



Evaluation Report July 2022

Heritage Lottery Fund Ref: OH-17-04487

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1 About the project

The project was set up to build on GMRC's (Greater Manchester Rape Crisis) experience of supporting South Asian women survivors of sexual abuse. It made use of a unique opportunity to gain insight from women GMRC would have continuing access to for a short period of time and to make sure that these experiences would inform all communities in the future.

Project aims:

- To record and capture the experiences of five survivors of sexual violence from the South Asian Community. The survivors were members of a support group run by
- To explore how sexual violence is viewed by older South Asian women. Through running workshops – reaching 55 South Asian women aged 55 and over.
- To produce a range of tools with which to inform, educate and engage a wider audience.

Project team:

- GMRC Counselling Service Manager – overseeing the project (and key link to the 5 survivors of sexual violence with a strong relationship with each woman)
- GMRC staff members (who had supported the organisation's South Asian women's support group, SAWG) – providing support for the project's workshops with older women
- Oral History Interviewer for the 5 survivors – an experienced researcher
- Facilitator for the workshops – an experienced community facilitator
- Project evaluator – an experienced project evaluator
(Note – the facilitator and evaluator are the same person)

Key external stakeholders:

- Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust (AIUET, The University of Manchester) – supporting understanding development of heritage projects and archiving of project outputs
- Alchemy Arts – filming and photographing for the project
- Community organisations involved in workshops with older women

Project plan:

The project had a detailed plan for all aspects of the work required, originally from June 2019 to December 2020.

Training, support and safeguarding:

Training and support for all project participants, particularly women taking part and the project team was a key feature of the planning, due to the highly sensitive nature of the issues being discussed.

Evaluation methodology

Due to the small number of participants and stakeholders, the evaluation methodology was mainly qualitative and consisted of:

- Project team interviews/discussions
- Post interview conversations with survivors
- End of workshop discussions with workshop participants and community organisations

2 What happened/ achieving the approved purposes

The first few months of the project went to plan and up to March 2020 outputs towards our approved purposes included:

- Project team and external stakeholder meetings to discuss project plan, activities and evaluation; ensuring DBS status in place as needed
- Oral history training – separate workshops for the project team & two community organisations, and for the 5 survivors (by AIUET)
- Sexual violence training for project team (where needed) and for community organisations, 12 participants (by GMRC)
- Social media training for the project team, 4 participants (by Alchemy Arts)
- Developing Participant Information and Consent Pack for survivor interviews
- Developing Workshop Information and Consent Pack for group workshops
- Initial consultation discussions with survivors
- Initial meetings with 2 community organisations and developing plans with a range of other community organisations in order to access older women for group workshops
- 3 workshops with older South Asian women – 23 women in total
- Interviews with GMRC staff and trustees to document the history of GMRC and how it developed the South Asian Women's Group

In March 2020, due to the Covid pandemic, activities were paused for a while and all stakeholders involved had to adjust services to accommodate the new requirements:

- On health and safeguarding grounds, the project was no longer able to hold workshops with older South Asian women, and this aspect of the work became incomplete. The work up to that point has been reported on.
- It was agreed the individual interviews agreed could continue with Covid restrictions being fully observed.
- The planned end of project 'Showcase event' was no longer to be held, and project results/outputs became planned to be all made available online.

In addition, all members of the project team and 2 of the 5 survivors experienced serious consequences of the Covid pandemic, including long illness bouts, either personally or within their immediate families. This led to extended work absences for members of the team, and subsequent delays to the project.

In August 2021, the Heritage Lottery Fund agreed a project extension to July 2022.

The additional project outputs since completed are:

- The first three individual survivor interviews took place between January and September 2021. The interviews were then transcribed and also translation was required. This process was more costly and time consuming than the project had envisaged. In addition, for personal reasons the Oral History Interviewer was now not as available as would have been the case originally. It was decided to change interviewer for the final two interviews and these were carried out by the community facilitator, with the support of the Counselling Service Manager. This change was fully agreed with the two survivors. The interviews took place in November and December 2021.
- Five anonymised films have been made to represent each survivors story, illustrating the main themes and issues from the oral histories.
- All project team members and a range of senior GMRC staff and trustees and community members have been interviewed on film to document their views and the learning from the issues raised by the oral histories and the project. A summary film has been made of these interviews.
- The oral recordings, summaries and transcripts have been deposited with Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust under a 100 year embargo.
- A report of the main themes and learning from the project has been written.

GMRC are in the process of updating their website to include a 'What Will People Say' project page to include the films, reports, and explanation of the main themes and issues arising from this vital oral history project.

3 Summary project data and findings

3.1 Project data summaries

Quantitative data

Table of participants

	Age	Ethnicity	Gender
5 survivors of sexual violence	35-42: 5	5 south Asian – 3 born on Indian sub-continent, 2 in UK	5 Female
Group Workshop 1 – 12 participants	55-59: 4 60-64: 2 65-69: 4 70-72: 2	12 south Asian, all born on Indian sub-continent	12 female
Group workshops 2 & 3 – 11 participants	55-59: 2 60-64: 5 65-69: 2 70-76: 2	11 south Asian, all born on Indian sub-continent	11 female

Qualitative data

a. Survivor interviews feedback

Summary: Feedback about the survivor interviews was positive in terms of their structure and implementation, especially for the support and information given to survivors. Survivors have also described some personal benefits from telling their experiences.

Survivor comments:

'This project is good to give us a voice, that's really important. I want my story to be out there. I know there are so many women out there in my position but they don't know where to go.'

'GMRC staff are so well trained and know what they are doing. They understand the clients. The sensitivity to us 5 women is very good – making sure everyone is comfortable and knows what's going on. It is good we've been trained so we know how our interviews are being used and stored. We are kept in touch with every detail and it's been done to our timetable.'

'We had an amazing amount of information beforehand – it was bitesize and palatable so I could digest it.'

'The interview process was good, with brilliant questions and a good flow. I knew exactly why I was doing it – I want to help other people as that will help me to cope. I held back emotionally during the interview which was difficult – it was very, very intense and I was

exhausted. The Manager kept in touch with me that night and the support arranged for me afterwards really grounded me.'

'The interview helped me to really deal with a lot of things that I had been putting to the back of my mind and ignoring. Combined with having been in the group [SAWG] it helped me deal with my demons and I feel stronger for it. Saying it out loud was kind of.... It [my experience] was a big thing but I made it so big that it was consuming me. I was able to make it small and hold it in my hand and look at it and think "You don't bother me anymore." Some things came up in the interview that I didn't know were there, and I could see some things I believed were facts were something else. It's really important to me and what I want to do in the future that I deal with my issues. If this project didn't come up a lot of the things I wouldn't have got chance to deal with.'

'Even though I am in pain, I want to talk about these things. I feel good to have done the interview.'

Project team comments:

'The women are brave and courageous to share what they have. There is so much passion in what they say.'

'There is such a depth of experience. We have seen exactly what the impact of sexual violence on the individual looks like.'

'The process has been long and intense. It has triggered issues for the women for which we have offered support and the option to suspend their project involvement (which they didn't take). We have done a proper job.'

'I am really impressed with the care and attention given to the women contributing to the project.'

'There can be a tendency with victims/survivors that people just want their story and that's it. The women have been held and really cared for, and it's been difficult for some of them.'

'The sexual violence training was a real eye opener and it allowed us to implement sensitivities when it came to creating the final outcomes and try to be as authentic to the true stories as much as possible.' Alchemy Arts

'The fact that we have these heroic women who have survived the most horrific abuses and are still here to tell their stories is just phenomenal and that is the legacy for me. The importance of their stories being captured and told to a wider audience is fundamental to giving hope to anyone who may feel that there is no hope.'

b. Workshop feedback

Summary: The workshops held gave some interesting results and findings. The project team in particular felt they were just getting going, both in terms of having developed a suitable structure and hearing women's views. There is limited feedback from participants due to the pandemic meaning the workshops were not completed, including some evaluation activities.

Participant comments:

'We don't usually speak up and the [workshop] session opened up people to speak in front of others, things which we don't usually speak of. Now we did in front of all these people. It's encouraging because you can talk to people about whatever you're going through. You can say it, you don't need to keep it hidden.'

'Sometimes we don't know anything but I've learnt from them [others in the workshop]. And about how to talk towards the younger generation. This is very good for us.'

'I think we should give the messages [from the workshop] to the children.'

Community organisation comments:

'We know that sexual violence is a big issue in the community and were very interested to hear what they said. There are limits to what women might say due to: not wanting to speak badly of their husband; not wanting to disclose information or views that could be used against them. Structuring the conversation to allow it to be distanced from the personal is important.'

'The women there were willing to begin conversations. As a first step it did open up a topic never previously discussed. The 'wow' said during the consent discussion illustrates this opening up.'

'In any group, some people will always be more willing to speak than others.'

Project team comments:

'As a heritage aspect, the project workshops have shown the difficulty of raising these issues which are always behind closed doors. We [GMRC] don't believe in hiding it – we need to be explicit or we are hiding what the community do. If we don't say 'rape' or 'sexual violence' no-one else will. We know if you talk professionally and in the right way, women will talk to you.'

'I wish we had had more time. The women were beginning to open up. And we had developed a structure and activities that would have helped individuals (who might be more shy or anxious) to talk. We did get some good views – and different views - but with more time a lot more would have come out.'

'I feel disappointed that we didn't get to do more workshops as planned. It felt like where we got to was just touching the tip of the iceberg. If we hadn't had to stop the workshops we would have learnt more about older women's views and experiences. And I suspect we would always have wanted to do and know more - it's a rich vein that we were investigating.'

3.2 Summary project findings

As well as recording the life stories of five individual women known to GMRC, we have run workshops to explore older women's views of sexual relationships more broadly, talking to South Asian women aged 55 and over.

We want the project's findings and key messages to inform both communities and professionals in order to promote learning and awareness raising, community conversations, and better professional practice.

Key messages

1. We have captured the experiences of five South Asian Muslim women about the prolonged, extensive and shocking sexual violence they experienced and have survived, and the long term deep and enduring impact on their health and well-being and their lives overall, as well as those of their children and sometimes their wider families.
2. We have learnt how the cultural and religious norms, expectations and behaviours in South Asian communities for sexual relationships, especially marriage, have made it extremely difficult for women to talk about or leave sexually violent relationships
3. We have heard how the five women have survived their experiences of sexual violence through a combination of their own personal resilience alongside external support from both professionals and their personal networks.
4. We have heard of some good practice by the professionals supporting south Asian women with sexual violence. We have also heard how poor or uninformed practice has sometimes hampered good outcomes for women and their families.

These key messages need to be understood in the overall context of our work. Whilst the five women who have been interviewed are all Muslims, Greater Manchester Rape Crisis knows from experience that sexual violence occurs in all communities, including South Asian communities, irrespective of ethnicity, religion and class.

4 National Lottery Heritage Outcomes Achieved

Heritage

- We have recorded South Asian heritage through our survivor interviews and group workshops, which have brought into the open a topic which is not usually discussed and exposed its wide cultural ramifications.
- We have improved understanding of sexual relationships and sexual violence in the South Asian community through the project. We have identified themes and issues which are particularly relevant within the community, as well as those which can be generalised to the whole population. Some of these were known or suspected through our previous work with South Asian women and the work of others, and we have been able to explore and describe them more fully. In group workshops women were exploring these issues together for the first time. We have captured these conversations from older women whose life experiences (as immigrants to the UK) are very different to younger generations.
- We have created a series of films and documents which will continue to educate both professional and community members.
- We have deposited survivor interview records with a reputed archive within Manchester University for future generations to be able to access.

People

- The following skills and knowledge have been formally learnt through the project:
 - Staff and members of two community organisations have learnt about oral history and how to obtain it.
 - 5 survivors have learnt about oral history and the process of obtaining it.
 - Members of two community organisations have learnt about sexual violence, its impact and how to provide initial support and referral if someone discloses about this issue.
 - Staff members have learnt about using social media.
- People have given time voluntarily to the project:
 - 5 survivors have volunteered considerable time in order to prepare for interviews, be interviewed, read transcripts and be debriefed. Approximately 6 days each. Their commitment to being able to have their experiences recorded for heritage was very high, despite the impact of the pandemic on them and their families.
 - 23 women have volunteered between 4 and 5 hours each for group workshop
- People have learnt about heritage as follows:
 - 23 South Asian women have discussed aspects of sexual relationships and sexual violence together and what this means for themselves, their families and their communities. They have discussed some similar and some very opposing views and learnt from each other. Staff from two community organisations were present and have also learnt through observation.

- The dissemination of the project will lead to both professionals and community members learning about sexual violence in South Asian communities. It will also illustrate themes for all communities.
- GMRC has learnt more about sexual violence in the South Asian community and will use this learning for ongoing service planning.

Communities

- We have engaged with a number of South Asian community organisations, some of whom were ultimately unable to take a fuller part in the project due to the Covid pandemic. We are disseminating our project findings widely including through these organisations.
- We have engaged with 23 older South Asian women who were very enlivened by the discussions and some have told us that they have discussed their views more widely with friends, and some with family members. The women have also recognised that GMRC is an organisation that could potentially support members of the community which they had not known before.
- We have engaged with influential community members – including the local MP and an Imam from a Manchester mosque – who are helping us to disseminate our findings within their networks.

5 Key Project Achievements

These achievements are the ones which we believe to be the most important for the success of the project:

Recording heritage

All aims of the project have been achieved to some extent. The most fundamental aim was to record the experiences of 5 South Asian women survivors and this has been fully achieved. It is well documented that the South Asian community has been disproportionately affected by the Covid pandemic, and there was a substantial impact on the lives of survivors and project staff, and the project took much longer than initially planned. The commitment shown by survivors and the project team to this aim was considerable.

Supporting 5 survivors

The project – and especially the Counselling Service Manager - has maintained very supportive relationships with the 5 survivors. Despite the survivors' absolute desire to tell their stories for the project, it is nevertheless re-visiting extended and traumatic experiences, at a time when other current life experiences are also occurring. This has required very significant, and at times intense, support. The skill of the Counselling Service Manager in particular (as well as the interviewers) in providing support before, during and after the interviews was critical to the success of the interviews and the project and cannot be underestimated. The survivors are very appreciative of this support.

Project films

The analysis of the interviews and workshops that we carried out was extensive. The numbers of people were relatively small but the data was very rich. We are very pleased that we have been able to distil this into key messages that have been well represented in the project films.

Project team

The team that GMRC have created for the project (including the key external stakeholders) are nearly all of south Asian heritage. Each member of the team has brought a wealth of professional and personal experience to the project and deep commitment to making the project work. The team work has been good, with members bringing in knowledge and expertise in a range of ways beyond their project role, adding to the confidence to deliver the project. Communication within the team has been good.

6 What we have learnt from the project

About sexual violence

We have learnt so much about individuals and the South Asian community including:

- About the extraordinary strength and resilience of women to survive extreme and prolonged situations of domestic and sexual violence
- How the views of the older South Asian women about sexual issues have been formed and yet never been discussed.
- The strong sense of community for differing south Asian groups, and yet subjects such as sexual violence are taboo and kept silent.

We explore these issues and more in our project report and the films which are available separately.

About heritage projects

We have learnt about developing and managing a heritage project including:

- The level of preparation and commitment needed to support and successfully carry out sensitive heritage interviews and workshops. We were already aware of this but our experience on the project has confirmed the high level. For the individual interviews, this also increased due to the Covid pandemic and its impact on participants.
- The importance of culturally appropriate delivery teams and recruiting the right team that could fulfil the brief but apply emotional intelligence to their delivery. We had recruited the right team from the start.
- The length of time for individual interviews needs to have a reasonable time boundary but also flexibility to each individual's way of expressing themselves and their emotional needs. Interviews took longer than initially planned.
- The planning of workshops where a never before discussed personal and hidden issue is being raised. Women were willing and well prepared to discuss this with us, but it needed perceptive handling and having trusted people from community organisations also present, alongside a measured approach to developing conversations, supported by GMRC's sexual violence training resources. It also needed clarity to ensure that the tricky boundary between revealing personal details (not required) alongside exploring individual views was clear.
- The level of funding needed (higher than we had anticipated) to ensure that the interviews are well documented, including transcribed & translated.
- Ensuring that staff also receive training and support with the sensitivity of the issues. This was well built into the project plan, but merits being mentioned.
- The Counselling Service Manager is highly skilled in her role. She had no prior experience or understanding of heritage projects. She has learnt about research methodologies, and about filming and how that comes about.
- It takes a lot more time and resource to successfully carry out a project of this highly sensitive nature than might at first be obvious. The level of commitment from the Manager to ensuring the project was successful was much higher than we had anticipated. This had an adverse impact on the other aspects of the Manager's role, as well as on her personal well-being.

- Our project planning processes were good. We especially learnt the importance of ensuring that methodologies are checked and agreed from the start – we did do this and made some early adjustments as there were some differing views within the team.
- We have learnt how external circumstances – the pandemic - can massively affect a project, and yet the initial heritage needs were unchanged. We have also exposed a range of ideas for potential heritage projects for the South Asian community in relation to sexual violence.

Our overall learning about heritage projects has been very interesting and we are very pleased with what we have achieved through our handpicked project team. For any future projects we would recommend a more resourced project (both time and money) ensuring capacity was fully available for both the project and the main work of GMRC.

7 Project legacy

The project has some known and unknown legacy aspects. Our planned legacy is:

- Project films and reports available online
- Survivor interviews deposited in official archive for future generations
- Dissemination plans through our community and professional networks

The project resources offer ways to facilitate change in understanding and attitudes to sexual violence and supporting those who experience it.

We know that although the number of people involved in the project is relatively small the conversations we have opened up around the topic of sexual violence within South Asian communities have begun discussions that have never before been had. The community organisations and the older women involved have told us that some people have continued conversations beyond our work. The ripple effect of these conversations is not known but it will be operating alongside our planned legacy work.

There are organisational legacies from the development of the project team and for all organisations involved in the project for:

- Understanding of heritage projects and how to successfully carry these out
- Wider understanding of sexual violence issues and knowledge about GMRC's services
- Members of the project team being an ongoing resource for GMRC and its services
- The potential for further heritage projects and/or a larger scale project that involves a consortium style application that delivers outcomes locally, regionally and nationally.

Very importantly, there are personal legacies for the 5 survivors interviewed for the project, who are the reason the project came about. For each of them to have told their story has been an intense and emotional experience, which they have felt to be of benefit to themselves and ultimately will be for others.