Evaluation of the Empower Women Project

A partnership project between Shpresa Programme and Solace Women's Aid providing a specialist service for Albanian Speaking Women affected by Violence Against Women and Girls in London

Final report

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to all those women who made writing this report possible.

The staff at Solace Women's Aid and Shpresa Programme were always willing to meet with us, to share their ideas and experiences, and to consider how to develop and sustain this critical work. This was at a time when both agencies were trying to meet a growing demand for their services with very finite resources.

Partner agencies shared their experiences of working in the sector and of working alongside the Empower Women project. They brought a unique perspective to this report as providers with expertise in working with very vulnerable women and we are grateful to them making time to give us their feedback.

Albanian speaking women affected by gender based violence were brave and generous, sharing their time and their experiences with us. Women chose to take part in this evaluation in spite of how hard it was for them to talk about the abuse they had suffered, as they wanted their voices to be heard and to be part of a project which will help build a safer world for all women. We share their hopes and respect their courage.

We met with Albanian speaking young people, male and female, who chose to train as Healthy Relationship Champions. We were inspired by their capacity to engage with such challenging issues and by their determination to create a different world for themselves and for others affected by gender based violence. Their hope is infectious, and their courage demonstrates that a different future is possible.

Esme Madill and Rachel Alsop

'In Albania you have to accept domestic violence as part of the culture. You do not have any support, any encouragement to talk about it. Whereas here we are aware that there are ways of becoming safe and not living in a violent relationship.'

Woman trafficked from Albania, interviewed at Shpresa Programme, October 2017

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1. Introduction to the Empower Women Project

In 2012, Shpresa Programme (Shpresa), an Albanian community organisation, developed a partnership with Solace Women's Aid (Solace) a specialist violence against women and girls (VAWG) support service, to engage Albanian Speaking Women (ASW) in London around experiences of violence and abuse. This two year partnership project (hereafter referred to as phase one of the Empower Women project) was generously funded by Trust for London and the Henry Smith Foundation and over the two years:

- provided workshops to 404 ASW to raise awareness of VAWG
- offered casework support to 95 ASW who had experienced or were experiencing violence and abuse
- delivered workshops to 175 Albanian speaking young people to begin to challenge attitudes and behaviours within the Albanian speaking community about gender based violence (GBV).

The Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU) at London Metropolitan University were commissioned by Trust for London to evaluate this phase one of the Empower Women project (Coy and Sharp 2015), and found that:

- the project 'opened a door' into specialist support for ASW, as the link with Shpresa created trust and Solace provided expertise on VAWG
- the project uncovered different forms of VAWG experienced by Albanian speaking women, including trafficking
- the project exceeded its targets
    - reaching 404 women (target 350) through awareness raising workshops which women described as leading to significant changes in their understanding of domestic violence, including its different forms
    - reaching 95 women (target 75) via the casework service: these women described themselves as 'lucky' and had only positive things to say about the service
- developing and managing the partnership required of Shpresa and Solace, energy, time and willingness to have open conversations
- there was a strong consensus across women who engaged with the service, workers and local stakeholders about the need for a specialist project for ASW.

Based on this two year project and the evaluation findings, Shpresa approached both Trust for London and the Henry Smith Foundation for a further two years of funding. These funding applications were successful and they are funding the current Empower Women project (phase two). There are three key elements to this project:

(i) Work with young people at Shpresa to develop their understanding of gender based violence and of healthy relationships.

(ii) Group work with women at Shpresa who have experienced VAWG to raise awareness of VAWG, to help prevent VAWG, and to promote healthy relationships

(iii) Casework for women experiencing violence and abuse, provided by Solace via one-to-one advice, information, practical and emotional support and advocacy.

In June 2017, Madill Parker Research and Consulting were appointed to evaluate phase two of the Empower Women project. The evaluation brief asked that this evaluation focus on:

- learning from the work with children and young people (which was deliberately omitted from the previous evaluation)
- lessons for all those seeking to address violence in new migrant communities.

This is the final evaluation of phase two of the Empower Women project which ran over two years from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2018. During this time:

- 207 children and young people aged 14 – 21 took part in Healthy Relationship workshops. In year one these workshops were delivered by Solace Woman's Aid. In year two they were delivered by 16 Healthy Relationship Champions, young people aged 15 to 21 who had been trained by Solace Women's Aid to deliver Healthy Relationship workshops to their peers. The aims of the Healthy Relationship workshops were to improve the children and young people's understanding of GBV and of healthy relationships (target 166 children and young people over the course of the two year project –target exceeded by 25%)
- 216 women who have experienced GBV attended weekly workshops at Shpresa to raise awareness of VAWG and to increase their understanding of healthy relationships, this included attending workshops delivered by Solace (target 200 women over two years – target exceeded by 8%)
- 93 women experiencing violence and abuse accessed a one-to-one casework service provided by Solace which included information and practical and emotional support (target 90 women over two years – target exceeded by 3%).

In addition to these three key areas of work, over the course of the two year project, Shpresa hosted or co-hosted three conferences drawing on the learning from this project and sharing the knowledge gained regarding the needs and experienced of ASW affected by GBV:

- On 31st January 2017 at Portcullis House, a conference on the needs and experiences of ASW fleeing GBV attended by 150 mainstream providers.

- On 18th March 2017 at Gascoigne School, where 145 ASW attended a conference and learnt more about GBV and the nature of healthy relationships. That same day Shpresa hosted held a celebration event attended by 137 women who have been a part of one of Shpresa's support groups including those addressing the issue of VAWG to celebrate their learning and to promote healthy relationships.

- On 6th June 2017 at UCL, where 130 professionals attended a conference focused on the experiences and needs of ASW, with insecure immigration status, affected by GBV.

- On 8th March 2018 at the Houses of Parliament, Shpresa hosted an International Women's Day event for 90 delegates, focusing on women and violence within the Albanian community.

Shpresa staff also trained other providers working with women affected by gender based violence, including trafficked women and women from Albanian speaking communities. Staff were trained at Hestia in October 2017, at a West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network

meeting in January 2018, at the Single Point of Contact (SPoC) Workshop organized by the Human Trafficking Foundation at the Houses of Parliament in February 2018, at the Birmingham Salvation Army's Adult Victims of Modern Slavery meeting in April 2018, at Migrant Help in April 2018 and at Solace Women's Aid in June 2018. In total more than 120 professionals including police, NHS staff, social workers and NRM[1] First Responders[2] were trained in the final year of the project. Shpresa's training focused on: raising awareness of the needs and experience of Albanian speaking women, including victims of trafficking, exploring the barriers to these women accessing services, identifying how to develop safe and inclusive services for these women and other women from new migrant communities feeling violence and abuse, including trafficking.

[1] The **National Referral Mechanism** (NRM) is a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. The NRM is also the **mechanism** through which the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) collect data about victims. (See http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/uk-human-trafficking-centre/national-referral-mechanism accessed on 10 November 2017)

[2] **First responders** are frontline staff in statutory and voluntary agencies. Currently, in most areas in the UK, only designated first responders may make a referral for a potential victim of trafficking into the NRM. First responder include staff from the Home Office, the Police, the Border Force, local authorities, the Salvation Army, Barnardos and the NSPCC.

2. Methodology

This is the final report of a qualitative, process evaluation of a two year project.

In this evaluation report the evaluators have focused on:

- Identifying the impact the project has had on the women and the children and young people who have accessed a service
- Identifying the lessons learnt during the project which can inform other work in this sector with Albanian speaking women and other new migrant women affected by violence and abuse, including trafficking
- Exploring ways that this work can be sustained.

The evaluators have chosen a case-study approach: collecting and collating data from a variety of sources to triangulate findings. Data sources include:

A literature review

The first part of the literature review considered academic and policy papers relating to gender based violence (GBV) experienced by migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women. While the main focus was on literature relating to the UK and to Albania, where pertinent, research documenting GBV against migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women in other countries was also included. As much of the literature on GBV attended to domestic violence an additional literature search was conducted to find recent research on trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, with specific attention to literature detailing the particular experiences of trafficked Albanian women.

The second part of the literature review focused, firstly, on UK research dealing with young people and domestic/ intimate partner violence and, secondly, on research examining healthy relationship programmes targeted at young people in the UK.

Focus groups and interviews with service users

A focus group was undertaken with six Healthy Relationship Champions who had attended workshops delivered by Solace to improve their understanding of gender based violence and of healthy relationships.

Four focus groups were undertaken with a total of 16 women who attended weekly workshops at Shpresa to raise awareness of VAWG and to increase their understanding of healthy relationships.

A focus group was undertaken with seven women attending Shpresa's women only English classes.

One to one interviews were carried out with five Healthy Relationship Champions who had attended workshops delivered by Solace Woman's Aid to improve their understanding of gender based violence and of healthy relationships: one had not passed the accredited training and four had gone on to deliver Healthy Relationships training to their peers.

One to one interviews were also carried out with a further two Healthy Relationship Champions in year two of the project after they had delivered peer training over a number of sessions.

One to one interviews were also carried out with three women who had attended weekly workshops at Shpresa Programme to raise awareness of VAWG and to increase their understanding of healthy relationships.

Observations

The evaluators observed a Stopping Violence Against Women workshop delivered by Solace to nine young people from Shpresa who were training as Healthy Relationship Champions.

They also observed of a training session delivered by two trained Healthy Relationship Champions to a group of 14 of their peers, young people aged 13 to 19 years of age, accessing Shpresa Programme's services.

Finally, they observed a women only English Language class attended by 15 women including women accessing the Empower Women project.

Interviews with partners

Telephone interviews were conducted with staff from four partner agencies: the Human Trafficking Foundation, who were interviewed twice during the course of the project, Hestia [3], the Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commission, Total Family Coaching and Parenting and the Women's Therapy Centre.

Project Staff

Interviews were undertaken with three staff members at Solace Women's Aid and two staff members at Shpresa Programme. In addition, the evaluators facilitated Evaluation Planning meeting with key project staff from Shpresa and Solace every 3 months.

Conferences

Evaluators attended the Conference on 31st January 2017 at Portcullis House exploring the needs and experiences of Albanian speaking women fleeing GBV. They also attended the Conference on 6th June 2017 at UCL addressing the experiences and needs of ASW with insecure immigration status, fleeing violence and abuse.

Ethics

Informed consent was sought and received from all women and young people who took part in this evaluation. It was made clear to all participants that participation was entirely voluntary and that their consent to involvement in the evaluation could be terminated at any time. All women and young people who took part in the evaluation were receiving support from staff and volunteers at Shpresa.

While women all gave their consent to being interviewed or to taking part in a focus group, the interviewer was mindful of the potential risk of re-traumatising women through the interview process. Interviews were deliberately kept informal and were not undertaken in

[3] Hestia is a registered charity and the largest provider of accommodation and outreach support in London for female, males and transgendered survivors of human trafficking

formal settings which might replicate the experience of being interviewed by Home Office staff or other officials. When women became upset they were told they could stop the interview at any time and were reminded that this would not affect any services they were to receive now or in the future.

In focus groups women spoke in more general terms and many women said how much they wanted to contribute to the evaluation and support the project by giving their feedback. Some women explained that they wanted to have their voices heard and to let people know about their experiences and the experiences of other Albanian women. However, in one to one interviews two of the women became upset and, on one occasion the interviewer chose not to proceed, as while the woman stated that she wanted to take part in the evaluation, a recent negative decision from the Home Office regarding her asylum claim had left her confused and very anxious. On another occasion an evaluator had travelled to interview a woman who had accessed the weekly workshops. It was apparent as soon as the evaluator met her that she was tired. The woman had that week been informed that she had been granted asylum after a positive conclusive grounds decision from the NRM. She admitted to having had a very emotional week, feeling exhausted and wanting to go home so the evaluator immediately reassured her that she did not have to take part and the interview did not go ahead.

Women receiving an active casework service from Solace Women's Aid but not accessing Shpresa's women's support groups were not asked whether they would like to be interviewed as part of the evaluation. It was felt to be inappropriate to interview these women, who may not have networks of support in the community and who may have been in a violent relationship at the time of the interview. Instead, the Solace Project Worker kindly shared two anonymised case-studies which gave an insight into her work with women. In addition, the anonymised reporting data from the Solace casework service was shared with the evaluators, providing information on the demographics of the women accessing a service, the progress towards the project outcomes and both achievements and challenges of the casework service.

Ethical considerations do not end at the point that the interview or focus group ends. All data collected during the course of the evaluation has been anonymised. In addition, the evaluators are committed to working with Shpresa Programme and Solace Women's Aid to ensure that the voices of the women who bravely chose to take part in this evaluation are heard by those who have the power and resources to make a positive difference to the lives of these women: service providers, practitioners, funders, commissioners and policy makers.

3. Literature Review on Gender Based Violence (GBV) amongst migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women

While violence against women and girls (VAWG) cuts across all groups of women regardless of class, ethnicity, race, religion, sexuality and nationality, research indicates that migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women who are 'outside of their country of origin' are especially at risk of gender-based violence (Rights of Women 2011: 5; see also Pillai 2001; Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Anitha 2010). Research suggests, for example, that asylum seeking and refugee women in the UK are more likely to be victims of rape and sexual assault and more prone to be subjected to domestic violence (Refugee Council 2009; Anitha 2011; Hubbard et al 2013). The literature recognises that violence can occur at all stages of the migration process (Mullally 2011; Rights of Women 2011): women may have been victims of GBV in their home countries and the violence continues through and after migration; they may have left their country to escape GBV; they may have been trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation; or they may have migrated for other reasons but then experienced GBV in transit and/or their destination country.

Within the literature there is recognition that to understand the particular vulnerabilities of migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women, attention needs to be paid to the ways in which individual and cultural factors intersect with an array of structurally embedded inequalities and practices that both produce the conditions for gender based violence to prevail and also inhibit women's agency to challenge violence and abuse (Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Sokoloff and Dupont 2005; Sokoloff 2008). For example, migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women are more at risk of an 'intensified experience' of violence (Rights of Women 2011: 5) because their social location makes them less able to access legal and social services which might yield protection (see also Hubbard et 2013).

There is consensus that such 'intensifiers' of GBV for migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women are manifold and include:

1. Language problems

Research indicates that ability to speak the language of the host nation can be empowering to women who are victims of GBV. As Menjivar and Salcido (2002: 903) note 'for many immigrant women language is a barrier in accessing and communicating their needs to community-service providers and in seeking protection from their abusers through the criminal justice system' (see also Hubbard et al 2013). A lack of host language can moreover enable abusers to assert further power, particularly if abusers have superior language proficiency. However, in some instances gaining language skills presents a challenge to the power of the abuser and can lead to an escalation in violence (Menjivar and Salcido 2002). While the literature acknowledges that gaining language skills alone does not automatically ensure greater protection against violence, the overall importance of language learning for migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women as a general tool of empowerment is nonetheless recognized (Menjivar and Salcido 2002 Burman and Chantler 2005; Family Violence Prevention Fund 2009).

2. Social isolation, shame and stigma.

The literature highlights the ways in which social isolation can intensify women's experiences of GBV (Family Violence Prevention Fund 2009; Rana 2012; Hubbard et al 2013). Many migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women are cut off from extended networks of family and friends placing them at greater risk of abuse. Social isolation is exploited by perpetrators of violence in a number of ways: either within existing abusive relations as a tool to further exert power and control; or as an avenue to forge new violent relationships in which socially isolated women are groomed for sexual exploitation or domestic servitude (Hubbard et al 2013: 3). However, the literature also recognizes that women can be socially isolated when they have family and friendship networks in place. In communities in which violence against women is seen as acceptable and speaking out against violence is seen as bringing shame to families and communities, women who are victims of violence are silenced through (fears of) stigmatization, marginalization, retaliation or rejection (Pillai 2001; Ben-Porat 2010; Hubbard et 2013). They may as a result be pressurized to stay in abusive relationships by family (Rana 2012) or be fearful that disclosure will further stigmatise their communities by reinforcing already existing racial and ethnic stereotypes (Agnew 2009). The shame and stigma related to sex trafficking mean many women and girls who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation are unable to return to their family of origin. Trafficked women who are returned to their home countries are therefore particularly vulnerable to re—trafficking because of the vulnerable, socially marginalised position they find themselves in on return (Corrin 2005; Tahiraj 2017).

3. Insecure Immigration Status

Insecure immigration status can intensify women's experience of violence in a number of ways (Rana 2008; Anitha 2010; Anitha 2011; Mullally 2011; Girishkumar 2014). Firstly, the threat of deportation, fabricated or real, can render women vulnerable to manipulation and sexual exploitation, and can be used by abusers to prevent women from seeking help (Family Violence Prevention Fund 2009; Rana 2012). Secondly, women may themselves be uncertain about their legal rights and unable or fearful of seeking help for fear of deportation. Thirdly, the law itself may bring 'added risks and vulnerability' (Mullally 2011: 462). For women with uncertain or dependent migration status who are victims of GBV. 'Women who may want to access support to help them escape domestic violence may in effect be replacing domestic violence with potential state violence through deportation' (Burman and Chantler 2005: 66). While it is beyond the scope of this review to give a comprehensive overview of the relevant legislation (see Graca 2017 for an overview) there is consensus within the literature that the current immigration legal system does not adequately address the lived realities of women with insecure immigration status who are experiencing GBV (Burman and Chantler 2005; Anitha 2010; Anitha 2011; Mullally 2011; Hubbard et 2013; Girishkumar 2014). As an example, Anitha's analysis of domestic violence among South Asian migrant women in the UK concludes that there 'is an urgent need for a reform of the law in the United Kingdom' to adequately accommodate the needs of immigrant women who experience domestic violence' (2011: 1279).

4. Poverty

Literature on GBV recognizes the interrelationship of poverty and violence against women (see Slabbert 2017 for overview). Women living in poverty are more susceptible to domestic violence, as they not only lack the economic means to escape their situation (and access to

money may be further restricted by their abuser/s) but also that living in impoverished conditions can also be a trigger for violence (Bell 2003; Slabbert 2017). In particular, women in poverty who are not in the workforce are more susceptible to domestic violence (Bell 2003). Research with migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women in Wales notes that many women 'were living in poverty or destitution, which makes them vulnerable to various forms of violence, from forced labour to prostitution' (Hubbard 2013: 3-4). The correlation between poverty, migrant, refugee or asylum seeker status and vulnerability to GBV should therefore not be underestimated (Family Violence Prevention Fund 2009).

It is acknowledged in the literature that poverty acts as a catalyst to migration (Corrin 2005). It also accentuates vulnerability to GBV at all stages of the migration process. In both home and destination countries (and places in-between) economic hardship makes women targets of trafficking and sexual exploitation. In Albania, for example, 'the majority of identified victims of trafficking (62%) lived in poverty prior to being trafficked. Poverty continues to be one major indicator that increases vulnerability, and traffickers prey on the vulnerable' (Tahiraj 2017:11).

Poverty is compounded by state policy (Hubbard et 2013). For example, current immigration legislation means, that women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)[4] face the stark choice of staying in the abusive relationship or risking destitution or deportation

[4] Immigration law in the UK stipulates that women who come to the UK to join partners or spouses are subject a probationary period. If in this time the relationship breaks down, they no longer have the right to remain in the UK and have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) (Anitha 2011). Until a change in the law in 2002 this meant that women who were experiencing domestic violence were not only at risk of deportation if they left a violent marriage before the end of the specified period but were also ineligible for state support if they did leave. In 2002 the Domestic Violence Rule was introduced which meant women could apply for indefinite leave to remain [ILR) if their marriage had broken down because of domestic violence. In 2003 the evidentiary requirements were broadened, but concern remains that the law still intensifies migrant women's experiences of violence in that 'the evidence required still relies on successful contact with services, which are expected to record the disclosure, thereby taking little account of the nature of domestic violence or of the reality of service experiences for minority ethnic women in the United Kingdom' (Anitha 2011: 1263-4). To be eligible women also have to have no criminal convictions, failing to take account of the type and severity of crime that has been committed or to recognise that some women may have criminal convictions entirely because of their abuse, thereby ignoring 'the complex links between experiencing domestic violence and becoming involved in the criminal justice system' (Rights of Women 2011: 15). Moreover, during the period of time the Home Office takes to decide on the application women still have no recourse to public funds excluding them from vital welfare and accommodation support needed to escape a violent relationship. Moreover, the DV Rule only offers protection (all be it limited) to those women who are in the UK as the wife, partner or civil partner of someone who is British or has Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).
http://rightsofwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ROW_Domestic-Violence-A4-DIGITAL.pdf
(Accessed 23 September 2018) Rights of Women (2014) go on to note that:' Only women who have leave (permission to be in the UK) as a spouse, civil partner or partner of someone who is British or has ILR can make applications under the domestic violence rule. If you have leave as a fiancée, student or worker you cannot make an application under the domestic violence rule even if you have married someone who is British or has ILR in the UK. If you are married, in a civil partnership or in a relationship with someone who is not settled in the UK (for example, you are the dependent of a worker) you also cannot make applications under the domestic violence rule.' For these women it may be possible to apply for asylum or to make an application to stay in the UK on the basis of private and family life.

(Imkaan 2008). If women are without access to public funds most cannot access refuges or meet their basic material needs (Anitha 2011).

For women who are in the position to legally work limited language skills, social isolation, caring responsibilities, restrictive gender norms and racist employment structures are just some of the factors which limit access to paid work. It means that skilled migrant women face additional barriers entering the labour market despite their experience and qualifications (Rubin et al 2008; Pemberton et al 2014). In addition, perpetrators may also control household finances and limit women's access to earnings and household resources as a form of abuse and control (Rana 2012).

5. Lack of familiarity with law and services

Arriving in a new country, women's choices are impeded by a lack of familiarity of their rights within the law, and relevant services where they can obtain help (Burman and Chantler 2005; Graca 2017); a situation often exacerbated by and interlinked with a lack of language skills, social isolation ad insecure immigration status. Many women assess their current situation in relation to their knowledge of legal, institutional and cultural frameworks of their country of origin which may have less legal protection and service resources for victims of GBV (Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Graca 2017). Research conducted in Wales, for example, notes that many migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women 'were largely unaware of the available services which can provide assistance to those experiencing violence' (Hubbard et 2013: 4).

6. Inadequate Services

The literature recognizes that the violence experienced by migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women may be intensified by a lack of appropriate services in place to meet their particular needs. There are three key issues identified. Firstly, that there is an overall lack of services to help victims of GBV; a situation exacerbated in the UK by cuts to funding and changes to commissioning practices (Coy et al 2009; Towers and Walby 2012; APPG on Domestic and Sexual Violence 2015; Corry 2018). Women's Aid Annual Survey noted that in 2016 1 in 4 referrals to refuge services was declined due to lack of space (Women's Aid 2017). The closure of the Eaves project in 2015 was a particularly devastating blow to the sector. Eaves had been in operation since 1977 providing a range of services including specialist support for women who had been trafficked and women who had been victims of sexual violence. The Poppy Project, for example, had supported 2000 women who had been victims of trafficking (https://www.eavesforwomen.org.uk/news-events/news/closure-of-eaves-another-nail-in-the-coffin-for-the-women-s-sector/; http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/womens-charity-eaves-closes-citing-abysmal-commissioning-high-rents-factors/management/article/1370967 accessed 6th November 2017). Secondly, mainstream services may lack the 'cultural competence' to address the particular needs of migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women. Cultural competence here is defined as 'an understanding of the cultural differences of clients as well as the particular cultural and structural needs that different communities have – including language specialism; immigration expertise (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005: 51; see also Menjivar and Salcido 2002;

Ben-Porat 2010; Larasi 2013). Thirdly, there is a demand yet a paucity of specialist services that can attend to the particular needs of migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women in relation to issues of violence (Hubbard et al 2013; Larasi 2013; Women's Aid 2017). Outside of London there is limited provision for Black and Minority Ethnic women. In the South West, for example, there are no refuges specifically for BME women (Women's Aid 2017).

New Migrant Communities

While common patterns of GBV amongst migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women are identified within the literature, it is acknowledged that an understanding of the particularities of specific groups of women in specific contexts is needed to identify how experiences of GBV differ between communities, to ensure the most appropriate policy and service provision responses (Imkaan 2015). Most of the case study literature on GBV in migrant communities relates to established migrant communities (for example Anitha's work with South Asian migrant women in the UK) and there is little research specifically in relation to GBV within newly arrived migrant communities generally and the Albanian community in particular (Coy and Sharp 2015; Tahiraj 2017; Hynes et al 2018 being key exceptions). In terms of service provision it is recognised that targeted specialist services and provision 'run by and for the communities they seek to serve' (Imkaan 2015: 7) – such as the programmes run by Shpresa - play a vital role in supporting marginalised groups of women such as migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women to escape GBV, and act as a key point of contact for mainstream GBV services to reach such marginalised groups (Family Violence Prevention Fund 2009; Ben-Porat 2010; Hubbard et al 2013; Larasi 2013). However, it is noted that such specialist services in the UK are 'neither sufficiently recognised nor adequately resourced' (Imkaan 2015: 10) and vulnerable to closure (Larasi 2013; Imkaan 2015; Imkaan 2016; Women's Aid 2017). With such gaps in the literature apparent, more research is needed on GBV within new migrant communities in the UK to investigate specific patterns of violence, specific service needs and the capacity of providers to meet these needs.

Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation

Existing research on GBV in the Albanian community (Coy and Sharp 2015; Tahiraj 2017; Hynes et al 2018) notes the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation within the community. According to the National Referral Mechanism[5] (NRF) reporting in the second quarter of 2017 Albanians constituted the highest number of nationals identified as potential victims of trafficking in the UK; the majority of these were recorded as having been trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation. In Coy and Sharp's (2015) evaluation of the partnership between the Shpresa Programme and Solace Women's Aid it was noted that, of the Albanian speaking women accessing the Empower project, 46% of the women had been trafficked, most (95%) for the purposes of sexual exploitation and 5% for domestic servitude (2015: 25).

[5] The **National Referral Mechanism** (NRM) is a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. The NRM is also the **mechanism** through which the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) collect data about victims. (See http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/uk-human-trafficking-centre/national-referral-mechanism accessed on 10 November 2017)

There is consensus across the literature that human trafficking, whether for the purposes of sexual and/or labour exploitation, constitutes a significant, criminal, profit driven transnational problem (Centre for Social Justice 2015; Sharapov 2017). The need for more accurate data on the scale of trafficking, both globally and nationally, is also widely noted (Centre for Social Justice 2013; All Party Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery 2014; Hynes et al 2018). A number of concerns are raised in relation to the reliability of current modes of data collection pointing to problems of quantifying because of the hidden underground nature of trafficking; an underreporting of cases in official figures; inconsistencies in how data is collected; variations in the criteria used to define what constitutes trafficking; lack of methodological transparency underpinning some large scale data sets (Anderson 2007; Dowling et al 2007; Eaves 2009; Andrijasevic 2010; Home Office 2010; Home Office 2012; All Party Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery 2014 ; Human Trafficking Foundation 2013; Lipscombe and Beard 2014; Madden Dempsey 2017; Raphael 2017). As the Centre for Justice Slavery Working Group noted 'Our research shows that a large proportion of cases are never recognised or reported, and do not appear in any statistics or measures of the size of the problem. There is no consistent grip on the numbers; agencies charged with such responsibility are groping in the dark for a sense of scale (2013: 16).

Nonetheless all the data that does exist indicates that the vast majority of people trafficked for prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation are female (Dowling et al 2007; Home Office 2016a; Tahiraj 2017). The Eaves project (2009), for example, suggests that 'possibly up to 85% of transnational victims are women and children' (5). The ILO estimates that more than 99% of victims of forced sexual exploitation' are women and girls (ILO 2017: 39). In England of the 1090 referrals of potential victims of trafficking reported by the NRM in the second quarter of 2017, 93% of adults identified as potential victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation were female (NRM 2017:13). However, sexual violence against women and girls is not limited to trafficking specifically for sexual exploitation but also occurs in other forms of trafficking (Eaves 2009). A survey of health amongst survivors of trafficking in England noted for example that '[t]wo-thirds of women reported being forced to have sex during trafficking' This included 95 % of women trafficked for sexual exploitation but also 54% of those trafficked for domestic servitude and 21% for other types of labour exploitation (Oram et al 2016:1075).

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is clearly a gender issue but has, as Russell (2013) notes, 'remained undertheorized as gender-based violence' (2013: 83) Turner (2013:61) argues that trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation needs to be understood as part of a 'continuum of violence against women' (65) in which experiences of violence are molded by the intersections of gender and other vectors of discrimination based on race, class, nationality, ethnicity (Crenshaw 1991; Turner 2017; Kelly 2016). 'When trafficking is expressly conceived as violence against women and consequently as gender—based discrimination' Turner argues 'it shares much in common with other forms of violence against women' (61). Stephen-Smith (2008) also notes such continuities of violence. Half of the trafficked women engaged with the Poppy Project had experienced some level of sexual and physical violence *prior* to migration, leading her to conclude that 'previous experiences of sexual or physical violence may result in women being targeted by traffickers. Women who have suffered abuse are vulnerable to accepting offers from people who can offer a way out of the situation' (12).

The literature on trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation highlights a range of push factors within home countries that make some women and girls more likely to be trafficked. Poverty, a dearth of employment opportunities and limited access to regular migratory routes to escape debt and poverty are key factors which render women and girls particularly vulnerable to exploitation (Stephen-Smith 2008; Turner 2013; Home Office 2016a; Tahiraj 2017; Hynes et al 2018). Corrin (2005:546) notes that '[i]n assessing the traffic in women, a key concern is the limited choices for economic engagement those women living in absolute poverty have. Survival strategies in such situations entail risks and harsh choices'. Within the literature it is argued that easy and rigid distinctions between consent and coercion, agency and victimhood, smuggling and trafficking cannot be made (Anderson 2007; Andrijasevic 2010; Russell 2014; Mai 2016; Sharapov 2017) as exploitation occurs within a complex global web of social and economic inequalities, in which 'exploitative operators profit from the misfortunes of others' (Kelly 2016). For example, a woman who initially 'consents' to be smuggled, seeking to escape poverty through promises of work, may find herself later trafficked in transit or in the destination country.

In relation to Albania, Tahiraj's analysis of the trafficking of women and girls draws similar conclusions. Women and girls from poorer backgrounds are more likely to be trafficked. 'Trafficking camouflaged in the form of work opportunities or proposals to marriage is seen as a way out of poverty and isolation (2017: 15). Domestic violence against women and girls is rife (see also van Hook et al 2000; National Institute of Statistics INSTAT Albania 2009; Amnesty International 2010; United National Support to Social Inclusion in Albania Programme, 2015; Hynes et al 2018) with particularly low rates of reporting in rural areas, and limited resources such as help lines, refuges, rehabilitation services or access to legal aid to help women escape abusive relationships (Amnesty International 2010; CEDAW 2016). Trafficking has been a criminal act in Albania since 2001 but there is a significant disjuncture between policy and practice (Hynes et al 2018). Moreover traditional norms which legitimise violence against women (Poteyva and Wasileski 2016) and confer social and economic power to men underscore a context in which the trade of trafficking women and girls is able to flourish (King and Vullnetari 2009; Tahiraj 2017).

There is no single profile of the trafficked woman (Tahiraj 2017: 11; http://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKUT/IAC/2016/92.html accessed 6th November 2017). Women and girls may be trafficked via arranged or forced marriages, or become involved in trafficking in order to escape such arrangements. Fears over revenge killings related to blood feuds and honour codes as stipulated in Albanian customary law, the Kanun, have also been linked to trafficking (Tahiraj 2017; see also Van Hook et al 2000; Schwander-Sievers 2006; McDonald 2014). Blood feuds have implications for women in a number of ways. Traditionally only adult male members of the family should be killed to avenge a blood feud, yet in recent years women and girls have also become direct targets 'to atone for family honour' (Tahiraj, 2017: 21; see also Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland) 2009). Blood feuds also have economic significance for households with specifically gendered implications. For example, when men are either confined to their houses to avoid being murdered or are murdered, women have to take over responsibility as the main breadwinners (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2008). More research is needed here, however, on the interconnections between blood feuds, poverty and trafficking.

While trafficked women come from all parts of the country, rural and urban areas, from a variety of social backgrounds and are a variety of ages, patterns can nonetheless be identified. Women and girls living in poverty, especially those without family support, are most likely to be trafficked. Women and girls who have been trafficked and return to Albania are also vulnerable to re-trafficking (Free Movement 2016; http://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKUT/IAC/2016/92.html accessed 6th November 2017). The stigmatisation attached to trafficking for sexual exploitation means many are ostracised by their families if they return (Home Office 2015; Hynes et al 2018). As the family is the cornerstone of informal welfare and safety within Albania such exclusion makes the women and girls vulnerable again to the traffickers. Some programmes of assistance and reintegration exist (see for example 'Different and Equal' programme http://differentandequal.org/home/) but provision is limited and unable to meet demand (Amnesty International 2010; Tahiraj 2017).

4. Evaluation Findings in the work with ASW affected by GBV

This literature review has identified the key vulnerabilities of refugee and migrant women, including those who are undocumented, and highlights how these vulnerabilities intensify their experiences of violence and abuse and act as barriers when these women seek to access services. In this evaluation we will draw on the literature to inform our understanding of the evaluation findings and to identify good practice within the project, some of the challenges facing the project staff and to highlight opportunities to increase impact and share the learning in the final year of the project.

VAWG and Albanian women

Two hundred and sixteen ASW have taken part in Shpresa's groups for women affected by VAWG in the two years of phase two of the Empower Women project. Ninety eight of these women have completed an evaluation forms and twenty six have taken part in an interview or focus group as part of this evaluation.

As has been highlighted in the literature and in the evaluation of the first phase of this project (Coy and Sharp 2015), there is a limited knowledge base on VAWG in Albania but key findings include:

- higher prevalence rates of domestic violence and abuse among Albanian women than women living in the UK
- Albanians constitute the highest number of nationals identified as potential victims of trafficking in the UK, among women the trafficking is 95% of the time for sexual exploitation
- Albanian women rarely seek support from statutory or other agencies.

These findings were mirrored in all the interviews and focus groups undertaken by the evaluators. In every focus group women stressed the difference in attitudes to violence against women in Albania and here in the UK. Firstly, women explained that the issue was not spoken of in Albania:

'Back home, in my country, we never discuss these topics with our parents, in school…'
Woman in focus group, 10 July 2017

Women repeatedly emphasised that if you did experience violence, even your own family would not support you should you speak up about the violence or seek to leave a violent relationship:

'In Albania even your own family, they do not support you. Your husband can come and kill you and morally everyone judges you. If you are a divorced woman, your life will be hell.'
Woman in focus group, 27 October 2017

'Even if a woman told her mum and dad, her mum and dad would say: 'you must stay with your husband, he can do what he likes'.'
Woman in focus group, 15 July 2017

Young people, as well as the women, spoke of how it is taboo to speak of GBV in Albania:

'I think Albania wants to maintain the image of a perfect family and to break the stereotype is to damage that imagine...If you talk about violence and you are the victim you are blamed and not the perpetrator…In Albania your parents and everyone will tell you 'he is your husband so do not talk about the violence.''
Young people aged 13-19 in focus group, 14 April 2018

Women described how public opinion plays a significant role in the options, or lack of them, available to women in Albanian society:

'In Albania you have to stay with your partner because of others' opinions. What happens in the family home stays in the family home. In Albania you live according to others' opinions.'
Woman in focus group, 15 July 2017

*'There (*in Albania*) it is a norm. It is accepted. Violence is normal.'*
Woman in focus group, 15 July 2017

Other women felt strongly that while '*everyone has grown up with it'* and accepting violence is '*the mentality'* in Albania, nonetheless '*it is not normal*'. In one focus group (12 July, 2017) women discussed why it was seen as normal. They felt that economic dependence on men made them more vulnerable, as identified in the literature, but that this was not the only reason women experienced violence. This group of women said that in Tirana and big cities women have a little more freedom and may go out for coffee on their own, whereas women in rural areas in '*the villages and the north'* remain extremely vulnerable. They described how a women's position has not changed in centuries and women's lives have little value.

'If anyone gives birth to a boy everyone is happy. If they give birth to a girl it is nothing, less than nothing.'
Woman in focus group, 12 July 2017

'The woman is belonging to the man. She has no rights. No rights.'
Woman in focus group, 10 July 2017

Women agreed that the silence around women's violence in Albania and the acceptance of violence as the norm results in women not having any understanding of their rights or of what they might do to protect themselves and their children in the face of violence and abuse:

'We come from a country where we are ignorant in how to make it stop and not repeat. We don't have knowledge. It is hard to change from how you were raised.'
Woman in focus group, 12 July 2017

The interviews with young people at Shpresa Programme (see below) found that they too are aware of the prevalence of VAWG:

*'I am a volunteer at Shpresa and I hear a lot of stories of women being abused in the Albanian community and I care about my mum and L (*Director of Shpresa*) and my sister and when I heard the statistics that 60% of women are abused, I want to put a stop to it… When I heard one woman got murdered in one of the cases, I really wanted to get involved….'*
Albanian boy, aged 16, interviewed on 10 July 2017

While there was a recognition that services in the UK were far from perfect, women said that here in the UK they have begun to learn that they have rights and that they can ask for help:

'In the UK it is a bit different. We don't have our family members around and we can seek help and be anonymous. You can seek help and hide yourself. What happens here is that the system is really bureaucratic and complicated and it stresses you out just to understand it, but there is support.'
Trafficked woman, aged 24, interviewed on 27 October, 2017

'… here we are aware that there are ways of becoming safe and not living in a violent relationship.'
Woman in focus group, 27 October 2017

<u>The impact of the group work with women at Shpresa who have experienced VAWG to raise awareness of VAWG, to help prevent VAWG and to promote healthy relationships</u>

Nineteen women gave feedback, via one to one interviews or focus groups, about the Empower Women project's workshops and the support of Shpresa and Solace. All the women (n. 19) said that as a result of attending the workshops they had more knowledge about what to do they, or a friend should, experience VAWG.

Women said that before they have been to the Solace workshops they had some ideas about their rights and some information about VAWG but their knowledge was limited:

'I knew my rights before the workshop but after I gained a lot more information.'
Woman in focus group, 15 July 2017

'I understood more (from the workshops) about the consequences on children if there is abuse.'
Woman in focus group, 15 July 2017

'I got more information…I learnt more about psychological abuse…I learnt more about abuses of different ages, especially older women.'
Woman in focus group, 15 July 2017

Women described how the workshops gave them two key pieces of information:

(i) Where to go for help

*'A (*Project Worker at Solace*) has given me a list of numbers I could ring.'*
Woman in focus group, 27 October 2017

*'(*After the course*) I better understood the process for getting help'*
Woman in focus group, 15 July 2017

'Before doing the course I did not know there were many places where you could refer women for help. I did not know there were groups where you could speak with women with the same problems. It helps me to know how and where to get help.'
Woman in focus group, 12 July 2017

(ii) How to stay safe

'Before we done the training I was a bit ignorant on how to act and what to do if violence happened to me. After the training it opened my eyes on what to do and how to protect myself.'
Woman in focus group, 12 July 2017

'I learnt from the course that if she does decide to leave then she should not tell her partner as that can be more dangerous.'
Woman in focus group, 15 July 2017

'Now I have phone numbers at home from Solace Women's Aid and I would say if the violence is big it is better to be without him than with him and I would say get out before you are killed.'
Trafficked woman, aged 46, interviewed on 27 October, 2017

'Safety is so very important. Here is a safe place. This is the most important thing for everyone. You want to feel safety and here you can be safe.'
Trafficked woman, aged 24, interviewed on 27 October, 2017

Ninety eight women attending the Empower Women groups at Shpresa completed evaluation forms which asked them to rate the impact of the service on a scale of one to ten. Key findings were that:

When asked, 'Since coming to Shpresa have you gained more information about life in the UK, your rights and responsibilities and how to stay safe?', 50 (51%) of these women, on a scale of one to ten, rated their access to information at scale point 10. Seventy one women (72%) rated their response to this question at 6 or above. No one on a scale of one to ten responded with a one.

When asked, 'Since coming to Shpresa do you feel safer, more confident, less distressed and better able to make choices that keep you and your children safe?', 53 (54%) of these women, on a scale of one to ten, rated their safety at scale point 10. Seventy nine women (81%) rated their response at 6 or above. No one on a scale of one to ten responded with a one.

When asked, 'Since coming to Shpresa do you have more support networks and are you less isolated?', 53 (54%) out of 97 women who responded to this question, on a scale of one to ten rated their reduction in isolation at scale point 10. Eighty two out of 97 women (85%) who responded to this question rated their response at 6 or above. No one on a scale of one to ten responded with a one.

All 26 women interviewed or taking part in focus groups were accessing services at Shpresa and all spoke very positively about the role Shpresa plays in their lives. In simple terms, women explained that they know they can refer women at risk to Shpresa and they will then get the help that they need. At the focus group on 12 July 2017, all six women concurred that they would advise a woman experiencing violence to go to Shpresa where she could get advice and so much more: access to English classes, support from other women, training and activities:

> *'I would advise her (*a woman experiencing violence*) to go to Shpresa for whatever she needs. Who is not part of Shpresa should come here.'*
> Woman in focus group, 12 July 2017

Two women taking part in focus groups (one on 10 July and one on 12 July) had already referred friends experiencing violence to Shpresa. One of these woman had left her violent partner with support from Shpresa and Solace. The other remained with her violent husband, but her friend felt reassured by the fact that she continues to attend Shpresa and can call on Shpresa for advice and support at any time.

Women saw Shpresa as much more than an advice agency:

> *'I came here and started learning things. I started feeling better with myself. I started doing jobs and volunteering. I did the ASDAN course. I did a lot of training. I did the Albanian Women's Empowerment event and Refugee Week.'*
> Trafficked woman, aged 24, interviewed on 27 October, 2017

At the focus group on 27 October, two trafficked women spoke about how Shpresa gave them a purpose in life, a replacement family and a place to go when they are anxious or troubled:

> *'Now I have Shpresa I have a purpose, a reason to go out. I am really busy so I am not always thinking about the things that have happened.'*
>
> *'...when I am here it feels I am with my extended family. When I have something upsetting I can come here...If you did not see me here you would see me in mental health hospital.'*

Besa is 24. She was referred to Shpresa Programme by Hestia. She was trafficked from Albania to Italy and then Belgium where she was repeatedly raped and kept locked in a flat. In Brussels she managed to escape from her traffickers with the help of a client. She was pregnant and came to the UK in the back of a lorry. She has claimed asylum and been referred to the National Referral Mechanism as a potential victim of trafficking. She now has a four month old baby and is living in Asylum Support accommodation in east London. She describes feeling 'lonely and judged'. She is very frightened of what her family will think or do should she be returned to Albania. She is aware she will be considered to have brought shame on her family and her village.

Since she was referred to Shpresa, (just three weeks ago at the time she spoke with the evaluator), she has begun to attend English classes regularly at Shpresa, where she has met other women with whom she can talk and socialise. She has been referred to Solace for casework support and she has been referred to an Albanian speaking therapist who runs a therapeutic support group for women who have experienced GBV at Shpresa. She describes how:

'When I am stressed now I have someone to talk to. Here I feel like home. I feel safe.'

Besa is likely to have to wait many months or even years for a decision on her asylum application. Staff at Shpresa have explained to her that during that time she can access support from the staff, volunteers and her peers at Shpresa. She will also be encouraged to develop her skills and confidence by continuing to improve her English and by undertaking training and by volunteering at Shpresa to support other women in a similar position to herself.

<u>Casework for women experiencing violence and abuse, provided by Solace via one-to-one advice, information, practical and emotional support and advocacy</u>

During the year in question 93 women accessed a casework service at Solace Women's Aid. A further 29 Albanian women were supported via Solace's Advice line, they are not included in the number of 93 women accessing a casework. So in total, during the two year life of the project, Solace has supported 122 Albanian speaking women affected by GBV. Forty three of the 93 women (46%) were referred to Solace by Shpresa while 13 (14%) referred themselves to the project and others were referred by other Solace projects or specialist providers

including Hestia and IKWRO. Solace staff noted that this project has enabled Solace to engage Albanian women from a range of referral routes, not just from Shpresa.

Women were aged 16 to 50, with the majority (30%) aged 26 to 30 years of age and the next largest aged group (17%) aged 21 to 25 years old. 54% of the women had applied for asylum and were awaiting a decision – many of these women had been trafficked and this was the basis of their asylum claim. 19% had NRPF. 8% were on spousal visas. 12% were British nationals. 6% had refugee status or Indefinite Leave to Remain. 1% were EEA nationals.

The implications of the women's immigration status will be discussed in more detail below but it is notable that 73% of these women had insecure immigration status and a further 8% were dependent on their partner's visa. This is a shift from the first phase of the project where nearly a quarter (24%) of the women accessing a casework service were British Nationals. As staff at Solace explained, working with women who have insecure immigration status is extremely demanding in terms of the caseworker's time, as these women may be destitute and without legal representation, and securing safe accommodation for them can be extremely challenging. The clear implication is that additional funding is needed for projects working with women experiencing GBV who cannot reply on the protections afforded to British citizens or even the limited protection afforded to those who fall under the Domestic Violence Rule.

Via the casework service Solace has supported women who experienced multiple types of abuse including: physical, sexual, psychological, forced marriage; 'Honour' Based Violence; rape; stalking and harassment; gang related violence; sexual exploitation; sexual offences (excluding rape); and child sexual abuse.

The majority of women at any one time were living in insecure accommodation: staying with friends, in a refuge, in temporary housing, with the perpetrator, or even sleeping rough. All the women had some additional support needs over and above the VAWG, including mental health problems, language barriers, physical health issues, depression, and one woman was pregnant.

The nature of the support offered by Solace was flexible and responsive to the needs and experiences of the women. The Project Worker always begins her contact with women by undertaking a comprehensive risk assessment. The complex and intractable nature of the problems the women bring to the service and the fact that the Project Worker at Solace is employed for just 4 days a week requires a high level of partnership working and clear onward referral routes. Typically, if it is possible to describe a typical case, the Project Worker will assist women with:

- Securing emergency accommodation
- Applying for asylum
- Obtaining financial support
- Accessing ESOL classes
- Accessing health services for themselves and their children
- Securing emergency food and clothing from charities
- Referring for specialist legal advice
- Accessing counselling and mental health support

- Attending court and securing orders (e.g. Protective Steps orders) to safeguard the women and her children
- Liaising with social services
- Attending MARAC[6]
- Undertaking safety planning.

Fatina obtained the number for Solace Women's Aid from a friend. She called Solace and was referred to M (the Solace Empower Women Project Worker) via the Solace Advice Team. She was very distressed during this first phone call. M sought to calm her and reassure her as it was hard to understand what Fatina was saying while she was crying. Once Fatina was able to talk more clearly, M understood that Fatina had a head injury from an assault that had taken place two days ago. She had not reported this assault to anyone as she explained to M that she had not claimed asylum so was too scared to go to hospital or contact the police in case she was deported.

She was with a friend at that time so M spoke with Fatina and her friend and reassured and supported them until Fatina felt ready to go with her friend to the Accident and Emergency department at the local hospital. M called A&E and spoke to staff there, while Fatina was being seen. The receptionist at A&E found a Greek speaking doctor as Fatina also spoke Greek. Working together, the Greek doctor and M found out that Fatina had been brought to the UK via an arranged marriage but that she was then trafficked by her husband once in the UK. The Greek doctor helped her to understand that she needed to speak with the police so the police came and opened an investigation.

M contacted Southall Black Sisters (SBS) as they have funding to assist women with no recourse to public funds. Fatina had to stay in hospital for four days due to her head injury. During this time forensic evidence was gathered. SBS found a refuge place for Fatina and she was given new clothes and help in finding a lawyer who can represent her in her asylum claim. M continues to liaise with SBS and Fatina's lawyers to ensure that she is given the best possible chance of securing international protection and staying safe.

All the evidence from this evaluation is that the group work service at Shpresa, supplemented by the workshops delivered by Solace, and the casework service offered by Solace, provide Albanian speaking women with:

- Space where they can talk about VAWG and acknowledge its impact on their lives
- Information about how and where to get help
- Practical and emotional support in leaving abusive situations.

What is also apparent from all the evaluation data is that these women would not access similar services from any other agencies.

[6] A MARAC, or multi-agency risk assessment conference, is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, probation, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Women are universally positive about the service and all the qualitative data points to women feeling able to voice their fears and concerns and access help, often for the very first time, in addressing very real dangers and the impact of long term violence and abuse.

Drawing on the literature we see that the key vulnerabilities which intensify the experience of GBV for migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women are:

- Language barriers
- Isolation, stigma and shame
- Insecure immigration status
- Poverty
- Lack of familiarity with law and services
- Inadequate services

The evaluators saw evidence of these vulnerabilities being addressed throughout this project:

Language barriers

In 2016, Shpresa secured funding from the City Bridge Foundation to supplement the work of phase two of the Empower Women project by funding English language classes for all the women taking part in the Empower Women project. While this element of the work is not being evaluated in this report, all the women interviewed as part of this evaluation were attending regular English classes.

'To speak English is an important part of a woman's journey to empowerment. If you do not have English you are isolated and vulnerable.'
Director, Shpresa Programme

Women were clear that access to English was critically important to them as they sought safety:

> *'I want to improve my English…I don't want to be lonely or judged.'*
> Trafficked woman, aged 24, with 4 month old child, interviewed on 27 October, 2017

The evaluators observed a tightly packed English class, where 15 women and 5 volunteers worked with a skilled bilingual teacher to acquire ESOL Entry Level, Level one and Level two. Some of these women were accessing a casework service at Solace and the majority had attended the Empower Women services at Shpresa. In a focus group after the class, seven women, including two who had been trafficked and three who had fled GBV, described how at Shpresa they have access to opportunities to learn English as well as access other help. The women described how at Shpresa, unlike at other NGOs, everyone is helped to access English classes and other services, there is no stigma if you are seeking asylum, are undocumented or have fled GBV.

> *'[Shpresa are] for all the people – for those who are undocumented and those who are not. They help everyone.'*
> Trafficked woman, at focus group on 15 September 2018

Isolation, stigma and shame

The fact that Shpresa and Solace have come together to provide a dedicated service for ASW affected by VAWG, in and of itself, brings this issue out into the open and begins to tackle some of the stigma and shame women feel when acknowledging their experiences. Both agencies evidenced a high level of awareness as to how vulnerabilities of class, race, gender, ethnicity and immigration status come together and coalesce to compound disadvantage and isolate women from potential sources of support. Shpresa's community based approach to service delivery, embedding services in the local community and training and supporting women service users to enable them to provide peer support to others, helps develop networks which tackle isolation and loneliness in an organic manner. In the focus groups the evaluators saw evidence of women supporting each other and developing a safe space to talk of taboo issues.

Poverty

The Project Worker at Solace and staff and volunteers at Shpresa have developed links with food banks, charities for the destitute and children's services to ensure that women's and children's basic needs are met. Solace's casework service addresses women's and children's housing needs to prevent homelessness as well as destitution. Central to Shpresa's ethos is a commitment to enabling service users to make a full and active contribution to the communities in which they now live. Women are encouraged to attend training and to volunteer: gaining skills and experience which have the potential to enable them to enter the job market, as a long term route out of poverty. This is, however, dependent on their immigration status and whether they have the right to work.

Lack of familiarity with laws and services

The Solace workshops focus on giving women an understanding of their legal rights and the services available to them in relation to VAWG. Shpresa's group work introduces women to a programme which identifies their rights and responsibilities in the UK and develops women's understanding not just of VAWG but about many aspects of their life in this country: including education, training, employment, mental and physical health, volunteering and children's rights. Many women in interviews and focus groups described how before they accessed Shpresa's services they had no idea about the law or about what support was available to them.

'We would not know where to start without Shpresa… We would not have anything and we would not know where to look for information… We would not be able to learn English…We would suffer for basic things…It is very difficult if you don't have someone like Shpresa to guide you what to do.'

Focus group, 15 September 2018

Partner agencies interviewed as part of this evaluation were aware that if Shpresa was not providing services these women would not be helped and, in fact, their needs would be invisible:

'Would be a real gap if didn't have them there…(They) help identify people who wouldn't be identified otherwise…Their work has provided evidence of what is happening in the Albanian community…helped shine a light on that.'

Staff member, Human Trafficking Foundation, interviewed on 24 July 2018

Inadequate services

Both Solace and Shpresa have sought to share their expertise in working with Albanian women with mainstream agencies. Solace and Shpresa have developed relationships with agencies working with trafficked women and with women fleeing violence, with legal advisors, charities for the destitute, children's services and homeless and housing services. Shpresa has provided training to more than 120 professionals and has hosted four conferences to highlight the protection needs of trafficked women and children from Albania. In the words of an Adviser at the Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner:

> *'Previously there was no understanding, or at least not enough understanding, of Albania. L (*Director of Shpresa*) brought value, built networks with the Salvation Army and Human Trafficking organisations and so people started to understand blood feuds and the culture. By working with a community organisation we have managed to put this on the radar: the needs of the (Albanian) community.'*
> Staff member, Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, interviewed on 28 July 2017

However, another partner agency described how it is still the case that in other agencies the needs of Albanian speaking women '*get lost within the organisation'* whereas at Shpresa:

> '(women) *don't have to explain themselves. They* (Shpresa*) understand what the problems are.'*
> Staff member from the Women's Therapy Centre, interviewed on 18 July 2018

Insecure Immigration status

In the context of increasingly restrictive immigration and asylum policies in the United Kingdom, human rights advocates suggest that a 'culture of disbelief' permeates the asylum system (Anderson et al 2014). However, it is not just human rights advocates who have questioned the UK asylum system's decision making processes. In May 2013, a UNHCR report 'Beyond Proof – Credibility Assessment in EU Asylum Systems', found the UK asylum system to fall short of the standards expected by the Common European Asylum System.

Referring to this report, The Home Affairs Committee stated:

> UNHCR identified a number of specific failings in the quality of the UK's asylum decision-making, including the following: failure by caseworkers to understand the basics of human rights law; a lack of understanding by caseworkers of the role of applicants' credibility; frequent use of speculative arguments to undermine credibility; failure to apply the correct methodology to credibility assessment; and

> lack of consideration of relevant evidence and the placing of unreasonable burdens on applicants to provide supporting evidence. It is notable that three of these five reasons relate directly to decision-makers' assessment of applicants' credibility (Home Affairs Committee 2013d: 13, para 15 quoted in Anderson et al, 2014:15).

There is also evidence that there exists a discriminatory approach to the determination of asylum claims based on gender-based particular social groups and that gender-sensitive policies are not always implemented on the ground, which can result in unfair treatment of women seeking asylum. At the same time, a lack of gender-specific policies affects women's privacy and safety in UKBA accommodation, and their health and well-being in immigration detention (Querton 2012).

While all those seeking protection within the asylum system face this culture of disbelief and all women in the asylum system may be subjected to unfair treatment due to a lack of gender sensitive policies and procedures, Albanian women appear to fare particularly badly.

Trafficked women from Albania

Albanian women and children make up the largest group of those people who are referred to the National Referral Mechanism as victims of trafficking yet decision making is such that these women and children are less likely to receive a positive decision than those of other nationalities.

Country of origin for victims of Trafficking to the UK

In 2017, 5,145 referrals were made to the NRM, a 35% increase from 2016: UK, Albanian and Vietnamese nationals were the most commonly reported potential victims of trafficking: 820 UK nationals were referred (16% of all referrals), 777 Albanians were referred (15% of all referrals), as were 739 Vietnamese (14% of all referrals).

- 541 out of the 1094 adults referred to the NRM for sexual exploitation were Albanian, that is 49% of all referrals and the largest group. The second largest group were 316 Vietnamese: 29% of referrals. 94% of those 1094 adult referrals were women
- 505 minors were referred to the NRM as potential victims of sexual exploitation 63% of these were UK referrals. The largest numbers of none UK referrals were Vietnamese minors: 29 children, 6% of the total number of referrals. The second largest group were Albanian minors: 27 children, 5% of the total number of referrals. 89% of those 362 minor referrals were girls
- 1961 minors were referred to the NRM as potential victims of all forms of trafficking: the UK, Vietnam and Albania were the most commonly reported child potential victims of trafficking: 620 UK nationals were referred: 32% of total referrals. 314 Vietnamese children were referred: comprising 16% of all referrals. 206 Albanians were referred: 11% of children referred to the NRM. 38% of children referred to the NRM were female and 62% were male.

(National Referral Mechanism (2018) *End of Year Summary 2017)*

By June 2016, for the year 2015 (the latest year for which these figures are available) the numbers of potential victims of trafficking receiving negative conclusive decisions, that is to say those the Home Office do not accept were victims of trafficking, were as follows:

- Of 600 Albanians referred to the NRM 145 (24%) received a negative decision and 328 (55%) were still waiting for a decision
- Of 478 Vietnamese referred to the NRM 52 (11%) had received a negative conclusive grounds decision and 183 (38%) were still waiting for a decision
- Of 257 Nigerians referred to the NRM 45 (18%) received a negative convulsive grounds decision and 257 (56%) were still waiting for a decision.

(National Referral Mechanism (2016) *Statistics Q1 January to March 2016)*

<u>Women seeking asylum from Albania</u>

However to receive a positive conclusive grounds decision does not necessarily result in women being granted asylum or international protection and being able to stay in the UK and rebuild their life here. Women seeking asylum from the UK on the grounds that the state cannot protect them from gender based violence, including those women who have been trafficked stand very little chance of being granted asylum: an Albanian applying for asylum in 2015 had a 0.5% chance of being granted asylum at first decision.

Applications for asylum in the UK in 2016:
In 2016, the largest number of applications for asylum came from nationals of:

- Iran (4,192),
- Pakistan (2,857),
- Iraq (2,666),
- Afghanistan (2,341),
- Bangladesh (1,939) and
- Albania (1,488).

(National Asylum Statistics, Home Office, released 23 February, 2017)

Grants of asylum in the UK in 2015
Grants of asylum at first decision for nationals from these countries during the previous year were as follows

Country	*Number of applications*	*Grants at 1st decision*	*%*
Iran	3,716	1,951	52%
Pakistan	3,365	720	21%
Afghanistan	2,852	594	21%
Iraq	2,648	216	8%
Bangladesh	1,320	86	6.5%
Albania	1,998	10	0.5%

(National Asylum Statistics, Home Office, released 25 August, 2016)

<u>Albanian women brought to the UK by their husbands or future husbands</u>

Albanian women who come to the UK on a marriage visa and who experience GBV have some limited protection under the Domestic Violence Rule (see, Anitha 2011). However, those who are brought here by their husbands without a visa have no right to protection unless they can claim asylum on the grounds of GBV, an application with a very limited chance of success, as noted above.

While this area is under researched, experts from academia and the legal professions at the conferences Shpresa has facilitated to explore these findings, suggest that Albania is perceived as a 'safe country' and that decision making by the Home Office and Immigration Tribunals do not reflect the reality on the ground for women fleeing trafficking, GBV and forced marriages. What the literature tells us, and what Solace and Shpresa have learnt from the women accessing the Empower Women project, is that Albanian women are vulnerable and require international protection because:

- Poverty, particularly in rural areas and the north of Albania, leaves women vulnerable to offers of marriage or to forced marriages, resulting in women being sent by their families to the UK with no visa and no protection. Poverty also makes women targets of trafficking and sexual exploitation.
- Blood feuds (revenge killings related to the Kanun, an Albanian mediaeval code of honour) leave women vulnerable as men flee and women are left to protect children and secure sufficient income to survive. Shpresa is aware of a link between blood feuds and trafficking among women they are working with, a link requiring further research.
- Concepts of shame and honour require women to remain in violent relationships rather than risk shaming their family.
- In a country where violence against women is seen as the norm and men retain social and economic power, the trade in trafficking women and girls is able to flourish (Tahiraj 2017).

This mismatch between women's experiences and the perception of those making decisions about whether woman can access international protection has a numbers of implications for the women using the Empower Women project:

Access to Legal advice

The chronic under-provision of expert legal advice across the asylum system is a barrier for all those seeking to access a fair hearing, (Migration Work CIC, Jan 2016). However, given the patterns of decision making in Albanian cases, staff at Solace and Shpresa talk of how hard it is to secure high quality legal advice for the women they are working with. Skilled and experienced lawyers may be reluctant to take on cases which require intensive work, which will be poorly remunerated (via legal aid), and which may still mean the chances of success are poor.

Delays in decision making

Figures published by the Home Office show that at the end of March 2017, there were 8,879 asylum applications that had not received an initial decision within six months, compared

with 5,059 the year before (http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/asylum-seekers-wait-six-months-more-decision-rise-80-per-cent-figures-home-office-refugee-council-a7755626.html accessed on 8 November, 2017). Anecdotal evidence from Shpresa's own caseload suggests that women from Albania are frequently waiting over a year and sometimes over two years for a decision on their claim.

Re-traumatizing

Research indicates that the asylum interview itself can re-traumatize women (Schock et al 2015). The evaluators were aware that women taking part in focus groups and interviews viewed the asylum system as hostile and persecutory. In the words of one young woman, interviewed on 27 October 2017, the waiting leaves you '*blocked, lonely and depressed'* as you are unable to *'do anything'* and are left with overwhelming feelings of '*hopelessness*.'

Women themselves, and staff working with these women, described how hard it is to begin to rebuild their lives while they live with the threat of a return to their abusers hanging over them.

> '*I have been refused and it was very difficult to wait but now it is terrible and I have to go to court and I don't know what will happen… People have tried to help me. People at Shpresa and Hestia have treated me well and been really kind. Everyone has done their best for me but I can't fully understand. I don't have education back home… I have some therapy but I don't know how to prepare for it…I am really stressed.'*
> 46 year old woman who waited 2 years for a decision on her asylum application. The NRM accepted she is a victim of trafficking but the Home Office refused her application for asylum. This woman finally received a positive decision in September 2018, three years after her initial application.

Staff at Solace and Shpresa expressed immense frustration that the asylum and immigration system can undermine their work, which seeks to secure women's safety, by leaving already vulnerable women destitute, homeless and without legal representation, further increasing their vulnerability.

Shpresa through its conferences and outreach work is vociferously seeking to raise awareness of, and advocate for, the protection needs of vulnerable ASW and has made significant progress in this area:

> *'(*Shpresa*) is helping organisations working in the field to understand victims and where they come from… She (*the Director of Shpresa*) goes beyond developing understanding to protecting the rights of her co-nationals whether abused women or unaccompanied minors. She is that bridge between the vulnerable community and statutory agencies… helping people to understand their rights and access support. So she is not just maintaining cultural traditions, she is protecting their rights, actually sometimes fighting for rights.'*
> Staff member, Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, interview 28 July, 2017

'It is great that we have had training from Shpresa…to encourage Albanian speaking women to access services and know that they will not be judged.'
Team Leader, Anti Human Trafficking project, Hestia, interview 13 July, 2017

'Shpresa provides to agencies an understanding of the Albanian experience, a nuanced understanding.'
Staff member, Human Trafficking Foundation, interviewed on 24 July 2018

However all interviewees quoted above noted that Shpresa is '*really tiny*' and that while the Empower Women project is *'invaluable'* more is needed:

'*…having an Albanian speaking caseworker at Solace is extremely useful…I just think more is needed. More than once caseworker would be valuable as I know she has quite a large caseload and we have struggled to get women seen straight away.'*
Team Leader, Anti Human Trafficking project, Hestia, interview 13 July, 2017

*'…the needs is much higher than Shpresa's capacity to meet it…the quality of their work is exceptional…(*but*) as they continue their work with trafficked women etc they will need proper resourcing.'*
Staff member, Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, interview 28 July, 2017

'(need) more training for statutory services. There is a lot of distrust and a lack of understanding about the Albanian diaspora amongst statutory agencies…Need more research to understand properly what is going on.'
Staff member, Human Trafficking Foundation, interviewed on 24 July 2018

5. Literature Review on Young People, Domestic Violence and Healthy Relationship Programmes

Research indicates that domestic violence impacts on young people in two key ways. Firstly, a significant number of children and young people live in families and households in which domestic violence occurs. Statistics vary but figures endorsed by the NSPCC estimate that 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse (https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/domestic-abuse/domestic-abuse-facts-statistics/ accessed on 6 November 2017), and that almost a quarter (23.7%) of 18-24 year olds had witnessed domestic violence in their homes during childhood (Radford et al 2011: 47). Humphrey et al (2008) note that the 'most significant challenge in responding to children and young people affected by domestic abuse lies in recognising that this is a widespread, chronic and serious social problem' (ch.2, para' 2). Statistics suggest that 130,00 children in the UK are living in households in which the levels of domestic violence and abuse are considered 'high risk' but that this is still 'likely to be an underestimation' as there is an overall underreporting of domestic violence and significant gaps in data collection exist (Smith 2016; 10).

Secondly, young people experience domestic and partner violence within their own

relationships (Barter et al 2009). Until recently partner violence within young people's intimate relationships had received little academic, policy or practice attention in the UK. As Barter et al note (2009: 7) '[a]lthough a substantial body of UK evidence exists on adult experiences of domestic violence, including the impact on children and on professional practice [...] we know very little about teenager's own experiences of partner violence in their intimate relationships' (see also Fox et al 2014; Warrington and Thomas 2016). Recent research, although still limited, has revealed alarmingly high figures. The first study into intimate partner violence in young people's relationships in the UK by Barter et al (2009) indicates that one in five teenagers have been physically abused by their partners, including a quarter of girls. Placing emotional, physical and sexual violence together the research notes that '*one in six* girls reported some form of severe partner violence' (179). While such violence 'can impact any young person' (Firmin and Curtis 2015: 5), some young people appear more at risk. 'Young people with intra-familial abuse in their histories, or those living with domestic abuse, are [...] more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse' (Firmin and Curtis 2015: 3). Girls from families with histories of domestic violence and girls in relationships with older boys are also considered more likely to be 'at *serious* risk of harm due to their partner's violence' (Barter et al 2009: 197 – emphasis our own).

It is recognised in the literature that domestic and intimate partner violence amongst young people is a gendered issue: girls and young women are more likely to be the victims and boys and young men are more likely to be perpetrators of violence (Barter et al 2009; Barter et al 2015; Firmin and Curtis 2015). For example, third of girls in the Barter at el (2009) study reported experiencing sexual violence compared to 16% of boys. One in nine girls had experienced *severe* physical violence compared to just 4% of boys. Moreover, girls are also more likely to be victims of repeated violence (in line with general domestic violence data see Walby and Allen 2004). Subsequent research has shown that girls are also more likely than boys to be victims of online emotional abuse (Barter et al 2015).

Such patterns of violence and abuse are consistent with broader trends of sexual violence against girls and young women (Firmin and Curtis 2015). Research by Girlguiding UK reports that almost 6 out of 10 girls have been victims of sexual harassment in schools and colleges (Girlguiding UK 2014; see also EVAW 2010 http://www.evaw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/YouGov_poll_for_EVAW_on_sexual_harassment_in_schools_2010-1.pdf accessed 13th November 2017; Women and Equalities Committee 2016 for further data on sexual harassment in schools). Girls aged 10-14 have a higher incidence of being victims of sexual offences than any other age group, with girls under the age of 16 constituting 30% of all female rape victims (Russell et al 2016: 80). While research notes that the majority of abusers are male (Barter et al 2009), data demonstrates that boys and young men are victims of violence too, albeit in considerably smaller, yet nonetheless significant, numbers. In Barter et al's (2009) research half of all boys reported being victims of emotional violence in relationships; 18% reported experiencing physical violence; and 16% reported sexual violence.

Research suggests that awareness of intimate partner violence is generally low amongst young people (Barter et al 2015). The number of programmes in the UK working with children and young people to address issues of domestic, sexual and intimate partner violence is, however, increasing (Warrington and Thomas 2016). Moreover, the government has committed to the introduction of mandatory relationships education in all state primary

and secondary schools in England from September 2019 (Long 2017). While the literature evaluating previous and existing healthy relationship programmes in the UK is still limited (Barter et al 2015; see for Stanley et al 2015 for an extensive review of the literature school based interventions), there is nonetheless some consensus within the research on the challenges faced in the successful delivery of such programmes.

These challenges include:

1. Tackling the gendered nature of violence

It is recognised that there is a risk of alienating boys when discussing the particular prevalence of violence against women and girls perpetrated by boys and men (Fox et al, 2014). Evaluations of projects identify the difficulties of engaging boys (Bell and Stanley 2006). Stanley et al (2015: 127) note that messages for boys should be 'positively framed and should avoid a blaming approach that could provoke resistance'. Being able to encourage free expression while also managing the expression of prejudices which might derail discussion or offend participants are thus key challenges for facilitators.

2. Who delivers the programmes

Most healthy relationship programmes take place in schools[7] and there is considerable discussion within the literature as to whether teachers or external facilitators are best placed to deliver the programmes (Fox et al 2014; Stanley et al 2015). It is acknowledged that external facilitators may have greater specialist training in issues of sex and relationship education but teachers usually have greater knowledge of their pupils. Moreover, their embeddedness in the school structure means potentially that they are able to ensure ongoing engagement with, and pastoral care of, the students participating. Nonetheless many teachers lack the confidence and skills to deliver the programmes successfully (Humphreys et al 2008; Stanley et al 2015). Fox et al (2014) argue that, while teachers may be best placed to deliver the programmes, it is vital that they receive sufficient training and work in collaboration with specialist agencies. 'Irrespective of who delivers the work, effective programmes need highly skilled, well-trained staff' (Humphreys et al 2008: ch.6, section: *staffing,* para' 2)

The literature suggests that the participation of young people in the design and delivery of healthy relationship programmes can increase young people's positive engagement (Rawsthorne and Hoffman 2007; Stanley et al 2015; Warrington and Thomas 2016). 'Peers are usually seen as more credible by young people, have greater influence than adults as they share characteristics and life experiences directly with those passing on the skills (Rawsthorne 2010: 14). While it is noted that more research is needed to evidence the impact of peer educators on healthy relationship programmes (Warrington and Thomas 2016), Houghton et al (2015) point to the general importance of including 'young experts', advocating the active participation of children and young people in the development of domestic violence research and policy.

3. How to best engage young people

[7] See AVA Project for an example of an exception - Warrington and Thomas 2016

Across the literature it is acknowledged that a successful programme hinges upon the ability of the facilitators – whether they are external or internal to the schools – to effectively engage the young people with whom they are working (Humphreys et al 2008). Programmes need 'workshop leaders … who can engender high levels of trust and respect' (Fox et al 2014:30) and who are able to negotiate students' potential discomfort with the material.

It is acknowledged that the mode of delivery has to be student responsive – that a 'one size fits all' approach should be avoided (Fox et al 2014). For example, some students enjoy role play, while others detest it. Research indicates, however, that young people in general find creative, interactive, practical sessions the most engaging (Bell and Stanley 2006; Fox et al 2014).

4. Reaching a diverse range of young people

School based programmes may not reach all groups of young people effectively. For example, young people who are not engaged with the school system may as a result be excluded from vital healthy relationship training (Warrington and Thomas 2016). Moreover, Stanley et al (2015) argue that there is little evidence of programmes in the UK 'addressing the complexities of domestic abuse for children who were marginalised through race/ethnicity, class, sexuality or disability', concluding that there is 'a need for programmes tailored to the needs' of marginalised children, including 'children from Black and Minority ethnic groups' (127). While increasing effort is being put into developing strategies to engage boys in healthy relationship programmes less attention has been paid to the particular needs of LGBT young people (Stanley et al 2015).

6. Evaluation Findings in the work with Albanian young people training as Healthy Relationship Champions

Staff at Shpresa, when seeking to address GBV in the Albanian speaking community, identified early on that tackling VAWG after it has happened was critical but would not by itself lead to a cessation or even a reduction in VAWG. As ethnic Albanians themselves, Shpresa staff and volunteers felt it important that young people within the Albanian speaking community were given the training and support to challenge accepted norms about the relationship between genders. For this reason, part of the funding in phase one of the Empower Women project was used to deliver awareness raising workshops to young people to challenge attitudes and behaviours within the Albanian speaking community about GBV. During phase one of the Empower Women project it was decided due to resource constraints that this work with young people would not be a part of the evaluation. However, anecdotal feedback from the young people was that they valued these workshops: attendance was high and young people said they wanted to learn more.

When the funders were approached to secure funding for phase two of the Empower Women project, it was agreed that a cohort of young people would be trained as Healthy Relationship Champions: to develop their understanding of GBV and of healthy relationships and to enable them to train their peers to similarly develop an understanding of GBV and healthy relationships. This phase two evaluation is to include this work with young people.

The training has been, and continues to be delivered, by staff from Solace. The training course being used is an accredited programme called Stopping Violence Against Women and consists of three one day sessions covering: domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking and harassment, trafficking, Child Sexual Exploitation, prostitution, FGM, Forced Marriage and 'Honour' Based Violence.

The first and most notable conclusion from the interviews and focus group with young people who had completed the Stopping Violence Against Women training was the very complex and nuanced understanding these young people had gained in relation to violence and abuse as a result of their involvement in this project. At a focus group on 10 July 2017, the evaluator met with six young people: one boy aged 14, one girl aged 15, three sixteen year old girls and an 18 year old young woman. All three had completed the accredited Stopping Violence Against Women training programme with Solace Women's Aid.

Feedback about the training at the focus group was exclusively positive. Young people noted:

> *'The lady who delivered the training was very friendly and made you feel relaxed.'*
>
> *'She got us to set ground rules at the beginning and made it safe. She told us who we could talk to if we needed to and if we felt uncomfortable. If she was asking questions she made it clear we did not have to be obliged to answer.'*
>
> *'It was really good. We had group discussions and you were told there is not a right or a wrong answer.'*
>
> *'She gave you facts, was more specific, she more developed your ideas and gave you a broader idea of the issues.'*

This feedback was consistent with the feedback from three young people who had completed the training and who were interviewed one to one (two of whom were not part of the focus group):

> '*There is no way the training could be improved…'*
> Albanian boy, aged 16, interviewed on 10 July 2017
>
> '*Back home in my country we never discussed these topics with our parents in school so I thought it would be interested (sic) to take part in this and learn new things and I found out a lot and it was really helpful…I do not think there is any way it (the training) could be improved. Everything was perfect.'*
> Trafficked young woman, aged 21, interviewed on 10 July 2017

All six young people described how the training had enabled them to recognise forms of violence they had not thought of before the training. These included:

- digital abuse: making someone delete contacts or refusing to let them use forms of social media, as well as the more widely recognised forms of digital abuse, including sharing nude pictures
- stalking: including on-line stalking
- coercive control: where one person seeks to tell another *'who they can see, what they can wear, when they can go out'*
- financial abuse: where one partner is not able to keep their own money or is kept without any access to finances.

One 16 year old boy described how before the training he had not considered that calling a girl repeatedly might actually be harassment:

> *'(I learnt) do not call her a lot of times. If she does not pick up after you have called her two calls she might not want to talk to you so if you keep calling then it is harassment.'*
> Albanian boy, aged 16, interviewed on 10 July 2017

This same boy also described how the training had made him think about unwanted touching and how this could constitute sexual assault.

In the focus group the young people evidenced a complex understanding of what a healthy relationship might consist of. They talked of concepts of fairness, equality, respect, consent, positive communication, and avoiding social isolation. They discussed how you did not need to see bruises to spot an unhealthy relationship but noted how you might be concerned if in a relationship there was violent and aggressive language, one partner considering themselves superior, one partner being very socially isolated and one partner controlling and setting limits on what the other can do.

The evaluator in the focus group set scenarios for the young people to discuss e.g.

- A friend tells you their dad is hitting their mum. What might you say to your friend? Would you take action?
- You are out with a group of friends and a boy touches a girl repeatedly and she is clearly unhappy and uncomfortable. What might you do?
- A friend is sharing nude photos of an ex-girlfriend. Would you say or do anything?

In the discussions that followed, the young people demonstrated a nuanced understanding of issues of consent, the law in relation to sexting, sources of help for those subjected to violence and abuse and how to consider your own safety and that of others in abusive situations. The young people discussed who would be the best person to intervene in each case and whether, if they took action alone, they would be endangering themselves or others.

The evaluator observed part of a training session delivered by the Solace staff member to nine young people from Shpresa: three boys and six girls aged 14 to 19, on 27 August 2017. The trainer had a relaxed, calm and reassuring manner. The session being observed was on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and involved detailed discussion of women's genitalia, violent cutting and physical and emotional trauma. The skill of the trainer was such that the

mixed group of young people were engaged, focused and able to discuss the issues openly. Training methods included film clips, written material, PowerPoint presentations, small group work and discussions. The trainer made it safe for the young people to ask questions and also reassured participants that it was ok to feel distressed and to take time out. Some young people had limited knowledge of their own genitalia, others had limited understanding of issues such as menstruation. All this was handled by the trainer in such a way that everyone's knowledge was increased and no one was made to feel stupid. The trainer also avoided simplistic concepts of primitive cultures by encouraging young people to think of cultural practices in the UK which leave young people feeling unsafe or unhappy (for example, the pressure to look a certain way).

The 18 year old girl who was part of the focus group had, with two trained peers, delivered a Healthy Relationship training session to a group of young people at Shpresa. She described her fears about this and about the potential for other young people to fail to engage with the topic:

> *'I was training in front of my peers, my friends, they were the same age as me. I was really nervous. Some of the content is really hard to talk about. I was scared they might not take it seriously. I was scared they would laugh. So I was really nervous.'*
> Albanian young woman, aged 18, interviewed on 10 July 2017

However, her fears were not realised and the session, according to the young woman herself and to a member of staff at Shpresa, was a great success: young people took it seriously, were engaged, did not laugh and had mature discussions about GBV and healthy relationships. The young woman described modelling herself on the Solace trainer who had trained her as she delivered the training, using interactive methods and making it safe for young people to question and discuss. L (Director of Shpresa) was delighted with how the sessions went:

> *'It went really really well. This is what we had hoped for. Young people themselves leading the way in the move towards healthy relationships.'*
> Director, Shpresa Programme

In the final year of the project the evaluators observed one of the peer led training sessions and undertook one to one interviews with a further two Healthy Relationship Champions who had delivered peer training over a number of sessions. The ease with which the session was delivered and received and the acceptance of this project as part of the services Shpresa offers with and for young people is evidence that this work is now embedded within the organization.

The evidence gathered during the last two years indicates that this training programme meets all good practice criteria identified in the literature:

- Not alienating boys in tackling the gendered nature of violence

  Staff at Shpresa assumed that boys and young men would be as interested and committed as girls and young women to addressing GBV and training as Healthy Relationship Champions. The trainer from Solace spoke to the boys and young men in an inclusive manner, assuming they were part of the solution not the problem, taking their concerns seriously and being sensitive to their needs and feelings.

- Trainers to be highly skilled and / or to be peer educators

The evaluators noted the skilled and experienced manner in which the training was delivered by the Solace trainer. The young people themselves were fulsome in their praise of the trainer and noted how she had made it safe for them to discuss difficult issues, never making them feel stupid or in the wrong.

Central to Shpresa's ethos as a user led organisation is a commitment to peer support and peer education. As in every area of service delivery at Shpresa, there is a belief that peers with lived experience are best able to support and train others. Peer education about Health Relationships is now embedded within Shpresa's termly timetable and both the peer educators, the Healthy Relationship Champions, and those attending the sessions take the issue seriously and are attentive and nuanced in their approach to and understanding of this challenging topic.

- Engaging young people with trusted facilitators using interactive training methods

All the feedback from young people (n. 10) indicates that the facilitator engendered a high degree of trust and respect and that her training methods were interactive and consistently engaging.

- Reaching a diverse range of young people

Shpresa works with approximately 180 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (including girls and boys who have been trafficked and those fleeing domestic violence, homophobic violence and 'Honour' Based Violence) and 300 children living with their birth families. From the outset, staff at Shpresa wanted the Healthy Relationship training to be open to all young people including very marginalised young people, living in foster care or hostel accommodation, some of whom are disengaged from formal education. Solace was able to offer an accredited training programme with a skilled trainer which engaged all the young people Shpresa works with, ensuring that at Shpresa tackling GBV and promoting healthy relationships is seen to be a whole community issue to which all young people can contribute.

The evaluator noted that the two boys who were either interviewed or who were in the focus group indicated that they were aware of high levels of GBV within the Albanian speaking community. They both described wanting to be part of this project as a result of their awareness of VAWG within their community. In observing the training, the evaluator also noted the boys and young men describing themselves as being part of a group of peers who would tackle GBV. While the sample is tiny, this may be an indication that this project offers young men who have grown up in a culture, which legitimises violence against women and confers social and economic power to men (King and Vullnetari 2009; Tahiraj 2017), an alternative identity as they transition to adulthood. At Shpresa they can gain status and respect by becoming volunteers and Healthy Relationship Champions, undertaking accredited training and becoming peer trainers.

This project also offers young women and girls a space where their experiences are acknowledged but where they are also offered alternatives to traditional female roles: the 18 year old who had delivered peer training talked about how much she had learnt and how good it felt to be taken seriously. Even those young people who do not complete the accredited training, like the young woman who had been trafficked who was interviewed and who had agreed with staff that she did not feel confident enough to deliver peer

training, gained a great deal from workshops by offering a safe place to have these discussions:

'*I learnt how to protect myself and how to have a healthy relationship…In my country we only call abuse physical, not emotional or financial or technological abuse. These terms were completely new to me and I was not aware before that this was abuse.'*
Trafficked young woman, aged 21, interviewed on 10 July 2017

7. The Partnership

This was a partnership project delivered by Solace Women's Aid and Shpresa Progrmame.

Solace Women's Aid is a specialist agency, working across London to provide life-saving support to more than 11,000 women and children survivors of domestic and sexual violence each year. This Empower Women project has enabled Solace to access the Albanian speaking community:

'There is a huge need within the community. The Albanian community is one of many patriarchal communities with women needing services that they can access and this project is working to fulfil (that need). The project is of particular importance to women with insecure immigration status: those seeking asylum and trafficked women.'
Advice Service Manager Solace Women's Aid

Over 45% of the referrals to the Solace casework service for Albanian speaking women came from Shpresa and the partnership with Shpresa, in the words of the Advice Service Manager at Solace, has developed effective referral pathways.

Shpresa Programme is a refugee community group working with men, women and children from the Albanian speaking community. Shpresa provides services to more than 2,000 members of the Albanian community each year and through this Empower Women project, Shpresa has been able to address the needs of women within the community fleeing violence and abuse.

'*We do not have expertise in dealing with violence and abuse. We are not a specialist agency. We needed a specialist provider to work with us to keep Albanian women safe.'*
Director, Shpresa Programme

And the evidence is that this project has kept women safe.

Partnership work is not always easy, even when there are not the resource constraints and demands currently facing VAWG's services as outlined in the literature review. Both agencies could have continued without developing this work. Shpresa could have offered a range of community based services and just referred women to specialist VAWG services ignoring barriers to access, as this was not their area of expertise. Solace could have continued to meet the existing demands for casework, there was no need to generate more work with a new migrant community. However both agencies recognised that ASW

experience multiple vulnerabilities, which intensify their experienced of GBV and as such require specialist interventions and, thus, decided to work together to address this need.

In their Good Practice briefing 'uncivil partnerships? reflections on collaborative working in the ending violence against women and girls sector', Imkaan a London based Black and minority ethnic organisation note that the following areas need exploring if partnership work in the sector is to be strengthened:

- Power in the relationship
- Honesty about the partnership and reasons for working together
- Respect – mutual respect between the partners
- Conflict management and
- The allocation of resources within the partnership.

In this partnership, Shpresa is the contract holder and in this sense holds more power in relation to this contract. While at the same time, Solace is the larger agency in terms of annual income and number of employees with greater experience of managing large contracts and, as such, the loss of the Empower Women project in the future would have a less serious impact on the charity's income and staffing levels.

Shpresa is a user-led organisation – founded by and for Albanian refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, embedded within the Albanian community, while Solace is a specialist VAWG agency seeking to protect women and girls from domestic violence and abuse. These differing areas of expertise can present challenges to a partnership: for a community based, user-led organisation, run by and for members of the community, thinking of staff safety and professional boundaries will involve a different set of challenges than it will for a specialist VAWG agency. At the same time a specialist VAWG agency will face different challenges working with a community group with less experience of safety planning and risk assessments.

The evaluators noted the importance of transparent and sincere communication and a willingness to resolve any conflict and to recognising and respecting each agency's unique and invaluable contribution to the partnership. They also noted that the pressures that both agencies are under sometimes made it difficult for sufficient time to be set aside to work on a develop the partnership.

Meaningful partnerships in collaborative work to end violence against women and girls requires care, rigour and a genuine commitment to equality and social justice, according to Imkaan (2017). The evaluators saw evidence of this from both partners: Shpresa changed the day that one of the groups was facilitated to enable Solace staff, who do not habitually work weekends, to attend, while Solace increased the allocation of resources for translation, which was not covered by the project budget, to expand the number of ASW who could access the Solace Advice Line. However, on other occasions meetings between partners had to be cancelled at short notice and commitments could not be fulfilled due to resource constraints.

It was apparent to both evaluators that Solace and Shpresa share core values, which include a belief that women and girls can and should live free from violence and abuse; that all

women and girls regardless of their mother tongue, country of origin, immigration status and mental health should be able to access services which meet their needs and treat them with dignity and respect; and that services should be empowering, informed directly by the expressed needs and experiences of women and girls who have experienced GBV. However, at a time when voluntary sector services, especially those for refugee and migrant communities and for women and girls, are facing severe cuts (Imkaan 2017), it can be hard for agencies to allocate resources to develop and protect the partnership itself: devoting time to meetings, communication, joint training and sharing and learning opportunities.

8. Recommendations

This is a final evaluation report and thus the focus of the recommendations for Solace Women's Aid and Shpresa Programme is on how to how best to share the learning from this unique project and how to sustain the positive outcomes now that the project has ended. Recommendations for practitioners, commissioners/ funders and policy makers are critical if the learning from this work is to be sustained and to inform future work with Albanian speaking women and women from other new migrant communities affected by GBV.
Recommendations for Solace Women's Aid and Shpresa Programme

- That both agencies continue to deliver services informed by an awareness of the multiple vulnerabilities experienced by ASW, vulnerabilities which can intensify their experiences of GBV and prevent them accessing services
- That both agencies continue to recognise the importance of identifying those Albanian women experiencing GBV and ensure that their services are accessible these women and are able to protect them and their children from harm
- Given the unique and critically important nature of this work for ASW affected by GBV, that both agencies give priority to securing funding to maintain services for ASW affected by GBV and to undertake further research into the needs and experiences of ASW, and women from other new migrant communities, at risk of GBV
- That both agencies consider how best to use their networks to ensure the learning from this work is disseminated widely and that the voice of ASW affected by GBV is heard by practitioners, service providers, funders, commissioners and policy makers.

Recommendations for practitioners working with ASW affected by GBV

- Given the dearth of specialist provision for women from new migrant communities affected by GBV, that those working with ASW, and women from other new migrant communities, engage with the findings of the Empower Women project in order to learn from this model and develop services informed by the lived experience of ASW fleeing GBV.

Recommendations for commissioners and funders

- Given what is known about the economic cost of domestic violence to services[8], not taking into account the non-economic cost to the lives of women, children, families and communities, consider the cost benefits of continuing to fund small scale, high impact projects, such as this, with a focus on prevention (via the work with young people) as well as addressing the needs of some of the most vulnerable women in our communities
- That funding is committed to further research into the needs and experiences of ASW, and women from other new migrant communities, given the hidden nature of their experiences of VAWG and the vulnerabilities which can intensify their experiences of violence and abuse.

Recommendations for policy makers

- That further research is undertaken into how best to ensure the safety of women and children, subject to immigration control, who face multiple barriers to accessing services
- That the government consider, in the light of their commitment to ensuring 'that women subject to immigration control receive the support that they need' (Home Office 2016b), how lack of access to quality legal advice, delays in decision making, the culture of disbelief and the issue of re-traumatizing women impact on the support received by ASW and the subsequent safety of these women and their children
- That in line with the Home Office's commitment to providing 'Mandatory training for those making decisions on asylum cases … with training on sexual violence, including the links between VAWG and memory loss' (Home Office 2016b: 40) training providers from the voluntary and community sector are engaged to provide culturally sensitive expert training from those with regular, direct experience of working with survivors of sexual violence within the immigration system.

[8] The key research in this area is now quite dated but indicated that in 2009, the total cost of domestic violence to services (Criminal Justice System, health, social services, housing, civil legal) amounted to £3.85 billion, while the loss to the economy was £1.9 billion, Walby 2009