

imkaan

imkaan safe minimum practice standards

working with black and 'minority ethnic' women and girls



Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

These standards have been developed and written by Marai Larasi & Dorett Jones, and have been produced as part of **Imkaan's** Quality Assurance Framework.



Produced and published by:

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Imkaan is the only UK-based, second-tier women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against black and 'minority ethnic' (BME) women and girls. The organisation holds over fifteen years of experience of working around issues such as domestic violence, forced marriage and 'honour-based' violence. We work at local, national and international levels, and in partnership with a range of organisations, to improve policy and practice responses to BME women and girls.

As a membership organisation, Imkaan represents the expertise and perspectives of frontline, specialist BME women's organisations that work to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. Imkaan also delivers a unique package of support which includes: quality assurance; accredited training and peer education; sustainability support to frontline BME organisations; and facilitation of space for community engagement and development. Our research activities support the on-going development of a robust evidence-base around the needs and aspirations of BME women and girls, as well as promising practice approaches to addressing violence.

INTRODUCTION

The Imkaan Safe Minimum Practice Standards (SMPS) are the second in a series of accredited standards and part of a broader quality framework provided by Imkaan to both specialist Black and 'minority ethnic' (BME) violence against women and girls (VAWG) services and smaller BME community organisations.

These standards are specifically designed for small, BME community groups delivering support to BME women and girls affected by VAWG, including more newly established specialist BME ending VAWG organisations. Thus, while we recognise the importance of broader organisational structures in areas such as governance and management, we also acknowledge that many small community organisations may not have had the opportunity to invest in such structures in a formal way. Yet local, 'grassroots' community projects may be the first or only group a girl or woman will engage with, especially where organisations may be delivering services around a single area or work e.g. female genital mutilation (FGM). We believe that even where practitioners are focussed on a more community-based approach without rigid organisational structures, the services that girls and women receive can be safe, supportive and effective. As such, these standards focus primarily on **service delivery** and **practice** and the **ethos which underpins that practice**.

Accreditation in the context of safe, minimum practice is effectively certification that, at the time of the assessment, the group concerned is delivering a service which:

- promotes the safety of women and girls
- is able to manage immediate risk and safeguarding concerns

The SMPS will support organisations to reassure users of the service, funders and commissioners, and other stakeholders, that work is being delivered safely. We recognise that some groups may not feel able to meet SMPS requirements immediately. It is important to note that Imkaan may be able to provide developmental support, including training, in order to ensure that organisations are better able to meet the standards. The SMPS are designed to be supportive, and to lead to organisational improvement and sustainability. They are not designed to exclude organisations that are committed to working safely and appropriately.

Imkaan recommends that groups that have achieved SMPS commit to ongoing development. This includes ensuring that new staff and volunteers are adequately and appropriately trained.

ETHOS AND PRINCIPLES

Imkaan's work, and these standards, is underpinned by a broader human rights context, one which emphasises equality, safety, justice and empowerment.

We know that small community organisations may face a number of constraints, which may in turn limit their ability to develop complex systems and policies. Yet many groups are, in and of themselves, essential resources for their ethno-cultural communities and their local areas, and in many cases, for girls and women specifically. As such, it is essential that community organisations provide support in ways that are safe and appropriate.

The key elements of the under-pinning ethos of these standards are therefore:

- All levels of staff, board/trustees, management and volunteers must continuously adopt a non-judgmental approach, i.e. where women and girls are believed, supported and where their safety and well-being are prioritised.
- All women and girls are therefore responded to, and supported, from a position of belief and credibility. The group understands and recognises the impact of violence and trauma on girls' and women's lives and is able to respond sensitively and safely.
- All aspects of the group's work, from initial enquiries through to casework support and outreach will reflect this non-judgemental perspective. This approach requires ongoing challenge to perceived notions of acceptable 'womanhood' and 'girlhood' including broader cultural perceptions around gender, sexuality, behaviour, faith and belief, marital status, immigration status, age, disability, ethnicity, class and sex.
- The group is committed to working in ways that **do no harm**¹ i.e. the group understands the harm that can be / is caused by work which is delivered in ways that lack the necessary safeguarding, human rights and/or equality frameworks.

The over-arching core principles are:

- Woman-centred and girl-centred approach
- Safety
- Cultural analysis and specificity
- Partnership

¹ **Do no harm** is increasingly being adopted as a core principle of work around issues such as FGM e.g. <http://www.options.co.uk/sites/default/files/end-fgm-programme-brief.pdf>

STANDARDS BY CORE PRINCIPLES

1. Woman-centred and girl-centred approach

Overview: Group understands that violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of girls' and women's unequal status across society. Group also understands that BME women and girls experience multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination which can relate to factors such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, class, and disability.

Justification: Violence against women and girls is perpetrated against girls and women because they are girls and women. VAWG is recognised as a breach of women's and girls' human rights globally, regionally and nationally. The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (General Assembly Resolution 48/104 [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993](#)). This definition relates to all violence against women and girls, including forms that have been historically linked to 'tradition' and 'culture' such as FGM, which the World Health Organisation states "is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women".

However, BME girls' and women's lives are often shaped by other factors including discrimination on the basis of 'race', ethnicity, immigration status, caste / class etc. Such factors are critical to understanding BME girls' and women's experiences.

'Do no harm' consideration: When we fail to recognise VAWG as a gendered issue, we ignore the realities of girls' and women's lives. This in turn can lead to poor, unsafe and disempowering practice.

Standards

- 1.A. Group recognises the impact of violence and trauma on women and girls' lives.
- 1.B. Provision of safe girl/women-only spaces.
- 1.C. Women and girls are always provided with the option to be seen by a woman.
- 1.D. All staff are adequately trained on the importance of a gendered analysis of violence against women and girls including issues such as FGM.
- 1.E. All staff have received basic equality and anti-discriminatory practice training or equivalent which covers key areas such as the Equality Act 2010.

2. Safety

Overview: Group understands the need to prioritise and support the safety of women and girls in all areas of the organisation. Where organisations engage in activities not relating to VAWG, their other activities must not conflict or compromise the safety of individual girls or women or girls and women generally.

Justification: Violence against women and girls is both embedded and widespread in our societies. It causes varying degrees of harm to individual girls and women and to girls and women collectively. Harm can range from emotional distress to death. Girls and women are often hurt in many different ways and the effects can last for an entire lifetime. Safe practice can reduce risk, help to meet needs and save lives.

'Do no harm' consideration: Safety is critical and foundational in any work on any form of violence against women and girls. Failure to routinely and systematically prioritise safety can have devastating consequences for individual girls, women and the people in their lives.

Standards

- 2.A.** Group must have clear, agreed process for assessing and responding to safety needs and risk.
- 2.B.** Staff and volunteers have participated in safeguarding training and understand their responsibilities in this area.
- 2.C.** Organisations can evidence adherence to these policies in their case work.
- 2.D.** Group must have clear referral pathways including into local voluntary and statutory provision.

3. Cultural analysis and specificity

Overview: Group understand how a girl's or woman's relationship with phenomenon such as 'culture' can shape experiences of violence, her relationship with those experiences, her relationship with 'community', her access to services and the type of services that she may want/need.

Service provision is developed with an understanding of notions of culture, the impact of colonisation and patriarchy, and demonstrates an understanding of the impact of racism and discrimination in the lives of women and girls within the context of violence.

Justification: Although ideas of culture are strongly contested, they are undoubtedly a key aspect of how human beings understand themselves. Culture is therefore an important element of how organisations develop their understanding and approach to violence against women and girls.

Interacting with, and interpreting, cultural nuances can make a significant difference to how violence is understood and responded to. Given that interpretations of culture can also be used to justify violence against women and girls, being able to work with girls and women to navigate through what cultural references may / may not mean to them is vital. Groups unfamiliar with, or who may strictly adhere to, key cultural references, may ignore clear signs of vulnerability, need, and risk and may also miss opportunities for support.

'Do no harm' consideration: Ignoring cultural references, or excessive 'cultural sensitivity', can both lead to missing important warning signs. However, a rigid adherence to one interpretation of culture may also prevent a group from making critical interventions. Cultural analysis and specificity therefore draws on a strengths-based approach, which connects to the

other SMPS principles, and which ensures that culture is used to optimise safety and empowerment rather than increase vulnerability and risk.

Standards

- 3.A.** Group is able to critique how notions of culture and religion may be used to justify VAWG, without essentialising whole 'communities'.
- 3.B.** Group is equipped to respond to women's and girls' different, individual experiences and relationships with their cultural identities.
- 3.C.** Group is able to engage with / mindful of different cultural nuances and their impact (dependent on the 'communities' that the group works with).
- 3.D.** Group recognises that for BME women and girls, safety may include 'safe spaces' which are themselves 'cultural' including support from other women and girls.

4. Partnership

Overview: Organisations should have good links and partnerships with other services, such as youth, health, VAWG and social care services

Justification: Workers, and individual groups, working on their own are not always able to respond to the breadth of a girl's or woman's needs. Organisations often develop their own expertise and specialisms; as such working in partnership, when done safely and effectively, can help to provide safety for girls and women. Working in partnership where learning is shared can also build community accountability and transformation.

'Do no harm' consideration: Partnership is only a safety net if girls and women are able to preserve their autonomy and if the necessary confidentiality is maintained. Equally, failure to share vital information can result in harm to girls and women, and good safeguarding procedures should be followed by all groups.

However, harm should also be understood in its broadest sense, which, for example recognises that ignoring a woman's right to self-determination in pursuit of a criminal justice outcome, may not be the best result for her and may in fact cause her ongoing harm.

Standards

- 4.A.** Group is able to demonstrate that it works in partnership with other groups in order to provide the best services to women and girls.
- 4.B.** Group is able to demonstrate that partnership working supports, rather than compromises, women's and girls' safety and autonomy.

For more information on the Safe Minimum Practice Standards, or Imkaan's work generally, please contact us at:

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