

# Not My Shame

Project report

---

**Principal Academics:** Georgina Gnan and Zara Asif

**Principal Artists:** Andreena Leanne and Zoe Thompson

## Project background

---

This project was funded by the UKRI Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network as part of its workstream on artistic and public engagement around violence, abuse and mental health.

The project ran for a total of 7 months

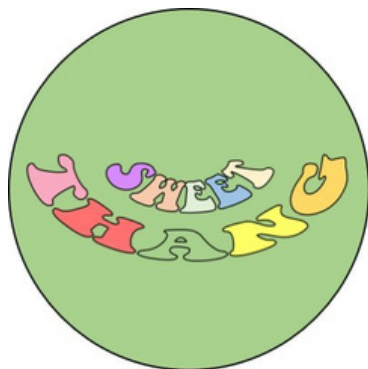


### Project team:

- Georgina Gnan, King's College London
- Zara Asif, King's College London
- Andreena Leanne
- Zoe Thompson, Sweetthangzine
- Evie Muir
- Emma Brech, Maya Centre
- Fiona Reynolds, Maya Centre
- Michalina Popiolek, Maya Centre

### Project partners:

- The Maya Centre
- Sweetthangzine



## Project summary

---

Women who are survivors of abuse, often feel shame. This may be due to negative societal attitudes and victim blaming, which can be internalised. Negative beliefs about the self, as well as the trauma experienced by many survivors, can affect their mental health. This project aimed to support survivors by shifting their beliefs and feelings of shame through creative writing. We focused our project on Black LGBTQ women survivors as there is little support targeting them and they may experience additional racism and heterosexism when seeking support.

We ran self-care focused creative writing workshops, which participants attended once a week for six weeks. They were given writing prompts and encouraged to write anything they wanted and in any style. They could share as much or as little of their writing as they wanted to but were encouraged to discuss what they had written with the group. As well as the workshop facilitator (a survivor herself), there was a therapist present who could offer support when needed. After the workshops were completed some of the poetry written by participants was included in a zine, which was developed by an artist who is also a survivor, and was launched at a public engagement event.

The workshops were very well received and initial feedback indicated that participants would be interested in attending further creative writing workshops. As the weeks went on, the women felt more comfortable within the group and discussions felt really effective. Participants said the workshops made them feel really good, and one even said that writing her thoughts down made it feel like her anxiety was leaving her head. Therefore, we consider the workshops to be a success. The zine launch event was also described as empowering by an attendee.



## Public impact

---

As part of the zine, we hosted a zine launch event/public engagement event at the Science Gallery London, in collaboration with the Health and Social Equity Collective. Zoe Thompson put together a special edition of Sweet Thang Zine, and the event aimed at providing an evening of health, uplifting and empowering, full of poetry and discussion. The evening invited members of the project (survivors, facilitators, creatives) as well as a select people from the general public including academics and students. The survivors were given a platform to share their poetry/short stories and Zoe read out a piece from the zine titled “Inflorescence” – which is an essay by Evie Muir.

As part of the event, Andreena carried out a short, informal workshop based on her positive affirmation prompt cards. All attendees of the event were able to join in, read and react to the positive affirmation prompt that was given to them. Some quotes from the attendees of the event:

*When we hold shame, we can't focus on our wellbeing. Writing is a form of therapy which helps us to lift that shame from inside and move it on to paper - Andreena Leanne*

*I never saw poetry as therapy, then I was given seven minutes in a workshop to write something and from those seven minutes, I haven't stopped writing- Participant*

*[Poetry] helped me to not define myself by the trauma I have experienced- Jaqueline O, poet who wrote 'Garden Song' for the zine*

# Survivor involvement

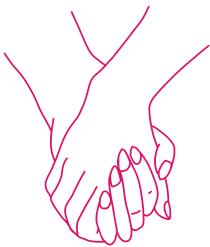
---

Survivors were involved in this project throughout. The initial outline of the creative project was co-designed with survivors and researchers and an emphasis on the importance of lived experience was maintained until the end of the project. The workshop facilitator (Andreena), and both artists we collaborated with (Zoe and Evie) are survivors themselves, and all identify as female, Black and LGBTQ. Involving survivors from the start ensured that the style of the creative workshops and the development of the zine were safe and appropriate processes. Women who were linked to the Maya Centre were then recruited to take part in the workshops. All of them identified as Black, LGBTQ survivors.

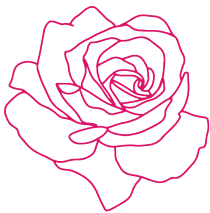
The main lesson learned was about the power of community. All the participants talked about how important it was to them that the workshops were for such a niche group, as there is very little support targeted at Black, LGBTQ women. It was evident that they all felt safe and able to open up, and benefited from being around others who could relate to their experiences.

## Key messages

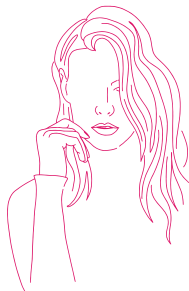
Top 3 key messages from the project



The shame is not yours to carry. Shame does not belong to the survivor, but to the perpetrator of abuse



The effect poetry can have on wellbeing shows the power of creativity



Alternative forms of therapy can be effective in reframing the narrative

## Final Outputs

---

### Zine

To view the final Zine click [here](#).

### Blog

You can also read a blog post about the project, written by project lead Zara Asif for the Centre for Society and Mental Health [here](#).



# The Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network

---

We will be sure to keep our members updated on any outputs linked to this project in the future. To keep updated you can sign up to our mailing list and receive our monthly newsletter. You can also follow us on our socials . All links can be found at the bottom of this page.

---

## About the VAMHN

We are a network of individuals and organisations aiming to reduce the prevalence of mental health problems by addressing associated violence and abuse, particularly domestic and sexual violence. We bring together and support research by experts from a range of disciplines, sectors, and backgrounds - some with personal experience, others with expertise from the work that they do, and survivor researchers with both.

The activities of the network are organised into 3 themes:

<b>Measurement</b>	Measuring the extent and impact of domestic and sexual violence in relation to mental health. Our first year activities focused on the theme of measurement
<b>Understanding</b>	Understanding the pathways that lead to domestic and sexual violence and their relationship to mental health problems
<b>Intervention</b>	Planning interventions and services to prevent, reduce and address domestic and sexual violence in people with mental health problems or at risk of developing mental health problems

<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.vamhn.co.uk">www.vamhn.co.uk</a>
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:vamhn@kcl.ac.uk">vamhn@kcl.ac.uk</a>
<b>Twitter</b>	@VAMHN
<b>Forum</b>	<a href="http://vamhn6.wixsite.com/forum">vamhn6.wixsite.com/forum</a>
<b>Instagram</b>	@ukri_vamhn

