

## Graphic Lives: telling Bangladeshi migrant women's stories through graphic narratives

This joint project between Manchester Metropolitan University and Hyde Community Action was carried out in 2017 and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It saw nine women from the British Bangladeshi community in Hyde (Greater Manchester) exploring their own life stories and the historical narratives of their communities through workshops on life history, cross-cultural storytelling and digital skills, as well as visits to Manchester Museum and the Whitworth Art Gallery to engage with collections. The women then used a simple online comics creation tool to communicate their own multimedia story using photographs, drawings and text in any language.

While each of the women created a very individual comic telling her own personal story, there were a number of common themes.

### Closeness to family in Bangladesh

This was one of the strongest and most common themes. Despite living far from their families and having very limited opportunities to visit, the women feel a very strong connection to parents, siblings and even extended family members such as nieces and nephews in Bangladesh.



I miss my mum because she is in Bangladesh.  
I miss my family too.

### Associating Bangladesh with happy memories and less stress

Even though they may have experienced upsetting events in Bangladesh, such as the death of a parent, the women's memories of growing up there are overwhelmingly positive. They feel their lives in Bangladesh were much less stressful than their current lives in the UK.



I was so happy in my country like the  
blue bright sky in my home country in  
Bangladesh.

### Finding a support network

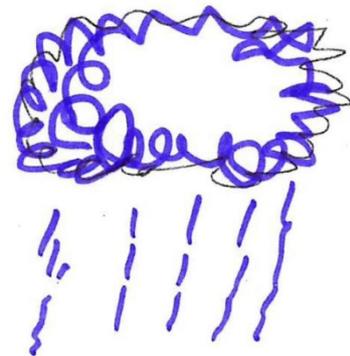
Leaving their family in Bangladesh mean the women often lack the support network they might otherwise have been able to rely on. As well as providing practical support, families are important sources of encouragement and reassurance. Living in the UK, the women need to seek out alternatives such as Hyde Community Action.



Now I live in Hyde in Greater Manchester. I am happy to come to Hyde Healthy Living Centre because I can get good help here and I have friends here.

### Living with in-laws

The women were expected to live with their in-laws, at least when they first moved to the UK. While some women have supportive relationships with their in-laws, many experienced challenges in not only moving to a new country, but also joining a new household. The complex relationships within extended families can place considerable pressure on the women as daughters-in-law.



I lived with my in-laws. It's difficult for me because I have so much responsibility.

### Dealing with bureaucracy

Navigating bureaucracy, for example procedures to acquire citizenship or requirements to register for educational courses, is a frequent challenge.

After I was married, I faced lots of immigration problem and my husband spent lots of money and was very fed up. But after 5 years I got my UK visa. My family and my husband's family felt so happy.



### Valuing education

Many of the women had studied in Bangladesh and are also keen to gain qualifications in the UK. Whilst some are making use of their education, for example by teaching Arabic, others feel they were not yet using their skills and knowledge fully in the UK.

My husband started to do odd jobs and me too. We had to give up our dream job of accountancy.

### The challenge of learning English

Although the women had learnt some English at school in Bangladesh, this is very different from the English they are likely to hear in their everyday lives in the UK. They are keen to improve their English, but it is not always easy to find time and opportunities to study.



I learnt to speak English at Hyde College and I helped my husband. I am still learning, but it is taking a long time.

### Wanting independence

The women are keen to secure greater independence for themselves, for example, by learning to driving or getting a job and their own income. However, finding ways to do this in a country that is still unfamiliar to them in many ways can be challenging.



I can't drive yet, but I want to learn in the future. I want to become independent. I want to feel confident and be able to do things myself.

### Expectations of women

Societal and cultural expectations and responsibilities placed on women were a common theme, for example, caring for elderly relatives or getting marriage rather than completing their studies.



But I wasn't able to finish my college course because I got married.

### Having children

Having children often helped the women to feel more positive about living in the UK; although they still miss their family in Bangladesh, they are keen to ensure the best future for their children.

On the other hand, experiencing miscarriages and other fertility problems can have a severe negative impact.

This is my only daughter after three miscarriages. Now she is everything to me.

