

Violence Against Women of Colour

An investigation into violence against women and girls of colour in Camden
done by Take Back the Power - The Winch.



**the
Winch**



Lankelly Chase

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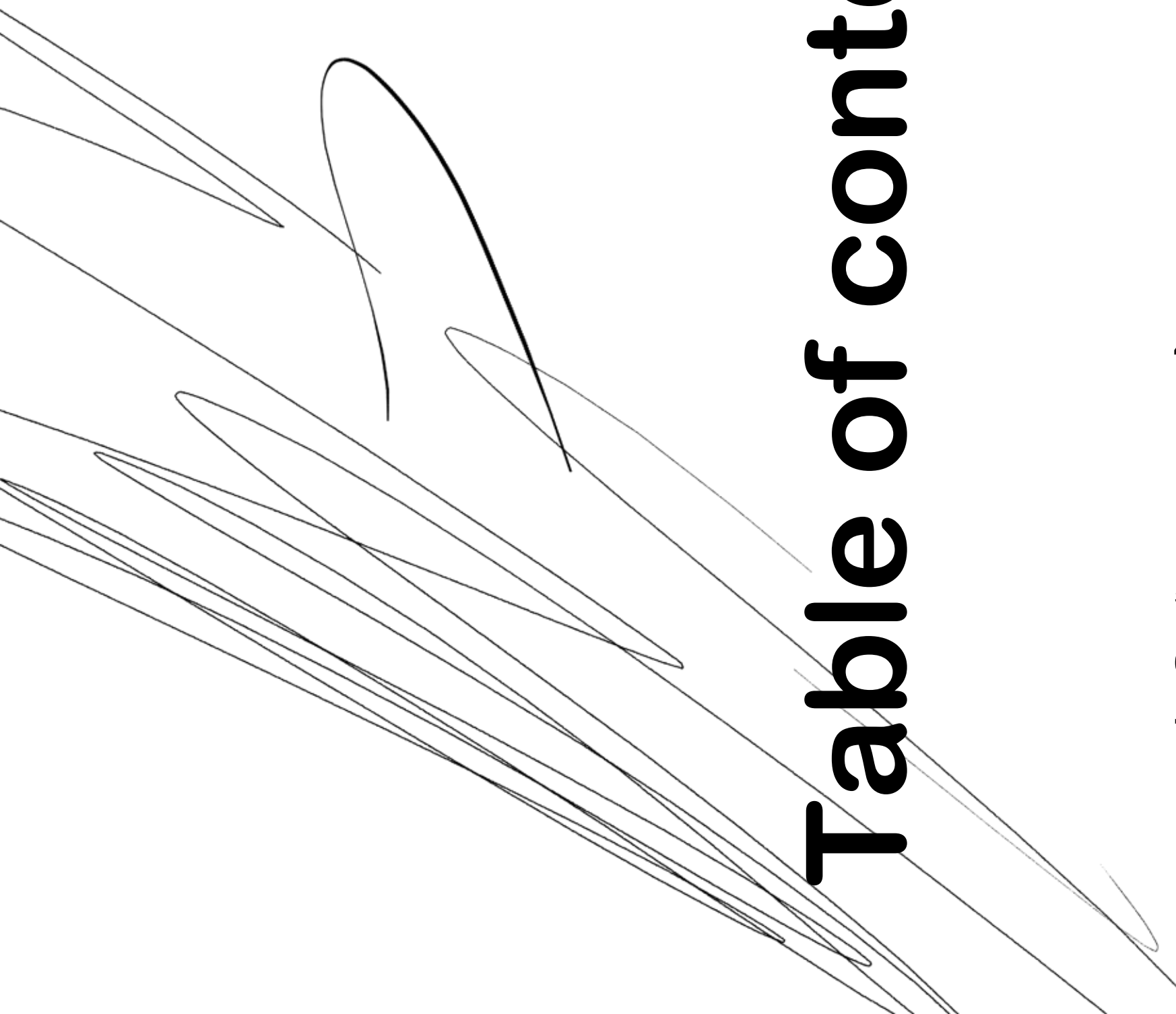



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Introduction

Take Back The Power is a youth-led social action project in The Winch. We address injustice and inequality in Camden, through research, knowledge sharing and campaigning.



We believe
we all have
a collective
responsibility
to one another,
and together
we can build a
more just and
equitable world
for all.

This project is centered on researching violence against women and girls of colour. Violence against women and girls is a huge issue, and we feel the need to address and highlight it.

Our approach centres social justice, mutuality, freedom, dignity and accountability in our local community. This report builds on our previous work, investigating the causes of violence against women and girls of colour, offering practical solutions, as we not only try to understand it, but also to uproot it.

We are young women researchers who are both passionate about making a positive difference in our community in Camden. One of us believes in a more radical approach for transformative change, and the other believes in more gradual change.

One researcher chose to ask radical, uprooting and political questions during her interviews. The other took a methodical approach. We see our different approaches as complementary. Together, we believe we produced a balanced report.

We chose to focus on violence against women and girls of colour because globally they are disproportionately affected by sexual, emotional, financial and physical abuse.

We want this to end
for all women and girls
so that
they can live freely
and fulfil their
human potential.

This report addresses 3 main questions:

How does violence
against women of colour
show up in Camden?

Who are the
perpetrators of
violence in Camden?

Does systemic violence
exist in Camden?

We address these questions in the discussion section.

Our report builds on existing research on this topic. We believe that this research report is useful and fills gaps in some of the existing work because the voices of grassroots women and girls of colour in Camden are our focus, and that future researchers and activists will be able to build on our work.



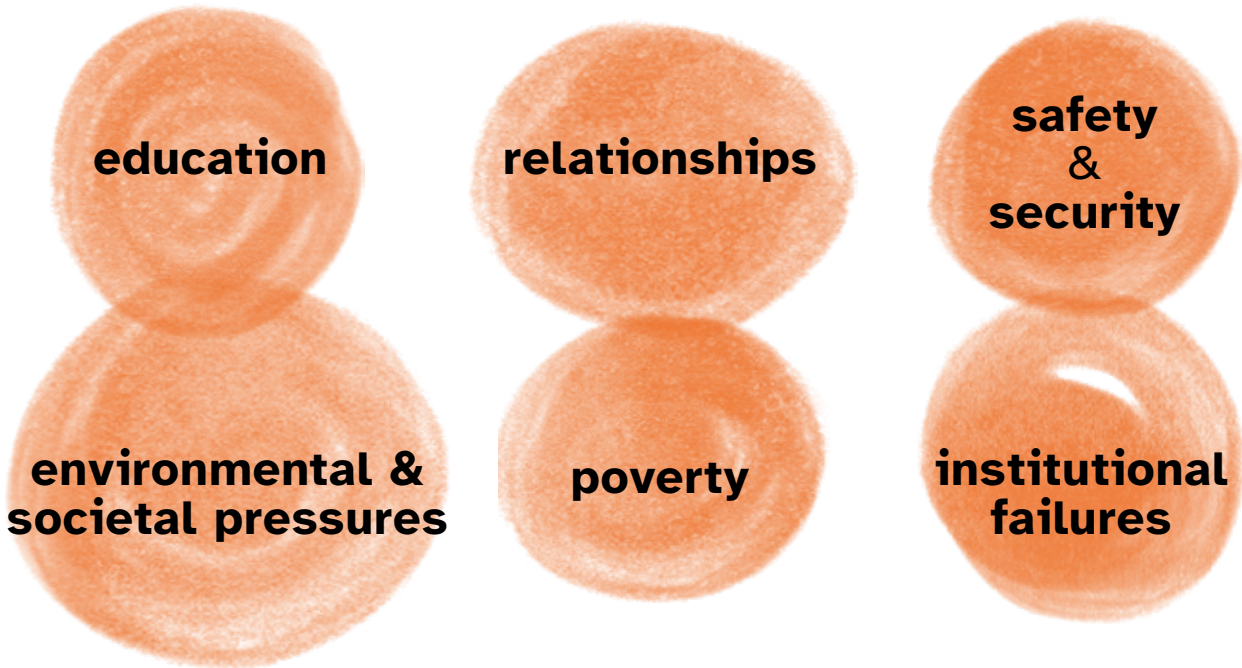
As researchers we wanted to contextualise the data we collected from our interviews by looking at statistics and figures on domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Camden.



We found that **of the estimated 13,000 people** (including men, women and children of all ethnicity) subjected to domestic and sexual violence in Camden, an estimated **3,000 were women and girls of colour** (*Camden Women’s Forum, 2021*).

We **collected stories from 36 people**: grassroots activists, youth workers, charity workers and survivors of violence. We present these in the findings section.

We organised interviews into **six themes**:

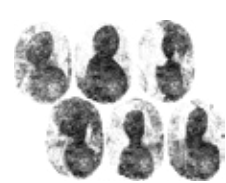


We share the causes, consequences and solutions for each theme.

As well as interviewing people in Camden, we looked to **existing literature** to help us answer our research questions. We include insights from renowned Black British and American cultural critics, writers, activists and academics including Professor **Adam Elliott-Cooper**, **Afua Hirsch** and **bell hooks**.

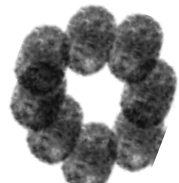
Methods and ethics

We held **11 interviews** in total. The mix of three different categories helped us gain insights from a range of perspectives:



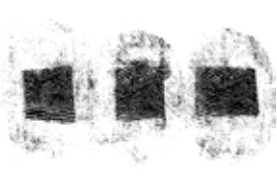
7 interviews with **individuals** (men and women*):

- Dee
- Danielle
- Lee & Dave
- Eva
- Haman
- Yasmin
- Lana



1 group interview with people from **8 grassroots organisations:**

- All African Women’s Group
- Black Women’s Rape Action Project
- English Collective of Prostitutes
- Global Women’s strike
- International wages for housework campaign
- Queer strike
- Women Against Rape
- Women of colour in the Global Women’s strike



3 interviews with people from **established organisations:**

- Paulinaç (The Winch)
- Play team (The Winch)
- Youth team (The Winch)



Interviewees spoke either in their personal role as **survivors of violence**,



or as part of **organisations** working closely with people affected by violence.



We interviewed people both online and face-to-face,



in individual and group settings.



We interviewed people aged 16 to 70.

* We recognise there are more than two genders. As far as we know, everyone we spoke to was a cisgender man or woman, so this report refers to men and women.

We were kept accountable by our interviewees, who read and contributed to our draft report. Both researchers conducted the interviews, and there was usually a supervisor present.

Before each interview, we sent all interviewees:



an interview guide, a research brief about the report, a consent form.

The wellbeing of our interviewees was our top priority. We offered everyone:



a non-negotiable fee of £50 for individuals, and £200 for grassroots organisations for their time and effort,



travel expenses, wellbeing sessions with an experienced practitioner, a list of organisations to contact for help and support.

As researchers on behalf of the Winch, we:



are paid, receive travel expenses, have regular one-to-one debriefs, attended two wellbeing sessions.

We told all participants how we kept their data safe. We explained:



recorded interviews are kept safe on a secure cloud-based drive,



all personal information is kept confidential,



only the researchers at the Winch can access the folder,



any quotes featured in the paper can only be used with their full and informed consent,



saved information is only used to review interviews,



contributors can be anonymous, use an alias, or give their real name.

Interviews were conducted separately, but both researchers had access to each other’s interview recordings. The researchers had a shared secure drive where they could upload their interview notes for each other’s reference. The combination of interview recordings and post-interview notes allowed both researchers to gain an insight into all the interviews.

Ethics and values

As researchers we focused on three key areas:

1.

Reflexivity

We understand that the knowledge produced in this report is produced in the context of our personal experiences.

2.

Positionality

We are aware of our position of power as interviewers, and how our identities influence our opinions, interpretations and experiences in the world.

3.

Safeguarding

It is vital that our research report doesn't harm the community. We kept in mind the potential effects of the research when published.

We understand that knowledge produced in this report is produced in a context of our personal experiences.

We aimed to:



Centre the voices of marginalised people in our local community as much as possible,



Be creative to challenge injustice and oppression,



Be part of a healing journey after violence and trauma,



Take a stand against violence and trauma from affecting people in the future.

We acknowledge that this report contains sensitive information and data. At the end of this research report, there is a list of support organisations and services for anyone who would like to reach out for support, care, help and protection.

Findings and themes



Theme 1: Relationships

Violence against women of colour manifests itself in interpersonal relationships. In our research, we have found that strong social connections and long-term trust within local communities help to reduce violence against women of colour and children too.

Six themes came up repeatedly in interviews. We organised our findings around these six themes: relationships, safety & security, education, environmental & societal pressures, poverty, and institutional failures.

These themes encompass the causes of violence based on the experience of the violence survivors in our interview, and it also shares direct quotes from our interviewees.

Each subsection in our findings section addresses each theme in turn and is accompanied by a summary of the main key points highlighting key issues and possible solutions.

Key Issues

Building strong bonds for safeguarding

Building strong bonds in one's personal life

Living abroad and isolation

Solutions

Create more safe spaces for women of colour to allow more communities to form reducing isolation.

Specific training for key workers enabling them to form better, stronger bonds with vulnerable individuals.

Provide resources and information in these safe spaces so women know how and whom to seek help from.

Building strong relationships to protect

Play and Youth workers consider building relationships to be at the heart of everything they do. Many stories of violence happening at home will be picked up either from when the families decide to talk about their experiences or from children sharing ‘organically’ what is happening in their own lives at home.

For many years, they have built strong bonds and established trust with families, helping both parents and children to open up about their experience of violence.



“Relationship is at the heart of everything and what I found in general is that for parents, carers we are like the first port of call, the ones that they do feel safe and that they do trust to share something and sometimes they can’t or they don’t want to actually take it that next step.

- Play worker lead

Building strong bonds in one’s personal life

We found examples of the positive impacts that peer relationships and mutual aid have had on young girls. An interviewee told us about how one of her friends did not have a good relationship with her family at all and that she was put in an only-women hostel. **Her father was abusive and her siblings ‘turned a blind eye on her’.** It is only after a while that her friend decided to share what was happening to her close friends. The interviewee told us that **her friend should not have felt ashamed to share what was going on in her life and that it was alright for her to ask for help.**

“At first she didn’t want to speak to her friends about it and after the process had already started this is when she decided to tell her friends. She didn’t want people to perceive her differently, people’s perceptions of you, you don’t want them to see you as weak. It is ok to ask for help, you shouldn’t feel ashamed.

- Yasmin



Interpersonal relationships with individuals in institutions

We found some evidence that good relationships between individuals and institutions work very well.

We spoke to a woman survivor of sexual abuse, about the **relationships that helped her recover and change her life course.** She told us that building rapport with her headteacher and head of year made her feel well-supported, and had a good influence on her behaviour. Developing a good connection with a police officer also gave her access to useful advice about life. Every time they talked it was a “natural conversation” where he listened carefully to what she had to say. She says **her life may have been very different without support from these individuals**, and that she might, for example, have been sent to a pupil referral unit (PRU).

Living abroad and isolation

A migrant woman who faced sexual and domestic violence shared how **being away from loved ones in another country exacerbated the violence she faced in the UK**. She was told “*you are only in this country because you married me*” and felt too ashamed and embarrassed to tell her family abroad about what was happening to her, for fear of becoming a “burden” to them.

“He would often come home drunk and stay out late, and whenever I asked he’d tell me it is *“British to behave that way”*, and if I tried to speak to him about it, *he’d hit me...*”

- Dee

“*I never knew what domestic violence was until the social worker saw him hitting me, and advised me to report it...*”

- Dee

She found support from a member of staff at the Winch who ran weekly Family support sessions, including Zumba classes, for the community. **Through these weekly sessions she slowly came to build a strong trusting relationship with this particular charity worker, and one day, she opened up to her.**

Having more recreational activities for vulnerable women in the community helps them to meet other women, and support workers, which can **reduce isolation and allow them to form more supportive relationships** with others, ultimately forming a safe space for them to share their experiences, get information and educate themselves about what violence is, and what is acceptable. Especially for immigrants who are unaware of some of the policies on violence in their new country, this is key.



Theme 2: Safety and Security

Safety was a key theme in our interviews. People told us how important it is to feel safe and free - whether that’s free to share stories of violence, or a safe space where young people and survivors of violence can get protection and support.

Key Issues

Lack of safe spaces to share experiences

Youths experiencing violence

Lack of youth centres to support young people

Solutions

Set up more accessible safe spaces for youths and women to share their stories so other women can learn from their experiences.

More protected safe spaces and facilities to reduce isolation for vulnerable youths and “keep them out of trouble”.

A more integrated youth worker system.

Equip youth centres with resources to support young people experiencing domestic violence and cultural barriers.

Sharing your experiences for positive change

For survivors of violence against women and girls, there can be social stigma if they try to speak up. Survivors may not share their stories out of fear or shame.

One of our interviewees encourages other women to share their stories, to help tackle violence against women. She believes that **sharing life experiences will keep new generations abreast with knowledge about violence, stop victim blaming, and ultimately encourage children to share their experiences of violence.** While talking about violence isn't enough to end it, reducing shame and stigma could help some survivors get the support they need.

Women and girls experiencing domestic violence

A young Black muslim woman shared her story of a friend who was sent out of the UK by her mother due to "bad behaviour" in the UK. In her words, her friend was trying her best to change despite having been expelled from school. She felt that it was unfair that her friend had to leave suddenly without even saying goodbye to her friends.

“Like one of my friends was shipped [out of the UK] because she ended up being in certain situations that weren't good for her and then it is like ok I haven't seen her in two years because of something that brought shame upon her family (...) like everyone says seek support and when you seek support does it always work out in your favour? No, because my friend was not asking to be shipped [out of the UK] she was asking to be supported and have a support circle.

- Angel

Women and girls are reluctant to report their experience of violence to the police

Our interviews picked up why young and older women from a racialised minority are reluctant and conflicted in coming forward outside of their racialised group to share their experiences of domestic and sexual violence. Some of which includes:

“The police are *not* trained to handle domestic violence cases, this contributes to violence itself.

- woman activist

“No follow up from the police.

- Domestic violence survivor, Lana

“The lack of response from the police is also a form of violence.

- woman activist

“There should be a separate emergency service phone number for Domestic Violence, and not the police.

- woman activist

“In cases of *emotional abuse*, the police are often reluctant to act because there is no evidence.

- Domestic violence survivor, Lana

And her recommendation is:

“There should be experts (aside from the police) in handling domestic violence, people who are able to identify abuse, even without evidence.

- Domestic violence survivor, Lana

“Police brutality.

- woman activist

“The police *don't believe women* when they report abuse.

- woman activist

“Criminalisation of victims which leads to fear of the police.

- woman activist

“Stereotyping and labelling of victims; *homophobia* and *racism*.

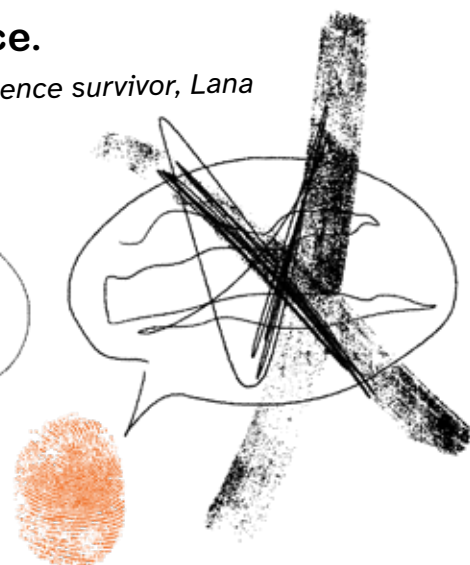
- woman activist

“Deportation of victims.

- woman activist

“The police are *unapproachable*.

- woman activist



We heard from Dee who felt dismissed by the police as her husband broke a court order. She was told by the police to go home and come back the next day. In her words, she was not taken seriously and the severity of her situation was not acknowledged.

If the police had taken action promptly she argued that they would have been able to stop her ex-husband taking her son to Ireland in time.

“I called the police and everyone, *no one really helped me at that time* [...] I went to the police station until night time, nothing. Do you have any court order they say? The court order said that he needs to come back for 2 hours, but he didn't and then they tried to check his place and no one answered. The police told me to come back to the place tomorrow, it is late. I nearly passed out at that time. *I had to go back there on my own.*

- Dee

A young woman of colour / survivor of violence spoke about how violence is prominent in the education system. She gave the examples of Child Q who was stripped searched at a school in East London without any adult supervision as well as the 'present' government legislation which she argued criminalises young muslim children at schools.

“The way that *state violence* is enacted against women, especially young women of colour, is through the education systems. We had the case not so long ago about Child Q and *the police allowed to come into schools and striped searched young black women* and this is a very normal thing and normal for children especially young black children and children of colour to be excluded from school and even with the legislation we see coming through with the bill, but also with the prevent legislation which criminalises young muslim children in schools.

- young women of colour / survivors of violence

Our interviewees also shared some useful recommendations to fix this fear of police, which can be found in the recommendations section of this report.

Culturally attuned/competent safe spaces needed

Cultural definitions of violence may vary, so it is important there are safe spaces for young people to share their stories with others, as well as youth workers, so that they are aware that there is support they can access.

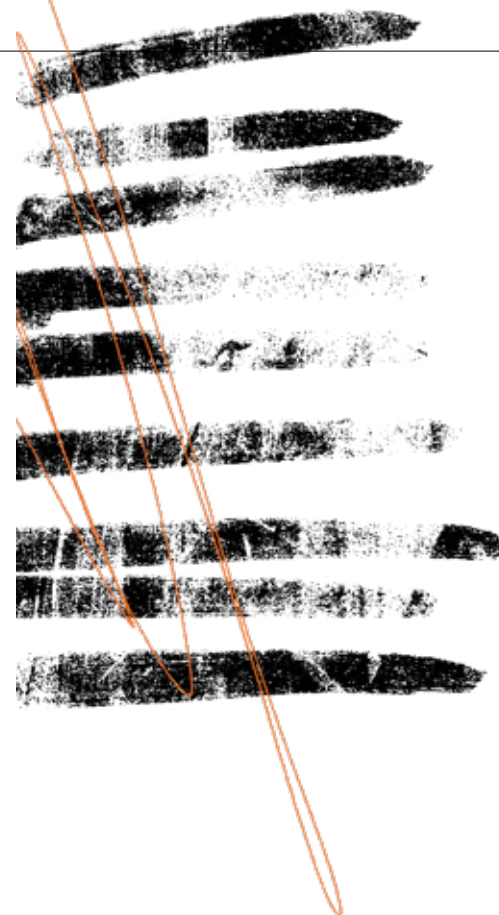
A youth worker spoke about the need for competent spaces. She has noticed that **bullying among girls has meant that some friends do not want to come forward due to a fear that they would get others in trouble**. This is why she finds it helpful to create an open consistent space that they can always come back to in their own time to speak about any experiences of harassment and violent/toxic relationships.

Angel as a self-identified muslim girl stated that safe spaces for muslim women are lacking in Camden. She would even advocate for **only-women gyms** so that women feel safe to share their experiences with no one in sight to harm them.

Not only should these safe spaces exist, but they need to be culturally attuned. If staff, volunteers and peers are culturally competent (**able to understand, appreciate and respectfully interact with people from other cultures**), then these spaces will be much more welcoming, useful and usable for young women of colour. Lastly, there must be clear routes for how young women of colour can seek help.

“I think that if you come from a certain background or a certain community you might feel a lot of shame about accessing help and about what has happened if you’ve got any sort of cultural religious beliefs around you are supposed to stay together even when something really horrendous and difficult has happened to you and sometimes having to explain that to someone who is not of your background is just putting an extra barrier and extra strain on you that you do not need in a super difficult time.

- Play worker



“If you are sitting across from someone who understands you on that kind of level, I think it makes such a difference for people thinking about accessing. For a lot of people they might not go and get the help because they feel that they can be judged or their community is going to find out {...} I know that for a lot of women as well there are a lot of concerns around their ability to look after their child almost like victim-blaming.

- Play worker

Cultural competence doesn't mean tolerating harmful behaviours. Angel told us that in her Asian culture, it is seen as normal to discipline a child by hitting them.

“I went to an Arabic school and in that culture rulers are used to hit the kids whenever you do something bad. This is normalised, you need to discipline kids and I mean I would just behave well so that I wouldn't be hit by a ruler.

- Angel

Angel said that one way to tackle this normalisation of disciplining children by hitting them is for parents to create safe and open environments for listening and supporting their children at home, for their children to want to be with their parents and for parents to spend quality memorable time with them. Her faith lies in the up-coming new generation of parents who she would argue are less influenced by these cultural disciplinary practices and are open to alternative ways of raising their children.

Play workers at the Winch who work with children aged between 4 and 11 years old say some children talk about what happens, or has happened, at home.

“The little boy that kept mentioning instance of violence that happened when I think he was a baby or even when his mother was pregnant with him, sort of thing, so they would bring it up, and our job in that moment is to kind of reassure that child a bit, and try to *find a safe space where they can talk privately about that with us.*

- Play worker

As Play workers, they create a safe private space for young people to feel reassured and to share their story and if this raises a concern make sure an appropriate referral is made to Camden's Children and Families Team through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and get any additional support they need by sign-posting them to appropriate local services.

She also argued that while schools provide support for young people, they are not as good as youth centres which are better at supporting and protecting young people, especially outside school hours. **Issues like in-school sexual harassment, toxic masculinity and racist disparities in discipline and policing can make some schools unsafe spaces.**

“In terms of schools providing support it's okay, but you go outside and you find it is way better (...) if you go outside to a youth centre, *the youth workers seem way more supportive than anyone in your school.*

- Angel

Finally, a young female youth worker told us that youth centres are important because often times, boys are not sure what to do with their free time, and without these protected spaces for them to relax and socialise with other boys, they may end up exposed to dangerous behaviours, situations and expectations.

Not enough safe spaces for young people

Many youth clubs have closed down across London. The few youth centres that remain aren't always well-known. A male youth worker told us there was a lack of communication amongst youth workers and clubs across Camden and London.

One 16-year-old girl we spoke to said that Camden has not enough safe spaces for women to speak about their experiences.

“If you talk about safe spaces, whatever spaces there are they haven't been communicated clearly, they haven't been shown, demonstrated clearly, because if *there was a safe space for women, I'm pretty sure you'll catch me and half of my other friends in a queue around the block but we don't do that because there are no safe spaces.*

- Angel

“I feel like some young boys do not know the help is there and “cause a lot of youth clubs and youth centres have shut down, they do not know what to do with their time. They will just be outside with their friends, probably do something stupid.”

- Yasmin



Theme 3: Education

Education came up in almost all the interviews we collected. Whether through youth work, community efforts or schools, education gives opportunities to intervene in critical moments of young people’s lives.

Key Issues

Exposure to domestic violence from a young age.

Different ways males engage with supoprt.

Lack of role models during childhood.

Solutions

Youth work (eg. after school programmes, youth groups) to educate youths against domestic violence.

Less conventional educational youth work (eg. football sessions, recreational activities) for young people rather than just counseling or workshops.

Efforts within community whereby everyday individuals can be role models.

Schools to provide emotional support.

Educating through youth work

Young people who see domestic violence at home when they’re growing up may believe it is normal.

“If you grow up seeing your Dad abusing your Mum, you’re going to think it’s ok.

- young person

For young people with a challenging upbringing, **it’s vital to get the right support and exposure to people in their community so they can learn that violent behaviour they see at home is not right.**

After-school programmes, like football clubs or youth groups are places where youth workers can help vulnerable young people to process their feelings on violence they experience at home, and understand why the violence they see at home is harmful.

A youth worker who runs an after-school football session told us about working with young people who experience domestic violence, and helping them to “relieve stress and pressure.” They also said:

“The problem is what can we do to change it?
The kids can see what’s going on.

“If they were severely in trouble I’d send them for further help.

Youth services like after school football clubs tend to be more accessible for boys and young men than girls or young women. We need alternative ways to educate young people against violence, which are accessible to everyone.

“Sport facilities [...] help them relieve stress and pressure they see at home...

“It’s not necessarily [a] place where they get direct support [from] a social worker and counselled.

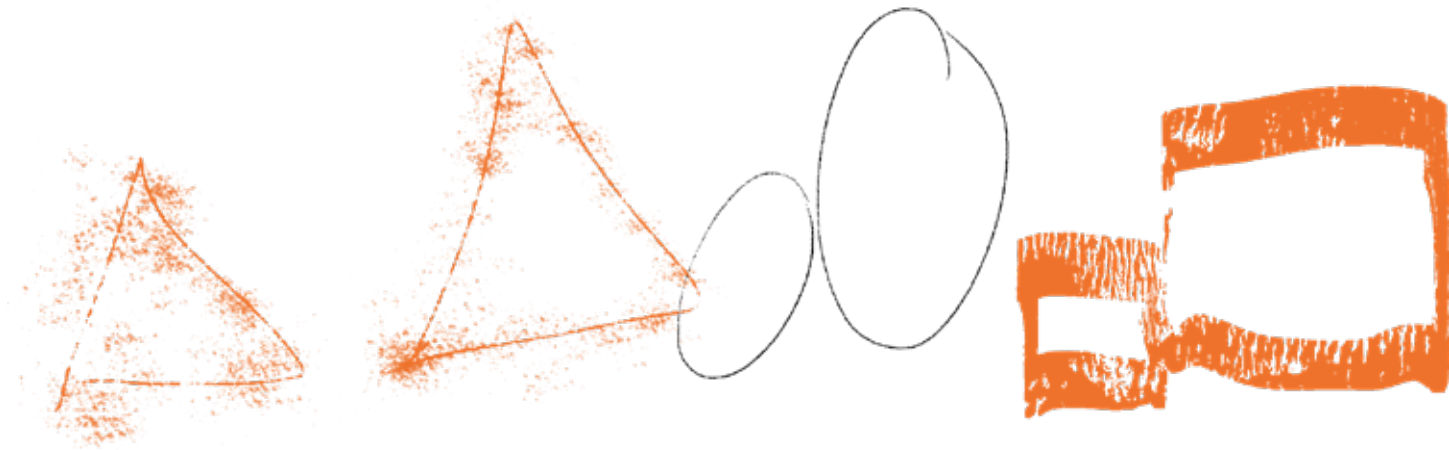
There may be gender differences in how women and girls recover from trauma, compared to men and boys. One youth worker suggests that men and boys respond to more “proactive” methods, like sports.

“Ladies are more emotional, mindful.. the way they recover from trauma is different from how a male might.”
- male youth worker

Generalisations about women and men contribute to gender stereotyping, and can increase gender-based violence. The belief that women are more “emotional” than men, in particular, is used to dismiss women’s valid concerns as hysterical or irrational.

We suggest that the reason men and boys may favour sports, instead of talking about their emotions, is because of stigma. Social norms make it hard for boys to talk openly, while girls are often made to feel unwelcome or unsafe in sports.

We need to see more youth work in the community, like after-school youth groups, sports and other activities, to help young people learn about alternatives to violence.



The importance of role models

For young people growing up in homes without strong parental support or educational opportunities, having role models in the community is vital. The same youth worker who runs the after-school football sessions for vulnerable young people also spoke about how in the USA there have been efforts where:

“Groups of fathers go around schools during lunch times acting as role models, peacemakers and there’s hardly any violence about now, and that’s probably because there’s a presence, fathers, *role models to look up to.*”
- 27-year-old youth worker

As well as youth workers who can act as role models for these young people, we want to see more organised activities and efforts within the community, perhaps modelled on these groups of fathers in the USA.

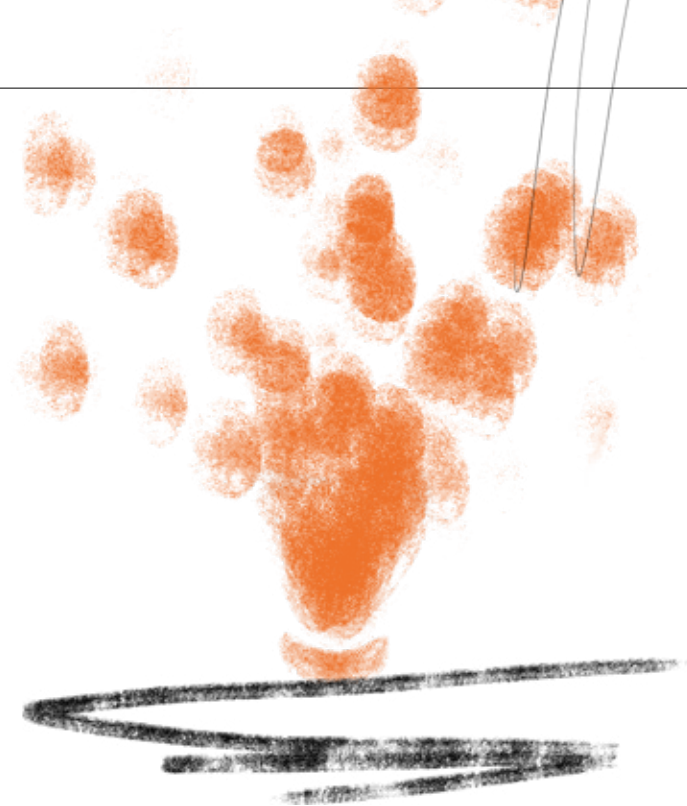
Anybody can be a healthy role model for young people, from youth workers to teachers to parents.



Intervention in schools

A male interviewee spoke about a triangle linking schools, parents and children. By connecting them together we hope that young people can learn how to challenge, question and reflect upon entrenched views and behaviours at home that might negatively impact their physical and emotional well-being.

If a young person grows up in a home where violence is seen as normal, or talking about emotions is seen as unacceptable, then schools offer a chance to challenge and shape these beliefs.



Theme 4: Environmental and social pressures

Our interviewees spoke about gender stereotypes, taboos, cultural barriers and desensitisation to sexual and physical violence in schools. These all contribute to violence against women of colour.

Key Issues

Gender expectations: men perceived as alpha males.

Social pressure on young people to become involved in violence.

Cultural taboos and barriers around sexual abuse preventing women seeking help.

Desensitisation of violence.

Solutions

Educate young people to respect all individuals irrespective of their gender.

Normalise conversations around sex and relationships by facilitating them in sessions in schools.

More sexual health support and awareness made accessible particularly for women experiencing cultural taboos and barriers.

Gender stereotypes

Our interview with two male youth workers interviewees showed some of the different pressures young and adult men face compared to young and adult women. They have seen and experienced the pressures that men are put under: to be an alpha male.

Online influencers like Andrew Tate, Hamza Ahmed and Corey Wayne are hugely visible, promoting the view that men should be dominant, seek power and prioritise earning money. By contrast, women are often expected to be more conservative, and to assume a more domestic role.

“Men feel different types of pressures to females which could play a part.”

They might feel that they need to provide, be the alpha male with their friends, have a good job, for example, or be respected by family members or might have pressures from parents growing up, whereas females sometimes they [feel] they need to be a good lover, for example, [...] to be a good cook, which is a bit different to guys.


- 27-year old male Youth worker

Social pressure to engage in violence

We spoke to a youth worker whose brother died because of gang violence in Camden. She said that male violence includes toxic masculinity and gang violence. Two male youth workers said that female violence includes fist fights, and is often based on intimate relationships.

Another male interviewee spoke powerfully about his teenage past dealing with violence in his secondary school in London. He was told that if he wanted to survive he had to learn how to fight. He believed that he needed to fight to “send a message” to other children in his school. He ended up being sent to jail.


Gender stereotypes can also lead to violence whereby young boys feel pressured to prove their masculinity by doing things beyond their comfort zone. One youth worker told us teenage boys may be told by their girlfriends that they will break up with them if they do not “prove their love” for them by having “fist fights” with other boys.



“[Violence] is prominent in Camden. It has a lot to do with a lot of boys, gangs, stuff, and it is just back and forth retaliation sometimes. More so for men. For women, it happens, but I feel like it is not as high as - it is not in the form that it would be - with men.

In Camden a lot of [violence is] territorial for males, and social media plays into it.

A lot of people would see something on social media and it would spread rapidly and so it would be trying to stand up for your ego.
- Yasmin



“[In] my experience as a youth worker doing mentoring in schools I have seen a lot of violence in terms of female-female violence caused by a guy that one person might have liked [...]

There is an example where one child has said this person’s boyfriend likes me, at a certain point in time, and the person didn’t agree with it and a few months later found out that it was actually true. She was upset about

it and [went] back and forth multiple times about who was telling the truth, about four/five months ago, and then [it] ended up escalating and fists fights over a boy, essentially over who was telling the truth, who was lying.

- 27-year-old male Youth worker

Taboos and cultural barriers

Taboos and cultural barriers around sex, sexual health and victim-blaming are a key issue in violence experienced by young people of all genders.

One woman survivor of sexual violence told us there was not a lot of support for women experiencing sexual violence. As a young South Asian woman in Camden, she recalled having only one or two sexual health meetings while at her youth offending service. **It was only when she went with a support worker to visit different sexual clinics that she got a better understanding of sexual health.**

“I wish I had more support. I think I only had one or two sexual health meetings whilst I was at the youth offending service.

There was only one person who just sat me down and we spoke about sexual health and that was it.

I then went on with my Children Society worker and I went around to different sexual health clinics and I got a better understanding of what it is and I think being an Asian it is so taboo to talk about sex.

- Danielle

She experienced sexual abuse during her work experience and despite feeling a lot of shame and guilt, she finally found the courage to tell her parents about what had happened.

Rather than being supportive, **they believed it was her fault** and there was a lot of victim blaming. For example, they told her that she should have stopped him before he did anything to her, and that what had happened was her fault.

“I think [shame] played a big part and guilt - I don’t know why I felt guilty, but I did.

And then the shame stopped me until that point, then I was like, you know what, this is so wrong/ I haven’t done anything wrong.

They will see that I am broken, so I need to tell them, so I told my Mum and my Dad. Their reaction was really really upsetting.

I wrote a statement to my parents, and sent it to my parents to read and my dad said

‘Why didn’t she stop him before he could do anything more?’

I was in a state of shock. I couldn’t do anything. By the time I did something it was a little bit late.

My parents’ reaction was like ‘Why did she not do something? Why did she not ... ?’

- Danielle

As Danielle’s story shows, it is not enough to simply encourage young women to share their stories of violence. **Telling a story and then being disbelieved or criticised can be enormously traumatic.**

We need to make sure that young women can safely share their stories and then get tailored support, so they can heal from their experiences and also be safe and healthy in the future.

Desensitisation to violence

One female interviewee mentioned the fine line between what is seen as fun and violence by young men and women. Jokes of a sexual nature or about violence and abuse are normalised at school.

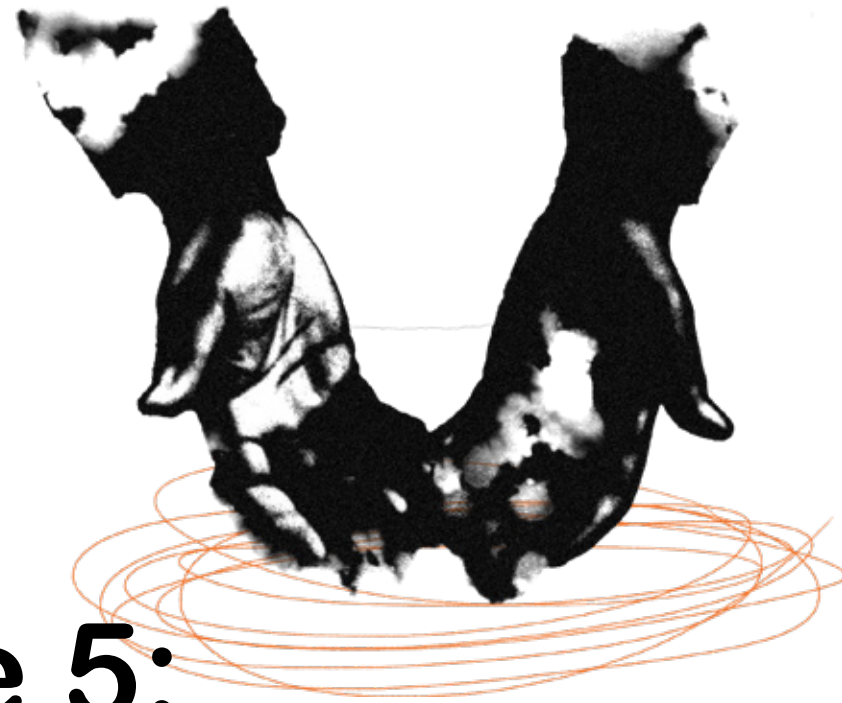
“It is *normalised* to make sexual innuendos, it is *normalised* to make jokes in that manner, it is *normalised* to make domestic violence jokes, it is *normalised* to make violence jokes of any sort.

- Angel

Angel spoke about educating young people on boundaries in tackling the normalisation of sexual and domestic violence jokes in schools. She would like to see open conversations between all genders on violence, stigma surrounding sexual assault and establish standards by which they should hold themselves by.

She thinks that it is crucial to communicate about one’s feelings and take responsibility to speak up if boundaries are not respected to help tackle sexual violence and harassment in schools.

Another female youth worker believed that **social media plays a key role in spreading violence rapidly and getting young people to fight**. They become “desensitised.” Hurtful comments that they wouldn’t necessarily say in person are easier to post online.



Theme 5: Poverty

Poverty exacerbates violence against women of colour. Women should not have to choose between destitution and domestic violence. One of the reasons why many victims of domestic violence stay in their abusive marriages is because of the fear of having to live with poverty. Difficulty finding housing, nowhere to go, no financial support, and all these potential traumatizing challenges forces women to remain in their abusive relationships. Our interviewees who are survivors of domestic abuse shared their experiences.

Key Issues

Young people from poor households lacking basic necessities (eg. food).

Youth centres forced to shut due to governmental cuts and policies.

Vulnerable women forced to resort to sex work in order to meet their basic necessities.

Resources not directly reaching vulnerable individuals.

Solutions

Short-term solution: provide resources which directly reach vulnerable individuals (eg. universal income).

Long term sustainable solution: provide opportunities for long term stable incomes.

A survivor of domestic violence spoke about how a lack of money and resources made her emotional and physical trauma even worse.

She was living in a crowded accommodation in a women's refuge with six families all sharing one kitchen only. She was also receiving universal credit. **The weekly petty cash needed to be paid back and she recalled the immense pressure put upon her to find a job within three months.** Her trauma made it very hard for her to find a job.

“Can you imagine living in a house with six different women and families and one kitchen down? Can you imagine that?”

We have our different routines. My son goes to sleep between 8 to 9pm and the other children are jumping around in that time, how noisy it was just next door. I only had one bedroom.

- Dee

“I had petty cash like £20 or something like that. I have to ask but pay back. I am in debt. I have to pay back when I have money.”

- Dee

One of the youth-workers mentioned the negative behavioural impacts that he has witnessed poverty has on young people.

“Kids get aggressive when they can't get what they need for their daily survival;

“they get angry when they see their parents struggling;

“they sometimes go to the extent of taking what other people have violently.”

- Youth worker

Government cuts and austerity

Government cuts, austerity and restructuring of the welfare state have led to a rise in poverty. More people are now reliant on food banks, and many youth centres have closed down. One youth worker we spoke to said that poverty at home leads to young people being neglected. Hunger can also cause violence.

“Hungry children are angry.” - Lee

“There was nothing for the kids, they took away youth clubs and took away everything so [...] there was nothing for them to do...again it was cuts, loads of cuts in youth work, there were loads of cuts so again it was just finding that safe haven for the young kids.”

- 27-year-old male youth worker

Sex work

Poverty pushes a lot of women into sex work to feed their children. Sex work is partially criminalised by law, which puts them at risk. Many sex workers justifiably fear reporting violence and abuse.

“Criminalisation is violence; when sex workers are criminalised, it really does take a toll, because we’re often treated like criminals rather than workers, carers and mothers.”

Criminalisation means it’s much harder to report violence and get justice, especially for rape and sexual assault.

- Charlotte, woman of Colour activist in the English Collective for Prostitutes

The women we spoke to shared how **struggling to find other sustainable sources of income** forced them into sex work.

“Many sex workers are mums and go into sex work to be able to feed their kids. Sex work is often a choice out of a set of bad choices because what alternatives are there to low-waged jobs with bad conditions?”

For Women of Colour and immigrant women, racism and sexism combine; we’re often in the worst paid jobs, then we’re punished for finding other ways to earn and be independent.

- Charlotte, Woman of Colour activist in the English Collective for Prostitutes

“More than half of women in our group live in poverty, many are mothers, they do not have status, their children do not have status; some have had to leave children behind when they fled.”

When we reach here, we face racism and sexism from the Home Office and courts, and are forced into destitution.

Lack of any other alternatives force us into abusive relationships where we are exploited, we stay there, and just die there, you know what I mean, or go into prostitution to put food on the children’s table.

Who as a mother wants to see their children suffering? We want to make our children happy and mothers go the extra mile, whatever it takes.

- Malaka, Nigerian mother, survivor of rape, domestic, physical, emotional and sexual violence; All African Women’s Group member

Funds in NGOs may not benefit vulnerable women

Women from grassroots organisations told us that **funds which go to NGOs in Camden are not reaching vulnerable women**. They said the NGO sector is an industry, channelling money to the top layers of their organisations, instead of using it for work that will help women out of poverty.

Money doesn't usually end up in the hands of those in need.

“Parts of the asylum rights movement (and the race, women's and other movements), is an industry where *funds go to the top layers*, to people who rise up out of self-interest, leaving the rest behind.

Many start off with good intentions, but end up with NGOs or outfits whose main role is gathering funds, having a few well-paid jobs but doing not much...

● *not enough to make a fundamental difference, or worse high-jacking or watering down demands of grassroots people to use as funding opportunities or for other ends, rather than ending injustice and suffering for everyone. This needs to be confronted.*

How can we women overcome all the violence we face if demands based on our actual experiences and needs aren't central and prioritised, and our work valued including with a reliable income?

- Sara, activist with Women of Colour Global Women Strike

“We start with campaigning to put money and resources in every woman's hands, especially mothers, the main carers...

...unless you're fighting for every woman to have money in their own hands to decide independently what to do with it...

...unless you're doing that kind of work, it's not serious.

We say:

“Start at the bottom, for everyone to go up together, so there is no bottom or top.”

- Sara, activist with Women of Colour Global Women Strike



Theme 6: Institutional failures

Institutions are failing women of colour in Camden. People we spoke to talked about austerity, cuts to public services, lack of awareness of the resources available to residents in Camden, and the hostile environment, which makes it extremely difficult for refugees and asylum-seekers to get the support they need.

Insufficient outreach from services

Too many people don't know about services that could help them. We spoke to one female youth worker, whose brother was killed by gang violence. She told us many young people don't know about services in Camden, and that there is not enough outreach to let them know what services exist. In her view, schools should be doing more to support and guide these connections between services and young people.

“Not a lot of people know about the services. They haven't done the research, [...] they haven't been shown that there are these local [services] around them.

I feel like in schools they should have a board or something that shows, okay, there are these places here that you guys can go to after school or even emails for them so if they want to search it up themselves [...] and get in touch themselves. I feel like schools should really have that.

- Yasmin

Key Issues

Lack of awareness of social services.

Mothers being separated from children.

Breakdown of relationships between social workers and vulnerable individuals.

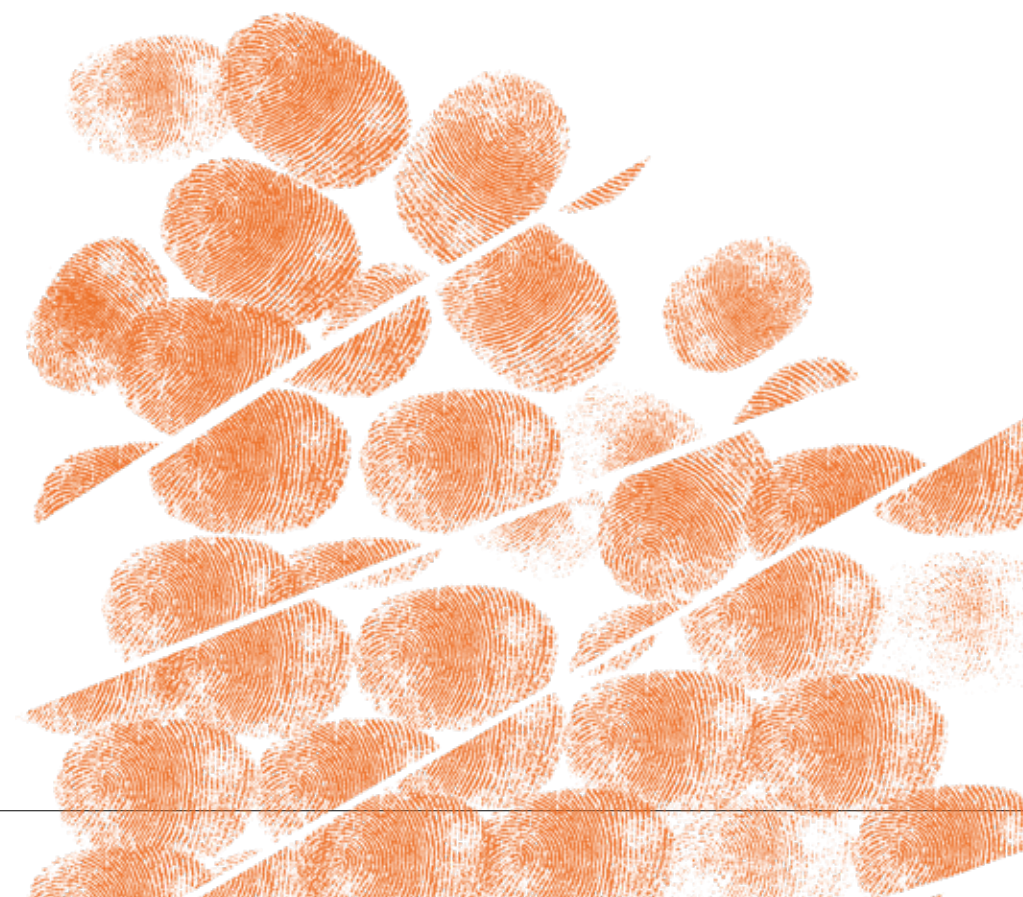
Refugees struggling with immigration policies and social services.

Solutions

Schools to have notice boards advertising safe after-school spaces around Camden that young people can go to for support.

More emphasis on preventing separation between mothers and children.

Address difficulties within social services and Home Office (eg. Quick turnover of social workers, lack of funds).



Schools should be central to the community.

A school that is deeply connected to local services and the community is one that can genuinely safeguard young people, providing joined-up support and care.

A Youth worker **described her youth centre as ‘a safety net, it is a communal support’**. They organised residential trips to allow young people to be more independent and to learn essential life skills such as cooking.

She spoke about how **a young boy who was in the streets selling drugs in the area attended her youth club for many years before changing his whole life around**. He knew that he needed help and he chose and felt comfortable seeking this help at the youth centre. He now runs activities there and he brings his friends along too.

“Wherever he needed help or even if he didn’t specifically ask he knew that it was there if he ever needed it. Even if it was coming to the youth centre whenever he wanted or just always having our phones available for them to call whenever they needed. They find it helpful.

- Sara

A 16 years old student had some strong criticism of the quality and availability of support for young people in schools. She believes that any type of support is much better in communal integrated spaces outside schools such as youth centres.

“In terms of schools providing support it is ok, but you go outside and you find it is way better. You are an educational institution you should have top class support, but you don’t. Whereas if you go outside like at youth centres, the youth workers seem way more supportive than anyone in your school. Aren’t the people that you spent most time with, are they not supposed to be the most supportive people? It doesn’t feel that way.

- Angel

Separation of mothers from children

A Camden mother of four in from the grassroots group Support Not Separation shared her experience using the following quotes:

“We fight against the separation of mothers - the main carers - and their children, for example social workers and the courts mix up women’s poverty with abuse, even handing children over to violent fathers.

It is very painful, something that we’re determined to end. No mother or child should suffer this.

As well as saying no to separation, we hold a monthly picket (the first Wednesday of the month) outside the family court in London, with our banner “Support Not Separation” because mothers need their children and children need their mothers, that precious relationship must be respected.

Did you know that children of colour are ten times more likely to be taken into care?

- Samina, a mother of four from Support not Separation



Social services

We spoke to Play workers who told us about how many social workers leave the profession.

“I think *it is pot-luck*, I actually have had some really good dealings with social services in Camden, really really good and unfortunately really really not good. You know, I think over the last few years the consistency of social workers, they are not staying in their roles which is a massive breakdown *because it takes time to build the relationship*. Once that relationship is formed, well that's gone and then someone else comes in, you know there is a different set.

- Play worker lead

“Social workers not staying in their roles, managers leaving and *cases having to be reinvestigated and reopened*.

- Play worker

Indeed the same play worker spoke of how **the burden social workers face in their work can often be 'soul-destroying'** and make them struggle to maintain the 'passion' for their role they initially had.

We can see social workers being forced out of their profession as another kind of institutional failure. **Many social workers have been let down by a lack of funding, an impossible workload, and not enough emotional support.**

Mistrust of authorities

Vulnerable people often express distrust of state services and have strong negative associations with them.

“I think there is cultures a lot of fear of social services involvement and this is for all women really in all if you look at how people distrust services especially if you come from a difficult background or somewhere *you had a lot of interaction with services and you've got negative experiences and connotations of those places*.

- Play worker

Speaking to activists who work with survivors of domestic, physical and sexual violence, we heard that **the police are the biggest obstacle to women reporting their abuse**. They told us that a lot of the experiences these women have had with the police in the past has led to a huge mistrust of authorities.

Unfortunately, **many vulnerable women believe that reporting to authorities simply results in them being further discriminated against.**



“The authorities have to *hold the police accountable*. One of the main reasons why women don't report rape, racist attacks and other violence is because *the police are racist, sexist, and homophobic*.

The brutality of the police has been exposed as never before, for all to see for example the unprovoked and vicious attacks women who demonstrated against a serving police officer who kidnapped and murdered Sarah Everard, and officer sharing selfies of murdered sisters, Bibaa Smallman and Nicole Henry, while posted to protect the crime scene.

Police brutality and discrimination are major obstacles to reporting our attackers -- it is not really about training on “cultural differences”, or “cultural sensitivity” – that approach smacks of the race industry.

We need the police to act like human beings, the fact that we are poor and more likely to be discriminated against are among the biggest obstacles. The best training for the police is to prosecute and jail the rotten apples.

- Crissie, Global Women Against Deportations, and Women Against Rape

Another barrier to approaching the police according to a grassroots activist is a **fear of further conviction**. One interviewee said:

“If you consider reporting to the police often your first thought is what is going to happen, how will I be treated? Are they going to raid my home, or my community or arrest, detain and deport me?

These are serious obstacles to coming forward to report rape and violence.

- Githua, All African Women's Group

Grassroot activists strongly felt that there was a degree of corruption involved with authorities: *“You know, sacking the corrupt vicious police.”*

But many still recognised that there were other police within the system who genuinely wanted to help and had the right intentions. **“Promoting the ones who are trying to do the right thing and that sends a completely different signal to what is possible”** said one woman of colour and grassroots activist.

Moreover, the positive experience one vulnerable young person spoke of with a strong, trusting bond she had built with a police officer also shows us how **enabling bonds to be formed between the authorities and vulnerable individuals can have a powerful effect**

Finally, one of the activists told us that many survivors of violence feel let down by the criminal justice system due to the **low conviction rate of violent perpetrators**:

“The figures have exposed that it is not so much that women do not speak up about it, the problem is that women are having their cases dropped either because evidence is not collected by the police or their intrusive, sexist and racist questioning puts women off from pursuing their attackers.

Women who ask for help are not getting it. Many women are withdrawing after having reported and the conviction rate is now at an all-time low – under 1% of reported rapes lead to a conviction.

- Crissie, Global Women Against Deportations, and Women Against Rape



Asylum seekers and refugees

The All African Women Group told us it is very difficult for women of colour who are survivors of rape and domestic violence to deal with the Home Office. Survivors of violence are forced to tell their stories to strangers after an exhausting journey to get to safety. Some of these survivors will not even have access to public funds and it is not guaranteed that they will be reunited with their children.

“When women from our group open their mouths and speak I start crying, you know, I was crying...because they do not have recourse to public funds, *they are refused money to live on, and they suffer more, often for years.*

Getting your papers [right to stay] here is very hard, and crucial. It is not easy: like me *I lived close to 20 years in this country and I just recently got my papers.*

A lot of women are suffering to bring their family here, it is a big problem; to settle down with your family here *you have to fight, and fight again.*

You know, a lot of women in our organisation are still fighting to make sure they find their children and can bring them here to safety, after having suffered the pain fleeing either domestic abuse, or war, or starvation, or whatever they are fleeing from. Like me I fled terrible domestic violence.

- Malaka, Nigerian mother, survivor of rape, domestic, physical, emotional and sexual violence, All African Women's Group member

Furthermore, asylum-seekers receive less money than immigrants, following a law passed in 1999 creating more hardships and violence.

“It used to be that whether you were an immigrant or an asylum seeker, or not, *everybody was in the same benefit system; that changed in 1999.*

Asylum-seekers were put under NASS, getting 70% of benefits, and *no longer eligible for housing and other benefits.*

That created an apartheid benefit system, part of the Hostile Environment, that over time has driven down asylum seekers' and everyone else's rights and benefits. *Now many more people are absolutely or near destitute, everybody's benefits rights have been driven down.*

Many people don't know that *a mother seeking asylum with a baby gets a miserly £45.85/week, to cover food, toiletries and travel -- nobody can live on that. Some people in hostels only get £8 weekly, the rest is in the hands of those running the hostels, a recipe for corruption and violence.*

These measures drive the most vulnerable women into destitution, making us *much more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, rape and other violence.*

- Sara, a woman of Colour and activist of more than 35 years, based at Women's Crossroad Centre



Discussion

By linking up our findings from recorded interviews to existing academic theories and literature on feminism, racism, policing and colonisation we hope we have added to understanding about violence against women of colour in Camden and how we can tackle it, which will help make a difference for the Camden community.

The summary below shows the three research questions and an outline of the key points we have gathered from our interviews to answer them. We have also supplemented each of our answers with existing literature.

How does violence against women of colour manifest?

- Domestic violence due to gender stereotypes and lack of education.
- Poverty, isolation and discrimination especially amongst migrants and refugees.
- Sexual abuse.
- Separation of mothers from children.
- Poverty forcing women into sex work but being criminalised for it.

Who are the perpetrators of violence in Camden?

- Violence can be committed by both individuals and institutions.
- Despite negative racial and gender stereotypes associating black men with violence, we found perpetrators of violence can be females and of other races too.
- Violence can be experienced due to societal pressures and doesn't need to be "committed" by a perpetrator.

Is there systemic violence?

- From an education point of view, there is a lack of education from schools and role models within the community of youths.
- Government cuts leading to closure of youth centres and women centres.
- Inefficient use / lack of funds leading to poverty forcing mothers into (criminalised) sex work.
- Vulnerable individuals struggling with social services and Home Office.



A. How does violence against women of colour show up?

A historically patriarchal society still persists today. This may influence gender stereotypes leading to domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse has been normalised in society.

DISCRIMINATION, RACISM AND HATE CRIMES against women of colour IS A KEY ISSUE.

What we learnt from literature



WOMEN OF COLOR EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

WOMEN OF COLOUR EXPERIENCE SEXUAL ABUSE.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN OF COLOUR MANIFESTS ITSELF THROUGH CONSTANT SCRUTINY OF THEIR BEHAVIOUR.

What we learnt from our research interviews about Camden

We have found that violence against women of colour manifests mainly as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual abuse and through constant scrutiny of their behaviour. Women of colour experience violence implicitly as well and this can less obvious such as discrimination from society and institutions. These are explored in later sections.

The United Nations defines gender stereotyping as

“the practice of ascribing to an individual woman or man specific attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of her or his membership in the social group of women or men. It limits men and women’s capacity to develop their personal abilities, professional careers and make choices about their lives”

(Women gender stereotyping, Ohchr, 2022)

1.

Women of colour experience violence as domestic violence and sexual abuse. A historically patriarchal society has influenced this.

Violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual violence, is normalised and perpetuated by the patriarchy.

Many young men and women grow up thinking that to receive dignity and respect, they need to follow unattainable physical and mental standards pushed forward by our “imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy”, in the words of the late feminist cultural critic bell hooks. Hooks described patriarchy as a “political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.” This results in many men and women being trapped into narrow and outdated gender roles that severely impact the freedom and emotional expression of oneself.

Patriarchal values have serious consequences for people living in Camden, from men wanting to exert dominance over their partners, to teenage boys feeling pressured to show their manliness through physical violence and gang violence.

2.

Women of colour experience racism, sexism and discrimination based on religion.

Due to discrimination (like stop and search, hate crimes against Muslim women on the streets, barriers around institutions and bureaucracy) women of colour always have to be conscious of their actions and what they are wearing. Even in public, Muslim women are not safe.

3.

Violence against women of colour manifests itself through constant scrutiny of their behaviour.

Women of colour carry the burden of constantly thinking about their actions, what they are wearing, and how they will be perceived. They are affected by racial profiling, for example, disproportionate levels of stop and search, hate crimes and verbal and physical violence.

For example, between April 2020 and March 2021, there were 697,405 stop and searches in England and Wales (excluding vehicle searches), there were 7.5 stop and searches for every 1,000 White people, compared with 52.6 for every 1,000 Black people (GOV.UK, 2022).

A 2018 report by Tell MAMA, found:

“Places of Anti-Muslim hate incidents: consistent with previous years, THE LARGEST PROPORTION OF STREET-BASED INCIDENTS TOOK PLACE WITHIN PUBLIC AREAS such as parks and shopping areas and the second most common place for incidents was public transport networks, such as trams, buses, etc.”

(Gendered Anti-Muslim Hatred and Islamophobia, Street Based Aggression in Cases Reported to Tell MAMA Is Alarming, 2018)

Put simply: Muslim women of colour are often unsafe in public spaces.

Many women of colour also face violence in the form of disrespect, and a lack of communication of boundaries between different genders.

A 2021 national report by OFSTED shows sexual jokes, banter and violence are normalised by young people within schools.

Given that 9.5% of the women population in Camden are Muslim women, this is a very relevant issue in our community that needs addressing.

“Children and young people said sexual harassment occurs so frequently that it has become ‘commonplace’.

For example, the OFSTED (2021) report also found that 92% OF GIRLS AND 74% OF BOYS SAID SEXIST NAME-CALLING HAPPENS A LOT OR SOMETIMES TO THEM OR THEIR PEERS.

The frequency of these harmful sexual behaviours means that some children and young people consider them normal”

(Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, 2021)

The combination of powerful gender stereotypes, a constant scrutiny of women and girls’ actions and behaviours as well as a disrespect and lack of boundaries between all genders make women of colour less free, expressive and fulfilled human beings. Indeed this is an issue women of color face globally, and not just in Camden.

B. Who are the main perpetrators of violence?

British imperialism and ~~slave-trade~~ has lead to the negative stereotypes of black men which persists in today's culture which may lead to a negative stereotype of black men being perpetrators of violence.

Historically black men have also been portrayed as sexually threatening.

What we learnt from literature

Violence can be committed by ~~both men and women~~ but research shows male perpetrators of domestic violence are more prevalent.

Violence can be committed by ~~both black and white men~~.

Young people in Camden may also experience violence where ~~parents are perpetrators~~.

Violence does not necessarily need a "perpetrator" and can be experienced in the form of ~~discrimination~~.

What we learnt from our research interviews about Camden

Literature: Historical racial stereotype against black men

We learnt from existing literature how history has come to negatively form the racial stereotyping of Black men which is still very prominent in today's media and culture.

For example, in 'Brit(ish) on Race, Identity and Belonging' Afua Hirsch wrote how

“The number of things that have been said about black men in this country for the most part have been about as negative as you can possibly get.

(Hirsch, n.d.)

She spoke about the hyper sexuality of Black men in mainstream culture. She writes,

“Stereotypes of Black men and other ethnic minority men as sexually threatening then leads to inaccurate data spreading virally on social media, pointing to the false statistics about the prevalence of sexual assaults of black men.

(Hirsch, n.d.)

Moreover, in Professor Adam Elliott-Cooper's book 'Black British Resistance To British Policing', he talked about how he believed the slave trade and a historically imperialist British society has led to the racial stereotypes of Black men that still exist in today's society. In his words:

“As Britain rose to become the greatest slave-trading nation in modern history,

ideas about gender and race became fundamental to justifying the trade and the brutality which underpinned it.

Black people in drama and novels were stereotyped through a number of different caricatures.

These cultural phenomena served as the mass media of their day, complete with recurrent characters and memes which both reflected and helped produce 'common-sense' assumptions of racial Others.

(Elliott-Cooper, n.d.)

Despite these racial stereotypes associating Black men with violence and as threatening, our interviews have shown that Black men are not the only perpetrators of violence in Camden.

We have learnt that violence can also be committed by white men and women themselves whilst children can face violence whereby perpetrators are peers, parents and institutions.

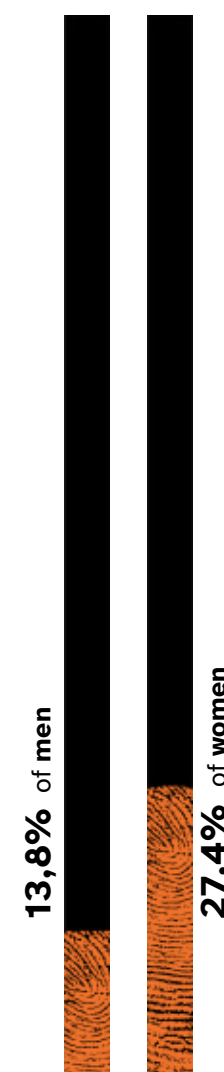
1.

Violence can be committed by people of all genders but male perpetrators are more common.

Violence committed by women may manifest as control, manipulation and abuse. We hear how teenage boys face pressure from their girlfriends to “prove their love” or manliness by having fist fights. This is just one example of how female violence manifests in Camden. As bell hooks wrote in ‘All About Love’:

“Few of us enter romantic relationships able to receive love. We fall into romantic attachments doomed to replay familiar family dramas. Usually we do not know this will happen precisely because we have grown up in a culture that has told us that no matter what we experienced in our childhoods, no matter the pain, sorrow, alienation, emptiness, no matter the extent of our dehumanisation, romantic love would be ours.

(hooks, 2018)



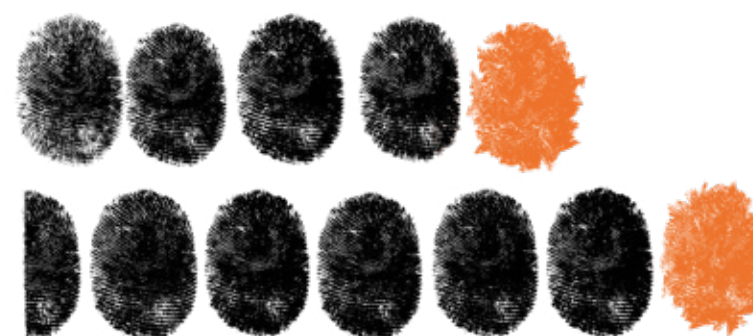
Yet it is important to stress that the number of women affected by gender-based violence nonetheless outweighs the number of men affected by gender-based violence.

From a recent report entitled ‘Male Victims of domestic abuse and partner abuse’ published in April 2021, we can see that this is reflected by the two statistics below:

“13.8% of men and 27.4% of women aged 16 to 74 have experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16 (2019/20),

equivalent to an estimated 2.9 million male victims and 5.9 million female victims...

... For every three victims of domestic abuse, two will be female, one will be male....



... One in four women and one in six to seven men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime.

(Brooks OBE, 2021)

2.

Violence can be committed by men of any race despite historical racial stereotypes.

Interviews with two survivors of domestic violence in Camden who were physically and emotionally abused by both their White British husbands also demonstrates that white men are perpetrators of violence in Camden as well.



In 'All About Love', hooks (2018) wrote that

“until we begin to see loving parenting in all walks of life in our culture, many people will continue to believe we can only discipline through punishment, and that harsh punishment is an acceptable way to relate to children.”

“Every day thousands of children in our culture are verbally and physically abused, starved, tortured, and murdered. They are the true victims of intimate terrorism in that they have no collective voice or rights. They remain the property of parenting adults to do with as they will. There can be no love without justice. Until we live in a culture that not only respects but also upholds basic civil rights for children, most children will not know love.”

“Many men in our culture never recover from childhood unkindnesses. Studies show that males and females who are violently humiliated and abused repeatedly, with on caring intervention, are likely to be dysfunctional and will be predisposed to abuse others violently.”



3.

Violence can be committed by parents.

Finally, we found out from both current literature and interviews that young people may experience domestic violence whereby parents are perpetrators. Indeed, some cultures see violence against children as a reasonable form of discipline.

Research from Women's Aid finds that "one in seven (14.2%) children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood" (Impact on children and young people - Women's Aid, 2022).

Indeed, the stories of our young interviewees who spoke about how one of them was actually blamed for sexual abuse she experienced rather than supported, or how another's friend was simply shipped off to another country by their parents simply for misbehaving, only re-emphasises that many parents may be perpetrators of violence in Camden.

4.

Violence doesn't necessarily need an individual perpetrator but can be experienced as discrimination from society.

Violence can be implicitly experienced, as we explain through our institutions in the following section.



In conclusion,

through our mass media consumption, understanding of history and culture, we can see why certain communities and groups of people are targeted as being disproportionately more violent than others. We can nonetheless attest here that:

**Violence can indeed be
committed across
ALL RACES, AGES AND GENDERS,
as well as
by PARENTS TOWARDS CHILDREN.**

c. Is there systemic violence?

**SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE IS
THE HARM PEOPLE SUFFER FROM
SOCIETY AND INSTITUTIONS.**

Where does the line between
individual and collective
responsibility lie?

Societal views of
what should be **INDIVIDUAL AND
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES**
are fluid and change with culture
and historical events.

Systemic violence exists as

**INSTITUTIONS FAILING TO
PROVIDE ENOUGH SAFE SPACES
FOR YOUTHS AND WOMEN**

Systemic violence is experienced as

**POVERTY &
DISCRIMINATION**

**THE LACK OF EDUCATION
AGAINST VIOLENCE
FOR YOUTHS**

**SEX WORK &
PROSTITUTION**

**BARRIERS & MISTRUST
WITH AUTHORITIES**

In 'Visions of political violence', Ruggerio, (2019) defines systemic violence as

“the harm people suffer from the social structure and the institutions sustaining and reproducing it. This type of violence prevents its victims from satisfying their basic needs, and is an avoidable impairment of the fundamental means necessary for human existence.”

'Visions of political violence', Ruggerio, 2019

This definition of systemic violence stresses the fine line between what is considered an individual and a systemic failure. Where does the line between private and public spheres start? When do we blame an individual's lack of basic needs upon them or upon the institutions governing society? We can argue that this fine line is never truly fixed and can move depending on the public and political discourses we found ourselves into at a particular time in history.

For example, after the Second World War, the creation of the National Health Service demonstrated that public opinion and those in power understood that there is a collective responsibility to the care and welfare of one human being to another.

“In 1945 there was also a powerful feeling in Britain that effective post-war social and economic reconstruction was both vital and deserved, and that the tired old Conservative establishment that had dominated the interwar years would be incapable of providing it.”

“An Introduction to Modern British History”, Lynch, 2001

1.

Poverty and discrimination are systemic violence.



Many interviews collected for our research mentioned the responsibilities that each individual holds when it comes to the power of choices and actions, however personal stories shared by frontline youth workers and migrant women of colour survivors of violence clearly demonstrate how systemic violence exists and manifests itself as an intersection between poverty, sexism and racism in Camden and from around the world.

They argue that poverty often guides the actions that one might take to survive, feel dignified and respected in society. Therefore, poverty is not an individual failure, but primarily a collective failure.



“On almost every measure, women are economically worse off than men. Poverty and economic inequality increase a woman's risk of being subjected to violence. They undermine her voice and bargaining power at home, work and in wider society. Women and girls living in poverty are less able to leave abusive partners as they are more reliant on them, they are more likely to live in areas which are unsafe and they are less likely to have access to education”

ActionAid, Violence against women and girls (VAWG), 2021

Systemic violence shows up as the intersection between poverty, sexism and racism in Camden and globally.

ActionAid argues that

“poverty often guides the actions that one might take to survive, feel dignified and respected in society.”

Action Aid, Violence against women and girls (VAWG), 2021

They speak of how women experiencing poverty are more likely to experience violence both at home and in society. Indeed financial dependance on their husbands are what ties a lot of women down to abusive relationships they are in.

Moreover poverty is often a barrier to education, and through discrimination can also be a barrier to job opportunities for stable incomes. They then find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle whereby poverty and societal discrimination are some root causes.

“Even in the UK I suffered, I could not report because I was threatened, I was beaten, I was forced to stay in that relationship because [I had] nowhere to go”

Malaka, Nigerian mother; All African Women's Group member

Our interviews with a survivor of domestic violence who spoke of the financial difficulties she faced after fleeing her abusive husband further demonstrates that women

in Camden do experience systemic violence in the form of poverty and discrimination as well. Here she spoke of how her “migrant status” prevented her from getting a National Insurance number thus her own financial independence, but that the “petty cash” and “universal benefits” she received after seeking help was barely enough to sustain her basic daily needs.

Her story and research shows that poverty is a collective failure not an individual one.

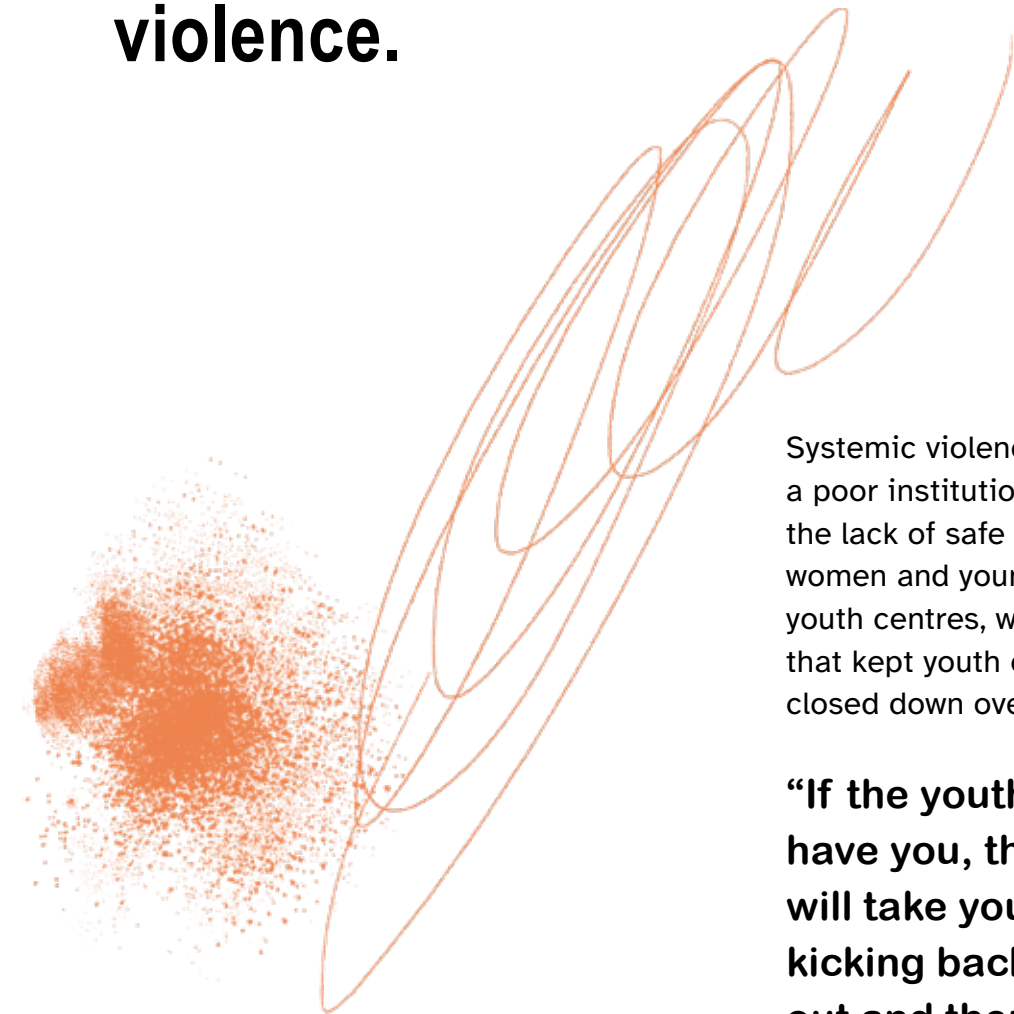
As Scott a.k.a Wretch 32, 2019 wrote in ‘Raptology’, poverty and discrimination are risk factors to systemic violence from society, educational institutions and the police.

“if you are from a certain background, you’re systematically excluded from all the things that help keep you on the straight and narrow. You’re kicked out of class for the slightest thing; you can’t get a good job because of the colour of your skin. You’re surrounded by people who are forced to break the law just to get enough to survive.”

Scott a.k.a Wretch 32, ‘Raptology’, 2019

2.

The lack of safe spaces for young people and women is systemic violence.



Systemic violence is shown through a poor institutional response towards the lack of safe spaces for vulnerable women and young people. Many youth centres, which were places that kept youth off the streets, have closed down over the years.

“If the youth club won’t have you, then the streets will take you. You start by kicking back and walking out and then you quickly realise you’ve got to stand on your own two feet. So what have I got to be able to support myself?”

Indeed, this is no different in Camden as told by a youth worker who said that since many youth centres have closed, many young boys who don’t know what to do with themselves end up causing trouble in the streets instead.

From literature and from our interviews, we have learnt that safe spaces such as youth centres and women centres are key in providing young people with key trusting relationships, skills and role-models to help them stay away from violence and crime. Interviews with Camden youth workers and young people themselves also tell us that this is no different in Camden. Indeed, for many young people, it is through youth centres that they are educated. For example, a research report called 'Out Of Service' published by YMCA in 2020 has shone a light on the scale of cuts in youth services across England and Wales:

“Between 2010/11 and 2018/19 spending on youth services in England and Wales reduced from £1.41bn to just under £429m. While the dramatic decline in spending has had a profoundly negative impact on the ability of services to meet young people’s needs, the scale of the cuts had largely gone unnoticed.”

Our interviews with youth workers and young people from Camden re-emphasise the fact that the lack of funding and closure of youth centres is a massive issue in Camden. Indeed this has been a recurring theme throughout our entire report.

3.

Sex work can be systemic violence due to criminalisation.

From our interviews it is no doubt that many mothers having to engage in sex work to feed their children is a key issue in Camden.

As young researchers, we recognise that the legalisation and policies surrounding sex work is a contentious topic and we believe that advocating for more efforts to support these women is key. For example, enabling these women with better job opportunities, and ensuring funds going to organisations meant to help them, actually benefit them.

We have learnt from our interviews that inefficient use of funds in NGOs is an issue prevalent in Camden.



4.

Barriers with authorities can produce systemic violence.

Our interviews with vulnerable migrant women show us how they struggle with authorities whether it be the Home Office, social services or with the police.

From our interviews with grassroots organisations, we learnt that the main obstacles to reporting to the police are fear of further conviction. One interviewee said,

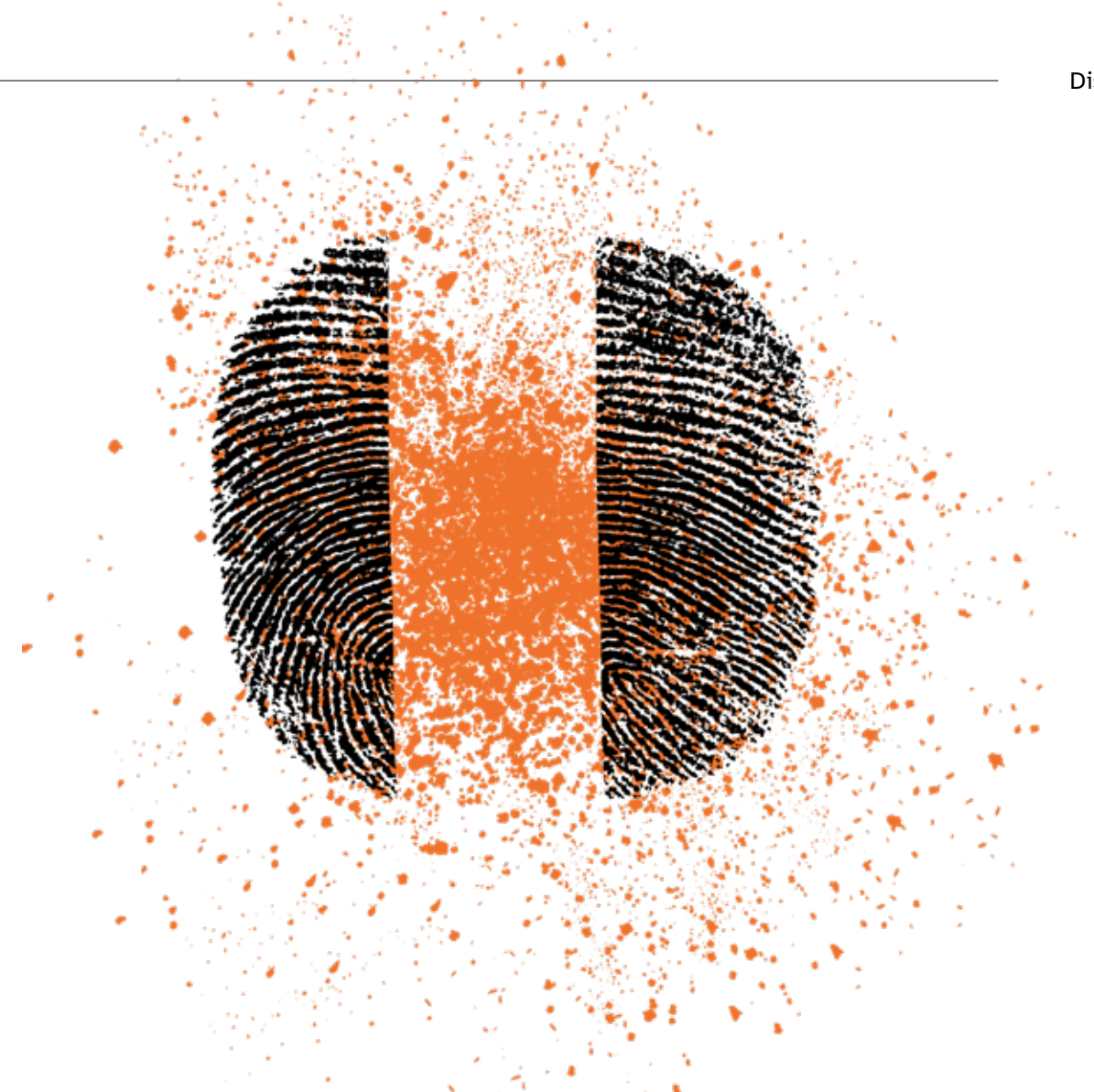
“If you try to report to the police you will think what is going to happen are they going to raid my community or my home.”

Also, believing, perhaps from previous negative experiences, that they will be discriminated against. One interviewee said

“that’s the biggest reason why women don’t report because you see the racism, the sexism, the homophobia.”

Interviews with grassroots organisations suggested that there still remains an overwhelming mistrust of the police amongst vulnerable individuals in Camden.

Yet we can learn from the experience of one young person who spoke about a positive bond she developed with a police officer and her headteacher who guided her that bridging miscommunication and disagreement between institutions and vulnerable individuals could be an area to focus on.



We found out from interviewing grassroots women of colour campaigners that the hostile immigration system perpetuates violence against women of colour.

Migrant women survivors of violence and rape believe they have a right to be in the UK given the historical context of British imperialism resulting in the impoverishment of their country’s resources and the exploitation of their labour.

The Nationality and Borders Bill and Rwanda Refugee policy put forward by the government in 2022 will make everything harder for the most vulnerable in the world to seek refuge and sanctuary in the UK.

The women we spoke to agreed that once they come for the most vulnerable in our society the hostile immigration policies would have a knock-on effect on the wider British society as a whole. **It can be described as a race to the bottom.**

In these women’s consciousness, the UK’s immigration and welfare system perpetuates the violence that many migrant women of colour are trying to flee in the first place.

5.

Systemic violence exists in the lack of education.

We have seen that gaps in the education young people receive from schools, the community and institutions are severely lacking.

From a school point of view, young people spoke of how more could be done to increase the awareness of support services for young people, and how more work can be done to help them process their emotions.

Within the community, youth workers believed more community efforts to provide role models for youth can be done either through youth work (like after-school activities) or community efforts (like “groups of fathers going around schools acting as role models”).

Finally there also is a need to educate young people against the normalisation of sexual violence exacerbated by social media, and also more sexual health support for young people in schools.



In conclusion,

systemic violence exists and impacts the lives of Camden's residents.
It exists in the form of:

**poverty AND discrimination
from society**

**INSTITUTIONS FAILING to provide
SAFE SPACES for women and
young people**

**FINANCIAL STRUGGLES,
pushing many mothers
into SEX WORK**

**THE BARRIERS vulnerable
individuals face with
BUREAUCRACY**

**LACK OF EDUCATION
AGAINST VIOLENCE
for young people**

Short-term recommendations

Institutions, organisations and families should prioritise orientating young girls on about domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, consent, etc, and also encourage them to leave abusive relationships by teaching them necessary steps as well as pointing them to the support available for women and girls.

Workshops

To provide emotional support for young people to share experiences on gender stereotypes and violence among young women. Similar opportunities and spaces should also be created for young men to process their feelings and emotions, challenge existing attitudes and behaviors and build confidence and skills to challenge their peers.

To normalise the conversation around sex and relationships.

To learn how to spot the potential dangers of social media and how to set up effective boundaries to protect minds and bodies.

Training

Train specific staff members regularly on assessing and responding to potentially violent situations.

Provision

Young women of color need culturally appropriate, trauma-informed support in spaces they feel are safe and inclusive, to process their feelings and emotions.

Support schools to bridge young people to local services.

Provide alternative educational courses to avoid total school exclusions.

Financial and welfare support

Raise pay and reduce carers' workload.

Provide benefits and public funds for asylum-seekers that are enough to live on.

Long-term recommendations

Based on our research, we found that violence against women of color is an area that is under-researched based on historical marginalization of Women of Color, and thus warrants more research.

We therefore, call on young people like ourselves as well as organizations, to build on this research work focused on centering women's voices to have more sustainable solutions in our communities.

Outreach and expansion work

Make provision for more youth work across Camden, conduct outreach to the community so young people know about them.

Better connect young people and women of colour to sexual health support and clinics in Camden.

Hiring

Appoint a dedicated policy worker in your own organisation working on violence against women and girls to inform and challenge its own practice and culture

Financial and welfare support

Recognise the great value of unpaid caring work towards humans and the environment by providing income for caring work.

Give money directly to people (unconditional cash transfers, or universal basic income) so people can meet their basic needs.

Change the law

Change immigration laws so that refugees and migrants have access to public funds, and facilitate the reunification of migrant women with their children.

To address how the police handle domestic violence and violence against women and girls in general, our interviewees shared the following recommendations:



“The police should not just separate victims from their violent partners, the abusers also need support and orientation, otherwise they will find a new victim and continue perpetrating violence.

- Youth worker

“Police in schools should build relationships with students and offer safe spaces to discuss the violence they face, rather than criminalise them.

- Suraya



“If they want more victims to report violence, the police should make the ones who have reported get victories.

- woman activist

“Stop victim blaming: stop blaming women who face rape because of their outfits.

- woman activist

Conclusion

Violence against women and girls of colour is primarily a collective responsibility and more needs to be done in Camden to tackle this as a systemic collective effort. It harms them, their family, and their communities. It violates the rights of women of colour, steals their safety, freedom, happiness and fulfilment.

It doesn't have to happen. There are many solutions to violence against women. We can make them work well to protect women of colour from these abuses.

Many women of colour fear for their lives and try to flee, but countless others are forced to stay in abusive relationships for fear of being killed. It is the trusted and stable relationships that those women often build in the community that help them to seek support.

A sense of inherent power perpetuated within our patriarchal society and reinforced by our media and culture are the root causes of interpersonal violence notably between men and women. Power, superiority and control is also

revealed in the violence against children inflicted by parents. Literature by bell hooks labelled this as a form of "terrorism" where young people become emotionally damaged and carry on living as wounded adults perpetrating the same negative patterns they have been subjected on them as young people, into their adult relationships. Education on vulnerability, critical self-reflection and the processing of emotions and feelings is key in addressing some of the traumas inflicted upon our young people.

Our research report also revealed the hardship caused and reinforced by the welfare and immigration policies established by the Home Office, police and criminal justice system towards the most vulnerable people in our society which include women of colour, young people, refugees and asylum-seekers.

The political choice to pursue austerity has closed down many youth services. Many refugees and asylum-seekers do not qualify for public funds, resulting in many living in destitution. The proposed Rwanda Asylum Plan, as well as the Nationality and Borders Bill, are clear evidence of how many obstacles and barriers are increasingly put forward in the lives of people seeking safety and sanctuary in the UK.

The criminalisation of sex work and the lack of direct money and resources being given to those most struggling to survive daily add to this systemic violence.

We started this research report aiming to focus on how violence

against women of colour in Camden would manifest. From our report, we have learnt how education, relationships, safety and security, poverty, institutional failures and environmental and societal pressures all play a role in contributing to this and are therefore areas we can aim to intervene in. We also hope our discussion section exploring the role of systemic violence and other perpetrators of violence within Camden adds a different perspective to this report.

Finally, as co-researchers, we hope that this report has given its readers a deeper insight into how gender-based violence is experienced in Camden. Although we recognise this report has its limitations, we hope this report will benefit our Camden community as a whole.

Support Organisations and Services

Here is a list of organisations that offer support, help and guidance in Camden:

Camden Safety Net (Camden Council)

Camden Safety Net is an independent domestic and dexual violence advisory service that provides services to survivors of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence as well as to children affected by violence.

Website: camden.gov.uk/domestic-violence

Email: Camdensafetynet@camden.gov.uk

Phone: 020 7974 2526



West Hampstead Women's centre

West Hampstead Women's Centre provides information, advice and support for women living in Camden. The daily drop-in crisis intervention service provides immediate support to women with problems concerning domestic violence, advice on healthy living, and more.

Website: whwc.org.uk

Email: info@whwc.org.uk

Phone: 020 7328 7389



Mental health Camden & Solace Women's Aid

Mental health Camden and Solace Women's Aid together offer support for people who have been affected by domestic abuse and who live, work or study in Camden.

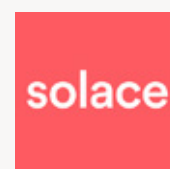
Websites:

mentalhealthcamden.co.uk/problems/domestic-violence

solacewomensaid.org/were-solace

Email: advice@solacewomensaid.org

Phone (helpline): 0808 802 5565



Refuge

Refuge provide support for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

Website: nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Phone (helpline): 0808 2000 247



Hopscotch Women's Center

Hopscotch Women's center offers a series of services for women who are under the influence of inequalities and abuse; and also provide care at home through their Home Care team.

Website: hopscotchuk.org

Phone: 020 7388 8198

Address: 50-52 Hampstead Road, London, NW1 2PY



Women Against Rape (WAR)

Women Against Rape (WAR) offer self-help support services including counselling to Black and immigrant women and other women of colour who are survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and who are asylum seekers fleeing rape and other persecution.

Website: womenagainstrape.net

Email: war@womenagainstrape.net

Phone: 020 7482 2496



Asian Women's Resource Centre

Asian Women's Resource Centre offer emergency advice at any time during opening hours and holistic services including counselling, advocacy, support groups, information and advice on welfare rights and domestic violence.

Website: asianwomencentre.org.uk

Email: asianwomencentre@aol.com

Phone: 0808 169 4455



Bloom (by Chayn)

Bloom is a service run by Chayn, offering free courses for women facing violence.

Website: bloom.chayn.co



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Take Back The Power is a youth-led social action project in The Winch. We address injustice and inequality in Camden, through research, knowledge sharing and campaigning.

We believe we all have a collective responsibility to one another, and together we can build a more just and equitable world for all.



Shout Out. Speak Up. Be Outspoken.

📷 *takebackthepowerldn*

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