Public Petitions Committee

Tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland

Supplementary written evidence from roshni

Question posed by Deputy Convener Mr Chic Brodie in relation to cultural sensitivity when working with minority ethnic victims of child sexual exploitation, 11th June 2013, Oral Evidence, Panel 2

Response by Anela Anwar, Head of Projects, roshni:

There are a number of culturally specific issues and barriers to tackling Child Sexual Exploitation in minority ethnic communities that any developed National Strategy and/or guidance and action plan must take account of. These are relevant in relation to prevention, reporting, prosecution and recovery.

I have outlined these issues below:

1. **Communication and Lack of Understanding:** Defining, recognising and speaking of child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a challenge for minority ethnic communities. There is a lack of appropriate vocabulary in minority ethnic languages to describe sexual exploitation as well as a lack of understanding as to what constitutes CSE.

2. **Denial and Secrecy is greater within minority ethnic communities:** CSE and child sexual abuse are taboo subjects within minority ethnic communities. They are not openly talked about and instances of exploitation/abuse are not discussed or reported.

3. **Honour & Shame:** The concepts of honour (‘izzat’) and shame (‘sharam’) are deeply entrenched within minority ethnic individuals and communities. Sexual abuse is considered to have a negative impact on honour and will bring shame onto the individual and family. It is not until an act has become public knowledge that honour is lost. For this reason many instances of exploitation/abuse are kept secret and not reported for a fear of the community finding out. Sexual exploitation/abuse within minority ethnic communities often remains hidden and unreported, as children and young people are too ashamed or afraid to speak out and are often prevented from reporting by both family and the wider community.

4. **Lack of Cultural Awareness:** There is a real perception that services lack understanding of cultural and religious issues and the impact of these on minority ethnic victims and their families. Serious concerns exist within minority ethnic communities that authorities would not understand their religion or culture. Research shows that minority ethnic girls and women are less likely to report
sexual abuse because they perceive service provision to be inadequate in providing a culturally sensitive response.

5. **Lack of Trust & Breach of Confidentiality:** Minority ethnic communities have a deep distrust of professionals and outside agencies. In addition, minority ethnic victims fear that confidentiality will be breached. Anecdotal evidence from services to minority ethnic children and families supports the view that South Asian, African, Caribbean and Chinese communities all share a common fear of ‘everyone finding out’. Turning to outside agencies and taking legal action is a difficult decision for many since it involves breaking their silence publicly and taking steps that are perceived negatively by the rest of the community. Consequences of reporting or disclosing abuse can often be harsh and sometimes even life threatening.

6. **Fear of the Repercussions:** Hostility, further violence, isolation, fear of loss of home and family are the most common reasons why instances of abuse/exploitation will not be disclosed. These are powerful barriers to reporting. Victims of sexual exploitation/abuse and their families will have a real fear of reprisals from not only the abuser but also a relatively strong community network that may condemn rather than help the victim. Repercussions can be severe, with survivors and their families facing potential isolation and ostracism from the community. In some instances, the repercussions can be violent with honour based violence and honour killings.

Frontline staff and professionals across public, private and third sectors tackling child sexual exploitation must have an awareness and understanding of these issues and barriers and must take these into account when working with minority ethnic communities.

Services should develop and implement culturally sensitive practice and staff should be trained to feel knowledgeable and confident to address child sexual exploitation within minority ethnic communities and work with minority ethnic victims.

Partnership working with specialist minority ethnic services is essential in tackling child sexual exploitation not only in building bridges and trust with minority communities but also to raise the capacity and build confidence amongst the mainstream workforce.

Finally, support should be provided to specialist minority ethnic services to provide culturally sensitive and specialist support to minority ethnic victims. Given the sensitivities around child sexual exploitation, specialist minority ethnic organisations are best placed to engage in initiatives on prevention and reporting as well as in the provision of specialist support services.