

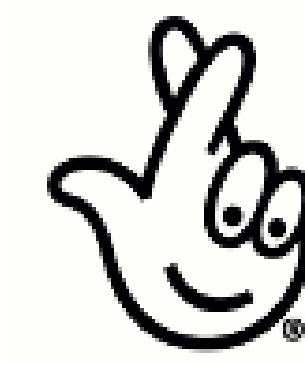
What Will People Say?

Exploring The Life Stories of South Asian Women Survivors of Sexual Abuse

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INTRODUCTION

This study explored the life stories of some South Asian women survivors of sexual violence.

AIMS

- To gain an increased understanding of the multifaceted impact of sexual violations upon South Asian women.
- Perceptions, experiences, disclosures, honour and shame, personal journeys and support in relation to sexual violence to be explored.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research study (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Loseke, 2013) via three extensive, individual interviews conducted from a purposive sampling strategy. Research participants were Pakistani and African Indian Muslim women, aged 35 – 42, of diverse demographics who lived in the UK. The majority of interviews were conducted in English, with some participants' sporadic dialogues in Arabic, Punjabi and Urdu. The methodology was thematic analysis (Sanders and Wilkins, 2010). The theoretical framework included a humanistic theoretical approach (Hough, 2000).

ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis (Holliday, 2002; Braun and Clarke, 2006) of the data was undertaken and seven main themes were identified from the transcripts. Forty-three sub themes were identified. Codes were deduced from the data (Ezzy, 2002; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012; Babbie, 2014; Miles, Huberman and Saldana; 2014).

FINDINGS

- Abuse
- Relationships
- Gender
- Islam
- Feelings
- Culture
- Consequences and Journeys

DISCUSSION

- Psychological and emotional impact of sexual violence and subsequent traumas was intense and immense. Some of the survivors broke the cycle of intergenerational abuse and familial collusion.
- Men whom sexually violated girls and/or women did not appear to be held accountable for their violations by their families or communities. Females whom were subjected to sexual abuse were the recipients of familial and societal repercussions.
- Concepts of honour and shame were embedded within the sexual violence phenomena for South Asian sociocultural communities. Sexual violations spanned years/decades.
- Participants being silenced for prolonged periods of times during their survivors' journeys appeared to be the nexus, which held some family relationships together.
- Impossible for a participant to detach her name and identity being associated with the abusive male parent on the Day Of Judgement in the Hereafter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- British South Asians to raise the awareness of sexual violence, domestic abuse and marital rape.
- Safeguarding children in mosques and schools.
- Imperative that professionals, including therapists, do not overtly/covertly apply pressure on survivors to report their historical sexual violations when they choose not to do so.
- Essential for healthcare professionals to have some awareness of the complexities encompassing sexual violence, honour and shame when working with South Asian women survivors.
- GPs to have more knowledge about the complexness of sexual violations within South Asian communities, including incestuous rapes, pregnancies, births and Dissociative Identity Disorder (www.mind.org.uk).
- Counselling training to include how individuals may develop mental health problems or illnesses consequential to sexual violations, and abusive honour and shame practices. Individual and collective honour and shame may be integral to some clients' identities.
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate South Asian Women's support groups and counselling to be implemented into therapeutic service provisions.

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

- Marital rape was not recognised from a cultural perspective. In Islamic principles, marital rape was "definitely wrong and definitely a sin." (Asma)
- Some participants were exposed to an amalgamation of threefold toxic constructs; toxic masculinity (www.aurorand.org.uk; www.psychologyinaction.org), toxic femininity (McCann, 2020) and toxic parents (Forward, 1991).
- Remarkably, a strongly held belief was maintained by a perpetrator that he had the prerogative to have sexual contact with any females whom were not descendants of his male bloodline.
- No respite, separation nor closure from being connected to the perpetrators in this life or the next.
- Parents denying their children access to sex education in schools was not protecting them from abusive practices as this paradoxically increased children's vulnerabilities of being preyed upon by perpetrators.
- The detrimental impact of some professionals questioning the evidence of abuse or applying pressure on survivors to report the violations cannot be underestimated.

CONCLUSION

The participants offered unambiguous hope to other survivors. It was evident their human spirits had transcended the brutalities of their past lives.

The following quote encapsulates one of the survivor's journey:
'I've been in a dark, dark, dark place... the lowest of the low you can go, I've been there... and I've clawed my way to the top, quite literally, clawed my way to the top... [pause] and I want to pass that on, that you can do it... no matter how bad you feel, it can be done... and the more you do it, the more you'll tell yourself "It's OK, it wasn't your fault... like your body..." you know, affirmations and things... it gets easier and now, I can do it without even thinking about it" (Masooma)

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

Scan here to access the complete oral history research project and film documentary



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