

Help at hand for Asian victims

A Scottish charity has backed calls for the authorities to do more to protect Asian children from domestic violence. An NSPCC report yesterday identified cases where social services, police, teachers and health workers felt unqualified to deal with south Asian victims.

The children's charity warned that agencies were sometimes taking the wrong action, or failing to act at all, on the grounds of respecting other cultures.

Asim Khan, a director of Glasgow-based Roshni, said the NSPCC report went to the heart of the work it was doing to raise awareness of child abuse in black and ethnic minority communities.

"The cloak of silence the report talks about and the difficulties social workers have in gaining access are one of the reasons we were set up," he said.

"Abuse is being overlooked because not enough time and money is being put into ensuring social workers and others are tooled up to deal with this issue."

The NSPCC report, "I can't tell people what's happening at home", called for better training and support for professionals to help them avoid misunderstandings when working with Asian victims. The NSPCC's Asian helpline manager, Saleha Islam, said: "Asian children and their mothers suffer the double injustice of a community that would rather save face than deal with domestic violence and a system that lacks cultural understanding so hides behind political correctness."

Social care professionals reported that some Asian perpetrators of domestic abuse used their culture and religion to justify their actions and control their victims. There were also cases where women and children were subjected to further violence by their extended family, particularly in-laws.

The report found Asians were brought up to believe that their family's public image was more important than individual safety and that family problems should be kept secret. The NSPCC noted that this made leaving an abusive family situation or getting help more difficult.

Diana Sutton, the charity's head of policy and public affairs, said the needs and rights of Asian children were too often being ignored.

"Research cited in the report revealed that Asian women and children worry about racism and stereotyping by the authorities and are more likely to use services which are especially for Asians," she said.

The NSPCC says more Asians should be recruited to work with victims of domestic violence and dedicated refuges are needed for Asian children and their mothers. The report also raised concerns about lack of intervention in cases of young adolescents being forced into marriage.

Roshni works to defend the interests of children in all situations of domestic and other forms of abuse. Khan disputed the suggestion that political correctness lies at the root of the problem.

"Political correctness may be used as the excuse but I believe it is more to do with the fact that workers just don't have the skills to be able to deal with these issues," he said. "Speaking to a white child may not be the same as speaking to a child from a Muslim faith or a Sikh faith family."

Roshni doesn't provide services directly, but can train social work departments and other organisations in tackling issues of abuse while remaining sensitive to cultural differences, Khan said.

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By STEPHEN NAYSMITH, Society Editor