

Institute for Public Policy Research



REACHING OUT

TACKLING DISENGAGEMENT AMONG PAKISTANI
AND BANGLADESHI WOMEN IN BRITAIN

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CONTENTS

Summary.....	3
1. Evidence and drivers of disengagement.....	4
2. Disengagement from mainstream services	8
3. Community-based interventions: A way forward?	10
4. Recommendations.....	13
Annex: Research methodology	16
References	17

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The Bridge Institute for Research and Policy is a leading independent institute in Britain that specialises in researching the state of contemporary Muslim communities in the UK. The Institute is a think tank that focuses upon British Muslims to influence, inform and shape policy.

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TERMINOLOGY

For this research we focused on women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin. This included women who were born in the UK, as well as women who born abroad but are long-term resident in the UK or naturalised citizens. We have drawn on secondary data that focuses on those two groups. Where necessary we have also drawn on analyses covering British Muslims. Over half (approximately 53 per cent) of Muslims in the UK are of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.

We define disengaged women as those who are limited in their ability to access economic opportunities, mainstream services and the wider community.

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SUMMARY

There is widespread acceptance that the social and economic disengagement of women from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities remains a challenge (Ali 2015; Social Mobility Commission 2017; Women and Equalities Committee 2016).¹ The government has recognised the need to tackle disengagement as a key priority (Casey 2017, Integrated Communities Strategy 2018).

Yet recent years have not seen significant improvements, with some indicators suggesting that disengagement could be intensifying (Murray 2017). Advances in rates of economic participation, in particular, have stalled, even though qualification and educational attainment have improved considerably in the past decade (Malik 2018; Muslim Council of Britain 2015; Cheung 2014).

The factors driving persistent disengagement arise from the complex interplay between structural factors, persistent (and potentially worsening) discrimination, and cultural conservatism. A large proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are currently being let down by mainstream services, including employment support, subsidised childcare and mental health support. Our research finds that distrust, detachment from the community and a lack of personalisation increasingly hamper the ability of mainstream services to promote greater engagement.

In contrast, the community-based interventions profiled as part of this research and presented in this report demonstrate that these approaches can be highly effective. They tend to enjoy higher levels of trust, are based within the community, and have a greater ability to provide personalised support.

However, our research suggests that community-based organisations are struggling. Despite their track record in reaching the most disengaged women and the fact that many local services rely on their services, currently many community groups find themselves locked out of funding. Most are too small or informal to access public sector contracts. As a result, groups remain dependent on a shrinking pool of local authority grants.

Ensuring that community-based support remains viable will be critical to tackling disengagement among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. In this report, we set out an initial road map for how to increase levels of cooperation between public sector agencies and community groups on the ground.

We call on service providers to take the following actions.

- 1. Blur the distinction between statutory and community-based provision** by adopting hybrid approaches – where the services offered by statutory providers are managed in partnership with community-based organisations.
- 2. Develop better and more nuanced evaluation methods focused on social outcomes** moving away from numerical evaluations to a wider set of indicators, including improvements in confidence rates, social participation and improved trust in wider services.
- 3. Ensure groups that support disengaged women from the Bangladeshi and Pakistani community are accessing funding for civil society and social investment.**
- 4. Support platforms that can enable the exchange of good practice among community-based organisations working with disengaged Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.**

¹ 38 per cent of Muslims are Pakistani; 15 per cent are Bangladeshi; 14 per cent other Asian; 10 per cent Black; 6.6 per cent Arab; 2.9 per cent white British; 4.8 per cent other white (Women and Equalities Committee 2016).

1. EVIDENCE AND DRIVERS OF DISENGAGEMENT

Dismantling the barriers to social and economic participation in British society is critical to ensuring that all citizens and residents can lead productive and fulfilling lives, integrated fully in their local communities. However, the evidence, including previous IPPR research in the city of Bedford, shows that disengagement among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women remains a key challenge (Murray 2017).

Disengagement remains most evident in the labour market. Although female economic inactivity overall has been declining, it is persistent among ethnic Bangladeshi and Pakistani women in the UK (Woodward 2018); Bangladeshi and Pakistani women earn less than women from all other ethnic minority groups (Women and Equalities Committee 2016). Inequalities in the levels of economic participation between men and women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are particularly stark: while 71 per cent of men from these communities are in employment, only 38 per cent of women work, representing the biggest gender gap of any ethnicity (APS 2017).

Economic disengagement remains a challenge despite reductions in the percentage of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with no qualifications (Malik 2018; Muslim Council of Britain 2015). Indeed, significant improvements in the educational attainment for girls of Bangladeshi origin and increases in the numbers of girls attending university is not reflected in improvements in labour market outcomes for these two groups (Social Mobility Commission 2016; Cheung 2016).

Economic disengagement is coupled with ongoing evidence of social disengagement among these groups. Longitudinal surveys suggest that young Muslim women tend to have narrower friendship circles than all other groups. Findings of the British Election Study also suggest that overall Muslim women are more likely than Muslim men (12 per cent compared to 8 per cent) to say that *all* their friends are from the same ethnic group. The data suggests that social disengagement is particularly pronounced among older women (50+ years) and women without degrees (Ipsos MORI 2018). Moreover, analysis suggests that women from these two groups have a higher propensity for mental health problems than women from other ethnicities (Anand and Cochrane 2005). Interviews and focus groups carried out for this and previous IPPR projects (Murray 2017) suggest that social isolation remains a significant challenge for many women.

“Some of the barriers include confidence, even simple things like how to read price tags they feel isolated and are scared.”

“There is a lack of confidence and we are keen to boost confidence by creating familiarity.”

“Some women are scared to put the bins out, it is a scary experience.”

The drivers of disengagement among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are diverse and deep-rooted (Davidson-Knight et al 2017). Through our research we have identified three key barriers.

First, caring responsibilities are a significant factor. Pakistani and Bangladeshi households tend to have more children and are among the most likely of any ethnicity to be formed of adults with dependent children: 42.7 per cent of Bangladeshi households and 38.7 per cent of Pakistani households in the UK are designated ‘married with dependent children’ (compared to 14.1 per cent of white British households) (UK Gov Census 2011). Analysis by the Muslim Council of Britain shows that 18 per cent of Muslim women aged 16–74 are ‘looking after home or family’, compared to 6 per cent in the overall population (Muslim Council of Britain 2015). For Muslim women in particular, caring responsibilities do not extend only to children but also to parents and older relatives.

Second, entrenched cultural conservatism among many Muslim families also creates barriers to engagement (Murray 2017). Women interviewed for this project confirmed that attitudes towards women’s roles can undermine their ability to participate socially and economically:

“Culture makes things difficult in their lives and this can inhibit them to do the things they hope and dream to do.”

Recent government-sponsored reports, notably the Casey Review (2016), have drawn attention to the issue of culturally conservative attitudes in Asian Muslim households impeding the integration of women. Analysis of the Understanding Society Survey, cited in the Casey Review (2016), suggested that a significant proportion of British Muslims continue to hold conservative views regarding women’s role in the family (for example, 38 per cent agreed with the statement “husbands should work, wives should stay at home”, compared to 18 per cent of Christians and 11 per cent of non-religious people).

However, research suggests that Muslim women themselves value work and careers (Bunglawala 2008, Tyler and Ahmad 2006) – something which our interviewees confirmed.

“Most of these women want to work and be financially independent. They know that if they have marriage breakdowns that means they will be left with nothing...”

“We need to train daughters, we need to get them financially independent. There is a stigma if women are financially stable. The husbands take advantage of the fact that the women can’t earn and work and gain money for herself. It’s a cultural thing that women are not to go out and work, it has nothing to do with Islam.”

Attitudes to work are often determined by the dynamics within households, rather than the views of women themselves. Our interviews and previous IPPR research (Murray 2017) show that the expectations of family members, such as husbands, sons and mothers-in-law, can act as significant barriers to engagement, particularly once women marry or start a family. Studies have identified factors such as family honour, shame, expectation from community, family and friends

all playing a role in exacerbating disengagement, particularly among the most vulnerable women (Anand and Cochrane 2005).²

“Parents don’t like girls to work and there is a lot of pressure on Muslim girls to do as their families say.”

“Some in-laws and families argue that it is not a good thing for women to go out and work, no women are allowed to work, and it makes us financial disabled. When we are able to leave we are able to take some control back for our lives and find work.”

“Sometimes, but not always, my family has given me my rights. But I know women who have not received rights at all.”

Third, structural factors continue to play a significant role. In a recent study, Khoudja and Platt (2018) challenge the role of cultural conservatism in holding back women as emphasised in the Casey Report. They show that earlier findings have shortcomings as they tend to overstate the role of individual characteristics such as cultural background in explaining female participation in the labour market (Khoudja and Platt, 2018). Instead, they draw attention to the impact of other life-changes, such as women having a stable partner, playing a more significant role in women entering the labour force.

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests a hardening of wider societal attitudes in recent years. While discrimination was not directly referenced, most of the women we spoke to described mounting frustration with employers in particular. Too often, employers were unable to see beyond visible characteristics, particularly headscarves.

“It is really hard for these women to get work experience and employers won’t accept these women.”

“It needs to work two-ways, no one wants to integrate with us or make an effort to learn about [our] beliefs.”

“In some factories lots of men have picture of naked women and this can be off-putting for the women who don’t want to work in an environment where women are heavily sexualised.”

Of greatest concern were the widespread accounts of everyday hostility recounted by the interviewees (see box 5).

“We have lots of educational trips and we take the women out. And based on their outer garments and how they look people stare at them and make them feel uncomfortable. A few people have approached us and said, ‘What are you doing here?’, ‘Why have you come here?’. All we were doing is taking the women around Asda and giving them life skills on how to shop, and these people were being offensive. It is a good job that the women did not understand English then they would have heard what these people [other shoppers] were saying and would have really damaged them and put them off coming out on their own and shopping independently.”

“These people torment us all the time, they come, knock on the door and run away. Even though I do not wear the headscarf they know I am a Muslim and a foreigner, so they treat us very badly. These communities need to learn and be educated.”

2 Throughout the report we have included a number of comments from women interviewed in this project to highlight their lived experiences.

These experiences are borne out in the wider evidence. The persistence of employer discrimination against Muslim women is well documented (DWP 2009; Wood et al 2009). But there is also evidence to suggest increases in everyday intimidation. According to the reporting organization for anti-Muslim incidents, Tell Mama, 2017 was a record year for Islamophobic anti-Muslim incidents, with over 1,200 Islamophobic incidents including a 30 per cent increase in off-line, street-level incidents (Tell Mama 2017). Furthermore, the research found that women from the Muslim community are being disproportionately targeted. Six out of 10 victims were women, of whom the majority were aged between 13 and 18 (ibid).

Tackling disengagement among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women is critical if we are to ensure that they can participate fully in society and the economy. Over the course of our research, the women we spoke to identified it as the best way of ensuring that women gained financial independence and were able to make autonomous decisions.

Many of the key skills that are prerequisites for social integration are gained through engaging with services and by being employed. The world of work and interaction with service providers offer critical opportunities to improve English language capabilities and social understanding. The workplace is one of the key sites of social integration. It is through the workplace that different groups come into contact with those from other cultures and meet others outside their family unit. Work is a key opportunity to familiarise people with other cultures and social practices, and boost women's confidence (Murray 2017; Griffith and Halej 2015).

Moreover, engagement can have wider impacts on children's prospects. The ability to speak English, navigate the local labour market, build links with others in the local community and develop support networks have been shown to lead to improvements in educational attainment and the longer-term outcomes of succeeding generations (OECD 2015). Programmes that enable Pakistani and Bangladeshi women to engage are critical in demonstrating to their families and the wider community that there are advantages to social integration and that women's labour market participation is consistent with Islam.

The evidence outlined above highlights the persistent barriers faced by Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, and the case for tackling them. Services need to be designed in ways which can tackle these complex and reinforcing barriers. In the next section, we set out some of the issues which currently affect the ability of women accessing the support they need by mainstream provision.

2. DISENGAGEMENT FROM MAINSTREAM SERVICES

Mainstream services continue to struggle to reach the most disengaged Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.³ The rates of participation in employability and skills support for this group are significantly lower than for all other ethnic groups (Marangozov et al 2010). Despite reforms aimed at targeting the most disadvantaged groups, the evidence suggests that Muslim families are less likely to take up tax credit support for childcare (Ipsos Mori 2011) or free early education (Runnymede 2011). Women from these two communities also tend to under-utilise mental health support and other health services (Anand and Cochrane 2005).

The factors that inhibit Pakistani and Bangladeshi women accessing mainstream services are complex. Our interviews and focus groups identified three key issues.

First, the women we spoke to viewed mainstream services as intimidating and hostile. Many felt that services were designed primarily to identify or tackle abuse, rather than offer support. Even services which were set up to enable participation, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) lessons or training, were viewed with distrust.

“The mood and atmosphere [in the Jobcentre] is tense and creates arguments within the home. Jobcentres don’t understand this.”

“Training courses were seen as a threat, they were worried about doing courses...”

“The ESOL class was not seen as the right place for them.”

Second, many interviewees described how some services, including benefits and welfare services, were becoming more distant and detached from the community (ITV 2017). Increasingly streamlined processes for Jobcentres have forced women to travel further from their communities; and this is coupled with the fact that many mainstream services are seen as impersonal and less accommodating to religious and cultural needs. This has caused practical problems (for example, making it harder for women to juggle caring responsibilities and forcing them to use public transport) and often helped to entrench the resistance of family members.

“Rather than women having to go and drop their kids to other places and then come, they can just come and bring their kids with them and feel more welcome.”

“If they have to travel out to drop their kids and spend their benefit money for travel it can get very costly.”

3 This research focused on the issues affecting women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in the UK. Where necessary, secondary data and research cited refers to Muslim community. Although this encompasses women from a wide range of backgrounds, the majority (53 per cent) are of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.

“The courage that it takes them to go to the Jobcentre is not recognised.”

Third, services were seen to be less accommodating of women’s cultural and religious needs (Hussain 2005). Women described how few made the kinds of critical adjustments which could have helped enable participation, such as providing halal food or women-only sessions (see box 3). Moreover, women interviewed reported systemic misinformation about attitudes and practices among service providers – including with regards to welfare and childcare.

“[Unlike mainstream services], community groups which are led by BAME communities are culturally more aware and more sensitive than a white-led government with white-led employment services.”

“Benefits providers don’t understand that there is a family pride and (women) do not want to claim off the state.”

“They look after the elderly, their children, their disabled child, they don’t tick a form to say they are carers, but they are! They don’t want it to be seen as a job or get recognition for it... mainstream providers don’t understand that.”

“ESOL was not the right class and also, they were mixed gendered which made the women feel uncomfortable.”

The views of the women consulted as part of this research resonated closely with those of women who participated in previous IPPR research with disengaged women in Bedford (Murray 2017). This previous research programme also found that small adjustments to timetabling – as well as to the style and feel of services – could make a fundamental difference when it came to helping women engage with key services. However, in general, it is up to individual frontline workers themselves to make these adjustments, often with limited support or sources of know-how and information.

As a result, services (alongside many large charities which offered support) were seen as impersonal, lacking in the kinds of human dimension which many disengaged women felt was critical to their engagement. Women felt that services were there to point out their deficiencies rather than build on their qualities and competencies, with few of them recognising existing skills or other assets.

“There needs to be a distinction as to what is needed here, it’s about power, empowerment, engagement... not to clump them all together.”

“We developed our own English classes held on Friday mornings and regularly. The talk English is a practical class and helps them identify things which they have seen outside and translate into English.”

“They are a generic service which does not look at specific issues.”

“Everything is on the individual, there is no face to face support and then they are referred to charities such as Shelter.”

Tackling disengagement among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women will only be possible when they can access public services that can offer the support they need. In the next section, we show that – given the barriers experienced in relation to mainstream services – many women rely on community-based provision. We also set out the case for much more integrated approaches which enable closer integration between community-based approaches and mainstream provision.

3.

COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS: A WAY FORWARD?

“These communities are not hard to reach – they are there but we just haven’t worked out how to engage with them.”

There is an emerging consensus, including among government agencies, about the importance of community-based interventions (see box 1). Indeed, the government’s recent Civil Society Strategy signaled a greater focus on collaborative commissioning which enables engagement of community and not-for profit organisations in the delivery of public services (DCMS 2018).

Box 1: Community-based English language provision

The Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government’s (MHCLG) approach to supporting English language learning among the most disengaged women increasingly focuses on community-based provision. The focus of the courses is on the everyday English that women need to go about their daily lives. Lesson take places in community centres, mosques and other venues that women use within their own neighbourhoods. Teachers are either from the community or are highly trained in key cultural and religious practices. MHCLG’s approach was shaped by findings of a series of randomised control trials commissioned by government, which found that community-based English language classes both increased language proficiency and promoted social integration more effectively than centrally-provided tuition (Learning and Work Institute 2018).

But despite this growing recognition of the effectiveness of community-based support (see boxes 2–5), organisations working on the ground are under increasing pressure. The seven groups that took part in this research pointed to the fact that demand for their services significantly outstripped their capacity and described that they had experienced substantial cuts in levels of funding in recent years (see annex). They set out a difficult dilemma: while recognising that community groups’ effectiveness lies in the fact that they are ‘grounded’ and accessible, it also means that they are small and therefore lack the administrative and financial capacity to apply for and manage public sector contracts. The situation had become increasingly serious as grant funding which had formerly been administered by local government has decreased or, in many cases, disappeared (Gray and Bradford 2018).⁴

⁴ The five groups we spoke reported highly dependent on a small number of highly-committed (often overworked) staff and volunteers.

Box 2: SkillsHouse (Bradford)

SkillsHouse was initially set up in June 2015 to coincide with the opening of Bradford's 'The Broadway' shopping centre. It operates as a 'finishing school' where clients can develop work-based skills, attitudes and behaviours that employers specify for job vacancies. Close liaison between businesses and partners such as Jobcentre Plus (JCP) mean that SkillsHouse bridges the gap between the skills a person may have and the ones that a specific role may require.

SkillsHouse is open to all unemployed people in Bradford District. Many of the clients it works with have been unemployed for more than a year, are recovering from a period of ill health, or require support with progression in literacy and numeracy. Individuals undertaking pre-employment training with SkillsHouse are also guaranteed an interview for entry levels jobs in local firms and additional support in order to help them to secure employment in the district.

The SkillsHouse partnership consists of a small core team funded by Bradford Council and backed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the National Careers Service (NCS) as well as key delivery partners – Bradford College, Aspire-Igen and Shipley College – who work closely together to provide a range of coordinated services.

SkillsHouse work alongside Get Bradford Working, who are working to tackle unemployment levels in the city of Bradford as an initiative by Bradford Council. The council has developed Get Bradford Working, as a long-term strategic investment programme that draws together a number of different projects which tackle the different issues and barriers facing Bradford's residents.

To date, 1,100 local people have gained employment through the programme, with higher rates of engagement among women of BAME origin.

The funding challenges for community-based groups working with the most disengaged women are long standing, predating the current drive for austerity (see for example Grant and Buckner 2006). But the evidence suggests that the situation has worsened considerably in recent years. Analysis by IPPR North has found that groups serving ethnic minorities, those in the most deprived areas, and smaller organisations (Chapman and Hunter 2017) may have been among the worst affected by cuts to civil society funding (St Chad's Durham University 2016). In other words, community-based groups working with disengaged women are likely to have been disproportionately affected.

At the same time, the groups researched as part of the project reported significant increases in levels of demand, partly as a result of higher numbers of unfunded referrals from statutory services (such as Jobcentres). They identified a widespread assumption among many public sector providers (and some contractors and larger charities) that community-based services were provided free of charge. This was the case even when the women sign posted by funded mainstream services to community groups were those with the most complex needs.

Box 3: Aaina Centre

The Aaina community centre is based at the heart of Walsall and focuses on supporting disengaged women from all communities into the labour market. Aaina provides accessible services that cater for women and their children in Walsal. They enable women to aspire and achieve through volunteering and work placements, health and wellbeing, education and training, employment and enterprise, support services and community engagement.

Their services are largely community-based, covering English language, effective communications skills courses and confidence-building through educational outdoor trips. They offer sewing classes for isolated women to encourage them to socialise and further build on their key skills.

The service users can volunteer at the centre to gain work experience and also 'give back' to the centre which had given them life-changing experiences. The ethos of the centre is essentially that it is 'run by the community, for the community'.

The centre has developed a bespoke approach to ESOL classes to ensure that these are not intimidating for the women, overcoming some of the barriers faced at the more formalised learning spaces of local colleges. The bespoke course, known as 'English my way', is designed to improve the service user's proficiency in conversational English before moving onto the rules of the English language. This has proved useful, and participants have found that learning conversational English began to increase their confidence and self-belief before going onto the next stages of the English language. By applying their conversational English, women were able to converse more confidently in formal and informal social settings.

Aaina language courses focus on being empathetic to the needs and challenges of their service users. To further support the needs of their user, the centre also offers childcare facilities and a free play scheme support during school holidays.

Although the centre has been operating in the area for decades, some of its successful initiatives had to be cut back.

Tackling disengagement among Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups will only be possible if community-based groups working on the ground get a better deal. While most received funding to cater for the most extreme forms of abuse (such as providing shelters for victims of domestic abuse), the groups profiled for this research reported significant shortfalls in funding for the work they did with service users with complex needs which did not necessarily fall into the category of acute needs (including long term health problems, domestic abuse and complex caring responsibilities).

In the following section we set out reforms required to ensure that the critical support that they provide remains sustainable.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: BLUR THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN STATUTORY AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROVISION

Statutory providers need to rethink how they work with community-based organisations. There should not be an assumption that because community groups are well-established or have access to volunteers, they will automatically be there to offer support. In the context of deep cuts, this puts unsustainable pressures on the groups and their staff, particularly when signposting takes place without consultation with the organisations themselves.

Hybrid approaches, in which the services offered by statutory providers work are managed in partnership with community-based organisations and work is done in collaboration (rather than through formal commissioning), offer a way forward. Under this model, rather than paying for services, statutory commissioners should seek ways of embedding their services within community based organisations. One option is to cover the costs of a community outreach worker who is based in a community organisation. In this way, workers are better placed to broker links with disengaged women, particularly those who aren't in touch with local services.

Hybrid approaches currently being trialled by the Jobcentre in the Washwood Heath of Birmingham suggest that they can yield many tangible benefits. Despite comparable levels of funding to basic jobseeker support, local providers and the DWP report significant improvements in the rates of participation among disengaged women from the local Muslim community. Initial evaluations show that, 18 months in, this approach has resulted in higher levels of participation in English language lessons and greater engagement with a range of services, including employment support.

RECOMMENDATION 2: DEVELOP BETTER AND MORE NUANCED EVALUATION METHODS FOCUSED ON SOCIAL OUTCOMES

In order to gauge effectiveness when it comes to tackling disengagement, programmes should move away from numbers-based evaluations methods, and apply more sophisticated social outcome measures. The aim should be to gauge the progress of the women against a wide set of indicators (including improvements in confidence rates, social participation and improved trust in wider services). A number of the groups involved in this study (see box 4) have developed evaluation tools which could be replicated by others. Community-based services should also find ways of improving coordination among all services providers and other key local actors, including colleges and employers.

However, more research and evaluation are needed in order to develop insights into the most effective ways of supporting effective and sustainable community-based support for disengaged women. Drawing on the lessons of the government-sponsored community-based ESOL trials, government should implement a range of pilots to establish best models of practice in relation to a range of issues, including social engagement and economic participation.

RECOMMENDATION 3: ENSURE THAT GROUPS WHICH SUPPORT DISENGAGED PAKISTANI AND AND BANGLADESHI WOMEN ARE ACCESSING FUNDING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL INVESTMENT

Our research suggests that many community-based groups doing vital work with disengaged women are currently falling through the cracks in terms of funding. As public sector commissioning has become more streamlined, it has also become less accessible for groups of this kind. In most of the groups, other than applications to charitable foundations and Lottery funding, little had been done to diversify funding sources beyond the traditional local authority grant making model. This has impacted on the resilience of the organisations as budgets have become more constrained.

Government should therefore audit the existing funding streams available for community groups and wider civil society, to establish whether groups working with disengaged women from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi community are accessing this kind of support. This includes funding being made available via the Place Based Social Action Plan, Access (the Foundation for Social Investment) and other forms of social investment, as well as funds which have been created to support greater integration, such as the Controlling Migration Fund. The aim should be to establish whether groups of this kind have a viable long-term funding model.

In addition, in light of the commitments made in the recent civil society green paper, specific guidance should be issued for commissioners working with these target groups, particularly Jobcentres and welfare providers.

RECOMMENDATION 4: SUPPORT PLATFORMS TO ENABLE THE EXCHANGE OF GOOD PRACTICE AMONG COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS WORKING WITH DISENGAGED PAKISTANI AND BANGLADESHI WOMEN

Finally, government should develop and support platforms which could enable the sharing of good practice and models of working among community-based organisations. Our research suggests that too often groups working on the ground operate in isolation and have no opportunities to look beyond the daily provision of services. They also tend to be under-represented in mainstream civil society forums and organisations.

Studies have found that existing Muslim women's organisations, such as the Muslim Women's Network, are structurally weak and under-funded (CLG 2009). Meanwhile, platforms that are in place to assist mainstream civil society groups can lack community-specific know-how and have weak networks into the relevant groups. As part of its plans to set up a 'What Works' centre to support improvement in mainstream integration support (MHCLG 2018), government should develop a specific focus on programmes that demonstrate effective ways of working with disengaged Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.

Box 4: Shantona (Leeds)

Shantona is a women and family centre based in Leeds, which focuses on building confidence and independence, reducing health inequalities, and promoting wellbeing in the community. They offer tailor-made solutions and provide a range of support services focused on empowering women and strengthening families. Their staff reflect the makeup of their user groups, made up of women from a variety of backgrounds.

Shantona helps bridge the gap between women and mainstream resources. They enable greater understanding about the cultural backgrounds and sensitivities of these women, and offer 'transitional support workers' to work alongside women. They offer 10–20-week training courses to

help confidence-building in women and support them to achieve their educational and employment aspirations. Shantona provides an in-house nursery to help women with childcare so that they can attend courses. In addition, the nursery is used as a place for some of the women to gain work experience and 'nursery nurse' accreditation.

The greatest challenge that Shantona experiences is the lack of consistent funding, and the women who attend the centre were not able to access mainstream services easily. Currently, staff feel under pressure to support service users, even when it is not their remit to do so, as this responsibility and remit should be provided through mainstream support.

The organisation celebrated its 20th anniversary in October 2018, which was attended by local councillors, local police and civil society, indicating support and acknowledgement of the organisation and the work it is contributing to the communities within the locality of Leeds.

Box 5: Nottingham Muslim Women's Network/United Communities Network

Nottingham Muslim Women's Network (NMWN) are working to empower local Muslim women and offer confidence building strategies and courses. Their work is attempting to reach out to women and largely focuses on issues relations to domestic abuse and hate crime.

NMWN were keen to emphasise that opportunities to engage and integrate into the larger society should be based on skills their service users have. The group has paid staff members, but struggles to generate enough funds to grow the organisation. The staff reported that some interactions of the staff members with the local council staff made them feel uncomfortable, as they felt prejudgments were made about them due to their religious dress wearing the 'jilbab' long dress/garment.

The organisation is made up of a diverse network of Muslim women, sharing knowledge and voicing the needs of Muslim women in Nottingham, providing a channel between the community and statutory organisations to ensure women are involved in the decision-making process to influence local policy and strategy development. They have worked to raise awareness of unaddressed issues affecting Muslim women, organise events and forums to collect the views of Muslim women, undertake community research, and to make representation on relevant boards and decisions making bodies.

The United Communities Network (UCN) supports local BAME women by encouraging them to gain employment, supporting their educational learning and identifying what type of barriers are preventing them from gaining opportunities and education. UCN are often signposted by mainstream providers to women who face poverty and barriers. Their work is to provide one-to-one support for women and this includes developing their interview techniques, CV writing skills and support in job searches. The organisation reaches women through hosted job fairs and linking them to a wider network of inspiring people to help them gain confidence.

Central to UCN's work is challenging the discrimination of women from BAME and religious communities. The UCN noted that there was a climate of fear in relation to British Muslims and was problematic for their members to access opportunities if they overtly stated their religious identities. Some of the women chose not to state their religious affiliation in order to avoid 'standing out'.

ANNEX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research for this report covers seven cities in England (Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Leeds, Nottingham, Peterborough, Waltham Forest and Walsall). The research team undertook nine focus groups and a series of one-to-one interviews with managers and outreach workers in the community-based organisations. Forty-eight people took part in the focus groups. Focus groups were made up of two–10 people. Each focus group lasted two hours and took place in a range of languages, including Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and English. The findings were translated and transcribed. Researchers were able to converse with the respondents in languages that participants felt most at ease. The respondents varied in ethnic backgrounds, age, and gender. The study was made up of service users, paid staff members, volunteers, local council workers, key members of the British Muslim communities and three business owners. Some of the respondents had experienced domestic abuse in their past and thus care and sensitivity was applied when conversing with these specific respondents by using the University of Nottingham ethics guidelines.

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