

**ASIAN FAMILY
COUNSELLING
SERVICE**

**SUITE 51, THE LODGE, WINDMILL PLACE, 2-4,
WINDMILL LANE, SOUTHALL, MIDDX UB2 4NJ**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2011-2012**

CHAIR'S REPORT

AFCS has had a particularly difficult and challenging year. However, we have been fortunate, in that; whilst a number of voluntary organisations have lost their funding, AFCS has been exceptionally lucky to continue to attract the same level of support from Central government. This is about to change as the Department of Education's two year grant to AFCS comes to an end in March 2013. We are hopeful of gaining more funding in the next funding rounds.

The Management Committee is making contingency plans for the future, and will actively support the staff at both Birmingham and London to enable them to continue giving their best support to clients.

Any cutbacks will have serious consequences for our clients. Many are single parents and most are unemployed. The effect on them and their families will be extremely stressful. With the increase in the divorce rate amongst Asian families, the availability of a counselling service is vital.

We shall ensure that we continue to provide an excellent service as we have done for the last 27 years.

The Management Committee is grateful to all the counsellors and staff for their hard work and dedication.

Rani Atma

Founder and Chair of the Asian Family Counselling Service

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Now in its twenty seventh year, the Asian Family Counselling Service (AFCS) has been providing counselling and support to the Asian community in a culturally appropriate manner in various Asian languages. It has achieved recognition as a professional, caring and confidential service. Our referral base has grown significantly over the last few years. Initially our referrals came from nurses, social workers, police officers and lawyers but we now receive referrals from a number of voluntary and statutory agencies such as Housing Officers, Mental Health and Wellbeing Services, Children's Centres, Community groups and General Practitioners.

AFCS has seen an increase of around 3.5% in the number of clients from the previous year. This is in part due to the recession as well as there being fewer organisations offering counselling and support. These clients are therefore being directed to AFCS. Marriages that were already quite fragile have begun to fail because of the pressures felt by families due to the economic down turn. In addition to this, many clients present a multitude of issues of varying complexity and our counsellors have managed them successfully.

Women represent about 70% of our clients. The reason for men not seeking counselling is that they find it difficult to acknowledge their feelings and are traditionally supposed to "get on with it". Although we have clients of both genders coming to AFCS, there are greater numbers of women approaching the service in the first instance. To bring about a change in the relationship it may not be enough to just counsel the woman and we have had to call the husbands in too. With both coming together, there is a better chance of resolution of their issues. Asian men tend to deal with depression and family problems by drinking; this has become a major problem in the community affecting the whole family. We find that some of our younger clients are resorting to taking drugs. Alcoholism in the family and the consequences of this has been cited as a reason for them turning to drugs mainly to cope with difficult family problems.

AFCS has noticed that the second generation of men growing up in this country are more comfortable with the idea of going for counselling to resolve their issues and take the initiative to make an appointment.

Many young Asians are able to choose their own partners these days, but the tradition of arranged marriages still continues. This is sometimes confused in the media with forced marriages. Not all arranged marriages are forced as many families will just introduce the couple to each other and let them make up their own minds over a series of meetings. So there is an element of choice as either one or both may withdraw from this process at any time. It is only if they are both happy with the arrangement that the marriage goes ahead. AFCS is very often approached by these couples for premarital counselling so that they can be helped to make up their minds or iron out any sticky issues that may arise before the marriage.

We have also provided supervised and supported contact at our premises for families where the courts have directed them to use our service. In the past year, 5 families were directed by the courts to AFCS for weekly or fortnightly supervised contact. In many cases, the relationship had broken down due to domestic violence and that is why the court had directed them to AFCS for supervised contact. The courts have asked for AFCS to report on these sessions so that appropriate action may be taken by them while awarding custody or further sessions of contact.

ABANDONED SPOUSES

The issue of abandoned spouses is still a significant problem. Most of these women do not have indefinite leave to remain in the UK, speak little or no English and also have no recourse to public funds. AFCS tries to find families who will support these women so that they can come to the UK to fight for the custody of their children as well as seek justice. It is difficult to find supportive families as the process of going through the courts can be

quite lengthy and it typically takes about 18 months to two years for some kind of satisfactory resolution to take place. In our view, these women should at least be accorded the same rights as those enjoyed by asylum seekers.

POST NATAL DEPRESSION GROUP

The Post Natal Depression Group is a group for Asian women who have a diagnosis of Post natal Depression and have been referred to AFCS by their GP or some other health professional. It is held once a fortnight during term time and the women are able to bring their babies and toddlers up to the age of two years to this group. It is run only term time as it is difficult for AFCS to look after all the school going children in addition to the babies.

The women set the agenda for the group. In addition to talking, the women are also interested in acquiring new skills. They do yoga/keep fit and also some arts and crafts work. Being involved in a common activity gives the women an opportunity to talk about their issues as well as learning different skills from each other. This also helps the women to support each other outside of the group. Aromatherapy is also provided alongside the talking therapy, as we are well aware that many Asian women present with psychosomatic symptoms, which need a holistic approach.

CLIENT ISSUES

The predominant factors leading to distress were pressures of conflicting roles and living dual lives, transitions to different life stages, domestic violence, a lack of freedom at home, an absence of avenues in the family to communicate distress, financial worries, forced marriages and racism to name a few. Women who self-harmed talked about experiencing sexual abuse within the family. Self-harm included a diverse set of behaviours like cutting, overdose and eating disorders. Domestic violence was also a major concern among clients seeking help from AFCS.

Young Asians who have a partner belonging to a different community are

often forced to make the choice of leaving their families in the hope that reconciliation may be possible once their parents have softened their stance and are willing to forgive them. This sometimes happens around the time when a grandchild is born and AFCS receives many requests to facilitate such conciliations. This once again highlights the complexities of cases that a counsellor at AFCS has to deal with.

AFCS continues to provide counselling and support to victims of forced marriages. AFCS has maintained good links with other voluntary and statutory services in order to deal with this problem. Dealing with a case of forced marriage or domestic violence can mean liaising with the police, finding a refuge, getting legal help as well as providing emotional support to the victims. It is a struggle to find a place in a refuge, especially for women who have no recourse to public funds, or for young women above 16 and below 18 years of age. We have been highlighting for some years that there are clients who have been abandoned or are victims of forced marriages and need to have their cases viewed sympathetically.

Telephone counselling continues to provide support to people who do not live in London and those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot come into the office. Referrals are received from as far afield as Manchester, Bradford, Bristol and Southampton. Once again it brings home the fact that there are very few counselling services available to the Asian community. Very often telephone counselling is the only option available to the Asian communities. Our Birmingham office is able to provide a face to face service to the community in the West Midlands as well as telephone counselling to those who prefer that option.

The types of issues that we have dealt with this year are:

- Marital problems
- Depression
- Suicidal feelings
- Domestic violence

- Abandoned spouses
- Arranged marriages
- Emotional abuse
- Post natal depression
- Forced marriages
- Self Harm
- Generation and cultural gap
- Mixed marriages
- Conciliation & Mediation
- Adultery
- Premarital counselling
- Young women and men who want to leave home
- Incest and sexual abuse
- Financial problems due to the recession
- Managing debts
- Bereavement
- Supervised and Supported contact
- Personality clashes

CASE STUDIES

AFCS is unique and different from other counselling services inasmuch as its clients come from different communities and different cultures. Some couples are western in their outlook having similar values as any British white couple. The others are very orthodox and are clinging on to their Asian cultures.

Our counsellors counsel according to the clients values. To give a flavour of some of the cases we have handled, here are some case studies:

1. A middle aged couple who had been married for 26 years and have 4 children are having problems in their marriage. The husband had embarked on an affair with a woman he had met over the internet and

his wife found out. The wife is very angry with him about this and counselling is helping them resolve the issues in their marriage.

2. A young couple who had been married for 3 years but had not consummated their marriage. The woman had come from India and had no support of her own in this country. Her mother-in-law blamed her for not being supportive towards her son and was certain that the fault lay with her. Counselling provided the channel for the young man to admit to his wife that he was gay and AFCS helped the couple to separate in an amicable way.
3. A young Sikh woman was in love with a Muslim man: her parents were against her marrying him and had said that they would disown her if she went ahead. She was confused about what to do. Counselling helped her to make up her mind as to what option to take.
4. A young woman from India, was suffering domestic violence at the hands of her husband and in-laws. This was an arranged marriage and her in laws were demanding a lot of dowry from her parents in India; they were not able to pay the amount demanded and as a result the domestic violence started. She also discovered that her husband had a girlfriend and had been forced to marry her. She was hospitalized after a brutal beating and she went to live with some family friends. Her in-laws, however, had kept her passport and her clothes and jewellery and would not return them to her. Her immigration status in this country had not been finalized and she had no recourse to public and was supported by AFCS in locating a solicitor to fight her case. Supportive counselling was provided for her over an extended period of time.

Evaluation of our services is carried out by using the CORE 10, PHQ-9 and GAD 7 forms. These forms are filled in by our clients pre and post counselling and we measure the shift that has taken place by comparing the client's scores on all these forms. The results are shown in the attached charts. Not all our clients are able to fill in the forms as they may not read and write English. Verbal feedback that we receive from the clients has been very positive and this is also reflected in the number of referrals that we get

as a direct result of clients who have used our service referring their friends and family. Client satisfaction is very high at 98%. AFCS is also part of the Department of Education's Relationship Support evaluation steering group and will be taking part in the qualitative elements of this important research in the next year.

Clients have expressed the usefulness of having a counselling service with Asian counsellors because they feel that their problems could be understood instinctively by an Asian counsellor rather than a non-Asian counsellor. This feeling was further enforced especially when clients talk about the pressure of having to live in a very different culture and to leading 'double lives'. The other factor which the clients considered to be important was that counselling was available in the clients own language. Even if they speak English, many clients tend to lapse into their own mother tongue when talking about distressing and emotional problems.

AFCS is also on the steering group for the Open University based research project called 'Enduring Love?' to find out what make relationships endure in the 21st century. There is a lot of research on the reasons why relationships breakup and not much on the reasons why couples stay together. This project will endeavour to find out the latter.

OUTREACH

The Primary Care Trusts are being dismantled, so it is important for AFCS to make links with the new Clinical Commissioning groups, both in Ealing and Birmingham. The other organisations we have close links with are SAFE in Ealing, MIND, MENCAP, Healthy Minds in Birmingham, Sure Start Centres, CORAM centres, Day Centres, women's refuges in many parts of the country to name a few.

MEETINGS, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

AFCS has been active in attending meetings and seminars in order to establish links with various statutory and voluntary organisations and is committed to work in partnership with them. This is important so that we can signpost our clients for any additional issues that we may lack the expertise for and is also useful for promoting our services to them so that we get appropriate referrals.

Our counsellors have received regular internal and external supervision as it ensures that standards are maintained, counsellors are supported and the clients' needs are being met. Supervision is a very important part of all counsellors' jobs. This is provided to all counsellors, both paid and volunteer, on a regular basis according to BAC guidelines. The supervision for volunteers is provided in house too.

Counsellors and volunteers have also attended training courses on Domestic Violence, Female Genital Mutilation, Couple Counselling, and Forced Marriages to name a few. This is seen as an important part of the growth and development of staff.

MEDIA

AFCS has links with the media so that it can comment on issues to do with the Asian community and media interviews have been given for radio on topics such as 'Infidelity in the Asian community', 'Bounty Hunters', and 'Forced marriages'. AFCS been interviewed for newspaper and magazine articles as well. We have been consulted by agony aunts from various newspapers such as The Sun, and The Daily Mail for help with replying to their Asian readers' problems and they then publish our details for further help and support. This provides AFCS with publicity and we have observed that demand for our service goes up once such a letter is published. AFCS sees itself as an important agency commenting on current Asian issues.

FUTURE PLANS

AFCS plans for next year are to continue to build capacity and look for varied sources of funding. It will look at working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations. It is vital that AFCS continues to provide a service which is essential for the Asian community, but even more importantly, to represent the community's point of view to the government as well as to other agencies. For young people, social media is an important channel and AFCS will strive to target them through this mode.

Demand for the services has continued to increase as breakdown in relationships and divorce numbers are still rising, and so the need for culturally sensitive marital counselling services is hugely important.

We would like to thank the Department for Education, Ealing Council/Ealing Primary Care Trust and South Birmingham NHS Trust for supporting AFCS. I would also like to thank the Management Committee, staff and volunteers for their continued help and support.

Kulbir Randhawa
Director

FEEDBACK FROM SOME CLIENTS

I feel more at ease and found the counselling very helpful

I am very grateful for the help I was given and would like to say thank you

The counsellor and the support staff were very friendly and considerate. I am feeling a lot better after all the counselling sessions. Thank you.

Very helpful, friendly and personal service.

I felt I would be judged as an Asian, but I wasn't and felt comfortable. Feel more comfortable to cope with life. I am a more positive person now.

It has helped with all the issues that I had and I would use the service again.

Excellent service, very professional. Incredibly thorough and really looked after me. Took time to go through all issues, with patience and compassion

I am very happy with the service. Really good support offered. Keep up the good work.

APPENDIX

Enquiries and Referrals

Total Enquiries: 1896

New Clients: 705

Breakdown:

Marital Cases 367

Family Cases 52

Individual Cases 286

Some of the enquiries related to our media and publicity work. Others were outside the remit of AFCS and were therefore referred to agencies such as Solicitors, Social Workers, CABs, Law Centres, and Health Professionals etc. Referral sources include mental health resource centres, counselling psychologists, psychiatrists, GPs, word of mouth, media such as radio, TV and newspapers.

Actual counselling hours or contact with clients:

Counselling sessions (old, new & group) 3353 hours

Telephone counselling 385 hours

Supervision/Case Notes/Admin 1502 hours

Meetings/Training/Talks to other groups 393 hours

ASIAN FAMILY COUNSELLING SERVICE

Its objectives:

- a) To advance education among persons of Asian origin and in particular, among such persons resident in the UK, about all aspects of marriage and family relationships with a view to developing personal responsibilities and enriching family life.
- b) To safeguard and protect the good health, both mental and physical, of adults and children of Asian origin, resident in the UK and to prevent the hardship and distress caused by the breakdown of marriage
- c) To educate the public, statutory and voluntary organizations about the difficulties of the Asian population.

Trustees

Mrs Rani Atma - Chairperson
Ms Rashida Punja - Vice Chair
Mrs Veena Kapila - Treasurer
Mrs Nina Toller - Secretary
Mrs Susan Needham

Employees

Ms Kulbir Randhawa - Director/Counsellor
Mrs Gopi Aswani - Senior Counsellor/Group Facilitator
Ms Rahat Sheikh – Senior Counsellor
Ms Kirti Chopra – Counsellor
Ms Rita Mangat - Administrator/Receptionist
Mrs Donata Fernandes – Quality Assurance Officer
Ms Meena Jogia - Counsellor
Bilquees Bagshaw – Counsellor
Ms Kulwinder Panesar – Administrator/Receptionist
Mrs Shahnaz Shafique - Reflexologist/Aromatherapist

Volunteers

Daljinder Legah
Khudeja Bi
Naureen Yawar
Ranjit Kaur
Sadhna Issar
Saheeda Begum
Saima Pasha

Names and address of our Auditors:

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