

# Parental mental health and child welfare network

## Workshop 7

What are the particular issues for black and minority ethnic parents with mental health problems and their children?

Leader: Julianna Frederick

**The importance of considering the following issues in practice was emphasised:**

- Person-centred approaches to supporting parents with mental health needs. The emphasis was on the importance of building trusting relationships between Mental Health (MH) staff and the people who use the service.
- For numerous reasons, such as fear, ignorance and spiritual beliefs, the stigma of MH in black and ethnic minority communities may be greater and this can result in lack of support from family members.
- There may be many children living with mentally ill parents who have not been identified. Increased awareness of the effects on children may help with identification.
- Providing appropriate information for parents with mental health problems and their children: for example, the whereabouts and well-being of family members following a crisis, what support services are available, who to contact in a crisis.
- Support for children, recognition of their needs and their anxieties about their parents.
- Ensuring the safety of children is a responsibility for all workers involved. No worker should make assumptions that children are being safeguarded. Checks should be incorporated into working practice and

protocols should be in place about who should link with who.

- Children know their parents well and are often able to identify triggers to mental ill health.
- Children may not trust MH workers enough to enable them to help, children may be more likely to talk to voluntary sector staff.
- Hospital staff should be aware that other MH patients can have a negative impact on children who are visiting their parents.

#### **Issues raised by practitioners:**

- In response to calls about raising awareness one delegate said that this was not the problem. Social workers in both MH and Children and Family teams were aware of the issues but too busy to do their jobs as well as they would like. Moving from one crisis to the next, the ability of social workers to follow up crisis work with good practice is limited.
- The amount of time taken up arguing over eligibility, funding and boundaries could be put to better use. These barriers need to be broken down.

#### **Suggestions for improvement:**

- CMHT and Children and Family staff should provide awareness training for each other.
- Routinely offering carers' assessments to children.
- Ensuring children are included in discussions and decision making.
- 'Skilling up' all front line staff to identify issues for black and ethnic minority people with mental illness so that appropriate referrals can be made at an early stage.
- Family (systemic) approaches to providing MH services, for example, North Essex practice 'Family Group Conferencing'
- Preventative work to stop young carers ending up as service users.
- Non MH workers in each locality should be identified to work with children.
- Child friendly visiting rooms should be provided in hospitals.

- 'Skilling up' teachers to identify children who may be facing problems at home. Ensuring that signs such as behaviour problems or self-harm are appropriately identified and causes investigated.
- Ensuring that people from black and ethnic minority communities are offered culturally appropriate services.