Reducing offending within BAME and Muslim communities
Foreword from General Secretary of National Association of Probation Officers (Napo)

It’s a huge privilege to be able to write the foreword on what is a seminal piece of research by Arooj as there has been a significant lack of attention to these important issues over many years. Napo has proudly championed anti-discrimination and high quality professional practice in the justice sector for over a hundred years and we welcome this vital work.

It has long being recognised that there is disproportionate representation of Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) people in the justice system, as evidenced in the recent publication of the Lammy Report. BAME prisoners are less likely to find employment both inside and outside of prison and are less likely to participate in offender behaviour programmes. However, to date we have had little understanding as to why this is happening or how to effectively address re-offending rates within BAME communities.

This research is critical in understanding key issues:

- What leads to BAME people re-offending?
- What is their experience and views of the services on offer?
- What are the consequences of offending on their families and communities?
- What support do they need to desist from offending?

Whilst it has long been evidenced that family relationships are vital to desistance, we have to now look at that in a different context for different communities. One key issue identified in this paper is the lack of knowledge that Muslim families and communities have of the justice system and how it works. This needs to be addressed and organisations working with Muslim offenders need to recognise that their own lack of knowledge can seriously hinder the positive effects of rehabilitation.

This research could fundamentally change the way that the justice system works with Muslim offenders which in turn will have a positive impact in terms of community relations, wider society and the economy.

Ian Lawrence
Napo General Secretary
October 2017
BAME & Muslim Communities and the Criminal Justice System (CJS)

According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, there is now a greater disproportionality in the number of black people in prisons in the UK than in the United States. ¹

It is well known amongst those working in or with an interest in the CJS that people from BAME (Black Asian Minority Ethnic) communities are over-represented at almost all stages of the criminal justice process.

However, despite their over-representation within the CJS, BAME and Muslim Offenders/Ex-offenders are in fact, under-represented in the uptake of most services that provide help and support to address behaviour that leads to or reduces offending.

We undertook this research to find out from BAME and Muslim ex-offenders who have been in contact with Arooj since release about what issues led them to offending; what their experiences and views were about services; the consequences of their offending upon their family and community; what help and support they needed in order for them not to re-offend and achieve a life free from crime in the future.

Below are a few facts:

**Startling prison population statistics**

- 26% of Prisoners are BAME compared to only 14% in the National Population
- 14% of Prisoners are Muslim compared to only 4% in the National Population
- Muslim prisoners have doubled since 2002
- BAME women offenders have been increasing in the past few years

(The most recent statistics are represented here in Box 1).²

### Box 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Prison Population</th>
<th>% pt change on 2002</th>
<th>% general population aged 15+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>40,919</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>-9.5%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>12,825</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>+7.5%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>+0.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>+0.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>1,529</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>+1.2%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>+0.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>25,749</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>-0.9%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,547</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>+1.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not received</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>+0.1%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>84,307</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources**: MOJ, Offender Management Statistics Quartely, July To September 2016, 26 January 2017; NOMIS, Census 2011

¹ Prison Reform Trust website, available at: http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/ProjectsResearch/Race

WHY WAS THIS RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN?

BAME individuals are:

- more likely to be imprisoned
- imprisoned for longer than white British people
- have negative perceptions and experiences of life in prison
- disproportionately targeted by the police

Young People

- 37% (560) of BAME children were in the secure estate facilities in 2012 (Young Offender Institutions, Secure Children’s Homes and Secure Training Centres)
- Between October 2011 and 2012 the overall number of children in custody decreased by 21% but the number of BAME children increased by 3%.
- The UK Muslim population is young, made up of 50% under the age of 25.

Concerns

- According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, there is now greater disproportionality in the number of black people in prisons in the UK than in the United States.
- This is a real concern as these levels have been reached in the UK within only a few decades.
- This highlights an urgent need for action to address this disproportionality by all organisations working within Social and Criminal Justice Services.

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4 In 2017 this has risen to 41%, see: BTEG (2016) The Young Review Update Available online at: http://www.bteg.co.uk/content/young-review-updates
According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, there is now greater disproportionality in the number of black people in prisons in the UK than in the United States.
ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This report highlights key findings from research undertaken by Arooj into the personal experiences and views of BAME and Muslim Ex-offenders during prison and resettlement.

115 ex-offenders completed a questionnaire about:

- What issues led them to offending
- The consequences of their offending
- Impact upon families, relationships and health
- The role of the family and specialist Support Services
FUNDING BODIES

A rise in numbers of BAME prisoners means a rise in numbers of those who need support for rehabilitation and re-settlement.

To tackle this, it is essential that funding bodies and commissioners work with and support BAME voluntary & community organisations and utilise their knowledge & experience.

Harnessing the experience, understanding and knowledge that reside in BAME organisations is crucial in supporting offenders to desist both ‘through the gate’ and upon release from prison. 5

Findings

• 90% said that there was the need for a Befriending and Mentoring support service both inside prison and in particular upon release.

• Of these respondents nearly two thirds (62%) said that they would be less likely to re-offend, if they had such support.

5 This was also stated in the TR agenda document, Transforming Rehabilitation: A Revolution in the Way We Manage Offenders MoJ, 2013: p. 14.

ROLE OF THE FAMILIES

Our research reveals that it makes sense to support ex-offenders and their families both on the inside and after release; enabling families to support rehabilitation.

Families know the offender well and are often prepared to go the extra mile to help them turn their life around.

Families can play a crucial role in helping offender’s leave crime behind.

Findings

• 65% feel they have lost respect within the family and community.

• 86% of the respondents reported their imprisonment has had a major impact on their family.

• 56% have had no contact with their children.

• 70% stated family support could have prevented re-offending.

• 86% of the respondents stated their relationships with their parents or partner has been seriously affected.

AROOJ IS A REGISTERED CHARITY WORKING WITH BAME (BLACK ASIAN MINORITY ETHNIC) OFFENDERS, EX-OFFENDERS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO GIVE SUPPORT, BOTH IN CUSTODY AND AFTER RELEASE
HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

The cost to the NHS in relation to health related problems is considerable and increasing (£Million’s). It will keep increasing unless families have support for their own health and wellbeing in the rehabilitation process.

Findings

• 43% have developed health problems.

• 65% stated that their parents or partners have developed health related problems as a result of their imprisonment.

• 89% of the respondents in our research thought that the misuse of drugs and alcohol was a problem within Muslim communities.

• 29% of respondents thought that there was a drugs/alcohol misuse problem among Muslim Offenders in Prisons.

• 30% required help to stop drugs and alcohol.

• Nearly half said their families have lost respect in the community which is also leading to health and mental stress related issues.

• 39% respondents stated that they would be less likely re-offend, if their families had a greater understanding of the Criminal Justice System, drugs misuse and crime.
63% of the offenders were unemployed before offending

50% of all respondents had financial problems

30% were involved in drug and alcohol misuse

37% were influenced by their peers to commit a crime

94% are very concerned about their future as a result of their imprisonment

65% feel they have lost respect within the family and community.

86% of the respondents reported their imprisonment has had a major impact on their family

43% have developed health problems

56% have had no contact with their children

70% stated family support could have prevented re-offending

66% having employment (self-employment) would stop them from re-offending

30% required help to stop drugs and alcohol

36% stated that specialist cultural and religious support would help them to stay out of trouble

90% of the respondents stated that there is an urgent need for a befriending and mentoring support service both inside prison and particular upon release. Of these respondents nearly two thirds (62%) stated that they would have used the service.

65% stated that their parents or partners have developed health related problems as a result of their imprisonment

Nearly half of the respondents said their families have lost respect in the community which is also leading to health and mental stress related issues

86% of the respondents stated their relationships with their parents or partner has been seriously affected

39% respondents stated that they would less likely re-offend, If their families had a greater understanding of the Criminal Justice System, drugs misuse and crime
There are a very high proportion of BAME and Muslim offenders within CJS. Their experiences and perceptions of prison life are negative at the least.

Very little, or no, support is provided on the outside.

In promoting sustained desistance from crime, Culture and Faith has a key role.

To ensure a proactive approach in the delivery of criminal justice services Leadership from statutory agencies and funding bodies is essential.

The experience, understanding and knowledge that reside in BAME organisations is crucial in supporting offenders to desist in prison and ‘through the gate’.

Funding bodies must work with BAME organisations to develop holistic approach to provide culturally appropriate support both in and outside prison, in order to prevent and reduce re-offending by increasing family participation, understanding & involvement within the Criminal Justice System.

In 2017 there are more specialist support agencies for BAME and Muslim groups and individuals (e.g., Muslim Youth Helpline and Muslim Hands amongst others).
The experience, understanding and knowledge that reside in BAME organisations is crucial in supporting offenders to desist in prison and ‘through the gate’.
Background

Arooj is a charitable organisation founded in 2007 and was set up to explore the underlying factors behind the disproportional increase in the BAME and Muslim Prison population and to address issues that were faced by them and their communities, during and after their involvement with the criminal justice system (CJS).

Since our formation and subsequent involvement through working with many organisations in the CJS, we are concerned that despite their over-representation within the CJS, BAME offenders/ex-offenders are in fact, under-represented in the uptake of most services that provide help and support to address offending behaviour.

The mainstream CJS organisations have, in the main, not been that successful in increasing the uptake of their services by BAME and Muslim offenders/ex-offenders. In comparison, BAME led third sector organisations, who are able to provide culturally appropriate support and services to cater for the specific needs of BAME and Muslim offenders are better at initial engagement and attracting far greater numbers to their services.

However, due to resource and financial implications, they are limited to what they can really offer in the long term. They also do not have the capacity and/or required expertise to deal with the complex needs of offenders/ex-offenders and their families, such as those affected by substance misuse related issues.

Current

Our main aim is to deliver a holistic & culturally appropriate and specific support service to BAME and Muslim Offenders/ex-offenders and their families; particularly the South Asian and Muslim communities.

We deliver a coherent support package of initiatives aimed at overcoming the barriers faced by them and their families; who can play a crucial role in helping offenders leave crime behind. Families know the offender better than anyone and are often prepared to go the extra mile to help them turn their life around.

We use a holistic approach to provide support, both in and outside prison, in order to prevent and reduce re-offending by increasing family and community understanding and involvement within the Criminal Justice System (CJS).

The emotional and practical support provided by Arooj recognises the importance of understanding each service user’s culture and faith and also the role it can play in desistence from crime.

Arooj is one of a few organisations that:

- Work primarily with South Asian and Muslim offenders/ex-offenders and their families
- Have considerable experience in engaging with and helping to address specific and varied issues they face, both in Prison and Through the Gate.
- Have developed a model of intervention and support, which delivers a culturally sensitive ‘Befriending and Informal Mentoring’ support service during custody and the transition from prison back to society.

To reduce the risk of re-offending, we support Offenders and their families

- Throughout the custodial sentence and during the process of resettlement.
- Provide practical support during the often unsettling and stressful time of returning to life in the community and the difficulties that they may be faced with.

7 The importance of this is acknowledged in the Young Review: “the involvement of ‘representatives from the offenders’ own communities and faiths can play a substantial role in improving... confidence in decision making processes and other procedures” (Mullen, 2014: 12).
As a community-based organisation we utilise our local knowledge and extensive networks to work with BAME and Muslim communities and individuals in many different ways; work in partnership with many local partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors.

**Key objectives**

**Working in partnership with key stakeholders, our key objectives are:**

- To prevent and reduce re-offending among BAME and Muslim communities
- To support BAME offenders & their families during the custodial sentence
- To support the re-entry, resettlement and re-integration of BAME Ex-offenders back into society

**Our goals are:**

- Identify issues that are faced by BAME communities;
- Explore the underlying factors behind the increase in the BAME Prison population
- Working with their families to develop solutions to prevent re-offending
- Provide support to Offenders / ex-offenders to desist from crime or overcome their offending behaviour.