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Introduction

Harmful Practices are a form of Violence against Women and Girls. The United Nations has defined harmful practices as:



“Forms of violence that have been committed against women in certain communities and societies for so long that they are considered part of accepted cultural practice. They lead to death, disability, physical and psychological harm for millions of women annually.”

The term ‘Harmful Practices’ covers a number of different types of abuse, which include, but are not limited to:



In Haringey, we know that many women and girls are affected by harmful practices. An estimated 3,500 women are affected by Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and there were 115 cases reported between April 2015 and March 2016. We also know that there are high but hidden numbers of victim/survivors being forced into marriage and experiencing/suffering so-called 'honour' based violence. To better build a picture of prevalence in the borough, and to ensure that we are best supporting victim/survivors, Haringey Council's Violence against Women and Girls Partnership focused our latest practitioner's forum on improving responses to harmful practices.

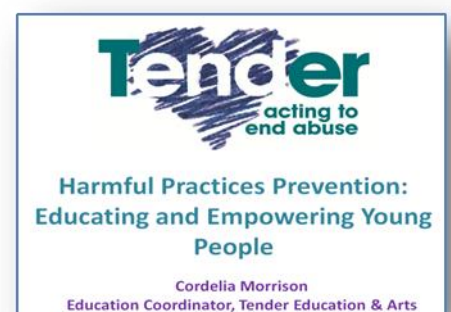
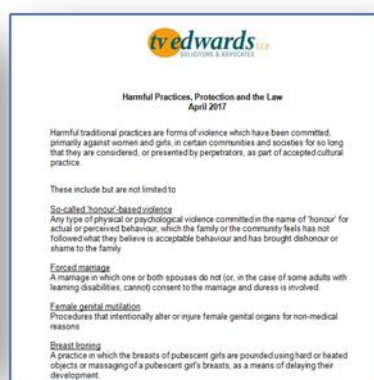
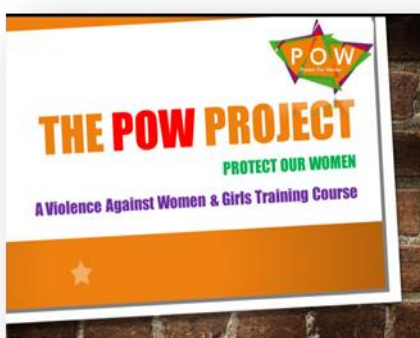
Summary:

On Thursday 20th April, partners were invited to share best practice, ideas and explore better ways of working together to support those affected by harmful practices. Over 20 professionals from a number of voluntary and statutory backgrounds were updated on local and national best practice and were presented with the opportunity to reflect on their own approaches.

Speakers included:

Rosa Ruiz	Latin American Women Rights Service
Ozlem Altinminereoglu	IMECE Women's Centre
Lorraine Anderson	Solace Women's Aid
Maud Davis	TV Edwards Solicitors
Cordelia Morrison	Tender

Panel members' presentations:



[Protect our Women Project](#)

[Protection and the Law](#)

[Tender work in schools](#)

Expert by lived experience: Ms A's Story

It was important that the voices and experiences of survivors of harmful practices shaped the discussion of the forum and influenced decisions going forward. Ms A was invited to share with the forum her experience of accessing services and where she felt that improvements needed to be made. On the day, however, Ms A told her support worker that she felt unable to take part in the discussion, and decided not to come. Her absence reminded the forum of the need to work harder to create safe spaces where experts by lived experience feel able to share their stories. An empty chair was placed in the room to remind the forum of Ms A's absence. She did ask her support worker to share her experience. Her story is below:

Ms A's experience (as told by her support worker at Latin American Women Rights Service - LAWRS):



"A few years ago, Ms A came to LAWRS; she was desperate for advice and support. She was a victim of domestic violence. After all the struggles, she managed to leave her ex-partner. She did it. In the process, she started a relationship with her ex-partner's stepfather (who was in the process of divorcing his wife), and it was then that the abuse escalated. She was not only threatened by her ex-partner, but also by her ex-sister in law and mother in law. She suffered persecution, harassment, psychological and emotional abuse by her ex-partner's family.

They managed to find her address and one day her ex-partner came to Ms A's house and abducted her son from her home. She never left her son alone; she had sole custody of him. It seemed to be an act of revenge.

Allegations and accusations were made against her - how she was a bad mother; she was not a decent woman; she was an immoral person. During her journey, she dealt with different agencies. She struggled to communicate as English is her second language. She felt discriminated against and unheard. She felt that nobody believed her; especially because her son is still living with her ex-partner. Furthermore, it is not clear if they have contact with the ex-partner's biological father, who has an extensive history of violence and allegations made in relation to sexual abuse of children. At no point has anyone suggested or mentioned that she is a victim of honour based violence, because as a Latin American, our community is not linked with harmful practices."

Ms A is receiving support from LAWRS who continues to work closely with her. Although absent from the practitioners' forum, Ms A's experience highlighted the work we need to continue to do in creating safe spaces for victim/survivors. The group discussed the best ways that this can be achieved and the conversation continued into the interactive workshop session.

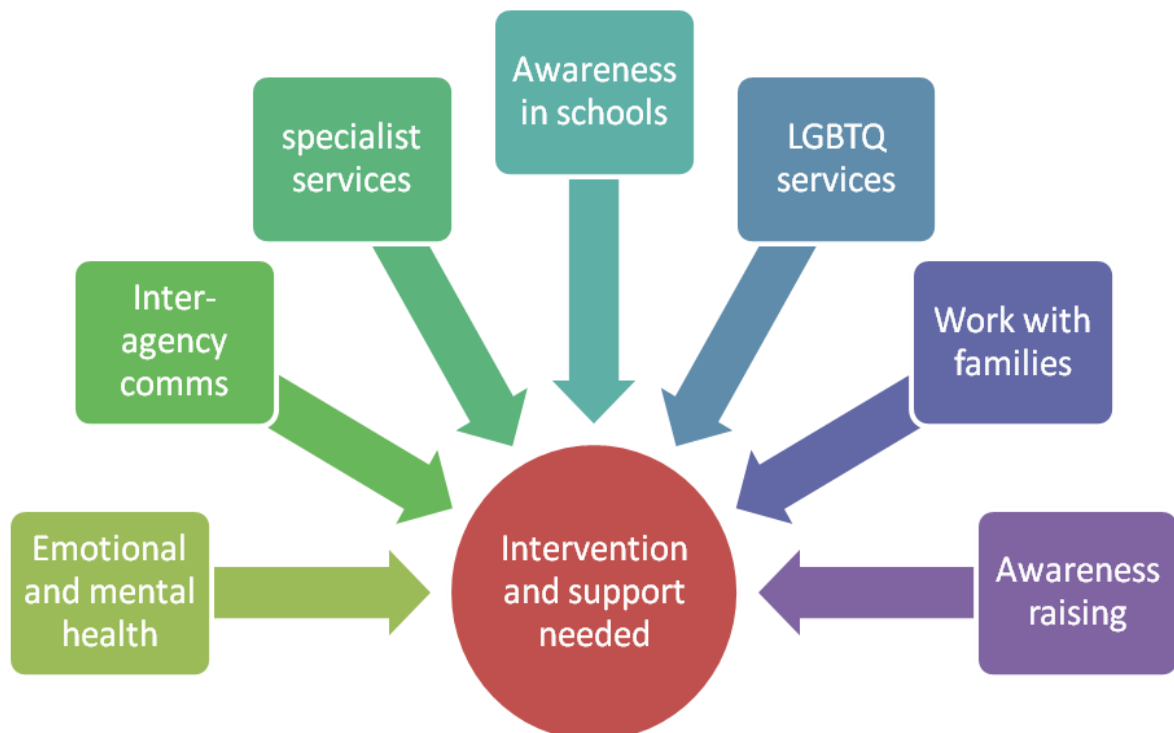
Feedback from Workshops:

The group split into small working groups to look at current service provision and where improvements could be made. Each group was given one of two case study scenarios and was asked to consider:

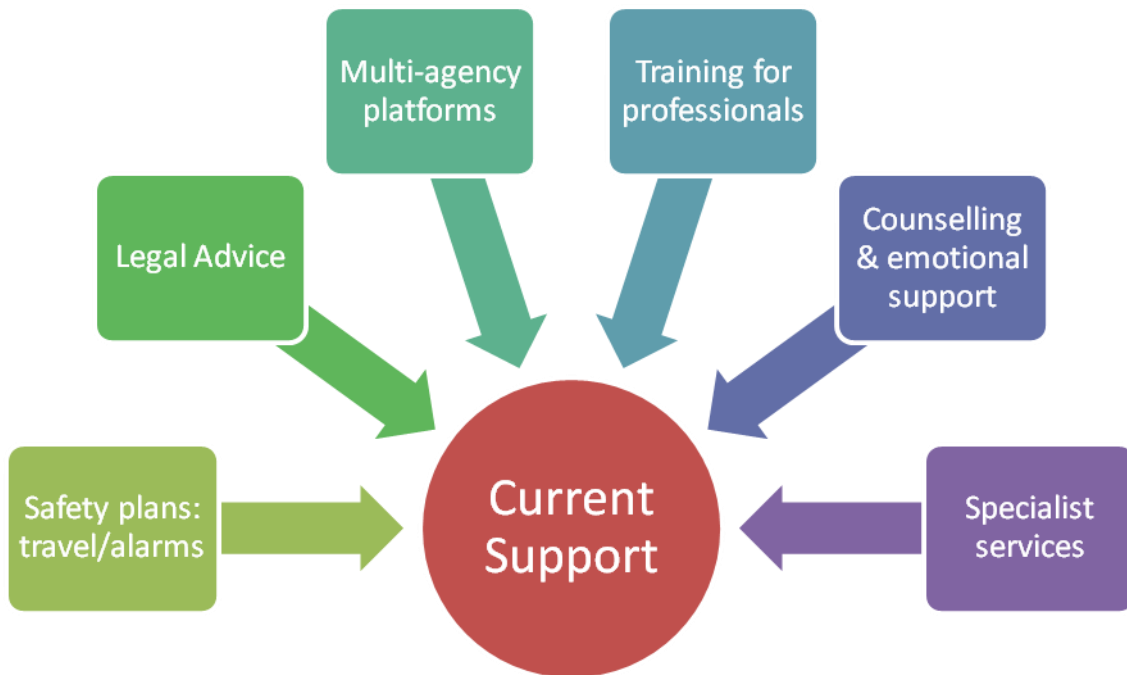
- a) What interventions and support the victim/survivor needed?
- b) What support can your organisation currently offer?
- c) How can Haringey improve our response to those affected by harmful practices?

Feedback from groups was captured on flipcharts:

a) What interventions and support the victim/survivor needed?



b) What support does your organisation currently offer?



c) How can Haringey improve our response to those affected by harmful practices?

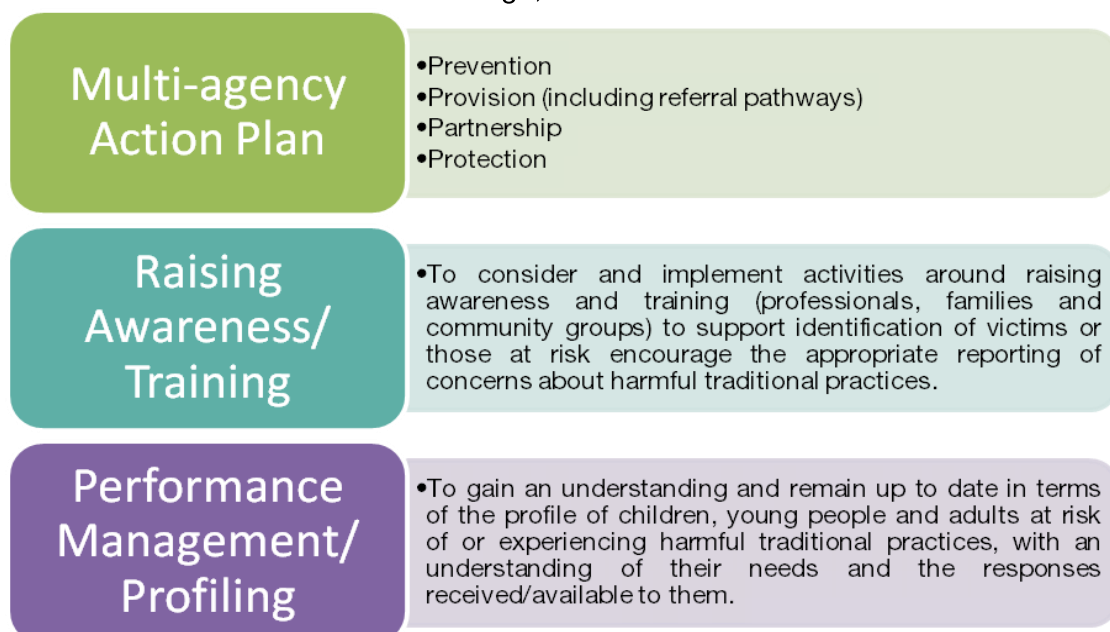


Key points/recommendations

- Harmful Practices are too often labelled as a 'cultural or religious' issue but it is important to recognise the universal nature of abuse and that it is not limited to one group or community.
- Although some victim/survivors may be more at risk, professionals must understand that anyone can experience harmful practices.
- Information sharing between partners and multi-agency work must be improved.
- Data collection and a better picture of prevalence of harmful practices in Haringey is a priority so that the need for support can be identified.
- Specialist services must be available to support victim/survivors.
- Services need to work together to better share best practice and avoid 'recreating the wheel'.
- Statutory agencies must work closely with voluntary and community partners in creating a coordinated community response to ending harmful practice.
- There are a number of services in Haringey and it is important that these are clearly promoted and accessible.
- Assumptions should not be made about what victim/survivors need. Ongoing conversations must be had to ensure people with lived experience shape service provision.

Harmful Practices Steering Group:

The Harmful Practices Steering Group is made up of a range of specialist services and partners who feed into the VAWG Strategic Group and the VAWG Partnership more widely. Meeting quarterly, the group aims to support a coordinated, multi-agency, approach to tackle Harmful Practices within the borough, and has three main functions:



Conclusion

This Practitioners' Forum highlighted some great work happening in the borough in addressing harmful practices but also identified need for improvement. The forum emphasised that ending harmful practices needs to be seen as the responsibility of all in order for victim/survivors to get the best support they need. The Harmful Practices Steering Group is mainstreaming this work by feeding into the VAWG Strategic Group and the wider VAWG Partnership; and ending harmful practices features highly in the new 10 year VAWG strategy. The strategy focuses on creating a coordinated community response; prevention; support for victim/survivors; and holding perpetrators to account. It was agreed that wider conversations around harmful practices need to take place and the feedback from this forum will be taken to the next quarterly Harmful Practices Steering group meeting for discussion and to inform work going forward.

Additional information/reading:

- [Breast Ironing Policy Briefing](#) (Tri.X 2016)
- Legal Guidance with an A-Z list for topics: <http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/index.html> and <http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/equality/vaw/index.html>
- [Strengthening responses to forced marriage and female genital mutilation– Good Practice Briefing](#) (Imkaan, Rights of Women and London VAWG Consortium 2016)
- [Tackling Female Genital Mutilation in London](#) (London Assembly 2017)
- [The Missing Link: A joined up approach to addressing harmful practices in London](#) (Imkaan, Equality Now and City University, London, 2011).

The next Practitioners' Forum will take place in September 2017.

Details will be circulated shortly. For more information, please contact the VAWG Team at VAWG@haringey.gov.uk