

Stopping the stigma

A cancer screening workshop for women from minority ethnicities.

June 2025



Connecting with women

About Healthwatch Dudley

Healthwatch Dudley listens to people's views of health and social care. We aim to hear from all communities including those who may find it more difficult to have their voices heard. We share feedback with people who have the power to improve services.

Womenn

Womenn is a not-for-profit organisation, dedicated to supporting and advocating for the well-being of women while fostering a sense of community togetherness.

Womenn's primary focus is on improving mental health and wellbeing for women from ethnic minorities. This community experiences unique challenges and barriers, Womenn provide resources, support, and a safe space for women to improve their wellbeing.

Coming together

Mehvish from Womenn connected with a member of staff from Healthwatch Dudley with an idea to host a workshop that encourages women to attend their breast cancer screening appointments.

Healthwatch Dudley collaborated with a NHS representative from the screening programme, a Community Connector from Macmillan and Mehvish to plan a workshop.

Connecting with women



danglies, chaathi

breast in Mirpuri

mammay

slang in Mirpuri

The session

Nila from Macmillan translated the information into Mirpuri to ensure the content was accessible for everyone attending.

In this report, cervical screening is often referred to as a smear test, as this was the term the women used during the session.

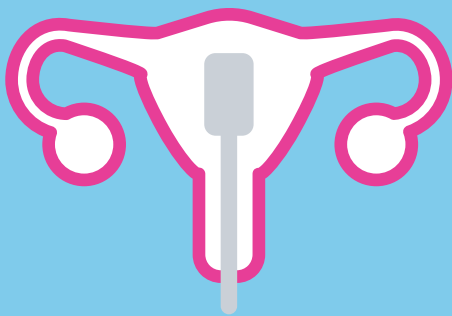
To open the session Nila asked the women what they called their breasts.

Nila shared a presentation about cancer screening, what to expect when attending an appointment, how often you need to go, and the importance of looking for signs and symptoms regularly.

**“Culturally, we don’t talk
about body parts”**

Eight women attended a two hour session to find out more about bowel, breast and cervical cancer screening programmes, what to look for and why it is important to attend screening appointments. The women attending had the opportunity to look at resources, including breast models which have lumps that they could find and equipment that is used for cervical cancer screening.

Stigma and shame



"People are aware of screening but they're embarrassed to go"

Low attendance for cancer screening

Some of the group had not been called for any screening appointments due to being too young, and others shared reasons why they don't attend when they are invited.

"I have had letters and missed calls telling me to go for my smear test, but I haven't booked."

"I've had children but I don't go for my cervical screening."

"I worry about [cervical screening] hurting."

"There's a stigma around going for smear tests in the Asian community they say you need to wait until you have got married."

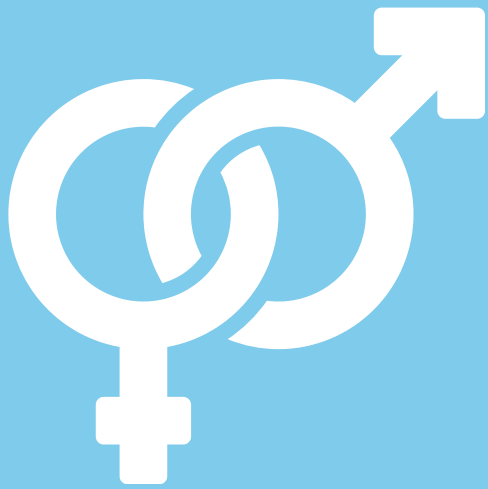
Cervical cancer

Due to the age of the women attending, the discussion was mainly about cervical cancer.

Cervical screening, usually called a smear test, checks the health of the cervix and aims to identify cervical cancer early.

Women or people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 are regularly offered cervical screening.

Talking about cancer



“We need to share breast cancer information with our sons, husbands and dads as they can get it too.”

The women shared their thoughts on discussing cancer screening and looking for signs and symptoms with family members.

“Talking about things like periods with boys is helping to normalise things. We need to support our sons to be more encouraging.”

“Men need to know about cancer too.”

“We need to be having conversations about cancer in families and not brushing it under the carpet.”

“My husband encouraged me to go along for my smear test and I’m really glad as they found a polyp.”



Accessible information

One woman shared that information needs to be accessible to people whose first language isn't English.

"Videos and information in other languages would be really helpful. I didn't know someone would be here today who could translate, otherwise I would have brought my mom along."

Mistrust of services

We heard about experiences of receiving diagnosis and how a misdiagnosis can damage trust in the community.

"If something has been missed previously then people don't trust the doctors so they don't go back. Next thing they're diagnosed stage 4 cancer."

"I know someone who was diagnosed with IBS but it was actually stomach cancer."

Healthcare in Pakistan

We heard that cancer screening is not routinely offered in Pakistan, so some women are not aware of it when they move to England.

"In Pakistan there are no smear tests, so some women don't know they can go for them here [England]. Their relatives wouldn't have gone for tests either."



Asked and Answered

A snapshot of questions asked during the event.

"I know someone with nipple discharge, should they go and get it checked?"

Yes, any changes to your breasts, including discharge, lumps, changes to their appearance, please speak to your GP.

"Can I get a blood test instead of a smear test?"

Blood tests can pick up certain markers that may indicate cancer but you need to attend screening appointments.

"Does the HPV vaccine contain pork?"

Some vaccines contain porcine. Please check the NHS website for up to date information.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccines-and-porcine-gelatin/vaccines-and-porcine-gelatin>

"It has been really beneficial and I have learned so much."

Resources and information

Womenn

Womenn is a not-for-profit organisation, dedicated to supporting and advocating for the well-being of women from ethnic minorities, while fostering a sense of community togetherness.



<https://womenn.online/>

Breast screening

If you have missed your breast screening appointment please contact the team on



01384 244177 or 01543 576235

If you are worried about or affected by cancer please contact your GP practice or Macmillan.

Macmillan

Macmillan provide services for people living with cancer and their loved ones. They also provide information on cancer, cancer screening and treatments.



0808 800 00 00



<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/>

Worried about symptoms? Want to discuss cancer screening?

- Contact your GP practice to book an appointment.
 - For help finding the contact details of your practice, visit NHS 111 or contact Healthwatch Dudley.
- If you notice any changes or have any symptoms that are worrying you, contact your GP to get checked.

Feedback and recommendations



Provide accessible information in different formats

- Improve accessibility of information about cancer and cancer screening by creating and sharing it in different formats.
- These could include:
 - Videos
 - Other languages
 - Picture based posters



Run cancer information event for men

- Run a similar information event targeted to men from ethnic minority backgrounds.

“We need to share breast cancer information with our sons, husbands and dads as they can get it too.”



Be culturally aware

- Services should consider the culture and background of patients and make adjustments to provide an inclusive service.



Thank you

Thank you to everyone who attended the event and shared their experience.

Thank you to Mehvish at Womenn CIC for arranging the venue and inviting people to attend.

Thank you to Nila from Macmillan and Jayne from NHS Breast Screening for providing information to the group about how to spot cancer early and information about cancer screening programmes.

"Thank you for organising an amazing workshop for the ladies, they thoroughly enjoyed it and followed with plenty of positive feedback. We are ever so grateful for all the efforts and hope to work together for more lifesaving workshops that are often seen as a taboo in many cultural backgrounds."

-Mehvish, Womenn



If you would like this report in another language or format please contact us.

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**Committed
to quality**

Healthwatch Dudley is committed to providing a quality service, from how we collect data, to the information we provide. Every three years we perform an in-depth audit, in conjunction with Healthwatch England, to ensure we meet this high standard.