EXCHANGE HOUSE
Travellers Service

Domestic Violence:
Developing a Response
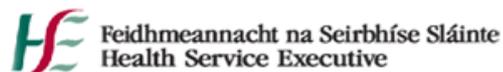
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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

DEVELOPING A RESPONSE

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INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by Exchange House in order to explore the issue of domestic violence amongst its service users, with a view to identifying gaps in current service provision and to make recommendations regarding future interventions in a range of areas, including direct provision, reporting mechanisms, education and information dissemination to service providers and agencies.

The report, which is based on a number of research methodologies, is divided into three sections:

A review of contemporary research and literature on the subject of violence against women within minority ethnic communities:

Perspectives of Traveller Women (Based on the analysis of a focus group discussion with Traveller women, and of a number of individual interviews with women who had used services for abuse women).

Perspectives of Service Providers (A summary of the findings of a postal questionnaire to agencies which provide services to abused women, both settled women and/or Traveller women.)

REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE ON

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS

Introduction

This literature review focuses on recent international studies that examine the complexities of domestic violence in ethnic minority communities. The first part of the review addresses the impact of culture, racism and socio-economic status on women's experience of domestic violence and identifies some of the issues that merit consideration in devising strategies to meet the needs of abused women from minority ethnic groups. The second part summarises the recommendations in the literature for the development of effective and culturally appropriate services.

In reviewing this literature, it is important to acknowledge that psychosocial, economic and cultural factors can interact in complex ways to place ethnic minority groups at increased risk of domestic violence without ethnicity necessarily being a risk factor in and of itself. It is also important to recognise that there is considerable diversity among different ethnic groups in terms of the prevalence, nature and impact of domestic violence. The research, nonetheless, indicates that common experiences can be identified among ethnic minority women in domestic violence situations and that responsive service provision requires an awareness of, and sensitivity to, such experiences.

Culture

The literature suggests that measures to address domestic violence need to take account of the fact that cultures define and experience such violence differently. Particular attention is drawn in the literature to the fact that there are varying cultural perceptions of what constitutes abuse (Ahmad et al, 2004; Wenzel et al, 2006; Yoshihima, 2002).   A point of emphasis in the literature is that cognisance must be taken of the cultural norms and values that foster violence against women, and that ethnic minority women must be able to voice their concerns about how violated they feel within a cultural framework that is meaningful to them (Asylum Aid, 2002; Memmott et al, 2001; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a).

A consistent finding in the literature is that certain culturally-mediated factors can be influential in deterring ethnic minority women from disclosing abuse or seeking assistance. These factors include gender roles, familism, inter-family structures, shame and collectivism. A range of studies, for example, of ethnic minority communities in the UK and US indicate that abused women often live within a cultural milieu that makes them fail to recognise intimate violence as a social problem (Ahmad et al, 2004; Bui, 2003; Dasgupta, 2000; Hicks, 2006; Preisser, 1999).   Furthermore, they can face tremendous cultural pressures when they attempt to break from the cycle of abuse (Hicks, 2006). Because certain cultural traditions emphasise family privacy and require the individual to turn first to her family, seeking help in the community means confronting cultural prohibitions against causing 'loss of face' for oneself and one's family (Bui, 2003). Such studies also suggest that women do not always receive family support when they decide to leave their abusive husbands because a woman is judged to have failed in her role if she cannot maintain her marriage and provide her children with a father, regardless of his conduct (Dasgupta, 2000; Hicks, 2006).   A women's desire, therefore, to protect the family name and to avoid

ostracism from her community can prevent her from seeking help outside her family.

In summary, the literature highlights a number of key issues in relation to the importance of attending to the cultural context in which domestic violence occurs. Firstly, women may be reluctant to report their experiences of abuse because domestic violence is not acknowledged as a social problem within their communities or because it is traditionally viewed as a private matter. Reluctance to engage with services may, in consequence, emanate from fear of bringing shame on their families or from apprehension about sanctions or rejection by extended family networks. Secondly, the centrality of family in the lives of many ethnic minority women as well as cultural prescriptions in relation to the primacy of their roles as wives and mothers mean that, for some women, family unity pre-empts individual safety. How a woman perceives and manages her experience of domestic abuse can, therefore, be strongly influenced by culturally-specific factors in particular communities.

Racism

The literature also emphasises the significance of racism as a determinant of women's response to domestic violence. Racist beliefs and practices can serve to prevent minority women from seeking or finding effective interventions. Because of the experience of stereotyping and discrimination when seeking assistance, women from ethnic minority groups can feel unprotected by the domestic violence, social service, health or criminal justice systems (Bent-Goodley, 2005; Cole, 2001; Kasturirangan et al, 2004). Furthermore, their experience as victims of racial prejudice by majority group members may make family and community ties all the more important (Dasgupta, 2005; Pittaway, 2004). In addition, institutionalised racism can operate in covert and overt ways to perpetuate exclusionary practices in services and to subtly render domestic violence in minority communities invisible (Hamby, 2005).

The notion that domestic violence is 'cultural' for some communities and, therefore, does not warrant a serious response from agencies has been documented as a significant factor placing ethnic minority women at great risk from violent partners or family members (Bograd, 1999; Burman et al, 2004; Donnelly et al, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a, 2005b). In this context, it is noted that when domestic violence is defined as culturally normative, the victimisation of women is denied, and this translates into a failure to recognise the need for intervention strategies (Dasgupta, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a, 2005b; Volpp, 2005). If service providers characterise ethnic minority groups as inherently violent, they tend to view intervention efforts as futile (Burman et al, 2004). Stereotypes may also lead professionals to underestimate the impact of abuse on minority women or to overestimate the ability of these women to cope (Donnelly et al, 2005). Furthermore, the internalisation of stereotypes may contribute to some minority women not perceiving themselves as victims of abuse or as being in need of help (Nash, 2005).

The evidence in the literature also indicates that women from ethnic minority groups typically experience anxiety and lack of trust when they engage with services because of

well-founded expectations, if not actual experience, of racist attitudes and behaviour. In particular, the point is consistently made that women with a devalued racial identity feel ambivalent about using the police to deal with domestic violence because they fear that calling the police will subject their partners to racist treatment by the criminal justice system as well as confirm racist stereotypes about their own community (Bent-Goodley, 2005; Bui, 2003; Cole, 2001; Dasgupta, 2005). The literature specifically highlights the twin problems of aggressive policing and of under-policing, as well as the issue of intrusive and coercive interventions by child welfare agencies, as being key factors in deterring ethnic minority women from engaging with services (Campbell et al, 1997; Homel et al, 1999; Pittaway, 2004). Racism, therefore, can make it appreciably more difficult for ethnic minority women to access the resources they need to escape domestic violence.

Socio-Economic Status

Current research on domestic violence in marginalised ethnic groups indicates a strong correlation between family violence and socio-economic disadvantage, particularly in terms of the experience of persistent and chronic poverty, social isolation, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, family disruption, residential mobility and population density (Hampton et al, 2005; Kasturirangan et al, 2004; West, 1998, 2005). These stressors are further documented as placing ethnic minority groups at increased risk of alcohol abuse which is associated with higher levels of physical assault and with the endorsement of more approving attitudes to violence (West, 1998). While alcohol is commonly blamed for violence in ethnic minority groups, the literature argues that it should be more correctly viewed as an exacerbating or situational factor rather than a direct cause (Homel et al, 1999; Memmott et al, 2001). Socio-economic disadvantage is also associated with a range of psychological problems, such as lack of self-esteem or self-respect, powerlessness, frustration and shame, which impact on the risk of victimisation by domestic violence (West, 2005).

It is pointed out in the literature that not only are women living in poverty more likely to experience partner violence, they are also more vulnerable to such abuse. Without adequate resources, women have difficulty accessing services and are unable to relocate and, therefore, to avoid contact with their violent partners. Indeed, women's access to material resources is deemed one of the most critical factors in determining their vulnerability to domestic violence (Bui, 2003; Sharma, 2001; West, 2005). The observation is made that the violence and control by an individual abuser is not the only form of violence experienced by abused minority women. Lack of adequate institutional support in the form of welfare, social services and housing is another level of violence which occurs in ways that are racialised as well as gendered and classed (Coker, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a). The literature, therefore, highlights the need for strategies to address socio-economic inequalities as well as the social processes and community-level characteristics that engender domestic violence (Hampton et al, 2005).

Service Provision to Abused Ethnic Minority Women

There is growing recognition that many models of intervention are conceived from an ethnocentric perspective in that they are largely based on western notions of family and family life (Crichton-Hill, 2001; Sharma, 2001). Cognisance is, therefore, not taken of cultural differences in terms of family structures, role expectations, social opportunities and restrictions. It is observed that ethnic minority women can often be viewed as either inappropriate for services or as unreceptive to them (West, 2005). Service providers working from a settled white western cultural paradigm may, for example, consider certain coping styles to be maladaptive or they may fail to accommodate differences in family structures and relationships, child-rearing practices and communication styles (Cole, 2001; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a, 2005b).

The observation is also made in the literature that the failure to acknowledge the cultural context in which abuse occurs can lead services to intervene in ways that unwittingly compound women's experience of domestic violence. It is argued that insufficient regard may be taken of the contextual factors that influence a woman's decision to leave or stay with an abusive partner. In particular, the contention is made that in risk assessments, service providers often do not recognise the consequences for ethnic minority women of being perceived as having betrayed one's culture and community. The tendency of many services to structure their interventions to support women who leave abusive relationships rather than those who stay is also deemed in the literature to be problematic (Cole, 2001; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002; Sharma, 2001). Alienation from the dominant culture, lack of resources and dependence on extended family networks can render it exceptionally difficult for women from ethnic minority communities to leave a family situation that is abusive.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The literature presents a number of general recommendations for the development of good practice in the design and delivery of services to abused minority women. A range of priority areas of action are identified. These include: helping women to overcome barriers to receiving assistance; protecting people at risk; working with children and young people to break the cycle of violence between generations; working with both victims and perpetrators to break patterns of violence; working with the community to educate against violence; reforming legislation and improving responses by police, courts and other mainstream support services; disseminating information and sharing models of good practice; and researching areas where new information is needed to support violence prevention.

The literature emphasises that all of these approaches should be informed by the principles of culture-appropriateness and active community involvement. It specifically advocates the use of activities and models of service delivery that are culturally-compatible, determined at the local level and have a high degree of community acceptance and ownership (Bent-Goodley, 2001, 2005; Campbell et al, 1997). In this regard, it is recommended that communities should be involved not only in the design of culturally-specific programmes but also in their ongoing evaluation and assessment.

Research evidence, furthermore, documents the effectiveness of the active participation of community members in taking on roles within resource and support networks in helping to reduce and prevent domestic violence. In this context, studies suggest that ethnic minority women can be more open to receiving assistance and support from those who share a common cultural background (Cole, 2001; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002; Preisser, 1999). It is also, however, recognised that some women have too many concerns about confidentiality to approach a person for support who is identifiably linked with their own community (Burman et al, 2004). While the literature acknowledges that it should not be presumed that a woman would choose to work with someone from her own background, it indicates that women can benefit from having the choice of using domestic violence services that are staffed by individuals of the same ethnic group or from having access to culturally-specific services (Cole, 2001; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002).

The documented difficulties that cultural and family ties can create for abused minority women underscores the important role of mainstream service providers who are independent of intra-community conflicts of interest. It particularly highlights the need to challenge the notion that domestic violence is a cultural norm in some ethnic groups which can result in a reluctance to recognise or address minority women's experience of abuse (Burman et al, 2004; Sokoloff and Dupont 2005a, 2005b). A point consistently made throughout the literature is that proactive strategies should be adopted to educate service providers about culturally appropriate ways of responding to the needs of abused minority women, and it is recommended that agencies should be encouraged to develop codes of good practice in addressing this issue.

A central recommendation made in relation to culturally-specific domestic violence initiatives is that they should adopt strategies which contrast with the individualistic methods typically employed by mainstream services (Sharma, 2001). Considerable emphasis is, therefore, placed on the need for projects to operate in a whole-of-community and whole-of-family context that is sensitive to the wider family and systems of people (Bent-Goodley, 2001). Indeed, it is contended that the failure to address the familial and community context in which domestic violence occurs is a key contributory factor in recidivism (Memmott et al, 2001). In this regard, emphasis is placed on the value of community education programmes which engage men as well as women.

Throughout the literature reviewed, it is observed that, because of cultural isolation or lack of literacy, ethnic minority women tend to have a poor level of knowledge about their rights and entitlements and available services. The provision of culturally-appropriate support and education is, therefore, deemed a priority. In this context, a range of psycho-social interventions are recommended which include individual and group support, information and awareness-raising initiatives, and educational programmes that promote personal development and enhance practical life skills (Campbell et al, 1997). Attention is particularly drawn to the importance of ensuring that support and education programmes are culturally tailored to address the particular needs of ethnic minority women, and that

outreach efforts focus on culturally appropriate ways of transmitting information, such as informal networks (Campbell et al, 1997; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002; Preisser, 1999).

Among the other principles of good practice identified in the literature is the need to recognise and address the underlying causes of domestic violence in ethnic minority communities, including substance abuse; loss of, or conflicted, cultural identity; and the multiple effects of socio-economic disadvantage (Cole, 2001; Homel et al, 1999). The literature insists on the need to give priority to special initiatives and programmes covering areas such as housing provision, education attainment, access to training and employment, addiction, and health (Coker, 2005). Consideration is also given in the literature to the importance of improving the responses of the criminal justice system. In this regard, the literature highlights the importance of a commitment to address barriers to reporting, appropriate policing, court assistance to victims, speedy and appropriate court processes, and suitable rehabilitation and post-release support for offenders (Coker, 2005; Strategic Partners Pty Ltd, 2003). It is also asserted that for genuine improvement in responses to domestic violence in ethnic minority communities, there needs to be greater coordination between the different sectors of service delivery (Memmott et al, 2001; Preisser, 1999). Emphasis is, therefore, given to the value of establishing partnerships between statutory agencies, domestic violence services and community-based organisations working with ethnic minority groups.

A further key issue that is consistently identified in the literature is the importance of secure and consistent funding. It is argued that non-recurrent funding results in the application of short timeframes to projects which often require slow preliminary work to build trust up within a community before the problem of domestic violence can begin to be addressed (Strategic Partners Pty Ltd, 2003).

Conclusion
The literature emphasises that competent service provision requires an appreciation of the consequences of the intersection of race, gender, culture and class on the experience of domestic volence as well as an understanding of the various factors which can operate, on different levels, to compound women's difficulty in seeking and finding effective help. It specifically identifies the need for policy and practice to be informed by a clear analysis of the structural ways in which abused minority women can be subject a dual vulnerability, in terms of being marginalised within their communities and in relation to the majority population.

TRAVELLER WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

Prevalence of Abuse

Violence and abuse within intimate relationships is a factor for a significant number of Traveller women. However, while it is not possible to provide accurate prevalence data on the extent of this abuse within the Traveller community, there is no evidence to suggest that it is more or less prevalent than in the community in general. What is clear is that the legal and support mechanisms that have been introduced, and which are to a certain extent effective in facilitating settled women to eventually access safety from abuse, are not, for a number of reasons, as effective for Traveller women. As was noted in the literature review above, the reasons for this lack of effectiveness lie in structural and cultural factors both within the systems themselves and within the Traveller community.

Forms of Abuse

The forms of violence reported to this study reflect the forms of violence found in most studies of domestic violence i.e. physical abuse, (including life threatening assaults), verbal and psychological abusive and coercive control (Watson and Parsons, 2005; Bradley et al, 2000; Kelleher and Associates, 1995). The nature, extent, dynamics and aetiology of the violence as reported by the respondents in this study appear to mirror very closely the experience of abuse in other communities and societies (Heise and Moreno, 2000; WHO, 2005)

Family and Cultural context of Violence

The cultural context which the respondents in this study outlined can be described as a closeknit community, which supports traditional family values and the indissolubility of the marital relationship. Women's roles in this closeknit society are primarily child centred and family oriented. Few women either work or live outside the family unit, and consequently they have few independent financial resources. Men are expected to be in charge of their families. This reflects the 'familial' cultural context discussed in the international literature (e.g. Hick's 2006, Bui, 2003).

Young women tend to live within their husband's extended family network, and in close proximity to his parents and siblings and their families. Such a family context can provide support, such as shared child care and prevents isolation for young women. However in the event of domestic abuse, the other strong values of the community appear not only to counteract the supportive nature of such a closeknit familial life style, but tend rather to emphasise the abused woman's responsibility to the family system as a whole, 'locking' her into the abusive situation. The importance of marriage, which couples tend to enter into at a young age, is underscored by the pressure exerted on both parties to remain in the marriage at whatever cost. This reflects the traditional Catholic (and other religious) family values which many older women in all communities would cite as reasons for remaining in an abusive relationship.

> *"If you're married, you're married to stay"*.

These pressures interact with the structural difficulties which exist in the systems and agencies on which abused women rely when seeking to access safety.

Women's Help Seeking

The women in this study reported a range of help seeking behaviours which reflect those noted in other studies (Goodman et al, 2003, 2005; Peled et al, 2000). Many of these help seeking activities, however, involve interaction with official systems and services which are not designed for, nor always supportive of, the nature of the Travelling community's family oriented way of life. (As noted in Section 1, this is a common experience for ethnic minority women; e.g. Cole, 2001; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002). Examples of these difficulties with specific agencies are as follows:

Gardaí

The first of these difficulties is the lack of support they may receive from their extended families if they call the Gardaí for protection from violence: as one woman described it- *"They don't get involved"*. The 'loss of face' for the man appears to accentuate the fear of retaliation, which is a common fear for many abused women who seek external help.

> *"You get them arrested, and you're guaranteed the minute they get out of the police station, they're going to come back and break you up and the trailer as well. It's for shames sake as far as they're concerned, their credibility is gone."*

For a woman who does risk this retaliation and calls the Gardaí, she needs to be sure that she can be protected from violence. Such protection can only be assured if

(i)   The Gardaí respond promptly to her call for assistance:

(ii)   They intervene appropriately and according to the Force's own Domestic Violence Policy:

(iii)   She can, if necessary, leave the site (even temporarily) and go somewhere he cannot access her. To do this she will need time to organize herself and her children to go a place of safety, for example a refuge, and she will need the means of getting there. This research would suggest that none of these conditions are guaranteed if she calls the Gardaí.

> *"If they do come, some of them drive in and say 'we got a phone call', and he [husband] says, 'everything's fine here and they just drive out and you're left dripping in blood.....they never walk in and ask you 'are you all right'. They just don't care, they think' it's the Traveller culture, let them at it."*

Finding Refuge

Finding a place in a refuge is always a difficulty for abused women, as Irish Refuges (particularly those in the Dublin Region) are constantly full and must turn women away. For a Traveller woman, her chances of getting a place are even slimmer, as most refuges have a policy of admitting only one Traveller woman at a time.

Women also may not have the bus or taxi fare to bring her to the refuge, thus adding to the difficulty of her efforts to escape a violent situation. While the practice of some refuges was described by many respondents as excellent, and '*supportive, 24/7'*, there were concerns expressed about the response by staff in one or two refuges. Concern was also expressed about the reality of discrimination and *"being looked down on"* by some of the other residents. The ban on male children over the age of 14 was also a barrier to the use of refuges by Traveller women.

Legal Remedies

As recent figures show, obtaining a barring order is becoming increasingly difficult in the Irish legal system (Watson and Parsons, 2005). For Traveller women, there are added difficulties in either obtaining a barring order, or taking charges against her partner. The closeknit family lifestyle may mean that not only is a woman now confronted by an abusive husband, she may also be confronted by angry in laws, and perhaps even, by her own parents and siblings, who do not wish to see her marriage fail. She may also have literacy difficulties which make the form filling and legal procedures necessary for obtaining a barring or protection order almost insurmountable. Added to this is the difficulty of bringing children into town, perhaps on a number of occasions, to complete this process. The delay in cases coming to court was also referred to as a barrier.

Enforcing a barring order, if the obstacles can be overcome to obtain one, presents Traveller women with another difficulty. As one respondent described it, and was even though her husband was barred he simply moved to another bay on the halting site, from where he can verbally harass her:

> *"Traveller men will not turn away another Traveller man. The police can't do anything because he is not in your bay, even though he is in the halting site."*

> *"If his family is around her (on a site) they won't like the idea of him getting arrested."*

It was suggested that a female member of the Garda Síochána would be the most suitable person to help women with this procedure, calling to the site to help her fill out the necessary forms when possible.

Accommodation

The experience of the women who participated in this study is similar to other studies (Goodman 2003) which find that specialized domestic violence services are cited as the most effective mechanism for women seeking safety from violence. As will be noted below, refuge providers are very conscious of the high level of take up of their services by women from the Traveller community, but are aware that another level of service is necessary.

Despite the difficulty of finding immediate accommodation in a refuge, there are few alternative options available to Traveller women. Staying with their mother was mentioned by some of the respondents, but very often she will not have room to accommodate her daughter and possibly a number of children.

> *"It's not always an option [going back to one's mother]. If you're in a trailer, or say your mother's in a trailer, for example, and you've five or six kids, where's she going to put you up, even if she wanted to?"*

If she does have such room, providing such refuge may create severe difficulties with her son in law's family.

> *"They [her family] will get the blame for breaking them up, so she won't go to them for fear of that."*

There were a variety of opinions expressed regarding the longer term options which would be most secure for women leaving violent relationships. Long waiting list for social and public housing for all members of the community were seen as a major barrier. Transitional housing provided by housing associations was seen by some women as an ideal solution to the problem of accommodation in the medium or even short term, but this may also result in pressures from a woman's in laws. Accommodation in a specialized 'group scheme' was suggested as one way to overcome this barrier.

In some cases distance and anonymity from their husband's family, together with long term secure housing (apartment or house) were seen as the best long term options which could assure a woman's safety if she left her abusive marriage. This means she would have to leave her home, break off all contact with her old friends and way of life, and bring her children to a new home, in a part of the country where she is not known by other Traveller families. Even though she is the victim of crime, she is effectively 'on the run', living like a protected witness, but without the protection. This is a sad and isolating option, even if sufficient facilities were available.

Social Work

While the protection of children is now a major social policy concern, the unintended consequences of this concern without a concomitant concern for women's safety has led to a fear by abused women of social work intervention. When women have become involved

with the social work services, this concern appears to be focused on the abused woman's parenting ability rather than her husband's violence.

> *"I think most women with kids are afraid that the social worker's going to get on to the kids."*

This focus on women's responsibilities rather than their husband's behaviour is a matter of extra concern for abused women, and can only be allayed by a woman centred social work practice which recognises that the danger to children comes from their father's abuse and not their mother's fear (Kelly, 1994).

Social Welfare

Lack of independent financial resources is a particular difficulty for women attempting to leave an abusive relationship and has been noted in the international literature reviewed in Section 1. Some of the respondents pointed out that even when separate payments are being made, this can mean that a woman will be getting perhaps €175 for herself and her children while her husband gets €180 for himself. This inequitable situation, resulting from the 'male breadwinner' model social welfare system, appears archaic in the 21st century and adds to the difficulty women experience when attempting to leave a violent relationship.

Finding Safety

All of the issues discussed in this section have life threatening consequences for women living with a violent partner. They involve economic, psychosocial and cultural issues, including economic dependence, limited literacy skills, a familial cultural context exerting pressures to remain with abusive spouses, and limited resources and options for long term alternatives. They also reflect the findings of international literature on the experiences of women in other ethnic minority communities.

PERSPECTIVES OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

Racism and Discrimination

While there were a large number of responses which recognized that Traveller women experience discrimination in accessing services and networks outside the Traveller community, there were also a minority of comments which suggested that violence is more acceptable within the Traveller community because of 'cultural' or 'religious' reasons. (This was also noted in the literature reviewed above e.g. Donnelly et al, 2005; Burman et al, 2004). It would appear from this small number of responses, that greater cultural awareness and training is necessary to enable such staff to identify the specific barriers to women's safety, within both the Traveller community and the wider society.

Accommodation

Echoing the concerns of Traveller women, the principal barrier to Traveller women's safety which most of the service providers mentioned was the lack of suitable accommodation, either emergency (i.e. refuges), or longer term accommodation. While there is an overall shortfall in the number of refuges spaces for the size of the population, Traveller women accessing one of these scarce spaces have extra hurdles and barriers to overcome, as outlined below:

1. Refuges in all areas of the country will not admit two Traveller women at the same time. While this may at times be perceived as discrimination against Traveller women, the rationale behind this policy is the danger posed to women if a member of her husband's extended family is in the refuge at the same time. (The complex interconnection between this barrier to her safety and the issue of family expectations has been referred to in section 2 above).

2. If there is no refuge space available, she may experience overt discrimination from B & B owners, who do not want to admit Traveller families to their premises.

3. As abused women will not wish to leave their children in the care of their abusive husband, finding suitable emergency accommodation with a large number of children (especially if there are teenager boys) will be particularly difficult.

4. Traveller women may not have access to their own income and therefore may not have a bus or taxi fare to bring them to a refuge or hostel with their children, even where there is a vacancy for all of them.

Finding suitable permanent accommodation greatly compounded for Traveller women and was noted as such by the majority of the respondents. Some service providers recommended the provision of specialized emergency and social housing to meet the specific needs of Traveller women.

Legal Remedies:

An Garda Síochána

The Service Providers also recognized the discriminatory pattern of responses by many members of An Garda Síochána. They also recognized the complexity for women who live on sites beside their husband's family or even their own family, which was also referred to by Traveller women themselves. It would appear that for Traveller women, both their ethnic identity and their physical location prevent them from obtaining the same level of protection as settled women (problematic as this may be for settled women also).

> *"Police and other services will not respond to call outs to the site in some cases."*

Legal Aid

Access to legal aid was noted by some respondents as being a further difficulty for Traveller women. One of the primary reasons cited for this is a low literacy level amongst Traveller women, and the impact on the extended families of a legal action taken by one member against another.

> *"Protective orders sometimes are not relevant/useful especially on halting sites were the abuser may move only yards away."*

Conclusions:

The previous 2 sections have reviewed the information, comments and suggestions made by both Traveller women and service providers in the course of this research project. These findings reflect very closely the findings of much previous research on the issue of intimate partner violence against women within ethnic minority communities, which were summarized in Section 1 above. The principal areas of concern were the lack of appropriate emergency and long term accommodation for Traveller women and the difficulty that their close knit family networks may create if a woman is seeking to leave her husband because of abuse. The interconnectedness of families within their communities also adds to the difficulty for women seeking to move away and become 'anonymous'. The strong emphasis placed on family and marital stability, and women's traditional child caring role within the home, place additional barriers to her leaving and finding an alternative home.

Added to these 'internal' community barriers, there are a range of 'external' barriers within the wider community in which services for abused women are located. Traveller women and many agencies noted the particular difficulty of an inconsistent and what is often experienced as a discriminatory Garda response to Traveller women. Garda and Court procedures place further barriers, even if a woman manages to get away from her abuser. The fear of social work child protection procedures and an emphasis on the woman's behaviour rather than her partner's abuse, discourage women from disclosing abuse or contacting a refuge.

The lack of sufficient refuge accommodation and appropriate transitional or long-term accommodation has been noted by most participants. Discrimination by private landlords and very long public and social housing waiting lists make the very idea of leaving her community an extremely daunting task. These structural barriers are added to by the pressures on women from their own communities not to leave their families, placing women in a 'catch 22' situation between community pressures and external barriers. To leave an abuser permanently is extremely difficulty for all abused women, but the extra pressures experienced by abused Traveller women make this a particularly hazardous exercise

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the many and varied difficulties discussed above, the recommendations which have grown from the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires will be divided into wider policy recommendations followed by recommendations which refer to services, or programme provision, appropriate to Exchange House itself.

GENERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An expansion in **refuge accommodation** facilities, including a review of the ruling which prohibits teenage boys over the age of 14 from admission to a refuge. This may involve the development of a particular type of emergency accommodation more suited to the needs of women with older sons.

2. The provision of a variety of **transitional and long term accommodation** should be explored in greater detail. Such variety of accommodation could include transitional apartments in developments around the country, which would not be easily identified and would enhance the possibility of anonymity and safety. Specialised group housing projects for Traveller families might include facilities for separated women, in which they could live in safety but within a Traveller community. An increase in the supply of local authority housing in general, with specific allocations for abused women, would reduce the waiting time for women leaving abusive situations and thereby enhance their opportunities for finding long term safety.

3. Serious consideration must be given by Exchange House, in conjunction with other Traveller agencies, to ensuring a **consistent implementation of An Garda Síochána's own 'pro-arrest' domestic violence policy**. Without a concerted effort by relevant agencies in conjunction with the Garda authorities, abused Traveller women will remain at increased risk of serious and life threatening injury.

4. The **involvement of Traveller women in the provision and evaluation of services for abused women** would enable the experiences of the Travelling community which have been highlighted in this report to be consistently heard within such services. Such involvement could be facilitated for example by inclusion on the Boards' of Management of relevant organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFICALLY RELEVANT FOR EXCHANGE HOUSE

1. It is recommended that a **consciousness raising programme** be developed specifically for women and led by specially trained Traveller women. The model for such a programme is already in existence in the Health Education programme being successfully run for women. It is possible and possibly preferable, that a programme to enable women to reflect on their roles within the extended family, as currently experienced by them, and the effects of marital violence as both an infringement of their human rights and a threat to their family stability and health, be delivered within the Health Programme framework**.**

2. In view of the manner in which literacy difficulties accentuate barriers to women's safety, the **development of a consciousness raising programme** according to the Paulo Freire model of adult education, could help to address two challenges to women's safety at the same time. Ideally such a programme should be developed by a facilitator experienced in this model, in conjunction with a Traveller woman who has experience of the issues which are discussed in this report.

3. Exchange House is well placed to **develop a specialized information service on the issue of violence against Traveller women using a range of media** (e.g. specially designed leaflets using pictures or cartoons, a short video or DVD with an explanation of what domestic violence is, and what women's legal entitlements are, as well as the location of available services). This information could also be utilized by other agencies providing services to abused women (e.g. Hospital A&E Departments, Court Service, etc.)

4. It is recommended that Exchange House, in conjunction with a range of domestic violence services, **develop a training programme for (preferably) Traveller women to act as liaison** between these services and Traveller communities in their own locale.

5. The deployment of **trained outreach Traveller women, to work alongside the existing social work service** would provide women with a choice of personnel whom they could approach for support.

6. **Court accompaniment** would appear to be a particular need for women seeking court orders, and this service is provided by Women's Aid. It is **recommended that Exchange House monitor the uptake and usefulness of this service** by its clients, and if necessary either develop enhanced and formal links with Women's Aid, or explore the possibility of adding such a role to its own support/outreach workers.

7. It is recommended that procedures be put in place to enable social work and support staff in Exchange House, to quickly access appropriate personnel in the HSE in order **to instigate proceedings for a Barring Order when a woman requests it.**

8. It is also recommended that **Exchange House develop links with appropriate Legal Aid Board centres** in order to initiate an exchange of views and experiences. Having legal representation in family law disputes has been found in this study to be the exception rather than the rule for Traveller women. Developing good working relationships with staff in the Legal Aid Board would help to redress this trend and make it the norm for Traveller to have such representation

9. It is also recommended that Exchange House provide and facilitate **support groups** for women either experiencing, or in the process of leaving, abusive relationships. Such groups have been found to be extremely helpful for women in a number of contexts, and while the difficulties identified a number of times in this report regarding confidentiality and family relationships, it is **recommended that such a service be piloted** independently, or developed in conjunction with other agencies such as Women's Aid or one of the Refuges.

10. It is recommended that provision for a forum or programme to enable and **support men to discuss the pressures and fears** they experience would be helpful in enhancing safety for women.

11. It is recommended that Exchange House become involved in **preparation for young couples before marriage,** providing clear and down to earth information about the unacceptability of domestic violence, and urging young women to break the silence that surrounds this issue.

12. It is recommended that **Exchange House become more proactive in addressing the issue of cultural awareness** within the context of domestic violence. The development of information leaflets/videos/DVDs for both Traveller women themselves and for service providers will help to reduce this chasm of misunderstanding which perpetuates myths about violence and the Traveller community. A proactive approach to the education and training of relevant service personnel, such as refuge staff, Gardaí, social workers and A&E staff, is recommended.

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