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Abstract for Conference and Article– Vanisha Jassal

“Preserving what for whom?”: victims’ perspectives on the silence behind child sexual abuse in Britain’s South Asian communities.

Family and community relations matter to human beings: they are what makes us feel wanted, needed and preoccupy much of our time, attention and energy. In some communities, including South Asian, the role of family and community is reported to represent additional layers which indicate greater mutuality, more permanent inter-relatedness and higher expectations. This paper explores some of the problems with this and through cases of child sexual abuse of females, examines the potential for perpetrators to exploit this model of family/community life and for survivors to feel a heavier burden of fear, guilt and shame. Through interviewing survivors over a period of 18 months, the intense concern and lifelong efforts to keep the abuse hidden for ‘preserving’ family life and relations is discussed. What is the cost of this ‘preservation’ and whom should decide or quantify this? Whilst sharing what may be quite familiar features of child sexual abuse in South Asian communities, the paper also represents, almost in antithesis, the strength, resilience and importantly, the rationale of female survivors in this journey of ‘preservation’. It also raises necessary points about statutory interventions and social inequalities when working with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, arguing for greater cultural sensitivity and competence, and acknowledgement and acceptance that the lived experience of members from all communities, need to be seen, heard and better understood.