregnant are often more at risk from their partner if he is violent, as are their babies:

- Women often experience domestic violence for the first time or men are more abusive when she is pregnant or after the birth of a baby.
- 40–60% of women experiencing domestic violence are abused while pregnant (Parker and McFarlane 1991)
- Abused women have a higher rate of miscarriage, stillbirths, premature labour, low birth rate babies and injuries to the foetus (Saltzman 1990).

Two of the women are not parents, but were very pleased to contribute their thoughts despite not having used midwifery or health visiting services.

Question 1:

What would it have been like for you if you had been asked questions about domestic violence at your antenatal (midwives) or postnatal (health visitors) appointments? (This would only happen if there were no children present and the woman is alone.) Do you think this should happen for all women who have babies, and if so, why? What concerns might you have about this approach?

What the women told us

In general women commented that it is a very good idea in principle to ask all women if they are experiencing any form of domestic violence. However the staff do need to be aware that being pregnant or having just had a baby is a vulnerable time for most women, so she may not tell the truth. It takes skill and patience by staff to enable women to open up. They also need to be aware that the woman’s greatest fear at this time might be that she will have her baby taken away if she tells about violence at home.

- Yes — do ask all women
- If I had been asked on my own it would have made a difference: it depends if the woman is ready.

“I think it would be a good thing to ask but I don’t know if you would get an honest answer.”

- Shame may be a factor in a woman not telling

“The shame factor comes up straight away and you’ve got the responsibility of the child inside of you and you should be taking care of that, sometimes it goes over your head.”

- Women often feel / hope the abuse won’t happen after they have a child.

“I also think women hope at that time, whether you have got children or not, or whether your children are older, it’s never going to happen again every time. I think you would think more so like that when you are pregnant, probably deny it because you would hope this will be a new beginning with the baby and that he won’t be doing it, so I think that women are less likely at that stage to say.”

When asking, staff need to be aware of the real fears women have of authority figures or professionals deciding that they are not fit to be mothers.

- Fear of social services taking children away

“I think also the consequences of saying that to a social worker or a health visitor — what’s going to happen?”

“I think that how I would feel, speaking in quite a formal environment — hospitals, doctors, people still think — social services can take my children.”

“There would be a risk that you are putting your child in danger basically — that you could lose it.”

The way that women are asked could make a difference to their concerns and therefore to whether they would disclose or not.

- It does make a difference — how you are asked
- Being listened to properly is key
- Find out what the woman wants, don’t act on her behalf

“I think it’s officialdom and there are many ways to ask a question, so even if you got staff to ask the question — it’s the way they ask the question, the environment they ask the question in, whether they have time to actually listen to your response.”

“I’ve always found that when I’ve been asked personal questions and the time’s ticking and you are trying to protect yourself I think you tend to bat it back because you don’t want to be taken over, for instance if you say — yes I’m being abused — would they then put you on an at risk register, would they then take your children away and then you become part of a process that you have no control over, because they asked you a personal question and maybe they haven’t actually listened to the

facts or you haven't explained in a way that protects you and your child so you sort of kick off a process that perhaps you have no control over."

- Where you are asked is important: the health visitor may be safer to tell than in the hospital

"There are a few schemes, like Domino schemes where the midwife comes to the house, or you see them in a surgery — it's less formal, if you build up a relationship with a health care worker you've got this professional friendship and you are perhaps more likely to talk to them."

How a professional asks a woman, and their capacity to listen to the response can be either a positive experience for her, or one which makes her feel abused.

- Don't re-abuse — staff need to be aware about how to ask.
- It could be experienced as another threat, when you're already being put down at home

"I think that when you are in domestic violence situation they (the man) tend to isolate you, get rid of your confidence, not allow you to be a person or have an opinion and then if somebody in an official process asks you a question, it's almost like the actual process of asking you a question — the environment, is in itself isolating, how can I say it, it's like they are another perpetrator in the way that they ask"

When staff are under pressure, and maybe don't know signs of possible violence at home, the woman can feel even more on her own.

- Do health visitors recognise signs and needs such as post-natal depression?
- Staff changes make it a lot harder. It takes time to build up trust.

"There is twenty years difference between my two kids. The first time that I had a child the health services — I felt more looked after then than I did this time round. This time round I found it positively soul destroying, the hospital was crumbling, the midwives couldn't have given a shit actually to be honest with you. Every single one of them I just thought as soon as I could let go of them I let go of them, which was really, really sad because none of them actually recognised that I was having problems. I was so lucky that I had a really good GP, because none of them recognised that I was absolutely bonkers with post natal depression, I didn't know what day of the week it was and none of them seemed to recognise that."

"When the services are stretched and you are not seeing the same person every time, and you have confided in that person and for whatever reason they can't be with you the next time, it makes you feel unsafe and uncared for."

Women do need privacy in order to tell about domestic violence, and to be ready to tell.

- Women need enough privacy: don't ask them around the man or children.

"I can't tell them because I don't feel that I have enough privacy to express my problem to them because always my husband is around, and there's children around so there is no way for me to."

How can the midwives or other staff in the hospital get time to really ask women about domestic violence? These women are concerned by the experiences they have had. Being able to show that time is available to tell would make a difference for women experiencing domestic violence.

“Usually the woman stays in the hospital 24 hours and the nurses or the midwives they want to just get rid of them and they are not interested at all to hear anything about the woman.”

“I think probably the best way would be to educate society into knowing what the statistics are towards pregnant women, so that women know before they actually do get pregnant.”

Question 2:

If you think all women should be asked — what do you think the attitudes and responses of the staff should be when asking this question?

And if a woman says “Yes, I do experience domestic violence”, how should they respond?

What training do you think staff should receive in order to ask effectively?

What the women told us

The staff need to understand why they are asking women about domestic violence. They also need to be skilled to ask the question, in a way in which women don’t just think it’s something staff have to do as part of their job.

“If I say yes then what will you do, what will the system do? The system has something to propose? Or it’s just for statistics like what’s the colour of your hair. I want to know the consequence of my answer.”

- Help staff understand and be able to say why they are asking women: e.g. give statistics to women, so they understand that they are not alone if they are experiencing domestic violence.

“Maybe not even ask the question directly. You could just put across the statistics and say bla-de-bla... and then she goes back in for her scan and somebody goes in and says — look these are the statistics we tell everybody and if you are going through that or anything like that does happen it may be a good idea to take away a leaflet... Say for instance that woman goes away and she may not have had violence but then half way through the pregnancy all of a sudden something happens then at least she can think back and say — hang on a minute am I becoming one of these statistics.”

It is important to tell women what will happen if they disclose that they are experiencing domestic violence.

- Give women information on what happens if they say yes, that they do experience domestic violence.

- Give women leaflets so they can get help if / when they need to, even if they don't say 'yes' to the question about domestic violence.

“And it needs to be up-to-date and well maintained because you go in police stations and they’ve got raggedy old leaflets. I think that environment, if it is well maintained shows that that is an issue that is important to that area.”

Consistent midwife support means that women will build trust with them and be more able to tell if they are experiencing violence at home.

- Set up clear midwife allocation — so it is more likely that trust can be built.

“There is theoretically a process whereby every woman is allocated a midwife. I didn’t receive that, I had someone different on my doorstep every fortnight, it drove me mad. I think you might then get some results if a woman is allocated a midwife and therefore that midwife can stay with the woman through to the birth then there is some chance of friendship, bonding.”

Staff need to receive good basic training about domestic violence, which should include dealing with myths in society about who gets abused and how.

- Training: teach the basics — e.g. why women stay, breakdown myths, teach that all women could experience domestic violence across class, race etc.

“I think you have to go back to basics with them because not all women empathise with people who’ve experienced domestic so you’ve got to look at the issues around why women stay and you’ve got to break down the myths. Also tell them that it’s not people who are living in extreme poverty, it’s not people who aren’t educated, it’s not one particular race or ethnicity it’s across the board and I really think if you do that, you’ve made big strides.”

“You need to teach understanding of the issues, they (women) are not going to necessarily say, yes I am being abused. You need to look at the signs, like are the food cupboards locked or are they nervous every time the phone rings. You know you have just got to know what the signs are and not everybody’s violence is the same as somebody’s else, it may not be that you are being physically abused but you are actually being controlled through money or controlled by your freedom.”

- Don't do it on the cheap.

“I think you can do a lot more damage, you can really frighten people off... good training could make a lot of difference to a lot of women’s lives and I think it is just worth taking a bit more time to put that training in.”

- Be aware some staff could experience domestic violence, so do training that allows for this — covering all their needs and making it real.
- Training: use experienced drama groups so that staff can see what domestic violence is like, and the different ways it is carried out.

“It might be worth putting some money in and getting some professional actors in to actually play the roles but also to be aware that people you are trying to train have their own personal issues around domestic violence, that you can cope with that as well.”

I think this comment is interesting as it shows how despite the personal trauma of domestic violence, survivors are able to see what is needed to improve practice as well as support staff in these services who may be personally impacted by the issue — despite the fact (see above) that the NHS had not been able to offer these women an effective relationship with the staff caring for them in pregnancy. They were therefore not speaking from any particular feeling of commitment to individuals they remembered having made a bond with at this vulnerable time.

It is also important to help staff think about how to deal with confidentiality if a woman wants to disclose.

- Speak about confidentiality — and then see how a health visitor could respond by asking more without jumping to child protection.

“If there was a confidentiality clause, if you was going to see a midwife or health visitor or something like that, if they did say, look anything you do tell me would be confidential, especially at this time whilst it’s antenatal... or any information you may ask from me is given to you in confidence and you’re not going to be judged as a mother, you’re not going to be judged as a person, you’re not going to be seen as somebody who’s putting their child in danger, that would probably make a lot of women relax a little bit more and then maybe tell a bit more.”

- Tell women that help is possible
- In training, teach staff to be aware that not all domestic violence is physical

The staff should respond by taking any disclosure seriously. They should do the following:

- If a woman says yes, record the details

“I think it should be all linked like this borough with Advocacy Project, DVIP and the police. There should be some criteria where they let one of those agencies know and they are in on it, so that it is on the record, so that whatever happens to her, if she was killed or anything, it was on record, it was officially written down, because it’s no good when you just tell people and they don’t put it down.”

If a woman discloses abuse, it would be very helpful to offer some listening support to her right away.

- Creating space for women to be listened to: e.g. trained counsellor

“I think to actually admit to a professional that you have been battered and that you haven’t fallen downstairs is a real big step anyway, so I mean where possible, I know that it’s asking the moon but, a little space where you could actually go away with a proper trained counsellor and just work it through would be marvelous.”

Teach staff that women may be trying to tell, but be afraid to. And only ask if the man is not present.

“Well they should actually shut the door and give you the opportunity. The only time I actually had the courage, I think that when I was in A and E it was fairly obvious to me that I had been battered, and I was trying to get them to take me seriously without actually explaining what had happened.”

- Only ask if there is a private space and the man cannot hear

- Notice if the woman wants the man to stay away / be separate

“I was saying, I fell down the stairs — I fell out of the loft — every time they asked me my story changed but I kept saying — I really hit my head, I’ve really hit my head, and they kept saying, well you’re not concussed and I said no, but I’ve really hit my head and they were like — well you’re not concussed, and I was thinking, please x-ray me because I couldn’t hear and I didn’t have the opportunity and I didn’t feel safe and everywhere I went he bloody well came too, and even though I said, can you stay here because I’m going round the corner the woman said, ‘oh, no, you can come along too’.”

Teach staff not to get into a lot of legal or official jargon if the woman discloses. It can be very confusing, and at this stage she would mainly benefit from being listened to. Then when she is ready she will be able to hear about practical advice.

- Don’t get into official process — it can be confusing and lead to the woman backing off.

“I was like all over the shop and he immediately went on the official line that I mentally and emotionally couldn’t connect with and I completely backed away from telling more because the next time I was beaten I didn’t go back because I didn’t want to officially do anything and I felt that if I did go back it would be taken outside of my control.”

Hospital staff, including midwives, need to be aware that domestic violence can take place in relationships of younger couples.

- Be aware young women could be experiencing domestic violence.

“I feel that so many young girls going into the A and E or to have babies with young guys who could be their abusers... I think really hospital staff should take more notice and ask them as well.”

Question 3:

Should posters about domestic violence be displayed and leaflets be placed in bathrooms in ante-natal or post-natal clinics?

What the women told us

The women were in agreement that posters and leaflets show a positive message that women can tell about domestic violence, and that they will be believed.

- Have good up to date leaflets available. Include them in packs at antenatal. It shows that the issue is being taken seriously.

“I think posters and leaflets should be in the waiting rooms of ante-natal clinics, and included in packs given to pregnant women. They should be in other languages besides English.”

- Use video and translated leaflets in public places or antenatal classes and bathrooms.

“Is there any chance to get a video about domestic violence because in this country everything is on video... why not a video to say where to go, etc.”

In Conclusion

The women were pleased to be asked about the impact of domestic violence on pregnancy and how they think midwives and health visitors in particular can play a part in protecting themselves and their children.

They have strong and clear views about the need for staff to be well trained before screening woman in clinics or in their homes. Domestic violence is a complicated issue, and prejudices and myths need to be addressed before staff screen women so that their own views and experiences don't get in the way of possible disclosure.

Fears which women have about losing their children if they do tell need to be taken seriously. So there needs to be a range of ways in which women get the message that they can tell. These include:

- Being told what will happen if they disclose abuse.
- Clarity about confidentiality
- Being willing to listen to women well, including if they are trying to tell indirectly
- Give all women information, including leaflets, so that if they don't disclose now they go away with something which they can use in the future
- Use information such as statistics to explain why staff are asking about domestic violence.
- Have the same midwife wherever possible, otherwise trust cannot be built to tell.

In general the women agree that screening all women is important. But it should be done in an unrushed manner, and be repeated at different stages in a range of ways so that women get the message that it is okay to tell and that they will be responded to according to what **they** want.

Staff training needs to take these points into account. So it should not be done 'on the cheap'.

3.2 Black and Minority Ethnic Women

Black and Minority Ethnic survivors Using Legal Services: November 2002

Introduction

The aim of this particular consultation session with black and minority ethnic survivors was to provide a space to hear where these women have received good service support, and in their view what barriers they have encountered as women from black / ethnic minority communities when using legal services in relation to their experiences of domestic violence.

Recognising that past consultations had not reached a wide range of black and minority ethnic survivors whose first language was not English, Standing Together decided to set up this session with the intention of also welcoming them into the wider consultation process. It was hoped that this consultation would contribute to improved practice with black and minority ethnic women service users by Standing Together partner agencies.

Recruiting Participants

Standing Together invited black and minority ethnic (BME) women who have already participated in their general survivors' consultation, but in addition contacted a number of agencies in

Hammersmith & Fulham to reach as wide a group as possible of women who wanted to contribute their views and experiences to this particular session.

As with the other consultation sessions, I spoke with most of the women by telephone before the session. Each also received a letter with some information about the aim of the consultation. Childcare was offered, and interpreters. In the event, none of the women who attended needed an interpreter. Snacks were provided, but our break was set up so that those women observing Ramadan had use of the meeting room while the food was available to others in a separate space.

Five women attended this session:

- Two (2) women were Moroccan, one (1) was Algerian, one (1) Malaysian / Chinese from Singapore and one (1) British Hindu. (These descriptions were the women's own words when asked how they would describe themselves as black and minority ethnic women.)
- Ages: 20's–40's
- Time since the end of the violent relationship was 6 months to 4 years.

Facilitators

In this particular consultation meeting, I believe that the women benefited from having two facilitators from ethnic minority communities. We also span different age groups and cultural experiences and styles of communication. Clarity about my providing the structure of the meeting and Bhupinder watching for inclusion of all women as well as attending to emotional needs provided, I believe, a successfully safe and inclusive structure to the sessions so that all women could fully participate. This was important as most of the women had not attended a Standing Together consultation session before and several were very nervous about it on arrival. In addition, Bhupinder used her own experiences as a black woman to empathise and draw out the views of the women present.

Process of the Meeting

The first part of the meeting involved welcoming the women, checking their understanding about why the consultation is taking place, and creating the space for links to be made between them so that they would be able to say their experiences and views on use of the legal services. We stressed the importance Standing Together places on survivors' input in order to make changes, which will improve services to women and children experiencing domestic violence in the future and why this session had been particularly set up for black and minority ethnic women to contribute their experiences.

Setting some 'ground rules for working together'

Taking the 'ground rules' from the wider consultation process, the women agreed to use the same approach to working together for this meeting.

- Each woman can choose how much she wants to say about herself, or not.
- Confidentiality: if we meet outside this group, each woman can choose her response. If one woman doesn't want to talk, that's okay. It's not personal. We will acknowledge one another.
- Listening to one another / taking turns
- Respect one-another's different views and experiences: impacted by age, culture, etc.

- It's okay to disagree with one-another / have a different view.
- Don't interrupt each other.
- Having some fun together!
- No mobile phones on unless needed for emergencies (e.g. children)

Closing the Session

At the beginning of the session most of the women were anxious about the consultation, including fears of not having much to contribute. By the end of the two hours they were still contributing thoughts and were sorry that the session was ending. The atmosphere was very positive and the women had clearly enjoyed the process and appreciated the opportunity to come together as black and minority ethnic women survivors of domestic violence and contribute their thoughts for future improvement of services.

At the end of the session we invited the women to say what they had got for themselves out of the meeting. Comments included:

"It was good to be listened to."

"I liked airing my views."

"It was interesting hearing one another."

"It would have been good to have a longer session."

"I appreciate the help with transport getting here."

"It was good that you wrote up what we said, so we could see what you were putting down."

"I would like to be sent a copy of the report, and hear what happens with it."

These women were then invited to join the Standing Together wider survivors' consultation in the future. Two who were new to the process said that they would like to join it. Two chose not to, one due to other links with a Standing Together partner agency, and the other due to safety reasons.

Starting the Consultation Process

I informed the women: "this is about your comments and recommendations. Standing Together wants to hear your views, and intends to use them to directly influence and make improvements in how services respond to women experiencing domestic violence in Hammersmith & Fulham".

In this session, Standing Together wants to focus on legal services provided to black and ethnic minority women. This might be through use of a solicitor, going to the police, courts or to other legal services such as the Law Centre or community advice agencies.

I gave an explanation of the legal process, including the criminal and civil routes. All of the women present had used the legal services when living with domestic violence. For some of them this was outside the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, as well as some years ago.

Question 1:

If you have used the legal services, which ones, and what did you find useful / helpful about them in meeting your needs when you had experienced domestic violence?

In this part of the consultation the women concentrated on their positive experiences of using both the police and solicitors.

The Police

- They came quickly, and it was helpful that they checked back later and gave me information on how to use them.
- They told me about the CSU, and were good and supportive, including giving me lots of numbers.

“I found that when I did go to the police station they told me about the CSU straight away which was good to know that there was someone set up just to help you, it wasn’t just random, talking to anyone who didn’t know anything about it, so I thought that that was something positive and supportive.”

“They were helpful in the fact that when I did go in about the CSU contact they gave me a leaflet with loads of numbers, there was a lot of help there.”

- They turned up when I needed them and told me about Advance

“With me they came round they set it all up for me to come to Advance and stuff.”

- the police took me to the refuge

“My friend took me to the police station, then the police took me to the refuge.”

- They were very helpful and picked him up
- It was good that they let me make my own decision

“They don’t push you, they let you make your own decisions, they give you the information and then they leave you to it.”

Solicitors

- The solicitor helped me to get custody of my son

“She helped me to get custody of my son. She was good, she was on my side...she tried to tell me what do.”

- I felt that the solicitor was on my side, and gave me information
- I got a quick response, and felt comfortable with her
- The solicitor was good at listening

“She got me an injunction, we went to court straight away. She was excellent, I felt comfortable with her. She had a nice way of speaking: it was the way she talked with me and listened.”

- I was given a choice to see a man or woman solicitor

“I had a choice of going to a man or woman and I found having that choice was good.”

Question 2:

What concerns did you have, and in your view were there any barriers set up by these services for you as black / ethnic minority women?

In this section I asked the women to tell us, as black or ethnic minority women, was there something that they thought really wasn't okay about the way the legal services responded to their needs?

This time the women told us about their concerns about policing, followed by their views on solicitors and then other legal services.

The Police

- The police didn't arrest him, even when I gave his telephone number, and car details. Left me scared and not knowing what was happening.

“Why didn't they pick him up and arrest him that day? They left him. If it wasn't for my sister, she's in the police, they wouldn't pick him up at all. I gave them everything, the telephone number, the mobile, everything, and they weren't going to do nothing about it. Why weren't they picking him up that night? He was basically around the area but they didn't do nothing about it. So I ended up having to call my sister in the force so she had to go and speak to them and tell them to do their job.”

Facilitator: “Okay, and what was that experience like for you?”

“I was really hurting, because I couldn't sleep because I knew that he was out there, he could come back any time, there was nobody there with me to stop him. It was frightening.”

- There was not enough immediate action
- They were discouraging and didn't seem to want to do paperwork. They should have supported me even if I had withdrawn later

“I found them discouraging, even when they gave me the choice of deciding what to do they were still like — well remember if you write a statement then you've got to take it further and a lot of women do drop out. They just didn't want to go through it, the paperwork, that's what they made it look like, oh we're not bothered, that's the impression they gave me a lot of times.”

- They told me to withdraw when I wanted to go through with it

“It made me feel very vulnerable because I really wanted to go all the way to court all the way through it. That made you feel like, oh, because some women come and some don't, so better to drop it. It's really difficult because when I first went in and you go and make a report and you go and speak to them they are really encouraging, yeah we can do this, because usually the people on the desk, they don't know much about it, so you feel like something's going to get done, then all of a sudden you go back again and that's it, it's gone they just totally discourage you, you

can't do anything about it, you go through these highs and lows, one week thinking something's going to happen and all of a sudden it's all gone and I'm alone again."

- My son was not heard, and his experience was not used as evidence

"My son was a witness, because my son witnessed everything, he was ten years old, they wouldn't take him, they said they couldn't put him on the stand because he was my son, he was always going to be on my side, he doesn't know what's really going on, he's a child. What I don't like is the way they treated him. They didn't take his experience, what he said seriously because of his age and his mental disability."

- 4 years ago, and 3 years the police told me they couldn't remove him, so I should go
- My English was limited, so they didn't take me seriously. They believed my husband when he said I was crazy because he could speak more English

"They said we can't get him out, you have to leave. I said: I can't leave with the kids and I was really shocked. And it happened to me again 3 years ago, same thing, saying you have to go."

Facilitator: *"Can I ask you a question? Do you think that your culture and your background might have had any influence on the way that the police responded to you?"*

"I think because I am not very good in English, then they just don't bother...I don't want to say they are racist. If you know how to speak if you are a very good speaker very good talker, then they will because they know you know what to do, not like, I still don't know what to speak, but I know what to do I know what's happening about everything, but because of the way they treat me it was hard because he was there with me, I couldn't speak, they rather listen to him because they understand him. And they didn't give me any information on where I could go."

- I speak English and they brought in an interpreter with the wrong language. It made me feel small and I hadn't been asked. I wore Hijab, so they assumed I didn't speak English
- I felt like nothing, the way they responded

"With me I can speak very well English and they still brought me an interpreter... I was brought up in this country. I sat there very quiet because my husband was there and they brought me someone and the woman started talking to me in, not in my language, in Arabic. I don't understand Arabic very well, I can speak Moroccan I don't speak Arabic... Because at that time I had the Hijab, that's why they thought I couldn't speak English."

The women then discussed the different responses they have had from the police depending on their ability to speak English. They agreed that assumptions are often made, and women should be seen apart from their husband / male partner.

- An Asian woman police officer listened to me, while a white male and black female officer didn't

"I went to the police at Kensington and Chelsea, I went there a couple of times to the station and one time I went there was an Asian woman at the desk and she

took maybe half an hour sitting there with me talking through what they could do, whereas another time when I went there was a white man and he was just like — yeah, whatever, I'll write a report if that's what you want, and that's it, he just wasn't bothered and it happened like that quite a few times and I just felt like maybe it was because the woman was Asian, that she was more willing to sit down, and listen. I've been into Shepherds Bush and Hammersmith and there was a black woman, she was the same she just wouldn't want to help, she was like — yeah, just fobbing you off."

This comment led to discussion between the women on responses from different officers from different communities. They agreed that you don't always get support from those in your own community, but what is important is to be heard and asked what you need.

- Police called by a neighbour were impatient when they turned up, then didn't remove the man so the woman couldn't say what was happening

"My neighbours called the police, a few police cars come, then they ask — did you call the police, I said no. The police officer got angry — who call the police? Then my ex sat down in the sitting room and I can't say anything, I said it's not me... I can't say anything, I said — look I didn't call the police, he is there I cannot say anything, the policeman so angry."

- Called police for woman being beaten in street by a man: not taken seriously because my English is not good when I am scared

"I hear someone fighting in the street, and the man has hit her down, I call the police — I say I hear the woman shout and see the woman and the man hit her out on the floor, I say you better come, and the police say — no one called... I think so because my English is not good enough, it is not clear. So I took the phone to the door and said — can you hear a woman shouting?... They came eventually... It was really horrible, the woman was on the floor, he beat her on the floor."

- Immigration status — the police told me that they couldn't help me

"...when they open the door the police lady opened the door and I run, I don't know where to go but I was just so happy because the door is open and I go to this small place under the stairs and I stay there and they start looking — where is she, where are you, we need to talk to you, don't be scared and then I came when I heard the lady said that and I said — I want to go somewhere, but I don't know where to go, I am scared and then she said... and that time I didn't have status I am not allowed to stay in the country yet, my passport is still on his hand. She said have you got your papers? I said I haven't got nothing, he has got everything and I don't know where to go, I just want to go back to my country I don't care, she said — you can't go without a passport, you can't do nothing we can't take you to a refuge we can't do nothing. She said — so why did you call the police? I said I didn't go to the police and I don't know how to speak very good English, I said me — I didn't call the police, she said okay okay, and I said, maybe the neighbour called. See that's when they've got a hold of you when you've got no papers, you've got no where to go, you've got no family, they can do anything to you and they know you can't get away from them."

- The police don't understand what you are going through — they need to read between the lines more.

“A lot of the police don’t understand what you are going through, they don’t try and understand, they’ve never really dealt with it before, they have heard of it but they haven’t gone into it in detail and that causes problems because even if you say something they don’t understand what you mean because you’re not always going to be totally upfront they need to learn to read between the lines a bit just to get an impression.”

Solicitors and Other Legal Services

Community services

- I went to the Moroccan service, for legal support. They wanted me to be quiet and go back to my husband: these were women. The man who worked there was helpful and gave me advice.
- I also went there, but they reinforced my father’s view of “deal with it” and stay. They say do it for your kids. Besides other agencies, barriers can come from your own community.

“They are supposed to help us because they are from the same country but they don’t, especially women, I even scream at them and shout at them because they really just look at you like this — from top to bottom, they look at you down, really down, it’s like something unbelievable if you fight with your husband or you fight with someone... It’s supposed to be legal advice, but they can’t give you any.”

“Do you know what they said? Oh go back to your husband, don’t be stupid, you are from Morocco, don’t think you’re from here — but I said, so, just because I’m from Morocco do you want him to beat me and you want me to sit down? They expect you to sit there and listen to your husband...he’s your husband you have to accept everything he does. ...The man there, he was really helpful he’s the one who found stuff out for me.”

“I went to the same place, and my father was very happy because they like said his view, that he wanted, so he liked it. No, you are always the bad one, even if you are innocent... It’s us who do everything wrong because we back chat them, we’re not supposed to back chat them. We have to listen to the man, if he tells you to go and jump out the window.”

“To tell you the truth I haven’t got a divorce yet and it’s been two and a half years, basically when I go up and try and get a divorce he won’t sign the papers — he says: I want my wife back... I want her back, why should I divorce her when I want her back, and they (the Advice Centre) listen to that.”

These comments by two women led to discussion about how it is often assumed that black and minority ethnic women will get the best support from within their own community. Other agencies often advise black and minority ethnic women to go to their own community advice agencies. The women agreed that the barriers can come from within their own communities. To other agencies the women wanted us to convey this message — don’t assume to send us to our own community agencies because we won’t necessarily get support there.

“I went there because of one thing, it’s because I didn’t know how to speak English, I was saying, wow, they’re speaking my language so I can explain, they can understand me... and I didn’t get support.”

- Listen to us — and do what we need
- Don't judge us
- I hoped I'd get help because we speak the same language

“You need them to really understand, some people like Women’s Aid who have experience before, they really understand, I was expecting the women (at the Moroccan Advice Centre) to help me.”

“They should understand very, very well and they should do what you are asking them to do... they should tell me what to do because I don’t know, I don’t know what to do... I need to move, I need to separate, I need to get divorced?”

- With our own community agencies — it should be people who know about the issue and they should ask what we want and then tell me what my options are.
- We go to these agencies because we're the same. They need to know British law, rights and how to use it, and take steps back from our own culture.

“I think that inside your own community you go to them because they are the same as you but at the same time they need to understand that this is Britain they need to understand what’s wrong here and what’s right here, what you can do and what you can’t do.”

“They should start to realise that even though we are a certain culture — take the good things from that but realise that in this country domestic violence isn’t allowed, it is not right and there is a reason for that and then tell what to do about it, they should think about it culturally but also the British way of thinking.”

Solicitors

- I was not told about costs, when I couldn't get Legal Aid. The solicitor or police didn't tell me I could get an emergency injunction out myself.

“When the police left a message to phone the solicitors I phoned them up, made an appointment, but I was never told about the cost, so I went along, found out, tried to apply for legal aid, found out I couldn’t get it... So then for that consultation I just to tell her what I’ve been through cost me a hundred and twenty pound and at the end of it she goes — Oh but I’ll do you a favour and write you a letter to him, for free. I was like, what is a letter going to do? He won’t even read it, so that was like, I spent a hundred and twenty pounds for nothing and then she goes, well come back to me a month after you’ve stopped working and then we will do something.”

“Advance told me that I can actually get an injunction without going to a solicitor, and the solicitor didn’t tell me that, I thought the solicitor should have at least told me that I could get an emergency injunction.”

Question 3:

If you didn't use any legal services, why not? What held you back from using them?

Because the time was short for the session, we didn't address this question directly. It was also the case that for this group of women they actually had used the legal services.

A number of the points raised in the next section below are important to note and could make a real difference to whether black and minority ethnic women re-approach the police, solicitors or other agencies for support when experiencing domestic violence.

Question 4:

What do you think needs to happen to make legal services really accessible to you as black / ethnic minority women, in order to get the service you really need?

- Provide **short** list of contacts — so you can get help if you need to
“I think a shorter list of contacts, so just specific places not a whole list, you say here’s a whole list — do what you want with it, but maybe just giving, even if there was like one place you could go to — tell them your problem and they could direct you to a place that would help the most. So that you are actually getting feedback that you need, not just a list of certain numbers that you just phone around about ten places and not get what you really want.”
- Take women somewhere safe. Don’t assume women have the money to call round
“If they could, if they know that you have got nowhere to go — just take you to somewhere straight away, not give you the numbers... I didn’t have the money that time, not even twenty pence to call... do you want me to go to the streets and ask for twenty pence to call this number?”
- If you don’t speak English they should call to help you
“I think that when they know you can’t speak English I think they should phone for you and find out the proper places to go to for help, not let you do it yourself, especially when they know you can’t really speak the language.”
- Take to police station to use their telephone
“Maybe take you away from the situation — take you to the police station and let you use their phone. I mean how hard is that, it gets you away and you can actually get help on your own then.”
- Women should be talked to separately from the man — when the police come
“You just want to get out, you can’t speak in front of him. It’s not safe, you can’t always say what you want to say in front of him.”
- Know that it’s hard for us to say what we want and maybe we may not know our rights
- Advance as a ‘go between’ — they wouldn’t come back about what the police did.
“Well, with Advance we would talk about things, and then they’d say we will try and speak to the police and see if there is anything we can do and then they wouldn’t get back to me, so I’d know bits, but I wouldn’t know the whole story and I wouldn’t know how to take it further... I thought maybe it was because I was a student and they probably thought I can speak English, I can deal with it myself, that’s how I felt, that I should be able to get on with it. Even if you are a student or you speak very good, sometimes you don’t know what to do, it’s not about speaking English.”

- Police need training on domestic violence, what women go through
- Put yourself in my shoes and understand my situation.

“I think all police should be given some basic training on domestic violence, how to deal with it, what people go through, because you can walk into a police station and someone behind the counter is not going to know anything, but it would be nice if they had a little bit of training so they can understand a little bit, instead of fobbing you off to someone else, because you’ve gone there for a reason, you don’t just want to go there and get sent away again.”

- If you’re a black and minority ethnic officer, use the skills and knowledge you have. Don’t say I can’t speak our language. At least start the translation until the interpreter arrives
- Not letting police who speak other languages support victims in this way shows the police don’t trust each other, they should believe one another

“It was Moroccan policeman... he didn’t help and he couldn’t (wasn’t allowed to) speak my language... if you are a black or ethnic minority officer — use the language. He said I can’t speak the language in front of them, I’m not allowed to, they think we are talking about something else... I don’t speak English I need him to translate it so I can understand, at least until an interpreter comes.”

“It just shows that police officers don’t trust each other and that’s wrong, they are the police officers, they are in authority they should have that — people should trust them, so even if you speak to them in another language then everyone else around you should respect that and say — well yeah, we believe what they are saying. Especially if he’s (the black and minority ethnic officer) been explaining to them in English anyway .”

- Have funds to help women get to a hostel, or other service

“It was Fulham police station (three years ago) — they left me outside the station and I had to walk from Fulham to Hammersmith to a hostel. I had to walk all the way to Hammersmith to that hostel, they said walk.”

- Encourage women to stick up for themselves.

“One thing I want to tell the police, I want the police to tell the women to stand up for themselves and to go, go and do whatever you feel you want to do, just go, because if the police say that it will really help.”

“I would like to tell every woman who has problems like me, you shouldn’t scare, you shouldn’t be down, even if you don’t know how to speak — speak your own language, just stand up for yourself, don’t be scared, don’t do my mistake, just sit down.”

Conclusion

The women appreciated the opportunity to provide their views and thinking about their use of legal services, including community services. They would like to be involved in further Standing Together consultations.

Having the space together as black and minority ethnic women seemed to enable them to highlight particular issues that many of them shared when using legal services. The primary concerns were:

- Assumptions should not be made about black and minority ethnic women. Find out what their needs are directly from them.
- Community advice agencies do not always provide non-judgmental support and information to women. In fact sometimes they can be collusive with the abuse. Other agencies should not automatically refer women to them. Awareness raising needs to be addressed with these community agencies as well as the bigger statutory ones.
- Women appreciate being asked about the violence away from the man. This is the same as women requested in general in other consultation sessions for Standing Together, but includes the need to check language needs and make sure that she knows what her rights are.
- Taking an approach which empowers and encourages the women to state and get her needs met will be safer for these women and their children. Do not make decisions or act on their behalf, but do consider provision of support such as use of telephones, and cash for transport.

The women ended the session saying that they would like to see the report on the session, and to hear how it is used with Hammersmith and Fulham agencies.

3.3 West London Domestic Violence Court

Survivors views of the West London Domestic Violence Court: January 2003

Introduction

In the consultation with survivors in 2001, Standing Together heard that women would find it much easier to give evidence in a court where professionals were prepared and understood the issue and the setting was more informal.

Advance and other Standing Together agencies identified the same need for a specific court dedicated to hearing domestic violence cases.

In October 2002 the first domestic violence court in London was established in West London, on a trial basis. With the first review about to take place, Standing Together invited survivors to see the court in progress and feed their comments into this review process.

Participants

There were seven women at the consultation. Several others would have liked to be there, but couldn't due to work or other commitments.

Of these women:

- Two were Moroccan
- One was Chinese
- Four were white British

Most of these women had used either the civil or criminal courts as a result of their own domestic violence experiences. They were eager to participate in this session, and to use their own experiences of the process to assess whether this court improved the situation for women witnesses in particular.

Standing Together had organised for the women to use a room in the courts to meet before and after they attended the court session. The women found this thoughtful and welcoming, and enjoyed sitting around the 'board-style' table and the generous supply of refreshments available throughout the morning. One woman commented: "it feels like our views are being taken seriously".

The previously agreed 'groundrules' were used by the women for this session.

Preparing and then viewing the court in progress

Bhupinder and I met with the women before we went into the domestic violence court. Using the 'listening pairs' process that has been a key tool in the consultation process, the women supported one another by hearing expectations and fears they had before we entered the court itself. Several women were able to speak about their own courts experiences as a result of domestic violence, and each woman feeling vulnerable about re-entering a court was paired up with a buddy.

We all then went to the small public gallery in the domestic violence court where Standing Together provided an excellent, clear explanation of how the court operates, including who is in each role (the prosecutor, defendant's solicitor, police officer, Advance advocate, etc).

Over the following hour the women saw several cases presented to the courts. These were preliminary hearings in which the case was presented and dates set for the full hearing. Unfortunately we did not see any women as witnesses. The women whispered and commented in between each case, noticing that the male defendants were sitting in the court before their own case was heard, noting the closed-in defendants box (the secure dock) and the proximity of the witness stand as well as video screen (not in operation).

What the women thought about the domestic violence court

On leaving the court, the women spent another short time in pairs, with encouragement to focus on their feelings as well as initial views on the court they had seen in progress. This was most important as personal experiences had been 'triggered' for several women, one of whom Bhu sat with in a side room while she had a cry and offloaded memories.

Acknowledging that the experience of sitting in the court had been emotive and that I was sorry we did not have more time for personal offload, I then asked the women for their general comments on the Court.

What was good in your view about this court?

- That ADVANCE is available, "to grab a hand" for women

"They were sitting there ready to step in, whether you had asked for it or not... you did have the opportunity to grab a hand if you needed it."

- That the defendant is in a closed box "all shut up" — but we think it should be locked as we saw one man walk straight out of it to talk to his solicitor.

"The box, just the way it was all shut up. ...It was safe."

“But I reckon it should be locked, I reckon once the man is in it, it should be locked and once you (the woman witness) are ready to leave it should be unlocked because then you’ll be completely safe.”

- That the Prosecutor was a woman: she was strong / positive and had no hesitancy

“Well, what I think that was very good was that the prosecutor was a woman... I think she was very strong, I just preferred her to be a woman.”

“She was really on the ball and really positive about what she had to say... she spoke really clearly.”

“...if I was stepping in court I would be absolutely petrified full stop, but to get there and find that it was friendly and that it was okay, sometimes I think that the more women you have round you the more support there is and emotionally safe you feel.”

- Could have a man prosecutor — but he needs to be clued up about domestic violence

“I think you can have a man but I think you need to be clued up about the issues... they need to be trained.”

- That there is a T.V. — that it could be possible to use video link

“The TV, the idea that you could give your evidence and not physically be sitting there.”

- It flowed well and all the court staff knew what it was about

“I think the general flow, the fact that it flowed... I suppose psychologically can help you... they all seem to know what they were about.”

- The judge reminded the solicitor for a man who did not appear: “this is a domestic violence court and we do require his presence”. They took the issue seriously.

“The solicitor said: “you know some courts don’t require the defendant, my client hasn’t come today”... they focussed directly back onto what they were there for which was domestic violence... they actually said: “this is a domestic violence court”.

What do you think needs improving / what changes need to be made to this court?

- Concerns about victims’ addresses coming out in court.
- Other male perpetrators were present in court, waiting for their case to be heard — this may well have ‘normalised’ the behaviour for these men.

“I had a big concern about the fact that there was these other men waiting for their cases to be heard... I was concerned about the confidentiality because they were hearing people’s, victims’ addresses. Also the fact that they are sitting there it may actually normalise what they’ve done, because with a lot of people coming in, men can think I’m not the only one who’s hit this woman — or done whatever. I just don’t like the idea of that, I realise that they probably do it (have the men waiting there) for speed, but there should be some waiting area outside the court.”

“I think it could almost normalise it for them, it could almost make them feel that — I’m not the only one who’s done it... it shouldn’t be normalised in the system out there.”

- Should be mirror glass — so man can't see public gallery: e.g. relatives' privacy. There is no confidentiality for them.

“That guy that was waiting (in the court) to be heard was sitting in those chairs glaring at us, I mean really trying to intimidate us, now we could have been relatives, friends.”

“The public gallery is very close to where the person (defendant) in court is...there should be mirror glass so they can't see us.”

Facilitator's note: one of the defendants waiting for his case spent some time winking and trying to flirt with the women in our group — as we were visible in the public gallery.

- Couldn't hear the solicitor well, or clerk. They should have microphones so everyone can hear them

“The judge we can hear very clearly. Apart from that the other people we can't hear much because they are facing the judge.”

“They weren't using microphones and I think Nic (from Standing Together) said that they never use their microphones and I think even for the defendant in the box — he has a right to hear what the solicitor's saying, what's being said about him and he didn't know what was going on.”

- Could have labels for staff — so the public knows who is doing what job.

“The advocate, and the crown prosecution. All the people should have a label on the table so when women come in they know who they are.”

- It is a very small court: reversing where the witness box and the defendant is could avoid intimidation — especially if the man is 'made' to face the judge.
- Need screens — so that the man can't see / intimidate the woman.

“He'd be sitting there glaring at her...he should be sitting behind his solicitor barrister.”

“I think the defendant if he was at the front of the court then he would have to be looking forward at the magistrate and the victim was behind then there would be no reason to continue looking at the victim... that guy was really giving us glares in the box and we don't even know him, now imagine if the victim was sitting that close, plus the door was open.”

“I don't think either defendant or victim should see each other I think you should be able to give your evidence or your point of view.”

- Lot of coming and going by staff — this was a bit off-putting.

“In terms of showing that this court is serious... people were in and out, in and out, talking, other cases coming out, I just think it takes away from the whole process.”

Standing Together had formulated several questions that they specifically wanted the women's feedback on, as follows.

Question 1:

From what you saw in the court, and from your own experience, do you think the Courts session for domestic violence cases should be ‘closed’ to the public, or not? And why?

This question interestingly raised a discussion. Initially all of the women thought that the court should be closed.

- Otherwise it can lead to embarrassment
- Confidentiality — no woman’s address should go to strangers
- Safety: there could be anyone sitting in the public gallery
- If a group like us wanted to sit in the public gallery, the woman could be asked

“Safety/confidential/you don’t want anyone knowing your life/your address, your life.”

“I don’t think any woman would want their address and their history said with strangers — we would want that private, which is extremely important.”

“Individual women could be asked then if there were groups like us — explain why we were doing it — if they would mind if they then viewed their case... but I don’t think that just as domestic violence cases they should be open to the public, because actually if we had nothing to do each day we could all just amble in there everyday, if you were a voyeur — take your sandwiches in and sit there all day... imagine all the information you could get on people... so that you can’t just take somebody’s details and walk away with them or that you then become physically at risk from someone sitting in the public gallery.”

However, the following comments were also made, reflecting how the women’s views developed in discussion:

- Closing the court could lead to collusion with hushing up of domestic violence in society

“I agree with all of that, but I think the other side, the down fall if you close it, is that you could have a negative effect that you could almost be colluding with the hushing up of these cases in terms of hiding how many cases actually happen, hiding the fact that it does happen every day on a major scale and that you could be colluding with the perpetrators.”

“Maybe there could be a middle ground where there is some sort of monitoring about who these people are, you know maybe it isn’t just a free for all, so if there is someone going in the public gallery, there is someone there to find out who they are and ID them and names are taken.”

- Definitely should not read out women’s addresses in the court

“Make sure that none of these names and addresses are read out in court — there are other ways of doing it, you can show them (the women) a piece of paper and say ‘Is this your name and address; do you agree to it?’”

Question 2:

Standing Together is not sure yet whether and when women will have choice about using a video link to give evidence. Do any of you think it would not be a good idea?

All the women agreed that video link is a good idea:

- Video use would take away the fear element — so more women would come forward to be witnesses in domestic violence cases.

“It’s a very good idea.”

“I think you’d get a lot more people coming... I think that if you took away some of the fear element... so if you can take some of the fear and some of the stress away maybe more people would want to come forward because it wouldn’t be so awful.”

“I think court for anybody, regardless of whatever the case is, is quite scary for some people so that could just make it that much easier, but I really think there is no reason why the perpetrator should be able to see the screen I think they should be able to hear it, but I think if you let them see the screen — that’s giving them power again, because the woman may not want him to be able to see her. The woman may have changed her identity in all sorts of ways. ...I personally wouldn’t want to give him that power to see me, I’d just like him to be able to hear me, because even if I was in another room I would know he’s watching me and that would make me feel unsafe.”

Question 3:

When women live in Hammersmith and Fulham they are offered support in going to court by ADVANCE: help to go over the statement, watch for her safety, pass any updates to the Crown Prosecution Service, and come into court with her. Then help to find out the outcome of the court: the decision. Is this the kind of support you would want in coming to court? What other support might women need?

The women agreed that this is very good support, and added the following thoughts:

“I would wish if I go to court — some women to come with me just to give me support because last time I was by myself and my solicitor she had to go...and I was in this room and he was in the next room.”

- It would also be good for some women to be accompanied from home and back

“Can they pick them up from their home and take them to the court and take them home again?”

“Yeah, because when you come out it’s emotional it may be a good or bad result and you just need somebody to go home with rather than just making your own way home.”

- It is important to have a consistent person / the same woman all through the process. Women don’t want to explain to another person

“I think it would be good if you could either meet the team or be assigned one, it’s like the midwife I suppose so that in your mind you have continuity and that in itself is safety.”

“I want to feel safe and the only way I would feel safe was if I wasn’t meeting a stranger every time, not that they were my friend but that they were somebody that I knew one hundred and one per cent that I could trust.”

- Women need ongoing support: to help with empowering and links to other services

“I think you need more than just the before court and a bit after I think it is a continuous thing because it is about empowering, if a woman who has survived domestic violence has lost the power now she’s got to start empowering herself and she may not know how to go about that, and you can’t do it on your own, say if you haven’t got a support system or you haven’t got people who understand the situation, then you need someone who does.”

Question 4:

What do you think of the leaflet on the Court that is sent to women before they come to it?

In general the women liked the leaflet and think it is very good that women receive it before coming to be witnesses in the domestic violence court. They also had some proposed changes to it.

- The leaflet gives you hope — it gives a statement that domestic violence is “not acceptable”

“It gives you a lot of hope... that it says it’s (domestic violence) unacceptable and it’s not your fault.”

- It is good you can be asked your views on punishment, but it could be scary and make women feel very responsible for the results, as well as provide unnecessary stress to the woman. It could be reworded to say:

“your opinions are important — if you have a view on the punishment we would be pleased to know”.

“I think that one where it says the magistrates will listen to all the evidence (from police, witness, medical evidence) and decide whether that person’s guilty... where it says you may be asked for your views to help the court decide on the punishment — I think it’s good that they want to hear your view but at the same time if you read that you might think — oh I don’t want to go then, I don’t want to be asked those things, especially if he’s going to be there and I’ve got to say something in front of him.”

“It could be an unnecessary stress.”

“It could be reworded in a way that — yes your opinions are important and yes you are being listened to, but in that way it looks like that woman’s going to be put on the spot.”

- There should be a sign to the domestic violence court. Women shouldn’t have to say, “I’ve come for the domestic violence court”. It is not private.
- It would be good for the leaflet to be in other languages.

Conclusion

The women all welcomed the introduction of this court dedicated to hearing domestic violence cases. The atmosphere, obvious improved awareness of the judge and prosecutor, and the availability of an advocate is a huge improvement to the general court situation that many of them experienced.

There are improvements to be made still. In particular the presence of defendants waiting to have their case presented in the court was a concern to the women. They also think that the witness box should be further away from the defendant and that preferably she should be able to give evidence from another room by video link. Most of the women thought that the court should be 'closed' although through discussion they also developed views about the **disadvantages** of a closed court — demonstrating again how well able the group is to engage with a wider “policy” context, weighing up both sides of a proposal whilst starting from a perspective informed by personal first hand experience. All agreed that reading out the woman’s address in court should cease in order to ensure her and her children’s safety.

Standing Together future consultation

Debbie joined the group at the end of the session. She thanked the women for their contribution to improving services in Hammersmith & Fulham for women experiencing domestic violence. Debbie then informed the group that a final session of the present consultation series would take place a month later to review the process as well as determine next steps in what Standing Together hope will be an on-going consultation process with survivors.

The women were all pleased for these views to be used for the review of this court in a couple of weeks time, and Standing Together staff included them in the information they presented to partners.

3.4 Reviewing the Consultation Process and Next Steps: February 2003

As the second year of sessions came to an end, Standing Together wanted to hear directly from the women about what they think of how the consultation process had been set up and carried out.

The aim of this session was therefore to ask women about:

- a) The process
- b) The reports produced from the sessions
- c) What they have valued or liked, and any improvements they think are needed for future consultations
- d) And to let the women know what Standing Together plan next.

The Process

I gave an explanation to the women about how Standing Together had developed the plan for the consultation, including preparing agencies to receive their feedback and act on it. Each woman received a copy of the ‘protocol’ (Appendix A) and we talked it through. All said that it was well planned, and clear. They also appreciated the way in which their safety had been considered and the preparation carried out with agencies to hear their views.

The Reports

We then took time to receive feedback and any corrections on the three reports I wrote after each consultation session over this year. Most women had read them. Several had copies with them to give feedback from. Women found it interesting to see their thinking written down, including quotations. There was some discussion about whether these all made sense 'out of context' and attention drawn to a few mistakes. In general though the women liked that their direct words were being relayed to practitioners and policy makers in agencies.

There was one issue that concerned me in how we had presented the reports to the women. We had not this year been able to set up support for two women who do not read English — not because of lack of resources in terms of money, more because of a failure to think sufficiently in advance about their specific needs. In practice, had we been more effective in doing this and predicting their needs, it may still not have been feasible in the time available to have had the reports translated. Perhaps a more effective solution would have been for someone to sit with the women and help them understand the content.

What Women Liked and Improvements Recommended for Year Three

The next part of the evening was spent giving the women an opportunity to feed back their views on the consultation sessions.

We asked them:

- a) What have you liked / thought is good about the consultations with you?
- b) What do think could be improved / changed in the future?

After some discussion in pairs / small groups, the women made the following points.

The good things / what we liked

- A chance to say what I want to say, that it is written down and can help other women.
“...it gave me a chance to say what I wanted to say, and know that it’s going to be put down on paper and it’s going to help some other women.”
- I feel what we say is valued — it goes further than this room.
“I think it’s been very important to feel that what we’ve had to say is valued and not just given lip service, been listened to and it’s going somewhere further than this room.”
- I’ve got a bit stronger since coming.
“I’ve got a bit stronger obviously, do I enjoy coming to them? Yes I do because I enjoy talking to other women, I don’t feel I’m talking to a wall.”
- I enjoy talking to other women.
- I’ve been heard, and not judged.
“I like it because I have been heard and I don’t feel like I’ve been judged.”
- I’ve been free to say what I want and we’ve learnt about each other.

- Before I was scared to talk. Now I feel supported.

“I find that the group gets more supportive and I feel free to talk about things and we can learn from each others experience, and this is a good thing. Before I felt very scared and I had no freedom to talk and I always felt down, you feel nothing you know, but here everyone is together.”

- Makes me feel something good came out of the bad years.
- This is our gang / posse. We’ve had similar sorts of experiences. This is us ‘getting our own back’.

“Well it’s really the whole thing of, it’s like a retribution thing that makes you feel that something good has come out of the wasted years and the bad things that have happened to you and we are almost like our gang, this is our posse... it’s like us getting our own back because it’s helping.”

- It’s good to know this will go to policy makers.

“It is good to know — like you’ve said that this is going to go into a report and hopefully it will be part of what policy makers will be reading and you know it is not going to be like a lot of policies — brought out of thin air with no research behind it, although there is a long way to go, it’s so brilliant and it’s a positive out of a negative.”

- I’m glad I’ve played a part in this.
- It puts domestic violence on the agenda — like the BBC showing it recently in ‘Hitting Home’ week of programmes.

“It’s put on the agenda for the government, and I feel that the councillors and that are now beginning to take it seriously.”

- We’re from different walks of life, and ethnicity and we’re part of this group.
- It’s positive that you’ve drawn us together and got interpreters, etc.

“I thought it was positive that we are all from different walks of life, from talking to each other, we’re all from different ethnicities which is you know, really good, although we’ve got similarities we’ve also got massive differences as well which is all part of the positivity of the group. It’s not about saying — oh it must have happened to me because I am part of this set of people, we know, it just backs up what we already know, that it can happen to anybody. And I guess it’s positive that we’ve been able to draw across different walks of life.”

“You’ve got your interpreter, travel and childcare expenses, all of those help, and the food!”

- The phone calls before each session are a reminder that you haven’t forgotten us. They are also good if you can’t read.

“...it makes you know that you haven’t been forgotten.”

The women agreed that it was also good that my home number was not given to them — that I am protecting myself as well as thinking about them.

The Facilitators

- Vital to have them to ensure 'safety' for the group (safety to contribute)
- Makes it easier to get everyone heard

"I think in a group like this it is vital to have two facilitators who ensure the safety of the group... possibly if there had only been one facilitator it could be anarchy because we all get sometimes quite excited and speak at the same time."

- It keeps us in order
- It's good to have two facilitators and important to have diverse age, background, ethnicity

"I think it is important, like we have a mixed group it's important that we have facilitators from diverse backgrounds, ethnicity, and ages."

- The two complementary roles are good: one as 'teacher' or guide to do the session and the other for calming/emotional support

"Vicky does like the school teacher — and I love the way Bhu, she like, she calms us... emotional support."

"I think you've been a guide, Vicky".

"I think the facilitators have been very supportive, I can't think of anything negative."

"I've had as much help as anybody could ever give me and I couldn't ask for any more. Everything I've always asked, I've always had an answer, I've always had the support."

What's not been so good, or needs to be improved

- Alternative day and evening meetings are best — to help with safety and when we are all available

"It would be good to continue to alternate evening and daytime meetings... some people they don't want to come out at night when they don't perhaps feel safe. I know they can get childcare but they are feeling more vulnerable."

- We'd like longer sessions, with more time to spend together: to get to know one another more.
- I know this is not a 'support group': but it's valuable for the process to have more time together.
- It helps to have some time to be together to off load each time.

"Some more time for our sessions... I always think that people with this sort of group or training or whatever, the most important time is when you have that social time."

"we don't actually have much time to talk together... It's quite nice to actually have time to open up to each other and tell each other things because then you feel more comfortable...you need that time."

“I know you’ve said it’s not a support group as such, but I think it’s still a valuable part of the process, that could be the part that makes you feel at ease, gets you back in to it.”

“Because this is a personal thing that has happened to us and we are discussing personal things, it is quite nice not to then just go away, be discussing personal things and not really know anything about each other — you need to be slightly personal... Or have the chance to if you want to.”

- Can’t tell other people, and it helps it to go. We’re all together.

“It helps talking about it, more of it goes.”

“I can express and hear other women, I can hear this lady and what she went through and you know — we’re all together.”

After the closure of the excellent venue the sessions were in last year, Standing Together have had a challenge to find suitable, safe and private spaces for this past year.

- It is important to have good venues: ‘more like my sitting room’ — this is part of treating us as important

“I would say that I don’t like this venue, I feel like we’ve been squashed up in a corner somewhere and been dumped... it would feel more comfortable if it was like a sitting room — do you know what I mean? Chairs, and maybe a carpet on the floor... it’s important because the very nature of domestic violence is about not being important and about being oppressed and about being suppressed and being treated as rubbish and so that’s why as we’ve said before the whole group has been positive in terms of being made to feel important and I think the venue should reflect that as well and that’s not a reflection on you guys for booking it because I know its really hard to find it.”

Throughout this process the women giggled and made jokes and enjoyed being together a great deal. I had a strong sense of how much closer and more relaxed they are with one another and how much they like being consulted in this manner.

What Standing Together Plan for Year 3

After a short break, Debbie and Nic from Standing Together joined the group for the final part of the evening. They started with appreciations to the women:

“It has been so valuable to hear your thoughts and experiences, and to have your continued involvement. We wanted to take your voices to the places where women’s voices easily get lost, to the agencies. You’ve enabled us to do this. Your words in these reports can’t be ignored.”

“It’s been so worthwhile to hear what you think, as ‘the people who know best’. It’s been what we’ve hoped for, and we have seen the professionals impacted by hearing your words and recommendations. Your advice last year helped us set up the Domestic Violence Court, and your views this year will help improve it over time. It is an on-going process of change, and Standing Together thinks you are the most important part of it.”

Standing Together wants to meet with the women every 2–3 months over the coming year, using the same style of consultation meetings. In the mean time, they will offer the women some training so that they can increase their skills for speaking out, and if they choose, respond to the media when Standing Together is asked for survivors' views. All the women liked the sound of being offered these skills, which Standing Together offered 'without strings attached'. None of the women are required to use them for this work.

All of the women present said that they would like to participate in next year's consultation process, and some also signed up to be informed about other 'outside' requests for survivors views which come through Standing Together. Those women who were not present for this final evening but have participated in the sessions this year will be contacted to hear whether they would like to continue in the group.

Finally, it was time to say goodbye for Bhupinder and myself. We spoke to the women:

Bhupinder: "We've asked probing questions. You've been vulnerable and open and held yourselves in response. I feel sad about leaving. It's been exciting work and thank you all."

Vicky: "I feel sad leaving, and I am going because I want to increase time for my art, not because I don't want to be with you any more. I have loved supporting you to get your voices heard. I think what you have done so far and the potential for the future is very powerful. I have loved working with Bhupinder, and I know that you are in very capable hands with Standing Together for year three."

One of the women then spoke on behalf of the group, as the 'senior member' and thanked both Vicky and Bhupinder for their thoughtful and supportive guidance as facilitators. "You handled it well with a big group so that we could all take part".

Section Four



Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 General strengths of the consultation process, and learning for the future

a) A multi-agency approach is crucial.

The primary strength to this project was in my view the background work that Standing Together had done to build a team of partner agencies in Hammersmith & Fulham before commencing this consultation, which came out of the long history of working together as part of the Hammersmith and Fulham Domestic Violence Forum. The trust already in place between these agencies made it possible for Standing Together to take the women's recommendations back and have them heard and responded to. It was used immediately to raise awareness and provide guidance for policy and practice changes in key agencies which women use when experiencing domestic violence.

b) The women told us that this was a positive experience for them.

There was understandably some concern for agencies and facilitators that we should not 'use' the women, take any risks to their safety or put emotional strains on them during this consultation. The women told us they felt empowered by being consulted and positive about something good coming out of their negative experiences.

c) Providing two facilitators — one white and one black — was a strength of the project. It was also important that time was given to clarifying their different roles.

We could hold the process of consultation in place as well as assist women to handle emotions as they participated in the consultation process. The women experienced our different cultural backgrounds and ages as a positive aspect, reflecting some of the diversity of the women in the group. This diversity appeared to provide more 'safety' for the women to talk about differing experiences. I would therefore recommend that future consultations with women survivors include two facilitators who build a strong working relationship, ideally one white and one black.

d) Taking time to plan well for each consultation session.

Before each of the four sessions, Bhupinder and I met with the Standing Together staff to prepare. This included providing us as facilitators with background to the aims of each session: e.g. why a particular service was being focused on. Standing Together providing us with this 'picture' meant that we were able to answer most questions from the women, and set the questions we asked in a wider context for them. I would recommend that time is put aside to prepare well with facilitators.

- e) **Creating an inclusive way of consulting women survivors as well as meeting their practical needs was important. This ensured greater diversity of women participating.**

Women appreciated the availability of travel costs and childcare facilities as well as presentation of gift vouchers. Having an interpreter as needed was also important, as were safe and accessible venues. Refreshments meet not only a practical need but show that the women are appreciated.

- f) **Using links with diverse agencies to bring black and ethnic minority women into the centre of the consultation process.**

Recognising that the group did not include many women who in particular did not speak English or where English was their second language, Standing Together took time to assist minority community and other partner agencies to bring these survivors into the process. I believe that the session set up to hear their particular views and recommendations not only strengthened the impact of the consultation, but enabled these women to join the wider group in a more effective manner. It is clear that all the women appreciated being in a diverse group. Recognising that there are now no African / African Caribbean women in the group, Standing Together would do well to take a similar approach to bringing these survivors back into the process next year.

- g) **Providing enough time for women to develop their relationships strengthens the consultation process.**

The women clearly told us that we should have provided them with more time to spend together besides that spent in direct consultation. They believe that this will strengthen relationships and so the outcomes of the consultation. In future Standing Together will honour this request.

- h) **Providing copies of each session report to the women was important.**

It ensured they had an opportunity to correct any misrepresentations. To make the report accessible to all the participants I would recommend that Standing Together must provide support to women who cannot read, or who cannot read English. Standing Together should build in time in each session to briefly go through the report from the previous session to ensure that all women can fully participate.

The women received copies of reports of all sessions they attended. It ensured that they could see how the information they gave us was being used, and gave them a sense of their contributions.

- i) **Making time for the Standing Together staff to come and thank the women and directly hear their feedback on the consultation made the process less isolated.**

Standing Together staff were pleased to thank the women directly and feed back how they had been using the reports written after each session as well as plans for year three. I would recommend that all such consultation projects include this direct contact. It makes the process and outcomes more personal.

- j) **Women are the experts. We need to listen to how they think services should make improvements.**

The women stated clearly to agencies how the services need improving in order to ensure the safety of greater numbers of women and children experiencing domestic violence in the U.K. If we listen well, a great deal of agency time and money can be saved by responding directly to their recommendations.

k) It was important to check the process of whose agenda was being used for the consultation.

I believe that consultations with women survivors of domestic violence need to be thought through carefully. The primary aim should be to elicit women's views in a manner that will ensure that they are acted upon. There are several models of such consultation. Standing Together has decided to stay with identifying which agencies are ready to use this process, and consult the survivors accordingly. I believe that this is appropriate as long as regular (probably annual) reviews take place with the women to ensure that any issues or views they have to contribute have not been left out of the process. As the group grows in confidence I think it is likely that the women will expect Standing Together to address issues with agencies which are not yet a part of this process: e.g. Housing services.

l) Women are clear about how agencies need to respond when they ask for help.

Women may express a range of responses to their different experiences and require differing resources when experiencing domestic violence. However there are several key factors which will greatly increase the level of service given:

- Listen to what women are saying, and believe them.
- Provide the resources and support needed for black and ethnic minority women to receive full services.
- Provide women with information that they can use to protect themselves and their children.
- Provide training on domestic violence and practice guidance for all front line practitioners.
- Take action to protect women when they are under threat from their violent partners: e.g. bring in an advocate, use the legal process on their behalf. In doing so, listen to their feelings and respect their needs in order that they are not disempowered.
- Remember that women need support after they are away from the violent relationship. It takes time to adjust to the changes in their lives and to support their children (if they have them). This support can make all the difference in how their life progresses after they are free of the violence.

4.2 Recommendations to agencies

The details of these recommendations are included in the reports on each service consultation under 'Findings' (see Section 3). To summarise, the following are some key elements relating to key agencies:

a) Health — Midwifery and Health Visitor services

Most of the women who participated in the consultation had used the midwifery and health visitor services when experiencing domestic violence.

With an aim of ensuring that women are able to really receive aware and effective responses when they use health services as a result of domestic violence, they summed up their general views on these services as well as recommendations for the future, as follows:

- Screening all women using these services is a good idea, asking them if they experience domestic violence

- Staff need to be skilled to do this well, so training needs to be provided for them about domestic violence
- Put posters up and leaflets about domestic violence in ante-natal packs for mothers, so women know the issue is taken seriously
- Be aware that women may be scared to disclose, fearing that their children could be taken away from them
- If a woman does disclose, keep records so that they can be used as evidence should she go to court
- Help staff be prepared to provide her with information about support agencies, if she wants it.

b) Legal Services to Black and Ethnic Minority Women

All of the women involved in the consultation had used the police services when experiencing domestic violence. Several had found that being believed, taken seriously and put in touch with local support services had been key in enabling them to remove themselves from the violence. This ensured the protection of themselves and their children.

- Women think all police officers should be trained about domestic violence and how not to make assumptions about women from different communities / cultures
- Women want to be asked what happened away from the man when the police arrive
- If a woman's English is limited, she still needs to be taken seriously
- Appropriate interpreters need to be provided when women need them, who speak the correct language and understand domestic violence
- The police need to assist women to find these other resources, so if a black and minority ethnic officer is present they should not be prevented from talking with the woman in her own language, if they can — the police should trust one-another
- Don't assume that minority community organisations will provide appropriate support. They need to know about domestic violence or they can collude with the violence
- When immigration status is an issue for women, they need to be told where to go for advice and support.

c) West London Domestic Violence Court

The women were delighted to be consulted about this new court. Their comments and recommendations went directly into the review process at the three month stage and were greatly appreciated by the professionals who have developed this first 'pilot' domestic violence court in London.

The women commented:

- It is very good that 'ADVANCE' advocacy service is available to support and protect women
- It is good to have female prosecutors and judges/magistrates. They show women a confident model
- It is good that the staff are trained and ensure that domestic violence is taken seriously

- We think the victim's address should not be read out in court
- Other defendants should not be in the court when another case is being heard. It could condone the behaviour: "he's done it, so I can too"
- The defendant's box (secure dock) should be locked, and not in a position where he can intimidate the woman.
- There should be one way mirror rather than glass in front of the public gallery, as men can see who is there — e.g. providing privacy for relatives.
- The Domestic Violence Court should probably be a 'closed court', although the women also saw a downside to this proposal: the possibility that a closed court may make less of a contribution to raising public awareness; and may in some sense reinforce the silence which surrounds domestic violence — something private, which cannot be spoken of in public.
- There should be screens, and video link would be very good to encourage women to be witnesses.

Appendix A

Standing Together Consultation with Survivors 2002–03 Protocol

1. Purpose of the consultation

- To take a step towards “accountability to survivors”, a cornerstone of Standing Together.
- To improve women’s safety by hearing directly the experiences of individuals and using them (anonymously) to improve agency practice.
- To give Standing Together information and opinions from survivors about initiatives we are planning — before changes are made.
- To further develop a group of women who can form a “survivors’ panel” for Standing Together to consult about its ongoing work.

2. Purpose of this protocol

To ensure that the consultation at minimum does not harm women / make them less safe; and that Standing Together does all it can to make it a safe and positive experience for women.

3. Contacting women

Standing Together will hold individual details (name, address, phone, email) in their office and will not share them with any other agency and will only use them for this consultation. Standing Together will only contact women in the way they have described as safe for them.

Dates of meetings and details of any outside speakers (e.g. it may be that the court would like to send a speaker to describe current practice and hear feedback) will be sent in advance. Women will be offered the chance to give their views by phone or post if they cannot/do not want to attend a meeting.

4. Format of consultation

Standing Together wishes to consult mainly by way of meetings, but can also offer women who prefer the choice of telephone consultation. Standing Together is hoping for 3 meetings, at which we will present information about Standing Together and recent progress and current plans, and then invite survivors to comment. In the meetings Standing Together is envisaging mainly “conversational” consultation, i.e. no requirement for reading or writing.

NB. The meetings are not supposed to be a support group (although the event will include refreshments and “social time” and women may make their own networks as a result of it).

Standing Together will have details of local agencies that can provide support; and will refer women as appropriate. Standing Together will provide facilitators at each meeting, so there will be someone available to offer individual support if needed during the meeting.

Standing Together will make it clear to any outside speakers that they are not to use the meeting for any purpose except the one agreed in advance with Standing Together i.e. to consult survivors on a

specific aspect of agency practice; and Standing Together will be careful at the meeting to make sure they stick to this.

5. Access to consultation

Standing Together want to respond to the specific needs of women who are willing to be consulted, and will attempt to find out what these are in our initial contact with those who respond. Standing Together will book an accessible venue. Standing Together can pay travel expenses, childcare, and interpreter's costs.

6. Recording of consultation

Standing Together needs to record the content of the consultations but not the names of the survivors. For note taking Standing Together will use initials. For passing on the record of the consultation Standing Together will not use any initials or names at all.

7. Use we will make of consultation material

We will produce reports from the consultation. Nothing in the reports will identify individual women. The reports will try to be an accurate and complete record of views expressed; and will be provided in draft for participants to read and comment on. The report will not be shared with anyone apart from the consultants and Standing Together staff until participants comments have been sought and acted upon. Each participant will receive a copy of the final report.

Appendix B

Letter inviting women survivors to participate in the consultation

Dear

(Agency woman knows) has links with a project in Hammersmith and Fulham called 'Standing Together against Domestic Violence'. It aims to make women and children safer by improving the way police and the courts respond to domestic violence. It also includes the offer of individual support from an independent women's organisation called ADVANCE for every woman who calls the police about domestic violence (please see the enclosed information about Standing Together).

Standing Together wants to talk to women who have experienced domestic violence about how they think the system could be improved, and what they think of what has been done so far. This consultation is a chance for you to be involved in making changes that will help other women going through domestic violence.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be involved. If you are, the details you fill in on this letter will be given to the Standing Together office (and not to anyone else). If you would like to come to these meetings Standing Together will write to you, or if you would like, Vicky Grosser (the consultant) will phone to speak with you. We don't expect the meetings to have large numbers of women, and we would be very pleased if you can join us.

We can pay childcare and travel costs for the meeting.

If you choose to assist us, then the information you give to Standing Together will be kept strictly confidential.

We have enclosed a stamped addressed envelope for your reply, and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

.....

Note

The following four appendices are the programme plans for each of the four consultation sessions with women survivors. They are included as a guide for others considering similar consultation processes in the future. Please credit both myself: Vicky Grosser and 'Standing Together' when using them.

Appendix C

Survivors' Consultation Meeting Plan Health Services / Training Needs

16th October 2002

1. **Welcome, and introductions.**

- Women: something about your life that you enjoy.
- What do you hope to get out of being involved in this consultation?
- Groundrules for the group: As with last consultation.
- Vicky will give little background to the consultation, including 'map' about Standing Together and flipchart of what covered to date by last consultation on health.
- Contributions from Bhupinder and the women who were in last years sessions.

2. **Reminder about aims of the consultation.**

- That it is not a support group, but we know feelings could come up and Bhupinder is the support if they do.
- Vicky and Bhupinder say about their different roles.
- Questions from women about Standing Together or the consultation process.
- Can 'Standing Together' use the consultation information? — agreement from women. Copy of all reports will come to them.

3. **Pairs: getting to know one another more**

- Tell the other woman one thing about yourself.

BREAK

4. **This consultation is focusing on the Health services**

- **Okay to tape sessions?** (transcripts held at Standing Together and copy to Vicky)

This is about your comments and recommendations.

- a) Women often experience domestic violence for the first time or men are more abusive when she is pregnant or after the birth of a baby.
- 40–60% of women experiencing domestic violence are abused while pregnant (Parker and McFarlane 1991)
 - Abused women have a higher rate of miscarriage, stillbirths, premature labour, low birth weight babies and injuries to the foetus (Saltzman 1990).

(Pace this slowly, if women are needing to share brief pieces of own experiences.

Acknowledge / check that all may not be mothers / biological mothers.)

Q1. What would it have been like for you if you had been asked questions about domestic violence at your antenatal (midwives) or postnatal (health visitors) appointments? (This would only happen if there were no children present and the woman is alone.)

Q2. Do you think this should happen for all women who have babies, and why? What concerns might you have about this approach? If 'Yes' — what tips would you give on how staff should be trained and how they should then ask women? Should posters be displayed and leaflets be in bathrooms?

b) If you used A and E or a Walk-in Centre:

This is a follow-on from last (January 2002) consultation on walk-in Centres.

- Last time we looked at what was helpful about A and E response towards you?
- Also, what was not helpful, or what concerns did you have, and why?
- All agreed then that asking all female 'walk-in' patients (if you didn't have children with you, and you were alone) about domestic violence is a good idea?

Q3. What do you think the attitudes and responses of the staff when asking this question should be? And if a woman says 'Yes' I do experience domestic violence, how should they respond? What training do you think they should receive?

Is it okay for 'Standing Together' to use this feedback on health right now?

- To feed back to health professionals, for fundraising purposes, to develop policy and practice, and include in a final report.

5. Ending and Vouchers

Appendix D

Survivors' Consultation Meeting Plan Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Views on Legal Services in Hammersmith & Fulham

22nd November, 2002

1. Welcome, and introductions.

- Women: Your name and one other thing about yourself
- What you hope to get out of being involved in this consultation?
- Groundrules for the group: (As used in wider consultation group.)
- Vicky will give little background to the consultation, inc. information about agencies linked to Standing Together.

2. Reminder about aims of the consultation.

- That it is not a support group, but we know feelings could come up and Bhupinder is the support if they do.
- Vicky and Bhupinder say about their different roles.
- Questions from women about Standing Together or the consultation process.

3. Pairs / Groups of Three: getting to know one another more.

BREAK

(Drinks and snacks available in café, or space here for you if you are observing Ramadan)

4. This consultation is focusing on the Legal services

- **Okay to tape sessions?** (transcripts held at Standing Together and copy to Vicky)
- Vicky use flipchart to show what we mean by 'legal services' — check which women have used them.

(Pace this slowly, if women are needing to share brief pieces of own experiences. **Acknowledge / check that all may not have used legal services.**)

Q1. If you have used the legal services, which ones, and what did you find useful / helpful about them in meeting your needs when you had experienced domestic violence?

Q2. What concerns did you have, and in your view where there any barriers set up by these services for you as a black / ethnic minority women?

Q3. If you didn't use any legal services, why not? What held you back from using them?

Q4. What do you think needs to happen to make legal services really accessible to you or other black / ethnic minority women, so that you could get the service you really need?

Thank the women for their input, and say that they will get a copy of what is typed up as a report to be used by Standing Together locally. NO names or other details which could identify you will be used.

Is it okay for ‘Standing Together’ to use this feedback on legal services right now?

- To feed back to professionals, for fundraising purposes, to develop policy and practice, and include in a final report.

5. Ending

- Inform about next steps, links to wider group and plan for longer term group consultations after this series of sessions.
- Take names of women interested in being involved in wider consultation group, inc. session in Domestic Violence Court in January.

Vouchers

Appendix E

Survivors' Consultation Meeting Plan West London Domestic Violence Court

January 23rd 2003

9.30am

- Arrival, introductions, and prepare for the session sitting in and observing the court

10.00

- Go into the Court — with 'buddy pairs' for support to help with focus of listening and learning. Nic (from Standing Together) give information about the court and take questions

10.15ish

- Court starts, and we observe.

11.00ish

- Leave the Court (depending on appropriate time to do this) and debrief in pairs briefly
- Feedback on what the women thought — good points and concerns, using Standing Together questions for consultation:

Q1. From what you saw in the court, and from your own experience, do you think the Courts session for domestic violence cases should be 'closed' to the public, or not. And if so, why?

Q2. Standing Together is not sure yet whether and when women will have choice about using a video link to give evidence. Do any of you think it would not be a good idea?

Q3. When women live in Hammersmith & Fulham they are offered support in going to court by ADVANCE: help to go over the statement, watch for her safety, pass any updates to the Crown Prosecution Service, and come into court with her. Then help to find out the outcome of the court: the decision.

Is this the kind of support you would want in coming to court?

What other support might women need?

Q4. What do you think of the leaflet on the Court?

Is it okay for 'Standing Together' to use this feedback on the courts right now?

- To feed back to courts professionals, to improve practice, and include in final report.

12.00 noon

- Debbie (from Standing Together) give information about plans for session on 26th February, to review the consultation process and give information on what next.
- This will include saying goodbye to Vicky and Bhu as facilitators.

Vouchers

Appendix F

Survivors' Consultation Meeting Plan Review / Next Steps Meeting with women and Standing Together

26th February 2003

1. **Welcome, and introductions.**
 - Standing Together wanting direct feedback on the process to date.
Reminder of 'Ground rules' for the group.
2. **Any feedback on the two reports sent out to women and how used to date by Standing Together**
 - a) Health Report
 - b) Black and Minority Ethnic Women Report
 - c) Courts session fed into DV Courts Review Process
3. **Use handout on the process for consultation as set by Standing Together partner agencies.**
 - Ask women if they think this is right structure for future sessions.
4. **Pairs: we want your feedback on what you think about the consultation process we have done for Standing Together to use in Hammersmith & Fulham.**
 - a) What have you liked / thought is good about the consultations with you?
 - b) What do think could be improved / changed in the future?
 - Feed back and flip up and tape responses.

Standing Together agencies are interested to hear about the following.

- Payment of expenses
- Phonecalls before each session
- Reminder letter
- Circulation of copies of reports
- Feedback from Standing Together on how the women's views are used to impact local services
- Venues used and when the meetings are held
- Roles of the two facilitators

BREAK

5. Debbie / Nic tell the women the aims for the consultation in next stage.

- It will be convened by Standing Together to consult on specific topics.
- Probably a break now for several months.

6. Which women are interested in responding / being called about regarding non activities

- Nic / Debbie to give examples and circulate list for the women to sign if would like to participate in this.
- Plan to provide speaking skills and media skills for the women in order to do these things — e.g. speak as survivors to the press.

7. Saying goodbye to Vicky and Bhu

- a) Bhu and Vicky say goodbyes and appreciations
- b) The women invited to say something to them

Ending, Vouchers and Hugs!