

All Wales

Saheli

Association

supporting Asian and Muslim families

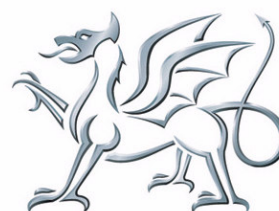


MUSLIM WOMEN TALK WALES 2006 PROJECT REPORT

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**ARIENNIR GAN Y LOTERI
LOTTERY FUNDED**



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
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The Saheli Engagement Model

The research that is described in this report is a Community Engagement Project and was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and part funded through a project funded by the Big Lottery as a means of exploring the issues and concerns of women within the Muslim Community living and working in Wales. It assists the statutory government in complying with the aims and objectives of the National Assembly for Wales Race Relations Scheme 2005 -2008 including:

Develop policies and deliver services in a way that takes account of the needs of different ethnic groups in Wales.

- Promoting good race relations in Wales.
- Help build the capacity of minority ethnic groups so that they have the confidence to engage with the Assembly and gain access to services and information with ease.
- Demonstrate leadership in the promotion of race equality across Wales.
- Promoting high quality training and education opportunities for all ethnic groups and promote good race relations and the elimination of racial discrimination in schools and colleges.

The research provided by the project will also assist the Welsh Assembly Government in complying with point 10 of the Race Relations Scheme: Collaborative Working and Regulation.

10.3 The Assembly Government will work with its partners, across all parts of the Welsh public and voluntary sectors to promote race equality.

The project is organised by the All Wales Saheli Association. Through meetings, one to one information exchanges and conferences with the Muslim and non-Muslim community, Saheli has sought to network with Welsh Muslim women's groups, loose networks, individuals and other conventional groups and agencies that work with or seek to engage with the Muslim populous throughout Wales. The initiation of the Muslim Women Talk Campaign WALES has been hugely advantageous and been the precursor for the organic development of an informal 'networks of networks'. This project has opened a route of communication with a significant percentage of Muslim women and their families that do not participate or are not members of existing formal Muslim groups. Their voices and opinions can be transmitted and fed back. Further the process of engagement has enabled Muslim women to become better informed and confident in opening dialogue where they have self identified critical issues, concerns and solutions that they say need to be addressed in order to mitigate the involvement of young people in extremist groups and activities. The project has also sought to raise the consciousness of the diversity of ideas, opinions and experiences within the Muslim and non- Muslim community in general.

'I need to know what my rights are. So many times, I have been to the police station to beg them to release my son. I know of no other way to deal with this.'

Comment made by a mother whose son was arrested in Newport

Foreword



We are pleased to introduce this report that outlines the principle issues and concerns facing the women of the Muslim community within Wales. We are delighted that the All Wales Saheli Association has been given the opportunity to assist the Welsh Assembly Government in meeting the statutory requirements as set out in the Race Relations Scheme 2005-2008 and hope that the recommendations made in this document are embraced by the decision and policy makers within Wales.

Muslim Women Talk Wales is the largest project that has been undertaken by the All Wales Saheli Association. For seven years, Saheli has served as a locally run and managed voluntary organisation catering to Muslim and Asian women, children and families, we have experienced, first hand, the difficulty that community members have in communicating with those who are there to provide safety and assistance. As an organisation, our chief aim is to establish a valuable communications link between the policy makers and the Muslim community living in Wales that will allow individuals to receive relevant/accurate information, express concerns, raise issues and develop the confidence to positively contribute to community life.

The idea for this project was inspired by the backlash felt by the Muslim and Asian community following the bombings in London of July 7, 2005. Given the nature of our work, our concern for the women and children within the community took on a new meaning. We found ourselves answering more calls from the parents of young men and women concerned about what will happen to their children now that Islamophobic attacks were on the rise. They felt unsafe and uncertain of who to call and what to do. There appeared to be no clear sense of direction how to access justice for those whose likeness may be misconstrued as a possible 'terrorist'.

The All Wales Saheli Association saw the need for a collaborative partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) following two meetings held, at their behest, July 19th and August 2nd 2005. On those occasions, Muslim women from groups and associations within Wales raised a number of salient issues including extremism, racism and Islamophobia and concerns for family and community relations. Many of the findings in this report reiterate those concerns.

Saheli hopes that the lessons learned from this project will contribute to the existing knowledge base regarding the Muslim community and that it will inform those statutory service providers dedicated to serving the whole of the community in an equitable and dignified manner.

Sincerely,

Shahien Taj

Data on the UK Muslim Community

DEMOGRAPHICS

- In 2001, there were 1.6 million Muslims living in the UK, out of a total population of 58.7 million people (2.7%).
- 74% were from an Asian ethnic background, predominantly Pakistani (43%).
- 46% of Muslims were born in the UK.
- 34% of Muslims were under 16 years of age.
- A third of Muslim household (34%) contained more than 5 people, 25% of households contained three or more dependant children.
- 38% of Muslims lived in London.

(Source: *National Statistics: 2001 Census*)

EDUCATION

- In 2001, there were 371,000 school-aged (5 to 16 year old) Muslim children in England.
- In 2004, 67% of Indian, 48% of Bangladeshi and 45% Pakistani pupils gained 5 or more A* to C at GCSE (or equivalent), compared with 52% of White British pupils (Source: *Social Trends No.36, 2006*).
- 31% of young British Muslims leave school with no qualifications compared to 15% of the total population.

(Source: *National Statistics: 2001 Census*. unless otherwise stated)

POVERTY

- 35% of Muslim households have no adults in employment, (more than double the national average). (Source: *'Muslim Housing Experience'*, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 2004).
- 73% of Bangladeshi and Pakistani children are living in households bellows the poverty line (60% of the median income). This compares with a third (31%) for children in all households. (Source: *Department for Work and Pensions. Households Below Average Income 1994/95—2000/01*).
- In 2001, 13% of Muslim men and 16% of Muslim women reported 'not good' health. (Source: *National Statistics: 2001 Census*).

HOUSING

- In 2001, 52% of Muslim households did not own their own home
- 28% of Muslim households were living in social rented accommodation —i.e. accommodation rented from the council or housing association.
- Muslim households were the most likely to experience overcrowding. One third of Muslim households (32%) lived in overcrowded accommodation. This compares with just 6% of Christian households who experience overcrowding.
- Muslim households were the most likely to lack central heating (12%)

(Source: *National Statistics: 2001 Census Report on Faith*)

EMPLOYMENT

- In 2004, 28% of 16-24 year old Muslims were unemployed. This compares with only 11% of Christians of the same age. (Source: *National Statistics: 2001 Census Report on Faith*)
- In 2004, a fifth of Muslims were self-employed. (Source: *National Statistics*)
- In 2004 almost seven in ten (69%) Muslim women of working age were economically inactive. (Source: *Social Trends No 36. 2006*).

CRIME

- 47% of Muslim students have experienced Islamophobia. (Source: *Federation of Student Islamic Societies Survey, 2005*).
- Almost 10% of the prison population are Muslim, two-thirds of whom are young men aged 18-30. (Source: *Prison Service Statistics, 2004*)
- Between 2001 and 2003 there was a 302% increase in 'stop and search' incidents among Asian people, compared with 118% among white people. (Source: Home Office, *Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System, 2004*)

RELATED STATISTICS

A sense of identity for many young Muslims is formed from a mixture of experiences within the community, educational institutions, religion and family. Yet many young Muslims feel they have an inadequate grasp of their own heritage and history against which to balance the other influences in their lives. (Source: *Young Muslims Speak*, Peace Direct 2006)

Young Muslims are concerned about the way they are understood by the public (non-Muslim and Muslim) and portrayed in the media. (Source: *Young Muslims Speak*, Peace Direct 2006)

31% of British Muslims agreed that Imams are out of touch with the views of young Muslims (Source: *MORI poll, 2005*).

Discussion between young people on the Muslim Youth Helpline, a confidential helpline for young Muslims, has included topics such as ineffective services for young Muslims; discontent over foreign policy; and the difficulties of integrating when people have the dual identity of being British and a Muslim. (Source: www.myh.org.uk)

A survey of 136 Muslim young people (of which 51 responded to an online survey and 85 took part in a focus group), undertaken to research their opinions on the Government's Youth Matters Green Paper (2005) reported that:-

- 40% of the online respondents considered the standard of service provision in their local area to be 'poor', with 15% describing it as 'terrible'. Most participants in the focus group agreed that the lack of information about what was available in their local areas was an important reason why they do not take up more activities.
- A significant majority of the young people considered their local mosque an important focus for community participation and support.
- 74% of the young people felt that the delivery of youth services should reflect the religious and cultural sensitivities of the users.

- Almost all Muslim young people called for different sports sessions for young men and young women, as well as certain arts and drama activities like dance which many young Muslims said they would prefer to do separately.
- The majority of Muslim young people said they were actively involved in voluntary work in their communities.
- Over 80% were in favour of the idea of an Opportunity Fund, letting young people decide how money is spent on youth services. They believed that 'it would feel like people were really listening to us'.

(Source: Youth Matters: *a report from Muslim Youth Helpline and NCVYS*, 2005)

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Report Summary

The research presented in this report was carried out by the All Wales Saheli Association. Meetings and conferences were held throughout Wales. Facilitators for the meetings were recognised community members who were not only able to draw out the issues and concerns raised by the women, they were also able to provide enlightened and informed contributions throughout the campaign and for that we are most grateful.

AIMS

To establish a valuable communications link between the policy makers and the Muslim community living in Wales that allowed individuals to receive relevant/accurate information, express concerns, raise issues and develop the confidence to positively contribute to community life.

How were we going to achieve it?

- By running a series of open discussion meetings aimed at engaging the views of Muslim women within the community. The reason being that Muslim women being at the centre of family life and have no community-based forum to articulate their queries/concerns.
- By integrating an educational programme aimed at engaging the views of Muslim and other minority youth through existing partnership with the CPS and the police. Thus avoiding programme duplication, demonstrating the effectiveness of positive working relationships and adding value to the existing structure
- By introducing a long term strategy for engagement with Muslim (and other minority ethnic) young people that allows for the exploration of social, cultural, physical and environmental identity whilst providing a network of peer and mentor support during the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Muslim Women Talk Wales was aimed at including the voices of Muslim women, from all walks of life. The strategy proposes the delivery of a series of open discussion meetings with women from the Muslim community within Wales.

The campaign acted as a conduit between the individual and decision makers within government bodies across the UK and assist in the facilitation of frank and transparent dialogue regarding policy development and action. Thus, the information gathered would assist in directing thinking at WAG level as well as through other key public bodies.

The All Wales Saheli Association felt that it was imperative the WAG play a key role in determining the direction of future activities and directives in relation to developing a stronger engagement with Muslim communities, in Wales.

METHODS

A total of 15 meetings were held throughout Wales. Each meeting lasted between 3-4 hours in duration and included a two stage process whereby the women were able to discuss relevant issues openly amongst themselves before engaging with invited guest speakers. The thinking behind this model was that staging meetings would allow time and space for the women to build their confidence and focus their thoughts so that when they meet with the guests, they would feel more capable of articulating their views and ideas.

Meetings were flexible in construct and included:

- Space for Government officials/ Mainstream bodies and steering group members to speak to the community.
- Opportunities for Muslim women to informally network with government officials from a variety of levels and locations.
- Steering group members giving a background and sense of purpose to the meetings.
- Participative workshops facilitated to an agreed format for women to share their experience and concerns.
- Lead person collating notes
- Information for women regarding the Anti-terrorist Law and what to do practically if anyone or in particular young male members of the family find themselves approached by the Police.

RESULTS

The issues and concerns of over **600** women were engaged as a result of our meeting format:

- Women felt threatened under the current climate of negative feeling toward the Muslim community as a result 9/11, 7/7, of ongoing news items in the media and coverage of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

'I was walking over the bridge, in the middle of the day, and a white man pulled my scarf off and threw it in the river. I didn't do anything to the man! Why do they hate me so?'

- Women believed that there is a systematic effort being made to disengage the Muslim community from mainstream society and felt as if they were being forced to 'go back to wherever they came from.'
- Women have experienced a demonstrated lack of/negative response from statutory service providers including and especially the police.

'The sound of my voice turns them off. Even if I speak English – I still have an accent and they put me on to someone else.'

'If there is an accident between a white person and an Asian – the Asian is always at fault. The police favour the white person.'

- Women felt that their culture was a stronger influencing force on their social behaviour than their faith.

'I can deal with Allah (SWT) on the day of judgement – but I have to face my community tomorrow.'

- Women feel that the concept of honour within the community is not understood by service providers – nor do they feel that the individuals assigned to work with them have even the slightest interest in learning about their culture – or how they are expected to behave.
- Older women believe that they have a difficult time adjusting their way of thinking regarding views on marriage and relationships. They are conservative and hold strong cultural and traditional beliefs. This mindset is then imposed on younger women.
- Women are unaware of child protection issues and the laws relating to treatment of children and young people.

'We accept our own pain without realising that we ourselves are contributing to the cycle of violence.'

'My life is about everybody else's honour. There is no such thing as my life and my honour – it's about everybody else.'

- Women feel that their children are being disadvantaged in education due to a lack of cultural understanding of their children, Islamophobia and the additional pressures placed upon them by their peers and their teachers to – 'be more like the other children'.
- Women felt that the greatest lack of communication takes place between the so-called community leaders and the Muslim community itself and what they know about the issues that matter or are of concern to the whole of the community. (i.e.: The relationship within the family and the feelings of women and young people.)

CONCLUSION

We have seen from our research that the issues and concerns faced by the majority of women in Muslim communities rest in the lack of training given to service providers and the misconception that the Muslim community is led solely by faith and not culture. There is a marked difference between the practice, aspirations and practice of Islam in daily life. The man made patriarchal system and the nuances that are part and parcel of that philosophy are a much stronger than the practice of the faith itself.

Time and again, we have heard that individuals have been given a lesser quality of service and attention based on the lack of understanding of the cultural nuances between Muslim communities and the inability or unwillingness of the individuals providing a given service to understand those differences.

On the whole, the women were quite willing to speak their mind, but have found little or no avenues open for discussion with those able to make a difference in their lives. Their

problems, like those of other communities, revolve around the care of their children, their own sense of validation and the recognition of their important role within the family nucleus by the male members of their own community.

There is a demonstrated lack of awareness as to the rights, responsibilities and entitlements that they have under British law. (Many of the women we met were more familiar with Sharia and faith based rights.) There is also lack of understanding as to the representative nature of the National Assembly for Wales in relation to Central Government and the meaning of devolution and its direct impact upon their lives.

There are a high number of incidents involving Forced Marriage and Honour related abuse that is either unrecognised or widely ignored by the wider community. We have heard many anecdotes relating to the disappearance of vulnerable women as young as eleven and as old as sixty five. Few if any investigations into these incidents are carried through to the courts and many are sidelined due to the incapacity of service providers to look beyond the face of an individual and into the inner workings of the family and the community.

We cannot, however, lay blame on any particular incident or individual, rather the failing of statutory and voluntary service providers to obtain an appropriate standard and level of training needed in order to successfully undertake work within an often complex and intricate set of relations and relationships, between family members and the wider Asian and Muslim community living in Wales, the United Kingdom and abroad.

One of the more difficult issues arising is the inability of BME oriented voluntary organisations to fully develop the appropriate resources in order to work with the issues affecting Muslim women. It has been assumed, on several occasions, that BME communities can understand each other ... nothing could be farther from the truth. Many of these organisations are only able to scratch the surface and with fierce competition for core funding and the lack of equitable and appropriate collaboration – the community suffers due to infighting, competition and an unwillingness to deliver diverse, appropriate and equitable services across cultures and communities.

Finally, the project has sought to develop links across the community and across Wales covering rural and northern areas. These links are fragile and need support in order to become established. Muslim Women Talk Wales has identified ways to better support vulnerable Muslim women living in Wales – but it is a work in progress and more time is needed to transfer the good ideas into good practice.

Background

According to the 2001 Census, there are approximately 21,700 (there are unconfirmed figures that suggest more than 50,000) Muslims living in Wales. The aim of the **Muslim Women Talk** project was to include the voices of Muslim women, from all walks of life. The strategy proposed the delivery of a series of open discussion meetings with women from the Muslim community within Wales.

The project acted as a conduit between the individual and decision makers within government bodies and statutory sector across the Wales and assisted in the facilitation of frank and transparent dialogue regarding policy development and action. Thus, information gathered would be used to assist in directing thinking at WAG level as well as through other key public bodies.

The All Wales Saheli Association felt that it was imperative WAG play a key role in determining the direction of future activities and directives in relation to developing a stronger engagement with Muslim communities.

Saheli, undertook initial investigative work to assess which links with key organisations and individuals could be used to ensure that the right target audience was accessible.

Originally, it was envisaged that meetings would take place in key communities throughout Wales, including Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, Carmarthen, Aberystwyth, Lampeter, Bangor and Wrexham of grass roots Muslim women, plus (and) one meeting with 'professional' women including non-Muslim women from minority ethnic communities. The reality of the situation became clear as some groups were smaller than anticipated and the groups in North Wales proved difficult to reach by virtue of geography and scheduling problems. Our greatest success was in the number of women who travelled to meet with others in the name of **Muslim Women Talk Wales**, thus forging a network of voice across Wales.



Crucial primary engagement was made with grass root Muslim women in order to establish confidence and ensure that effective and productive links were made. Anecdotal evidence proved correct in that many of the Muslim women we met with had little or limited experience in wider community engagement and were fearful of interacting outside their conducive environment. Therefore, it became clear that we should limit the number of visitors/speakers we had in order to keep the conversation among the women flowing.



In the face of our recent work, the long term aim of the project in Wales continues to be the facilitation of open discussion that will raise confidence and aspiration levels of Muslim women regarding the issues, which need to be tackled toward decreasing extremist tendencies, empowering communities and participating confidently within civic and political structures. Now that the first bridge has been built, it remains of great importance to enter into a wider discussion with other minority community members.

It is important to note that the effects of the London bombing has left its mark on the other black and ethnic minority communities, living in Wales, who face increased racist and Islamophobic attacks. Evidence from our meetings suggest that a higher standard of training in ethnicity and diversity issues, delivered from a Community Development perspective, is required at local authority level to aid in developing better strategies around community safety and community planning for inclusion of minority communities. The fall out from 7/7 has also affected the way in which young men and women are treated in schools and in areas outside school catering to a cross section of young people. Whilst there is an effort being made by educators to stem the use of racist language and behaviour in the classroom, anecdotal evidence has shown that some teachers have been the worst offenders, thus encouraging negative behaviour and intolerance among the young people entrusted in their care.

Aims and Methods

Muslim Women Talk Wales aimed to establish a valuable communications link between the policy makers and the Muslim community living in Wales that allowed individuals to receive relevant/accurate information, express concerns, raise issues and develop the confidence to positively contribute to community life.

A series of open discussion meetings were aimed at engaging the views of Muslim women within the community. The reason being that Muslim women being at the centre of family life and have no community-based forum to articulate their queries/concerns. The time spent in engaging these views has proven to be highly informative and interesting. For the women we have spoken with have never been asked their opinion before and learning how to do that posed the greatest challenge.

Our attempt at integrating an educational programme aimed at engaging the views of Muslim and other minority youth through existing partnership with the CPS and the police has proved to be very disappointing. We have found the CPS to be uncoordinated and unable to deliver on their promises and the police unable to take on board the subtleties of working with young people from communities outside the white and mainstream. Efforts are now being made to work with a national programme for engagement with a partner organisation who, will in turn, franchise material to the police. It is unfortunate that we have been unable to establish a good working partnership, to date. We will, however, continue to develop projects with young people, making the information that they receive relevant to life in Wales.

Our engagement with Muslim young people has proven to be quite positive. We have met with young women and discussed their views and concerns and including their perceptions of identity and responsibility, including political participation as evidenced in our two field trips to Westminster.

Profile of the Participants

Within the greater scheme of things, Muslim women are very often marginalised, seldom is there an opportunity for engagement with them which would allow them to convey their thoughts and opinions, much less when it comes to political participation. As part of our research, we organised two trips for Muslim women to the House of Commons to meet up with MP's, peers and also representatives from other women's organisations that were involved with the Muslim Women Talk Campaign in other parts of the UK.

Women from various backgrounds and ages were invited to attend and we found that a large majority of the participants were students that came from business and law backgrounds. The non-student participants were women who had an interest in the campaign and were activists within the Muslim community in Wales. We had women from Swansea, Newport, Cardiff, Rhondda Cynan Taff and North Wales. There was however resistance to the campaign from a minority group within the community who disagreed with political engagement in non-Muslim countries.



Communications Gap

Unlocking the mysteries of any community can be a challenge. Here in Wales, however, there is an undeniable lack of understanding within the Muslim community. Through our discussions, it has become evident that the 'community leaders' have not grown with the community during the time that followed 9/11 and 7/7. Younger community members have not been included in local community events and excluded from the very foray that have been aimed at discovering their reasons for lack of engagement, thus proving their point quite clearly. In fact, the many efforts at reaching these young people have been made by external groups and organisations. This can be evidenced in the work of the Welsh Assembly Government's BME Youth Forum and even Funky Dragon.

If WAG is going to develop inclusion policies aimed at young people, a greater effort needs to be made to reach them through the people that they turn to - local project workers and community members who take the time to listen. The age gap is evident within the community. WAG needs to reassess the way it reaches Muslim communities and consider alternative and non traditional methods of engagement.

At the start of Muslim Women Talk Wales, women were bemused by the concept of engagement, now they are keen to have their say among other women and raise their own concerns regarding the safety and well-being of their families and the wider community.

Culturally, women have not played a visible role in the discussions regarding the community because it is seen as unacceptable. Mixed groups of men and are not viewed in a positive light by the community and women taking stand are considered harridans. By working in a culturally sensitive manner, we have been able to provide discussion and information to those at the heart of the household. Now that this channel is open, we need to do all that we can to keep the information flowing.

On an external level, although much has been done to initiate discussions on ethnicity and diversity – little has sunk in to those service providers at the 'coal face'. Professionals and volunteers within the community recognise that managers and supervisors receive training on dealing with ethnicity, equality and diversity. However, that training has not 'cascaded down' in an effective and consistent manner. A fully vetted and comprehensive programme of training for service providers needs to be undertaken that is inclusive of those very individuals the sector is trying to reach.

Forced Marriage

Muslim Women Talk Wales has served as a catalyst for discussion among Muslim women on the issue of Forced Marriage. Saheli has been able to identify partners within the Welsh Local Government Association as well as the Principal Welfare Officers from all 22 unitary authorities, in Wales and was recently invited to present a discussion regarding the development of best practice in recognising potential incidents of Forced Marriage through the active monitoring of school registers and information provision and access points for young people in distress.

Whilst "forcing someone to marry" is not currently considered a crime, there are a number of charges that can sometimes be brought. These include: assault, harassment, cruelty to persons under the age of sixteen, kidnapping, false imprisonment and abduction. The

escalating recognition of the problem of Forced Marriage has now reached a point where it is necessary to raise a question regarding the need to criminalise it and make the act of Forced Marriage an illegal offence.

Discussions among the women, have raised concerns regarding the number of unrecorded incidents of Forced Marriage, in Wales. The reasons for this stem from the clandestine arrangements made by parents without the full knowledge of the young men and women involved. There is also a demonstrated lack of understanding regarding the gravity of the concerns raised by young men and women to teachers, counsellors, GPs, social workers and the police. Again, anecdotal evidence suggests that many of these claims are dismissed as 'fanciful ideas' or 'cries for attention.' One recent incident notes the recruitment of a teacher, by parents, to telephone a young woman who ran away from home. The teacher thought she was helping the girl return to her 'loving' parents unaware of the fate that awaited her on her return.

At present, the National Assembly for Wales does not have a compatible set of guidelines specifically designed for practitioners, in Wales. The All Wales Saheli Association has endeavoured to meet with a number of statutory and voluntary service providers to help raise awareness of the issues surrounding Forced Marriage – but as the immigrant population in Wales increases, we find ourselves unable to reach practitioners in areas of Wales that are just beginning to receive new families within their communities. For this reason, we believe that it is imperative that we hold a national conference on the issue of Forced Marriage.

Honour Related Abuse

“In the community, ‘Honour’ is like breathing air and oxygen – if you don’t have it you may as well die”

Comment made by a professional Muslim woman – Cardiff 1 March 2006

Perhaps the most difficult bridge to build was that between the community and the service providers. There is a clear gap of understanding or 'common ground' between those who live in the community and those who serve it.

Through our research, we have established that the concept of 'honour' is one that is misconstrued. In the Western mind, 'honour' is an aspiration, however, in the Asian and Muslim community; 'honour' is something that an individual is born with as part of their connection to the family nucleus. Honour is not the sole possession of the individual, rather that of the whole family and extended family, as well. Any action taken by that individual has a direct impact on the immediate and extended family. Losing that sense of 'honour' can put an individual in far greater danger than is perceived by the Western mind. The gravity of this loss and the wider impact it has on the community cannot be explained away in a half day seminar.

Whilst we extol the virtues of living in a global village where the advancement and promotion of equality, justice and the advocacy of human rights is a social norm, there are still those men and women subjected to complex and archaic customs such as the practice of honour related conditioned/cultivated behaviour violence and abuse, living here in Wales.

This inexcusable practice is born from ancient tribal customs practised by societies all over the world. Many migrants, living in Wales, have a highly developed sense of cultural and social order where the subject of honour or 'Izzat' is featured in myriad facets. In some communities, honour is more deeply internalised and conservatively practised than in others.

Perpetrators of honour crimes are most often men that have been socially conditioned with the ideology of shame and honour that relates to gender identity. For women, this identity is shaped around the idea of being a 'good woman' who remains devoted to her husband and family despite ill treatment and the 'bad woman' who is husbandless, independent, boundless and sexually free. There is a belief that women are easily aroused and likely to bring shame to the family – therefore women need to be tightly reined as they may upset the patriarchal order. Failure to observe culturally valued and gender prescriptive behaviour can lead to social disapproval and community reprisals.

In the main, women of all ages and walks of life are subjected to and are victims of honour based violence and abuse, crime and killing. Justifications for these actions are legitimised by the essential need to promote and maintain family honour 'izzat'. Reasons range from not serving a meal quickly enough to *allegations* of women entering into illicit sexual relationships. In these cases, women are killed by their own brothers, fathers, husbands and sons.

Through our work, Saheli has advocated on behalf of more than two dozen women and young girls, living in Wales. Through our own work and in partnership with WAG and the statutory service providers, efforts are being made to stem the tide of honour based violence in Wales.

The WAG in these efforts however, is not recognised by the community. Further to that, inexperienced and unvetted individuals are becoming involved in incidents, thus inadvertently placing young men and women at greater risk. It is imperative that WAG take a leading role in the provision of accurate information and policy to the statutory service sector.

Recommendations

- We recommend the development of a **'Change oriented'** practical engagement model (tool-kit) that will allow service providers to effectively work with Muslim & Asian youth and communities – the package should be developed to take account of race, faith, culture, gender, sexual orientation and the cross cultural identity and living experiences of Muslim & Asian and youth and communities.
- Further and more comprehensive work with policy makers and service providers to raise awareness of the social behaviour (socialisation) and cultural attitudes toward domestic abuse and violence **'in the name of honour'**. There is a great concern that the issue of **child protection** within the Muslim & Asian minority ethnic communities is not monitored appropriately. At present, there are few if any practical ways of working with faith-based communities in monitoring and reporting cases of child and domestic abuse. Our research has demonstrated the need to remove the current stigma that favours 'political correctness' instead of the pursuance of justice in the name of human rights.

- A comprehensive programme of work that reflects the need for Asian and Muslim parents to realise the often complex and challenging environment of their children in relation to the wider world. By working in partnership with service providers. Organisations like Saheli can provide valuable input in establishing programmes for positive parenting, that can raise their parental and community awareness with regard to the needs of their children and develop the necessary skills to co-exist and integrate with wider sections of the community in a positive and balanced way.
- Further and more comprehensive work with service providers:
 - (a) To develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of the difference between Arranged and Forced marriages
 - (b) Assist service providers to actively engage in the abatement of this practice by working in an equitable manner with minority communities and encourage a discourse that leads social change by faith and culturally sensitive means.
- A solid programme of standardised training to encourage good practice among national, regional and local governments. The further development of policies providing the foundation for informed and equal partnerships between Government bodies, service providers and community groups on issues where Asian and Muslim communities are concerned. For the very simple reason that the issues and concerns faced by trans-national communities do not fall within easily recognised geographic and statutory boundaries and therefore need to be treated as matters of national/ international concern.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

Questionnaires Used

1. Questionnaire relating to Muslim Women

Which of the following are areas of concern for Muslim Women?

Child Protection

Forced marriages

Domestic abuse / Honour related abuse

Racism, harassment and Islamophobia

Youth Identity and International Politics

Parenting and managing to support children in a multicultural society

Managing gender bias

Accessing accurate information relating to Muslim marriages, divorce, limping marriages

Managing extended family relations

Language barriers

Access to the Mosque and Imam

Others

How can Muslim women be better supported in managing these issues? (pls note sample documents of projects)

Welsh Muslim women's barriers to political participation

Politicization - to increase the participation and contribution of Muslim women in Welsh/British civil society:

Is there a need to promote the political involvement and participation of Muslim women in to the Welsh or Central Government

What are the obstacles to full citizen participation and Politicization for Muslim Women?

Case study

Muslim women suffer multiple forms of discrimination, prejudice and inequality both from within the community and externally. From our discussions the hypothesis of honour is a huge problem. For effective change there is a need to recognize (wholesale) the obstacles that negate Muslim women's participation and distinguish between setting up structures and systems and the ultimate need to build confidence and assist them in challenging behaviour from **their** perspective.

A successfully well established young Muslim woman in her late 20s shared the following:

"Within my family and community to live according to one's own aspirations is an alien concept, I know many young women - educated, intelligent and professional - who have abandoned personal ambitions because the culture clash and expectancy is too stressful. I was the "black sheep" an anomaly". "I may have achieved much but not without great pain and grief - my whole life has been tainted and dominated by the kisa (subject) of honour"

The woman speaks with a depth of pain and hurt but they are the reality of her experience. The powerful influence of "Honour" (izzat) restricted her life choices, her limitations were further exasperated by the double jeopardy experience of racism and discrimination.

This young woman had never endured any physical abuse though it is clear that her emotional well-being had been compromised. The young woman was very specific of her position and explained that she is very much part of her family, extended family and would not have it any other way.

Can you empathise with the above?

What can be done to support Muslim women more effectively?

2. Questionnaire relating community relations

Community Relations – your views

Community relations – within the Muslim community

Community relations – with the wider community

Barriers to interaction and communication – wider community perspective

Obstacles to integration – Muslim community perspective

3. Questionnaire relating Welsh Identity, Communications and Representation

Welsh Muslim identity and sense of belonging

Do you feel you belong in Wales? Do you consider Wales as your home?

How do you feel about being a Muslim in the UK/Wales?

Is being a Muslim easier now than perhaps 10/20 years ago?

Communication and access to information and services

Do you receive up to date information about local or national services?

Are services sensitive and appropriate enough for you to comfortably access?

Do you believe that the people, organisations that work with you/ your community understand/ respect you and your faith and culture?

Aside from your religion and culture, do service providers understand the conditions and nuances of Izzat and Honour Codes?

Community representation

Do you recognise a member of your community or organisation that has the mandate or authority to speak on your behalf?

Do you believe that through your own community – your views and concerns are clearly and correctly voiced and represented?

Increasing communication – Do you have an alternative/preferred way that would improve communications with/within/from your community?

4. Questionnaire relating to CPS, Police and changes in Law

Amongst Muslim women (in particular) we are finding a common occurrence where racist and Islamophobic incidences are not being reported. There are fears of repercussion, belief that the police will not act, or an acceptance that racial and religious intolerance is a normal part of life.

Would you agree with the above statement?

Reporting Racist Islamophobic incidences to the Police – Are you satisfied or not?

Do you understand the different roles and responsibilities of the Police and its working partners the Crown Prosecution Services (CPS)?

In your community engagements with the Police and CPS – Do you feel that you are better informed of your rights and responsibilities or policed?

Do you think the community know enough about the following?

How Stop & Search works?

If the Police enter your home and search your property – do you have rights?

If your child or member of your family are taken in to custody/arrested - Would you know what to do?

Policing and security after London bombings

Anti-Terrorist laws - Changes in the legislation: how does this affect communities?

Under the Anti Terrorist legislation; non-disclosure- Are you aware of the legal implications of the failure to disclose information?

Safeguarding and ensuring national security- As a responsible member of British civil society do you feel that you know what the law NOW requires of you?

Access to your basic human rights

Appendix 2

Focus Group to discuss issues with Muslim students

Thursday 1 December, 10.00

Parade Learning Centre Group Discussion Room

It was noted that:

- There are differences in gender expectations for behaviour between young men and young women.

Issues of sexism – young men have often been heard name calling non-Muslim women; language is derogatory, implying that they are loose.

General chauvinist behaviour has been noted with non-Muslim, Muslim women and other minority women. They appear to have a perception of varying rules, rights and privileges for men vs women.

- Some young men are not following Islamic practices and guidelines and are drinking, clubbing and in premarital relationships.
Shahien reported that there is surreptitious drink and drug problems, which is leading to more difficult problems for young women.

Some Students appear to have issues with identity (code of religion & culture) their behaviour may not follow their religious codes for behaviour or they may be uncertain about the extent to which they wish to adhere to these.

Very often young Muslim women appear to be reticent and keeping secrets. There is a great expectation of them, with fears of having to conform, doing something wrong, being found out and being shunned from their families and community

- Staff observed increasing tendency for young people from ethnic groups stay within their groups. Many issues are racially bound

Shahien informed the group that in her observations of a number of schools she noted young people up to secondary education interacted well with all their peers however post 11 years + young people from ethnic groups tend to socialise and stay within their groups

- Learning and physical disabilities can be viewed differently in the Muslim community where these may be viewed as an illness with a tendency to keep a person at home.
- There is 'a generality of fear'. Young people are less willing to travel. Shahien reported difficulties finding British (Welsh) host families willing to offer accommodation to overseas Arab students.
- A current rumour in Cardiff about a bombing which had been the topic of conversation in one class was reported and discussed. This was accompanied by feelings of fear and excitement which were dealt with by the lecturer who was with the class.

- A reported increase in American style 'video' behaviour.

The general picture is that Muslim boys are indulged, whereas the Muslim girls have stricter family obligations

A number of issues relating to the college were identified. The points for action or further consideration by college are listed below.

- Naming systems. Islamic and other non-European naming systems do not always fit college and other identification requirements. There needs to be advice taken on this and students should be aware at enrolment that they need a first and second name that will not change and that can be used for identification, exams, and on certificates etc.
- Staff has experienced sexism from male students ('Being spoken to as if I'm stupid or they can get around this.')
- Accusations of racism - Staff recognise that when students make accusations of racism that this may be correct, but it can also be a teenage reaction similar to, 'it's not fair', or 'You only said that because you don't like me'. This can be upsetting for staff.'
- A feeling that on occasion there is a lack of respect towards ethnic minority staff.
- Staff find it more difficult to communicate with students who are veiled since so much communication is through body language. Often exams/assessments are undertaken by measuring the student's communication, presentation and language skills (Example: English GCSE). There is concern that the veil is limiting the student's capacity.
- College ID cards. Clarification is needed about whether or not veiled students can have their photograph taken with a veil, and if not, how privacy can be maintained. This is a concern for overall security (The Home Office's faith and Communities Unit may be able to offer advice.)
- Ramadan. Some younger students use this as an excuse for arriving late or going home early. The workshop on October 21 on 'Understanding Muslim students' helped with this, and information needs to be disseminated more widely.
- Tracking students - Attendance and time discipline. There is a need to address attendance and punctuality problems. This is a general issue for all students, but is more of a problem with Somali students.
- The Trowbridge site is less acceptable to some young Muslim groups, particularly women. This means that some students will be recruited onto courses for which they are not suited because they are located at the Parade.
- Similarly, attendance at evening classes may be felt to be unacceptable. (particularly for young Muslim women)

- Asylum seekers have social problems. They lack money and have difficulties applying for EMAs. Asylum seekers cannot access the student support fund or the WALG until they have been here for 3 years. The very people who need the help are blocked from financial assistance.
- Forced Marriage-Staff are aware that forced marriage is a problem but feel that they cannot interfere in family affairs when they suspect a student may be the subject of a forced marriage, but the student has not specifically said that this is the case. Staff was not previously aware of the FCO's Forced Marriage Unit and Forced marriage guidelines for Educators and other practitioners. This information was circulated, further information was shared with an update of the current consultation on the question of criminalising Forced Marriage; staff welcomed information and requested additional leaflets.

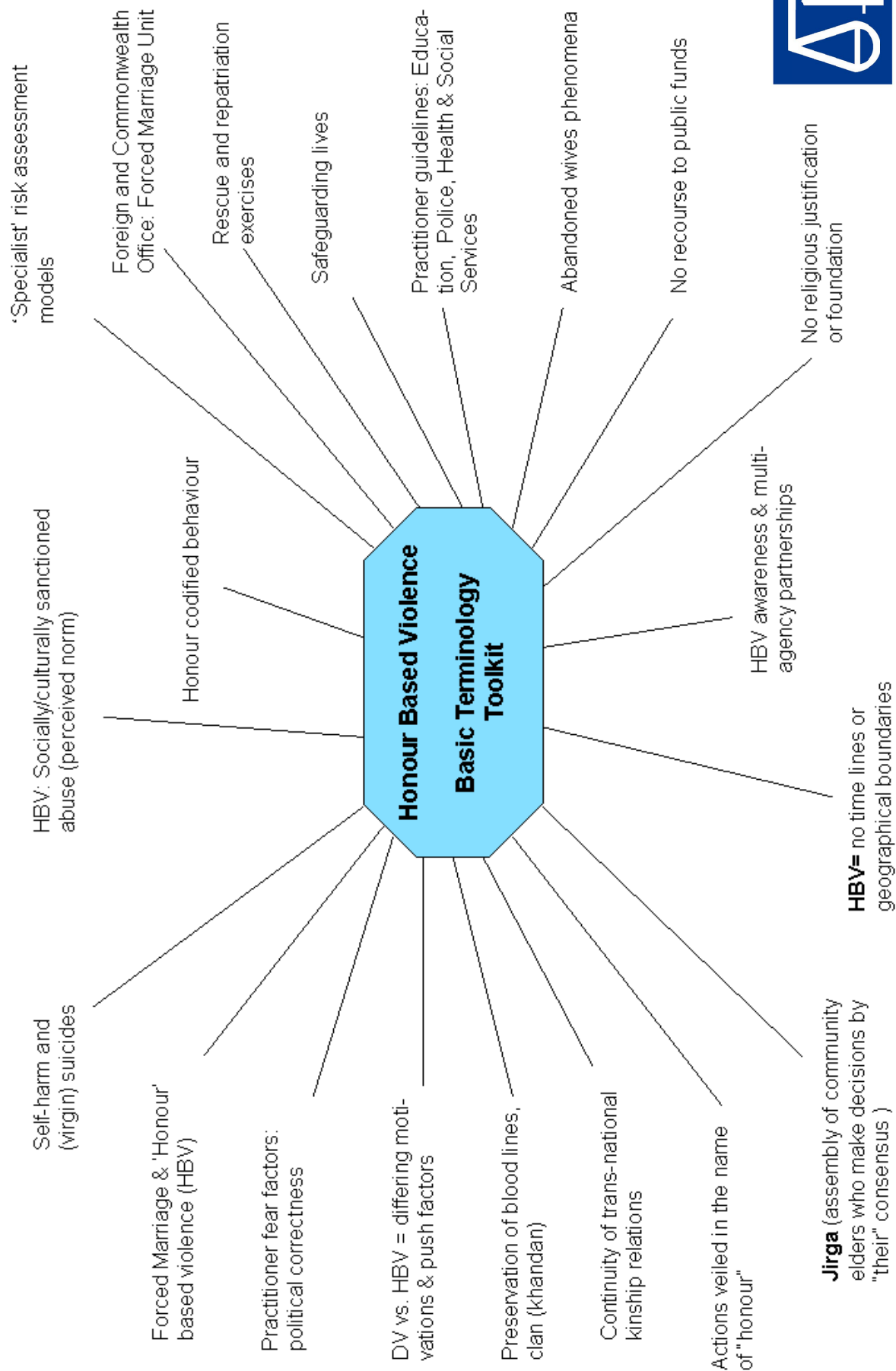
Overall reflection and feedback for staff (session 1 & 2)

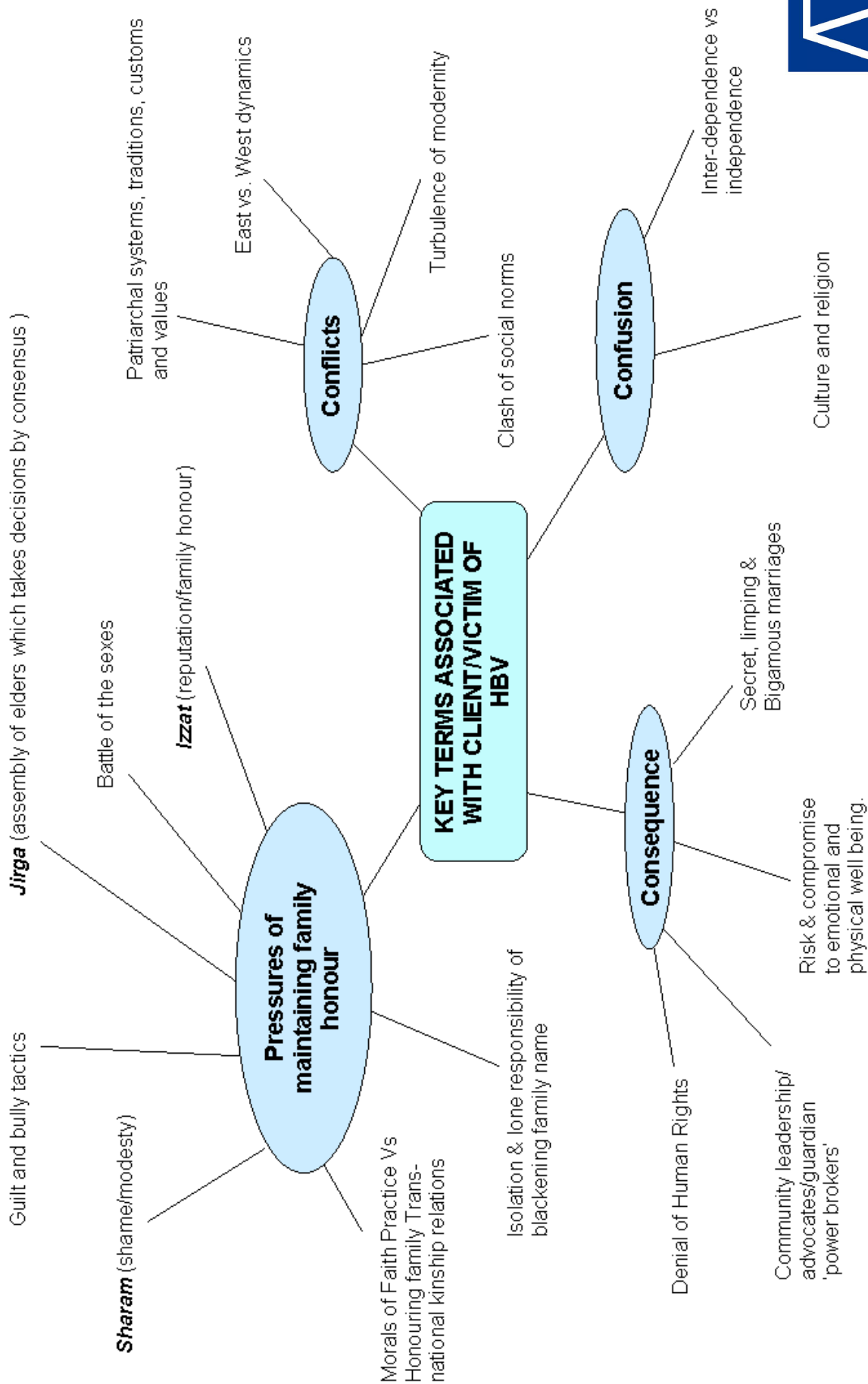
Bridging the gap and balancing the act

Demystifying race, cultural and religious connotations and living experiences between minority and white students is a huge task. In these trying times of heightened tensions, misrepresentations and misunderstandings it is vital we assist and participate in effective communication and recognise it as a exploration in identifying a formula for facilitated integration. Essentially this requires evolving and multifaceted input and support, pivotal are the delivers of education. The information shared is of great value and worth.

It was an honour and privilege to have the opportunity of speaking with and hearing the voices of staff members. The honesty, concern and willingness of the staff in communicating such sensitivities were welcomed. Most importantly it evidenced their professionalism and genuine eagerness to offer all students an equal and fair right in accessing a high standard of education.

Appendix 3





All Wales

Saheli

Association

supporting Asian and Muslim families



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