



WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO APPG INQUIRY INTO 'POP UP' BROTHELS

December 2017

Introduction

1. Muslim Women's Network UK (MWN UK) is a national Muslim women's organisation in Britain (www.mwnuk.co.uk). We are a small national charity (no. 1155092) that works to improve the social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls. Our membership also includes women of other faiths or of no faith and men who support our work. We find out about the experiences of Muslim women and girls through research and helpline enquiries. We identify policy and practice gaps and use this information to inform decision makers in government as well as informing our community campaigns at a grassroots level.
2. We also develop resources and train women so they are better aware of their rights. We have a separate website for our national helpline (www.mwnhelpline.co.uk) that provides advice and support on a range of issues some of which include: domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, female genital mutilation, divorce, discrimination, mental health etc.
3. MWN UK are very aware of the prevalence of sexual abuse and exploitation with Muslim and BME communities and the harm caused to victims. Our knowledge and experiences come from both our Helpline cases and research undertaken. In 2013 we published our report "Unheard Voices: The Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girls and Young Women", which brought to light the hidden experiences of Asian and Muslim girls and young women in a bid to raise awareness, aid understanding of the issues involved and help develop preventative strategies. A copy of our report can be found here:
http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/UnheardVoices.pdf.
4. As such, we felt it was necessary to provide evidence to the APPG in respect of its Inquiry into 'pop-up brothels' and highlight our concerns regarding the use of these for purposes of sexual exploitation.
5. Although we work predominantly with Muslim women and where relevant will focus on the experiences of Muslim women within our Evidence, the points we raise may also be relevant to non-Muslim women, as well as young men and boys who may also have been affected by sexual exploitation.

6. We respond to the questions of the Inquiry as follows:

The scale and nature of the practice:

• How do pop-up brothels operate? • Who is involved in the operation of pop-up brothels? • On what scale are pop-up brothels operating and has there been an increase?

7. We feel first of all that the APPG's understanding of 'pop up brothels' is incomplete. The practice is not limited to the use of residential properties and holiday lets rented for a limited period of time. Rather our research has highlighted that exploitation and abuse of girls and young women can take place in various locations including hotels, restaurants, takeaways and vehicles. Recently we have also come across a case where the premise used was a snooker hall, highlighting the breadth of the issue as ultimately any business premise can be used for such abuse after it has closed. Moreover residential properties such as flats and houses may not necessarily have been 'rented'; for example, in some cases house parties were thrown where victims were brought and raped by the attendees. Victims are also moved within cities, to nearby cities and across regions. One victim for example, recounted that she had been taken to every city along the main motorway from the city in which she resides.
8. In respect of the question as to how 'pop up brothels' operate, the following excerpt from our Unheard Voices report will perhaps provide you with the clearest response:

"My mate called me and said 'Bro I have a surprise for you, come over to this house.' When I got there 15 of them were sitting in the living room. My mate told me to go upstairs for my surprise. When I went into the bedroom, another friend was doing this girl (she was a 20 year old of Pakistani background). The lads went up one by one and took turns and while they were waiting they were calling their mates, cousins and uncles to come over and join in and showing off. Others turned up too including two older men who were taxi drivers, who went straight upstairs. One older man said I am going to call my son over so he can practice on her and later his 15-year-old son arrived in his uniform. Everyone took turns and it took 6 hours... The girl is not paid but she gets looked after, she is given food and the boys make sure she gets home safely if it gets late. There are set days Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays...."
9. The same individual mentioned another example of a group of six boys in their late teens calling their friends to come and have sex with a girl they had in a house. He explained that often a girl would date one of the boys, who then passed her on to another friend who then passed her on until everyone starts to "share" her.
10. We appreciate that the focus of the Inquiry is on 'pop up brothels' which are used temporarily but we do feel it is necessary to highlight that the premises used for sexual exploitation may not always be a temporary situation. A house could be used for one night in the guise of a house party or it could be used regularly, and it could even be a family home where other family members turn a blind eye to the abuse inflicted by the perpetrator on victims (in some cases the victim has been a family member herself). Business premises may also be used on alternate days, weeks or months so as not to arouse suspicion.

11. It is important to note that money may not always be a factor in such models of grooming, but that does not mean that the victims are not exploited and do not require assistance.
12. Our research and Helpline cases highlight that there is no distinct profile of perpetrators involved in sexual exploitation of Muslim and BME victims, other than sometimes sharing the same ethnicity as the victim (which is relevant in terms of the grooming techniques used as highlighted in our report). We have found that perpetrators varied in age, faith, ethnicity, professions and included married and single men. Our research also uncovered evidence of female involvement often consisting of them assisting the offenders to getting to know the victim, witnessing abuse and even encouraging it.
13. We feel it is also necessary to consider how perpetrators are exploiting and abusing victims. Different models of grooming can be at play and it is important to take these into account if sexual exploitation is to be tackled. For example, a victim may have been a part of an alleged Islamic marriage to the offender which was conducted in secret and done so with the aim of silencing the victim from opposing her so-called husband. If found at a premise being used as a 'pop up brothel', the perpetrator may simply state he is here with his wife.
14. It is difficult to answer the question as to the scale in which 'pop up brothels' operate or whether their use has been increasing as to do so would require us to gauge an understanding of the full scale in which sexual exploitation itself is taking place. MWNUK believe that the cases we have dealt with and/or are aware of are merely the tip of the iceberg and there are sadly many other victims of sexual exploitation who remain hidden. Further research needs to be carried, and strategies implemented so that we can tackle and end sexual exploitation and help those in need.

Links with organised crime:

• What links are there between organised crime groups and pop-up brothels?

15. Our research has found that sexual exploitation cases involved planning and organisation, rather than being opportunistic. For example if we consider the "older boyfriend" and "peer pressure" models of grooming, it involved working in partnership with younger men and boys connected to schools and colleges, who were either pupils at the same school or had not long been out of the education system who would groom girls before introducing them to older men. The "older boyfriend" also followed a typical pattern of giving gifts, attention and most importantly exploitation of vulnerabilities. For example, they would recognise that many of the victims were seeking to escape a conservative, controlling and perhaps abusive environment and would exploit these vulnerabilities through promises of love, marriage and safety.
16. When considering all those involved in the network, it is also important to note that for example, the 15 year old school boy's involvement may consist of the initial stages of befriending the victim and bringing her into contact with a higher level of individuals or may include inflicting sexual abuse himself. On the other hand, his actions may be as a result of being abused himself or alternatively due to bullying or blackmailing (such as disclosing his sexuality to family members which would place him at risk of violence).

17. A particularly worrying tactic used by perpetrators is to encourage girls to run away from home and contact the likes of women's groups and police to report that they were in danger of a forced marriage or honour based violence so that victims could be found accommodation, making them more accessible to the perpetrators. This is a clear example of why it is vital that all stakeholder organisations including refuges and homeless shelters are provided with training to be fully equipped to spot the signs of grooming, or potential grooming, and provide assistance.
18. There have been instances where the victim would not have been in contact with the perpetrators had it not been for separate criminal dealings occurring between the perpetrator and a partner or relative of the victim. For example, the brother may have become involved in drugs use and/or dealing; the perpetrator may force the victim to settle the debts of her brother and from this point on keep both siblings entrapped in their circle of exploitation.

Associated harms and exploitation:

• What is the scale and impact of sexual exploitation in pop-up brothels? • How do pop-up brothels impact on the wider community?

19. As stated at paragraph 14 above, the true scale at which sexual exploitation is occurring is not fully known and we feel it is necessary for further research to be carried out in this respect.
20. We feel that the main focus of the Inquiry should be with what is occurring **within** the 'pop up brothels'; that is, sexual exploitation and violence against women and girls. This very real issue is beyond concerns such as the market values of neighbouring properties (albeit concerns relating to matters such as nuisance, anti-social behaviour or sexual harassment do need to be taken into account). In fact, focusing on tangible impact on neighbourhoods will mean ignoring all those situations where premises are used covertly for sexual exploitation (such as using snooker halls or by throwing house parties) without third parties ever knowing what is truly occurring within. The continued existence of sexual exploitation is in itself the biggest and most important negative impact on all our communities and wider society.
21. We would also like to highlight the impact on the victims themselves which can include: mental health issues; suicidal tendencies and self-harming; PTSD; living in constant fear; gynaecological problems due to STIs and brutal rapes; health problems associated with drug and alcohol addictions; pregnancy; forced marriage; forcible hymen repair surgery; abuse by family; disownment; isolation from family, friends and wider community.

Effective responses and prevention strategies:

• How can individuals exploited in pop-up brothels be best provided with help and support? • How can organised crime networks profiting from sexual exploitation be stopped? • What, if any, action should the government take in relation to pop-up brothels?

22. Whilst we appreciate that the focus of this inquiry is on 'pop-up brothels', we feel that this question should be broadened to what can be done to assist all those who have

been sexually exploited rather than limiting considerations to those exploited in ‘pop up brothels’ only especially as it appears the working definition of the same as being used by the APPG is incomplete.

23. Whilst there is generally sufficient legislative measures available by which to prevent and tackle networks of sexual exploitation within the UK, we feel its effectiveness is limited due to a lack of proper utilisation in the first instance. We feel the key is to allocate appropriate resources to the tackling of sexual exploitation including training for all stakeholder organisations; this should not only include more dedicated police but also better investigative strategies. Perpetrators for example, sometimes use websites to ‘advertise’ victims of sexual exploitation (often pretending they are older than they are); we do wonder why, where offenders are using such overt methods, they are not investigated further?
24. It is important however to keep matters under review and introduce any legislation required to tackle any new models that come to light swiftly. Sections 33 and 34 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 for example relate to the keeping of brothels and landlords and tenants allowing premises to be used as brothels. However, what about the situation where money is not involved but the landlord is aware of the sexual exploitation taking place (such as a group of friends ‘sharing’ the victim), or where the landlord has not “let” the property in the strictest legal sense? Will the landlord be charged under section 33 instead of section 34? Will a licensor and licensee relationship be sufficient to hold the landlord to account? Would it assist to update the law to make the position clear to landlords so as to highlight the seriousness of the offences? We feel a more specific Inquiry needs to be carried out in this respect so that the laws can reflect the different circumstances in which sexual exploitation can occur and rogue landlords can be held to account.
25. It is also important to keep the needs of the victims in mind when considering measures by which to help and support them. With regard to Muslim and BME victims there may be specific cultural issues which need to be taken into account when considering safeguarding actions. A female victim for example may find that her marriage prospects have diminished and as a result, her family feel the only option is to take her abroad to get married (thus the victim becomes at risk of a forced marriage) or even to just remove her away from the public eye. On many occasions the family will take away complete support and the victims find themselves disowned, homeless and without any financial assistance. In other instances they may be in direct danger of honour based violence. It is unfortunate that such attitudes are prevalent in BME communities and much needs to be done to challenge these issues.
26. Shame, honour and stigma attached to being a victim of a sexual exploitation are hurdles which appear in various guises and it is vital that a support network is put in place that assists Muslim and BME victims not just in terms of proceeding through the criminal justice system but generally. Recent MWN Helpline cases have sadly highlighted to us that case handling by some members of the police of sexual abuse cases are not adequate; one victim informed us that the insensitive manner in which she was asked for details of her case by the police officer made her want to take her complaint back. She was also not kept up to date as to how the matter was proceeding and had no understanding of the court process; MWN provided her with the relevant information but we are concerned that had we not been approached to answer her

questions, this victim may have withdrawn her complaint which may have meant that a perpetrator of sexual exploitation was able to walk away without having to answer to anyone.

27. Support services must be faith and/or culturally sensitive and appropriate, so as to be able to identify any and all underlying issues that may have made the individuals vulnerable to exploitation in the first place. However, the individualities of all victims must be taken into account; it should not be the case that the same support package is provided to all in the same manner. For example, whilst one individual may wish to have their faith matters taken into consideration another may wish to stay away from such topics due to having been abused by a religious leader. Adequate training of issues affecting BME and/or Muslim victims is therefore imperative in ensuring that a proper support network is made available. The needs of victims with mental health issues and learning disabilities must also be considered and addressed. It is also necessary to ensure resources are available to meet demands; victims should not have to wait if they need counselling or therapy.
28. Consideration also needs to be given to the physical needs of a victim as well as emotional; in our case studies we have found that the lack of practicality shown has gone towards worsening a situation. A victim may have been disowned and been made homeless and has then been placed in accommodation in an area that keeps the victim very much in the public eye and thus discoverable by the offender as well as family members who may intend to harm her. As our research has shown accommodation such as refuges and hostels are targeted by offenders, it is important to take this into account.
29. A holistic approach needs to be taken when assessing the needs of victims. Many young victims will have missed out on education, and many others may be unable to find the means to support themselves financially. Support should include providing victims with assistance in terms of obtaining education, entering employment and developing life skills; this will aid empowerment and social inclusion of said victims and allow them to begin rebuilding their lives. To ignore these needs could mean victims return to the perpetrators of abuse and become trapped in an indefinite circle of exploitation.
30. MWNUK have been providing training to individuals and organisations in relation to sexual exploitation cases involving Muslim and/or BME victims so as to ensure that specific vulnerabilities and individualities can be identified and appropriate support and preventative measures can be provided. We are therefore able to assist in this respect.

Final Comments

31. As a point of clarification, we must explain that our comments and examples have been limited to Muslim and BME women due to the nature of our organisation and its work. As a national Muslim women's charity our work predominantly deals with Muslim and BME women albeit we also work with individuals of other faiths and are therefore also aware of issues of relevance to other faith and non-faith communities. We are also aware that some of the issues experienced by Muslim and BME women can also be experienced by non-Muslim, non-BME women, as well as men. In turn

we wish to clarify that where we make any recommendations, we do so on behalf of all those within wider society who may be affected and who may benefit from such recommendations.

32. Our case studies are anonymised for the safety and protection of those involved. Some cases however may have come to us anonymously and remained as such throughout our involvement.
33. MWNUK would like to express its willingness to assist through research, training, support, information or advice or any other means which would assist in tackling and ending the crime of sexual exploitation.
34. We would like to thank the APPG for holding an Inquiry into ‘pop up brothels’ and thank you for providing us with the opportunity to give Evidence. We hope it proves to be useful in your considerations.

**On behalf of Muslim Women’s Network UK,
Shaista Gohir OBE, Chair
Nazmin Akthar-Sheikh, Vice-Chair**

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