



Promoting Mental Wellbeing

Transcript:

The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Elders in Black and Minority Ethnic Communities:

Promoting Mental Wellbeing

Mrs Mahindru: I feel now I can't go out, I can't do anything. Even now I feel I have the willpower, but sometimes after my cancer then I feel I am going down.

Narrator: Mrs. Mahindru lives in East London, she is at risk of poor mental health as she lives by herself, has little mobility, and is unable to leave her home without help. She is not alone, as Jabeer Butt from the Race Equality Foundation has identified.

Jabeer Butt: We know if you live in a poor area with high crime rates, where some of the services are poor, the likelihood is that your mental wellbeing is going to be poor as well. And we know for minority communities they are likely to live in poorer areas, they are likely to live in areas where services perhaps aren't as good as other areas, they are likely to face more challenges in daily living.

Mental wellbeing could be about feeling happy, but we know happiness can be a transitory thing, and can be easily achieved. Mental wellbeing really, defined properly, would suggest it is about fulfilment, it is about saying that things are good now, but things are also going to be good in the future, and that I have achieved things and that I will achieve things in the future as well.

Narrator: So how can statutory services, and society as a whole, identify and promote mental wellbeing. At the SubCo Centre in Newham, East London, a title referring to the people who come here from the subcontinent they are addressing this issue. Taskin Saleem is its Chief Executive.

Taskin Saleem: One of the biggest factors is isolation, depression and loneliness, because I think there has been lots of expectation around Asian communities that there are a lot of support networks. Yes there is to some extent, but as the needs change, families find it very difficult to support their families appropriately, particularly parents or grandparents.

Narrator: Like similar services, charitable trust SubCo is funded through a variety of means, including local authority assigned personal budgets, health trust and self funding. They recognise how vital early intervention can be.

Taskin Saleem: Our philosophy is that no matter what has happened to you we can still prevent you from deteriorating by looking at things like a healthy lifestyle, what you eat, your exercise programmes, looking at social stimulation and mental wellbeing as well, in terms of what works for you as an individual and preventing you becoming isolated or depressed.

Narrator: Originally from East Africa, Mrs. Mahindru moved to the UK in 1998 after her husband died.

Mrs. Mahindru: I can't get up well, it is very difficult to get up for me, even from the bed so many times at night, it is very difficult, so nobody can help me, nobody can do it for me, this is my own, so I don't complain to anybody.

Taskim Saleem: In the last five years she has had very serious illnesses, particularly she has had cancer twice, and that has actually affected her mobility, and also has led to a lot of depression as well. She has no relatives in this country; when we met with her she had actually become a very closed person, very introverted, and the cancer was something that was always praying on her mind. And the fact is that she was grieving for the loss of things that she used to be able to do. She is a very independent, very strong minded individual.

Narrator: After a neighbour told Mrs. Mahindru about SubCo a social worker arranged a referral.

Shabana Asif: What do you have difficulty with, so we can support you? So if you would just like to tell me what health issues you have?

Mrs. Mahindru: I have so many problems.

Shabana Asif: That's fine, tell me all.

Taskim Saleem: We also undertake our own assessment as well, with our own staff who will then actually do a home visit. There is quite a lot of information that is not completed on an initial assessment form that has been completed by the social worker.

Shabana Asif: Your next of kin details?

Jabeer Butt: There certainly seems to be some evidence that when assessment is taking place the black and minority ethnic older people are less likely to get a service, and also if they do get a service, are more likely to reject it. And it raises the question what is going on there? Is it that their needs are lower and therefore they don't need a service, or is it the case that actually we are not carrying out assessments properly? And I fear it's the latter.

Taskim Saleem: When we go in as SubCo, because the staff member is doing everything, in terms of the language, filling out the forms, trying to understand what the individual needs but also what the carer needs, we actually get a lot more information.

Shabana Asif: So if you go out would you like to meet different people? What would you like?

Mrs. Mahindru: Yeah I would like, I would like ...

Shabana Asif: Making friends?

Mrs. Mahindru: Yeah.

Shabana Asif: We also have massage sessions twice a week.

Mrs. Mahindru: Okay.

Shabana Asif: Do you think it would benefit you, would you like me to put your name down for that?

Mrs. Mahindru: Yeah, please.

Shabana Asif: You would?

Mrs. Mahindru: Yeah.

[Music playing]

Narrator: SubCo have developed a changing programme of activities, centred around what service users ask for, including Bollywood aerobics, Tai Chi and reminiscence days.

Taskim Saleem: Families find it quite hard to take people to places like the seaside or on boat trips, and holidays abroad as well, that is about making sure that people have access to live a normal life, whatever that is. But in terms of wellbeing that means doing the things that you could have done when you were younger, but never got the opportunity to, or that you can do now, you have the finances, but you now need the support of staff to help you to do that.

Narrator: So how has Mrs. Mahindru's sense of wellbeing improved since coming to SubCo?

Taskim Saleem: She is able to reconnect, build up her social networks, do things like Tai Chi, go for a massage, relax, talk to other women, talk to some of the men as well.

Mrs. Mahindru: *So my swelling has gone down, but it's very, very helpful, very, very helpful.*

Narrator: SubCo believe that in order to offer users the service they want, staff have to understand their clients, be culturally sensitive and offer choice, and it is an ethos that drives them.

Taskim Saleem: When we say the Asian community that doesn't mean anything. Asian community is made up of people from the Indo subcontinent, people who have lived in East Africa, loads and loads of dialects, language, gender, we have to look at how we can compliment that with the staffing, and with volunteers that come in as well. So it is important that we have that mix so people can communicate, because if you can't communicate it is not very good for your wellbeing overall.

Male Speaker: *We love you too as well, okay.*

Jabeer Butt: It is important for us to recognise it is not just social care practitioners that need to be involved in promoting positive mental wellbeing, it is actually something that needs to happen across the community. So, for instance, reducing crime can actually make older people feel safer, and if they feel safer the likelihood is that they are going to be more active and do things. And I think this is where social care practitioners can do something about the partnerships they establish, to actually promote the wellbeing of older people.

It is not just about working with the health service, it is perhaps also working with police and with leisure services, with housing services, because all these things are part of creating an environment where black and minority ethnic older people are actually feeling positive about their local community, and are able to have actually a positive sense of their own wellbeing.

Narrator: SubCo think it is vital that individuals with personal budgets, and social workers, are made aware of their services, and can easily access them. Users can then make informed choices about the best services for them.

Jabeer Butt: Prevention we know works, and not only does it work, it works in a way that is really important, because that is actually cheaper than actually doing the other work, which is about dealing with things when they have fallen apart. If we are able to support prevention it is likely that older people are going to be able to look after themselves better and be able to lead their lives more successfully without much more intervention from social care practitioners.

Taskim Saleem: They go away feeling better in themselves, I think. From coming in the morning you can actually see by the time they go home there is a change, they feel like they have done something useful, they have talked to individuals, they have socialised, they feel a lot better within themselves.

Mrs. Mahindru: I wait the whole week, now Thursday comes and I can go to the SubCo, Saturday comes then I go to the SubCo. Then in when the evening comes I relax, because the whole day I spend there I feel light. If I go to the SubCo I feel my family is there.

I am coming now, it is finished, okay thank you, bye-bye.

[End of Recording]