

# Call to Action for a Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Strategy for England and Wales Briefing Paper:

## Responding effectively for racialised communities

**June 2021: paper by the Action on Perpetrators, racialised communities task and finish group.**

### Introduction

A Call To Action for a perpetrator strategy for England and Wales was launched in January 2020 and now has over 120 signatories and a network who come together for a monthly 'Action on Perpetrators' virtual meeting. Since then the government has a legal commitment as part of the Domestic Abuse Act to publish strategic approach to perpetrators, which we expect it to do as part of a new DA strategy in late 2021.

It is essential that a strategic response to perpetrators works to effectively increase safety and reduce harm for all adult and child victims-survivors.

The purpose of this briefing is to set out in more detail the key elements that need to be considered to ensure that any national domestic abuse perpetrator strategy is inclusive and responsive to racialised communities.

When referring to racialised communities we are using the term 'racialised' to refer to people who are marginalised due to their race or ethnicity. However, we recognise that people will not always define themselves using the language we have used. We recognise that this group is not homogenous, and that different racialised groups have different experiences from one another. We also recognise that people facing racial minoritisation face intersectional barriers that extend beyond race and ethnicity.

The briefing also highlights other terminology which can cause concern due to negative connotations, such as perpetrator and its link to over criminalisation of racialised people. We recognise that different terminology will be used in different settings, and propose that policy makers and service providers are mindful and purposeful about impact of terminology and whether it creates additional barriers for racialised communities.

The briefing builds on research carried out by University of Suffolk and H.O.P.E Training and Consultancy<sup>1</sup> which explored family and intimate relationship harm within racialised communities with a focus on those causing harm. Recommendations from this research include the need for:

- Further research into culturally grounded interventions and language
- Sustainable research funding for community-led interventions
- A family-focused approach to perpetrator work
- Expanding the Call to Action for a Perpetrator Strategy to specifically include the needs of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities

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<sup>1</sup> Adisa O., and Allen K. (2020). Increasing safety for those experiencing family and intimate relationship harm within black and minority ethnic communities by responding to those who harm: Survey findings. University of Suffolk.

A 'racialised communities working group' was formed in January 2021 to explore issues raised from the above research and other relevant issues, with a view to proposing key elements for an inclusive perpetrator strategy and providing leadership to the wider Action on Perpetrators group on these issues. This briefing sets out key elements that are essential for any inclusive strategy.

There are specific issues of concern for racialised communities when looking at the response to those causing harm in intimate relationships and within families. Much of the current response to perpetrators of domestic abuse is centred in policing and the criminal justice system. This creates barriers both for those experiencing harm and those causing harm. Structural racism continues to create a significant barrier to racialised communities feeling confident that they will receive an effective response from statutory services and mainstream institutions, or indeed whether contact with these agencies will potentially trigger a more negative response in the context of heightened criminalisation of minoritised groups<sup>2</sup>. Government strategies, such as the 'hostile environment' have exacerbated this, creating immigration related barriers to victim-survivors in reporting domestic abuse to the police.

As highlighted in the University of Suffolk and H.O.P.E research, there can be cultural differences in perception of what constitutes abusive or harmful behaviour. This has an impact on what constitutes appropriate and effective language and approach used to address such behaviours. The Call to Action Network hopes to see an increased awareness and shared understanding of what needs to change, why and how this can most effectively be achieved.

Within the domestic abuse sector, the range of specialist services responding to perpetrators of domestic abuse is very small and underfunded. The workforce within that sector also often lacks diverse representation from across the communities they serve. Research with victim-survivors from racialised communities found that 86% preferred to receive support from a specialist service (Thiara & Roy, 2012<sup>3</sup>).

Victim-survivors of domestic abuse need to be confident that the responses to those causing harm will be culturally competent and will not result in the victim-survivor, their family or wider community experiencing increased harm, from the person/s causing that harm or from any services due to systematic racism. Strategies to address harmful behaviour need to be created in order to address specific needs and concerns, and create a response that effectively reduces abuse and increases safety and wellbeing for racialised women and children.

### **Call to Action for a Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Strategy**

The call to action launched in January 2020 sets out 5 elements a national perpetrator strategy needs to include:

1. Public and voluntary services empowered to hold perpetrators to account
2. Best-practice perpetrator interventions available across England and Wales
3. National quality assurance systems
4. A sustainable, predictable source of funding
5. National and local leaders to spearhead the perpetrator strategy

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2018 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

<sup>3</sup> Imkaan (2012) Vital Statistics 2: Key findings report on Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee Women's and Children's experiences of gender-based violence

Using those headings, and the sub-headings within the main document, we set out more detail on the approach required in an effective response for racialised communities.

## **1. Public and voluntary services empowered to hold perpetrators to account**

Consideration must be given to language and terminology and whether there are connotations that raise concern or are exclusionary for racialised people. In the University of Suffolk research participants raised concern about the term ‘perpetrator’:

*‘Naming someone who has engaged in harmful behaviours as a ‘perpetrator’ may amplify destructive cultural stereotypes about race and criminality or alienate Black and minoritised people from programmes designed to engage community members in combating abuse.’*

Additionally, the term ‘holding perpetrators to account’ can have criminal justice connotations, when in fact it is intended to apply more broadly, including across a range of settings outside the criminal justice system. Different phraseology could be considered in certain contexts to address concerns about criminalisation/over-policing of racialised people. The Call to Action working group has identified a need to identify an alternative terminology that is accepted within ‘by and for’ organisations but which still places the abuse solely with the person using harm.

The Call to Action sets out the need for effective policing and criminal justice responses to domestic abuse as one part of the wider solution. We recognise that this element of an overarching response may contain particular concerns and structural barriers for racialised communities, and these must be explicitly addressed.

**Police led multi-agency forums:** Police led forums are an effective mechanism for the co-ordination of responses to high-harm high-risk perpetrators of domestic abuse. It is recognised that this may present concerns about institutional racism, information sharing and unintended consequences for racialised communities. There can be a lack of recognition and understanding of the work that ‘by and for’ organisations do, and opportunities are missed to have specialist insight and input at multi-agency forums. Multi-agency forums/panels should know the local agencies in their area and ensure there are opportunities for such agencies to input expertise. Additionally, there need to be clear protocols in place that set out how the purpose of information sharing and how it will be used – for example these forums should not be used as a chance to advance immigration objectives and this should be clear to all participants.

**More systematic use of criminal justice opportunities:** There are barriers for racialised communities in reporting abuse to the police for fear of consequences, particularly in relation to institutional racism, and government strategy around immigration. Additionally, the language of ‘perpetrator’ is a barrier for some racialised people due to criminalisation and victimisation by the criminal justice system. These barriers need to be proactively addressed through training and best practice guidelines to ensure opportunities for intervention are not missed.

**Workforce development training:** The Call to Action sets out the need for training across the statutory and voluntary sector to enable a range of professionals to identify abusive behaviour in their clients and in their workforce, and have the confidence to respond effectively.

This is heightened in relation to ensuring effective responses to racialised communities as there can be a lack of understanding of some additional or specific abusive behaviours experienced by victims and survivors that risk being perceived as ‘cultural norms’ or

'practices due to their culture or religion'. This means that those using these abusive behaviours are less likely to be recognised and opportunities for intervention are missed. There needs to be cross-cultural training to increase understanding of types of abuse and ways to challenge/address, underpinned by recognising, believing, and responding positively and effectively to all victim-survivors. This training needs to be developed and delivered by experts from racialised communities and reinforced by good partnership working with specialist services.

Alongside training to develop understanding of abuse, there should also 'anti-oppressive practice' training to build awareness of behaviours that could create barriers for racialised communities reaching out, enabling statutory or mainstream voluntary services to improve practice, and provide effective support. Training needs to be part of a wider systems approach to change to fully address the underlying issues.

**Clear pathways into perpetrator interventions:** The Call to Action sets out the need for clear pathways into intervention from multiple routes including criminal justice, social services and CAFCASS, health and mental health services, and voluntary sector, including self-referral.

Due to barriers to engagement with and response from statutory services, there needs to be a wider pathway into interventions for racialised communities. There needs to be a strategic approach in local areas to centre community-led 'by and for' organisations in commissioning, capacity building and local referral pathways. This will require effective communication strategies to work with communities to increase knowledge and confidence in interventions, and also for statutory services to understand the work that community organisations do. Pathways need to include clear information sharing protocols that address any barriers or concerns about consequences of sharing information and accountability mechanisms that track how well these engagement activities have led to the increased involvement and funding of 'by and for' organisations.

## **2. Best-practice perpetrator interventions available across England and Wales**

**Availability of quality assured interventions:** The Call to Action sets out the need for quality assured interventions across England and Wales provided by both voluntary and statutory sectors that address the whole range of those using harmful behaviour. There need to be interventions that meet the needs of racialised communities, and not as one homogenous group, but tailored appropriately to different communities. This includes accessibility such as language needs, as well as content of programmes that reflects cultural specificity.

There is currently a lack of evidence and understanding of 'what works'. There needs to be mapping, scoping, research and evaluation to build an evidence base for effective interventions for racialised communities, improving the overall response to those that harm and informing commissioners when looking at the needs of local communities.

Mainstream domestic abuse services, particularly perpetrator services, tend to be predominantly White, especially in leadership positions. This creates gaps in understanding experiences of racialised communities, and impacts on recruitment where practitioners or leaders from racialised communities may not want to work in unrepresentative organisations or have a negative experience when they do. Adequate investment in a community-led workforce and leadership development programme for racialised communities will help

support domestic abuse services to be representative and effective for the communities they serve.

**Appropriate community level initiatives and communications campaigns:** The Call to Action sets out the need for a campaign to ensure that those seeking help know where to access it and communities are enabled to recognise and speak out. It also calls for culturally responsive interventions, and inclusive healthy relationship programmes for children and young people, ensuring abusive behaviour and harmful gender stereotypes are challenged, and that prevention starts at the earliest stage.

Public and community awareness campaigns about domestic abuse and harmful behaviours need to be relevant and specific to different communities and developed by and with community organisations and national expert organisations. Such campaigns should centre input from racialised communities, practitioners and young people.

### **3. National quality assurance systems**

The Call to Action states that infrastructure is needed to ensure that adult and child victim-survivors are kept safe, address the risks of poor practice and provide confidence in the quality of specific perpetrator interventions. Further data and research is needed to develop an evidence-base on best practice.

**National approaches to quality assurance and accreditation:** identifying and evidencing effective approach and practice of grassroots community-led organisations should inform quality assurance frameworks. This gives an opportunity for learning from grassroots organisations to have a greater impact on the wider sector's approach to those causing harm.

Accreditation programmes need to be accessible for smaller organisations who often are unable to access them due to a lack of funding and/or capacity. Training on quality standards for commissioners should include needs for racialised communities.

**Perpetrator work should be covered by the relevant inspectorates:** under new appropriate thematic programmes (e.g. HMICFRS, HMI Probation, NICE). Inspections should include assessment of responses to racialised communities with clear expectations, guidance and standards to measure against. Inspectorates should consider inclusion of 'peer inspectors', such as practitioners from specialist organisations, to work alongside them to provide expertise.

**England and Wales wide data collection supported by analysts and communicators, to enable the collation and use of best practice and insights:** Data collection needs to include racialised communities and ensure learning is captured for different groups, not as one homogenous group, in order to understand differences and gaps. Grassroots organisations should be supported to participate in data and outcomes monitoring to be given opportunities to evidence approach, and to highlight needs and outcomes for their client groups. This should include capturing the voice of people with lived experience of domestic abuse.

### **4. A sustainable, predictable source of funding**

The Call to Action highlights that delivering a Perpetrator Strategy for England and Wales will require sustainable funding alongside, and not detracting from, funding for victim-survivor services.

**Cross-departmental funding commitment:** The Call to Action sets out that commissioning would be based on appropriate training, quality and safety standards.

Commissioning processes can often be inaccessible to small specialist organisations due to capacity and criteria such as financial thresholds and a heavy administrative burden. There needs to be development of commissioning models that support and enable inclusion of grassroots by and for expertise. Commissioning must be underpinned by local needs assessments and include, at highest level and at outset service design, data collection requirements as well as incentives to include by and for organisations that meet the needs of local populations. Funding models should include specialist victim-survivor and children's support.

## **5. National and local leaders to spearhead the perpetrator strategy**

The Call to Action sets out the need for strategic leadership at central and local levels to deliver societal and systems change, and such leadership must connect with those working on the ground to embed best practice.

**Explicitly include the remit to oversee responses to perpetrators in the responsibilities of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner:** The DA Commissioner should ensure there is a platform for national and locally-based specialist organisations to input/influence policy and approach to ensure community needs are reflected and responded to.

**Develop a leadership programme:** The Call to Action includes development of a leadership programme that trains and links individuals and organisations across England and Wales who can lead change in their area's response to those causing harm. This needs to include the consideration of professionals from racialised communities who are supported as leaders so there is meaningful inclusion.

There need to be opportunities for racialised people at every seniority level. There needs to be investment in a leadership programme developed with and for racialised communities.

**Hold Ministers and government leaders in every department accountable for calling out abusive behaviour and tackling harmful gender stereotypes in their day-to-day communications and business:** The Call to Action proposes that this sits under the general functions of the DA Commissioner. This should include cultural specificity and clear communication strategy and guidance on the ways government ministers and departments can call out abusive behaviour and tackle harmful gender stereotypes. This should be supported by training and awareness raising events delivered by specialist organisations.

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