



Domestic abuse in the Eritrean community / Uk perception & prevalence

Accredited Community Research Course

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The student group

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Khedijah Ali Mohammed-Nur

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Executive Summary

This research is an attempt to get an insight into perception and prevalence of domestic abuse in the Eritrean community. By doing this research it is hoped to acknowledge that domestic abuse like in any other society and community is an issue in the Eritrean community and to encourage members of the Eritrean community to openly raise and discuss the issue as to become aware of the impact of domestic abuse to victims of domestic abuse which are mainly women and children and its impact on society as a whole.

The research will also look into the services provided by Eritrean community organisations to address domestic abuse, examine their level of awareness and explore ways to enable them tackle the subject effectively in order to contribute towards building a healthy and fair community.

Online questionnaire/survey and semi structure interviews were used for this research.

Key Findings

The findings from the survey including from the semi structure interviews indicate that domestic abuse and violence is a cause for concern, less spoken about and a taboo in the Eritrean community for many reasons. Significant number of participants responded yes to domestic abuse being an issue that needs to be addressed in the Eritrean community.

The following two statements from respondents reflect that domestic abuse is an issue in the Eritrean community:

“Experiencing of violence in a relationship which can be either verbally or physically, it is repeated, unacceptable behaviour that exist in relationships...I believe DV affects people from all social and racial backgrounds that includes the Eritrean community. Majority of Eritrean people wouldn’t like to talk about it because this subject is a Big Taboo.”

Furthermore a respondent commented stating *“Yes it is an issue understanding the definition of abuse in in our culture, we don’t define the moral, financial or mental abuse as domestic abuse it has to be physical”.*

The participants highlighted that often more women than men are the victims’ of domestic abuse.

“A quarrel between a husband and a wife. More often than not it is the husband who assaults (hits) the woman. He thinks as he is the head of the family it is the duty of the women to get reprimanded by her husband whenever she makes mistakes. Yes it is an issue in the Eritrean Community.”

The vast majority (87.5%) of respondents of the questionnaire stated culture as a main cause of domestic abuse, over 70% of respondents said patriarchy, religion and 60% society as some of the causes of domestic abuse and in the Eritrean community.

The findings of this research demonstrate that:

- In the Eritrean society women are less privileged – The majority of women are not aware of their rights, including their legal rights. Their subordination contributes to an ongoing cycle of domestic abuse.
- The current political situation and instability increases risk for domestic abuse.
- The definition and understanding of domestic abuse in the Eritrean society is often limited to physical abuse. There is a need to introduce a broader definition of domestic abuse - it is not just physical, emotional, and financial, denying access to personal freedom and movement, undermining, marital rape and coercion is often not considered as abuse.
- The community organisations reported lack of funding as a barrier to address domestic abuse in the community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made based on the extensive level of problem there exists in the Eritrean community in discussing the issue of domestic violence including:

- A domestic abuse and violence working group from all Eritrean communities across UK must be set up address the subject, examine the scale of the problem in depth and look into organising domestic abuse awareness training programmes and workshops in the community.
- Eritrean community organisations must develop a strategy to address domestic abuse effectively as well as lobby for funds.

- Further research is needed to thoroughly examine the scale of the problem in depth.
- To encourage the community in particular women to speak up and set up Eritrean women's support group. There needs to be more community intervention to raise the community's level of awareness of domestic abuse, women's rights and human rights as whole.
- There is a need to lobby for specific funds to address domestic abuse in the Eritrean community.
- Establish domestic abuse helpline and develop leaflets and literatures, plays and educational materials specific to Eritreans in both Eritrean official languages of Arabic and Tigrigna.

Chapter 1

(i) Central aim and research plan

'Violence against Women is always a violation of human rights; it is always a crime; and it is always unacceptable. Let us take this issue with deadly seriousness that it deserves.' Ban Ki Moon, United Nations Secretary General.

Domestic abuse and violence is a major societal problem and a public health issue that needs to be addressed and prioritised by all members of society including the Eritrean Community.

There are many reasons why domestic abuse and violence is so prevalent in modern society. Firstly, we live in a patriarchal world in which women are not equal in nearly every aspect of life. The traditional gender roles of this male dominated society are that men are powerful and aggressive, whilst women are timid, weak and objectified as being merely tools of male convenience. Due to these traditional roles, seeking help is harder when men are seen as 'the protector' even when they are the perpetrators of violence against women.

This small scale research aims to explore the following:

- Insight into perception and prevalence of domestic abuse in the Eritrean Community in the UK.
- To find out the level of awareness and services regarding domestic abuse in the Eritrean community in the UK and explore measures to prevent and reduce incidents of domestic abuse in the Eritrean community.
- To find out the barriers and the gap in services to address domestic abuse, inform and influence decision makers at local and national level.

Sample

I planned to talk to both Eritrean men and women over the age of 18.

Due to time restraints, the questionnaire was sent out via email and social media. I did this through the Eritrean community networks.

Timescale

I had 6 months. Firstly I conducted a literature review and then I did the questionnaires. Next I did the interviews. Finally, the analysis and the write up were completed.

(ii) The purpose of this research

Background information

Eritrea is one of the new countries located in the region of the Horn of Africa with the population of around 6 million becoming independent in May 1991 following a 30 years of armed struggle against Ethiopian annexation. Since independence Eritrea has been engaged in a number of conflicts with its neighbouring countries.

The current problems caused by the ever-more repressive regime in Eritrea forces Eritreans to leave their country in thousands including a large number of women and children. It has been difficult to find an accurate data of the Eritrean Population in the UK; however, it is estimated over 20.000 Eritreans live in the UK (Cockcroft 2008). In 2001-2010 a total of 14,325 Eritreans reportedly claimed asylum in the UK (Migration Observatory UK). Women in Eritrea do not enjoy equal rights and have limited control on their lives (Sihanet.org). The three statements below reflect the extent of tolerance and normalisation of domestic abuse in the Eritrean society as a whole.

'It is better to tolerate a bad marriage than to return to your father's home'

'It is better to be called the wife of x than the daughter of x '

(Eritrean proverbs)

'When he becomes fire I become water'

(an Eritrean woman victim of domestic abuse)

The purpose of this research is to get an insight into perception and prevalence of domestic abuse in the Eritrean community. By doing this research it is hoped to encourage members of the Eritrean community to openly raise and discuss the issue as to become aware of the impact of domestic abuse to the victims of domestic abuse which are mainly women and children, as well as society as a whole.

In addition, the research will look into the services provided by Eritrean community organisations to address domestic abuse and explore means to equip them and enable

them to bring domestic abuse at the forefront of their agenda and contribute to building a healthy fair and a civilised community.

(iii) Literature review

Domestic abuse is:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- *Psychological*
- *Physical*
- *Sexual*
- *Financial*
- *Emotional¹*

Several studies have shown that violence and abuse against women is widespread across cultures and societies.

The findings from the World Health Organisation multi –country observational study on women’s health and domestic violence showed prevalence of 15% in Japan to 70% prevalence in Ethiopia. The study surveyed 24097 women from ten countries and the findings show a significant correlation between women’s experience of lifetime domestic violence and poor health. Women who reported to have experienced domestic abuse even once in their life reported to suffer from more emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and attempts than non-abused women (The LANCET, April 2008).

It is also documented that 90% of victims of domestic abuse and violence continue to be women (McGough 2011).

According to recent reports from the Office of the National Statistics, in 2010/11 there were 697,870 recorded incidents of domestic violence in England. The reports highlighted that often domestic and sexual violence remains ‘hidden’ as a result the majority of victims

¹ (Home Office 2013)

suffer in silence. In the UK domestic abuse reportedly cost the taxpayer an estimated £3.9bn a year.

Despite a lack of official data regarding the extent of domestic abuse in Eritrea, it remains a well-known fact that violence against women is pervasive. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in its 34th session raised grave concerns regarding the lack of data and legislation to address violence against women including marital rape in Eritrea. (CEDAW Report on Eritrea 3 February 2006).

There is also very limited amount of research regarding domestic abuse and violence in the Eritrean community in Diaspora for one to compare.

As part of a PhD research project (Abdulkadir 2007) looked at the perception and root causes of gender based violence in the Eritrean society.

The writer concedes her lack of quantitative evidence due to the lack of official data, political reasons as well as the denial of Eritreans to recognise violence against women as an issue. Nevertheless the writer talks about the depth of information that was shared in the form of personal accounts from victims of violence. The people she interviewed gave extremely valuable accounts of their harassment as well as the abuse of others and they also spoke of the “hidden” nature of what goes on, where silence is a virtue and the blaming of victims who come forward is commonplace and devastating.

The writer puts forward that the only way to move forward is to change the attitude of the country; both of men and women for different reasons. One of the areas in most need of reform is access to the criminal justice system which is one of the reasons why silence is so deafening in the country concerning these matters, especially within the military. The writer believes that a public campaign urging survivors to come forward to the police and courts could, “change gender-relations in society”.

The writer ends by reaffirming the need to change the attitude of the country, including, “age-old” traditions and schools of thought.

A community based cross-sectional study looked at intimate physical violence among women in Shimelba refugee camp in Northern Ethiopia. The study interviewed 422 Eritrean married and cohabiting refugee women randomly sampled. The study found that the violence against women was “substantially prevalent” within the subjects with a quarter being physically abused as well as a third of pregnant women. The physical violence within refugee camps could be rectified with a number of changes, one of which

put forward by the writer is the need to equalise the gender roles to a more progressive state.

As well as this, improvements in raising awareness regarding the impact of domestic abuse within families, formal/informal education and communication are recommended as ways to move forward.

Creating job opportunities as well education about the abuse of alcohol are also put forward as solutions along with shortening the stay of those in refugee camps.

The writer says that greater effort is needed to educate women about their rights that they have or measures they can take against an abusive partner or a previous incident, and the authorities must do more to take action. The report ends on an admission that more work was indeed needed to analyse the correlation between domestic violence and the different tribes/religions/generations in refugee camps.

The impact of domestic abuse/violence on women

The impact of domestic abuse and violence on women is well documented in several studies. Domestic abuse is devastating in all forms and the sheer variety of ways it can present itself is one of the reasons why it is so horrifying. Women who experience domestic abuse exhibit experiences that equates to 'torture and imprisoned hostages' (Refuge.Org UK). Domestic abuse can materialise as implied threat or present itself in severe and all too common incidents of serious assault, death or rape.

Women who go through an abusive relationship too often develop post-traumatic stress, anxiety depression, and suicidal thoughts, sleep disturbances including nightmares, a sense of isolation, and mistrust of themselves and others (Abrahams 2010).

Abuse within a shared household often results in an environment of constant fear. Fear of physical or sexual attack, fear of verbal abuse and manipulation and for most mothers who reflect on past abusive relationships, fear for the safety of their children as well as a feeling of shame for not being able to protect them. Hence parent's capacity to meet their children's needs could be compromised. (Cleaver et al 2007).

As well as the women in abusive relationships, the other innocent victims of domestic abuse and violence in a family set up are the children who either witness or are actual recipients of the abuse, whether verbal, emotional or physical.

Therefore, the risk of an unintentional injury and death during an episode of domestic violence involving a child is higher. Safeguarding and protecting children is a moral and a professional duty in a civilised society. Following the Victoria Climbié enquiry the UK government introduced guidance under Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme that shifted its direction to include preventative measures as well as strengthening the protection of children (Laming Report 2003).

Every Child Matters main aims are to ensure that every child:

- stay safe from any harm;
- being healthy;
- enjoy and achieve;
- economic well-being;
- having a positive contribution in society.

As children are still in the early stages of their lives, the effects on them could be overwhelming and long-term, disrupting their formative years of developing social skills, trust bonds and relationships. Many children who have been raised in abusive households have severe issues caused by their upbringing both as children and as they mature (Rynolds et al 2014). Common behavioural effects include aggression, isolation, passiveness, self-blame, educational or work issues, depression and substance abuse. Protecting and safeguarding children is a moral and professional obligation. Domestic abuse and violence can have devastating outcomes to children and their families. Therefore, it is clear children living in a household of domestic abuse a significant number of children may not reach their optimum potential and are unlikely to achieve the Every Child Matters five outcomes.

Generally refugees from conflict area come with their own stressor factors like post-traumatic stress and grief of loved ones. In addition challenges such as language barriers, immigration issues social isolation that may increase tensions within the family and increase the risk of domestic abuse within the household. Language barriers meant that in particular women may face difficulties in accessing information regarding services available for them and their children including their legal rights (Refugee Council 2005).

(iv) Methodology

Originally as part of the study, three research methods were planned for this research including:

- Online questionnaire/survey;
- Semi Structured interview;
- Focus group

However due to the limited time that I experienced as researcher and the sensitive nature of the subject, the focus group methodology was deemed unsuitable and instead questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were adopted in a bid to provide a more free flowing and less evasive environment for the selected sample.

Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a tool used to enquire a series of questions that can be open ended or closed. Open ended questions allow respondents explain themselves as they desire often longer responses are expected and tend to be exploratory nature. Whereas closed questions tend to produce short responses such as yes or no.

The questionnaire used for this research was a combination of both open ended and closed questions. A web based tool (Survey Monkey) was used to create the questionnaire and distributed online. Considering time constraints and resources that the researcher had experienced as a researcher, this tool found to be efficient and cost effective way of gathering data. The other benefits of collecting data online includes the ability to enable mass participation providing everyone a chance to get involved and without revealing their identity.

The questionnaire was aimed at both genders i.e. males and females to capture the perception, to trigger awareness and generate discussion of the subject in the Eritrean community. Questionnaires in this context are a preferred method of collecting empirical data quantitative in nature.

Semi Structured Interviews

Generally interviews are common and essential tools of collecting qualitative data. They are considered effective in gathering opinions, personal experiences and ones perceptions. Bernard (2011) state that using Semi-Structured interviews is effective when the interviewer has a limited opportunity to interview as well as allows the interviewer to 'stray' from the guide and explore further as appropriate. In total 6 interviews were carried out. The questionnaire with slight changes was used to initiate the interview. In addition, with the interviewee's consent some of the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. A semi-structured interviewing method also enabled me to get a more one to one time with each of the selected participants and allowed me to ask follow-up question to gain more knowledge in the selected topic area without exposing the participants to a more general context for them to share such sensitive data.

(v) Ethical considerations

One of the most important aspects of carrying out of a research is that the research is intended to cause no harm (Salkind 2012). Considering the sensitivity nature of the research, maintaining confidentiality was imperative during and post the research processes particularly with interviews. Ethical approval was obtained following a thorough assessment of risks. The researcher gave reassurance that she understands the sensitivity of the subject, is aware that she may come across any domestic abuse victim or survivor and ensured that in such instances; she is prepared to refer the person to appropriate agencies. Consideration was thought regarding the venue of the interviews. Interviewees were given choices in order to protect and avoid compromise the safety of potential victims of domestic. One of the advices from the Ethical approval committee member was to avoid the focus group method due to potential sensitivity of domestic abuse and violence.

Participants were informed that participation in this research was voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Information sheet regarding the research was read, consent form provided and signed by the participants.

Chapter 2: Research findings

The questionnaire was distributed via email and on the social media. Twenty nine people responded to the questionnaire. Three of the respondents were overseas and excluded from the research.

- Females accounted for 56% of the sample while male respondents accounted for 44%. The respondent's age varied between 23-66. The mean age of the respondents was 41yrs.
- All but one was born outside Eritrea. The educational level of respondents varied between 12th grades and A-levels, to a PhD level.
- 18 of the respondents left Eritrea post-independence while the remaining arrived prior to independence in 1991.

The findings from the survey including from the semi structure interviews indicate that domestic abuse and violence is a major problem, less spoken about and a taboo in the Eritrean community. 21 participants responded yes to domestic abuse being an issue in the Eritrean community.

One of the respondents went further to say that:

"Experiencing of violence in a relationship which can be either verbally or physically, it is repeated, unacceptable behaviour that exist in relationships...I believe DV affects people from all social and racial backgrounds that includes the Eritrean community. Majority of Eritrean people wouldn't like to talk about it because this subject is a Big Taboo."

Furthermore a respondent commented stating *"Yes it is an issue understanding the definition of abuse in in our culture, we don't define the moral, financial or mental abuse as domestic abuse it has to be physical"*.

The participants highlighted that often more women than men are the victims' domestic abuse.

"A quarrel between a husband and a wife. More often than not it is the husband who assaults (hits) the woman. He thinks as he is the head of the family it is the duty of the women to get

reprimanded by her husband whenever she makes mistakes. Yes it is an issue in the Eritrean Community. ”

The vast majority (87.5%) of respondents of the questionnaire stated Culture as a main cause of domestic abuse, over 70% of respondents said patriarchy, religion and 60% society as some of the causes of domestic abuse and violence in the Eritrean Community.

An interview with one of the survivor of domestic abuse including marital rape went further to say that domestic abuse starts at home.

“Discrimination and abuse against women and girls starts at home with in the family, we Eritrean’s raise girls and boys differently. Our society and culture tend to discourage girls from continuing their education, often prepare young girls to wed when they reach certain age often at a young age and become economically dependent on the man”.

Another respondent said: *“A man feels his authority is undermined in Britain”* implying that had a man been in Eritrea he would enjoy more authority and control over the woman.

As well as the survey, the interviews with the two victims of domestic abuse and four workers of the Eritrean Community affirmed that domestic violence is prevalent in the Eritrean Community in the UK. One worker said: *“The problem is they don’t disclose it”* and highlighted that some women who join their husbands and partners in the UK seem to be at risk of domestic abuse due to their total dependence on the man. She added that *“one woman reported that her husband denied her transport fees and access to education”* The community worker added that some men go beyond this and if their wives refuse to obey them they return or threaten to return them to the country where the victim came from.

One respondent indicated cultural clash as one of the reasons for domestic abuse especially if the woman was brought up here in the UK, knows her rights, independence and marries someone who was born and brought up back home she is more likely to experience domestic abuse from her partner. Similarly another respondent stated that: *“women assuming her independence in the UK, a confusion of roles for women and men in the UK”*. Implying that women tend to feel more independent and roles of men and women appears different or changed here in the UK.

Furthermore the interview with Eritrean Community Workers as a community organisations; if they come across any domestic abuse issues they only refer to appropriate agencies with the consent of the victims which rarely happens. Generally abused women do not openly disclose abuse, they seek support with their housing and further interview may reveal domestic abuse but often they say they did not want to take matters further. All the

community workers said that they are bound by confidentiality and if the women refuse to disclose, they don't share the information. One added that domestic abuse is often complicated and seen as a "private matter" and added that he does not want to be seen as interfering with "family private matters" In addition he revealed when he attempted to support a victim, he was threatened by the perpetrator of domestic abuse. No posters, leaflets and information regarding domestic abuse were visible in three of the Eritrean Communities the researcher visited in the office.

Moreover, Women's Aid support worker stated that she works with Eritrean women and families affected by domestic abuse and added that "they are under the radar of Social Services but they are not on it" when asked to clarify what she meant, she said: "The families come to the attention of Social Services following reports of domestic violence but tend to retract their statements or the children's basic needs may have been met and children may appear well looked after therefore the majority of cases do not meet the criteria to be on the Child Protection Plan".

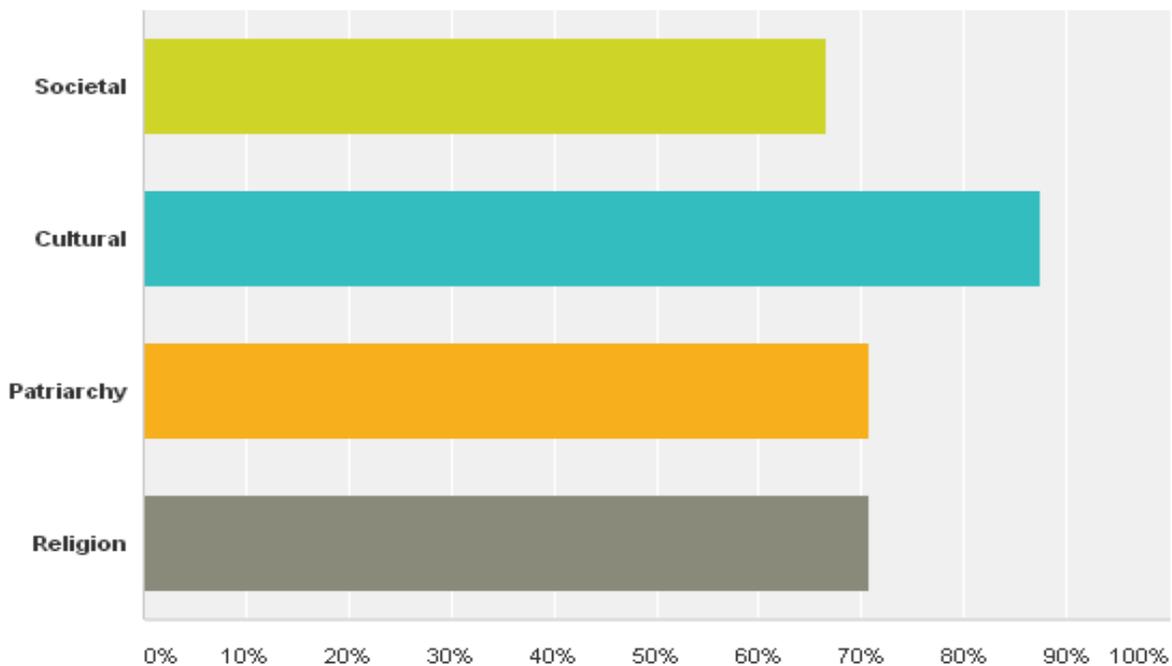


Figure 1: What are the causes of domestic abuse in the Eritrean community?

A significant number of respondents to the questionnaire (65%) reported that they have come across neighbours and friends, 60% relatives and 25% reported that they themselves have been victims of domestic abuse (See figure 2). All the reported 25 victims of domestic abuse were women.

In addition, all the Community Workers reported to have not come across any male domestic abuse victim.

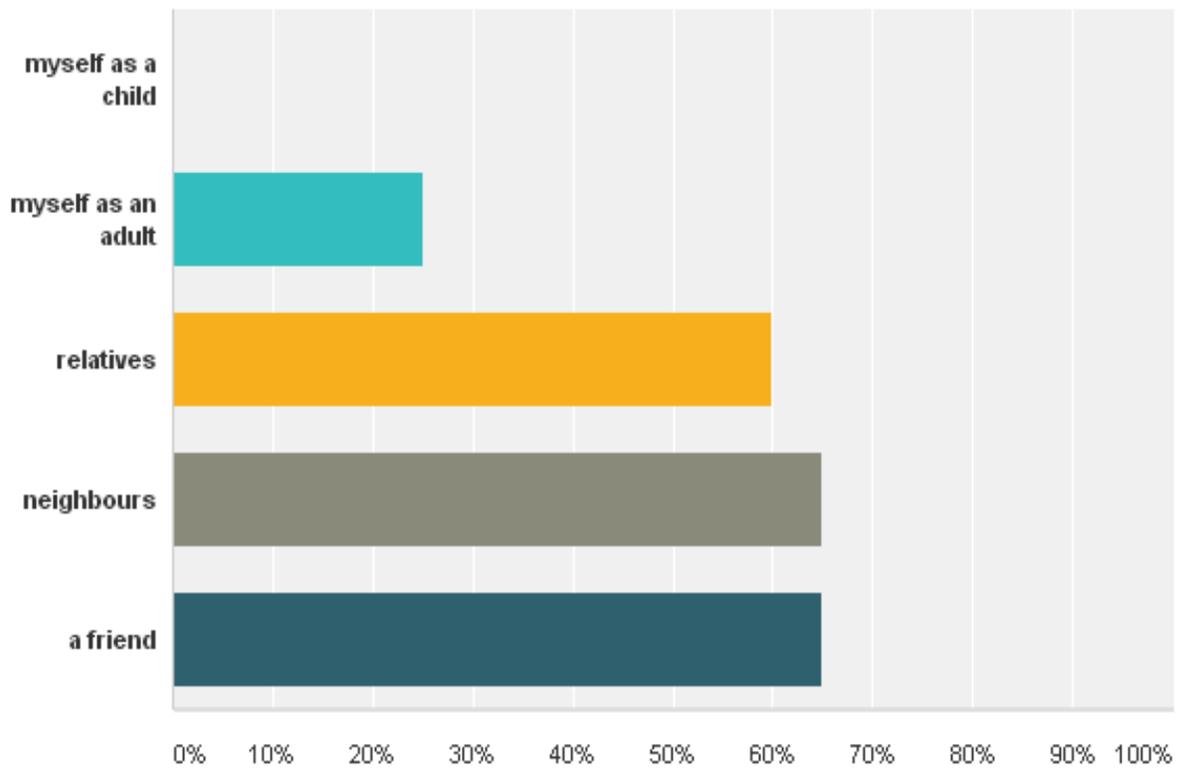


Figure 2: Have you been or do you know anyone affected by domestic abuse?

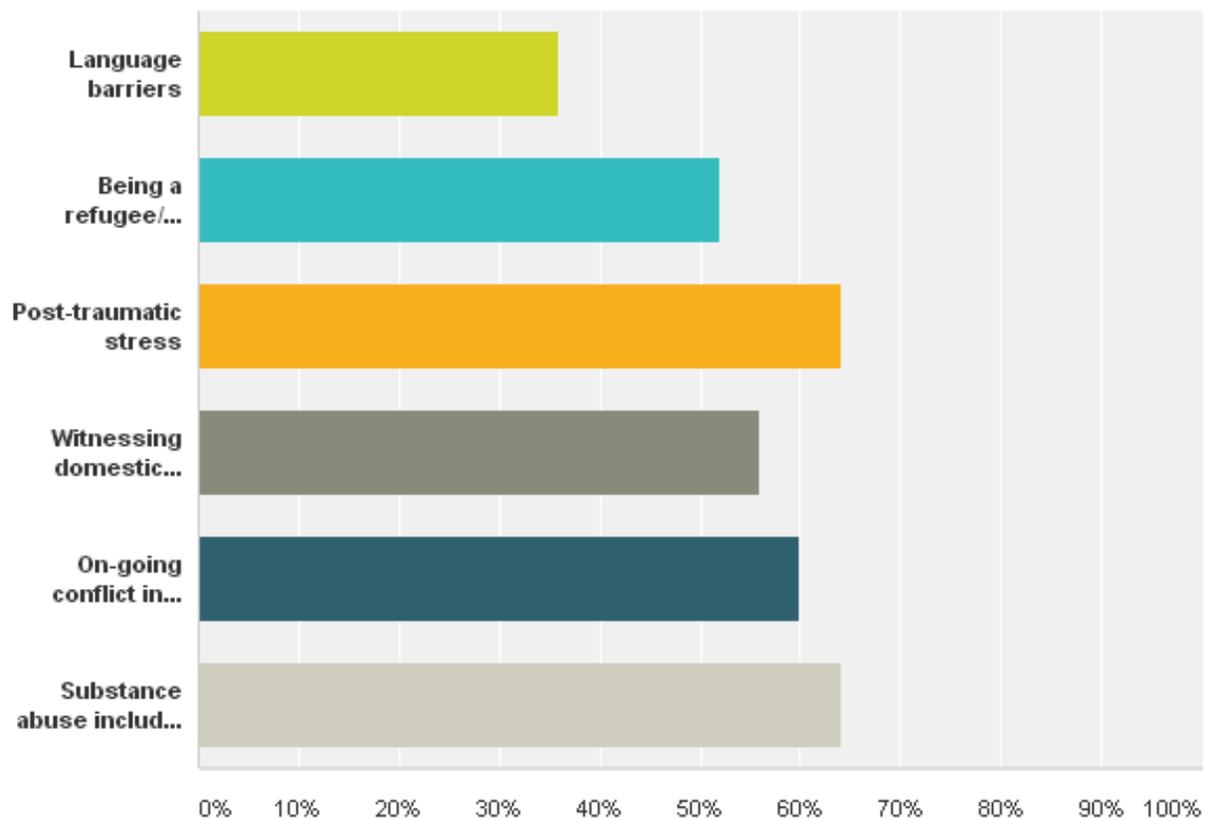


Figure 3: What do you think leads to domestic abuse?

A significant number of respondents 64% said post-traumatic stress disorder and substance misuse as a major contributory factor that leads to domestic abuse followed by ongoing conflict in Eritrea 60% and witnessing domestic violence as child 56%, being a refugee/removed from home 56% and language barriers 52.

These figures were supported by eleven comments from respondents. The comments include themes like: “*personal and institutional in Sawa*” referring to a Military training Camp in Eritrea where young people from the age of 17 and over are forced to serve indefinitely in the name of ‘National Service,’ “*dictatorship*” as well as “*all aspects of life in Eritrea is abused*” were mentioned as the causes and contributory factors to domestic abuse in the Eritrean community.

Victims and Survivors	<i>Post-traumatic stress, long term trauma, Lack of cooperation with others, Depression, stress, anxiety, mental health issues, Lowered confidence and self-esteem, Physical and mental damage, Isolation from family and friends, mistrust, difficult establishing another relationship, Lack of confidence and self-worthiness, Powerless, afraid to seek help.</i>
Children	<i>May develop aggressive and learnt behaviour, become introvert, may normalise domestic abuse later in later life, Fear, anger, shame, resentment, sadness, anxiety, low self-esteem, loss of concentration, low confidence, Lack of trust, confusion, disturbance, low achievement, victimisation, trauma,</i>
Perpetrator/Abuser	<i>Get wilder, Sometimes temporary regret, False power, threatening and controlling, guilt and remorseless, May not receive the help they need, Huge impact, If exposed they don't accept it, others to know, it will cause them mental break down. Undermine the victim, can go to prison, lost contact with children</i>
Society	<i>Increase victims, pressure on NHS, long term social disturbance, additional burden, lack of awareness, public services more often the man, frustration short of funds, financial and broken society, huge impact on funding for survivors and institutions for perpetrators, If this problem is not tackled from the beginning over pressure on services</i>

Table1: Responses to the impact of domestic abuse to victims and survivors of domestic abuse, children, perpetrators and the society.

Awareness of the Services available for victims, children and perpetrators of domestic abuse:

17 responded to awareness of the services available for domestic abuse victims, children and perpetrators, they said they know services such as Women’s Aid, Refuge, Victim Support, Domestic Abuse Helpline, the Police, Social Services Childline, local Clinics, Counselling, and Mental Health team.

Only four indicated that they know services available for perpetrators of domestic abuse.

One of the respondents said they are aware about the services to support perpetrators of domestic abuse *“but none specifically focusing on Eritreans”*.

There was no respondent that mentioned any of the Eritrean Community organisations as an agency to approach for information and support. In fact one of the survivors of domestic abuse said she didn't know that she could get support from the Eritrean Community organisations.

With regard to the current level of information and awareness provided by the Eritrean Community organisations, 75% of the respondents reported very poor and 12.5% poor. Only 4.17% said ok, good and very good. Three Eritrean Community organisation workers agree with this response. They said the main problem is that the cuts in budget and funds meant that most workers work part time. Therefore the limited resource they have is targeted at other services and support needs of the community such as Housing, Welfare Benefits, Immigration and Health issues.

What prevents victims of domestic abuse to speak up?

Victims and survivors of abuse said family and relatives prevented them from seeking help. One survivor of domestic abuse said that her parents kept telling her to *“Shelel Belyo, kbelyelu eyu”* meaning “try to tolerate him or persevere, he will grow out of it” they referred to him as ‘he just has temper’ simplifying the abuse instead of saying he is ‘an abusive man’.

Another victim who was brought to the UK by her husband revealed that, when she first arrived in the UK how she had very limited social network, her husband use to physically abuse and undermine her, but once she knew more people and made friends who had noticed the abuse and they spoke to her husband, but instead of improving his treatment towards her he cut her off from them and he threatened them to stay away from her. This particular woman revealed marital rape and said that she never knew ‘marital rape’ was considered as an abuse.

A survivor shared her story of abuse by her husband whom she married in Africa and brought her here when she was under-18 years old. They both had no formal education, though wanted to continue her studies but he prevented her from studying by stating that they should have a child. She had one child, and once the child was a year old she found a part time job and she wanted to work to support him and her parents back home. Again, he prevented her from working by stating he wanted a second child. She said *“now that we have 5 children, he is satisfied, I can attend college”*. She said she is determined to get some sort of education to benefit herself and help her children with their homework.

It appears that there are so many more untold moving stories and abuses going on behind so many doors of Eritrean households.

In the UK there are several Eritrean Community organisations. These organisations are set up to provide information, guidance, support and advocacy and empower the community members. All the Eritrean community workers interviewed said that they have attended training about domestic abuse and violence awareness and are aware of the impact of domestic abuse; know where to refer clients as well as some services like “*anger management programmes*” for perpetrators of domestic abuse. Yet, none of the four Eritrean Community organisation workers have organised any workshops or seminars to raise awareness of domestic abuse in their respective community. Furthermore one of the Community workers stated that they had funds to address domestic abuse, they translated their leaflet that states their services include support and information with domestic violence and family matters, they attend the local Neighbourhood meetings but because of ‘confidentiality issues’ it was hard to report and share cases. Therefore they just refer cases to Women’s Aid and similar agencies. As a result the fund to address domestic abuse reportedly was discontinued.

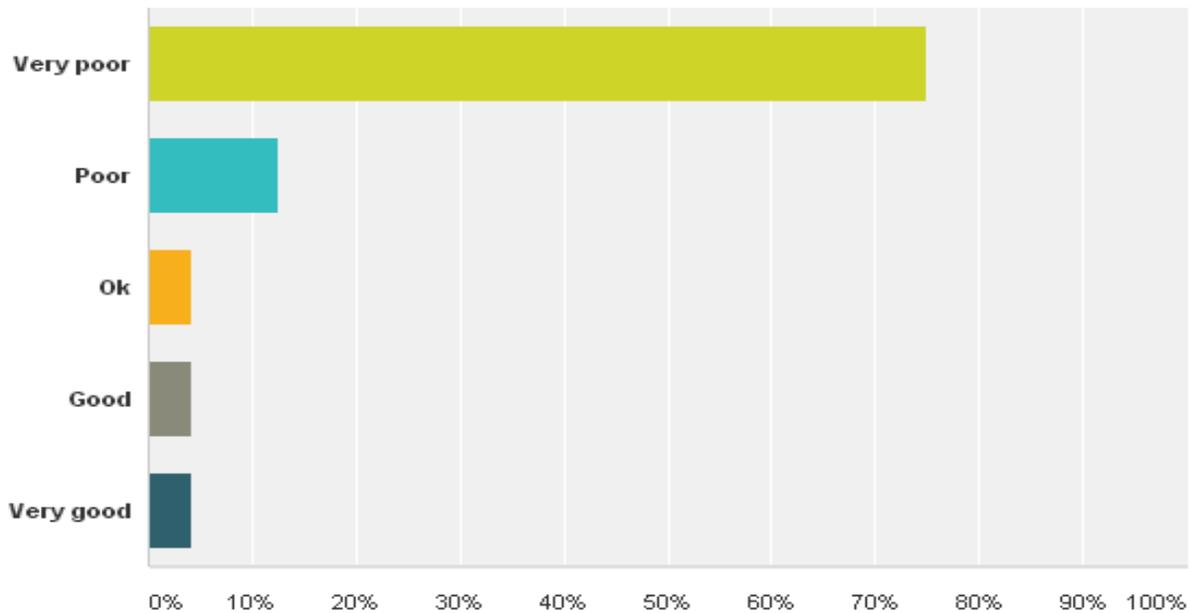


Figure 4: Current level of information and awareness provided by the Eritrean Community organisations regarding domestic abuse.

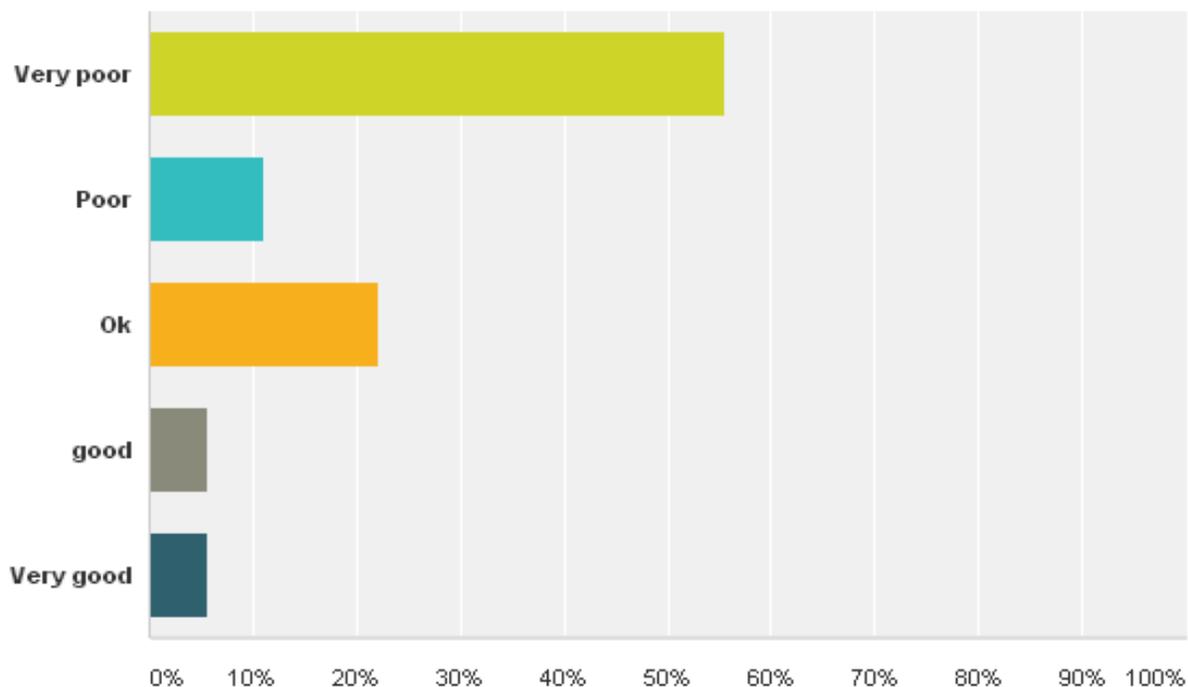


Figure 5: The support received from Eritrean Community Organisations

When asked both via the online questionnaire and one-on- one interviews what the Eritrean community can do to raise awareness about domestic abuse and its impact on society.

Apart from one respondent who sounded bitter and expressed her view as *“nothing as far as know or I didn’t get help when I needed it”* the twenty-five responses gave a variety of different perspective and solutions. Several were identical but some were quite original and could be put into practice as ways to improve the current situation.

Several people wanted to collate current data about how bad the problem is at the moment, just so people could see how widespread domestic violence is which could unite survivors. These pieces of information should also be widely available and support groups should be set up to handle people coming forward for help or counselling.

One answer states the need to "Bring in agencies working on domestic abuse as well as police to provide information and other support to those in the community looking at this

issue (including the consequences). Teach the youngsters acceptable/unacceptable behaviour. Community needs to integrate better into the mainstream - the community still acts as if it is back home."

One answer spoke of the importance of social gatherings such as weddings and religious holidays and called for them to be hubs of knowledge for women and men alike. One of the study participants said: *"Provide services specialising in domestic abuse and let the community know that these services are available."*

Women only support groups were also mentioned as these can build strong ties within society as well as ease the load of having to open up about past/current experiences. A strong supportive group can also help those currently in abusive situations as non-judgemental people to offer places to stay, basic amenities as well as emotional and financial support is critical.

Chapter 3: Discussion

The results of this research show that domestic abuse is widespread within the Eritrean Community in the UK as it is in Eritrea. It is also less spoken about.

Several reasons emerged for domesticating abuse and violence against women in the Eritrean community. As in many other societies, Patriarchy as well as the discriminatory practices, religious creeds, the culture of undermining or minimising domestic abuse as the main causes of the widespread violence against women with in the Eritrean community.

Abdulkadir's 2007 stresses *"the first step to and preventing violence against women is to recognise in all its forms"*.

It appears the definition and understanding of domestic abuse in the Eritrean community seems very limited to physical abuse. The findings indicate that emotional abuse, marital rape, financial control, coercion, denying access to education including denying personal freedoms of movement of a women do not seem to be considered as abuse and violations of human rights. ." As one of the participants stated:

"Understanding of the definition in our culture, we do not define the moral, financial or mental as abuse'.

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project's 'Power and Control Wheel', which can be found in the appendices section, demonstrates patriarchal power and control and the broad definition of violence against women in all its forms.

Similar to this research, Abdulkadir (2007) states, there is a real need to educate women about rights. in addition she states *"This victimisation of the survivors, combined with a lack of critical public discussion of the broader issues of the violence against women and the lack of recognition of their rights discourage women from admitting their suffering or pursuing legal justice"*.

A response from a respondent stated *"all aspects of life in Eritrea is abused"* This indicates where there is no rule of law it is hard to expect rights of women to be respected. Similarly, other studies have linked domestic abuse with the current political and lawless status of Eritrea where gross human rights abuse is committed by the current regime (Abdulkadir; Sihanet.org).

Nevertheless, unlike in Eritrea, in the UK where women's and human rights is enshrined in the law, one expects all members of the community to exercise their rights. On the contrary, two of the responses in particular to what leads to domestic abuse in the Eritrean community UK were deplorable. These particular respondents implied: *"a woman*

assuming her independence in the UK, a confusion of roles for women in the UK” “Adapting Western Style is the problem and we should stick to our culture” were responses to what leads/causes to domestic abuse. With such kind of deep rooted perceptions of domestic abuse of some members of the Eritrean community, it is not surprising to find women who join their spouses here in the UK to be at a higher risk of domestic abuse and violence. It is found that a number of reasons prevent these women from disclosing the abuse. For instance their immigration status is tied with their spouses; secondly low educational background, financial dependency and having dependents seem to compel women tolerate abuse within a household.

The other main finding of this study is the role of Eritrean Community organisations to raise awareness of domestic abuse and violence against women in the community. All the Community workers reported that domestic abuse and violence is an issue in the community and a taboo and difficult to tackle. Confidentiality issues, lack of funding and the difficulty reporting outcomes to be barriers to addressing the subject. However, considering the impact of domestic abuse to women, children, and society as a whole one would have hoped a little more proactive steps such as organising workshops, seminars and debate on how to address the issue should have been taken as a priority. Putting posters on the notice board walls and ensuring domestic abuse information leaflets as well as other literatures visible in the offices are small steps that the Community organisations should have taken to address domestic abuse in their respective community. It is a known fact that attitudes to domestic violence can be hindered by lack of training. It has transpired that there is a need to examine the Eritrean Community organisation workforce, their gender composition, level of knowledge, perceptions, of domestic abuse and its impact to society in greater depth.

The impact of domestic abuse to women and perpetrators

Similar to the studies by WHO (2006); (ONS 2013), McGough (2011) the findings of this research affirms that domestic abuse has a gender component and the overwhelming figures of victims of domestic abuse remain to be women. It is very, very rare to find an Eritrean male victim of domestic abuse. In this research, there was no indication of an Eritrean male domestic abuse victim; including the responses from the Eritrean Community workers have not identified any male domestic abuse victim. Even if any was to be found one can imagine that in a society like Eritrea, it would be particularly seen as a shame for a man to disclose domestic abuse.

As it is clearly documented by Feseha et al (2012); Abrahams (2010); and the Lancet, women who go through an abusive relationship too often develop post-traumatic stress,

anxiety depression, and suicidal thoughts, sleep disturbances including nightmares, a sense of isolation, and mistrust of themselves and others. Women who reported to have experienced domestic abuse even once in their life reported to suffer from more emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and attempts than non-abused women (WHO 2006). The findings of this research reported similar experiences by women following domestic abuse and violence.

In addition, children living in a household of domestic abuse many of them have severe issues caused by their upbringing both as children and as they mature (Reynolds et al 2014). Therefore, it is evident that children living in a household of domestic abuse a significant number of children may not reach their optimum potential and are unlikely to achieve the Every Child Matters five outcomes.

Despite a lack of official data regarding the extent of domestic abuse in Eritrea, it remains a well-known fact that violence against women is pervasive.

Domestic abuse and violence can have devastating outcomes to children and their families as well as society. Findings of this work indicate despite the majority of respondents appear to be aware of the impact of domestic abuse, and violence similar to all the studies reviewed. Despite this it is also stated that domestic abuse is a big issue in the Eritrean community, unspoken about because it considered 'shame' to discuss the issue. If it is revealed often within family, the majority of families tend settle the matter within the family, by men and often with no consideration to the view of the woman victim.

The responses to the impact of domestic abuse to perpetrators were included in this paper to find out the level of awareness of community members regarding the consequences of the actions by perpetrator. It has emerged that in addition to risk of losing contact and going to prison for domestic abuse and violence, there appears limited knowledge that if a perpetrator did not have a British citizenship and sentenced for over 2 years, it is possible that he will be deported. It seems not many Eritreans are aware of this law.

Chapter 4

(i) Conclusions

- organisation workers have highlighted that some women continue to live with abusive spouses due to the fear that their children will be taken from them by Social Care and hence, as well as their spouse by the Police preventing them to report incidents of domestic abuse.
- There is a need for further research to explore the extent of the problem.
- There needs to be more community intervention.
- This targeted intervention needs to be for women and men. This needs to be included for all in schools and within the community.

(ii) Recommendations

The following recommendation can be made based on the extensive level of problem there exists in the Eritrean community in discussing the issue of domestic violence including:

- A domestic abuse and violence working group from all Eritrean communities across UK must be set up to examine the scale of the problem in depth and look into organising domestic abuse awareness training programmes and workshops in the community.
- The Community to consider set-up of domestic abuse drop in sessions in areas where most Eritreans reside, explore possibility of creating a helpline as well as devise leaflets with a broad definition of domestic abuse in both Arabic and Tigrigna languages specific to Eritreans.
- Eritrean community organisations must develop a strategy to address domestic abuse effectively, contribute to reduce the incidence, monitor and report barriers to

addressing domestic violence to the National domestic abuse strategy group and funders.

- The community to device educational materials literatures and plays to raise awareness about domestic abuse. This needs to start from a very young age and consider incorporating within the Saturday mother tongue Community Schools programmes.
- Further research is needed to thoroughly examine the scale of the problem in depth.
- To develop an Eritrean women's support group/project in order to encourage women to speak up, share experiences and break the cycle of violence.
- The name domestic violence needs to change - some feel the 'domestic' makes it less serious and not affecting the whole society - but violence is violence. 'Don't domesticate violence' project and campaign may change attitudes of people towards violence against women.

(iii) The strengths and limitations of research

The questionnaires provided some insight into perception of the problem and as an issue that needs to be addressed regardless of where Eritreans live.

Distributing the questionnaire online has triggered and raised a lot of interest within the Eritrean Community globally and has opened a discussion among Eritreans regardless of their geographical existence.

Use of interview with survivors, community workers and some professionals working in the area of domestic abuse provided a relatively additional insight into the scale of the problem and the barriers to tackle the issue in the community.

Some of the online responses have potential for further exploration.

Considering the education and literacy level among Eritreans and in particular women (45% female and 67% males) as well as a language barrier, distributing the questionnaire online may have excluded the ones less confident to use computers /modern technology and follow a complex survey online.

The sample used may not reflect accurate data of the extent of prevalence of domestic abuse in the Eritrean Community in the UK.

Improvements:

I would distribute the questionnaire manually because Eritrean women tend to use technology less than men;

I could use the same channels to reach people - this worked well for me.

Timing - the timing was hard - managing a fulltime job, other commitments and the social issues was challenging - it would be better to be able to commit to this fulltime and for the research to be funded.

I would like to add a focus group in order to allow women to speak up, to share experiences and encourage others (and will do so as part of the project group we are setting up)

A final point, as a result of this project, we are initiating an Eritrean women's project group in order to raise awareness of women's rights, including their legal rights. This will partly be social and offer wellbeing support. We hope to start Women only a programme of walks and cinema outing.

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Appendices

Appendix-1- The Power and Control Wheel



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