

NETWORK MEETING 27TH APRIL 2021

We Say No to Domestic Violence and Abuse

This network meeting, attended virtually by 40 participants, was held to inform and discuss the topic of Domestic Abuse which sadly continues to be a real issue for many households in Redbridge.

Staff and trustees were delighted to be joined by Miranda Black, LBR Domestic Abuse Service Manager, Jane Hogg, Senior Social Worker and Paree Banu Community Safety Officer.

The meeting commenced with input from two RFF Trustees Dr Pratibha Datta and Rabbi Larry Becker speaking about this topic from their respective faith perspectives.

Dr Datta stated that the Hindu faith condemns domestic abuse although it is acknowledged that it is a problem and does exist. Hindu households are encouraged to learn to understand the concept of duty as opposed to asserting rights and seek to understand each other other's behaviours and tensions. There can be underlying circumstances of financial pressures, the stress of caring for young children, unequal sharing of household duties, especially in nuclear families. In multi-generational households the elders would be expected to intervene in times of tension and provide support to tide the couple over and resolve problems.

Rabbi Becker explained that there was a myth that domestic abuse is infrequent in Jewish households but it is acknowledged that it does take place. There is little said about domestic abuse in the texts but one more well known saying is "Spare the rod, spoil the child" but in fact this refers to using nothing worse than a shoelace to administer punishment. In the 13th century there were examples of husbands who used force on their wives being brought to court but they could be excused if they pleaded it as done in anger and it had historically been more acceptable in Jewish households in Islamic countries but even in the 14th century writings stated that wife is given for life and not for sorrow and she should not be expected to live with a snake. In the modern world it is accepted by all Rabbis that domestic abuse is not permitted in any circumstances.

Miranda, Jane and Paree jointly presented information defining the different forms of abuse (physical; sexual; psychological or emotional; use of threats/intimidation. The emotional abuse being the hardest to spot and come to terms with, as it leads victims to believe that they are to blame, with their self-esteem being worn down with constant undermining or "put downs". Abuse can be economic or digital as well as harassing or coercive.

Coercive control aims to punish / harm a victim and it can slowly creep in isolating the victim from family and friends – it can make it so uncomfortable to act in a way that is its easier to just go along with what is asked. Gaslighting sows the seed of doubt so that a victim questions their sanity and could maybe take the form of preventing the victim attending their place of worship or following their faith practice (eg adhering to dietary requirements).

In some cultures, there can be incidences of forced marriage or so-called honour- based abuse following rumours of inappropriate behaviour, mode of dress or sexual orientation.

Domestic Abuse is a big problem in the UK with 3 women killed a fortnight, and affects 1 in 4 women, 1 in 6 men and 1 in 7 children. There are lots of barriers preventing victims seeking help, but it is more likely that victims will confide in family members or friends rather than an agency. Therefore it is important that everyone is aware of the signs to look out for and avoid saying the "wrong" words.

In these times of lockdown there may be more telephone contact than in person contact therefore it is good to be aware of any shouting or abusive comments being heard in the background during phone conversations.

Things to Avoid Saying or Thinking

People sometimes say "*all couples argue*" but abuse and disagreement are not the same thing.

“She provoked him” saying this places blame on the victim.

“It is a private matter” – this condones the abuse.

“If it’s that bad, you’d leave” – this minimises the reasons why victims stay – victims need understanding not judgement.

“I think you should” – this is disempowering – victims have managed up to this point – they are experts in their own lives – any decision needs to be their choice.

How to Respond

It is important to Listen (without judgement) / Believe/ Signpost – if someone is in danger always ring 999.

Local Organisations

In Redbridge contact Reach Out on 0800 1456410 – lines open Monday-Friday 9 am to 5 pm or email Reachout@redbridge.go.uk. This service will listen and believe a victim and can implement a quick response with safety planning and connect to Refuge and other services. High risk referrals will be referred to MARAC (Multi-Agency Response” and other services such as Free Your Mind for children who have suffered domestic abuse.

Refuge is a local service for Redbridge residents who are victims of gender-based violence

- Phone: 0800 169 7759 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)
- Email: redbridgevawg@refuge.org.uk

National Organisations

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 2000 247 - 24 hour advice and support regarding domestic abuse

Rape Crisis Helpline – 0808 802 9999 -For women who have experienced sexual violence

Galop – 0800 999 5428 - Support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing violence, including domestic abuse

Men’s Advice Line - 0808 8010327 - For male domestic abuse survivors

Karma Nirvana - 0800 5999 247 - Helpline for ‘Honour’-based abuse and Forced Marriage

Bright Sky - A free mobile app providing support and information

Other Redbridge Trustees were then invited to give the perspective on this topic from their respective faiths.

Imam Rafiq explained that the Koran is clear that there should be no harm or reciprocating of harm therefore you do not put yourself in a situation where you can be harmed but should instead reach out. Believing men and women should be protectors of each other with no compulsion in religion and should not enter a contract of marriage against your will. The quality of believers should be that all are safe from their conduct or their tongue and to live with each other in kindness with compassion and mercy. Spouses have rights and must not be physically or verbally abused.

Phil Butcher gave the Christian perspective that Christian marriage is to be based on co-operation, respect, kindness and understanding and the vows include to love and cherish one another. It is important in a Christian marriage to allow freedom and independence but sadly domestic abuse is endemic and so often hidden in communities.

Harmander Singh explained that Sikh scriptures emphasis is on marriage as equals and to bring up children with a duty of care to find the correct marriage partner for them. Harmander has been involved in drawing up a 7 point plan to reduce domestic abuse but the uptake to adopt this from the Gurdwaras have been slow. It can be very difficult for women to get help when communities are concealing it and he has known of community leaders providing false evidence to courts supporting perpetrator of violence.

Carol Khorsandyon of the Bahai faith said that sometimes a perpetrator can be viewed as a pillar of society and the community will be unaware of the abuse which makes it hard for a victim to be believed.

Phil asked the speakers about the growing issue of dementia in the population and if this can be a risk factor for abuse. Miranda agreed that this can be the case with either the person with dementia becoming violent and abuse or the carer becoming exhausted and frustrated – in these cases it may be possible for extra respite care being provided with provision of daycare services to give them space apart. There is an independent charity called “Safe Lives” that works on behalf of people with disabilities who are victims of domestic abuse.

Another question was about disclosure from a child in a school or out of school setting. Jane confirmed that this would be reported and trigger a child protection investigation.

Imam Rafiq summarised that it is clear that all faiths are united in their beliefs against violence but sadly there can be cultural misinterpretation of texts and then it should be the duty of faith leaders to correct this. Imam will tell a perpetrator of abuse that he is a criminal and will refer to counselling – there is a charity in Neasden that has been set up to support Muslim victims of domestic abuse.

Phil explained that he is involved with a charity called “Explore” where married couples visit schools and answer questions about relationships from pupils aged 14-18. It has become apparent that children who have grown up witnessing domestic abuse will believe it is normal behaviour.

Carol suggested that if these situations continue then children are learning behaviour that they believe is acceptable – Miranda confirmed that sadly this is the case and these children often go on to become perpetrators themselves.