



# BMER Women, the Law and Violence – Where's the Justice?



Informing, educating and empowering  
women on their legal rights



## About Rights of Women

Rights of Women is an Industrial and Provident society (not-for profit), which was founded in 1975 to promote the interests of women in relation to the law. Rights of Women is a membership organisation that works to attain justice and equality by informing, educating and empowering women on their legal rights. The organisation runs two confidential legal advice lines for women, one providing advice in areas such as family law, relationship breakdown and domestic violence, and one focusing on immigration, asylum and sexual violence. We produce publications and information sheets, organise conferences and training courses and undertake policy and research work in areas of law affecting women.

The organisation is funded by the London Councils and the Big Lottery Fund



Disclaimer: This publication is a report of proceedings at the Conference *BMER Women, The Law and Violence – Where's the Justice?* convened by Rights of Women on 26 September 2007, held at Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD. This report is not intended to be a verbatim record. In addition, many of the footnotes to the presentations featured in this publication have been added by Rights of Women.

Rights of Women  
52-54 Featherstone street  
London EC1Y 8RT

Telephone: 020 7251 6575/6  
Fax: 020 7608 0928  
Email: [info@row.org.uk](mailto:info@row.org.uk)  
[www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk)

© Rights of Women, 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, without permission of Rights of Women.

To receive further copies of this report, please contact Rights of Women.

# Contents

Preface	2
Morning Session – Violence against BMER women: Setting the Scene	
Introduction by the Chair	3
Keynote Address: Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC	3
Shaminder Ubhi	5
Farhat Khan	8
Question and Answer Session	10
Workshop Reports	12
Afternoon Session – Taking the Agenda Forward	
Yasmin Rehman	17
Marai Larasi	19
Question and Answer Session	21
Keynote Address – A High Profile Survivor	22
Close of Conference	22
Annex I: Biographies of Speakers and Workshop Facilitators	24
Annex II: Conference Agenda	28
Annex III: List of Conference Delegates	29

# Preface

Our conference this year is the culmination of many years of campaigning, providing training and writing on legal issues relating to Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee women including women seeking asylum (BMER women) by Rights of Women. Our focus on BMER women is not to single out certain communities, but rather to recognise that BMER women have historically been and continue to be marginalised and disadvantaged, particularly in relation to their legal rights and remedies.

This conference was extremely timely. Over the last year there have been significant developments in law and policy affecting BMER women such as those related to forced marriage, 'honour' based violence and trafficking. In particular, we were privileged to have had the opportunity of working closely with Lord Lester on the drafting of the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 and are indebted to him for his unwavering commitment in seeing his Act through Parliament. I also want to express our thanks to our former Policy Officer, Sanchita Hosali, whom Lord Lester specifically acknowledged in his keynote speech, for her valuable contributions to the Act on behalf of Rights of Women.

We dedicated the conference to the memory of Banaz Mahmood and the countless other women who have lost their lives as a consequence of male violence against them.

Although it was clear from the contributions of speakers and delegates that there is still a long way to go before violence against BMER women is eliminated, the conference has strengthened our resolve to work together to end this appalling injustice. It was inspiring to see such a wide range of different organisations who work with BMER women engaging in such a vital debate and I hope that the partnerships that were forged will continue to develop beyond this event.

Since the conference, our work on issues affecting BMER women continues. This year's extensive outreach training program includes courses relating to immigration and asylum, trafficking and forced marriage. In addition, funding from Comic Relief is enabling us to extend the remit of our work to support the needs of asylum seeking women affected by sexual violence through our sexual violence advice line and publications. We continue to highlight areas of law and policy which have an impact on BMER women and are actively involved in the campaign to abolish no recourse to public funds.

This conference would not have been possible without the support of many people. We would especially like to express our gratitude and appreciation to all the speakers and workshop contributors who gave their time and expertise so generously. Finally, I would like to thank all the staff and volunteers at Rights of Women for their energy, enthusiasm and commitment to making this conference such a successful event.

**Emma Scott**  
*Acting Director*

# Morning Session

## Violence against BMER women: setting the scene

### Opening remarks: Judy Richards

Judy began by introducing Rights of Women and highlighting the long history that Rights of Women has addressing discrimination and violence against women including Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee women and women seeking asylum (BMER).

Judy explained that the Conference would examine recent and forthcoming laws affecting domestic violence and sexual violence and abuses predominantly experienced by BMER women. She made it clear that the focus on BMER women was not about singling out certain communities but rather about recognising that BMER women who experience violence are a specific group that have been marginalised and often denied access to justice.

Judy observed that violence against women cuts across all boundaries, whether they are race, ethnicity, religion, culture or class. For Rights of Women it was important to view the violence experienced by BMER women within the broader context of violence against women.

Given the many policy and legal developments in the area of BMER women accessing justice – such as the recent Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 and increasing initiatives around ‘honour’ based violence and trafficking, Judy emphasised the timely nature of the Conference. It would provide delegates not only with a thorough grounding in the law and legal rights of BMER women but would also contribute to vital discussions concerning access to the law, service provision and a platform from which to campaign for reform.

Judy then introduced Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC, the morning session’s keynote speaker.

### Morning keynote address: Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC

Lord Lester thanked Judy Richards and emphasised that, as the only man present, he was privileged to have been asked to speak. He said that he was proof that it is not necessary to be a woman in order to be a feminist.

Lord Lester’s address focused on the origins of the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 and its passage through Parliament, which he said had been remarkable and an example of just what can be achieved when non-governmental organisations such as Rights of Women work together on an important issue. It also illustrated how Government can be persuaded by passionate reason to enact well drafted laws to deal with real social problems.

Lord Lester acknowledged the strong support from Rights of Women for his Bill, and extended particular thanks to Sanchita Hosali, Policy Officer at Rights of Women, who had prepared briefings for the Bill’s second reading debate, submitted a detailed response about how the Bill could be improved and made the views of Rights of Women known to the leaders of all the parties in the House of Lords. He was delighted to be able to express his gratitude to her publicly at the opening of such an important Conference.

Lord Lester referred to forced marriage as a serious social evil and said that his Bill sought to combat and remedy the forcing of children and young adults to marry against their will. He said that it gives rise to gross abuses of human rights, especially affecting children and young people of either sex and that forced marriage is a form of domestic violence. Noting the link between forced marriages and ‘honour’ based violence, Lord Lester said that the term forced marriage was inherently contradictory; it is condemned across and within all communities including the more religious and traditional sections of society.



*Lord Lester and Shaminder Ubhi*

Lord Lester then discussed the background to the forced marriage legislation. He reflected on the Government's initial decision not to make forced marriage a crime and acknowledged the potential difficulties around criminalising families, inevitable police involvement and jury trials. Many people were deeply divided in their response to the consultation on this issue. When the criminal remedy was rejected, he decided to explore a civil remedy, believing it would provide much more effective protection to victims and potential victims. His first draft Bill was largely modelled on the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

He said that as a white male he recognised that the Bill's success depended on it being owned by those who really knew about the problem. His belief in the importance of collaborating with those in the field first brought him into contact with Southall Black Sisters and he was delighted to see that Hanana Siddiqui and Pragna Patel were both taking part in the Conference.

Lord Lester said he was initially concerned about opposition from those who worked with victims of forced marriage. However, these concerns turned out to be unfounded. He also paid tribute to experts in the field

who had educated him into shifting the focus of forced marriage from being a private law to a family law matter. In particular he acknowledged the very significant contribution of Khatun Sapnara, one of the most experienced family law practitioners in the area of forced marriage.

Supported by organisations including Southall Black Sisters, Rights of Women, Karma Nirvana, Ashiana Network, the Middle East Centre for Women's Rights, Women's Aid, the NSPCC, Liberty and Justice, as well as senior specialist members of the police service such as Commander Steve Allen<sup>1</sup>, Lord Lester said that he had lobbied hard with the Government who were initially opposed to the Bill. In contrast, the House of Lords, perhaps because of its cultural and gender diversity as well as cross party members, had been much more supportive. Lord Lester recalled how he was able to put together a coalition of supporters following a number of meetings and consultations. On 26 January 2007 there was an extraordinary second reading debate in the House of Lords in which everyone who spoke supported the Bill. He said that Baroness Ashton who was answering for the Government bravely defied convention by indicating that she had an open mind to the Bill.

The turning point was when one of Lord Lester's colleagues in the Lords persuaded Tony Blair to do a U-turn and support the Bill. After this it went through both the Commons and the Lords with amazing speed and as a result there is now a Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 on our statute books.

**'Thank you for keeping women on the agenda of those who want to forget us.'**

Conference delegate

Lord Lester then turned to the purpose of the Act which, by making it unlawful to force or coerce someone to marry against their will, aimed to seek a change in culture and a sensitive way of negotiating with traditional and often reactionary families and communities. It was both about protecting the honour of the victim through private family courts as well as creating a deterrent within communities and families and by giving victims access to simple remedies before a marriage takes place.

One of the Act's great strengths, he said, is the wide definition of force which includes coercion by threats and psychological methods as well as physical violence. It also covers the conduct not just of direct family members, but also friends, community leaders and bounty hunters through the inclusion of provisions relating to aiding and abetting, counselling and procuring, encouraging and conspiring. Lord Lester drew attention to the fact that the Act puts the guidance on forced marriage on a statutory footing and importantly, requires public authorities – such as schools, local educational authorities and the police – to have regard to the guidance. He also stressed the significance of potential third party applications for forced marriage protection orders as well as the very wide court powers to protect the victim including a power of arrest.

However, Lord Lester acknowledged that laws in themselves were not enough. For example, there has never been a single prosecution under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. Unless the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 was implemented it would not make any practical difference. It was therefore vital that significant government resources were made available

both to the Forced Marriage Unit<sup>2</sup> and to those agencies and organisations which were represented in the audience.

Lord Lester concluded his address by referring to a book that he wrote on race and law in which he said that cultural tolerance must not be a cloak for oppression and injustice within the immigrant communities themselves. Despite the fact that the book was published over 30 years ago, it was only very recently that opinion makers and decision makers had begun to recognise the importance of these sentiments.

*The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 enables a victim or a 'relevant third party' to apply for a Forced Marriage Protection Order. . On 12 December 2007 the government launched its consultation paper on 'Relevant third parties' and invited responses on the type of people or organisations that should be included in the definition. The consultation closed on 14 March 2008. The latest information from the Home Office is that the estimated implementation date for the Act is autumn 2008.*

### **Shaminder Ubhi**

Shaminder thanked Rights of Women and Ranjit Kaur for being invited to speak at the Conference. She said it was humbling to be on a platform with Lord Lester who had been such an ally for women who work to end violence against women.

Shaminder's presentation focused on the experience of Ashiana Network<sup>3</sup> as a frontline service provider and the progress and pitfalls of developing and sustaining services in a changing environment.

She explained that Ashiana Network, had started delivering services in the late 1980s

<sup>2</sup> The UK government's Forced Marriage Unit deals with 250-300 cases of forced marriage every year. It provides support to survivors of forced marriage as well as practical support and information to women at risk of being forced into marriage. For further information see their website [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) or call 020 7008 0151.

<sup>3</sup> Ashiana Network, which was founded in 1989, provides temporary safe supportive housing for South Asian, Turkish, and Iranian women between the ages of 16-30 who are experiencing domestic violence. For further information please see their website [www.ashiana.org.uk](http://www.ashiana.org.uk) or telephone 020 8539 9656.



*Morning panel*

with one safe house for South Asian, Turkish and Iranian women who were experiencing domestic violence. Today, Ashiana Network's women's services include two safe houses, one of which is specifically for women fleeing forced marriage, as well as outreach services, advocacy services, counselling and support groups for women. The second branch of Ashiana Network's work is the provision of youth services, which involves working mainly with young people aged 11-16, educating them about domestic violence through awareness raising workshops. The third branch concerns training provision to the voluntary and statutory sector on domestic violence and cultural issues such as forced marriage.

Shaminder said that the key issue for Ashiana Network as a BMER organisation was funding. The resourcing of the voluntary sector had undergone major change in the last four or five years including a new commissioning process. This was having a major impact in particular on small specialist

BMER organisations many of whom had suffered because they do not have the same resources to tender for services as large generic organisations. In addition, the changing priorities of funders meant that small organisations constantly have to reinvent themselves to meet different criteria. She concluded that it was essential, particularly for small organisations, to have a consistent, long-term plan for sustainable funding.

Shaminder moved on to look at the radical changes in domestic violence policy and practice, in particular the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004. She said it was important for women's groups to respond to the government inquiry into the effectiveness of the legislation. She welcomed the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 and was hopeful that it would make a difference to women accessing justice and support previously denied to them. In reviewing recent legislation, Shaminder lastly touched on the Equality Act 2006 and the gender



equality duty<sup>4</sup> which all organisations, whether statutory or voluntary have to comply with. The intention, she explained, was to create a level playing field in promoting equality between men and women. But she sounded a note of caution: the legislation could be used to promote equality but have a gender neutral policy which fails to address gender-based violence. She urged delegates to ensure that this did not happen.

Shaminder spoke about the general difficulty that women had accessing justice and appropriate services. She felt this was exacerbated by the complexity of the problems that a woman might present with. For example, many of the women who approach Ashiana Network come with multiple problems including self-harm issues, depression, eating disorders, language difficulties and immigration issues. Shaminder gave an example of a woman that had been supported by Ashiana Network.

A 25 year old Turkish woman who was at risk of a forced marriage to her cousin had fled to the UK. She had started a relationship with another man who she thought would protect her and married him. However, he had issues with drinking and drug abuse and she endured repeated and severe sexual violence

**‘Wonderful to see so many BMER women represented and representing. This conference meets the high standard we have come to expect from Rights of Women.’**

Conference delegate

from him. She eventually got the courage to leave him and reported his crimes to the police. She had no family or friends, did not speak English and was homeless. When she eventually made contact with her family in Turkey she was told that if she ever returned she would be killed. She approached Ashiana Network, who helped her with her Home Office application and emotional support to build her confidence. Although her husband was acquitted of sexual abuse, her application for indefinite leave to remain was successful. Had she returned home to Turkey she would almost certainly have been the victim of ‘honour’ based violence.

Finally, Shaminder gave two moving examples of women who had been supported by Ashiana Network. She then read out a quote from a woman who was the victim of forced marriage and said that her words demonstrate just how significant it is for women who find their own independence.

*‘...Since leaving, my family have disowned me and completely withdrawn their support. Leaving home will always be the hardest decision that I have ever made and no one will ever understand the pain of losing a family unless you’ve been through it yourself. Although I miss my family terribly, I have no regrets about my decision as it brought many positive things to my life. The freedom to make my own choices in life is a great feeling which I hope I never have to sacrifice again.’*

Shaminder emphasised the need to deal with the barriers that continue to prevent BMER women from reporting violence and accessing the services that they need including language difficulties, immigration issues, cultural differences, isolation from the community and support networks, not fitting

<sup>4</sup> The gender equality duty came into force on 6 April 2007. It places a general duty on public bodies, such as the police, to actively promote equality between men and women by taking account of their different needs. For further information see [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com).

in and the lack of awareness of available support. She said that for many of these women the effects of domestic violence can last a lifetime. However, she continued to be inspired by the strength and determination of the many women who work so hard to gain equality and justice. Equally, the courage and resilience shown by those women who experience domestic violence was a constant source of encouragement to her. She acknowledged the huge strides that had already been made in dealing with domestic violence but urged delegates to continue to build on their work because there is so much more still to do.

### **Farhat Khan**

Farhat's presentation focused on her personal experience of fleeing domestic violence in Pakistan and on giving delegates an insight into what she described as the 'nightmare world' of a woman seeking asylum in Britain.

She said that until recently she was described by the Home Office as a 'bogus asylum-seeker'<sup>5</sup>. It took six and a half heartbreaking and long years before the Home Office acknowledged the need for her and three of her children to have international protection by granting them full refugee status. Her eldest daughter, however, was still awaiting a decision and had to endure the agony of feeling that her fresh asylum application may be refused on a daily basis.

In telling her story, Farhat said that she would leave it to delegates to decide whether the British justice system had treated her and other asylum-seeking women like her fairly or not.

Farhat first claimed asylum for herself and her five children in the UK in 2000. She had fled Pakistan because of violence towards her and her children from her husband and his family. She suffered verbal abuse, physical beatings and humiliation. Farhat's husband

had refused to divorce her because of the shame and dishonour he said it would bring on him and his family.

Her decision to leave Pakistan was a consequence of her mother-in-law's decision that Farhat's two daughters then aged 5 and 8 should get engaged to her two grandsons, both of whom were 15 years older than her daughters and more violent than her husband. It was planned that the girls would get married when they reached puberty.

Farhat told delegates that it took all her courage to leave without her husband's permission. Predictably, he was absolutely outraged when she did so and vowed to take revenge for what he regarded as the dishonour brought on him and his family.

Farhat chose to seek asylum in the UK because during her last three years in Pakistan she had worked for the British

**'Excellent – a well informed, knowledgeable and most rewarding event!'**

Conference delegate



<sup>5</sup> This is not a legal term. It is a political concept first coined by Anne Widdecombe, then shadow home secretary, at the Conservative Party Conference in 1999 and has been used to stigmatise people who are seeking asylum.

Department for International Development (DFID) and had been impressed at the commitment expressed by the British Government to the situation of women in Pakistan. Her background as a national consultant on women's issues for DFID and the fact that her British colleagues knew about her personal situation gave Farhat confidence that she would be treated sympathetically if she sought protection in the UK.

The opposite turned out to be the case. On the evening of their arrival Farhat and her children were kept at Heathrow Airport until 2am despite being exhausted from the trauma of fleeing Pakistan. Farhat and her children were then dispersed to Manchester. She described how naïve she was in believing that she and her children would be granted asylum and how horrified she felt when her application was rejected by the Home Office.

Farhat went on to describe her subsequent appeal against the Home Office decision. She said that the immigration adjudicator was biased and hostile throughout the proceedings and that it came as no surprise to her when the appeal was rejected.

Putting the legal background of her asylum application in a wider context, Farhat reminded delegates how in 1999 the House of Lords had recognised that women in Pakistan faced persecution because the state was unwilling or unable to offer them protection<sup>6</sup>. As a result of this decision, the Home Office was obliged to grant asylum to women fleeing Pakistan due to gender based persecution.

Despite this important judgement, the Home Office had continually sidestepped its obligation to give protection to such women. In cases where credibility is not even challenged the Home Office refuses to grant

asylum on the basis that a woman can simply relocate to another part of Pakistan. Farhat pointed out that this is completely at odds with the reality of Pakistani culture which makes it impossible for a single woman to move to a new community when she has no links away from support systems without leaving herself vulnerable to sexual harassment and unwanted attention. She believed that the Home Office and immigration adjudicators are using the option of internal relocation to refuse applications from women asylum-seekers in order to limit the number of successful applications and ignoring the huge risks that this poses.

In 2002 Farhat was granted permission to work by the Home Office and began doing paid work. However, permission was withdrawn when appeal rights on her asylum case were exhausted and she was forced to go back on benefits. Farhat said that it was a huge blow because work gave her the opportunity to have a constructive role in society instead of being a paid asylum-seeker. As a volunteer, however, she said that she has received a number of awards. Farhat told delegates of the irony that while liable to detention and possible deportation she was being honoured by invitations to Buckingham Palace and Downing Street.

Farhat's greatest achievement was setting up a Manchester based group called Women Asylum-Seekers Together (WAST)<sup>7</sup>. By sharing skills, knowledge and experience and by supporting each other this group of asylum-seeking women of different nationalities who have fled their home country and face deportation, empower each other to overcome obstacles such as rejection, isolation, depression, potential deportation and possible destitution.

<sup>6</sup> Islam v Secretary of State for the Home Department, R v Immigration Appeal Tribunal and Another ex parte Shah [1999] 2 AC 629

<sup>7</sup> WAST is a self-supporting group set up and run by women seeking asylum. For more information call 07852 765 193 or see [www.refugeewomen.com](http://www.refugeewomen.com)

Farhat spoke about the constant difficulties that women face in providing evidence of violence and how, even if the account of a woman's experience is believed by the Home Office, it is frequently trivialised. She also expressed her concern that asylum-seekers are being used by politicians as scapegoats in order to explain away problems in the UK whether it be a housing shortage or policing. Consequently asylum-seeking women experience the double problem of both political and gender discrimination.

Lastly, Farhat spoke of what it was like to be an asylum-seeker. She said that it was not just about immigration status, but a way of existence and a state of mind. Had she been believed by the Home Office when she made her original application seven years earlier she, her two older children and all their supporters could have contributed so much more to the British economy instead of running a huge anti-deportation campaign. But, she said, being granted refugee status was personally important to her because it was an acknowledgement by the Home Office that it made a mistake in her initial asylum application.

She ended by saying that although she had been beaten and abused by her husband he had not been able to take away the pride and belief that she felt in herself. She had also refused to become a victim of what she considered to be the Home Office's pathological hatred of asylum-seekers and would continue to fight back on behalf of all the other women who come to the UK full of hope and are subjected to a political agenda that targets the most vulnerable.

### **Morning Q and A**

Debora Singer, from the Refugee Women's Resource Project<sup>8</sup>, said that she was struck by the inconsistency in the Government's

treatment of women. On the one hand there is a raft of legislation in place to protect women from forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and domestic violence. However, at the same time when women come to the UK fleeing their countries because of forced marriage, FGM or 'honour' based violence, they are refused asylum. She wanted to hear the panel's comments on what can be done about highlighting these inconsistencies to the public.

**Lord Lester** began by stating that he is married to an immigration judge. The one part of Farhat's speech he did not agree with was her generalisation about judges as though they represent a government agency with a political agenda. Although there are 'deeply reactionary, bad and lazy judges' in the area and miscarriages of justice do happen, it was also important to realise that people such as his wife are independently appointed, impartial and hugely committed to the work that they do. He said that they make the really agonising and difficult decisions about whether someone has a well founded fear of persecution. He acknowledged that while some of the more senior judges do operate what he called a disgusting system, he did not think it was helpful to write off the entire judiciary who deal with immigration and asylum cases.

Lord Lester also noted that as public authorities, both the courts and the offices running the immigration asylum service, must have regard to the forced marriage guidance. He was sure there would be a major public education drive by the judicial studies board to educate the immigration judges in the issues which had been described so vividly by Farhat.

**Shaminder** agreed that there were huge inconsistencies in how cases were dealt with.

<sup>8</sup> The Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP) was set up at Asylum Aid in 2000 and aims to enable women seeking asylum in the UK to obtain protection and security, to maintain their dignity and to be treated with respect during the asylum process. For further information please see [www.asylumaid.org.uk](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk).

She acknowledged that, as in Farhat's case, the abuse she suffered continued once she had arrived in the UK. Shaminder said that it was important to put pressure on the Home Office to make changes in the immigration legislation to account for women who experience domestic violence and who will face persecution in their country of origin if they return.

**Farhat** said that she did not have statistics to hand, nor could she say how many judges make fair or correct decisions and how many do not. However, from her experience in the advice centre at WAST, she had seen many

decisions that were very obviously wrong. It was not a question of the number of errors – one wrong decision was enough because a life is at risk. To send a person back to possible death or further persecution simply should not happen.

**Judy** said that as Chair she wanted to remind everyone of the support that they can provide to organisations such as WAST, Rights of Women, the Ashiana Network and Southall Black Sisters who can then work to ensure that judges are properly trained and so reduce the inconsistencies in their judgements.



# Workshop reports



*Heather Harvey*



*Tania Pouwhare*

**‘Complex issues explained in lay terms by professional, experienced women. Easily accessible and well worth attending.’**

Conference delegate

**Ranjit Kaur**, Director of Rights of Women, invited each of the four Chairs to provide a summary of the morning and afternoon workshops.

## **Workshop 1: Violence against women: international and national frameworks**

Sanchita Hosali, Policy Officer at Rights of Women, reported that both workshops had generated a lot of discussion among delegates following presentations by Heather Harvey from Amnesty International UK and Tania Pouwhare from the Women’s Resource Centre. The international section focused primarily on international law, human rights law and the responsibility of the government to address violence against women. The national section looked at the local frameworks and local laws that can be used to ensure violence against women is kept on the agenda.

Three key issues were highlighted in the morning session. The first was the fundamental importance of having an overarching definition of violence against women that draws on human rights laws. This would stop the current practice of segregating violence experienced primarily by BMER women as something ‘other’. Workshop participants agreed that a definition of domestic violence would not be sufficient because it would perpetuate the marginalisation of violence experienced by BMER women.

Secondly, it was important that women’s organisations really made use of the gender equality duty. For example, they can ensure that decisions made by local authorities in relation to the funding of service provision are fully compliant with the duty. If they do not comply, then they must be held to account.

The third issue that participants identified related to the importance of training. Sanchita noted that this would enable the women’s sector to gain a better

understanding of the relationship between human rights laws and violence against women so that women's organisations as a whole were in agreement on the issue. It was also essential that training in violence against women issues was targeted at decision-makers, judges and local authorities.

Sanchita reported that the afternoon discussion had focused on concern that the violence against women agenda had been hijacked by the anti-terrorism agenda which had marginalised the issue of women's safety. There was also agreement among participants about the importance of ensuring an understanding that violence experienced by BMER women was not just about 'honour' based violence but rather a whole range of issues. Discussion also looked at the gender duty and ways of holding the government accountable.

### **Workshop 2: Violence against women: children and the law**

Emma Scott, Senior Legal Officer at Rights of Women, began by discussing the workshop presentation by Michelle Springer-Benjamin from the NSPCC. This had focused on the impact of violence on children, the effect that it has on their development and the urgent need for research and participation particularly of BMER children and young people.

The workshop first looked at the problems experienced amongst the agencies that are tackling the issues of violence against children and young people. The discussion looked at examples of good practice. Lastly, participants explored possible reforms, not only of the law but also of the ways in which agencies were working.

Emma reported that participants had felt it was important to raise awareness particularly among young women between 16-18 years old who fell outside the social services framework. It was the already under-resourced voluntary organisations rather



*Michelle Springer-Benjamin*

than the statutory sector that generally seemed to fill the gaps in service provision.

The workshop looked at the existing protection that the law provides in relation to female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, sexual offences, and trafficking and discussed whether it was sufficient. There was a general feeling that the Government was quick to legislate but reluctant to implement the legislation.

In relation to good practice, participants shared their experiences about help lines, mentoring schemes and youth participation programmes. However, participants agreed there was still a reluctance within the education system to address issues around violence.

The afternoon workshop looked at the importance of adopting an overall strategy to which every agency would adhere. This would help ensure consistency, continuity and accountability among the different agencies working with children and young people.



*Hannana Siddiqui*

**‘A fabulous opportunity to meet intelligent, knowledgeable and passionate women working in the sector in an open and non-judgemental environment.’**

Conference delegate



14 *Aisha Gill*

Participants also felt strongly that young people should be involved in shaping policy and codes of guidance, especially among BMER sectors and that they should be encouraged to voice their views.

### **Workshop 3: Forced marriage: the law and protection**

Holly Pelham, Legal Officer at Rights of Women, reported that there had been wide ranging discussions in both the morning and afternoon workshops following the presentations by Hanana Siddiqui of Southall Black Sisters and Aisha Gill, senior lecturer in criminology at the University of Roehampton.

Three main themes had come through from the workshops. Firstly, participants were unanimous in the need for resources in order to implement the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007. This was essential since without effective implementation the Act risked becoming as ineffective as the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. In particular, sufficient resources needed to be put into improving the capacity of agencies that dealt with forced marriage, as well as providing financial support for educational and community services. While participants praised the forced marriage guidelines on paper, there was scepticism about their actual effect and concern again that resources were not yet being channelled into the various bodies to enable implementation. Inevitably, the implications of legal aid cuts concerned many participants.

Secondly, the workshops focused on the vital need for an extensive publicity campaign. This was also related to concerns that legislation is not enough without awareness-raising and implementation. Participants felt it was particularly important that at-risk women were informed about their rights under the Act in order to be able to benefit from its protection. Equally, this was a valuable opportunity to educate



communities perhaps using community leaders about forced marriage and so help prevent it.

Lastly, participants were emphatic that the negative developments in relation to immigration and asylum law must stop immediately. Using forced marriage to raise the age of immigration from 16 to 18 was simply a pretext<sup>9</sup>. Equally, participants were vocal in their opposition to the Government's inconsistent approach – legislating against forced marriage, FGM and domestic violence on the one hand within the UK but returning women to countries where they may experience precisely these violations on the other.

#### **Workshop 4: Immigration and domestic violence**

Cate Briddick, Legal Officer at Rights of Women, said that Alison Stanley from Bindman and Partners and Pragna Patel from Southall Black Sisters had generated excellent discussions in both workshops.

Pragna had focused on the background and emergence of the domestic violence rule. She talked about how Southall Black Sisters and other women's groups had successfully campaigned to have the concession but said that there were a number of worrying trends. Firstly, there was an increase in the breaches of confidentiality in how the Home Office are dealing with the applications. She highlighted that feminist organisations are increasingly being co-opted into immigration control as women's refuges are forced to turn away women with no recourse to public funds<sup>10</sup>.



*Pragna Patel*

Alison Stanley gave a lucid account of the application process, focussing on the forms, the primary and secondary evidence required and the importance of taking accurate notes when a woman first presents to an organisation.

Cate said that one main theme emerged from the workshops – the real concern that the no recourse to public funding rule presents a fundamental barrier to women accessing support. In distinguishing between British women who are experiencing domestic violence and women with an insecure immigration status, participants also agreed it was racist in its application.

However, Cate reported that there were some fantastic examples of good practice. She cited how women's organisations were using legislation such as the National Assistance Act and the Community Care legislation to challenge social services and get funding for women.

<sup>9</sup> Both the applicant and the sponsor must be aged 18 or over on the date that it is planned the applicant will arrive in the UK. At the time of writing the government was considering raising this age bar to 21.

<sup>10</sup> The 'No recourse to public funds' (NRPF) rule prevents people subject to immigration control (for example spouses and workers) from accessing certain funds such as welfare benefits, income support and housing assistance. Rights of Women has been actively involved in the Campaign to Abolish No Recourse to Public Funds together with organisations including Women's Resource Centre, Southall Black Sisters and Amnesty International UK. At the time of printing, Vernon Coaker, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Crime Reduction has stated that the Government recognises that there are problems with the NRPF rule and that it intends to introduce a scheme to enable the payment of money retrospectively to organisations that support certain women who have NRPF.



*Cate Briddick and Alison Stanley*

In conclusion, Cate said that the existence of the rule presented women with an impossible choice – remaining in an abusive marriage and being at risk of violence or even death, or

becoming destitute. The workshops had demonstrated the vital need for all women’s organisations to unite and campaign vigorously to end the no recourse to public funds rule.

**Ranjit Kaur**, Director of Rights of Women, said that the workshops had been very important in setting an agenda of issues to campaign for and that the workshops had isolated key priorities. She thanked Sanchita, Emma, Holly and Cate for their feedback.

Ranjit also expressed her thanks to Heather Harvey, Tanya Pouwhare, Pragna Patel, Alison Stanley, Aisha Gill, Hanana Siddiqui, and Michelle Springer-Benjamin for their contributions to the workshops. She acknowledged the valuable time they had spared to give their experience, knowledge and skills to participants.

**‘Excellent. Very informative speakers. I have come away brimming with ideas for change.’** Conference delegate



# Afternoon session

## Taking the agenda forward

### Yasmin Rehman

Yasmin Rehman thanked Rights of Women for inviting her to speak at the Conference and for their support over the years that Yasmin and Rights of Women have worked together. Her presentation focused on the development of policy and practice in the Metropolitan Police Service regarding BMER women, 'honour' based violence and the Metropolitan Police Service's plans for the future.

Yasmin began by stating that policing was not without its challenges and that the police were scrutinised in great detail by not only the Metropolitan Police Authority, but also by other agencies and central government. The police are the enforcement arm of the state with a duty to protect, to stop violence, to keep victims and those at risk safe and hold offenders accountable. However, Yasmin questioned what this actually meant for BMER women and the service that they receive from the police.

Yasmin discussed developments over the last ten years, including the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004, the ACPO shared and agreed definition of domestic violence, the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 and the rising profile of FGM but queried how these developments actually protected women and whether they made a positive difference. Yasmin illustrated this point with a discussion of section 5 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004 which introduced the offence of "causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable adult". Many are concerned that this section could be used to prosecute women who have experienced domestic

violence where a child or other family had died as a result of the violence. Yasmin stated that the Metropolitan Police had already secured 3 convictions under section 5 and that there are another 5 prosecutions pending. Yasmin highlighted the need to challenge agencies and to think about how changes to law and practice may impact upon women from all communities.

Yasmin also commented on the forthcoming Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007<sup>11</sup> and the implications for the police service, social services, the education sector and the health sector. She stated that the police service had been following similar guidelines since 2005 and that implementation was the key issue. The guidelines were now out of date and it was necessary to commission a review to ensure that they were fit for purpose. She also felt it was necessary to review the terminology within those guidelines to include wider issues of 'honour' based violence. In addition to reviewing the guidelines and their terminology, Yasmin also called for further research into violence against women to ensure that legislation and policies designed to assist BMER women come from a proper evidence base.

Yasmin further questioned what was actually meant by BMER, what were the issues of concern and how were the police service addressing them. In addition, what did providing a service constitute? She believed that the issues facing BMER women were not confined to 'honour' based violence, forced marriages, FGM, etc. and questioned why links were not made with other issues such as youth crime, domestic violence, rape, sexual offences and other forms of violence against women.

These questions arose from a soon to be published Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) paper which found that for four out of the last six years there has been a

<sup>11</sup>This received Royal Assent on 26th July 2007 but at the time of writing was not in force



*Yasmin Rehman*

disproportionately high level of BME women who have been the victims of domestic violence homicide. These deaths were not the result of ‘honour’ based violence and they were not from the communities the MPA expected to see. She believed that the police service needed to widen the lens and ask questions such as: do the communities of London, or of any city in this country for that matter, have equal access to justice? Do women have equal access to justice and if they don’t, why don’t they? Is there something about our systems and processes that is preventing women from having that access and if so, it must be challenged. Yasmin also questioned whether the way that groups and organisations worked together sometimes stifled the voices of some community groups and maybe even halted the progress of some work. As funding becomes more and more difficult to obtain, she wondered whether both statutory and voluntary organisations were losing sight of their original objectives and purpose.

Yasmin urged delegates to keep sight of their main objectives and to work together in order to deliver an effective service. She highlighted

the problem of various community groups representing one community, seeking to distance themselves from the experiences of those of other communities because of differences in ideology, race or religion. She also noted that groups were dismissing police officers and stated that this intolerance of the police force was affecting their delivery of services.

Moving on, Yasmin noted that there were a number of groups and organisations that followed models for best practice on a number of BME women’s issues yet they were somehow dismissed as they failed to grab the attention of the public or the media. She wondered about all those nameless, faceless women, who lived with the horror every single day and the terror of being in a violent, abusive relationship with their children as witnesses, yet they do not figure on police data or in the press. She strongly felt that these were the cases that needed to be tackled. It was important to look at the homicide rate, but it was also vital to look back along the continuum of violence. Yasmin again urged organisations and groups to work together alongside the police in order to develop solutions to the problems faced within different communities. There was a real need to develop specific responses to specific issues. The police service could not change if the public did not inform them of what needed to be changed.

In ending, Yasmin spoke briefly about the Metropolitan Police Service’s plans for the future. She stated that despite their best efforts, there will not be a “violence against women” strategy but a “serious violence strategy” which will incorporate domestic violence, rape and sexual violence. Yasmin expressed her disappointment at there not being a stand alone strategy but noted that there will be breakdowns by both gender and ethnicity. On a more positive note, an ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) document detailing an ‘honour’ based violence strategy was out for consultation

and it focused on the police response to 'honour' based violence. In addition, the MPS commissioned and funded a year long piece of work with survivors of domestic violence in order to hear from them directly their experiences with the police service, irrespective of whether they had gone through the criminal justice system or not. Issues specific to LGBT women, disabled women, BMER women, younger and older women and also men were also built into that work. Further, work around child protection has also been commissioned and a breakdown of all incidents of child protection that have come to the attention of the MPS will be published in the near future. The report will be broken down by age, gender, ethnicity and according to the incident such as domestic violence, child rape, child sexual exploitation, child neglect, etc. Yasmin hoped that these pieces of work would assist with improving services and increase engagement with communities. She ended by stating that BMER women's voices needed to be heard and the experiences of all women needed to be shared in order for both the police and organisations supporting women to be effective.

### **Marai Larasi**

Marai's presentation focused on some of the key issues affecting organisations providing services for BMER women who have experienced gender violence, including no recourse to public funds, funding and future challenges.

She began by addressing the issue of no recourse to public funds and stated that it made no sense at all from an equalities perspective, from a human rights perspective nor from a financial perspective. She emphasised that the government's position was unjustifiable and hypocritical reminding us that two tiers of protection existed in this country for women experiencing violence. She spoke about the experiences of a nia project worker on their information and referral line

and highlighted the main issues associated with assisting women with no recourse. Firstly, there was difficulty in finding suitable and safe accommodation for these women. Secondly, there was the problem of finding out who has a duty to assist these women and the reluctance of Social Services to assist with funding accommodation and subsistence. Thirdly, there was difficulty in finding legal advice when most women do not have the resources to pay for a solicitor to assist them with legal matters. And finally, the issue of dealing with specific issues related to women who were children when they came to the UK and are currently unaware of their status.

Marai acknowledged that the experiences of workers at the nia project could be echoed across the women's sector. Workers are constantly frustrated by the barriers they have to face and the amount of time it takes to work on just one no recourse case. In terms of workers' time this is time consuming and costly.

She noted that many women will not get leave to remain and have no hope of ever being allowed to rebuild their lives in this country. The challenge for the women's sector is how they provide services for women who are students, those who have overstayed or those who have entered the country illegally in the first place, knowing that in far too many cases they are fighting a losing battle. Marai emphasised the need to press the government to reconsider the issue of no recourse to public funds and the need for changes to legislation in order to enable women to access equal protection from violence.

Marai also spoke of the funding crisis within the women's sector. Marai questioned why after 3 decades of providing services, the women's sector still had to justify its existence and asked where BMER women would be positioned as the women's sector faced increasing threats to its very stability?



*Afternoon panel*

She further questioned what happens when funders force organisations to cut areas such as interpreting costs out of their budgets? Or what happens when organisations commit to providing equal services for a diverse range of women and children but realise that this commitment cannot actually be met because they simply cannot afford it?

Marai noted that the women's sector has been used to functioning on a 'broken shoestring' and that there was a real need to have stable, long-term funding provided to meet the women's voluntary sector needs. Marai agreed that services needed to meet the required standards and recognised that there are a range of competing priorities but she also stated the need to have the "30 plus years of expertise within the sector" to be valued. She highlighted the need to have local authorities fund children's services and refuges; to have resources focused on domestic violence provisions to be increased and targeted at the women's sector and the need for adequate funding for specialist sexual violence services.

Lastly, Marai focused on the issue of equality and diversity within the women's sector. Marai stated that having worked in the sector for nearly 13 years, she has seen the landscape

around race shift in ways she felt the women's sector had yet to acknowledge. Her early experiences of racism were mainly institutional which continues to exist in various ways. However, she also noted that during her time in the sector she has had to challenge service users over issues such as their language, their complaints about the smell of people's food, their labelling of certain groups of women as aggressive and others as more passive and she has also had to challenge staff about their attitudes. Marai noted that as the organisation developed over time, so did their service user base and the problem of racism became more complex.

She questioned what was to be done when those that we recognise as vulnerable themselves engage in this kind of abhorrent behaviour? Why aren't we having these very uncomfortable discussions? Why aren't we exploring the new complexities we are dealing with in terms of racism and prejudice and if we aren't having those discussions, what are we going to do to support workers around their experiences? What happens to the service users in the refuges when we go home?

She stated that it was vital to put diversity and equality back on the agenda. These issues

needed to be discussed at board level, in staff meetings, in house meetings and in supervision. Incidents need to be recorded and taken seriously and addressed because every incident is damaging and ignoring the issues had the potential to be soul destroying.

In ending, Marai reflected that her time in the women's sector has been challenging, fulfilling, desperate, frustrating, triumphant, disturbing and uplifting. She emphasised that she still believed in this work and still had faith that the women's sector can be proactive and responsive. She still believes that we make a difference to thousands of women and children every year and that without us lives will be severely damaged and even lost, however, she also reminded the delegates that there are still battles to be fought and battles to be won.

**'Extremely informative, very energising and focuses the mind on both the broader and specific issues.'**

Conference delegate

### **Afternoon Q&A**

**Ranjit Kaur** spoke about a debate at the Women's Resource Centre, 'What's Feminism got to do with it?' and the difficulty in getting the delegates there to agree on three priorities to put on the feminist agenda. She asked the speakers what three priorities they thought the women's sector should set themselves for the next five years or so.

**Marai Larasi** replied that at present we operate in a very sexualised culture. She spoke about current television programmes that suggest that we are operating within a mindset that does not want to recognise when women are being exploited. Further, she said that it sometimes felt as if we as

women participate in our own exploitation. Marai stated that as feminists we should continue to challenge issues around pornography, prostitution and the sex industry. She felt strongly that women trying to leave the sex industry should be offered the same level of support and services as women trying to leave a domestic violence situation. Women involved in the sex industry should be given the option to access services and support when they felt ready to do so. This was necessary in order to challenge the way women being commodified has become a normality.

**Yasmin Rehman** replied that the biggest priority should be changing the connotations of the 'F-word', the F-word being feminism. She noted that we still do not have equal pay yet it is widely perceived that the feminist movement has achieved equality for women. She mentioned the issues women still face, such as being sexually exploited and being subjected to various forms of violence and the necessity to raise the feminist agenda by getting young women involved in a third wave of feminism

**Ranjit Kaur** mentioned some recent research conducted by Girlguiding UK amongst young girl guides. The research showed that a vast percentage of young girl guides were concerned about equal pay, their working careers, equality in the workplace, discrimination in the workplace and sexual harassment. Ranjit noted how encouraging it is to have young women showing concern over such important issues. However, she also mentioned how worrying it was that, for example, lap dancing had become fashionable and a symbol of empowerment. She repeated Natasha Walter's argument that such ideas are not the new feminism but the new sexism. Ranjit further pointed out the importance of women only events like the Conference and that men should be encouraged to support such women only spaces.

## Keynote address A high profile survivor

**Survivor A** stated that no woman deserved to be a victim of 'honour' based violence. She pointed out that there was no honour in 'honour' killing and that the term should be changed. She believed that a family that chooses to kill their daughter for apparently bringing shame upon them and their community were really bringing shame upon themselves, their daughters and other women. She said that the lives of young women continue to be taken away in disgusting and horrific ways.

She expressed how distressed she was by the countless number of lives lost and how she wished those women could have been alive to enjoy a future, have children of their own, be with a man they loved and have a career they wanted. Her only hope was that if organisations coordinated their different tactics and their different ways of dealing with these complex issues, then perhaps the future for women facing such crimes would be different and lives could be saved.

**'Sharing real experiences has helped me to really understand the difficulties experienced by BMER communities and left me thinking what can I do to create change.'**

Conference delegate

## Close of conference

**'I was very empowered by the speakers.'**

Conference delegate

**Ranjit Kaur** applauded the Keynote Speaker's courage in making such a difficult speech and thanked her for coming to the Conference. Ranjit said that the book *Pathways to Justice: BMER Women, Violence and the Law* was dedicated to Banaz Mahmod and the issue of 'honour' based violence and that collectively the women's sector would reinforce their commitment to stop such crimes being committed against other women and would continue to fight to stop violence against women.

Ranjit agreed with the Speaker's comments on honour and stated that 'honour crimes' should be called 'dishonourable crimes' as there was no honour in any kind of behaviour that resulted in women being violated, raped, sexually assaulted or murdered. However, she said that this was the reality for women all over the world and highlighted the issue of women being violated in conflict areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries around the world. She noted that it was easy to forget about such women as we focused on the issues that affect women in our own country.





Ranjit Kaur

Ranjit highlighted the fact that women in such countries do not have the same facilities as we do to come together, share experiences and network, nor do they have the resources that we do to fight for justice and to campaign for changes to the law. Ranjit said that it was our responsibility to give these women a voice by lobbying the Government and the United Nations to record such crimes and to fulfil their obligations under international law.

Ranjit felt it was important to mention the work that had gone into the Conference and stated that it would not have been possible without the commitment and work put in by

Rights of Women staff and volunteers. Ranjit extended a particular thank you to Sanchita Hosali, Rights of Women Policy Officer, for her commitment and to Mina Rai, Rights of Women Admin Officer, for her contributions. Ranjit also thanked all the staff at Rights of Women: Emma, Holly, Cate and Malinda for the work they put into the Conference, the workshops and the book *Pathways to Justice: BMER Women, Violence and the Law*. She also extended her thanks to Alyssa, Rights of Women Intern, and Zoë, Cecilia and Hannah, Rights of Women Volunteers.

Finally, Ranjit wished to thank the speakers, the workshop speakers and the delegates. She said that the Conference was oversubscribed which highlighted the need for women only conferences which gave women the chance to have discussions and network in a safe environment.

Ranjit also thanked all the women at the Conference for the work that they do on a daily basis. Rights of Women does not work in isolation and it was important to recognise that there are limitations to the services Rights of Women can provide to its service users. Ranjit hoped that Rights of Women would continue to enjoy good partnerships with other organisations within the women's sector. She finished by stating that if everybody worked together then hopefully we could create a better future for all women.

**'The whole event was extremely encouraging ... this group of women absolutely know their stuff.'** Conference delegate

# Annex I: Speakers' and workshop facilitators' biographies

## Conference Speakers

### Lord Lester QC

Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC is a practising member of Blackstone Chambers, specialising in public law and European human rights law and a Liberal Democrat Peer. He was Special Adviser to the Home Secretary (Roy Jenkins) from 1974-76 with responsibility for policy advice on human rights. Lord Lester is an independent adviser to the Minister of Justice on some aspects of constitutional reform. He is a member of the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on Human Rights and the Lords' Select Committee on EU Law and Institutions. He recently introduced Private Member's Bills on civil partnerships and equality, constitutional reform and forced marriage. Lord Lester is President of INTERIGHTS (the International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights), and has published numerous books and articles on constitutional law and human rights.

### Shaminder Ubhi, Ashiana Network

Shaminder has worked in the domestic violence sector for over 12 years, managing and developing domestic violence provision for Black and Minority Ethnic women, developing preventative initiatives with young people and raising awareness with the community as a whole. She joined Ashiana Network in 1994 and is involved in local and London-wide strategic partnerships that address domestic violence issues and in particular, forced marriage and 'honour' based violence. She is also a member of the Impact Reference Group of the London Housing Foundation, addressing key funding, capacity and development issues in the homelessness sector.

### Farhat Khan, refugee and founding member of Women Asylum Seekers Together

Farhat Khan and her children fled from domestic violence in Pakistan in November 2000. Her husband's family had also arranged engagements for her two younger daughters which would have resulted in forced marriages at puberty if they had not left Pakistan. Farhat's claim for asylum and her appeal were refused. In the UK she founded Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST), a self-help and self-led group of asylum-seeking women based in Manchester. In July 2007, after six and a half years of campaigning, Farhat Khan and her three youngest children were granted refugee status. Farhat's eldest daughter is still waiting for a Home Office decision. Farhat now works as a paid multilingual Advice Worker at Cheetham Hill Advice Centre, where she volunteered prior to being granted refugee status. Prior to fleeing to the UK Farhat had 21 years of experience of working in community development in Pakistan working for a number of western governments and aid agencies, including the UK Department For International Development.

### Yasmin Rehman, Director of Partnerships and Diversity, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Violent Crime Directorate

Yasmin is Director of Partnerships and Diversity with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Violent Crime Directorate working on domestic violence, 'honour' based violence, violence against women and hate crime. She is currently the most senior Asian/Muslim female member of staff in the MPS. Yasmin is Deputy Chair of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) 'honour' based violence Steering Group and Chair of the MPS 'honour' based violence Working Group. In conjunction with the MPS Forced Marriage Team, she has developed the MPS and national Police response to forced marriages since 2001. Working closely with colleagues across the country, Yasmin has

recently produced the draft ACPO ‘honour’ based violence Strategy, which is out for consultation with partners from across sectors.

### **Marai Larasi, Executive Director, nia project (formerly Hackney Women’s Aid)**

Marai Larasi is the Chief Executive of the nia project. She has worked in the violence against women field for over 12 years. She has delivered frontline refuge services, facilitated support groups, delivered training and managed direct services. For the past 7 years Marai has been responsible for the strategic development of the nia project. She has worked on ensuring that the project remains a strong, committed feminist organisation, while rising to meet (and predicting) emerging expectations around everything from service delivery and quality to management systems and new technologies. Marai is involved in a range of partnerships, boards and committees that enable her to contribute to policy and best practice on a wider basis. Current positions include: Chair of the LB Hackney Multi-Agency Domestic Violence Forum, Vice-Chair of Women’s Aid Federation, England and Member of the UK Grants Advisory Panel, Comic Relief.

### **Morning session Chair: Judy Richards, Management Committee, Rights of Women**

Judy is a Service Development Manager at East Sussex County Council and has helped develop community groups, anti-racist networks and other equality initiatives across Sussex, nationally and internationally. She has been a member of the Rights of Women Management Committee since 2001. Judy has been a founding member of a number of women’s groups and other groups, both nationally and internationally.

### **Afternoon session Chair: Ranjit Kaur, Director, Rights of Women**

Ranjit is the Director of Rights of Women. Prior to joining Rights of Women in 2000, Ranjit was a civil servant for 15 years before

becoming Unison’s Regional Women’s Officer in the South East Region in 1993. In 1993 she was also awarded Honorary Life Membership of the Public and Commercial Services Union in recognition of her contribution to furthering equality issues in the Union thus becoming the first Black woman to be honoured in this way in the Union’s History.

### **Workshop Speakers**

#### **Aisha Gill , Imkaan**

Dr Aisha Gill is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Roehampton. Her main areas of interest and research are health and criminal justice responses to violence against Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women in the UK. She has been involved in addressing the problem of hate crimes and violence against women for the past decade. She is currently the Chair of Newham Asian Women’s Project Management Committee, a member of Imkaan (second tier national VAW charity) and a member of Liberty’s Project Advisory Group and End Violence Against Women Group (EVAW). Aisha has also served on numerous government committees related to ‘honour’ based violence, forced marriages and has challenged politicians to be more inclusive of BME women’s voices in policy-making concerning gender-based violence and human rights. Her current research interests focus on rights and marriage, familial homicide and femicide, trafficking, missing women and violence.

#### **Heather Harvey, Stop Violence against Women Campaign Manager, Amnesty International UK**

Heather graduated in law and specialised in women’s rights. She has some 15 years experience in public and voluntary sectors including 4 years in Western and Southern Africa specialising in women’s rights, equality and development. She has also worked in local authorities in the UK specialising in projects in support of the BMER community

with a special emphasis on women's rights, prior to her current post as Stop Violence Against Women campaign manager for Amnesty International UK, she worked in the Foreign Office as an NGO-employee seconded to the Forced Marriage Unit.

### **Pragna Patel, Southall Black Sisters**

Pragna is a founding member of Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism. She worked as a co-ordinator and senior case worker for SBS from 1982 to 1993 when she left to train as a solicitor. She has remained active in the group in respect of its policy and campaigning work and is currently chair of SBS. Pragna has given expert evidence in a number of civil, criminal and immigration cases and is involved in training and addressing professionals in social work, the judiciary, police and probation service as well as the voluntary sector on the experiences of minority women. She has also written extensively on race, gender and religion and is currently a member of the Advisory Board to the AHRC Research Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality, University of Kent.

### **Tania Pouwhare, Policy Coordinator, Women's Resource Centre**

Tania is Policy Coordinator at the Women's Resource Centre. Tania's background is in gender equality and prior to moving to the UK, she worked as Policy Advisor at the National Office of Women's Refuge in New Zealand. There she covered a range of domestic violence policy issues, worked with statutory agencies and conducted research. Tania also worked as an independent health researcher in areas such as cancer, unintentional injury, breastfeeding and family planning. Tania's particular areas of interest are indigenous women, sexual and reproductive rights, art and women in the Blues music genre

### **Alison Stanley, Partner, Bindmans Solicitors**

Alison is a solicitor and partner in London civil liberties firm Bindman and Partners. She qualified as a solicitor in 1984 and has worked in the immigration field both in the not for profit and private sectors. For 4 years she worked as the first solicitor for the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. She has lectured and trained extensively on immigration law. She co-authored *Putting Children First – a guide for immigration practitioners* and *Representation at Immigration Appeals: A Best Practice Guide*. She is a founder member of the Refugee Women's Legal Group and the Law Society's Immigration Law Committee.

### **Hannana Siddiqui, Southall Black Sisters**

Hannana Siddiqui is a Joint-Coordinator of Southall Black Sisters, where she has worked since 1988. Her work includes campaigning and casework with women and children experiencing domestic violence. She has worked extensively on issues related to forced marriage, 'honour' based violence, immigration and no recourse to public funds, including having served as a member of the Home Office Working Group on Forced Marriage until her resignation in April 2000. Hannana has written extensively on the work of Southall Black Sisters and on Black and Minority Ethnic Women experiencing violence.

### **Michelle Springer-Benjamin, Senior Consultant, NSPCC**

Michelle is a senior consultant with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), in the training and consultancy section, providing both internal and external training. Michelle leads on child sexual abuse and within this specialises on issues related to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children, disabled children, domestic

violence, child abuse and vicarious traumatisation. Prior to joining the NSPCC Michelle was Training Officer at the Women and Girl's Network, a community based organisation providing London wide resources for women and girls who have experienced any form of violence.

### **Workshop chairs**

**Emma Scott** is a Senior Legal Officer at Rights of Women, **Holly Pelham** is a Legal Officer at Rights of Women, **Cate Briddick** is a Legal Officer at Rights of Women and **Sanchita Hosali** is a Policy Officer at Rights of Women.



*Rights of Women staff*

## Annex II: Conference programme

9.00am	<b>Registration</b>
9.30am	<b>Opening remarks by the Chair</b> <i>Judy Richards, Rights of Women Management Committee</i>
9.45am	<b>Morning Keynote Address: Lord Lester of Herne Hill, QC</b>
10.10am	<b>Morning Session Violence against BMER women: Setting the Scene</b> <i>Shaminder Ubhi, Director, Ashiana Network</i> <i>Farhat Khan, Founder of Women Asylum Seekers Together</i>
10.50 am	<b>Question and Answer Session</b>
11.00 am	<b>Break and Networking</b>
11.15 am	<b>Workshops</b> <i>Immigration and domestic violence</i> <i>Violence against women: international and national frameworks</i> <i>Forced marriage, the law and protection</i> <i>Violence against women, children and the law</i>
12.15pm	<b>Plenary Session</b>
12.30 – 1.10pm	<b>Lunch</b>
1.10 – 1.30pm	<b>Refreshments and Networking</b>
1.30pm	<b>Workshops</b> <i>As before.</i>
2.30pm	<b>Plenary Session: Workshop Feedback</b>
3.00pm	<b>Break and Networking</b>
3.15pm	<b>Afternoon Session: Taking the Agenda Forward</b> <i>Chair: Ranjit Kaur, Director, Rights of Women</i> <i>Yasmin Rehman, Director of Partnerships and Diversity, Metropolitan Police Service</i> <i>Marai Larasi, Chief Executive of nia project and Vice Chair of Women's Aid Federation of England</i>
4.00pm	<b>Question and Answer Session</b>
4.15pm	<b>Afternoon Keynote Address: A survivor, to be announced at the conference</b>
4.30pm	<b>Close of Conference</b> <i>Ranjit Kaur, Director of Rights of Women</i>
5.30pm	<b>Book launch</b>

## Annex III: List of conference delegates

1 Pump Court  
African Women's Care  
Akina Mama Wa Afrika  
Alone in London  
Amnesty International UK  
Apna Haq  
Ashiana Network  
Asian Women Lone Parents Association  
Asian Women's Resource Centre  
Asylum Aid  
Barnardo's  
Barnardo's Spectrum Project  
BAWSO  
Bindman & Partners  
Bournemouth Churches Housing Association  
Brighton & Hove PCST  
CAADA  
Cardiff Women's Aid  
Central Manchester Women's Aid  
Cherith Solicitors LLP  
Crown Prosecution Service  
Dawson Cornwell  
Duncan Lewis & Co  
DVIRP  
East Sussex County Council  
Eaves Housing for Women  
Eva Women's Aid  
Fareham & Gosport Family Aid  
FORWARD  
Greenwich Asian Women's Project

Hearthstone  
Hestia Housing & Support  
HM Prison Service  
Hounslow Asian & Somali Advice Centre  
Humdard  
IFC  
IMECE  
Imkaan  
Immigration Advisory Service  
Islington Law Centre  
Kinara Asian Women's Refuge  
King's College London  
Knowsley Domestic Violence Support Services  
Kurdish Refugee Women's Organisation  
Lancaster & District Women's Aid  
Latin American Women's Aid  
Latin American Women's Rights Service  
LAX Centre (NI)  
Liberty  
London Borough of Barnet  
London Borough of Islington  
McKay Law  
Medway Black Workers Forum  
Medway Council  
Medway Social Services  
Metropolitan Police Service  
Middle East Centre for Women's Rights  
NCH  
nia project  
Northampton Women's Aid  
Northern Refugee Centre  
Northumbria Police  
NSPCC  
Peterborough Women's Aid  
Pollecoff Solicitors

Poppy Project  
Refuge  
Refugee Council  
Rochdale Council  
Roshni Asian Women's Aid  
Sandwell Women's Aid  
Sangam Association of Asian Women  
Somali Women and Children Action Group  
South Manchester Law Centre  
Southall Black Sisters  
Southside Partnership  
Stonham Women's Services  
Sutton Community Drug Team  
Three Dr Johnson's Buildings  
Tower Hamlets Asian Women's Aid  
Transport & General Workers Union of Unite  
UK Women's Fund  
UNISON  
UNISON – Norfolk Branch  
Valley House  
Victim Support Richmond Upon Thames  
WASP Project  
Watford Women's Centre  
Wellingborough & East Northampton Women's Aid  
Welsh Women's Aid  
Women Asylum Seekers Together  
Women in Prison  
Women's Aid  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom  
Women's Resource Centre  
Worthing Women's Aid  
Wycombe Women's Aid



Rights of Women  
52-54 Featherstone Street  
London EC1Y 8RT  
Tel 020 7251 6575/6  
Textphone 020 7490 2562  
Fax 020 7490 5377  
Email [info@row.org.uk](mailto:info@row.org.uk)

[www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk)

Industrial and Provident Society No 23221R