



WORKING WITH A COMMUNITY TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE HOME

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NSPCC

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Impact and Evidence series

This report is part of the NSPCC's Impact and Evidence series, which presents the findings of the Society's research into its services and interventions. Many of the reports are produced by the NSPCC's Evaluation department, but some are written by other organisations commissioned by the Society to carry out research on its behalf. The aim of the series is to contribute to the evidence base of what works in preventing cruelty to children and in reducing the harm it causes when abuse does happen.

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Executive Summary

Background

This is a report into a three-year project that sought to develop an approach to preventing child sexual abuse in a Somali community in London. This is not a report on the Somali community per se. Neither is it a report about female genital mutilation, the practice of removing part or all of the female external genitalia, which some Somali girls and women are subject to (Morison et al, 2004). Furthermore, this is not a report about an evaluation of an evidence-based intervention. The emphasis in this report is a description of what has been learned about trying to develop an approach to preventing child sexual abuse with members of a particular community. The report is principally intended for audiences who are interested in developing preventative approaches.

The project ran from June 2009 to June 2012. It was managed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a UK child protection charity working to prevent sexual abuse. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation commissioned Praxis, a community development organisation based in East London, to implement the project. Praxis created two part-time posts to progress the project:

- A *Project Development Officer* [PDO] who was a British Somali man.
- A *Project Outreach Worker* [POW] who was a British Somali woman.

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation commissioned an evaluation from the Evaluation Department of a British child protection charity called the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [NSPCC]. The Evaluator was a White British man. The PDO, the POW and Evaluator formed a project team, which was led by a manager from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a White British woman.

Methodology

This report describes the methodology used by the project team to work with the Somali community in London. The team decided to work with the Somali community in London after the PDO had been appointed and because it was felt the PDO, being Somali, would be more successful engaging members of his own community. Work was organised into cycles, comprised of planning, action, research and review. The project went through four cycles:

1. Consulting professionals from the Somali community on life in the Somali community and where the risks to children might lie.
2. Interviewing Somali mothers to find out more about the domestic life of Somali children and where risks of sexual abuse might be posed at home.
3. Focus groups with mothers, to find out what issues they would like to work on.
4. Provision and evaluation of workshops delivered to 70 Somali mothers, helping mothers identify and lower risks of sexual abuse at home.

Relevance to sexual abuse prevention initiatives

This report is a description of what has been learned about trying to develop an approach to preventing child sexual abuse with members of a particular community. It is important to recognise that this project did not arise out of a concern that rates of childhood sexual abuse were higher in the Somali community than in other communities. There were no statistics available on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the Somali community. So, while the findings are particular to a Somali community in London, the learning generated about the approach taken will be of relevance to anyone seeking to engage community groups in the prevention of sexual abuse.

The NSPCC has a special interest in the field of community engagement in prevention initiatives. It has set the prevention of child sexual abuse as one of its strategic goals and is running place-based initiatives to prevent child sexual abuse (NSPCC, 2016). The place-based initiatives are run from ‘Together For Childhood Centres’ in Plymouth and Stoke. Community engagement is seen as critical to setting the objectives of the initiatives, in deciding what services should be delivered and in deciding how those services should be delivered. With the development of the centres and the engagement of community members just beginning, the publication of this report is timely. The trials, tribulations, challenges and successes of engaging a Somali community in a child sexual abuse prevention initiative make this report a ‘must read’ for anyone involved in the delivery of ‘Together For Childhood’.

Findings and Implications

Understand the lives of the people you are working with

When designing interventions, prevention programme designers need to find ways of understanding the particular challenges faced by children, parents and families, in the areas they live, in addition to using national-level statistics and the findings of impact studies. Working together with community members to identify the particular challenges of the community helped the project team identify a number of dynamics and areas of risk that would not have been documented in population-level surveys or impact studies.

Discussions with professionals and mothers helped develop a better understanding of risk

Discussions with Somali professionals and mothers helped the project team better understand life in the Somali community in London, and how this could impact on the risks experienced by Somali children at home. During the course of the project, mothers were able to identify situations in which they left their children, which they felt posed a risk that could be lowered. This included situations where they left their children with certain males, certain babysitting arrangements and sleepovers. However, not all mothers identified situational risks and others talked about the challenges of identifying and responding to risks. A more detailed exploration of these findings can be found in a separate report entitled *Four Steps to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in the Home* (Williams, 2018).

Be careful with the use of 'insiders'

Using insiders to develop a preventative approach with a community group can help but one needs to guard against excluding those who are not in the social network of the insider. In this project, the project development officer, a British Somali man, had *insider* knowledge allowing the project team to make strides in engagement and understanding. However, there was a tendency to rely on the existing social networks of the worker, because people known to the development officer were easier to engage.

Exclude to include

While inclusivity is a key value of participatory initiatives, it can sometimes be the case that excluding certain people from the initiative helps include others. In this project, active engagement with a particular group of clan elders was not pursued after initial consultation with them because during the initial consultation the elders were critical of the project. It was feared that continuing to engage with the particular group of clan elders might have provoked some to try to actively stop the involvement of Somali mothers. Similarly, some mothers who participated in the project avoided telling their husbands about the project. Having said this, it was clear that some mothers did find male family members to be supportive in exploring concerns and attempting to find ways of reducing risk of sexual abuse.

Be resourced to respond

Prevention programmes, ideally, need to have sufficient budget and resources for responding to the preferences of community members. The project reported on in this evaluation had a limited budget, timescale and skills set on which to draw, which necessarily constrained the extent to which it could respond to community members' ideas, the influence of community members and what could be achieved. When considering their budget, prevention programmes might consider having enough money to employ both male and female staff. In this project, although the first member of staff employed was male, a female member of staff was later employed to make discussions around sexual abuse more comfortable for participating mothers.

Chapter 1: Working with mothers to prevent child sexual abuse

Introduction

This is a report into a three-year project that sought to develop an approach to preventing child sexual abuse in the Somali community in London. This is not a report on the Somali community per se. Neither is it a report about female genital mutilation, the practice of removing part or all of the female external genitalia, which some Somali girls and women are subject to (Morison et al, 2004). Furthermore, this is not a report about an evaluation of an evidence-based intervention. The emphasis in this report is a description of what has been learned about trying to develop an approach to preventing child sexual abuse with members of a particular community. The report is principally intended for audiences who are interested in developing preventative approaches. A separate report entitled *Four Steps to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in the Home* provides a detailed exploration of the findings gained from the evaluation (Williams, 2018).

The project, which ran from June 2009 to June 2012, was called *Protecting Parents Across Communities [PPAC]*. It formed part of a child sexual abuse prevention initiative called *Parents Protect*, run by a child protection charity called the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, which operated in the UK and Ireland (see Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2012, for more information on the background to the initiative). Part of the *Parents Protect* initiative involved the provision of a one-off educational workshop delivered to parents and carers, providing information about sexual abuse and how to prevent it (Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2018). Following the successful implementation of the group workshop, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation sought to develop opportunities for preventative work with non-English speaking communities. After having secured funding from the Oak Foundation (Oak Foundation, 2018), it set up the *Protecting Parents Across Communities* project.

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation commissioned Praxis, a community development organisation based in East London, to implement the project. Praxis created two part-time posts to progress the project. The post of Project Development Officer [PDO] was held by a British Somali man, and the post of Project Outreach Worker [POW] was held by a British Somali woman. Both were also working as advisors to Somali families at the time of their appointment. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation commissioned an evaluation from the Evaluation Department of a British child protection charity called the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [NSPCC].

The NSPCC Evaluation Department gave responsibility for the evaluation to a White British man, who worked as an Evaluator in the organisation. The PDO, the POW and Evaluator formed a project team, which was led by a manager from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a White British woman.

When the project was first conceived, the ambition of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation was to develop methods for preventing child sexual abuse within *three* separate non-English speaking communities. However, early on in the project, the team decided that its resource would be better focused on *one* community. The Somali community, living in London, was chosen because the PDO was Somali, and it was felt he could use his existing personal and professional contacts to recruit people into the project with a success rate that he would be unlikely to replicate with any other community. It is important to recognise that there was not a concern among the project team that rates of child sexual abuse were higher in the Somali community than in other communities. There were no statistics available on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the Somali community.

Having decided to work with the Somali community, the project team was clear that a large part of its initial work would involve identifying interested Somali people and using their intelligence to map out the situations that Somali children in London encounter that might raise the risk of sexual abuse¹. If things went well, the project team envisaged creating an intervention based on the intelligence, preferences and consent of the Somali people with whom they had built relationships.

The project went to plan. The first two years were spent talking to members of the Somali community to look at where work could be done to improve the safety of children. After the first year, the project team decided to focus on supporting mothers to make home life safer for children. It spent the best part of the second year talking with Somali mothers, finding out about their family life, the lives of their children and the issues they would like addressed. Having discussed the issues with mothers, the project team decided to create a workshop intervention, to help mothers feel more comfortable with talking about sexual abuse and identify things they could do to make home life safer. The workshop was delivered to over 70 mothers and was evaluated.

At the end of the project, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation drew together the key learning to create a toolkit for organisations looking to plan an approach to working with particular communities to

1 Similar projects were undertaken in Scotland (Nelson, 2004) and Australia (Smallbone et al, 2013; Smallbone, 2017). These projects were either unknown to the author at the time of this project or had yet to be published.

prevent child sexual abuse (Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2012). This report complements the toolkit and provides more detailed information on the challenges faced by the project team, project development and learning from the project.

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to highlighting the key features of the project methodology. The next two sections describe the ‘action research’ approach taken by the project team, which included a blurring of the evaluation and project development roles. The chapter finishes off by considering the risks posed to those participating in the project, and the responsibilities the project team had both to participants and the Somali community. The next chapter summarises the challenges and successes of engaging members of the Somali community in the creation of a preventative intervention.

Using action research to develop an intervention

The plan for developing the project was loosely modelled on the ‘action research’ approach (Hart & Bond, 1998; Stringer, 1999). Action research involves a team of people working with members of a community to set objectives and agree on working methods to solve a social problem. Work is organised into cycles, with each cycle consisting of planning, action, research and review. The work is tentative, collaborative and designed to facilitate the development of shared understanding and consensus for action among participants (Hart & Bond, 1998; Stringer, 1999).

The decision to use an action research approach was the result of both professional preferences and the limited resource and expertise of the project team. The Project Manager, with expertise in community participation, had a preference for participative models and felt working alongside members of the community was crucial to the success of the project. It was felt that the action research approach lent itself to making the time and space needed to help community members reach a position where they could feel safe and comfortable discussing and reflecting on the issues. Talking about sexual abuse can be distressing and it was felt that community members might feel stigmatised for the fact that their community had been chosen as the focus of a child sexual abuse prevention programme. Community members, it was felt, needed to be involved in a process that allowed interest and momentum to be built up slowly. Taking things slowly would allow time for misgivings to be aired, discussed and managed, producing a situation where people felt participation would meet with broad approval within the community.

While the action research approach was the preferred option, in other ways it also felt like the only option. It was recognised that, while the Lucy Faithfull Foundation did have expertise in delivering child

sexual abuse prevention programmes, the members of the project team, including the manager, did not. Although someone with experience in delivering sexual abuse prevention workshops did later join the team, the lack of experience in the team at the beginning meant that launching into the provision of a typical sexual abuse prevention intervention would have been difficult. The project team's experience fitted better with building up a project, which encouraged participation in a discussion about preventing abuse.

Blurring the evaluation and project development roles

The decision to work with people from the Somali community to build an intervention raised questions about the role for evaluation. Given that at the beginning there was no 'intervention' to evaluate, the project team asked the Evaluator to document the evolution of the project and to ensure that the project was developed in a way that was evaluation-minded. 'Evaluation-minded project development' required the Evaluator to ensure the team planned its development work and data collection so that it could hone:

- a set of outcomes, based on knowledge of the particular issues facing the community
- an intervention geared to achieving the outcomes agreed upon

To facilitate this process, there was a deliberate blurring of the boundaries between the Evaluator, Project Manager, PDO and POW. Initial ideas for separate project development and evaluation teams were scrapped in favour of a joint project development team, which brought all four roles together. The Evaluator was expected to contribute ideas about project development. Conversely, the PDO and POW were asked to play a role in collecting evaluation data, through participating in interviews and running focus groups. Team members' experiences of blurring the boundaries between evaluation and project development will be touched upon in Chapter 2, and a discussion of the pros and cons of the approach will be provided at the end of the report.

It should be pointed out at this point that the blurring of the boundaries between the Evaluator and the project team was not uncontroversial. Towards the end of the project, significant changes in the staffing of the NSPCC Evaluation Department led to a decision to withdraw the Evaluator from the project development team. There was a concern that involving the Evaluator in the programme development could lead to questions being raised about the independence and impartiality of the evaluation process. For this reason, the Evaluator was instructed to take up a more traditional evaluation role, focusing on planning and implementing an evaluation

of an intervention model that the programme staff would come up with.

Responsibility to the Somali Community

Throughout the project, the team was aware that it had a responsibility towards the Somali community in general and to participating members in particular. There was a danger, identified from the early stages of the project, that the work might end up focusing on challenges faced by members of the Somali community. As a counterbalance, the team aimed to use the project to identify what Somali mothers already did to safeguard their children from sexual abuse. The challenges of doing this, and whether the team then achieved it are discussed at the end of the report. Towards the end of the project, questions were also raised about whether the research findings should be focused specifically on the Somali community, or generalised to working with communities in general. This report does make reference to the Somali community, because the findings are particular to that community. However, this report is principally intended for audiences who are interested in developing participative preventative approaches, and who also have an interest in reducing situational risks at home (see Williams, 2018 for a discussion of situational risks). For this reason, it was felt that reference to the Somali community did not need to be included in the title of the report.

The evaluation plans for the project were approved by the NSPCC's Research Ethics Committee. The Committee's members are largely drawn external to the NSPCC. The NSPCC research ethics policy is based on the Economic Social Research Council Framework for Research Ethics and the Government Social Research Unit Professional Guidance.

Summary

This chapter has set the scene for the three-year project undertaken with members of the Somali community to prevent child sexual abuse. To recap, the Somali community was chosen out of expediency. The PDO, who was appointed before a community was chosen, was Somali and had existing links with the community, which the team was keen to build on. The team followed an action research approach to project development, seeking to involve members of the community in identifying what the project team could do to help. There was also a deliberate blurring of the boundaries between project development and evaluation, with a hope that this would allow the project to be developed around outcomes, which were based on a local assessment of need. The next chapter provides a detailed account of how the project was developed. Finally, the report discusses some of the key implications and questions arising from the project, offering pointers for the development of prevention programmes.

Chapter 2: Working with members of the Somali community

Introduction

This chapter describes the activities carried out to develop relationships, share understanding and develop and test a project intervention with members of the Somali community. The model of project development used was based on ‘action research’, where work is organised into cycles of planning, action, research and review (see Chapter 1). The project team went through four cycles. The first saw the team consulting and carrying out interviews with professionals and elders from the Somali community. The aim was, in part, to establish an understanding of the situations in which children within the community were at heightened risk. Following the consultation and interviews, and based on the findings, the team decided to focus the rest of the project on supporting mothers in making their homes safer for their children. Therefore, the second cycle involved interviewing a set of mothers, to see if the reality of their lives mirrored what had been suggested by professionals.

Following the interviews with the mothers, the project team honed a set of possible outcomes based on mothers’ feedback, and a range of working methods, which might be used to achieve those outcomes. In the third cycle, two focus groups were held with mothers, to get their ideas about which outcomes, in particular, they would like to focus on, and what working methods they would like to engage with. In the fourth cycle, the project team provided and evaluated a set of workshops to over 70 Somali mothers. This chapter presents the working methods and findings in brief from each cycle. A more detailed exploration of the findings can be found in an accompanying report entitled *Four Steps to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in the Home* (Williams, 2018).

First cycle: Talking to Somali Professionals and Elders

Approaching professionals and elders

The project team’s initial work with members of the Somali community was based, in part, on the PDO’s understanding of how the Somali community was structured. The PDO explained that in the Somali community there were large extended families, which were often part of larger clans, groups of people in the hundreds of

thousands, united under a common name. Many Somali people were said to identify with a clan, of which there were several in Somalia (see Hinds, 2013, for more detail). The PDO identified two types of people who exercised a large amount of influence within the clans and extended families:

- **Elders** were men who often had a history in seafaring and would have had contact with the UK through their seafaring careers. They tended to be over 70 years old, with conservative views, involved in ‘Somali clubs’, did not ‘believe in the West’ and felt antipathetic towards Western culture. They tended to regard themselves as ‘guardians of the community’ and had a role in resolving conflicts between members of the community.
- **Professionals** were educated adults, female and male, who had been resident in the UK since the 1980s, following the outbreak of civil war in Somalia. They could be approached for practical advice. They could also be considered as elders, although in this report they are referred to as professionals.

At the recommendation of the PDO, the project team agreed for the PDO to start off talking to elders and professionals. This was felt to be a good idea for two reasons:

- Professionals and elders would be able to provide a good overview of life in the community and how issues impacted on the risks facing children and families.
- Professionals and elders could, if unhappy with the project, bring developments to a halt. It would be useful to get them onside early and also get an early feel for if they were likely to support or resist the project.

The professionals and elders approached were people the PDO had existing professional or personal relationships with. They were approached on an individual basis. The PDO deployed a tentative, step-by-step process to engagement. He would start his conversation with a general discussion about child sexual abuse, then depending on the comfort levels of the elder or professional, move on to talk about its existence within the Somali community, provide information on the project and then invite the elder or professional to an evaluation interview.

Elders, generally, were not happy with the project. Some suspected it was a ‘Western-influenced’ project attempting to criticise the Somali community. Others felt that promoting a conversation about child sexual abuse would ‘Westernise’ or ‘poison’ the Somali community. They queried why the project was not being led by a Somali organisation and whether the PDO had the qualifications to lead on such a project. The PDO, fearing elders could bring a halt to

the project or encourage community members to shun him, decided to bring engagement of elders to a halt. They were not invited for interview. The implications of this decision are discussed throughout the rest of the report and returned to in the discussion chapter.

Professionals tended to be more approachable and at ease with conversations about child sexual abuse. Ten consented to an evaluation interview – six men and four women. Nine had jobs in the public sector, and five worked with the Somali community.

Interviewing Somali professionals

Interviews with professionals covered the following issues:

- Life for Somali people living in London.
- Awareness of child sexual abuse within the Somali community in London.
- Whether child sexual abuse was ever talked about.
- Whether concerns were discussed.
- How Somali people might respond to discussion of child sexual abuse.
- How Somali people might respond to the project team's attempts to open up a discussion about child sexual abuse within the community.
- People who might be willing to engage with the project.

The findings are presented below. They should be read as a summary of several perspectives on Somali life in London. They should not be treated as unquestionable fact. It is entirely possible that some of the views about the community, put forward, were not accurate or were biased by how interviewees wanted to see life within the Somali community rather than how it really was. That the information fed back may at times have been inaccurate or partial was indicated by the fact that some views contradicted each other. Rather than trying to determine if something was true or not, the project team intended to treat what they were told by professionals as a set of hypotheses, which could be tested further as they continued to engage members of the Somali community during the remainder of the project.

The history of the Somali community in London

Interviewees explained that Somali people had a 200-year connection with the UK. From the 19th century, Somali men had been employed in the merchant navy and would travel along the trade routes of the British Empire. Due to their work in the merchant navy, Somali sailors had formed some of the first Black communities in the UK, and Somali men had served in the British Army during the First and

Second World Wars. Two principal waves of immigration from Somalia were said to have occurred in the 20th century. During the early and middle part of the 20th century, Somali seafarers from Yemen and Somalia, working with the British navy, settled in dockland areas. Their families lived in Somalia. Some of these men were still said to be resident in London, and were considered as elders. The second wave of immigration was said to have occurred during the late 1980s following the beginning of civil war in Somalia. During this time, seafarers brought their families to the UK. The war in Somalia was said to have been ongoing since the 1980s and it was pointed out that refugees continued to migrate to the UK.

Many men struggled to adapt to life in London

During the interviews, professionals described how Somali men had struggled to adapt to life in the UK, principally because they found it difficult to find work. Many were said to have arrived with either no qualifications or without qualifications recognised in the UK. Somali men were also said to have found it difficult to learn English. Interviewees explained that some Somali men, finding it difficult to source work, spent their days in Somali cafes drinking and chewing khat (a leaf that acts as a mild stimulant). Khat chewing, combined with drinking, was felt by some to be leading to the development of mental health problems. Furthermore, chewing khat all day was said to lead to lethargy, resulting in men neglecting childcare duties and giving up on trying to find work. On the positive side, men from second and third generations were said to have been more successful in gaining employment. Furthermore, it was pointed out that a number of Somali community groups had been established in London to help support the community.

Generational differences

Some professionals were of the view that first generation Somalis in London expected to return to Somalia at some point. Because of this, they were said to have a strong motivation to retain their Somali language and cultural expectations. Second generation Somalis, in contrast, were said to have experienced a cultural conflict, wanting to remain loyal to their parents' ideas but having to meet the expectations of the British schooling system, school culture and employment market. Some interviewees felt that third generation Somalis were finding life more straightforward. They tended to see themselves as British, spoke English and not Somali and were more Western in their approach. Important differences over cultural and language expectations were said to have produced conflict between the different generations, and between parents and children.

Separation and single parent families

Interviewees explained that single parent families were common in the Somali community. Two reasons were given for this. Some Somali families were said to have arrived in London with just the mother – the husband having been killed in the civil war in Somalia or living in Somalia. Divorce and separation among Somali families were also said to have occurred. Men’s reaction to the language and employment challenges combined with women’s ability to be financially independent were said to be key factors. It was suggested that in Somalia ‘the man is king’ and was said to have the role of ‘a small God’. Women, it was said, were subservient and never argued with their husbands. Some interviewees claimed that in Somalia men were the sole provider, while others said that women did the work, but men took the money. What interviewees agreed on was that the situation changed when the family reached London. In London, the power of the man was felt to have been weakened. This was because, where families relied on welfare benefits and the benefits were paid directly to the woman, the woman found herself in control of family finances. Some women, finding themselves financially independent for the first time, and seeing that their husband was not contributing to childcare or household finances, were deciding to separate.

Acceptance of the existence of child sexual abuse

Some interviewees believed sexual abuse took place in the Somali community. Several anonymised incidents were mentioned. However, some interviewees also felt that child sexual abuse was a ‘Western’ or ‘White’ problem, and that in effect it had been a disease that had infected the Somali community once they had arrived in London. Similarly, some believed that child sexual abuse did not happen or was less likely to happen in Somalia and was less likely to happen in the Somali community in London than in other communities in London. Child sexual abuse was said to be discussed when stories hit the newspapers, but some interviewees said that Somali people never discussed it. Some members of the community suggested that the concept of ‘child sexual abuse’ did not exist in the Somali language. However, the term ‘child fucker’ was said to exist by one interviewee and to be used as a ‘deadly’ insult.

Conceptualisations of child sexual abuse

Somali professionals had a definition of child sexual abuse that limited the term to only penetrative abuse of young Somali girls and boys. Their understanding of abuse was affected by their particular understanding of the age at which adulthood was reached. Some considered adulthood to have been reached at 15, younger than that specified in British law. In Somalia, it was said, a 15-year old boy was considered old enough to be in paid employment, go to war and get married. A girl was considered an adult and able to marry when she

began to menstruate. In Somalia, some girls were said to be married as young as 11. The upshot of this is that for some Somali people in London, sexual activity between a man and a girl of the age of 11 was not seen as sexual abuse but rather as a man taking advantage of an unmarried woman. If the man were to force himself onto a girl, it would be seen as the rape of an adult. Some interviewees said children could be considered adults at the age of seven.

Where children might be at heightened risk of abuse

Professionals identified a range of situations where Somali children experienced risk. Being exposed to a risk did not mean that a child went on to be abused or was being abused, and the interviewees, by describing these situations, were not suggesting children were being abused. In fact sometimes professionals were unaware that the situations they described heightened the theoretical risk of abuse.

Sharing bedrooms and beds

It was said that some Somali children shared bedrooms and beds, sometimes with adults, and sometimes with people who were not known or related to them. Sharing with family members came about because there were more family members living in the household than bedrooms and beds available. Somali families could, relatively speaking for the UK, be quite large, with the number of children varying between two and eleven. Somali families, it was said, also tended to be living in social housing, which had between one and four bedrooms. It was also pointed out that children sharing with people who were not known to them could come about when Somali parents hosted other families. Sometimes, hosting other families was the result of fulfilling an obligation to distant clan members, who arrived in London looking for accommodation. Hosting guests, it was said, could result in children sharing beds or rooms with people of whom the parents knew little. Some of these people, it was pointed out, came direct from Somalia, may have suffered trauma and subsequently would be suffering mental illness triggered by the experience of war.

Babysitting and other informal caring arrangements

Interviewees identified a number of situations in which Somali children might be left in the company of unrelated males. These were at weddings, classes in Koranic madrassas and when male religious teachers gave lessons to children in homes (women, including single mothers, were said to be expected to be in another room when the teaching took place). Mothers were said to be likely to take more risks with babysitters if they were the sole carer and had a large number of children.

Boyfriends

Some interviewees felt that mothers who headed up a single parent household and were addicted to khat and alcohol, being unable to attract men interested in a stable family life, turned to men with an interest in casual sex. It was felt that men interested in casual sex were more likely to be interested in abusing the mother's children.

Gangs

Interviewees pointed out that some Somali children were involved in gangs. Although this was not explored in depth during the interviews, research suggests that involvement in gangs could lead to sexual exploitation and may involve rape initiation ceremonies (Beckett et al, 2012; Pearce & Pitts, 2011).

Neglect

Interviewees explained that some Somali children did not receive affection within the family home, which motivated them to seek affection outside of the home and made them vulnerable to exploitation. Lack of attention was felt to be sometimes the result of the large number of children in the family home, with the carer or carers not having enough time to give all of the children a sufficient amount of attention. It was pointed out that some children did not see a great deal of their fathers, who were separated from the family or otherwise absent. Cultural and language preferences between the first and successive generations were also felt to create an emotional distance between child and parents.

Trafficking and sexual exploitation

The professionals who were interviewed explained that some Somali children had been sent alone to live in London by family members looking to get them out of the civil war in Somalia (see Hannan, 2003, for more on this). Some of these children were said to have ended up being looked after by 'surrogate aunties' who used them to attract men into 'khat houses'. It was said that some Somali men travelled from London to Somalia to find a very young girl to take as a wife. A younger wife, it was said, could be dominated more easily, improving the man's self-esteem. Seeking to maximise their wellbeing, some men searched for as young a wife as possible (this perspective and practice is not unique to some people in the Somali community, see Onal, 2008). The project team did not explore whether elders bought young girls who they had chosen to be their wife back to London and what the experience of these girls was. Neither did the project team receive a disclosure from professionals about identifiable young people who had been trafficked or exploited.

Institutions

During the interviews, it was mentioned that some Somali young people were excluded from schools and some had been imprisoned in a Young Offender Institution. Being put in a Young Offender Institution was not an experience unique to Somali young people. However, as children in Young Offender Institutions experience a heightened risk of being exploited or abused (Allison & Hattenstone, 2012; Howard League for Penal Reform, 2016), it was suggested that Somali young people who had been put in these institutions had a special need for interventions to help protect them.

Reducing situational risk

Feedback from professionals during the interviews highlighted the ways in which parents took actions, which served to reduce the situational risks experienced by their children, although the actions were not consciously focused on reducing the risk of sexual abuse. For example, in Somali households, males and females did not mix. This arrangement was based on a particular interpretation of what Islamic texts were felt to recommend. If implemented effectively, these arrangements ruled out the possibility of girls being left unaccompanied with unrelated males. Some parents, who did allow socialising between males and females within the family home, were said to ensure that their daughters did not sleep in the same room as adult men. Some mothers, it was said, instructed their children not to let people touch them, kept an eye on their children playing outside, and did not allow their teenage daughters to go out unaccompanied at any age.

Grooming

Interviewees felt Somalis did not understand the process of grooming or did understand grooming but did not understand that it could happen online. They also felt that one step in the process of grooming, that is, developing trusting relationships with the carers of a child and with the child themselves, was not applicable to the Somali community. It was felt that in communities in the Western world, where people did not know each other, there was anonymity and distrust, which is something that people who wanted to groom a child would need to overcome. However, it was said that in the Somali community there was not much anonymity and trust was inherent in all relationships. It was felt that this meant a Somali adult looking to abuse a child in a family or community setting would not need to make a conscious effort to gain the trust of an adult or child. In London, every Somali adult was said to be considered the aunty, uncle, mother or father of every child, whether they were related or not. Indeed, it was pointed out that young people were expected to use the terms 'aunty' and 'uncle' when addressing adults. Furthermore, it was said that there was a bridge of trust between children and adults

based on the assumption that older people had wisdom provided by age.

Discussing concerns about sexual abuse

One route into attempting to reduce situational risk is to discuss concerns about sexual abuse with family members, so they can then take action to modify those situations. However, Somali professionals felt it would be difficult for people to discuss concerns. The clan, extended family and family structure was felt to influence responses to cases or reports of child sexual abuse. It was explained that the priority for any family member was to preserve the reputation of the family and clan, in the eyes of others. When a member of one clan wronged the member of another, every member of the latter clan was said to feel entitled and obliged to take retribution on any member of the other clan, i.e. each clan member could act on behalf of and was perceived to be an ambassador for their clan (a similar arrangement was reported in Kenyan society, see Odero et al, 2014). When an incident occurred between members of different clans, to stop the possibility of an escalation of inter-clan violence, it was said negotiations would be held between clan leaders, who were always male. The aim of the negotiations was to preserve the peace and the reputation of each clan.

This process was also said to be applied when a member of one clan or family abused a child from another. Where inter-clan child sexual abuse occurred, it was said that there would be shame for the clan of which the abuser was a member. But interviewees told the project team that clan members of the abused child would also feel ashamed. If the child was a girl and the abuse was penetrative, the girl would not be considered fit to marry. This, it was felt, would be a cause of immediate distress for the family and in the long term for the girl (if she wanted to marry another Somali). For this reason, clan members were said to want to keep news of abuse out of the public domain, for making the issue public would not only damage the girl's reputation, it would be seen as a betrayal of the requirement to preserve the reputation of their clan and a provocation of the clan of the abuser. Reparation was said to be agreed privately between clan elders. However, while this arrangement functioned to stabilise relationships between clan members and served to protect how people within the community perceived the girl's fitness for marriage, it was felt that it led to the physical, emotional and psychological harm done to the girl going unaddressed. Keeping concerns private in this way was not exclusive to the Somali community. It was and remains common to many groups including local government, religious institutions, including some institutions whose purpose is to protect and promote the wellbeing of children (e.g. Jay, 2014).

In relation to discussing concerns, interviewees pointed out that there was no such thing as a discreet conversation in the Somali community, so that any discussion, if it were to implicate doubt about family members or friend, would most likely reach those being doubted. The person being doubted, together with associated clan members would then feel affronted by the doubt and take retributive action. It was felt that a woman who shared her doubts could end up being accused of being mentally unstable or mad; suspected of not being able to fulfil her husband's sexual needs; ignored and isolated; and accused of being a liar, a gossip and a snitch. It was felt that sharing doubts could be seen as an attempt to damage the family or clan of the individual being doubted and could lead to retaliatory action against the members of the clan of which the woman was a member. Set against this context, interviewees felt that women would have good reasons for not discussing doubts and concerns. A woman would likely remain in denial or prefer not to discuss her concern, or otherwise have to be extraordinarily strong. Some felt that men would be more likely than women to discuss their concerns, while others harboured doubts, thinking men would feel motivated to keep quiet for the same reasons as women.

When asked what could be done to encourage adults to discuss concerns, interviewees said that adults needed to put the interests and future of the child before the reputation of the family, and they needed to be able to discuss the concerns confidentially, with someone outside of the Somali community.

What to work on and who to work with

Professionals identified a range of initiatives that could be undertaken by the project team to help prevent child sexual abuse. Raising awareness and promoting discussion of the issues among children and adults, with a particular focus on mothers who chewed khat and drank alcohol, were suggested. Some felt it would be a good idea to start a forum of Somali intellectuals, community workers and parents. One interviewee advised that the project developers needed to bargain with Somali community groups if they wanted their participation. This would have required the project team to provide something that interested the community group in return for participation. Others felt that it might be difficult to make progress on the issue with men who would see association with a project focused on child sexual abuse as a threat to the reputation of their clan and community. One interviewee felt discussion needed to be had with elders about the practice of marrying very young girls to very old men. He suggested one-to-one meetings with open-minded elders and then engagement with the men who supported the practice. Professionals were asked who might be interested in working further with the project team. Interviewees did not volunteer themselves but some did suggest named individuals

working for Somali community organisations or in the field of child protection.

Reviewing the findings

Having reviewed the insights provided by Somali professionals, the project team created a list of situations where children might be at heightened risk of abuse, which they could focus on. The team, led by the Project Manager, decided to focus on working with Somali mothers to increase the safety of their children in the home. Professionals identified a number of situations at home in which children were at heightened risk of being abused, and they identified the mother as being, more often than not, the principal carer. However, the choice to work with Somali mothers, while influenced by professionals' insights, was not solely determined by those insights. Mothers were chosen to work with, in part, because the project team felt they would be easier to work with than men. This is an issue to which this report will return in the discussion chapter, at the end of the report.

The project team decided to work with mothers in two stages. First, it conducted interviews with mothers, testing out and developing the insights provided to the project team by professionals. In particular, it wanted to test the notion that professionals had put forward that some mothers:

1. Did not believe fathers/mothers/uncles/Koranic teachers were capable of sexually abusing children.
2. Did not understand the process of grooming.
3. Did not think that Somalis would deliberately make friends with a Somali woman to get access to her children.
4. Would leave their children with any adult they currently know.
5. Would leave their children alone with male adults other than the father.

Interview topics included childcare and sleeping arrangements, the father's role in bringing up the children, understanding child sexual abuse, and what parents do when they are suspicious of another adult. The interview data would constitute a qualitative baseline, and would be something that the project team went back to mothers with, at the end of the project, to see if anything had changed. After the interviews the project group then planned to conduct focus groups with mothers. The focus groups, being based on the findings fed back by the mothers, were designed to find out which outcomes mothers would most like to work towards achieving, and their preferences for the working methods to achieve those outcomes.

Second cycle: Arranging and conducting the interviews with mothers

Mothers were recruited into the interviews by the PDO. Recruitment was done as part of a wider attempt to recruit mothers into the project. The PDO tended to approach mothers who he knew personally through his membership of the Somali community, or who he advised through his work. He did try to approach mothers with whom he had no history of interaction, but was unsuccessful in engaging them. At this stage of the project, the POW, a British Somali mother who had also worked as an advisor to Somali people, was employed. The fact of the worker being a Somali mother was important because the project team wanted someone to be present in the interviews who could act as a reassuring female presence, who could be someone to whom the mother addressed her answers if she preferred eye contact with a female, and who, by performing these roles would maximise the data the project team got back during their interviews.

The Evaluator, the PDO and the POW spent two full days discussing how they were going to properly prepare mothers for the interviews. They considered research findings suggesting that Somali women in London prefer to be informed verbally and face to face (Abdullahi et al, 2009, p684). They decided that, wherever possible, the PDO would first invite the mother into the building where the PDO worked as an advisor, to have an informal discussion about the issues with the PDO and POW. If the mother seemed comfortable discussing the issues, the PDO would issue an invitation to doing an evaluation interview. Furthermore, if the mother did agree to participate, the meeting would be used by the PDO to explain the reason behind the personal nature of the questions and to avoid a situation where the mother, halfway through the interview, feared that the personal nature of the questions were indicative of a suspicion that she had abused a child. The PDO could also properly explain the responsibilities of the team with regards to passing on disclosures of child abuse. It was hoped that by sharing the sensitivities and risks, the project group could prepare mothers in advance for the emotional and mental discomfort they might feel during the interviews, so that they would be better able to handle these discomforts and respond to questions openly during the interview.

The PDO approached mothers with the same tentative, step-by-step process he had used with elders and professionals. He tried to 'normalise' discussion of child sexual abuse by starting off with discussion about topics that were not difficult to discuss, and then linking them to other issues to arrive, eventually, at a discussion about child sexual abuse within families and within the Somali community. The opening topic was usually a discussion about problems faced by

families in general, after which the topic of abuse in schools would be introduced and then abuse by strangers would be mentioned. The focus would then move on to abuse by family members, and a recognition that sexual abuse happens in all walks of life and by implication in Somali family life too. As well as ‘normalising’ discussion of child sexual abuse, the PDO attempted to paint the project as an opportunity for participants to ‘give’ as well as ‘receive’. He did this by suggesting that the project would give mothers the opportunity to share what they knew about the topic with each other. Finally, the PDO tried to ‘sell’ participation by suggesting that one of the reasons child sexual abuse happens is because parents do not know about the issue. This was intended to use mothers’ concerns about the safety of their children as a motivating factor for participation in the project.

In practice, the PDO engaged mothers, at least initially, face-to-face and followed this with a conversation over the phone or a visit to the mother’s house. Pre-interview meetings were not held with all mothers, owing to the lack of the mother’s availability. On other occasions, the PDO had several chats with the mother before inviting her to a pre-interview meeting. The PDO found that mothers who he already knew were quite open to the idea of participation and some started to recount stories of abuse that they had heard of, and what they thought of the topic.

Fifteen interviews were carried out in total. The PDO, POW and Evaluation Officer all played a part in conducting the interviews. A decision was taken not to record the interviews on a voice recorder because the POW had advised that it would remind mothers too much of a Home Office interview that many mothers would have participated in when they arrived in the UK and requested refugee status. The POW felt that creating a situation reminiscent of Home Office interviews would unnecessarily frighten mothers into thinking the information being recorded might be sent to the Home Office.

The project team recognised that mothers, if talking about their personal lives in relation to sexual abuse, might sometimes feel distressed by the topics covered during the interviews. To ensure that mothers felt supported to deal with the distress, the POW, being a Somali woman, was chosen to debrief the mother at the end of the interview. The PDO and Evaluator, both male, would leave the interview room, and the POW would ask the mother about how she felt and give a list of organisations to contact if she felt she needed more support. It was also felt that the POW was best placed for dealing with child protection disclosures. The team felt that a Somali mother would feel most at ease disclosing and working out steps needed to share the information, if it was done with another Somali woman.

It is difficult to know quite how mothers experienced the interviews because the project team did not have time to involve them in follow-up interviews exploring the experience. However, the POW picked up on two issues during the process. Most mothers, she said, had felt honoured to be interviewed by the Evaluator, and saw the interview as a situation in which they needed to ‘perform well’, i.e. give useful information. Some would make eye contact with the POW during the interview, looking for validation of what they were saying. In the debriefing, some asked the POW “Did I do well?” and one said, “If you find my answer is not good, could you change it for me?” On the other hand, both the POW and PDO felt that mothers had experienced some degree of discomfort in the interviews. The POW described how many mothers looked as if they were sitting in a chair that was a bit too small for them (even though the chairs were of a standard size). Both the PDO and POW felt mothers were more conservative in their responses and what they chose to talk about in the interview, compared with the discussions that had taken place in the pre-meeting and prior to the interview.

Findings from the interviews

Findings from mothers are presented in brief here, and really to help the reader understand how they informed the project team’s decision-making. A more extensive exploration of mothers’ views and perceptions are presented in an accompanying report entitled *Four Steps to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in the Home* (Williams, 2018).

Mothers described how they were happy to leave their children in the care of a variety of relatives, often females, but also fathers, brothers, uncles, brothers-in-law and nephews. Such arrangements lasted between a few hours and a few months. Where children were left in the care of a relative for a long time, it was because the mother had made a trip abroad to visit relatives. When children were cared for by a relative, it could be in the child’s home or the relative’s home. Some mothers left their children alone with Koranic teachers in domestic settings. Some would also let male relatives take their children out to parks and other places where the children could play.

While mothers accepted that child sexual abuse could happen, some did not feel it could be carried out by parents on their own children, by uncles on their nieces and nephews and by Koranic teachers. Some felt that it could not happen within the Somali community at all. Few mothers had considered that adults might groom family members to get access to children. However, most had heard of adults getting access to children through the internet or mobile phone technology. This suggested that mothers were aware of adults grooming children through technology, but not of adults grooming parents and children

in face-to-face interaction. Most of the mothers felt their children were able to do things on the computer that they did not know how to do. Some did not have any rules for their children's use of the computer or of mobile phones.

Reviewing the findings

The findings helped identify areas in which mothers' understandings and acceptance of the risks of abuse and hence children's safety may be improved. The project team identified several areas in which it felt it could work with mothers, to help improve the safety of children:

- Change their beliefs about and get them to critically assess the possibility of abuse by male relatives and Koranic teachers.
- Raise awareness of face-to-face grooming of parents and children and to apply this to reviewing the situations they experience and the people they know.
- Assess the risks of leaving their children with male relatives.
- Look at alternative ways in which adult male relatives can interact with their children, which decreases the risk of abuse to the child.

By the end of the second cycle, there had been two significant changes made to the project staffing. First, the original Project Manager had left the project, and was replaced by an existing manager from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. Second, following a change in staffing in the Evaluation Department at the NSPCC, a decision was made to withdraw the Evaluator from the project development team, and to revert to a more traditional evaluation role, planning and implementing an evaluation of the intervention model that the programme staff would come up with.

Third cycle: Focus groups with Somali mothers

In the third cycle of work, focus groups were conducted by the POW and PDO to ask mothers if they had a preference for any of the areas identified above by the project team listed in the previous section. Mothers were given a verbal pre-focus group briefing. During the focus group, it was particularly important to communicate to mothers that the project group could not guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of mothers, if they disclosed personal information, for everyone else in the group would hear it. Mothers were asked to let the POW know if they wanted to make a disclosure and to make the disclosure outside the group. The POW and PDO conducted the groups, so that the POW could take the disclosure while the PDO continued with the group. Seven mothers attended the first focus group. Four mothers attended the second. Unfortunately, only the mothers in the second focus group were asked about the possible areas

of work identified by the project team. Brief notes were taken of mothers' feedback. Mothers expressed interest in doing work in all the areas, but reducing risk in the home environment was the only area that all four mothers expressed an interest in. Mothers' suggestions for how they might work on the issue included a workshop, making a DVD, creating a media campaign to educate Somali people, working with Imams, setting up a tea club, and internet safety training.

Fourth cycle: Delivery and evaluation of a workshop intervention

Following the consultation of Somali professionals and mothers, the project team decided to provide a workshop to Somali mothers. The choice of the workshop was a pragmatic one. In part, it was an attempt to respond to the preference of mothers for further engagement on the topic of sexual abuse. However, it was also partly the result of a feeling that the implementation of the project methodology had not resulted in the delineation of a clear intervention model being developed in response to the needs of the community. In part, this was because consulting the community had taken longer than anticipated. But it was also because changes to the staffing of the project, including the departure of the original Project Manager, and the withdrawal of the Evaluator from the project development team, meant less thought was being paid to ensuring that the consultation of Somali mothers was being used to identify a clear intervention model.

Consequently, it was decided that, given the need for implementing an intervention, it would be useful to involve an existing member of staff from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, who was experienced in delivering the Lucy Faithfull Foundation's *Parents Protect* sexual abuse prevention workshop. The member of staff from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation worked with the project staff to design and deliver a workshop, based on an adaptation of the *Parents Protect* workshop. The workshop was adapted by reducing the amount of information giving, increasing the amount of discussion time and adding information and references particular to the Somali community. The aims of the workshop were to improve knowledge, improve confidence in talking about sexual abuse and help mothers identify and lower risks in the home. Workshop organisers explained what child sexual abuse involved, including the process of grooming, and the signs and symptoms in victims and perpetrators. A short documentary, created by the project team, was also shown. The documentary focused on the account provided by a Somali woman living in London, recounting her experience of being sexually abused by a relative. The workshop provided a set of scenarios for Somali mothers to discuss to prompt mothers to think of steps they could take to decrease risks at home. Six workshops were provided to a total of 72 mothers, in venues close to where mothers lived. Workshops were delivered in English and

Somali by a Senior Practitioner from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, supported by the PDO and POW. During the workshops, the project team were surprised to see that some mothers had brought along other mothers who had not at that point been involved in the project. Furthermore, it became apparent that some women, while attending the workshops, had done so having made a conscious decision not to tell their husbands about it.

The evaluation of the workshops involved a post-workshop survey of mothers. The survey looked at whether attending the workshop had made a difference to mothers' understanding, views on child sexual abuse, and if they had taken actions to reduce situational risk. The survey was administered three months after the workshop – a reasonable amount of time for mothers to try and put into practice what they had learned. Surveys were administered over the telephone by the PDO and POW. Seventy of the 72 mothers who attended the workshops completed the post-workshop survey.

The majority of surveyed mothers were born in Somalia (97%, n=68), were between 18 and 24 years old (66%, n=46) and had between two and five children (56%, n=39). Of the 261 children cared for by the 70 mothers, 184 were under the age of 18. Half of the mothers surveyed were living as single parents (51%, n=37). The surveys, once analysed, were followed up with a set of interviews with mothers, 11 in total, to further explore the issues raised through the survey data. The qualitative interviews, which took place after the survey had been conducted, and four months after the workshop had been provided, were aimed at identifying the factors that explained the variation in the reported impact of the workshop. A separate evaluation report on the effectiveness of the workshop, including a detailed analysis of survey and interview findings, was submitted to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation in 2012 (Williams, 2012).

The key findings were as follows:

- Mothers reported that their understanding improved as a result of the workshops.
- However, not all mothers accepted that abuse occurred within the Somali community or could be perpetrated by certain family members. For example, some mothers believed that God effectively inoculated mothers' minds from wanting to abuse. Some simply did not want to believe that abuse could occur.
- Somali mothers were not always clear-cut in their views about whether abuse could happen. Some were ambivalent or demonstrated a degree of dissonance in whether abuse occurred within the Somali community.

- Protecting the reputation of the Somali community was a key concern for mothers when they talked about the possibility of abuse.
- Hearing stories of abuse occurring within the Somali community was a key factor in changing mothers' minds about whether child sexual abuse could occur in the community. Some mothers reported that the project documentary played a crucial role in changing their minds.
- Some mothers did report having identified situational risks at home, having attended a workshop. However, mothers varied in whether they were able to discuss risk reduction with family members. Where they could discuss the risk, some were told they were sick, but others were supported. Where mothers could not discuss the risk explicitly, they sometimes successfully changed domestic arrangements through other indirect means.

In conclusion, the evaluation of the workshops and project concluded that preventative programmes needed to go beyond informing parents about sexual abuse and help parents deal with the anxieties that come with accepting knowledge about abuse. A separate report, entitled *Four Steps to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in the Home* (Williams, 2018) provides a more detailed discussion of these points but in summary it was felt that prevention programmes could benefit parents by:

- Using real-life stories of abuse told by community members.
- Using approaches that allowed people to accept the possibility of abuse while maintaining pride and a sense of respect in their family and community.
- Supporting parents to handle the anxieties that arise about their own children, when considering the possibility of abuse.
- Helping parents find ways of dealing with adverse reactions from community members, when they try to discuss or reduce situational risks.

Following this work with the Somali community, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation developed a toolkit for organisations interested in working with community groups on preventing sexual abuse (Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2012) and have continued to work with a range of community groups (Saint & Almond, 2015).

The next chapter discusses the key learning points from this report. The discussion and learning points will be of relevance to anyone seeking to engage community groups in the prevention of sexual abuse.

Chapter 3: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter draws on the report findings to discuss the use of community participation and action research to prevent abuse, and the strengths and weaknesses of blurring the evaluation and project development roles. It finishes by considering the responsibility that the project developers and report author has towards those who participated in the project and evaluation.

Using community participation and action research to prevent abuse

Several lessons can be drawn from the team's experience in trying to engage community members in an exercise designed to develop joint understandings of what could be done to prevent child sexual abuse. The type of engagement achieved in this project would not have been possible without having someone dedicated to opening up informal conversations with members of the community. Community development and outreach work skills were essential. Furthermore, it is worth bearing in mind that a community member's willingness to participate is likely to be influenced, not just by the issue of concern to the project, but by who is asking them to get involved. A good shortcut to engagement is to employ a development officer from the community. They act as a social bridge, having both *insider* knowledge but also *access* to insider knowledge. In this way, they allow the project team to make strides in understanding the key issues. The experience of the PDO suggests that a step-by-step approach to engagement works well, and that a discussion about a common and relatively uncontroversial issue is a good place to start. It is not every day that you get approached to talk about child sexual abuse in the community that you live in. Small steps can then be taken to nudge the conversation towards a discussion about child sexual abuse in the community.

One weakness of employing a community member, which organisers of prevention programmes should guard against, is a tendency to rely on the existing social networks of the worker. In this project, while the PDO found success in engaging people with whom he had a prior personal or professional acquaintance, he was not successful in engaging mothers, with whom he had no previous acquaintance. In retrospect, it was clear that in the team's celebration of the PDO's engagement success, the failure to engage women from outside the PDO's existing social network went unnoticed and unaddressed. The consequence is that mothers sitting outside the social class or clan grouping of the PDO and who would not have gone to the PDO for advice were

not involved. Possibly, this meant that some of the most vulnerable children in the Somali community, those whose mothers had drug and alcohol problems, who would not know the PDO or would not go for advice, would not have benefited. There is of course a balance to strike between getting quick participation wins by working with those most likely to say yes and putting resources into engaging those who may never engage.

The project team's experience highlights the importance, from the beginning, of setting engagement targets and identifying and targeting particular groups from within the community who would benefit most from participation or who may be less inclined to want or to be able to participate.

The project team had planned to spend one year consulting members of the Somali community but ended up spending two. One factor to bear in mind is the length of time it takes for evaluation plans to make it through research ethics committees. A great deal of time was needed to plan an effective approach to making participants clear about what constitutes a disclosure and what would happen as a result. The project team needs to be aware of the timeline that research ethics committees work to, for reviewing proposals and amendments. Some may meet on a quarterly basis, which means, if the committee asks for amendments to be made it may take six months to get approval. Another reason for things taking longer than planned is that community members may not always be around when you want them. For example, the team's consultation of mothers was put on hold, when it was explained that many families would not be in London for the summer. Furthermore, getting mothers to engage in the intricacies of a subject that is often pushed to the back of the mind, such as child sexual abuse, requires a great deal of time.

After a year of engagement, arguably, the project team had only scratched the surface in helping mothers articulate what they did to prevent abuse. Arguably, Somali mothers, like many mothers, already did a lot of day-to-day things that helped prevent abuse but were not able to articulate that because they were not consciously aware and did not have the vocabulary to explain it. Greater awareness would probably require a higher level of engagement with the subject area than the project team had time to go into. If the programme had had more time and resources, it would have been useful to work with the mothers to analyse situational risk in more depth, and to get an insight into what areas of risk they were struggling to lower.

Programme organisers usually espouse the value of inclusivity, which underpins community participatory initiatives, and may talk about “involving the community”. However, in practice, project teams will only ever engage a small number of members from the whole ‘community’. Furthermore, some community members will be more welcoming than others. This means a decision needs to be made about what to do with people who are hostile or critical. Do programme organisers seek to win them over or sidestep them? In some cases, involving some members requires the exclusion of others. In this project the project team was aware that for some mothers participating in the project would mean breaking with an expectation held of them to shy away from showing an interest in sexual matters. Ensuring the project kept a low profile and avoided unwanted attention from influential male members of the community was a way of supporting mothers’ involvement.

The PDO realised early on in the project that Somali elders were not approving, and he felt that further attempts at engagement might provoke an initiative to stop other members of the community from participating. For this reason he stopped attempts to engage elders. Mothers engaged in strategies of exclusion too, for example by participating in the workshops without mentioning it to their husbands. While exclusionary practices may not fit with the traditional appeal to ‘inclusivity’, the experience of this project suggests programme organisers may be more effective in engaging with community members if they are clear about those who may need to be excluded or sidestepped. Sometimes, those who may need to be sidestepped are male community leaders who may have an interest in protecting patriarchal arrangements and expectations within the community, which run counter to attempts to preventing abuse.

The project team focused their work with Somali mothers, who were already enrolled into the social network of the PDO, and who wanted to learn about how to protect their children. Choosing to focus on mothers made sense because mothers were most likely to be the principal carers for children. A violence reduction project within the Somali community in Glasgow took the decision to work with Somali women for a similar reason (Brooks, 2018). However in the case of this project working with Somali mothers was also the easy option. The project team perceived that it would have been harder to engage men. Of course not all men are opposed to prevention but there was a perception among the team that working with men would mean having to deal with hostile responses that might have been intimidating and aggressive. The sole focus on mothers meant the project team did not get the advantage of:

- Men's insights into situational risks and what could be done to reduce them.
- Men's knowledge of what they can do to lower situational risks.
- The synergies that can result between couples working together. In this study, some fathers were supportive of the mothers, but work was not done with the fathers.
- Harnessing the support of males who may have wielded disproportionately high levels of influence over the community.

The project team started off working with women, arguing that men could be engaged later on, in a subsequent project, but this argument may seem like an excuse to avoid working with men, if the project team has no realistic plan for getting funding to do that work. Programme organisers, who want to avoid the bias of working exclusively or mainly with women, need to identify the key challenges to engaging men, and plan and budget for how they are going to address those challenges. Some of the challenges may be practical, and require work being done in the evenings and at weekends, to accommodate the fact that many of the men may be at work. Some of the barriers may be about how to tackle sensitive issues among groups of networked men, which may be supportive of practices that are considered unacceptable and abusive, such as forced marriage.

The project team's decision to focus their work with Somali mothers also meant that the project veered away from addressing the risks posed to some of the most vulnerable Somali children, who did not live within conventional families. Professionals identified five groups of children who could potentially experience high levels of situational risk, which the team's method of engagement would not have affected:

- Unaccompanied migrant children, arriving in London, and being used by distant relatives to attract men into Somali cafes.
- The child 'brides' of Somali elders.
- Children imprisoned in Young Offender Institutions.
- Children left with adults in religious schools.
- Children who spend time in gangs on the streets.

Approaches to reducing the situational risks of children in these circumstances would require some forethought and planning and would be challenging. In most cases, they would require some combination of outreach work and partnership working with police and institutions responsible for the care of young people. There would also be complex and sensitive ethical issues to address about if and when to refer a child's case to social services and the police. Reducing the risk posed to children who are by definition in abusive

situations would usually require referral to the police or social services. However, an argument can be made that in some situations referral to the police or social services might cause people to pull out of the project altogether. This raises the question of whether it is ever ethically acceptable for project workers to promise non-disclosure to community members. Certainly, this fits uncomfortably with most child protection agencies' stated values and priorities. However, it might be argued that a project that is looking to work with community members to prevent abuse within a community, depends on community members being open and honest about where and how abuse occurs, and that neither of these things can happen if community members know the information they give will be passed on to the police. It could be argued that a promise of non-disclosure could in the long run help more children through helping the community at large and other communities who may benefit from the learning. One approach might be for programme staff to make an ethical commitment to do everything they can to safeguard and protect the child or children in question, without taking actions, which they believe would bring the project to an end. In any given situation where child protection concerns emerged, this would mean the professional would need to negotiate with those involved as to what an acceptable course of action would be that would help protect the child and keep programme participants on board.

There are also limits to the extent to which community members can be involved in project decisions. In this project, the project team involved professionals and mothers in discussions about the project, but with the exception of the PDO and POW, community members did not have the final say in the direction the project should go. Furthermore, the limited budget, timescale and skill set on which the project team could draw necessarily constrained the extent to which the team could respond to community members' ideas and the influence of community members. Giving people from the community more power over programme direction raises the question of which people should be involved, and therefore who should be excluded. The degree of influence and formal decision-making power granted to community members is something for programme organisers to think about. A useful starting point for thinking through this issue would be Sherry Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation* (Arnstein, 1969).

An action research approach that intends to build interventions with community members, which are based on the insights provided by those members, needs to have a diverse range of professional skills and resources in reserve, to respond to community members' preferences and needs. In this project, the team provided an awareness-raising workshop and created a filmed documentary of a Somali woman recounting her experience of being abused as a child. Both of these

could be provided because the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Praxis, between them, had the resource and experience. However, the project did not have a budget to respond to other recommendations, such as a weekly tea club for Somali mothers or a media campaign. Neither did it work on all the issues identified by community members, such as the culture of inviting clan members to stay in the house or the practice of children sharing beds and bedrooms with others. The same finding was reported in a project that sought to develop a community response to sexual abuse in Scotland (Nelson, 2004, p424)

Finally, implementing a preventative approach to child sexual abuse, which involves discussing participants' views and experiences, can take its toll on staff. Discussing the topic in general is stressful. Doing it day after day, hearing about real life stories and concerns can be distressing, and can start to eat away at one's sense of optimism with the world. If you are a worker, who is also a parent, it can heighten your anxiety levels, and make you question your own childcare arrangements. For workers who are members of the community that the project is focused on there is also the added fear of being shunned by community members for involvement in the project or for having to pass on a disclosure about abuse.

The project team built in a lot of time to discuss the planning of the project, part of which was also used to discuss and process the anxieties, feelings of distress and apprehensions identified in this section. Spending time together in this way felt cathartic and therapeutic. It allowed the project team to come to terms with stories and information that challenged its view of the world. Being able to chat and offload about what had been found out, how it had made people feel, and the shock and distress that sometimes comes with talking about child sexual abuse was a crucial means through which the anxiety of the work could be dissipated. It also gave the feeling that this was a genuine 'team' approach, as opposed to a set of individuals coming in to play their part. The support provided by team members to each other was reassuring. Arguably, the team approach enabled members to be more relaxed when talking to elders, professionals and mothers. In any case, programme directors should understand that project workers will be challenged, and will need support to process these challenges. This should involve ensuring people, who have the right skills set, are able to provide debriefing sessions to those involved in the project.

Evaluation and project development methodologies

The importance of finding out about local dynamics

By focusing on developing understandings of the particularity of the challenges faced by the parents and children, this project helped reveal the following community dynamics and areas of risk that would not be commonly picked up in population level studies and impact studies:

- The usage of unaccompanied migrant children in Somali cafes.
- The practice of Somali elders going to Somalia to find child brides.
- Sharing of beds and bedrooms.
- The obligation of accommodating distant clan members.
- The large proportion of mothers bringing up large numbers of children by themselves.

Blurring the boundaries between evaluation and project development

Blurring the boundaries between the Evaluator and project staff, allowing the Evaluator to play a role in project development, and using project staff to collect and analyse data also has several advantages. It is common for qualitative evaluation of services and interventions, to ask questions similar to the ones those developing the project would ask. Integrating project development with evaluation helps avoid programme participants being asked the same set of questions twice – once by programme developers and a second time by project evaluators. Furthermore, project staff are better involved in the evaluation process when they play a role in data collection and analysis. Blurring the boundaries between evaluation and project development meant that the Evaluator and project development staff could spend a lot more time together, planning and implementing the project.

Building in a lot of time for staff to reflect, analyse, plan and also process their thoughts and feelings was felt to be crucial to the success of the project. Having this time allowed participants to fully appreciate the logistical problems of implementing any and each part of the project. For example, if the PDO had not pointed it out, the Evaluator would never have realised that many Somali mothers went to Somalia or other countries during the summer, and so would not have been available to be interviewed during this period. Research knowledge was useful for ensuring that the project and the conversations the project team had with community members were informed by and could contribute to current debates around theory and evidence. Evaluation skills allowed the project team to document and evaluate the effectiveness of the work.

The deliberate blurring of the boundaries between the Evaluator and project staff in the first half of the project, and the involvement of the Evaluator in the project development, could be criticised for giving the Evaluator a vested interest in reporting back positively on the project. However, such pressure is present in any commissioned evaluation (see Conley-Tyler, 2005, p8 for a discussion of this). Arguably, what is more important is the integrity of the Evaluator.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that in a study like this, which was operating on a very small budget, qualitative research, incorporating interviews and focus groups produced a lot of rich insight into how mothers understood, processed and responded to prevention messages for relatively little expense. It was noticeable too that, through interview, mothers could sometimes give information about situational risks, without being asked a question about situational risk, and without realising that they were giving information about situational risks.

Ethical dilemmas

The project team needed to spend a great deal of time thinking through how it was going to respond to child protection concerns. The team understood that passing on a disclosure made unintentionally could lead to participants withdrawing from the project in protest and also to the rejection of the PDO and POW by members of their own community. The team ensured that when parents were approached, a great deal of time and effort was made to ensure they understood the legal responsibilities of project team members with regards to passing on disclosures. Having a child protection expert involved in the project team would be useful for ensuring that a good procedure is in place, and that all team members are informed.

Responsibility to the Somali Community

Towards the end of the project, questions were raised about whether the research findings should be focused specifically on the Somali community, or generalised to communities in general. As is clear in the content of this report, a decision was taken to make reference to the Somali community. There are several reasons for this. Somali people partook in the project, understanding and expecting the project to publish a final report and many of the participants requested to see a copy when finished. To honour that commitment, it made sense to publish the report, acknowledging that it was about the Somali community. Furthermore, while it was true that releasing the report might incur anger of some who have an interest in ensuring that the issue of child sexual abuse is not discussed and addressed, it is, at the

end of the day, the role of child protection charities to take a lead in opening up such debates. Having said this, the decision was taken to omit mention of the Somali community from the title of the report, to broaden the report's appeal to people who are interested in working with communities.

One of the criticisms that could be levelled at the way this project unfolded is that while the team spent time consulting with the Somali community about their experience, it did not leave enough time to consult with members on how the findings should be presented. In fact, the team spent no time doing this, because as the funding came to an end, the availability of project team members, to work as a team to address the issue, diminished. The project finished in 2012, and a report on the workshop was submitted to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (Williams, 2012). While parts of the report were used in conference presentations and published information about the project, the full report was not published, and participants in the project were not sent a copy.

However, in 2016 a decision was taken by the NSPCC to publish a report on the project, because the work was felt to be relevant to the strategic priorities of the organisation, and in particular, the organisation's ambition of setting up a place-based initiative designed to prevent sexual abuse (NSPCC, 2016). Consequently, on publication of the report, plans will be developed to distribute the report to study participants. The PDO and POW were given the opportunity to be consulted on how they were represented in the report, given the impact that the report's publication might have on their relationships with people in the Somali community. They both received copies of the report, but when asked to respond, did not take up the opportunity to feedback.

Conclusion

This report described a three-year project working with members of the Somali community to develop approaches for preventing child sexual abuse. A number of lessons can be drawn from this experience. First, seeking to understand the particular challenges faced by children, parents and families in the areas they live helps identify particular challenges that would not have been documented in population-level surveys or impact studies. Second, the project team found that using insiders to develop a preventative approach with a community group could help but one needs to guard against excluding those who are not in the social network of the insider. There was a tendency to rely on the existing social networks of the worker, because people known to the development officer were easier to engage. Third, while

inclusivity is a key value of participatory initiatives, it can sometimes be the case that excluding certain people from the initiative helps include others. Fourth, this project was limited in how it could respond to suggestions from community members by its budget and resources. Prevention programmes, ideally, need to have sufficient budget and resources for responding to the preferences of community members. And finally, prevention programmes that seek to engage community members need to think through the end game. In this project, there was not sufficient time planned to share and discuss the findings with community members.

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