



COVID 19 AND IMPACT ON BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Key Issues Facing Single-Parent Families in Black Communities During COVID 19 Pandemic

**AFRUCA Briefing Paper 1: COVID 19 Series
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About AFRUCA

AFRUCA – Safeguarding Children is a national charity with offices in London and Manchester working to address child protection issues in Black and minority communities in the UK. We provide prevention and early intervention services to address child abuse issues, working with families and communities. We also provide educational services, working with practitioners in different fields to improve their skills and enable better intervention in families.

Since the onset of COVID 19, AFRUCA has experienced increased referrals into our child protection early intervention services from local authorities across the country. This shows an increasing number of children referred into the care system due to a variety of safeguarding reasons.

Our Child Protection and Social Work service aims to help reduce the number of children from BME communities in the child protection and foster care system. We provide a tailor made, culturally appropriate, intensive one to one training and support service for parents in the child protection system. We work objectively with families, ensuring parents receive new skills so they can provide a positive home environment for their children, free from abuse, exploitation and harm.

AFRUCA has developed a set of briefing documents to help draw attention to the range of child protection issues exacerbated by COVID and the impact on children in Black and other minority communities.

This short briefing paper explores some of the key issues impacting on single parent families during COVID 19 lockdown, with instances drawn from community intelligence, AFRUCA case work, media reports and other sources.

A version of this paper was presented to the Manchester City Council Children and Young People's Board meeting on 8 July 2020.

Introduction

COVID 19 has had significant impact on the UK Black community in many ways. Many families have lost their source of income, due to the prolonged lockdown, while others have experienced a reduction in income. Families with no recourse to public funds have experienced exceptional hardship as the usual sources of help and support, including faith organisations, food banks and others were closed during this period. Single parent families, in particular suffered significantly due to lack of social networks, reduced income as well as

We have identified below some of the different ways single parents families known to AFRUCA and our partners have been impacted by COVID 19.

2. How COVID Has Affected Single Parent Families

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, AFRUCA has recorded an increase in referrals into our child protection support service from local authorities across the country - with others on our waiting list. We are recruiting additional staff to help address the high demand for our service during this period.
- About 90% of AFRUCA cases are domestic violence and physical chastisement related with resultant effect on the emotional and mental health and well-being of the children in affected families. Majority of our COVID cases involve single mothers. It appears that parenting single handedly during the crisis has led to an increase in the abuse of children.

Parents are stressed, due to:

- Lack of finance – Job losses put pressure on parents who are unable to meet the day-to-day needs of their children. The provision of food vouchers by some local authorities is helpful but non-food item purchases are difficult.
- Job loss is rampant as many ethnic minority individuals work in sectors that were closed due to the pandemic (retail, restaurants, hotels and so on). Results are the inability to meet the costs of housing, pay bills and undertake other financial responsibilities.
- Pressure from COVID – 19 lockdown is a source of anxiety and worry for many parents – especially because of the long duration and uncertainty regarding when this would end and how long children would be at home. Now that we

are coming out of the lockdown, there are fears of a second wave and the impact on children's schooling.

- Some parents are unable to return to work now that the lock-down is easing due to fear of children going to school as they are unsure of safety and risks to health (parents who have ongoing medical conditions).
- Having to spend very long hours within close proximity of the children, with no respite especially in small accommodation creates conflict and confrontations between parents and children.
- Some parents are at a loss on how to engage the children on daily basis during the lock-down. As children are stuck endlessly indoors, many parents do not know how to divert and entertain them, especially when children are of different ages and require different approaches.
- Children of parents with disability are doubly affected with no access to help, support and respite – and the fear of contracting COVID due to their vulnerable physical health.
- Some parents' have difficulty controlling teenage children who are leaving the home during the lock-down
- Lack of support network. Many single parent house-holds are very isolated with no help and support network to rely on. There are mental health implications of this on mothers and children.
- Where parents fell ill with COVID 19, children were left to care for them, (before hospital transfers) placing enormous burden on the children.
- Additional pressure on parents with "No Recourse to Public Funds" in relation to survival and food purchases. While some parents received food packages from charitable organisations, most of the time these are not food they would normally eat (for cultural, religious or health reasons).
- Increasing conflict between parents and teenage children, leading to parental abuse in some cases. These forms of abuses include mainly verbal abuse, shouting, threatening, intimidating behaviour.
- Challenge: how to address these issues in the event of a second and future waves of COVID.

3. Impact On Families

The above and other issues have resulted in many children living in poverty and deprivation during the lockdown. Children and parents are experiencing mental health problems due to the prolonged impact of staying at home and additional hardship due to financial difficulties. Asylum seeking families with no recourse to public funds who are in the process of finalising their immigration documents have been left in limbo as

the immigration courts are largely comatose – compounding the mental health of many parents and their children.

4. Supporting Families During COVID

Arrangements to extend the nation-wide Voucher Scheme up to after the school holidays welcome by AFRUCA as it would provide many single parents with some respite. However, there were concerns that some parents may not be aware of how to register for the scheme.

We are aware of many Black led charities providing door-to-door food delivery services during COVID. This role was very valuable and really helped many families to cope during this difficult period.

As part of our child protection support service, families referred to AFRUCA received intensive one-to-one positive parenting courses to help them address challenges in parenting and prevent children ending up in long term foster care.

With some of our unrestricted grants, we were able to provide a small number of our service users with small cash grants to enable them make essential non-food purchases, especially as required by the children.

AFRUCA also started to deliver a series of child protection community webinars on social media using ZOOM and Facebook Live. This was to provide continuous education to parents about child protection issues they were likely to encounter during COVID and how to address these.

We are aware that other charities provided mental health psychotherapy for families during this period, although there seemed to be a dearth of provision. We hope to be able to expand our support service to cover mental health support for both children and their families, in the case of a second wave of the pandemic.

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