

**BRITISH SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF CHILD
SEXUAL ABUSE:
AN INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

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Acknowledgments

I did it! I never doubted I would complete it, but my, has it been the journey of my life.....

As in every step of my life, I first thank God. Without my faith, I would not have started this journey, never mind complete it.

First and foremost, I dedicate this thesis to Narinder Penji and Bim, my two sisters, who left my life too soon. I thank them for representing the kind of female strength and courage which can often be overlooked or ignored. I dedicate it to my wonderful sister Kam, who has managed to pick out the best bits of being a South Asian woman, and mix them up with a little Western vibe. She equally represents immense strength and courage in her everyday life. I am as proud of you, as you are of me. Thank you for always believing in me, and in this story.

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by you all. Gender inequality remains a detriment to female wellbeing, and this thesis is a dedication to all girls and women who suffer this disadvantage, but who still manage to contribute so much to the lives of others, often at a cost to themselves. May the negative impact of 'shame' and 'honour' one day disperse from womanhood forever.

For those who have picked up this thesis, I hope you enjoy reading it. Most of all I hope that it makes you reflect deeply on the challenges which British South Asian women may experience. However, I also hope it enables you to see their strength and courage in responding to these difficulties, and gives you a new and fresh perspective on their identity.

Abstract

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in British South Asian communities is under-researched despite the disproportionate levels of its under-reporting to statutory agencies. The practice and policy explanation for this under-reporting has been commonly referred to as 'cultural barriers', namely 'shame and honour', cultural constructs which are known to significantly impact the lives of women from South Asian communities. However, the voices of these women have been minimally documented, leaving gaps in knowledge about how shame and honour are experienced in the context of CSA, and what other factors may constitute their lived experiences. This research interviewed 15 British South Asian women who are victims/survivors of CSA, within the framework of intersectional feminist theory, and a narrative analysis was undertaken to capture their unique experiences.

Findings indicate that the intersections of gender, race, parental migration, and class created specific vulnerabilities to CSA, and as adult survivors, these can be impediments to healing from the abuse. They elucidate previously underrepresented nuances and complexity related to shame and honour in the context of CSA, and evidence the strength of the women as they navigate their trauma and isolation. Finally, findings demonstrate the ramifications of disclosure and the personal cost of self-protection.

This thesis indicates that practice and policy work examining CSA in British South Asian communities must move beyond exploring disclosure and reporting. Instead, what is additionally needed is practice and policy structures which integrate a cultural sensitivity lens, allowing more effective risk assessment and support for British South Asian CSA female victims/survivors, both as child victims and as adult survivors.

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Glossary

BASW	British Association of Social Workers
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CRT	Critical race theory
CSA	Child sexual abuse
CSA Centre	Centre of Expertise on CSA
CSE	Child sexual exploitation
DfE	Department for Education
HBA	Honour based abuse
HMICFRS	His/Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
IICSA	Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse
KNSCH	Killings in the name of so-called honour
MWNUK	Muslim Women's Network UK
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OCC	Office of the Children's Commissioner
ONS	Office for National Statistics

Part 1

Tracing the Journey of Child Sexual Abuse as a Societal, Feminist, Cultural and Racial Subject of Inquiry

A Literature Review

Chapter 1

Introducing the Thesis

'A lot of people like me...they don't have their voices heard, especially in the Asian community. A lot of it is very hidden. Older family members will tell you, "Don't tell people", because of the whole stigma around honour, shame and so on. A lot of BME children are at risk and I don't think anyone realises how much at risk they are. As you're growing up, your parents teach you about shame and honour. It's a very big thing in the Asian community'.

(Laila).

Chapter introduction

This thesis examines the lived experiences of child sexual abuse (CSA), as experienced by British South Asian¹ women. Through sharing their narratives, 15 British women of Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani ethnicity shared their unique accounts of their abuse, how it affected them at the time, what the experience meant for them today, and why they had chosen to speak. Through narrative research, grounded in a feminist standpoint methodological approach, the objective was to retain their voice as a central feature of this thesis, as British South Asian women's experiences of CSA have been minimally examined. Practice and policy discussions exploring CSA in British South Asian communities, have focused on the existence of cultural barriers as being the reason for under-reporting of CSA (Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006; Gohir, 2013; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Report, 2013; Cowburn *et al.*, 2014; Gill and Brah, 2014; Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Martin *et al.*, 2014; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; Fox, 2016; Gill and Harrison, 2019; Rodger *et al.*, 2020; Jay *et al.*, 2022). As stated by Laila, one of the women in this research, shame and honour are significant elements of many South Asian women's experiences of CSA. This thesis sought to explore this and also investigate their experiences beyond shame

¹ The term South Asian is used in this thesis to represent people identifying as either Bangladeshi, Indian, or Pakistani, in the UK. It is acknowledged that the South Asian diaspora globally consists of additional populations, and of people identifying themselves using different or additional terms (Rangaswamy, 2005).

and honour, so that their experiences and perspectives could be documented in a deeper, more wholesome way.

As the research was undertaken with women sharing their childhood experiences as adults, the thesis will refer to 'woman/women' in the main. At other times, 'female' is a more suitable word. On occasions, 'girl(s)' is utilised, in addition to, or instead of, woman/women, when the women are positioning themselves as a child, or when the broader context of CSA is discussed. Although gender has become more fluid in recent years, moving beyond the male-female binary (Stoller, 2019), all 15 women identified as female; therefore, the binary definition of male and female is adopted in the thesis. Furthermore, the term victims/survivors is employed throughout the thesis to describe those who have experienced CSA. Finally, the thesis investigates intra-familial CSA, not extra-familial CSA, such as child sexual exploitation (CSE). Intra-familial CSA is perpetrated within the family setting by perpetrators known to the child. In contrast, extra-familial CSA, which although may involve perpetrators known to the child, is not confined or perpetrated within the intimate environment of the family unit (Berelowitz *et al.*, 2012).

Before discussing the British South Asian experiences of CSA, this opening chapter provides an overview of the UK and international CSA landscape. This includes contextual information about this category of child abuse, and recognises that CSA victims/survivors, whatever their ethnicity, nationality, gender, or sexuality, share some commonalities of experience. CSA is a terrible, traumatising, and often life-changing form of abuse, and all victims/survivors have their own difficult experiences, during and after the abuse. British South Asian female CSA victims/survivors are not being presented in this thesis as deserving of special attention. Rather, the thesis seeks to highlight their experiences to better understand the circumstances and risks that make them vulnerable to CSA, and the obstacles to their accessing the support that they need.

The CSA contextualising sections include discussions about the impact on victims/survivors, prevalence data, disclosure and reporting, and legal definitions. Due to serving as a generic backdrop, these sections do not differentiate between female and male CSA. At this point in the thesis, it is acknowledged, however, that experiences of male CSA victims/survivors, as explored by Viliardos *et al.* (2002) and Rapsey *et al.* (2020), require greater attention. This includes further exploration of British South Asian male victim/survivors, building on the work of Dr Hannah Begum, as documented in Begum (2018) and Gill and Begum (2023).

Following this contextual background, the research questions, theories, and research methodology framing this research will be outlined. The chapter ends with a summary of subsequent chapters.

Setting the scene: low disclosure rates

The impact and traumatic effects of CSA have been shared by many victims/survivors over the decades (Herman, 1981; La Fontaine, 1990; Frothingham *et al.*, 2000; Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; Halvorsen *et al.*, 2020). Herman (1981) documented the devastating impact CSA was having on her female clients in therapy sessions:

'Sexual abuse [of a child] by an adult who should be in a position of trust is a particularly traumatising violation which shatters the victim's sense of physical and psychological safety and security' (p.6).

Alaggia (2005) states that there is a:

'[L]oss of one's childhood and ability to trust in relationships, loss of emotional and psychological well-being, loss of control over one's body, and the potential loss of significant people in one's life when the perpetrator is a family member' (p.453).

The effects of the abuse include low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, anger, aggression, substance misuse, somatic difficulties, self-harming behaviour, suicidal tendencies and suicide (Finkelhor and Browne, 1986; Lundberg, 2016; McElvaney, 2016; Dubowitz, 2017; Lemaigre *et al.*, 2017). The physical effects of sexual abuse can include certain cancers, arthritis, inflammatory, diabetes, heart disease and morbid obesity (Nelson, 2016). Psychological effects are often severe, and the mental health of victims/survivors can significantly impact life outcomes (Crisma *et al.*, 2004; Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Nelson, 2016). Therefore, researching CSA and all its facets should remain a priority research area.

In terms of the prevalence of CSA in the UK, there is a widely reported discrepancy between officially recorded cases and the actual occurrence of the abuse (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; McElvaney, 2016; McNeish and Scott, 2018), and it is globally recognised that rates of CSA are likely to be higher than those shown in official data sets (Finkelhor, 1986; La Fontaine, 1990; Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; Dubowitz, 2017; Jay *et al.*, 2022). Scholars have primarily explained this discrepancy as being due to low rates of disclosure by children (Finkelhor, 1986; Crisma *et al.*, 2004; Alaggia, 2005; Dubowitz, 2017; Karsna and Kelly, 2021). Children often feel embarrassment, shame, guilt, or fear (Alaggia and Kirshenbaum, 2005). They can lack the words and language to explain what is happening to others (MacIntosh and Ménard, 2021), and some do not recall what has happened to them until adulthood, due to the trauma caused by the experience (Radford *et al.*, 2011; Lundberg, 2016).

Children can also fear perpetrator threats, concerned about repercussions for their family (Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; Lemaigre *et al.*, 2017). Where the abuse has been perpetrated by a family member, as opposed to a stranger, research evidences that disclosures are less likely as disruption to the family unit becomes an intense concern for children (Alaggia and Kirshenbaum, 2005; Hershkowitz *et*

al., 2007; Schönbucher *et al.*, 2012; McElvaney, 2015). This is a significant point in the context of exploring CSA in British South Asian communities as the context of family and the interconnectedness with extended family members is often a fundamental feature of children's lives (Sharif *et al.*, 2023).

Victims/survivors also fear that they will not be believed, will be blamed for the abuse, and will not receive support from family members. Crisma *et al.* (2004) discuss how family responses can vary, and Tener (2018) found that family members employed several tactics to minimise the impact of abuse, including denial. Alaggia and Kirshenbaum (2005) report how, because CSA is often perceived as a taboo subject, it generates strong emotions, and therefore, the pressure on families following disclosures can be significant.

At this point, it is helpful to define disclosure in terms of the disclosure recipient, as this can often be conflated in the literature. Disclosures can be made to family members, friends, professionals in statutory services, or to third-sector organisations. A child may disclose CSA to a family member, a relative or a friend, but not to any statutory service. Hence, this disclosure may not be recorded in official statistics unless it is reported to the relevant statutory agencies. Some children disclose directly to those in statutory roles, in which case the official data reflects this. This variation in disclosure recipients has been commonly discussed in research on CSA disclosures. In their research sample, Lahtinen *et al.* (2018) found that among the children who had disclosed, just under 50% had done so to a friend, 26% to an adult in their personal network, and only 12% had disclosed to the authorities. Elliott *et al.* (2022) found similar results, concluding that children had most frequently disclosed the abuse to non-offending family (66%), to friends (17%), and to formal support providers (12%). Allnock and Kiff (2023) concur that children mostly disclose to family and friends rather than professionals.

The Smith *et al.* (2015) study with adult survivors found that disclosure to family members and friends remained high at 66.7%, and disclosure to a professional within a statutory setting increased to 27%. They also indicated support services, such as counselling, being an additional disclosure recipient for adult survivors, representing a disclosure rate of just under 20%. Disclosure is therefore a complex phenomenon, and there is a further need to distinguish between initial disclosures and additional disclosures made to others. However, the points of significance are that, firstly, CSA victims/survivors do speak about their abuse. Recent data evidenced that 72% of children had told someone that they had been sexually abused (The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2024). Secondly, the high number of disclosures occurring solely within family and friends' settings, rather than statutory services, suggests that they are not receiving the necessary support interventions. These are fundamental points when reviewing CSA practice and policy, with sufficient attention therefore needing to be given to why disclosures tend not to reach statutory services and how support can be provided to victims/survivors where a clear disclosure to statutory services is unlikely.

Table 3 demonstrates that 14 out of the 15 women interviewed as a part of this thesis had disclosed the abuse, either as children or as adults, or both. Only two of these 14 disclosures reached statutory services. Hence, these findings concur with the aforementioned research papers and reports, and although it is acknowledged that unique barriers to CSA disclosure by children from some black and minority ethnic backgrounds exist, whether this results in lower disclosure rates remains unknown (Allnock *et al.*, 2019). This thesis has not specified a particular form of disclosure as its starting point is what is included in official statistics on CSA, which illustrate lower-than-expected CSA rates in British South Asian communities.

Considering the complexities with disclosures, it is understandable why official statistics documenting CSA are deemed to be a significant underestimation. The problem is further amplified in how local authorities and the police collate data on CSA incidences, and the inconsistencies, gaps and lack of clarity as to what precisely the data represents, as will be discussed next.

Discrepancies in the official recording of CSA cases

I

Child abuse and maltreatment remain a national and international problem. 1 in 5 adults aged 18-74 in the UK reported that they had experienced at least one form of child abuse before the age of 16 (8.5 million people) (Office for National Statistics, 2020). However, in the UK, there is no single measure for assessing the national scale of child abuse and maltreatment. Data on CSA is, therefore, inevitably affected by the shortfalls in national child abuse data. Deficits in data collection can also be caused by varying definitions of CSA (Finkelhor, 1986; La Fontaine, 1990) and the amalgamation of data on intra- and extra-familial CSA. Cases of CSE and other forms of extra-familial CSA can be conflated with figures of intra-familial CSA, which impedes accurate data on abuse perpetrated within the family environment. Kelly and Karsna (2017) discuss that the UK police and crime statistics reported significant increases in CSA cases, but that these combine intra- and extra-familial CSA. Gill and Begum (2022) also reported such rises, with the British police recording a 267% increase in CSA cases since 2013, likely to include both intra- and extra-familial cases. In addition to police and crime statistics, CSA statistics in England are collated by all local authority social services departments. However, even here, it remains unclear whether these statistics include both intra- and extra-familial CSA and/or how the Department for Education (DfE), to which these statistics are submitted annually (Table 1), differentiates between them. For instance, data from a local authority reported that only intra-familial CSA is documented at the local authority level (Local Authority A, 2024),

with CSE cases managed separately, often through police data. However, an interview with the statistics officer compiling the DfE figures reported that these figures include CSE cases, indicating that local authorities are forwarding CSE cases to the DfE. The officer also confirmed that there is no Government record of only intra-familial CSA cases (Department for Education, 2024a), acknowledging this as a gap. Furthermore, the 'Multiple' category (Table 1), used at local authority and DfE level, refers to a child who has experienced more than one category of abuse (Department for Education, 2024a; Local Authority A, 2024). Children included as 'Multiple' are not included in any other category to avoid a child being counted twice. For example, if they have experienced Physical and Sexual abuse, they are categorised in the 'Multiple' category rather than in the Sexual Abuse category. This is likely to be contributing to decreased figures in the 'Sexual Abuse' category. In addition, a child is categorised according to the abuse defined at the initial point of referral, even if other forms of abuse materialise at a later point (Local Authority A, 2024). These findings suggest inadequacies in data collection, highlighting the challenges of obtaining a clear picture of the national prevalence rate of intra-familial CSA across all communities. An analysis of how local authority and DfE systems record intra-familial CSA was beyond the scope of this thesis but is included in the recommendations.

Table 1:

Annual cases of children on a child protection plan against categories of abuse, as recorded by the Department for Education, 2012-2024.

Year	Child Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Neglect	Multiple abuse
2023-24	1,760	3,430	18,430	23,350	930
2022-23	1,890	3,630	19,000	25,050	1,210
2021-22	1,930	3,780	19,480	24,430	1,280
2020-21	1,930	3,650	18,840	24,120	1,480
2019-20	1,970	3,820	18,380	26,010	1,330
2018-19	2,230	4,170	18,460	25,330	2,070
2017-18	2,180	4,120	18,860	25,820	2,820
2016-17	2,260	3,950	17,280	24,590	3,010
2015-16	2,370	4,200	17,770	23,150	2,810
2014-15	2,210	4,760	15,860	20,970	4,110
2013-14	2,030	4,670	13,640	17,930	4,500
2012-13	2,220	4,690	12,330	18,220	4,870

Source: Department for Education (2024b). *Statistics: Children in Need and Child Protection 2012-2024*.

Prevalence of CSA and legislative frameworks

Despite deficits in data collection, available data indicate that CSA is being experienced by a significant minority of children each year, and girls are reported as being affected in greater numbers than boys. Prevalence rates for all forms of abuse, including sexual, were collated by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) through its *How Safe Are Our Children?* Reports, up until 2020 (NSPCC, 2024a). Its 2017 report documented that sexual offences against children had doubled between 2005/06 and 2015/16, explaining the increase by possibly a greater awareness of CSA, and increased reporting of the abuse (Bentley *et al.*, 2017). Over 10 years ago, the NSPCC commissioned research which asked children about their experiences of child abuse, including CSA (Radford *et al.*, 2011). Surveying 2,275 children aged 11-17, this was the only piece of research which asked children directly about their experiences of abuse, and it

concluded that 1 in 20 had experienced CSA. The NSPCC continues to use this figure (NSPCC, 2024b). Other statistical data available at the time of publishing this thesis were those recorded by the ONS, which, in 2020, took over the task of producing national child abuse prevalence data from the NSPCC. The data evidenced that in 2020, 7.5% of adults aged 18-74 had experienced CSA (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Furthermore, a BBC report in 2023 on CSA estimated that 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys are sexually abused before the age of 16 (BBC, 2023).

In relation to intra-familial CSA specifically, this thesis has drawn on rates of intra-familial CSA from the Centre of Expertise on CSA (CSA Centre for short). This Centre was established in 2017 by the UK Government's Home Office department, in partnership with the children's charity Barnardo's. Statistics from the CSA Centre document that two-thirds of all CSA cases reported to the police are intra-familial (McNeish and Scott, 2018; Scott, 2023). This signifies a sizeable number, and indicates the need for continuing efforts in addressing this abuse.

The statutory guidance for all professionals working with children and young people in the UK, is the *Working Together to Safeguard Children* document (HM Government 2023a). The guidance provides the working definition of CSA as defined below:

'[F]orcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children' (HM Government, 2023a; p.162).

This thesis retains this full definition when referring to CSA, including male and female perpetrators, and children as perpetrators. In addition, the thesis adopts the definition of

intra-familial CSA abuse, as set out in the 2003 UK Sexual Offences Act, and this further guides practice and policy:

'[P]erpetrated by a family member or that takes place within a family context or environment, whether or not by a family member. These offences reflect the modern family unit and take account of situations where someone is living within the same household as a child and assuming a position of trust or authority over that child, as well as relationships defined by blood ties, adoption, fostering, marriage or living together as partners' (Horvath *et al.*, 2014; p.10).

Due to low disclosure and reporting rates, identifying and responding to CSA poses specific challenges for child protection professionals (Garstang *et al.*, 2023). Absence of a disclosure, familial denial about the abuse, or families seeking to protect children without statutory interventions, can engender feelings of professional helplessness (Nelson, 2016; Lovett *et al.*, 2018; The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2024). The NSPCC commissioned research in 2014, which highlighted that UK practice in managing CSA cases can be varied and ineffective (Martin *et al.*, 2014). Practitioners were reported to lack confidence and felt they did not have adequate skills and knowledge to make effective decisions. Historically, the infamous Cleveland case across 1987-1988 is also likely to have created anxiety and hesitancy amongst practitioners in responding to CSA (Nelson, 2016). One hundred twenty-one children were removed from their homes across this UK town, following medical evidence indicating CSA, but this evidence was later discounted. After a period of intense social services and police involvement, significant media attention and public scrutiny in defence of the parents and families, a large proportion of the 121 children were returned home with the conclusion that the diagnosis was inaccurate. The effects of the Cleveland case were investigated several years later by Frothingham *et al.* (1993). The researchers undertook studies of medical records from the same group of Leeds paediatricians, pre- and post-Cleveland. They found that although there were no marked differences in rates, types of abuse or disclosure information, there were fewer compulsory removals of children into care and fewer perpetrator convictions post the Cleveland case. It

is therefore likely that, post-Cleveland, professionals were more reluctant to take statutory action in CSA cases.

However, a renewed focus on more effectively identifying and responding to CSA over the last several years has mapped out a clearer path for professional practice. Increasing attention on child sexual exploitation (CSE) was highlighting a link between CSE and CSA. Children who were experiencing CSE often reported that they had previously experienced intra-familial CSA. This was found to have increased their vulnerability to CSE (Berelowitz *et al.*, 2012; Berelowitz *et al.*, 2013; Jay, 2014). A 2013 investigation by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) into CSE stated:

'So many young people told us during the Inquiry of their early histories of being sexually abused within the family home and of their experiences never being acknowledged. As a consequence, they were neither protected nor supported. Currently only 5.5% of the approximately 60,000 children in England with child protection plans have a plan under the category of sexual abuse. We suspect that this is a significant undercounting' (Berelowitz et al., 2013; p.97).

These findings led to a further report by the OCC a year later entitled "*It's a Lonely Journey*": *A Rapid Evidence Assessment on Intra-familial Child Sexual Abuse* (Horvath *et al.*, 2014), which continued to identify significant gaps in determining the prevalence of CSA.

A further impetus in directing attention to intra-familial CSA was the high-profile case of Jimmy Savile, which emerged in the public arena in 2012. With victims/survivors coming forward to disclose the abuse that he had subjected them to, a closer examination of CSA was mandated. This included Operation Yewtree and Operation Hydrant, the former investigating cases of historical CSA, and the latter, the failure of authorities to respond to it. Amidst these events, and following the OCC research, in 2015, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) was established, concluding in 2022. In 2017, the aforementioned CSA Centre was also established. The CSA Centre and IICSA placed an important focus on expanding CSA knowledge, seeking to improve professional practice and to support victims/survivors more effectively. It thus led to a closer examination and analysis

of intra-familial CSA in the UK than ever before.

These contextualising parts on CSA demonstrate that responding to this abuse is challenging across the practice and policy sectors. There are victims/survivors of abuse across all communities who are missing from official data and for whom support is, therefore, not provided. The following sections discuss how these same challenges are also impacting British South Asian CSA victims/survivors, but other complexities also impact them. Existing research suggests that British South Asian communities face additional barriers to disclosure and reporting beyond those reported in generic CSA research. However, the research does little more than state this, and victim/survivor experiences are largely absent.

British South Asian experiences of CSA

There is a consensus within policy reports and academic research that the proportion of reported cases of CSA amongst British South Asian communities is particularly low, considering the proportion of these populations in the UK (Moghal *et al.*, 1995; Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006; Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015). This is also documented in international research on South Asian experiences as examined by Robertson *et al.* (2016) in the USA and Sawrikar and Katz (2017) in Australia, both of which indicate a lack of research on CSA experiences among the South Asian diaspora living in the Western world.

Moghal *et al.* (1995) was the earliest attempt to highlight the issue of CSA in British South Asian communities. Using data sets of CSA referrals made to two Leeds hospitals, the study reported differences in referral rates, disclosure, reporting and interventions between South Asian and White children. Over eight years, only 37 children from South Asian backgrounds were referred. The research also found that 16 of the 37 perpetrators were known to the victim, signifying a sizeable rate of intra-familial abuse. Only five of the 37

South Asian referrals were made by family members, suggesting a reluctance of family members to report cases to statutory agencies, and only three of the 16 perpetrators were charged with sexual offences, with one being convicted. This indicated a likely retraction of allegations or charges (by children or their non-abusing carers). The authors report:

'The difference in those reaching case conference and being registered as sexual abuse between the Asian and [White] Frothingham cohort suggests that in the former, evidence had to be overwhelming before a case conference was held. Professionals may be less keen to act where Asian children are concerned unless they are sure of their facts' (Moghal et al., 1995; p.347).

In later years, the Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) study provided further evidence on under-reporting of CSA in British South Asian communities:

'Research focused on Asian children who have been sexually abused ... suggests a consistent pattern of Asian children being under-represented both amongst those registered because of "sexual abuse" and amongst those receiving relevant services and interventions' (p.1364).

As previously discussed, underreporting is a known phenomenon in CSA cases, primarily due to various barriers to disclosure. However, official Government investigations and academic research evidence additional barriers for South Asian and other racially minoritised families, which relate to cultural norms and beliefs (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Report, 2013; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015). McNeish and Scott (2018) state that:

'High levels of secrecy, shame and stigma within some Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME²) groups, combined with cultural assumptions by professionals can increase barriers to disclosure. BAME children are under-represented in child protection services when it comes to sexual abuse' (pages 3-4).

² The term BAME (Black and Asian Minority Ethnic) is no longer employed, and has been replaced by alternatives including Global Majority, People of Colour or Racially Minoritised. BAME is an unsuitable categorisation of what are, multiple racial and ethnic identities (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021). However, the term BAME/BME has been used in some of the documents cited in this thesis, and was referred to by the women interviewed for this research. The term, therefore, appears in various places in this thesis.

Official recording of CSA in British South Asian communities

Under-reporting of CSA in British South Asian communities is again partly explained by flaws in data collection. The OCC Report of 2015 on intra-familial CSA stated that:

'Data held by statutory and non-statutory agencies relating to the ethnicity of victims is not recorded consistently (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; p.49).

The DfE, responsible for collating annual national data on child abuse, began collecting data on ethnicity only in 2012 (Table 2). Before this, the prevalence of CSA for South Asian communities (or any other ethnic group) was not recorded by the Department. Such information provides baseline data for any research investigating prevalence rates, and therefore, is a significant limitation to note in any investigation of CSA in racially minoritised communities in the UK. This deficit may also provide an explanation for the limited academic research on CSA in racially minoritised communities in the UK, compared to the White majority. The term 'racially minoritised' will be used throughout the thesis to describe the context for exploring British South Asian and Black communities, with 'minoritised' reflecting an active social minoritisation of people rather than their simply existing as a minority (Gunaratnam, 2003).

The conflation of ethnic groups by the DfE further impedes the establishment of a clear knowledge base about CSA as experienced by racially minoritised communities. For instance, the categories 'Asian' or 'Asian British' include Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, and other Asian backgrounds. This was a point of interest for this thesis at the research proposal stage, because although the South Asian diaspora shares a common socio-cultural and geopolitical history, there are differences across groups. British Bangladeshis are the most economically deprived amongst the three groups, whereas British Indians are in the higher income group, with a greater number having home ownership (Race Disparity Unit, 2025).

Socioeconomic disadvantages, such as poor housing and health outcomes, are often experienced by British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (Matejic *et al.*, 2024), and women from these communities are reported to face particular challenges in the labour market (Li, 2024). Hence, the Asian or Asian British categorisation risks failing to identify possible distinctions between the communities concerning CSA risks, patterns of disclosure, and perpetrator behaviour. An example of the implications of such categorisation was apparent in the high-profile cases of CSE in the UK, where the perpetrators were repeatedly referred to as 'Asian' men in the media (Gill and Harrison, 2015). However, they were overwhelmingly Pakistani (Jay, 2014). Data which fails to record ethnicity effectively limits our understanding of CSA across racially minoritised communities. Although significant differences across Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani communities did not materialise in this thesis, the point about conflating ethnic groups together in data collection illustrates the limited progress which has been made in exploring CSA in racially minoritised communities. At the same time, it is important to note that the lower levels of referrals from racially minoritised communities mean that publishing sub-ethnic groupings can make individuals identifiable, and this was confirmed by the Department for Education (2024a). How this aspect of data collection could be addressed was not part of the objectives of this thesis, but it is a point to which the thesis returns towards the end.

Table 2:

Annual cases of children on a child protection plan for child sexual abuse, as recorded by the Department for Education, categorised by ethnicity of the victim, 2012-2024³.

Ethnicity	Total	White	Mixed	Asian/Asian British	Black	Other ethnic group
Dates						
2023-24	1760	1370	120	110	90	40
2022-23	1930	1460	140	150	60	40
2021-22	1870	1500	100	150	80	40
2020-21	1870	1450	130	160	90	40
2019-20	1890	1470	130	170	80	40
2018-19	2190	1780	130	150	80	50
2017-18	2110	1700	140	110	120	40
2016-17	2200	1817	138	112	97	36
2015-16	2320	1910	160	130	80	40
2014-15	2280	1910	120	140	90	30
2013-14	2140	1800	120	120	80	20
2012-13	1990	1660	110	120	70	30
<i>No data on child sexual abuse and ethnicity was collated by the DfE prior to 2012</i>						

Source: Department for Education (2024b). Statistics: Children in Need and Child Protection 2012-2024.

Defining British South Asian communities and their history of migration

The South Asian diaspora is widespread worldwide, encompassing populations from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Afghanistan. This research focused on communities from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, as these comprise the largest South Asian populations in Britain (Office for National Statistics, 2021). They also share similar social, cultural, and religious histories, as their origins lie in what was once a shared homeland, India, before its 1947 Independence from British rule. After this point, the nation was divided into India and Pakistan during the 1947 partition, and in 1971, it was

³ The DfE classification of ethnic groups is defined as:
 White comprise white British, white Irish, traveller of Irish heritage, any other White background and Gypsy/Roma;
 Mixed comprises white and black Caribbean, white and black African, white and Asian, any other mixed background;
 Asian or Asian British comprises Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and any other Asian background;
 Black or black British comprises Caribbean, African or any other black background;
 Other ethnic groups comprises Chinese and any other ethnic group.

further divided when Bangladesh was created.

The migration of Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani communities from the Indian subcontinent involved several million people leaving in the 1900s, who chose to live across the world's continents (Brown and Foot, 1995; Deepak, 2005; Robinson, 2005). The British Government had invited citizens of its Commonwealth to come and live and work in the UK. Many took advantage of the opportunity to pursue good educational and economic opportunities. Moving to a new country, with its unfamiliar, different, and often hostile setting, made migrating families hold on firmly to their cultural norms and values (Laird and Tendam, 2019). For South Asian families, central to these values were the importance of family and community life, family reputation, and specific standards of social behaviour expected from family members, particularly children and women (Dasgupta, 1998; Laird and Tendam, 2019). In attempts to develop culturally sensitive CSA prevention programmes, Sawrikar and Katz (2018) discuss how migrant communities in Australia continued to retain values and beliefs which represent their country of origin. This aligns with the seminal work of Berry (1990) on acculturation, which describes how migrating families constantly balance preserving their culture with adapting to the host country.

Migration from the subcontinent of India provides a significant component to this thesis, because although the 15 women are second or third generation South Asians, as opposed to first generation migrants included in the diasporic movement to the UK across the 1950s and 1960s, their identities were shaped and formulated by the cultural backdrop of the Indian subcontinent. Research has shown that migration leads to the transfer and sustenance of cultural beliefs and norms (Deepak, 2005; Roy, 2023), thereby inevitably impacting subsequent generations and settler populations within these communities (Gill and Brah, 2014; Laird and Tendam, 2019). For example, migrating communities often encountered racism and were 'othered' (BBC, 2014a; Patel, 2021), leading to them closing

in on themselves. Hence, any context of abuse (CSA or other) experienced by second and subsequent generations is likely to have been shaped and influenced by these early migrating histories of their elders. The tensions of existing across both a migration and a settler landscape were reported in the context of sexual violence against women, where South Asian women shared the challenges of living in Britain amidst the traditional norms of their home countries (Cowburn *et al.*, 2014). A core part of these norms was the constructs of shame and honour.

‘Shame and honour’, ‘Sharam and Izzat’

UK research has explicitly denoted ‘shame and honour’, or ‘sharam and izzat’ to use the terms employed by South Asian families, as a barrier to CSA disclosure and reporting in British South Asian communities. Although separate constructs with multiple meanings when applied to universal settings, in the context of this study, shame and honour primarily refer to cultural norms governing social behaviour. This has often been described as an unwritten code of behaviour, embedded within family life, and although it applies to both men and women, it predominantly governs females (Thiara and Gill, 2010). Through the umbrella of shame and honour, women are perceived as the human vessel in which the family's honour is held (Smith, 2013; Gill *et al.*, 2018). Should the code be transgressed, there can be serious consequences for women (Gill, 2013). Because of this, and due to CSA perpetrated mainly by males against females, only female victims/survivors of CSA were recruited for this research.

The type of shame within the shame and honour nexus is in addition to that experienced pervasively by CSA victims/survivors, as documented by multiple scholars (Finkelhor and Browne, 1986; Alaggia and Kirschenbaum, 2005; Dubowitz, 2017; MacIntosh and Ménard, 2021; Manay *et al.*, 2022). They have discussed feelings of shame which relate to internal feelings emerging from one's own sense of self. This differs from the shame which

is driven by and imposed by wider family and community members, through the framework of cultural and social norms, as experienced by British South Asian victims/survivors. Although this thesis does not provide an analysis of shame and honour per se, Chapter 2 highlights the significance of shame as a human emotion and of honour as a value-based system, and thus how they impact people and communities across the world. What is significant to note at this point in the thesis is that the shame and honour nexus is the commonly given explanation for why disclosures and reporting of CSA in British South Asian communities are lower than expected.

CSA studies on other British minoritised ethnic communities report barriers distinct from the shame and honour nexus. Barriers for Black victims/survivors focus more on distrusting statutory services (Dhaliwal, 2024), and Black women can also feel that they are unlikely to experience justice of any kind due to their experiences of other forms of abuse and racism (Wilson, 2022). In her 2024 report, *Child Sexual Abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean Heritage Children*, Dhaliwal (2024) highlights that overall, there is a need for a greater exploration of CSA in racially minoritised communities in Britain. Her research also reiterated that for British South Asian communities, shame and honour were the predominant themes and were a unique lens through which British South Asian CSA is being perceived.

Research questions and methodology

The overall aim of this research was to examine how British South Asian women make sense of their experiences of CSA. It sought to achieve this through the narratives of 15 British South Asian female victims/survivors of intra-familial CSA, who were brave enough to share their stories of abuse. Although shame and honour has previously been examined by scholars, in the context of British South Asian women's experience of domestic

abuse, sexual abuse in adulthood, and honour based abuse (HBA) and violence (Gill, 2009; Thiara and Gill, 2010; HMIC, 2015; Tonsing and Barn, 2016), examination of the constructs within the loci of CSA was limited. This thesis has endeavoured to investigate this gap and employed the following research questions to guide the study:

1. What meaning do British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA give to 'shame and honour' in the context of their abuse?
2. What do the women's narratives demonstrate about their ethnic, racial, personal, social and cultural identities, and what broader implications do these identities have for UK CSA practice and policy?
3. How does the application of an intersectional feminist theoretical framework provide a deeper understanding of their experiences of CSA?

As an intersectional feminist, my⁴ sense-making of the social world questions so-called 'truths' about what people are doing or not doing, why they are doing it or not doing it, and who is telling us all of this. This research, therefore, sought to locate the voice of victims/survivors at the centre by adopting a narrative research methodology. There are elements which draw on postcolonialism in that the framework enables an understanding of how the lived experiences of those from global majority backgrounds continue to be impacted by Western histories of colonialism, including marginalisation and cultural stereotyping (John, 2023). Furthermore, British colonial history was known to have impacted first-generation migrants from the Indian subcontinent who were entering the UK, as many had been affected by the 1947 Partition of India. Thus, second and subsequent generations of British Asians, like the 15 women in this research, although not directly connected to this

⁴ In parts, it was more appropriate to write in first person, as this more clearly explained the process of researcher reflexivity which was a critical aspect of this research journey.

colonial history, remained affiliated with the theme and history of colonialism through parental and grandparental lived experiences (Hussain, 2005).

A feminist underpinning primarily speaks to my fundamental desire for gender equality and the need to challenge aspects of social life that discriminate against women because of their gender, particularly concerning the abuse and violence women experience by male perpetrators. The variety and diversity of women's experiences, have been, and continue to be, documented globally by feminist scholars who identify themselves with one or more feminisms. This thesis discusses the progress and limitations of White Western feminism, specifically in the context of CSA, because these bodies of work are those that British-born South Asian women have largely been exposed to and arguably governed by. In discussing these limitations, intersectional feminism provides the key theoretical framework. This lens has allowed me to bring to the forefront the experiences of British South Asian females, who are not only facing the standard inequalities associated with their womanhood, but also the layered disadvantages due to inhabiting a cultural context very different from their countries of origin. It has enabled an analysis of the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and parental migration in the context of the women's experiences. Critical race theory (CRT) appears as a valuable lens of analysis for some of the research's findings, namely, in considering why UK child protection practice is found to be lacking in its safeguarding responsibilities of South Asian children, and why national CSA services and interventions for South Asian communities have been deemed to be insufficient and ineffective (Jassal, 2022; Jay *et al.*, 2022)(Jay *et al.*, 2022). However, CRT is marginally applied, as it better aligns with current CSA and child protection practice and policy than with what was demonstrated through the narratives of 15 women.

Aligning with the theoretical approach outlined above, the narrative research methodology consisted of 15 one-to-one guided conversations⁵ with the women, with storytelling serving as the medium through which the research was conducted. The strength of narrative inquiry lies in the depth and detail of the lived experiences it yields (Andrews *et al.*, 2013), and it is particularly instrumental in bringing forth the voices of marginalised communities (Etherington, 2011). Having gathered momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, narrative research remains a popular method of social research (Barnwell and Ravn, 2024) due to its ability to generate rich accounts. Due to the often extensive data that follows, sample sizes are relatively small, a limitation that is no longer perceived as such in research academies (Clark *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, as has frequently been noted in defence of smaller samples in qualitative research, the prime intention is never to establish generalisations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013). It can be argued that it has been this type of generalisation, in bracketing the whole experience of South Asian victims/survivors of CSA within shame and honour, which has led to limited progress in documenting their experiences in a more fulsome way. Instead, the objective of this research was to hear from the women about their individual experiences, which most of them had never shared with anyone previously. At the same time, social research should leave us with some collective patterns which help us to be more informed about the social world we inhabit. This thesis does do this, but not at the cost of the uniqueness of the stories told, how they were narrated, and why.

Chapter conclusion and thesis structure

In summary, this research sought to explore the CSA experiences of British South Asian women in response to reports that rates of disclosure and reporting are

⁵ Although 'guided conversation' has become the preferred term for semi-structured interviews, the term 'interview' will be used in this thesis.

disproportionately low. Fifteen women participated across the three years of data collection. The key research question centred on the constructs of shame and honour, as this had been documented as the key reason for the under-reporting. However, by adopting a feminist standpoint epistemology, centring on women's individual and unique stories, the approach was to be as open as possible to their experiences and to avoid being constrained by the shame and honour nexus.

This chapter has provided an introduction to the thesis, including the context for CSA, the research aim, and outlined the research questions guiding the study. It has also introduced the theoretical paradigms employed in the thesis and the methodological approach adopted for the data collection and analysis. Chapter 2 presents the literature review underpinning this thesis, examining the historical efforts of White Western radical feminists to expose CSA within patriarchal structures, the contributions of non-White feminists, and a discussion of postcolonial feminist and intersectional theories and perspectives. It also outlines why CRT offers a useful potential lens to examine the subject. Finally, it discusses shame and honour and what they mean in the context of CSA.

Chapter 3 discusses the feminist and narrative research methodology adopted in this thesis and outlines information about participant recruitment and ethical considerations. It also details the specific approach adopted for the narrative analysis, reiterates the emphasis on victim/survivor voices, discusses the researcher's positionality and reflexivity, and presents the research's limitations. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the empirical chapters, which document the research findings. Chapter 4 illustrates narratives that refer to shame and honour, but which provide detailed insights into these constructs and their meaning for the women. The granular accounts from the women have enabled the nuances of shame and honour to emerge and demonstrate why these are such a barrier to disclosure and reporting. Chapter 5 presents experiences of CSA which go beyond shame and honour. This chapter

provides insights into narratives which are not culturally bound. Through this chapter, the women's identities and voices come through strongly, and the findings in this chapter challenge existing presentations of South Asian female victims/survivors of male-perpetrated abuse. Chapter 6 presents a narrative of 'disclosure', detailing the accounts of the five women who disclosed to family members, either as children or adults, and the implications of this for them.

Chapter 7 is the Discussion chapter, where the thesis situates the research findings within a broader context. It discusses how this research extends intersectional feminist perspectives on CSA. It restates the value in narrative research in exploring the experiences of racially minoritised women. Chapter 8 is the final chapter and draws the thesis to a close, summarising its key points. It also makes broad recommendations oriented around the findings for this thesis, including for UK CSA and child protection practice and policy and services for adult survivors. The chapter also includes a final reflective account which I felt was important to include, for my own personal closure to this journey, for the 15 women who made this research possible, and for anyone who reads the thesis and is curious about the origins of this research.

Chapter 2

CSA and Feminism: Examining the Progress and Limitations of Theoretical Contributions

'The world calls us global, but we are still local; the question is how to make our local the part of global without losing our specificity'.

(Spivak, 2018; p.167).

Chapter introduction

Chapter 1 has provided contextual literature about CSA, including factors affecting British South Asian victims/survivors. This chapter synthesises and critiques the theoretical and conceptual framework shaping this thesis, exposing the gaps in the literature which speak to a marginal exploration of the CSA experiences of British South Asian women, and provides an analysis of how the constructs of shame and honour feature in these experiences. It discusses how Western radical feminist research documented the experiences of male-perpetrated abuse of White women, in the context of patriarchal structures, and extends this to an analysis of feminist works which examine the experiences of Black and South Asian women. Although the latter will be predominantly analysed, Black feminist works provide essential context for some of the arguments in this thesis. To briefly stay with Spivak's quote at the opening of this chapter, there is a need to engage specific, contextualised human experiences rather than adopt a broad, homogenising framework that risks erasing differences or flattening complexity. This chapter addresses such concerns and highlights how CSA in British South Asian communities has been invisibilised due to such homogenisation.

As the chapter shifts its focus to South Asian communities and CSA, the nexus of shame and honour, and the characteristics of collectivist societies are discussed. Before examining how shame and honour in these communities tend to transfer beyond the individual into family and community life, shame as a universal human emotion will be briefly discussed through a psychoanalytical and sociological lens to illustrate its commonality as a barrier to disclosing and reporting CSA. The chapter comes to a close with an analysis of how intersectionality theory has provided, and continues to provide, a useful lens to explore the particular experiences of CSA, as experienced by racially minoritised girls and women. This discussion includes an integration of CRT.

White Western feminism and patriarchy

The vast majority of CSA cases across the world consist of female victims and male perpetrators (Finkelhor, 1984; McElvaney, 2016; McNeish and Scott, 2018). This made CSA a predominant subject of concern for the Western radical feminists of the 1960s-1980s, who discussed violence against women amidst patriarchal structures, and male domination of women within the private spheres of the home (Walby, 1990; Sanday, 2003). CSA, as a male-perpetrated abuse against young girls, was brought into Western scholarly and political debates by this wave of feminism (Richardson and Robinson, 1993). As this research sample examines the experiences of women living in Britain, it was crucial to draw on this literature to evidence the extent to which the experiences of women of colour, both generally and in relation to CSA, have been less explored.

Through therapeutic settings, where White female CSA adult survivors found spaces to speak about their experiences, a body of knowledge began to formulate about victims, perpetrators, barriers to disclosure, and the profound impact CSA had had, and was

continuing to have, on women's lives (Dworkin, 1981; Herman, 1981; Kelly, 1988; Walby, 1990). The energy and commitment of radical feminist scholars gathered momentum, and through their discourses and works across the West, particularly the USA, the sexualisation of women's bodies became a subject of scholarly and public debate, and became a direct attack against patriarchy. Sexual politics thus emerged as a term (Sielke, 2009), and patriarchy has been, and remains, a prominent factor when examining gender inequalities. The endurance of patriarchy is evident in multiple feminist writings and is a prominent subject of examination in this thesis. Radical feminists had thus laid an important foundation in developing knowledge about CSA.

Gender inequality and female marginalisation have been explored as academic and social subjects of interest, as seen in the works of feminist scholars such as Betty Friedan (1963) and Ann Oakley (1972) in the USA. They argued that certain social interactions and discourses, and imbalance of power, were creating the roots of gender inequality. Judith Herman studied the abuse of women and reported that in the USA, many of them were experiencing mental health problems and trauma due to having endured incestuous abuse male-perpetrated abuse (Herman, 1981). She argued that fathers, as CSA perpetrators, felt that it was their right to be looked after, emotionally and physically, by their wives, and if this was not forthcoming, then by their daughters:

'Without an understanding of male supremacy and female oppression, it is impossible to explain why the vast majority of incest perpetrators (uncles, older brothers, stepfathers, and fathers) are male, and why the majority of victims (nieces, younger sisters, and daughters) are female' (Herman, 1981; p.3).

In her seminal works on feminism, Simone De Beauvoir (1949) had also discussed how being either male or female, denoted a set of social and cultural expectations and conditions, infamously stating that *'one is not born, but rather, becomes, woman'* (De Beauvoir 1949; p.283), She illustrated how females were vulnerable to male-perpetrated

sexual abuse, such as CSA, and discussed patriarchy as a critical component of such abuse. Sylvia Walby also argued that male violence against women could not be understood without investigating patriarchal social structures. She defined patriarchy as '*a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women*' (Walby, 1990; p.20). One factor of such a system is the collection of CSA data. Although CSA of females in the Western world has been increasing its profile across academic and policy spheres since the 1970s, there have been relatively limited developments in terms of the identification of the abuse, facilitation of disclosures, data gathering, convictions and therapeutic interventions. Herman (1981) discussed the historic acceptance of CSA resulting from a desire to protect patriarchy, male reputations and status. David Finkelhor, an American sociologist, has also alluded to such a protection of patriarchy, stating that with males traditionally being the key policy-makers, there has been relatively limited advancement in the identification of the abuse:

'[S]ince men occupy powerful policy-making positions, the gender politics of sexual abuse can often hamper effective policies and public action' (Finkelhor, 1984; p.12).

This exploration of CSA within patriarchal social structures therefore predominated Western feminist literature throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However, the source of knowledge leading to these conclusions rested on the accounts of White women, with limited insights into factors that could have been impacting non-White women. Walby (1990) stated:

'The neglect of ethnic difference and inequality in many white feminist and non-feminist writings has come under intense scrutiny and critique in a number of recent texts' (Walby, 1990; p.13).

These perspectives were developed by poststructural feminists, who recognised the need to create additional spaces for women to share their experiences, where the diversity of women was adequately considered. Within the intellectual movement of poststructural feminism, the concept of single and universal truths about womanhood was challenged. This perspective recognised differences in experience and, therefore, the existence of multiple truths and

realities across the social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. Poststructuralist feminism encompasses a wide range of perspectives, only a subset of which are relevant to this research. What is key to take away from this theoretical movement is the space it provided for considering the diverse experiences of women.

Critiques from Black feminist thought

bell hooks (hooks, 1981, 2015) documenting the experiences of Black women in the USA, argued that the Western feminist movement was failing to consider diversity in terms of race and ethnicity. Hussain (2005) discussed this specifically in the context of the Black and South Asian British feminist movement. Directing attention back to the Indian subcontinent, Spivak (1981) examined the impact of colonialism on women's lives. It was these and other poststructuralist feminists, defined more specifically as intersectional and/or postcolonial feminists, who demonstrated how absent the experiences and voices of women of colour were. Vociferously arguing against being amalgamated into the 'sisterhood' or 'woman-ness' claimed by White Western feminists, postcolonial and intersectional feminists criticised this as being ethnocentric and demanded that women of colour have the spaces and channels to represent themselves (Spivak, 1990; Mohanty, 2003a). Despite the commonality of gender, they argued that there were differences amongst women which needed examining, relaying that not all women have the same experience of disadvantage and discrimination. Race and ethnicity became a particular locus of difference in these debates. As Beal (1970) states in a collection of works from the US Women's Liberation Movement, *'[W]hite women's movement is basically middle class. Very few of these women suffer the extreme exploitation that most black women are subjected to day to day'* (p.350).

This group of feminists also discussed how patriarchy, albeit a universal reality across many countries, was experienced differently by women, as was the abuse of women

within patriarchal structures. There was a realisation during these developments that there was a pressing need for spaces to discuss the experiences of racially minoritised women. Hence, intersectional feminism is the core theoretical framework for this thesis, enabling a deeper investigation of how the intersection of gender and ethnicity, and the intersections of patriarchy, parental migration, and class, impact British South Asian women's experiences of CSA.

The origins of patriarchy in South Asian communities lie in historical texts and religious narratives, where there was a general subordination of the female to the male (Dasgupta, 1998; Hussain, 2005). As communities that largely retain their religious foundations, the definitions of female and male roles outlined in sacred texts have a lasting impact on them. Traditionally, a male is expected to remain within the family home, caring for his parents and other family members, thereby being awarded greater value to the household (Ballard, 1982; Abraham, 1999). Within this role, he gains considerable autonomy and rights, including the right to inherit family land and property. In contrast, the female is expected to be married and move away, and create a new life with her husband and his family. She will therefore be subject to their attitudes and behaviours, and her welfare and rights will be determined by the decisions they make. As a consequence, she loses all rights to her father's assets and is instead expected to benefit from her husband's. From dependency on her father, she moves to dependency on her husband (Ballard, 1982). Although one can argue that there has been a shift away from such traditions within British South Asian communities, these cultural conventions remain deeply embedded, still shaping male and female roles within a family.

Intersectionality theory has been a vital lens for understanding issues affecting people of colour, examining how race intersects with gender, social class, religion, sexuality, and disability. As a Black intersectional feminist exposing the oppression faced by Black

women in the USA, hooks argued that their experiences were separate from, and greater than, those faced by White women and by Black men (hooks, 1981). She opposed the representation of Black women's experiences by White feminists, stating that through a discourse of strength, they were romanticising the Black woman's experience of oppression and dehumanising it. Furthermore, she argued that the nature of patriarchy within the Black community, and the perpetuation of abuse of women within this, was sidelined, if not ignored.

Several scholars, such as hooks, were working on ideas and concepts related to intersectionality. However, it was the contribution of Kimberlé Crenshaw, particularly her 1989 and 1991 works, that more publicly exposed the invisibility of Black women's experiences in the USA (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Within these strands of development, the politics of difference, commonly referred to as identity politics, emerged to highlight the existence of identities that consist of multiple intersections (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory has been expanded to explain oppression and discrimination in various segments of society and industries, and Crenshaw has argued that this risks diluting the multiple oppressions that people of colour can experience (Steinmetz, 2020). This thesis redirects intersectionality theory to the intersections of gender and race, or more specifically, gender and ethnicity.

South Asian feminists were equally pushing the boundaries of Western feminism through the intersectional and postcolonial lens, arguing that existing paradigms were ill-informed about the experiences of women from the Global South, and were essentially excluding them. The 19th-century anti-colonial movement in the Indian subcontinent laid the groundwork for the surge of feminism in the region. Alongside campaigns for better education, employability, and political participation for women, there was an emphasis on

nationalism and anti-Western sentiment (Roy, 2018). Chandra Talpade Mohanty demonstrated how, rather than consider such events, Western feminist critiques had created a single category of third-world women who were seen as illiterate, poor, and ignorant, in contrast to Western women (Mohanty, 2003b). Therefore, she and fellow South Asian feminists presented works which pushed forward the experiences of women from the Global South. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a contemporaneous feminist scholar of South Asian heritage, also drew attention to the experiences of women in the Indian subcontinent. In her seminal work, *"Can the Subaltern Speak?"*, she noted that Western feminism and philosophies were overlooking a multitude of lived experiences (Spivak, 1988). In terms of CSA in the UK, therefore, in ethnically diverse communities, examining the problem through a predominantly White Western model is, hence, limiting.

Situating CSA experiences of British South Asian females within feminist works

In terms of reporting on male-perpetrated abuse against girls and women, some feminists of colour began publishing research that demonstrated the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender, which lay at the core of the intersectional feminist movements. Abraham (1999) researched marital sexual abuse of women within South Asian communities. She discovered that this was rarely reported because women felt subordinate to their male partners or other male family members. Her sample of 25 immigrant South Asian women living in the USA yielded narratives that aligned with traditional beliefs about female and male roles. She discussed how specific characteristics associated with the South Asian woman make her more susceptible to abuse of all kinds:

'[T]here is a general tendency in mainstream South Asian cultures to primarily construct femininity in terms of submissiveness, inferiority, self-sacrifice, nurturing, good moral values, docile demeanor, social dependency, and chastity' (p.596) ...and 'the one image that gets centrality in the dominant religious and cultural rhetoric is

that of the "true" South Asian woman in terms of purity, docility, keeper of cultural traditions, and family unity' (Abraham, 1999; p.597).

She discussed how, within the paradigm of South Asian patriarchy, men often have a desire to control female sexuality and thereby exercise control over the female body itself. It is through such attitudes that abusive behaviour towards women can be executed.

Singh *et al.* (2010) and Cowburn *et al.* (2014) discussed the impact of patriarchy through interviewing South Asian female victims/survivors of abuse in the USA and Britain, respectively. The former study researched women who had been sexually abused by their male partners, and found that other family members accused them of '*being instrumental in their own sexual abuse because, as a female, they somehow invited the traumatic event*' (Singh *et al.*, 2010; p.451). The Cowburn *et al.* (2014) study revealed that patriarchal norms often silence women from discussing sexual abuse and violence:

'In South Asian communities, when a child speaks out about the harmful actions of a male family member, respected community leader or family friend, he/she also contradicts and challenges the patriarchal ideology that construes the family as a place of safety, protected by the patriarch and other male members of the family and community' (p.2-3).

As previously discussed, the body of knowledge which had emerged from the Western radical feminist movement is centred on the experience of White CSA female victims/survivors. Here, women were disclosing CSA within therapeutic settings, which they were accessing for their mental health problems, often linked to their sexual abuse experiences in childhood. Although this information provided valuable knowledge about victim/survivor experiences, perpetrators, and the prevalence and impact of abuse, it was making minimal contributions to the experiences of racially minoritised women (Tyagi, 2001), who were unlikely to have had access to such therapeutic services to share their experiences. Gilbert *et al.* (2004), for example, have documented the barriers for South

Asian women in accessing mental health services. It was not until many years later that literature centring on racially minoritised women's CSA experiences began to emerge.

It was at the turn of the twenty-first century that research studying CSA in non-White communities in Britain was published. Bernard (2001) was the earliest scholar to examine the issue, reporting on the experiences of Black mothers whose daughters had been sexually abused by male family members. The first scholarly investigation of CSA with British South Asian communities was undertaken by Gilligan and Akhtar (2006). The research was conducted in the city of Bradford, in an area with a high proportion of South Asian families. It was facilitated through a project that supported children and young people who had been sexually abused, and involved a consultation with 130 South Asian women and 12 focus groups. Although the women were not recruited as victims/survivors of CSA, they discussed how CSA was being under-reported. They spoke about how shame and honour were related to such a topic, stating that this made addressing CSA as a community problem challenging. They also shared how raising the issue with male members of the family and community was difficult, thereby indicating that patriarchal norms were also a significant factor in the under-reporting. The women stated that there was a need for interventions and support services to be mindful of such factors. Although this was a USA-based study, Robertson *et al.* (2016) also found that traditional patriarchal ideology was affecting non-disclosure. This has since been documented more extensively in research emerging from IICSA in the UK (Rodger *et al.*, 2020; Jay *et al.*, 2022).

Gill and Brah (2014) continued the discourse of patriarchy in the context of 'honour killings' – killed in the name of so-called honour (KNSCH)⁶. They argued that cultural

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This thesis has adopted the phrase 'killings in the name of so-called honour' and its abbreviation, KNSCH, rather than 'honour killings' to avoid justifying these heinous acts.

expectations and perspectives defined by shame and honour made women and children particularly vulnerable to abuse. During this period, several studies named shame and honour as a particular barrier to the disclosing and reporting of CSA in British South Asian communities (Berelowitz *et al.*, 2012, 2013; Martin *et al.*, 2014; Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; Fox, 2016). Before shame and honour within the context of British South Asian communities are discussed, it is acknowledged that shame and honour are universal human emotions and feelings, unlinked to any ethnicity or culture. A brief synopsis of their universality will, therefore, be explored within the framework of Western psychoanalysis and sociology before moving into the specific domain of shame and honour within a South Asian context. Although this thesis adheres to the collective term 'shame and honour' as reported in the literature on South Asian CSA in Britain, it is helpful to separate the two terms, consider the nuances and subtleties, and appreciate the added weight of combining the two words.

Shame and Honour: theoretical perspectives

Western psychoanalytical and sociological works provide a helpful starting point for a discussion on shame. In his original psychoanalytical writings, Sigmund Freud did not use the word shame but alluded to it as the basis of his core arguments. Namely, shameful events in childhood have been repressed in our unconscious minds, affecting feelings and behaviour in adulthood (Morrison, 1989). He purported that all human beings have a tendency, consciously or unconsciously, to discard emotions that we see as shameful, including sexual urges, desires, and experiences. Subsequent psychoanalysts and psychologists have discussed shame as a perennial and enduring feature of how individuals make sense of their being and direct their actions in everyday life. Abraham Kardiner (cited

in Scheff, 2003), through his study of small traditional societies, was the first Western scholar to name shame as an emotion and stated that it was the principal component of our consciousness. Erik Erikson (cited in Scheff, 2000) elaborated on this idea, arguing that processing our feelings around shame and guilt were critical child development stages.

Western sociologists shifted the focus of ideas about shame from the individual to the collective, arguing that, as a social construction, it deserved attention beyond being viewed solely as an innate emotion (Goffman, 1956; Goffman, 1963; Kaufmann, 1985). This developed ideas about stigma and how the emotion of shame is closely attached to being stigmatised. Being or feeling stigmatised involves exposure to a multitude of experiences such as discrimination, ostracisation, and social exclusion. Here, there are broader implications for the individual than feeling shame alone, and these relate to broader societal and collective perspectives. As early as the 1900s, Western sociology was introduced to Cooley's concept of the Looking Glass, which discussed how individuals formulate ideas about what is shameful through their social interactions and what they believe others think of them (Cooley, 1964). Scheff (2000) and Scheff and Retzinger (2001) have continued the sociological analyses of shame as a taboo emotion, with others' views as a factor in one's experiences. In recent times, Tyler (2020) has examined how societal institutions cause stigma to perpetuate and persist, marginalising individuals based on attributes such as race, class, gender, and immigration status. Societally projected shame, therefore, has a deep-rooted evolutionary human history, and is not always, but can be, interlinked with honour/dishonour.

A sense of honour has been present in historical accounts from the earliest literary texts, spanning across various religious and philosophical traditions (Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, 1992; Bowman, 2007). Be they the victories of gods and goddesses, or the battles of kings and knights, honour has been a deeply rooted characteristic of human beings

(Bowman, 2007). Often aligned with pride, achieving success and representing oneself in a positive light is important to most human beings. Through his development of individual psychology, Alfred Adler defined a human system as one through which individuals seek honour, pride, and even power (Adler, 1928). His arguments established the premise that few would reject a moment of pride or the awarding of honour. In this sense, honour is antithetical to shame.

Shame and honour are, therefore, universally experienced by people, both innately and as social constructions across communities. Their exploration in this thesis relates to transcending the individual experience and to a more collective sense of being. Hofstede's theoretical paradigm of collectivist and individualist societies provides a valuable framework for understanding why South Asian communities (and collectivist communities more generally) appear to have an intense preoccupation with the constructs of shame and honour, which extend beyond the individual (Gill and Brah, 2014). Hofstede (1980) defined Western communities as consisting of individualistic cultures structured around independence and autonomy, with a notable emphasis on self-concern. This was in contrast to non-Western communities, including South Asian communities, which tended to consist of collectivist cultures that prioritised family, social order and harmony, and a greater concern for the wider community. Therefore, families in collectivist communities are likely to be influenced by those beyond the immediate family network.

Sawrikar and Katz (2017) applied Hofstede's model to explore child protection across several racially minoritised communities in Australia, including South Asia, South East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South America. Many commonalities were identified across the communities, and it was deduced that they were essentially collectivist compared to the White majority in Australia, which is defined as individualistic. Collectivist societies were intensely concerned with family and community reputation, as well as social

stigma. Although the White majority was also reported to have concerns over family reputation, these feelings were not perceived to be as intense as those demonstrated by the collectivist communities. Baker and Dwairy (2003) also discussed this sense of collective identity in the context of Palestinian CSA cases in Israel.

South Asian families are reported to be heavily governed by values which seek to avoid shame and risk losing honour, as documented in UK based research examining domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and HBA (Abraham, 1999; Gohir, 2013; Cowburn *et al.*, 2014; Gill and Brah, 2014; Gilligan and Akhtar, 2016; Aplin, 2017; Harrison and Gill, 2017a; Idriss, 2017; Begum, 2018; Idriss, 2020). Despite being subject to physical, emotional and sexual abuse, women from Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani communities are known to have refused disclosure or reporting of the abuse, believing that the resulting shame and dishonour would be too severe a consequence for them to endure. Mansoor (2017) describes this deep attachment to shame and honour as the 'honour and shame phenomena' in her examination of how these constructs affect members of the British Muslim community in everyday life. The nexus of shame and honour means that victims/survivors are made to feel shame on behalf of their family members, extended family members and sometimes their broader community (Gill *et al.*, 2018).

In her research with South Asian communities, Abraham (1999) discussed that a male member's honour is often determined by his effective control over his female relatives, particularly his capacity to keep them chaste. Female purity, represented through chastity, is a core aspect of the shame and honour nexus (Gill, 2009; Cowburn *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the pressure to avoid shame and retain honour rests heavily on the females in the family, who also experience the highest costs of transgressing this social code of shame and honour (Thiara and Gill, 2010; Norton, 2011). Baroness Gohir OBE, CEO of the Muslim

Women's Network UK (MWNUK), has campaigned and written about how shame and honour particularly impact women from South Asian communities (Gohir, 2013), discussing that due to these constructs, sexual abuse of females from these communities remains largely unknown.

Gill and Brah (2014) have also discussed how these cultural constructs make South Asian women particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse of any kind, for they are unlikely to want to disclose the abuse, both within and outside of the family home. In their description of honour, they state that it refers to:

'[N]ot only a person's estimation of his or her own worth, but also the acknowledgement of that claim by his or her community through recognition of his or her right to pride. Thus, 'honour' often has multiple connotations and overlapping meanings related to respect, esteem, dignity, reputation and virtue' (Gill and Brah, 2014; p.73-74).

Expectations of purity from women's bodies are again a universal phenomenon, discussed by Grosz (1994) in her works about how male hegemony continues to sexualise the female body. Therefore, such purity is a socially constructed concept which imposes and enforces moral and sexual norms on women. Within this lens, women's bodies are often expected to be virginal and chaste (Morgenroth *et al.*, 2024). There appears to be an intense preoccupation with the purity and chastity of women in South Asian communities, and with the concerns of this being compromised and thereby dishonouring families and communities (Cowburn *et al.*, 2014; Gill and Harrison, 2019).

HBA and KNSCH, organised and perpetrated by male relatives of the family, are particularly tragic consequences of a supposed loss of this honour (Norton, 2011). Shame and honour were the reasons given for the murder of women, KNSCH, by family members who deemed their behavior and actions culturally inappropriate and, therefore, dishonourable (Smith, 2013; Gill and Brah, 2014; Aplin, 2017; Idriss, 2017). Awareness of

this form of abuse and murder has increased over the last 10 years in the UK, and Siddique (2024) reports that between 2020-2022, the number of HBA offences recorded by British police forces, increased by more than 60% and in the year ending March 2024, 1810 HBA-related incidents were recorded by the police in England and Wales (The UK Home Office, 2024). However, this does not include a breakdown by ethnicity.

HBA was initially documented by Dyer (2015) and HMIC (2015), both referring to the high-profile killings of Shafieah Ahmed and Banaz Mahmood. Shafieah was killed through suffocation by her parents when she was 17 years old, accused of becoming 'too Western', and Banaz Mahmood was murdered by her father and male relatives in 2006, due to choosing her own life partner. Such killings highlighted the connection of shame and honour to something beyond the individual, directing it towards concerns related to broader familial and community factors. The increasing number of such killings has led the statutory and academic sectors to examine violence and murder against women in such contexts more closely. This has been a crucial inclusion in intersectional feminist literature over the past few years. Begikhani *et al.* (2015), examining HBA and violence, emphasise the need to adopt an intersectional lens to capture such experiences. Furthermore, such studies have evidenced that KNSCH risks reinforcing concerns and fears about shame and honour amongst South Asian women (Gill and Brah, 2014; Aplin, 2017; Idriss, 2017), with likely implications for CSA disclosures and reporting. The data in this thesis revealed that a few of the women expressed concerns about this when asked about barriers to disclosure. Such cultural dynamics are significant when examining the lived experiences of South Asian women because they increase their vulnerability to male-perpetrated abuse. Scholars cited in this chapter have laid essential foundations for understanding this experience and vulnerability, and this thesis further seeks to contribute to this knowledge base.

Literature on shame and honour, as featured in the experiences of CSA in British South Asian communities, is sparse, hence the rationale for this thesis. Some of the relevant works have been briefly referenced in Chapter 1 and in this chapter, and will be unravelled in more depth in the next section. This will be presented chronologically, so that the contribution of this thesis can be temporally placed. Although not all the research explicitly refers to 'shame and honour', choosing 'cultural barriers' as a broad heading, the constructs of shame and honour are implied.

A chronological analysis of the examination of CSA in British South Asian communities and the relevance of critical race theory

Moghal *et al.* (1995) were the first to investigate South Asian cases of CSA in Britain. As documented in Chapter 1, this research concluded that referrals of CSA from communities were lower than expected, and professional practice appeared to show marked differences in responses compared to referrals from White communities. This included fewer escalations of cases and fewer convictions of perpetrators. The authors conclude that the South Asians who were referred, '*probably represent the tip of a larger iceberg*' (Moghal *et al.*, 1995; p.347). A few years later, Barn (2001) indicated that referrals for CSA were less from Black and other racially minoritised communities. It was not until five years later that Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) published their findings on key cultural concerns and barriers to reporting CSA, based on research with South Asian communities in Bradford. This raised key practice points for professionals and highlighted the need for culturally sensitive practice. However, like the Moghal *et al.* (1995) study, this research did not include CSA victims/survivors from the South Asian communities. Research participants in the Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) study included non-CSA-targeted members of South Asian communities who were asked about their perspectives on the subject matter. The research centred on awareness-raising and the development of educational materials, and although it indicated

the need for culturally competent practice, it did not refer to shame and honour.

In the high-profile cases of CSE in Rotherham, Rochdale and Oxford in the early 2000s, the accounts of South Asian victims/survivors were sidelined. There was significant media and political attention about CSE having been perpetrated by 'grooming gangs' made up of Asian, predominantly Pakistani men, against young, White girls (Gill and Harrison, 2015; Tufail, 2015; Hallett, 2017), for which convictions and prosecutions were rightly made. However, there was a notable absence of documenting CSE abuse of non-White girls, as deduced by the subsequent House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Report (2013) investigating CSE. Through witness statements, the Committee reported that victims/survivors from South Asian communities were unlikely to come forward for fear of being ostracised by their families and communities. This publication also referred to the interim report of the OCC, which was investigating CSE, and which had deduced that there was an under-reporting of racially minoritised victims/survivors of CSE, noting that children from these backgrounds were unlikely to be identified as victims by police or social services (Berelowitz *et al.*, 2012). Instead, they were identified as such by faith-based organisations, cultural groups, or youth justice services. The Berelowitz *et al.* (2012) investigation was the first official report documenting that some children from racially minoritised communities were impeded from disclosing, due to concerns about bringing shame on their families, and were vulnerable to HBA or forced marriage if CSE became known. The report acknowledged that the perpetration of CSE by Pakistani men against White girls was only one model of grooming. However, it was still criticised for profiling the Muslim community in a particular way. Some argued that this deviated attention from other models of grooming and neglected the vulnerabilities that children from different ethnic backgrounds were experiencing (Cockbain and Tufail, 2017; Colley, 2019).

Gohir (2013), Cowburn *et al.* (2014), and a BBC report (BBC, 2014b), substantiated the findings of the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Report (2013), arguing that Asian perpetrators of CSE were also abusing girls from their own communities, but that these incidences were not reported due to victims/survivors being concerned about shame and honour. The BBC (2014b) reported that a 2014 conference on CSE stated that:

'Asian girls, were at most risk, from men from their own communities.....that there's a particular vulnerability, associated with their culture, that was being purposefully manipulated and exploited by the offenders'.

Following the 2013 report by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, the Muslim Women's Network UK published findings that documented the experiences of South Asian female victims/survivors of CSE (Gohir, 2013). This identified the barrier of 'shame and honour' in an explicit tone, and was the first overt pulling together of these constructs as being apparent in children's vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation. Its key findings included children and young people from Asian/Muslim communities as being vulnerable to grooming and sexual exploitation, and being most susceptible to offenders from their own communities. It is a noteworthy point that it was an organisation led by South Asian women, which was responsible for this overt exposure of shame and honour as a barrier to disclosing and reporting. This illustrates the importance of contributions from researchers of colour and the adoption of intersectional approaches.

Despite such research, there remained an absence across public life about CSE victims/survivors from the South Asian, or any other racially minoritised community. Similar to the research on CSA, the invisibility of CSE South Asian victims/survivors was solely explained by 'cultural barriers'. There appeared to be no concerted effort being made by those responsible for safeguarding children to proactively ascertain the risks to which children from South Asian communities were being exposed. It can be argued that this public marginalisation of their experience further silences South Asian victims/survivors of CSA

because it transmits a message that their experience of abuse is of lesser importance or concern. It is within this line of inquiry that CRT requires inclusion.

Currently, CRT has had limited applicability in child protection practice in the UK, and a larger body of literature is available for the USA and Canada (Cénat *et al.*, 2021; Akuoko-Barfi *et al.*, 2023; Clark, 2023). However, as it takes race as the starting point for examining the disadvantages experienced by people of colour (Delgado *et al.*, 2017), it is a relevant framework. Furthermore, its value lies more broadly in advancing knowledge of the lived experiences of people of colour. This is often through their narratives, which makes it a suitable theory for this thesis. The fundamentals of CRT rest on the concept of White privilege. Laird and Tedam (2019) describe the term as being:

'[P]remised on the notion that regardless of whether they consent or agree, all White people irrespective of gender, age or class are to some extent beneficiaries of being racially white' (p.36).

The theory purports that those who are racially White need to recognise the advantageous positionality this affords them. Examining the nature of White privilege can be uncomfortable, disconcerting, and controversial, and it is not something that will be examined in this thesis. However, it does offer insights into why South Asian CSE (and CSA) victims/survivors may have remained absent, in contrast to White victims/survivors of CSE perpetrated by the 'Asian grooming gangs'.

The term 'shame and honour' was employed for the first time in an academic paper, in reference to abuse against children, by Cowburn *et al.* (2014), a year later than Gohir's (2013) report. Although this paper focused on sexual violence of women (not children), and the significance of what the authors termed 'cultural dynamics' of honour for these women, there was also a recognition that children would also be vulnerable to these dynamics in the context of experiencing and reporting abuse. It also linguistically defined the terms shame and honour, using the Urdu/Punjabi terminology of *sharam* and *izzat* to express the intensity

with which these cultural factors were impacting women's experience of sexual abuse and violence. Sanday's research into cultures that make rape of women by men more or less likely offers relevant insights here (Sanday, 1996, 2003). Her anthropological studies of various societies led her to argue that women can be, and are, vulnerable to beliefs that locate masculinity in a superior position and which establish certain expectations around female sexuality. Professor Aisha Gill has spearheaded scholarly works on sharam and izzat in the context of South Asian women's experiences of male-perpetrated abuse (Gill, 2004; Thiara and Gill, 2010; Gill, 2013), and was also an author in the Cowburn *et al.* (2014) paper. However, it was this latter paper that first, albeit tenaciously, indicated a link between these constructs and CSA.

In the same year, there was a substantial shift in emphasis evident in the Gill and Brah (2014) paper, arguing for greater attention to seek the voice of female South Asian victims/survivors of abuse and violence. Referring to the killing of Shafieah Ahmed by her parents, a case of KNSCH, the authors present an analysis which purports that without the encapsulation of these voices, the cultural nuances impacting these women will continue to go amiss by professionals, leading to continuous abuse, violence, and murder of this group of women. In short, it is only through the accounts of women experiencing the damaging implications of shame and honour that practitioners can begin to understand how to respond effectively. This thesis aims to contribute to this line of enquiry. As Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will illustrate, it documents how, through the women's narratives, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of shame and honour has been ascertained.

Following its investigation into CSE, as reported in Berelowitz *et al.* (2012), the OCC published its report into intra-familial CSA in 2014 (Horvath *et al.*, 2014). The report discussed the correlation between intra-familial CSA and a child's vulnerability to CSE; hence, the report represented a greater effort to investigate this form of abuse. It also

indicated that racially minoritised children were not receiving adequate professional responses or services, and were experiencing specific barriers to disclosing and reporting:

'Black and minority ethnic children are under-represented in child protection referrals [for sexual abuse], do not access child protection services with the same frequency as white children, or (when they do) may receive a poorer quality of support from professionals' (Horvath et al. 2014; p.17). The report continues: 'There are gaps in research on black and minority ethnic children's experiences. Particular attention should be paid to their disclosure routes' (p.19).

It also deduced that racially minoritised children and their families were less able to, or willing to, access support services for various reasons, including high levels of denial of CSA due to issues of shame and honour. In the same year, the NSPCC commissioned research to explore social workers' confidence in CSA cases (Martin *et al.*, 2014) and found significant and concerning gaps in working effectively and adequately with racially minoritised communities. Furthermore, in 2015, the OCC (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015) published its follow-on report to its 2014 intra-familial CSA review (Horvath *et al.*, 2014), setting priorities for action. It again signified barriers due to shame and honour, and recognised the enormous impact disclosures can have on family life. Eleven recommendations were made, several of which were directed at the Government. None related to action centred on developing practice for racially minoritised communities. This omission appears to conform to CRT, where there is, what seems to be, an inexcusable failure to take action to support racially minoritised communities. The experiences of racially minoritised children experiencing CSA were, therefore, clearly being reported over the period discussed in this section. However, almost ten years later, the issue appeared unaddressed, as reported in the edited works of Gill and Begum (2022), documenting the CSA experiences of racially minoritised children.

It was the charity Barnardo's that redirected attention to the needs of all racially minoritised children, in its CSE report of 2016 (Fox, 2016). Echoing the findings from Gohir

(2013) and the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2015), it emphasised that the ethnicity and culture of children and young people needed to be better understood to safeguard them:

'[G]irls and women of Indian and Pakistani heritage who have been sexually abused or exploited are less likely to report their abuse because of concerns about their marriage prospects, or becoming victims of honour-based violence within the family. In such communities where girls become vessels for the 'honour' of the family, there is an emphasis on the girls' virginity and an expectation that a child will 'police' his or her own actions in such a way that they safeguard the father's and family's honour. In such situations, speaking out about abuse could affect a young person's safety, whole future and security' (Fox, 2016; p.24).

This quote highlights several factors that refer to the specific lived experiences of these girls, previously alluded to but not in such a direct manner. Following this report, academic research began making similar overt linkages between shame, honour, and CSA. The Harrison and Gill (2017a) paper focused on women's experience of sexual abuse and barriers to disclosure. It drew brief parallels to how these barriers are also likely to exist for children being abused. The research participants were again not recruited for their experiences of abuse (either as adults or as children), but for their general perspectives on sexual violence in South Asian communities. Research conducted by the CSA Centre has been instrumental in identifying the prevalence of CSA in the UK and has repeatedly documented the under-reporting of CSA in South Asian communities (Kelly and Karsna, 2017; McNeish and Scott, 2018; Karsna and Kelly, 2021; Scott, 2023). The reports have also continued to indicate that South Asian victims/children face barriers to disclosure that are dependent on cultural barriers such as family/community shame:

'Children from minority ethnic backgrounds are under-represented in all agency data, meaning their experiences of child sexual abuse are missed even more frequently by official agencies than those of White children' (Karsna and Kelly, 2021; p.84).

On the back of these concerns, the CSA Centre commissioned research to explore the experiences of racially minoritised children further, publishing the Ali *et al.* (2021) report. During this period, I was emerging as one of the few researchers investigating this subject, and my preliminary work was cited in this report. In response to gaps in practice, Ali *et al.*

(2021) outlined how improvements could be made. Findings echoed previous research in that South Asian and other racially minoritised children were likely to experience specific barriers. Sexual purity was a factor of concern for South Asian females, fearing ostracisation from families or forced marriage as a response to disclosure, and there was a call to increase understanding about this. There was again a recognition that, amidst the widely discussed CSE model of the Asian male committing sexual offences against White females, the experience of South Asian female victims/survivors was being neglected. Having interviewed a group of professionals who had worked with racially minoritised children and families, the findings by Ali *et al.* (2021) included experiences of victims/survivors which centred on community concerns about female purity and chastity, and community shame and honour. They also indicated inadequacies in professional practice and suggested areas for development to achieve culturally competent practice. The research was the first attempt at seeking the perspective of UK professionals who were supporting racially minoritised children, who were victims/survivors of CSA, and through them, documenting the experiences of the children. Some of the research outcomes, in terms of practice guidance, have been developed by the CSA Centre as part of its response pathway (CSA Centre, n.d.). More tangible practice changes are still being defined, to which I plan to contribute.

Voices of British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA were represented for the first time in the Gill and Harrison (2019) paper. This was a combined analysis of sexual violence of women, in addition to CSA. Nevertheless, it indicated, through victims/survivors themselves, that the cultural constructs of shame and honour, and restraints of living in patriarchal familial and community settings, were significant barriers to disclosing and reporting CSA. The intersections of gender and race were discussed by Gill and Begum (2022) in the aforementioned edited collection on CSA in racially minoritised communities, where the authors seek to disrupt dominant discourses about CSA and victim/survivor experiences. My own chapter in this collection (Jassal, 2022) calls for greater attention to

this by those responsible for UK child protection practice and policy, with arguments centring on the limitations of viewing the problem as shame and honour alone, and also of the risks of professionals pathologising or essentialising cultural norms, traditions and values. Instead, as documented in Chapter 7 of this thesis, there is a need to integrate these facets of South Asian experiences of CSA into mainstream practice and policy.

In more recent years, IICSA has interviewed victims/survivors through its Truth project, and its documentation of the needs of racially minoritised groups was produced following focus groups consisting of 15 victims/survivors (Rodger *et al.*, 2020). The title of the relevant report, *"People don't talk about it"*, indicated that some communities felt that they were unable to disclose to family members or agencies. Hence, support for them was impeded. A further report from IICSA, which explored racially minoritised communities' engagement with services (Kaiser *et al.*, 2021), documented shame and honour as a significant barrier. Information on South Asian experiences of CSA was, by this period, frequently raising shame and honour as barriers to disclosing and reporting. The Inquiry's final report concluded:

'Respect for a diversity of beliefs is the hallmark of a liberal democracy but can never be used to justify harm to a child. There were significant barriers to effective reporting of child sexual abuse, including victim-blaming and notions of shame and honour (Jay et al., 2022; p.7).

The Conservative Government's response to the final report (HM Government, 2023b) promised a plethora of financial and strategic responses but failed to mention even once the needs of racially minoritised children and families, and the barriers that they may be experiencing. Meghji (2021) discusses how CRT offers a lens through which the embedded social structures of racism in Britain can be better understood. This inaction by the previous Government appears to demonstrate these very structures and fails to evidence a

commitment to understanding the needs of communities defined by collective identities.

Developing an understanding of collectivist communities through an intersectional lens

Impediments to disclosing and reporting CSA rooted in a sense of collectivism have been reported in several communities. The examples below illustrate a commonality of locating family/community concerns beyond the individual's needs. This indicates that South Asian experiences of CSA are, in that sense, not unique. However, the term 'shame and honour' is not employed in these papers, except for Arab communities.

South Eastern communities represented several themes which allude to collectivist concerns. Futa *et al.* (2001) conducted research with Southeast Asian students in the USA. They found that victims/survivors tended to internalise their feelings, and did not want to involve child protection services, with the authors concluding that '*Individual members may be overlooked in order to maintain family unity, harmony, and community*' (Futa *et al.*, 2001; p.194). Back *et al.* (2003) report that Singaporean women were less likely than their White counterparts in the USA to disclose, owing to a strong sense of duty towards their family. Chen *et al.* (2004) found that CSA was rarely reported in China. Sil and Soo (2008) discuss intra-familial CSA within Korean communities and conclude that within collective societies, victims/survivors are disregarded when problems such as incest arise, due to protecting the family from shame, thus contributing to low rates of disclosure, strong denial, and under-reporting of intra-familial sexual abuse. Chan *et al.* (2011) researched Chinese children's perspectives on abuse and found that filial piety and loyalty to parents were predominant concerns for children, impeding disclosures. Li *et al.* (2012) report that adherence to Confucianism values of family and patriarchal norms results in low reporting of CSA, with victims/survivors thereby experiencing significant psychological distress. In examining CSA

in South Korea, Choi *et al.* (2015) report that '*caretakers are unlikely to report sexual abuse in Asian cultures ...in order to spare embarrassment and loss of face within the community*' (p.81).

In Arab communities, patriarchy was apparent as a significant barrier. Haj-Yahia and Tamish (2001) discuss the impediment to male and female disclosures of Palestinian students due to the patriarchal structures of Arab societies, indicating the risk of KNSCH following disclosure. Haboush *et al.* (2013) found that within the Arab culture, the constructs of shame and honour were pervasive. Horvath *et al.* (2014) reported that because CSA in Turkey is perceived as a social taboo, this impacts family and community responses to it. It has been useful to present findings that evidence cultural barriers across several so-called collectivist societies, as this potentially offers a broader set of lessons from this thesis.

It was also informative to explore feminist works from the Global South, specifically the Indian subcontinent, for two reasons. Firstly, although settler South Asian communities, second generation and beyond, will feel a lesser connection to the Indian subcontinent, their lives can still be intertwined with influences from it (Robinson, 2009). The influence of shame and honour is one such example. Secondly, how feminist scholars in the Indian subcontinent were making sense of male-perpetrated violence against women, more broadly, was of interest. Across the 21st century, feminist groups in India have vociferously campaigned against violence against women and girls, following high-profile cases such as the gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old physiotherapy student in New Delhi in 2012. The #MeToo movement in India added impetus to these endeavours and has seen feminism adopt a new wave of action in the Indian subcontinent, with its Slutwalk and Pink Chaddi campaigns (Roy, 2018). Mohajan and Mohajan (2022) discuss the efforts of such feminist action to fight gender-based oppression in the Indian subcontinent. The 2024 elections in India demonstrated that women were becoming more vocal about their safety, coming out to vote

at a higher rate than ever before, almost reaching 50% of the total vote (Business Today, 2024). Such events suggest that the feminist movement in the Indian subcontinent has gained significant momentum in the political and media spheres. Although an analysis of the impact of such movements goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it is helpful to evaluate whether British South Asian women have been able to garner similar attention and awareness-raising against gender-based abuse and oppression. UK organisations such as Southall Black Sisters (n.d.) and Karma Nirvana (n.d.) are well-established UK charities that represent racially minoritised girls and women in the context of abuse and violence. They have been actively involved in supporting affected girls and women and in significant policy reform, such as the introduction of the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 (UK Public General Acts, n.d.). However, it is fair to surmise that their activism and work have been less visible than that seen on the Indian subcontinent, possibly symptomatic of being a part of migrant and colonial histories. This indicates that the voices and experiences of British South Asian women who are victims of patriarchal norms and abuse remain marginalised, despite the efforts of such groups.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has discussed the feminist works within which CSA has been, and continues to be framed in the West, predominantly in Britain. This includes the contributions of White, as well as those of later feminists of colour through postcolonial and intersectional feminisms. Developments in intersectional feminist works have made essential contributions in reporting on the experiences of racially minoritised communities, and the experiences of male-perpetrated abuse of women. The chapter has also discussed literature on CSA in British South Asian communities, which represents a context that is heavily influenced by a collectivist culture governed by concerns of shame and honour. This has increased the vulnerability of girls and women to male-perpetrated abuse and adds to relevant discussions about gender inequality and patriarchy. CSA in such contexts is therefore likely to occur in a

gender-based sphere of double disadvantage and exploitation.

Although there have been developments in recent years towards expanding the knowledge base about CSA as experienced by racially minoritised communities living in the Western world, this has been late coming. This makes CRT a relevant lens through which to examine this neglect. Furthermore, it has primarily depended on the efforts and investments of South Asian and Black scholars. This thesis continues this pattern. Who tells whose story has been a critical development in postcolonial and intersectional feminist literature, and whose voices have been and continue to be minimally heard or even absent, remains an equally significant point. At this stage in the thesis, I will take the liberty of claiming that, as a British South Asian woman with roots in postcolonial history, I am helping to tell the story of British South Asian women, simply because they should have the same rights and access to spaces to share their experiences. Before these stories are shared, the next chapter will set out the research methodology adopted in this thesis.

Chapter 3

A Feminist and Narrative Research Methodology

'Feminist research has stressed a set of common epistemological features: focuses on subjective interpretations of social experience, respects the role of reflexivity in the research process, acknowledges the contextual and relational nature of knowledge, rejects subject-object dualisms, and values the relationship between the researcher and the participant, attends gender, power, and transformative social action'.

(Mohajan and Mohajan, 2022; p.45).

Chapter introduction

The previous chapter examined CSA and the bodies of theoretical knowledge through which it has been framed. This chapter establishes the link between these theoretical concepts and the study's research methodology, which is structured around a feminist standpoint epistemology and narrative inquiry. The chapter discusses how this methodology facilitated the thesis's development. As the quote at the start of this chapter indicates, research guided by a commitment to explore female lived experiences will be impacted by certain principles. This primarily includes giving women a voice by creating a space where they can tell their stories in the way they wish. Through this approach, the research sought to bring forward narratives that have too often been excluded, and to see their stories as knowledge itself. A narrative inquiry approach also acknowledges my involvement in this co-construction of meaning. It recognises that, through listening to and interpreting what they told me, the research would be shaped by our interactions. Researcher reflexivity, therefore, is a critical component of this methodology, and this chapter will provide a commentary on this, as well as how I mitigated against researcher bias. How I refrained from deviating from the women's stories as the source of knowledge is also set out towards the end of the chapter.

There will also be a discussion of the philosophical traditions guiding the research design. One's meaning of life and reality is subjective and created by one's sense of the world. Defined as a researcher's ontological and epistemological standpoints, these philosophical leanings are a key driver in influencing any research design. They are critical in explaining and justifying a particular research approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

Therefore, a brief recap of the epistemological and ontological stances behind this thesis will be presented first and foremost in this chapter. This will be followed by a discussion of the specific research questions guiding the research, as well as decisions about the research sample and recruitment strategy, research methods, and data analysis. The chapter will also include the ethical considerations I made as the researcher, my positionality as a researcher, and the reflexive approaches I adopted. Finally, it will discuss the limitations of this research.

Research philosophies

Ontological questions relate to the nature of reality and what we come to believe. This thesis sought to test this by exploring what shame and honour actually meant to victims/survivors, rather than assuming they had a fixed meaning applicable to all members of British South Asian communities. This approach recognises that the meaning we give to our social world is determined by a range of social structures and the interactions between social actors (Grant and Osanloo, 2014; Morgner, 2022). Namely, that our social world is socially constructed and that these structures are to be interrogated so that new meanings, unheard experiences, and hidden voices and perspectives can become known. A fundamental component of this perspective is getting to the heart of the issue through a bottom-up approach, which requires starting with the people about whom a supposed truth is being presented (Clark *et al.*, 2021).

This thesis started with the premise that we are insufficiently knowledgeable about British South Asian experiences of CSA and therefore, have a limited sense of what this reality is. Shame and honour are complex phenomena, and although this thesis is not seeking to examine this per se, it argues that there is a need to understand the constructs better as they have been applied to CSA in British South Asian communities. How an understanding of them was to be gained, was therefore, given considerable epistemological attention. A feminist standpoint epistemology was adopted, centring on the direct experiences of 15 South Asian women who were victims/survivors of CSA. Feminist standpoint theory purports the value of knowledge production through the experiences and perspectives of those who have previously been marginalised, and recognises that they are best placed to provide insights into the social structures and power relations that have been overlooked (Binte Mohiuddin, 2025). The research methodology therefore adopted an interpretivist approach, setting out to examine the women's social reality as they told it and noting the meaning they gave to it. This co-production of knowledge would mitigate against presenting findings in any singular or simplified way, and instead would attribute weight to their unique experiences, individual relationships, and personal sense-making about what they had experienced. The objective was to avoid generalising or compartmentalising what are often complex, multi-layered, and nuanced experiences.

Having spent over 20 years in the field of child protection and writing the literature review for this thesis, I was aware of the enormity of undisclosed CSA across Britain (and globally). The epistemological approach was, therefore, one that would locate the voice of victims/survivors at its core, allowing their lived experiences to be brought to the forefront through their voices. Furthermore, insights into the experiences of CSA, as told by victims/survivors, remain critical to developing practice and policy knowledge in responding to this abuse (Council of Europe, 2024). CSA victims/survivors are often termed 'silent' victims, as they rarely disclose the abuse with anyone, rarely report it, and often carry the

weight of their experience throughout their lives. This is summarised in the 2014 UK Children's Commissioner's Report, investigating intra-familial CSA:

'[The] voices of child victims of sexual abuse within the family environment are largely absent despite the many years of research into this matter and tens of thousands of papers published' (Horvath et al., 2014; p.6).

The absence of voices relaying the South Asian experience of CSA, even 50 years after literature on CSA and victim/survivor voices had emerged, was concerning. Even in 2024, when this thesis was nearing its end, there remained limited discussion about CSA in racially minoritised communities in Britain, across practice and policy sectors. Developments led by the CSA Centre have made a firm step forward in addressing this, with the publication of Dhaliwal's (2024) report, to which I had contributed. This thesis makes a further contribution to these developments and gives voice to the largely unheard and unknown experiences of British South Asian CSA female victims/survivors. Having introduced the ontological and epistemological perspectives guiding this research, the remainder of the chapter will elucidate how these perspectives informed the research methodology, first by exploring the research sample and data collection methods.

Sampling and data collection

The decision to choose women as the research sample was made due to CSA being perpetrated predominantly by males against females. Also, the 'shame and honour' construct as a barrier to disclosing and reporting in South Asian communities was reported to affect South Asian women more than men. Although this thesis recognises that South Asian males are also victims/survivors of CSA, and can be impacted by 'shame and honour' in their lives (Begum, 2018; Mansoor, 2017; Jaspal, 2020), broadening the focus beyond South Asian women risked diluting the breadth of their experiences, and once again, risked marginalising their voices.

Although there has been an increasing body of knowledge emerging about female experiences of CSA since the 1970s (Morgan, 1970; Oakley, 1972; Herman, 1981; Finkelhor, 1986; La Fontaine, 1990; Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Allnock *et al.*, 2015; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; McElvaney, 2016; Nelson, 2016; Dubowitz, 2017; Kelly and Karsna, 2017; Lemaigre *et al.*, 2017; McNeish and Scott, 2018), there was a notable absence of discourses reflecting the experiences of South Asian women living in the West. Scholars have sought to address this (Bernard, 2001; Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006; Harrison and Gill, 2017a; Karsna and Kelly, 2021; Jassal, 2022; Scott, 2023), but research on their specific experiences remains sparse, and one could argue that this reflects decades of limited academic and governmental investigation. This research has probed further into the readily accepted narrative of CSA disclosures and reporting in British South Asian communities as being impeded by 'cultural barriers', as it seemed that this was too simplistic a presentation of a social reality consisting of abuse, trauma, and significantly, voices which were absent in the literature and the practice and policy domains. These experiences appeared to be simplified, generalised, and marginalised. In alignment with feminist research methodologies seeking to address such reductionism and omissions (Harcourt *et al.*, 2022), this thesis adopted a methodological approach which centred on the women.

The recruitment strategy

The women were recruited through purposive sampling as this approach "*allows researchers to select participants who have the most experience or knowledge about the phenomenon under study, providing rich, relevant data*" (Campbell *et al.*, 2020; p. 653). The recruitment phase spanned 2017-21, and although hesitancy amongst CSA victims/survivors to come forward and participate in the research had been expected, the extent of the challenge had not. The silence in participants volunteering for the research appeared to echo the silence about CSA in British South Asian communities. During 2017-18, the Research Advert (Appendix 1) was emailed to all national CSA victim/survivor services and

to other organisations identified as possible gatekeepers to CSA victims/survivors (Appendix 6). This generated a minimal response. A few organisations responded, stating they would keep the research on file and that they were rarely contacted by South Asian victims/survivors. A national women's rape and sexual violence organisation informed me about one of its centres supporting South Asian women. This was the breakthrough needed. That centre provided two of the initial research participants. Having seen the research advertised on social media, a second organisation supporting South Asian women worked with me to promote the research amongst its local community. This generated a few additional research participants.

All English local authorities were also sent the research advert. Not a single one replied, which, again, seemed to echo the silence mentioned above. The majority of research participants learned about the research through the X/Twitter account created for this research, which followers across Instagram channels sometimes shared. This widened the research's reach, as some women would not have been able to access the support services where the research was being promoted. The use of social media to promote the research also provides valuable insights into recruiting CSA victims/survivors for research. There is complete anonymity until they choose to respond, and hence a greater sense of control, with no pressure or obligation to participate or even respond. The approach also provides them with time and space to consider their participation. For some who had come to know about the research through these means, it was the first time that they had disclosed the abuse to anyone. This indicates the importance of having time, anonymity, privacy, time and space, before participants decide to partake in CSA research.

Some of the women came across the research advert when browsing online for information on CSA in South Asian communities. This was either out of curiosity about what developments, if any, were taking shape in this area, or seeking support for themselves.

During this process, they either discovered the website I had created for the research or my online profile as a child protection academic, which linked to the research. They reported feeling pleased on discovering that someone was researching the subject, and shared that they were eager to get in touch with me and participate. The research had revealed that there was a group of victims/survivors who, although silent through non-disclosure, were expressing a desire to share their experiences. Qualitative research does not stipulate minimum and maximum sample sizes, as the emphasis is on whether the data generated is adequate for the identified method of analysis. The recruited sample of 15 was deemed sufficient for a narrative research design.

Profile of the 15 research participants

The specific criteria for the sample were: Gender (Female); Ethnicity (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani); Nationality (British); and age (21+). This provided a level of homogeneity across the sample which is necessary in qualitative research. Table 3 provides a profile of the 15 women, including demographic details at the time of interview, and factors related to their CSA experience. These details demonstrate the various intersections of the women's identities, which are discussed across the thesis to varying degrees.

All women identified as second-generation due to being born in the UK or having moved to the UK at a very young age. Their parents were described mainly as first-generation migrants, born in the Indian subcontinent. They all defined as British nationals, and when asked about their ethnicity, eight recorded as Indian, five as Pakistani, and two as Bangladeshi. These figures reflect the representative sizes of the communities living in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2021). However, with British Pakistani and particularly British Bangladeshi communities reported as experiencing greater socio-economic disparities than British Indians, this imbalance in the sample suggests that access to my research may have posed particular barriers for Pakistani and Bangladeshi

victims/survivors.

In other aspects, the sample represented a good spread. The women's ages ranged from 21 to 61, with the majority in the 21-31 or 32-41 age bands. The geographical location of the abuse and the participants' locations at the time of the interview (not shared in the thesis) indicated that the research achieved broad national coverage. 12 out of the 15 were graduates, and 11 were employed.

Table 3 also outlines the relationship between the women and the alleged perpetrator, which carries particular significance in that most were members of the extended family as opposed to fathers or step-fathers, who are reported as making up the highest proportion in White communities (Scott, 2023). This alludes to the form of families in which the women were raised, where relatives were a standard part of family life. Extended families are discussed in Chapter 5 as a risk factor. There were two perpetrators who were religious figureheads in the community, and there was a particular power dynamic narrated by one of the women in this context, in terms of a fear of not being believed if she disclosed that someone of such religious standing had perpetrated the abuse. The narratives of the second women abused within a religious context spoke less about this but more about the hypocrisy of religion and its values within a South Asian context. There were three female perpetrators, a sizeable minority of the sample, and a feature that presented particular sense-making for the women and me as a researcher. Findings here related to how abuse perpetrated by females was, or would be, interpreted by families.

As the research sample consists of second-generation South Asian women living in Britain, facets of inter-generational family life were relevant to explore in this thesis. This includes defining whether the alleged perpetrators were first- or second-generation South

Asians, and Table 3 evidences a relatively even split. This was not something that I had asked the women, wanting to inquire about the actual abuse and the alleged perpetrator, as minimally as possible. However, I was able to discern this through their narratives. Although this research does not examine perpetrator identities or behaviours, I believe it was relevant to briefly include these details here to highlight the nuances and complexity of CSA once again.

Table 3 also illustrates the form of disclosure as shared by the women. Chapter 1 has discussed the complexity of disclosure, but most children and adults do disclose to someone, though this is less likely to be a professional. Table 3 also illustrates this. None of the women had disclosed or reported the abuse to statutory services as children. Two had decided to do so in adulthood. One of the women had retracted her statement to the police, and the second was pursuing a criminal charge against the perpetrator many years after the abuse had taken place. Reporting to statutory agencies has not been included in the table due to the risk of identifying the women and the live case at the time of writing.

Four of the 14 women who had disclosed had done so to a non-abusing parent or parents. At just under a quarter of the sample, this is not an insignificant number. However, these women expressed a deep sense of regret, as discussed in Chapter 6. Three others had disclosed only to their male spouse, rather than to anyone who was biologically related. A similar number had disclosed to support services such as counselling. One of the women had never disclosed to anyone other than me. In summary, the patterns of disclosure related here align with the literature discussing the complexity of disclosure. For this research, however, it is important to highlight that the women did disclose and decide to speak about the abuse. However, these disclosures remained within the confines of their familial spaces, as will be examined in the empirical chapters.

Table 3: Profile of research participants and relevant CSA details

The five participants shaded in grey experienced significant ramifications from their disclosure, and these findings are discussed in Chapter 6.

Research participant (pseudonyms)	Age	Ethnicity	Education level	Employment status	Geographical location of abuse (optional)	Perpetrator (First/Second generation)	Form of disclosure
<i>All identified as second generation</i>							
Sonam	21-31	Bangladeshi	UG (due to complete)	Employed	London	Male cousin (Second generation)	As an adult: disclosed to her sister, friend and university staff.
Priya	51-61	Indian	UG degree	Employed	Left blank	Male priest. (First generation)	As an adult: disclosed to a distant relative, and counsellor.
Zara	32-41	Pakistani	NVQ Level 2	Unemployed/ volunteering	Lancashire	Male cousin. (Second generation)	As an adult: disclosed to her husband, and support services.
Laila	21-31	Bangladeshi	UG degree	Employed	West Yorkshire	Male family friend. (First generation)	As an adult: to her parents.
Parminder	32-41	Indian	PhD	Employed	Warwickshire	Brother and uncle. First and second generation respectively)	As an adult: to her counsellor.
Sofia	21-31	Pakistani	PhD (due to complete)	Student	West Midlands	Female cousin (Second generation)	As an adult: to her parents and siblings.
Yasmeen	32-41	Pakistani	UG degree	Unemployed	Greater Manchester	Brother. (Second generation)	As a child: never disclosed the abuse to anyone but stated that it was known in the family. As an adult: to support services.
Kully	32-41	Indian	UG degree	Housewife	West Midlands	Aunt. (First generation)	As an adult: to her husband.
Kiran	32-41	Indian	UG degree	Employed	West Midlands	Father. (First generation)	As an adult: to her non-abusing parent and siblings.
Miriam	32-41	Pakistani	UG degree	Employed	South West England	Uncle. (First generation)	As a child: to her non-abusing parent. As an adult: to support services.

Tina	21-31	Indian	MA degree	Employed	Berkshire	Female cousin. (Second generation)	As an adult: to her parents and siblings.
Jas	42-51	Indian	GNVQ	Employed	West Midlands	Male priest. (First generation)	As an adult: to her husband and support services.
Salma	21-31	Pakistani	A' Levels	Employed	East Midlands	Male cousin. (Second generation)	As a child: to her non-abusing parent. As an adult: to her partner.
Satinder	32-41	Indian	UG degree	Employed	West Midlands	Male cousin. (Second generation)	As an adult: to one of her parents.
Roshni	32-41	Indian	MA degree	Employed	East Midlands	Family member (does not specify).	Never disclosed to anyone.

Guided conversations/semi-structured interviews

Guided conversations/semi-structured interviews were adopted as the research method, facilitating attention to what participants were saying, how they were saying it, and the meaning they attributed to what was being said. Seidman (2013) states that such methods are adopted because of an *'interest in other individuals' stories [and] because they are of worth'* (p.9). They enable a conversation with the research participant; hence, the term 'guided conversation' is increasingly preferred, although the term 'interview' will be used in this thesis. Traditionally, narrative research avoids guiding the conversation with questions, as in semi-structured interviews, preferring a less structured format (Mills and Fleetwood, 2020). There may also be a preference for more than a single conversation with the participant. Why this research deviated slightly from these conventions is explained in the following section.

Due to concerns about triggering the women and making the experience too intrusive, a single interview of 1-1.5 hours seemed appropriate. Furthermore, the interview

questions (Appendix 4) were designed to guide the conversation rather than restrict it. They were introduced naturally and often flowed into one another as the women narrated their stories. Clark *et al.* (2021) and Elhami and Khoshnevisan (2022) discuss the effectiveness of interviews as a research method when conducted skilfully, and I had invested considerable time in preparing for each interview, building on the learning from previous ones. Within a narrative design, the emphasis is on how the researcher approaches what is heard, and the processes of interviewing were therefore a critical part of my research design.

Eight of the conversations were held face-to-face, in comfortable locations, often buildings delivering support/counselling services and with a nurturing ambience. The rooms were in a private, quiet part of the building, and snacks and drinks were provided to create a warm, welcoming environment. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the remaining seven conversations were conducted online via the MS Teams platform using my university staff account. This involved revising the ethics form to include confirmation from the IT department that the live online interview would be secure and private, accessible only by me. The department also confirmed that the recording would only be available to me. The revisions also included participants' agreement to an online interview and their satisfaction with its security measures. The women were supported through this change, including ensuring that they were comfortable with both the time and place for an online interview. This was critically important as the interview now needed to be held in their home, and I was concerned about whether there would be sufficient privacy for them with their family members being unaware of the abuse. Furthermore, without my physical presence, signs of distress could be missed. After implementing measures to address these concerns, the online interviews went well. There was still an intimacy with the participants, and cues of discomfort, were still notable. In addition, the women still felt comfortable sharing their experiences freely. All 15 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Having discussed the sample and research method, the following section homes in on the narrative

design of this research and its analytical method.

Narrative inquiry

Developments in social research have been mammoth in moving away from positivist research methods, leading to a plethora of qualitative and interpretivist approaches (Aguzzoli *et al.*, 2024). With a rich theoretical background stemming from a focus on the individual (McAllum *et al.*, 2019), the key premise of an interpretivist approach is that, rather than reality having a single, universal meaning accepted by everyone, it is composed of multiple perspectives stemming from individual experiences and social interactions. Within such paradigms, research designs framed around the stories people share, and the narratives that emerged, examined individual human experiences to a particularly profound level (Holloway and Jefferson, 2013; Colla and Kurtz, 2024), be it through the sharing of oral narratives, written, visual, or other materials (Andrews *et al.*, 2013; Condon *et al.*, 2024). Stories are a part of everyday human communication, with people telling stories to each other to give meaning to what has happened to them (Wong and Breheny, 2018). They are more than a simple recounting of experiences, and play a part in people's lives in ways that matter deeply (Kim, 2015; Lloyd, 2023).

As social constructionism emphasises social phenomena as multifaceted and constructed through our own experiences in the social world, narrative constructionism focuses on how, through the narratives individuals share, multiple versions of a particular social reality are available for study. The terms narrative and story can be used interchangeably in the literature on narrative research, but there is a distinction. The story is the participant's recounting of events, and the narrative is the context that gives these events broader meaning. It is the narratives that provide deeper analysis of the stories being told,

enabling the researcher to eventually identify cross-data findings (Sandberg, 2022).

Beyond the content of what is shared, close attention is given to how something is being told. Pauses and silences were carefully noted, and these can be significant occurrences when undertaking research with those who have experienced trauma; here, what is unsaid can be just as significant as what is said (Richardson and Allison, 2019). Furthermore, why something is being conveyed is also important. In short, the researcher's key role is to listen and produce an interpretation that reflects the participant's individual sense-making of their experience. This process of data collection is what enables the participant's story to become the unit of analysis, what Smith (2016) labels as 'storied data'. Narrative data has also been identified as an effective means of hearing marginalised voices (Etherington, 2000; Ballantine, 2021), further supporting its suitability for this research.

Plummer (1995) employed narratives as an interpretive device in his voluminous collection of stories about people's sexual experiences, stating that this had allowed people to share experiences that had have often been difficult to speak about. In her attempts to convey the experiences of Somali women affected by the Somali civil war, also a context about which one would find it challenging to speak, Sobral (2019) applied a narrative lens on the fictional works of diasporic Somali women writers. Referencing their writings, she illustrated the deep sense of shame felt by Somali women, both in the context of traditional gender inequalities and as a consequence of war and migration. Sobral (ibid) cites the texts used by the writers to interpret Somali women's experiences of isolation, abandonment, and shame, commenting on the meanings such narratives may convey. Focusing on what the writers have said and how they have said it, allows Sobral to highlight experiences of Somali women in these contexts that are otherwise likely to remain unheard.

This research aimed to explore the multiplicity of experiences shared by the 15 women. Although shame and honour were aspects of the interviews, centralising the women's contributions and adopting a strong focus on each of their stories and the multiple facets within each enabled rich findings. To facilitate this process, I considered the following questions during the data analysis stage:

- a) What meaning did the women give to their individual experiences of CSA?
- b) What does this add to the existing knowledge base?
- c) What was my role as a researcher in presenting this knowledge as close as possible to their interpretation of it?

Tenets of narrative analysis

As the above section indicates, there is considerable flexibility in narrative research designs, as the research participant takes the lead in the interview. This is why there is no *'prescribed, step-by-step, linear procedure'* for analysing narrative data (Smith, 2016; p.203). No suitable computerised systems facilitate the analysis of narrative data (Josselson and Hammack, 2021), making the analysis stage a daunting process for narrative researchers. At the same time, this lack of uniformity, rigidity, and resistance to categorisation, is also a strength. The analysis of data involves what Smith (2016) calls a constant 'movement of thought', with the researcher loosely seeing the data, entering, pursuing, and identifying unexpected directions. It is this freedom with the data that encourages the discovery of new territories absent from the existing literature (Kim, 2015). Furthermore, as Barnwell and Ravn (2024) state, the *'concern is not so much with what constitutes a narrative as with what narratives can do'* (p.4). Nevertheless, it is helpful to discuss some guiding models and frameworks espoused by key narrative scholars before describing the mode of analysis

adopted in this research.

Kim (2015) summarises the approaches of three critical protagonists of narrative analysis: Donald Polkinghorne, Elliot Mischler, and William Labov. She discusses how a researcher can adopt one or more of their facets, which have been set out below:

- a) Focus on a particular event and the implications of this for the person, and for the other characters in the story;
- b) Allow the narrative to stretch across a life course, and the analysis stitches up the various elements to provide a coherent story;
- c) Identify a beginning, a middle, and an end of a story, with an analysis of who was involved and the importance of the setting;
- d) Emphasises the time and location.

Smith (2016) outlines additional models: thematic, interactional, performative, rhetorical, personal, visual, and dialogical, which consist of some of the features of Polkinghorne, Mischler, and Labov listed above. Sandberg (2022) discusses four forms: thematic, structural, performative, and dialogical. The variety of models demonstrates the complexity that is sought to be captured and reflects the reality that, whatever model is used, it will need to be designed around the data. Qualitative research often generates large volumes of data, and the researcher must decide how best to process them in a structured way. Generally, the steps involve defining, categorising, theorising, exploring, mapping, and interpreting data (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002). Depending on the analysis method, it can be a time-intensive stage. The data generated in this research was extensive. Having adopted an interview style that allowed each woman to tell her story freely, it was important that the analysis captured the varying elements and factors that had been shared by the women (Harcourt *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, as the interview was the sole research instrument, any

analytical process needed to optimise the generated data.

The mode of narrative analysis adopted in this research

Having explored several models, a process of analysis was designed to enable as close an alignment as possible with the aim of the thesis. The aim was to understand how British South Asian women make sense of their experience of CSA. People narrate their stories in a particular way and give individual meaning to the characters and events (Fehér, 2011; Westerhof *et al.*, 2020). This needed to be examined in a way that avoided categorisation in the early stages of the analysis. The mode of analysis, therefore, paid close attention to the content of the story, the individual meanings the women attributed to it, and the rhetorical devices they used when sharing it. It also noted the diversions they took in telling their story. As these stories were very much untold and unheard, they demanded a bespoke model that captured not only their essence but also the nuances and details of events, characters, and settings in each story. Aligning with the tenets of narrative analysis, this would also ensure that data were not overly interpreted in light of preconceived notions about the social reality being explored (Denscombe, 2014). Therefore, it was only after each transcribed interview was analysed as a single unit of analysis that broader narratives were defined.

Many of the women recounted their experience of abuse in the context of what life was like before the abuse, during the abuse, and after the abuse. Therefore, the model was based on a temporal framework, as in many existing models. This would consist of three periods in each of the women's lives: pre-abuse, the period of abuse, and post-abuse, exploring their experiences of CSA across the course of their lives. This would include how they perceived and experienced the abuse in the past, its impact on their present life, and what it means for them as they move into the future. Sometimes events block people's lives,

and through narratives, they can remove the blockage and move on. Through this, we can come to understand the world and our experiences within it in new ways. As John (2023) states, a key characteristic of narrative research is the recognition that individuals see their lives in terms of continuity. This was an appealing feature of narrative research, as it offered the women an opportunity to position themselves and their lives in a more positive light. Hence, elements of the 'personal' model, with its capacity to capture stories as they evolve (Smith, 2016), were also integrated.

However, this temporality was rarely conveyed in a linear, chronological manner. The women often returned to events to fill in gaps in their stories, jumping across the different time periods of their lives. This disruption to the linear, beginning, middle, and end characteristics of narratives is a feature of trauma narratives (Mezzalira, 2022). Therefore, although I interpreted their stories through a lens of continuity, I also allowed the women to sense-make in the manner that felt most natural and authentic to them. Furthermore, there are documented cultural differences in how stories are told, with non-Western storytelling tending to be less orderly in its narration of events (Vretudaki, 2025).

The 'performative' model of narrative analysis discussed in the literature (Smith, 2016) was also relevant, given the level of curiosity about why participants were sharing their stories in this particular research, in the way they were, and at this specific moment in time. Stories are told with a purpose in mind, often with a particular intention (Wong and Breheny, 2018), and so this feature allowed for this consideration. Finally, the five stages of narrative analysis developed by Josselson and Hammack (2016) provided the technical guidance for managing the data to the depth desired. Data from one of the interviews is used as an example to illustrate these stages.

Before the analysis stage commenced, the interview recording was listened to. This allowed a re-familiarisation with the woman, the tones in which she spoke, and a sense of once again being present with her. A first reading of the transcript followed this, without adding any notes. This individualised each conversation, diverting from some of the themes that had started to emerge across the dataset during the transcribing process. There were five further stages of analysis. Appendix 7 includes the analysis template created for this research. These five stages are listed below and involve examining the transcript multiple times to identify the stories within it, their essence, how they were told, their structure, and the narratives they tell. Rhetorical devices such as pauses, sighs, tears, changes in tone, and any deviations that appeared were noted. This involved considerable immersion with the data, moving back and forth across each transcript.

Stage 1: Noting points of interest

The transcript was read a second time, and this time, points of interest (POI) were underlined. These were points that appeared to be significant to the participant and/or of interest to me as the researcher. For example, in Parminder's transcript, I underlined the following:

'[A]ny thought of disclosing anything, you would be...too fearful of what would happen to your own family'.

'[I]f you're growing up in a family where uhm they've still got very traditional views, then I assume that that would trickle down into the children at some point through socialisation'.

The decision about POI was made using the criteria of frequency, or the impact on the participant when telling, or the impact on me as a researcher when hearing what was being told; any one of these three criteria would qualify for inclusion as a POI.

Stage 2: Labelling points of interest to form sub-narratives

On the third reading, the POI were given brief descriptions or labels to identify them as either core or less prominent aspects of the story. These were called sub-narratives. They were defined according to the same criteria above, which had identified them as POI. In addition, there was consideration of whether they sufficiently fit in with the research questions for this thesis. Stories that did not were defined as less prominent sub-narratives and aspects of the story that did not develop into a narrative form, were labelled as *non-narrative form*.

For example, when Parminder shared that '*[H]e was the baby of the family, uhm...and in my eyes, I kind of protected him from a lot*', this was identified as a core sub-narrative labelled as *Loyalty to family*.

Other core sub-narratives for Parminder included:

1. *Disclosures not happening for a variety of reasons (normalising abuse, self-blame, religious, cultural, shame, fear, community norms).*
2. *Religion as creating certain social norms.*
3. *Transitioning from self-blame to non self-blame.*

Less prominent sub-narratives included:

- a) *Father as a protective factor but unaware of abuse.*
- b) *No desire to understand the offender's (possible victim) experience.*

All sub-narratives were listed on an A2 sheet, Column 1 representing 'core narratives', which were numbered, and Column 2 depicting 'less prominent sub-narratives', which were lettered. Both lists were presented in the order of their appearance in the transcript, which was significant during the later analysis stage. For example, in Parminder's account, the

core sub-narrative about *Impact on mental health* appears late in the conversation, point 20 out of a total of 23 core sub-narratives, and indicates a tendency of some women to possibly under-estimate the impact of these complex and traumatic experiences on the rest of their lives.

Stage 3: Re-reading the transcript to add to it, the core and less prominent sub-narratives, and to identify additional sub-narratives

On the fourth reading, the numbers and letters corresponding to the sub-narratives were added to the transcript line by line as a process of cross-checking and to see whether other sub-narratives could be identified. A fifth reading was undertaken to check this for a final time. If there were new sub-narratives, these were added to the lists. After stages 2 and 3, there were often 20-30 sub-narratives in total showing on the A2 sheet.

Stage 4: Grouping existing sub-narratives into themes

All the sub-narratives listed on the A2 sheet were studied to determine where they could be grouped into broader themes, but, due to a reluctance to excessive categorisation, they still numbered between 15 and 20 at the end of this stage.

A sixth and final reading of the transcript involved stepping back from these themes and cross-checking them with the research questions, leading to the identification of a final set of core narratives. These were considered within a broader context, whilst still connected to the personal story. By the end of this stage, the number of core narratives in each transcript had often halved.

Stage 5: Thematising the narratives across the data set to form grand narratives

Once the individual-storied data were analysed across stages 1-4 and their individual contributions were valued, the core narratives across the dataset of 15 interviews were thematised into *grand narratives*. This stage was the interpretive stage of the analysis and is what is shared as findings in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Due to a duty of care to the women and concerns about triggering, member checking was not undertaken. This is a feature of narrative analysis in which the researcher asks the participant whether the transcript accurately reflects their experience (McKim, 2023). Furthermore, it was the hearing of what women were sharing at that moment in time, in their first interaction with me, that needed to be captured and valued. They may have seen aspects of their story slightly different post the transcript being produced, and having now met me. Although this too would be worthy to capture, and alludes to the continuous sense-making that can be facilitated by narrative analysis, it would have taken the research beyond its remit. Each woman was sent their password-protected transcript, informing them that there was no obligation to open the file. If they wished, they could contact me for the password, which would be sent via text message. Ten of the women requested the password.

Having set out the mode of data analysis, this section will discuss points about research rigour. Discussions about assessing the quality of qualitative research involve reviewing the terms validity, reliability or trustworthiness (Adler, 2023). Reliability and validity have their origins in positivist research approaches and therefore do not fit within narrative analysis. Although it still indicates adherence to the principles of validity and reliability, trustworthiness primarily assesses quality by judging a piece of research as 'worth paying attention to', as described by Lincoln and Guba in their 1985 work (cited in Elo *et al.*, 2014).

Through this paradigm of evaluation, it is not about the replication or generalisation of research findings, but about valuing the data in its own right, and it is this process of meaning-making by the participants that must stand up to scrutiny (Enworo *et al.*, 2023) and will be discussed here. Rigour in qualitative research needs to be adopted throughout the research journey, including being conscientious about methodological consistency, sample representation, and the analysis of findings (Patterson *et al.*, 2023). Some examples of how rigour was achieved in this research are provided below:

- Established a separate email account and database to contain and track communication with research participants;
- Produced a research journal noting research reflections, decisions, and challenges;
- Developed a bespoke method of narrative analysis to optimise the raw data.

A narrative researcher's procedures allow one to evaluate the trustworthiness of their research. This detail was provided earlier, along with the different stages of analysis I had created. Rigour was also achieved by being the sole transcriber of the interviews, which were completed verbatim. Using the transcription software Otter saved time, allowing the main transcription document to be produced relatively quickly. Although I had to clean the transcript copies for accuracy, the time saved allowed me to focus on the details of how the women were sharing their experiences.

Ethical considerations

Some of the ethical considerations, namely, triggering concerns, have been stated earlier, and this section will discuss others. Flick (2014) states that good ethical practice is when:

'Researchers will conduct their research in accordance with ethical codes; and that research proposals have been reviewed by ethics committees for their ethical

soundness' (p.53).

Appendix 5 includes the ethics application for this research, submitted to the University of Kent's School of Social Policy, Sociology, and Social Research (changing its name to School of Social Sciences in 2024). The application includes the amendments made due to COVID-19, which required re-approval. Ethics has remained at the forefront of this research process due to the subject's private and sensitive nature. Most CSA research seeks the perspectives of adult victims/survivors, as has been the case with this research, due to ethical challenges in undertaking research with child victims/survivors of CSA (Foster and Hagedorn, 2014a, 2014b; Foster, 2017). A duty of care towards CSA adult victims/survivors should remain integral to the research process (Kirkner *et al.*, 2019). One of the key concerns for me, my supervisors, and the University Ethics Committee, was the potential to trigger participants. Therefore, measures were built into the research design to address this, including the Research Advert stating that the research centred around exploring barriers to disclosure and reporting, rather than individual experiences of abuse. An overlap was inevitable but this was managed effectively during the interviews. The interview schedule (Appendix 4) indicates that questions that were directly relevant to the participant's experience were asked later and in an indirect way.

A phone call was arranged with all those who agreed to be part of the research to check that they were ready and comfortable to share their experience, and to allow them to ask any questions. Some women had seen the research advert through third sector organisations, but most had seen it on social media. Following the phone conversation, the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2) and Consent Form (Appendix 3) were emailed to them, asking them to review these before making a final decision to participate. If they did wish to proceed, an interview date was arranged, and a further opportunity to ask questions before the interview was provided. The Consent Form was completed and signed before each interview. This set out the voluntary nature of the research, the right to withdraw at any

stage of the research process, and issues related to anonymity, confidentiality, and data storage.

On receiving the Information Sheet and Consent Form, some women never replied. I emailed them a few days later to see whether they had any remaining questions. A small minority emailed back saying that they had changed their minds and no longer wished to participate. Some never replied back. Others responded, leading to an interview, but even some in this group ceased replying when details about interview dates were being sent. In 2021, due to the fieldwork being finalised, I wanted to offer a final opportunity for an interview to the women who had initially made contact but never replied. Four women replied that they now wanted to participate, and had not replied before due to personal commitments. Others said they were hesitant previously, but now felt in a stronger emotional state to participate. Of the 26 women who initially contacted me about the research, 15 decided to participate.

The ethical aspects of the research became real for me as soon as the first interview began, as it became apparent that the perpetrator had never been reported. Although I knew this to be a reality in many CSA cases and had discussed problematic disclosure of information with supervisors, when faced with it as an actual lived experience, I was thrown a little off guard (while remaining composed). The concern that the perpetrator could have committed offences against others, or even pose a risk today, surfaced within me. As the questions had been designed around aspects of family, community, and shame and honour, further personal information about the perpetrator was inhibited, and I re-directed the conversation. However, it led me to have several discussions with my supervisory team, departmental colleagues at my continuation seminar, and an expert on CSA research ethics. I was not forming a judgement about the participant's decision not to report the abuse, as my instinctual response was to respect her right to have made whatever decision she felt was

appropriate for her. I just needed to marry this commitment to my research participant, with risks to third parties and my responsibility as an ethical researcher. Following the discussions as mentioned above, I was reassured that, as the interview had not been designed to investigate individual experiences of abuse, I should remain alert to avoid eliciting personal information about the perpetrator. Furthermore, I reconciled the issue by reminding myself that my Research Advert and the research explanation to participants before the interviews had defined the research as centring on child abuse cases, not on its criminal aspects. Although the two are interrelated and CSA is a crime, the research was not designed to explore criminality, i.e. who the perpetrator was, whether he was reported/charged, whether he was known to have abused others, etc. To ensure that my concerns were reflected in the research design, the following addition was made to the Consent Form:

I understand that although the prime purpose of this research is not to explore individual cases of abuse in detail, if the researcher thinks that someone may be at risk of harm or abuse, she will need to speak to her supervisory team and if necessary, relevant statutory services. However, she will inform me if this is to be the case.

Although the remaining 14 participants disclosed who the perpetrator was in terms of their relationship with them, I was not given any additional details that would have required contacting any third party. Furthermore, in terms of duty of care, when personal experiences were shared during the interview, this was handled in a nurturing and appropriate way, eliciting necessary points and minimising any distress to the participant. The women were provided with a list of national and local support organisations, should they want to access support following the interview. With their consent, I contacted them a couple of days later with a checking-in email.

As part of the ethical framework, no third party assisted with the transcribing or analysis stages. Although this placed a considerable onus on me, it created a vital intimacy between me and the data, allowing me to immerse myself in it right from the outset. In

addition, it contributed to a trusting rapport with the women, which was critical to me as a researcher and also important for creating an environment where the women felt they could share their stories openly and without perturbation. To mitigate against biases that can ensue from being the sole person analysing the data, I integrated processes of researcher reflexivity throughout this stage of the research.

The ethical features of narrative research

A further point to discuss in this section about ethics is how ethics is intertwined in a narrative inquiry approach. At the heart of such a methodology is staying as close as possible to what the research participants are telling you. Seeing their stories, their accounts, as more than mere data, a narrative inquiry centres them as being the source of the knowledge being created. Gamlin's (2020) ethnographic research with the Indigenous Wixárika women in Mexico led to significant findings about the disproportionate levels of maternal and infant mortality rates in this population. Through the women's narratives, deep insights were provided about the traditional and entrenched gender inequalities which were negatively impacting the women's experiences of marriage, giving birth, and motherhood. The richness of this narrative inquiry would have been facilitated by Gamlin (2020), who had worked in the area for many years and had developed trust with the women. Through this, she was able to authentically represent their realities. In these final sections, my desire to seek knowledge as told by the women themselves is conveyed, specifically through a discussion of how I refrained from deviating from this focus.

The research design had also initially included practitioners working in third sector organisations, delivering support services targeting South Asian women for issues such as mental health and sexual violence. A few of these organisations were gatekeepers to some of the research participants, and could potentially have provided additional insights. Having

completed five such interviews, I felt that a diversion was taking place, shifting attention away from the women's lived experiences to how practitioners were interpreting them. Generic themes as discussed in the literature review were often relayed by the practitioners, including a lack of visibility of South Asian women's experiences in mainstream services, embedded cultural norms of shame and honour, or elements of patriarchy thwarting adequate support for women. This lacked sufficient depth into how their service users had experienced these constructs, or whether other factors were emerging that required consideration. Discussions also centred on the work of third-sector organisations supporting South Asian women and the challenges of securing adequate resources and funding. Early in the research process, therefore, it became clear to me that my central aim of exploring the lived experiences of CSA, as experienced by victims/survivors, was best understood through the women's narratives alone.

A further slight deviation included seeking child safeguarding practitioners as an additional sample group. This was a significant reflective point as it began shifting the focus from the women's experiences to the subject of CSA and child protection. This led to the redrafting of the title and research questions, which was at times quite a psychological struggle. This has been reflected on at length, leading me to deduce that I was, at a subconscious level, possibly beginning to question whether the women's voices were sufficient to carry the research forward. I had perhaps started to mirror the invisibility of their experiences in existing literature. I continued wrestling with these thoughts and feelings and eventually realigned the research to its original objective.

Researcher positionality and reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity encourages researchers to reflect on their preconceptions and biases throughout the research journey (Etherington, 2011; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; White

and Davis, 2023). Undertaking narrative research demands special consideration of positionality and reflexivity because there is considerable potential for bias, requiring the researcher to remain as close as possible to the data throughout the analysis (Josselson and Hammack, 2021). Being a South Asian researcher investigating South Asian CSA, the subject of researcher positionality was particularly profound. Although defining researcher positionality as an 'insider' or 'outsider' simplifies what is a complex and nuanced dyadic interaction between a researcher and who they are researching (Hayfield and Huxley, 2015), it is helpful to use these concepts in terms of defining the value added and limitations of a research project.

Sharing an ethnic and cultural background with the women denoted me as an 'insider'. I, too, had an ethnic heritage emerging from the Indian subcontinent and a lifetime of experience as a descendant of first-generation migrants. This included a shared understanding of the significance of family values, reputation, and familial concerns around shame and honour. This was a key reason why the women responded to the Research Advert, in which my ethnic background and gender were stated. Some women shared that I had shown understanding of their experience simply by including shame and honour in the Research Advert, and that they had felt relief not needing to explain these to me. Shah (2006b) discusses the value of researchers being somehow aligned with the lives of those they are researching. Although there will be exceptions, I believe my research enquiry benefited from my shared ethnic, cultural, and gender identity with the women. They perceived me as an 'insider' and were comfortable with me during the interviews, often speaking beyond the allotted one hour.

During the field research, I spent considerable time developing a trusting relationship with the women. Not only was this important for recruiting and collating the data, but I also felt a significant responsibility to ensure that the women were okay throughout the process.

As the research progressed from year to year, the reasons for starting in 2017 were quite different from those in later years, as the subject took on greater depth. The women had become real women, rather than just a sample. They had rich, nuanced, and intense lived experiences. The research process has given me so many insights into the women's lives, and I feel that the time, care, and attention I invested in developing rapport with them, enabled a productive co-production of knowledge. I got to know the women intimately as they trusted me with some of the most personal aspects of their lives. As the research developed, I became less paternalistic towards them, having started with a strong need to protect. Nkosi *et al.* (2022) investigated girls and young women at risk of HIV in South Africa. They discussed how a tendency to protect participants can often be synonymous with qualitative research, especially when exploring human vulnerabilities. However, they caution against excessive protection of participants, as this can impede participants' voices. I remained diligent about how the research was undertaken and how I needed to keep them involved post-interview, but I became much more conscious of their own resilience and rejection of cultural norms, challenging my own unconscious assumptions about their vulnerability and capacity to demonstrate resistance.

These periods of reflexivity were significant to how sense was made of the data and its findings. Finlay and dela Cruz (2023) state that throughout the process of analysis, the researcher should critically evaluate their position on the topic. In narrative research, where the researcher must decide which themes and narratives to include, this becomes even more important. Researchers are expected to be mindful of which stories, themes, and narratives they are drawn into, potentially influenced by their own ontological perspective, personal experiences, or the theories framing their research. Therefore, during the different stages of my analysis, I reflected on:

- Why I was attentive to particular stories over others.
- Why I was being drawn to certain phrases in the transcript.

- Why I was focusing on certain rhetorical devices.
- Why I was identifying certain themes from the stories being told.
- Why I chose to select certain grand narratives as the basis of my empirical chapters.

I have also felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to write up the women's stories without the infiltration of my assumptions. One benefit of this research spanning several years has been the opportunity to consistently and longitudinally adopt this evaluative role. I created reflexive spaces for myself after the interviews, when listening to the interviews, reading the transcripts, analysing the themes, and formulating the narratives. This allowed me to continuously stay close to the data, revisit my own thoughts, feelings, and biases, and maintain my attention on the women's views and experiences. My focus on the uniqueness and originality of what was being shared, rather than a tendency to categorise, was reflected in my decision to take a 12-month unpaid career break to immerse myself fully in the data. One of my key concerns was how to weave the volume of data into the thesis, as a multitude of narratives had been identified. I was committed to providing each of the 15 women with a voice, and for their narratives not to be marginalised in any way.

I remained conscious of my commitment to gender-based discrimination and injustice, and mitigated against this coming through into the interviews and the data analysis stage. Furthermore, the women knew that I was a child protection academic and researcher, seeking to explore gaps in practice and policy relating to the experiences of British South Asian female CSA victims/survivors. Their perception of my professional role could, therefore, have impacted what they shared and how they shared it. This was mitigated by explaining, from the outset, that although I hoped the research would eventually have an impact on practice and policy, I was currently only aspiring to this rather than directing it. I

felt that this enabled me to manage the women's expectations and encouraged them to focus on their experiences, which was the objective of my engagement with them.

Often, research topics of this nature are chosen because of personal experiences or connections a researcher has with the topic. It was therefore helpful to continuously reflect on this emotional connection to the research. This is particularly relevant to narrative research, where the words of the participant are the all-important aspect, as is the qualitative researcher's positionality (Riessman, 2008; Wong and Breheny, 2018). Their own perspectives and biases inevitably impact the research, but how they mitigate these impacts is critical (Kim, 2015). Throughout the research, I reminded myself that this research was not about me or my perspectives. It was about the 15 women who trusted me with what they had shared. As a child protection academic, there tended to be an urge to think about future child protection practices and policies, and how changes need to be made to ensure that the voices of British South Asian children are adequately captured. However, the below questions and answers helped to return time and time, to the women, to their stories, and to the data:

Question: Why is this research being undertaken?

Answer: To hear directly from the women about their lived experiences of child sexual abuse.

Question: What is it that the women are saying?

Answer: Reflexivity and rigorous data analysis of each transcript will provide an individual account of what each woman is saying.

Question: Why is the research being undertaken in this way?

Answer: To give space and time to each woman, because they have not had this before. Therefore, it is important to pay close attention to what they say and

how they say it. Reflect on why they are saying it at this point in their life, and why to me.

Question: What other ways could this study have been completed, and why was the decision made not to?

Answer: The research could have been extended to child protection professionals and practitioners in third sector organisations supporting victims/survivors, to gain broader insights into CSA in British South Asian communities. However, this risked diluting the depth of the women's lived experiences.

Few would argue that undertaking research with victims/survivors of abuse does not affect the researcher, and although I regard myself as a resilient individual, staying with the subject of this research across eight years was an emotionally demanding experience. Hearing the women's stories of abuse and trauma, and their sense of inequality and injustice, had an impact on me after each interview, and as I listened to the recordings after, as well as re-reading the transcripts through the analysis stages. I was often shocked and angered by what I had heard. Due to the confidential nature of the research, I had no opportunities to discuss it with friends and family in a meaningful way, and my sole channel of support was my supervisory sessions. Here I was able to discuss how the women's experiences and their isolation made me feel, and it was reassuring to know that I could speak about this with my supervisors. One aspect of the emotional impact the research had on me was a strong sense of wanting to give back to the women, and so I built in ways to stay connected with them, which is discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter. Finally, I practice meditation daily and know it has helped me maintain my emotional balance during this research period.

The aforementioned sections have sought to discuss aspects of the research process which demonstrate the trustworthiness of this research. The final section in this chapter shares the limitations of this research and how I mitigated against these.

Research Limitations

Insider status

Earlier discussions have relayed the benefits of having insider status in this research, but there were also potential limitations of this. Our common understanding of shame and honour might lead us to expect that women would accentuate these aspects, omitting others. This was evident when they would use phrases like *'you understand what I mean'* or *'as you know'*. However, the content and structure of the interview questions and their delivery and management demonstrated alertness to this. Although shame and honour were discussed, the focus was on their individual narration of this rather than encouraging responses which only confirmed generic perspectives associated with the constructs. Aspects of their narration which did not centre on shame and honour were also keenly followed up, encouraging them to elaborate on such deviations. This same fluidity was adopted during the data analysis, being attentive to marginal narratives that might be swallowed up by those that were more prominently known or expected. The process of reflexivity, discussed later, enabled the necessary openness with the data and included checks and balances during the research process.

A second feature of being an insider could have led to some women not coming forward to participate in the research. Sharing personal information with a researcher of a similar cultural background could have been an uncomfortable factor for some. Greene (2014) describes how one can be seen as *'too much of an insider'* (p.6). Hence, some

women may have been concerned about issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and curious and questioning about the research motives. This latter point was expressed by one of the research participants during the interview. She shared that she was initially dubious about participating because she was unclear about the research's intentions. Such concerns were mitigated through information included in the Research Advert, Information Sheet, Consent Form, and through the telephone and email exchanges with participants, all of which clarified the research aims and intentions and set out measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Due to the nature of CSA, there will be some victims/survivors who continue to be hesitant, regardless of the attempts researchers may make. This is their right, and although it takes immense courage for victims/survivors to participate in research, it also takes courage to choose not to. Even though this thesis suggests taking a fresh look at how research with CSA victims/survivors can be planned and executed, it is also important to respect decisions made by victims/survivors to never partake in it.

Small sample size

Although this thesis has demonstrated depth in the women's CSA experiences, it has limitations. A research sample size of 15 may be too small to draw meaningful conclusions. Before this is refuted in terms of the adopted research methodology, the challenges in recruiting research participants will be relayed. Although the research design had commenced with a target number of 30 research participants, it became apparent that there was a general hesitancy amongst the targeted sample. 15 women eventually confirmed their participation from a pool of 26, with others changing their minds or not following through on subsequent stages. In addition, the support organisations to which the research advert had been disseminated were unlikely to be accessed by South Asian women on a sizeable scale. In addition, COVID-19 was likely to have impacted people's participation in research projects across the board. Furthermore, qualitative research seeks to uncover meaning in the social world, rather than seeking data that yield singular, homogenised, and generalisable findings.

Having undertaken the first few interviews, it was clear that the data being generated was dense and rich, and sufficient for the narrative analysis method that was to be adopted.

A second limitation relates to the type of CSA victim/survivor recruited for the research and the absence of other representations. As the study used purposive sampling, with only British female CSA victims/survivors invited to participate, it was initially expected that these broad criteria would recruit a wide range of women, spanning boundaries of ethnicity, age, geography, and socio-economic factors. Table 3 indicates that it achieved this across ethnicity and geography, but was limited in relation to age and socio-economic factors. 86% of the sample was aged between 21 and 41%, 73% of the women were employed, and 80% were graduates. Recruitment was mainly secured through social media, appealing to the younger age group and possibly to women with a particular educational background who were familiar with the field of social research. Furthermore, where women had accessed the research advert through a support organisation raises the question of the women not being able to or wanting to access such services, who would have been missed. In summary, women falling outside of the social media and support organisation arenas were not reached.

Part of the research design was to revisit the support organisations that had served as gatekeepers for a few of the participants. The aim of attending their support groups was to recruit women who were less active on social media and from the older age group. This would have included first-generation migrants for whom English was unlikely to have been a first language. Being fluent in Punjabi and Hindi, I could accommodate this. Their inclusion may have provided significant additions to the research. However, this plan was thwarted by COVID-19, forcing these organisations to close. Dhaliwal (2024) has indicated the need for first-generation racially minoritised victims/survivors of CSA to be included as research participants, and this offers an opportunity for future research.

A single research method

The approved ethics application for this research emphasised the need to avoid re-traumatising the women, which inevitably influenced the data-gathering and analysis stages. The single interview kept the potential risk of triggering participants to a minimum. Although multiple research methods are often espoused as representing robust research, the fundamental objective of this research was to hear directly from the women, and this was adequately met through the interviews. The original research design had included a second research method to enhance the narrative element of the research, involving a sand tray. The sand tray method involves placing miniature props representing real-life objects in a sand tray to express what a research participant may be feeling about a particular aspect of their experience (Roesler, 2019). This was going to take place a few weeks after the interview. All 15 women had agreed to participate in this second phase, but due to COVID-19, it was not possible to complete it.

Offering to conduct the interviews by telephone could have increased the sample size and drawn in women from a broader age range and a wider socio-economic background. However, to build a trusting rapport and put the women at ease, seeing me, either in person or online during COVID-19, was considered necessary. As part of the suggestions to develop channels through which British South Asian female CSA victims/survivors can share their experiences, telephone interviews could, however, be an option. Many of the women had expressed that they did not want to disclose to anyone nor report the abuse, and that their anonymity was important to them. Telephone interviews are likely to be more reassuring in light of such concerns and, hence, an approach worthy of further consideration.

Disclosures of historical CSA

Although a narrative analysis is not about validating whether what is being shared is true or accurate, it is important to acknowledge a common critique of interviewing adult survivors of childhood abuse, which is that trustworthiness can come into question due to a reliance on memory. There has also been much discussion of memory lapses or distortions in CSA research specifically (Lindsay and Read, 1994; Gunawardena and Jayasekara, 2019). However, this research was not about the content of what was being shared or the details of the abuse. It was about the meaning the women were giving to their experiences. There was no other reason for the women to participate other than to share their experiences. For many, it was to help contribute to necessary changes in how British South Asian communities and relevant agencies respond to CSA. All women opted to have the raw data stored so that other researchers could access it, reaffirming their commitment to the research for its own sake rather than for personal gain. It can also be argued that where participants had accessed counselling or other support services, their perspective of the abuse and related issues would be influenced in a particular way. However, as the researcher interacting with them, I suggest that therapeutic interventions gave women the strength to speak about their experiences.

As this section outlines key points about the research methodology and processes of reflexivity, it includes the deviations which temporarily took the research somewhat away from the victims/survivors. I had initially sought to interview South Asian mothers whose daughters had been sexually abused as children for three reasons. Firstly, some of the research had indicated that mothers in households often uphold the constructs of shame and honour. Secondly, mothers are the most likely family members to whom children disclose (Horvath *et al.*, 2014; Many and Collin-Vézina, 2021). Finally, to examine whether there was

a distinct difference between how different generations perceived shame and honour.

However, no South Asian mother whose daughter had experienced CSA came forward to participate. Exploring why this was again goes beyond the scope of any detailed analysis in this thesis, but is returned to as a point in a later chapter.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has discussed how specific ontological and epistemological perspectives have informed the research design and guided the research process. It has detailed the research methodology, its alignment with the research questions, and the adopted model of narrative analysis. The rigour of the research process, ethical considerations, and points about positionality and reflexivity have also been outlined. The chapter brings Part 1 of the thesis to a close, having set the context for the subject matter, its theoretical dimensions, and its research methodology. Part 2 will include Chapters 4,5, and 6, the empirical chapters.

Part 2

British South Asian Women Speak About Their Experiences of CSA

Introduction to the Findings Chapters

The minutiae of personal data produced by the women storying their experiences were, through the narrative analysis approach discussed in Chapter 3, translated into grand narratives. These are shared in the following three chapters. The grand narratives in Chapter 4 are grouped under 'shame and honour', in Chapter 5, they are grouped under 'resilience and strength', and in Chapter 6, under 'Disclosures'. Deciding on the grand narratives included a close revisiting of the research questions for this thesis, which are set out again below:

1. What meaning do British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA give to 'shame and honour' in the context of their abuse?
2. What do the women's narratives demonstrate about their ethnic, racial, personal, social and cultural identities, and what broader implications do these identities have for UK CSA practice and policy?
3. How does the application of an intersectional feminist theoretical framework provide a deeper understanding of their experiences of CSA?

The women's words are all shown with single quotation marks (' ') and have been *italicised*. Where the women have voiced another character in their story, or are recalling their own words from the past, this is shown with double quotation marks (" "). Where I have noted something of interest in how part of a story is being told I have written this in non-italicised text and within square parenthesis []. Such parenthesis is also used where I have added text to make the excerpt coherent or provided a translation of a Punjabi/Urdu word into English. Where the women have emphasised a word/phrase, **bold** font has been employed. Where they are pausing between words, it is shown as ... for a short pause andfor a longer pause. Where some of the text in a vignette has been taken out as superfluous to the point being made, this is shown as -----. None of the participants is identifiable. Pseudonyms are used instead of real names, and where potential identifiable information has been removed, this is shown by XXX.

Although each of the findings chapters is presented according to the grand narratives, they end with a discussion of what can be learned about the women's experiences in relation to

their specific ethnic community, as well as other demographic data that may be relevant. This allows for a deeper understanding of the significance of an intersectional approach when exploring their vulnerabilities to CSA.

Chapter 4: The Shadow of Shame and Honour

“Automatically, the survivor/victim’s family, they are the disgraced ones...I think our Asian families are so scared of this sharam word because, I think women are perceived as, you know virgins, and you know once this abuse takes place, they’re not a virgin...I mean, my mom used to say that “no one will want to marry you, if you talk about it”... so I think, as soon as South Asian parents hear about it [CSA], rather than thinking of the welfare of the child, the bells are ringing of ‘sharam’, she’s got no sharam left, she’s not that...kind of pristine, kind of virgin anymore...So they will try everything to kind of sweep it underneath the carpet”.

(Salma).

Chapter introduction

Shame and honour are reported to be key reasons why little is known about CSA across British South Asian communities, but there is a dearth of research that represents direct accounts from victims/survivors. This chapter presents grand narratives that all relate to the subject of shame and honour. Unlike existing literature on the connection between CSA and shame and honour in British South Asian communities, this thesis has provided personal, detailed, and nuanced perspectives on the constructs, directly from the victims/survivors.

Five grand narratives have been defined:

1. The silence around sex, sexual relations and sexual behaviours.
2. Shame and honour are intertwined with concerns about marital prospects.
3. Community-wide perspectives as influencing family life.
4. Self-reflections on shame, honour and gender inequality.
5. Izzat (Honour).

The silence around sex, sexual relations and sexual behaviours

Many women spoke about how discussing anything sexual, or even acknowledging intimate relations, was taboo and not spoken about. Instead, it was clear that related topics were not to be discussed and were considered shameful and disrespectful. In such an environment, the experience of sexual abuse and its disclosure was, from the outset, felt to be forbidden. Women were prohibited from watching anything sexual on TV or speaking about sex or sexual relations, which was likely to have ill-equipped them from acquiring the language to talk about sex as children, and to gain an understanding of healthy relationships.

Satinder speaks about how sex and sexual issues were not spoken about within her home as she was growing up. This created a deeply embedded feeling of not being able to make sense of the abuse which occurred years later, nor feeling able to disclose it:

'I think...some of the factors that contributed to my vulnerability were uhm...you know, just a complete lack of sexual education. A complete lack, you know such a repression around any form of sex or intimacy related conversations? Uhm, I think which you know'.

In this excerpt, Satinder alludes to a dominant narrative often associated with South Asian communities of sex being a taboo subject. Her intonation changes in her use of 'you know' in this particular sentence, as she indicates how sex being taboo was a common phenomenon across the community in the period she was recalling, suggesting that I, as a South Asian, would be aware of this, by bringing me into her account with the phrase '*...which you know*'. There was a strong sense amongst many of the women that sex was something not to be spoken about, and this was communicated through everyday parenting behaviours and narratives, which, although did not explicitly use the terms sex or sexual, managed to transmit persistent messages of needing to represent, and preserve, one's modesty at all times and at all costs. Sex as a taboo subject has been discussed by scholars across history and spanning different communities and societies. In her anthropological studies, Douglas

(1966) explained that societies need mechanisms to preserve social order, and that sex is one such mechanism. Defining sex as taboo and as something bad and impure means that it has the potential to destabilise the social order, and thus it should be concealed. Foucault (1976) also discusses how societal structures and norms can control how sex is perceived and spoken about, allowing only some institutions to control the discourse about sex and sexuality. However, in the context of CSA, sex as taboo is problematic. Ahmady (2023) addresses the taboo around incest and CSA in Iran and demonstrates how this prevents recognition, reporting and intervention.

Satinder continues to recount how even when she did try to share something sexual as a young child, it was dismissed very quickly by her mother:

'I think there were also instances where from a younger age things had happened. So you know, I remember, you know in India being touched, and looked at horribly by someone that I was really uncomfortable with, and my mother saying, "Oh, just ignore it, he's kind of not mentally well", you know'.

Her mother refuses to unpack what Satinder is telling her and instead shuts down any discussion of inappropriate sexual behaviour, nor does she challenge the behaviour. Without questioning caregivers about such decisions, it is impossible to know why such responses were made. However, through Satinder's narrative, and particularly through her voicing her mother, *"Oh, just ignore it, he's kind of not mentally well"*, she distances herself from this view as an adult, something she was unable to do as a child. As an adult, she now has agency that she did not appear to have as a child.

The explanation of the offender being *'mentally unwell'* represents her mother's attempts to dismiss the experience and possibly her self-justification as to why she does not act upon what has happened. This could represent her attempts to protect Satinder by minimising the impact of the incident. Without speaking to Satinder's mother, there is no available rationale for her action. However, Satinder's recounting of the incident and her inclusion of it provide an insight into her experience of encountering inappropriate sexual

behaviours, and her sense-making of it as a young child. In short, her mother did not provide her with reassurance, nor did she follow up on Satinder's concerns. Because it had been dismissed and explained through a plausible, even sympathetic narrative of ill health, Satinder may have started to question whether the incident had occurred in the way that she had originally thought. Although Satinder's relationship with her mother was overall a protective and nurturing one, and Satinder in no way suggests that her mother failed to protect her, what she shared in the interview suggested that her mother's response was a significant factor in her vulnerability to the sexual abuse she experienced several years later.

The failure of her parents to explain what is appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour continues into her adolescent years when, at 13, Satinder is reprimanded by her father for sitting on her uncle's lap:

'And then I remember being 13 and my uncle sitting me on his lap. You know, at a home party, and you know, my dad going nuts at us both, do you see what I mean?'

She does not talk about whether this act was appropriate or not, nor does she say anything about her relationship with her uncle, and completely omits him from her narrative. The significant point for Satinder is her father's response and his decision to tell her off as a 13-year-old, rather than reprimanding only her uncle, who was the adult. She is angered as she recounts this, and now, as an adult, sees this as ridiculous:

'Now I'm like, why on earth, were you going nuts at me? I was thirteen uhm, and I'm not sure how they directly impact, but I do know enough now to know that these small, small incidents can contribute to your vulnerability because you're not...empowered or you know, supported at those moments'

Mitra (2020) has discussed how the concept of the deviant female sexuality is deeply entrenched in the history of the Indian sub-continent, going as far back as colonial times. The need for females to represent a certain type of womanhood has been documented in Mitra's study as being the foundation for how Indian society was structured, and how female sexuality was taken to serve the purpose of the elite, who established a society based on the

Hindi monogamy ideology, controlling and erasing women's sexuality. The response from Satinder's father to his daughter's innocent behaviour takes on an accusatory tone, alluding to the embedded ideals about the type of behaviour expected from females.

In both accounts, Satinder has adopted an entirely different perspective towards these incidents as an adult, unable to make sense of them as a child. The process of storying has allowed her to recognise that her parents' refusal to have open conversations about such events left her unclear about such behaviours. What is also critical is that neither her mother nor her father singled out the male adults as the ones in the wrong. Although Satinder did not label her uncle an offender, her father's response to his brother sitting his adolescent niece on his lap was interpreted as offensive; rather than rebuke his adult brother alone, he scolds both of them. Her mother also provides a reason for the earlier offence, stating that the man's behaviour was due to ill health, rather than calling it out. Both examples demonstrate a strong reluctance by the parents to engage in any idea of sexual intimacy, mystifying the subject of sex and sexual relations. They also illustrate how the subtle, nuanced ways in which caregivers respond to such situations can lead children to feel that their experiences are not meaningful or that they are not entirely blameless for the act.

Shame and honour are intertwined with concerns about marital prospects

Several women related shame and honour to marriage, sharing accounts of how, as a woman, familial expectations included not wanting to jeopardise one's marriage prospects. The women had grown up with strong ideas that women were to be raised for marriage, childbirth and keeping a home. Anything that endangered this was to be prevented and avoided, and if anything shameful did happen, the consequences for the family were likely to

be severe. Sonam provides an example of how easily a reputation of shameful behaviour could be acquired in the context of risking the potential to be seen as worthy of marriage:

[Shouts the word shame a little as if for emphasis] *'Shame is **anything**, in as I understand it having heard my dad rumble on about it enough and uhm just like speaking to friends and stuff, shame as I understand it is anything, any action that interferes with the prospects of you or your family around you i.e. your siblings, getting married. **That's** how I see it. So.....it's like you know a simple concept of she has a mobile phone-----it's the ideas that people infer from that, so "She has a mobile phone, she's using that phone to talk to ...guys, she's not married" and that impression will leave a mark, and when it actually comes to getting married, it will reduce your chances because you will always be known as that girl who had the mobile phone and used it to text guys [laughs] -----I just feel like shame is something that just...uhm ...hinders the possibility of you getting married'.*

In this excerpt, and generally across her conversation, Sonam explains her meaning of shame solely in the context of marriage. The tone of her narrative is fast-paced, loud in parts and very definitive in its message. She is quick to respond to what shame means for her; a construct which, if surfaced, has the potential to ruin not only her chances of marriage but also those of her siblings. As the eldest of four, she has always felt this responsibility, even now as an adult, as is apparent when recounting the following example from her dad. On telling him that she was going travelling with a female friend, and significantly for him, with no male relative, his response, below, and voiced by Sonam, relates this back to his concerns about marriage:

"I don't agree with it, I don't approve, it's shameful and if other people in the community knew that you are going on holiday essentially by yourself, like you know, then people are going to think you're a bad person and when it comes to proposals and stuff, no one is going to want to marry you, and by association, no one will want to marry your siblings".

As the eldest, Sonam believes that her behaviour is always intertwined with the future of her siblings. She laughs in places as she retells how her dad links her travel plans with concerns about her siblings being left unmarried. Her process of sense-making allows her to realise how illogical, even farcical, this sounds: *'That was his **only** worry. It's not like "oh I might get Denghi fever over in XXX", like that would be rational but no"*. Where shame from such incidents is voiced so strongly and damningly by her father, it is unsurprising that Sonam has never disclosed her sexual abuse to either of her parents. Zara also suggested there would be familial fears of being unworthy of marriage should her sexual abuse become known. Her

tone expressed considerable frustration about this, particularly as she located it in the context of gender inequality:

'Then no one's gonna want one to marry the girl because she's...obviously she's dirty now or whatever. So it's like the girl suffers from the perpetrator, but then she suffers from the community as well, because nobody-----[will want to] marry her, you know, it's just...it's suffering for the girl throughout. The perpetrator will once again get away with it. He can get married, he'll have children, you know. Nobody's gonna know he's not a virgin. And it's okay for boys to be, you know, not to be a virgin. But if a girl's not a virgin, oh my god, you know. Nobody asks the boy. Even if they do know it's like, "oh, he's had a few girls, chalo [never mind] boys do that, it's okay", you know. But if a girl's had a boyfriend. oh, my god, "no don't look at her, don't marry her. You're not good enough for my son now", you know, it's just..so silly'.

Zara speaks in the third person in the above excerpt, removing the narrative from her own experience. By doing this, she can provide what, in her view, is a common perspective of the community in which she lives. Namely, cultural norms by which she herself would also be judged. She illustrates how if sexual abuse becomes known, the girl victim/survivor would be punished because she will be seen as unmarriageable in the eyes of the community, and be seen as *'dirty'*. The loss of virginity would be seen as a permanent punishment for the girl, whereas the perpetrator can continue with his life as if nothing had changed. She repeats the word *'suffer(ing)'* three times. Although she is not talking directly about herself in this excerpt, she may be thinking about herself and her situation, as she had never exposed the perpetrator for the abuse inflicted on her, and speaks of how he has continued to lead his life unaffected by his actions. In contrast, she has suffered mental health problems and feels a strong sense of injustice in being unable to expose or report him for the sake of maintaining harmonious familial relations. In this way, she is able to present a stark difference in the futures of the victim/survivor and the perpetrator, post the abuse. She and the other women remain marred by the abuse in a deep way, whereas the perpetrators continue to lead their lives, seemingly untainted.

In the excerpt, Zara also alludes to gender differences in the community, stating that there is an acceptance of sexual behaviour if you are a boy but not if you are a girl. By voicing the community, she disconnects herself from this view and terms it *'silly'*. Through

storying her experience, she can voice her frustrations about her own experiences and the perceptions of sexism in her community. By doing this, she can reaffirm that she disagrees with such perspectives intensely. Many of the examples shared in this section have alluded to patriarchal structures where the female is objectified and whose identity is perceived only in relation to the male figures in her life.

Community-wide perspectives as influencing family life

Frequent parts of the data set alluded to a sense of community and how family life was interwoven with extended families and community life. This created additional pressure and expectations about what family life and a woman's role within it should consist of. It provided a clear, rigid, and unmoveable framework for what defines shame and what the consequences are for family dishonour. Despite Sonam's use of humour to ridicule her father's ideas about marriage, as shared earlier, his beliefs still govern her in the present time. This is partly because she locates her father's views in a broader cultural context of what the *community* thinks. Although she does not entirely excuse her father, she does suggest that the veil of shame in the South Asian community is too pervasive, inevitably infiltrating family life:

'I just, I [sighs]...the thing is that...you know like.. there is an element of truth when my dad talks about...uhm sharam and like honour because the thing is if he was the only person in the world who believed that then it'd be fine but he isn't, and I do have three younger sisters and a brother to worry about-----I basically don't want any of my sisters at some point in their lives to meet someone, meet the man of their dreams and then it doesn't work out because he or his family...doesn't want to...get involved with my family because of the sexual abuse'.

The sigh at the start of the sentence reflects an unwilling acceptance of the reality before her, in that it is not only her father who thinks this, but a whole community, a community that will determine the future of her siblings. Disclosing the abuse would, for her, therefore, be a purely selfish act where she thinks only about her feelings, without consideration for her younger siblings. This is an uncomfortable position in which to find herself, and through

storying this reality, she, in some way, hesitatingly conforms to the perspectives of her father. However, although she cannot break away from the hold of community norms, she demonstrates agency in voicing contradictory views to those of her father. Sonam was also able to reaffirm for herself that she was the victim. For many years, she had been confused as to whether the abuse was abuse, and through telling her story, she is clear that she had been exploited.

The pressure on Sonam from this community perspective, filtered through her father, is an example of community coercion where emotional pressure can be so intense, that the woman is made to feel responsible for everything that can potentially go wrong for the family (Anitha and Gill, 2009). Socio-cultural expectations and pressure are pervasive and penetrating, impact women's lives, and they feel unable to disconnect from them and thus align themselves with these expectations.

Zara's account also speaks to narratives about family loyalty and responsibility, alluding to the importance of one's family needing to be perceived positively by the wider community. Although there can be value in such expectations, leading to family unity and togetherness, it can also be deemed a weighty responsibility. Zara never disclosed due to worries and fears about the ramifications within the extended family:

'That's why I stay quiet now, as well, because I know there's going to be a big fight and relationships are going to break and everything. And I don't want to be the reason for that. [Very quietly] yeah...wish it was different though...it shouldn't have to be like that. If someone's done wrong, one person's done wrong that person should get punished, not everybody else'.

Zara's decision to stay silent is not only related to her perception of what may happen post-disclosure, but is also determined by her loyalty to her husband. Even though she states that her husband has been an immense source of strength to her, and is the only person within

the family to whom she has disclosed, the below excerpt indicates that she remains entrapped in what can be deemed gendered expectations of womanhood:

'If I make a big fuss now, it's gonna hurt my husband and his mum, which he's [husband] said to me clearly, you know, "please don't for my mum". I could very easily go to the police now and report him [the perpetrator], but I've been through it now, you know, I've helped myself and everything'.

Due to the perpetrator being her husband's brother, her husband is inevitably tied to the implications of wider disclosure. He is seeking to protect his mother from ensuing heartache, and possibly wants to protect his brother from shame and even prosecution. This may be understandable, but at the same time, it speaks to Zara still lacking complete freedom to make a choice. Her sense of agency is possibly compromised and this need to keep the peace in the extended family means that she still has to see her abuser. This is not easy for Zara. She shares how in the past she has experienced periods of deep depression and has made attempts to take her own life.

Espinosa (2023) undertook research with East/South East Asian therapists in America supporting women from their communities who had experienced sexual assault. The study found that the burden on women to uphold the values of family integrity often resulted in them not disclosing, but that this correlated with high levels of distress for victims/survivors. This sense of responsibility was echoed across the narratives of the women in this research, such as in the excerpt from Zara above.

Although she does not minimise the impact that this experience has had on her, nor hide her frustration at the injustice of being unable to expose her perpetrator, through storying, Zara is able to reaffirm for herself that she is positioning herself in a healthier place in her life:

'I'm going to help other women now, because I can't do anything to him. So I'm going to direct it in a positive way. Not in a negative way and try and commit suicide again [laughs]'

The laughter at the end is powerful. There is nothing humorous about suicide and neither does Zara think this. However, her humour here is part of her attempt to use this space with me to present the new Zara. The Zara who wants to fight the cause and not remove herself from the fight. She does not want to entertain the idea of the old Zara, but wants to focus on, and wants me to focus on, her reinvigorated identity, which is alive, present and seeking to contribute to change. Through support from a culturally sensitive support organisation, she has developed considerable inner strength and determination to translate her experience of abuse to now support girls and women who are in a similar situation:

'I've lived it you know, I've got my daughter to protect now and to look after, and I'm going to help her by making her aware. I think for me, it's not that it's too late but I just don't see the point now [of disclosing]. I've helped myself get through this. And I want to help other women now. So...he'll [perpetrator] get what's coming to him sooner or later. But I want it to stop for other girls now you know'.

Zara's capacity to live amongst her abuser led me to feel a mixture of emotions. I had some concern for her wellbeing, but also felt admiration for her for finding the inner strength to lead what was presented as a 'normal' life where she was a wife, mother, and volunteer.

Furthermore, I commended her determination to support other women, which came across in an assertive, passionate, and driven tone. It was as if this was the only way that she could move forward from her trauma and make some sense out of it. Her desire to make a positive change was repeated several times, and she asked me to keep her in mind for possible future work in this vein. For Zara, the process of storying was highlighting the injustice of not being able to expose her perpetrator. This was an unsettling reality for her, and one that she needed to transform into a positive experience in some way, where she felt more in control.

Self-reflections on shame, honour and gender inequality

As previously discussed, shame and honour, as a barrier to disclosure of abuse amongst the South Asian community, is a significant factor cited by academics, the government, and safeguarding practitioners. However, inquiries about what these constructs mean to those affected by them are minimal. Such narratives, as just discussed, centre on shame and honour perspectives that the women presented as held within family and community life. The following analysis illustrates how the women themselves came to adopt and inherit these constructs. Women spoke about how shame and honour had been a part of their childhood and how they had internalised the constructs from very early on in their lifetime. The strength and insidiousness of the constructs are clear through these granular insights, demonstrating how these constructs became embedded in their consciousness. They had not necessarily heard the phrase shame and honour being used, but they had a clear sense that they existed and mattered, as shared by Sonam below:

'Simple things like..when I do my laundry ...and then take it out, my mum would make us ..put things like our bras and our underwear on the washing line and then she'd put like a sheet over it.....As soon as I....started puberty and grew breasts I had to always wrap a shawl around my chest area'.

Modesty was seen to be important in Sonam's life and her mother reinforces this message through her actions. It is unclear why the mother did this but the practice of hiding underwear indicates that exposure of it would be seen as shameful. Having an everyday task enveloped in the construct of shame indicates how shame would have prevailed in Sonam's everyday life. What she and her sisters wore was also a part of Sonam's modesty narrative and she draws in gender differences to elaborate on the discussion:

'Having been brought up in that environment of having always to cover meant I would always have to cover. The girls would always have to cover up. No one ever said to my brother, "don't wear shorts". No one ever said to my brother "don't walk around shirtless in front of girls that are not your siblings" ...so I was constantly kind of reminded that if anything does happen between me and a man, it's instigated by me because I didn't do the right things'.

Sonam expresses a sense of desperation and sheer frustration with the reality of being held accountable for any negative attention or encounters she may have with a man. Because of this, she believed that disclosing sexual abuse would not prioritise her experiences or needs, and she felt that no matter what action she took, she would be the one blamed because she is a girl or a woman. This is a huge burden of responsibility for her to carry as a young girl, into her teenage years, and even as a young adult.

The women's narratives often included points about the cultural tendency to blame the female victim rather than the male perpetrator, and/or suggested that the male perpetrators are left unchallenged and not made to answer for their crimes. Kennedy and Prock. (2018) discuss how victim-blaming messaging impacts victims/survivors of CSA, sexual assault and intimate partner violence. These may include comments about how the victim/survivor was dressed or the action that they took, and are messages that circulate through mass media as well as from within family and friends' circles when disclosures are made. Victims/survivors, therefore, come to experience anticipatory stigma in the context of their abuse, believing that if they disclose the abuse, they will be blamed (ibid). A fear of victim-blaming was a key concern for many of the women in this thesis, and their narratives illustrated how they had internalised this concern.

As well as having to actively adopt actions which avoided shame, Sonam recalls hearing references to shameful behaviour, as interpreted by her parents, which again reinforced the message of shame in the context of family life:

*'I think if they didn't really **beat** it into me, **drum** it into us when we were younger...you know just hearing random things like, random thoughts like, random stories about you know "I saw so and so's girl today in Tesco and this was what she was wearing, and this was how she was dressed", you know, and all of this stuff, things like that you know?'*

The use of '*beat*' and '*drum*' suggests the regularity of hearing these messages again and again during her childhood, and the repetition of '*random*' allows her to emphasise this

regularity. By voicing her parents' perspectives in this way, she distances herself from them how their views. She struggles to find the words to explain such views, and this contrasts with her earlier sentences in which her tone is assertive, and the process of sharing allows her to distance herself from such perspectives. Yasmeen also shares how her lived experiences were guided by norms of how females were expected to behave. She voices her family members in the excerpt below:

"Don't do this, it's sexual. Don't do that it's sexual. Don't come down the stairs in your pyjamas. Do not come down the stairs with your hair open. Do not sit here and brush your hair amongst us all. Whatever you do, you do in your bedroom. And if you get dressed, you get dressed in the dark". Just weirdness...Everything was sexual. Everything. "Don't move your head in this way, oh you talk with your eyes you do". "What do you want me to do? It's the way my body works. Or, "you've got very luring eyes, you're always attracting attention with your eyes".

Yasmeen narrates this as if she can still hear these instructions loud and clear. She appears to take herself back to her childhood, and at the time when these words were said to her. The repetition of *'Don't/Do not'* allows one to sense the restrictions that were placed on her. Appearing to be unable to make sense of it as a young child, and unable to even now as an adult, she uses the words *'Just weirdness'* and *'What do you want me to do?'* to express her confusion. Unable to question anyone at the time, she questions it now where she has agency as an adult and is free from the context of abuse and familial constraints. The space in this conversation allows her to realise the extent to which she was seen as being responsible for what may happen to her, or what was happening to her. Yasmeen stated that her family was aware of the sexual abuse being perpetrated against her by a close family member. Ironically, across many of the women's narratives, there was an excessive focus by caregivers on risks outside of the family network, in comparison to potential intra-familial risks. Where intra-familial risks were disclosed or known about, as in Yasmeen's experience, these were ignored or denied by caregivers.

Zara also shares her experience of growing up and being conscious of how she was expected to act:

*'Girls are supposed to shut up and put up -----"Oh have you gone on your period? Don't speak about it. Don't talk to a boy". We were always told to have a scarf on and sit properly when around men. -----and saying something like this [the sexual abuse] would have been **really** bad because we are from a strict family. Uhm...so yeah, no, I'd never, I'd never have...said anything to anyone'.*

Talking about being on a menstrual cycle was seen as shameful, even though this is natural and something over which she has no control. She alludes to the point that if menstruation and not covering her head in the presence of men were deemed to be shameful, then sexual abuse was certainly going to be so. Not only shameful, but it would have been accusatory of her, because she was already made to feel the blame for having a period or allowing her scarf to fall from her head.

Salma shares a similar narrative:

'So it was a case that girls were never allowed to leave the house. We weren't allowed to wear jeans. We weren't allowed to, you know, do anything basically, so it was, I was dropped off to school. I was picked up from school. I had to wear, you know, salwar kameez [South Asian attire] to school. You know it was, my mum sewed them in the uniform colours. So it was it was like a village lifestyle in the UK if that makes sense'.

The women spoke frequently and with strong and affirmative language when they described parental attention to how the women dressed as children. Parents were said to believe that by compromising their modesty, the women (girls) would become more vulnerable to abuse by men. Some of the women's accounts relayed the naivety or hypocrisy of family members in thinking this, stating that this represented ideas about sexual abuse being 'out there' in the world, rather than closer to home. Laila presents an additional definition of modesty, beyond the clothing worn by women:

'[It can mean being] on your phone giggling loudly or with a group of friends giggling loudly and screaming the town down -----the news will go back to your parents, so you've got to always keep putting an act on outside. It's sort of like, it's like, you're a lolly but the wrapper's wrapped tight around you-----You've got to make sure nobody knows too much of your business -----Because if you make a scene, then people will look down on you and say, "What kind of family is this?" So yeah you've got to always keep it in mind. And it's engrained into us. Since birth, it's engrained'.

Laila's account starkly suggests the duality of existence experienced by the women growing up. Her examples evoke images of young, free-spirited and joyous girls who are made to reconsider what they are doing because of the construct of shame. She shares further examples of her younger sister, who is more like the character described in the excerpt than she is. She describes how her sister is scolded by her parents, whereas her nature is to be private and unseen, behaviour that is commended by her parents. I was curious about her use of a lollipop in a wrapper to describe the need for girls to be less overt, less loud, and publicly invisible. The metaphor possibly signifies women as being sweet, special, and a treat (for men, although this is implied rather than stated), but needing to be protected and invisible to ensure that the treat remains as such (for men). This relates back to the narratives of marriage and the need for a girl to be unscathed until she marries. This suggestion is strengthened through a further metaphor used by Laila:

'My dad said uhm...he gave me a metaphor. He goes "If you have a nice big gold, shiny car, and you throw that in the mud, ...that's a boy. You can pick it up and you can wash it. And you can shine it all, polish it, and it'll be shiny again. But a woman is like silk. If you throw that in the mud. And you try and wash that mud out, you'll never be able to...And that's what it's like. A woman, once her name is tarnished, once something happens or goes wrong, and her name is linked to that, people will always remember it. Whereas with a boy, they can go mess about and do whatever they want. People will not say another word to them". And it's true'.

This metaphor suggests that both males and females are valuable, or at least, start off as equally valuable. The male is described as 'gold, shiny' and the female as 'silk'. However, the female's value is susceptible to being devalued. The male's value is not. The responsibility of the female to uphold expected gender roles is depicted vividly through this metaphor. Even though Laila speaks about her father as someone who does not feel comfortable abiding by many of the cultural norms espoused by his community, she said that he feels he has to follow them. This illustrates how the shame and honour constructs infiltrate family life. Laila's 'And it's true' at the end of this excerpt, illustrates that she agrees with her father's analogy, in the sense that this is how the community in which they live,

would interpret female behaviour compared to male behaviour. There is a sense of acceptance in Laila's tone, a feeling that such beliefs are unchallengeable.

Parminder shares a similar account about gender differences, sharing how she never disclosed because she was certain that as a female, she would be the one blamed:

'[T]he finger could be pointed to me first...and people could think that I instigated it...or made him think that I wanted it.....because it's all about...repressing female sexuality, but there's nothing within our culture about, within the Sikh Punjabi culture about, repressing male sexuality'.

Sonam speaks to a comparative point:

'[I]f we were walking down the street and a guy looked at me or you know with a kind of desire whatever...my parents first wouldn't, wouldn't be "what a creep like, I need to protect my daughter"...unfortunately their thought would be "well what could my daughter be doing to prevent that, or may be [if] she wore a hijab and covered her face, may be then it wouldn't have happened" '.

There was a common feeling amongst many of the women that they would be blamed for the abuse. This is not surprising considering that their childhoods had been governed by the dos and don'ts of how to behave as a 'good' girl. Familial expectations and cultural norms made them constantly conscious of what they must not do, to avoid dishonour and bring about shame. These excerpts again echo a discourse of victim-blaming and suggest a strong family culture driven by gendered norms and hierarchies where females were seen as wholly responsible for the inappropriate behaviour of males. Such attitudes align closely with the concept of rape myths, which was first introduced in the 1970s by Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1974). Reporting on the serious under-reporting of rape in the US, the authors highlighted that victims/survivors were not coming forward due to a fear that they would be blamed, as opposed to the perpetrator. This was due to the strong and commonplace social attitudes which were denying the existence of the act of rape, stating that women were capable of resisting the sexual advances and acts of men if they so wished. Such attitudes have continued, holding women responsible for rape because of their supposed actions and behaviours (Hudspith *et al.*, 2023).

Burt (1980) discussed how societies can hold prejudicial and stereotypical views about sexual abuse and rape, going against the interests of the victim/survivor. He found that the higher the gender stereotyping, the greater the acceptance of rape myths. The aforementioned excerpts from the women in this research have strong notions of gendered norms, with women expected to behave in a way which was seen as 'good' and 'obedient', whereas men appeared to be free to act and behave as they wished. The women, therefore, were unlikely, to have been seen as blameless. This is not only clear when they explicitly state it, but it is also evident through their persistent references to the gendered norms that they lived through.

Justifying male predatory behaviour in this way can lead to societies having a higher tolerance for such abuse and can lead to victims/survivors from such communities minimising their abuse experiences (Espinosa, 2023). Although findings in this thesis did not specifically convey these points, the women's consistent narration of the high likelihood of not being believed or supported, and consistent references to gender inequality, allude to these points.

The women's narratives indicated that expectations of specific behaviour were placed on them as women, and they did not see the same pressure on the men in their lives. For Parminder, this gender inequality was discussed movingly, as she shared her mother's preference for boys over girls:

'I definitely thought she [mother] had a preference for the boys over me. And I think that fear of her blaming me [prevented disclosure]...I think it's embedded in our culture, the preference for boys over girls. It seeps through on so many different levels...and I think...whether it's...explicit or not, doesn't really matter because implicitly you still pick up on it'.

Parminder is certain, through her use of '*definitely*', that her mother preferred her brothers to her, which was a factor in her not disclosing. Because of this preference, she felt that she may have been blamed by her mother for the abuse. She uses the word '*seep*' to indicate

the prevalence of gender differences and how it spills into different aspects of life, almost uncontrollably. Through overt and covert messages and practices, the women saw directly, through the different ways that their brothers were treated, that life trajectories were dependent on whether you were a male or female. There were defined and descriptive roles for them as women, and an instilling of fear if there was a deviation from these. This resulted in lived experiences that were interwoven with deep gender inequalities, and a sense of the women feeling of less worth. Disclosing sexual abuse in such contexts, therefore, seemed unimaginable for the majority of the women.

The women shared multiple examples across their lifespan, which highlighted for them, as much as for me as a researcher, the emphasis and importance of shame in family life. This emphasis spanned from their early years to the present time. In addition, they spoke about how if they disclosed, rather than the behaviour of the perpetrator being scrutinised, the focus of parents, families and communities would be on what they as girls did or did not do. Through the storying of these accounts, some of the women were taken aback by how pervasive shame had been in their lives and were thankful of the opportunity to have had this self-reflective space, as shared by Sonam:

'It's definitely made me think about things in a different perspective cos obviously it's weird, I mean, sharam definitely and izzat less so, but still, plays a huge part in my life..it's constantly there, it's like that shadow that will never leave you kind of thing, but I never really like break it down the way I've done or process it the way I've done today so I found it quite helpful'.

Sonam acknowledges that the constructs of shame and honour continue to feature in her life. The use of the word '*shadow*' indicates their permanence for her, as if she will never be able to escape from them. Many women shared this sentiment. Although they were able to detach themselves from the constructs, in the sense that they saw no value in what they brought to women's lives, they were still operating within the realms of shame and honour in

various ways. As Sonam states, she is having to exist in the shadow of shame and honour because these are rooted in the fabric of family and community life.

Izzat (Honour)

The constructs of shame and honour, *sharam* and *izzat*, are largely described as one entity in the literature. The two were also intertwined in the stories that the women told. However, the narratives demonstrated that honour tended to be a more serious, affirmative and impactful influence in the women's lives. The content of the narratives about izzat, and the tone in which they spoke about it, was different enough for it to be included as a separate and final grand narrative in this chapter. The word 'honour' does not carry the same weight as 'izzat' in its meaning to the women, and so izzat will be used in these latter sections.

Zara was the most forthright in expressing frustration and anger at the construct of honour, which may have been because she was still tied into it by having to see her perpetrator, and not being able to openly disclose what he had done:

*'[T]he girl is the family's izzat. But if somebody...like... if...I don't know how to put this, if somebody came and...raped me...that would be the family's izzat gone. Not just my izzat. So it's **my** job to protect this izzat. And if somebody takes it away from me, it's my fault, and I will have to pay for it. So it's always on the woman. You know, it's like this thing - we have to hold it in our hand and if we drop it we're going to get punished for it. We have to hold it and it's such a heavy thing to hold for you know, all our life..and then we have to pass it onto our daughter, right? You know, "now you have to hold this izzat and it's your job to keep this izzat in place for the rest of the family".*

Zara shares this excerpt in both a considered and impassioned manner. Again, she talks in the third person, as if removed from this somewhat, but at the same time, knowing that this was, and is, her reality. It is as if this allows her the distance she needs to make sense of her reality of trauma and injustice. Her delivery in this excerpt suggested that there was a lot she

wanted to say, repeating the word 'izzat' and remaining in a continuous flow of dialogue, until she felt satisfied that she had argued the point. Using the example of rape, she explains how abuse, even rape, will always be interpreted as being the fault of the woman, and it is she who would be punished because of it. This is because the woman will be seen to have allowed her izzat to be taken, and to have failed in protecting it. Her inclusion of passing this responsibility on to her daughters portrays the inter-generational weight of this burden. The pressure on a woman to uphold a family's izzat is voiced through her repetition of her needing to 'hold' the izzat, depicting the fragility of izzat and how it can be easily dropped or lost. This task of holding the honour was a hard-lived reality for the women, as evident in Zara's account.

That so much should rest on a woman strongly indicates the patriarchal structures within which Zara and many of the women existed. Her account signifies that the woman's body represents the strength, stability, and success of a patriarchal structure. If she is raped, the structure is dismantled. Feminist writings critiquing rape myths have discussed rape as a component of patriarchal structures, an act which is used to dominate women not only by the act itself, but to create fear in women and hence, to socially control them (Hudspith *et al.*, 2023). Zara's account illustrates this. She has an unshakeable certainty that she, as a woman, is responsible for safeguarding the honour of the home. This inevitably controls how she behaves and acts.

Parminder also discusses how izzat is embedded into the lives of girls and women:

'I think, from a very young age, especially in Asian communities, it's kind of drilled into you, isn't it? -----the whole notion of family honour? -----And so that's drummed into you at a very, very, very young age, and you kind of conform to those, don't you, you know, until you kind of get out into the world and start challenging those-----you kind of think, well, actually, that's my responsibility. And I think that kind of stopped me from doing so [disclosing]'.

Parminder uses the verb 'to drill' and, like Sonam's reference to being 'drummed', the sense of honour being metaphorically beaten into the women was conveyed in several accounts. Drill and drum evoke the sense of repetition and reinforcement. Repeating the word 'very' illustrates that these ideas about honour are instilled into girls from an extremely young age, and they are only able to challenge them once they have been exposed to life outside of the family network. This demonstrates how the family environment had an intense insularity where these norms originated, festered and grew, unable to be contested by children in their formative years. Izzat is strongly associated with serious implications for the family, amplifying feelings of pressure to conform. Parminder continues to suggest, like Sonam and Laila, that izzat is associated far more with women than males:

'It's about being sacred, isn't it? Your sexuality being sacred uhm. It's about being pure uhm...which sounds so stupid in today's...you know, in the context of today's culture but, yeah uhm..... it's about if...a girl does something sexually uhm she loses her izzat. Yeah, it's about losing that pureness-----It's reinforced...you kind of grow up having a sense of what honour means but you don't really know what it means, if that makes sense'.

The use of the word 'sacred' emphasises the sense of responsibility each of these women was holding. The connection to God evokes a sense of fear and foreboding, if they break this code. 'Pure' adds to this narrative of godliness, always needing to do the right thing, and if not, there are likely to be consequences or punishments. Like Sonam, Parminder speaks in the third person here, voicing what she sees as the common community view of honour. There is again a sense of the women having no control over the expectations that are put onto them, and being tightly governed by them. Laila voices the same points and further indicates the deep-seated nature of honour in the community:

*'Honour is ..it's a multifaceted thing. Imagine a diamond. You're in the middle of it. There's lots of facets around you. It's not just your family. It's **everything** that evolves around you. That feeling comes from your family teaching you about it, and pushing it into your head. "Honour, honour, honour, honour" constantly, constantly, constantly. And "you're a girl. You need to be like this. You need to be some sort of polished beautiful silk...not touching bad things or dirty things". That's where it's come from. It's engrained, not just into our communities, but our ancestors, our roots....I don't think that will ever go away cos that's what makes up being Asian. Honour. Sharam. Izzat. Shame. That is what an Asian person is. Doesn't matter what religion you're from. If you're brown....those come with you...that's what I think'.*

In this excerpt, honour takes a central position and appears deterministic of everything else that happens. Laila used evocative imagery to illustrate this and emphasised honour's impact on *'everything'*. Through repetition of *'honour'* and *'constantly'*, the instilling of these constructs in the lives of the women is emphasised. The use of the words *'ancestors'* and *'roots'* allows her to convey the longitudinal influence of these constructs, and in her view, the continuing impact they will have. Her grouping together of 'honour, sharam, izzat, shame' conveys a sense that these are all one and the same thing in terms of their impact, influence and insidiousness, and the pauses between each word, further add to a sense of doom and inescapability in her narrative. In other words, it does not matter what you call these constructs, they are damaging, persistent, and permanent.

Across the data set, although there were many indications of gender inequality, and shame and honour being constructs which disadvantaged the women and negatively impacted their lived experiences, there were also narratives speaking to mothers as being the gatekeepers of these constructs. An analysis of mothers' perceptions of shame and honour falls outside of the scope of this research, but it is an interesting narrative that has emerged in terms of the women's lived experience of CSA, and how reinforced messages of shame and honour by mothers possibly amplified their silence and fear of disclosing. Priya states:

'I think it's [honour] what we get told by our...mums, really, it's not even the dads as much. It's the mums who say, you know, "you have to be like this or you have to be like that".'

Zara gave a number of examples of how her mother had established clear protocols of behaviour and expectations for her throughout her childhood:

'I think a woman is a woman's biggest enemy because she has lived her life that way....then her daughters have to live their life that way. So my mum has said, "well my mum told me I have to be like this and I have to cook and when mehmaan [visitors] come you have to feed them" and..she's kind of put that in our heads as well'.

The women felt that such traditional ideas about womanhood created certain expectant behaviours in them growing up. These included needing to behave like a 'proper' and good woman, cooking and cleaning in the home. The excerpt from Parminder illustrates this too:

'I remember, my mum saying, or was it my nan saying to my mum, or my mum saying to my nan..."she's got to learn to cook because when she goes to her in-laws her in-laws will send her home because she doesn't know how to cook". It was just absurd, uhm if you think about it now, but you know, all that stuff is just, yeah, it's kind of just implicitly kind of just drummed into you isn't it, and you get these kind of subtle messages that you internalise'.

Salma's relationship with her mother was fraught due to her mother denying the abuse, as narrated below:

'I approached and told her it was happening and her response was that I was breaking her family, ruining her family and he [the perpetrator] would never do such a thing and I was the devil basically, she just said that she'd rather, I'd be dead, than say all of this. Uhm, so when you say that to a 10 year old, uhm she kind of doesn't ever bring it up for the next couple of years and just goes through that abuse in silence'.

The failure to believe and safeguard Salma remains a painful event for Salma, and revisiting it in her story confirms for her that she cannot see her mother as a good person. She illustrates the depth of emotional damage caused by this point-blank denial by her mother and her mother's blame towards her. She sees the relationship, therefore, as irreparable on many levels. However, despite the intensity of the pain, Salma still manages to provide a rationale for her mother's behaviour. In the excerpt below, Salma shares how concerns about the wider community were the likely reason her mother responded as she did:

'[S]he was too worried about what other people would say. That's always been the case, -----like "Can we go out?" And it was like "No, if X Y and Z saw you what would they say?". And you'd be like, what do you mean if they see you?----- I think that was the biggest thing for her, that if people found out, she wouldn't have the perfect family-----with South Asian families, it is the family of the victims and the victims that are ashamed to even speak about this, [rather] than the accuser, and that's how it keeps on happening, because families are so scared to talk about it'.

Familial responses reflecting ineffective action to address disclosures as being dependent on wider community concerns are significant because they position these concerns over the wellbeing of the child. The point about shame being directed at the victim and their family, rather than on the perpetrator, echoes many of the narratives discussed earlier by some of the other women. Although there was a rawness and level of pain expressed by Salma when

sharing this experience of direct denial by her mother, she spoke in a measured manner. Through the storying process, she was able to step back from the context and clearly identify for herself what was rational and right, and what was illogical and wrong. The process enabled her to reinforce this message for herself, confirming that the shame in South Asian CSA cases is being placed on the wrong person. Salma's lived experience, to an extent, worsened following disclosure. This indicates the complexity of disclosures happening in such a deniable environment, as is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Although predominantly governing the life of a woman, izzat is a familial concern and males in the family are also impacted by it. Yasmeen discusses this in the context of migration, where male members of a family felt responsible for protecting their family's reputation as they inhabited an environment that was unfamiliar and often hostile. First-generation South Asian families migrating to the UK, often felt isolated and disconnected from the host society, and maintaining a family's honour was described as being a reassuring and protective factor in Yasmeen's narrative. She spoke about how her family did not have the know-how to respond to anything which risked this izzat, and hence were ineffective in responding to the abuse occurring in the home:

'So I think for a man, there's a lot of pressure on maintaining that so-called status of respect in a family. And when you're not equipped with the right tools, which is quite fundamentally education uhm you don't even know how to maintain that in a civilised, communicative, positive way. How do you maintain respect around an issue that's been told it's worse than a dirty nappy? -----I think there's a fear of intervention-----of consequences, fear of uhm losing so-called respect in the community, in the family, fear of having to face the reality that actually there might be an offender in your family or actually you were offended against..... It was just basically trying to keep private and safe, my parents were very insular. They had no family in the UK, so uhm it was about trying to keep things to yourself because they had hard experiences when they had mixed with people'.

Yasmeen's account reveals important findings about macro issues beyond family and community life. Many of the women's families were first-generation migrants who would have encountered similar fears, and the reinforcement of values based on honour is likely to have

been an attempt to preserve the familiar in an environment which was unfamiliar. However, the strength of this preservation may have unwittingly led to serious ramifications for victims and survivors of CSA. Yasmeen's story, where the abuse was actually known about in the family environment, speaks to a continuing silence about the abuse within the family, amidst persistent concerns of honour being damaged or lost. Her description of CSA being perceived as '*worse than a dirty nappy*' evokes the idea of it being an untouchable, undigestible and completely discardable commodity. This could not be accommodated by a family adjusting to a different life in new territories, according to Yasmeen. Her narrative suggested that the preservation of honour amongst the migrating populations may have led to many families feeling unable to report the abuse, attempting to self-manage it within the privacy of their homes.

Her story is also different from the other women in that the CSA was known in her family, but was partly not addressed due to being perpetrated by immediate family members. There appears, therefore, to have been a complex set of factors at play, predominantly resulting in the continuous abuse and persecution of female family members by the male family members. Yasmeen does not overly comment on this aspect, possibly due to the pain and trauma. Instead, she adopts a very systemic and macro perspective as to why the abuse had occurred in the first place, centring on the experiences of migrant families and socio-economic difficulties and communities feeling isolated. Although she is not providing reasons for the abuse by doing this, she does find that these broader aspects give her a sense of meaning for herself, sharing that CSA should not simply be seen as something that is wrong, or that someone is right and another is wrong. Rather, that other broader factors can also make children and families more vulnerable to CSA. In addition, her story indicated that families do not always know how to manage CSA, a seriously debilitating and damaging occurrence in family life. She suggests that concealing it may be the only thing they know

how to do and have control over.

Yasmeen summarises the significance of shame and honour in the lived experiences of British South Asians as being '*virtual pillars for your every breath...indoctrinated in people from a very early age*'. This quote provides a poignant conclusion to the narrative of shame and honour discussed in this chapter. The women provided nuanced, explicit and multi-layered accounts of what shame and honour meant to them growing up, how the constructs were communicated to them, and how they interpreted these in their formative years. They spoke about how shame and honour emerged as concerns during their abuse and how they impacted disclosures or non-disclosures. Speaking to me years after the abuse, they were able to revisit shame and honour through a different lens, often realising that the constructs were still predominating their lives in various ways, even if they themselves now attributed a different meaning and value to them as adult survivors. Often, this consisted of a lesser, even nil value, having experienced the suffering caused to them by the constructs, and the potential for them to damage, deny and destroy.

There are multiple layers of shame discussed in this chapter, mirroring the findings of Tonsing and Barn (2016) in their exploration of intimate partner violence as experienced by South Asian women in Hong Kong. In addition to its taboo and hidden nature, as discussed by Kaufman (1985), shame's overwhelming power lies in its ability to make one feel judged. In collective societies, this judgement tends to be particularly intense. Not only can this create a permanent sense of powerlessness for individuals and lead to a loss of autonomy and choice, but it also serves as a form of social control imposed by the social structures one may inhabit. For the women, these structures were enforced not only by the perpetrators but also by their immediate family members, extended families, and their communities.

Deeper insights into the research participants - part 1

This chapter has heard from Sonam and Laila from the Bangladeshi community, Satinder and Parminder from the Indian community, and Zara, Yasmeen and Salma from the Pakistani community. This research does not evidence that coming from a particular community led to specific outcomes in terms of how women experienced their abuse. Nor does it seek to suggest that some experiences fared worse than others, and it remains sensitive to all the experiences shared by the women. However, through its intersectional lens, the research has sought to highlight any intersections that may have occurred in these experiences.

As second-generation South Asians, all women alluded to sex being a taboo subject and sexual intimacy being an unspoken topic in families. Family life, as created by their first-generation migrant parents, led to an invisibilisation of sexual discourse, which resulted in them feeling unable to discuss anything sexual with them. Some stated that this increased their risk to CSA as perpetrators were aware of the secrecy around sex-related discussions. However, as mothers of third-generation children, some of them shared that they were far more open about such talks with their own children, seeing this as a means of keeping their children safe from sexual abuse. Literature on how British South Asians who are second-generation or beyond, parent, and whether this is similar or different to first-generation parents, is sparse. In their sample of 19 British South Asian mothers, Kerrane *et al.* (2024) found that they actively prepared their children to live in a hybrid culture, suggesting greater openness in the parent-child relationship. However, a report published by the Oxford Against Cutting charity indicates that there continues to be a need to overcome sex-related taboos in British South Asian communities (Clayton-Hathway, 2024).

None of the women spoke of caste, but there were indications that class, and related to this, education and employment opportunities, may have impacted their experiences to some extent, and could still be doing so. As discussed earlier in the thesis, British Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities encounter greater socio-economic disadvantages (Matejic, 2024; Race Disparity Unit, 2025), with women reported to have higher unemployment rates than the Indian and majority White communities (Li, 2024). Such factors are likely to have created certain stresses for women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds during their everyday lives as children and even now as adults.

Zara and Yasmeen appeared to be exceptionally constrained by the abuse, and seemed unable to move away from how it had left them feeling. Both were from the Pakistani community, unemployed, and although most women in the sample had achieved an undergraduate degree, Zara's highest qualification was an NVQ Level. In addition to being unemployed, this suggests a further limitation in her economic capacity to establish greater independence, and hence, confidence for herself. Yasmeen discusses the challenges of migration for her Pakistani family when she was growing up, and the intense effort to have economic stability. Much of her narrative about her childhood centred on her parents working hard to make ends meet, and facing the barrage of racism on a daily basis. Here, the intersections of class, ethnicity, race and migration were particularly pronounced.

In contrast, Parminder and Satinder, who were of Indian background, had been educated to PhD and graduate level respectively, and were in stable employment. They had created an existence which took them away from the context of the abuse, both in terms of social and economic life. That is not to say that their pain and trauma were any less, but they had acquired the means to seek therapy, in Parminder's case, and both had established strong careers. Satinder's narrative illustrated being able to step back from the abuse, and, for example, mock aspects of parental responses to the inappropriate behaviour that she

had experienced in childhood. Salma, of Pakistani origin, also seemed to have created a life that was less governed by the abuse, despite her educational journey ending at the school level. She, however, had severed ties with her immediate family members for her own wellbeing, and demonstrated a particular strength and determination to achieve justice for herself. She was the only woman among the 15 pursuing a criminal investigation against the perpetrator.

Sonam and Laila, both from the Bangladeshi community, spoke about strong connections between family life and the local Bangladeshi community. This closeness could be related to the British Bangladeshi community experiencing considerably lower socio-economic outcomes, and hence, a greater reliance and dependency on the community. Although they were both the youngest participants in the sample, aged between 21 and 31, they spoke extensively about the significance of community to family life, and were impacted by this in negative ways. Having grown up in such a close-knit environment appears to have influenced both their risks of CSA, as well as their disclosure patterns. Both had been abused by men within the close family and friends network, alluding to the interconnectedness of the community. Sonam's perpetrator was a close relative, and hence, Sonam felt certain that disclosure to her parents would never take place. Laila had disclosed the abuse to her parents, but as the perpetrator was not family, it was easier for her and her family to disassociate from him without any significant implications for them in terms of their local community. However, she was persuaded by her mother to retract her police charge due to concerns about how this would be interpreted by the community. This is discussed further in Chapter 6. How the women were connected to their perpetrator, therefore, was also significant to their experiences.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter documents first-hand accounts from British South Asian women who have experienced CSA. Through this research, they have been given the opportunity to speak for themselves, and were keen to share their story with me. I saw this as a privilege, and have taken care to present their words with due attention and sensitivity. Chapter 3 has discussed my attempts and commitment to undertake the interpretive task well, but I wish to reiterate the point here, too, where the reader 'meets' the women for the first time.

The findings in this chapter provide depth to our understanding of what shame and honour mean to British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA. Their narratives illustrate the nuances of shame and honour, demonstrating that the insidiousness of these constructs ran deep into their being, and the potential for them as a barrier to disclosure was, therefore, mammoth. Many of the women shared that the constructs remain an integral part of their lives. This level of understanding about shame and honour provides a wider and deeper understanding of why they obstruct disclosures. The chapter has also identified the relevance of class and socio-economic factors, and how this may have influenced women's experience, even in the present time. Whereas this chapter has homed in on the barriers to disclosure as governed by shame and honour, suggesting that the women had limited control over their lives, the next chapter presents an alternative perspective, and moves to other facets of their experiences.

Chapter 5: Narratives of Strength and Resilience

"You know, he's followed me all my life. Every time I move houses, he moves houses, to a couple of streets away from me, even now he lives a couple of streets away from me. And that's one thing I know, he's promised me, no matter where I go in the world he's going to follow me. And I've learned to deal with that".

(Zara).

Chapter introduction

This chapter shares narratives that present a new framework for understanding British South Asian women's lived experiences of CSA, disrupting the arguably fixed interpretations of their identities. These identities can often be presented as lacking agency, having been formed through discourses of patriarchy, suppression, and submissiveness. Instead, the narratives shared in this chapter have been grouped under the broad heading of strength and resilience because they demonstrate the women's ability and capacity to have survived the abuse, mostly in complete isolation. In addition, as depicted in Table 3, the women had made significant educational and employment progress and appeared to be engaging effectively in social and family life. They were working, volunteering, parenting and 'surviving' in the world. As far as I was aware, they were not engaging in unhealthy or destructive behaviours. Having heard their stories, I often wondered how this was possible, especially in circumstances such as those indicated in the opening quote to this chapter. However, it is equally important to highlight that the focus of this research did not enable a deeper exploration of these lived realities and narratives of strength and resilience have not been presented to negate the pain and trauma experienced by the women. Rather, they speak to the inner strength the women have drawn on to sustain not only themselves, but those they love and want to protect. These narratives also demonstrate that the women now have greater agency, as adult survivors, and a desire to exercise this. Finally, they provide insights into a different future from their past, with the women having shaken off the constructs of shame and honour from their psyche at least, and looking to a different and

less restrictive life for themselves and their own children. These facets of the women's identities have been categorised under the below three grand narratives:

1. Secrecy to protect others.
2. Seeking to make change for others.
3. Living amongst, yet disconnected from shame and honour.

Secrecy to protect others

This narrative relates to the women's desire to protect family members from the upheaval and disruption a disclosure would create. Only two of the 15 women disclosed the abuse as children. A few disclosed to friends and therapists in adulthood. Two disclosed to immediate family members in adulthood. Two of the women reported the abuse to the police as adults, one having retracted their statement. The other was seeking a criminal conviction against the perpetrator at the time of the interview. For one of the women, I was the only person she had disclosed to. Although these patterns of disclosure and non-disclosure are not atypical of CSA victims, there was a firm intention amongst the women to keep the experience away from family members, during the time of the abuse and even today. It is within this context of what was ultimately an existence of secrecy that a narrative emerged of protecting family members, above and beyond their own pain.

The women often spoke about how they had lived the abuse, experienced the trauma, and did not see any reason to inflict the same pain on loved ones. They were able to compartmentalise all the damaging feelings from the abuse, and progress to what, on the surface, appeared to be a successful professional and personal family life. This protection of others and their resilience to enable this included subtle, yet poignant, accounts and narratives that are missing from existing literature. Zara speaks about what would happen if

she ever disclosed, and through the process of explaining this to me, appears to be reaffirming this decision for herself:

'They [extended family] would have like cut off all ties, and there would have been like a big break in the family ----- so that's probably why I stayed quiet. That's why I stay quiet now, as well, because I know there's going to be a big fight and relationships are going to break and everything. And I don't want to be the reason for that (very quietly). Yeah..wish it was different though...it shouldn't have to be like that, you know. If someone's done wrong, one person's done wrong, that person should get punished, not everybody else....So..he'll get what's coming to him sooner or later ----- I could very easily go to the police now and report him. But I've been through it. You know, I've helped myself and everything'.

Zara's use of words like 'cut,' 'break,' and 'fight' suggests the damage that disclosure would have on her family life. Ties would be severed and become irreparable. There would be conflict, and she sees herself as triggering all this disharmony, as acknowledged in a quiet voice. However, the tone of this narrative changes midway, from Zara seeing herself as a potential cause of family disruption to someone who is the object of injustice. Through having the space to talk this through with me, she can identify that it is not she or anyone else who should have to suffer because of what the perpetrator has done. From a quiet voice, she becomes more authoritative and louder, wanting the perpetrator to be 'punished' and 'get what's coming to him'. There appears to be a fight bubbling inside her, but she is unable to take it anywhere, sharing that her husband has requested that she not disclose. She presents a good and close relationship with her husband, and states that he has asked for this to protect his mother, who will be significantly impacted by the disclosure and is closely related to the perpetrator. This appears to present a paradox of emotions for Zara, who shifts from her role as protector and keeper of peace to wanting to expose injustice and criminal behaviour. There is considerable complexity in her context of non-disclosure, but it indicates that even after many years since the abuse, Zara is unable to free herself from it in the way that she may want or need.

As a woman who was not economically independent at the time she shared her account, there is a strong possibility that Zara feels that she cannot deviate from what her

husband is asking, however much she may want to. She speaks about her comfortable and secure life with him and her children, and it may be too precious and frightening to risk losing this, should she go against his wishes. There is a possible element of patriarchal bargaining here, a concept developed by Kandiyoti (1988) to explain how decisions made by women, to adapt as best they can within patriarchal structures, can reinforce these very structures. Such decisions are not signs of approval from the women, or of their passivity, but often strategies to function and survive under unequal or difficult conditions. For Zara, her decision, by aligning with her husband, has retained economic security and safety, and his love and care.

Sonam had thought about taking her case to prosecution, and shared this with me prior to the interview, during it, and even after her transcript was shared. This was something that was surfacing again and again in her lived experience of abuse. However, her narrative also continued to have strong elements of protecting her family:

'I think if he wasn't a member of my family, may be it'd be easier, if he was like a guy down the road or something or a teacher or something like that, it'd be easier, but because...he's a member of my family like...so many lives will be destroyed...by it...'

The pauses towards the end of the extract allowed her to emphasise how damaging it would be for her family life if the abuse were revealed. Even though her own life had been severely impacted by the abuse, including a nervous breakdown and the loss of a life-changing educational opportunity, she remained concerned about the other *'lives [which] will be destroyed'*. She talks about *'so many lives,'* not just one, two, or a few. This feels unmanageable for Sonam, someone only in her 20s. The burden of this is huge, as well as unfair and unjust. She tries to examine her feelings of such enormity by explaining how it is the familiarity of the perpetrator within the family network that makes the destruction seem inevitable.

Parminder spoke emotively about protecting her vulnerable and sick father and her mother, the latter to whom she was not close as a child, but was protective of in adulthood:

*'I don't want her to be upset because of me, because of **me** (very quietly). I don't want to give her, even if she, even if she thought...even if she supported me, and said to me "actually it wasn't your fault", I still wouldn't uhm...because I know what it's like to live with this...and...even for...for her, I wouldn't want her to feel that. I wouldn't want her to feel... "that shit, I left her by herself to sort it out, and just ride it through", uhm...yeah, I just couldn't, I couldn't do it to her'.*

Repetition of the words '*I don't*,' '*I wouldn't*,' '*I couldn't*,' emphatically express Parminder's insistence that she can never disclose to her mother. She is convinced that her mother would feel guilty and hurt by being unable to protect Parminder, and she does not wish for this. She feels that she has lived through the pain and continues to live through it, but wants to protect her mother from experiencing it. A disclosure would mean that she will trigger this painful cycle, locating herself, Parminder, as the cause of it. By explaining this in a quiet tone in the opening sentence, and emphasising the '*me*', she hints at the unfairness of this.

Despite her being the one who has experienced the abuse, she would be the one to cause pain to her mum. Here she is questioning how it is that she, as the victim, has been put into this additional disadvantageous position. In this sense, Parminder alludes to what is a reality for many victims/survivors when considering disclosure. Unlike their own pain, they are unable to control this extension of pain to others. This provides an important context for non-disclosures. The protection of the family is expanded by Parminder to include the protection of a family's reputation:

*'Any thought of disclosing anything, you would be...too fearful of what would happen to your own family, but also ----- how people perceive **your** family'.*

The use of the word '*your*' and her emphasis on it allude to the importance which she attributes to the family unit and the protection of it. She does not just want to talk about her family, or someone else's family, in this sentence, but everyone's family in her community. This is because how '*your*' family is perceived, matters to everyone. This emphasis on a family's image again indicates the barrier this poses for disclosures, for potentially each and

every South Asian victim/survivor. Parminder's desire to protect her mother from pain, another innocent female, can be symbolic of patriarchal bargaining through exercising her agency and not allowing patriarchy to damage and hurt another woman.

She continues to emphasise this point by recounting what was still an upsetting incident for her, where, in her early adolescence, she had been slapped in public by the perpetrator. She feared that if she became visibly upset by this incident, the disclosure might also spill out, which is something she did not want, as she explains below:

*'Because he...despite everything he did, he-was-still-a-part-of-my-family (emphatically). Uhmand thinking what would **happen**, either to him or to me? And the impact that that would have on my, **my** family?...That was just too much to bear at the time'.*

Regardless of her remaining, to this day, saddened and tearful by this public humiliation and what she saw as sheer brutality, Parminder recalls the strong feelings of loyalty she had for the perpetrator as a close family member, and not wanting him to come to any harm. Her delivery in the above excerpt emphasises this tension, where, in the same breath, she acknowledges the abuse and the need to protect the perpetrator. Parminder had only disclosed the abuse to her therapist and me. From a very young age, she had been subjected to sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators, both within and outside of the family, and family circumstances were such that she had to remain connected to some extent to one of her perpetrators. However, she remained silent due to her sense of protecting her family unit.

Like Zara, Parminder continues to live with the injustice of not seeing her perpetrator held to account for his crimes, wanting to maintain family harmony. There is an element of selflessness and self-sacrifice in this, because whilst Zara and Parminder continue to bear the burden of their suffering, others in the family can enjoy this harmony. Although Zara speaks of the comfort she has gained in disclosing to her husband, his request that she not

disclose to anyone else or report it is a further example of silencing Zara as the victim/survivor. Satinder also frequently referred to this element of protecting the family in her account, and her narratives were the strongest in presenting how this was a barrier to disclosure. She talks about the fear of violence, killings, and criminal conviction, all of which would destroy family life and relations:

*'[T]he idea of, for example, my father knowing and then going out and killing my XXX, going to jail, was a **l-e-g-i-t-i-m-a-t-e** worry of mine for about 10 years after it happened uhm like really legitimate, which is really, I can say it to you because you would get it, but it's so hard to say to anyone else you know'.*

Her emphasis on 'legitimate' was more than the general emphasis women had placed on certain words (illustrated in bold in the empirical chapters). She spoke this word extremely slowly, expressing her genuine fear as a child that if she disclosed, her father would be furious. This would lead to him murdering the perpetrator and then being imprisoned. She brings me into her narrative of violence that took place in some Punjabi households in the era she was referring to. Although I could not directly relate to this, I was aware that violence and volatility were features of Punjabi families during that period in particular, as families wrestled with post-migration challenges and issues. She continues her protective narrative below:

*'You know there's so much emotional guilt in my culture. You know, you do something wrong, and you'd give your father a heart attack, so what if you actually told them about sexual abuse you know what I mean? As a child, that very threat of you being the cause of your parent's death, is real. It feels real, right?.....So that's the main barrier, that this child, **any child**, feels in this community, that they're going to **destroy their family for the rest of their life**'.*

Here, Satinder alludes to the role of a child in a Punjabi family and the expectation that they are responsible for their parents' health and happiness. Satinder's narrative about protecting one's family moves to suggestions for current practice and policy. She argues that in the South Asian context, a child cannot be seen as separate from their family and that the family

will need good and robust support after any disclosure. Otherwise, the child simply will not disclose:

*'So one of the things for survivors is you know, they're very likely to, not want to do **anything** that's gonna put disruption and danger in the path of their family. They're going to need **so much** reassurance, so much reassurance that their **family** will get support. You can't just take away a survivor, a child survivor, and leave the family hanging. **No** way because that child survivor won't do anything ----- And that means the families need support. **Enormous** amounts of support, so you can't support a South Asian survivor without supporting the family'.*

She has strong feelings about the need to take a more holistic approach to CSA, without which she believes disclosure rates from the community will remain low. Returning to her own experience, she states:

*'I can't comprehend bringing my perpetrator to justice. I've been asked countless times by people I've disclosed to [friends], would you ever call the police and my first, my first reaction was it will **destroy m-y fa-m-i-l-y** and that's because of izzat and honour...It just feels like there's gonna always be an added layer for an Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi child, an added layer'.*

She again emphasises 'destroy' as if no other word summarises the extent of damage a disclosure would cause. In her mind, destruction is the only outcome, as if nothing after this can repair the damage inflicted on family life post disclosure. These are strong sentiments, and the emphatic tone in which she says 'my family' alludes to her protectiveness towards her family.

Roshni spoke about how she would never disclose because of the impact this would have on her mother. Coming from a single-parent household, Roshni was the only woman not to speak about izzat as solely representing something governing female behaviour. Roshni felt that izzat was about how the community perceived your socio-economic status. She already felt judged due to her mother being a divorcee and due to Roshni's difficulties during her teenage years. Furthermore, the family had struggled financially, and for Roshni, all of this made her particularly protective of her mother. Although the injustice of not holding the perpetrator to account angered her, she stated that she would never be able to disclose

because her mother had suffered enough in her life.

Wanting to protect non-abusing parents/carers and other family members from the impact of disclosure is common amongst children who have experienced CSA (Warrington *et al.*, 2023). In the excerpts in this section, this appeared to also be enveloped in an inter-generational sense of duty and protection from the women (as children and even now as adults) towards their non-abusing parent and family members. Parminder and Roshni did not want to disrupt the emotional world of their mothers, sharing that they had suffered enough in their lives. Their accounts indicated the elements of self-sacrifice that first-generation South Asian migrant mothers had made for their families, committing wholly and selflessly to husband, children, home, and community. Kerrane *et al.* (2024) discuss how second-generation British South Asian mothers feel that they are far less bound by such a self-sacrificing identity. Although the 15 women also demonstrated this, now as second or third generation adult women, there was still an element of self-sacrifice amongst the women who had not disclosed.

Like Parminder and Roshni, Zara and Sonam's sense of protection was centred around the need to maintain a family identity, which continued to be seen as acceptable. For Zara, family life was defined by close extended family relations, the disclosure of which would inevitably damage. Sonam too was concerned about disclosure having a long-term effect on the identity of her family, concerned that those marrying into her family would negatively judge her and her family because of the sexual abuse. These concerns had a slight crossover with the narrative of Community-wide perspectives as influencing family life (Chapter 4), but there was more of a direct link back to the family unit and the actual impact that disclosure would have for a family existing within a wider family/community context. The interwovenness with family members, typical of the collective identities of South Asian family life, is signified in these accounts. Although such collectiveness within families continues to

remain a feature of British South Asian family life to some level (Ansari-Thomas, 2024), as second-generation women, most now with families of their own, this also appeared to be less of a factor.

Satinder's narrative of protection also went back to when she was a child experiencing the abuse, whereas the other women centred on protecting family members largely in the present time. She had lived in a household with several extended family members, and the likelihood of severance of these relations was a strong reason for her not disclosing. Instead, she sought to protect the network of relationships through which the family functioned.

Whatever the precise reasons for protecting family members, the narratives demonstrate a deep sense of the women taking on the burden of thinking first and foremost about everyone else and seeking to avoid familial pain, upset or disruption. The narratives illustrate an innate strength in the women who continued to hold onto their experience of abuse for the sake of others. These narratives about family protection do not generally link to suggestions from the women about how practice ought to consider such concerns, unlike other aspects of what they had shared. It is as if these were private familial matters and decisions. When the women narrated these intimate accounts about their mothers, fathers, and siblings, it was a separate processing of information from when they were considering how practice can be developed for the future. On these occasions, the women very much internalised their storytelling, possibly reassuring or reminding themselves why they did not disclose. It was only Satinder who expressed a connection between the two elements and vocally summarised how practitioners need to be aware of how a disclosure will strip away this desire to protect. Most of this excerpt has been included in its entirety because it illustrates the difficulties a South Asian child victim/survivor of CSA experiences in disclosing:

*'I think the particular barriers that face South Asian women when it comes to sexual abuse like, should not be underestimated, and they **are different** because South Asian females grow up with a huge sense of internalised responsibility for the welfare of their families. And that's you know, multi-faceted, and until, until services learn that there is extra work to be done to support that child, divest their responsibility for the family, and then also support the family...you're not going to get as much disclosure and as much opportunity to support as you can. Like I think that's really, really crucial to understand. South Asian women are mini adults carrying you know, their families wellbeing on their shoulders. Uhm so you know, and, and that's drilled into them from a very young age. And I think you've got to really, really **get** that and **embrace** that and embrace and put yourself in the position of a child who's been told **over** and **over** again that what **she** does, what **she** does with her body and her life and her sex and her virginity, will impact everything ----- help the family, help the survivor. You gotta, you gotta help the family help the survivor. You gotta help them negotiate whatever issues around shame or honour that they have as well, so that they're in the best place because these families are so connected, right? You're so connected that actually, in a weird way, families **are** in the best position to support, but they need the support to support.....Like if there's any threat to a child, of anywhere between 8 and 16, that she's gonna be taken away from her family, **it is not going to happen**. So that's also the thing. You've got to help them as a family unit. Otherwise you won't have the chance to do anything'.*

In a lengthy summary, Satinder articulates the additional barriers and unique experiences of South Asian female victims/survivors. She states that the child, specifically the female child, is interwoven into the expectations and standards of family life, and carries a heavy weight of responsibility, to ensure that everything keeps operating smoothly for all who are a part of the family unit. This responsibility is internalised and is integrated with the constructs of shame and honour, and the girl/woman's supposed duty to uphold these. Her use of '*mini adults*' conjures up a sense of this weighting. It helps explain why a child cannot be disconnected from the family, as she explains, why the child must feel that the family unit as a whole will be supported to manage the ramifications of disclosure. She refers to '*you*' when referring to services/professionals, calling for them to '*get*' this reality and '*embrace*' it, and reassure these girls and women that they have not failed in this responsibility by disclosing, and that families will be effectively supported. She repeats and emphasises several words to convey this message: '*really*,' '*embrace*,' '*over*,' '*she*,' '*help*,' and '*gotta*.'

What is also relevant under this grand narrative are the insights into the often unspoken narratives about the nature of the relationship between most of the women and

their parents. Although this was not suggested as being an intimate one by the women, not even emotionally nurturing by many of them, at the same time, it appeared to be a strong one. Traditionally, the authority of elders in families and their role in decision-making about their children's lives are cultural norms in South Asian families (Deepak, 2005; Berrington, 2018). Those migrating from the sub-continent to Western countries would have integrated such norms into their families, with an expectation that children commit wholesomely to their familial duties and roles. Children, thus, embodied the needs and wishes of their parents into their own identities and into their lives, almost without a choice. The women in this research were these children, and examples of filial piety were consistently relayed in their narratives, creating a hierarchy between parents and children and a psychological distance. Sharing their experience of CSA in this context would be difficult, and many of the women alluded to this.

Seeking to make a change for others

A second narrative relating to strength and resilience was the determination of many of the women to make positive changes for other South Asian girls and women. They spoke about how they were motivated to not let this experience ruin the rest of their lives and, instead, wanted to use what they had been through to help others. Many women shared that they wanted to speak with me because they had a desire, almost an urge, to make changes, or at least help contribute to changes. This also suggests a possible trauma response for the women, which deserves greater recognition; the need to use their experience for positive change for others. They also wanted to expose the issue more within the South Asian communities and beyond. These narratives were affirmative and filled with energy. They were in contrast to descriptions generally associated with South Asian women experiencing abuse, which tend to denote passivity, invisibility, and silence. Women used words such as

'*enthusiastic*,' '*excited*,' and '*relieved*' when they learned about this research. Yasmeen stated:

*'I do think it's crucial and important to communicate on such key subjects that are quite often brushed under the carpet, **more** so in the South Asian community, in today's society. And if I can do something to create positive change in that, that domain, I will...I just jumped at the opportunity, I felt enthusiastic, excited, and I felt ultimately this is an invaluable piece of research...and if it can impact on the wellbeing of a little girl that I once was...then why shouldn't I?'*

Yasmeen speaks about the issue being dismissed in the community. She felt '*enthusiastic*' about addressing this and had '*jumped*' at the opportunity to partake in the research. In contrast to the silence and hidden nature of CSA, especially in South Asian communities, this urgency to participate is quite paradoxical. It was as if she were waiting for someone to ask her about it. Her reference back to her own experience is poignant, referring to how her desire to make a change will mean that other little girls may be saved from such suffering. This was an important motivator for her, and for many of the other women.

Through narratives about seeking change, many of the women were negotiating their positions within a patriarchal system, using available opportunities to improve and develop their conditions. Ruslin (2022) discusses how such agency can be demonstrated inside and in relation to patriarchal structures, and seeks empowerment and voice, through such patriarchal bargaining.

Laila shared similar feelings:

'I feel like our voices are often silenced as South Asian women. And so when I saw you advertising your research, I thought, I want to get involved and I want my voice out there..uhm and I thought you know, may be my voice can help impact and help other survivors. I felt optimistic, strangely, and I thought, you know, someone's doing this work and it's really important, and I need to get involved'.

The word '*voice*' is mentioned three times in this short excerpt, and there is a clear desire

expressed by Laila for these voices to be heard, including her own. Of all the women wanting to contribute to change, Zara's determination for this was the strongest. The process of storying reinforced this objective for her, and she repeated it throughout her interview.

This is evident in the below extract, which were her first words to me in the interview:

*'I want to come into this field and help other survivors, and I want **them** to maybe be where I am now ----- I want to raise awareness as well ----- I think for me, it's not too late but I just don't see the point now. I've helped myself get through this. And I want to help other women now..... I want to kind of wake our community up to open your eyes and realise this is going on. And I think the elder generation, my mom and dad's generation, they've lived their life, they're not going to make a big difference now. But for my generation, and my children's generation, I think it's us who can make this difference by raising awareness'.*

Zara's use of 'I' is prevalent in the above extract. She feels as if she is the one in control now, and she is determined to use this control for good. Her ambition to make change is big and her narrative implies that she does not want her experience of CSA to hold her back. She has '*helped [herself] get through it*', and now she wants to shake up her community so that they acknowledge CSA happens, and that something needs to be done to address the problem. When asked why being a part of this research was important to Priya, she echoes similar accounts to the others:

*'I think it's an area that really needs to be looked at, because there's a huge amount of secrecy in the culture...I think **women** in the culture and especially uhm...the girls...need a voice really. But more than that, I think it needs to be the people around that individual who...who know about it, but...just shut their eyes...or look the other way'.*

This extract illustrates a desire to contribute to developing a culture where the voices of girls and women are not lost. She also indicates that such research should seek to address the secrecy and silence that is maintained and reinforced by non-abusing members of the family/community, indicating the need to have a more open culture around CSA. Priya frequently pauses in telling me about her motivation to participate, as if she is thinking directly back to her own experience in forming her response. This was an experience where she felt significantly isolated in the period of abuse, and after, and where she felt that no adult or agency was addressing CSA as a subject, adequately. She continues by asking, '*Where else is the information going to come from? Other than from people like me?*'. This

rhetorical questioning is an affirmative presentation of her feeling that she has a role to play in contributing to improvements and developments in how CSA across the South Asian community is managed and responded to. Through the process of storying, Priya was also able to share her anger, frustration, and despondency in terms of how she feels the South Asian communities respond to CSA. Now in her mid-50s, she shared how in earlier years, she had sought help for her experience within her community:

'There was not one single organisation, that's Indian, and the temples, and those sorts of places, that actually...even thought about it you know and, and why not? Why not! When, you know, it [the South Asian community] has got the highest rate of child sexual abuse in the world? So I just saw it as a cover up. Because it probably happens with the people that are in there anyway. But this is denial en masse'.

Her frustration continued in her response to recent initiatives to safeguard children in temples:

'I don't believe it. I don't believe it. I think this is just tick box exercises. "Yes we've got this, we've got this"... It's a tick box exercise, and the culture is still allowed to continue and that is how I see it in these temples, when you know they say they've got this, they've got this, you know, all the political correct stuff they need to have uhm and all the, you know, processes they need to have in place to remain as a valid organisation. I don't believe it. I don't believe it'.

As a victim/survivor, Priya feels strongly that she needs to be involved in the developments to safeguard children, in whatever form this contribution takes. She is distrustful of leaving this to others, and her repetition of *'I don't believe it'* indicates this. She illustrates a powerful sense of individual responsibility to be part of the change, believing that only victims/survivors can really make the difference needed. Priya's profound feeling of needing to be involved in developing practice, as a victim/survivor, suggests that she had a sense of safety and trust in taking on this role. The CSA system needs to build on this trust and enthusiasm, integrating Priya's experience and knowledge, and that of the other women, to inform practice and policy. In a context where secrecy and silence have prevailed, something which featured across the narratives of the women, this indication of co-production with victims/survivors offers a promising way forward in identifying these unheard

voices. Engaging with victims and survivors is an important way to highlight gaps in practice and the implications for victims/survivors, as indicated by international law such as the policies to tackle CSE and CSA set by the Council of Europe (2024), as well as national policies such as the inclusion of adult survivors in developing the CSA Centre's Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway, and in the establishment of its Advisory Board (CSA Centre, n.d.). However, should victims/survivors prefer to remain anonymous, the opportunities for them to have a voice appear to be less available. This point is revisited in Chapter 7.

Laila's story also includes references to wanting to make positive change, but more so because this will avoid them living with the regret of not having disclosed. Laila expressed intense regret about having retracted her police statement against the perpetrator:

'If somebody is a victim then they need to speak to somebody about it because...the way I felt, that regret...worse thing of my life...worse thing of my life (laughs). I've never felt such regret'.

Repeating the word 'worse' and stating it to be the worst thing in her life indicates the extent of her regret. Her message to others is not to have this regret, and she uses the opportunity to revisit this particular aspect of her experience. It is a feeling that she is unable to remove, and by sharing her story with me, this becomes apparent to her once more. Her laughter appears to signal her feelings about this, almost as if the regret is worse than the abuse she had experienced. Laila's experiences were different from those of any of the other 14 women, as she had experienced a single, isolated incidence of sexual assault as an adult in her 20s. She had immediately disclosed to her parents and followed up with the police. Even in this context, however, she was prevented by her mother from pursuing the case and had eventually aligned herself with her mother's thinking. The rationale from her mother was that the reporting would bring shame on Laila because she was a woman. The process of storying indicated that she had not reconciled this tension between what she felt was the right thing to do and what her mother, or the community, felt was the appropriate action. In terms of supporting change, therefore, Laila's message rested on creating an environment

where South Asian girls and women are supported to make reports of assault, and not be swallowed up in concerns about familial reputations.

Similar to Laila, Jas also wanted to create environments where women could report abuse without a sense of pressure. Her ex-partner, to whom she had disclosed, used her abuse against her during their divorce proceedings. She felt that because she had never disclosed, her capacity to defend herself against his accusations of being of 'poor mind' because of the abuse, left her vulnerable:

'Because I couldn't talk about it, it made me look like "maybe she has got mental issues" or whatever. Yeah. When I saw it [the research], I said, I definitely want to be part of it, to let other people know that, you know, it can be used against you if you don't talk about it'.

Through sharing her story with others, Jas has moved from a highly vulnerable position to seeking therapy, to speaking about her experience, and now to being an ambassador for a charity supporting South Asian women who have experienced abuse. For someone who still felt quite unsettled by her experience and still felt elements of self-blame, storying her experience with me appeared to have provided some helpful insights into how she had moved on from this experience in a positive way. Kully was another woman who had used a public platform to help others, although not by disclosing her abuse. Kully was raising the profile of sexual abuse and exploitation across the South Asian communities, and was very clear in her reasons for participating in the research:

*'[W]hen I heard about this [research], I was just like oh, yeah, definitely, I'm more than happy to share my experience because we need to break down that...it's so cliché when I say it, but that shame, honour, **bezthi** [synonym for shame] of talking about something that you know you didn't really deserve happen to you and I think...for many years I didn't really see myself as a **victim**, if that makes sense? And I think the way Asians, Indians **process** something like this is very different and we don't look at ourselves as, victims? It's just something that happened and we try and suppress it and that's what I've done. I've suppressed it to a point where actually, I think I suppressed it so well that I don't actually remember much of it. But I know it happened, and I know the impact that it had. So there does need to be a conversation about this. We have to provide space for boys and girls to come forward and know that their voices are going to be listened to...we need to start having and providing spaces to have that conversation, and I've never heard of anything like this [research] happening before'.*

In the above account, like many others, she speaks about the excitement of being a part of a project that will give voice to women like herself. She reiterates what the other women had spoken about concerning these experiences, namely, additional barriers that need understanding and exposure. She emphasises the need for conversations and spaces for the subject of CSA to be aired and discussed, and that this should stop being solely connected to shame and honour. Without this, she feels that victims/survivors will continue to suppress their experiences. She alludes to points about cultural resiliency, stating that *'the way Asians and Indians process something like this is very different, and we don't look at ourselves as victims'*. To address this gap, she has taken on the active role of creating spaces to have such conversations. Almost ironically, she does this without revealing her own experiences in these forums, and so, although she has created a channel for voices for others, her voice remains silent and hidden.

Miriam, too, had taken on quite a public role to address the issue, centred on her own experience of CSA. She reached a point in her adult life where she felt she no longer wanted remain silent:

'[I was] sick and tired of...looking through the newspaper and reading this abuse story and that abuse story but, the media aren't covering events, you know around CSA amongst Asian people uhm in a proportionate or uhm practical, productive way, so, yeah, it [participating in the research] was daunting to begin with, but as I've done it many times, it's kind of become my role now'.

Miriam shared that, however difficult she had initially found talking about her abuse, she continued to do so because she felt that such experiences should be known. Like others, she appeared to have found some solace in adopting such a role, even a different identity for herself, away from the abuse. Having a public-facing identity where she is able to voice her experiences of abuse appears to subjugate the years of denial of her abuse by family members. It also allows her to highlight the failures in safeguarding, as she recounts below:

'As a child, I used to find it almost exhausting having to explain to a White person, simple things, well, for me were simple things, but for them they just couldn't get it. When I talk about shame, when I talk about honour, when I talk about modesty, to them, they're just words. To me, I live and breathe and eat it. They, they, they are the air that I breathe. It's like saying to me "Miriam shame is not that important. Put shame in its place".....However, it's like saying Miriam stop breathing'.

This excerpt conveys what living with shame and honour means for Miriam, and many of the women shared that this understanding is missing amongst professionals. It was a key reason why many women participated in this research, or why they were undertaking a public role in seeking change, or why they had plans to engage in relevant projects. Laila also spoke similarly about the need to have a better understanding amongst professionals about cultural norms affecting South Asian victims/survivors. When talking about her White therapist, she states:

'She was White. And it felt like, I don't know if it was the lack of experience, but just her Whiteness was too much for me. And I thought, I can't actually talk to you about this because...it was just the one session and I thought, I don't want to continue with this because in my head I just thought, she won't get it...I just felt like having a White therapist, she wouldn't, she just won't get it. Like she won't understand the shame, the guilt. Uhm and so I think moving forward, I would need to see someone with a similar heritage'.

Having decided to seek therapy, it was unfortunate for Laila that she was unable to gain any benefit from it. Although the above experience is not necessarily the experience of all South Asian victims/survivors, it is a significant perspective from a victim/survivor who felt that someone outside the South Asian communities would be unable to comprehend the magnitude of how shame and honour impact CSA victims/survivors. It therefore strengthens the need for the meaning and impact of shame and honour to be better integrated into practice and service provision.

On the other hand, Miriam spoke at length about how South Asian communities do not know how to approach the subject, stating that *'a lot of BAME organisations don't have the terms sexual abuse or child sexual abuse or sexual in their titles. Uhm, again, because that's about uhm (sighs) not calling it what it is'*. This gap in terminology exasperates her,

and how this speaks directly to the community's incompetence, in her view, in addressing the problem. Satinder shared similar feelings and said that she came across this research when looking to see what support services were available in the South Asian community for CSA victims/ survivors, concluding that there was nothing significantly available. Towards the end of the interview, Satinder expressed an interest in supporting any future work that I may be involved in:

'If there is something around harnessing positive energy around this [subject], then I'm well up for it...if there are things that you find that are happening or other women that you speak to, that also want to, I don't know, make changes or whatever, just keep me posted'.

The desire to be a part of a progressive movement was clear across the women's narratives. This is predominantly why they engaged in the research and shared their stories. The Research Advert (Appendix 1) indicated that I was seeking to explore how CSA is *perceived and managed in South Asian* communities, rather than focusing on personal details of abuse. The women responded to this research aim by sharing accounts which demonstrated the tendency for communities to silence the abuse, and the motivations of the women to challenge this secrecy came through sharply in their narratives. Whereas they had been silenced, through the structures imposed and reinforced by their families and communities, they did not want this to remain a reality for girls and women presently suffering or at risk of this abuse in the future. Discussions about how the abuse was being 'perceived and managed' therefore generated significant responses in the interviews, as did how they thought it ought to be perceived and managed.

Some of the women had discovered this research project online. They had been searching for sources of support or trying to find out how CSA in South Asian communities was being responded to. Social media and online feminist campaigns, of which #MeToo was the most prominent, offer new means of raising awareness (Quan-Haase *et al.*, 2021). The #not my shame campaign for increasing public awareness of CSA, represents another

example of how online mediums provide victims/survivors with a platform to voice their experiences (#not my shame, n.d.), and others have reported how victims/survivors share experiences on podcasts and on radio interviews, with the intent to achieve social change (Muldoon *et al.*, 2024). However, none of the women indicated that they were a part of such online or social media groups. The preservation of anonymity, which most of the women expressed as being important to them, is a likely reason for this. Only two of the women had decided to talk about their experiences publicly, but in non-online spaces, probably allowing them to have a level of control over the process of sharing. Another woman had adopted quite a high public profile supporting South Asian women who had experienced CSA, but without sharing her own experience. Participating in this research appeared to be a safer means of sharing for the women, and offers significant learning for how CSA practice and policy can support such groups of women.

These narratives represented strength and resilience because not only did the women have to relive their experiences in various ways, through telling me their stories, but they did this with the strong intention of creating positive change. Thus, their narratives often swiftly moved from pain, hurt, and anger to wanting to help others.

Living amongst yet disconnected from *shame* and *honour*

The final grand narrative under the umbrella of strength and resilience refers to how, although the women held a disdain for shame and honour, and all that these constructs represent, many of them were still unable to disconnect completely from them. This requires a particular level of resilience in managing this duality of perspectives.

Resilience in the context of child abuse involves discussions about how people cope with the abuse that they have experienced, and how they manage to overcome its impact, in

order to sustain the 'normal' aspects of everyday life. In many narratives, the women gave examples of their resilience, without calling it this. Their resilience was illustrated through their capacity to exist in a community where the constructs of shame and honour, which had impacted their experience of abuse, continued to be upheld with rigour, even though the women themselves had no regard for them. In this sense, they still had to live amongst the constructs and the cultural norms they detested, even though on an individual level, they felt detached and disconnected from them. They lacked the freedom to call out what they saw as flaws in their community and openly explain why they despised the constructs so vehemently:

*'You know, it's just...it's **not** fair. Where does the man come into it? It's a farce (laughs), yeah that's what it is. It's a man made thing izzat. The man decides what izzat is, how you're going to protect it. You know, everyone wants their wife and their daughter to uphold that izzat but that same man will go out and take somebody else's izzat away. So I think it's just a farce and it just needs to kind of stop now'.*

Zara boldly rejects shame and honour in her present life, and her laughter ridicules the construct of honour. Her choice of words reaffirms her feelings towards it, describing honour as a '*farce*' and repeating the word. It's a farce because she feels that there is hypocrisy in how men interpret honour, seeing it as only applying to women and not themselves. This gender divide in how shame and honour are experienced rests very uncomfortably with Zara, with her stating that '*it*' needs to stop. She knows that stopping it will not be easy, or even possible, but the phrase indicates that she no longer has any capacity to hold meaning for the constructs. Her weariness of having to live her life by them, and still having to be unable to expose her perpetrator, is conveyed.

Satinder shares an account of how the community can deny abuse to save face, and how she finds this difficult. She is appalled that her parents attended a wedding of a family where domestic violence had been perpetrated, indicating that, because of shame and

honour, abuse is not called out. In the excerpt below, she provides her own reaction to this sidelining of domestic violence:

*'For me, I'm like, don't come near me like you know what I mean. I am literally like there is absolutely no way. You and your family, knew about this [the domestic violence] and didn't stand up to it. Now I can't blame them because, you know it's a lack of education, but who's to say that it's not the same for sexual abuse, you know, so where are you going to get the justice in your, in **your** community? Are they going to ostracise the perpetrator? Are they going to ostracise the perpetrator's family?'*

Satinder is distancing herself from this injustice, illustrating that shame and honour do not feature for her in such decision-making anymore. At the same time, she gives an explanation as to why the older generation may not be responding as she is, explaining this through a lack of education. This simplifies what is likely to be far more multi-layered, but for Satinder, the point is more about needing to distance herself from such perspectives. Questioning where the justice in all of this is, and whether perpetrators are going to be held to account, are questions that hang in the air because there are no answers. But these are questions that she wants answered, possibly because she is seeking such answers in relation to her own abuse.

Satinder also summarises the impact on victims/survivors from still being embedded in communities that uphold shame and honour so strongly:

*'You know, there are probably many, many people of my generation who are second generation who may, or may not disclose. And unfortunately, we know, the impact of intergenerational trauma. We know the risks of it, you know, we know all these problems [and though] there's hope, but it's still **devastating** that there's potentially lots of people that have been left with undealt issues'.*

She is one such victim/survivor, feeling that she cannot disclose due to shame and honour and thereby, still having to live her life within its confines. She speaks on behalf of many and articulates the human cost of upholding shame and honour in the context of CSA. Laila's decision to retract her statement to the police is also an example of how she was still

having to abide by the constructs of shame and honour. Even though her mother acknowledged the assault and empathised with Laila's experience, she indirectly enforced the constructs onto Laila:

'Mum was like "Oh don't go to the police. Look it's happened...leave it to God, leave it to God...Oh you know, you've just got divorced, you've got to think about this, what will people say, you know, what will people say, people find out they're going to say this they're going to say that". And I remember, I just I left it. It just...because she was right. I mean (laughs) I'd just got divorced. If people found out, I'd be scum of the earth, people already see me as damaged goods. I don't need to be damaged anymore. So (gulps), that happened'.

This excerpt depicts the depth of shame and honour continuously needing to be upheld by Laila, as a woman. Divorce and sexual assault are intertwined as one, both markers on *her* reputation rather than on the males involved. Words such as '*damaged*' and '*scum*' indicate the impact of certain events on a woman in terms of how she is perceived by others in her community. Her mother reinforces these cultural constructs, and Laila concedes to them. However, the gulp in her voice indicates that she remains unsettled by her decision, and this process of storying reaffirms for her that this was not what she wishes she had done. She continues to share how she has encountered the perpetrator in the street since and confronted him, and ends recounting this episode by stating, '*But...I'm gonna hurt him one day. It's just, it's mad, it's...I'll never let it go*'. This confirms that there remain loose ends to her experience due to being shackled to shame and honour. Again, living amongst the perpetrator and not being able to expose him, although she so desperately wishes to, again indicates strength. She has compartmentalised the experience, continuing with her life, but believing that one day she is determined to have justice and at that point, she will not '*give a damn what people are gonna say*'.

Patriarchal bargaining is illustrated by Laila and her mother's decision to take no further action against the perpetrator. In their view, they had already experienced high social costs from Laila's divorce. Therefore, burying this experience would save them from further shame and enable them to move on with their lives, with the community none the wiser. This

reflects the limited choices available to women within patriarchal structures where a judgement on a woman is so heavy.

However, Laila also speaks about the positive aspects of shame and honour when talking about her brothers' partners, and her suggestion to them that an Asian girl would be a better option for them than a White girl. She states that because Asian girls are brought up in an environment of shame and honour, they are more invested in a relationship and will think *'I've got to think about my family, I've got to think about...everything, I can't just up and leave as soon as something gets hard'*. This illustrates that although she may be disconnected from the constructs of shame and honour on a very individual level, she is also unable to completely break away from them and what they represent. As a young woman in her 20s, this is a contradiction that Laila appears unable to reconcile, or possibly knows how to.

Miriam's mother had also responded to her daughter's abuse in a way that reinforced the shame and honour constructs, although less directly than Laila's mother. Miriam's account of her mum denying and minimising her abuse as a child is not discussed extensively by Miriam, but she does share that when, as a child, she tried to tell her mother what was happening, her mother told her to *'Jaa dobjja'*, which is an Urdu/Punjabi phrase instructing one to metaphorically go and drown oneself. It was a clear indication that what was being shared did not want to be heard, and that it would be better if Miriam herself did not exist. On reflecting on this in her story, Miriam shared how she feels that her mum was tied to the pressure of community perspectives and the implications for the family should the abuse become known. However, as a child, she was directly subjugated by the constructs of shame and honour, not having the language or cognitive ability to even understand them at that age. Furthermore, her mother's failure to call out the abuse, even when Miriam was an adult and alluded to it, meant that she was still enveloped in the clutches of her mother's commitment to upholding shame and honour. This was at a cost to Miriam, who was pained by the denial of her truth, both in childhood and adulthood. Living through this and

developing affection and closeness with her mother despite her denial is indicative of a certain strength and resilience.

The experience of mothers was not a part of this research, and so how and why they preserved honour is not a significant element of this thesis. Furthermore, the women rarely delved into why their mothers may have acted in a certain way, almost as if accepting that this was just how it was, and generally, mothers were presented negatively or as passive women. They had either contributed to the silence around sex and sexual abuse, denied it had occurred, or were insufficiently empowered to address the problem. And the women provided explanations for this behaviour, such as living in a patriarchal home meant that their mother had less of a voice; or that the mother's key preoccupation was to run a household which was free of shame and dishonour; or that mothers had their own pressure of needing to appease the family or community. Miriam and Salma drew in the latter point when talking about the hostile and unsupportive responses from their mothers when each had disclosed their abuse. The women, therefore, spoke for their mothers rather than shared what their mothers had told them about why they were behaving or responding in a particular way. These missing narratives indicated something about the emotional relationship between the women and their daughters, suggesting a psychological distance and disconnect. The women had spoken about how the experience of migration had created specific challenges and pressures for their mothers, and maybe empathy for this had amplified the already existing generational gap between mothers and daughters. This distance may have been what impeded the women from inquiring more about the lives of their own mothers.

Matoo (2022) has argued for a greater understanding of the experiences of Black and South Asian mothers in the social work realm, as it is an under-researched area. The author states that in the West, the concept of motherhood is constructed according to White identities of motherhood, pathologising and silencing mothers who do not align with this.

Referring specifically to South Asian mothers, Matoo (ibid) states that they tend to be understood within a paradigm of shame and honour, concepts that have been discussed across this thesis. Her call for the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and class to be considered when exploring the narratives of Black and South Asian mothers is a welcome one, providing a useful framework for seeking insights into their responses to CSA.

The narrative of strength and resilience was presented through strong language and evoked a deep resistance to shame and honour, and their negative implications for women. However, it also, in antithesis, demonstrated women's lives continuing to be impacted by the constructs. Strength and resilience were therefore represented through their living with this ambivalence, and straddling two very different realms of thinking and feeling about shame and honour.

Deeper insights into the research participants - part 2

In addition to Zara, Sonam, Parminder, Satinder, Yasmeen, Salma and Laila, from the previous chapter, this chapter also hears from Roshni, Priya, Jas, Kully and Miriam. From the latter five, Miriam is of Pakistani origin, and the other four are from the Indian community. This chapter has discussed the women's sense of loyalty and protection to their families. For the group of women who had not disclosed to parents/the non-abusing parent, there was a sense of needing to protect them from the pain of disclosure, across the three communities. However, there was a difference in terms of how this was interpreted according to the age of the women. There was also a collective response to want to make a change, and again, how the younger and older women responded to this was subtly different. And finally, the continuous subjection to shame and honour, was something that appeared to be affecting all the women to varying degrees, with only the oldest participant, Priya, appearing most free from its clutches.

Whereas the older participants, Roshni, Parminder and Satinder, expressed concern for parental health and circumstances, Sonam, a younger participant, had a greater concern for her sibling group and was contemplating the idea of whether to report the abuse to the police. Like Laila, who was also a younger participant, the sense of injustice seemed to still be simmering in Sonam, and for both of them, this was more present in their narratives than parental welfare. Whether this was something that would quieten with age is unknown, but it was beneficial to capture and learn that the drive for justice does exist amongst this group of CSA victims/survivors somewhere across their arc of experience.

Roshni was the only woman not to have disclosed to anyone; not to family, friends, professionals or support services. I was the only disclosure recipient of her experience. Her narrative included insights into how existing family stigma, namely parental divorce and being raised in a single-parent family, can lead to a child victim of CSA, and an adult survivor, feeling that disclosure can be an added family stressor. As well as Roshni's references to poverty, this intersection of family structure and poverty is an important one to note in terms of both vulnerabilities to CSA and barriers to support and interventions.

Many of the women, across the three communities, spoke powerfully about wanting to make positive changes for girls and women, whether or not they were still influenced by the constructs of shame and honour. There was a clear narrative of not enough being known about CSA in South Asian communities, and any particular factor or any intersections did not influence the drive to seek change, be that ethnicity, age, education level, employment status, or who the perpetrator had been. There was an overwhelming consensus that they wanted their experiences to inform change and that they were willing to be a part of this change.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has shared narratives from the women which speak to strength and resilience through *secrecy to protect others, seeking to make change for others and living amongst yet disconnected from shame and honour*. Their descriptions under each of these grand narratives have provided insights which have previously not been shared in the literature about CSA across British South Asian communities. Why they do not disclose in this chapter goes beyond simply 'shame and honour' and presents women who are fiercely protective of their families. It has also provided stories which show how the women, although silenced on one level, are energised and loud about wanting to make a difference for other girls and women. These narratives also illustrate that the women are still having to live amongst the constructs that have so often, and continue to, constrain and pain them, but that they accept this with considerable dignity, live with this, and provide rational reasoning for why things are the way they are.

Despite not disclosing, not reporting to agencies, not seeking timely therapeutic interventions (as children, and for some, as adults), and amidst feelings of considerable isolation and loneliness, they were 'surviving'. This notion of surviving, as used here, sits uncomfortably with me, due to its subjectivity and simplicity. However, it allows me to represent their strength in being able to continue with life, through having made sense of what has happened to them. Their conversation with me was a further opportunity to do this, and repositioned many of them into a healthier place, although by no means indicating an endpoint of their journey.

Findings discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 have centred on barriers to disclosure due to the constructs of shame and honour, the nuances and embeddedness of these constructs, and the strength and resilience of the women who have had to live with the experience of

abuse, predominantly in isolation. The next chapter is the final findings chapter and provides a further backdrop as to why many choose not to disclose. It does this by sharing narratives which encapsulate what happens when disclosures do happen, familial responses to this, and implications for victims/survivors.

CHAPTER 6: Life After Disclosing: What Happened, Why it Happened, and What This All Means for the Women Today?

*"It's been three years since I've come out and I'm **shocked** at the way my experience has been interpreted... the **lack** of support I've had and how they've just, they don't wanna talk about it and they just want to bury it under the carpet, and pretend it hasn't happened. It didn't make me feel any better or any good. I **regretted** coming out with it in fact. It was a **big** mistake I made".*

(Kiran).

Chapter introduction

The thesis has, up to this point, discussed the problem of low disclosures and reporting of CSA in British South Asian communities. Disclosing is often viewed as a prerequisite to one's recovery from the abuse. It can be a disclosure to family or friends, statutory services, or third sector organisations, and it need not involve reporting the abuse. Whatever form it takes, there is an implicit belief in the CSA field that disclosing will be a positive step forward for the victim/survivor. However, this chapter documents that this is not necessarily the case in contexts where family and community expectations and concerns predominate, overriding the victim/survivor experience. Therefore, this chapter brings the research to a crescendo, evidencing that the problem is not simply about why disclosures may not happen, but also about what happens when they do.

This chapter hears from the five women who had disclosed their abuse to a non-abusing parent or parents: Kiran, Sofia, Tina, Salma and Miriam. We hear from Kiran, Sofia, and Tina for the first time in this chapter. Salma had also disclosed to the police (as an adult), and as discussed in Chapter 5, so too had Laila, but she had retracted her statement. Salma and Miriam were the only two who had disclosed to family members, their mothers, as children, but neither had had their abuse reported to statutory services.

The women expressed a strong regret in disclosing, leading to a broad narrative of 'Disclosure' in this final empirical chapter. Findings illustrate the severe ramifications of disclosing to family members, including the resulting intense isolation of British South Asian female CSA victims/survivors, evidencing why disclosures may never occur. Four of the women felt that leaving their homes and, for two of them, disconnecting from family members through intentional estrangement, was the only way of ensuring their own wellbeing. This chapter, therefore, also depicts unique insights into the sacrifices the women have had to make in their personal lives. In the context of self-sacrifice, the chapter briefly reintroduces Priya and Satinder, who, felt that the only alternative to not disclosing, was to leave their homes and community.

Kiran

Out of concern for her children, Kiran disclosed her sexual abuse to her immediate family members, and unequivocally spoke about her regret in doing so, as shared in the opening quote of this chapter. This is because her family ostracised her, refused to speak about the abuse, and had failed to demonstrate in any way that they acknowledged that it had happened. Instead, they have shown contempt and violence towards her and forbade her from entering the family home. Due to this, Kiran was intentionally estranged from her family, a decision she took to protect herself from pain and hurt. However, this has also disconnected her children from her family, which causes her sadness because she feels that they had previously benefitted from her family's love and attention.

Three years after the disclosure, Kiran remains regretful that she told her family about the abuse. Her shock at the lack of support from them and their disregard for what

happened to her has left her feeling that she should never have disclosed. She feels abandoned by their reaction, and whereas they have decided to move on from the disclosure, Kiran has a strong desire to emotionally process what happened to her. She believes that she is thwarted in her journey of recovery because of their unwillingness to discuss the disclosure with her. Working in the helping profession, this phase of processing is an important part of her identity, and without it, she remains disappointed, angry, and disconnected from her family. Speaking about being ostracised, she states:

*'I can't go back to my **maternal** home. I can't go back to my home, where I grew up-----
That makes me feel quite shit'.*

There is sadness in her tone as she relays the reality of being cut off from everything that she has ever known. Research evidences that estrangement of adult children in the context of child abuse is a painful and extensive process, with those enacting the estrangement feeling a deep sense of loss of the family unit (Herschmann, 2023), and this sense of pain was clear in Kiran's narrative about the ramifications of disclosure, as indicated above. The sadness Kiran expressed moved me, as I was drawn into the complex array of emotions she was sharing. She had articulated these to me in a clear, rational way, but the undertone of loneliness and desertion was profound. I felt privileged that she trusted me with this, but also felt equally powerless in that I would not be able to make any of this better for her.

A little later, Kiran quietly states: *'I still don't think I'm fully believed in my family'.* Their silence and unwillingness, or incapacity, to recognise and hold what has happened, has brought one of her greatest fears alive; the fear of not being believed. This leaves her feeling further victimised and, once again, alone with her experiences of abuse, because of the lack of change the disclosure has brought. She feels that her experience was of no significance to her family. From her perspective, she expected change, particularly, a greater

understanding on their part as to why she had a tendency to become angry. Labelled by them as a '*weirdo*', '*fucked up*', and having '*psychological issues*', she had believed that the disclosure about what was a disturbing and traumatising history of CSA would lead to greater sympathy from them. This did not happen, and instead, she has continued to be perceived as troublesome.

Herschmann (2023) has reported on the lack of understanding and support from family members as being a painful consequence of estrangement, which adult survivors of abuse can experience. Furthermore, Muldoon *et al.* (2024) discussed how, post-CSA disclosures, victims/survivors often have the added pressure of acquiring unwanted social identities such as being stigmatised by the abuse. This was experienced by Kiran too, as she was now perceived even more negatively by her siblings. How groups (e.g. family members) see victims/survivors is important in mediating the relationship between traumatic experiences and post-traumatic wellbeing and growth (ibid.), which highlights the extent of what Kiran has lost.

Kiran's disclosure had also been shared with extended family members, which caused Kiran to feel further shame and victimisation. Although she believes that it was right to call the abuse out and make the perpetrator accountable, she feels that she is still being judged by others, and so lives with the tension of whether it was or was not the right decision to disclose. Kiran's non-abusing parent and her older siblings did not outrightly deny the abuse, and some even turned it to their advantage. The sheer lack of support for Kiran is quite inexplicable. It is as if it is easier for the family to do nothing, rather than talk it through, even if it means losing Kiran in the process. This demonstrates the impact of disclosure on the family unit, with families lacking the necessary skills to manage it effectively. Rather than being able to contain it in any way, they find themselves responding in an irrational and emotionally charged way.

However, through storying her experience, Kiran is able to draw out some of the positives the disclosure has brought out, however small and minor in comparison to her sense of loss. She expressed pride in how her disclosure enabled another family member to gain the courage to disclose. Linden and Sillence (2021) have documented that despite the complexity and enduring nature of estrangement, there are positives for adult survivors of abuse. These include improvements in quality of life and overall wellbeing, and gaining a newfound sense of agency which they state is an important feature of post-traumatic growth. Kiran's account illustrated that having a greater sense of agency and control over her life had brought strength to her. Despite being shunned, she felt that she was more *'together'* psychologically than her siblings, being able to compartmentalise her experience of abuse and having meaningful relationships and interactions with others, as well as a successful working life. Finally, she now feels able to recognise the importance of connecting with her inner child to better understand the impact and damage caused by the abuse. This is an important process for her as she progresses on what she calls her spiritual journey, and is helping her to seek an existence beyond what she has now. This unknown future is presented in a hopeful narrative.

As she comes to the end of the interview, she shares her gradual acceptance of never having the parents and siblings which she had desired. She speaks about the cultural expectations of remaining loyal to your family, come what may. Only through therapeutic support has she been able to realise that this need not be the case. Kiran's account illustrates that disclosures are also the start of something different for victims/survivors. They are a trigger for disruption, but also a catalyst for change. The journey can be a difficult one, and whereas Kiran's educational and professional standing has equipped her with some of the skills and strength to remain true to her desire to process the impact of abuse, I am conscious that other women may not be able to sustain this sense of abandonment and

emotional devastation. Disclosures for such women, therefore, remain unlikely or unwarranted.

Towards the end of the interview, the difficulty of living with the abuse, and its not being acknowledged by her family, comes to the fore. However, she also vocalises her capacity to make sense of this reality, rationally and logically, even attempting to understand the perpetrator's lived experiences. She recognises that there may never be an end point to her struggle or a resolution to her story, but that she is on a continuous journey of sense-making and appears to be at some ease with this.

Sofia

Sofia also regretted disclosing her abuse and feels that this has tinged her life with negativity. Early in her account, she talks about how because she had imagined that familial responses to a disclosure would be more about the person hearing the disclosure e.g.: *"Oh my God, how do I deal with it as a person"* and not *"how can we support the victim or how can we make things easier for the victim"*, she had made it a *'priority'* to *'hide'* and *'navigate'* the abuse. Her eventual disclosure mirrored her fears, leaving her feeling disappointed and regretful. This was because the perpetrator and the perpetrator's family remain unaware that she has disclosed the abuse to her immediate family. This lack of accountability means that there is no resolution following the disclosure, and Sofia is left in limbo. This is worsened by the disclosure becoming known by some of the extended family, leaving Sofia feeling exposed and further victimised. Although she does not suggest that these individuals should confront the perpetrator, she does feel hurt by their continued collegial interactions with the perpetrator.

Sofia's parents' reactions were markedly different, with her mother being supportive, unlike her father. However, Sofia shares how they both immediately became preoccupied with feelings about extended family members and the community perspective. She had suspected that this would happen. Nevertheless, she had also, during her period of non-disclosure, kept the hope alive that maybe their reactions would prioritise her:

'[M]y dad was just kind of blank and didn't say anything, and then he tried to calm everyone down and said like yeah, "well we need to get the other side of the story" and like, just didn't really validate any of it. It just basically was like "Oh...if it's real...I don't know if you're telling the truth".-----[M]y mum was like "Oh I feel like I've been a bad mum, I haven't even been able to protect my kids" like, you know, "they've took advantage of my honour" '.

Seeing the reality of their responses play out made Sofia feel that she no longer had hope of them prioritising her needs. Sofia's recollection of what her parents had first said at the point of disclosure signifies that their focus was diverted away from her as a victim/survivor and onto other concerns. Like Kiran, the disclosure left her feeling quite alone with her abuse, being drawn into additional issues which she did not care about. The disclosure, in this sense, had brought extra pressure on her. Although she herself did not feel shamed by the abuse, asserting that it was the perpetrator's shame and not hers, she did feel concerned that community members might start to perceive her differently due to the abuse. Despite feeling privileged to have the support of her siblings and mother, acknowledging that this is rare, she still feels that the wider community perspective has the potential to intrude negatively on her future.

Sofia's narrative of disclosure had a significant strand about responses from those outside of her immediate family circle. As the thesis has discussed, this was a familiar preoccupation for many of the women's families, and here, there is an opportunity to discuss what may be occurring in a community where this intrusion by community members occurs in the first place. Individuals within collectivist communities tend to have a public image and identity which is heavily aligned with ideas of honour (Kandiyoti, 1988), and this can differ

from their private image at home, which like all families, is vulnerable to secrets, loss and trauma. The refusal to believe a victim/survivor's disclosure, or respond to it adequately, therefore, tends to be more about protecting the wider community context and embedded patriarchal structures, rather than being concerned about the private suffering of the victims/survivors and particularly the suffering of women (Gill and Anitha, 2025).

Puwar (2004) offers a useful framework to explore how women's bodies are perceived and helps explain why women's bodies become sites of intense scrutiny. The public persona, the family's representation in wider social spaces, must conform to dominant expectations of respectability, while private experiences of harm are rendered inconvenient or invisible, pushing women either into silence or out of their communities. Although Sofia's extended family, like Kiran's, was aware of the abuse, there was no acknowledgement of it, as if the wider community context in which they all lived and operated, celebrated and connected with each other, had to remain intact, at the cost to Sofia.

When she describes the lead-up to the disclosure, Sofia's usual matter-of-fact tone suddenly acquires emotive language:

'I have had mental health difficulties and I never really associated the two -----it's actually impacted my entire life. So I was just kind of...you know, at my wits end, like why should I allow this to rip my life and, you know, be dealing with this on my own when everyone's kind of arguing about silly things, not knowing that this is, you know, the fire brewing inside me'.

Even though she had navigated her feelings about the abuse and tried to lead a '*normal life*', she wrestled with the injustice of her life being '*ripped apart*', and one day, in a tense family argument, she had disclosed the abuse. The excerpt above indicates that she felt a sense of injustice in seeing everyone else getting on with their life, without mental health struggles, yet she had an internal '*fire*' within her, which she had to carry at all times. It is as if she had reached a point of some desperation with all these feelings of containment and burning,

driving her to be at her *'wits end'*. The word *'brewing'* indicates a build-up to the disclosure, leading to the eventual explosion of telling her family about the abuse. However, her disclosure was made in a momentary lashing out of anger, and not in a planned way as she had always envisaged. She said that her capacity to internalise the pain of abuse had reached its threshold. When talking about disclosures as being a part of healing, she is affirmative in regretting the disclosure, and does not link this to recovery of any kind:

'Yeah, it's weird cos I kind of regret it. I regret disclosing, like I really do. I think I was in a better place when, like I said, I had that hope that you know when I do eventually disclose, I would get that support from my family and like extended family and I didn't, and now everyone knows about it'.

Like Kiran, Sofia expected that things would be different and that there would be a change. However, again, there appeared to be a brushing aside of the abuse. Other than the support and acknowledgement of the abuse by her father, Sofia does not express what she had hoped for after the abuse. This is similar to Kiran. Through both their narratives, disclosure led to a messiness and disorder of emotions and family dynamics, as if everyone impacted is unsure about how to function within the family unit following a disclosure of CSA. Although there is an inevitability that ruptures in the family will occur following a disclosure, and that things will never be quite the same again, these narratives also indicate the importance of seeking victim/survivor and family member perspectives on what they each need, to rebuild these ruptures.

A sidelining of the abuse by families reflects the complexity of familial networks, which are heavily interwoven, as was the case with Sofia. She explains that the abuse became possible due to a reliance on extended family members to care for children. Post the abuse, she is still having to see the perpetrator due to this continuing interconnectedness. Sofia makes a significant point about gender impacting the outcome of her disclosure. Her father had prioritised broader familial concerns over Sofia's disclosure, not wanting to disrupt familial relations with extended family members. This was because the

perpetrator was from his side of the family, and Sofia states that if the perpetrator had been someone on her mother's side of the family, her father's reaction and responses are likely to have been different. Her mother is, therefore, constrained by the action that she can take. Furthermore, her mother is even advised by her own family not to expose the abuse, highlighting the strong tendency to conceal CSA.

Throughout her narration, Sofia has a calm tone. It appears that she has accepted that she will be supported by some, and not others. This calmness may also be explained by her comment that there is a cultural expectation of needing to be the '*bigger person*' in situations of difficulty or conflict. Sofia finds herself having to live in this environment of unresolved issues, following the disclosure, in several ways. Firstly, the perpetrator remains oblivious to the disclosure, despite the ruptures in her own family unit. Secondly, she has to continue seeing the perpetrator due to the interwoven nature of her extended family. Thirdly, her father has been asked to leave the family home due to his failure to support her and to stop interacting with the perpetrator's family. He refuses both demands, causing continuous tension within the family home, and undoubtedly, still affecting Sofia's sense-making of the abuse.

Tina

Tina's parents became aware of her abuse recently, and although stating their support for Tina, they continued to have interactions with the perpetrator's family and, thereby, failed to demonstrate this support. Tina was left feeling hurt and abandoned by this, and to protect her own wellbeing, broke ties with them. My conversation with Tina was different to the other 14 women in that her experience was still raw. The reported act of

betrayal had occurred only a few months before her interview with me. Through storying the events, Tina expressed some understanding of her parents needing to save face and attend a family event at the perpetrator's home, but overwhelmingly, her feelings were of confusion, disappointment, and anger. She also felt that patriarchal decision-making was a part of this, with her father wanting to preserve extended familial relations, and his loud and aggressive nature preventing her from directly confronting him about these decisions. Instead, her mother has had to take on the mediating role. However, Tina feels that her mother is limited in this due to subjugation to patriarchal structures, including having to leave her home in the Indian subcontinent to marry someone in the UK, her experience of domestic abuse, and living in a masculine-dominated community. This leads to her mother making weak attempts at showing her support, questioning why Tina had not disclosed earlier, and expressing a desire to move on from the disclosure rather than demonstrating a robust approach to addressing the abuse. Following the disclosure, Tina was, therefore, also in a state of upheaval and left without any resolution. She remained torn between, on the one hand, caring about her parents and how they must be feeling about the estrangement from her, and on the other hand, being resolute in wanting a firmer commitment of support from them. Blake *et al.* (2023) discuss how children can experience a profound sense of loss when their parenting support is not as they expect or wish. Tina's narrative alluded to this in that although she did not experience abuse by either parent, she strongly conveyed a sense of failure on their part in calling out the abuse and demonstrating adequately that they shared her pain and hurt.

Salma

Salma, from all the accounts of disclosure to immediate family members, initially appeared to have reached a place of greater surety and direction. This stemmed from having lived several years away from her family unit and being in a healthy and supportive intimate relationship. Herschmann (2023) found that the intensity of estrangement had reduced in her

research participants where one to three years of intentional estrangement had passed. This stronger positioning led to Salma having a strong desire to spread the message that girls and women can still experience life positively after having experienced CSA:

'I want there to be something out there to say, actually, if you do this and come out and speak [disclose], you can make it and you can have a better life. I'm yet to ever see in the news or a documentary out there that someone says that this happened to me, but this is what I did and I'm so much better for it now and I think that's missing, and that scares a lot of other people to maybe not come out and talk about it'.

Like Kiran, Salma's narrative had also demonstrated the benefits that estrangement had brought to her life. This sense of agency is illustrated by her aforementioned quote. Her emotional distance from her family has allowed her to develop her sense of agency and empower her to a degree, and to take action to help others. For example, Salma shared how, since she has left her family unit, she has not even thought about shame:

'Whereas ever since I've left you know, I don't use that word [shame].....I feel like I've had a battle with that word, when I was at my mum's... but honestly, I've not actually thought about it ever since I've left because it's, I refuse to have it as part of my life now, uhm and I don't know if it's bitter or anger, but now I'm like "you guys should have the sharam [shame] for doing this to me" '.

Having a greater sense of agency, through the physical and psychological distance facilitated through estrangement, Salma is able to shift the burden of shame onto the perpetrators, as well as onto her family for not supporting her post the disclosure.

At the same time, as her narrative of disclosure unfolded, it became apparent that her experience was still, on some level, unresolved. Salma's first introduction to the disclosure centres on her mother, who denied the abuse was happening when, at the age of 10, Salma told her about it. She reported the abuse to her school at the same age, but following a conversation with her mother, the file was closed. This leads Salma to enter a narrative about her mother, which illustrates the complexities of Salma's feelings towards her. These include how her mother was not the epitome of motherhood upheld in South Asian communities, and she speaks about having a significantly negative relationship with

her mother due to the denial of the abuse. However, she also recognises that her mother is constrained by community expectations of maintaining a pristine family reputation. A reputation which would undoubtedly have been damaged by the disclosure being acted on. Although Salma is firm in her belief that being estranged from her mother is the best course of action for her, she talks about how others can make her feel that this is not necessarily the right thing to do, and thus, she is still feeling a level of pressure even when estranged. Melvin and Hickey (2021) found that such social pressure can be intense, leading some adults to keep their experiences of estrangement private. This example also substantiates the argument made by Muldoon *et al.* (2024), that the trajectory of CSA is a continuous creating and re-creating of the victim/survivor's social identity; how even the decision to estrange from one's family leaves a mark and a need to explain, or even a sense of being judged as discussed by Linden *et al.* (2021).

As an adult, Salma reported the abuse to the police. She was the only one out of the 15 women who had reported the abuse to statutory services and followed it through. At the time of the interview, her case was still being investigated. She spoke about the length of time the process takes from start to end, and the emotional toil of this. In her case, the perpetrator was continuing to deny the abuse, trying to turn family members against Salma by calling her a liar and someone with ulterior motives for saying what she was. Salma was angered by such gall and lack of shame. She also spoke about the legal loophole which had allowed the perpetrator to escape back to their homeland, despite her warning the police about the possibility of this happening. Therefore, at the time of the interview, reporting the abuse had not given Salma the ending she had wanted. Nevertheless, she did not regret the act. She spoke about how her decision had brought about positive changes for other female relatives, creating a more liberal environment than the one in which she had grown up. She also felt that her experience of reporting has enabled her to have a stronger understanding of the gaps in the statutory systems that make reporting CSA difficult for South Asian

women. This includes needing to have appropriate support for women where there is a tendency to shame the female victim/survivor rather than the perpetrator. She gives an example of how her brother, although supporting her, cannot see why his description of the situation as being one where Salma risks losing her honour, represents a continuing tendency to avoid shaming the male perpetrator. Because of such deeply embedded cultural norms, she feels that it would be difficult for many women to remain resolute in the context of disclosure, and wants to help make the changes required to assist in this.

Miriam

As discussed in Chapter 4, Miriam had disclosed the abuse to her mother as a child, but was told to go and drown herself. In adulthood, Miriam is again disappointed and hurt by her mother when she suggests to Miriam that they should make a social visit to the perpetrator's home. Miriam shares how her lack of language to describe the abuse in her mother tongue may have meant that her mother did not really fully understand the extent of the abuse. In this sense, she does not really have a clear idea of what her mother knew or did not know, and is left with thinking about whether it was her limitations in explaining the abuse, which impeded the abuse from being stopped. Re-directing her mother's response onto herself suggests an element of self-blame, which is likely to have left Miriam in a somewhat irreconcilable position. It may also explain how, unlike Tina and Salma, Miriam had managed to sustain an affectionate relationship with her mother, albeit through times of turbulence, disconnection and disengagement. Furthermore, her mother's response to her abuse is largely overshadowed in her interview by accounts of her mother being a single parent, facing considerable socio-economic challenges, and trying to do her best to raise a large number of children. Her disclosure narrative is, therefore, enveloped in sympathy for her mother, and there is, instead, a level of anger directed at statutory services such as the

police, school and social services, who she believes failed to identify the abuse, despite clear indicators.

Priya

Priya shared that she left her family and community as a young adult because she was unable to access suitable support for her experience. Not having this support impacted her recovery and wellbeing, and she felt that her only choice was to leave. She now feels that if she had disclosed as a child, she may not have *'lost the relationships with [her] family that have been lost'*. Instead, she states:

'[I've] the lost the richness of the culture that I could have had ...my children have lost the richness of that culture they could have had. And for me....I don't see it [the community] in a positive light anymore...I really would have liked to have had support from my community, so that I could be integrated back into it....Because whilst my life is very anglicised, I'm still an Indian. I've lost all of that over the years, because....you know, to, to try and get into that culture where you were the shame, and all of that is so...it's such a big, big issue....that at some point, you know, the conversation would happen, and then you've lost that part of your life, because of the shame'.

Priya's deep sense of loss due to leaving her community is conveyed by repeating the word *'lost'*. She describes the *'richness'* of a community she could have had, if only no shame was attached to her. She indicates a lack of choice about the decision she made, stating that the abuse would have been a *'big issue'*, suggesting the extent to which she, as a victim/survivor, had to consider the implications of disclosure, which stretched beyond her and her immediate family. This sense of personal sacrifice, with her and her children losing out on the richness of a community, comes across strongly. The inter-generational impact of her decision to choose to move out of a community in which she found no support is an important part of her narrative, although she mentions it briefly. Her children now exist in a world which could have been very different to the one they inhabit now. Whether it is a better, worse or relatively similar existence is a secondary concern. The key point related to

the context of this research is the impact on Priya of having made this decision, which she feels was enforced upon her. She ends the interview by stating:

'And as I get older, I feel it even more, because...you know, I just haven't lost my family and the extended family. As I said, it's my roots and my culture'.

There was a strong sense of 'the what ifs' or the 'not knowing about a life that could have been', which emerged from Priya's process of storying. Herschmann (2023) has discussed the profound sense of loneliness that can result from estrangement from one's family, and although Priya did not claim to be estranged, there was a definitive sense of isolation in her experience of no longer belonging to her community of origin. Muldoon *et al.* (2024) have discussed how a disconnection from family and social groups can have adverse implications for the wellbeing of victims/survivors, and I felt that this was evident in Priya's experience. She seemed to be navigating a space of uncertainty, and through being with her during this process of sharing, I felt that Priya would benefit from further storying. This may enable her to reach a more settled emotional place.

Satinder

Satinder states that the abuse was causing her '*deep, deep pain*', and convinced that she could not tell anyone due to the damage this would cause to family life, she '*flew*' from home:

'My reaction was to fly. I flew, you know, I, I flew away to XXX, flew into White culture, flew into everything I could do to escape and kind of...spent 20 years running ever since really uhm, but I had to go and find safety...and interestingly, that safety wasn't in my culture at that time, or I didn't feel like it was. So actually the impact of it was that, you know, with great sadness...I divorced myself from my culture'.

Satinder's frequent use of '*flew*' illustrates her desperation to escape, feeling that her environment was not a safe place for her. She needed to survive and flying and running

away from her home and community was seen as the only option. Like Priya, she relocated to the White community. For both of them, the White community was likely to be a space free from the constraints of shame and honour, where they would not be judged or be seen as tainted or blamed for the abuse they had experienced. It was a means of creating a new existence for themselves, and both spoke of their sadness in having to make this decision. These decisions demonstrate the extreme action some British South Asian women feel that they have to take to 'survive' CSA.

Satinder acknowledges that not everyone would have the aptitude or resources to make such decisions and presents the reality of what disclosures would mean for some, losing everything they had ever known. Talking for such women, she questions:

"What do I do [if] I'm on my own? What do I do, when all my, if all my family abandon me and all my social standing abandon me?" and continues to conclude by telling me: *'I don't think many survivors are able to then go out and forge a completely separate parallel life, you know?'*

This final narrative poignantly encapsulates some of the core findings documented across the three empirical chapters. It represents the difficult predicament in which British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA can find themselves. This includes the fear of being abandoned and uncertainties about whether they have the wherewithal to have a life of some sort after a disclosure. It recognises that some women 'survive' by literally fleeing the location of abuse, some forever, and that others remain confined within it. The failure to support the women's disclosures, where they were made, is cruel and inexplicable. The women were re-victimised by this, and at the time of the interview, had still not, understandably, achieved a place of peace and reconciliation with this injustice. Although the families' reasons for their responses and behaviour are not available, it can be deduced that the women's experiences were largely ignored, sidelined and conveniently dismissed. It can also be suggested that the women, seen within the gendered structures that the women were raised within, were largely positioned as bearing the family's izzat, and because izzat is

communal as well as familial, disclosure can become framed as a disruptive act that risks jeopardising a family's community standing. This type of community coercion, thus, shapes victim/survivor experiences of abuse and subjects them to continuous victimisation (Gill and Harrison, 2019). This coercion can be violent and even murderous, as documented in the cases of KNSCH discussed in the earlier chapters, or reiterated verbally through everyday expressions such as: *"Think of what people will say"*; *"Reporting is against our culture"*; *"There will be no marriage proposals for you or your siblings"*, statements which were akin to what many of the women had shared in this research. These direct and indirect forms of coercion also lead families to stay silent about abuse, rather than supporting the trauma-experiences of women like Kiran, Sofia, Tina, Salma, Miriam, Priya and Satinder.

Deeper insights into the research participants - part 3

Kiran, Sofia, Tina, Salma and Miriam had disclosed to their non-abusing parent(s), and all had regretted this action. The first four were aged between 21 and 31 and had all disclosed in adulthood; Salma had also done so as a child. Miriam was aged between 32 and 41 and had disclosed to her mother as a child. Seeing disclosures appear within the relatively young age bracket can suggest that there was an early attempt to sense-make on behalf of these women. The sense of regret, as they feel it now, may be something that lessens or changes with their maturity, but for this analysis, it is significant to note how this sense of regret aligns with their deep desire to achieve positive change for other girls and women. Through experiencing these feelings of regret, they are likely to be well-positioned to comment on what works and what does not, as well as what is more likely to be effective as a form of intervention. Furthermore, each of these women was at the high end of the education and employment demographic in the sample, indicating that these factors may have provided the confidence to make the disclosure.

A further point of importance in understanding their experiences of abuse is how they were related to the perpetrator. Three of the women were abused by a cousin, one by her father, and one by her uncle. Kiran, who was abused by her father, appeared to have experienced some of the worst implications following the disclosure. The proximity of her father to the rest of the family unit provides a strong explanation as to why this was the case. It also indicates the difficulty for victims/survivors to disclose, where the perpetrator is the father (or even the mother). Like Salma, who was abused by her cousin (who was also her brother-in-law), Kiran was forced to disconnect entirely from her family. There is pain in this separation, but both Kiran and Salma agree that it has to happen for their own wellbeing. They are both strong personalities in that they have a clear steer on what they want for their recovery and their future.

The capacity to start a new life refers back to the earlier discussion in the thesis about whether some women had a greater means of doing so than others. Apart from Salma, who was defined by a strong determination to achieve justice for herself, all the other women who left home amidst disclosures were in economically stable positions. Satinder and Priya are also included in this. Again, this is not to suggest that there was a particularly favourable outcome for these women, particularly as they spoke about their isolation and loss of family and community. Rather, the point is that it highlights that even within this group of 15 British South Asian women, there was a variety of circumstances and experiences that have been captured, and need to be better documented within the CSA field of practice and policy.

The final discussion about factors specific to the women who had disclosed was the gender of the perpetrator. Tina and Sofia were abused by female cousins, and it is noteworthy that their narratives expressed the same sense of betrayal, upset and anger as the other women. However, family responses to the abuse appeared more tame than those

where the perpetrator was male, and there was a real sense of carrying on as if nothing had happened. Even though this was also a feature in some of the other women's experiences, it was more pronounced in the narratives of the women who had been abused by a woman (Tina, Sofia and Kully).

Chapter conclusion

All six women shared their isolation and feelings of loss due to the denial and detachment from family members and/or from their communities. They spoke vociferously against the injustice caused by shame and honour, justifying their decisions to depart from family and community, despite the heartache this caused. They acknowledged that disclosures may seem necessary, but at the same time, they spoke about the ensuing pain and hurt which followed. Unfortunately, this was an emotional disruption to which they, as victims/survivors, were subjected, rather than the perpetrators. The process of moving on from the abuse is discussed, as well as the significance of having the economic means to do so in various ways. Finally, who the perpetrator was appears to have an impact on how families respond to disclosure.

Narratives speaking to recovery and healing post-disclosure were less conspicuous. This chapter has illustrated that disclosing CSA does not necessarily transition victims/survivors to a better place. Rather, this narrative of disclosure has evidenced how they can be left further victimised and feeling a greater sense of abandonment and isolation. The severance of emotional ties through estrangement, or leaving one's community, left a deep sense of loss and pain and indicated an ongoing trajectory of post-abuse trauma. At the same time, there were insights into how this had also created a greater sense of agency and control for the women, and further positive features for their wellbeing.

Although the narratives indicate a particular point in the women's lives, with the process of sense-making likely to continue, this chapter evidently provides further insights into low levels of disclosure and reporting. Whereas findings in Chapter 4 had set out the problem, and Chapter 5 had provided a sense of hope, the disclosure narrative left me with a sense of 'damned if you do, and damned if you don't'. The barriers faced by British South Asian women intensified for me, as did the urgency and need for an equivalent level of intensity in addressing these barriers. The next section, Part 3, captures this and is the final segment of this thesis, presenting the Discussion Chapter and Conclusion to the thesis.

Part 3

Discussion, Implications, Recommendations and Conclusion

Chapter 7

Recognising the Multiple Dimensions of Experiencing and Living with CSA

*'The particular barriers that face South Asian women when it comes to sexual abuse, should not be underestimated and they are **different** because South Asian females grow up with a huge sense of internalised responsibility for the welfare of their families. And that's, you know, multifaceted, and until, until services learn that there is extra work to be done to support that child, divest their responsibility for the family, and then also support the family, support the child.,,you're not going to get as much disclosure and as much opportunity to support as you can'.*

(Satinder).

Chapter introduction

This chapter examines the findings discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Having been given the time and space to share their stories, this chapter attempts to do justice to the women's contributions by positioning what they have shared into a broader socio-cultural and political context.

The nexus of shame and honour as an impactful factor in the context of CSA has been elucidated through the findings in this research. These constructs had a permanent presence in the women's lives, a cradle-to-grave reality from which they could not deviate or divorce. Through an intersectional feminist methodology and narrative research design, shame and honour are examined to a deep level, evidencing how they are weighted barriers to disclosure and reporting. The women deemed the constructs to be damaging, unjust, and biased against females, and many of them remained bound by them at the time of the interview. This thesis was not exclusively seeking to examine shame and honour per se, nor the vast range of scholarly works discussing these constructs. Rather, it has attempted to demonstrate the specific meaning attributed to these constructs by the 15 women who

participated in this research. A key finding in the analysis stage was the distinction that had emerged between shame and honour. Although interrelated and overlapping, these constructs evidenced subtle differences in the data and led to different implications and outcomes. Conflating them, as is the case in existing literature, undermines and simplifies the women's experiences. Therefore, they will be examined separately in this chapter.

Findings also evidence that although the women felt considerable constraint by the constructs of shame and honour, this was matched by their desire to improve how CSA in British South Asian communities is being responded to, so that girls from the communities are more effectively supported. These narratives indicated strength, resilience, courage, and considerable agency. This has provided fresh insights into their identities, but also into broader social and cultural identities of South Asian women experiencing abuse. Chapter 2 discussed the theoretical underpinning of intersectional feminism, and this chapter revisits this, demonstrating how findings from this research contribute to the development of this theory.

Findings have also indicated the significance of the migrating diaspora from the Indian subcontinent, its postcolonial histories, and its impact on subsequent generations. For instance, Saini (2022) has previously reported on how racialisation continues to pervade across generations. In addition to gender and ethnicity, therefore, this thesis adds parental migration as a further intersection to the women's experiences of CSA. Although stretching beyond the remit of this thesis, findings also alluded to experiences related to age, generations, and socio-economic factors, which can offer learning for the future.

Barriers to children disclosing and reporting CSA, across communities, have been documented in Chapter 1. These include shame, guilt, fear of not being believed and concerns about the implications for family life. Chapter 2 has examined existing research on

shame and honour, as reported barriers for British South Asian CSA victims/survivors (The Home Affairs Committee Report, 2013; Cowburn *et al.*, 2014; Gohir, 2013; Jay *et al.*, 2022), but a limited exploration of what victims/survivors themselves think and feel about shame and honour. This knowledge deficit can be deemed to have resulted in ineffective measures to support CSA victims/survivors from South Asian communities. Begikhani *et al.* (2015) have discussed how an intersectional lens allows a move away from assuming women are silent because of cultural norms alone. Instead, there are personal, social and institutional factors which play a role too, as will be illustrated in this chapter. A narrative research design has facilitated a rich discovery of their experiences, and captured in detail the familiar, but, most significantly, the nuances, the unknowns, and the unexpected. A narrative inquiry has enabled an examination of not just what happened, but how this was told, and why it was told. Thus, the value of narrative research will be revisited, suggesting new ways of recruiting CSA victims/survivors as research participants.

The final section of this chapter will present implications for UK CSA and child protection practice and policy, and offer key points of learning. As Satinder's opening quote in this chapter indicates, responding to CSA in British South Asian families requires a transformational response; a multidimensional response to a multidimensional problem. This section, therefore, locates the experiences of the 15 women in the broader context of CSA practice and policy. The women's experiences deserve greater recognition and understanding by practitioners and policy-makers tasked with responding to CSA. In this section, ethnic and racial disparities and disproportionalities in the UK child protection sector will be discussed, and CRT is reintroduced in this context. In recent years, IICSA and the CSA Centre have been involved in addressing the experiences of racially minoritised CSA victims/survivors, which has been encouraging to note. This thesis forms a part of these developments.

Development of intersectional feminist theory: integrating the 'CSA shame and honour nexus'

Violence against women has a gendered dimension to it, and ideas about women's bodies are socially constructed, leading to societal labelling and restriction of female sexuality and behaviour. Furthermore, sexual activity is a behaviour which is twinned with both excitement and impurity, potentially leading to feelings of shame and disgust that can be amplified in cultures with conservative moral standards and negative beliefs surrounding sex (Knowles *et al.*, 2016). Females and sexual activity together, therefore, tend to generate particular social expectations and attitudes. Weiss (2016) discusses how as far back as biblical texts, female sexuality was seen as shameful and '*loathsome and disgusting*' (p.205). In relation to racially minoritised women, Begikhani *et al.* (2015) and Zouari (2022) discuss that the prevailing notion of honour is also a critical component of female sexuality, embedded in the bodies of women who are abused and murdered, in the name of so-called honour. They highlight the importance of challenging male privilege and social norms of male domination, purporting that grassroots movements are essential in addressing the problem. This will be referred to later in the context of CSA practice and policy.

Shame and honour were common themes in the women's narratives. The literature review had already indicated this, but it was the meanings that the women gave to these constructs within the loci of CSA which were new. The depth of meaning these had for the women helped to better understand why disclosure and reporting are unlikely occurrences. Narratives alluded to a cradle-to-grave framing of shame, and the women spoke about how notions of shame had been a part of their lives as long as they could remember. This ranged from what they interpreted as an everyday example of shame, such as telling a young girl off for the way she is sitting, to the more serious, like telling her that she should go and drown herself if she told anyone else about the abuse. Data demonstrated strong cultural narratives about honour, shame, gender and silence across the women's lifespan; before the abuse,

during and after the abuse, and for them today, as adult survivors. This was found across the three ethnicities within the sample: Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani. Findings demonstrated detailed descriptions and granular insights into how shame and honour affected their experience of CSA, evidencing that shame and honour are more nuanced and complex than what has been previously researched. Because of the constructs, the women existed in a vacuum of secrecy and solitude, seeking to preserve a way of life which remains bound by a penetrating preoccupation with shame and honour. This is not necessarily their preoccupation, but that which is interwoven into the fabric of their lives. Shame and honour present as insidious and largely irremovable constructs. Chapter 6 has evidenced how, even after disclosing, the women were unable to break away from the confines of shame and honour, and familial and community coercion. There was an overwhelming tendency of families to position community perspectives before victim/survivor experiences. Through the intersections of gender and ethnicity, this thesis, and this chapter in particular, demonstrates how British South Asian women are vulnerable to CSA and how barriers to disclosure and reporting are particularly obstructive for them.

Parents were reported as being overly concerned about the women's physical appearance as children, such as what clothing they were wearing and how they were wearing it. There tended to be a preoccupation with the women's behaviour in daily activities and how this was labelled as shameful: what they said, how they said it, how they sat, what they did or did not do. As Mehta (2025) states, *'[f]rom childhood, Indian women are taught how to behave – how to sit, speak, and dress "appropriately" to avoid trouble'* (p.158). Such behavioural expectations had created a consciousness which rested on the fragility of what was deemed right and wrong, and what could or could not be spoken about. A shift in the supposed wrong direction risked destabilising family life and led to disapproval, and their narratives indicated a sense of 'damned if you do, and damned if you don't'. Although expectations and norms associated with parenting are commonplace across communities

and countries (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2020), this research identified narratives about what others than their parents would think about certain behaviours, and what impressions these behaviours would create about the family unit. Jain *et al.* (2020) have discussed how female modesty and obedience are strong cultural norms for South Asian families, and such issues certainly appeared to matter to the women's parents. The women discussed how a CSA disclosure would have been a significant threat to expected social norms and parental expectations.

They were also made to feel that they would be blamed for any unwarranted male attention and digressions, due to the gendered norms and patriarchal structures within which they grew up and existed. They were accused of provoking men for what they did or did not do, and shame was often discussed in the context of gender differences, with women sharing narratives of how it was girls and women who were raised to be alert and aware of shame and its implications, rather than boys and men. Mehta (2025) discusses how cultural norms and gender roles from the Indian subcontinent are known to significantly influence attitudes towards sexual abuse and violence, and found that attitudes that aligned with rape myths also aligned with gendered norms. As first-generation South Asians, parents of the women acted according to such beliefs, and victim-blaming and the concept of rape myths featured heavily in the women's lives, both directly and indirectly.

Narratives of honour or izzat honed in on this focus on family and community. Bhanbro (2021), discussing how honour can drive conflict and murder between brothers, highlights how izzat is a way of existing and defining family life. The women in this research were governed by a collectivist existence and a heavy and persistent burden of upholding family honour. This had positioned them in a difficult place in the context of disclosing and reporting CSA. The depth of preserving a way of life where family honour is placed on a pedestal, making girls and women the vessels for that honour, was shown to have had a

high human cost. The narratives relating to honour were more serious and affirmative in tone and language, alluding to depression, mental health breakdowns, attempts to take one's life, and life-long trauma. In terms of where the pressure of shame and honour was largely coming from within the family unit, the role of mothers requires consideration.

Examining the role of mothers in cases where their daughters had experienced CSA was included in the original research design because the literature indicated that mothers could adopt a prominent role in upholding honour. However, due to a lack of mothers coming forward, the focus was retained wholly on victims/survivors. Other than Bernard's (2001) research investigating the perspectives of British Black mothers whose daughters had experienced CSA, research with mothers from other racially minoritised communities, in the context of CSA, is absent and is generally absent across the social work sector (Matoo, 2022). Although they did not feature as a separate sample, mothers did emerge through the narratives of the women and, therefore, deserve inclusion in this chapter.

Research on HBA and violence documents mothers as being partly responsible for abuse perpetrated against females (Aplin, 2017). Women condoning and perpetrating abuse against other women, especially in the context of women who are already marginalised, may appear an odd inclusion in a feminist thesis. However, Harrison and Gill (2018) have previously discussed how responses from South Asian mothers can be unsupportive in responding to CSA disclosures, and findings in this thesis echo this, requiring some level of analysis. The unsympathetic and cold responses from the mothers to the women's disclosures had amplified their isolation and sense of abandonment. The women were clear in their narratives that their mother was complicit in reinforcing the constructs of shame and honour, and held a deep sense of confusion, anger, disappointment, and even hostility about this.

At the same time, despite their angst and hurt, they were able to provide a level of understanding about their mother's reactions. They described how their mothers were confined to cultural norms and community expectations, which, as first-generation migrants, were of importance. This has also been recognised in research by Hussain (2005) and Begikhani *et al.* (2015) in relation to KNSCH. An analysis of mothers in this section, therefore, alludes to the dominance of patriarchal structures, with mothers unable to disconnect from these. Mothers who uphold honour, witnessed by their daughters, can possibly lead to an inter-generational transmission of this honour-based belief system. Laird and Tadam (2019), in their analysis of the shame and honour constructs in child protection, state how '*often children internalise these beliefs and values at a young age and they can therefore be deeply held*' (p.126). Shame and honour were, therefore, cultural norms that were transmitted through both patriarchy and matriarchy, making disclosures significantly difficult for the women. Mother's reluctance, inability, or incapacity to effectively act on disclosures could be argued to be contributing to what was labelled by Sanday (1981) as rape cultures, creating or supporting cultural conditions that make sexual abuse tolerated to a greater extent.

As adults, there were strong indications from all of the women that the cultural norms to which their mothers had adhered were less of a feature in their own lives as second or third-generation South Asian women. As indicated in the grand narrative of *Living amongst, yet disconnected from shame and honour* in Chapter 5, the women expressed disdain towards shame and honour. They spoke about how they attributed less attention to community perspectives and ensured gender equality amongst their own children. There was a recognition that the experiences of their mothers were different from their own. They shared how, for their mothers, so much had centred on the family environment and reliance on the community, as first-generation migrants. Ullah (2024) has explored how such experiences are documented well, but how experiences of second-generation South Asians

are less so. He discusses the complexities that this later generation experienced in terms of identity formation, shifting between cultural norms of their parents and countries of origin, with the way of life and culture of the Western host country.

Gupta *et al.* (2007) have discussed the psychological struggles and resulting mental health difficulties of second-generation South Asian girls in trying to constantly manage this adjustment across two very different cultural norms and expectations. This journey of adaptation was also demonstrated in the women's narratives, as they spoke about the disconnect that they felt from their parents' perspectives, unable to make sense of this as British-born South Asians. However, now, in the present, the women generally feel less bound by this. Unlike their mothers, they felt less in need of such interconnectedness with family and community. At the same time, some were still living amongst these cultural norms and felt impacted by them. These largely included the women who were still living amongst their family, and/or who had not disclosed to family members. However, even amongst these women, there was a belief and determination that these cultural norms would not be present in their own futures, or in the lives of their own children.

Feminism has travelled a long journey to tackle CSA. As we find ourselves in what is now termed the fourth wave of feminism (Mohajan and Mohajan, 2022), there is potential to grasp the issue of CSA in racially minoritised communities in a stronger and more visible way. Furthermore, the experiences and voices of victims/survivors remain integral to developing practice and policy. This thesis has demonstrated that Bangladeshi and Pakistani victims/survivors, constituting two and five women respectively in this research (compared to eight women of Indian heritage), may be less forthcoming in sharing their experiences. Greater consideration, therefore, needs to be given to the additional barriers that may prevent these communities from having their voice heard. However, this thesis has also evidenced that some women want to preserve their anonymity, but still have a voice.

Mechanisms that allow for both, therefore, require consideration. Social media has been demonstrated in this research as achieving this, both facilitating women's participation in the research, and thus having voice, yet still allowing them to remain anonymous. There is, therefore, potential to explore how social media or online platforms can support women to have the channels they need to exercise agency and have voice.

As well as the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and parental migration (discussed in the next section), class also emerged through the narratives of some of the women and more so through their demographic data. With British Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities reportedly experiencing greater socio-economic disadvantages than British Indian communities, it is noteworthy that it was a British Pakistani woman who spoke at length about her parents experiencing severe financial difficulties and hardship, and how this impeded their capacity and ability to effectively support her. In her adulthood, she was also one of two women who were unemployed at the time of the interview. A further Pakistani woman, who was also unemployed and educated to a much lower level than many of the other women, remained highly impacted by the abuse in her present life, still having to see her perpetrator and have a level of interaction with him. In contrast, two of the British Indian women who had graduated to degree level and beyond had managed to build a life which was economically sound and which represented considerably more security and stability. This in no way negates the impact of the abuse on these women. Still, it is an indication that healing from the abuse was supported to some extent by the existence of stronger socio-economic factors in adulthood. Finally, in terms of class, the only two women from the Bangladeshi community spoke more extensively about the importance of community to family life. Although educated to graduate level themselves, a strong reliance on community life by their families may suggest that they had less economic freedom to deviate from community norms.

The influence of migration on settler communities

Although difficult to label and articulate by the women, shame and honour as a topic emerged relatively quickly in the interviews. This was likely to be because it had been identified as a theme in the Information Sheet for this research. What was less conspicuous were references to having to inhabit and live within both the South Asian and the White British cultures, and the challenges that this presented. This research has demonstrated that the women's risk of CSA and their experiences of CSA were impacted by being second or third-generation British South Asian women. Noda and Oyama (2021) discuss how what is not shared in narrative data can also be of value to understanding people's experiences, and the next section, therefore, draws out the subtle and indirect references made to familial migration experiences. This evidences the significance of being parented by first-generation parents from the Indian subcontinent, the challenges parents and families encountered with this, and the impact on British-born children (the 15 women) who were straddling the two cultures.

The women were all second or third-generation British South Asians, their parents having migrated to the UK from the Indian subcontinent. As settler migrants, their life was influenced by the migration status of their parents, who often entered a hostile host country. Racism was a common experience of migrants entering the UK in the 1950s (Patel, 2021), leading families to hold on tightly to what was familiar. This included the norms and values of their homeland, which for those migrating from the Indian subcontinent, included features of patriarchy and filial piety. The desire to preserve these norms created considerable insularity within the family unit, and kept what were seen as Western influences and interventions away from family life (Ullah, 2024). However, this thesis evidenced that upholding cultural norms also rendered children largely invisible and lacking agency.

Many of the women spoke about cultural norms that prohibited talking about intimate relationships and anything sexual. They were, therefore, left unclear about whether what they were experiencing was sexual abuse, due to not being made aware of what was considered a healthy or acceptable intimate relationship. Furthermore, the secrecy around sex and sexual relationships created a barrier for the women in terms of lacking the language and confidence to disclose the sexual abuse, due to the nature of it being sexual. This was commonly reported by women from across the three communities. Chand and Thoburn (2006) have discussed this in the context of safeguarding children from the British South Asian Muslim community, arguing that defining sex as taboo poses a challenge when trying to keep children safe from abuse. Perceiving sex and sexual relations as taboo hinders an openness to discuss intimate relations, which is an important aspect of making children comfortable enough to talk about sexual abuse. Gohir (2013) and Cowburn *et al.* (2014) also discuss the general reluctance to raise the topic of sexual relations within South Asian family life, where it is viewed as embarrassing or shameful. Due to its very nature of being sexual, such perspectives are likely to be an impediment to CSA disclosures across South Asian communities.

Migrating parents also structured their lives around familiar concepts of collectivism and community, relying on friends, extended family members, and their racial community for support (Khan, 1979). Sharing homes with relatives was a common phenomenon, as each family worked toward establishing their financial independence. These networks also provided moral and emotional support when needed. Although having benefits, the pattern of family life meant that children were exposed to adults beyond their immediate family, some of whom were perpetrators of sexual abuse. The women spoke about how this extension of families and the web of relationships created a deep sense of loyalty and obligation which made disclosures difficult. Parents had built their security and happiness around their families, including their children. Children, in return, had a sense of obligation to remember the sacrifices their parents and grandparents had made, leaving their homelands

and settling into a foreign, often hostile country, with little economic and social capital to help them rebuild a new life. Pleasing and protecting parents was, therefore, integrated into a child's psyche. Although the women interviewed in this research were sensitive to the challenges parents had faced in starting a new life in the UK, they also alluded to how this created a disconnect between themselves and their parents, both in childhood and continuing into adulthood. The findings evidence that this disconnect did not facilitate or encourage disclosures.

Domestic abuse was also shared in a number of the women's stories, with examples of both mothers and fathers exhibiting aggressive and violent behaviour. This was both towards each other and also, at times, towards the children in the home. The women alluded to a sense of frustration in families, stating that this probably resulted from the stresses of migration. Research evidences particularly low levels of reporting of domestic abuse in British South Asian communities (Thiara and Gill, 2010; Femi-Ajao *et al.*, 2018; Hulley *et al.*, 2023) and the 2022-23 ONS data (Race Equality Unit, 2024). identified the lowest rate of this abuse for those who identified as Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani (and Chinese/Asian other). As the women had shared how domestic abuse had made them vulnerable to sexual abuse, with perpetrators reported to have taken advantage of familial contexts of abuse and violence, the gap in data on South Asian domestic abuse, and the related vulnerabilities of children as discussed by Izzidien (2008), signifies a further gap in documenting the experiences of British South Asian CSA victims/survivors.

A final feature of migrating histories, which is of significance to how the women made sense of their experiences, centres on the lived experiences of their parents. This was indicated in discussions about the immediate impact of migration, such as facing racism, economic hardship, and abuse and violence in the home, but less so in a broader context. Namely, how the lived experiences of parents prior to migrating to the UK, including parental

trauma, may have had an impact on the women's experiences of being parented in the context of CSA. Although this research did not probe into this, the inclusion of this point by a small number of the women makes it relevant because unprocessed and unresolved parental experiences are known to impact the lived experiences of children (Walker, 2007; Denham and George, 2014; Loving, 2018). The trauma many of the women's grandparents and parents had experienced during the 1947 partition of India is significant in this context. Tanveer *et al.* (2024) describe this event as:

'[T]raumatic human migration, ethnic riots, and inhumane atrocities.....fourteen million people or more were displaced and became refugees while two million people died or went missing indicating an event more tragic than the holocaust' (p.401-402).

The trauma from the ensuing death and destruction caused by this mass migration impacted hundreds of thousands of people. Furthermore, further trauma was caused by the partition of Bangladesh in 1971 (Ali, 2023). Inter-generational trauma resulting from these experiences was shared as a brief, but significant point, because the women drew on these histories to make a better sense of why parents may have acted in the way that they did. They reflected on these parental experiences and gave meaning to why they, as children, were often invisible entities in their households, and why a child-focused family life may not have been a tenable option for parents. For instance, denial of disclosures by mothers, however painful, was also explained by the women as possibly related to experiences that the mothers may have endured. There is ample literature documenting parental responses to CSA, from non-abusing parents, including their emotional reactions, the impact of disclosure, and practical implications such as needing to finance legal fees or move house (Massat and Lundy, 1998; Elliott and Carnes, 2001). Elliott *et al.* (2022) have discussed parental denial of the abuse, and Tener *et al.* (2018) emphasise that parental sense-making is a dynamic, rather than static, process (Tener *et al.*, 2018). However, such research does not explore racially minoritised parents, and is thus lacking in relation to British South Asian parents, which, if available, could offer a means of further sense-making for CSA victims/survivors.

The aspects of migration that have been discussed signify that there was a separation between the experiences of the women and those of their parents. This is not an unusual reality in general terms, but it is significant when considering embedded beliefs about cultural norms and familial expectations. Robinson (2005, 2009) and Dey *et al.* (2017) have discussed the challenges of settler communities in terms of having to develop a bi-cultural identity. As they experienced the abuse, as children, the women were enwrapped in the South Asian expectations laid out to them as girls. They were voiceless in the familial environments which their migrant families had established. However, now, as adult women, having been given the space to story their experiences across their lifespan, they were able to identify aspects which they wanted to challenge. It is not that they outrightly rejected concepts of collectivism and community, but that they wanted to speak out about associated risks and dangers. This was markedly different from the attitudes of their parents and grandparents, who, as previously discussed, were heavily influenced by the context of migration.

The paradox of a silent voice

A key finding in this research, captured in Chapter 5, relates to the women speaking about wanting to make a change and to have a voice. As discussed in the thesis, this was a core reason why they participated in the research. This indicated that the women were forming a new role and identity for themselves, and that this appeared to be an important transition for them, even possibly a trauma response to their abuse. The development of trust that had been created between me and them was a significant feature of this research, and the women passionately shared their drive and motivation to want to be a part of the change, and the potential for co-production was indicated and even suggested by some of the women. How women can retain their anonymity, yet also contribute to change, merits careful consideration in current CSA practice, policy, and research circles. It also raises questions of how best this desire can be channelled. Where developments in practice and

policy are sought for racially minoritised communities, it is often individuals from the communities themselves who are left with the responsibility to drive the change. I was, therefore, left wondering what support some of the women who were taking on the public speaking mantle were being provided to undertake these roles, and this equally deserves further consideration at the policy level. In 2024, the CSA Centre launched its REACT Network, bringing together individuals of Black and South Asian heritage who have expertise in supporting those who have, or are, experiencing CSA in racially minoritised communities (CSA Centre, n.d.). The Network includes victims/survivors from these communities. This is a positive step towards co-production of policy with racially minoritised victims/survivors and may in due course, offer mechanisms for facilitating victim/survivor voices which wish to remain anonymous.

Encapsulating this desire for change as the 'paradox of a silent voice', summarises several features of this finding. Firstly, the nature of the research itself is giving voice to the women, voices which have previously been silent. Secondly, they shared a deep determination to continue having a voice, beyond this thesis. A few of them had begun to speak about their abuse publicly, acquiring a voice in this way. Some had begun to contribute to the field of CSA through informal and formal networks, either by sharing or not sharing their own story. Others did not want to share their experiences but were looking for ways to make a difference. These different patterns of wanting to have a voice demonstrate a keenness amongst the women to have a voice and contribute to progressive change. This desire to have a voice is absent in existing literature on British South Asian female experiences of CSA, but strongly present in this thesis. Just as Black feminists have written about how the identity of the 'strong Black woman' fails to capture their experiences (Geyton *et al.*, 2020; Jones *et al.*, 2021), this thesis evidences that the perception of the South Asian woman being of a submissive character, requires greater challenge, as has previously been argued by Anitha and Gill (2009). Often presented as quiet, timid, invisible, without voice,

and lacking agency (Hussain, 2005), this thesis shows them with a strong voice, with opinions and perspectives, seeking to direct change, and with a determination to be heard.

Despite their trauma, they want to challenge their communities to recognise and accept that CSA happens in their families and communities. Aishah Simmons Shah, a Black feminist who has publicly disclosed being a victim/survivor of CSA, has argued that working with communities is a pivotal part of the solution in addressing sexual violence against racially minoritised women. She discusses the importance of communities calling out abuse and violence and expressing their intolerance of it (Shah, 2006a). This thesis documents how the women also wanted to be a part of such action. However, Gill and Anitha (2025), in the context of forced marriage, have discussed the pressure and force of South Asian communities, and how being subjected to familial and community coercion in the manner that many British South Asian women are is under-researched. Arguing for greater consideration of the 'total burden of coercion', they discuss the need for women's experiences to be positioned within a broader socio-cultural setting. This community coercion was strongly evident in narratives of the 15 women. Dismantling deeply held cultural perspectives would, therefore, not be straightforward. However, the women expressed a firm desire to try. They wanted to tell their communities that the CSA victim/survivor is not to blame, but is in need of support, and their narratives echoed a desire for justice. Acknowledging the struggle to challenge cultural norms and attitudes towards sexual abuse and violence, Mehta (2025) states that, as well as holding individuals accountable, there is a need to shift an entire culture towards justice, empathy and equality. Some of the women accepted this but wanted to be a part of the change, however small the steps towards change, or the change itself.

Implications of CSA for families, regardless of ethnicity, are profound, but the narratives of the women in this research have indicated a strong sense of South Asian families and communities being ill-equipped to know how to respond. The women wanted

safeguarding agencies and therapeutic interventions to adequately consider and respond to the specific needs and realities of British South Asian female CSA victims/survivors, and their families. They were bold in their positioning of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion as being central to their experiences of CSA.

They did not necessarily want to lose their anonymity through exercising this voice, and that was, and is, their choice to make. However, their willingness to speak suggests that more concerted efforts should be made to recognise this, and for spaces to be created for them to speak. Such spaces are especially significant because of the findings evidencing experiences beyond shame and honour. The need to have a voice was an important part of their healing and recovery. It also offers further opportunities for them to sense-make about what they had experienced. How these voices can be captured forms a part of the recommendations made in this thesis (Chapter 8), and contributes to the work undertaken by Wilson (2016), who discusses the importance of such spaces in her CSA research with British African-Caribbean communities. This facet of the findings also demonstrates patriarchal bargaining. Within the limited choices available to them, where breaking completely free from patriarchal structures appears to be an unavailable option for most of them, they have also become active participants by having and wanting to voice. In this way, they are able to struggle against this oppression via activism, from within the oppressive structures themselves, as discussed by Ruslin (2022).

The involvement of victims/survivors in addressing CSA has been longstanding, including through international policies such as those enacted by the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (also known as the Lanzarote Convention) (Council of Europe, 2024). The UK is one of 46 member states which have agreed to policies committed to not only raising awareness about CSE and CSA at all levels of society, but also to encouraging the participation of victim/survivors in addressing the problem. The CSA Centre in the UK has also designed a

CSA response pathway which includes victim/survivor voices (CSA Centre, n.d.). Such policies and initiatives offer opportunities to strengthen the means of hearing from victims/survivors from racially minoritised communities.

British South Asian female victims/survivors of male-perpetrated abuse: challenging traditional perceptions of their identity

As well as the willingness and determination to share their experiences and participate in active change, other previously unheard and undocumented narratives from the women indicated strength and resilience. These narratives emerged from the women's perspectives on family loyalty, surviving in the midst of continued angst and unresolved trauma, and activism, as discussed above. These findings have posited new identities for British South Asian female CSA victims/survivors; identities that extend beyond the framework of shame and honour. A social constructionist ontology enabled the research to not see shame and honour as being a fixed and singular reality in their experiences, but to be open to the multiple realities and experiences which had existed for the women, and continue to exist for them. Collins and Bilge (2016) discuss the value of recognising the multiple dimensions which can impact one's lived experience, and the women in this research reflected this. Thus, this thesis challenges the too readily accepted barrier of shame and honour as being the only representation of their CSA experiences. By being able to share what they wished to share and how they wished to share it, previously unreported identities have emerged.

There was an intense sense of loyalty and wanting to protect family members from the implications of disclosure, illustrating considerable strength. This went beyond wanting to avoid family ruptures and alluded to deep care toward non-abusing family members who would be affected by disclosure. In these narratives, the women compartmentalised their abuse, although it was still impacting them and their lives in various ways. They spoke about

how they would never want to bring the pain of disclosure to innocent family members, but protect them from this. This commitment to family life requires greater exploration from services. There may need to be questions asked centring on what family means to children and young people for instance, and what roles they play in family life, to gauge the level of responsibility victims/survivors may have towards their non-abusing family members.

Another strength was the reality that some of the women were still having to live amongst the constructs of shame and honour, although all of the 15 women, now as adults, perceived these to be a harmful and destructive set of cultural norms. This was again explained in the context of protecting family members. A few were still living amongst their perpetrator, continuing to be bound by shame and honour. This dual relationship with shame and honour evidences a sustained level of strength and resilience, abiding by the constructs but bearing a deep detestation for what they represent. Gangoli and Hester (2022), in their research with largely South Asian women who had experienced gender-based violence, state:

'[They] felt a sense of cognitive dissonance between what they were told was 'normal' by their families/communities and what they actually felt was normal behaviour' (p.46).

The findings in this thesis also evidenced such 'cognitive dissonance', particularly demonstrated in the decisions made by a few of the women to leave their families and communities, unable to reconcile the inner tensions created by shame and honour. To escape from this and preserve their own wellbeing, they left everything that they had ever known. Leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar, sometimes severing links with immediate family members, represents strength but also considerable agency. Although they spoke about the enormity of such decisions and the personal losses for them, there is also a sense of agency that emerges from these actions. This sense of agency appeared as less empowering than that illustrated through the women's desire for change and activism, but

nevertheless, it does demonstrate the action that the women took for their own wellbeing, independent of anyone or anything else.

The findings have highlighted the relevance and value of adopting an intersectional lens to document CSA experiences. Although intersectionality theory has developed into multiple corners of social life, examining intersections of various kinds (Roy, 2023), its origins lie in examining the intersection of gender and race (Crenshaw, 1981). This thesis adopts these intersections, although focusing more on ethnicity rather than solely race, and has added parental migration and class. It, therefore, provides new learning for the theories introduced in Chapter 2. Namely, a development of intersectional feminist theory in its examination of male-perpetrated abuse of women. Western feminist works had made good strides in bringing the voice of the female CSA victim/survivor to the fore. An intersectional feminist approach has enabled an exploration of CSA in racially minoritised communities in Britain, discussing the intersections of gender and race (Bernard, 2001; Davis, 2019; Gill and Harrison, 2019; Gill and Begum, 2022). This thesis contributes to these works by discussing and elucidating how British South Asian CSA victims/survivors were, and likely to still be, not only at risk of CSA because of their gender, but also due to being governed by cultural norms embedded in their South Asian heritage and migration histories. This subjects them to additional vulnerabilities that have been minimally explored in intersectional feminist literature.

The thesis also makes a contribution to feminist works that move CSA beyond being solely connected to patriarchy. Sands and Nuccio (1992) discussed how a postmodern feminist lens homes in further on the diversity of lived experiences, arguing that grouping experiences can limit a holistic examination of situations. In the context of CSA, a postmodern feminist lens facilitates a consideration of male CSA victims/survivors, female perpetrators of CSA (Clements *et al.*, 2013; hooks, 2015), and one of the least examined

areas, female experiences of CSA perpetrated by mothers (Lin *et al.*, 2022). Turton (2010) has discussed how female perpetration of CSA can be less effectively responded to by professionals due to its gendered nature, with males overwhelmingly perpetrating the abuse. Three of the 15 women, a fifth of the sample, were sexually abused by females. This indicates that it is both relevant and important to continue expanding feminist works on CSA.

The value of a narrative and feminist research methodology

Hearing from victims/survivors of CSA remains critical to developing our understanding of the issue (Brennan and McElvaney, 2020) and to developing practice (Jay *et al.*, 2022). Research with victims/survivors is a crucial part of this endeavour. However, research by Kennedy *et al.* (2022), involving a systematic review consisting of 116 papers, found that just over 10% of research was co-produced, advised or consulted on by survivors. Through a narrative inquiry, this thesis develops this area and has exposed the value of making bold and persistent attempts at capturing the voices of victims/survivors who have been insufficiently included to date. Through a narrative inquiry, this thesis develops this area and evidences the value of making concerted and persistent efforts to capture unheard voices. The approach attempts to address the problem of some narratives becoming more dominant (Santos, 2016; Presser, 2018). Without hearing from CSA victims/survivors across communities, agencies will remain ill-equipped to understand their needs and provide suitable support and interventions, something that is a human and civil right of all victims/survivors.

The temporal feature of the narrative analysis mode, which was designed for this research, allowed the women to narrate their experiences across their lifespan: pre-abuse, the period of abuse, and post-abuse. CSA is an enduring experience that shapes identity and for the women in this research and giving space to their narratives demonstrated this endurance. Post abuse narratives included findings which illustrated a deeper understanding

of their isolation and rejection resulting from disclosures, and the life-long impact of this. This indicates that it is not just disclosures and reporting that should be investigated in CSA research in British South Asian communities, but also how victims/survivors can be supported post disclosures. The women were able to share how, over the years, they have had different feelings and perspectives about their experience of abuse, and how they are continuing to sense-make. Some developed fewer feelings of guilt and self-blame. Some better understood why they wished to be involved in helping other CSA victims/survivors. Some felt hopeful about the future, believing that the constraints imposed by shame and honour and gender inequality would not be as pervasive. Others less so. Although some appeared to have reached a point of resolution in terms of what meaning they had given to this experience, others were in the midst of that journey, and it felt that further storying of their experience may help them reach that point. The interview in this research was not a finite point for the women, and the processing of their experiences would likely continue into their future years. However, their participation in this research has been significant in this continuum of processing and sense-making. It has allowed each woman the time and space to tell someone that they are a CSA victim/survivor, and for them to feel that there is a will and keenness for this information to be heard and known. For many of them, it was the first time that they had disclosed to anyone who was not a friend or family member. For all of them, it was the first time that they had disclosed to someone who they felt may be able to make a change, whatever that may be. As Harcourt *et al.* (2022) state in their consideration of feminist research methodologies:

'Through sharing stories and making visible the negotiation of multiple identities and positionalities, ethics and the complexities of everyday research, ...knowledge is not disconnected from, but rather entwined with, emotions and experiences' (p.21).

The conversations with the women in this research have created a strong foundation of new knowledge upon which further ideas and approaches for intervention can be built.

The women also indicated the importance of researchers and professionals who share their culture, being a mechanism for their experiences to be brought to the fore. Many spoke about their discomfort in discussing their experiences in White spaces, with White professionals, feeling that their experiences were not understood to the depth required. Sharing a South Asian identity with me as the researcher put them at ease, and at times they drew me into their narratives as someone who 'gets it'. At other times, they felt free to ridicule their culture, using humour to comment on what they believed was the absurdity of shame and honour. This research has evidenced that accessing victims/survivors of CSA to partake in research is challenging, especially where there are deep concerns about protecting one's anonymity and the motivations for the research, as demonstrated in this thesis. However, the research process for this thesis has also highlighted that access and the development of trust are achievable and facilitated by those seen as 'insiders'. The design of the research and the several phases of rapport building were critical aspects of this research and suggest the need for expanding how we develop CSA research projects, and question whether there is sufficient socio-educational and political commitment for this. This is a particularly significant point in terms of supporting minoritised communities. Begikhani *et al.* (2015), for instance, have reported on how research exploring violence against women in racially minoritised communities can struggle to secure research funding.

A further development of feminist methodologies examining CSA in racially minoritised communities also relates to the patterns of engagement that were discovered with this research. There was a continuum of engagement, as discussed in Chapter 3, with women who had wanted to be involved but then changed their mind, and an element of back and forth in their thinking. This is worthy of further examination, both in terms of hearing from a larger number of CSA victims/survivors, as well as a better understanding of what some of the concerns of participating may be. For instance, the sand tray method of research that had to be abandoned due to COVID-19 could be more appealing to victims/survivors, due to

it being less dependent on talking and interacting with the researcher.

A final reflection about the nature of a narrative methodology when undertaking CSA research is the particular emotional strains on the researcher. As Chapter 3 has discussed, although I am a resilient person, there were times when I felt emotionally stretched by the research. Primarily, this relates to a sense of responsibility and duty of care towards the participants. The impact of researching CSA has not been sufficiently examined, as discussed by Silverio *et al.* (2021) in their response to an ethics committee that had asked them to report historic cases of CSA in their research. A supportive structure for CSA researchers is relevant and necessary to continue supporting research in this area. Furthermore, there is recent evidence that some child CSA victims/survivors do wish to speak about their experiences within the context of research (Dhaliwal, 2024), and researchers who decide to include children in their samples will require adequate emotional containment and support. The final section of this chapter discusses the relevance of this thesis to current UK CSA practice and policy.

Implications for UK child protection practice and policy

The migration of South Asians to Britain spans almost 80 years, and therefore, a core question that arose throughout this research process was why there had been such a limited knowledge base centred on the CSA experiences of South Asian victims/survivors living in Britain. Even after the public Jimmy Savile sexual abuse scandal, the high-profile CSE cases, and IICSA, the South Asian experience and voice remained quite absent, other than the small number of scholarly works discussed in this thesis (Gohir, 2013; Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006; Gill and Harrison, 2019; Jassal, 2022). In response to the previously mentioned high-profile cases of CSE perpetrated by mainly Pakistani men against White girls, a practitioner from a community-based organisation supporting South Asian CSE victims/survivors reported that:

'Known abusers in the community have committed equally horrific acts, within their own home, it's not just the young White girls outside of their own immediate communities that they're targeting, you know, the young girls within their own family systems and family networks, are being abused, and systematically being abused, and the men will get away with this, because nobody wants to address it, and no-one wants to own up to the fact that their daughter has been molested' (BBC, 2014b).

Over ten years later, little appears to have changed in terms of practice and service delivery. Gangoli and Hester (2022) discuss this in terms of 'epistemic injustice', describing how certain testimonies are left unheard. Although the voices of children experiencing CSA remain largely undocumented in research, for reasons discussed earlier in this thesis, there has been a notable absence of racially minoritised experiences. The reason why can partly be explained by the ample literature evidencing disparities and disproportionalities in the UK child protection system, with regard to a child's race, ethnicity, religion or culture, as will be discussed in the next section.

The current context of UK child protection practice and policy

In terms of how this thesis may be relevant for UK child protection practice and policy, it can be argued that, as it rests on historical accounts of CSA and experiences of largely second-generation South Asian women, this is limited. British South Asian CSA victims/survivors today will be of third-generation and beyond, arguably less influenced by notions of shame and honour and by the challenges posed by bi-cultural identities. However, this is refuted on three levels. Firstly, some of the victims/survivors in this research were within the 21-31 age bracket, and hence, not that long away from having been a child who had experienced sexual abuse. Secondly, the transmission of cultural norms across generations is a known phenomenon and was indicated in the data. Second, third or even fourth-generation South Asians can be deeply affiliated with cultural norms and values (BBC, 2014a). Shaikh and Reading (1999), and Ghelani (2001) discuss this in their research with South Asian children and young people, and there is reported to be an inherent tendency for

subsequent generations to possess the same cultural values as their parents and grandparents. Dangerous elements of bi-culturalism can be seen through UK cases of radicalisation where British-born Muslim young people have misinterpreted cultural norms from their native lands to develop dangerous ideologies (Abbas *et al.*, 2024). These discussions go beyond the scope of this thesis, but they allude to the need for continuous attempts to develop culturally sensitive practice. Thirdly, migration from the Indian sub-continent to Britain is still taking place, requiring attention to the risks potentially facing new waves of future British-born South Asian children. The need for child protection practice to develop and better integrate the needs of racially minoritised children and families, therefore, remains a core issue.

The UK child protection system is a long-established one, consisting of rigorous legal and policy frameworks (Children Act, 1989, 2004; Equality Act, 2010; HM Government, 2023a; BASW, 2021). Furthermore, health and social care practitioners in the UK are governed by their professional codes of values and ethics, which stipulate that services need to be equally delivered to all service users, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation and socio-economic background (BASW, 2021; The Health and Care Professions Council, 2024). However, practice and services for children and families from racially minoritised communities have been reported as being inadequate and ineffective (Qureshi *et al.*, 2000; Barn, 2007; Chand, 2008; Bernard and Harris. 2016, 2019; Kirton, 2018; Laird and Tedam, 2019; Ahmed *et al.*, 2022; Laird and Williams, 2023; The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2025). Research illustrates that these children are likely to be less well supported and protected from harm, or receive disproportionate interventions (Birchall and Hallett, 1995; Tilbury and Thoburn, 2009; Davis, 2019; Bywaters *et al.*, 2020; Jassal, 2022; Davis *et al.*, 2024).

The over-representation of Black children in care, and a higher likelihood of them being subjected to child protection investigations, has been frequently discussed as being of

concern (Webb *et al.*, 2002; Owen and Statham, 2009; Laird and Tadam, 2019). The under-representation of Asian children in the child safeguarding and protection system has been studied to a lesser extent, but Ahmed *et al.* (2022) have documented this in recent times. Socio-economic inequalities resulting from one's race or ethnicity also remain a frequent phenomenon across studies examining health and social care outcomes (Mirza and Warwick, 2024), and child protection literature evidences that socio-economic factors can amplify existing disadvantages for racially minoritised children (Bywaters *et al.*, 2019). Such inequalities have also been directly linked to CSA, with Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) reporting that:

'Professional approaches originate in cultural contexts, which are often different from those of most British Asians. If the proportion of children and non-abusing carers from Asian communities who access relevant services is to increase, professionals need to develop better understandings of cultural imperatives which determine behaviour in those communities' (Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006; p.1361).

Language as a barrier is often cited as a common obstruction when working with racially minoritised communities, with practitioners lacking confidence in their engagement with families whose first language is not English (Chand, 2005). The use of interpreters is a long-standing issue and includes factors such as lack of funding for interpreters, how they are perceived by service users, and the accuracy of their accounts (Birmingham Race Action Partnership, 2011; Laird and Tadam, 2019). The NSPCC (2014) and Malik *et al.* (2024) have continued to report problems in practice arising due to language barriers.

Horvath *et al.* (2014), investigating CSA, also found that racially minoritised children do not access child protection services with the same frequency as White children, and tend to receive a poorer quality of service should they do so. In more recent years, IICSA reported that organisations had failed to recognise or support the cultural and religious needs of racially minoritised CSA victims (Jay *et al.*, 2022). In recent years, racism and

discrimination have been more overtly stated as to why racially minoritised families are in receipt of less adequate family services:

'Experiences of discrimination and racism were commonly reported among the parents and young people who participated in our research. These experiences related both to trying to access services and to the support that families received from services' (Waddell et al., 2022, p.9).

Some of the 15 women, for instance, spoke about the focus on the experiences of White girls being sexually exploited during the high-profile CSE cases. Although understanding that this had to be addressed, they felt that it was almost in parallel, silencing the experiences of any other girl, from any other community. The women stated that their experiences were invisible and barely considered by the media and political leaders. Agencies need to be aware of, and be receptive to such perspectives, because it suggests that racialising child protection issues risks creating further distance between South Asian communities, agencies and support services.

In her analysis of why change may not materialise, despite a plethora of data and a sufficient awareness of the problem, Ahmed (2021) discusses how only some narratives continue to be heard, whereas unheard voices are obstructed. She argues that a dismantling of institutional structures is required for these voices to also be heard. Researching complaints of sexual harassment and abuse in universities, she refers to 'institutional mechanics', which are barriers to progress. In light of the above analysis and stated shortfalls in child protection practice and policy, some of these mechanics relate to how race and ethnicity are responded to in child protection institutions. The UK Government-commissioned 2025 Report *"It's Silent": Race, racism and safeguarding* children found that practitioners' understanding of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children's lived experiences was incomplete and consequently, they held a poor understanding of children's vulnerabilities and risks (The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2025). Recognising that some progress had been made, the Report highlighted the need for much greater improvement in practice and provides guidance for practitioners, leaders, and organisations.

There is potential for such 'institutional mechanics' to be unpacked through CRT. With race and racism being its core tenets, CRT frames racism as being pervasive in institutions. Perceiving cultural norms like shame and honour to be fixed and immovable can be argued as being one such feature of organisational mechanics, and a form of racial bias. Applied to child protection, CRT would guide an exploration of organisational norms and practices to identify where discrimination is occurring, overtly or covertly. Gupta and Featherstone (2015) employed CRT to examine discriminatory practices towards Black fathers. They analysed case studies of Black fathers whose children were at risk of being permanently removed because of social work and family-court decision-making often resting on assumptions and stereotypes about Black fathers. CRT is, therefore, able to support an examination of issues such as whether risk assessments and thresholds for interventions are making discriminatory decisions about non-White families and pathologising them, and overly basing decisions on the parenting cultures of White Western society. Also referring to CRT, Laird and Tedam (2019) discuss how White practitioners need to reflect on their concepts of family life because, derived from an individualist culture, White practitioners will inherently affiliate themselves with notions of individualism rather than collectivism.

As can be seen from the findings of this thesis, a collectivist understanding is critical to effectively identify and respond to CSA in British South Asian communities and, importantly, to enable access to support and therapeutic services. Failing to facilitate access to these services, partly due to perceiving the problem through a White lens, creates a disadvantage for British South Asian CSA victims/survivors. The women's narratives often alluded to such points, and they felt that statutory agencies were inadequately equipped and designed to meet their needs (as children and adults) and the needs of South Asian families where CSA had occurred. For instance, a couple of the women spoke about their dissatisfaction with White therapists as adults, as they had insufficiently understood the

constructs of shame and honour. And the two women who had had statutory interventions as children spoke about how agencies had failed in their responsibility to keep them, accepting parental accounts of family life, making minimal efforts to capture their voice, and misinterpreting signs and the language used to describe the abuse. There was little more said about the input of statutory agencies, but there was certainly an indication that agencies had failed to consider their specific cultural context. With its emphasis on how race intersects with other areas such as ethnicity, gender, migration and culture, CRT would allow for an appreciation of the family unit for the women, of their collective existence, and of the desire of families to avoid negative factors infiltrating family life. As it also emphasises the importance of centring the lived experiences of racially minoritised communities, it would encourage efforts to hear from victims/survivors of CSA from these communities, across the generations. Begikhani *et al.* (2015) discuss how racism is embedded in British society, affecting generation after generation:

'No matter how settled, multi-generational, integrated and long-term they are, Britain's complex minority communities have often been stigmatised as consisting of 'immigrants' (p.19).

CRT, therefore, provides a powerful framework for understanding such embedded racism, and in exploring racial and ethnic inequalities in child protection. The UK is a culturally and ethnically diverse society, with the South Asian population comprising a sizeable minority. According to the most recent census, the Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh category was the second highest recorded ethnic category at 9.3% (Office for National Statistics, 2021). It can therefore be reasonably argued that the citizen rights, including human rights, of this populace are being neglected due to an insufficient consideration of their lived experiences of CSA. This includes the rights of both children from the communities experiencing the abuse in contemporary times and adult survivors who are still suffering from its impact. Although CRT is in its early stages of development, with regard to applicability to the UK child protection sector, it does offer some interesting perspectives

on the marginalisation of racially minoritised communities in child protection practice.

However, CRT's direct applicability to the UK context is less straightforward. Much of the literature is rooted in the US, where institutions, structures, and racialised histories differ from those in the UK. As a result, CRT is underdeveloped in UK child protection scholarship, making its application valuable but not always easily evidenced or widely embedded in practice at the present time. Furthermore, its applicability may also be stifled due to it being marginalised by the current US administration, which has seen organisational policies, practices, and resources for equality, diversity and inclusion being eliminated, and approaches supported by CRT being threatened (Briscoe and Jones, 2024). Such attitudes are likely to have implications for future scholarly research in the US when exploring issues as those examined in this thesis. In the UK, EDI practices in child welfare and protection thankfully continue, for now, and the next section discusses how cultural competency remains the key tool in addressing the problem of race, racism, and unconscious/racial biases.

Cultural competency, cultural sensitivity, and the pitfall of cultural essentialism

Cultural competency denotes a practitioner's level of competency in adequately understanding a service user's cultural background so that assumptions are avoided, and cultural values and norms are respected (Laird and Tedam, 2019). The terms cultural sensitivity and cultural humility are sometimes employed to better reflect the necessary changes that need to be made. These two terms recognise that meeting the needs of diverse communities must not imply an end-point in terms of the achievement of skills and knowledge, or rely on what can be a subjective assessment of a practitioner's competency (Laird and Tedam, 2019). However, in practice and policy literature, cultural competency is still a widely employed term and, therefore, will be used in this chapter. How practitioners

achieve cultural competency is less prominently discussed (Dana and Allen, 2008; Harrison and Turner, 2011; Ezell *et al.*, 2024; Uher *et al.*, 2024). Rather, there is limited development in this area which suggests thwarted or ineffective commitments made by organisational and national policies for addressing inequalities, itself suggestive of racist and oppressive public service practices and policies. As Dominelli (1997) observed in her early works in this area: *'racial inequality has not disappeared because white people understand better the customs, traditions and religious activities of ethnic minority groups'*. She argued for fundamental structural change in organisations and the cultural dynamics within them.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2000) and Singh (2009) have presented the importance of having culturally sensitive solutions for racially minoritised women. Barn and Das (2016), and Mohamed (2024), have discussed the need to re-formulate Family Group Conferences, a mechanism by which families are integrated into the child protection process, so that they more effectively consider the needs of diverse families. This thesis extends such arguments to the context of South Asian British children and women affected by CSA, helping move the issue forward towards the needed transformational change. As outlined in Chapter 1, data collection on intra-familial CSA remains challenging, with plans afoot for the ONS to improve national child abuse data overall, asking those aged 12-25 about their experience of abuse, including CSA (Office for National Statistics, n.d.). It would be a good development if intra-familial CSA, as well as the ethnicity of victims/survivors of intra-familial CSA, were included as part of these endeavours. When discussing areas of practice and policy development for racially minoritised communities, accurate and consistent data on ethnicity is fundamental (Mirza and Warwick, 2024). This is included as a recommendation in Chapter 8.

Although child protection practitioners and policy-makers are advised to better understand culturally specific factors, it is also critical that racially minoritised communities are not stereotyped. Cultural essentialism describes the encouragement of stereotypes and

perceives communities as having certain behaviours, and assumes certain outcomes or expectations, thereby leading to discrimination (Begikhani *et al.*, 2015). For example, Patel and Strachan (1997) found that media stereotypes of South Asian families had led to attributing certain problems and behaviours to them during the provision of support. In exploring forced marriage, Sandhu and Barrett (2024) have also discussed how discourses on British South Asian women are largely centred on marriage, rather than a deeper exploration of their experiences, choices, and identities.

In the context of child protection specifically, Laird and Tedam (2019) have discussed how cultural essentialism can lead to practitioners viewing families in a particular way, thereby impeding effective practice. This thesis purports that an insufficient and inadequate examination of the lived experiences of British female South Asian victims/survivors of CSA is partly due to the continuing tendency of perceptions about the South Asian culture, i.e. that shame and honour are strong cultural norms against which minimal effective action can be taken. Wetherell and Potter (1992) discussed how adopting fixed ideas about culture can be oppressive and damaging, and Ahmed *et al.* (2009) documented it as being problematic in their exploration of British South Asian women's experiences of domestic abuse. Here, perceiving domestic abuse from a cultural lens was leading to ineffective and poor responses to the mental health needs of the women.

Culturally essentialising the South Asian culture, be it defining it as patriarchal, oppressive of women, abusive, or alien, is problematic for several reasons. For one, it would amplify practitioner perceptions that the communities are 'hard to reach', hard to engage' or 'unreachable', or other commonly used terms to describe when engagement with racially minoritised communities does not happen (Brackertz, 2007; Darko, 2021). This risks further alienating the communities, leading to half-hearted agency attempts or even apathy when assessing the risks and needs of the communities. Furthermore, cultural essentialism can

make communities themselves feel under attack, leading to a defensive attitude and creating a greater sense of insularity. On starting this research journey, I was, therefore, sensitive to how the British South Asian culture would be perceived, aware that findings which aligned with negative preconceived ideas would be unhelpful and even damaging. This was a key element of my researcher reflexivity, encouraging me to be alert to nuances in the data and to findings which conveyed different sets of meanings and interpretations.

One key aspect of culturally essentialising the South Asian community relates to viewing family life as operating within a patriarchal model. This posits women as being unable to speak about their abuse, as representing gender inequality, and as perceiving quite primitive forms of family (Gill and Brah, 2014). Male members, particularly fathers, are seen to take on the dominating role in families, and it is often assumed that female relatives and mothers take on a secondary and quite powerless role. Research into physical and sexual violence against South Asian women has substantiated such representations. However, seeing women as simply submissive dilutes our understanding of their lived experiences and takes away agency from the women. Importantly, as the findings from this research have illustrated, there is a direct antithesis to such apparent submissiveness in the women's narratives of strength and resilience. Furthermore, such a reductionist perspective, which centralises patriarchy, fails to offer opportunities to women to challenge patriarchal structures.

On starting this research, therefore, there was sensitivity to the cultural assumptions that have previously been made about South Asian perpetrators of abuse. Begikhani *et al.* (2015) discuss how the UK media essentialised certain ethnic communities when reporting on KNSCH. Such essentialising was again apparent in the reporting of the high-profile CSE cases involving Asian men as perpetrators, and examined by Tufail (2015) and Hallett (2017). These cases had positioned race as the core issue when discussing CSE (Gill and

Harrison 2015). The subject re-ignited in the mass media and political domains in more recent times (The UK Home Office, 2025; UK Parliament, 2025; Walker, 2025). Not only did this distract attention away from other forms of perpetration or victim experiences, and risks doing so again (Jassal, 2025), but it also created a powerful, negative and very public image of South Asian men being sexual predators (Akhtar, 2014; Cockbain and Tufail, 2020). This thesis again centred attention on South Asian perpetrators of sexual abuse. It was, at times, a difficult balance to strike, but a commitment to safeguarding children took precedence, and if there were aspects of British South Asian communities which were continuing to put children at risk of CSA, I had a professional responsibility and desire to highlight this. Furthermore, there have been failings in child safeguarding resulting from sidelining issues of race or ethnicity, as documented in the aforementioned high-profile CSE cases (Jay, 2015; Hallett, 2017). Geraldine *et al.* (2020) have also discussed how honour-based abuse and violence require practitioners to avoid 'moral blindness' and respond primarily to the protection of the child so that South Asian children become more visible in the child protection system.

This research has evidenced the issue of sexual abuse of South Asian girls, perpetrated by South Asian men, across the Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani British communities. This model of perpetration is very different to that defined by the 'grooming gang' narratives. It has been highlighted that this group of male perpetrators, a group which itself is varied, remain hidden, unspoken about, and importantly for the victims/survivors, not brought to justice. This was also highlighted by Sikh Women's Aid (2021) in the report on CSA and other forms of male-perpetrated abuse in the British Sikh community. In this thesis, many women spoke about how perpetrators were aware that they would not disclose or report the abuse due to shame and honour, and sometimes other factors. The voice of British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA, or CSE, is, therefore, significantly obstructed, with any sense of justice remaining elusive. This layer of protection afforded to

male perpetrators of intra-familial CSA in South Asian communities requires further examination and offers opportunities for future research.

The relationship between racially minoritised communities and statutory agencies

Earlier sections have stated the legal and professional responsibilities of statutory agencies in providing effective child protection services to all children. However, failures in this and in other areas of health and social care practice and services have led to considerable distrust of statutory services amongst racially minoritised communities in Britain (Anitha and Gill, 2009; Cowburn *et al.*, 2014; Harrison and Gill, 2017b). This distrust is long-standing. Swift (2011) reported on how there was a strong distrust of agencies that developed due to the various experiences of first-generation South Asians, and how, consequently, they did not access health services. Low rates of access to support services by racially minoritised communities remain in more recent times, such as not accessing social care services to the same extent as their White counterparts, and/or not receiving effective support (Gilbert *et al.*, 2004; Laird and Tadam, 2019).

Bernard (2001) and Laird and Tadam (2019) have examined how this distrust continues to feature in the context of child protection, often due to experiences of racism and being 'othered'. Such factors require sufficient recognition in terms of how engagement with communities can be made more effective and culturally sensitive. Bernard (2001) discussed CSA in Black communities, reporting that Black mothers shared their concerns about how White workers would perceive their family should a disclosure be made, coupled in particular with how Black male perpetrators would be attributed with even more negative characteristics by statutory agencies, particularly the police. Failings in policing are another example of why this distrust exists. The Halo Project is a charity based in Middlesbrough,

supporting racially minoritised girls and women. In 2020, it submitted a super-complaint against the police sector. A super-complaint is a complaint where *'a feature, or combination of features, of policing in England and Wales by one or more than one police force is, or appears to be, significantly harming the interests of the public'* (HMICFRS, n.d.). The Halo Project argued that the police were failing to respond effectively to incidents of sexual abuse being experienced by those the charity was representing (Halo, 2020). As summarised in Table 3, none of the 15 women in this research had reported to statutory agencies as children, and only two had as adults, many years after the abuse had taken place. One of the women had retracted her statement, and the other was involved in a criminal case against the perpetrator, but spoke about the incompetence and delays with which this was being managed by the police. Overall, there was a reluctance, hesitancy, and even fear of involving statutory agencies by the women, and some evidence of why this is probably the case. How statutory agencies are responding to racially minoritised communities in the context of CSA, therefore, requires further exploration.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has discussed how this thesis contributes to intersectional feminist works, integrating the voices and needs of British South Asian CSA victims/survivors. It presents the significance of the 'shame and honour' nexus in the women's experiences and the need for this to be more adequately recognised and acted upon by those working in the field of CSA and child protection more broadly. It has also illustrated a desire amongst the women to share their experiences and their voices, indicating varying levels of activism. The importance of a narrative research design in hearing minoritised experiences has been restated, indicating new ways of engaging victims/survivors of CSA in research. Without creating a landscape where British South Asian female CSA victims/survivors feel that they are seen and heard, they are unlikely to come forward and will remain marginalised.

Although concern has been expressed in policy spheres about the lower-than-expected rates of CSA disclosure and reporting in British South Asian communities, this thesis argues that this requires greater interrogation. As findings from this research provide more informative data about the relationship between shame and honour and CSA, it is recommended that a greater onus be placed on child protection practitioners, services, and policy-makers to better understand and respond to shame and honour as a barrier and integrate this as a part of their professional safeguarding responsibilities. The approach below, as purported by Begikhani *et al.* (2015), in their discussions about KNSCH, is recommended:

'It requires stronger political will, more effective civil and criminal legislation, on-going training and support for relevant professionals, improved legal processes, a greater number of prosecutions, more effective coordinated support for victims, comprehensive awareness-raising and public education' (p.15).

The next chapter brings the thesis to a close with a summary of its key findings, recommendations from the thesis, and some final reflections.

Chapter 8: Recommendations and Conclusion

'Finally somebody's actually doing some research into it, because it's something that needs to be done'.

(Sonam).

Chapter introduction

This narrative inquiry has provided rare insights into how British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA have made sense of the abuse that they have experienced. By having the means to share their voice, many of the women valued the process of sense-making, and so the value of a narrative research design will be restated in this final chapter. A summary of the research findings will be provided, and the thesis ends with key recommendations stemming from this research. These recommendations are deliberately broad in nature as a means to identify the critical areas needed to make those initial steps towards what is hoped to be more significant developments in addressing CSA in British South Asian communities. This final chapter, however, begins with a personal account which seeks to illustrate the origins of this research, and the motivation to complete it in as authentic a way as possible.

A final reflexive account

Sonam's quote at the start of this chapter signifies how important this research was to the women. However, it also alludes to the gap that has existed in documenting their experiences. Although this thesis goes some way to addressing this, Sonam's words are also a reminder of the many women who were not part of this research and who remain unheard. Having been in the sphere of child protection for over 20 years, I had never envisaged studying this subject matter. It may sound clichéd, but I believe that this topic

chose me, rather than me choosing this topic. Over 25 years ago, my elder sister took her own life. It was, and remains, a significant influence on how I see the world, and particularly women's experiences within it. At the time, I was 22, and I recall reading a book about factors which make women more susceptible to suicide. My sister had most of these factors in her life. The discovery saddened me but also made me curious about what women may be going through in their lives and how they continue to live and survive, having experienced tragedies and trauma, often without ever sharing this with anyone. I also knew that my sister, being a South Asian woman, would have faced additional challenges. At that stage in my life, I did not have the language to articulate this, but I remember feeling that more needed to be known about the silent suffering of girls and women.

So much else happened in my life across the 20 years following that initial reflection, and I never again thought about it in a concrete way until 2017, when I began this PhD. The reason I share this here, at the end of this thesis, is to illustrate my motivation to complete it in a sincere, authentic and trusting way, on behalf of the 15 women who have shared their experiences with me. It also explains my rigidity in undertaking the research only with the victims/survivors, rather than extending it to third sector practitioners and child protection professionals. Inevitably, the journey has involved emotion, but I have adhered as much as possible to the neutrality expected of a researcher. A distance between the data and what sense was made from it has been maintained, and efforts to retain rigour in the research process are discussed in Chapter 3. At the same time, unlocking the emotional worlds of women who have held their silence, or who broke their silence but were rejected, should have an emotional impact on the researcher, and it did so on me. This is central to feminist research. This research has spanned eight years, and completing it has been a challenge. This was amplified by the deep feelings it continuously stirred within me, the overwhelming sense of responsibility I felt for the women, and my duty of care towards them. I am thankful, relieved, and pleased that I have now been able to give them something back. A narrative

inquiry has allowed me to input as a researcher, but by honouring the complexity of what is being said and resisting any reductionism.

It has also consistently facilitated an empathic and sensitive approach towards the women, demonstrating a sense of deep integrity to report as authentically as possible the stories which had been insufficiently heard. This process of rapport building was a critical aspect of this narrative inquiry, and in the strengthening of trust between the women and me. This was from the first email exchange in which they enquired about the research, to this day, where I have remained contactable, if they so wish. I sometimes reflect on how they are now and how participation in this research may have affected their lives moving forward, if at all. At the end of my first interview, I felt unsettled. Having heard from the research participant, saying goodbye and never seeing them again, was uncomfortable. Although my supervisors had prepared the ground for this interaction, I thought, *What now? Do I just let her go and never see her again?* I felt indebted to the participant for entrusting me with her story, and a sense of guilt that I was just going to take this information and move on. This led to a 'checking in' email being sent to participants a couple of days after each interview. An email is sent to them once a year, with brief updates on how their contribution to this research is being deployed.

Some of the women reply, sharing their reflections about how the process of storying has positioned them in a different place in their lives. Others, having read their transcript, feel that they now realise the full impact that the abuse has had on their life. A small minority do not reply, but neither do they ask that the emails stop, an option which is always provided. Many of them continue to thank me for pursuing the research and developing a knowledge base in this area. It is this shared understanding with the women, this connection, which has helped sustain the thesis to its end.

This continued connection with the women is in part due to the sensitivity of this subject matter, but also relates to their expressed desire to make a change. They wanted to help British South Asian female victims/survivors of CSA by raising the profile of this abuse across the communities, by creating services which understand the profundity of shame and honour, and by having more voices like theirs present when discussing CSA in the practice, policy, research, and public arenas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Expansion of research funding and opportunities to enable a continued and greater exploration of the lived experiences of CSA in British South Asian communities, across the generations.**
- 2. Consider research designs which are innovative and creative, encouraging participants to come forward, and which ensure that they feel safe enough to share their experiences.**

Research methodology

This narrative inquiry sought to explore the CSA experiences of British South Asian women, including and beyond the constructs of shame and honour, through adopting an intersectional feminist approach. The intersections of gender, ethnicity, parental migration, and class have provided a deeper understanding of their experiences. An intersectional lens has also highlighted variations in experiences and identities according to age, educational background, and variations within the three ethnic groups, suggesting that there may be additional vulnerabilities for women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage. It is hoped that the value of adopting such a research methodology to explore the experiences of racially minoritised women is emphasised by this thesis.

It is also useful to reiterate the potential for CRT to be an additional lens for examining such experiences, specifically in addressing the ethnic and racial disproportionalities and disparities in UK child protection practice and policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. University social work programmes to integrate intersectionality and critical race theories into their courses when teaching race, ethnicity and culture in child protection.

2. Child Protection agencies to raise awareness about disparities and disproportionalities in CSA data, and deliver relevant training to develop staff skills and knowledge.

Findings: the women's experiences of CSA

Although disclosures of CSA by children are known to be rare (Solberg *et al.*, 2021), it appears noteworthy that from a sample of 15, only two disclosed their abuse to their non-abusing parent as a child. There was a shared sense amongst the women that, due to concerns about shame and honour, disclosure would not lead to a supportive response from families. The insidiousness of shame and honour as experienced by girls and women has been conveyed through the research. The narratives of shame and honour provide a rich context to understand that their experiences of CSA stretch beyond the sexual abuse, and strongly pull in the cultural context of being a British South Asian woman. The research has also evidenced the relationship between vulnerabilities to CSA created by the cultural and migration contexts inhabited by second and third-generation British South Asian children. There was also evidence that where disclosure did happen, the impact was destabilising, damaging, and destructive, seemingly to irreparable levels.

None of the women expressed a sense of justice from what they had experienced. On the contrary, many spoke about the injustice of not only having had to experience the abuse, but to have to continue living with it in a silent way, some still having to exist amongst the perpetrator. This materialised into a deep desire to have a voice and to make changes in practice and policy, to support other girls and women. This sense of activism possibly represents their seeking of justice, as if translating injustice into a positive cause was the only way of attaining justice in the absence of a disclosure. Choosing to speak to me as part of this research may have been their first step towards this, as being a part of a positive development was a strong part of their identity, post the abuse. This thesis recommends creating channels and spaces for the British South Asian victims/survivors to share their experiences and contribute to change.

Most of the women regretted disclosing to family members, and the narrative of disclosure was presented as a single grand narrative, due to sharing a common theme across the dataset. However, there were a number of strands within it, relating to the different experiences, circumstances, and identities of the women. Those who were still enveloped in close-knit family and community life found themselves having to remain quiet about the abuse. It was as if the abuse or the disclosure had never happened. Those who had made decisions to leave their family and community, and had the capacity and means to do so, may have been freer from this burden of silence or marginalisation of the abuse. At the same time, those who had left felt a strong sense of loss and found that they had to create a new identity and life for themselves. This was not out of choice, but as a direct consequence of the abuse. Disclosure, in this thesis, does not evidence a positive outcome for the victims/survivors of CSA. Salma was the only one who did not regret disclosing overall, although she had expressed regret as part of her journey. She had been able to create a new, healthier life for herself and was determined to explore means of making disclosures less difficult, painful, and destructive than her experience had been. There is a

particular sense of hope in her determination, although as of yet, the mechanisms for this support are missing, as discussed later in this chapter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Create spaces, online and face to face, for British South Asian women to share their experiences of CSA, either individually or collectively, and retaining their anonymity if they so wish.**
- 2. Design support and therapeutic services, online and face-to-face, which British South Asian women can access for CSA-specific support.**

The women themselves felt a disconnect with the constructs of shame and honour, speaking about the destructive intrusion that the constructs had had on their lives. However, for many of them, shame and honour remained a pervasive force in their lives. They were still living a life where they felt that they had to protect their families from this shame and honour, and preserve a family context that was still intact. This led to me having significant reflections as a researcher about why this was so, considering their disregard for shame and honour. There is no judgement being made about this, nor about the resulting non-disclosures and non-reporting. Through getting to know the women before, during, and after the research, there is immense respect and admiration for them, and through their narratives, there is a robust understanding of why they remain silent and preserve family harmony. Rather, the curiosity relates to developing practices and policies targeting CSA in British South Asian communities today, as it provides a critical point of learning.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Work with schools, Further Education colleges, and universities, to raise awareness of shame and honour and their impact on lived experiences, to more effectively support and safeguard children, young people and younger adults.

Continuous exploration of this sense of avoiding shame and preserving honour is fundamental to unlocking the current stagnation that exists in responding to CSA in British South Asian communities. Actively and persistently adopting an intersectional and critical theory lens opens up such scrutiny so that more effective responses can be created and transformational change appears possible. This change must involve making a context where victims/survivors do not have to choose between their own wellbeing and the wellbeing and protection of their families, as was the case for many of the 15 women in this research. Interrogating this reality seeks to provide a wider knowledge base from which practitioners and policy-makers can work, and better understand and respond to the lower than expected CSA referrals from British South Asian communities. Fontes and Plummer (2010) state that:

'No culture is defined solely by one value, nor is any particular value held by one culture exclusively. However, understanding values that are often held closely by people in a specific culture can enhance our ability to overcome barriers to the disclosure of CSA among families within that culture' (p.496).

This research has highlighted that female CSA victims/survivors from British South Asian communities have not only had to internalise their individual feelings of shame, commonly reported in CSA cases, but have also had to digest the wider implications of this shame, considering the consequences for extended family and community members. This sense of shame or sharam is integrated into their sense of self from childhood, and even as adults, they are unable to disconnect from it completely. Social norms of collectivism and interdependence are permanent and pervasive. Honour or izzat is interwoven with this sense of being, but carries with it a weighty sense of responsibility with wider implications than

individual shame. Familial and community concerns about izzat heavily impacted decisions to disclose and the after-effects of disclosing. There has been considerable strength and resilience demonstrated by the women across their life course, undocumented in existing literature. 2013).

Findings have also shown some of the women seeking to raise greater awareness of CSA in their communities. Earlier chapters have identified the severe inadequacies of data on intra-familial CSA, which is likely to obstruct their ability to highlight its prevalence, often denied in British South Asian communities. In addition, this research has exposed the need to develop mechanisms to support British South Asian children at risk of CSA, and the need to provide clearer guidance for professionals and services in their engagement with victims/survivors and their families. CSA support services and therapeutic interventions have been reported to be minimally accessed by racially minoritised communities (Kaiser *et al.*, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Children's support services to have ongoing specialist training to increase awareness about shame and honour to improve CSA risk assessment and support for British South Asian children.**
- 2. Official data on intra-familial CSA incidences to be consistently separated from those of CSE, and the ethnicity of the victim/survivor, and the perpetrator, to be recorded distinctly as Bangladeshi, Indian, or Pakistani.**

Lessons and recommendations for CSA and child protection practice and policy developments

The cultural and ethnic diversity of the UK population demands a thorough examination of how CSA manifests across communities, how it is responded to, and how victims/survivors are supported. This thesis recommends transformations that enable position CSA in British South Asian communities as abuse, first and foremost, beyond a narrative of cultural norms and deficits. Furthermore, it calls for the consistent and strong integration of culturally sensitive practice and services. There is a need for child protection and victim/survivor services to fully consider the implications of disclosure for girls and women. The women in this research who had disclosed, regretting doing so, because the support and sense-making that they had hoped would be forthcoming from families, did not materialise. This left them feeling further isolated and alone. Some indicated the need for a whole systems approach, where the whole family unit is considered in the post-disclosure period to mitigate against this. As Sandhu and Barrett (2024) conclude in their examination of the oppression of women in the context of marriage choices, South Asian women's behaviours are strongly intertwined with family and community. Widanaralalage *et al.* (2025), researching male CSA in British South Asian communities, has also argued for the need for a greater recognition of the values and fears of South Asian families when planning service provision.

This thesis, therefore, proposes that concerted and collective action from the grassroots level to the higher echelons of change is what is needed to more effectively address CSA in British South Asian communities. This would mirror or develop the efforts of organisations representing racially minoritised girls and women, such as Southall Black Sisters (n.d.), Karma Nirvana (n.d.), Imkaan (n.d.), Apna Haq (n.d.), Quetzal (n.d.) and Panahghar (n.d.). Their contributions have included considerable activism on behalf of those experiencing sexual abuse and violence, challenging cultural essentialism and demanding

that the rights of racially minoritised girls and women be adequately considered both within their cultural contexts and beyond (Thiara and Roy, 2020; Quetzal, 2022). However, despite the efforts of such organisations, data continues to highlight disparities and disproportionalities in the support and interventions provided to racially minoritised women vulnerable to abuse (Thiara and Harrison, 2021). This alludes to arguments presented in Chapter 2 about how, despite grassroots organisations in the UK having made good progress in raising awareness about the abuse and violence of racially minoritised girls and women, gaps remain in the work of statutory agencies. Developing projects within these groups, but with a specific focus on CSA to make the issue more prominent, would be a positive step forward. Many of the 15 women had indicated that these services do not exist. For example, Roshni stated: *'We don't have anything that's culturally appropriate. We don't have anything that understands the wider context of... the repercussions of disclosing, and even once you do, if the services are...they're not suitable to meet your needs'*.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Develop support and therapeutic services for British South Asian women who have experienced CSA. This should include funding existing third sector organisations which provide services to British South Asian women experiencing abuse, so that they are able to develop their expertise in CSA support.

CSE has dominated CSA discussions over the last 20 years, attracting practice, policy, academic and media attention (Berelowitz *et al.*, 2013; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2013; Jay, 2014; Hallett, 2017). This deserves attention, but similar attention has not been attributed to intra-familial CSA. This thesis makes a call to address this, and to implement the 20 recommendations made by the seven-year Independent Inquiry into CSA. Although it is encouraging that the 2024 elected UK Labour Government is promising to *'introduce a landmark Race Equality Act...[to] strengthen protections against*

dual discrimination and root out other racial inequalities' (The Labour Party, 2024), it is yet to be seen what changes it will make with regard to child protection practices and policies. Its *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive* strategy (Department for Education, 2024c) and its *Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill* (UK Parliament, 2024), fail to state specific vulnerabilities of children according to ethnicity, or indeed any other protective characteristics, thus lacking an intersectional analysis of the risks a child may be exposed to. Even the previous Conservative Government's *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy (Department for Education, 2023), which was a major reform of Children's Social Care, made no direct reference to addressing racial inequalities, and nor did it make a single reference to the needs of racially minoritised children and families experiencing CSA in its response to the Final Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (HM Government, 2023b). Funded by the UK Government, the *What Works Centre for Children & Families* (now Foundations) evaluates and documents models and approaches which are addressing gaps in child protection practice (Foundations, n.d.). Its recent publication seeking to achieve tangible change for racially minoritised children and families in the child welfare sector (Sorgenfrei *et al.*, 2023) is encouraging, although it remains to be seen what changes result.

Although violence against women and girls remains a national priority (UK Parliament, 2023) and international concern (WHO, 2024), time will tell whether the UK Labour Government (or any future Government) will be effective in more explicitly responding to issues of race and ethnicity in the context of child protection practice and policy, and specifically in responses to CSA.

Finally, this research has also highlighted that shame and honour are not constructs which the women unchallengingly accept. Rather, these are constructs entrenched in their personal, cultural, religious, and socio-economic life. Challenging them, therefore, requires a transformational effort which must include the victim/survivor, but also move to the social

and political institutions which continue to enforce them in the form of community coercion or statutory and political apathy to address the problem. It is these locations of change that appear to unchallengingly accept shame and honour as the reason for low disclosures and reporting. The result of this has been an inadequate consideration of the experiences of CSA in British South Asian communities. Findings also suggest that these locations of change need to have a greater understanding of what happens when disclosure does occur, and design support and services around this for victims/survivors, as well as for their families. It is hoped that this thesis contributes to the bold, new, and transformational ideas that are necessary to respond adequately to the gaps discussed within it.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Advert



Researching child sexual abuse and the experience of British South Asian female victims/survivors.

I am a lecturer at the University of Kent and I am undertaking research for a PhD into the above topic and I would be interested in hearing from you if you meet the criteria below:

You are an adult female survivor of child sexual abuse and you are from a South Asian community, specifically Bangladeshi, Indian or Pakistani;

Or, you are a mother from these communities whose daughter(s) is a survivor of historical child sexual abuse;

In either case, you must be over 21, female, and living in England.

Whether you are a survivor or a mother of a survivor, please note that the research is focusing upon how this type of abuse is perceived and managed in South Asian communities. Although individual experiences will inevitably be shared, this will be largely in the context of the research aim just outlined. Personal histories and specifics of a case is not the focus of the research. Please also note that this research is not studying cases which may still be being investigated but only historical, closed cases.

The research methods will include one to one confidential conversations with me, conducted in a sensitive, safe, warm and comfortable environment. All data will be anonymised and no single participant will be identifiable. Please note that you will be able to withdraw from the research at any point.

More details about the research will be made available following contact. If you wish to make contact, please email me on sacsauk@gmail.com

I am a female from the South Asian community and would be very interested in hearing from you.

Thank you.

Vanisha Jassal

Appendix 2: Participant Information sheet



A research project on child sexual abuse within the family and the experience of female victims in South Asian families.

Background to the research

I am a PhD student seeking to undertake research into the sexual abuse of female children and young people within the home, amongst South Asian families living in England. I am defining South Asian as Bangladeshi, Indian or Pakistani heritage. I am a second generation female of Indian heritage, born in England.

Child sexual abuse is a highly traumatic experience for children, young people and surviving adults and the emotional and physical harm it causes is well documented. In all communities it largely remains the 'hidden' form of abuse, as disclosure by victims is rare and often takes place once they are in adulthood. It is therefore difficult to know the precise incidence of this abuse. Previous research indicates that we know even less about its prevalence amongst the South Asian communities and cultural factors centred upon 'shame/sharam' and 'honour/izzat' possibly make disclosing the abuse more difficult. The consequence of this added layer of pressure for these victims may mean that they are even less likely to disclose and fail to receive culturally appropriate support.

This research project seeks to better understand these culturally specific factors, through hearing from the experience of survivors themselves. This research is driven by the need to keep trying to give survivors a space in which they can talk about their experiences and to create new knowledge around this crime. The more we know about it the greater the possibility of improving practice and policy so that this hidden abuse is less hidden and is dealt with more appropriately and sensitively than is sometimes the case. Without such aims for the future, many children remain at risk within their own homes.

I am interested in hearing about how influential (or not) these cultural factors were in your experience as a survivor of child sexual abuse.

Research participants

If you are an adult (over 21) female survivor of child sexual abuse of South Asian heritage then I would be very interested in hearing from you. The research can include participants for whom English may not be a first language as I am fluent in Punjabi and Hindi. Other languages can be accommodated for through an interpreter if this is felt to be appropriate. The focus of the research is not survivors' individual experience of abuse but more the possible influence of cultural factors. It is appreciated that individual experiences may begin to be shared and this will be managed by the researcher so that any recounting of specifics around one's experience of abuse is kept to a minimum.

The research will also seek to gain the perspective of statutory and voluntary sector workers involved with this issue so that important learning for practice and policy can be gained.

The methods to be used in the research

My research methodology will take place in two stages and please note that in both stages, all of the material will be anonymised and will be used solely by me as the researcher for this research. If the findings are to be referred in published material by the researcher, again it will be referred to anonymously and no participant's individual narrative or experience will ever be revealed. We can talk more about this in due course so that participants are clear about the whole process.

Stage 1:

I will be undertaking one to one conversations with participants about the topic of this research. I will have a few guided questions which I will ask to begin the conversation. The conversation will last one hour and will be audio recorded so that I as the researcher can focus on the session rather than on making notes. It is a common feature of research and I will be the sole person listening to the audio and transcribing the material from the audio. We can discuss this further in due course.

Stage 2:

At the end of Stage 1 I will ask whether the participant is happy for me to contact her for Stage 2 which involves a Sandboxing Session. This will take place at a later date and will last 1.5-2 hours. Through this method, participants will have access to a range of symbols (small props/toy pieces) which they can add into a sand tray to show their experience of shame and honour and other aspects of their experience which they wish to share.

Sandboxing is an engaging and creative technique used in social research to allow research participants the space to clarify their thoughts and reflections and create some distance between the subject being talked about and themselves. It has been used with survivors of abuse in other research, as well as for other purposes, and is a helpful medium through which complex feelings and emotions can be brought into discussions.

A key part of this methodology is capturing the placement of props/toy pieces in the sandtray. It is therefore beneficial if the process is captured on film so that the sand tray creations and the discussion is not missed. The participant herself will not be filmed as the mobile camera will be placed in a static position so that only the sandtray and participant's hands are in view. If participants wish to opt out of filming, there is a second option of recording the session by audio only and taking a photo of the sand tray at the end.

Again, we can talk more about this in due course so that participants are clear about the whole process.

Research sensitivity and confidentiality

I understand the difficulty of talking about this experience and I will undertake my research sensitively and confidentially and I will make your participation as comfortable as I can. This study has been considered by the Research Ethics Committee in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Kent. I will be obliged to adhere to the ethics standards agreed

by this Committee. I will provide contact details of organisations which may be able to offer support as I understand that the sessions may leave participants feeling unsettled. These will include contacts local to the participant, as well as national organisations for survivors such as NAPAC (National Association for People Abused in Childhood), HAVOCA (Help for Adult Victims of Child Abuse), The Survivor's Trust and CISTers (Childhood Incest Survivors).

Research data will always be anonymised and will be stored in line with the UK Data Protection Act and recent GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) throughout the course of the Study. No individual research participant will be identified through this research and anonymity will be adhered to throughout the research. Once the PhD has been completed, the research data can be:

- a) stored confidentially by the researcher;
- b) archived within the UK Data Service (<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data>):
- c) destroyed following completion of the PhD.

The decision will be made by the participant at the point of consent and all options will be fully explained to the researcher prior to this decision having to be made.

Participants can withdraw from the research at any time, either before, during or after the Stage 1/Stage 2 sessions, without having to provide an explanation. Participants can also ask for the sessions to be paused/stopped at any time. I will be organising the interviews in various locations and reasonable travel expenses that you incur through taking part in the Study will be reimbursed, but please keep receipts. Refreshments will be provided at the sessions.

The sessions are due to take place from August 2018 – December 2020.

Contact details

If you are interested in taking part in this research or wish to discuss this research further, please email me at sacsauk@gmail.com. Please leave your number or email if you prefer, so that I can contact you. Thank you very much for reading this information.

Vanisha Jassal

Appendix 3: Participant Consent form



A research project on child sexual abuse within the family and the experience of female victims/survivors in South Asian families.

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. The information sheet previously shared with you and shared again at this stage of consent, explains what the study is about and how I would like you to take part in it. Please do read it again before you tick the relevant boxes on this consent form and sign it. Once again, I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the research at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact me at sacsauk@gmail.com

- ☐ I, the undersigned, have read and understood the Study Information Sheet provided.
- ☐ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the Study.
- ☐ Issues around confidentiality have been fully explained to me.
- ☐ I understand that my personal details such as name and address will not be revealed to people.
- ☐ I understand that any names or places I refer to will be anonymised or given pseudonyms.
- ☐ I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs but my name will not be used.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will do everything possible to ensure that my experience or me as an individual participant, will not be identifiable.
- ☐ I give consent for our interview to be audio recorded and understand that this audio will only be used by the researcher and that it will be deleted once the transcription been completed.
- ☐ I have been given adequate time to consider my decision and I agree to take part in the Study.
- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the Study at any time a month before the research activity begins, without having to provide an explanation.
- ☐ I understand that I can also withdraw from the Study during the research session itself, without having to provide an explanation.
- ☐ I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any material related to this project to the University of Kent and understand that I am not to be given any of this data.
- ☐ I understand the processes involved in how the information may be stored and have been explained my options of whether I prefer my anonymised data to be stored for

future research purposes or whether it be destroyed following the completion of the PhD Study. I have selected one of the three options below:

- ☐ I wish for the anonymised research data to be held securely by the researcher on a permanent basis;
- ☐ I wish for the anonymised research data to be stored within the UK Data Service (<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data>) for accessibility by other researchers. I have been made aware of the varying options around this including the option for me as a participant having to be consulted if the data is to be used by others;
- ☐ I wish for the anonymised research data to be destroyed by the researcher following the completion of the PhD and I will be notified by the researcher through writing when this has taken place.
- ☐ I understand that although the prime purpose of this research is not to explore individual cases of abuse in detail, if the researcher thinks that someone may be at risk of harm or abuse, she will need to speak to her supervisory team and if necessary, relevant statutory services. However, she will inform me if this is to be the case.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

(Please provide a signature as this document represents your consent to participating in the research and the above points. This document will remain with the researcher at all times in a confidential place).

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 4: Guided Conversation/Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me what made you want to be a part of this research?
2. Can you identify what kinds of feelings you had when you saw the research advert?
3. Can you say anything about the reasons why children and even adults do not disclose? (availability of services, poor response of services).
4. I am particularly interested in elements of *community*. Can you tell me about how you think this type of research would be viewed by your community?
5. Is there anything you can say about what it was like being from your particular community and going through this experience?
6. Shame or Sharam is a large theme in this research – can you tell me what shame means to you?
7. Whether you disclosed the abuse or not, what role if any did Shame/Sharam play?
8. Could you explain whether this was different in relation to different family members?
9. Related to Shame/Sharam is the concept of Izzat/Honour which features strongly in South Asian communities. What does this mean to you?
10. What can you say about honour and being from your community?
11. Did honour feature as a factor in your experience of abuse?
12. Sometimes the communities I am researching talk about Haya/Modesty. Are you able to say anything about these and do you think that this was an additional factor in your experience?
13. What would you say about how sex is discussed in these communities within the family.
14. Do you feel religion plays a role in how shame, honour and modesty are perceived?
15. Can you tell me about your how your family members may have interpreted shame honour and haya?
16. In CSA cases, mothers are usually the one who children may turn to – can I ask whether your mum was someone you could/did go to during this time? Is there anything you wish to say about this?
17. Would you like to make any comment about the roles of mothers and the roles of fathers?
18. Do you think that the concepts you have spoken about, Sharam, Izzat and Haya, differ for boys and girls?
19. Would you like to add anything further about being from your particular ethnic community and whether this impacted your family life?
20. Are you able to comment on any supportive factors that may exist within your particular ethnic community?
21. Is there anything else that you would like to say about child sexual abuse of females in the South Asian community?
22. Are there any comments you would like to make about how current generations manage such issues with their children?
23. As the interview comes to an end, is there anything you would like to say before we end the interview?
24. Are there any feelings that you would like to share as we come to the end of the interview?

Appendix 5: Ethics Application form

(During the course of this PhD, the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research changed its name to School of Social Sciences).

Name of Applicant: Vanisha Jassal	ILP	No
Name of your Degree: (e.g.PG/UG degree title) PhD		
Campus: Canterbury		
Name of Supervisor: Dr Marian Duggan		
Title of Project: <i>Shame, Honour and Child Sexual Abuse of females within South Asian communities living in England.</i>		
Please provide a brief jargon free background to the project in no more than 150 words:		
This project seeks to provide a deeper understanding of intrafamilial child sexual abuse (CSA) of females within the South Asian communities living in England. Official statistics for this type of abuse are widely acknowledged to be lower than the actual incidence of abuse and this is reported to be even more so for children and young people of South Asian heritage. Research indicates that these communities are strongly governed by concepts of 'shame' and 'honour' which although relevant and applicable to other communities are likely to carry specific meaning and weighting for these families. How these concepts may relate to issues of <i>female</i> shame and honour, will be examined. In the interests of child protection and welfare, how these concepts may or may not be impeding the reporting and the management of child sexual abuse, will be researched through interviewing women from these communities, both female adult survivors (aged over 21) and mothers whose daughters have experienced CSA. Staff from statutory and third sector organisations will also be included as research participants as their perspective of how CSA is managed within these communities is significant for addressing policy and practice issues.		
Research Methods:		
<i>A. Selection & number of interviewees/participants.</i> Three participant groups will be targeted: Group A: Female Adult Survivors (aged over 21). Group B: Mothers whose daughters have experiences CSA. <i>Group A and Group B participants will not be known to each other.</i> Group C: Statutory (police and social services) and third sector workers. Group A and B - a phenomenological approach will be adopted as the focus of research is the meaning they attribute to the experience of the abuse and the possible influence of 'shame' and 'honour'. Through one to one guided conversations, the research will seek to understand how these individuals make sense of the way such abuse is perceived and managed in these communities. Please see the questions in Appendix 7 and Appendix 8 which will guide these interviews. <i>[THE APPENDIX NUMBERS REFERRED TO IN THIS ETHICS FORM DIFFER FROM THOSE ACTUALLY INCLUDED IN THIS THESIS, AND THEY HAVE NOT ALL BEEN INCLUDED IN IT].</i> In August 2018, due to delays in accessing sandtray training (my main research methods as outlined below), I decided that I would need to replace this method with 1-1 face to face interviews with survivors. Simon Cotttee (Ethics Committee, SSPSSR) confirmed that as the questions posed would be the same, then this would not need a revision of the ethics form so I continued with face to face interviews from August 2018. <i>[ADDITIONS DUE TO COVID-19]</i>		

By 2020 I still had some interviews to complete and COVID-19 emerged in the Spring of this year. Due to the pandemic not showing signs of disappearing, the research was being delayed and following discussions with supervisors in Autumn 2020, it was decided that I re-commence future interviews using online mediums. The ethical considerations around this were talked through and the main points are around ensuring that future participants are informed about the change and are comfortable with this, with no obligation to participate if they are not. Another point discussed was around whether their home environment, or other setting from which they may decide to receive the online call, is a private enough of a setting for them. As the sessions would need to be recorded to still enable audio transcription, security of the data was to be investigated.

Following these supervisions, I notified the research participants who were waiting to be interviewed, about the change to online interviews and advised that they take time to think about this and that there was no obligation to continue participating in the research. I confirmed that the same confidentiality and anonymity frameworks would be applied. I will be using MS Teams and have investigated the security levels around this with the UoK IT department, Head of Assurance and Data Protection and the UELT department. My main concern is around who could potentially access the recording once it has been downloaded in MS Teams. I have been informed that as the organiser of the meeting, I would be the only one with access to this recording and that the default setting on the MS Teams streaming site is only set to me having access to it. It has been further advised that I download the video immediately from this site to my personal One Drive and then delete it from the streaming site for additional security. Once transcribed, I will delete it from the One Drive. As there is an automatic captioning feature in MS Teams once downloaded, it will mean that the transcription will be quicker and it will be deleted quite quickly, akin to audios of my existing interview data being discarded. I have amended my consent form to reflect these changes (included with this correspondence) and will be sending this to participants. I have also informed them about the IT security reassurances from the above departments.

With Group A the questions (Appendix 7) will be asked through an interaction using the sandboxing methodology⁷. This is a creative and participant led means of gathering data and involves a custom built sandtray in which participants choose to place various small props/toys of choice to tell a particular story about their life. Sandboxing has been used since the 1950s as a means of engaging with children who are experiencing emotional difficulties and was significantly encouraged by the psychoanalyst Carl Jung who saw it very much as fitting into the psychodynamic paradigm of which he was a key part⁸. It has more recently begun to be used with adult clients⁹ and can be used in social research to allow research participants the space to clarify their thoughts and reflections and create some distance between the subject being talked about and themselves. Having completed some sandboxes as an adult myself, I value it as a method and am very keen to contribute and create knowledge around this relatively unknown approach.

Appendix 14 includes some images of sandboxes to illustrate the method. I have been involved with this technique for the past 12 months, using it to educate children's social workers and have realised its benefits in allowing users to represent their experiences in a very open yet safe way. I have recently completed a 2 day certified training programme with the Association of Integrative Sandplay Therapists (<http://sandplaytherapy.co.uk>) which is the leading organisation in the UK around this method. I will also be completing the PG Certificate within the next 12 months which will grant me the status of a Certified Sandplay Therapist. I have chosen to study this in my own time at weekends, so that I am able to competently and confidently manage the method in my PhD research.

This methodology allows participants to engage in a less direct way and is very appropriate for research of this nature which is extremely sensitive. The methodology, as well as the research topic overall, was received positively by academic and practitioner delegates at the prestigious

⁷ Hutton, D, (2004). Margaret Lowenfeld's 'World Technique'. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 9(4), 1359-1045.

⁸ Kalf, D.M. (2003). *A Psychotherapeutic Approach to the Psyche*. (Temenos Press).

⁹ Doyle, K. and Magor-Blatch, L.E. (2017). "Even Adults Need to Play": Sandplay Therapy With an Adult Survivor of Childhood Abuse. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 26 (1), 12-22.

child protection congress BASPCAN¹⁰ at which I presented my subject and research methodology recently.

Sandboxing will facilitate an exploration of the participant's experience of child sexual abuse and specifically how being from the South Asian community and concepts of 'Shame' and 'Honour' may have impacted this experience. Participants will add their chosen props/toy pieces into the sandtray as the discussion unfolds and guided by questions posed by the researcher. A valuable part of this process will be to capture the placement of props/toy pieces in the sandtray and the narrative that follows. It is therefore beneficial if the process is captured on film so that the sand tray creations and the discussion is not missed. The participant herself will not be filmed as the mobile camera will be placed in a static position so that only the sandtray and participant's hands are in view. However, this will not be imposed upon the participant. If participants do not wish for the filming to take place, they can opt for the second option which is audio recording the session and the researcher taking a photo of the sand tray at the end. Due to the likely richness of data held within the final sandtray, I will ask all participants whether they mind me photographing the sandtray as I may wish to use it in future publications or presentations but will make it clear that it is fine if they prefer not to agree to this. All of these options will be relayed to the participant in the Information Sheet, Consent Form and in discussions prior to the session along with other options.

All of this material will be anonymised and will be used solely by the researcher for this research. If the findings are to be referred in published material by the researcher, again it will be referred to anonymously and no participant's individual narrative or experience will ever be revealed. This too will be explained to the participant in the Information Sheet and the Consent Form.

Group C plays a key role in supporting victims and families and so may have insights into concepts of 'shame' and 'honour' which help formulate a more wholesome narrative of the extent of influence of these factors. These participants will be contacted online through the Q-Methodology¹¹ following the Group A and B data collection. See Appendix 9. My second supervisor (Professor Shemmings) has utilised this method and written about it and it will be a good means of triangulating my research. However, the questions and themes to be used within this approach cannot be defined at this stage and relies upon the data collection for Groups A and B.

At least 30 participants from Group A and 15 from Group B will be interviewed once. I seek to recruit Group A and B participants through:

a) Organisations who are likely to have access to survivors:

These organisations are supporting victims of abuse, are mental health charities or are supporting women specifically from South Asian communities for a range of reasons. Currently these include, MIND, Rethink, Karma Nirvana, Southall Black Sisters, Muslim Women's Network, NAPAC, Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, Mosac, the Survivors' Trust.

b) Organisations/mechanisms which reach national audiences:

This includes radio stations/online media which targets South Asian communities (e.g. BBC Asian Radio Network; Desiblitiz). These have in the past covered this issue and have had responses from the communities, indicating that there are survivors/members of the community who are willing to talk about this issue.

c) Online

I will be developing a website through which this research will be shared and this will allow for online recruitment of participants, through regular online mechanisms.

I seek to recruit Group C participants through contacting officers (responsible for child protection) in all local authority children's social services departments, police departments and relevant third sector organisations. Named individuals from each of the organisations would be initially sought so that the research data can be circulated in a targeted way. An initial telephone conversation explaining the research will also be carried out. I will also include their recruitment on my website

¹⁰ <https://www.baspcan.org.uk/congress-2018/>

¹¹ Shemmings, D. (2006). 'Quantifying' qualitative data: an illustrative example of the use of Q methodology in psychological research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 00, 1-19.

through regular online mechanisms.

At least 30 participants from Group C will be recruited; ideally an equal split of social services, police services and third sector workers.

The total number of participants is 75 (30 survivors, 15 mothers, 30 professionals/third sector workers).

B. How will your project comply with the Data Protection Act? I.e. how much personal data do you plan to collect from respondents? How will you ensure that data is kept securely? Do you plan to destroy data after the project is completed?

All data will be stored on network space at the University of Kent, to which only Centre for Child Protection staff have access. My research files will be password protected and encrypted. Group A and B participants will be attributed a pseudonym and this will be used in all the research records. Their geographical location will also be attributed a letter code such as Area A, Area B etc. I will give participants the option of creating their own pseudo name so that they feel more assured of this anonymity. It may also enable them to feel less directly involved in the sensitivity of the research matter.

Group C participants will be provided with an individual number and their geographical location a number code i.e. Area 1. Their organisation will be labelled as organisation blue (social services), red (police), green (third sector). To assist in recalling which code refers to which participant, a key will need to be designed but this will be saved on an encrypted file on the same server.

All participants will be informed that all data will be managed and stored throughout the course of the Study, according to the University of Kent ethical standards, UK Data Protection regulations and GDPR. No personal information will ever be revealed or shared in the form that anyone or any organisation can be identified. The participant will choose one of the three options regarding how she wishes the research data to be managed once the PhD has been completed:

- a) stored confidentially and anonymously by the researcher on a permanent basis;
- b) archived within the UK Data Service (<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data>) (and this will be explained to the participant);
- c) destroyed following completion of the PhD (with the participant being informed through writing by the researcher when this has been completed).

The above decision will be made by the participant at the point of consent and all options will be fully explained to the researcher prior to this decision having to be made. I do not wish to return any material to the participant due to the risk that it could be lost by the participant and come into the possession of another person and potentially misused by another. I will make this clear to participants at the start of the initial contacts so that they are completely clear about this before the start of the interview.

C. Anticipated start date & duration of data collection.

I will be carrying out the data collection from July/August 2018 until June 2019.

D. Details of payment, if any, to interviewees/participants and of interviews?

If participants desire, reasonable travel costs will be fully reimbursed. I will ask this before a participant commits to the research. No other payment will be given to participants.

Interviews will be carried out in a location which is accessible for most participants and initial enquiries have highlighted Birmingham as being an area where such work is already actively being carried out and therefore may be very suitable. London, due to its accessibility may also be an option. I live in Kent and would not want to host any interviews here. The sensitivity of the topic means that there is a chance that some family member may be unsupportive of this research (if aware of it) and I therefore do not want my home area being known to anyone.

Therefore, whichever the location(s) I will ensure that it is a building which is occupied and that I will not be alone with the interviewee in the building; only the room. Although I will have built an initial rapport over the phone with interviewees and will emphasise that this is a one to one interview, I will not know whether they will be accompanied by someone and I would feel more comfortable being in an occupied building.

It is most likely that a room in the local University (in Birmingham/London) be utilised. This is likely to be hired with minimum or no charge in the interests of academic research. It is also likely to be perceived by participants to be a natural choice due to the nature of this research being academic research. The cost of room hire is to be kept to a minimum and where possible free room hire will be sought through personal links and possibly through organisations supporting survivors of abuse. If needed, there are funds through my PhD budget to fund rooms costs.

I will abide by the below safety points from the University of Surrey which I have found very useful: <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU29.html>

I will attempt to line up a series of interviews across several days so that the same location can be used. I will only host 2 interviews per day; 1 in the morning and 1 in the afternoon so that there is no chance of participants seeing each other thereby respecting confidentiality and anonymity.

I prefer not to travel to locations chosen by participants due to the above concerns and will make it clear that central locations (e.g. Birmingham and London) have been chosen for specific purposes and ensures that the research is carried out efficiently over a period of days.

E. Source of funding (if any).

I have a sum of money for my PhD studies allocated through the School.

F. List questionnaire and other techniques to be used: N.B do not forget to attach these to your application.

See Appendices 1-14.

Ethical Considerations:

A. Indicate potential risks to participants (e.g. distress, embarrassment) and means adopted to safeguard against them.

Group A (adult survivors, aged over 21)

The subject matter upon which this project is based is of a distressing nature. Therefore, there is a possibility that participants from Group A will experience distress in recalling their experiences. I will make the precise nature of the research and the information they are being asked to share, very clear through the information sheet disseminated at the point of contact and again at the start of the interview. This will be translated as necessary into the language of the participant. It will also be made clear that they can stop or withdraw from the interview at any time and/or skip over any questions.

I will adhere to the ethics standards agreed by this Committee and I will always provide details of organisations which may be able to offer support. These will include contacts local to the participant, as well as national organisations for survivors such as NAPAC (National Association for People Abused in Childhood), HAVOCA (Help for Adult Victims of Child Abuse), The Survivor's Trust and CISTers (Childhood Incest Survivors).

The boundaries of my research will be stated in this information sheet and will be reiterated with the interviewee at the start of the interview. Namely, that this research is seeking to identify themes indicating that child sexual abuse in these communities may require a different approach in how it is managed by agencies. The focus of the research is how cultural concepts such as 'Shame' and 'Honour' may impact the experience of abuse. In order to ascertain this, the participant will inevitably need to share her individual experience of abuse but I will guide this narrative towards the cultural concepts of interest. This will require considerable sensitivity and the participant will not be made to feel that her personal story is not of interest. It is, but in the context of 'Shame' and 'Honour' rather than the details of the abuse: who was involved, what exactly happened, what were the consequences etc.

I will fully acknowledge that the participant is allowing me into a very private world and I am aware that I may be the first person that the participant has ever spoken to about their abuse. I will determine this during the initial rapport building stage, before the interviews themselves as this

factor may impact upon whether participating in the research is appropriate in terms of their wellbeing. I will ask questions around why the participant has agreed to take part in the research as this will provide some indication of whether they are 'ready' to participate. From anecdotal evidence I have learnt that women from the South Asian communities do wish to talk about such abuse, often wanting to make a progressive step towards the issue and such motives may indicate more 'research readiness' than someone who has not ever spoken about their abuse. However, this is a decision which I will make on a case by case basis as it would be unethical to implement a kind of blanket exclusion of participants for any reason.

These initial discussions will also include me asking what support, if any, they have received and again provide some insight into their wellbeing and readiness for research participation. It will not be appropriate at this stage to guide them to support services as this may set my role up as a counselling/emotional support one. I will however, at the end of the interview, share sources of support that the participant can contact.

The sandplay method will allow me to manage any points of distress as I can divert attention to other points in the sandtray. Due to the nature of the technique and the creations within it, I can return to various aspects of the sandtray/conversation later if appropriate. Participants will be fully informed about the process of sandplay and how it links into my research. At the start of the sandplay I will outline that whatever information is shared through the creation of the sandtray, like the interview discussion itself, will not be shared with any other third party but that the sandtray analysis will simply be drawn together within various themes.

I will ensure that the physical space is appropriate. This should be a comfortable and inviting space so that the interviewee has a sense of warmth, allowing her to share what will be very intimate feelings and thoughts. This space should also be a quiet space so that an uninterrupted dialogue can ensue and the interviewee has the sense that their needs are being given the due attention and distractions are minimum. I will provide refreshments as this adds to a welcoming environment.

I will clearly communicate that should any information be shared with me where there is still a risk of child abuse perpetrated by someone then this information would need to be shared with relevant agencies.

Group B (mothers of daughters who are CSA survivors)

Group B participants will be provided with the same conditions as above as although they may not have been directly involved in such abuse, as mothers, they will have been, still may be, very emotionally involved in the experience of the abuse of their daughter(s). Again, I will adhere to the ethics standards agreed by this Committee and I will always provide contact details of organisations which may be able to offer support. These will include contacts local to the participant, as well as national organisations for mother of survivors of child sexual abuse such as MOSAC (Mothers of Sexually Abused Children) <http://www.mosac.net/> or Stop It Now <http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/resources-for-parents-of-survivors>

They will not be, however, using the sandtray and this means that the conversation with these participants will be more direct and therefore careful attention must be paid to visible signs expressed by the participants through their body language, picking up on points of distress or discomfort. The interview will be audio recorded.

There will not be any biological or social connection between different research participants and neither will the two sets of participants ever meet in person.

Group C (statutory and third sector workers)

Group C participants will have been affiliated to particular organisations and possibly still employed by these agencies and so it is imperative that they are assured of confidentiality and anonymity that whatever they share, will not be relayed back to employers.

This group may be concerned about professional integrity or practice being questioned by the research and it will be made clear that this research is not seeking to make judgements such as these, or any. Instead, it is about drawing in their expertise and knowledge around this area. It will be made clear that they should not name any individuals or cases when sharing information as the focus is not on individual cases and this will serve to protect them too as they will not be breaching any confidentiality if they adhere to complete anonymity of cases.

For all participants, it will be made clear at initial contact, that no current case is the focus of the research; only historic cases which are now closed cases i.e. no current intervention from these services is in place at the time of the research.

B. What confidentiality issues might arise during data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results? How do you plan to protect participants' anonymity?

Having volunteered to be part of this research, all participants are willing participants and they are likely to see the value in the project and/or intend to seek some individual cathartic benefit from it. However, they are very unlikely to want the findings of their individual experience to be exposed beyond our one to one interactions and this is why I will clearly outline that this space is a confidential space and that all personal details will be anonymised. I will also reassure participants that individual details of their experiences will be largely categorised into thematic strands amongst other participant accounts and where quotes are used, they will be anonymised. The process of anonymity discussed earlier will clarify this.

I will state very clearly that what they will share with me will remain within the confinements of this research project and even though the research will be discussed in some public arenas where the issue will be of interest, complete anonymity of each participant will be fully respected. These arenas may include lectures within the University of Kent and external to the University at other academic institutes; academic conferences; forums examining practice and policy issues related to the subject matter.

It will be made clear that if anything is shared with me that indicates that an adult and/or child is at risk of harm, I would need to report this to the relevant organisation, be that the gatekeeping organisation or any other relevant agency.

C. What difficulties might arise (e.g. regarding power and/or dependency imbalances between researcher and participants) and how do you safeguard against them?

With Groups A and B there is a risk of dependency upon me as a researcher, as someone who may provide counsel and emotional support which is why setting the boundaries of my research as outlined earlier is essential. The information sheet and initial questions at the interview will facilitate the decision to accept the participant into the research and I will provide relevant contact details at the end of the interview.

If at any point I sense or see that the participant is becoming agitated or distressed, either through their body or verbal language, I will ask whether they wish me to pause or stop the interview. I will respect any decision be it a pause and re-starting a little later, or completely ceasing the interview.

If a gatekeeping organisation has facilitated access to Group A and/or Group B participants, I will outline that my research is separate to any service that the participants may be receiving from the organisation. This will include a written statement that I am not permitted to disclose anything that the participant has shared with me to the organisation unless, as stated earlier, there is risk of harm to anyone in which case I will inform them. All this will be relayed to research participants too.

With Group C it will be important to again outline the purpose of the research so that participants are aware from the start that this research seeks to collate their perspectives and is in no way forming a judgement, acknowledging that this is a very difficult area in which to work and about which to make decisions. There is the possibility that workers in these groups adopt an official line to protect organisational interests and for this reason it may be necessary to also include staff who may be retired or moved into other professional roles.

The online medium will be heavily used to recruit all group participants but I will also be relying upon certain individuals to act as gatekeepers to the participants. Some promising initial links have been made with third sector organisations through which Group A and B participants can be reached and Group C participants may also need to be recruited through these means. It will be necessary to build a trusting rapport with all gatekeepers and to keep them engaged in the research if they wish to be but the parameters of this research will be clearly defined from the start.

Due to respecting the confidentiality of participants, gatekeepers will be informed that individual details of no participant will be shared; only the generic findings of the research and themes. I am willing to invest time into supporting the interests of the gatekeeping organisation so that the relationship between me and them remains balanced rather than unidirectional where they may feel that they are providing me with access to participants and I am giving little in return. Furthermore, should any areas of concern be revealed to me during interactions with participants, I may need to get them involved and draw upon the procedures of the organisation. For example, refer to specific support organisations the gatekeeping organisation has at its disposal or safeguarding measures they need to implement if they feel an adult or child is at risk. As stated earlier, the participant will also be informed of the need to break confidentiality if anyone is at risk of harm. I will be responsible for familiarising myself with these policies at each gatekeeping organisation.

D. How will the project take into consideration cultural diversity (e.g. through provision of interpreters where necessary)?

All participants will be speaking English or Punjabi/Hindi, all in which I am fluent. Should a South Asian language be spoken where my fluency is less strong (e.g. Bangladeshi), I will employ an interpreter. Often interpreters are attached to organisations which I will be contacting through this research, such as survivor's groups. Local authorities also have a pool of interpreters. It may be possible to source such interpreters on a low or no cost basis. If there are costs, I will use my PhD budget. Should an interpreter be necessary at an interview, consent from the research participant will need to be sought and she will be assured that the same confidentiality agreements to which I as a researcher will be bound, will also bind the interpreter.

At all times, the key point to be observed will be that the interpreter and research participant are unknown to each other and that the interpreter is comfortable with the interpreter. For instance, I would not employ an interpreter from a gatekeeping organisation of which a participant may be a member. This will be facilitated by me may be needing to source the interpreter myself and from a geographical area away from the participant's residence. Complete detachment between the interpreter and the participant will need to be confirmed once details of the interpreter are known as the participant will be asked prior to the interview whether the interpreter is known to them. I am not able to ask the interpreter whether they know the participant as this will mean sharing the personal details of the participant which my ethical processes have stated that I will not do. I will explain to participants that if they are not satisfied with the interpretation during the session and wish to cease the session, then they can simply inform me of this and the session will come to an end.

The information sheet about the research will be given to the interpreter so that they are fully aware of the nature of the research. Additional information will be included around the option for the interpreter to leave the interview at any point if they become distressed in any way. However, the nature of the research will be fully explained to any interpreter before they commit to the work and an outline of the nature of child sexual abuse and its consequences will be explained to the interpreter and relevant information websites/training will be shared.

E. Why, if at all, are you paying participants? What is the potential impact on them of such financial inducement?

I will not be paying participants. I will be fully reimbursing all reasonable travel costs.

F. What provision are you making for giving feedback to participants about your findings?

I will disseminate the Executive Summary of the research to each individual participant and this will

be written in the various languages of the research participants from across the groups.
<i>G. What other ethics review procedures has this project already undergone (e.g. with funding bodies)?</i>
None.
Consent:
<i>A. What procedures are you using to secure participants' informed consent (please append any forms etc. use for this)?</i>
Below is a list of all the Appendices included with this ethics form and these represent all the forms to be used in recruiting participants. Appendix 1: Research advert for Group A and B participants. Appendix 2: Information sheet for Group A participants. Appendix 3: Information sheet for Group B participants. Appendix 4: Information sheet for Group C participants. Appendix 5: Information sheet for gatekeeping organisations. Appendix 6: Information sheet for interpreters. Appendix 7: Researcher questions for Group A. Appendix 8: Researcher questions for Group B. Appendix 9: Researcher questions for Group C (these can only be determined once the research with Groups A and B has been undertaken, hence this form being minimal). Appendix 10: Informed consent form for Group A. Appendix 11: Informed consent form for Group B. Appendix 12: Informed consent form for Group C. Appendix 13: Informed consent form for Interpreters. Appendix 14: Examples of Sandboxing. Should the research participant require it, all relevant documents will be translated into the language of the participant.
<i>B. What procedures will you use with participants unable to give their own informed consent?</i>
N/A. Only participants able to give their own consent will be interviewed in this research.
<i>C. Explain, where applicable, why the informed consent of the participants is not being sought?</i>
N/A.

Appendix 6: National Child Sexual Abuse Victim/Survivor Organisations that were sent the research advert

Organisation	Website
ANBU (Abuse Never Becomes Us)	https://www.anbu.org.uk/
BAWSO (Black Association of Women Step Out)	http://www.bawso.org.uk/
BBC Asian Network	https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/live:bbc_asian_network
Birmingham VSC (Voluntary Service Council)	https://www.bvsc.org/
Changing Pathways	https://changingpathways.org/
ChildLine	https://www.childline.org.uk/
Children's Commissioner for England	https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/
CISterS (Childhood Incest Survivors)	https://cisters.org.uk/
CSA Centre of Expertise	https://www.csacentre.org.uk/
ECSA (Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse)	http://ecsa.lucyfaithfull.org/
Hackney CVS (Community and Voluntary Sector)	https://hcvcs.org.uk/
HAVOCA (Help for Adult Victims of Child Abuse)	https://www.havoca.org/
Imkaan	https://www.imkaan.org.uk/
Karma Nirvana	https://karmanirvana.org.uk/
Kent Counselling	https://www.cbtandcounsellingkent.co.uk
Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership	https://www.kscmp.org.uk/
Lifecentre	lifecentre.uk.com
London Survivors Gateway	http://survivorsgateway.london/
Lucy Faithfull Foundation	https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/
MENTER (BME Network for the East of England Region)	https://chnet.com/5772/mentor.html
MIND	https://www.mind.org.uk/

MOSAC (Mothers of Sexually Abused Children)	https://www.mosac.net/
Muslim Women's Network (MWN)	https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/
National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)	https://napac.org.uk/
NAVCA	https://navca.org.uk/
NCVO	https://www.ncvo.org.uk/
Oldham CVS 'Action Together'	https://www.actiontogether.org.uk/
One In Four	https://oneinfour.org.uk
PACE	https://www.itsnotokay.co.uk/parents/pace/
Project Choice	https://www.oldham.gov.uk/projectchoice
Rape Crisis	https://rapecrisis.org.uk/
Rethink	https://www.rethink.org/
Ruri Foundation	https://www.youtube.com/@rurifoundationhappierhealt4886
Saheli	https://www.saheli.org.uk
Sikh Women's Aid	https://www.sikhwomensaid.org.uk
Southall Black Sisters	https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/
Stop It Now	https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/
Survivors UK	https://www.survivorsuk.org
The Lantern Project	https://lanternproject.org.uk
The Survivors Trust	https://thesurvivorstrust.org/
Women and Girls Network	http://www.wgn.org.uk/

Appendix 7: Narrative Analysis Template created for this research

Stages of Analysis	Description of the analysis
	Listen to audio recording of the interview.
	First Reading of Transcript.
1	Second Reading of Transcript: Underline Points of Interest (POI) <i>(Noting frequency, the impact on the participant when telling, and the impact on me as a researcher when hearing what was being told)</i>
2	Third Reading of Transcript: Labelling POI to Identify Sub-Narratives <i>(Identifying POI as Core [each given a number] or Less Prominent [each given a letter] aspects of the story [sub-narratives], using criteria shown in Stage 1, plus whether points sufficiently fitted in with the research questions)</i>
3	Fourth Reading of Transcript: Adding the Numbers and Letters of the Sub-Narratives to the Transcript <i>(Allows for cross-checking and identifying additional sub-narratives)</i> Fifth Reading of Transcript <i>(Repeat Stage 3)</i>
4	Grouping Existing Sub-Narratives into Themes and then Core Narratives Grouping sub-narratives into themes Sixth Reading of Transcript <i>(A final reading of the transcript to identify core narratives, considering relevance for research questions)</i>
5	Thematicisation of the narratives across the data set to form grand narratives <i>(Thematicising core narratives across the data set to form grand narratives)</i>

Appendix 8: CSA in British South Asian communities: a short aide-memoire for child protection practitioners, agencies and policy-makers

Findings	Recommendations
<i>Referral rates for British South Asian (BSA) CSA victims/survivors are likely to remain disproportionately lower than expected without a transformational change at practice and policy levels, which responds effectively to CSA risks in BSA communities, and which examine and integrate their lived experiences.</i>	○ Children's universal and child protection agencies: have a mandate to safeguard all children and ought to be expected to demonstrate that they are fulfilling this responsibility, and be adequately resourced where this is falling short. ○ Children's universal and child protection agencies: create and strengthen CSA ethnicity data recording and reporting systems, and make this data available and accessible where necessary and appropriate. Regularly compare this data to local ethnicity data to monitor disproportionalities. Design interventions to address findings. ○ Policy-makers: take responsibility for any disproportionalities, interrogate relevant data, and resource practitioners and organisations, including culturally appropriate services, to more effectively identify risks and support victims/survivors from BSA communities. ○ Child protection practitioners: be professionally curious about low referral rates from BSA communities, across genders. Through scholarly works, independent, and government commissioned research, expand and strengthen their knowledge about CSA in BSA communities ○ Child protection practitioners: engage in regular and purposeful culturally competent learning and development. CSA risk assessment models and interventions, and support services, across child protection agencies, ought to develop and integrate intersectional approaches in order for ethnicity, race, religion, migration, and culture, to be adequately considered when responding to CSA. ○ Spaces for victims/survivors from BSA communities to share their experiences, with or without losing their anonymity, ought to be created, informing necessary practice and policy changes.
<i>Research about CSA in BSA communities remains limited and more innovative means of recruiting CSA victims/survivors as research participants ought to be supported and resourced, and feed into practice and policy changes.</i>	○ Existing research examining the experiences of BSA victims/survivors ought to be made accessible to practitioners. ○ Researchers seeking to expand knowledge in this area ought to be supported locally and nationally, to develop research projects examining the BSA experiences of CSA. This includes developing links with the CSA Centre and other bodies interested in and invested in such research.

- Spaces for victims/survivors from BSA communities to share their experiences, with or without losing their anonymity, ought to be created, informing necessary practice and policy changes.
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Adapted from Jassal (2020) and Jassal (2022).