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**EXPLORING THE LIFE STORIES
OF
SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN
SURVIVORS
OF
SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

March 2023

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First published 2023

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GLOSSARY

Abaya:	a full length, female cloak
Alhamdulillah:	all praise be to God
Ālima:	Islamic scholar (female)
Ālim:	Islamic scholar (male)
Allah:	the Muslim and Arab name of God
Bhola:	simpleton
Chadar:	a large piece of cloth to cover the head and torso
Doli jaye, janazah uttay:	a bride and her carriage leave her family home to take her to her matrimonial home – a Muslim funeral commences
Du'ā:	Islamic prayer of invocation, supplication or request, even asking help or assistance from God
Eid/Eids:	worldwide celebration and festival for Muslims
Ghar damad:	a man whom lives with his wife's parents
Hadith:	a narrative record of the sayings or customs of Prophet Muhammad and his companions
Imam:	a Muslim leader, a person whom leads prayers in a mosque, a religious leader
Inna Lilahi Wa Inallah-e-Raji'oon:	verily we belong to God, and verily to Him do we return
Insha'Allah:	God willing
Islam:	peace, submission to the will of God
Izzat:	honour
Juk kay apna gala tho deek aw:	bend and show me your neck
Kameez:	long tunic
Khula:	Islamic divorce initiated by a wife
Kismet:	destiny
Kothi apni thah aye ghi:	the donkey has been brought to heel
Mama Jee:	mother (respectful reference)
Masjid:	a mosque
Marsha'Allah:	what Allah (SWT) has willed
Maulana:	a Muslim man revered for his religious learning or piety
Mosque:	a Muslim place of worship
Nikah:	Islamic marriage
Pathan:	a member of Pashto speaking people of Pashtun heritage
Prophet Muhammad:	Holy Prophet and last messenger of God
Qur'an:	Islamic sacred book, Muslim scripture
Ran mureed:	wife follower
Rishta:	marriage proposal
Roti:	a flat, soft, unleavened round bread
Salaam:	a Muslim salutation meaning peace in Islam
Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam:	May Allah (SWT) peace and blessings be upon him (Prophet Muhammad)
Shalwar:	a pair of loose-fitting, pleated trousers
Sheikh:	a leader in a Muslim community or organisation

SWT: Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala (Glory to Him)
Yahni kay: namely

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACEs:	Adverse Childhood Experiences
BACP:	British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
BAMER:	Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee
DBS:	Disclosure and Barring Service
DID:	Dissociative Identity Disorder
GMRC:	Greater Manchester Rape Crisis
GP:	General Practitioner
IDVA:	Independent Domestic Violence Advisor
PBUH:	Peace Be Upon Him
SAWS:	Sallahu Alaihi Wa Sallam
SAWSG:	South Asian Women's Support Group
SVRT:	Sexual Violence Recovery Toolkit
SWT:	Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala (Glory to Him)
UNI:	University

ABSTRACT

09 March 2023

Exploring the Life Stories of South Asian Women Survivors of Sexual Violence

This study explored the life stories of some South Asian women survivors of sexual violence. It aimed to gain an increased understanding of the multifaceted impact of sexual violations upon South Asian women. The perceptions, experiences, disclosures, honour and shame, personal journeys and support in relation to sexual violence were also explored.

This qualitative piece of research encompassed individual interviews with three participants whom were recruited via a purposive sampling strategy. The women were of diverse demographics and identities, with an age range of thirty-five – forty-two. The majority of interviews were conducted in English, with some participants' sporadic dialogues in Arabic, Punjabi and Urdu.

The methodology was thematic analysis. Seven main themes were identified via thematic analysis of the data. The theoretical framework included a humanistic approach. A predominantly insider researcher position was established, which was a major influence in eliciting the rich, deep and meaningful data which emerged in relation to the life stories of the participants. Ethical considerations, including safety, assessing/managing risk, trust and confidentiality were key components in how the research was approached, designed, conducted, interpreted and understood.

This study identified that the psychological and emotional impact of sexual violence and subsequent traumas was intense and immense. The sexual violations occurred during various stages of the participants lives; childhoods, adolescences and adulthoods. For some participants, the sexual abuse spanned decades. Men whom sexually violated girls and/or women did not appear to be held accountable for their violations by their families or communities. Preposterously, the females whom were subjected to the abuse were the recipients of familial and societal repercussions. Some of the participants were exposed to an amalgamation of threefold toxic constructs; toxic masculinity, toxic femininity and toxic parents. Toxic masculinity (www.aurorand.org.uk; www.psychologyinaction.org) was evident in the narratives of the participants whom endured dominance, rapes, sexual assaults, misogynistic behaviours, aggression, physical abuse, verbal attacks, and so forth by some of the men in their lives. Patriarchal attitudes, values and belief systems appeared to underpin the oppressive and controlling environments, and relationships, the participants were subjected to at various points in their lives.

It is proposed that some of the women in the participants lives may have exercised toxic femininity (McCann, 2020) as they appeared to uphold some patriarchal belief systems and conduct. Some women covertly and overtly practised gender based discrimination, which they imposed upon the participants. It is also possible that some of the participants' mothers/female relatives may have been entrapped in the complexities of toxic femininity themselves as there were narratives of some female kindred being subjected to male subservience, domestic servitude and prohibited from developing any independent support networks or social life due to male domination. Participants gave clear examples of when some family members appeared to have colluded in the physical and sexual violence. Some of the women talked about how

they sensed their mothers knew about the abuse, but never acknowledged this, which suggests some mothers chose to take on a bystander role.

The concepts of honour and shame were very much embedded within the sexual violence phenomena for South Asian sociocultural communities. The honour and shame complex appeared to be perpetuated by individual, familial and societal construct systems. It was apparent that gender based honour and shame differences existed, with negative outcomes for females perceived to have dishonoured and shamed themselves and their families. Based upon the findings, it was apparent that character shaming of girls and women survivors of sexual violence was rife in some of the South Asian communities. The survivors' families also felt a deep sense of shame by being connected to any overt or covert indicators of sexual abuse. Hence, there was a wall of silence placed by some families and communities pertaining to this topic.

Due to the marital and non marital rapes, some of the participants' pregnancies resulted in births, one attempted miscarriage, two miscarriages, one termination and one incestuous birth. Some of the survivors' rights to control their fertility were eradicated by their abusive husbands as they purposefully raped their wives with the intention to impregnate them. The abusive husbands knew the women's vulnerabilities would be increased during their pregnancies, so they enforced consecutive pregnancies to ensure the women remained trapped within the abusive marriages.

It was a pivotal moment in the lives of some of the survivors when it became known to them that their children were being abused. One survivor unexpectedly witnessed her young daughter being sexually abused by the same perpetrator whom had abused her for decades. Another perpetrator physically abused a survivor in the presence of their young children so they witnessed her being violated. He also physically abused their children in the presence of the survivor so she witnessed them being violated. The survivors reacted swiftly to protect their children and found the inner strength to challenge the perpetrators. They took action to ensure their children and they themselves were no longer being violated. Hence, some of the survivors broke the cycle of intergenerational abuse and familial collusion.

Some participants and their families were able to disconnect from the abusers, whereas, for others, this was not a viable option due to the ongoing, interfamilial connexions. Hence, some of the perpetrators remained at the periphery of the participants lives. Being associated with the perpetrators name due to the very close family associations, was another internal, lifelong struggle some of the participants endured. All of the participants being silenced for prolonged periods of times during their survivors' journeys appeared to be the nexus, which held some family relationships together. The concealment of the sexual violations resulted in the participants experiencing an internal disintegration of themselves.

An astounding finding that derived from the data was the strongly held belief maintained by one of the perpetrators that he had the prerogative to have sexual contact with *any* females whom were not descendants of his male bloodline. Another unexpected and striking finding that emerged from the data was a religious belief that in the Hereafter, the deceased are to be resurrected by their biological father's name on the Day of Judgement. Hence, despite a participant's desire to detach her name and identity from being associated with the male parent whom abused her, unfortunately, this was impossible for her to achieve in the Hereafter due to her religious beliefs. This resulted in one of the participants feeling there was no respite, separation nor closure from her being connected to the perpetrators in this life or the next, and

that the name of one of the perpetrators would remain associated with her even after she had taken her very last breath.

The research illustrated that despite the sexual violations occurring over a protracted period of time and the subsequent, extreme and complex levels of trauma, the survivors had managed to create lives that were meaningful for them and their children, including their husbands, for those whom were married.

The participants offered unambiguous hope to other survivors. Despite experiencing lifelong and deeply traumatic sexual violations, which for some participants spanned years, and at times decades, it was evident their human spirits had transcended the brutalities of their past lives. The following quote encapsulates one of the survivor's journey:

*I've been in a **dark, dark, dark place... the lowest of the low you can go, I've b-e-e-n there... and I've c-l-a-w-e-d my way to the top, quite literally c-l-a-w-e-d my way to the top... [pause] and I want to pass that on, that you can do it... no matter h-o-w bad you feel, it can be done... and the more you do it, the more you tell yourself "It's OK, it wasn't your fault... like your body..." you know, affirmations and things... it gets easier and now, I can do it without even thinking about it** (Masooma, p. 60).*

The participants human spirits did not die. They survived. They gave detectible hope to other victims and/or survivors of sexual violations.

The findings from this research investigation cannot be extrapolated to all South Asian women survivors of sexual violence as they derived from a very small sample size.

Dr Nasreen Mansoor

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the report has been submitted in support of an application for another funding source.

The identifiers ‘research participants’, ‘participants’ and ‘survivors’ are referred to interchangeably throughout the report to represent their positionalities within the research and their life stories.

The identifiers ‘survivor’ and ‘perpetrator’ has been adopted throughout this report in order to represent the terminology verbalised by the research participants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, and foremost, our deepest and most grateful thank you is to the research participants, whom have contributed towards this research project. It has been a privilege to have interviewed such inspirational and courageous women. We will always appreciate, value and respect their life stories, which they have shared with us.

We also wish to thank the National Lottery Heritage Fund whom have provided the financial resources and support for this research project to be undertaken. The input of colleagues at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre & Education Trust, The University of Manchester, is also much appreciated.

Gratitude is expressed to each individual whom has directly and indirectly contributed towards the research project.

REPORT CONTENT WARNING

The contents of the report contain some explicit accounts of various forms of abuse that some readers may find distressing. Readers are encouraged to please exercise caution and self care when reading the report and thereafter.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter offers some context to how the research project originated and the rationale for focusing upon South Asian British Muslim women survivors of sexual violence. An outline of the research project conception, South Asian diaspora selection, research process, questions, aims and objectives are presented. The researcher's insider/outsider positionality is illustrated.

1.2 Research Project Conception

The research project was officially launched by Greater Manchester Rape Crisis on 25th June 2019, after successfully securing funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The aim was to complete the study by December 2020. However, due to the very unfortunate Covid-19 pandemic, the research was suspended for a period of time and an extension was approved. The research project was successfully completed in March 2023.

1.3 Reasons for the South Asian Diaspora Selection

A preliminary literature review identified a lack of existing literature pertaining to South Asian British Muslim women survivors of sexual violence. It appeared there was a void in other studies focusing upon the voices and contemporary, lived experiences of these specific survivors. Hence, a funding application was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund with the specific aim to undertake a qualitative study to hear the voices of the survivors whom met the research criterion and to disseminate the findings of their life stories.

Greater Manchester Rape Crisis has been facilitating a South Asian Women's Support Group (SAWSG) since its inauguration in 2013 after identifying a gap in this service provision from other organisations. The purpose of the group was to provide a safe and culturally appropriate space for women survivors from South Asian communities. The SAWSG was publicised by internal and external communication methods, and leaflets were disseminated to General Practitioner Surgeries and various community organisations. South Asian women survivors from the communities contacted the Clinical Lead directly or were referred internally via Greater Manchester Rape Crisis Centre's Counselling Service. External services also referred women to the SAWSG. Assessments were undertaken to ascertain the survivors' individual needs and if group support was appropriate for them.

The SAWSG provides a confidential gateway for survivors to meet and access support from the service and each other. The average number of attendees was 8 – 10 women. Initially the group was open ended, hence some women attended for a short period of time. The longest attendance members were the ones whom participated in the research project. The SAWSG was initially semi-structured, and consisted of planned activities and sessions that were psychoeducational and supportive. The Sexual Violence Recovery Toolkit (SVRT) (2018) (www.rockpool.life) was introduced as a structured, 12 week programme. However, the programme was completed over an extended time frame when it transpired it was not possible to complete the SVRT effectively with a rigid framework as this was not conducive for the group members and their processes.

1.4 Research Process

The methodology for this research encompassed a humanistic theoretical approach, (Hough, 2000), a qualitative research method (McLeod, 2001) and thematic analysis (Sanders and Wilkins, 2010). A qualitative study was undertaken as this was identified as a particularly apposite method for the research topic (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Loseke, 2013).

Qualitative data was generated via three extensive, individual interviews. The research participants were Pakistani and African Indian Muslim women, aged 35 – 42, whom lived in the UK. All of the interviews were conducted face to face. The individual interviews were undertaken by a sole researcher.

After many ethical considerations and due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, the research questions were divided into two parts. Each participant was offered an opportunity to partake in the interview on the one day with substantial breaks planned in between Part 1 and Part 2, or to attend the interviews on two separate occasions. All of the participants chose to undertake the interviews on one day, which incorporated comfort and timeout breaks. However, during the course of some of the individual interviews, it transpired that it would be most apt to facilitate the interviews on two separate days due to one participant requiring a lengthy break during the interview as she unexpectedly became emotionally dysregulated (Spring, 2019; Davis, 2021; Ford, 2021) as her memories and feelings of a particular experience with her husband twenty years ago were suddenly triggered. Hence, it was imperative that she was stabilised (Herman, 1997; Spring, 2019) and centred before continuing with the interview. The contingency plan embedded in the research design to provide the participants emotional support by the Clinical Lead should the need arise was implemented. This resulted in the aforementioned participant's availability to complete the interview in one day being curtailed.

In order to assist the participants to gradually ease into the research process and its depth, the researcher initially asked some general questions about the participants and their families, before focusing on the questions pertaining to sexual violence. The timeframe allocated for the interviews was as follows: 90 minutes maximum for Part 1 of the interview and 60 minutes maximum for Part 2 of the interview. An interview schedule is included in the appendices (Appendix Four).

1.5 Research Questions, Aims And Objectives

The title of the research was:

Exploring the Life Stories of South Asian Women Survivors of Sexual Violence

The aims of the research were to ask the following questions navigating the study:

Interview Part 1

Opening of the individual interviews:

- Could you please share with me a little about yourself and who you are?
- Could you please share with me a little about your family of origin and your current family please?

Interview Part 1

Sexual Violence Focus – Eliciting data through a combination of general and then specific research questions formulated for the qualitative data generation method:

- As we are here to talk about your journey as a survivor of sexual violence, we acknowledge that people have their own language when talking about it. How would you describe sexual violence?
- In your own time, and at a level that feels safe for you, can you talk to me about what happened to you and how it has impacted upon your life?

Interview Part 2

Sexual Violence Focus – Eliciting data through a combination of general and then specific research questions formulated for the qualitative data generation method:

- Could you please describe what led to you accessing the South Asian Women's Support Group at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis?
- How would you describe your experiences of being part of the South Asian Women's Support Group at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis?
- What other type of support have you experienced after you made the disclosure(s)?
- In your opinion, what is the impact of your sexual violence upon your family and community?
- As a survivor, where are you now in life?
- As a survivor, what would you suggest are positive ways forward in addressing the issues of sexual violence of South Asian women?
 - (a) What would your message be to professionals working with South Asian women whom are survivors of sexual violence? **(Prompt)** What has been helpful/unhelpful in your experience of accessing support?
 - (b) What would your message be to other survivors from the South Asian communities looking for support?

Interview Part 2

Closing of the individual interviews:

- Are there any other areas of sexual violence you would like to talk about that may not have been covered by this mind map?
- How did you experience this research interview?
- Can you talk to me about how you ground yourself, and what you will be doing to look after yourself today and the rest of the week please?

The objectives of this study were:

- To conduct individual interviews with women aged 18+ of South Asian heritage, whom were survivors of sexual violence.

1.6 Researcher Insider/Outsider Positionality

It is pertinent to acknowledge the researcher held an insider, not outsider, status (Carter and Bolden, 2012) which was viewed as a source of strength for this study. As argued by Stanfield (1998) the researcher's autobiography, culture and historical context is of great significance as this determines what the researcher is, does and does not see, in addition to their ability to analyse data and disseminate knowledge adequately. Although the researcher and participants had some shared multiple, intersecting identities; i.e. women, South Asian heritage et cetera, no assumptions were made pertaining to what the participants may share about their life stories. It was made explicit to the participants there were no correct/incorrect answers to the research questions and they had complete autonomy to not answer any of the questions if they chose not to do so. The researcher and participants had no dual relationships and the contact between them was strictly for the purpose of the research study and interviews.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter commences with a focus on the researcher position. It illustrates why and how the research study was investigated and critically explores the reasoning in adopting a qualitative methodological approach, which consisted of individual interviews. The import of research sampling and ethical issues are explained. The data collection and data analysis are illustrated.

2.2 Researcher Position

The theoretical framework underpinning the research project stemmed from a humanistic approach, which states that with the right conditions, humans have a natural ability to grow and reach their full potential (Hough, 2000). The research ethical guidelines published by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) were also embedded within this study (BACP, 2019).

2.3 Research Methods

A substantial amount of consideration was invested in the research design to ensure the participants were offered the therapeutic and practical support they required during each stage of research process, and beyond. It was imperative the participants' health, wellbeing, safety and confidentiality remained of paramount importance. Due to the research title, there was a possibility the participants' past traumas may resurface during the course of the interviews and contingency plans were in place should this arise.

A quantitative research method (Bell and Waters, 2014) was not adopted as this data generation method was not considered appropriate for the nature of the study and the research questions. For example; it would be inapt to attempt to generate the data in a robust, ethical and safe manner via a survey design Braun and Clarke (2013a) without appropriate risk assessments or support mechanisms in place for the anonymous participants. Analysing secondary data was ruled out as the intention was to generate primary data for the study.

A mixed method approach (Cresswell, 2014; Giddens and Sutton, 2014) of combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Bell and Walters, 2014) via interviews (Seidman, 2013) and questionnaires (McLeod, 2003) was not considered an appropriate strategy for a number of reasons. As this was a small scale study, collecting data on a larger scale was surplus to requirements. Also, it would be extremely difficult to ascertain if any safeguarding concerns were present for the anonymised participants, which suggested it would be almost impossible to monitor any risk elements. Thus, it was imperative that any potential harm to participants being inadvertently triggered was removed from the research process before it could arise.

A qualitative research method (McLeod; 2001; Loseke, 2013) was adopted, which consisted of individual, semi structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The rationale for this method was to elicit in-depth knowledge about the participants' perceptions of sexual violence, their life stories as South Asian women survivors of sexual violence and their experiences of accessing services. A transparent researcher trail (Ballinger, 2014) was documented at every stage of the research in order to strengthen the validity, reliability credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Flick, 2002; Morse *et al.*, 2002; Robson, 2002).

2.4 Individual Interviews

Individual interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009;) were undertaken to directly obtain the participants rich, qualitative data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Braun and Clarke, 2013b; Punch, 2014) via their own lived experiences and their preferred language. All of the interviews were conducted face to face. Due to the nature of the research topic, it was inappropriate to consider remote interviews as it was imperative to ascertain the participants' safeguarding requirements during and after each part of the interview process. As the research was examining a very sensitive and complex subject, it was important for the participants to feel safe and confident in being able to articulate their viewpoints. All of the participants were given a choice to share their narratives in a language of their choice. Hence, the participants expressed themselves in Arabic, English, Punjabi and Urdu.

2.5 Sample Number

As this was a small scale study, three research participants were recruited for the individual interviews. Two other participants whom indicated their interest in the research were not interviewed by the researcher due to the substantial and repeated delays by the participants in arranging the interview dates.

2.6 Sample Criteria

In order to uphold consistency of the participants' multiple, intersecting identities such as gender, culture, race and ethnicity, it was imperative that a group of women whom had some homogeneousness of these key aspects were identified. Segmentation (Morgan, 1997) was adopted all throughout the research as a method of participant selection whom met the primary composition of the sample criteria; gender, age, ethnicity and sexual violence survivor.

The four categories of sample criterion were:

- **Gender:** Women
- **Age:** 18+
- **Ethnicity:** South Asian
- **Survivor:** Sexual violence

2.7 Ethical Issues

All aspects of ethical considerations (Bond, 2004; Jenkins, 2017) were diligently embedded within the research project. Informed consent, confidentiality, trust, boundaries, assessing/managing risk, privacy, respect, safety, integrity, duty of care and communication were some of the numerous elements incorporated into the study.

The University of Manchester Research Ethics (www.manchester.ac.uk) and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy research ethical guideline were integrated into the research (BACP, 2019).

2.8 Participant Identification

All of the participants were identified via Greater Manchester Rape Crisis (GMRC) as they sought internal partakers for the research project. Attempts to recruit external participants were not implemented as the aim was to research and disseminate the life stories of women whom had specifically accessed GMRC's services. The participants were members of the SAWSG at GMRC and some had accessed the group for 5 years. The search for research participants was discussed in the SAWSG by the Clinical Lead as per GMRC's strategy to publicise the research project and access participants via GMRC's internal sources. After a period of time, all of the participants voluntarily indicated their interest to partake in the study. They expressed they trusted the Clinical Lead, the SAWSG and GMRC. The Clinical Lead also knew the participants very well and had worked closely with them for several years.

In order to protect their identities, the participants were offered the choice to not reveal their precise employment positions and to consider selecting a descriptor that derived from the same genre, which they accepted. Thus, the participants factual employment and offspring information has been slightly amended. However, all of the other data remains authentic.

2.9 Pre-Interview Meetings

Telephone meetings were arranged with all of the individual participants to explain the purpose of the study, research protocol and process. The 'Participant Information Sheet' (Appendix One), 'Participant Informed Consent' (Appendix Two) and Mind Map (Appendix Three) documentation was provided to each participant. Subsequent to the minimum two weeks' contemplation period, the participants were contacted and the interviews were arranged.

2.10 Opening and Closing of the Interviews

After the 'Participant Information Sheet' (Appendix One) and 'Participant Informed Consent' (Appendix Two) documentation was signed and dated by the participants and the researcher, and copies exchanged, the interviews commenced at GMRC Centre.

The participants were initially asked to share some demographic information about themselves in order to obtain some specific data and to build a connection, safety and trust. Thereafter, the sexual violence questions were facilitated with care, sensitivity, empathy, time, and appropriate pace and depth. The participants were invited to talk at a level, depth and pace that was safe for them, whilst the researcher subtly assessed and monitored their risk throughout the data generation process. The participants talked in substantial detail about their life stories with candour, fluidity, emotions and courage. Towards the end of the interviews, the participants were offered the opportunities to share anything pertaining to sexual violence that may not have been covered by the research questions. They were also invited to provide their verbal, constructive feedback about how they experienced the interviews and then asked some non-emotive questions. The latter strategies were intentionally incorporated to facilitate the participants to focus back to the present moment and to gradually distance themselves from the deep and intense material, whilst the researcher carefully brought the interviews to a close.

The Clinical Lead at GMRC was available before, during and after each interview as a safety measure, should the need arise for her to provide therapeutic interventions to the participants. She had facilitated the SAWSG for several years and had developed safe, therapeutic relationships with the participants over a period of time. Two of the participants had previously

received long term, individual counselling from the Clinical Lead. The participants attended the SAWSG for 5 years, with some of them being members since the group's initial formation in 2013. Hence, due to the safe, trusting and supportive relationships established between the participants and the Clinical Lead, she was available to support the participants throughout the research process. Her direct and indirect involvement and presence before, during and after the research interviews was pivotal in ensuring a robust and safe research process was delivered. After each interview ended, she had an individual check-in with each participant to offer them emotional support and facilitate some grounding techniques, as required.

The illustration on the next page represents the participants' demographic data for the research study.

Participants' Pseudonyms	Gender	Age Range	Ethnicity	Country of Birth	Marital Status	Children	Education Level	Occupation	Interview Format
Ayesha	Female	42	African Indian	England	Married	6	Higher Education	Teacher	Individual
Asma	Female	Early 40s	Pakistani	Pakistan	Divorced	4	Degree in Islamic Theology	Carer and Teacher	Individual
Masooma	Female	35 – 40	British Pakistani	England	Married	3	Further Education	Support Worker	Individual

Table 1 – Participants' demographic information for individual interviews

2.11 Transcriptions

All of the interviews were transcribed by an approved, independent transcriber. Non verbal communication such as facial expressions, eye contact, body language et cetera was noted by the researcher. Modulation and paralinguistic data such as intonations, sighs, crying, pauses, deep inhalation/exhalation, tears, silences, laughter, gestures et cetera were noted by the researcher and included in the edited transcripts. Hence, detailed naturalized transcriptions were produced rather than denaturalized versions (Davidson, 2009). The latter are filtered transcriptions with limited attention drawn to the description of accent or involuntary sounds (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Vernacular spoken in Arabic, Punjabi and Urdu were also noted and included in the transcripts by the researcher. All of the transcripts were made available to the research participants, whom verified they were accurate representations of the interviews. The rationale for this additional procedure in the research methodology was to ensure the transcripts were validated, the research ethics were upheld and to empower the participants by offering them the autonomy to control the content of the transcripts (Mero-Jaffe, 2011).

As an additional measure to facilitate the participants' autonomy and empowerment, this research project report was made available to the participants for their perusal and critique prior to its final release for publication.

2.12 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (Winter, 1992; Sanders and Wilkins, 2010) was selected to analyse the data, identify themes within and across the transcripts. All of the codes were generated inductively (Boyatzis, 1998; Bryman, 2012) as they derived directly from the data. The themes were not identified deductively; i.e. not originated from theory or previous research (Boyatzis, 1998; Bryman, 2012). Themes were produced after the codes were identified and arranged into singular/multiple lists. A codebook was produced after the codes were compiled and integrated into the research study (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). The themes were identified at the manifest and latent levels (Braun and Clarke, 2013a). Seven main themes were identified from the transcripts; **Abuse, Feelings, Relationships, Culture, Gender Consequences & Journey and Islam**. The main themes were colour coded in all of the transcripts as illustrated in Table 1 below. The findings in the report focus upon the sexual violence questions listed in Part 1 and Part 2 of the interview schedule. The findings do not focus upon the opening and closing of the individual interviews.

Abuse	Feelings	Relationships	Culture
Gender	Consequences & Journey	Islam	

Table 2 – Thematic analysis seven main themes

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter illustrates the findings derived from this qualitative study as answers to the aforementioned research questions. The table below illustrates the main and sub themes identified from the data via Thematic Analysis.

3.2 Thematic Analysis Main Themes and Sub Themes

Thematic Analysis (Holliday, 2002; Braun and Clarke, 2006) was performed and seven main themes identified were; **Abuse, Feelings, Relationships, Culture, Gender, Consequences & Journey** and **Islam**. Sub themes were formed from the main themes illustrated in Table 2. Codes were also deduced from the data (Ezzy, 2002; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012; Babbie, 2014; Miles, Huberman and Saldana; 2014) Unfortunately, there is not the scope to illustrate the codes for the purpose of this report.

Table 3 on the following two pages illustrates the main and sub themes identified from the thematic analysis process.

Main Themes	Sub Themes
<p style="text-align: center;">One Abuse</p>	<p>Experiences of Psychological Abuse Experiences of Emotional Abuse Experiences of Physical Abuse Experiences of Sexual Abuse Experiences of Financial Abuse</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Two Feelings</p>	<p>Secure/Insecure Childhoods/Adulthoods Past/Current/Ongoing Traumas Detrimental/Beneficial Mental, Emotional, Physical, Sexual and Financial Health Internal and External Distress Vulnerabilities and Strengths Implosion and Explosion of Self Unhealthy/Healthy Self Value, Self Worth and Self Belief Visible and Invisible Scars Incarcerated to Liberated Survivors</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Three Relationships</p>	<p>Dynamics with Family of Origin Dynamics with Ex-Husbands/Perpetrators Dynamics with Current Husbands Dynamics with Current/Ex In-Laws Past Dynamics with Children Current Dynamics with Children</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Four Culture</p>	<p>South Asian Communities Expectations Individual/Collective Honour Individual/Collective Shame Stigma of Sexual Violence/Domestic Abuse/Divorce Endogamy Preference/Exogamy Rejection</p>

Table 3 – Thematic analysis main themes and sub themes

Main Themes	Sub Themes
<p style="text-align: center;">Five Gender</p>	<p>Female Status Male Status Gender Based Discrimination Perceptions of Female Virginity and Chastity Educating Sons/Daughters/Adults/ Communities</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Six Consequences & Life Journeys</p>	<p>Long Term Impact of Sexual Violence Negative Experiences of Accessing Support Positive Experiences of Accessing Support Survivors' Journeys Resilience as Survivors Ongoing Challenges for Survivors Ongoing Challenges for South Asian Communities Ongoing Challenges for Professionals</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Seven Islam</p>	<p>Women and Men's Equality in Islam Perceptions of Marital Rape/Sexual Violence Religious Figures/Leaders' Power and Abuse Safeguarding Children in Mosques Educating Muslims about Islam, Culture and Safeguarding Issues</p>

Table 3 – Thematic analysis main themes and sub themes

3.3 Findings Process

All of the participants were invited to decide their own pseudonyms to protect their identities and to offer them complete autonomy as to how they wished to be identified in the report. Data considered most pertinent in answering the research questions is incorporated in the report. One of the major challenges experienced in the research process was in relation to how the data could be condensed into a concise report, without losing the essence and the nuances of the multifaceted, life and sexual violence experiences the women had lived through and survived. Although this was a small scale research study, the amount of data produced was vast. For example, one of the interview transcripts consisted of circa 34,000 words and 90 pages of data. Hence, it was impossible to include all of the content of the life stories into the research report or film documentary. Thus, the film is a snapshot of the women's life stories. Although the report aims to encapsulate the participants' lived experiences in more detail, editorial decisions were made to select which data could be included in the report.

Each word, sentence and paragraph spoken by the participants was invaluable and it was imperative to ensure the narratives were given the time, space, focus and respect they deserved, which has been achieved through the detailed data analysis process and findings chapter. However, the report is a condensed version of the women's life stories and it is hoped the crux of their experiences has been captured, without compromising on the depth or magnitude of their narratives. Thus, it is hoped the following pages have illustrated the essence of the richness, texture, nuances and quality of the participants voices, thoughts, feelings, experiences and personal journeys. Italics represent the participants' quotations and words articulated with emphasis are highlighted in bold text. Hyphenated text indicates the slow pronunciation of lexis.

3.4 Main Theme One Abuse

The theme of abuse was prevalent for all of the participants. Abuse, in multiple forms, was embedded within their lives, predominantly from childhood onwards for the majority of survivors.

*Yeah, it [sexual violence] started **very early**, as far back as I can remember and I have a lot of **memory blocks** um... as a **result**... for as long as I can remember, as **far back as I can go**... this has always been there... and I can't go... really far back. I think the furthest I can go is **maybe 8 or 9, maybe 7**... my memory doesn't go any further back than that.... Um... so it's always been there for me, in my memory and it went on for a number of years. It went on into my 20s by the same person, so it's **not childhood sexual abuse**... **I don't know what you would c-a-l-l this ... a prolonged sexual abuse**... so... it was a number of years.... Throughout my whole teenage years, my adolescent years. Hmm [pause] and he was a **very, very close family member**... **who even now is still in my life**... **unfortunately** [paragraph quietly spoken]... I just wish I knew at the time... that this is something... I thought he actually **cared** about me because that's how he made it out, **obviously, someone's buying me chocolate and toys and... showing me love that I'm not getting from my parents or my siblings**... I know **now** that I attached to him because of that **reason**... I wish I knew at the time (Masooma, p. 16 – 17).*

3.4.1 Sub Theme One Experiences of Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse was exerted upon the survivors by their perpetrators and, at times, also directed towards the survivors' family members. Some of the perpetrators attempted to demean the participants in their communities.

*Then... this one day, I mean the violence was so bad... she [second elder sister] then grabbed my mum, my older brother and my younger brother... and I... we were all trying to do a runner and... run away from the house. But... what **he did** was he grabbed hold of **me** and he locked me in the bathroom... but... even when I was locked in the bathroom, I was saying... like to the rest of them "**Just go!**" **But he wouldn't let me go.** I remember him running after the family... he didn't go after them straight away... he's just drinking his half cup [of tea] then he went after them... he got them back saying I've committed suicide... **that's** how he got them back (Ayesha, p.12 – 13).*

*We'd have an argument and he'd say "You know, **OK let's c-a-l-l everybody**, but from my brother's mosque, that they should witness what's happening in our household" which doesn't make sense, but I think he was just using it... again to... make me feel I was to be **blamed**... and... to kind of **disgrace** me in the community (Asma, p. 25).*

***He** [perpetrator] **knew that I'm not getting attention from the people that I should be getting attention from.** So, he **saw me.** He saw that I was **vulnerable**... he... saw that even when I was **little**... because **I wasn't getting the attention. I wasn't an attention-seeker**... so he gave me that attention and **I took it... with open arms, I took it. And that scares me for other children, that really scares me** (Masooma, p. 19).*

*But before he left... he went to the GP... and he told them **I was abusive... I... hit my children and I'm crazy**... and he came back and he said, "Something terrible has happened...." I said, "What?" And he goes "I've just been to the GP... and I told her that you're **so abusive and controlling**... so... **the social services are going to be over any minute... and they're going to take the younger two away**" because obviously they were one and three, they were very young, and the older ones are five and seven... "They'll interview them... they'll probably take them away from you. **So, y-o-u can't keep them under any circumstance.**" I was obviously petrified... I said "Well, what do you **suggest I do?**" And he said "Well, **don't tell them about me... because that way, at least I'll have the children. But if you tell them about me... then y-o-u won't get the children, I won't get the children and they will actually go to the social services, which is not the right thing to do**" (Asma, p. 28).*

3.4.2 Sub Theme One Experiences of Emotional Abuse

There was a recurring theme of all of the participants being subjected to emotional abuse at various life stages.

I think it's really important to build a relationship with your children... I wish my parents had with me or my sister or my brothers or s-o-m-e-b-o-d-y built a relationship with me where I would feel comfortable enough to go and tell them what

was happening to me [participant looks sad] *Yes, there's a difference between boy and girl, but the love and the care should be the same level for all of them. I didn't have that and I couldn't go to anyone to tell them what was happening to me... because we didn't have that relationship... and treat children equally because what my sister had, I didn't have. And if she ever did something wrong, I would... get punished w-i-t-h her* (Masooma, p. 83 – 84).

Not having any love... not having anything, any emotions or anything... I met the ex [husband] through whatever... and because he was such a sweet talker... he was very clever, he knew... that I was very vulnerable and he played at those heartstrings (Ayesha, p. 14).

I knew as a wife I may not be as good because I was never good enough for him. So, if it wasn't the cleaning... he'd pick on my cooking, if it wasn't the cooking, it was... me being British and not being Pakistani enough! ... [incongruent laugh]... it was silly things, but he a-l-w-a-y-s had a fault in me, and I was always trying to justify or rectify my faults (Asma, p. 15).

3.4.3 Sub Theme One Experiences of Physical Abuse

The participants shared graphic accounts of being physically abused during their childhoods by multiple perpetrators of violence and/or during their adulthoods. Some other family members were also subjected to physical abuse.

He used to work in the steel mills, so he had steel-capped boots... and we used to get kicked in the back, in the head with these steel-capped boots... [deep inhalation] We'd get pulled by our hair and dragged down the stairs... oh, it was... e-v-e-r-y, s-i-n-g-l-e d-a-y... every single day when we finished school and we walked home... we'd pray... whatever we could recite, whatever we knew... we would pray a-l-l the way home. People would be like... kids would be running and happy [exhalation] we would be dreading going home... and I remember... when... my mum opened the door... the first thing would not be "Salaam" and greet her, it would be... "Is there a fight going on?" "Is there peace in the house today or not?" And that's what we used to say every day when we walked in and every day she would be battered and bruised... so that was the early years [sighs] (Ayesha, p. 10).

He was physically abusive, not just to me... it was to my children [pause]. When he... started... physically hitting the children, that's when my motherly instincts kicked in and I thought... 'I can't carry with this... I can't see my children being beaten up in front of my eyes ...' [quietly spoken and pause] *It was just really painful* (Asma, p. 16).

I was groomed. But at the time... I was just like... 'Oh no, he loves me, he loves me... because he's told me enough times, he loves me.' Yeah [pause] but then... when I started going into my teenage years, *I knew it was wrong. I knew what he was doing was wrong because I had sex education in school. My parents told me not to go to the class, but I secretly went to the class... and from there, I learned, because the teacher said "These are the age restrictions and if somebody does this to you, it's wrong."* And then I thought, 'OK... well, this is wrong. He shouldn't be doing this to me.' *And that's when the violence started. That's when the love stopped, and the violence started* (Masooma, p. 18).

3.4.4 Sub Theme One Experiences of Sexual Abuse

Some of the participants expressed they were sexually groomed by the perpetrators from when they were very young girls and this continued until their adulthoods. Other participants were subjected to sexual abuse in adulthood by their husbands. Some of the rapes resulted in the participants experiencing pregnancies, miscarriages and a termination.

*When I was thirteen, when I had these excruciating stomach pains... Now that I've had **children** I can relate that pain and it was a pain of a **miscarriage**... I remember **very clearly**... **very, very clearly** – **I'm thirteen**, I didn't even know what... [pause] sexual intimacy was... I was quite **naïve**... I remember my older brother actually saying "Call an ambulance." And he [perpetrator] wouldn't **call** an ambulance... but when the ambulance service **was called**... we were always very scared... [sniffs]... I think he called the ambulance... and er... for some reason my mum was also reluctant to call the ambulance. I believe she knew what was going on, but she always tried to... act like... she didn't know... [sighs]... when the ambulance was called um... his words to them was "You know what kids are like, you know, you can't stop them nowadays these days... you **can't control them**. They do what they want **outside**... and they have **relationships**..." So... when I was taken to the **hospital**, they kept me there for a **week**. I was on a **drip** and back in the day then... it was never looked into... as thoroughly as what it is **now**... nothing was **ever** looked into. So, it was just put down to... abdominal pains, but I was bleeding and... I remember... stuff coming out of me... like big clots... I remember that... very, very clearly... like **now**... after suffering a miscarriage with my first husband, I now realise what a miscarriage is and the pain and everything and I can now relate to it and it was that (Ayesha, p. 11).*

In the beginning, like when he actually started to rape me... if I said "No" to him, he would **beat me up** or... **beat me up and rape me or he would get me in trouble by my mum... or dad** um... so it was like **I had to make a choice**... **I had to choose my b-a-d**, as they say, um... and then **eventually**, you know, **stopped arguing, stopped fighting**... **and just let him do his business and then it just went on for y-e-a-r-s and y-e-a-r-s**... until I got **married** and... it happened a few times after I got married (Masooma, p. 22).

[marital sexual violence commenced] **Right at the beginning**... [clears throat] ... *he made it out as if... he was sexually more... [silence] erm... **active** than I was and I was like **really cold**. So, any time I didn't consent, **it was my fault**... **I didn't love him e-n-o-u-g-h**, so he actually made it out at the beginning that he **just l-o-v-e-d me so much**... that he wanted it constantly, every single **night**... **a few times**... whereas I thought **he was making me sore**... but... he made it out as **again**, it was **my fault** that I didn't love him **enough** and that's why **I didn't... consent to it or I didn't want it**. [pause] So, I had no say in it because... it was **always my fault**... **anytime, anywhere**, so it was a **constant threat** (Asma, p. 35).*

*When I came... that seven week break [participant temporarily returned to live with her family of origin for seven weeks] that's when I thought '**This is not right**. We're here and we've had another argument and suddenly... **that's not right, that's not you loving me**, that's you showing control and I'm sorry, I'm not willing to give you that. **If I don't***

want it, it means no. ' And I knew I wasn't going to be cursed by the angels [incongruent laugh] and I knew I wasn't because I had that level of understanding I guess... and that's when I stood up to it (Asma, p. 35 – 36).

3.4.5 Sub Theme One Experiences of Financial Abuse

Some of the participants shared narratives of being financially abused by the same perpetrator whom they were sexually violated by.

I had, you know, no... control over spending my money (Asma, p. 20). He'd actually... drained out the bank accounts because it was joint bank accounts and... he transferred the property on to his sister, so he wasn't going to let me stay in there (Asma, p. 40).

*I'd get paid in a **brown envelope every Wednesday**... I never used to drive, he'd pull up with my brother... **right** close to the window and he would look at me... through the window... and he'd look at the table, and my wage slip was on the table... and the **fear, I never touched my wage slip** until... he would look through the window and give me that eye contact to say "**Pick it up.**" And that's when I'd pick the wage slip... I wouldn't open it. I'd go in the car... and... greet them and say "Salaam" and I'd give him the wage slip. All I would get in return would be the brown envelope and the wage slip... the money, he would **take out**. So [sigh] **I just worked for nothing basically** (Ayesha, p. 13).*

3.5 Main Theme Two Feelings

A multiplicity of emotions was experienced by the participants, including not having permission to show any visible signs of distress and being conditioned to remain silent. Incarceration and feeling one's body was utilised for a perpetrator's sexual gratification was also expressed.

*I think you need to be **assertive**... if you're not comfortable with something, **speak up and don't do it**. And that's really important. That's one thing that we don't get **taught**, as Asians, how to... be **assertive**. We've always been told to "**shut up and put up**"... [pause] and even **now**, when somebody speaks loudly to me... or... raises their voice or it looks like somebody's going to get upset with me... it's just a **n-a-t-u-r-a-l reaction that I go quiet**... and no matter how much I try... I ... **I literally cannot speak, my voice won't come out, my throat will close up**... because... [pause] by my parents, by my relatives, by **him**... I was always told to "shut up" you know. Yeah "when elders are talking, **you don't speak... you don't answer back**... if you're upset or... **we never had a choice, we weren't allowed to be upset**, we just had to... **be quiet... you don't speak. You do what you're told to do, and you don't speak**..." and...by **him** as well, it was like "If you speak... there's going to be consequences." And this is... in the beginning, it was "This is our **secret**... don't tell anyone..." So... **a-l-l the way through** I've had people say to me "**Don't speak, you're not allowed to speak.**" So... but once I got married... when I moved into my own house, I was **independent**. I was an **adult**... I was my own person but even then, I wouldn't speak... I've always been a doormat... if somebody said to me do something, **I would do it**. I've always tried to please people so*

they wouldn't get **angry** with me. **Even if I had to tell little, white, lies to please people, I would** (Masooma, p. 80 – 81).

Anyway... then umm... with my... ex-husband... the intimacy was **very one-sided**... there was hardly anything... in the sense of... comforting or love or... **very much**... one-sided, whatever **his** needs were, **his needs were fulfilled**... right OK... turn your back and... **yeah**... good night kind of thing. So, I used to feel **used** and I just thought, **'Is this what the hype is all about?'** But... I know... looking back, **he knew**... **what I had been through**... **he could tell**... **what I had been through**... because he **h-a-t-e-d** me going back to my family home (Ayesha, p. 15).

He took all the phones away, he took my mobile phone away, the house phone away, he locked... me in the house when he had to leave for the mosque, for the prayers... I found the backdoor key... erm... as I was leaving, he came home and he **followed me** and... he **apologised**, and he **cried**, and he said "Come home and this will be the last time it ever happens... I'll never be abusive to you. And **don't** let anybody know." I mean I was on foot... I'd left the kids at home and I was feeling **guilty** that I'd left them on their own... My eldest was six but... I left them all. I think the youngest two were sleeping... erm... and I thought **'I need to get help.'** You know, **I felt trapped**... and **imprisoned** er... and **I felt I couldn't breathe, I felt strangled!** [incongruent laugh] **When you're being locked in the house without your phones and without anything and you're not able to speak to anybody** [whole section spoken quietly] (Asma, p. 18).

3.5.1 Sub Theme Two Secure/Insecure Childhoods/Adulthoods

Some participants experienced loving and nurturing childhoods and adulthoods. For others, their damaging histories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (www.manchestersafeguardingpartnership.co.uk; www.youngminds.org.uk) trajectory continued into their adulthoods.

My brother came to visit me erm... [pause] and he'd actually done courses on domestic violence. Now all my brothers have actually...they've studied from the same institute where my husband graduated from. So, they're all, Marsha'Allah, they're all Ālims... so... I knew what my husband was saying wasn't right when they were doing the opposite, they were with their wives and they respect their wives and Alhamdulillah and you know, my brother had just done a course on domestic violence and I think he'd had, you know, understanding of what it is and the symptoms to look out for... and he... he's actually a role model in his, you know, he was actually...he's an Imam in the Masjid in his locality and he works with...you know, he actually did counselling of *couples*... so he had a good understanding of what it was. So, although me being totally silent on you know the family issues and stuff...and trying to hide what was happening, he learnt it **wasn't normal**, he knew there was something wrong. So, he... did his courses and... he had doubts about me as well and sometimes I actually think did he actually, you know, did go on to study domestic violence and abuse because he was worried about my wellbeing. So, he came over and he realised **I was**...you know, **I was not me. I wasn't the sister that he knew**. So, he tried to **talk to my husband**... and you know, in a **positive way**, you know if there's any issues at all, you know, you can feel free to come and ask and that... and... my husband, I think he didn't want my brother to erm get involved and to pick out, you know, to learn about what was happening... so he was **really harsh on him**. So, he started an **argument** with him...just to kind of

b-l-o-c-k that link... I mean I lived just half an hour away from my brother, but **I wasn't allowed to visit him...** we'd go into his locality, you know, as an outing with the children, but we **weren't allowed to visit him** (Asma, p. 15 – 16).

Not that my dad hit me that much but... I was just so scared of my dad. My mum... you know... she used to (Masooma, p. 21).

From where I was, to where I am... worlds apart and from here, I can do s-o much more... and I've got that confidence in myself... I had no confidence, nobody else had confidence in me... but now, I don't need anyone else's confidence, I don't need anything from anybody, I can do it all by myself. I'm m-o-r-e than capable... and I want to, and I will do great things because I believe in myself... I had nobody... I had absolutely nobody. Nobody knows my story apart from... me, my husband and obviously the perpetrator... but my husband... he emotionally supports me but practically he can't do anything because... the closeness of the... family, the relationship... so it's just me. I'm going to help myself... I'm going to do it! (Masooma, p. 61).

*He would always refer to his children as 'bastards' ... he'd demand that we speak to him... every day... so he picked up the phone and you just asked how you are... "You're bastards! You're cursed..." He would say things to me where... excuse my language for this... but this is his quotes, "Oh, you know, like you open your legs and you loved getting shagged by that Paki... you really enjoyed it and you enjoyed it when he was doing it to you and putting it in you" and this is him saying these words to me, "You're going to be making sure that you find a Paki for your brother... and get him to do... all of that." And I'm thinking... 'How could you say that to... to me, knowing the kind of relationship we had where... what I am classed as to you...' [sniffs and silence] And that's what he would do a-l-l t-h-e t-i-m-e... he would refer to my mum... **God rest her soul...** as a "slut", he would provoke my brother by saying "Yeah, you know... I did this to her and I basically..." excuse my language, but this is the words he used "I shagged her like this... and that's how you were born" and... you're saying this to your son about his mum... and this is the kind of man he was and he is. **Everything** was sexual... e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g was sexual (Ayesha, p. 23).*

I wouldn't say I love myself but I'm almost there... I'm almost there and that feels... sometimes, it feels a bit silly saying it to myself... "I love myself" or I look in the mirror and I say, "I love you..." or "I like you." But, I do try to make the conscious effort of telling myself that... [pause] mentally looking in the mirror... "You're looking nice today" or "I like you today" or even in the shower... I tell my hands, my legs, my arms, my c-h-e-s-t that I like you... because... I hated them for so long... and now I actually... I like you now because you've done a lot for me... my breasts... they were abused, but now I've fed three children [participant places her left hand briefly on her chest] they've done a lot for me and I appreciate them for what they are... for what they were supposed to be for... and I think that's what a lot of women don't do... and in my job... that's what I tell women now... "Appreciate your body, the parts that you can't even think about... try to think about them for what they are... and for what they were meant to be, not for what somebody made them into" (Masooma, p. 59).

3.5.2 Sub Theme Two Past/Current/Ongoing Traumas

The interviews revealed the impact of traumatic experiences during childhoods, adolescences and adulthoods.

*Like when I was in school, I was... **going through a lot**... [participant hugs a very large teddy bear close to her and wraps both of her arms around it tightly] **because that's when it was happening, in high school, I was playing up, I wasn't learning** [pause] **I wasn't there. I would start crying out of the blue, for no reason**... I was probably **dissociating** but I... **didn't know at the time that I was... the problem for me was at home**... So, what did the teachers do? "**Oh, she's playing up in class, let's contact the parents.**" Obviously, I'm not going to tell my parents what's happening with me and why I'm doing this. So, my parents would get angry with me and my mum used to slap me, because, in Asians, **it's normal to slap**. And then it was like well... **I can't be safe at school, I can't be safe at home, where am I supposed to go?** So, I thought... 'let's **commit suicide or let's run away from home but I always ended up coming back because**... **I was too scared to even run away from home**... Yeah, I just felt like a **ping-pong ball**... **my parents batting me back to school, school batting me back to my parents**... and... **in between all this is happening I just... didn't feel safe a-n-y-w-h-e-r-e** (Masooma, p. 67 – 69).*

Panic attacks being so frequent because some days I'd just... shut off everything and go lie in bed and thinking, '**If I'm going to die, I'm going to die and they'll find my body... but I can't cope, I can't manage**...' just being... just lying in bed, **I'd fall asleep** and I'd wake up and you know, I'd be OK! But... I was getting constant flashbacks, I was physically, mentally drained (Asma, p. 43 – 44).

*Because **I'd been to university**... he was at uni [ex-husband's relative] and my brother was at uni – we used to talk about educational stuff and university life and my ex [husband] **couldn't understand that because he was illiterate. He could not understand the concept of that, so what he would do is... what he knew best.** He'd put me down in front of them... he'd walk in... he'd kick his shoes off... put his foot out towards me and say "**Take my socks off.**" And I'd have to **do it**... he'd throw the DVD at me, in my face, in front of everybody... "**Put the DVD in the machine.**" My cooking would be criticised, it was just never good enough... anything that I did was never good enough (Ayesha, p. 18).*

*Once he [second son] was born and I went back to work... because... he [ex-husband] wouldn't give me anything for housekeeping, **nothing**. But I was expected to **pay** for things... where was I supposed to get the money from? There was this one day when my sister came, he just threw the money at me... in my face... it was just **degrading, abuse, control, taking my house keys, taking my car keys**... just everything I did was **watched**... to a point where I started... wearing the **abaya** because I didn't want people to look at me... I just wanted to be in a shell, like just nobody look at me, nobody... just **ignore me**... I don't exist (Ayesha, p. 19).*

3.5.3 Sub Theme Two

Detrimental/Beneficial Mental, Emotional, Physical, Sexual and Financial Health

The aftermath of sexual violence resulted in the rejection of the embodied self. Some participants engaged in self blaming and had a misplaced sense of being responsible for the abuse. Self loathing of oneself eventually rehabilitated into one's self acceptance of their body. Themes of mental health breakdowns emerged from the data.

*I wasn't... like in touch with my body... mentally, **physically** I didn't like looking at myself... **I hated myself, I felt d-i-r-t-y**... but I know now, **it wasn't my fault**. I know it wasn't my body's fault... and I think that's one **thing** that people don't really think about... that... **mentally you can be OK, but with your body you're not OK. Or with your body you're OK, but mentally you're not OK and you need the two to connect...** and I didn't connect the two for a long time. **I always blamed my body... I blamed myself for what happened; If I didn't have this body, if I wasn't a female, it wouldn't have happened to me ... but...** it took me a long time to realise **it's not my fault, it's not my body's fault**... and now that I am... **connected**... I sometimes look in the mirror and I... **sometimes, not a lot, but sometimes** I look in the mirror and think, **'You're actually looking pretty today. Your colour is nice and clear today... the dark circles under your eyes are fading, they're getting lighter ...'** **I never used to do that.** I just used to look in the mirror and see like **urgh ... I used to feel sick just looking at myself... ugly... disgusting, my body was... I couldn't touch myself in places ... but now I can ... and... I'm comfortable with myself** (Masooma, p. 57 – 58).*

*It stopped about... the last... episode... like I can recall... was... August 2016... where it all happened and... all of this came to light and at that point I went into... **absolute breakdown**... but then again, survival kicks in because... you've gone into breakdown but you're thinking, **'I am a single parent with three children! How am I going to ... their schools ...'** Because September they had to go to school, their day to day care... my youngest was still very **tiny** at that point... and **that** is when... the **desperation** kicked in... And you are like... a duck in water – on the surface it's calm, but beneath you are **paddling like crazy!** (Ayesha, p. 28 – 29).*

*I actually felt, you know, **ashamed** of what I was going through... and somehow, I thought it was **all my fault**. And then it became the norm after my second or third child, you know, if anything trivial... for cooking rice and not making **roti**... you had to have both at the table... [pause]. **I was beaten up in front of my children ... and I couldn't tell anybody about it ... I tried to run away ... I left home ...** I left the kids inside because what he did was he actually, on one of the occasions, he physically abused me... and... **I was completely lost**, so I just went to bed at first, I thought I need to clear my mind... and **I need to get away**. I think that was the first time I thought, **'T-h-i-s c-a-n-n-o-t c-o-n-t-i-n-u-e**. My children are suffering and I need help (Asma, p. 17 – 18).*

3.5.4 Sub Theme Two

Internal and External Distress

All of the participants indicated acute and prolonged inner and outer torment and turmoil, which appeared to be a customary occurrence for a substantial period of time in their lives.

*I've always **hated** men... I've never been close to my dad or my brothers or any **o-t-h-e-r** man and for me to be so close to my **husband**... it's a bit of a **shock** when I think about it... I kind of... get taken aback like, oh my God, from absolutely... having **hated** men... to **absolutely loving this one man s-o much**, you know, I've given my soul to him... he is amazing. So yeah, **not all men are bad!** [incongruent laugh] (Masooma, p. 8).*

*I had **young children**. I had a bigger responsibility at home. He wanted the house to be... clean all the time... top to bottom... he wanted food... freshly cooked food every day at **each mealtime**. He expected me to look after my children, give them a **good**, you know, **upbringing** and yet **he wanted me to work as well**. And I did it for as long as I could... until obviously with the birth of my fourth, **I was completely out of my mind**. I **could not carry on the burden anymore** (Asma, p. 13 – 14).*

*I was actually accused of not being a Muslim, not being... culturally good enough, not being... a good **mother** because I'd let my children witness their dad being **taken away** [by the police]. That made me feel so sad... and I felt as if I was totally **useless** and **everything was my fault** (Asma, p. 22).*

*I think for those six years that I was married to him, one of the things that he constantly and **consistently** told me was that **I was mad**, I was crazy to the point where I thought of myself as **crazy** and mad... and I thought **I** was the one that needed help. But when I looked back on what I'd **written**... and my brother's really quite good at writing, so he actually translated it for me... "**So now look at this, what you've given me, and this is what I've written, do you think it's the right thing? Is that happy? Is that healthy?**" I said "**Of course not...**" "**Would you bear that if that was happening to any friend of yours or anybody you knew?**" And I said "**N-o-t for a second.**" And he goes "**Well, we can't see you in that situation as well, so you have to understand where we're coming from and you have to trust us**" (Asma, p. 24 – 25).*

***Before he** [perpetrator] **knew that my husband knew, he would take advantage** and, you know, like I was saying... the **e-y-e-s** looking at... I would feel like **he's raped me with his eyes all over again, every time I saw him** (Masooma, p. 20).*

*Somebody like myself, who had a little bit of understanding [of referral procedures] found it so **difficult** to get that breakthrough... and the **d-e-s-p-e-r-a-t-i-o-n**... you can't put emotions into words... I was... at the point of **d-e-s-p-a-i-r**... '**How do I make anybody u-n-d-e-r-s-t-a-n-d... the despair that I was in?**' ... But... I am... **s-o, s-o, s-o** grateful that I found [clinical lead at GMRC name] because if I hadn't... I don't know where I would be now... that was my lifeline. Yes, the **journey is mine, the hard work is mine**... but... it's... somebody giving you that **bait** that you hang onto because many people walk past. Organisations walk past... because **they don't k-n-o-w** and the other thing is, they are too **e-m-b-a-r-r-a-s-s-e-d** to admit they **don't know**... So it's easier to turn a blind eye than to accept '**I don't know**'... and that is what I have found (Ayesha, p. 36).*

3.5.5 Sub Theme Two Vulnerabilities and Strengths

The corollaries of being subjected to sexual violence was omnipresent. All of the survivors had managed to overcome their vulnerabilities to various gradations and developed the capacity to become resourceful and independent women.

*And I think it was just God that gave me courage and I said, 'Do you know what...?' Because I was just so **angry** at him for doing that [saying to her GP that she was hitting the children] for **lying** [incongruent laugh] and I said "Do you know what? I know that... whatever you've done, you've done, right. I can **d-e-a-l** with the world, but I can't put up with any of your behaviour... why have you come back? You've taken all your stuff. I'll deal with the rest. I'll deal with the social services, but I can't tolerate to see your face. You've tried to have my kids... you think you can take the kids away from me." I said "If I'm meant to have them... I will get them, no matter what. And if it's not destined to be... I can't **k-e-e-p** them, you know, if it's not meant to be. But I know one thing for sure... is I can't see **y-o-u-r** face anymore." [laughs] I think that's the last conversation I had with him and that was it, I've **n-e-v-e-r** spoken to him after that (Asma, p. 28).*

*Being a survivor means taking on that challenge or surviving **e-v-e-r-y** single second of **e-v-e-r-y** single day, keeping yourself grounded, keeping yourself focussed, keeping yourself **n-o-r-m-a-l** and living a normal life, being a wife, being a mother... being an individual, more than anybody else, being you, an individual but keeping your mental... state... **s-a-n-e**... (Ayesha, p. 29). It's difficult because you will forever... be putting up barriers... I don't think a survivor can ever live without putting barriers up... or surrounding themselves with barriers... because if you don't put barriers around you... you're not safeguarding yourself... (Ayesha, p.30). When I am... the most **vulnerable** and that's when my survival has to kick in... to get through the day... basically taking one step in front of the other to **walk**... or even **b-r-e-a-t-h-e** (Ayesha, p. 31).*

*I wasn't ready to get married. I was kind of **forced into it** because I... ran away from home. But yeah, the pregnancies [due to the rapes] were prior to... getting married um... the suicide attempts were prior... but it was **weird** because **nobody ever noticed**... that I tried to **commit suicide**... maybe I... saw it in films and thought, 'OK, that's how you do it,' but you know, take a few extra paracetamol... a few extra... tablets from your mum, nick 'em from your mum and take them... but **in my head, I was committing suicide**. I was trying to commit suicide, so I'd actually **mentally prepared myself**... it was because I just wanted to end my life. I didn't go and throw myself off a bridge or... jump in front of a car or anything, but I was trying to commit suicide so... That was my intention, I just did it the **wrong way**. Now I think '**Thank God** that it happened the wrong way' because then I wouldn't have my **children**... and my **amazing husband**... but at that time, yeah, I'd just had enough (Masooma, p. 28).*

3.5.6 Sub Theme Two Implosion and Explosion of Self

There were clear illustrations the participants had experienced an internal disintegration of themselves as the impact of the sexual violence resulted in them struggling to

communicate, interact and engage with other people. They also emanated external distress by inconsolable crying. However, their inner resilience helped them to recover from their fragmented lives as they became more insightful of their thoughts, feelings and actions.

My kids were nearly taken off me... but you have to say to them [police and other organisations] and show them that if I was not in the right mental state, how would I have got through this... and kept my kids safe? So, you're doing these things. Just don't let... vocabulary, language...or... somebody's position dictate what you... the fact that you know you're doing the right thing. And again, I keep mentioning this word, recognise... recognise that you c-a-n do this. You a-r-e doing this, and you have been doing this. [GMRC Clinical Lead name] hasn't lived my life, you haven't lived my life, my children haven't lived my life... I've lived it and I recognise that I've lived it. But, it's then taking that recognition forward... in... positive ways... and b-e-l-i-e-v-e m-e, you will hit so many negatives ... but it's channelling through those negatives and finding that glimmer of positive... and there will always be one little glimmer of positive, whether we want to see it or not (Ayesha, p. 44 – 45).

They always used to think I'm just moody or bitchy or... antisocial... because I didn't like going... into like a gathering and people... I just like... keep myself to myself. And even now, when I do go into gatherings... and I feel like I'm able to socialise... I don't have the skills... to uphold a conversation unless, like now, because I'm talking about myself... I can talk, but if you ask me to talk about other things ... I'd probably struggle a bit because I'm an expert on myself. I'm not an expert on anything else (Masooma, p. 28 – 29).

It was terrible and I think that's when I wrote to my mentor... my Sheikh erm and I wrote everything... the abuse that I was going t-h-r-o-u-g-h and what's happened and basically, I was crying out for help and I told him that I don't want to tell my family because... I don't know how I'm going to... I don't know what to do basically and I needed help... I got a letter back and... the first thing he said was "Inna Lilahi Wa Inallah-e-Raji'oon. What are you doing? What are you putting yourself and your children through?... Talk to your brothers ... talk to your family and you have to seek help" (Asma, p. 22).

So, I brought two children with me and I left the older two with my husband and they [family of origin] said it was just going to be for a few days. I came home to my family. I remember I was just constantly crying, I couldn't speak to anybody. If anybody had asked... "What's happening?" I'd just start crying... I didn't know what was happening... I was... mentally, physically... I was unable to... say anything and I was all c-o-n-f-u-s-e-d of who I was or what my responsibilities were or what to do and... the best thing that happened was... my mum and my sister-in-law, they took care of my children and... they said "Whenever you have time, at your own pace, just write down what happens in your house. You can't talk... but you can write down what happens." And that was, I think, a positive tool, because I wrote down a few incidents that had taken place so they got a bit of insight into what was happening... and... by the end of two weeks, I think, because he was still... consistently abusive to my family... I didn't want to talk to him ... for those two weeks... I was so fearful because I knew that... he'd probably just shout abuse over the phone for... me... staying away from him ... I talked to my children every day, but not talked to him. And that gave me, I think, that freedom

to be able to write it down... and when I looked back at it. I thought, 'Wait, this is not right...' I think writing is a powerful tool (Asma, p. 23 – 24).

3.5.7 Sub Theme Two

Unhealthy/Healthy Self Value, Self Worth and Self Belief

There was evidence the abusive experiences the participants were subjected to and the very unsafe environments they lived in at various life stages, had a significant impact upon how they valued themselves and their sense of self worth. Their self belief was impaired for a period of time and there was a developmental delay in the formation of social skills.

*I had my third child, I was expecting my fourth when he got his visa. I was... [pause] **lost as a person**... I'd come to a level where... if I was given a choice between **two colours**... **I didn't know which one I liked. I mean it'd just confuse me**... so I was... **so used to being controlled that I had no choice of my own. I had no confidence in myself, I had no trust in anybody**... so I'd actually lost trust in **everything and everyone**... [incongruent laugh]... I did actually feel that I wasn't being a good **parent**. I kept blaming myself for everything (Asma, p. 11 & 42).*

[name of a women's organisation with national and local branches in the UK] *don't understand me, **who else is going to understand me? What are they going to think of me? They're going to think 'this woman is crazy!'** That was another thing, the fear kicks in because you're thinking, 'They're going to think I'm crazy... they're going to take my kids off me' (Ayesha, p. 37).*

*I used to have mood swings. I used to **dissociate** ... I didn't know I was **doing** it um... but I would be quite **violent**... people thought I was **crazy**... because there's different **characters, there's different sides** ... so it has **r-e-a-l-l-y impacted a lot**... **nightmares, flashbacks**... the dissociation as well...um [pause]. Just not being able to **socialise**... because I was depressed... during the time when I would **learn** how to socialise... when I would pick up the **skills**, I was depressed. And now **I feel like I don't have the skills**... and **now**, I'm going to pick up the **skills**... which, I'm going to use **later on when people probably won't want to know me anymore**... because ... **I haven't been able to build that relationship** ... so I feel like I'm like...you know, like... from... nine to twenty-two... [participant moves her hands to illustrate an object being picked up and placed from left to right] *I feel like that part of my life, I've had to **lift it and move it**... so it's going to take me **that many years** to pick up certain skills that I would have picked up in those years... so I just feel like I'm **behind**... I'm getting educated **now**, but I would have done that in **those years**, you know. So, I just feel like I'm just... so many years behind everyone of my **age group**... (Masooma, p. 54).**

3.5.8 Sub Theme Two

Visible and Invisible Scars

The interviews revealed the consequences of sexual violations included trauma, depression, pregnancies, miscarriage(s) and a termination. A façade of portraying a perfect family and desperate attempts to receive appropriate, professional help also emerged. One of the participant's spouse experienced depression and accessed

therapeutic interventions upon ascertaining his brother had sexually abused his wife during her childhood, adolescence and partial adulthood.

*I suppose for him [husband] to process that, he needed to know those **details**. Um... so that was like me **reliving my trauma all over again, having to tell him...** and then obviously **h-e was traumatised** because he looked up to his brother... your older brother has **done that**. So... he went through his own recovery, my husband... counselling... **depression**. So, we were **both depressed at the same time! We were both having counselling at the same time, we had couples counselling because we got to a point where we just didn't want to be with each other anymore... because we were so depressed. We had our own demons to deal with...** but we worked through it, **thank God**. And we're in a better place now... **thank G-o-d** I told him... because I can't imagine... what my life would have been like **carrying that secret...** twenty years of marriage, you know, **his brother coming and going**, me having to **pretend...** I would have been **constantly traumatised** and I wouldn't have been able to get the **help** that I got... **if I hadn't told my husband**. And if he would have left me, then I would have been better off because if he can't deal with something... **that's not my fault, then I'd rather not have you ... I'd rather be alone. But, thank God, he didn't leave me, and he helped me, and he saved my life basically...** And having to tell him that your brother actually raped me pregnant, twice... **one, I had an abortion and the next one, I had a miscarriage... he doesn't hate me...** I can't look at my own body... **I can now ... very, very recently...** but I couldn't look at myself, I couldn't touch myself, I hated myself... and for him not to feel like that towards me... it's like **w-o-w...** it's a really big **wow moment** because you think **'Well, I don't like myself, how can he like me?'** [pause] I just thought... **one, knowing that she's been raped...** is... **enough of a reason for man to not...** that I've **heard** that a man doesn't want to touch you because... they feel like somebody else has been there... and then for him to **still want me**, knowing that it was **his b-r-o-t-h-e-r** and I've had like... two babies in there from somebody else... he still wants me, so he **m-u-s-t be an angel...** I just can't imagine any other man... being OK with **that and still feeling attracted to you and still calling you beautiful and still... lusty after you... because I wouldn't... I don't know if I could. So... my husband is an angel!** (Masooma, p. 26 – 27).*

*I did have visits from my **health visitor...** regular visits... the health visitor or the midwife... those days used to be... like a **blessing to me** because my husband would be **so nice to me on those days** because **he didn't want me to mention anything to them** Because he always told me that if... **these people... hear anything of what's happening, they will take our children away...** so I was not to mention anything, but he'd be so nice to me... to kind of **show that...** 'We're the perfect family at home.' Erm, but I did erm suffer from depression – they thought it was postnatal depression... By the time I had my third... I wasn't mentally, physically fit to do anything. I'd lost my personality completely... so my health visitor did pick up on that one... my GP diagnosed me with postnatal depression, so I got more **help...** which **he didn't like...** [pause] because he thought... the more I'm exposed to services, the more likely he's going to be **caught out**. So, he was like... "You don't need to accept help from them and we're OK. I'm here to look after you. And that should be sufficient..." And I played along with it, I guess, I played along with the happy family thing (Asma, p. 17).*

*I contacted them [sexual health clinic] again and again, I was just like... **this desperation, just trying to say whatever I could to try and get help and I was coming***

out with all sorts. I was like “Please, please, please...” because it was... not information overload, but in a way, yes... everything had come... it wasn’t everything, sorry, a lot had come to me, a lot had been exposed to me and I needed to break it down and digest it. I couldn’t. It was overwhelming. I just couldn’t cope... I felt like I was having a breakdown... When I contacted them, they basically said “We don’t deal with this.” They then put me through to ISVA, then via ISVA I got through to umm the Rape Crisis, but with Rape Crisis again, it was like... every day, every hour waiting for the call and again, this is where... we need to be more aware of these things and there needs to be more people here because their workload is immense so... for somebody as vulnerable as what I felt I was... by the time they contacted me... every hour, every second (Ayesha, p. 35).

3.5.9 Sub Theme Two Incarcerated to Liberated Survivors

The participants’ eventual recognition of their realities, and seeing the abusive dynamics through a lens of authenticity and clarity, were instrumental in them unearthing their inner strengths to challenge, disempower and reject the oppressive, controlling and abusive men in their lives.

He threatened to leave the house as he did many times earlier... the only difference was I used to b-e-g him to stay, previously... literally, I’d say, “Treat me as a slave or whatever... I’ll be your slave for the rest of your life, but don’t leave me.’ But after the seven weeks [of living with her family of origin] I used to say “There’s the d-o-o-r... it’s your choice that you’re making. I’m OK. I don’t need you anymore.” And any time he said to me, “You’re crazy” I’d say “Well I’m sorry, I’m n-o-t the crazy one. I did go crazy by living with y-o-u... but... I’ve been with my family, Alhamdulillah, and I’ve come to my sense and... if you’re willing to stay with me, you will come to your sense t-o-o.” And he didn’t like that! [smiles and laughs]... But if you d-a-r-e, you know, even look down upon me, there’s the d-o-o-r. I a-i-n’t tolerating it anymore’ [smiles and laughs] (Asma, p. 26 – 27).

When I got married it was really weird because I just... got this courage inside me... and I got this e-n-e-r-g-y inside me... then this once... when he [perpetrator] came to me... I said, “You know, you touch me again... and I’m going to tell your brother what you’re doing to me, what you’ve been doing to me. And I’m going to k-i-l-l y-o-u.” And at that moment, I c-o-u-l-d have killed him... e-a-s-i-l-y, I could have killed him. I just didn’t feel anything in that moment... and... he just walked away... and I thought ‘W-o-w! That was easy! He just walked away.’ And he didn’t hit me, he didn’t beat me up, he didn’t force me, he didn’t do anything. He just walked away. And I was lying there all night because he used to come in the middle of the night when everyone was asleep... because he used to live with us (Masooma, p. 22).

That for me was it... that for me was my trigger [witnessing the perpetrator whom sexually violated her for decades, in the act of sexually abusing her 6 – 7 years old daughter] and I think that’s when the maternal, survival instincts kicked in... because it was like, ‘Whatever you’ve done to me... you’ve done... You’re not doing that to her!’ I got up, I dragged her [she was sleeping]... I mean she’s heavy, she’s grown... as in like she’s developed... I grabbed her and... she’s a dead weight and I just looked him in the eye... and I’ve n-e-v-e-r, e-v-e-r done that in my life. I looked him in the

eye, I've not said anything to him and he **knew**, but he knew he had that control over me... so he's just looked me back in the eye, like 'What you going to do about it?' And I grabbed her (Ayesha, p. 25 – 26).

I've been in a **dark, dark, dark place... the lowest of the low you can go, I've b-e-e-n there... and I've c-l-a-w-e-d my way to the top, quite literally c-l-a-w-e-d my way to the top... [pause] and I want to pass that on, that you can do it... no matter h-o-w bad you feel, it can be done... and the more you do it, the more you tell yourself "It's OK, it wasn't your fault... like your body..." you know, affirmations and things... it gets easier and now, I can do it without even thinking about it** (Masooma, p. 60).

3.6 Main Theme Three Relationships

One of the participant's had secure, safe and nurturing relationships with her parents and siblings. Sadly, the majority of participants were abused by one or both parents and had not experienced love and safety due to the abusive, parenting they received. An abusive husband's attempts to further isolate a participant from her caring and concerned family galvanised her to challenge his controlling behaviour, which he had disguised with misinterpretations and distorted views of Islam and chauvinistic, cultural expectations.

*I think that was... the cut-off point... when things really escalated... he didn't want me to call, you know, or have **any contact with any of my family members, including my mum**. This was like right towards the end... when we had arguments and... **I refused to do that...** "You being a wife and me being a husband, it's just... I've got control... I can... religion, culture give me a greater right and... keeping contact with my family, but you don't have to do that because culturally you're part of my family **now** so you're not to contact any [of your] family members" (Asma, p. 21).*

*And my mum and dad are the type, they would **slap me... because they're from Pakistan – slapping and hitting is... nothing to them**. So, he [perpetrator] would get me into trouble, so... **it's either... getting beaten up from him or get beaten up from my mum or dad**. So, either way, I'm going to get beaten up so... **I don't have a choice, so what would I rather do? And most of the time I... gave into him... because then he would be gentle, and my mum and dad wouldn't** (Masooma, p. 21).*

*He [other parent] would not **s-l-e-e-p... much... he'd always... openly watch... porn...** and this is somebody who'd been going to... the **Masjid** five times a day... quite a noted, pious, person in the community and at home **you're doing that** (Ayesha, p. 23).*

3.6.1 Sub Theme Three Dynamics with Family of Origin

The participants talked with candour regarding family relationships, expectations, autonomy, decision-making and the milieu they were raised in. In one abusive household, the perpetrator favoured two of his children whom he permitted to eat. He relentlessly and viciously beat the other children on a daily basis and would consume

his own meals in front of them as they helplessly and silently watched him eat when they were hungry and deprived of basic food.

*I was so **h-a-p-p-y with my upbringing** and I thought that was due to the **love between my mother and father**, Alhamdulillah, and my family erm... I wanted to give that to **my child**... [as I was already expecting my first child]... *although... my parents could see what was coming along and they did advise me to separate and to take divorce... And because I was expecting my child, I thought it was my duty to... try and keep the family together and I was willing to sacrifice **a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g**... just to... get **that**... to give **both parents to my child**. So, I moved back with him... against my parents' will. As a married woman, I thought I was **exercising my right** by going back to stay with him because he was my **husband** and I owed it to **him and to my child to make sacrifices** and I think that's where he thought... he had me full in control. So, for the next seven years... I was... just obeying... just trying to **please him**, just to **keep him happy** (Asma, p. 10 – 11).**

*When I was **born**, my husband's six months older than me, when I was born, my mother in law said... like they do in Asians... "**She's going to be my daughter when she grows up, she's going to marry my son**" which is... disgusting and weird but it used to happen. So, we always knew that I was going to marry my husband. **The whole family knew**, nobody ever came for my rishta because **they knew** ... that... I'm marrying him... so, obviously his brother knew that I'm going to be his sister-in-law, so... when **he said that**... "I knew that I could never marry you, I thought I'd have you in that way" [pause] for me to see that [text message from him] was a **shock**... for my husband to see that, it was **devastating** [pause] (Masooma, p. 43).*

*The other parent was a controller... He'd want us to get educated... so that he could show the world that "My children are educated" but one thing he said was "You're never going to get married." He never wanted to marry us [girls] off... it was like we were his prized possessions. My older sister... he used to use things like... for example... your education against you... so he would allow you to study... but on the day of her final exams, he would not let her go to university. All night, he'd beat her... it was **always the case**.. Eid day was **awful** for us... awful because there would be fighting... My mum used to get an allowance of five pounds a day... for shopping and everything. But out of that five pounds, he **always ate meat**... so he would want her to buy meat for **him**... and... his cigarettes – heavy smoker... I would sit there and I would **watch him**... we would all watch him **eat**. And we'd be **hungry** and we had **no food**. But we'd sit and watch him **eat**. And then... the older brother, he'd get food... he was a **boy** and what have you and... his favourite [daughter] would get it. But my older sister and I... were always targeted... I remember when my elder sister ran away and she got married – I was like... **I got it**... I certainly **got it** in the sense... the **violence and everything** (Ayesha, p. 11 – 12).*

3.6.2 Sub Theme Three Dynamics with Ex-Husbands/Perpetrators

The positionalities with abusive, ex-husbands and perpetrators were fluid and not static. Some participants and their families were able to disconnect from the abusers, whereas, for others, this was not a viable option due to the ongoing, interfamilial connexions.

My focus was my children and my husband... and I thought I was being a good mother and a good wife... that was my focus at the time... anything that pleased him was... my responsibility, just to please him. Anything he said was, you know, it was always right, and I couldn't oppose it, or I couldn't give my view on it (Asma, p. 11).

But for the rest of my life I will always, my name will a-l-w-a-y-s be linked to one of the two perpetrators... When I was signing those documents [participant gestures towards the research interview documentation]... and as I was signing and I'm thinking, 'I'm linking you with me' and it will always be a link, hence why I was saying... that every single day is a survival, it is... trying to get my identity... Yes, I carry that name and even in Islam you are resurrected and umm... by... so now, do you understand when I say to you that every day what I go through, even after my last breath... (Ayesha, p. 28). Sometimes people get closure where they can... separate themselves... I can't... I'm not allowed to and when that child comes asking or wanting their love... that a child wants from his parent, from his mum... trying to put those feelings... it is so difficult... and I s-e-e it... and I know it... that he does get treated a little differently by me, but it's not his fault (Ayesha, p. 29).

We [participant and her parents] moved to the north, he [perpetrator] followed... and then when I got married and I moved out with my husband, he followed. And I... I've confronted him, and I said "Why are you following me?" He said, "I'm n-e-v-e-r going to leave you alone." So even where I'm living now... he's followed... just down the road. And every time I move... he moves. And... nobody thinks it's weird because obviously he's my husband's brother, so everybody thinks, 'Aw, they want to stay close and everything' but they don't know the real reason, but now that my husband's confronted him... he's stopped (Masooma, p. 23 – 24).

After my third [child] I r-e-a-l-l-y wanted to use some sort of contraceptives because I knew Islamically you're allowed to. But he kept saying that if... those contraceptives... have some... negative effect on me, not having babies, he wanted a bigger family.... I think the reason why was because he knew that I wouldn't be able to think straight if I was pregnant... if I was... confident... he wouldn't be able to control me. So, I think the pregnancy and the children were just... another control factor (Asma, p. 19 – 20).

For us two [participant and her husband] it's ongoing... it's never going to end... sometimes I feel guilty for putting this on my husband... I wish he didn't have to go through this... and I feel sorry for him that he has to... but... I didn't choose this and I'm glad I've got the support... I feel sorry for when he has to see him [perpetrator] in public and he has to let on to him... k-n-o-w-i-n-g what he's done, what kind of a monster he is... but then... I am so grateful... I'll eternally be grateful for the support he's given me... because... I used to self-harm, I tried multiple attempts of suicide, I ran away from home... but then came back (Masooma, p. 27 – 28).

3.6.3 Sub Theme Three Dynamics with Current Husbands

There were marked differences in how some of the participants were able/unable to disclose to their current husbands their experiences of historical, sexual violence. One spouse was extremely supportive and engaging with his wife, and appeared to be attuned to her innermost thoughts, feelings and processes. Another spouse was

divergent to the aforementioned dynamic as he was completely oblivious to the sexual violations his wife had experienced in the past.

After so many... failed attempts of suicide ... I just... I didn't want to live and... he's [husband] the one that said "No, you need to. You're worth it. You're better than this. You're better than... what somebody's made you." So... he's amazing... I can't see myself without him [paragraph very quietly spoken]... he's... more than an anchor, he's... you know, like when they say soul mates? He actually is ... I don't have to be speaking but he can just tell by looking at me how I'm feeling... he can read me better than I can read myself. It's really weird how... we are s-o close, and we've never had an argument. We have our little tiffs here and there, but we've never had... an a-r-g-u-m-e-n-t [smiles] (Masooma, p. 7).

My husband doesn't talk to him [perpetrator] anymore ... only in gatherings... just... to keep face my husband does because all that... "what will people say?" which is the title of this [research project] (Masooma, p. 25) ... just because of that... my husband speaks to him and everything but, I don't... I don't have to speak to him if I don't want to and... if somebody asks me "Why?" I don't have to answer them. My husband says "If they ask you ... just say "Because I don't want to" and if they have any further questions just tell them to come to me" (Masooma, p. 25).

The stigma, the taboo, the awareness, the perception, all of that. At the moment, I live a double life, I cannot tell my husband what I've been through ... he has n-o idea... what I've been through ... e-v-e-r-y single day of my life, as long as I am with him, this act has to continue. And this act is continuing because... I don't feel I can trust... and the trust again, comes with fear. But this kind of fear isn't the children, the fear is myself... because you're thinking 'If I trust you and I let you into... a little bit about my life... are you going to use that against me and break me down emotionally in another way?' Because... human beings are very good at doing that (Ayesha, p. 37).

3.6.4 Sub Theme Three Dynamics with Current/Ex In-Laws

The participants shared narratives of their ex-in-laws also being the perpetrators of abuse or colluding with this as they were silent bystanders to the abuse they witnessed/were aware of.

The abuse that I suffered when I went to his family... in a sexual way... because they just thought of me as an easy target... because I was British... from here and I was there [in Pakistan] and I was alone there because he would just leave me alone and go off... because over there, women get no recognition, you're a Pathan... I remember at that time... they were straight black trousers that were in... with a tiny slit... like this... [hand gestures to demonstrate the miniscule slit in trouser design] a tiny, tiny slit and I was told... by... my older brother-in-law, who was the head of the family, that either I change... or... I will be hit... beaten with a cane ... (Ayesha, p. 46 – 47).... The way the tailor touched me up... because 'Oh, you're from England...' When I came back to the house... and I've gone in to greet them and say "Salam" to them and I've still got my chadar on and my brother-in-law was sat on the floor... and he literally, just like a vulture... leaped up, grabbed my chadar and p-u-l-l-e-d m-e d-o-w-n... and... literally just ripped it off me, but the way he dragged me, I had actually bent forward so... I had exposed a lot of my cleavage and he said... in Urdu "juk kay apna

gala tho deek aw” yahni kay **“bend and show me your neck”**[cleavage] (Ayesha, p. 47).

*When he was actually abusive, I did try to seek help from... **his family members** ... one of the occasions he threatened me to... **physical abuse** ... I was **r-e-a-l-l-y terrified**. I thought he was just gonna lock the doors, take the phones away and **I’ll be imprisoned again**. Er, so I thought whilst I’ve got the phone, let me call his sister. So, I called his sister and I told her that... this was what her brother was about to do... she said she was busy, and she’d call me back later and I thought **‘That’d be too late!’** Because... obviously I knew I wouldn’t have... my phones with me or you know, any means of contact. So I dialled **999** (Asma, p. 21).*

3.6.5 Sub Theme Three Past Dynamics with Children

There were parallels of the participants previously practising overprotective behaviours towards their progeny in order to keep them safe. One of the survivors expressed how she had contended with her internal struggle to be able to leave her daughter unsupervised with her current husband, whom was not the biological father of this particular child.

*I had actually been **overprotective of my children, I wouldn’t let them out of my sight**... **I was just scared at first**... [after the separation] because their dad had actually threatened that... he’d actually **kill us all and he’ll kill himself** (Asma, p. 45). **Alhamdulillah, I’ve got the four... and we’re happy!** (Asma, p. 26).*

***But, it has impacted... my children**... because of my depression... because of my husband’s depression... our mental health, our **triggers**, it has impacted on them because in the beginning, I was **over protective**, I was **so over protective** and my older children... I feel like I hid them away from... [pause] **things**... like my daughter’s **only** started to get the bus now – she’s **seventeen**... and **even now, she has to share her location with me**... and my husband, she has to share her location so we can see where she is **all the time**... and my son, he’s in high school, but they have to share their location... **We pick and drop them, she gets the bus to college, but not back from college**... Now we’re... being more comfortable, giving them a little bit more **freedom** so she can go out with friends... **but she still has to share her location. She still has to text and call**... **they’ve never stayed over at anyone’s house. I still wouldn’t allow that. I don’t allow anybody to stay over at our house** [pause] I’ve never really stayed over at anybody’s house **alone**... I’ll only do it if we go as a **family**... if I know my husband’s there, so if anything does happen, **he’s there** (Masooma, p. 53 – 54).*

*I... try my best to try and understand this family that I’ve gone into now... **H-e’s** [husband] **not the biological father of my daughter**... I know what’s happened to me with that relationship... **I don’t want to live a life where I can’t walk out the house and go to work thinking ‘They’re home alone, what’s going on?’** It’s going to **m-e-n-t-a-l-l-y** just... **destroy me**... so... **again**... to be a survivor, it’s the **constant grounding**, it’s the **constant touching base** (Ayesha, p. 38).*

3.6.6 Sub Theme Three Current Dynamics with Children

All of the participants had implemented measures to ensure their children were safe within and outside the home environments. They had developed very loving, nurturing, communicative and meaningful relationships with their offspring. There was a rhetoric from the participants their progeny were their strengths.

*I know I've put the effort in and I've... made that relationship with my children and I know they would come to me... or at least I've given them, you know, information and tools... for them to use... if they needed to speak to somebody, **they know where to go. They know who to speak to.** But that doesn't mean, "Oh, you know, here's a piece of paper with numbers on it. **That's what you call if you need it.**" I've given them the choice of coming to me **first**... if they want to **and** have that information. And I think that is **s-o** important to make that relationship, so they feel comfortable to come to you for **a-b-s-o-l-u-t-e-l-y a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g**... My daughter is seventeen... and... I **can't wait** to have... the chat about **sex**... when she gets **married** because I'd rather she learnt it the proper way from me... I think it's proper because I've been... **on the other side** and... have had it the hard way. So, I'm going to teach her **e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g** not just how to have **fun** or... **just the dangers. I'm going to teach her e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g overall and I'd rather it was me than somebody else ... because then I know what I'm telling her**... it's not like, "Oh, OK, you know, what is she doing? Is she guessing? And where is she getting the information from?" **That's just going to drive m-e crazy, the what ifs, the what ifs, you know, all the time**.... In the beginning when I started talking about these things, I was really **uncomfortable** because I never had that with my **mum**, so I didn't know where to begin. I didn't know what was appropriate information, what the right age was... to start talking about these things. But then me and my husband sat down, and we had a conversation **first** and we decided the right ages and... the level of information and what... **just everything**... as a partnership... we **decided** and... **he spoke to my son and I spoke to my daughter, that's one... thing**...where we've maintained boundaries... But it was really uncomfortable to begin with and... now... we're at that stage where she can speak to me about anything... I think... **'Get over that uncomfortable feeling** because... the bigger picture is that you're **saving your children** from... something **really, really bad**' and then they're going to speak to their children and then they're going to speak to their children, so again, it's like a **snowball effect** (Masooma, p. 84 – 85).*

*I like my independence and I **l-o-v-e** my children and I just wanted to give them the best. I think they've been my focus... ever since I've had them. They've been a blessing. I've never looked down upon them and they've always been my... my **strength!** [smiles and laughs]. I used to feel at the beginning that they were my **weakness**, but **no**. I think over the years I've **realised** my children have been **my** strength, they've **always** lifted me up when I've had bad days, when I'm down and... I think what I feared the most was bringing them up on **my own**... I wouldn't be a good **parent**... but what I've realised is that the children... they're actually a lot more... what's the word? [pause] They can understand way more than **we think, they're more resilient** [smiles] (Asma, p. 38).*

*I have made sacrifices, but they haven't gone to waste... I haven't wasted them... my kids are doing **amazing** (Asma, p. 51).*

3.7 Main Theme Four Culture

Patriarchal practices and attempts to normalise abuse materialised. One participant alluded to dressing a particular way due to her identity as a Muslim girl, which appeared to stem from her cultural perception and values of modest attire for Muslim females. Some South Asian communities emasculated men if they chose to live with their in-laws or were perceived to be listening to their wives.

He [ex-husband] kept telling me that... even being physically abusive is normal in Asian families, apparently... "All women get beaten up and it's OK to be beaten up by your husband, it's nothing to be... ashamed of" (Asma, p. 32).

I would cut myself in places where nobody could see so it would be at the top of my arm... or like my thighs, places where nobody could see because obviously, I'm an Asian girl, I don't... wear short sleeves or... skirts or anything. So, nobody ever noticed... and... that makes me quite sad that nobody ever noticed (Masooma, p. 28).

It's not just one person... it's us as a community, you know, so if someone's 'ghar damad' you think, 'Oh... how are you going to listen?' Because when you call somebody a 'ghar damad' he actually loses his... people... actually feel, the men feel that no-one is going to listen to what they have to say... I mean that's how low they take it and even the term 'ran mureed...' They think 'he doesn't have a say of himself [as]... the man of the house...' (Asma, p. 9).

3.7.1 Sub Theme Four South Asian Communities Expectations

Females being told to stay silent about sexual violence by other women emerged. The damage incurred due to the abuse, resulted in cultural practices being mistaken as religious requisites. Perceptions of stigma and shame were attributed towards women and girls in relation to divorce and conforming to specific dress codes.

It's so sad... and unfortunately, it's the women who tell the women to stay quiet [pause] so the women don't help themselves... because they won't speak to their daughters about this... they won't educate their daughters... or their sons... [about rape, sexual violence, safety] dads are always at work, mums always busy in the kitchen or... with other children... so they're not educating their children and then this rape and these kind of like myths [female virginity evidence]... they just carry on and on and on and how many lives get ruined because of it? [paragraph quietly spoken] (Masooma, p. 40).

I was so mentally... I didn't see the difference in my culture and religion, I did actually... mix up the two. I was totally confused about what my religious rights were... and I practised my culture and I wanted to stay with my husband until the end... until my last breath! [incongruent laugh] Because in our culture, again, they say, you know, doli jaye, janazah uttay (Asma, p. 10).

See again, it's the culture thing, but for the first... I think six years... I didn't apply for divorce and I wasn't divorced... although he married like after a year or two... but I

*didn't even tell my family **abroad** that I was... **separated** ...because... of the **stigma**, because I think I am the first in my family... my extended family to be divorced after having children because it... just doesn't happen* (Asma, p. 48).

*And we lived on a street full of Pakistanis... so we were the outcasts... our dress sense was very different. We were allowed to wear certain clothes where other people would look and think '[tut] **Shame on you! What are you wearing?**' Everything was **modest**... I could wear... **a short skirt with tights**... and feel comfortable with that whereas everybody else on the street was wearing **shalwar kameez**... and back in the day... it was like "Oh... you don't want to be seen with them. You girls will get corrupted!"* (Ayesha, p. 8).

Negative connotations being attached to the research participants due to their British status also materialised in the findings.

*I was... **adamant that I'm never going to tell my husband**, even before I got married to **him**... so... when we got married... I was... **told** that apparently men can tell if **you're not a virgin**... **I don't know how**... there's supposed to be some bleeding or something... but obviously **I can't remember it, if I ever did or not**... my husband, he just... asked me, he said "**You're not a virgin, are you?**" And I just thought... **'If I say no, I'm going to have to keep this secret forever and that's going to be s-o hard... and I'm going to... they're brothers, they're going to be s-o c-l-o-s-e to each other...'** and this was like **all instant**, it just... quickly went through my mind and I said to my husband, "No, I'm not a virgin..." and he automatically thought... she's from **Britain**, she's probably had **boyfriends**, she's probably been sleeping around... and... I saw that **look in his face**, you know **'Oh, you slut!'** And I said "**Not because I wanted to, because I was forced.**" And then his... his face changed from **'slut'** to "**W-h-a-t?**" Like **shock**... and I didn't tell him it was his brother then... I just told him I was raped, so that's why I'm not a virgin... at the beginning of our marriage... we didn't... **stop talking to each other or being husband and wife but**... but there was **this distance**... because I was still being abused... **I wasn't comfortable with having sex... I wasn't comfortable with being close to my husband** (Masooma, p. 25 – 26).*

3.7.2 Sub Theme Four Individual/Collective Honour

The honour and shame complex appeared to be perpetuated by individual, familial and societal construct systems.

[Mum says] "**You have to say Salaam to him.**" And I said, "I don't like him. I don't want to say Salaam to him." She said "**Why? He's older than you, you need to.**" And I said "Because I just don't want to. I don't like him." And she says to me every time but... I think she **knows**... **w-h-y**... that there's something **more to me just not liking him**... than... what I'm letting on. I think she knows there's more, but she won't say it because of obviously shame and honour (Masooma, p. 25).

*Now I understand the difference in **religion** and **culture**... the culture says that **you have to stay married**... because... a **d-i-v-o-r-c-e-e** is really frowned upon and being divorced in... our community... you lose your... **honour** and **it's not just yours, I think***

it's your whole family's as well... nobody looks ... up to a divorcee or being a single parent – it's really frowned upon (Asma, p. 10).

There was a stage where I thought I was... completely on my own and there was no way out and I couldn't tell anybody and the stigma of shame and honour and everything that was attached to it (Asma, p. 48).

3.7.3 Sub Theme Four Individual/Collective Shame

Females not achieving their subjective and/or others' expectations of married life, marital choices and marital dynamics resulted in them and/or others feeling a deep sense of shame. Girls and/or women being raped was interconnected with shame.

It was after my first child... he beat me up the first time, but I was so ashamed of it that I didn't mention it to anybody... I'd n-e-v-e-r been beaten in my life. My father never lifted a finger on me! Neither did my brothers and I think... I wasn't expecting it from my husband and... admitting it to people was even more embarrassing... I actually felt... ashamed of what I was going through... and somehow, I thought it was all my fault (Asma, p. 17).

My sister, all these years, would write letters and send money... but the other parent... he would keep the money, he'd rip the letters and rip the pictures and... always... he'd beat us and say to us "You are getting this because of the shame that she's brought to this family. I can't go out on the streets – everybody's saying "Well, your daughter's run away. Your daughter's this, that and the other." "You girls have brought shame and this, that and the other" And I'd be the one that'd get the beatings (Ayesha, p. 16).

I felt that my brothers, Alhamdulillah, they've got successful marriages and I've felt almost... that by... me... getting divorced I'd be somehow bringing shame to my family... and the honour of my family, that I wasn't a good enough daughter to maintain my marriage (Asma, p. 25).

I h-a-t-e-d men and I h-a-t-e-d my husband in the beginning, so after a few days [of marriage and the participant's confirmation that she was not a virgin when he questioned her about her virginity during the 2nd night of their marriage]... he... came to terms with me being raped and how he's going to handle it. I was sure he's going to leave me... but he didn't... because we're first cousins... and that would have brought shame on the family if he left me and then what reason would he give? "Oh, she's been raped" and then obviously because it is family then that would be shame on the whole family and... so he didn't speak up and then... he came here [UK]... I got pregnant... life carried on (Masooma, p. 26).

3.7.4 Sub Theme Four Stigma of Sexual Violence/Domestic Abuse/Divorce

There was compelling unification of marital rape and sexual abuse being a taboo subject. Some communities' condemnation of girls and women for the violations they

experienced by men resulted in a significant lack of communication that was multifaceted and multi-layered.

I wasn't able to say "**no**" because he knew... if I was to mention that to anybody in our community, they wouldn't even... *believe me or they wouldn't even think it's rape...* or they... would always obviously *take his side*. "**He was doing the right thing... and I was in the wrong**" because obviously it's not even considered bad in our community. *Islamically... I could have stood my ground...* but we don't talk about these things so *openly* so... *I have not mentioned a w-o-r-d about sexual abuse to any member of my community* (Asma, p. 36).

I've given the blame back to who it belongs to... it wasn't mine to hold onto and I did for a long time because that's what I was made to feel... but I've given it back... society, community... it made me feel like it was my fault by what I'd heard from people, obviously not to me because nobody knows about my story but... generally what you hear in society is it's always the woman's fault, it's always the girl's fault, it's never the man's fault. And I held onto that, but then I realised, it's not mine to hold... it's his, so I gave it back to him... m-e-n-t-a-l-l-y I gave it back to him and yeah, I'm happy with myself now. And I've moved on... in my relationship with my husband as well... where I'm absolutely comfortable with him... where before I wasn't... and even with my children, I can jump about, be silly and I can... just roll around on the floor with them where before I'd just sit on the side and... not do anything because I wasn't comfortable with it (Masooma, p. 58).

3.7.5 Sub Theme Four Endogamy Preference/Exogamy Rejection

Some of the participants were subjected to endogamy/exogamy conditions by their families of origin/marital families at various stages of their marital relationships. Some participants' British status was utilised to secure their overseas partner's British residencies.

[male parent] *he wanted us to marry... his...brother's sons... who were abusive, who were from back home, back in Africa and he knew their background, they were on cannabis... [sniffs] this, that and the other, uneducated... but he said that "You are made to please them" ... and "You marry them and you stay in this house"* (Ayesha, p. 24).

In our family, we don't get married outside of the family... unless there's **a-b-s-o-l-u-t-e-l-y nobody** in the family that you could **possibly** marry, then we... marry outside the family... (Masooma, p. 6 – 7). I didn't have a choice when to marry, who to marry or anything... **It was arranged. I had to do it. I didn't have a choice...** so I had to get married and I didn't speak up (Masooma, p. 26).

[After 7 years of marriage and having 4 children, the in-laws] *were actually thinking of divorcing me because they'd got what they wanted [husband's British visa after 6 years of marriage] and they wanted him to marry into the family... so suddenly it was a case that I wasn't from their family anymore* (Asma, p. 14).

3.8 Main Theme Five Gender

All of the participants talked candidly about the significance of genders and positionalities in families and communities. It was evident that females and males were considered differently in relation to their births, value, status, marriage/divorce, sexual violations and autonomy.

The man decides to rape, the man decides to ... have sex, the man decides she's not a virgin, "I'm going to leave her." [sighs]... It's a man's world (Masooma, p. 40).

*I think that's just culture where the woman, where the girl has to move in... with her husband's family. It can be the other way round and that's **perfectly OK, according to our religion**... But culturally, it's **unacceptable**... It's frowned upon or it's like if you listen to your wife and you... consult her before you make your decisions, in our **culture**, they call it "**Ran mureed – you're following your wife!**" Which is a really negative way of saying that, whereas The Prophet, Sallahu Alaihi Wa Sallam (SAWS) he consulted his wives before matters (Asma, p. 8).*

3.8.1 Sub Theme Five Female Status

Different notions of female births and status existed in the participants' families and communities. There were variances in whether females were valued or devalued in some of the families.

*Being one of the youngest, I had a lot of **privileges** [slight laugh] and being the only sister... there was never a time when I had to ask for anything... **I was just given everything that I needed**... and I was content with that [slight laugh]... it was just amazing... I had a feeling of a really beautiful upbringing, so I was actually blessed (Asma, p. 2 – 3).*

*When he [ex-husband] looked at her [firstborn was a girl], the **face**... that he made when it was **girl**... because **he wanted a boy** (Ayesha, p. 20).*

*And unfortunately, like for the foreseeable future how many girls are going to have to get divorced or **die**... get **murdered**... **because of this myth? I didn't know that there's no scientific**... [evidence of female virginity] ... because my husband **heard it, I heard it and all these years, I've been carrying it as well** (Masooma, p. 31).*

3.8.2 Sub Theme Five Male Status

Men whom sexually violated girls and/or women did not appear to be held accountable for their violations by their families or communities. Preposterously, the females whom were subjected to the abuse were the recipients of familial and societal repercussions. The birth of a son in some families was celebrated and he was bestowed with increased status compared to a daughter being viewed with decreased positionality.

If, a man rapes a **girl**... “**it’s always the girl’s fault**...” nobody’s ever going to say anything to the man... **e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g** comes down to the girl... to the female (Masooma, p. 40).

Er...[sigh] you see, we don’t consider it as **rape** in marriage because... the reason why you get married is to bring the two individuals **together**, that is the whole reason and to... be able to have **children** and you’re not going to achieve it without obviously staying together. But where it becomes a problem, you know, in **Islam** obviously there’s etiquettes of everything so... there’s ways of doing it, so... you show some sympathy, you show your **love**... your attractiveness to the other partner and you do it in a proper way (Asma, p. 37).

My **eldest brother**... he was... quite a **pampered** child – first **boy**... typical Asian family... so he was the crowned prince of the family, I guess! [wry smile] (Ayesha, p. 8).

3.8.3 Sub Theme Five Gender Based Discrimination

All of the participants expressed opinions and experiences pertaining to the significance of gender in cultural, familial and intimate, partner relationships. It was evident that females were treated differently to males in relation to value, equality, sexual boundaries and acceptance.

Culturally, I think women are really **downgraded**, especially in our South Asian culture. It’s like men are the **dominant force**... whereas **Islam** puts you at an **equal** level with the men – you just have **different roles to play**. But it doesn’t... undermine... personality... being a woman isn’t any **lower** than... being a **man** (Asma, p. 6).

For **him**...[other parent] **only the bloodline is through a male**, so for him, any **other female**... is basically open... for his needs... his desires (Ayesha, p. 28).

So, why is it when it comes to **sexual violence**... a woman is scared of telling her husband? [pause] Because, he’s going to blame her. **Why should he blame her? It’s not her fault. And even if he does blame her, then he doesn’t deserve you, you deserve much better.** Yeah, you’ll be alone again for a few years or there’s going to be some talk in the **community** but... **it’s better than living a lie for the rest of your life, which is really hard.** It’s not easy because I live this lie **every day** when it comes to my family. And I’m **g-l-a-d** I’ve told my husband because I don’t have to live this lie with him. **I can speak to him openly**... when I’m feeling **down** or when I’m being **triggered** or stuff, I can **speak to him**... and it scares me to think that if **I didn’t tell him**... what would my life be like? Sometimes, I wish he didn’t know... but he does, that’s how things worked out... And he **does** because he **understands me now**... it’s hard work **obviously** but... **if he left me, I would have been happier now**... because I wouldn’t have had to **live a lie**. But, he hasn’t left me, so it’s **worked out**... really good, **Alhamdulillah**... I can’t thank him... or **Allah** enough (Masooma, p. 75 – 76).

3.8.4 Sub Theme Five Perceptions of Female Virginity and Chastity

Different notions of female virginity compared to male virginity existed. Evidence of female, virginal blood was considered to be a measurement of chaste conduct. Untruths told about a participant's marital faithfulness resulted in her being ostracised by her community.

Because of that thing that he [husband] heard and that... I didn't even k-n-o-w before... I didn't even know that men can tell if a woman's a virgin or not. I just thought... like you can't tell with men, you can't tell with women... until he said it to me... and I was like "R-e-a-l-l-y? Men can tell?" And then obviously I had to then tell him what happened to me otherwise... I probably wouldn't have... In hindsight, I'm glad I did. But at the time... I wouldn't have told him... how many women... it saddens me to think now that how many women are out there... because of this myth? [sighs] (Masooma, p. 32).

It's so sad that everything just... depends on... the virginity of a girl (Masooma, p. 40).

I had nowhere to go and I was being shamed by everybody in the community, neighbours because of what the ex [husband] was saying about me [sniffs] (Ayesha, p. 21).

Yeah, and I really believed... that... men can tell and because I knew I wasn't a virgin, I thought, 'Oh my God, he can actually tell...' If I was a virgin, I would have said, "No! How dare you!" I would have fought him. But, because I knew I wasn't a virgin I thought, 'It's actually real' and I told him. And I feel g-u-i-l-t-y like... almost every day that my husband doesn't have his brother and my husband had to go through this mental breakdown because of what I told him... [pause] and when I see him now, when he comes to pick me up... [long silence, deep sighs and quietly cries]... Me and my husband are so open with each other... [quietly sniffs] that we don't have any secrets at all... [pause] and the thought of telling him this information... how's it going to make him feel? Because of a myth... these...twenty years he's lived... could have been different... maybe he didn't have to go through all of this... if some s-t-u-p-i-d person... didn't spread this myth... he could have been happy. I would have been the one suffering, only me, h-e wouldn't have had to suffer... and I would have been OK with that. I would have just got on with my life, like I did before... like a robot, just do things... h-i-s life could have been so different... [pause] So, I feel like I can't face him! [silence] (Masooma, p. 44).

3.8.5 Sub Theme Five Educating Sons/Daughters/Adults/Communities

Emphasis was drawn on the importance of educating sons, daughters, adults and community members about sexual violence to help reduce how prevalent this was. It was viewed that people whom were leading figures in their societies may have a greater influence on increasing the awareness of sexual abuse and that it was imperative for such persons to have appropriate competency skills pertaining to cultural norms.

Yeah, so, it's just education... I can teach my children, I can teach my nieces and nephews but I'm not... in that position at the moment where I can go out and speak... to the wider community because I don't hold status at the moment and that's what people listen to, they listen to somebody's whose got status. So, I want to say to the people who've got status... "U-s-e your position... it's not all about making money and pocketing it. Use your position for the better... for the goodness of other people" (Masooma, p. 70).

But I think we... you need to get down to the survivors' level for everything... which a lot of people are not doing. Where are you getting all this education from? You know, yes there are survivors who are leaders now... but that's just your experience. It needs to be like... a lot of experiences collectively to make the... difference, not just one or two survivors because everyone's experience is different and... at the moment it seems to me... white... [pause] white-based... a white person's experience, it's not... a multicultural thing... and that's really sad (Masooma, p. 74).

Education... for people... in power... on sexual violence and trauma... because it's not standard for them to have training on this... cultural understandings and norms (Masooma, p. 82 – 83).

3.9 Main Theme Six Consequences and Life Journeys

The ramifications of experiencing sexual violations was a very powerful theme. The depth, severity and longevity of abuse the participants suffered had substantively influenced their past, current and future lives.

So, it's impacted... *e-v-e-r-y a-s-p-e-c-t of my life*, it has... it's impacted in a *big, big way*... if it was a one-off case, if I was raped, never saw him again, I would have got over it *quicker, maybe*... but because he's been a *constant*... it's *harder*... and every time I hear his name or drive past his *house* or... see him in public gatherings... you know... *I can say "I'm over it... I know how to deal with it" but that doesn't mean that I don't get triggered*, I just know how to deal with those triggers now... but it's *still there*, you know, *there's not one day where I don't think about it. It's just always there. The colour green is a trigger... when my husband coughs... he coughed this morning, that reminded me of him, that was a trigger*... there's *so many things that are triggers*... but I've just learnt how to deal with them *better. So, it's not going away, it never will go away... just learnt how to deal with it better*. And, *that*, in itself is a *big thing* that I have to... constantly, every single day have to... *deal with things*... [pause] and it's *hard, it's hard*, but it gets *easier* [pause] (Masooma, p. 54).

3.9.1 Sub Theme Six Long Term Impact of Sexual Violence

The aftermath of surviving the sexual violations was deeply rooted and a lifelong struggle to contain. The participants past traumas remained with them as a permanent manifestation and fluctuated from being at the forefront, centre point or background of their lives.

It is just so terrible that it actually haunts me to this day... after he's finished... he used to quote "kothi apni thah aye ghi." It was like a Punjabi quote, but he'd just say that, you know, [donkey] Now you know who's in charge, you know, now you know where you belong' and that makes you feel... it was really dehumanising. It makes you feel like a piece of meat that anybody can... do what they want (Asma, p. 35 & 36).

I did some... diagnostic tests and stuff and found out that... there's a high possibility that I suffer from DID – Dissociative [Identity] Disorder... [sniffs] and... that has been my coping mechanism... to get through this (Ayesha, p. 9).

I've done the maths and I've done... the calculations and I've done the conception dates and stuff... [long pause]... and I realised why he [ex-husband] won't accept him [son]... [very long pause, tries to speak, pauses again and cries] [speaks quietly] *t-h-a-t's t-h-e m-o-s-t d-i-f-f-i-c-u-l-t t-h-i-n-g f-o-r m-e t-o l-i-v-e w-i-t-h... is living every single day... seeing him... knowing... [whispers] who he is... what do I call him? What am I to him?* [continues to cry]... *and that's when I realised... the abuse that I had been suffering... [sniffs] from the other parent... and what it's caused... and what it's done... and for me, like I said, I have to survive this until the last breath I take... because I can still...*[cries and long silence]... [whole paragraph very quietly spoken] (Ayesha, p. 20 – 21). Sometimes people get closure where they can... separate themselves... *I can't... I'm not allowed to* and when that child comes asking or wanting their *love*... that a child wants from his parent, from his mum... trying to put those feelings... *it is so difficult... and I s-e-e it... and I know it...* that he does get treated a little differently by me, *but it's not his fault* (Ayesha, p. 29).

[inhales deeply] *So I'm like in that conundrum again, like 'do I or don't I tell him?'* [about the virginity myth realisation] *And it's just bringing back a lot of those... feelings that I felt twenty years ago... [deep sighs]... I feel like I'm in that vulnerable place again... [exhales loudly]... oh God! I'm trembling all over... it's triggering those memories and those feelings that I never thought I'd feel again... I never thought I'd be in this position again... 'do I or don't I...?' With my husband, I feel like I can't... like... it's the second night of our marriage... and he noticed something yesterday... and he's asking me about it, like... oh God!... [voice grows louder]... oh God, I'm feeling so scared of even like... that... the fear is coming back... right, I need to ground myself. I really need to ground myself* (Masooma, p. 46). [Interview stopped for 70mins]

3.9.2 Sub Theme Six Negative Experiences of Accessing Support

The interviews revealed, unfortunately, an abundance of negative encounters the participants experienced in their quests for professional help, which compounded their struggles furthermore.

I remember going to the town hall and crying, literally crying... I needed somewhere to stay, and they said they couldn't help me. It was terrible, nobody was there to listen to me. I felt as if each word that he'd [ex-husband] said to me was coming t-r-u-e... I was going to be neglected, I was going to be frowned upon... lose my honour... I was going to affect, you know, stain my family's honour by returning to the family as a single mother and it was haunting me every day... I really do feel I was neglected

by the council. I really feel strongly about it because if I was given that at the beginning, I could have achieved a lot more (Asma, p. 40 & 55).

*I went to the GP and he gave me a number to call and I'm glad my husband pushed me, otherwise, I wouldn't have.... because... it was so hard for me to speak to my GP... and you're telling me to call another number... and say it all over again. And that number that he gave wasn't for the organisation that I needed because she... put me onto somebody else. So... I think there needs to be advertisement maybe... of where... women can go... the help that they need, directly, not first number, then second and then third and then **f-i-n-a-l-l-y**... you get to the place you need. By that time... a year or two maybe had passed* (Masooma, p. 72).

My then GP referred me to this counsellor [who was a white, female] who came home... to see me... and... she asked me questions and everything and once I told her what happened, she said, "OK... I'll contact you for our next appointment and everything" and I never heard from her again! And... that just put me off. I thought... 'I've just... s-p-i-l-l-e-d my guts to you. I've just told you my deepest, darkest secrets...' and I was like waiting for her, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, waiting, waiting, right, she's going to contact me now, now, now... she never did! And up to today, I don't know why she never contacted me again! And I just never... thought to... contact her... I don't even remember where she came from now... and that just put me off. I thought, 'Oh, if that's what counsellors do... if that's what counselling is, then I don't want it.' And I don't want antidepressants because they just give me a headache and I don't like them. And then for years I just went into isolation... I couldn't step outside the front door... because I was so scared of bumping into a man. I just locked myself [in] for about a year or two, I locked myself... I couldn't step outside my front door without my husband being with me... But that... counsellor r-e-a-l-l-y put me off, the one that came and didn't come back again. I think I went about ten years... from that point on I didn't seek any kind of help because I thought 'Everyone's going to be like her' and she didn't follow through, she didn't tell me why... I've just never heard from her again and that r-e-a-l-l-y put me off so that was r-e-a-l-l-y unhelpful. I don't know what her reasons were. I don't know what happened to her but... if something happened to her, I should have had a call from the organisation to explain to me why she can't come back (Masooma, p. 71).

I told her [white, female counsellor] everything and she was like "Well, why don't you report?" I said "Because I can't report..." I told her my community and everything... "Yeah, but community has got nothing to do with it, you need to report." And she was like pressuring me to report and I said "No, you don't understand." And it's like, "Well, you don't... obviously, you don't know what my culture is like... You don't know what my community is like." So, I think a cultural understanding is really important... even if you can get just an overview of... the different cultures that you'll have to deal with... So, that counsellor or... whoever's helping you, needs to... know a little bit about your culture or your background, so you can have an understanding, to some extent. So, cultural understanding, for me, is really big because obviously that counsellor didn't understand my culture, which is probably why she didn't come back (Masooma, p. 65).

My GP... was an Asian lady... of the same kind of age group as myself... very well spoken... When I went and told her all of this, she looked at me in disbelief like "What

are you s-a-y-i-n-g? What proof do you have? Have you done this DNA test? Have you done this?” And I’m like trying to say to her... *“This is stuff that I cannot even touch upon, I n-e-e-d help, I’ve got all of this that’s just come flooding to my brain!”* *She had no idea what DID [Dissociative Identity Disorder] was... she... l-o-o-k-e-d at me like I was some kind of... I brought something to her which she... did not want to admit that she had no clue about, so the way... for her to deal with it was to basically prescribe me antidepressants and just... be gone with me basically. But...at that point, I said to her, “I do not want antidepressants ... I know what I’m saying. I might not have physical, actual e-v-i-d-e-n-c-e... because with mental health, there really isn’t something physically that I can show you ... but I am telling you ... and I’m n-o-t paranoid, I’m not hallucinating, I am... putting my foot down and saying to you “Get me some help!” ...[coughs] She then basically kind of said “Take these, come and see me again.’ And I didn’t give up, although it was so easy because I walked out of there... in despair... I remember getting in my car, screaming saying “Allah help me! I need help!”* I rang [name of a women’s organisation with national and local branches in the UK] *who were s-o, s-o unhelpful... basically because... I had a solicitor going through legal things with my ex[husband]... they were kind of guiding me towards going down the legal route and I’m trying to say to them “I don’t want physical, legal help! I want somebody to understand the emotions, I want somebody to help m-e... to kind of... to get to terms with what I’ve just found out... and come to realise”* (Ayesha, p. 33 – 34).

And also, when I spoke to my GP who is from a Pakistani background, it was straight away she started, I could tell in her eyes... the stereotyping, the t-a-b-o-o-s, the things that we say you shouldn’t do... you were doing that to me, when I’m talking to you about my other parent and what I’m going through... my son and so on and so forth... she was b-a-f-f-l-e-d, she had n-o understanding of how to deal with this. I’m not saying that they should be educated to the level of yourself... or other organisations or... but at least be aware... The organisation that I got in touch with, the Rape Crisis and the South Asian Women [Support Group] is actually opposite the road from my GP. She didn’t know it existed (Ayesha, p. 35).

I remember the sexual health people said to me “Get the police involved” and I was like “How can I get the police involved? Do you realise the i-m-p-a-c-t this is going to have?” ... The organisations that are there... really... do not... understand the depth... they understand the surface, they don’t understand the depth (Ayesha, p. 35).

So, [name of a women’s organisation with national and local branches in the UK] just closed the door on me basically... When I split up from my ex-husband, I had IDVA [Independent Domestic Violence Advisor] involvement... they knew clearly that I had gone through rape... I had the police involvement... I had no help! IDVA never referred me to a-n-y rape crisis or anything like that ... the police didn’t... Well, this is what I faced... I feel, personally, had I been somebody who... had a language barrier, maybe more provisions would have been put in place, maybe they would have dug deeper (Ayesha, p. 50).

I know women who have and the way they’ve appallingly been treated by police... women as well... it’s just like... no feeling “We need to do a swab, we need to do this, we need to do that...” and it’s very like... clear-cut for them, no feelings, involved. But, you need to be more sympathetic and empathic and... there needs to be feeling,

you need to be more sensitive, they've gone through trauma... they've gone through maybe the worst thing in their life ... and you're just treating them like another number or like another statistic, like... "We just need to tick all these boxes and off you go" (Masooma, p. 67).

3.9.3 Sub Theme Six Positive Experiences of Accessing Support

The interviews ascertained numerous, positive experiences the participants received as they strived to receive appropriate, professional help.

[Accessing the SAWSG] Yeah, *that was just like opening another window to another new world*. It was obviously... the support that my family weren't able to provide... I came into the group... at first, I was really quiet because *I felt ashamed*... [clears throat] of what had happened and I thought I was the only one, but meeting other *women*... from similar backgrounds, I thought "*Wait a minute, you've just been through what I have!*" And I think... after a few sessions, we were kind of opening up to each other... so it was just an *a-m-a-z-i-n-g experience*. It was once a week... but that was *my time*... and we could come and *be ourselves*... *knowing that it will be confidential, and nobody would judge us* (Asma, p. 44).

I came to the counselling session [at GMRC] and... I knew she was going to be a Pakistani lady because she's called [counsellor's name]... but... I knew nothing about counselling. I didn't know what kind of approach, I didn't know there's different modalities, I didn't know anything about it. Erm... and then she was like, "I totally understand you." And I was like 'Oh my God! Somebody who understands my culture. Somebody who understands my religion [participant places her hand on her chest area]. Somebody who knows what I'm talking about... w-h-y I couldn't tell anybody... why I couldn't go to the police...' and she didn't tell me... she didn't say to me "No, you need to go to the police" because... that's what I used to think, that if I'm going to tell somebody, they're going to say "No, you have to report it." And she didn't. So, the counselling happened and then when she said to me "Right... there's this group that's starting... From not wanting to go to that group... and then not wanting to leave four years later, I still didn't want to leave! [smiles and laughs] It's the best thing... the b-e-s-t thing ever and I'd recommend it to anybody... [pause] it's changed my life. There's a few things... that have made my life – my husband... [GMRC Counsellor] and the [Sexual Violence Recovery] toolkit [pause] I owe my life to them... we [the group] trusted her [counsellor and group leader at GMRC] more than anyone (Masooma, p. 49 & 50 & 51).

3.9.4 Sub Theme Six Survivors' Journeys

Albeit participants talked openly about acutely painful experiences of being violated by men whom were part of their family units, they were now able to distinguish the differences amongst love, religion, culture, power, control and abuse. They thought creatively of how to implement self healing, how to change what was perceived as inapt locution and how to continue to increase their inner strength.

The... sexual violence. I feel that in my life he [ex-husband] actually used that element to **control and power**... so for me... it was a combination of **abuse**... sexual violence, sexual abuse for me was like... we'd be in the middle of an argument and... **he'd want sex**... so he's shouting... black and blue at me, and at my parents... **screaming**... and then it was like, when he thought he was losing the argument... that'd be it straight away... he wanted sex. And I thought I couldn't say **no**... from an Islamic perspective because... we've always been told that, you know, you have to obey your husband. But I knew he was wrong at the same time because **I had that knowledge that there's etiquettes of everything... in the Islamic religion**... So, for such a sensitive issue, **there's etiquettes and I knew it wasn't right what he was doing**... I knew that was wrong... but somehow, I think with that **abuse**, because I'd lost the **understanding** and... **lost myself** and... out of that **control**... I'd... **oblige him**... and... after I'd had my time **away** [7 weeks living with family of origin]... [incongruent laugh] I guess when I was in my senses, I said "**No**" and **I stood my ground**. And... that was one of the factors that he realised **he's lost control over me**... So I think it was **r-e-a-l-l-y important**... for me to **stand my ground**... and **I knew I wasn't going to be cursed by the angel or by God or by anybody**... by saying no. Erm... but it took me a **while** to get to those grounds [silence].... Yeah, well for that eight years [of marriage and sexual violence] **it was like I had no say in it at all**... **I had no say in it. It was whenever he wanted, whether I consented or you know, whether I was for it or not**... and I actually felt I was... **being an obedient w-i-f-e** and **I thought I was going to be blessed**... **I didn't think it was wrong** or... whenever I did think it was wrong, I... I just thought it was... something that happens in all marriages. Because there were just so many other things that were happening... and a lot of the times **I did accept it** but... whenever odd occasions when I didn't, I'd just get the **beatings** (Asma, p. 31 – 33).

I've done a lot of **self-development** and I have started to like my... **body, even though it's out of shape, I've started to like it**... because **it's mine!** [smiles and slight laugh]. You know... and it's been strong, it's been there for me... it's put up with a **lot**... **Mentally, I've put up with s-o much**... but **my body's gone through it as well and I detached from my body**, but now, we've...come together as one and... that's really **powerful**... and that's what I've been... telling the women now, during the toolkit [SVRT] (www.rockpool.life) ... "**you need to love yourself first. It's not... your body's fault what you went through**... [participant shakes her head] and that... when you start loving yourself, you become more **assertive**... and **when you become more assertive**... you're **happier** because you're not being a **doormat**, which is what I was for most of my life...." [silence]. For a long time... **I submitted to him and he owned my body, he could use it however he wanted to, when he wanted to... where he wanted to... so it was his**. But I've taken it back for myself now... **it's not anyone's... it's not a-n-y-o-n-e's, it's mine**. And then it's going to belong to the ground once I've gone... it's nobody's now (Masooma, p. 52 – 53).

For me, straight away '**violence**' – **I don't agree with that**... I'd say... it's '**violation**...' it's not just violation, not for me sexually, it's **violation of me as a human being**... of my **emotions**, of... my day to day **being, existence**, so, therefore, for me... when you say '**violence**' you're actually giving control to the **perpetrator**... who's **doing the violence to you**... But by using the word '**violation**'... **I've got the control again because I've linked it to m-e**... it's a **violation of m-y feelings, it's a violation of m-y sexual**... basically intimate... **intimacy**... So, I like using that word to link to me, to give **m-e that control**. Why should I even give... **the other person the control again?** Because...

in my survival journey, I don't want to use words where it's referring to somebody else and giving somebody else that control, those perpetrators the control. Violence is basically... I don't inflict violence on myself, no way! So, by saying 'violence' automatically, in my head... it's putting pictures of those two people in... and I don't w-a-n-t that... I don't want t-h-e-m in my survival journey. They will be part of it... but they will be a controlled part of it... so rather than calling it 'violence' I want to call it 'violation'... you have violated... yes, because I have to say "you have" ... but I'm quickly taking that control back onto me... because it's about m-e, so it's my rights, my existence, me as an individual... I did not consent to you touching me or... doing what you did to me... and it should be I, it should be m-e. I want t-h-o-s-e words used in my survival – m-e, I... it's m-y journey, nobody else is going to take that away from, nobody else is going to get a-n-y bit of... recognition, other than those deserving... c-e-r-t-a-i-n-l-y not perpetrators... c-e-r-t-a-i-n-l-y not people who are not even f-i-t to be referred to as human beings... because... their questioning... is going to be done in the hereafter... where... [cries] there's going to be no scope for explanations... no scope for... "No, I didn't do this" or "I didn't do that" or "I didn't do the other"... So, I wish that... word would be taken out (Aysha, p. 40 – 41).

I'm in a comfortable place... with myself... with others... obviously the recovery is ongoing, it always will be... but I think I'm in the best place I've ever been... and it can only get better from here... I've gone back to education... working... got a job... family as well, you know, with the children, with my husband... [pause] I do still have flashbacks, nightmares... sometimes... but I feel like I can... deal with them better now... than I would before. Before, it was just like a downward spiral and I would just get depressed again. But now I can... deal with it easier, even if I do see him [perpetrator]... even if I do... hear his name... I can deal with it. It's not easy obviously but... it's OK (Masooma, p. 57).

3.9.5 Sub Theme Six Resilience as Survivors

All of the participants shared concrete examples of how they had achieved self autonomy and self empowerment in their lives. They were now in control of their lives, and their contemporary and future lifestyles. Attending the SAWSG and engaging with the SVRT (www.rockpool.life) were instrumental elements in positively changing the trajectory of their lives.

The toolkit [SVRT] (www.rockpool.life)... dealing with my enemies... I was no longer scared of him. I can face him now and not be scared of him and look him in the eye and intimidate him and make him feel like he's worthless and I can see that in his face now. Before, he would kind of look at me and I'd feel scared and... back to that little girl again... but now, I can stare at him and I can see that he can see I'm a strong woman now. And he doesn't like that... and that's b-e-c-a-u-s-e I faced my demons and that's because [SAWSG Leader] found the toolkit [SVRT] (www.rockpool.life) and she adapted it for Asian women to understand... she just changed the language for us to understand better... and I'm so grateful (Masooma, p. 50 – 51).

There will still be darkness there... I can't get rid of a-l-l the darkness... but... finally... I don't like using this word, but finally... I have control... or a degree of control... so why should I give that control back to somebody else? And that's the way I look at it. And the strength for me has been... in a very, very funny way – my girl! (Ayesha, p. 40).

Yeah, so I do a lot of grounding. I've got a lot of grounding tools... that I've picked up through work... that I use all the time. And I think my biggest grounding... tool... are my children... my husband is a bit triggering at the moment... [pause] he's just got a different way of dealing with things... to what I need, so... that's where my assertiveness skills come in. So, I'm trying to be assertive with him and just saying "This is what I need, so... stop" (Masooma, p. 88).

3.9.6 Sub Theme Six Ongoing Challenges for Survivors

All of the participants verbalised clear examples of their past, current and future struggles. It was apparent they needed to channel recognition, time, energy, investment and action into attempting to maintain stabilised psychological, emotional, physical and sexual health and wellbeing. They recognised and accepted their vulnerabilities and their strengths as integrated parts of their beings. One of the participants did not feel legal justice had been served for the abuse she experienced, despite the perpetrator being found guilty of domestic violence by the UK legal system.

And this is a message to a-l-l survivors – surviving will be until your last breath... do not go into something thinking 'it is a quick fix.' Do not think that if you don't feel you've achieved what you wanted... that... this hasn't worked, and you go back to... the... negative survival that you were used to. Set yourself very small goals (Ayesha, p. 44).

I have the power over my body now... because it's m-y body... until it goes back to Allah, it's mine and I have to... look after it... I abused myself. I used to self-harm... and... I... abused my body for something that it didn't deserve... it didn't deserve that and then my body didn't deserve for me to harm it... I tried to commit suicide s-o m-a-n-y t-i-m-e-s. My body didn't deserve that because my body did nothing wrong. You know, if I can appreciate other people... then I need to learn to appreciate myself... just saying it, is not enough, you need to actually show it sometimes... It's a constant reminder... that I need to give myself and I think others need to give to themselves as well... make the conscious effort to remind yourself... [pause] because we get lost in daily chores and routines and children and family and everything... life is really hard, so we need to just take a moment... and I try to do that and I'm trying to teach others to do that too (Masooma, p. 59 – 60).

I am very, very lonely where I am now. I have no friends... I have no family... and... this is where I have found that my grounding really has to kick in... because I have no support and... [deep exhalation] I get super depressed... so being a survivor is not this... light, happiness and... "The grass is certainly not greener on the other side... it's just a different shade of... grey!" [laughs]... That is called a survivor... in my eyes... because I've at least now understood... I'm not in denial and I'm not in submission (Ayesha, p. 38).

*He actually... applied for divorce... because he had to bring his wife over... that's something else that actually makes me **really angry** because when we separated and the police was involved and it was a **domestic violence case**... **he was found to be guilty of domestic violence**... **but he got away really lightly, all he had was some probation period**. So, he was like given, I don't know, counselling or anger management courses and stuff that he had to do. So, he's just moved on and he was actually able to bring another person over from abroad, from Pakistan (Asma, p. 49).*

*If... us as survivors don't speak up, how are people going to get educated? And then how are they going to educate others and then this circle is just going to keep going so... just because we're **Asian**... it doesn't mean we're not allowed to speak up. Yeah, I'm not saying go and... **scream it from the rooftops**... **that's not my thing, I'm not doing that**. I'm sat in a room with **one person**... telling my story and maybe **y-o-u-'r-e going to pick up something from this**... and speak to one person and they might tell another person... **that's all it takes to start something rolling**... if we can help **one person, if I help one, you help one, somebody helps one**... **and that carries on**... then... over time... we'll help **every woman that needs help**. And hopefully... by educating... I know it's never going to **end**, this is always going to be around, but we can **lessen it**... to some extent... if we can't... get rid of it totally then... maybe from 100 to 50%, we can bring it down that much... but it just takes somebody to **speak up**... share your story... [pause]... I want to tell my story because it's **cathartic** for me as well to... like speak it in some ways... but in other ways, I'm giving **my story**... **for others to learn from** (Masooma, p. 78 & 79).*

3.9.7 Sub Theme Six Ongoing Challenges for South Asian Communities

South Asian Muslim women being judged by perceptions of their virginity status was considered an issue that needed to be challenged and for men, in particular, to be edified about how to be respectful towards women. Other survivors were encouraged to confide in someone about the abuse they were experiencing so they could then access help rather than the fear of their children being removed by the authorities being a deterrent in them taking some action. South Asian communities remaining silent about sexual violence was viewed as a detrimental stance and required change. Parents being more cognizant regarding whom they trusted with their children was viewed as an important safeguarding strategy.

***Educate your sons to be good men towards women**... and... **if you're good to a woman then it wouldn't matter if she's a virgin or not**... then you wouldn't have to make up myths like that... [sighs]... **I've always felt s-o g-u-i-l-t-y for telling my husband and now I'm just feeling... that's kind of... times by a million now**... because of that myth...[evidence of female virginity] **that thing that he believed... I'd gone through what I'd gone through, you know, that's my... I don't have a choice. But h-i-s life could have been so different. I know we can't go back and change time, what's happened has happened... in my case, for the better, but in his case, not so good**... and... the other women and girls but... **how different things could have been? And I'm feeling... so much more guilty now, just the thought of having to see him**... [pause] (Masooma, p. 45 – 46).*

When you're a survivor you ... automatically become s-o i-n-t-e-l-l-i-g-e-n-t without realising it because the survival technique kicks in ... that we all have embedded in us ... We start thinking out of the box. You start thinking of avenues that nobody can think of. So, the survivor or people who are surviving, you have that strength in you ... if you have a partner who is controlling and will take your keys off you, your house keys, your car keys, will take your mobile phone off you ... when you go somewhere ... be it ... somebody, a friend, or a relative or even if you go to a shop or something – tell somebody something ... Say it ... say it to your child so that child then goes to school and says it to their teacher ... if you don't have a child, go to the shops ... if you're not allowed to go to the shops ... go outside in the back yard ... hang your clothes out – say something to the neighbour ... put your bins out ... say it to the bin men ... say it ... just try and say it ... because it's that one initial link that you need to do and then the rest just happens. But the thing is ... you need to stay in control, there'll be many people ... there will be many organisations ... that will kind of just take that lead and run ... no, stay in control, don't fear that ... 'oh my gosh, if I go to this person, they'll then contact the police ... the police will come and take ... [my kids]' (Ayesha, p. 44).

Because I've experienced it, I k-n-o-w how it's impacted me so I'm going to speak up. But we need people who are not survivors to speak up and teach their children so this s-t-o-p-s. Because if there's only one or two people talking about it because they're survivors ... it's not going to spread like ... like a virus because that's how we want this to spread ... the knowledge, the awareness around it. So, I think it's the people who are not survivors who are stopping their children from getting this [sex] education [in schools]. But, I could be wrong (Masooma, p. 15).

I'm trying to come to terms with this [female virginity myth] ... in a way ... it's good that my husband believed that ... because then I wouldn't have told him and I wouldn't be where I am today ... but in a way, I'm thinking about all those other girls ... so for me it's been a good thing ... for my husband to believe that and ask me that question ... but for all those other girls who've been killed and who have been divorced [paragraph quietly spoken] (Masooma, p. 39).

Don't blindly trust a-n-y-b-o-d-y. My parents blindly trusted him ... they would not hesitate at all, they would not think ... before leaving us with him ... and he abused that trust ... so ... there's no way I would let my children sleep over at anyone's house [participant's hands clenched] unless I know it's a house full of women and no man is going to enter that door ... I trust my husband ... but then I've given my daughter the tools ... also ... that doesn't mean I don't trust my husband ... I do ... but you never know ... you just ... absolutely, you n-e-v-e-r know, so I've given my daughter the tools ... if something happens, this is what you do. So, I've not scared her from her dad ... I do leave them alone ... but I'm ... I'm confident and I don't have to worry about it because I know she's got the tools. So, I wouldn't just blindly trust anybody like my parents did (Masooma, p. 85).

3.9.8 Sub Theme Six Ongoing Challenges for Professionals

Education for professionals in relation to sexual violations, mental health and being more receptive to the needs of survivors were viewed as essential tools in assisting women whom required help for sexual abuse.

GPs need to be e-d-u-c-a-t-e-d... to understand mental health issues. If you are a general practitioner, you need to understand the human body does not consist of the physical limbs and so on and so forth and organs. It also consists of a mind, a brain which has emotions involved. You need to understand the psychology as well (Ayesha, p. 34).

Towards the end, when I was moving away from here... I went in and spoke to my GP, she said... something very different... "Do you know what? I need to say thank you to you... you've taught me about this... I've...spoken to... many of my other Asian, Muslim or Asian... from other backgrounds, but Asian, minority ladies, and I've come to find that this is quite a big issue" (Ayesha, p. 35 – 36).

The foundation, I believe, of being here... is trust... if there's no trust, you're not going to do anything... because trust then links onto fear... If... it just takes that slightest... minute... atom of trust to be embedded in you, to feel that I can get help from somebody... but if that trust is broken, like for example, when I contacted [name of a women's organisation with national and local branches in the UK] an organisation where you're thinking... [name of a women's organisation with national and local branches in the UK] I trusted them, I spoke to them, they shut that door in my face... the fear comes in where you're thinking... [name of a women's organisation with national and local branches in the UK] don't understand me, who else is going to understand me? What are they going to think of me? They're going to think this woman is crazy!' That was another thing, the fear kicks in because you're thinking, 'They're going to think I'm crazy, I have mental... like... in the sense... they're going to take my kids off me' (Ayesha, p. 36 – 37).

3.10 Main Theme Seven

Islam

All of the participants were Muslim and practising Islam was a pivotal aspect of their lives. Their relationships with Allah (SWT) and their faith were fluid.

Indeed... it is s-o, s-o, s-o, difficult to... hold onto your faith, hold onto your... beliefs when you are going through some of the challenges... because... it's so e-a-s-y... and every human being does this...to say 'Why me? Why me? Why me? If my God, if my Creator... only wants good for me... loves his creation, then why... put his creation through what I've been through?' And it's s-o easy and I have been there and I have questioned and I have challenged... but then...what I've done in my challenges is... rather than ask people, I've turned to... my Creator because I am... of a Muslim faith, so for me, it's my Allah... and I've prayed and I've begged and I've screamed and I've cried and I've asked... and... in my asking... I have got answers (Ayesha, p. 4).

3.10.1 Sub Theme Seven

Women and Men's Equality in Islam

The participants' understanding of how Muslim women and men's status, and egalitarianism, was expressed.

*I've realised er, religion is actually mixed up with **culture** erm and people do portray culture as **religion** and in a lot of the cultures, women are still **marginalised**. Whereas, Islam is on the contrary... it actually gives respect to the women... she's **actually at the centre of the family and of the community and there's just so much respect that's actually given to women**, which we... **underestimate** and we're not aware of in a lot of the cases (Asma, p. 6).*

*They [Muslim women and men] **need to know their Islamic rights and they need to know their cultural rights, but don't mix up both because they're two different areas** (Asma, p. 59).*

3.10.2 Sub Theme Seven

Perceptions of Marital Rape/Sexual Violence

Significant others dismissing the existence of marital rape and experiences of sexual abuse due to cultural and/or familial denial was harmful for the survivors.

*There's no such thing as marital rape in our community, so looking at it again from a... [pause] what's the word? **Cultural**... angle... **there's no such thing as marital rape, but Islamically, it is recognised**... maybe not in those wording, **not considered as rape, but it's definitely wrong, it's definitely a sin!** (Asma, p. 37).*

*If I said to my family, anyone in my family, that he's done this they would say "No, he hasn't! He can't do that, he's not the type. He's too like... What do you call '**bhola**' in English? I don't know... So... they would never believe me that he could do something so... horrible and vicious and... the **violence**... he was... [pause] **s-o violent**. He would, you know, manipulate me... and if I didn't listen to what **he wanted**... he would... get me in trouble from my mum or dad (Masooma, p. 20 – 21).*

*He [ex-husband] basically started to rape me... because **I would not**... he would come home at two in the morning... and... we were in separate rooms... I was... with... [sigh] my son... in my bedroom and at two, three in the morning... and I'd be lying there and he'd just come in... just pull... whatever... even if I'm asleep, he'd just do what he wanted to... and that would be it. And I was **nothing** but a piece of meat to him... and I just thought 'Is this what I'm **going to do** for the rest of my life?' There was this... day where **he raped me**... and I was screaming and telling him "**Don't, don't, don't, please don't**" because... I'd just had... my first son... and I decided that... I've got my daughter and my son, this is it for me. I'm just going to live my life for my kids, that's it. And he **knew** that 'she's going to go'... so the only way to keep me was if he got me pregnant, so I'd stay. Then he raped me and I got pregnant with my second son... And I knew I was pregnant and I was punching my stomach because I wanted him... not to survive, so my brother said to me '[participant's name]... whatever's happened, has happened... **but**... he's meant to come into this world, he's going to come **no matter what you do**.' **That's** when I kind of got some consolidation, like... I consoled myself (Ayesha, p. 19).*

3.10.3 Sub Theme Seven Religious Figures/Leaders' Power and Abuse

The participants shared some accounts of being the recipients of religious manipulation and violations, and Islam being misconstrued so that abuse was disguised into Islamic practice. Physical violations occurred during an act of religious worship in addition to being affiliated with employment tensions at three mosques.

*And what we need to understand is that abusers... the people that are going to be abusive and controlling... they **don't have any religion or culture**, they follow what they... **want really**, and they will use anything to their advantage. I mean I was **learned**... I had studied for so long and yet, I think where my ex [husband] got the best of me was, I wasn't so equipped with my **culture** ... or as he portrayed it [incongruent laugh] and he was like he used religion to his cause ... just to **control me** (Asma, p. 7).*

*And he [ex-husband] would always like make quotes... from the **Quran** or the **Hadith** or from **wherever stories** ... of the **pious** or whatever he used to come... whatever he could think of... erm... that **I had a duty to my husband** more than anybody else. So, he should be my priority (Asma, p. 10 – 11).*

*And my parents thought 'Right, you know, she's playing up there [school], she's playing up at home, let's send her to mosque.' I went to mosque... and... the maulana... **there sexually abused me too** (Masooma, p. 60).*

*So, he used like... verses from the **Qur'an**, from the **Hadith**, from... the quotes of The Prophet, Sallahu Alaihi Wa Sallam (SAWS)... He always used it for his **advantage** and... even **culturally**... he'd actually used **everything** just to show who had... the **upper hand** and it was like **always to control** and to... **abuse me** (Asma, p. 7).*

*I mean I was **very tiny, petite** ... and I was sat there... and he [other parent] came and I was praying the **Qur'an** and he came and he **punched me in the back of my head** ... and he... **pushed me** and all I'm thinking is 'I can't let this **Qur'an** drop' ... so I'm protecting this **Qur'an**... and he's **pushing me** and he... **thumps me in my stomach** and... even then I'm thinking, '**I've got to hold onto this Qur'an... it can't drop!**' And... that was the level of **violence** (Ayesha, p. 12).*

*He [ex-husband] used to get into **fight**s! [incongruent laugh]... verbal fights... I think on some occasions, **he actually did punch one or two people as well!** [incongruent laugh] so **that was not a good sign**. Or he **threatened to punch them** ... so people knew he was **bad-tempered**... He was aggressive, yeah, physically too. Yeah, so he was actually an Imam at the Masjid. So, he was **respected**... and I guess he used his **authority**... to... [pause] I don't know what he was teaching! [slight laugh]... he was actually being basically made redundant at mosques. So, he worked at **three different mosques**... because of his **behaviour**... people were finding it difficult to work along with him. But then... he wouldn't bring it down to his **failures**, it was always my fault somehow... that he was being made redundant at mosque because of... I don't know **how he justified it**, but it was **a-l-l to do with me, it was all my fault**. **Every time he was made redundant, it was because of me** ... because... I was a burden, or the children were... a burden on him somehow, he had to...work to feed us and to look after us and... I mean I don't know how he justified it and I followed along (Asma, p. 12 – 13).*

3.10.4 Sub Theme Seven Safeguarding Children in Mosques

A disturbing account was revealed of children being sexually abused in Muslim places of worship by men whom were held in high esteem for their religious knowledge or devoutness. Women, religious figures also colluded in abusive practices by physically assaulting children in mosques.

And I know of so many cases where ... men and women have been sexually abused ... in mosques ... and parents feel so comfortable sending their children to mosque. Who's keeping an eye on the maulana who's got lots of children in front of him? You know, it's like a field day for them ... even the women ... leaders that teach children, even they abuse children, if not sexually, they'll physically abuse them, which doesn't make it any better if it's not sexually then "Oh, slapping them is better." No, it's not ... because that's a kind of trauma too (Masooma, p. 69).

3.10.5 Sub Theme Seven Educating Muslims about Islam, Culture and Safeguarding Issues

There was a strong theme of participants narrating cultural practices being misrepresented as Islamic ways of life directly contributed to the sexual violence against women.

I think it's the w-o-r-s-t you can do to a woman ... is when you sexually abuse her because you make her feel worthless and ... if you don't have control over your body you feel you've lost control completely ... and especially in our culture, they use it ... the men actually ... think that by ... sexually abusing your w-i-f-e you're ... showing her, her worth and you're sending out ... a message of, you know, who's in charge ... and that really ... if I think all ... kinds of abuse, that is the w-o-r-s-t you can do to a woman to break her [pause] and the psychological impact is just immense ... it was just horrible, it was just horrendous (Asma, p. 34).

Children need to know "Why are they stroking their arm?" You know, even if it's your dad, even if it's your mum. I've said to my children "If your dad touches you and you feel uncomfortable, you tell me. If I touch you and you feel uncomfortable, you tell your dad. But, if you feel that both of us are touching you inappropriately, then you need to go and tell your teacher or somebody else. Don't stay quiet. Speak about it because then that's the beginning and it's not going to end" ... So, before it ... [grooming] gets out of hand, you need to know ... early on, it's like cancer, you catch it early, you can treat it. So ... g-r-o-o-m-i-n-g, if you catch it early, you can stop it (Masooma, p. 11 & 12).

I thought it's really important for me to let other parents know that ... these things happen ... because you can e-a-s-i-l-y miss these things, you know, when an uncle says, "Do you want to come and sit on my knee?" Why is it important for a child to come and sit on your knee ... you can sit next to ... them or something, that just makes me really uncomfortable when I see children sitting on other people's knees and ... OK, it's OK. Not every man ... or woman is going to be inappropriate, but what's the need? Yeah ... it just makes me feel really uncomfortable ... Mum and dad can kiss their children on the cheek ... but anything more than that or ... like anyone more than, like your uncles and aunties ... "Why do they need to kiss you? What's the child getting

out of that? You know, it's y-o-u-r satisfaction, you feel like kissing... what's the child getting out of that? So, it's not necessary. If the child's not getting anything out of it, is it really that necessary?" They need to know affection and... the touch and everything but... there's a right way of doing it and there's the right people to do it... it's not everyone's job to... "Oh, I'm going to kiss you." You need to know... it's just... there's a lot around it but... slowly but surely it'll happen [sigh] (Masooma, p. 13).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter explores the research questions and aims to demonstrate plausible answers. Sexual violence appeared to be underpinned by power and control dynamics. The key elements of the main and sub themes are drawn out for critical analysis.

As the data emerged from a very small sample size of three research participants, these findings cannot be extrapolated to all South Asian women survivors of sexual violence.

The main research question was:

Exploring the Life Stories of South Asian Women Survivors of Sexual Violence

The key research sub questions were:

- As we are here to talk about your journey as a survivor of sexual violence, we acknowledge that people have their own language when talking about it. How would you describe sexual violence?
- In your own time, and at a level that feels safe for you, can you talk to me about what happened to you and how it has impacted upon your life?
- Could you please describe what led to you accessing the South Asian Women's Support Group at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis?
- How would you describe your experiences of being part of the South Asian Women's Support Group at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis?
- What other type of support have you experienced after you made the disclosure(s)?
- In your opinion, what is the impact of your sexual violence upon your family and community?
- As a survivor, where are you now in life?
- As a survivor, what would you suggest are positive ways forward in addressing the issues of sexual violence of South Asian women?
- What would your message be to professionals working with South Asian women whom are survivors of sexual violence? What has been helpful/unhelpful in your experience of accessing support?
- What would your message be to other survivors from the South Asian communities looking for support?

4.2 As we are here to talk about your journey as a survivor of sexual violence, we acknowledge that people have their own language when talking about it. How would you describe sexual violence?

The research elicited rich data pertaining to descriptions of sexual violence. All of the participants expressed that sexual violence was related to a lack of control of one's body and the perpetrators controlled the survivors' bodies during the course of the abusive dynamics. They expressed narratives of feeling worthless, violated, "like a piece of meat" and it was "dehumanising." Asma shared her husband would refer to her as a "donkey" directly after the marital rapes and he stated that as a donkey, she now knew who was in charge, she now knew where she belonged and that the donkey had been brought to heel. This suggests he attempted to remove her identity and dignity as a human being and insultingly replace this with an Equidae animal. He also intended to reassert his power, control and authority over her by sexually and verbally reminding her that he was her superior and she was his subordinate. He raped her into submission.

All of the participants explicitly shared they had never consented to any form of sexual contact with the perpetrators during the course of the violations. They were very articulate in describing sexual violence and what this encompassed.

*Sexual violence is when... sex is **forced upon you**... when you don't have... any control... and **you can't consent to it**... and you don't have any control over **your body**. So, I think men use **it**... to... show who's in **charge** (Asma, p. 34).*

*Sexual violence to me is... any kind of violation, it doesn't have to be **intercourse**, anything that is sexual that... that the other person doesn't want is sexual violence. So, somebody could **touch you the wrong way**, somebody can **look at you with a really disgusting sexual... way... which you don't want** [participant has an expression of disgust and 'urgh' grimace on her face] and I think that's... a type of violence because it's something **you don't want** but they're doing it knowing that you don't want **it**. I know there's **no law against that but for me, that's a violation** (Masooma, p. 9).*

***I did not consent to you touching me or... doing what you did to me**... (Ayesha, p. 41).*

*Sexual violence is not just touching of the... the genitals or whatever. I think... somebody could stroke your head in a really... **perverted way**... I've seen people **do that** when there's a **p-r-o-l-o-n-g-e-d**, you know, **stroke or prolonged** holding of the **hand** or... I've seen that, and I don't think it's right and I think that should be **highlighted** and mentioned. And when people talk about, to their children... inappropriate touching or being aware, they don't mention **that**... because that's where it starts from. Nobody just goes and **straight**... obviously some **do**, but... perpetrators, like childhood sexual abuse... **they don't just go and do that, a lot of them... groom you** and that's how the grooming starts, when they start touching. So, I think that's what **children need to look out for**. And that's what **I've taught my children** (Masooma, p. 11).*

It appeared that some of the perpetrators attempted to instil fear, power, control and manipulation over the survivors even from a distance; i.e. one perpetrator had threatened to kill the participant, their children and kill himself through suicide. This

threat resulted in the participant feeling scared for her children's safety for a substantial period of time after the perpetrator exited the marriage. She also felt misplaced self-blame the children had no contact with their father, even though he was the one whom chose to abandon them.

4.3 In your own time, and at a level that feels safe for you, can you talk to me about what happened to you and how it has impacted upon your life?

Some of the participants were sexually groomed from the ages of 5 – 7 by male relatives whom lived within their family homes. The sexual violations continued for an extensive period of time until the survivors were women aged in their 20s or 30s. One of the participant's sexual violence experiences commenced when she married in her early 20s until her husband left her after 8 years of an abusive marriage. In Ayesha's family, girls and women of three generations were sexually violated by the same perpetrator. Some of the survivors were sexually abused by multiple perpetrators at the same and/or different life stages as children, young people and adulthood.

The psychological, emotional, physical and sexual impact upon the survivors was immense and long term. One of the participants had attempted suicide on multiple occasions with the clear intention to die. She had also self harmed for a substantial number of years. The participants shared accounts of feeling disconnected from their bodies and had strong indicators of Dissociative Identity Disorder (www.mind.org.uk). Their relationships with partners, children, family members had been negatively affected for a period of time. They all experienced deep seated trust issues and had been hypervigilant for the safety of their children. Historically, they all had been overly protective of their children. However, their current parenting styles appeared to be more in alignment with their children's age appropriate independence and boundaries.

All of the participants were educated women whom had engaged in Further Education and/or Higher Education to various levels. One of participants could speak in five languages. Another held a degree in Islamic Theology. The impact of abuse upon their lives contributed to their sense of self being impaired and, at times, their autonomy was significantly diminished as the perpetrators exerted power and control in almost every aspect of their lives.

Some of the participants were intentionally impregnated through violent acts of marital rape by the perpetrators as a method to ensure they remained trapped and disempowered in the abusive marriages. The perpetrators knew it would be very challenging for the survivors to leave the abusive marriages with multiple, young children. Due to the marital and non marital rapes, some of the participants' pregnancies resulted in births, one attempted miscarriage, two miscarriages, one termination and one incestuous birth. Hence, there were themes of the survivors being denied any autonomy in relation to birth control with an indication that the perpetrators controlled the participants' fertilities.

An unexpected theme that emerged from the data was how some of the participants had made some very difficult choices as to the type of abuse they were subjected to by multiple perpetrators.

So, when this happened [discovering ex-husband had been having an affair for 2 years]... four days into my marriage... it was like 'Well, what do I do? Do I go back to

that... or do I stay here?’ So, I chose the lesser of the two evils... and I decided to stick it out, but then the violence here was... starting (Ayesha, p. 17).

In the beginning, like when he actually started to rape me... if I said “**No**” to him, he would *beat me up* or... *beat me up and rape me or he would get me in trouble by my mum... or dad* um... so it was like *I had to make a choice... I had to choose my b-a-d*, as they say, um... and then *eventually*, you know, *stopped arguing, stopped fighting... and just let him do his business and then it just went on for y-e-a-r-s and y-e-a-r-s*... until I got *married* and... it happened a few times after I got married (Masooma, p. 22).

It is suggested the participants attempted to navigate through the atrocious dilemmas of how to decrease being abused by multiple perpetrators. They conceded to one of the perpetrators in order to reduce being targeted by several perpetrators. In order to reduce the physical violence, one participant yielded to the coerced sexual violations as a way of having some respite from being physically abused as well as sexually abused.

Based upon the findings, it is argued that some of the participants had toxic parents. Forward (1991) notes toxic parents behaviours include those whom do harm their children, beat their children and sexually abused their children. She describes toxic parents as those “... who inflict ongoing trauma, abuse, and denigration on their children, and in most cases continue to do so even after their children are grown...” (p. 6).

From the study, it was apparent all of the survivors had experienced severe levels of trauma, anguish and pain, which had left an indelible mark on their lives. The findings suggested their silent suffering over a prolonged period of years led to an implosion, which manifested as mental health breakdowns. They had experienced depression, breakdowns, flashbacks, panic attacks, episodes of profound distress and crying, nightmares, isolation, mind and body disconnection, confusion, feeling sick to look at oneself, physically and mentally drained, loneliness, feeling ashamed of the abuse and unable to breathe. They described a deep sense of feeling lost, confused, trapped, memory blocks, self blame, communication struggles, self hatred, delayed social skills development, hatred of men and feeling dirty. It is suggested the participants experienced destructive shame as (Herman and Kallivayalil, 2019) write this includes survivors feeling broken, which was analogous to the participants’ references. It is recognised that child sexual abuse can cause an individual to feel lacking in their self worth and have low self esteem (www.victimsupport.org.uk).

It is suggested some of the participants experienced toxic shame at various points in their lives, which Golden (2017) writes can be a consequence of childhood neglect, physical, sexual or emotional abuse. He explains that traumatic experiences as an adult can also result in toxic shame and people whom feel toxic shame may feel insecure, stupid, worthless, foolish, inadequate, silly or simply less than. Herman and Kallivayalil (2019) state “Shame is among the most enduring effects of chronic interpersonal trauma” (p. 15). All of the participants had experienced periods of “no confidence” in their lives and “lost trust in everything and everyone” and at times, felt unemployable. Some participants did not realise for a substantial number of years they were subjected to sexual violations due to the abuse starting when they were very young children and they had no comprehension of what was happening to them. As minors under the age

of 13, they did not have the legal capacity to consent to any form of sexual activities (westmidlandsprocedures.org.uk).

Due to experiencing Dissociative Identity Disorder (www.mind.org.uk) and/or confusing cultural beliefs with religious beliefs, as adults, some of the participants remained unaware they were being sexually violated. However, all of the participants now had a clear understanding they were subjected to sexual violence and articulated they had never consented to any form of sexual activity that was enforced upon them and were “not in denial and not in submission” (Ayesha, p. 38).

All of the participants had attempted to run away from the abusive relationships at various stages of their lives. Due to their vulnerabilities, they were unable to uphold their escape attempts, enforced to stay in the abusive environments or manipulated into yielding to the perpetrator’s persuasion he would no longer be abusive. Hence, the survivors endured years of being entrapped in abusive and controlling relationships. Asma described when she was in the abusive marital relationship, she felt she was completely out of her mind. She could not oppose her husband on anything and felt she had to “obey him” which resulted in her being so focused on “being a good mother and a good wife” as she desperately wanted to maintain the façade of a happy family and was willing to sacrifice anything for this. She was so fearful of being correlated to the stigma of dishonour and shame associated with a female divorcee. She had internalised her husband’s 8 years of consistent, psychological abuse of him labelling her as “mad and crazy” that she then thought this to be true. He constantly threatened to leave her and their children, and that he would remarry. As she thought she was “mad and crazy” and unable to look after herself, let alone raise and care for four children as a single parent, she would beg him to stay and say to him “*Treat me as a slave... I’ll be a slave for the rest of your life, but don’t leave me*” (Asma, p. 26). This narrative suggests that Asma’s self value and self worth was so diminished due to the years of abuse that she was positioned as a powerless slave in the matrimonial dynamics with her husband as her powerful ‘master.’

The participants indicated they had to practise grounding techniques at regular intervals on a daily basis in order to live, breathe, maintain stable mental health and function as mothers, wives, sisters, professionals and members of society. Thus, their internal struggles to function as connected and embodied women was an ongoing and lifelong challenge. “Being a survivor means taking on that challenge or surviving e-v-e-r-y single second of e-v-e-r-y single day, keeping yourself grounded, keeping yourself focused, keeping yourself n-o-r-m-a-l and living a normal life, being a wife, being a mother, being a... being an individual, more than anybody else, being you, an individual but keeping your mental... state... s-a-n-e” (Ayesha, p. 29).

For some participants, sadly, there appeared to be no respite from completely breaking free from the connections with the perpetrators due to the continued strong, familial connections which meant some of the abusive men remained at the periphery of their lives. One of the participants experienced daily, visual reminders of the past sexual violations as she was the mother of a child borne as a consequence of incest. The strength of the participants’ mental, physical and emotional wellbeing fluctuated throughout their journeys as survivors and they recognised this was not a linear process. They had created barriers around themselves as safeguarding mechanisms. Some of the participants had never intended to disclose their experiences of sexual abuse and had

planned to take such secrets with them to their graves. However, due to unforeseen circumstances suddenly and rapidly unfolding in their presence, they revealed to some of their family members elements of the abuse that was in their conscious awareness.

Some of the survivors were sexually violated by different men; i.e. one participant was sexually assaulted when an adult by her brother-in-law and a male tailor during a trip to South Asia. Another participant was sexually abused during her childhood when aged 10 years old by a maulana when she attended Qur'anic classes. Thus, it appeared the participants were unsafe in personal, professional and academic spheres due to sexual predators waiting for an opportunity to arise for them to violate girls and women.

Another surprising theme to emerge from the data was that some of the male spouses, whom were originally from the South Asian continent, used some of the British Asian participants to secure British citizenships via marriage. It is plausible that some of the perpetrators of abuse adopted a silent stance to the sexual abuse inflicted by others as they may have had their own agendas to fulfil; i.e. maintain honour and elude shame, and to secure a British visa via the survivors. A further unexpected theme that materialised was how some of the participants were criticised, targeted and subjected to harmful behaviours as they were from the UK. One of the survivors was considered "an easy target" by multiple perpetrators in South Asia as she was British and from England. Some of her husband's female relatives colluded in the abuse by deliberately engineering situations whereby the survivor was put at risk of physical violence and actually, sexually assaulted by a male relative, which the females-in-law witnessed as silent bystanders. The reality is, we do not have any choices about the families we are born into nor the destinations of our birthplaces and nationalities. We inherent these multiple, intersecting identities. It is proposed that girls and women of indigenous South Asian heritage would not have necessarily been shielded from the perpetrators' abuse due to their inherent status as abuse is a global phenomena and affects all races, ethnicities, nationalities and classes (www.unwomen.org). Ayesha and Asma shared narratives of being imprisoned in the family homes by the perpetrators with no means to escape or call for help as the house keys, mobile phones, car keys et cetera were forcibly removed from them by the perpetrators. They described their lives being controlled by the perpetrators and subjected to the imposition of domestic servitude for a period of time.

The findings identified that inexplicably, one of the perpetrators held a strong belief the bloodline was only via male descendants so he deemed "... any *other female*...is basically open...for his needs...his desires..." (Ayesha, p. 28). Hence, he sexually abused three generations of girls and women in his immediate family as it appeared he considered it entirely acceptable for him to forcefully engage in sexual activities with them as they were available to him and he was entitled to have sexual relations with them. He did not seem to even consider his actions as sexual abuse, illegal, immoral, sinful, unethical nor transgressive behaviours. It is proposed this account is an example of how, at times, it is impossible to comprehend the incomprehensible.

All of the participants verbalised their children were their source of strength. Unable to tolerate their children being abused was the turning point for some of the survivors' life journeys and for them to find the courage within themselves to challenge the abusers. For Masooma, the catalyst in realising the acts of violence against her were sexual abuse materialised when she attended a sex education class in school and she learnt about personal boundaries, sexual contact and consent et cetera. Although her

parents had prohibited her from attending the class, she defied their decision-making, without their knowledge, which subsequently resulted in her saying “No” to the perpetrator. Her objections resulted in the perpetrator then regularly beating her prior to raping her so the acts of violence against her escalated. These findings suggest that Masooma’s parents’ intentions for her not to be exposed to any form of sex education in personal or educational domains did not offer her any protection. Her parents may have assumed she would be safe if she did not have any knowledge about sexual matters. However, conversely, to her parents’ suppositions, Masooma was very unsafe and vulnerable by not having any awareness of healthy/unhealthy relationships and boundaries. Thus, her learning about sex education in school essentially helped her to recognise the ‘love’ the perpetrator claimed he felt for her was in reality abuse.

At the time of the interviews, (2019 – 2020) all of the participants had regained control in their lives. Their minds and bodies were more integrated rather than separate entities.

4.4 How would you describe your experiences of being part of the South Asian Women’s Support Group at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis?

All of the participants enthusiastically shared how their attendance at the SAWSG was a life-transforming experience for them. For years, and at time decades, they had thought they were the only women to have been sexually violated as they had not met any other known survivors at all, or not outside their immediate family circle. In the case of sexual violations spanning three, female generations of one family, there was an indication only one of the survivors disclosed the violations when they came into her realisation. Her sibling did not acknowledge she also may have been abused by the same perpetrator, despite there being strong indicators she was. The SAWSG provided the survivors with a confidential and safe space for them to be their authentic selves where they were accepted for the women they were. They received and transmitted individual and collective understanding and support, listened and shared without any judgements. Being part of group with people of similar backgrounds and tacit understanding helped them to talk about their cultures, religion, thoughts and feelings. They all felt the group was sensitive to their histories, current circumstances and their ways of thinking and processing. There was a recommendation for more South Asian women to work within the South Asian communities as they would be more likely to have a natural, deeper understanding of the South Asian cultures and dialects compared to persons from a completely different culture.

The psychoeducational information from the group facilitators was pivotal in helping the survivors to gain knowledge about healthy and unhealthy relationships. The participants learnt about how some of the abusive traits were similar or dissimilar, and expressed they could not have gained this knowledge by staying at home. The group provided them with opportunities to focus upon themselves and they deeply valued their time during the group sessions. The participants shared that attending the group helped them to learn, grow and heal themselves in addition to assisting other group members to heal. As such, with the passage of time, individual and collective healing superseded the violations they had suffered.

4.5 What other type of support have you experienced after you made the disclosure(s)?

Unfortunately, some of the participants received unsupportive responses from some of the service providers when they disclosed domestic abuse and sexual abuse. They all shared accounts of the barriers they experienced at various junctures in accessing appropriate help, which contributed to an increase in their distress and deterioration in their mental health. One participant stated that her trying to receive help had been “the most difficult part” of her survival journey.

*He [ex-husband] beat me up in front of this guy and I was black and bruised and then left him. I had a massive bruise from here to here [hand gestures indicating extensive bruising areas] and I went to my doctor – my GP – and stuff and I showed them and... **nothing** was done about it, no help was given (Ayesha, p. 18).*

Another participant continued to struggle in silence for ten years due to the harm she felt she sustained by a counsellor pressuring her to report the sexual abuse during their initial session. The counsellor never recontacted the participant again after the first appointment and she was not offered any other form of therapeutic interventions. The complete lack of communication from the counsellor and counselling service contributed towards the participant then withdrawing from society and locking herself indoors for a few years. She became extremely fearful of being outdoors and bumping into a man. She could not go outside without her husband by her side. After the inexplicable disappearance of the first counsellor, she did not seek any form of therapeutic help for the next decade.

*That... counsellor **r-e-a-l-l-y** put me off, the one that came and **didn't come back again**. I think I went about **ten years** ... from that **point on** I didn't seek any kind of help because I thought '**Everyone's going to be like her**' and she didn't follow through, she didn't tell me why... **I've just never heard from her again** and that **r-e-a-l-l-y** put me off so that was **r-e-a-l-l-y** **unhelpful**. I don't know what her **reasons were**. I don't know what happened to **her** but... if something happened to **her**, I should have had a call from the **organisation** to **explain** to me **why she can't come back** (Masooma, p. 71).*

The above accounts demonstrated how some of the participants were let down by some services and professionals in the healthcare profession. It remains unknown if such failures may have contributed towards the perpetrators feeling invincible to continue to violate the survivors.

One of the participants described how her second experience of accessing counselling was an immensely positive phase in her life. She seemed to have been scarred by the single encounter with the first counsellor ten years previously, whom had pressured her to report the sexual violations and had appeared to be culturally uninformed. The second counsellor was a Muslim woman of South Asian heritage at GMRC and she instantly understood the reasons why the survivor had not reported the abuse. There was a sense of instant relief in the participant when she heard the counsellor verbalise “I totally understand you” and there was no forthcoming pressure for her to report the abuse to the police. The participant felt her culture and religion was organically understood and accepted by the counsellor as she articulated “And I was like, ‘Oh my

God! Somebody who understands my *culture*. Somebody who understands my *religion* [participant places her hand on her chest area]. Somebody who knows *what I'm talking about... w-h-y I couldn't tell anybody... why I couldn't go to the police...* and she didn't tell me...she didn't say to me, "*No, you need to go to the police,*" because you know, *that's what I used to think that if I'm going to tell somebody, they're going to say, "No, you have to report it."* *And she didn't*" (Masooma, p. 49). It is suggested their shared cultural connection and understanding, and the counsellor's acceptance of the participant's decision-making helped to rapidly form a deep, meaningful and trusting therapeutic relationship.

It was astounding to hear one of the participants and her young children had to wait nine years for a very large, metropolitan council to provide them with appropriate housing, despite their histories of being abused recorded on official documentation. It is argued that it is completely unacceptable that a vulnerable woman and her vulnerable children had to wait almost a decade to be offered suitable social housing security when they reside in one of the wealthiest country on the planet (Chakraborty, 2022) as England is the fifth largest economy in the world (Rodriguez, 2022). The participant came to the UK as a child and all of her children were born in the UK. Hence, she rightfully felt "neglected" by the council at a time in her life whereby she and her children could have become destitute if her family of origin did not invite them into their home.

4.6 In your opinion, what is the impact of your sexual violence upon your family and community?

For years, and at times, decades, the participants did not disclose to their families they were sexually violated. Due to a plausible Dissociative Identity Disorder (www.mind.org.uk) for decades, Ayesha was absolutely unaware and had no recollection of the abuse, until her trauma was triggered when she unexpectedly witnessed her perpetrator sexually assaulting her 6 – 7 years old daughter. This acute incident was the catalyst in unleashing her memories of being sexually groomed from the same age as her daughter "*I've got all of this that's just come flooding to my brain!*" (Ayesha, p. 33). The participant was able to share some of her delayed recollections with her siblings, whom were supportive. However, the participant suspected her eldest sister was also sexually violated by their parent and her elder sister would not disclose this as a way of safeguarding herself and also keeping everything quiet as she was married to a distant relative. The participant alluded her sister suffered from "some form of Schizophrenia" (Ayesha, p. 27) and this was a direct consequence of the traumatic sexual violations she must have experienced. The participant had no intention of sharing her history of sexual violations with her current husband, which was analogous to how this had been concealed from her first husband. Her community remained unaware of the sexual traumas she had endured.

Due to a strong sense of being impacted by the honour and shame socially constructed concepts (Mansoor, 2015b) Asma never disclosed to her family she was a survivor of sexual violence. She also felt that due to stigma, it was not possible to talk to her family about the domestic abuse she had suffered, despite her mother sensitively questioning her about this in the early years of her marriage. Although Asma was raised in a very caring, loving and supportive family, she felt unable to disclose to her parents or brothers the reality of her abusive marriage due to stigma. She felt her family and herself

would be dishonoured, that she would bring shame to all of them as she per her ex-husband's rhetoric. Hence, this suggests Asma had internalised the negative, critical and controlling messages from her ex-husband. Her fear of losing honour and bringing shame to herself and her family resulted in her being silenced by her ex-husband, which compounded him to physically assault her in front of their children and vice versa. Previous research by Mansoor (2015a) concluded "Shame is an emotion and is defined by how one responds to a perception of lost honour. It manifests itself on two levels; internal and external. Internal shame is the sense an individual may have of feeling ashamed, shameful or shameless. External shame has a social element which is very closely connected to acts of punishment and enforced compliance by others" (p. 209). Thus, it is suggested Asma's internal sense of shame also impelled her into her not communicating to other people for a substantial number of years the reality of her abusive marriage.

It appeared there were barriers in survivors and/or non survivors talking about marital rape in society as the South Asian communities "don't consider it as *rape* in marriage..." (Asma, p. 37). It is proposed that some communities' dismissal and denial that marital rape exists directly contributed to perpetuating the silence, which ensconced sexual violations. From the data, there was strong evidence girls and women would be 'victim blamed' by significant others and their communities if it became known they had experienced sexual violations. It appeared that male perpetrators of abuse would not be held responsible nor accountable for their sexual offences. These findings are comparable with previous research identifying the 'victim blaming' of women after their experiences of sexual violence Eaton (2019).

"The man decides to rape, the man decides to... have sex, the man decides she's not a virgin, "I'm going to leave her." [sighs] *It's a man's world* (Masooma, p. 40). It could be argued that some communities' collusion in blaming the females for being victims and survivors of sexual violations directly contributed to the almost impenetrable gender based discrimination and barriers girls and women experienced should they choose to disclose the abuse as "*Generally* what you hear in society is, *it's always the woman's fault, it's always the girl's fault, it's never the man's fault* (Masooma, p. 58).

The above narratives lead to the following philosophical question; "How can these entrenched, centuries old barriers be overcome when so many mindsets appear parochial and so resistant to change?"

Although most of the abuse was conducted covertly, there were incidents of sexual violations being witnessed by female relatives and domestic abuse witnessed by other men. Thus, occasionally the abuse was overtly meted out in the presence of other adult males/females. However, disturbingly, there was no indication that any of the witnesses intervened nor challenged the abusive acts as they appeared to be silent bystanders. This would suggest the perpetrators may have held a sense of entitlement to exert power and control over the survivors and significant others. It would appear that in one of the families, toxic masculinity (www.psychologyinaction.org) existed between two of the perpetrators whom "felt challenged by each other" yet there was no indication they had verbally acknowledged between themselves, nor to anyone else, they were engaging in acts of sexual violence against the same participant.

Some toxic masculinity behaviours include being violent, being dominant and sexual aggression towards women (www.aurorand.org.uk). A participant described how one of the perpetrators “...was so *possessive over me*...” (Ayesha, p. 14) that she was not allowed to sit with or talk to her older brother. Thus, silence existed amongst multiple perpetrators of abuse and among some of the siblings. Interestingly, one of the participants whom had been raised in what was presented as a loving, nurturing and supportive family talked about how her mother experienced stress and upset whenever she saw her grandchildren. The grandchildren resembled their father, whom was the perpetrator of multiple types of abuse against the participant. Although her mother was unaware of the sexual violations her daughter had experienced, there was a suggestion she experienced vicarious trauma (www.bma.org.uk) and secondary trauma (www.ptsd.uk) triggered by her daughter’s trauma and her now being a single parent. One of the survivor’s husband was “devastated” and “traumatised” when his presentiment that his wife had been sexually abused by his older brother was affirmed by her when he questioned her about this many years into their marriage. There were strong indicators he experienced vicarious trauma (www.bma.org.uk) upon confirmation his suspicions were accurate. As his mental health deteriorated, he became deeply depressed and received individual and couples counselling. Hence, the data established the damage and toxicity caused by sexual violations primarily affected the survivors, and at times, secondarily overwhelmingly affected some of their immediate family members. Although Masooma’s husband was consistently supportive, loving, caring and nurturing towards her, there was a sense that he felt disempowered to sever all contact with his abusive, older brother due to the very strong family connections and maintaining a public image of interfamilial harmony, even though this was the antithesis to the reality.

There were indicators that Ayesha and Masooma’s mothers knew about the sexual violations, yet, never verbally acknowledged this. Ayesha’s mother baked cupcakes for her and gave them to her when she was aged 5 – 6 years old every time she woke up from the enforced daily naps with the perpetrator, whom was her “other parent.” Her mother was also reluctant to call for an ambulance when Ayesha was bleeding profusely at the age of 13, with what Ayesha years later recognised was a miscarriage. As her mother was subjected to decades of psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse by the same perpetrator, she may not have had the strength or capacity to acknowledge to herself, yet alone anyone else, that her daughter(s) were also being sexually abused. Perhaps, she remained silent as safeguarding her children was beyond her reach? Despite the household being immersed in abject poverty and most of the family members being subjected to daily, acts of violence by the same perpetrator, Ayesha, her mother and siblings found ways to survive their individual and collective traumas. Although there was a sense that Masooma’s mother knew there were underlying reasons for why Masooma chose not to say ‘Salaam’ or acknowledge her brother-in-law, she did not delve further into this due to notions of honour and shame. Perhaps, remaining silent offered her a sense of honour being upheld and shame averted? However, these narratives indicate that both mothers were embroiled within the complexities of collective honour, shame and collusion positionalities. It is also plausible that the mothers may have been embroiled in toxic femininity which consists of gendered expectations resulting in women being subservient, quiet and submissive to men whom dominate and are aggressive (McCann, 2020). As stated by Sutton (2017) most people do not want to talk about shame as it leaves them feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable.

Ayesha sensed her first husband knew she had been sexually violated, yet, he also never acknowledged this to her. The potential reason(s) for his silence remains unknown. He was psychologically, emotionally, physically, sexually and financially abusive towards Ayesha throughout their marriage. Perhaps, he did not articulate what he accurately perceived as he too was a perpetrator?

It is important to draw attention to the facts that some of the participants did experience help and support when they eventually disclosed some of the abuse they had experienced. When Asma confided in a male Sheikh, and female and male religious mentors whom were also an Ālima and Ālim the reality of her abusive marriage, she received a swift reply, encouraging her to inform her family of origin about the violence she and her children were experiencing. It was brought to her attention she needed help and she was encouraged to seek assistance from her family, whom had always been very loving, respectful and supportive towards her. Asma trusted her Islamic teachers and mentors, and she described their guidance as being key to her taking the first steps towards her recovery. The encouragement from the Sheikh and mentors was pivotal in Asma subsequently feeling ready to convey to her family she needed their help for herself and her children. Her family invited her to stay with them, which eventually resulted in her recognising the abuse for what it was and that her husband was solely responsible for this. When Asma felt some qualms about whether she was ready to participate in the research study, she reached to her mentors for their opinions. Again, the mentors were very supportive and understood her hesitation. They encouraged her to share her story and stated that if her contributions helped someone else, then that would be amazing.

Ayesha also shared narratives of how her younger brother was “... an **amazing human being...a-b-s-o-l-u-t-e-l-y a-m-a-z-i-n-g** person... (Ayesha, p. 8). She depicted a close bond between them, whereby trust, safety, love, care and compassion were present. Hence, some of the participants did have brothers/male significant others whom were very supportive, kind and caring individuals, siblings, husbands, fathers, sons, religious leaders and so forth. These men appeared to be the antithesis of ‘toxic masculinity’ (www.psychologyinaction.org) and it is proposed they were positive role models for South Asian families and societies in addition to the Muslim communities. Toxic masculinity’s current definition includes “harmful social norms about how men should behave that lead to misogyny, homophobia, violence, and mental health issues” (www.psychologyinaction.org).

The data suggested Masooma may have experienced Stockholm Syndrome (www.mind.help) when the sexual abuse, which had spanned more than a decade, finally ceased when she told him she would kill him if he touched her again and that she would also inform her husband about the abuse. “*And then when it stopped, that wasn’t happy... that wasn’t a happy time for me, that was like... when you stop having drugs, there’s withdrawal symptoms, you go through that withdrawal period... I went through that and then I needed him and I wanted him... even though I was married, my husband was with me, but I needed him. And then all that attachment, you know, what do they call it? There’s a... there’s a condition... I can’t remember what it’s called now... [participant describes symptoms of Stockholm Syndrome] (www.mind.help) (Masooma, p. 22 – 23).*

This case illustrated the complexities of prolonged, sexual violence and the detrimental impact it had on the participant's psychological and emotional development. It seems that Masooma had developed an unhealthy attachment to the perpetrator. He had lived in her family home since her birth and initially gave her attention, chocolates, toys and a misrepresentation of care and love, which she had not received from her parents or any other family members. She described that in her past "*I had absolutely nobody*" (Masooma, p. 26) which suggests she was a very lonely child, young person and adult. Hence, his sudden departure from her life invoked a very tangible reaction within her and she described it as akin to drugs "withdrawal" symptoms. Irrefutably, she wanted the abuse to stop. Yet, for a period of time, the perpetrator's absence left a significant void in her life, which elucidates the convolutions of the abuser/survivor dynamics and the multifaceted impact of abuse, even when it has ended.

The findings identified that should the participants' communities become aware of the sexual violations, the survivors, not the perpetrators would be blamed for the abuse. Due to a fear of being tarnished by a perception of collective shame and dishonour, knowing the truth prevented some family members acknowledging the abuse. Due to familial and South Asian cultural notions of honour and shame the survivors had no intention of reporting the sexual violations to the Police. As documented by previous research undertaken by Mansoor (2015b) exploring the concept of honour and shame for South Asian British Muslim men and women, "Coercion, pressures, emotional blackmail, cultural identity issues, honour and shame are all powerful mechanisms of conformity placed upon some women by significant others in their lives" (p. 56).

Upholding the family honour was very much intertwined with keeping the sexual violence a secret for life. Some women could not disclose their sexual abuse history to their husbands as they had a real fear they would subsequently be rejected and divorced by their husbands. Hence, the veiled threat the survivors would be unsupported and punished by their spouses, family members and their communities if they disclosed any experiences of being sexually abused prevented some of the participants confiding in their parents, siblings, husbands, friends about the sexual abuse they had suffered. One of the participants experienced being "shamed by everybody in the community" (Ayesha, p. 21) as they believed her husband's lies she had engaged in adultery. This narrative was another example of some communities making negative assumptions and derogatory remarks about women whilst automatically dissociating men of any wrongdoing. These findings were in alignment with the conclusion identified by Mansoor (2006) whereby some South Asian communities negatively judged South Asian Muslim women from their own communities. Rife gossip was utilised as a powerful mechanism to convey messages of criticism and non acceptance of some South Asian Muslim women.

There was an indication one of the perpetrators was exhibiting stalking type of behaviour (www.police.uk) as he repeatedly moved into the same neighbourhood the survivor moved to. He repeatedly relocated to living only a few streets away from the survivor and her family, and would unexpectedly attempt to visit her at home when her husband was not at home. He persistently sent the participant unwanted communication, repeatedly relocated into the numerous areas she moved to which meets some of the examples of stalking as noted by Women's Aid (www.womensaid.org.uk). He exhibited all of the four warning signs of stalking as noted by the UK police; fixated, obsessive, unwanted and repeated (www.police.uk).

The participant and her nuclear family moved five times over a number of years and when she had confronted the perpetrator and asked why he was following her, he stated “ *‘I’m n-e-v-e-r going to leave you alone.’* So even where I’m living *now... he’s followed* ” (Masooma, p. 23). As the abuse remained unknown to the law enforcement authorities, she had no legal measures in place preventing him from following her or contacting her. Hence, her husband was the only person whom was able to provide her with some form of protection and shield her from the perpetrator, whom was his older brother.

Being associated with the perpetrators name due to the very close family association, was another internal, lifelong struggle for some of the participants. A belief that in the Hereafter, the deceased are resurrected by their biological father’s name on the Day of Judgement (www.Islaahh.wordpress.com) resulted in one of the participants feeling there was no respite, separation nor closure from her being connected to the perpetrators in this life or the next. She expressed that the name of one of the perpetrators would be associated with her even after she had taken her very last breath.

4.7 As a survivor, where are you now in life?

Based upon the data, it was apparent the participants had engaged in extensive trauma related therapy to help them to work through their life-changing, traumatic experiences. They had invested an immeasurable amount of time, energy, courage, attention, labour and investment to be able to reconnect with themselves, recognise and develop their identities, connect with their minds and bodies, and to heal to some extent whilst knowing their journeys towards recovery were a continuous process. They owned their vulnerabilities, strengths and bodies. They recognised their triggers and had acquired the knowledge and skills to be able to predominantly manage to contain their reactions so their distress did not become unsurmountable and they did not become emotionally dysregulated (Spring, 2019; Davis, 2021; Ford, 2021). They were all very attuned to the multitudinous struggles they had overcome and were equally attentive of future challenges. They no longer held themselves accountable for the abuse and accurately allocated this responsibility to the perpetrators. They had reclaimed their bodies and were able to accept themselves for whom they are. They were no longer merely existing as damaged and vulnerable beings. They were living, breathing and striving as strong, independent and empowered women. They were no longer living in their violent histories. They were articulate, vocal and seemed to be at junctures in their lives whereby they challenged oppressive, damaging and dehumanising practices. They were embracing the present and looking forward to their futures. They described themselves as survivors and not victims. The following quote encapsulates one of the survivor’s journey:

I’ve been in a dark, dark, dark place... the lowest of the low you can go, I’ve b-e-e-n there... and I’ve c-l-a-w-e-d my way to the top, quite literally c-l-a-w-e-d my way to the top... [pause] and I want to pass that on, that you can do it... no matter h-o-w bad you feel, it can be done... and the more you do it, the more you tell yourself “It’s OK, it wasn’t your fault... like your body...” you know, affirmations and things... it gets easier and now, I can do it without even thinking about it (Masooma, p. 60).

4.8 As a survivor, what would you suggest are positive ways forward in addressing the issues of sexual violence of South Asian women?

There were recommendations for the school curriculum to incorporate teaching children about how sexual grooming may start in subtle ways; i.e. touching of the elbow, prolonged holding of the hand, stroking of the head or arm et cetera. It was considered important for children to be informed that if they felt uncomfortable about anyone touching them, then they should tell both of their parents or a school teacher. Children needed to be encouraged not stay quiet and for them to share with adults if they felt uncomfortable about someone touching them. It was proposed that parents needed to teach their children in age appropriate detail about sexual boundaries and sex education. It was viewed as essential for children to know the dangers of inappropriate, sexual relationships and it was deemed that educating children on these factors was the shared responsibilities of teachers and parents. Teachers to receive more training about how to be alert to some of the covert signs of pupils being subjected to sexual violence was also recommended. The rationale for why sex education, sexual grooming and sexual safety needed to be communicated to children at an appropriately young age, was to help them develop the awareness of their personal safety and boundaries so they could recognise the differences between healthy, physical/sexual contact and abusive physical/sexual contact. It was hoped that children learning about safety in their formative years would help them to recognise as young people and adults if they were being sexually violated and to speak up about this. Children, young people and adults being aware, understanding and accepting they owned their bodies, and no one else owned their bodies, was also an important element in individuals recognising they had the rights to accept or refuse sexual contact.

The findings illustrated that insufficient awareness and knowledge about sexual violations existed. A further recommendation was for people as a collective, not solely survivors, needed to have conversations about sexual violence with different age groups to help stop the continuation of such abuse. There was a request for people to invest their time and energy into making societies safer places for everyone to live in.

All of the participants referred to having been silenced for prolonged periods of times during their survivors' journeys. At the time of the research interviews (2019 – 2020) the participants remained very selective with whom they disclosed their histories, hence, the sexual violations remained deeply concealed. Masooma verbalised that since her childhood, she had been told by multiple people in her life to “shut up and put up” due to her South Asian cultural upbringing. She alluded to it being a cultural norm for younger people to be silent when elders spoke. She was not allowed to be upset, not allowed to speak and she was not taught to be assertive, which resulted in her self-depiction of a “doormat.”

Based upon the data, it is proposed that it is important for South Asian children to be encouraged to express their emotions and verbalise their viewpoints in healthy and safe ways. Denying children the freedom of expression is not conducive to their personal development nor safety. Children articulating their thoughts and feelings is not synonymous with insolent behaviour and would not result in the revered respect for elders being jeopardised. Muting children from expressing their internal processes enhances their vulnerabilities to be preyed upon by perpetrators of abuse as they have

not been given the permission to utilise their voice and, thus, are restricted from alerting anyone about potential/actual safeguarding concerns.

All of the participants enunciated it was imperative for South Asian Muslims to be educated about Islam, culture and safeguarding issues to help reduce the sexual violations of South Asian women. In their own ways, the participants had exercised their agency to challenge abusive practices. It seemed religious principles were replaced by cultural beliefs as Islam afforded women the right to vote, inheritance, choose their spouse, pursue educational and employment interests in seventh century Arabia (Mahmood, 2013). Educating community members about the conflicts between Islamic and cultural values was of particular importance to the participant whom held a degree in Islamic theology.

*I feel a lot more confident about my **religion**, about my **culture**... and that's my way of giving back to my community. I try and educate the **women** where I teach... so I've got teenagers in my class... I talk to them about **nikah**... and **divorce** and the issues and I feel really... they need to be educated... and they need to... have role models around them that they can **trust** and speak to. So, that's my way of giving back to my society (Asma, p. 53).*

South Asian Muslim men and women being able to discern the differences between religious and cultural practices before embarking upon marriage was considered a progressive method in obtaining accurate knowledge about marital relationships and the rights of both parties. From the findings, there was an indication that some people in South Asian communities did not believe a wife could be raped by her husband as they did not consider marital rape existed. A participant shared that she would not be believed by her community if she disclosed she had been raped by her husband. Instead, they would “take his side” as “**He was doing the right thing ... and I was in the wrong**” (Asma, p. 36). These barriers contributed to the participant being unable to say “no” to her husband despite her being aware that from an Islamic perspective, she was entitled to consent or not consent to marital sexual activities, and that marital rape was “definitely wrong and definitely a sin.” Hence, this is another example of how damaging, cultural practices overruled Islamic law and how some communities silenced women from talking about sexual violations.

***Educating ... our women ... men as well... what erm violence is ... because a lot of the people don't understand... so I think education is the key... it's important to educate men and women before marriage about their religious and cultural rights... and not for them to mix up those two elements, so to be able to differentiate that** (Asma, p. 59).*

In the study, there was a particular emphasis upon the importance of communication initiated by parents with their children to ascertain their experiences of attending Islamic classes. There was a suggestion that parents choosing not to have conversations with their children about their Islamic education and also not talking to them about sexual safety and violence, increased their offspring's vulnerabilities to abuse.

*The parents wouldn't go to the maulana and say “**So, how was my child today? And what did they learn?**” Or go to your child and say... “**Did anything bad happen? Did the maulana do anything bad?**” You know, because you've not taught your children how to look after themselves, so **I never sent my children to mosque. I taught them at***

home, and I've also taught them about sexual violence ... because it's so important and, yet, obviously it wasn't easy, but you have to speak about these uncomfortable things to make them comfortable. If you're never going to speak, it's just going to be more uncomfortable. So, it's just like an injection... you think about it so much but once the needle's in, you think 'Oh [tuts] what was the fuss about?' You know... and that's what people need to do – stop being so s-c-a-r-e-d of it... because it's not scary [sighs deeply] (Masooma, p. 70).

The findings illustrated that some South Asian women felt their status would be/was devalued if they were a divorcee due to the negative, judgemental views by some of their community members. Hence, one of the participants did not apply for a divorce even though her husband had remarried. Due to her feeling the stigma of being the first woman in her family to be separated and then divorced, she did not inform her family overseas that she was separated from her husband for a significant period of time. The divorce was eventually initiated by her husband as he wanted to bring his second wife into the UK. The gender based inequalities and un-Islamic practices were in stark contrast to Islamic scriptures, which state the importance of egalitarian gendered relationships (Lyon, 2004). Islam does not condone the abuse of women (Wadud, 2006; Kusha, 2007; Kausar, Hussain and Idriss, 2011; Mahmood, 2013). Bakhtiar (2009) challenges how could Allah (SWT) who is The Merciful, The compassionate, endorse Muslim men beating their wives? Based upon the data, it is suggested that divorced women being relegated to a lowly status compared to married women originated from misconceptions and erroneous beliefs about Muslim women's religious and constitutional rights to divorce. Muslim women have had the autonomy to initiate divorce since the time of The Prophet Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) (www.islamic-sharia.org).

The findings exposed that some South Asian parents whom physically assaulted their children did not consider this as abuse. They seemed to fail to recognise and/or deny their violent actions were abusive and illegal. They clearly contravened the UK laws of child protection, which prohibits the deliberate hurting of a child and causing physical harm to a child (www.learningnspcc.org.uk). Physical beatings by such parents seemed to have been positioned as acceptable forms of parenting, discipline and cultural norms. Such mindsets may be acceptable in the South Asian subcontinent, however, it is argued that such practices are dangerous and unsafe, and do not belong in modern day Britain.

There were recommendations for South Asian parents to build relationships with their children so their offspring felt able to share anything with them with, whilst maintaining appropriate parent/child boundaries. It was recognised that parents also needed to treat all of their children equally and the love for a son or daughter should be the same. There was a request for parents to overcome feeling uncomfortable when talking about sex education with their children as such conversations could help “save” their children from experiencing “something really, really bad” (Masooma, p. 85).

4.9 What would your Message be to Professionals Working with South Asian Women whom are Survivors of Sexual Violence? What has been Helpful/Unhelpful in your Experience of Accessing Support?

All of the research participants had prepared copious amounts of notes in advance of the interviews to convey their subjective recommendations for positive change.

4.9.1 Recommendations for Service Providers

The data indicated the importance of support services providing group support for survivors with ethnic diversity amongst the professionals and attendees as this was considered healthy in survivors understanding abuse as violations of women and girls is a global issue and not confined to any particular demographic (www.unwomen.org). However, there were strong recommendations for homogeneity within groups as there would be a tacit understanding of their shared cultural nuances, backgrounds, linguistics, belief systems et cetera, which would be absent in a heterogenous group. White ethnic survivors' experiences that appeared to be the only ones publicised was not considered conducive and there was a recommendation for multicultural experiences to be highlighted as this reflected the reality. There was also a recommendation for professionals, including counsellors, to have some understanding of the cultural norms that South Asians customarily do not talk about sex, sexual violence or rape. Hence, it was very common for South Asian survivors not to disclose their experiences of abuse to their families and/or communities.

Another significant theme that was elicited from the data was for professionals not to question why the survivors had not reported the sexual violations. The participants stressed it was imperative for professionals to have some prior understanding that due to familial and cultural implications, the survivors chose not to report the abuse to the authorities and had no intentions to do so. Honour and shame concepts and experiences were some of the reasons the participants did not report the abuse and it is suggested that some professionals could benefit from increasing their knowledge about this phenomena. Previous research stated "Honour and shame were viewed as positive and negative notions which were ingrained from early childhood. This notion is not primarily contained within an individual's frame of reference and their sense of the world, but is deeply intertwined with the perception of other people's expectations which require fulfilment" (Mansoor, 2015a, p. 222). Cultural understanding and sensitivities were essential components to help survivors seek professional help. Indeed, there was a rhetoric that it was a cultural norm for South Asian families, communities and cultures not to talk about sex, sexual violations, rape et cetera with a recognition that "just because it's not spoken about as much, *it doesn't mean that it's not happening*" (Masooma, p. 67).

One of the participants shared she had noticed for several years that no one really talked to the survivors. Her impression was the "leaders" spoke amongst themselves, which suggested survivors were excluded from such communications and this was an oversight. Some professionals/services being "scared of offending people" from diverse cultures or religions was considered a barrier in the endeavours for positive change. Hence, there was a plea for individuals and organisations to not shy away from addressing issues that may be deemed polemic by some members of society.

If your intentions are good, then you shouldn't be scared of offending, especially in *this* country where there's *freedom of speech* ... If *you're going to stay scared, nothing's ever going to change* (Masooma, p. 75).

There was a sense of injustice felt by one of the participants that the perpetrator of abuse was able to create a new life for himself without any significant legal consequences for his domestic abuse offences. Despite the severity of his crimes, he did not receive a

custodial sentence. It is of concern that he was legally permitted to bring a new spouse into the UK when he was known to the police as a violent individual whom ferociously attacked his wife and young children on numerous occasions. It is recognised he is entitled to have the freedom to marry and to start a family as per the Human Rights Act 1998, Article 12 (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2021). However, it is argued there is a social and ethical responsibility, and duty of care for authorities to investigate spousal visa applications with diligence when the sponsor has a criminal conviction for domestic abuse in attempts to reduce the possibility of another, potentially vulnerable person, being the recipient of his abusive actions.

One of the participants expressed very positive experiences of attending courses for women survivors of domestic abuse. The psychoeducational content helped to increase her awareness of abuse and her confidence levels gradually increased. In her opinion, the ethnic diversity amongst the course leaders and attendees was a very positive way for her to meet people of different backgrounds. She considered it healthy for her to be part of a diverse group as this directly contributed to her knowing that she was not the only one to experience domestic and sexual abuse. She viewed the diversity in the UK to be affirmative and stressed the importance for professionals to be sensitive to the survivors' backgrounds and their ways of thinking, otherwise a barrier of "us and them" could be created, thus, it would be extremely difficult for the professionals to help anyone. She proposed the professionals needed to break down the barriers to reach out to people in order to be able to engage with them effectively.

Further recommendations derived from the data were for organisations to have a holistic approach in offering help and support to women so they worked in collaboration with each other, rather than disparate services. Professionals to increase their awareness of where the Rape Crisis Centres were located and to acquire knowledge pertaining to the referral procedures was considered a positive way forward. There was a strong recommendation for professionals working with survivors to be trained and educated in this field of work otherwise there was a risk they could be damaging the survivors if they did not have the competency skills to work with traumatised survivors. It was viewed that training for professionals working with survivors needed to be compulsory and trauma specific, rather than generic.

*I've seen so many people that just... trying to do it themselves but they haven't got a clue... and that's actually **damaging the survivors m-o-r-e**. It really **scares** me, and I think that's one thing for professionals... **somebody** needs to... pick out these professionals and say "It's compulsory for you to get educated" (Masooma, p. 64).*

One of the participants strongly requested for the term 'violence' to be replaced with 'violation' and 'violated.' For the survivor, 'violence' was associating the control elements with the perpetrators. Whereas 'violation' and 'violated' represented the survivors having regained the control and emphasised their survival journeys. Hence, she asked for the focal point to be upon the survivors as recipients of being violated as opposed to the focus being upon the perpetrators' actions whom meted the violence.

There were recommendations for GPs, teachers and the police to be educated about sexual violations so they could be more empathic and sensitive about the trauma the survivors experienced. People with status; i.e. political councillors and the police needed to go into the schools and the communities, and talk about sexual violations was

also proposed. An opinion was expressed that people in the community would listen to people whom had a “status.”

Concern was expressed that due to funding cuts, there was a reduction in the number of home visits undertaken by midwives and health visitors. There was a suggestion mothers being seen at the centres, rather than their home environments, may contribute to the professionals not being aware of the “core needs of the family.” Thus, home visits by professionals supporting mothers and babies/young children were viewed as an important element in maternal health and wellbeing, and to ascertain if there were any risk factors within the home environments. Funding to continue for organisations such as the Sure Start Centres, Big Life Centres and Domestic Abuse Services were viewed as essential measures to assist survivors. Courses for women on topics such as ‘Confidence Building’, ‘Strengthening Families’ and ‘Parenting’ were also considered important in helping survivors to rebuild their lives, and to help them and their families receive the support they needed.

*The Sure Start centres, I think they're actually the **backbone of our society**. I mean if we want to have a brighter future, we need to make sure that the women and young children, and the young families, they get the support they need... If they weren't there, I wouldn't be where I am today, and my kids wouldn't be where they are [silence] (Asma, p. 52).*

Based upon the findings, it suggested that school teachers need to be more alert to signs of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) (www.manchester.safeguardingpartnership.co.uk; www.youngminds.org.uk) being exhibited by pupils. There were clear indicators Masooma showed signs of distress in school on multiple occasions, yet, there was no indication that any of the school staff attempted to ascertain from her what may have been contributing to her episodes of unexpectedly crying, poor concentration, moodiness et cetera. Maybe the sexual and physical violations she was subjected to at home could have been stopped if the school had made attempts to explore the underlying reasons for her mental and emotional turmoil. She expressed that she was not safe at school, not safe at home, not safe at the mosque, and indeed, not safe anywhere. Thus, she had no place of safety during her childhood, adolescence and partial adulthood. This narrative highlighted how some girls and women's lived realities are that they are not safe in private nor public spheres, which raises the question; “Where is it safe for women and girls to be on this planet?”

It would appear that Ayesha's school teachers also were not attuned to the multiple, faceted abuse she and her siblings were subjected to on a daily basis at home. It is questionable how the school staff could not have noticed any of the non-accidental, potentially visible injuries inflicted upon the children on a daily basis by their extremely violent, male parent as Ayesha poignantly recounted “*He [other parent] used to work in the steel mills, so he had steel-capped boots... and we used to get **kicked in the back, in the head with these steel-capped boots**... [deep inhalation] **We'd get pulled by our hair and dragged down the stairs... oh, it was... e-v-e-r-y, s-i-n-g-l-e d-a-y**” (Ayesha, p. 10). Whilst there is an acknowledgment that school staff are now more alert in relation to child protection concerns, the above narratives indicated that any safeguarding concerns pertaining to these extremely vulnerable children were completely missed, hence, there is a suggestion they were let down by the education*

system. There was a recommendation for children to be taught in schools about sexual violations, trauma, assertiveness, wellbeing and mental health.

It is also disconcerting that healthcare professionals in a hospital setting did not appear to raise any safeguarding concerns as to why a 13 year old girl presented with profuse, vaginal bleeding? It remains unknown if the hospital staff solely focused upon the medical investigations and treatment due to lack of child protection awareness and/or whether cultural incompetency was also a contributory factor. Based upon these findings, there is a recommendation for all healthcare professionals to be aware of overt and covert levels of child sexual abuse and to be attuned to how the abuse may be deeply hidden within BAMER (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee) families and communities.

The data strongly indicated that GPs needed to be more aware of how to holistically assist women whom disclosed domestic and/or sexual violations. Prescribing antidepressants as the only/or predominant treatment option was not considered conducive by the participants. It is asserted that it is completely unacceptable that a GP in modern times did not even offer any help to a survivor when she revealed the extensive bruising she sustained after being physically assaulted by her ex-husband. There were recommendations for GPs to have more knowledge about the complexities of sexual violations within South Asian communities, including Dissociative Identity Disorder (www.mind.org.uk) without questioning if there was any evidence of the abuse and why this had not been reported. It is imperative that the survivors' truth is acknowledged, respected, accepted and believed. This study highlighted the lack of communication that existed among some healthcare providers. It is proposed there is a requirement for some GPs to become more conversant with therapeutic services that exist for survivors of domestic abuse and/or sexual violations and to have a clearer understanding of the referral procedures. All of the survivors had contacted their GPs with presenting issues of depression. However, the underlying issues of their harrowing sexual violations were disclosed at some of the consultations and this was the nucleus of what they desperately required professional help and support with.

This research elucidated that all of the participants unequivocally chose not to report their histories of sexual violations to the authorities. They expressed that due to the ongoing intrafamilial connections with the perpetrators, it was impossible for them to even consider approaching the police due to the cataclysmic impact this would have upon their family relationships and dynamics. Their experiences of some professionals "pressuring" them to report the abuse increased their distress. The participants verbalised narratives of feeling some women professionals working in the fields of domestic abuse, sexual violence and therapy whom they had accessed for support, unfortunately, lacked adequate cultural knowledge and sensitivity. Hence, it is recommended that some professionals could acquire some new learning from undertaking (further) training in cultural competencies, particularly in the domains of BAMER communities, and domestic abuse and/or sexual violence to help increase their awareness, knowledge, understanding and acceptance of why preventing familial catastrophic outcomes silenced survivors. The cultural complexities, nuances, vocabulary and depth of sexual violations in South Asian communities appeared to be absent in the comprehension of some of the professionals and service providers whom the participants had engaged with. The findings highlighted the importance for survivor's autonomy to be respected and how unhelpful it was for them when some,

possibly, well-meaning professionals tried to lead them towards a legal route of action, when the participants chose not to embark upon any criminal process.

The data identified that in Ayesha's experience, her being fluent in English contributed towards the lack of appropriate help she received following her disclosures of being a survivor. As such, it is recommended that equal assistance and consideration needs to be offered to survivors regardless of their linguistic differentiation and whether English is their primary or non-primary language. The participants recommended that for South Asian women whom may not understand or converse in English, it was important for services to reduce the linguistic barriers. All of the participants indicated the paramount importance for organisations developing trust with the survivors as this was the foundation of their professional engagement. Some of the survivors had been extremely fearful of their children being taken into care due to the mistruths told to the professionals by the abusers or due the survivors' perceptions the professionals would consider them "crazy." Threats by the perpetrators their children would be removed by the authorities if they became aware of what was happening in the homes, further silenced the survivors.

The participants talked candidly about how long waiting lists for accessing counselling had been detrimental to their psychological and emotional health as "the desperation then *grows*" (Ayesha, p. 43). However, the participants recognised that so many services were underfunded and overstretched, and were trying their best to help service users with the limited resources they had available. This study argues it is essential for the government to provide essential, financial help for women's organisations, therapeutic services and mental health provision as insufficient funds are directly contributing to the longevity of women's trauma.

The findings identified the participants initially did not know how or where to seek help for the sexual violations. They highlighted there was an absence of literature in public spaces and GP surgeries regarding sexual violence and recommended leaflets needed to be visual, particularly in medical practices as the majority of people would visit their GP surgeries at various junctures. There were also requests for organisations to advertise the help they offered for sexual abuse in public domains as a way of being more accessible to service users.

There was a direct recommendation for the police to be more empathetic and sensitive towards survivors, especially during the process of a forensic medical examination (Rape Crisis England & Wales). There were concerns expressed that survivors receiving a predominantly clinical type of response was not conducive nor appropriate for the trauma they had endured.

4.9.2 Recommendations for Culturally Appropriate Groups for South Asian Women

All of the participants shared numerous accounts of how the South Asian Women's Support Group had been pivotal in the transformation of their lives. They described how they had initially attended the group as deeply traumatised women whom were barely existing. The support of the group facilitators and peers, in addition to the culturally and linguistically adapted 'Sexual Violence Recovery Toolkit' (SVRT) (www.rockpool.life) helped them to grow into independent, confident, assertive and

empowered women whom were living and thriving to various degrees. Thus, it is imperative that culturally, sensitive groups continue and they receive the essential funding required as they could be a lifeline for some survivors and their families. The SVRT (www.rockpool.life) being incorporated into therapeutic work with South Asian survivors accessing individual counselling and groupwork was viewed as a vital component in assisting survivors on their recovery journeys. Continuing to adapt the language of the SVRT (www.rockpool.life) so that its linguistics were appropriate to the survivors was considered imperative.

And it was like *again understanding* what's, you know, *help we needed*, so we did so many *different courses*... and each one that we did... the confidence level was building *up* and we were... able to recognise ourselves again, so I think like *what I am today*... a *major role is from the group*... So, when somebody was going down, we were able to help them... so it was like... we weren't just discussing... and learning from the group leaders. I think it was... just... as a group of ladies we were helping each other *heal* in ways that we, I think nobody else would *understand*. So, it has been *i-m-m-e-n-s-e help*... It was the Asian... the women's group... that have *helped me find my identity*... *again*... and *connecting to my community in a positive way* (Asma, p. 45 & 47 - 48).

From not wanting to go to that group... and then not wanting to leave four years later, I still didn't want to leave! [smiles and laughs] *It's the best thing... the b-e-s-t thing ever and I'd recommend it to anybody*... [pause] *it's changed my life. There's a few things... that have made my life – my husband*... [GMRC Counsellor and Clinical Lead's name] *and the [Sexual Violence Recovery] toolkit* [pause] *I owe my life to them*... we [the group] trusted her [counsellor and group leader at GMRC] more than *anyone* (Masooma, p. 49 & 50 & 51).

4.9.3 Recommendations for South Asian Parents

Masooma stressed the importance of South Asian parents permitting their children to attend sex education classes in schools as this would provide them with some awareness about safety pertaining to sex. She had bravely challenged some Pakistani, Muslim parents' petitions to remove their children from sex education classes and their refusal to talk to their children about sex due to their notions of shame. She stated that if parents refused to talk to their children about sex and sex education, then they should allow the school teachers to cover these subject areas with their children.

Well, if you're not going to talk about it because of the shame and somebody wants to tell your children, why not let them tell your children? They need to know the safety... and everything around it... they're just going to touch... the surface of it. Y-o-u need to go in-depth with your children. But then there's all this shame. Why is it shameful to talk to your children about safe sex? And stranger danger properly? Yeah, that kind of blew up in my face. Everyone was like, "Oh my god! You're so bad..." and "You're this and you're that" OK... [incongruent laugh] (Masooma, p. 14).

Some South Asian parents denying their children to learn about sex, sex education and personal safety was considered a grave error of judgement. It was acknowledged that the parental intentions may have been underpinned by attempting to keep their children safe. However, it was viewed that the parents were actually doing a disservice to their

children by keeping them ignorant about such topics as this was detrimental to their offspring's safety and wellbeing.

I think that's *a mistake a lot of parents are making n-o-w. They think they're protecting their children, but they're actually not, they're denying them... the knowledge of keeping themselves safe* (Masooma, p. 18).

4.10 What would your message be to other survivors from the South Asian communities looking for support?

There was a strong correlation in all of the participants' emphatic message for other survivors to inform a professional or personal contact such as a school teacher, GP, refuse collector, dentist, Sure Start Centres, shopkeeper and potentially a neighbour that they had a controlling partner so they could then seek help and not to continue to suffer in silence. There was an unambiguous message that "help is always available." There was also a message for survivors to contact the police to ask for help even if they did not want to officially report the abuse nor take any legal action against the perpetrator(s). It was anticipated the police could then assist the survivors to access appropriate, professional help.

There were strong themes of survivors emphasising the fundamental requirements for girls and women, in particular, to be educated about grooming, power and control dynamics, personal safety, sexual abuse, consent, healthy/unhealthy sexual relationships, boundaries, marital rape and so forth. There was recognition that some boys and men were also subjected to abusive relationships. However, the focus remained on how invariably it was women and girls whom were in vulnerable positionalities due to being incognizant about healthy and unhealthy intimate partner and/or familial relationships. Findings from the study also illustrated it was important for children to be taught about healthy and unhealthy physical contact and displays of affection, with clear boundaries within families, and beyond, about whom was permitted to kiss children on the cheek, hold their hands, bodily intimacy such as infants/children sitting on nonparental laps et cetera. Children and young people having a positive role model, whom had a clear understanding of Islamic rights, that they could trust and confide in was viewed as a valuable anchor in life. Parents encouraging their children to be assertive was considered an important part of child development.

There seemed to be a resounding plea for survivors to seek help and to disclose to someone they trusted personally or professionally as a gateway to them accessing assistance. Due to some of the participants being isolated from their family of origin and friends by the perpetrators and them not having confided in anyone about the abuse, they had previously felt very alone and some had held a misplaced sense of self blame. However, being the recipients of appropriate personal and professional help and support, contributed towards the survivors' realisations they were never responsible for the violations and the perpetrators were solely accountable for this. Their guidance to other survivors was for them to know they are not alone in their survivors' journeys and they must never blame themselves for the abuse meted out to them as this was not theirs to own. They repeatedly stated their categorical messages for survivors was for them not to suffer in silence, they were not alone, and there is nothing wrong with them. One of the participants expressed regret she had not sought help sooner. She wished she had

asked for assistance earlier on so she would not have suffered eight years of marital abuse.

All of the participants encouraged other survivors not to give up and offered them hope “... *your abuse doesn't define you as a person. You have qualities ... you're not just your relationships that you were born into. You're not just what happened to you. You are m-o-r-e than that*” [silence] (Masooma, p. 76 – 77).

They conveyed to other survivors that their journeys towards healing would be a challenging and lifelong process and encouraged them to apply self care, self compassion and self love as they were entitled to live safe, happy and fulfilling lives.

Yeah, 'cause from being suicidal to thriving, it's been a long journey, but I've done it... it's been hard, but I have done it... and I'm going to carry on doing it and I'm going to carry on helping... so... it comes down to “don't be afraid... just don't be afraid...it can be done, it has been done” ... I never thought I'd be here... when I tried to commit suicide, I thought ‘this is it, you know, that's it, you know, no more ...’ but I'm sat here today and I'm thinking ‘Oh my God, if that happened, I wouldn't be here today helping other women.’ My story would have gone to my grave with me ... I'm s-o glad I'm here, I'm so glad it didn't work and I'm going to say to other women “Don't end your life because your life is too precious... [pause] to just waste because of somebody else... let them pay for what they did to you. You don't have to pay for what they did to you. Give it back to them, it's t-h-e-i-r issue, it's their disgustingness ... everything is theirs, give it back to them. Y-o-u keep what you want to keep and move on ... and just be happy and live ... and shine ... ” [laughs]... we need to make a difference... enough is enough (Masooma, p. 79).

Based upon the findings, it was apparent that some women survivors felt unable to disclose their sexual violation histories to their (current) husbands due to fear and risk of future reprisals by their spouses; i.e. manipulation, being controlled, being pitied, being abandoned and/or divorced by their partners. Hence, the prospect of potentially damaging ramifications for the survivors were direct contributory factors in the continuation of their internalised struggle and silence despite feeling acutely distressed at times. Yet, Masooma, assertively stated “Don't be afraid of telling your husband because... if he's going to leave you for that, then he's not worth it. If he can't accept you for something that's happened to you that wasn't your... choice or your doing, then he doesn't deserve you... you deserve so much better” (Masooma, p. 75)

My message for other survivors ... would be the first one is... a lot of women are scared to tell their husbands or partners ... and that's r-e-a-l-l-y... sad... because then they have to carry that on top of their experience. They have to carry this secret and the pressure, the mental pressure is s-o big ... and I've seen that, it's really sad... A woman is having a mental breakdown but she can't tell her husband because ... she can't break down in front of him because then she'll have to tell him w-h-y and then he might l-e-a-v-e her... So, my message is ‘don't be afraid of telling your husband because... if he's going to leave you for that, then he's not worth it. If he can't accept you for something that's happened to you that wasn't your ... choice or your doing, then he doesn't deserve you’ (Masooma, p. 75).

My clear message is don't suffer in silence. There is definitely help available, you just have to ask... so p-l-e-a-s-e don't be shy... to ask for help, there's nothing wrong with you or with anybody and there's nothing wrong with asking for help. But [you] really need to ask... there is help available, definitely and there will be help available to a-n-y-b-o-d-y who asks. Because you know, people around you, sometimes they want to help but they don't know what you're going through... So don't suffer in silence, you're not alone... in our group, there were people that have been abused like so differently, but there were some traits that were so similar... so... you learn that, and I don't think I could have learned that by... staying at home (Asma, p. 57).

The dichotomy of some cultural beliefs superseding some Islamic practices, particularly in relation to women's autonomy, empowerment and status were to the detriment of girls and women, and to the advantage of boys and men. Cultural belief systems that parents and religious leaders were entitled to exercise corporal punishment upon children, and husbands being permitted to physically abuse their wives and have sexual relations without consent also materialised from the study. Hence, the findings signified there was an urgent requirement for some South Asian British Muslims to be educated about the differences between cultural and religious practices so that egalitarianism between girls/women and boys/men could be implemented, which was more in alignment with Islamic values and scriptures (Lyon, 2004; Kausar, Hussain and Idriss, 2011; Mahmood, 2013).

4.10.1 Recommendations for Safeguarding Children and Parental Responsibilities

The participants vocalised strong opinions about how South Asian parents had a responsibility to talk to their children about the signs of grooming and how this could initially commence with what may appear to be a harmless, stroking of the child's arm. It was considered important for children to know they could tell one of their parents if they felt uncomfortable by one parent touching them. If they felt uncomfortable by both parents touching them or if they felt the parental touch was inappropriate, then it was deemed necessary for children to know they needed to inform a school teacher or another adult. Thus, parents encouraging children to talk to adults about any experiences of feeling uncomfortable regarding physical contact and not to stay silent was viewed as an achievable approach to try to prevent any signs of grooming from escalating.

Don't stay quiet. Speak about it because then that's the beginning and it's not going to end"... So, before it... [grooming] gets out of hand, you need to know... early on, it's like cancer, you catch it early, you can treat it. So... g-r-o-o-m-i-n-g, if you catch it early, you can stop it (Masooma, p. 11 & 12).

There were recommendations for parents whom were not survivors to also take responsibilities in making their children aware of sexual grooming. There were perceptions that stopping the continuation of grooming could be achieved by increasing children, young people and adults' awareness and knowledge of this phenomena. People being informed, and not ignorant, of sexual grooming by talking about this could lead to the information being "spread like a virus" which was advocated as another strategy to reduce sexual grooming.

Women whom were forced to engage in marital sexual activities by their husbands were encouraged to talk to a trusted adult as a way of receiving support for themselves. It was recognised women may not be able to talk to their families, regardless of how empathetic they may or may not be due to notions of honour, shame, embarrassment, and cultural communication styles and barriers.

So women need to be *aware* that... if there are cases where... they're being *f-o-r-c-e-d into it*... [marital rape] you know, *consistently*, they need to *tell somebody* and they need to *speak up*. Erm... it's not always possible, I think, to speak to family members... that's another *stigma* (Asma, p. 37).

South Asian parents were urged to “*Don't blindly trust a-n-y-b-o-d-y*” with their children whether this was in the context of babysitting, childminding, sleepovers or any other form of contact, which resulted in children not being visible to their parents in the same space. There was recognition that some parents trust was abused by the perpetrators as the violations occurred when the survivors were left in the company of the men whom, unknown to the parents, abused their child. One of the survivors never allowed her children to engage in sleepovers at any other person's house unless she knew only females were going to be in residence and no males were to cross the threshold. The participants trusted their husbands with their children. They felt comfortable and confident in leaving their daughters, in particular, at home with their biological/non biological fathers when they themselves were outdoors. One of the participants had provided her daughter with the “tools” so she knew what to do if “something happens” as “*you just... absolutely, you n-e-v-e-r know*” (Masooma, p. 85). Hence, the participants' histories did not impede their process in being able to cultivate trusting, healthy and safe father/daughter relationships within their own families.

4.10.2 Recommendations for Survivors

All of the participants talked with emotional depth as they spontaneously expressed their recommendations for other survivors. They encouraged other survivors to have self compassion, recognise their struggles, strengths and journeys. They also recommended for survivors take some form of action to help themselves, to try and establish a trusting relationship with someone learned and qualified in Islamic edification and the Qur'anic verses.

You need to have somebody you trust... and... like an anchor... I think the sooner like it starts... I think we all like, as human beings, we need to have role models and we copy... so if you have a good role model of somebody... a member of the community – could be a teacher, could be a friend... I guess it could be parents... but somebody who's Islamically sound who knows the Qur'an because in our community, I mean you tell somebody... they would not accept it at all. There's no such thing as marital rape in our community (Asma, p. 37).

They emphasised the importance for survivors to never blame themselves for any of the violations they endured and to recognise the perpetrators were solely responsible for their actions. The survivors and their bodies were not at fault, nor accountable, for being violated.

I'm trying to say to survivors and other people, that... somebody of myself, quite sane-minded, educated... here... I ended up doing something like this... [choosing to marry first husband] so don't ever feel that you are... stupid... that you are wrong because I will never, ever blame myself... I've done and made decisions... because of what I have been exposed to and how I had learned to survive and I've been surviving through all my life... otherwise I wouldn't be here now (Ayesha, p. 9).

Survivors were urged to recognise they had the mental capacity to look after and keep their children safe, and to state these facts to the professionals if there were any risks or fears of their children being removed from their care by the authorities. They were encouraged to not let language, vocabulary or a professional's position dictate to them their decision-making. They were requested to recognise the lives they have lived and to take that forward in positive ways, whilst being aware they would encounter many negative processes during their individual, survivors' journeys.

And again, I keep mentioning this word, recognise... recognise that you c-a-n do this. You a-r-e doing this, and you have been doing this. [GMRC Clinical Lead name] hasn't lived my life, you haven't lived my life, my children haven't lived my life... I've lived it and I recognise that I've lived it. But, it's then taking that recognition forward... in... positive ways... and b-e-l-i-e-v-e m-e, you will hit so many negatives... but it's channelling through those negatives and finding that glimmer of positive... and there will always be one little glimmer of positive, whether we want to see it or not... Please survivors... please, please, please, I b-e-g every survivor out there... self-pity to an extent... but self-pity doesn't get you a-n-y-w-h-e-re... action gets you places... recognition gets you places (Ayesha, p. 44 – 45 & 48).

4.10.3 Direct Referrals to Agencies Specialising in Sexual Violence and Trauma Related Support for Survivors

Being signposted from one organisation to another was unhelpful for the participants and they expressed how this could be re-traumatising for the survivors. For example; if a child confided in a school teacher they were being abused, it was recommended that particular teacher then took the lead in signposting the child to the relevant service(s) and informing the authorities. If multiple teachers became involved, this could become an unnecessary complication as the child may not wish to repeat their disclosure to numerous teachers if they did not feel comfortable with those members of staff. It was considered essential for the initial teacher whom heard about the disclosure to help the child to mentally feel ready to talk to whichever professional they needed to in due course. Direct referrals to the appropriate services, particularly by GPs, was considered more conducive. There was also a suggestion there should be some discreet telephone booths available for survivors to access to call for help.

4.10.4 Recommendations for South Asians to Raise the Awareness of Sexual Violence, Domestic Abuse and Marital Rape

There were repeated recommendations for South Asian people to take some responsibility in being proactive in raising the awareness of sexual violence. There was a proposal for religious leaders to also take some ownership of undertaking this work as “they hold the most power.” One of the participants suggested there should be separate classes for women, children and men when addressing the issues of sexual

abuse as she insinuated this would be culturally appropriate and sensitive. Another participant advocated education about domestic abuse and marital rape should be provided to the Muslim communities, including in a mosque setting.

There were messages for people to stop being fearful of how South Asian communities may react or of causing offence by talking about sexual violations in the public domain.

*Somebody needs to start somewhere and... you need to stop being scared, 'Oh my god! What are people going to say?' Or... 'If we do this then what will the reaction be?' Somebody needs to make a start for the difference to be made because if everyone carries on thinking the same... that we're going to offend somebody or... there might be like an **outcry** or some... **rebellious individuals** ... nothing's ever going to happen, nothing's ever going to change and it's just going to carry on and lives are going to carry on being **ruined**. So, somebody needs to take the initiative... **set themselves boundaries** 'Oh, I can only go into this area or this area' **make contacts and then pass the baton and get them to do the same**. And then when they've raised enough awareness, they can pass on the baton to somebody else, **but somebody needs to take the first step**... Because this is really important. It ruins lives and it's not just... for a week or a month or a year, **it goes on for the rest of your life** ... Somebody needs to start it and... I'm not in that position **yet** where I can because I don't have enough contacts... but when I do, **I will**... I know it's a process, but it needs to start happening, **what are we waiting for?** The longer we **wait**, the more women and men's lives are being **ruined**. So what are we waiting for? You know, nothing's going to change if you don't change it (Masooma, p. 62 – 63).*

There was a request for South Asian people to take the responsibilities for travelling into different local and national areas to talk about sexual violence and to make people aware of this damaging phenomena. It was hoped this collective approach could have a global, domino effect. South Asian people were encouraged to stop being scared of “Oh my God! What are people going to say?” (Masooma, p. 62) and to instead channel their energies into raising the awareness of sexual violence, as the impact of sexual violations was endured for the rest of the survivors' lives.

4.10.5 Recommendations for Safeguarding Children in Mosques and Schools

There were recommendations for mosques and schools to install video cameras as protective factors as a participant disclosed that children were being physically and sexually abused in such establishments. Children being left in a room with only one, Islamic teacher was deemed unsafe for the children. A recommendation for multiple Islamic tutors being present with children was viewed as a method to reduce the possibility of children being violated. There was an indication that some perpetrators abusive behaviour remained undetected as their actions were masked by the professional veneer they presented.

*Don't have **one** person in the room [in mosques] have two or three to keep an **eye on each other** that they're not doing the **wrong thing**. **Have cameras in mosques, have cameras in schools because I know a lot of abuse happens in schools. There's a lot of school counsellors that have abused pupils** [pause] and I know this for a fact... it's really scary and it all just comes down to education... and organisations working together. And it's like the **main** people in society like **doctors, police, teachers**...*

religious leaders, politicians... everyone's taken their eye off the other... people like the doctors, like the teachers, the religious leaders because no one is concentrating on them so... they can do whatever they want (Masooma, p. 69).

Based upon the findings, it is recommended that religious leaders whom have access to children in mosques need to have enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (www.gov.uk) undertaken by their prospective employers. Whilst there is recognition a DBS not stating any convictions cannot guarantee that no child protection concerns may arise due to some religious leader's behaviours, it would help to identify those whom do have a criminal record and hopefully deter mosques from employing adults whom pose/potentially pose a risk to children. It is also strongly recommended that when a man is known to be bad tempered, verbally abusive to others and has physically assaulted people, he should not be offered employment as an Iman in any mosque.

4.11 Not Alienating South Asian British Muslims

This research has noted some of the aspects of abuse that exist within some South Asian British Muslim families and communities. As noted by Holliday (2002) it has been attempted to present this study with care and not to otherize the participants as this could reduce them to "something less than they are, by othering the 'different' or 'foreign' as simplistic, easily digestible, exotic or degrading stereotypes" (p. 186). We live in a diverse world and, indeed, there are various practices and opinions on how life is lived. Culture is not universal. It is multi-layered and nuanced. It is suggested it is not viable to apply one way of cultural living as acceptable to the human race. Culture is "the way of life, including knowledge, customs, norms, laws and beliefs, which characterizes a particular society or social group" (Giddens and Sutton, 2014, p. 135). The reality is we live in multicultural, multiracial, multifaith and pluralist societies, which naturally fluctuate as "societies are never static, homogenous or united" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 19).

As aforementioned, domestic abuse and sexual violence are global issues and present in diverse populaces and cultures. "Domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape are crimes in which males use their superior social or physical power against women" (Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 944). Violence against women "is present in every country, cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity and age" (Mamdouh and Kharboush, 2013, p. 151). Shipway (2004) notes "violence within the Muslim partnership is thought to occur with similar frequency to that of other religions and cultures" (p. 52). "The subordination, regulation and control of women and girls through physical, sexual, mental, financial and emotional abuse happen in every culture and use the same mechanisms the world over" (Nayak, 2015, p. 54).

In the UK, violence by men against female partners remains prevalent and two women are killed by their current or previous partners each week (Giddens and Sutton, 2013; www.refuge.org.uk). Data published by the Femicide Census (2018) identified the killing of girls and women increased by 10% in England and Wales during 2018 (www.femicidecensus.org). Women being viewed as chattels was not confined to only some South Asian British Muslim communities. Towns (2014) writes capitalism and

Christianity were the central cogs to European civilisation and female subjugation was one of the outcomes of the capitalistic movement.

Giddens and Sutton (2014) note Victorian English families discipline included very strict rules and physical punishments. Middle-class wives were predominantly confined to the home whereas many men who were considered respectable frequented prostitutes and brothels on a regular basis. It is argued there is no universal concept of what is viewed as healthy and/or acceptable family relationships and dynamics as this evolves and is fluid. What may have historically been regarded as customary norms, may in current societies, be rejected as unacceptable. From the findings, it is suggested contemporary South Asian British Muslims were no different in their notions of double standard gendered sexual morality and acceptance in comparison to White British Victorians.

Previous studies have reported Islam is not the only faith which has been misinterpreted for patriarchal power and female subjugation. al-Attar (2013) noted religious texts in Christianity were utilised to maintain perceptions of gender inequality and female inferiority. Shipway (2004) stated Christian men could find passages in the Bible which appeared to “support male domination and even condone violence against women” (p. 52). Lamrabet (2015) recommends Qur’anic text should be read through the interpretive framework of equal universal human rights and in conjunction with the standards of our present time as per the approach adopted by scholars from past centuries.

Based upon this study and existing literature, it is attested not all non-Western men are angry or dangerous, and neither are all non-Western women unassertive or violated. Abuse occurs in every religious and secular societies and to single out non-Western nations, could potentially be racist, discriminatory, sexist and culturally stereotyping ways of thinking. It is proposed the convolutions of domestic abuse, sexual violence, honour and shame are so subjective and nuanced they may seem logical to some people and wholly illogical to others.

4.12 Original Contribution to Knowledge

Based upon this study, some tentative conceivable new contributions are offered, which may be considered as indicators for additional comprehension of sexual violence and South Asian women survivors. As the sample size was three participants, caution has been applied to the discussion as these findings may not embody other South Asian women survivors of sexual violence.

4.12.1 Entitlement to Sexual Relations

An astounding finding from the data was the strongly held belief maintained by one of the perpetrators that he had the prerogative to have sexual contact with *any* females whom were not descendants of his male bloodline. Hence, it appeared he did not consider his actions as sexual violations towards some of the women and girls in his family. He overtly watched pornographic material in the home environment. He was a man whom prayed five times per day at a mosque and was considered a pious figure in his community. Yet, disturbingly, in his mindset, he did not seem to recognise, let alone take ownership, of any transgressions in his behaviours. He seemed to consider his sexualised behaviour socially acceptable. It could be inferred that it may be implausible

for such a mindset to change when one is in resolute denial and/or resistance that they are the perpetrator of sexual grooming, paedophilia, marital rapes, incestuous rapes, psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse.

4.12.2 Toxic Masculinity, Toxic Femininity and Toxic Parents

It is claimed that incontestably the study elicited extremely rich data from the three research participants. Based upon the findings, it is suggested that some of the participants were subjected to threefold toxic constructs; toxic masculinity (www.aurorand.org.uk; www.psychologyinaction.org), toxic femininity (McCann, 2020) and toxic parents (Forward, 1991). Toxic masculinity was evident in the narratives of the participants whom endured dominance, rapes, sexual assaults, misogynistic behaviours, aggression, physical abuse, verbal attacks, and so forth by some of the men in their lives. It is proposed that some of the women in the participants lives may have exercised toxic femininity as they appeared to uphold some patriarchal belief systems and conduct. Some women covertly and overtly practised gender based discrimination, which they imposed upon the participants. It is also possible that some of the participants' mothers/female relatives may have been entrapped in the complexities of toxic femininity themselves as there were narratives of some female kindred being subjected to male subservience, domestic servitude and prohibited from developing any independent support network or social life due to male domination.

Furthermore, drawing from the data elicited, it is attested that some of the participants were the offspring of toxic parents. There were a multitude of examples of psychological/emotional/physical/sexual/financial abuse and neglect. Some of the parents utilised fear, control and manipulation to harm the participants, curtailed their autonomy and attempted to annihilate them from developing unfractured relationships with other men, including platonic male friendships, husbands, and a brother.

4.12.3 Perpetrator's Name Association in the Hereafter

Another striking finding that emerged from the data was a participant sharing how her name would always be linked to one of the two perpetrators and would be carried to her grave. She elaborated that when she would be resurrected, she would not be able to separate herself from one of the perpetrators in particular, as she would be called by the name of the other parent. Thus, she stated that she was "not allowed" to "separate" herself or obtain "closure" from one of the perpetrators "*even after my last breath.*" Islamic literature states the dead will be called to rise from their graves by their fathers' names on the Day of Resurrection by Allah (SWT) (www.Islaahh.wordpress.com; www.Islamweb.net). Hence, despite the participant's desire to detach her name and identity from being associated with the male parent whom abused her, unfortunately, this was impossible for her to achieve in the Hereafter due to her religious beliefs. As such, it seemed that it was unattainable for her to achieve any substantial respite from the traumatic violations she experienced in this world as she had the daily reminders of the abuse she survived as she raised her son, whom was conceived and borne from the incestuous rapes. It was indicated she would be denied any respite during the resurrection period as she would be called to rise from her grave by The Almighty on the Day of Judgement by the other parent's name. This narrative highlighted the endless struggles this survivor experienced when living in the temporal world and her future

transition into the eternal world. It is hoped that she achieves respite from her sufferings in the Afterlife, Insha'Allah.

4.13 Research Methodology Critique

A considerable amount of time was allocated in planning how the research was going to be undertaken to ensure that the research participants would be supported before, during and after the research process. The research focused upon 'Exploring the Life Stories of South Asian Women Survivors of Sexual Violence' and the women whom participated were extremely brave and courageous in sharing their painful experiences of abuse, which for some, spanned many decades. It was extremely important the research was conducted in a very safe, sensitive and ethically robust process so that the participants were offered the opportunities to share their narratives in a very autonomous way, which had the potential to be very empowering experiences for them.

All of the interviews exceeded the time allocated for both parts of the interviews as the participants were very forthcoming in answering the research questions. The initial plan was to have 90 minutes maximum duration for Part 1 and 60 minutes maximum duration for Part 2 of the interviews. However, as the participants shared their narratives at length and in such detail, it was appropriate, ethical and sensitive to offer each participant the time and space that they required to share at a level, depth and pace that was safe for them. Hence, adjustments were very quickly administered during the course of the first interview to accommodate the time required for this and subsequent participants to express themselves in the time frame they required. Interview one was 3 hours 2 minutes duration, interview two was 2 hours 35 minutes duration and interview three was 3 hours 56 minutes over two, separate days.

In retrospect, it is recognised that it was unrealistic to expect all of the research participants to answer the questions within the original plan of 2 hours 30 minutes maximum when the research question is an emotive subject and most likely to evoke a range of feelings within the participants. The survivors were offered the time and space they needed in an empathic and respectful way so they could freely express their voices, experiences, tears, vulnerabilities, pain, frustrations, sadness, love, happiness, opinions, passions, strengths and ambitions as they chose to do so. It is significant to note, the first participant vocalised that when she talked she needed to express herself in what seemed like a cathartic and purging manner as "*I have that verbal diarrhoea – for **m-e**... it's like...the dirt **is inside, I've just got it out, there you go – I've got it out...you're away from me now, you're gone***" (Ayesha, p. 43) and this then set a precedent for the interview durations to be extended, as required. The data generated had immense depth, richness and value and it is proposed it is unlikely the same quality may have been produced had the interviews been restricted within the original time schedule.

The third participant temporarily became emotionally dysregulated (Spring, 2019; Davis, 2021; Ford 2021) during the interview as her memories of being questioned about her virginity by her husband twenty years ago were triggered when the researcher gently shared with her, at an appropriate juncture, there was no scientific evidence of female virginity (Christianson and Eriksson, 2011; Karma Nirvana, 2021) as she did not want to collude with this misconception. Until that point, the participant had no awareness the notion of female, virginal blood was a myth and not a fact (Christianson and Eriksson, 2011; Karma Nirvana, 2021). The researcher could not have predicted

that her sharing the psychoeducational information could have been triggering for the participant and the interview was stopped for 60 minutes so the survivor could receive some individual, emotional support from the Clinical Lead at GMRC whom was purposely available for the whole day on the date of each interview, should her assistance be required. Hence, the meticulous planning of the research process and robustness of ethical considerations ensured the participant achieved emotional stabilisation (Herman, 1997; Spring, 2019) before the interview recommenced later on the same day.

4 CONCLUSION

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter revisits the aims of the study and offers some concluding statements of the key findings, which answered the research questions. Contributions to practice and training are critically analysed and discussed. The recommendations for future research considerations regarding South Asian women survivors of sexual violence are presented with transparency. A reflexivity section of the dynamics between the researcher and the participants is briefly discussed. A concluding summary completes the report.

5.2. Research Synopsis

This study set out to explore the life stories of some South Asian Women survivors of sexual violence. This research was undertaken with three participants. Thus, as this was a very small research sample, no claim is proposed the findings and discussion are representative of South Asian women survivors on a larger scale.

Returning to the research questions propounded at the beginning of this study, and the main and sub themes elicited from the data analysis process, the following answers were identified:

5.3 Sexual Violence

This study illustrated how sexual violence was intertwined with psychological, emotional, physical, verbal and financial abuse. Data analysis identified sexual grooming commenced when some of the participants were aged 6 – 7 years old and for some, continued until they were women aged in their 20s and 30s. Hence, the perpetrators exerted male dominance and abused some of the survivors for decades. Some of the survivors did not feel they owned their bodies during their childhoods, adolescences and adulthoods as they appeared to have been conditioned to believe the abusers owned their bodies. Some of the participants resorted to outwardly compliance of the sexual violations in attempts to minimise the abuse they were being subjected to, whilst inwardly, they silently protested. The participants *never* consented to the sexual violations and despite the atrocities inflicted upon them, they had survived their ordeals.

The findings illustrated deeply entrenched silences, which appeared to encompass every aspect of sexual abuse. The perpetrators had concealed their abusive actions for years, at times decades, despite them and the survivors living in the same accommodation with other family members for years. Perhaps, some of the most disturbing findings from the data were the perturbing narratives of how some of the survivors were subjected to violations during the day and/or at night whilst other family members were at home and, yet, no other adult appeared to notice, question or challenge the perpetrators behaviours. It is cautiously suggested there is a possibility if any of the adults whom may have suspected sexual violations were occurring within their family households had addressed this issue, then perhaps the abuse may not have continued for such a protracted period of time. Based upon the study, it is argued there seemed to be an inherent prohibition to acknowledging, recognising or disclosing any form of

sexual violence due to the criticisms, denigration and repercussions that would subsequently be directed towards the survivors.

There was clear evidence that gender based discrimination (Addo, 2010) and patriarchy (Paxton and Hughes, 2014) existed within the sexual violence phenomena. As noted by Mansoor (2015b) many South Asian British Muslim women lived in a patriarchal society of power, abuse and dominance. Some of the survivors' rights to control their fertility were eradicated by their abusive husbands as they purposefully raped their wives with the intention to impregnate them. The abusive husbands knew the women's vulnerabilities would be increased during their pregnancies, so they enforced consecutive pregnancies to ensure the women remained trapped within the abusive marriages. These participants verbalised clear examples of how the perpetrators had appeared to historically own the survivors' bodies; using them as a piece of meat, violating them as and when they chose to do so, which resulted in the women feeling worthless and dehumanised. Perhaps, the most unexpected and alarming finding from the data was the deeply disturbed narrative of one of the perpetrators owning a belief he was entitled to fulfil his sexual will with any females that were not part of his male, progeny lineage. Hence, he had sexually abused three different generations of women and girls in his immediate family and there was no indication he considered his actions ethically, legally, morally, religiously, culturally or socially reprehensible.

All of the narratives illustrated numerous examples of psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse. One of the participants formative years were infused with witnessing and being the recipient of daily acts of violence by the male parent. She was raised in a home environment that was extremely and consistently unsafe, which was infused with abject poverty. Despite the brutality and cruelty inflicted by the male parent upon the participant, the majority of her siblings and her mother, had formed close, loving, caring and supportive relationships. This report has intentionally referred to the perpetrator as 'the other parent' or 'the male parent' to emulate, respect and uphold the survivor's framing of their connection as she never referred to him as any other parental identifier.

Participants gave clear examples of when some family members appeared to have colluded in the physical and sexual violations. Some of the women talked about how they sensed their mothers knew about the sexual abuse, but never acknowledged this, which suggests some mothers chose to take on a bystander role. There was no indication that relatives and non-familial people whom witnessed/were informed of the physical assaults intervened, supported the survivors or challenged the perpetrators. Hence, this suggests familial and community collusion in the cycle of abuse and maintaining gender based patterns of behaviour and expectations; i.e. patriarchy (Awasthi, 2015; Nedjai, 2013; Giddens and Sutton, 2014; Wadud, 2015), toxic masculinity (www.aurorand.org.uk; www.psychologyinaction.org) and toxic femininity (McCann, 2020).

It was a pivotal moment in the lives of the survivors when it became known to them that their children were being abused. They reacted swiftly to protect their children and found the inner strength to challenge the perpetrators. They took action to ensure their children and they themselves were no longer being violated. Hence, the survivors broke the cycle of intergenerational abuse and familial collusion.

5.4 Life Stories

Despite the sexual violence being over a protracted period of time and the subsequent, extreme and complex levels of trauma, the survivors managed to create lives that were meaningful for them and their children, including their husbands, for those participants whom were married. Their human spirits did not die. They survived. They gave detectible hope to other victims and/or survivors of sexual violations.

All of the participants, bar one, had experienced tangible fear of their children being removed from their care by Social Services at various points in their survivors' journeys. Some abusive ex-husbands deliberately isolated the participants from their support networks, and amplified their violations whilst instructing the survivors to not inform any of the professionals involved about their home milieu, otherwise their children would be taken into care. Another survivor feared her children would be removed from her care by the authorities if other professionals, as per her GP, did not believe she was abused. Hence, the perceived threat of progenies being placed into care silenced the participants for a period of time, until they were able to recognise factual information from fictitious material.

The psychological and emotional impact of sexual violations and subsequent traumas was of a colossal magnitude. The participants had experienced some extreme levels of danger, distress and despair. They all encountered some key, defining moments in their lives, which directly contributed to them battling with their internal and external immeasurable struggles, and galvanised them into implementing some actions to stop the violations. Their resilience and determination helped them to alter the trajectory of their damaged lives. As their sense of self worth, self value, autonomy, empowerment and agency was imperceptibly restored, they found the confidence to challenge the perpetrators and to disengage with them from their lives to various degrees. Nonetheless, although some of the participants were not able to completely annihilate all connections with the perpetrators due to the strong familial associations, they had reclaimed the control and ownership of their bodies, sexual intimacies and their lives. The loving, caring and nurturing relationships they had developed with their children were a source of strength for all of the participants in their ongoing journeys as survivors. They recognised and accepted their struggles as survivors would be interspersed with enduring, daily challenges until they ceased to breathe.

The concepts of honour and shame were very much embedded within the sexual violence phenomena for South Asian sociocultural communities. It was apparent that gender based honour and shame differences existed, with negative outcomes for females perceived to have dishonoured and shamed themselves and their families. The data generated from this investigation corroborated with the doctoral study findings by Mansoor (2017) whom noted "... honour and shame was a socially constructed and controlled system, which was gender based and to the advantage of men" (p. 269). Patriarchal attitudes, values and belief systems appeared to underpin the oppressive and controlling environments, and relationships, the participants were subjected to at various points in their lives. It is suggested that some of the survivors were exposed to an amalgamation of threefold toxic constructs; toxic masculinity (www.aurorand.org.uk; www.psychologyinaction.org), toxic femininity (McCann, 2020) and toxic parents (Forward, 1991). The participants reported narratives, which indicated micro and macro levels of cultural barriers, which prevented conversations

taking place about sex education, safeguarding issues, marital rape and sexual violations as these were considered taboo subjects. Hence, survivors were silenced on a collective level by some of their immediate family members in addition to the communities they resided in. As such, it is argued that cultural inclusion was a powerful mechanism, which impelled the survivors and/or their families not to disclose the violations to shield them from being stigmatised, losing honour and being shamed by their communities. In reference to honour, which is translated as ‘izzat’ in some South Asian languages, Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) state “*izzat* is a complex concept, consistently reported as a major influence in Asian family life” (p. 1368).

Furthermore, it is equally important to highlight that one of the participants was raised in very safe, loving and nurturing relationships by her parents and brothers. She described feeling extremely “happy”, and “content” with her “beautiful upbringing” and referred to the deep love, which had existed between her parents. As the only daughter and sister in nuclear family, she had received “a lot of privileges” and considered herself to be “blessed.” The onset of her experiencing abuse commenced upon her marriage to man whom was the sole perpetrator of abuse towards her. There were also some narratives of male kin such as a father, brothers, a husband and male religious scholars and Imams being kind, supportive, caring, encouraging and respectful towards the participants and other females in their lives. Hence, some positive, male role models had a significant presence in the survivors’ lives whom some of the participants described as their “soulmate”, “angel” and an “amazing human being” with Du’ā for a brother to always be blessed with an abundance of “happiness” by Allah (SWT).

The participants expressed the need for authentic, Islamic education, not cultural conceptions, as a constructive approach to educating South Asian Muslims about female autonomy, healthy, marital and familial relationships, safeguarding, spousal rights, domestic abuse, sexual violence, marital rape, personal boundaries and so forth. They also verbalised that parents had a responsibility to have age appropriate conversations with their children about personal space and safety, sexual grooming, sex education, sexual boundaries, marital relationships et cetera as a way of safeguarding their children from being at risk of abuse. Children being allowed to attend sex education classes at schools was also endorsed as an essential psychoeducational element to help them become aware of healthy/unhealthy sexual relationships and how to access help if there were any child protection concerns.

The magnitude of sexual violence is an extensive phenomena and an ongoing concern. There was a rhetoric from the participants that they chose to partake in the study in order to help other survivors. They spoke passionately about how if they sharing their life stories could help even one, other survivor, this would be an immensely meaningful experience for them. They recognised and accepted their lived realities that although the intensity of their lifelong traumas may have diminished, they could never be completely erased from their lives. As such, the quote below has been selected to illustrate their sentiments.

I’m trying... *overall*, I’m trying to concentrate on why I’m doing this [research interview] *more than anything*... I think that’s what’s getting me *through this*, is why I’m doing this. Because that is *s-o important to me and I’m s-o passionate about it. It can get me through anything*... just the thought of *helping others or just even*

learning... from my story... that's what's getting me through this... apart from that I'm... OK... I'm getting through it but... and *I will* carry on obviously... it's lifelong work that I'm going to have to do... and I'll manage... but *it's a-l-l worth it... all the nightmares, all the triggers that I've been having since... everything is a-l-l worth it because of the end goal...* the end of the project is... it means a lot to me (Masooma, p. 87).

5.5 Contribution to Practice

The findings of this research proposition a number of considerations in relation to counselling practice. This research experience offers a deeper awareness and understanding pertaining to the impact of sexual violence upon the lives of some South Asian women. The psychological, emotional, physical and sexual wounds they sustained had left indelible imprints that were forever etched in their lives. Some of the wounds appeared to be sufficiently healed to allow them to live and thrive, rather than merely subsist. However, they were triggered daily by their past traumas and had to draw on their inner resources every single day in order to help themselves maintain a meaningful, quality of life. Otherwise, there was a danger they could constantly be in a state of traumatic influx. Hence, the external wounds inflicted upon them may seem to have healed, yet their internal wounds required constant attention and care to prevent them from becoming insurmountable.

Based upon the findings, it was apparent that character shaming of girls and women survivors of sexual violations was rife in some of the South Asian communities. The survivors' families also felt a deep sense of shame by being connected to any overt or covert indicators of sexual abuse. Hence, there was a wall of silence placed by some families and communities pertaining to this topic. There was a sense the reputation of girls, women and their families would be tarnished and dishonoured by any associations of sexual violations within their kinship. These barriers perpetuated why sexual violence was not acknowledged, was a taboo subject and remained deeply hidden. There were indicators that honour was a collective entity and not solely individualistic. Thus, honour was gained and retained collectively. Perceptions of dishonour were also viewed as a collective experience. Hence, efforts were made to distance oneself and one's families from any perceived shameful conduct as shame imbued the individual and their kinsfolk.

The data identified some of the survivors' mothers may have intuited their daughters were being subjected to sexual violations. Yet, their sense of honour and shame prevented them from broaching the subject of safety, even when they may have sensed/knew their daughters were being sexually abuse. Thus, it is suggested the fear of knowing the truth, fear of ramifications, fear of being affiliated with dishonour and shame silenced some people from taking any course of action to ascertain if sexual violations were occurring within their families. Invariably, it was the females whom were viewed by the South Asian communities and families as being culpable for any sexual violence they had experienced rather than the males being held responsible for their abusive behaviours. Parents denying their children access to sex education was not protecting them from abusive practices as it paradoxically increased their vulnerabilities to being preyed upon.

The detrimental impact of some professionals questioning the evidence of abuse or applying pressure on the survivors to report the violations cannot be underestimated. The survivors' mental health struggles and traumas were multiplied when they were the recipients of unhelpful responses from some professionals and services. Thus, it is imperative that professionals, including therapists, do not overtly or covertly apply any pressure on survivors to report their histories of sexual violations when they choose not to do so. They have already experienced their autonomy being diminished in abusive relationships and a therapist directing them to contact the police is contradictory with the ethos of empowering clients, respecting clients' autonomy, to facilitate the clients' wellbeing and not to harm the clients as per the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (BACP, 2018) which practitioners would customarily agree with and adhere to regardless of their therapeutic modalities and if they are a member of the BACP and/or other professional body. As previous research undertaken by Mansoor (2006) has identified that despite some South Asian British Muslim women experiencing some very damaging and rejecting behaviours by some of their family members, they were able to reclaim the control of their lives, and make positive and self fulfilling adaptations to their lives. Hence, based upon this research project study and prior investigations, it is argued that it is crucial the survivors' voices are heard, respected and accepted.

Other authors have established the importance of cultural and religious belief considerations when working in therapeutic relationships with diverse groups of people. Anand and Cochrane (2005) suggest "culturally specific concepts such as "sinking heart", *izzat*, *kismet* and "shame" might enable mental health professionals to understand the belief systems within which South Asian women function and develop a shared understanding of emotional distress" (p. 210). Based upon the findings of this study, it is claimed that cultural understanding would help in developing safe, therapeutic relationships and trust. Practitioners being aware of diverse concepts and belief systems in relation to western and non-western views upon mental health and wellbeing would also be good practice.

It is proposed that it is crucial for healthcare professionals to have some awareness of the complexities encompassing sexual violence, honour and shame when working with South Asian women survivors. Due to immigration, British cities have become multiethnic and religiously heterogenous (Giddens and Sutton, 2013). Thus, people from minority ethnicities do access healthcare services. As previous research has identified, honour and shame are pervasive and impacts upon an individual's psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and financial wellbeing (Mansoor, 2017). This research has identified, with consistency, the unintentional harm and distress caused to the participants by some professionals and some services due to their cultural insensitivities about their survivors' process and decision-making. Thus, it is imperative that when survivors approach any services for assistance that cultural awareness, understanding and sensitivity needs to be conveyed to them for therapeutic alliance and trust to develop.

It is suggested it would be conducive for therapists to have a comprehension that some clients of South Asian heritage hold greater value to the collective sense of being with significant others, rather than western notions of valuing the individual. For some, the sense of 'I' is of little relevance as more significance is attached to the sense of 'we' (Jackson, 2015; Dhillon-Stevens, 2012a) whereas in many western countries

“autonomy and individualism are the guiding philosophies” (Yick, 2007, p. 33). Laungani (2002) writes “In Indian family life, one’s individuality is subordinated to collective solidarity, and one’s ego is absorbed into the collective ego of the family and one’s community” (p. 136). Hence, if South Asian clients presented with sexual violence, honour and shame issues, it is imperative for therapists to be attentive to how the clients may process their emotions as this cannot be simplified to an impingement of one’s autonomy, empowerment and agency.

5.6 Contribution to Training

Psychotherapies have been created from the Western world’s perspectives of the mind, ill health, emotional distress and healing (Bhugra and Bhui, 2006). Conversely, we live in diverse multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial, spiritual and secular societies, nations and continents. Abercrombie and Warde (2000) write “contemporary Britain is a multicultural and multiethnic society” (p. 227). Based upon this research, it is suggested that Western, Eurocentric and androcentric therapeutic modalities could have limitations when working with clients of BAMER identities. Furthermore, there may be variances in understanding the cause of their distress, perceptions of healthy/unhealthy lifestyles, healing/unhealing processes and individualism/collectivism positionalities. Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) noted Eurocentric models of practice were inappropriate when working with cultures which were not considered in the development of such theories. Based upon the findings of this study, it is proposed that therapeutic training includes cultural awareness, competencies and limitations. It is important for training modules to include elements of how individuals may develop mental health problems or illnesses as a consequence to experiencing sexual violations, and abusive honour and shame practices. For some clients, their sense of individual and collective honour and shame may be integral to their identity. Hence, familial relationships, dynamics and culture would directly impact one’s identity formation, positionalities with significant others and their lived realities, and their sense of the world. Thus, the aforementioned elements to be included in training courses may assist trainees gain increased understanding relating to the intrinsic complexities and nuances of human development, growth, relationships and dynamics. As noted by Abercrombie and Warde (2000) some minority ethnicities in Britain have preserved a separate cultural identity to the White, British society.

5.7 Future Research Recommendations

This research fulfilled its aims to answer the research questions. However, throughout the course of the study, other pertinent areas which could benefit from further investigation were identified. Thus, it is recommended that further research is considered with the following focus:

- Exploring sexual violence with a cross section of cultural, ethnic, racial, spiritual and religious/non-religious multiple, intersecting identities
- Exploring sexual violence in diverse cultures and faiths
- Exploring sexual violence within the honour and shame phenomena
- Exploring sexual violence and counselling interventions
- Exploring sexual violence and multiple perpetrators
- Exploring sexual violence and marital rapes
- Exploring sexual violence and child sexual abuse

- Exploring sexual violence, child sexual abuse and religious leaders
- Exploring sexual violence in Muslim/non-Muslim individuals and South Asian/White research dyads

5.8 Reflexivity

It is acknowledged the researcher held an insider, not outsider status (Carter and Bolden, 2012) as there were some macro and micro levels of similarities between the researcher and the participants; i.e. gender, culture, faith, understanding, interpretations and language. It is proposed that the verbal/non verbal and visible/invisible connections between the researcher and the survivors directly contributed towards mutually, meaningful and in-depth research experiences. Efforts were undertaken to ensure the research was conducted in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner. A qualitative method was chosen as a quantitative approach was not considered culturally or linguistically conducive due to the research topic. Attempts were made to reduce as many visible/invisible barriers to assist in developing a safe, research environment. As stated by Liamputtong (2008) “cultural sensitivity is referred to as knowing the cultural context of the group with whom the researchers wish to work” (p. 4). Endeavours were made to capture and convey the findings, intrinsic nuances and multi-layered meanings so they remained true to the participants’ narratives and their lived experiences.

As noted by Merriam et al., (2001) “every researcher struggles with representing the ‘truth’ of their findings as well as allowing the ‘voices’ of their participants to be heard” (p. 414). Irvine, Roberts and Bradbury-Jones state “Insider researchers are able to immerse themselves in the original data and, if bilingual or multilingual, can mediate between linguistically diverse datasets, this may provide added insight and clarity to the interpretive process.” (Irvine, Roberts and Bradbury-Jones, 2008, p. 44).

5.9 Summary

The participants offered unambiguous hope to other survivors. Despite experiencing lifelong and deeply traumatic sexual violations, which spanned years, and at times decades, it was evident their human spirits had transcended the brutalities of their past lives. It seems most apt to note the following quotes towards the end of the research project report, as they epitomise the fluidity of their deeply, personal journeys and transitions from being powerless and vulnerable girls and/or women into becoming powerful and determined survivors.

Don't give up... [pause] I didn't give up. I did a few times ... but then I carried on ... [pause] I carried on and I carried on and I'm still carrying on and... I'm in such a good place. I can intimidate my perpetrator. He doesn't intimidate me anymore. And that for me is s-o powerful... because I never thought I'd be here... when I was self-harming, when I was trying to commit suicide, when I was running away. I n-e-v-e-r thought I'd be here... sat here talking to you today about this ... without breaking down and crying and being a big mess on the floor. Um... just carry on, don't give up.... you shouldn't give up... don't... I'm... glad I didn't stop... giving up or my husband encouraged me to... not give up because of what somebody else did. Because, I deserve to be h-e-r-e... I deserve to have a life and no matter how low you're feeling, just don't give up. That's my message. That's the first thing ... before speaking up, before ... getting help... I think in your own mind you need to not give up and feel that you want

to... [pause] *get beyond this because this doesn't define you, your abuse doesn't define you as a person. You have qualities ... you're not just your relationships that you were born into. You're not just what happened to you. You are m-o-r-e than that* [silence] (Masooma, p. 76 – 77).

It has been a rocky road but what I'm proud of is... all the help that I've had around and I'm really grateful for each and every individual that's been helpful... I mean, that is the reason why I'm here today. I want to let the women know, I mean there was a stage where I thought I was... completely on my own and there was no way out and I couldn't tell anybody and the stigma of shame and honour and everything that was attached to it. Erm... people talk, and they'll always talk but you have to do what you think is best for you and for your children. So, f-o-r-g-e-t about what people will think and just concentrate on what y-o-u think is better for your own future, I think that's really important. And then don't be silent, don't suffer in silence. Get help because it is available, you just have to ask. There is so much help available and there's angels all around, you know, ready to help... I mean that's the only word I can use for them [smiles and laughs] because they have been amazing... and yes... the group [SAWSG] did help me get... my children into the local... schools, which was a great help... and then with my housing, with the court case... with being me... I think it was the confidence building, I can't forget that. So, it was just... being proud of who you are. So, there was... me being not anybody... I was like totally worthless and I thought... I had no mind of my own... to me being who I am today (Asma, p. 47 – 48).

Keep faith... whatever faith y-o-u h-a-v-e... whether you refer to Allah as Allah or God or... whatever... or even a Creator or... however you refer to... the superior... just... keep that faith... and... it will get you many, many places. But even if you don't have a faith, keep the faith in yourself... and you'll get far... and that's it! [smiles and eyes sparkle] (Ayesha, p. 49 – 50).

Well, today... *it wasn't easy... it's always difficult to go back to things that you buried in the past, but I guess it's been... a learning experience for me as well because I haven't really... visited the events of the past for so many years now... simply because I know it'll have a negative effect on my health. I physically get migraines... I mean it's just the past that I didn't want it to be... but I think today's made me realise that... if that hadn't happened, I wouldn't be where I am today... so... trust your God's plans...* [laughs]... every... phase of life that we go through is like a piece of jigsaw, so... we need to really like trust God with the plans that He has for us and *each part of that jigsaw is important...* be it... colourful or a black... plain piece, it has its value... and it actually makes you the person *you are*. So... *I've actually learnt a lot*. I mean... looking at it now... from a *positive...* angle, I guess, after everything has happened and where I am a *survivor*, Alhamdulillah, and not a *victim...* *it's a h-u-g-e step* and... it's from a *completely different angle*, so it has been a positive learning experience for me too. And *I r-e-a-l-l-y hope that it helps somebody, even if it helps one person, I think it'll be worth it* (Asma, p. 60).

Even if I can help one woman in my life... that's my job done for me... I feel that's enough. If I've helped even one woman... that will be more than enough for me, yeah. But, if I can help more, obviously, it's a bonus! [smiles and laughs] (Masooma, p. 61).

Human beings have been created in a way where... *you will survive*... [sniffs and deep inhalation] And I'm sure if... *this* helps even *o-n-e person*, out of the millions out there... then... *Alhamdulillah* [whispered] (Ayesha, p. 29).

Upon completion of the research, it is hoped the readers will have an increased awareness, understanding and knowledge of the depth, magnitude and intensity of sexual violence upon the lives of some South Asian women survivors. The purpose of the study has been accomplished at this juncture. It is hoped this piece of research will be conducive to other persons in the fields of research, counselling, healthcare professions, voluntary and statutory sectors, and South Asian communities. It is also hoped the study will ultimately be of some assistance to the survivors of sexual violations.

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Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Ahmed Iqbal Ullah
Race Relations
Resource Centre &
Education Trust



GREATER MANCHESTER RAPE CRISIS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

"EXPLORING THE LIFE STORIES OF SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE"

Participants are being invited to take part in this research study and it is important the following information is read and understood before a decision is made for participation. Any questions regarding the research are welcome and will be answered promptly, with provision of additional information, as required.

Research Project Context

This research is being undertaken by Nasreen Mansoor, Researcher, as part of a research project for Greater Manchester Rape Crisis. This 18 month research is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and is due to complete in December 2020. The research is being supervised by Shabana Baig, Counselling Service Manager at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis. The research will be conducted in accordance with the 'Ethical Guidelines for Research in the Counselling Professions' (2019) as documented by the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP). The Researcher has undergone satisfactory basic and enhanced levels of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) investigations and may be contacted at any juncture via mobile on 07583 544590 or email on shabana@manchesterrapecrisis.co.uk or anne@manchesterrapecrisis.co.uk.

Aims of the Research Project

The aim of this study is to explore the life stories of some South Asian women living in England whom are survivors of sexual violence. The purpose of the research is to gain an increased understanding of the multifaceted impact of sexual violations upon South Asian women. The perceptions, experiences, disclosures, honour and shame, personal journeys and support in relation to sexual violence will also be explored.

Interview Process

A maximum of five female Participants aged 18+ from three specific ethnicities; Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani heritage will be interviewed. The women have been selected through our women's group (all were service users of Greater Manchester Rape Crisis) via a number of focus groups and discussions with them. A qualitative research method will be implemented by undertaking confidential, face to face or telephone interviews on an individual basis. The Participants will be invited to share their narratives of sexual violence at a level they feel comfortable and safe to disclose. The interviews will be undertaken at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis Centre and will be in two parts. Part 1 of the interview will be a maximum of ninety minutes duration and Part 2 will be a maximum of sixty minutes duration. Time keeping will be

effectively adhered. Part 1 and Part 2 of the interviews may or may not be on the same day. The Participants will decide in advance whether the whole interview is to be conducted on one day or to be conducted over two separate days. Any travel and accommodation expenses incurred by the Participants will be reimbursed by Greater Manchester Rape Crisis upon receipt of tickets and invoices.

Data Production, Storage, Access and Dissemination

The interviews will be audio recorded and will be professionally transcribed in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and Generalised Data Protection Regulation (2018). After the transcribing stage, the Researcher will have access to the recordings in order to complete the research. The audio life stories of the Participants obtained in Part 1 of the interviews will be securely stored by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre & Education Trust, University of Manchester. The stored, oral recordings will be subject to an embargo agreed with the Participant and will only be made available to the public after the embargo has ended. The oral recordings will only be made accessible for research purposes under controlled conditions. A full typed transcript of each interview will be produced and subject to the same embargo conditions. The audio recordings obtained in Parts 1 and 2 of the interviews will be securely stored by Greater Manchester Rape Crisis. The Participants' testimonies will be illustrated via the production of five films, digital media, performances, reports, displays, advocacy booklet and showcase exhibition whilst protecting their identities before, during and after the research process. Some Participants may receive a copy of their transcript and will be requested to verify it to be an accurate recording of their interview. A copy of the transcript will be submitted to any Participant whom specifically requests it. Once the research has been fully completed, the Researcher will destroy her copy of the audio recordings to safeguard the confidentiality of the Participants.

Informed Consent

Each Participant will have a minimum period of two weeks to consider her decision in participating in this research following receipt of the 'Participant Information Sheet.' Both verbal and signed 'Informed Consent' will be obtained from the Participants and a duplicate of this document will be given for them to retain. The Participants understand they are free to withdraw from the research at any stage and without any obligation to give a reason for their decision. Should a Participant decide to withdraw from the study, then this would not be detrimental to her in any way or in accessing any future service or treatment. It is important for the Participants to understand what the research will involve and to ask for further information if they are unclear about anything.

Safekeeping and Storage of the Data

All of the information the Participants share will be considered as 'data' and this will be analysed by the Researcher to help answer the research question. The data will be stored by Greater Manchester Rape Crisis for a maximum period of two years after the confirmation of the research project completion. The data held by Greater Manchester Rape Crisis will be securely destroyed after this timeframe has lapsed. However, copies of the data will be deposited at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre & Education Trust, University of Manchester and preserved for the future. The paper data will be stored in a locked and fire proof filing cabinet in the Researcher's home

and only the Researcher will have access to this. All electronic data will be password protected and the safeguarding of this material will be adhered to.

Confidentiality

The identity of the Participants will remain confidential at all times and the information provided will be safeguarded, unless subject to any legal or ethical requirements, which the Researcher will clearly outline from the outset. The Participants privacy will be adhered to and any factual details, i.e. occupations may be amended to something similar in the research report. Such amendments will be in order to continue to protect the Participants’ identities at all times. However, the actual essence of the interviews will remain authentic and quotations will be stated with pseudonyms. The principles of the Data Protection Act (2018) and General Data Protection Regulation (2018) will be strictly adhered to at all times. It is possible that due to the research title and interview content, some Participants, may feel they require emotional support after the interview has ended. All of the Participants will also be offered emotional support via Greater Manchester Rape Crisis should they wish to access this assistance.

Research Project Report, Completion and Publications

A copy of the research report will be forwarded to each Participant upon completion of this study. The research project commenced in June 2019 and is envisaged to be fully completed by December 2020. The research will be submitted for publication in journals. Participants’ identities will remain confidential within the research report and all published material. The Researcher's contact details will be issued to each Participant should the Participant wish to make contact with the Researcher at any juncture. The Participants will be respected throughout the whole process of this research study.

Complaints Contact Details

Formal complaints should be directed to Anne Stebbings, Chief Executive Officer/Manager, Greater Manchester Rape Crisis, 73 Ardwick Green North, Manchester, M12 6FX.

Participant's Signature

Participant's Full Name (Block Letters)

Date

I confirm that I have fully explained the purpose and nature of the research project and confidentiality will be adhered to, subject to any legal or ethical requirements. The interviews will be conducted with respect and sensitivity towards each Participant. The Researcher will be attentive in minimising the impact of the interview upon the Participant.

Researcher's Signature

Researcher's Full Name (Block Letters)

Date

Appendix 2: Participant Informed Consent Form

Ahmed Iqbal Ullah
Race Relations
Resource Centre &
Education Trust



GREATER MANCHESTER RAPE CRISIS

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

“EXPLORING THE LIFE STORIES OF SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE”

Nasreen Mansoor (Researcher) has fully explained to myself the nature of the research study and what my involvement would be as a Participant. I have received a copy of the ‘Participant Information Sheet’ which I have read and understood. I have had a minimum period of two weeks to consider my decision since receiving the ‘Participant Information Sheet’ regarding the research. I understand that the research is being undertaken with Greater Manchester Rape Crisis and the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded, unless subject to any legal or ethical requirements. The Researcher has discussed the contents of the ‘Participation Information Sheet’ with me and provided me with an opportunity to ask any questions concerning this.

I agree that the appropriate authorities may be informed of my participation if the Researcher, after consultation with Shabana Baig (Counselling Service Manager at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis) considers this to be an appropriate course of action. This will only be in circumstances such as I am currently at serious risk of harming myself or another person. I understand that should the Researcher wish to contact a third party, then I will be notified of this decision prior to this communication occurring.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask any questions and fully understand the nature of the research study. The interview process has been clearly explained to me both verbally and in written format. I have received my own copies of the ‘Participant Information Sheet’ and ‘Participant Informed Consent Form.’

If you are in agreement to participate in this research study, please kindly initial the boxes, then sign and date the consent form below.

- (1) I confirm I have read the attached ‘Participant Information Sheet’ on the above research project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions, which have been answered satisfactorily.
- (2) I understand that my participation in the study is on a voluntary basis and that I am free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason for this decision. My withdrawal will not be detrimental to any treatment or service I may require in the future.
- (3) I understand that the research interviews will be audio recorded.

- (4) I agree to the use of anonymised quotations to be utilised in the five films, digital media, advocacy booklet, reports, performances, displays and showcase exhibition.
- (5) I agree to my General Practitioner being informed of my participation in the study should any safeguarding concerns arise regarding myself.
- (6) I agree that any data collected may be passed on to other professionals involved in this research project.
- (7) I understand the research is being conducted for Greater Manchester Rape Crisis. Confidentiality will be safeguarded unless subject to any legal or ethical requirements, i.e. I am currently at serious risk of harming myself or another person.
- (8) I agree to Greater Manchester Rape Crisis to utilise my contribution on social media platforms, i.e. Facebook, Wordpress, Twitter.
- (9) I agree to Greater Manchester Rape Crisis sharing my contribution on its website and on the websites of organisations that it works in partnership with.
- (10) I agree to Greater Manchester Rape Crisis utilising my contribution for broadcasting objectives (television and radio programmes) and for educational purposes (schools, colleges, universities).
- (11) I agree to Greater Manchester Rape Crisis sharing my contribution in publications, i.e. books, posters, flyers, journals, articles.

I agree to take part in the above research.

Participant's Signature

Participant's Full Name (Block Letters)

Date

I confirm that I have fully explained the purpose and nature of the research study and discussed with the Participant the contents of the 'Participant Information Sheet.' Confidentiality will be adhered to, subject to any legal or ethical requirements.

Researcher's Signature

Researcher's Full Name (Block Letters)

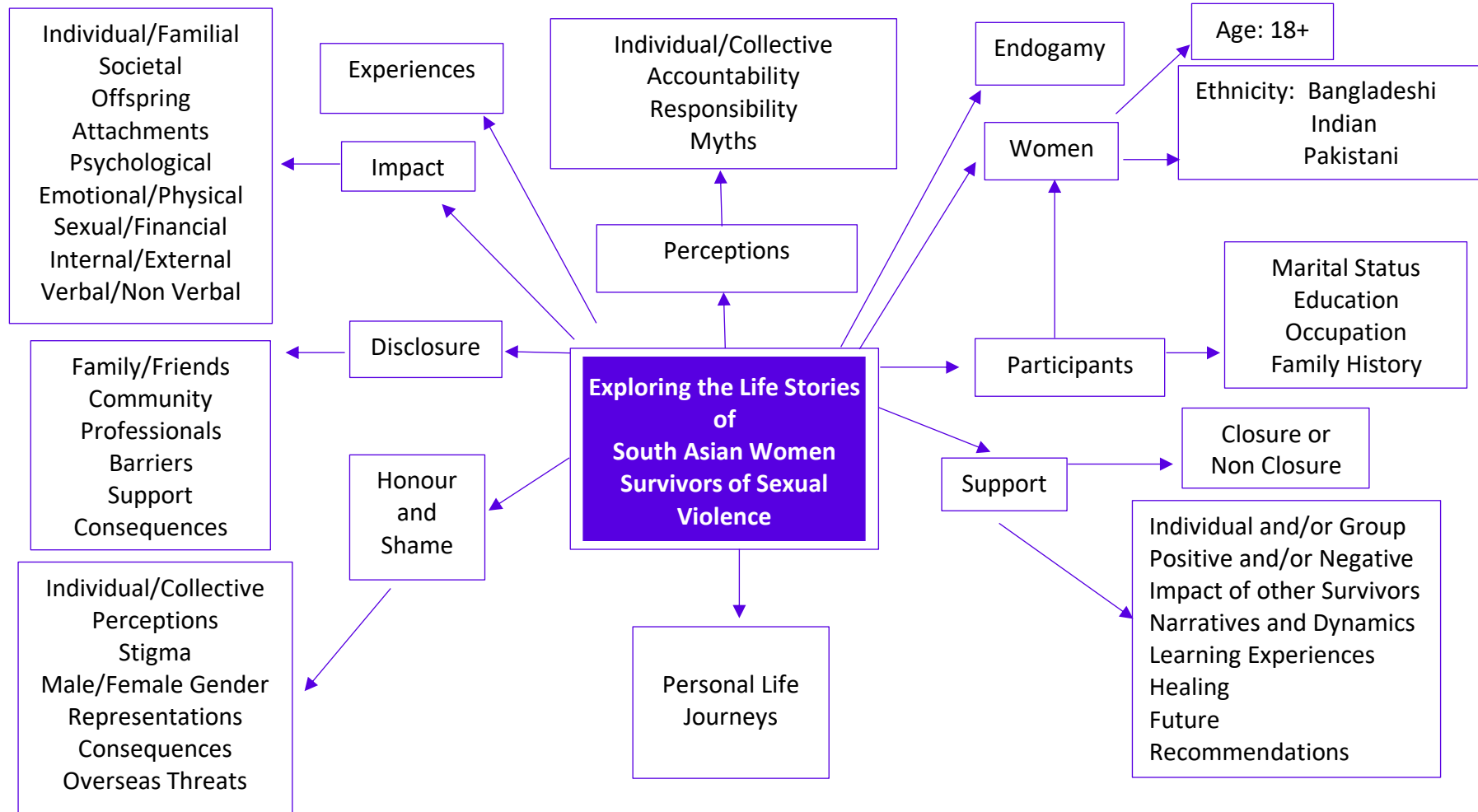
Date



Appendix 3: Mind Map

GREATER MANCHESTER RAPE CRISIS

MIND MAP EXPLORING THE LIFE STORIES OF SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE



Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Ahmed Iqbal Ullah
Race Relations
Resource Centre &
Education Trust



Greater Manchester Rape Crisis

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL DATA GENERATION METHOD

“EXPLORING THE LIFE STORIES OF SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE”

Thank you for participating in this research project. The ‘Participant Information Sheet’ and ‘Participant Informed Consent’ documentation has been completed and copies given to yourself. As you are aware, the aim of this study is to explore the perceptions, experiences, disclosures, honour and shame, personal journeys and support regarding sexual violence of South Asian women. The term sexual violence is used to describe any unwanted, non consensual sexual experience which causes emotional, physical and psychological pain. Within the rape crisis movement, sexual violence encompasses a range of experiences which include rape, sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, abuse in pornography and prostitution, forced marriage, sexual harassment and stalking, trafficking and sexual exploitation, crimes of honour and female genital mutilation (www.rapecrisisorg.uk).

I have illustrated to yourself and explained the mind map I will be utilising as a guide to facilitate the questions and explore key areas of the research. I am very much interested to hear your views regarding this subject and wanted to let you know that there are no right or wrong answers to what you say. Please do let me know if any of the questions are unclear and I will explain them further to yourself. Also, I would like to confirm that you are under no obligation to answer any of the questions you may not wish to. It is important that you share at a level that you feel comfortable and safe with, and please do let me know if you would like to have a pause at any stage. I will initially ask some general questions about yourself and your family and then focus on the questions related to sexual violence. We have a maximum of ninety minutes for Part 1 of the interview and a maximum of sixty minutes for Part 2 of the interview. Have you any questions or comments before we start the interview please?

Interview Part 1

Opening of the individual interviews:

- Could you please share with me a little about yourself and who you are?
- Could you please share with me a little about your family of origin and your current family please?

Interview Part 1

Sexual Violence Focus – Eliciting data through a combination of general and then specific research questions formulated for the qualitative data generation method:

- As we are here to talk about your journey as a survivor of sexual violence, we acknowledge that people have their own language when talking about it. How would you describe sexual violence?

- In your own time, and at a level that feels safe for you, can you talk to me about what happened to you and how it has impacted upon your life?

Interview Part 2

Sexual Violence Focus – Eliciting data through a combination of general and then specific research questions formulated for the qualitative data generation method:

- Could you please describe what led to you accessing the South Asian Women’s Support Group at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis?
- How would you describe your experiences of being part of the South Asian Women’s Support Group at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis?
- What other type of support have you experienced after you made the disclosure(s)?
- In your opinion, what is the impact of your sexual violence upon your family and community?
- As a survivor, where are you now in life?
- As a survivor, what would you suggest are positive ways forward in addressing the issues of sexual violence of South Asian women?
 - (c) What would your message be to professionals working with South Asian Women whom are survivors of sexual violence? **(Prompt)** What has been helpful/unhelpful in your experience of accessing support?
 - (d) What would your message be to other survivors from the South Asian communities looking for support?

Interview Part 2

Closing of the individual interviews:

- Are there any other areas of sexual violence you would like to talk about that may not have been covered by this mind map?
- How did you experience this research interview?
- Can you talk to me about how you ground yourself, and what you will be doing to look after yourself today and the rest of the week please?

Thank you very much for participating. As you are aware, Greater Manchester Rape Crisis is also available to offer yourself any emotional support if you feel that this is required at any stage. It has been a pleasure interviewing yourself for the research project. I really appreciate what you have talked about today. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries regarding the research study and/or what you have shared with me. Thank you, please take care of yourself and goodbye.

Nasreen Mansoor