



WHAT DOES GOOD PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?

Last year the Coaction Hub (a partnership project between Asian Women's Resource Centre and Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse) held a World Café event with 25 participants including by and for agencies[1], large and smaller mainstream VAWG agencies, individuals working in VAWG employed by local authorities, and 'generic'[2] third sector agencies who have a domestic abuse specialism. The aim of the World Café was to support our research, but also to bring together individuals in a creative, reflective space to collaborate, network and share ideas. More information on the World Café method can be found [here](#).

One of the questions posed in the space was to share examples of what participants think good practice looks like. Responses broadly covered 4 themes – specific examples of projects, inclusion and intersectionality, ways of working with service users and knowledge building. There was also an overarching theme of partnership. We briefly explore each of these themes below:

Examples of Projects:

3 projects were named as examples of good practice: the [Anti-Racism Working Group](#), [Coaction Hub](#) and the [SAFE Communities Project](#). Interestingly, all three projects, although different, centre partnerships.

Inclusion and Intersectionality:

Inclusivity was cited by a number of attendees as good practice. Whilst some responses were quite general e.g. 'inclusive services', other respondents were specific about who they wished services to be inclusive of, such as trans clients and those engaged in the sex industry. One respondent went beyond this to note that there needs to be accountability from agencies to ensure that survivors needs are met, including when they had multiple needs.

There was also a focus on services being actively anti-racist, including the need to name power within organisations and interrogate how we use it. Several responses focused on the need for white led agencies[3] to support by and for agencies with capacity building and training, whilst others were more explicit about ceding power. These themes echo some of the themes of the work of the VAWG sector anti racist working group, linked above.

[1] By and for Agencies are organisations which are run by the community they service In this report we are specifically referring to Ending VAWG by and for Services run by and for Black and minoritised women. IMKAAN's definition of by and for agencies can be found [here](#).

[2] The term 'generic' agency refers to an organisation who are not specialists in domestic abuse or VAWG, but who may have been awarded contracts for IDVA work or to manage women's refuges. Examples include housing associations and organisations who work with a broad range of client groups.

[3] Organisations in the VAWG sector who are not specialist by and for agencies for Black and minoritised women; white led organisations receive significantly more funding than by and for agencies.

Working with Service Users:

One of the key topics highlighted in this theme was around the importance of co-designing services and tools such as risk assessments with people with lived experience of VAWG. This was a re-occurring theme throughout the day, most notably during discussions on risk assessment tools and the structure of MARAC. Other respondents focused on the skills and approaches required to work with service users, including being trauma informed, non-judgmental, patient and proactive. Lastly, it was felt that in order to work effectively, there needed to be a focus on partnership. Information and guidance on trauma informed co-production can be found [here](#).

Knowledge Building:

Several attendees highlighted the importance of gaining knowledge, through training, but also the importance of practitioners being open to change, including through responding to criticism. Different types of knowledge building were cited, including peer learning, reflection and curiosity. The recurring theme of partnership was also noted as a way to build knowledge.

Partnership:

This theme cut across all areas and indeed across the topics explored throughout the day. Many respondents suggested ways in which partnership can improve practice, including partnership with service users to design tools and services. Other partnerships suggested were those of by and for and white led agencies, with the need for an examination of power relations between organisations. In all responses partnership was viewed as positive.

This theme was visited in more detail in one of world café questions *'You have been approached by a funder to bid for a harmful practices contract, and they encourage partnerships and inclusion. What would be the key things to consider in that partnership?'*

This discussion further explored the concept of partnership. Key themes included the need to clarify agency roles and key responsibilities, and for agencies to come to the project with varying specialisms. Co-production also featured, both between agencies, and with service users. We will explore this in more detail in the briefing on this topic.



Conclusion:

Whilst some respondents to our question highlighted areas and projects of good practice, it is clear that there is much work to be done to improve practice in the VAWG sector. Ideas of what good practice looks like, such as inclusivity of survivors experiencing multiple disadvantage, in practice are not widespread. We need a greater accountability to service users, including those viewed as ‘complex’ or ‘hard to reach[4]’ to provide appropriate, accessible and trauma informed services. This accountability needs to be not just from service providers, but for commissioners to fund in a way which allows the time and development of expertise to provide this support.



Currently, the expertise of both survivors and specialist agencies is overwhelmingly side-lined, and power dynamics between white led and by and for agencies and between survivors and VAWG agencies need to be addressed. It was also interesting that some respondents focused on the intersecting needs of survivors, an area which is often overlooked in our current risk based model of responding to domestic abuse.

There is a need for the mainstream VAWG sector to have greater consideration as to how the needs of survivors are met within our current model. This is an area where much learning could be gained from the by and for sector who tend to work in a more holistic way with survivors of VAWG.

Partnership was a theme throughout the responses, but in the context of the above issues, consideration needs to be given as to what equitable partnerships look like. Agencies and individuals need to acknowledge and actively address the power differentials between survivors and practitioners, and between white led and by and for agencies.

[4] The term ‘hard to reach’ continues to be used to describe individuals and communities who are less likely to engage with services. This places blame on these groups, and an alternative would be to reframe this as people or groups who are ‘under served’ or marginalised.

At Coaction Hub, we have been working to address these issues within a partnership between a second tier white led agency and a specialist by and for organisation. The first step towards this is acknowledging the power differentials, before actively working towards addressing these. This requires building relationships of trust and openness, but also being able to challenge one another, and access humility when things go wrong. For us this is an ongoing process, which we continue to build on and model within our agencies and externally.