



Spotlight #4: Episode 4

Podcast transcript

Interview with Jasvinder Sanghera and Priya Manora, from Karma Nirvana

Key:

I = Interviewer

JS = Jasvinder Sanghera

PM = Priya Manora

s.l. = sounds like

I: So, Priya, you are the Manager of the National Support Line for Karma Nirvana. Can you tell me a bit about yourself, what led you to do this work and how long you have been doing it for?

PM: I have been with Karma Nirvana since 2009; I started off as a volunteer myself and the thing that brought me to Karma Nirvana was in fact Jasvinder's book "Shame". So I had read that as a university student, read it in a day, could not put it down and then just decided that from there I wanted to help and Karma Nirvana had a training programme in 2009 and funnily enough I had graduated that year, so I came on to the volunteer programme and then when a job opportunity came up I applied and I started as a senior call handler, so that was me then working on the Helpline and that was seven years ago and then I have just developed from there into the role of the Helpline Manager. I still get to take calls and support victims and survivors and professionals on the Helpline. So that is really how I came about at Karma Nirvana and where I am now.

I: Great. Can you tell me a bit about the support line? Who is it for?

PM: Sure. The Helpline runs seven days a week now but Monday to Friday it runs 9 o'clock in the morning until 9 pm at night and then on Saturday and Sunday we are here from 10 until 4. So we support anybody, men, women and children who may be affected by forced marriage and honour abuse. Our call handlers are all trained to provide practical and emotional support to victims and survivors. What we do also get, as you will have heard, Jasvinder said 42% of our calls are from professionals. So the call handlers are not only just supporting, they are trained to support victims and survivors, they are also trained to support those professionals as well. That can range from police officers to social workers to teachers and health professionals, and what we will do is we will provide emotional support, we will provide practical support, we will provide advocacy and signpost people as well on to other services.

I: Great. So she said you have been with the organisation for seven years, is that what you said?

PM: That is right yes nearly seven years; it will be seven years coming up.

I: How have you seen the support line change over those years, what has changed?

PM: It has changed incredibly, massively changed. So when I first started at Karma Nirvana I was the only call handler and one of my colleagues who worked part-time and we now have nine call handlers and there is myself as well; so there are 10 Helpline staff members. So that is an indication of how it has really grown. What we have seen is that there is a pattern in 2013 where it really spiked and we saw an increase in calls and we were at the time going out and doing road shows, so those were half day presentations, multi-agency presentations and often the police would help us to organise that and we would invite health professionals, teachers, social workers etc. to that event; also people from the voluntary sector, professionals in the voluntary sector as well. From there the awareness increased and we saw that impact on the Helpline; those professionals that attended those roadshows, they would tell other colleagues and that was where we saw a spike and then we have just seen it increased from then and also with our out-of-hours service that started last August 2016, we've now seen an increase in those calls in the evenings; we were seeing that there was that need on an evening and a weekend so we managed to secure some funding thankfully for that service and now we are able to respond to those calls that come through which are usually crisis calls that we find on an evening and weekend. So you have women or men alike who have just turned up to the police stations and the police will be calling us saying where can we put this person for the night, they have fled the family and are going to be forced to marry. We have a 16 year old girl who has ran away from her family, fled the home, because she was at risk of honour-based abuse and at risk of being taken abroad to married and she's been taken to a women's refuge for her own safety but she's now feeling isolated. So we are there for those people and they are the sort of calls we find are coming through during the evening and weekend.

I: It sounds like a high-pressure job to have to know what to do in that moment of crisis.

PM: Absolutely it is. We provide training to all the staff on the Helpline; they do a fantastic job and it is great because all the call handlers do debriefing with one another during the day and we will talk about the sort of calls we have had but they know that they have a support network of senior call handlers and myself as well. So we will talk to each other about things that come through and help each other through those things and we come up with solutions together really about what we can do but make sure everybody is okay and they have switched off and left things in the office before they head off because it definitely is a high-pressured job and you do not know what you are going to pick up on the phone that is the thing; you could have just a general enquiry from a professional or it could be somebody in a crisis situation who is at immediate risk, who is unsafe in their house and needs to get out.

It's very rewarding though and I have to say from my six years that I was on the Helpline taking those calls directly myself; every day was different but every day you would walk away and feel like you have made a difference, you have helped somebody.

I: Over those years have you seen the need the individuals that you have supported change at all? Talking both about the victims and survivors but also the needs of professionals when it comes to development or awareness?

PM: Well in terms of victims it very much is the same sort of things in terms of wanting to get out or wanting that advocacy support and with professionals what we are finding is that there is that need for that awareness, that training and that education. We are still finding today that professionals do not know what the statutory guidance is, albeit that

has been around since 2007 – I'm just echoing really what Jasvinder said because this is what we hear from professionals on the Helpline; we will be telling them it's a criminal offence now or there are civil orders that could protect somebody that is going to be forced to marry and the statutory guidance has been out since 2007. We have call handlers who have this document saved to their desk top because we send it out so much every week to social workers, to police officers and that literally is, as Jasvinder said, they've got a tool box and that is a fantastic tool because it tells you what you should and should not be doing within that document, within that guidance when you have a disclosure of a forced marriage. So I would really encourage professionals to contact us and we can send it to you but it is there, it is on the Government's website on the Forced Marriage Section of the Direct Gov website – this multi-agency statutory guidance. Read that and that will educate you in terms of how to respond to these victims.

JS: If I may just come in on the needs of survivors changing. One of the things that we have clearly ensured is that we give voice to the experience of the victims and survivors since '93 to date and one of the pressing needs that Karma Nirvana have noticed is that when that person leaves there is no support for them at all. Okay you can place somebody to a refuge and the journey starts there. We are talking about a victim who is fleeing multiple perpetrators, who is more than likely going to ostracised by their family and disowned as I was and then having to live a life completely on their own; very often on the run; having to change their identity to be safe, missing their families terribly and there is no connection and their identities are completely fractured. The pressure to go back to their family is always high because they are missing them. If that missing consumes them they will go back. The family will promise them everything and they'll go back. Just little pieces of their family; they do not get birthday cards, they have nobody to celebrate Eid, Diwali or Christmas with them anymore; they've just been cast out.

So what we know is that is a huge void and we've been developing the survivor ambassador programme within Karma Nirvana for the last four years. We are launching it on June the 19th at the House of Lords and this is the vision to develop a survivor ambassador network so that they have a membership network that they can tap into to feel part of something in their isolation. So we will do things like send them newsletters of the great success stories of survivors who are making it every single day and coming out the other end, who has graduated, who has had kids albeit without their family. We also send them birthday cards, cards at that time of the year when you are missing your family more, so they are able to tap into it.

Alongside that we are launching the survivor ambassador website and also we are encouraging the greater visibility of survivors because any victim of any form of abuse feels alone and isolated and very often you think it is only happening to you. What is important is to hear about the empowerments of other survivors because that will speak to the victim who is thinking about that decision and also it will speak to that person who has left and is rebuilding their life.

So that is a need that has clearly come out of our work because as we increase reporting and we encourage survivors to leave abuse there is another journey and we have to recognise that that journey needs support. So on the Helpline also, Priya, I know that you will get survivors calling in for emotional support around those sorts of times in their life.

PM: Absolutely. As I was saying in the evenings and weekends we have certainly seen those things because they do not have the support, for example if they are in a refuge, but just generally when victims leave it is a really difficult time, it is just a start of the journey and that is why we are always encouraging victims and survivors on the Helpline. We provide ongoing support because we know that it is going to be a

journey and everybody's journey is different and they will all develop at different stages; they have all had different experiences; they are all individuals but we are there to support them because often they do not have anybody and it is letting them know that you're not alone; albeit in a professional capacity we are just at the other end of the phone and often when they do feel that isolated or that alone they do, as Jasvinder said, start having thoughts about wanting to return and often that can be the most dangerous thing for them but if they do not have anybody around they think well they have just come from one situation that they did not feel comfortable in or they were not safe or they were at risk, to just another situation where they are not happy.

I: It doesn't sound like much of a choice really; you chose to be completely ostracised and alone and scared with no support or you choose to be forced into a situation, and neither sound like a choice.

JS: Our victims are incredibly vulnerable because they have never been allowed to integrate, have independence, freedom of thought. So all of a sudden they are in the real world, quite naïve and vulnerable. How do you manage freedom, how do you manage living a life without on a system and all those rebuilding your belief and value systems and attracting unsavoury characters, they can be targeted for sexual exploitation, desperate for healthy relationships, a relationship, never having a model of a relationship and a bit of attention.

The Survivor Ambassador Programme has got to be that space for those individuals to tap into. I'm really excited about it and it has directly come out of the need and hoping the membership would develop through the support of organisations and through the Helpline as well where survivors will be encouraged to become part of that. Actually I've never had a birthday card from one member of my family since I was 16 years old. I gave birth to three children and no mother was there. I've grandchildren now. When my daughter married there was no family there.

So at those times you feel it. I am 52 this year; I'm still a survivor on that journey; I am human so at the end of the day it is important for survivors to recognise it is a shared journey but it is one you can overcome and this is what the programme will do.

I: It sounds like an amazing programme.

JS: Hmm we are excited.

I: Yes that sounds good. The other question I had is that I was thinking about how the needs of survivors change over time. I recently met with Dr Sundari Anitha and she talks about a newly recognised form of abuse; it is around transnational marriage abandonment and how she thinks it is one that has developed in response to DV concession, perpetrator using new means of controlling, coercing and isolating their partners, especially when they want to leave that relationship. Is that something you have seen as a newly recognised form of abuse, one that has already been there for a long time?

PM: I think we have been dealing with it for quite a few years and I think it maybe that there have probably been people, before the Helpline, when the project had just started, when the charity had just started but somethings certainly that on the Helpline we never provided training around; we are a UK-based charity but then we are getting calls from women who arrive in the UK or men alike who have been sponsored into country as somebody's husband or wife and then experience that abuse from there. There is domestic abuse within that but there is also honour-based abuse not just from the in-laws but often we will have women saying to us that if I go back, I do not want to be with this man and I could get a divorce but if I go back then I am risk and I will either be forced to marry somebody else, I will be killed in many cases. So we have seen

that over the last I would say six or seven years, certainly since I have been with Karma Nirvana.

We used to have [s.l. *Sugena 00:14:52*] project when I first started and then that merged into the DV concession which we have now.

JS: I think men actually, Priya. We've not spoken about men and we do support men.

PM: I mentioned in my introduction that we would support anybody but yes I think it is certainly an important one because we do support men and we are seeing an increase in calls from men; we went from 14% to 17% and now we are on 24% of calls from men and we would strongly encourage men to come forward because they are affected; it's not an issue which is judged on gender, it can affect anybody and we know that when men contact us they will feel things like should I really be contacting, I am man, should I just be getting on with it. As I am sure for other types of abuses as well, we hear that men have the same feelings and feel the same way but we would encourage men to contact us because they are victims and they deserve that support equally and all our Helpline staff as I said are trained to provide that support.

There are specific services for men as well such as, we have women's refuges, there are refuges for men. We support many men to leave those situations safely. It may be that they have been forced to marry and they have returned back to the UK and been forced to marry abroad and they want to leave because they do not feel safe because the additional pressure on returning is you have to sponsor your wife to this country; you have to have family with this person and it is nothing they want; they have not consented to any of this. So we may help to move to safer accommodation. They may not want to sponsor that person over to this country; we will help them around their feelings of being a reluctant sponsor and providing emotional support, if they need the advocacy support to go to the police or whatever it might be, they have the access and the same support and we support anybody in that way.

I: **That is really good to know. Thank you very much for having me come to your office and meet with you and talking to me. It has been really interesting.**