



ASIAN FAMILY COUNSELLING SERVICE

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ASIAN FAMILY COUNSELLING SERVICE

2007/8 has been another successful year for the Asian Family Counselling Service. We have seen all our activities expand, especially our referral base and outreach into the community. In this, our 24th year of operation, AFCS as a voluntary organization, has been increasingly in demand in every aspect of our operations.

REFERRAL BASE

Initially our referrals came from doctors, solicitors, social workers and lawyers but increasingly we receive referrals from a number of statutory and voluntary organisations such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Immigration Services, National Missing Persons Helpline, the Police Federation, the Department of Health, the local Primary Care Trust and Mental Health Resource Centres, Social Services, and voluntary sector organisations.

CLIENT BASE

Although the clients we have seen at the counselling service are mainly of Asian origin, we have also seen some couples who have partners who are not Asian. There are many issues which arise in mixed marriages and coming to an independent agency can help resolve these.

A trend that is on the increase is the number of marriages being arranged via the internet. Now there are many sites on the internet offering this service and this is beginning to revolutionize the way marriages are arranged in the Asian community. In the past marriages were arranged through the parents' social networks. As people get busier, they do not have a wide enough social circle and so are increasingly



looking to the net to assist them in arranging their children's marriages. Since the parents are, in the main, not computer literate, they are dependent on their children to surf the net. This will no doubt increase the choices for the younger generation and give them access to many more prospective partners across the globe.

FAMILIES

Families are another area of our referral base. This has, in the main, consisted of families with communication problems between generations with different expectations of parents and young adults and young people feeling they need 'space' and the elders not quite understanding this need. Families have come seeking counselling when one member of the family group is showing signs of the stresses and conflicts which belong to the entire family and AFCS has provided a calm and effective space for contemplation, reflection and eventually restoration.

Families disrupted as a result of war and civil disturbance have sought counselling. The tragic separation of members of the family and difficulties of settling after traumatic events, have presented us with challenges, thus leading us to combine the inner world of the client with the outer world where the counselling becomes a compass for navigating the future.

WOMEN

Domestic violence remains a huge problem. We remain committed to providing counselling to perpetrator as well as victim of domestic violence. In the past, a lot of women put up with unhappy marriages, as they were told by their parents that they had no choice but to remain in the marriage. Second generation Asian women are better educated and more assertive. Now they know they have a choice and are therefore not



so accepting of their situation and are ready to seek help outside of the traditional extended family.

Voluntary organisations like AFCS are playing an increasing role in the provision of counselling within the community. There is a gap in the statutory counselling services and AFCS fills that gap. There is a need for an organisation that understands the cultural and family beliefs of our community. As we provide counselling in several languages we reach a large section that would otherwise not be able to access counselling.

MEN

When AFCS was set up, over 90% of our clients were women. This has slowly changed over the past 25 years and now more men are willing to come for counselling. It is not seen as a soft option any longer and they are motivated to getting their relationships right and some even admit that they may have overlooked the signs of stress within their relationships. This is a step forward as the men also take responsibility in the breakdown of the relationships.

CHILDREN

But now even the children who are born and raised in the UK feel more comfortable accessing our services. They have grown up here and have a fairly Westernised outlook and this creates problems between the generations. Our service helps to bridge this gap between the generations and enables the two parties to understand each other better.

We are also getting referrals from children who feel their parents would benefit from relationship counselling. In a recent case a 71 year old Asian woman was referred by her son, because he wanted her to get help as he had witnessed his father physically abusing her. He wanted AFCS to



work with her so as to enable her to gain some autonomy so she could find the courage to leave her husband and go to live with the son.

COUPLES

Addressing couple and relationship matters lies at the heart of AFCS's work. The recurring themes are – lack of communication, and the difficulties of living within extended families. Above all, couples have sought counselling over issues related to parenting children in a culture other than their own.

ABANDONED SPOUSES

We are still working with abandoned spouses, especially women who have no recourse to public funds. These cases are particularly hard to deal with as we have to find families who are willing to take in these women and support them emotionally, physically and financially. The Home Office has become very strict and in one of the cases that we have dealt with since August 2007, the Home Office turned down the clients' application to extend her visa to continue to fight her case in the family courts. This is most unsatisfactory and caused the client and her child (with whom she now has established contact) a lot of emotional stress. The case went to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal and supported by AFCS the client and gave evidence and supporting statements. We hope that it becomes common practice that that if the case is still continuing in the family courts, the client should be allowed to stay at least till that case is decided.

GROUPS

AFCS has run two theme based groups in the past year. These have been for those clients who had completed their individual or couple



counselling and had similar kinds of issues. Being part of the group enables them to develop a self help support system and those women who had been isolated before, develop new friendships and support each other outside the group. Their network helps them to find childcare, doing school runs and sometimes preparing meals for each other, in times of sickness.

The postnatal depression group is in its sixth year. It was held every Tuesday between 9.30 - 11.30 am at the Golf Links Estate in Southall. Complementary therapies continue to be provided for the women in the group and they continue to support each other outside of this group. Research shows that positive intervention at an early stage is not only likely to benefit the mother-child relationship, but also the whole family. Creating a supportive alliance can lessen the longer term impact of depression on the family and help to prevent a repeating cycle of relationship breakdown.

In this year we have started a cookery group in response to a need that had been previously identified by our counsellors. Many of the younger couples work long hours and some of the men had no cookery skills whatsoever. This had become a problem in their marriages as there were constant arguments as to who would cook the meals. We decided to run a group for couples in how to cook healthy meals in a short time. This has been very successful. We will run another one depending on need in the next year. A cookery club is also held for depressed and isolated women. They meet every week term time to get together, cook healthy meals and learn different recipes from each other.

CLIENT ISSUES

Depression remains one of the most common psychological problems, affecting nearly everyone either through personal experience or through



depression in a close family member. Many of our clients are depressed because they are isolated and do not have the same sort of community backup as on the Indian subcontinent. This is further compounded by the fact that many of the women do not speak English and are not able to seek appropriate help. AFCS fills that gap in the statutory services offering counselling in 5 different Asian languages.

AFCS is continuing to provide counselling and support to victims of forced marriages. AFCS has links with the police force and their help is invaluable when we need to rescue someone who has been locked in her home or is about to be taken abroad. AFCS believes that it has an important role in helping victims to avoid forced marriages and, in case they have been unfortunate enough to become a victim, for their rehabilitation. This requires effective collaboration between various agencies such as refuges, lawyers, the Foreign Office and the police. Finding a safe place for the victims is always difficult, as there are few refuges and the demand for places is much greater.

Among the types of issues we have encountered are:

- Depression
- Suicidal feelings
- Abandoned spouses
- Arranged marriages
- Domestic violence
- Emotional abuse
- Forced marriages
- Para - suicide
- Adultery
- Generation and cultural gap
- Premarital counselling
- Mixed marriages



- Conciliation
- Young women who want to leave home
- Incest and sexual abuse
- Self harm
- Post natal depression
- Mediation
- Bereavement
- Personality clashes
- Debt problems

OUTREACH

AFCS has worked closely with Ealing Primary Care Trust (PCT) in the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) since September 2007. It is one of the two voluntary organisations chosen by the PCT to be part of this scheme. Ealing was one of the pilot sites but because of its success it has now become an expansion site. We are proud of being part of this service. AFCS also provides a satellite service at the Southall Day Centre, a centre for elderly Asians. This is to ensure that our service is accessible to all sections of the Asian community.

MEETINGS & SEMINARS

AFCS is committed to work in partnership with other organisations. To this end it attends many meetings – both at the local and national level. AFCS is also committed to providing training and running workshops on various Inter-cultural therapy topics. We have run the following 5 workshops jointly with Nafsiyat Intercultural Therapy Centre:

1. What is Inter-cultural therapy?
2. Psychotherapy for Diaspora Patients: A bi-cultural agenda for therapists and patients.



3. Suicide and self-harm in young women of South Asian origin: Epidemiological and Clinical perspectives
4. Understanding Attachment
5. Psychoanalysis and Culture: A personal Journey by Sudhir Kakar

The need for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is being increasingly emphasized. During the course of the year we have offered our counsellors a number of CPD opportunities. Along with Nafsiyat AFCS organized a major conference on the 16th of September 2008. It was very successful with 140 people attending it. Due to the excellent response we are hoping to make this a regular event, funding permitting.

MEDIA

AFCS has continued to publicize its services through leaflets and posters, being part of radio/TV interviews, as well as newspaper and magazine articles. We have been consulted by agony aunts on various newspapers such as The Sun, The Daily Mail to check before replying to Asian reader's problems and then published our details for further help and support. As a result we have been contacted by many clients through these sources.

AFCS is also used as a resource by the media to comment on topical issues. We have been regularly contacted by TV, Radio and newspapers and magazines inviting comment on issues of interest to the Asian community, or sometimes, to provide clients who are willing to talk about their particular problems anonymously.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

AFCS has achieved level 2 of the PQASSO quality assurance system and hopes to achieve level 3 in the current year. This work has highlighted



the areas where the organisation needed to improve and the management committee has taken appropriate action.

PARTNERSHIP WITH VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

The strength of AFCS's partnership with other organisations has seen expansion in our presence at the Southall Day Centre which has facilities for the elderly as well as with Nafsiyat for training purposes as mentioned above. We also make referrals to other organisations, when the client needs a different service, such as help with an immigration matter, or drug and alcohol dependency etc. As AFCS is becoming better known, it has seen a rise in telephone counselling with clients from areas other than London underlying our status as a national organisation. Once again it brings home the fact that there are very few counselling services available to the Asian community. Although telephone counselling cannot replace face to face counselling it is being used as an effective method of making our services available to all parts of the United Kingdom. Very often this is the only option available to the Asian communities.

FUTURE PLANS

What has made this year special is the leap that we have made in partnership with Nafsiyat Intercultural Therapy Centre which has propelled AFCS further into the fields of training and provided a platform for intercultural issues in therapy. We have, finally, been successful in finding funding from the Department of Children, Schools and Families to open a branch in the West Midlands area. This is an exciting opportunity for AFCS. We have many referrals from the West Midlands area and by providing a service locally in Birmingham, the clients now can get face to face counselling rather than telephone counselling. Once



this branch is well established we will be looking to open an office in another area with a high Asian population.

FUNDING

Funding for the forthcoming years remains a priority. AFCS will continue to apply for further funding to ensure it continues to provide an appropriate service for the Asian community.

Our thanks go to the Department of Health, Department for Children Schools and Families, and Ealing Council/Ealing Primary Care Trust for supporting AFCS. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Management Committee, staff and volunteers for their continued help and support without whom it would be impossible to provide the service.

Kulbir Randhawa

Director



FEEDBACK FROM CLIENTS

I am grateful for this service. The fact that AFCS is not funded by us (i.e. that we do not have to pay fees) means that there is no additional agenda!

It is really a pleasant service. I felt most comfortable and my problems were easily resolved.

Helpful. Useful – allowed me to analyse my problem well

Since counselling I have felt more positive about my life and future. It has given me back my confidence and I feel much better with myself

The counsellor was very good, understanding and experienced. She was able to empathize with my problems. Receptionist was very polite.

Excellent, helped me more than I could have ever possibly imagined with the problems in my life. I can't thank them enough

Always seen on time. Happy with the service and will come back if I need to.

I would like to thank the counsellor for helping me through my depression.



Enquiries and Referrals

Total Enquiries: 1846

New Clients: 328

Breakdown:

Marital Cases 242

Family Cases 11

Single Men/Women 75

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

Actual counselling hours or contact with clients:

Counselling sessions (old, new & group) 2086 hours

Telephone counselling 473 hours

Supervision/Case Notes/Admin 1043 hours

Meetings/Training/Talks to other groups 265 hours



ASIAN FAMILY COUNSELLING SERVICE

Its objectives:

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

Trustees

Mrs Rani Atma - Chairperson
Ms Rashida Punja - Vice Chair
Mrs Veena Kapila - Treasurer
Mrs Nina Toller - Secretary
Mrs Susan Needham
Mrs Kamaljit Gill (left September 2007)

Employees

Ms Kulbir Randhawa - Director/Counsellor
Mrs Gopi Aswani - Senior Counsellor/Group Facilitator
Ms Rahat Sheikh - Senior Counsellor
Ms Kirti Chopra - Counsellor
Ms Trinder Jaspal - Counsellor
Ms Rita Mangat - Administrator/Receptionist
Mrs Donata Fernandes - Quality Assurance Officer
Mr Jacek Opienski - Supervisor
Mrs Shahnaz Shafique - Reflexologist/Aromatherapist

Names and address of our Auditors:

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169 - 170 High Street
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Name and address of our Bank:

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