

BME Women's Group Project was an attempt to identify and work with women from Minority Ethnic (ME) background based on people's mental health and wellbeing.

Report

BME Women's Group
Year 2

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Abbreviations

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| <i>BME</i> | <i>Black and Minority Ethnic</i> |
| <i>CD</i> | <i>Community Development</i> |
| <i>ME</i> | <i>Minority Ethnic</i> |
| <i>MH</i> | <i>Mental Health</i> |
| <i>VOX</i> | <i>Voices of eXperience</i> |

BME Women's Group Project is a project using community development approaches, including the creative arts, to learn from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities about;

- Attitudes to, and experiences of, mental health
- What helps maintain well-being
- Effective ways of challenging issues affecting people's lives

Introduction

This report intends to give an overview and analysis of the second year of the BME Women's Group Project and its process.

For the purpose of outlining the development of the project, brief background information is given followed by the aim and objectives of the project. An outline and analysis of the process of running the project will be given with respect to what, why and how we ran the project. Finally, the outcome of this project, followed by challenges, barriers and tensions that existed within this sphere of work and exploration of possible ways forward will be elucidated.

Background

First year of the project led to the development of an action plan for the second year of the project. According to the devolved action plan, the project started its aim to assist more BME women. As Amina (previous partner organisation) lost its venue due to some organisational issues therefore the project started its cooperation with local community organisation called Saheliya. Saheliya is a mental health and wellbeing support organisation for BME women in Glasgow and Edinburgh. This cooperation helped the project to get access to people who needed support and the women were contacted through Saheliya. The facilitator also went to the organisations to explain the project and its aim in more detail to potential participants.

The establishment of the project involved a combination of perspectives such as mental health promotion, community involvement and development. This was to ensure that the issues and priorities are identified by the communities themselves and that people and organisations are encouraged to work together to address shared concerns through collective activity.

Therefore the work started by:

- Planning initial meetings with key contacts
- Producing contacts database for focus groups sessions with BME Women
- Designing focus group methodology
- Developing detailed project plan
- Planning the art sessions
- Planning the evaluation

Aim and objectives of BME Women's Group

The aim of the project in general was to identify and work with diverse women from Minority Ethnic backgrounds, invite them to join an informal activity sessions and to facilitate engagement amongst them in conversations / discussions and other relevant activities, through the VOX and to help BME women to have a voice in MH and feel they have heard more than before.

This was to help women to participate in social affairs, identify issues affecting their lives and their mental health and wellbeing, and exchange experiences/information/ideas. Moreover, through the process and the sessions helping them to raise their awareness and increase their knowledge on mental health issues and understand the impact of such issues on their overall health and wellbeing. The idea was that as well as the group improving their own mental health and wellbeing, they could also find out more about available services or groups/organisations for continued help and support.

Analysing process of running the project

The project commenced with cooperation between Voices of eXperience (VOX), one service user led organisation and one BME organisation. Mental Health Network chosen as a service user group/organisation and Saheliya chosen as a BME organisation.

The project started its work with the help of volunteers followed by having 9 focus group sessions with ME women to hear from women's issues and at the same time to raise their awareness about MH issues and to take a step forward in recovery through group activities.

Not only did networking assist with directing the aims of the project in respect of identifying a targeted group, but also helped capacity-build within network members in the form of partnership, sustainability and equal opportunities which helps empowering service users.

Various group activities utilised as tools to achieve the aim of the project. Through the process, screening film, wooden cubes called 'Blocking out stress building a healthy mind', mask, art material, photographs, play dough, poster making and many other activities were used which provided the opportunity for interaction and discussion with group members followed by reflection and action to plan for the next step of work. The sessions designed to help the group members to understand the impact of different issues on their overall health and wellbeing as well as working for change by encouraging them to focus on their personality and how they could help themselves as a first step in seeking help towards improving wellbeing.



Therefore, the designed activities provided opportunity for the group members to think profoundly about themselves, the issues affecting their lives, having a better understanding of their needs and the impact of these issues on their health, and consequently reflecting on their views and ideas in a piece of art.

The table below shows date and time of the focus group sessions as well as different types of activities and their purposes over each session

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Time</i> | <i>Topic</i> | <i>Number of Participants</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Purpose of Activity</i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| 20/02/2014 | 10:45-13:30 | General MH Awareness raising session | 16 | Screening film - Beyond Prejudice DVD | To challenge stigma -The film and consequent discussion was to develop participation and to challenge group member's perceptions of stigma in relation to MH. This was to transform group member's perspectives and to help the group participants to tackle the stigma. To put group members in the position of thinking about themselves, their values and compare their own experiences with others and feeling less isolated by knowing that others experience similar feelings. |
| 27/02/2014 & 06/03/2014 | 10:45-13:30 | Stress, Anxiety & Depression | 9 10 | Support blocks-wooden cubes called 'Blocking out stress building a healthy mind' and Play dough | Support blocks (NHS tool) - Encouraging participants to take part in group activities, voicing their issues through explaining their experiences, participants will recognise the causes of stress. This activity demonstrates that if problems build up then it could lead to instability and collapse. This was more about understanding the impact of these issues on people's wellbeing and how the amount of stress could be reduced to avert mental instability by focusing on positive aspects of our lives in order to transform our negative feelings to positive. |

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| | | | | | Play dough; Make something depressive and destroy it afterwards. To help participants to understand that they can reduce depression themselves. |
| 13/03/2014 & 20/03/2014 | 10:45- 13:30 | Food, Exercise and Mood | 4 & 13 | Photo language – Poster Information poster | To promote participation and to become more engaged with group members and to identify issues affecting their health. 'Photo language' as described being a 'non-threatening' way of voicing people's issues. To gain a better understanding of healthy food and how they could help women to have healthy mind. Make a poster by thinking about exercise and how exercise could help to have a mentally healthy body |
| 03/04/2014 (Both Groups) | 10:45- 13:30 | Identity | 10 | Mask To think about their identity. How they see themselves? How other people see them (what they think)? | The session designed to improve self-esteem and self-efficiency - The activity designed to help people to understand that identity is all the things that distinguish us from other people. It's what makes us unique and individual. So why do we all try to be the same? Despite appearance we are all still so different, our age, gender, family, friends, memories and nationalities build up our own individual identities. |
| 22/05/2014 & 29/05/2014 | 10:45- 13:30 | Art session, Group artwork - The purpose of this sessions is do group work, to create a piece of art and to showcase our art work during the art and film festival - Moving Minds - in October | 7 & 9 | Tree of Life | Tree of Life is a visual narrative method that helps people tell stories of the past, present and future. A group can use it to understand and reflect on the past and imagine the future of a project; and it can be used to build a shared view compiled of different and perhaps differing perspectives. |

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| 12/06/2014 | 10:45-13:30 | Discuss about future work and what women would like to do over the next year of the project. | 5 | Discussion and writing on flipchart paper. | Future work –Asked the group if they want to get involved over the next year of the project if so, what they would like to (what activities, topics, if they want to invite other people to join). This was to plan ahead about what we want to do as well as becoming aware of the number/numbers of interest women who want to get involved over the next year of the project. |
|------------|-------------|--|---|--|--|

Through group dialogues came out the experiences of safety, weather, war, unemployment discrimination, money, isolation, language barrier, housing, forced marriage, bereavement, etc, all of which have impact on ME women’s mental health and wellbeing. The experience of discrimination was one of the other issues relating to aspects of identity such as gender and ethnicity that contributes to mental health problems, which are then exacerbated by mental health stigma leading to mental instability and low self-esteem and self-confidence. Through discussions it was identified that there is a lack of support for BME women in Glasgow and there is a gap in terms of community work which involves mental wellbeing for this particular group. Many of the women said that medication was not the only cure for their mental health as they needed a place to go and meet other people and take part in activities that would improve their mental wellbeing. Consequently, the next step of the work was to make a unified piece of art within the group to exhibit over the Art and Film Festival and to celebrate the achievements of the group after having awareness raising sessions. Therefore 2 sessions planned to make the work possible and the group equipped with different art materials such as glue, fabric, ribbon etc. over the sessions. Followed by group’s interest the decision made to shape the ‘Tree Of Life’. Tree of life is a visual narrative method that helps people to tell stories of the past, present and the future. The group used it to understand and reflect on the past and imagine the future of the project and used it to build a shared view compiled of different and perhaps differing perspectives. The activity was an encouragement tool for group members to think about themselves and how their issues affect their emotional

wellbeing. Art work and creative development provided opportunity for the group members to express themselves individually within a unified structure. Employing art activity at sessions had a 'positive' impact on the feelings of the group members and 'transformed' their perspective as they created their own art and craft which not only had value for them but also had meaning for others. This was a way of enhancing self-confidence as members created something through personal thinking and reflecting that they could share it with the wider community.

Therefore, the process of creating art and subsequent discussions helped the participants to feel less isolated and enhanced their feeling of importance. This is because, they get the chance to express themselves about issues affecting them, building on their experiences, as well as having a chance to produce something that they could share with the wider community.

It should be noted that the whole project was based on the group members' needs and interests and to find out what was important for the group members and what they wanted to achieve as the project progressed. Evaluating each session at the end helped to find out about the needs of the group members and to get a better idea of how to direct the project and also to reassure the members about the effectiveness and usefulness of their ideas and suggestions with emphasis on having cooperative and supportive environment. This helped the project to have several positive outcomes.

The outcomes of the project

Group activities shaped the whole aspect of the women's group and fulfilled the expected outcomes of the project.

These sessions were processes of listening, observation, reflection, action, evaluation and planning for the next step of work and the formation of the women's group had numerous positive outcomes.

Regarding the BME Women's group, the meetings had a social component and were a suitable means of identifying issues affecting the members as well as sharing information and making positive contribution towards change in group members' emotional wellbeing.

Moreover, sessions and group activities helped participants to realise their strengths to deal with their MH issues, to realise how these changes affect their family and wider community and to think positively to find solution for problems. The issue of wellbeing came through in the process of group activities/art activities and as their views were listened to with due consideration to diversity and human rights. The project provided an opportunity to move from individualistic health education to a community development-led health promotion. It helped in building their confidence & self-esteem, reducing women's isolation, building a social and support network, raising awareness about mental wellbeing and the services and resources available to BME women.

The project also made a difference to VOX and its wider membership network. For instance, the project had aspects that informed VOX's members through the updates in the diversity newsletter about what issues may specifically affect BME women's MH and helped raise awareness through some of the artistic work that group members had produced which is going to share with wider communities in Glasgow over the Art and Film Festival.



The project helped to develop partnership between VOX and other community organisations. The project helped to gain access to new interest women form ME background to voluntarily help further development of the project. These are seen as the strength of the project. Moreover, the project provided BME women the opportunity to participate in social activities and talk about the strains, stresses and hardships in their lives as well as trying to explore the reasons behind those issues and effecting change in group members' attitudes towards their emotional wellbeing.

The table below shows the other positive outcomes of the project according to the evaluation at the end of each session:

Outcomes according to the evaluation at each session

| <i>Session Number</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Positive Outcomes</i> |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Session 1 | Screening film - Beyond Prejudice DVD | Developed more participation and support the group members in “working and learning together” and “collective action”, the film followed by discussions and interactions helped to challenge group members’ perceptions of stigma in relation to mental health. Attempted to put group members in a position of thinking about themselves, their values and compare their own experiences with others and feel less isolated by learning that others experience similar feelings. |
| Session 2 & 3 | Support blocks- wooden cubes called ‘Blocking out stress building a healthy mind’ and Play dough | The workshop helped the group members to recognise the physical and mental /emotional symptoms of stress through discussing the causes of stress, and realise that excessive stress could lead to instability and nervous break-down. It helped participants to have a sense of relief by having discussed stress in their lives. It also helped them to explore possible solutions to some of their problems and raised their awareness as to how to get help if required. In this respect, information pack provided regarding available services. In terms of community development values, this workshop represented a process of “collective action” as well as “community empowerment” by helping group members to identify ways of reducing stress in their lives or coping with it through enhanced feeling of confidence and self-esteem. Using play dough, helped them to think about themselves, reduce depression, feel less isolated and enhanced their feeling of importance. |
| Session 4 & 5 | Photo language – Poster | Helped the group members to participate in group activity and to become more engaged with other group members and to identify issues affecting their health. ‘Photo language’ as described being a ‘non-threatening’ way of voicing people’s issues, helped VOX to find out about different subjects and factors that affect ME people’s mental health. It was also an opportunity for the members to think about their choice and what was important for them to talk about. Using photo language and consequently sharing knowledge, experiences, stories, etc. among participants was a way of “working and learning together”. It was also a way of opening conversation to empower individuals to achieve their full potentials. The session helped women to break stigma and get them talking. In summary it was a learning opportunity for group members. Think about their life style. |
| Session 6 & 7 | Mask | An opportunity for the group members to think profoundly about themselves, the issues affecting their personality, having a better understanding of their needs and the impact of these issues on their |

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| | | <p>health, and consequently reflecting on their views and ideas in a piece of art. Also, an opportunity for the group members to express themselves which had a ‘positive’ impact on the feelings of the group members and ‘transformed’ their perspective as they created their own art and craft which not only had value for them but also had meaning for others. This was a way of enhancing self-confidence as each member created something through personal thinking and reflecting that they could share it with the wider community.</p> <p>Using art activity as having therapy interaction, rather than verbal content discussion.</p> |
| Art sessions | Tree of Life | <p>Art work and creative development provided opportunity for group members to express themselves individually within a unified structure.</p> <p>So employing art activity at sessions had a ‘positive’ impact on the feelings of the group members and ‘transformed’ their perspective as they created their own art and craft which not only had value for them but also had meaning for others. This was a way of enhancing self-confidence as members created something through personal thinking and reflecting that they could share it with the wider community. Art sessions highlighted that how people’s experience could be heard through art.</p> |

Community leaders meetings

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Time</i> | <i>Venue</i> | <i>Number of Participants</i> |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| 30/01/2014 | 11:00– 13:00 | MHF Office | 3 |
| 20/02/2014 | 9:30 – 10:30 | MHF Office | 2 |
| 27/02/2014 | 9:30 – 10:40 | MHF Office | 5 |
| 13/03/2014 | 9:30 – 10:30 | MHF Office | 4 |
| 27/03/2014 | 11:30 – 1:30 | MHF Office | 4 |

The challenges and lessons learnt

The first challenge was accessing Amina as a partner organisation according to what was planned initially. This was due to their organisational issues however, the project managed to get access to interest women through Saheliya. The other challenges were Child care issues and lack of funding to pay for child care over all sessions; school holidays which prevented some women in taking part of the project as well as language barriers prevented some women in expressing themselves.

Although the project was assisted with volunteer interpreters but again due to high turnout (especially for some sessions) we did not get a chance to hear everything. Moreover, lack of family support, physical health, appointments with jobcentre and home office were other barriers for some participants taking part of some sessions.

Summary and way forward

Various tools used to develop participation amongst group members. Through art as a tool, women found the chance to express themselves, share information and learn from others' experiences.

The project was another step in supporting public mental health movement, driven by community development principles, values, theories and practices. A number of principles shaped all aspects of the project including the importance of valuing different perspectives and working through enabling the voices of those who were most marginalised to be heard. The project was taken a step further by developing a partnership with 'Saheliya', a local community organisation that tackles mental health stigma and discrimination as well as Mental Health Network to further assist BME women.

The work has shown it is possible to tackle the complexities involved in the process of enabling the views and experiences of BME Community members being heard whilst ensuring the programme addresses inequalities in mental health and promotes community empowerment and social justice.

The second year of the project concluded by developing an action plan for the next year. In which a session organised with participants. The focus of the session was on what women would like to do and their interest for the future work, women's idea (brain storm) about things they want to achieve out of this work and the way we could achieve it considering SMART goals (SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) as well as asking for suggestions for ways to overcome barriers for future and to make the work possible.

Participant Quotes from BME Women's Group;

- "I feel relaxed and different after these sessions"
- "I have received the information which I was not aware of as mental health is always stigmatised in our community"
- "The sessions helped me to get to know more people and socialise more"
- "I feel happier now and feel I have solution to some problems"

For future work group members suggested;

- Invite other people/ communities to these sessions
- Having session / sessions to cook healthy food (cooking session)
- Outside activities like walking
- Participants asked for information in different languages to make it easier for them to understand (leaflets in different languages)
- Having more sessions to talk more about different mental health subjects
- Sharing information with wider communities by doing more practical activities

Participants named the benefits of the project as it helped them to meet new people, communicate with others, team work, getting new information, being active in their new society, get a better understanding of the subjects which they were not aware of and empowerment which contributes to women's ability to help those who are in need in their community as well as sharing information with more emphasis on positive social interaction with others as the most important component of the project.

As a result of the success in second year of the project, the main objectives for the next step (next year of the project) would be expanding the scope of the project and getting access to more women who are in need of support. Moreover, continue to work in corporation with Saheliya and the Mental Health Network as well as plan consistent workshops and activities which will however need more financial support.