Hate Crime & the Needs of the Somali Community in Southwark

A Community Focus Group
Introduction

Community Southwark is the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in the London Borough of Southwark. Social Action is a priority for Community Southwark, and through its Community Action Network (SouthwarkCAN) programme, it aims to ensure that:

* Residents have increased opportunities to make connections with others in their local communities;
* Residents have opportunities to take part in social action; and
* Residents are more enabled to share their views on their local community.

Community Southwark is engaging with people from seldom-heard communities within Southwark to ensure that we can find ways to listen to and support people who face barriers to being active in their communities. We are hosting a series of on-going focus groups with a diverse range of people from seldom-heard communities to gain an insight into issues that matter to people in these communities and, where necessary, to find ways of providing information and connections to services that could be of use to these individuals.

*Seldom heard group* is a term that refers to under-represented people who use or might potentially use social services and who are less likely to be heard by social service professionals and decision-makers. For this report, we are extending the definition to healthcare and welfare services within the umbrella of the Third Sector.

In conducting this research project, Community Southwark has partnered with Somalia Integration and Development Association (SIDA), a Southwark based organisation that seeks to support the needs of the Somali community by:

- helping new migrants to adjust to life in the UK;
- helping them to understand the legal, business and social systems in their local area and;
- bridging the gap between Somalis and other established communities within Southwark.

The purpose of conducting social action research is to engage local community members who are affected by a particular issue, in this case hate crime, and assist them in finding community based solutions. Effectively, the research subjects become co-researchers, as they are invested in the topic under study.

This project will allow Community Southwark to gain understanding of the needs of the Somali community in Southwark, whilst assisting SIDA to increase their own knowledge of the needs of their proposed target users, and begin a conversation on the solutions that can be devised from within the Somali community. A significant portion of the focus group focused on hate crime and how it is experienced by Somali women in Southwark.

Following the result of the European Referendum in June 2016, it was reported that there was a significant increase in hate crime. Figures suggested that hate crime levels were still 14% higher in September 2016 than September 2015, three months after the Referendum, engagement with community leaders suggested that this figure was an underrepresentation
of reality in Southwark. Current hate crime levels will be included in the next section of this report.

SouthwarkCAN will provide support with next steps and recommendations, and facilitate connections groups and individuals that may be able to promote social action.

**Overview of Attendees**

The focus group was held on Wednesday 22nd March 2017 at the SIDA offices in Camberwell. In total, 10 people attended the focus group.

**Age Range:** All attendees were aged between 25-64.

**Gender:** All of the attendees were female.

**Introductions**

**What is a hate crime?**

According to the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service) and ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers), Hate Crime is defined as:

"Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person’s race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by a hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender."

*Any incident, which may or may not constitute a criminal offence, which is perceived by the victim or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate.*

Data from Hate Crime and Policing section on the London Assembly website shows that from June 2016-June 17, there had been a total of 727 hate crime incidents. They can be broken up into the following strands:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hate Crime Type</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racist</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamophobic</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Semitic</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(It is important to remember that there may be double counting within the figures. Therefore, Islamophobic hate crime figures may be included in the figures for Faith. Any figures of less than ten have been rounded up to zero)
Opening Questions

a. What do you feel are the key issues for Somalis currently living in Southwark?

Discrimination and Perceptions of division in the Somali community

Racial and religious discrimination were noted as some of the most pressing issues for the Somali community in Southwark. All the attendees stated that they had been victim to an incident that they would describe as a hate crime, knew someone who had been a victim, and had themselves have been verbally abused due to their perceived religion.

‘Being told things like ‘Go back home, you don’t belong here.’

‘The F word… go back to your country.’

One of the attendees discussed ‘tribalism’, which was described as discrimination based on the tribe, or clan, that an individual represents. There are around seven main Somali clans with several smaller minority clans and sub-clans. The diversity of the distinct groups within the Somali community was described as something to celebrate. The concept of tribalism being perpetuated by politicians in Somalia for their own gain was noted as a concern for attendees’ families in Somalia.

For most of the attendees, the tribe of their lineage wasn’t a source of conflict, but allowed for a greater understanding of their genealogy, history and identity. One attendee reported that Somalis in this country tend to get along, and that the issues of tribalism don’t affect them as much. Another stated that whilst tribalism hasn’t been a significant issue, and was followed on by further comments on the unity of the Somali community in Southwark.

It was noted by one attendee that despite the divisions of tribalism back home, Somalis in Southwark are united and have no issues with people from other clans. More so, they acknowledge their heritage, but do not use this as a means of isolating and discriminating against other groups.

Community Leadership

It was acknowledged that whilst there are opportunities for Somalis to achieve academic and employment successes, there is a need for members of the Somali community to be more visible, rather than relying on several members of the community to represent them in civic society. Some of the attendees remarked that there is a need for training with Somali women to address their isolation for what is traditionally seen as a ‘male environment’, to recognise their contribution to their community, and understand how to make those changes.

Language Barriers

During the focus group, the majority of the attendees required assistance with English-Somali translation. This was stated as something that is more of an issue for 1st generation Somalis, or those who are part of the older Somali community. Poor English skills and/or a lack of confidence in the language were described [for many years] as an issue preventing seldom heard communities from being able to access appropriate education, healthcare and welfare services. A plethora of reasons were given for why the language barrier was described as a ‘long-running issue’. One main issue was the close connectivity of the Somali community. For some of the attendees, this connection meant that it limited the need to have to deal with and
communicate others from outside the community. It was also noted that this can be a limiting factor in an individual's personal attainment.

Theme 1: The current picture on Hate Crime

When the attendees were asked what their networks believed a hate crime constituted, they stated that the people in their networks defined it in the same way that the attendees had. Having stated that they had been to a community meeting led by the council regarding hate crime, this suggests the need for further and continued discussions with community leaders and residents about the definitions of hate crime, how communities affected by hate crime understand it, tangible methods of effective reporting and finding ways to combat it.

After being given the full definition of a hate crime as defined by Southwark Council, the attendees were surprised by the scope of the definition. One of the attendees was surprised that the definition relies on perception of the motivation behind the incident, and that if someone other than the victim perceived an incident to be a hate crime, that individual’s position is validated.

All of the attendees stated that they believed the current Metropolitan Police figures on reported hate crime to be an inaccurate picture of the level of hate crime incidents experienced by residents in the borough. When asked of the extent they thought that the figures were inaccurate, the attendees responded that whilst they were unable to place a numerical value or range to this, for a considerable proportion of Somalis, religious and racial discrimination was a part of everyday life, and for some, an expectation of living in Southwark.

All the attendees stated that the number of hate crime incidents that they had individually been victim to had increased during the period leading to and nearly a year after the European Referendum vote in June 2016. Whilst all the attendees knew that hate crime incidents were wrong, for some, it was accepted as part of life in Southwark, and in the UK. Some of the attendees stated that they had come from much harsher environments, and had life experiences worse than the incidents that some of them stated they faced daily. For others, this behaviour was perceived as being a part of the culture of Britain, and from certain sects of the community.

‘Someone in a good job, with an understanding of diversity… It should not happen.’

Some people, they are not bad, but they come from bad homes.

Others, they do it, because they are bad, and they are racist.

During the focus group, many of the attendees gave recent examples of hate crime incidents they had been victim to with the previous 12 months. They included being spat on, verbally abused, the threat of physical abuse, vehicular damage, and attempted GBH / murder.

‘I was travelling from East London and he was trying to take me out. He damaged the side of my car.’
Several of the attendees were perturbed that there is a growing number of people of Caribbean descent who are now targeting them.

Before, it was only the whites who used to attack, now we are finding that it is more black people doing it. Most of the black people who abuse us are from Jamaican or Caribbean backgrounds. It is never Africans or Muslims. The whites are there, and the Jamaicans are joining in.

**Theme 2: Community Understanding**

**Hate Crime Reporting**

The official guidance on reporting a hate crime states that the affected party should contact the police. All the attendees were aware of this, stating that in the event of a present hate crime incident, an individual should contact the police. They were not aware of other methods of reporting, such as informing their local Safer Neighbourhood Board, or connecting to community organisations that would be able to forward on reports of hate crime incidents to relevant police and council departments.

Most of the attendees were apprehensive about contacting the police.

*Our people do not report things to the police.*

Some attendees didn’t believe they would be taken seriously by the police when reporting a hate crime incident. Others were so distrustful of the police that they refused to contact them, for fear that they would end up being the recipient of a hate through the process, with the police as the perpetrator.

*‘We don’t like to involve the police, there isn’t that trust between us and the police. If we get involved, what will be the outcome?’*

*‘When you call the police, they are supposed to try to help to you!’*

None of the attendees felt confident in the process of reporting hate crime incidents. One reason given by the attendees was that none of them had seen any successful arrests or prosecutions of perpetrator of a hate crime. It was made clear that whilst this may not be the case, as success has not been promoted and advertised, it can only be assumed that this hasn't occurred.

Some of the attendees stated that they had reported incidents of hate crime in the past, but were not satisfied with the reporting process.

*‘If you report hate crime to police, maybe something will happen, but only if you push it through with them.’*

Most of the attendees felt that solving and preventing hate crime or finding perpetrators didn’t list as priorities for the police. Some stated that they felt the Somali community was unfairly targeted by the police using mechanisms such as stop and search.
'Talking to some mothers, I found that around Old Kent Road, when the police see that someone is Somali, they stop and search them. I've heard a lot of parents complaining.

There are good and bad people everywhere. Not everyone who is growing up around there is going to be in a gang or related to a gang. As soon as they see a few Somalis together, they label them as a gang.'

When asked who the parents were complaining to, the answer given was ‘within the Somali community’. This suggests that there is barrier or difficulty in raising concerns outside of the Somali community, and to an extent, their peer groups within their community. This suggests the need for interventions that target confidence building, and provide support to help them feel more enabled to voice their concerns about their local community. The inability to do this was linked to a poor grasp of aural, verbal and written English language.

There has been an issue in the past with a few young people, smoking something that they shouldn’t be. That isn’t happening now, but it seems to me that there are some people that have dramaticised what has actually happened for their own benefit. These are not Somalis…

The attendees suggested that whilst there is work being done to support the community, this work is often viewed with distrust within the Somali community. Concern was expressed that there are community initiatives that could provide support to the Somali community, that are not promoted effectively. This included information on leadership training, employment support and improving English language skills.

**Community Safety**

Overall, the attendees stated that they felt relatively safe in the Borough of Southwark. When asked if there were any areas in the borough of Southwark that made them feel unsafe, a plethora of answers were given. All the attendees acknowledged that they lived in areas that may be seen by others as been unsafe. These were noted as wards within Camberwell and Peckham. Some of the attendees stated that they wouldn’t feel comfortable visiting these areas, however, this was due to the historical reputation of the area, rather than actual incidents that had happened recently.

As women, the attendees felt that they were more vulnerable than men to actions that would compromise their safety.

‘I feel safe nowhere in the borough, especially Peckham’

**Public Services**

Overall, the attendees said that they valued the public services such as the police, health and welfare services, but also noted instances within these settings where they had experienced discrimination. One attendee stated that it made her feel unsafe and unsecure upon hearing how others in her community were being treated.

Several of the attendees referred to the way that they were treated by local healthcare professionals.
‘I was asking for vitamins for my daughter. My doctor said ‘Instead of looking for vitamins for your daughter, she doesn’t need it. Use the money to send back to your people back home.’ Now what does he mean?’

‘I visited my GP and I was shocked when he came up to me and said, ‘When are you going back to your home country? After the appointment, he sent me to another doctor, and he also asked me, ‘When are you going back home to your country’. This was before Brexit.’

In both of the scenarios given, the attendees stated that the healthcare professionals were white. It surprised the individuals that as professionals, they would make comments that would be considered offensive.

None of the attendees stated that they had made any complaints against any of the staff. When this point was explored further, they stated that they did not have the confidence to pursue the issue any further, and that they didn’t want to pursue an issue that they felt was unwinnable, or risk being exposed to further incidents of discriminatory behaviour as a result of pursing a complaint. A lack of confidence in spoken and written English was stated as being the main barrier to feeling capable of pursuing a formal complaint.

One of the attendees referenced an incident where her child was accosted by another in primary, and told that ‘You are the ISIS’.

My child was in school, and another child came up to her and said, ‘You are from ISIS’ My daughter has never heard that word before in her life. She came and then asked me, ‘What is ISIS’.

The mother stated that she felt very comfortable reporting to the school, and addressing the staff, and the other child’s mother, but also noted that some other mothers who didn’t have a good grasp of English would have felt intimidated in that situation. The attendees then discussed how the child would have heard and understood the term ‘ISIS’, and felt comfortable using it to address another.

Some people, they only see us properly on TV and think that all Muslims are the same, or that when you wear a hijab, you are a threat, and that is not the case.

Further discussion enabled some of the attendees to explain that they are unable to put their trust in any systems other than their own community circles for advice, information and support. When asked why some of them were willing to accept and normalise incidents that may be considered discriminatory, one attendee responded:

‘I expect it, but if person is not educated, and only knows what he hears, I can accept that. Those who are professional and in good jobs, I don’t’. They must have received some equality and diversity training so that this wouldn’t happen.

Summary of Findings
• There was a lack of awareness of the definition of hate crime.
• There is a perceived lack of female Somali community leaders. Support to increase numbers may help them feel more empowered to voice their needs and relevant concerns for their community.
• Further engagement with Somali community members, rather than community leaders, will allow great insight into the needs of the Somali community and how best they can be supported.
• Somali women report being subject to discriminatory practices across a range of public services.
• Language barriers can play a significant role in them directly addressing discrimination.
• There are problems with members of the Somali community not feeling comfortable in engaging with statutory services.

Next Steps and Recommendation

It was noted during the focus group that there are organisations who have set up initiatives where their service users can report incidents of hate crime to them. This is something that could be replicated by SIDA. As a next step, Community Southwark will now be working with SIDA to develop a hate crime reporting system that enables members of the Somali community who do not feel comfortable engaging with the police.

SIDA would then connect to relevant police and council departments of the police and Southwark. This would allow a conversation to develop concerning how the Somali community experiences hate crime, and help contribute to provide a clear, ‘truer’ picture of the actual number of hate incidents that occur in the borough, and hold these authorities to account for the follow-ups.

One suggestion made to assist the Somali community with recording the details could involve the use of smart phones. On most smart phones, there is a voice recorder facility. Individuals could record their account of the incident on their phones using this app, and could then forward/share this information with SIDA. An effective monitoring system would need to be in place to ensure that the information relayed is accurate, and record within an appropriate window of time after the incident has taken place.

Connecting with police and other bodies to find solutions entails a significant amount of trust that these establishments are committed to reducing racial, faith, or Islamophobic discrimination. Support is therefore required to build better relationships between the Somali community, police, healthcare and other bodies to enable Somali women to feel confident that they can access services without the fear of having a negative experience. Additionally, if they do have a negative experience, this support could enable them to feel confident in using their voice to address undue practices.