What must I seem like to you? How 'victimhood' is portrayed in educational advocacy interventions for female survivors of domestic violence and abuse
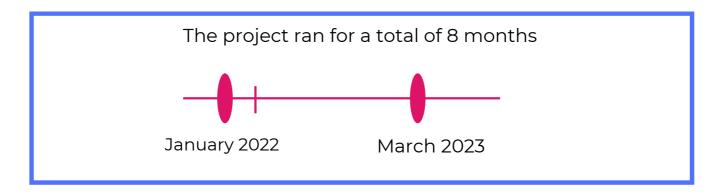
Project report

Principal investigator: Dr Melissa Jogie, University of Roehampton

Project background

This project was funded by the UKRI Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network as part of its workstream on the theme of interventions for violence, abuse and mental health.

The project ran for a total of 8 months

January 2022   March 2023

Project team:
- Dr Melissa Jogie, Lecturer in Education Studies at The University of Roehampton
- Professor Cecilia A. Essau, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at The University of Roehampton
- Professor Aisha K. Gill, Professor of Criminology at The University of Roehampton

Project partners and collaborators:

- Bexley Women's Aid
- Watford Women's Centre
- Sutton Women's Centre
- Asian Women's Resource Centre
- London Black Women's Project

Project summary

This project focused on examining the language, structure, and themes of advocacy programmes, which have been designed and are used to help women work through their experiences of domestic violence and abuse abuse (DVA) as they work on their personal journeys towards recovery. The project was carried out in partnership with five Women's Centres which provide refuge, survivor support, counselling, and recovery programmes for women.

Data was collected in four streams using methods of digital topic generation, multiple correspondence analysis (MCDA), Delphi surveys and focus groups with professional services and separate focus groups with survivors of DVA.

Key findings revealed gaps in terms of the challenges that professional services encounter when trying to formalise added content (which is more often based on experience than on research) into their programme of delivery. It is difficult for services to establish the impact the programmes have on the women undertaking the programmes in terms of survivors' resilience through recovery programme and the effectiveness of it on improving their mental health.

Another core finding was the level of trust and empathy that was built between survivors and public services (police, healthcare, legal system) whereby survivors feel persecuted by their abusers and blamed for their circumstances largely because of the inability of large public service bodies to offer bespoke and compassionate services. This was in complete contrast to the work done by smaller organisations like the women's shelters and religious and community groups which provided more support, guidance, and comfort for survivors.

One of the emerging recommendations was a stronger investment (generally) across all public services (banks, groceries, shops on local high streets) for their staff to be awareness of clients and patrons who may be experiencing, or are survivors of, DVA. This in turn would be complemented by actionable routes for early intervention and support for survivors, within the remit of business services. A third important finding that emerged was around data literacy and infographics. There was an apparent lack of data literacy across women's shelters and survivors of DVA. The partner organisations became aware of the importance of framing bespoke data for their users and the public to gain a better appreciation of survivors on various stages of recovery and the importance of being able to attempt to shape programmes and curricula around intersectional challenges.

Top 3 key messages from the project

Education about domestic violence and abuse for public services front-facing organisations is paramount, a there should be a curriculum of staff training on DVA for all personnel

Data literacy on DVA is important aggregate data, summary statistics, and visual (infographic) data can be made more powerful to be presented to policymakers and the public.

Intersectional programmes or curricula should be framed and tailored to help women from backgrounds who are elderly, young, black minority ethnic or homeless.

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:

Measurement	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
Understanding	Understanding the pathways that lead to domestic and sexual violence and their relationship to mental health problems
Intervention	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

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