About Us

At roshni, we have been working with minority ethnic (ME) communities for over a decade to tackle issues surrounding child abuse. We are a national registered charitable organisation with expertise in working with key partners from the public, private and third sectors. roshni has a long history of working with members of ME communities to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults. By raising awareness and challenging behaviours and attitudes, roshni seeks to ensure that minority ethnic communities take a more active role in tackling key issues affecting their lives.

Introduction

Child Sexual Exploitation is an issue which we have been working on for several years. While we do not work directly with victims of CSE, although we do work with victims of abuse generally, we conduct community awareness-raising sessions offering information on CSE and highlighting the importance of reporting abuse. In particular, we offer children’s workshops, ‘SAFE’, in community and faith organisations which discuss the issue of abuse with children and young people, highlighting to them the dangers of CSE and how to stay safe from harm. In 2012 we engaged with over 250 children and young people, and the project only continues to grow. We are the only organisation engaging directly with and raising awareness specifically in ME communities on the issue of CSE. While the focus of tackling CSE is often directed at the mainstream white community, we believe that CSE is as present within ME communities however more hidden due to cultural barriers, as discussed below. We therefore see it as a high priority to engage with ME communities on this issue.

In recent years we found our work was becoming increasingly difficult due to negative media stereotyping of Pakistani Asian men in relation to CSE. The horrific Rochdale case of 2012, where a group of Asian men were convicted of widespread CSE involving vulnerable girls, caused a media furore, with tabloids declaring Asian men were preying on white children, and even Baroness Warsi insisting that the men viewed their white victims as ‘easy meat’. Debate began to grow around ethnicity, faith, culture and gender without any clear discussion on the matter developing. ME communities felt increasingly targeted by the media and therefore began to retreat from the issue, becoming less willing to engage on the subject.

Therefore, in June 2012 roshni held the ‘Child Grooming and Sexual Exploitation’ conference, the first of its kind in Scotland. We felt it was important that an organisation began to generate discussion across sectors concerning CSE and took it upon ourselves to catalyse this process. The conference was attended by over
100 individuals from the statutory, private and third sectors as well as individuals from ME communities. The keynote speaker, Nazir Afzal OBE, then Chief Prosecutor for the North West of England who had lead the Rochdale investigations, offered an unique insight into CSE and the problems of racial stereotyping. Other panelists at the event included Gillian Wade, Head of the National Sexual Crimes Unit; representatives from Barnardo’s; staff from the Office of Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, and senior NSPCC staff, amongst others. Frontline services who work directly with CSE were also represented, such as Social Workers from across Scotland, Police officers from the then Strathclyde, Lothian and Borders and Tayside Police Forces and also key third sector parties including Scottish Women’s Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland.

Much important discussion emerged from this conference, which we then built upon in four Conversation Café’s with key service providers from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Ayrshire. This extensive engagement with professionals, coupled with our own experience working at a grassroots level with ME communities, has been used to inform this submission to the Inquiry.

Below we discuss three key areas in relation to CSE:

1. Multi-agency working and how this can be improved;
2. Wider issues surrounding CSE particularly in relation to ME communities;
3. What changes would be most helpful in preventing young people getting involved in CSE and in helping them escape it.

We would hope that these areas would be addressed in any strategy which the Scottish Government develops to tackle CSE in Scotland. We are also willing to give oral evidence.

1. Multi-agency working and how this can be improved

As concerns multi-agency working, most professionals we have engaged with feel that organisations are not working well together in this field. Firstly, this is said to be because all the organisations that should be involved are not involved. While the strategic leads in Scotland, including Child Protection Committees, understand CSE, instances of abuse are more commonly encountered by voluntary, grassroots bodies which do not have the same level of knowledge. A lack of ‘joined-up working’ means that a great deal of energy goes into small initiatives which are not sufficiently well-connected to have a significant impact.

Secondly, we have repeatedly been told by front-line professionals that there is currently a lack of information sharing. Professionals told us that without good information sharing ‘Quite often CSE gets reported within an agency…but this doesn't necessarily get passed on to another agency and they're not putting the pieces together.’ This lack of joining-up can sometimes be related to the difficulties of identifying cases – ‘initially it doesn't always look like child sexual exploitation.’ More effective information sharing protocols would be a particularly useful means of developing a knowledge-base in this field. Sharing information between all relevant
bodies is key if we are to fully develop a picture of CSE in Scotland. As it is, there is a lack of awareness of CSE across the spectrum.

Multi-agency working is particularly important in terms of engaging with ME communities. ME communities face cultural barriers, discussed below, which can make confronting sexual abuse particularly difficult. As a result, there needs to be collaboration with ME organisations to ensure ME inclusion and an ME perspective when it comes to tackling CSE. Without this, ME communities are at risk of becoming isolated and unable to tackle CSE. At roshni, we would welcome collaboration with mainstream organisations in order to offer our unique ME insight. Finally, a multi-agency approach in Scotland needs to be taken in relation to awareness-raising. There is currently a real disconnect between the importance of the issue and the response it receives. We need to place CSE higher on the agenda of society as a whole. This should involve grassroots bodies with community connections, such as roshni, collaborating with statutory organisations which have the resources and funds to run a high-profile campaign. Through this collaboration we would hope to see improved understanding of CSE throughout Scottish society.

2. Wider issues surrounding CSE, particularly in relation to ME communities

- Race

The connection between race and CSE has been much discussed in the press. From our research it has emerged that front-line professionals believe the problem of CSE is not linked to race but to the vulnerability of the young people in question. Often the young people front-line services encountered had regular contact with the ‘night economy’, frequenting taxi offices and take away restaurants. This increased vulnerability is what allows predators access to them, regardless of race or culture. We should not be surprised that abusers will act across communities to take advantage of vulnerability. This is why society as a whole must co-operate on this issue. We need to target venues known to be part of this ‘night economy’ where young people can be found. This is a key means of disrupting CSE networks.

It is also important to note that ME young people are at risk of CSE, although they are perhaps not targeted in the same way. CSE in ME communities tends to be more hidden as ME young people, especially girls, tend to be more isolated and do not socialise as part of the night economy. Thus, we would call on the Scottish Government to protect those on the streets late at night, who are particularly vulnerable, but to also be aware that there may be many hidden ME children experiencing CSE within homes and closed communities. Disruption techniques need to be developed which offer support to these young people.

Moreover, it was stated at our conference that the media has been ‘pushing’ the stereotype of a Pakistani Asian abuser when in reality the most common abuser is a white man acting alone. This stereotype is perhaps on the wane since the Savile scandal. If we have learned anything from that particular tragedy it is that white men are just as likely to abuse as those from ME communities. It is also clear that focusing on racial trends draws attention away from looking at the whole picture.
trying to identify trends and focussing particularly on certain communities, abuse elsewhere will remain unnoticed.

It is evident that it is a diversion to talk about race and culture and that the Scottish Government must remember this in any strategy developed to combat CSE. This has isolated ME communities and mainstream services need to collaborate with ME organisations to regain community trust on this issue. It is far more helpful to focus on how we can ensure that children are never allowed to be so vulnerable again and how we can work together to guarantee this.

• Negative attitudes towards women in the media

It was acknowledged during our research that there are wider problems concerning negative attitudes towards women. It was suggested that our society as a whole tends to view women as objects. Our research showed that the objectification of women in the media contributes to the idea that young women are 'up' for anything, which in turns fuels vulnerability. Values and attitudes, many of which are held by wider society, fuel some of the misogynistic behaviour seen in the recent high profile CSE cases. Therefore, we would call on the Government to adopt a strategy to combat these negative attitudes. We need to educate young men and empower young women so that the misogynistic beliefs which fuel CSE no longer have a place in our society.

• Additional barriers in tackling CSE in ME communities

In ME communities, cultural barriers such as honour and shame mean that discussing sexual matters is problematic. If a young person is abused, this can have a devastating impact on the family’s reputation and can destroy the young person’s marriage prospects. Therefore, ME families can be reluctant to report abuse and CSE can remain undetected. Services need to work with organisations, such as roshni, which are equipped to approach these issues with the required cultural sensitivity and knowledge. Specialist ME organisations have the necessary community links and understanding to approach this problematic subject with ME communities. It can be intimidating for any young person to seek a prosecution. This is heightened in ME communities where cultural barriers play an additional role. Mainstream services and the Scottish Government therefore need to engage with ME organisations in order to develop a culturally sensitive CSE strategy, which offers support to ME young people who have been exploited and protects them in the criminal justice system.

3. What changes would be most helpful in preventing young people getting involved in CSE and in helping them escape it

• Education

Early intervention must be a high priority in terms of tackling CSE. While early intervention does not yield results immediately, it is important to have the courage to fund services and then follow them through for decades in order to see the benefit. We need to ensure young people are aware of the risks and are equipped to protect
themselves from CSE. Providing information through established access points such as schools, religious organisations and youth clubs, as well as more innovative methods such as online and text campaigns, is key to empowering young people. Young people need to be made aware of the help available for victims of CSE. We need to talk to young people, but much more importantly, we need to listen to them. There needs to be more grassroots interaction with young people, which can be achieved through multi-agency working between statutory organisations and voluntary sector projects. At roshni, we are already engaging in this process. We work with children and young people through our ‘SAFE’ workshop series, which engages with community and faith institutions to educate children about abuse and how to protect themselves from harm. This kind of engagement is vital if we are to prevent CSE occurring and should form a key part of the Government’s strategy. ME parents also find it difficult to discuss sexual matters with their children due to honour, shame and other cultural barriers. We need to empower ME parents to talk to their children and address these issues with them. In order to access ME parents and offer them culturally sensitive support, mainstream organisations must engage with ME services.

Communities also require education. In the CSE Action Plan for England and Wales it is stated that Local Safeguarding Children Boards need ‘to increase understanding of child sexual exploitation, in the professional and wider community… Where appropriate, they might seek to raise awareness through race and faith networks, based on agreed messages and materials.’ England and Wales have already recognised that, in order to access ME communities and ensure all children are protected, there must be collaboration with ME community organisations. We would urge Scotland to adopt a similar approach which engages ME communities in a sensitive manner and utilises organisations such as roshni and our strong community links. One of the attendees at our conference was a leading Islamic cleric who also felt that CSE should be addressed within religious institutions. He said, ‘As an Imam when I look at this case I ask myself, have I failed or have Imams in the UK failed in addressing this issue? There’s a large number of Muslims who come to pray and it is the best way to educate people.’ Evidently, roshni has the foundations in place to work with communities and faith organisations on this issue, and the Government must capitalise upon this. CSE needs to be more openly discussed across all communities, utilising all relevant institutions to develop a better understanding of the issue. It is not enough for the Scottish Government to act alone. They must be prepared to work with specialist organisations, community groups and religious organisations if the message is to reach all vulnerable groups.

- Training for Frontline Services

Front line professionals have told us that they find it difficult to engage on this issue because of a lack of understanding and confidence in addressing ME specific issues and for fear of being branded ‘racist.’ We need to support agencies in how to work

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with minority ethnic victims and offenders with confidence, through better training and more partnership with minority communities themselves. There is a fear of being branded culturally insensitive and more must be done to equip all services to confidently tackle CSE regardless of the race of the offender or victim. This could be achieved through partnership working with ME specific services and mainstream organisations. At roshni, we offer training, both face to face and online e-learning courses, which provide an insight into tackling instances of abuse with cultural sensitivity. We would urge the Government in the CSE Strategy to require all organisations working in this field to undertake extensive cultural sensitivity training. Ultimately, collaboration is the best way for Scotland to tackle CSE, sharing all the skills and knowledge we have available from across our public, private and third sectors to ensure that no child in Scotland is at risk of CSE.