Casework guidelines for racist harassment support projects

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CONTENTS

Preface

1. Aims and objectives of casework
   1.1 Non-judgemental approach
   1.2 Focus of a dedicated agency
   1.3 Promoting rights
   1.4 Signposting
   1.5 Emotional support
   1.6 Advocacy
   1.7 Accessibility
   1.8 After-care
   1.9 Validation
   1.10 Reducing and preventing racist harassment

2. Client pathways to casework
   2.1 Referrals
   2.2 Direct contact
   2.3 Publicity

3. The casework process
   3.1 Referral and contact
   3.2 Collecting information from the client
   3.3 How to collect data
   3.4 Using databases
   3.5 Confidentiality
   3.6 Security
   3.7 Support packs
   3.8 Counselling
   3.9 Closing a case

4. Supporting caseworker and their projects
   4.1 Reducing caseload and increasing caseworkers
   4.2 Funding and facilities
   4.3 Partnership agencies
Preface

These guidelines are adapted from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s 2003 research report “Racist harassment support projects: their role, impact and potential” by Kusminder Chahal. As a result of this research he is currently writing a comprehensive Racial Harassment Casework Manual, planned for late 2004. The Ahmed Iqbal Race Relations Education Trust is also developing a racial harassment caseworker network. For further information contact Kusminder Chahal on 0161 275 2920 or email kushchahal@aol.com.

The following casework guidance and suggestions are based on interviews with clients, caseworkers and managers from eight racist harassment support projects. The projects are:

Birmingham Partnership against Racial Harassment (BPARH)
Birmingham Racial Attacks Monitoring Unit (BRAMU)
Justice for Victims Racial Harassment Project in Newcastle (INSAAF)
Leeds Racial Harassment Project (LRHP)
Newham Monitoring Project (NMP)
Racial Awareness Helpline in Wales (RA)
Racist harassment support group in Newcastle (RHSGW)
Support Against Racist Incidents (SARI)

Case studies of these support projects are provided in full on RaceActionNet.

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1. Aims and objectives of casework

Introduction
The key aim of all casework is to provide assistance, support and empowerment to victims of racist harassment. Casework undertaken by an independent support group is seen as having the impact of ‘adding more weight to a complaint from a victim’ and this results in ‘other organisations responding to our service user needs more effectively’ (caseworker).

Part of the consequence of casework and the resolution of the complaint includes perpetrators being charged with a racially aggravated offence. This has the effect of highlighting that ‘agencies are taking the problem seriously’ (caseworker). Projects offer their clients support through the complaint process and attend court with witnesses.

A by-product of successful casework is the recognition that an increase in caseloads has direct implications on funding and staffing. Some projects have also seen more positive engagement from the minority ethnic community as a result of the work both the projects and caseworkers undertake. For example, BRAMU mentioned that a strength of casework is that local people are more likely to refer clients and participate in public meetings that result in a genuine partnership between the community and the project.

Empowerment is a key theme that emerges from the interviews with people who have used support services. It is about partnership working between the caseworker and the client, and it exhibits itself in a variety of ways as the following suggests. The key elements to emerge from the research are: non-judgmental work; the focus of a dedicated agency; promoting rights; signposting clients to relevant agencies; emotional support; advocacy; accessibility; after-care; validation and reducing and preventing racist harassment.

1.1 Non-judgmental approach
Caseworkers often deal with clients who come from many diverse ethnic backgrounds and who have a range of experiences of racist harassment and discrimination. Clients entering the service and seeking help require an environment where they can be assured of an empathetic and non-judgmental hearing of their experiences and how they want to proceed with a complaint:

“SARI understood what I was saying. Me being white, I thought SARI was for blacks and Asians and I thought, ‘they are not going to listen to me’ but they did. They don’t judge you like the guy at the council did because I was white.”

“They were very non-judgemental about the fact that I was complaining about black colleagues. They took my view and accepted it.”

“I could tell they understood what I was saying, they were very human.”
1.2 Focus of a dedicated agency
The expectation from victims is that they are believed, that they can validate their experience and be listened to, and that they can receive a response. This does not always happen when victims of racist harassment complain to agencies like police, housing or even a school:

“In 1996 my husband’s nose was broken in an attack by one of the perpetrators. Children have smashed our windows and the police say they cannot do anything because they are under age.”

“… she was only my housing officer for a matter of about six weeks after I first notified them before she moved on and they didn’t replace her straightaway, so every time I went to the council to say ‘this is what’s happened since, this is what has happened now’, I would have to speak to a different housing officer, so there was no continuity whatsoever. That was a big frustration that, every time I went in there to complain or tell them about something, I’d have to start right from the beginning and it was draining. I can’t say that housing were brilliant because there was lack of continuity and that’s the most that you need at that time is continuous understanding and support from beginning to end.”

Continuity was offered by support projects:

“I had a caseworker but even if she was not available they [the project] knew about my case.”

Agencies by virtue of their position often respond in a fragmented way to victims. Support projects, however, have caseworkers whose primary role is to work with victims of racist harassment and offer them ‘continuous understanding and support’. It is this level of intense intervention and casework experience that sets support projects apart from other agencies where complaints can be made to:

“She [caseworker] gave me the impression she knew what she was talking about. She knew how I felt, you know, what prejudice is like, you know, how much it pains. It was the first time I felt somebody was listening, somebody that was taking it in.”

“They were different to the police, there was just a different understanding in that they were dealing with cases like this every single day and so the understanding that was there took on a different level because there was the compassion. The police probably come across racial harassment in dribs and drabs.”
Dealing with cases of racist harassment on a daily basis and supporting clients gives support projects the ability to become experts at managing the complaints they receive in a sensitive and empathetic manner. This is a primary function of the caseworker. They exclusively represent the client of their service and not another agency or individuals. The function of agencies such as the police and housing is different because they have other general duties and organisational constraints. For example, a housing agency will always have to consider the needs and accounts of perpetrators who are tenants.

1.3 Promoting rights
Support projects and their caseworkers have learnt that they cannot always solve the problem that clients may be experiencing. However, they can better equip them with information about what to do and what questions to ask when dealing with other agencies or furthering a complaint. This was illustrated through frequent references to the rights of those who had experienced racist harassment:

“But you know, not once, I’ve been thinking about it since, not once has anybody sat down and said to me, well these are your rights. But BRAMU told me. I’ve taken notice of everything they told me.”

“Once the NMP got involved we have learned about our rights – the police would say we cannot do this or that – NMP said they were wrong. The NMP gave us the right information for us.”

The focus on rights is a response from support projects who have seen or been told by their clients how their rights have been abused. This is a key reason why some projects have published cards that offer information on people’s rights if they are arrested or experience racist harassment.

1.4 Signposting
Support projects will signpost their clients to relevant agencies:

“They were very helpful. The first time I spoke to her [caseworker] she immediately put me in touch with a solicitor and suggested other contacts.”

Providing appropriate information to clients about who else could help them empowers those people to make informed decisions about what they want to do and raises their awareness about what is expected from other agencies.
1.5 Emotional support
Support projects and caseworkers aim to empower their clients to be able to advocate for themselves. However, at the first point of contact with a client, caseworkers often have to deal with the emotional consequences of racist harassment and in many cases the lack of action/understanding from other agencies:

“I knew that I was just very unhappy, very concerned for my kids, very stressed out and not at all well so I couldn’t have done all of that fighting on my own. They did all the fighting for me to get what I needed at that time and to have someone, you know, the police couldn’t have done it, housing couldn’t have done it. So, you know, they are an organisation that is extremely valued just for that.”

“The worker saw how depressed my mum was and how her health deteriorated because of the harassment but they picked her up and talked to her on a one-to-one basis and in Punjabi as well. The project is really friendly and understanding.”

“I feel there is someone who takes care of me in this particular case, the police can’t do everything, they can’t rebuild your confidence.”

“She just rang because the last time I had spoken to her I was very upset down the phone. They really helped because it was support, you know, I have got friends but it was like she was there, looking out for me.”

1.6 Advocacy
Caseworkers often have to act as advocates for the client. Again, because of the nature of the work the projects undertake, they are in a unique position to offer knowledge and information, and respond to the needs of the client:

“They knew the organisations to contact, they knew what kind of support I needed. I didn’t know at that stage what kind of support was even on offer let alone what I needed.”

“He [the caseworker] did everything for me. He communicated with the Asylum Seeker Support Unit, with Victim Support and a counsellor. He tried to communicate with so many people and helped to rehouse me.”

Clients entering a support project usually get the time and space to tell their story, are listened to and are asked what they want to see happen and what they would like from the project. In this sense, the caseworker begins to share the burden of their experience and can begin to develop a plan of action that is clearly communicated and agreed with the client they are representing.
1.7 Accessibility
Many of the people interviewed talked about how they felt confident that they could ring the support project and get a response or some action relating to their complaint:

“They said I could ring them when I wanted to. I can remember her [the caseworker] ringing me on a Sunday.”

“We have the confidence to know that we can ring 24 hours and we have never been let down.”

The level of reassurance and support that projects provide enables clients to feel confident in pursuing their complaint and challenging the behaviour of the perpetrators:

“Anytime we wanted her [the caseworker] to come she would, even the day before court she came and I said ‘just go through the notes with me’ and she did that.”

“What they actually did was good, I think they actually built more confidence in us. And they actually told us like, you know, these people can’t get away with it. We basically had to make a stand and I think they helped us do that.”

1.8 After-care
Projects will not close a case without either the permission of the client or after a time lapse if there has been no contact made with the project by the client. Some of the projects (where appropriate) will also keep both clients and ex-clients informed of annual general meetings:

“Somebody rang from the project and asked if I was okay after I moved into the new house. He said I could ring anytime there was a problem and asked if it was okay to close my file – they asked my permission to close my file.”

As a consequence of such close contact with clients and ex-clients, it has been known for clients to offer their services as volunteers or join the management committee of a project. Thus, the expertise gathered as a client is put back into the project to help others.

1.9 Validation
Projects provide a range of services, one of which is defined as ‘offering support’. In the interviews with clients and ex-clients of the projects, support was mentioned on numerous occasions. Support is often less about receiving information or advice than about being listened to and heard, and about having an experience validated:
“It was nice to have that support if you like. It was nice to have somebody to listen and not butt in and tell me ‘No, no that’s not right’, you know, and actually giving me an unbiased view if you like. They listened to me whether I was the one that was telling the truth or not. It wasn’t an issue at that point. They were just listening to me and seeing what I had to say.”

Validation of an experience is crucial to the relationship that develops between a client(s) and the project. Although the projects cannot always help to resolve the problem of racist victimization that the individual or family may be experiencing, the relationship that develops between the two parties is often based on the client knowing that they are believed and understood – that they have a valid claim or grievance.

### 1.10 Reducing and preventing racist harassment

Even though, in many of the interviews, it was clear that the racist harassment was continuing and caseworkers felt that they only ‘apply sticking plasters after the event’, the projects still had an important role to play with their clients and the local communities:

“We get our strength from the NMP, but we want to see this harassment end. We have done nothing wrong, why should we close our business.”

Caseworkers and management committee members recognise their role is often managing and reducing the problem of racist harassment even though they may not be able to stop it:

“I think we prevent escalation of problems because people can come here and sound off and as their representatives we can go out to represent them. We can go out to the police and try to diffuse tensions and explain how local people are feeling.” (Caseworker)

Support projects facilitate local people and their clients to vent anger. They also work with communities to develop strategies to reduce or prevent racist harassment and make agencies accountable for their actions:

“In terms of the community we have brought a different level of understanding and a way in which communities can organise themselves and take responsibility in their own right for how they will deal with racism and racial harassment. I think the core thing is to say to communities we can work, we can co-operate as partners, we can develop strategies around how the communities address these problems.” (Management committee member)
2. Client pathways to casework

Diagram to show possible client pathways into casework

2.1 Referrals from the reporting agency
2.2 Direct contact from the client
2.3 Publicity through events, campaigns, or friends

Casework process begins

Introduction
In the process of help seeking, there is no standard route of entry to the projects. Access varies depending on the types of knowledge and information available at a formal and informal level. The formal routes to projects are direct referral from an agency to a project or relevant contact information given to the potential client. The informal route can range from recommendations by friends, family and strangers or the victim finding the support project ‘by accident’.

2.1 Referrals
How people experiencing racist harassment find the support project can vary. There is no single method of discovering that an organisation exists and can help the complainant with their problem. Although projects advertise their services quite widely, this does not always mean that those needing to access them know about the services. In some cases, the victim comes in contact with a support project because the complaint has been referred directly from a reporting agency that the victim first approached:
“The police were brilliant, absolutely excellent, there is no way I could fault them for what they did and how much support they gave me. They actually put me on to SARI right from the beginning.”

Whether a direct referral is made by an agency to a support project can often depend on the type of relations between the agency and the project. Those support projects that have fostered good working relations with the police and housing tend to receive regular referrals. But such good relations are sometimes very specific to an area housing office, or police divisional area, or with certain officers and are not a guarantee that the client will be given appropriate information from the agency they first approach:

“After two years of incidents we reported it to the police, they said they couldn’t do anything because it wasn’t racial. We went to see a solicitor and he said you will need to get the Racial Board [Leeds Racial Harassment Project] to help. I found their number in the telephone book and when they got involved the police started to get involved.”

2.2 Direct contact

In some situations, the client got in touch with a support project after exhausting their options with the agency they first complained to. Some interviewees suggested they knew a support project existed in their area but chose to access it only after realising that their complaint was not being taken seriously by the statutory agencies first reported to:

“A friend of mine told me about them but I did not go to see them until I had a support pack from the council and there was a card in the pack. I rang them [the support project] because the man in the council was not listening to me.”

In many cases, knowing that the local project was involved often compelled local agencies to take action where before they had ignored the clients’ complaint.

Information that a racist harassment support project exists can come from a variety of sources and situations. For example:
“It was my mum that gave me the number of the support group.”

“I was suspended from my work and so I started going on courses to pass the time and at a course icebreaker I mentioned the problems I was having as a reason for being on the training. Someone said I should go to an organisation called BRAMU.”

“I saw a sign of SARI and I went in and told them what was happening.”

2.3 Publicity
Sometimes, people find out about the existence of a support project through publicity relating to its activities in a local area:

“In 1996 I had heard about a demonstration the NMP were organising in the paper. I got in touch with them and since 1996 they have been involved and responded to the police’s lack of action.”

Most support projects get involved in local events to advertise their project to local people. This can include health fairs, summer events in local parks, campaigns against injustice and public demonstrations that often attract media attention. All of these are used as vehicles to raise awareness of the existence of a project in its local area and the services it offers.

People who may be in need of support projects do not always know they exist. Such projects, unlike services like the police, a housing office or a chemist, are sometimes revealed to people in need only when they are needed – they do not form part of the mental mapping of services and resources that are available to people experiencing a problem:

“I have lived in this area, near BRAMU, all my life, yet I have never heard of them.”

“The police asked me if I had contacted them [the support project], I said no. Do you realise they existed? I said no.”
3. The Casework process

*Diagram to show the casework process*

3.1 Referral and contact with the client

3.2 Collecting information

- 3.3 How to collect data
- 3.4 Using a database
- 3.5 Confidentiality

3.6 Security equipment

3.7 Support packs

3.8 Counselling

Special services for clients

3.9 Closing the case
3.1 Referral and contact
A case most often enters a project through two sources – self referral or through an agency. The nature of the referral dictates the type of initial response from the caseworker. The project will usually arrange a visit with the client: some by writing a letter to the client asking them to get in touch, others – if they have telephone details – by ringing to arrange an appointment and decide whether a home visit or contact at the project office is preferred. Standard practice is that caseworkers aim to meet their clients within seven to 14 days of receiving the complaint, although immediate contact can be arranged depending on the nature and severity of the case. More often than not the letter that is sent out to the victim is in English with some explanatory information about the project.

Racist Harassment Support Group in Newcastle (RHSGW) describes its initial response as follows:

“Casework referrals are given immediate priority. Each time a referral is received from an agency or an individual, RHSG (West) writes to the victim within 24 hours, to establish direct contact. This introductory letter invites victims to respond. A leaflet translated into community languages is also enclosed, providing information about our work, and indicating how we will be able to help. This is then followed by a telephone call within 72 hours to confirm the date and time of meeting. At the initial meeting, I provide relevant advice and information (e.g. instructional sheets on Reporting and Recording Racial Harassment). I independently document the extent of the harassment and generate an action plan of responses agreed by the client. Independent documentation is then corroborated against police records and used as a basis to further the action plan. Client confidentiality is always assured, and clients’ wishes respected, with information shared with external agencies only on a ‘need to know’ basis.” (Caseworker)

Some referrals do not respond to letters from caseworkers. In these instances, cases are closed after a defined time lag. Whether a case visit can be arranged within seven to 14 days depends on the workload of the caseworkers. In a number of cases, a visit may not actually occur until four weeks after the referral has been made because of their large workload. However, this largely depends on the severity of the case. Again, some projects will define from the outset whether the case has a high, medium or low priority.

3.2 Collecting information from the client
Whether a client is met in the office or at home, the procedure for collecting information is very similar. Caseworkers tend to allocate in the region of one hour per visit, which can include listening to the accounts of the victim, completing the necessary forms and advising on appropriate action and what the caseworker can do for the client.
A home visit often, but not always, starts with the caseworker producing
appropriate identification to verify who they are. Identification is crucial,
especially if the client feels under attack or threatened from their harasser.
However, from making case visits with some projects, it was observed that
identification cards were not carried as a matter of routine.

The caseworker's aim in the interaction with the client is to do at least the
following:

- take details of the complaint
- complete any monitoring and consent forms
- offer advice and reassurance
- where appropriate offer security equipment
- decide with the client what they want to do next.

It is recommended that all projects should have photographic identification
and show it to all clients as a matter of routine.

Each caseworker can differ in their approach, but all should aim to elicit from
the client their version of events. In a scenario where listening to the client is
of utmost importance, it is often very difficult to write substantial notes. A
method adopted by some caseworkers is to repeat to the client what they
know about the complaint from their own notes made at the point of the
referral. They then ask the client to amend any inaccuracies or elaborate on
their story.

3.3 How to collect the data
Some projects have developed elaborate forms that take a range of details
from the clients while others take very basic information. The type and extent
of information taken depends on the nature and function of the project.
Support projects that monitor racist incidents beyond casework ask for a
range of details that feed into a network of other agencies. Other projects,
which primarily undertake casework, collect minimum information from the
client for monitoring and statistical purposes within the project.

The minimum information collected is:

- victim’s details (name, address, telephone number)
- gender
- date of birth and age (of main victim)
- ethnic origin of the victim
- English language proficiency
- type of incident
- details of incident.

Other support projects will also ask for information on the following:

- location of incident
- action taken by the victim and the response
• impact on security and safety
• profile of the perpetrator
• previous incidents
• consent from the victim to refer the case to other agencies.

3.4 Using databases
As more extensive data gets collected, some projects can develop databases to record detailed information about cases for monitoring purposes. BPARH has developed a database called ‘VICTIM’, in which the monitoring officer will regularly input all cases referred to them by participating reporting centres. Between April 1999 and February 2001, a total number of 1,626 cases were entered. ‘VICTIM’ is an elaborate database that enables BPARH to serve the function of a monitoring centre and also offers detailed information about the nature of, and responses to, cases. It is a management tool to process a large amount of information that is generated by multi-agency partnership working through the reporting centres scheme. SARI also maintains a central database for Bristol, Bath and north-east Somerset, which the police and council feed information into.

The database allows the caseworker to view what action has been taken by various agencies and it can generate a range of aggregate information that feeds directly into the casework forums.

The information a database can provide is:
• profile of victim
• profile of perpetrator
• referral agency
• agencies involved
• nature and location of incidents
• police action
• court action
• victim satisfaction
• number of cases opened and closed.

3.5 Confidentiality
It is often explained verbally by the caseworker that the information they share with the client is confidential. The clients are told that, with their consent, information will be shared with other agencies to progress the complaint. SARI asks all clients to read and sign a consent form, which, among other things, highlights that the project will not take any action without the consent of the client.

It is recommended that projects that are storing data on a database, either as part of a monitoring function or as part of a multi-agency co-ordination of all cases, should explain this clearly to all clients and explain why and for what length of time their details will be stored. It is also recommended that projects should review how secure their computers are for storing confidential information.
3.6 Security equipment
Caseworkers are sometimes able to offer immediate solutions to reduce a client’s fear and the likelihood of further racist harassment. Personal alarms are offered to clients as a matter of routine by those projects that keep them. Some projects are also able to offer surveillance equipment for short periods of time to households if their property is under attack. This is installed by the project usually with the assistance of the police and can remain installed for up to three months. LRHP has 14 sets of surveillance equipment, eight of which have audio facilities, which enable the capture of verbal abuse. ‘Pay as you go’ mobile telephones can also be offered in some cases.

The caseworker, acting on behalf of clients, can sometimes get others (e.g. housing departments) to take appropriate action in installing security equipment, even when the client has tried and failed to get an agency response:

“It took five months for a safety lock to be put on my door yet the police said it was needed. It was only when SARI got involved that this happened.”

3.7 Support packs
All caseworkers should offer some type of support pack to the client. These can vary in content and quality, but the basic information needs to include

- contact details of the caseworker,
- an emergency contact number,
- a leaflet explaining what racist harassment is and
- a complainant incident recording sheet (diary), which the client can complete as incidents occur.

Such incident logging sheets are also given to clients by housing departments. Clients appear to have mixed views about the utility of this process:

“If people respond to what you write in log sheets then that is a type of support because you feel like you have been listened to.”

“All my reports said the same thing – what do they [housing department] do with these sheets of paper?”

“It is like they [housing department] put them in a file and forget about it. Who reads them?”

Some projects have developed information specifically for young people and others have developed ‘Rights cards’, which detail what a person should do if they are arrested. All of these sources of information offer the number of the project as a source of advice and assistance.
The support packs provide the client with useful information in the event they are attacked again. However, support packs also make sure that a range of contact details are given to the client, thus ensuring they have a number of options in deciding on a course of action. The process of providing support packs is part of the project’s role of empowering clients through knowledge about their rights and who they can contact.

It is recommended that projects consider translating some of the information they provide. This is particularly important for meeting the needs of new communities.

3.8 Counselling
A number of caseworkers mentioned the need to have some basic counselling skills to help their clients. Most caseworkers are not trained counsellors, although many have picked up relevant skills through directly working with clients and some have developed links with local counselling services. RHSGW will, as a matter of routine, offer a referral to a counsellor that some clients have accessed. Racial Awareness helpline in Wales have utilised all their skills as Victim Support volunteers and staff to offer counselling support to their clients. Many caseworkers felt that counselling skills need to be developed within the projects, but a lack of formal qualifications, together with time and resource restrictions, have meant that this is not always possible.

It is recommended that projects should review the skills of their caseworkers in relation to the needs of their clients and explore means by which the identified skills needs could be met.

3.9 Closing a case
A case is closed by a project almost always in consultation with the client. A case is closed usually when:

- The client has been moved and has settled into the new accommodation.
- The harassment has ceased in the location it was reported.
- The case has been dealt with via prosecution or other intervention.
- The client has not made contact with the caseworker over a defined period of time.

In almost all of these cases, the caseworker will ask the permission of the client to close the file. Once a file is closed, it can be reopened if problems reoccur or new complaints are made. However, because of the heavy workload of most caseworkers, they tend to want to see cases resolved more quickly. This is not always possible because of the different needs of each client. Some of the projects will send a satisfaction questionnaire to find out how the service that clients received could be improved.
It is recommended that projects should consider evaluating all their case contacts. This will enable them to at least identify how casework could be improved, the benefits of their intervention and how clients feel about the service they have received.
4. Supporting caseworkers and their projects

The areas of improvement most cited by casework clients, were a reduction in caseload, more caseworkers, more funding and better offices for the projects. Management committee members and caseworkers corroborated all of these areas of improvement; however, they also felt that better partnership working with agencies was a crucial aspect to the support project improving its service to clients.

4.1 Reducing caseload and increasing caseworkers

In all of the interviews, there was no negative criticism of the representation the caseworkers offered, although it was often mentioned that it seemed that the caseworkers were very busy and managing a large number of cases – a cause for concern for managers, caseworkers and management committees:

“...They have been a big help but they have too many cases and are overloaded with work so they don’t function as well as they could.”

“They...Their caseload should be about 25 but you have got them managing 50–80 cases a month. We try to encourage caseworkers to close cases or seek a referral.” (Management committee member)

However, seeking a referral usually depends on the referred agency being able to deal sensitively and empower the client. Many clients access a support project after a lack of action from agencies and want the project to advocate on their behalf. A referral back to these agencies is likely to be resisted by the clients accessing support projects.

The number of cases a caseworker can take on can depend on the complexity of cases. Often, it is not only about the number but also about the intensity and severity of the cases:

“There...Their have been some very messy cases that take up a huge amount of time and we have to acknowledge, with a small project, if we get tied up with two or three difficult cases, your whole capacity to do casework is drastically reduced.” (Management committee member)

Caseworkers’ needs should also be addressed in improving services and in reducing the caseload they deal with. The emotional and casework support offered to clients has a consequence on caseworkers. They highlighted the frustrations and emotions they felt in undertaking casework. For caseworkers, offering an effective service to their clients meant the separation between work and personal space was confused. A large number of caseworkers worked beyond the standard hours and many worked weekends. The intensity of client support and casework was emotionally draining and caseworkers commented that their needs were often overlooked within the projects.
Caseworkers said that they had no access to counselling for themselves, there was limited management support to deal with the range of emotions they experienced and felt, often their own safety in the field was not assessed, and they had no or very limited contact with other caseworkers from across the country. It seems, in providing an emotional buffer to clients, the emotional buffer that caseworkers need is lacking. NMP aims to deal with caseworker burnout by recruiting caseworkers on a two-year cycle and the caseworkers leaving the project are invited to join the management committee, to maintain continuity and offer expertise to new caseworkers. This regular ‘regeneration’ of NMP offers a limited solution to some of the needs of caseworkers.

An essential part of supporting caseworkers is to ensure that they have access to appropriate counselling support if required. All caseworkers said that having access to a counsellor would help them resolve and manage many feelings that came up for them. However, such support is not offered, nor is it part of current costing in the budgets of projects. This needs to change. Caseworkers should have access to counsellors in the area where they work and funding for this should be part of the overall cost of the project.

4.2 Funding and facilities

“They need more funding. They did more for me in the two meetings I had with the caseworker than anybody else. They were extremely helpful.”

Clients and ex-clients could see the value of the projects in relation to the problems they had experienced but were often aware that the resources of the projects were stretched. In a number of interviews, clients of the projects mentioned not taking up too much time of the caseworker and often volunteering to go to the project office for a meeting rather than the caseworker coming to them to save the project time and money.

Management committee members and caseworkers felt that the short-term nature of funding and sometimes the absence of funding, the stress of too much casework, inadequate office space and poor state of the buildings where projects were based, did not reduce the service or commitment of the projects:

“I have shadowed the caseworkers and saw the work they did in terms of keep going out to visit clients, liaising with the family, trying to set up meetings with the different agencies and trying to secure a response from them. The average person is not going to know the avenues to pursue but with an organisation like this they are going to try to help and make a change for that client.” (Management committee member)
Clients, staff of the projects and management committee members were concerned by the funding crises that projects experience and their need for sustained funding.

However, as has been seen in the cases where this has happened, projects have survived because their commitment is to a greater public good. Even where funding has ended and not been withdrawn, the projects survive. SARI staff, for example, agreed collectively to forgo the annual salary increment rather than be forced to let staff go. This strategy enabled the project to both retain valued and experienced staff and allow time to seek new funding. The resolve, resilience and commitment of the workers in these projects cannot be understated.

Given the importance and relevance of support projects to local community safety issues and community cohesion, the provision of support to the victims of racist harassment and multi-agency work, it is vital to ensure adequate funding for the projects. It is important to enable projects to maintain a core staff that are able to undertake casework. Often, it is the casework element that is lost when funding is reduced or cut completely.

Projects access funding through a variety of local and national sources, for example Comic Relief, regeneration initiatives, Community Fund and charitable trusts. However, a direct central government commitment to funding local community-based initiatives, particularly caseworkers, should be explored. Such a fund could be developed and administered through government offices in the regions, and could have attached to it a process and outcome evaluation of how victims and communities have benefited as a direct consequence of the project and its casework.

4.3 Partnership agencies
Clients and ex-clients felt that a large and increasing caseload could be resolved through recruiting more caseworkers. Although projects said they needed more caseworkers, they offered an alternative view:

“We could say we’d like more caseworkers but you know that might not happen so you have got to look for alternatives and one of them is proper partnership work with agencies.” (Management committee member)
Many of the support projects have excellent links with a range of agencies:

“We have good relations with the police and other agencies and because of that we can represent our users. So, rather than an us and them, people can work with us at an inter-agency level. This makes a huge difference because you really get to know the people involved, you know the ones who are going to be involved in cases.” (Management committee member)

These good relations do help in the day-to-day management of cases and the type of response an agency will make. However, such relations do not reduce the workload of the caseworkers because the agencies are not developed to support victims of racist harassment in the same manner as support projects are.

Support projects would benefit, it seems, from a more concrete working relationship with agencies, particularly at the multi-agency level when different agencies are brought together to coordinate an effective response with and for the client:

“… a multi-agency response aims to combine the efforts of different agencies to assist the victims of racial harassment.” (Caseworker)

But it would seem that all of this is predicated on agencies and the support projects recognizing and being clear about when their involvement in a case starts and finishes, and what responsibility they have:

“We have to look for proper partnership work and establish who owns which case. I think there can be a tendency for a support project to work through the whole of the case when probably the involvement of other agencies to take ownership is absolutely key.” (Management committee member)

There is a tension evident between what the client wants from a service intervention and how some caseworkers feel agencies should respond to racist harassment:

“Agencies should develop so they don’t have to refer victims to us.” (Caseworker)

It is because clients receive a dedicated service aimed at attempting to resolve their complaint that they view the projects and the casework intervention positively. Mainstreaming casework may not be what the clients and potential clients of the support projects want.