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Child sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children: A knowledge review

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About the author

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We are a multi-disciplinary team, funded by the Home Office and hosted by Barnardo's, working closely with key partners from academic institutions, local authorities, health, education, police and the voluntary sector. We aim to:

- ▶ increase the priority given to child sexual abuse, by improving understanding of its scale and nature
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- ▶ enable more effective disruption and prevention of child sexual abuse, through better understanding of sexually abusive behaviour/perpetration.

We seek to bring about these changes by:

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- ▶ addressing gaps in knowledge through sharing research and evidence
- ▶ providing training and support for professionals and researchers working in the field
- ▶ engaging with and influencing policy.

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SEEN, a Barnardo's-run service, is a Centre driven to build a core foundation of knowledge, a network of people and advocacy for those with authentic experience. The Centre's mission is to identify, understand and tackle the structural inequalities which limit the opportunities of children and young people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage in the UK by achieving a system change in the provision of services to tackle the disproportionate outcomes they face.

Our Mission is to create systemic change by challenging structural inequalities that impede opportunities for a fair and equitable future for children and young people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage to fulfil their full potential.

Our Vision is to ensure the UK's structures of power provide equitable care, opportunity and understanding for children and young people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage. We will do this in partnership with others across all sectors, understanding that we cannot do this alone.

Our Goal is to create better outcomes for more African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children and young people. We are working to build stronger families, safer childhoods, and positive futures.

Find out more at <https://weareseen.org.uk/>

Contents

Executive summary	5
1. Introduction	11
1.1 Why was this review carried out?	11
1.2 Research objectives	11
1.3 What was involved?	12
1.4 The scope of the review	12
1.5 Terminology	13
1.6 Report structure	14
2. An overview of published research	15
2.1 Literature search strategy and scope	15
2.2 Types of publication	16
2.3 The knowledge explosion	17
2.4 Methodological approaches, sample sizes and primary methods of data collection	19
2.5 Geographical scope	20
2.6 Age of the research participants	20
2.7 Sex of the research participants	22
2.8 Race/ethnicity of the research participants	24
2.9 Summary	25
3. Thematic analysis: The nature of the abuse	26
3.1 Child sexual abuse in particular communities	26
3.2 Child sexual exploitation	27
3.3 Child sexual abuse in online contexts	31
3.4 Abuse within minoritised religious settings	31
3.5 Targeting of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children	35
4. Thematic analysis: Barriers to disclosure, identification and response	37
4.1 Naming the abuse – the lack of appropriate terminology	37
4.2 Family and community pressures	39
4.3 Racism and the pressure to be strong and silent	43
4.4 The aligning of internal and external barriers	44
4.5 Responses of non-abusing parents and carers	45
5. Thematic analysis: Impacts on victims/survivors	48
5.1 Physical and mental health impacts	48
5.2 Abuse in religious settings and its impact on faith	50

6. Thematic analysis: Services for and interventions with minoritised groups	51
6.1 From Black feminists self-organising to 'by and for' services	51
6.2 Community awareness-raising initiatives	53
7. Thematic analysis: Mainstream service responses	57
7.1 Social work/children's services	57
7.2 Policing and the criminal justice system	62
7.3 Health services	65
7.4 Education	65
7.5 Counselling services	65
8. Thematic analysis: Intersectionality and child sexual abuse	66
8.1 Reflections on disability	66
8.2 Reflections on gender and masculinity	67
9. An overview of ongoing research	69
9.1 Details of the research projects	69
9.2 Researchers' thoughts on research priorities	71
10. Discussions with stakeholders	72
10.1 How were the discussions conducted?	72
10.2 Reflections on the quality of service responses	73
10.3 Actions to improve service provision	74
10.4 Topics for future research	76
10.5 Concerns and suggestions around future research methodology	81
10.6 Calls for a network for African, Asian and Caribbean practitioners and academics working on child sexual abuse	83
11. Areas for further research activity	84
11.1 Establishing a research and practice network	84
11.2 Reflecting the voices of children and young people	84
11.3 Generating larger datasets on the African, Asian and Caribbean experience of child sexual abuse	85
11.4 Filling the knowledge gaps on specific communities	86
11.5 Understanding the specific contexts in which child sexual abuse occurs	86
11.6 Service responses	88
11.7 The health impacts of conjoined experiences of sexual abuse and racism	88
11.8 Raising community awareness and changing cultural norms	88
12. Conclusions	89
References	90
Appendix 1: Publications included in the literature review	98
Acknowledgements	111

Executive summary

This knowledge review is the first to provide an up-to-date overview of published research in relation to the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. It sets out what this research says about the nature of that abuse, its impacts, the barriers that prevent children talking about it, and how concerns about it are identified and responded to – both within communities and by services. Equally importantly, it identifies significant gaps in knowledge and understanding, and recommends how these can be addressed.

Commissioned by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (the CSA Centre) and Barnardo's SEEN Centre for children and young people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage, the review was conducted by the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU) at London Metropolitan University. In addition to examining 79 publications (including research studies, journal articles, book chapters and 'grey' literature) which related to 59 distinct research or evaluation projects, it collated information on ongoing research and convened four focus groups involving African, Asian and Caribbean heritage people with knowledge of child sexual abuse as academics/researchers, practitioners and 'experts by experience'.

Overview of the research literature

The publications reviewed dated from between 1988 and 2023. There is a shape to their content and quantity, with recent years seeing rapid growth in the number of publications. Only a small number of studies were published up to the early 2000s. The period between 2010 and 2015 focused principally on the sexual exploitation of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children; subsequently, there was a shift towards talking about child sexual abuse and sexual violence more widely.

Most of the published studies were based on qualitative research and were small in scale. They typically focused on a particular ethnic group or on abuse in particular settings such as religious institutions, with an emphasis on the experiences of women and girls; the distinct experiences of boys were largely absent. Very few included quantitative analysis of larger samples. As a result, the literature tells us about the nature of the sexual abuse experienced by African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, and the contexts in which it takes place, but not its scale.

The review found that the sexual abuse of Asian heritage children, primarily those of North Indian and Pakistani heritage, received more research attention than the sexual abuse of African and Caribbean heritage children: only four studies focused solely on African victims/survivors, and another four on Black Caribbean victims/survivors. Moreover, children of African, East Asian and Southeast Asian heritage received hardly any attention.

There was little research engaging directly with African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children; most relied instead on accounts from adult victims/survivors or practitioners, or on analysis of children's case files. Studies involving the greatest direct engagement with children as research participants were those on gang-associated sexual violence, one on intra-familial child sexual abuse, and two on the experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors.

Although many of the studies included discussion of service responses to the sexual abuse of African, Asian or Caribbean heritage children, there were only three evaluations of support services or interventions.

Thematic analysis

The nature and contexts of the sexual abuse experienced by African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children

Three larger-scale studies generated data on sexual abuse in specific South Asian communities – Sikh and Tamil – but there were no comparable studies in relation to African or Caribbean communities.

Eleven studies focused on **child sexual exploitation**. Those relating to South Asian and Muslim girls found connections between sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and honour-based violence; they provided insights into how sexual exploitation occurs and identified practitioner lapses. There was no comparable research on African or Caribbean heritage children.

Research evidence on the specificities of the African and Caribbean experience were lodged within large-scale studies of sexual exploitation or serious youth violence. While making a significant contribution to knowledge of sexual violence within and around gangs, the subordinate role of women/girls within them, and the normalisation of sexual violence within gang-affected neighbourhoods, these offered little analysis of racism.

The literature search revealed no published research on the sexual abuse of Asian, African and Caribbean heritage children in **online contexts**, but mounting concern about its growing incidence.

Four small-scale studies discussed the specific features of sexual abuse within minoritised religious settings. They drew attention to the impunity that perpetrators have in these settings, as a result of the power of religious leaders, and the close ties between families, businesses and religious organisations. The lack of any formal safeguards in these settings was also highlighted.

Only two articles focused on the experiences of **unaccompanied asylum-seeking children**, revealing the high levels of sexual abuse experienced by these children in their countries of origin, on their journeys into the UK, and in the UK.

Barriers to disclosure, identification and response

Studies in the review explored a range of barriers to the identification and disclosure of the abuse.

Language barriers: Studies focused on South Asian communities considered the dearth of appropriate interpretation services; the problematic use of family and community members as interpreters; a lack of the vocabulary needed to describe sexual violence; and the framing, in South Asian languages, of sexual violence in ways that render female victims responsible for it.

Family and community pressures: Also focusing on South Asian communities, several studies explored themes of shame, honour and community pressure, and how they obstructed disclosure and help-seeking. These small-scale studies, based on testimonies with adult female survivors, noted how the maintaining of family honour resides with women, thereby effectively silencing them; the specific gender dimensions of cultural norms that prioritise the family over the individual; and the normalisation of violence against women that makes perpetrators ‘untouchable’ and acts as a barrier to naming and reporting the abuse.

Racism and the pressure to be strong and silent: The few publications on African-Caribbean women found an expectation that victims/survivors should stay silent about abuse within the home to protect the family unit in the face of racism, sexism and socio-economic poverty; furthermore, Black mothers struggled with divided loyalties between wanting to protect their children and not betraying family or community by seeking help. Poor experiences with statutory services, combined with societal racism, contributed to these conflicted feelings and emphasised the important role that extended family networks can play in children’s lives by providing access to supportive adults.

The aligning of internal and external barriers: A few studies explored how internal barriers (a lack of understanding/awareness of child sexual abuse within communities, pressure to conform to gender roles, and notions of honour and shame) and external barriers (poverty, insecure immigration status, limited awareness of support services, a lack of trust in services, and racism) acted together to silence victims. Shame and stigma were identified as key barriers to reporting, and the studies made connections between gender relations within minoritised communities and the silencing of sexual abuse.

The role of non-abusing parents: The typical portrayal of non-abusing parents and carers (usually women) in the literature was negative, depicting them as in denial, complicit, or abusers. A few studies noted the mainstream racialised stereotyping of ‘the strong Black woman’, alongside survivors’ accounts that blamed their mothers for not protecting them and, in some cases, reacting violently to disclosures. The intersection of race, gender and class was found to place contradictory pressures on Black mothers, leading to divided loyalties and material and emotional dilemmas; they were often financially dependent on the men who had perpetrated the abuse. Others struggled to navigate unsupportive and hostile environments to get support for their children and were “subjected to intense scrutiny” and labelled as “dysfunctional and unstable”. The literature on Asian mothers highlighted the role of transnational networks where victims or abusers were sent abroad and/or victims were forced into marriage to avoid child sexual abuse disclosures.

Impacts on victims/survivors

Hardly any studies focused on the long-term impacts of child sexual abuse on the physical and mental health of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children – another under-researched area. Some surveys of adult women noted problems with depression, anxiety, and intimate relationships. Four studies offered some insights on the impact of childhood sexual abuse on African-Caribbean women’s feelings about themselves and their bodies, with one offering an in-depth, theoretical and conceptual discussion of the legacies of sexual abuse for the body and the self of these women.

Services for and interventions with minoritised groups

The need for – and the lack of – specialist services for African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children was emphasised in many research studies. Suggestions were made for dedicated specialist services, including safe ‘spaces to speak’, dedicated helplines and refuges. The few studies involving victims/survivors who had access to these specialist services emphasised the positive aspects of advocacy in the face of societal racism, relatability with others who understood their culture and religion, and the flexible and safe spaces that such services provide.

Three evaluations of interventions with particular communities, including a training programme, reported on what ‘worked’ to shift attitudes within the community, including the use of real-life case examples, understanding the lives of the people in question, and the value of a support network. It was noted that these alone were insufficient to bring about change.

Mainstream service responses

A number of studies addressed the poor quality of services – mostly children’s social services – for victims/survivors. These noted a general lack of trust in services because of racism. A few considered service responses to Black girls – more likely to be engaged through punitive projects around gangs and serious youth violence that criminalised their behaviour – and how they were subjected to racism and sexism simultaneously. When it came to working with Asian girls and young women, professionals feared being accused of cultural insensitivity and racism, and were found to prioritise concerns about family and cultural dynamics over the safeguarding of children.

Only three of the reviewed papers considered the police response to the sexual abuse of Asian or Muslim girls and women, highlighting widespread poor practice and a lack of understanding of the specific pressures on Asian victims/survivors. There were no studies seeking African and Caribbean heritage children’s views on or experiences of policing and the criminal justice system.

The literature search revealed hardly any published research on the response to the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children in the education or health sectors. A few studies with adult survivors identified health services' tendency to medicalise symptoms of abuse and trauma, and recommended that health professionals ask direct questions about the underlying causes of these symptoms.

Intersectionality

A small number of studies addressed the intersection of race/ethnicity with sex or disability. Only one explored the experiences of disabled Black children, highlighting their lack of voice: these children may not have the ability to explain what has happened, or may not have received the sex education to comprehend it, and social workers may attribute the signs of sexual abuse to the child's disability. While no studies have explored the experiences of disabled children of Indian heritage, some noted the high incidence of disability in research samples.

Two studies focused on the experiences of African, Asian or Caribbean boys who are sexually abused, highlighting the concerns about homophobia as a specific issue for them. South Asian victims/survivors were found to be subjected to different gender norms: while females are accused of provoking their abuse, males are made to believe that they should have stopped it. Echoing research with African-Caribbean female survivors of sexual abuse, the research with men also found that adverse contexts for Black families mean that boys are expected to endure hardships of all kinds.

Ongoing research

Seven ongoing research projects, all university based, were identified as part of this study; five were being undertaken as part of PhD study. All seven projects were qualitative, primarily involving interviews with adult victims/survivors and/or practitioners, and involved small sample sizes. Most were focused on child sexual abuse within South Asian communities, and two on African and Caribbean young people.

Very few of the identified knowledge gaps were being addressed by these ongoing projects. The level of available funding and resources clearly determined the limited scope of the research.

Focus group sessions

In the four focus group sessions with African, Asian and Caribbean heritage practitioners, academics/researchers and experts by experience, participants highlighted concerns that research had not translated into a qualitative change/shift in service provision; that statutory services and the courts were seeking the views of 'religious leaders' and then conceding to their denial of sexual abuse; and that service responses were poor. In discussing priorities for future research, participants also shared their personal experiences of working in the field of child sexual abuse, often at great personal risk.

Calls were made to raise awareness of, and increase the provision of, services for African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children and adults. Stakeholders stressed the need for more learning on how to shift norms, values and practices that legitimise child sexual abuse within diverse communities. They also underlined the need for applied research which can offer clear direction on service gaps, and impactful research that can be used to develop service responses or new interventions.

While several stakeholders suggested that more research is needed on the specific character of abuse within African, Middle East Asian, Southeast Asian and Latin American communities, and the silencing mechanisms experienced in those communities, others were concerned about the disaggregation of the African, Asian and Caribbean experience. They argued that any shared experiences and common themes – notably structural and institutionalised racism and poor state responses – might become downplayed.

The focus groups also identified a number of other areas for future research (addressed below) to better understand the scale and nature of child sexual abuse and service responses, reflecting the gaps identified in the literature review.

Addressing knowledge gaps

The literature review, the survey of ongoing research and the focus groups highlighted considerable gaps in knowledge around the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. The following research areas and activities could help to address these gaps.

Establishing a research and practice network

The CSA Centre should convene and facilitate a research and practice network for people of African, Asian, and Caribbean heritage working in the field of child sexual abuse. This could facilitate collaborative projects between people working across different subject areas, and across research and practice.

Capturing children's voices

There is a need for studies that engage directly with African, Asian or Caribbean heritage children who have been sexually abused, in order to gather information on:

- the contexts in which these children are sexually abused
- their experiences of recognising, naming and reporting the abuse
- service responses to the abuse
- the health impacts, both of the abuse and of being silenced
- the intersection of sexual abuse and age, gender and disability
- what good practice could look like.

Generating larger datasets

There needs to be research involving larger datasets. This could be done through work with voluntary-sector organisations and local authorities to pull together and systematically analyse large numbers of case files relating to African, Asian, and Caribbean heritage children who have been sexually abused.

Other options might include collating or data-mining testimonies, interview transcripts and case file notes from completed research projects or initiatives.

Filling knowledge gaps about specific communities

There is a need for more research relating to East Asian, Southeast Asian and African heritage children who have been sexually abused. The focus groups suggested that community organisations are interested in opening discussions on child sexual abuse within their communities, and might be able to help deliver large-scale studies.

Understanding child sexual abuse in specific contexts

No published study to date has addressed sexual abuse in **online contexts** with regard to African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. There is a need for research to establish the scale and nature of this abuse, and the specific experiences of those children.

While concern has been growing about the role of **religious practices and religious institutions** in the sexual abuse of African, Asian, and Caribbean heritage children, research to date has been based on very small sample sizes. More focused work on religious institutions and leaders could explore the layers of complicity and impunity around these institutions and their representatives, for example, and the impact of links between religious leaders and family members, businessmen and politicians.

There has been very little research into the **international dimensions of abuse**. Potential topics for research include children's experiences of sexual abuse in England and how this is connected with their countries of origin; the influence of diasporic networks in reinforcing cultural norms that deny abuse; the effects of family separation; and the movement of victims and perpetrators across borders.

Finally, there has been a lack of research into the impact of **immigration and border controls** on sexually abused children, and into child sexual abuse in contexts where the British state has a **duty of care** towards a child.

Highlighting service availability and responses

The published research literature on services' responses to the sexual abuse of African, Asian, and Caribbean heritage children has focused almost entirely on social work, with much less attention paid to policing, education and health services. Moreover, the research has generally been limited to social workers' differential racialisation of minoritised children, their misrecognition of abuse, and the barriers to receiving services; more information is needed on African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children's pathways into and through services.

Additionally, there are very few voluntary organisations focusing on these children, and those services are overwhelmed by referrals.

While the CSA Centre has recently charted the provision of support services for victims/survivors of sexual abuse, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, more research is needed to explore the types of provision in both specialist and mainstream organisations – and services need to be required to maintain profile data about their service users, including ethnicity.

Understanding impacts on health

There are significant bodies of research on the long-term impacts (particularly for girls and women) of sexual abuse and sexual violence, and on the health and socio-economic impacts of racism, but to date these two issues have not been considered together. Action is needed to rectify this.

Raising community awareness and changing cultural norms

There is a need for research into how silencing mechanisms in some communities can be tackled and 'spaces to speak' opened up. This requires long-term projects that can devise appropriate interventions and evaluate their impact, working with established organisations in local communities and helping to build their capacity.

Conclusions

Drawing on the literature review as well as discussions with stakeholders, this review has identified research areas and potential projects that could help to close the knowledge gaps identified.

Further explorations and studies will support preventive work with children at risk of sexual abuse; raise awareness within African, Asian and Caribbean communities of the incidence and impact of child sexual abuse; and help services, both statutory and voluntary, to design responses and interventions that better support children who have been sexually abused.

This can only be achieved through adequate funding of future research, to gain a better understanding of these areas and establish interventions that work.

1. Introduction

This report provides an up-to-date picture of the published research carried out to date in the UK in relation to the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children and young people: the nature of that abuse, its impacts, the barriers that prevent children talking about it, and how concerns about it are identified and responded to (both within communities and by services).

Commissioned by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (the CSA Centre) and Barnardo's SEEN Centre for children and young people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage, it is the result of a review conducted by the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU) at London Metropolitan University.

1.1 Why was this review carried out?

Although the likelihood of being sexually abused in childhood does not vary significantly between ethnic groups in England (Bebbington et al, 2011), children who come into contact with statutory services because of sexual abuse concerns are disproportionately White: in 2022/23, 26% of children in state schools and nurseries were of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage (Department for Education, 2023a), but they accounted for only 10% of those coming into contact with sexual assault referral centres (NHS England, 2023) and for 13% of victims of child sexual abuse offences recorded by the police (Vulnerability Knowledge & Practice Programme, 2024). A similar under-representation has been a feature in data from local authority children's services for many years (Karsna and Kelly, 2021). And a recent mapping study of support services for victims/survivors of child sexual abuse in England and Wales identified that African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children and adults were greatly under-represented among users of those services (Parkinson and Steele, 2024).

Previously, the CSA Centre commissioned the Race Equality Foundation to explore the needs of sexually abused children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, the availability of support services for them, and resources for practitioners (Ali et al, 2021). The findings highlighted the scarcity of support services for these children and a lack of resources for practitioners, and reflected earlier studies which had consistently highlighted the lack of support for these children (e.g. Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006; Allnock et al, 2015; Warrington et al, 2017).

Building on the Race Equality Foundation's study, this review has sought to collate what is known about the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children from the existing research, and to identify gaps in evidence.

1.2 Research objectives

This review aimed to produce an overview of published and ongoing research into sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children in the UK, including research with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. It specifically sought to:

- ▶ assess the quality of this research
- ▶ identify the most important findings and evidence gaps in this area
- ▶ consult relevant stakeholders and summarise their views on future research priorities in this field
- ▶ recommend how these evidence gaps should be addressed by researchers and those who commission or fund them.

1.3 What was involved?

The following activities were undertaken to address these objectives:

A desk-based review of published research

- ▶ This included academic articles, books and grey literature. Potential studies for inclusion were identified through a literature search of academic databases, and more were recommended by stakeholders in a series of focus groups (see below). The identified literature was then reviewed in relation to its contribution to existing knowledge; its methodological approach; its sample size and composition (e.g. sex, ethnicity/national origin); and its engagement with children.

Collation of information on ongoing research

- ▶ This involved interviews with researchers known to be currently undertaking relevant research, alongside a survey designed and administered by the CSA Centre to identify any other new research projects. Both the survey and the interviews gathered information about the aim and main focus of each research project, its methodological approach, the sample size and (where appropriate) the preliminary findings.

Four focus groups with stakeholders of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage

- ▶ Focus group sessions were held with African, Asian and Caribbean heritage researchers and practitioners working in the field of child sexual abuse, and with victims/survivors, to reflect on the initial findings of the literature review and discuss priorities for future research.

1.4 The scope of the review

What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is defined by the UK Government as follows:

“[Child] sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving 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.”

(Department for Education, 2023b:162)

Child sexual exploitation is the only form of child sexual abuse to have its own official definition:

“Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.”

(Department for Education, 2023b:154)¹

¹ A different definition of child sexual exploitation is used in Wales; see Welsh Government (2019).

This review has considered child sexual abuse in its widest sense, encompassing both intra-familial and extra-familial abuse (including child sexual exploitation). It covers both abuse by adults and harmful sexual behaviour by other children.

Overlap with other forms of abuse

Child sexual abuse overlaps with other forms of abuse and violence, including trafficking, forced marriage, intimate partner violence, peer-on-peer abuse, gang violence, online radicalisation and ritual abuse. The review addressed these other forms only where specific relevant publications were brought to the author's attention or when raised in the focus groups as containing specific points relevant to child sexual abuse and race/ethnicity (e.g. Noack-Lundberg et al, 2021).

1.5 Terminology

Race/ethnicity/national origin

This report uses the term '**African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children**' to refer to the children who descend from these continents/sub-continent, including those of mixed heritage; it encompasses a diverse range of national, ethnic and linguistic identities. The alphabetical ordering reflects that used by Barnardo's SEEN Centre, to avoid implying that there is any hierarchy.

For the purposes of the report, 'African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children' is preferable to the more contentious descriptor 'Black and Asian', which itself arose from a fracturing of the term 'Black', despite a long history in the UK of anti-racist campaigns which have highlighted the shared experiences of and struggles against colonisation, colour racism and immigration controls.

The terms 'Black and minority ethnic' (BME), 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic' (BAME), 'ethnic minorities', 'racialised minorities' and 'minoritised people/groups/communities' appear where appropriate in this report to reflect the terminology used in the research pieces under discussion. In some of the publications reviewed, these umbrella terms specifically refer to people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage; in others they also encompass, for example, those of Jewish, Irish, Roma and Traveller heritage. When not discussing the reviewed publications, the term 'minoritised' is sometimes used in the report to give some sense of the active processes of racialisation that are at work in designating certain attributes to groups in particular contexts as being in a 'minority' (Gunaratnam, 2003).

Religious and ethnic group categories as well as specific countries of origin are stated where used by the authors cited.

'South Asian' in this report refers to people who descend from the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka); 'East Asian' to those from China and Japan; 'Southeast Asian' to those from Vietnam and Malaysia; and 'Southwest Asian' to those from Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan.

Other terms

For the sake of simplicity, this report uses the term ‘**child**’ to mean anyone under the age of 18 (as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

The term ‘**victim/survivor**’ is used in this review, as it recognises that each individual who has been abused may regard themselves as a victim of the abuse, a survivor of it, or a combination of both.

Generally, other terminology used in this report (e.g. ‘historical child sexual abuse’, ‘peer-on-peer abuse’) reflects the language of the research publications being reviewed.

Wherever possible, discussion of **services** distinguishes between statutory provision (social care, health, education, police) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but also between mainstream NGOs and specialist NGOs (for instance, distinguishing national rape crisis or domestic abuse support provision from specialist ‘by and for’ services for minoritised women and children), as well as between services that have been established for children and those that are primarily geared towards adult survivors.

1.6 Report structure

The review findings begin with a **quantitative and content analysis** of the published research literature (Chapter 2).

This is followed by a detailed **thematic analysis** of this literature, arranged under the following topics:

- ▶ the nature of the sexual abuse experienced by African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, including abuse within religious settings and child sexual exploitation (Chapter 3)
- ▶ barriers to the identification and disclosure of the abuse, including those caused by language, cultural silencing mechanisms and racism/racialisation (Chapter 4)
- ▶ the impacts of the abuse and of the barriers to disclosure (Chapter 5)
- ▶ activities to raise African, Asian and Caribbean communities’ awareness of child sexual abuse, and to improve responses to it within those communities (Chapter 6)
- ▶ statutory services’ identification of and responses to the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children (Chapter 7)
- ▶ the intersectionality of race/ethnicity with other characteristics such as disability and gender in relation to child sexual abuse (Chapter 8).

Next, Chapter 9 explores **ongoing research** in this area, including research projects’ demographic profiles, methodologies and preliminary findings.

Chapter 10 presents key points from four **focus group** sessions held with stakeholders of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage, where the topics discussed included structural issues, service provision, research findings and future priorities.

Drawing together the research gaps identified across all three strands, and identifying areas needing further exploration and study, Chapter 11 outlines **areas for future research activity**.

Finally, Chapter 12 briefly presents the review’s **conclusions** and stresses the need for adequate funding of research in this area.

The key characteristics of each publication reviewed are set out in an appendix.

2. An overview of published research

This chapter provides a quantitative and content analysis of the published research literature on the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, including research with adult victims/survivors of that abuse.

2.1 Literature search strategy and scope

Literature searches were undertaken of academic databases, including EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete, Social Care Online, JSTOR and Care Knowledge, using a combination of the following search terms:

- child sexual abuse/childhood sexual abuse/child sexual exploitation
- online harms/online sexual abuse
- Asian/Chinese/Southeast Asian/East Asian/African/Caribbean/Black/minority/ethnic minority/racialised minority
- UK/England/Britain.

However, this returned only a small number of relevant results, so the search was widened to Google Scholar and the reference lists of the few articles and books that had been identified.

Further items were suggested subsequently by stakeholders at the focus group sessions.

The literature review included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books and book chapters, and grey literature such as reports produced by children's and women's organisations. It did not address whether or how race and ethnicity featured in the wider literature on child sexual abuse, unless specific items (e.g. Warrington et al, 2017) were referred to at the focus group discussions or suggested for inclusion.

Running alongside the key items reviewed for this report are more substantial bodies of knowledge on violence against minoritised women, honour-based violence, forced marriage, witchcraft abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM) and contextual safeguarding. These were not included in this literature review unless an item had been highlighted as containing specific points on child sexual abuse and race/ethnicity (e.g. Noack-Lundberg et al, 2021). There is surprisingly little mention of race/ethnicity within the research literature on harmful sexual behaviour and contextual safeguarding, and little or no mention of sexual abuse within the literature on witchcraft abuse in the UK. Similarly, although there is an ongoing debate about whether FGM is a form of sexual abuse, there is little reference to sexual abuse within the literature on FGM.

2.2 Types of publication

A total of 79 publications were reviewed. Three-fifths (n=48, 61%) of these focused solely on the sexual abuse of children (including, in some cases, particular forms of child sexual abuse such as sexual exploitation), while two-fifths (n=31, 39%) covered child sexual abuse within a wider scope (e.g. sexual violence against women and girls, youth violence, or child abuse more generally).

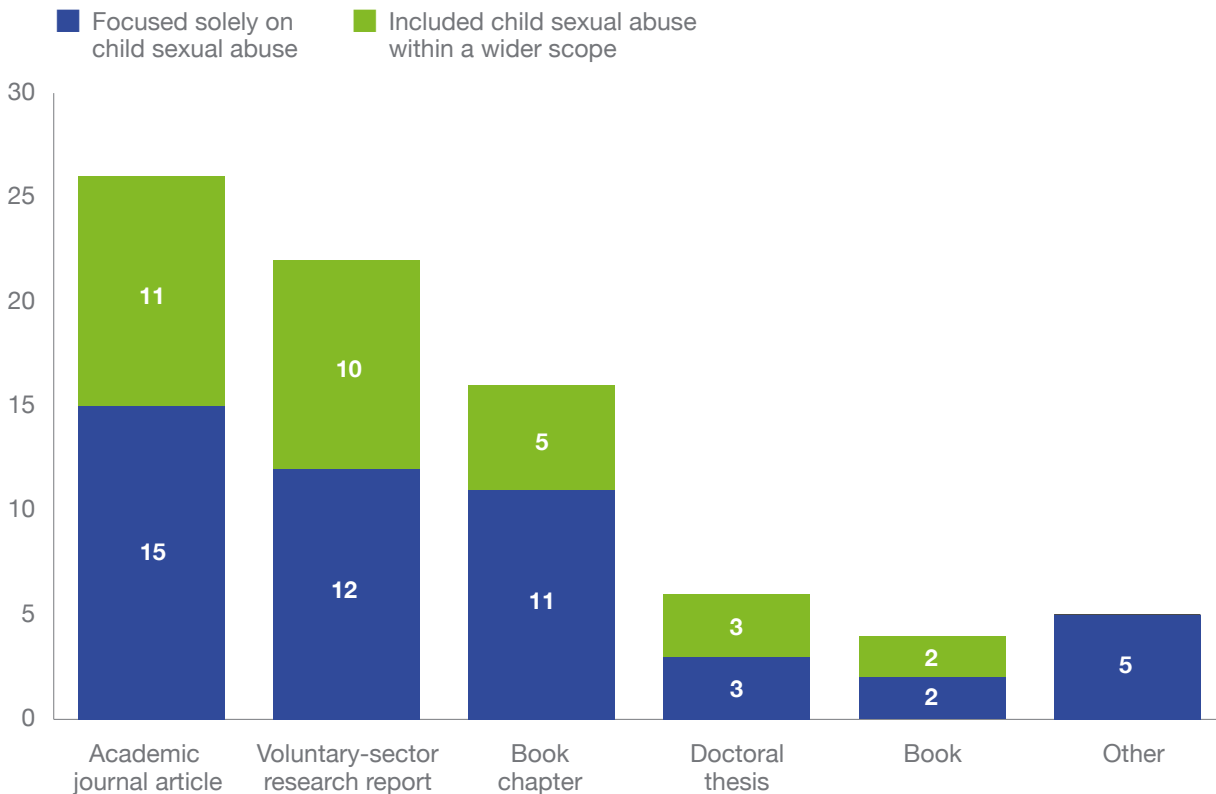
The 79 publications related to 59 distinct research/evaluation projects or reflective pieces: for example, PhD research projects that led to a final thesis as well as journal articles, and there were book chapters and monographs based on the same data. This partly explains why just six academics appeared as the sole authors or co-authors of one-third (n=28, 35%) of the 79 publications.

Of the 59 ‘unique items’ (the main output from each piece of research or reflection), 44 (75%) were reports on research projects, 11 (19%) were reflective discussion pieces, three (5%) were evaluations of services or interventions, and one (2%) was an investigation into abuse in religious settings, produced by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and based on the evidence submitted to the Inquiry. The reflective pieces are valuable for their engagement with the literature and insights into casework.

As Figure 1 shows, two-thirds (n=52, 66%) of all the 79 publications were produced through academic research – published in books, academic journals or doctoral theses – and more than a quarter (n=22, 28%) through voluntary-sector research or commissions (sometimes conducted jointly with academics). Of the 59 unique items, more than a third (n=21, 36%) had been published by voluntary-sector organisations.

Each publication was evaluated in relation to its methodological approach; sample size and sample composition (e.g. sex, ethnicity/national origin); and whether it engaged with children or with adult victims/survivors.

Figure 1. Types of publication reviewed



n=79. ‘Other’ includes government-commissioned reports, non-academic journal articles, and blog posts.

2.3 The knowledge explosion

There is a shape to the content and quantity of the research literature, with recent years seeing exponential growth in the number of publications: as Figure 2 shows, three-fifths (n=49, 62%) of the publications reviewed for this report were produced since 2016.

Between 1988 – the date of the earliest article identified – and 1999, there were only six publications that discussed child sexual abuse within African, Asian and Caribbean communities:

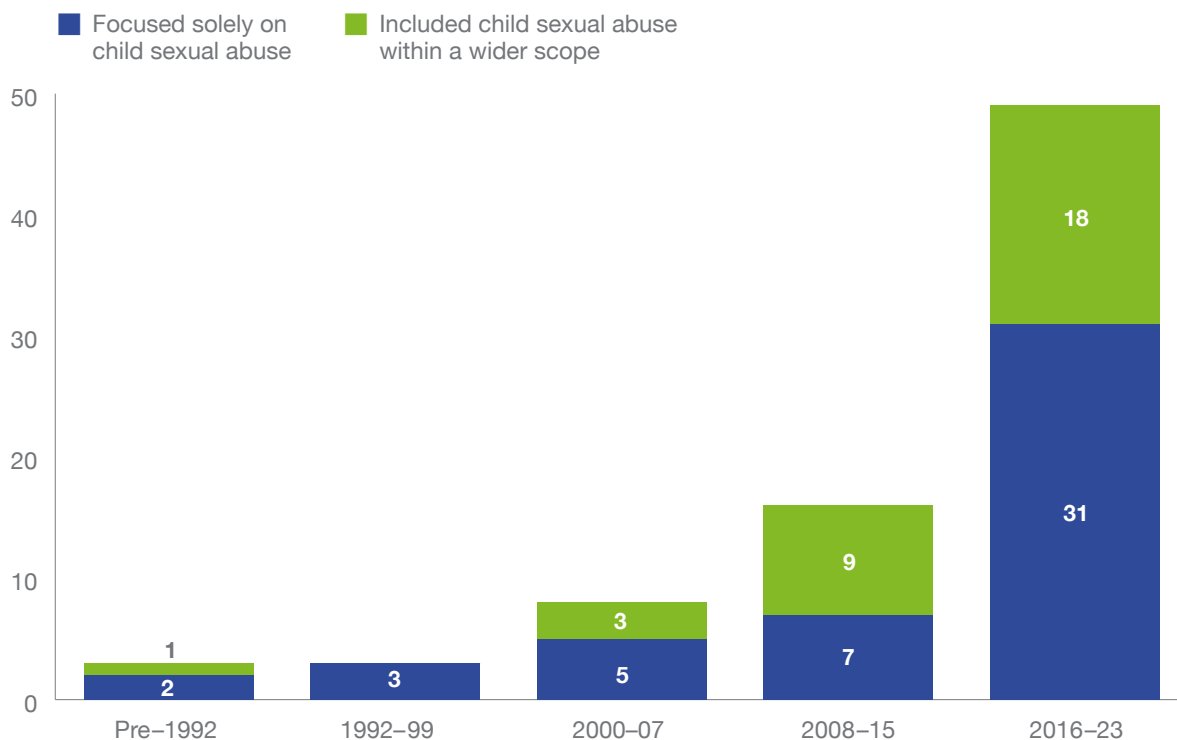
- ▶ Black Caribbean women were the focus of three of these (Bogle, 1988; Wilson, 1993; Bernard, 2001), two of which were specifically about Black Caribbean women’s activism on this issue (Bogle, 1988; Wilson, 1993).
- ▶ South Asian heritage children affected by child sexual abuse (Mtezuka, 1989; Moghal et al, 1995).

- ▶ One publication – the only one in this period to include child sexual abuse within a wider scope – was about eating disorders among Asian and African-Caribbean women; child sexual abuse was discussed in the women’s histories (Lacey and Dolan, 1988).

There were eight relevant publications during the period 2000 to 2007:

- ▶ Four investigated barriers to disclosure for child sexual abuse victims/survivors of South Asian heritage, particularly women (Laungani, 2003; Gilligan and Akhtar, 2005; Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006; Reavey et al, 2006)
- ▶ One was an early reflection on child sexual exploitation casework with Bangladeshi girls (Ward and Patel, 2006).
- ▶ There was a case study of sibling sexual abuse included in a reflection of social work responses to child abuse (Webb et al, 2002).

Figure 2. Year of publication



n=79.

- ▶ Bernard (2001) published the only focused study on the experiences of Black Caribbean mothers as non-abusing parents.
- ▶ Thomas et al (2004) explored the sexual abuse of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people.

Between 2008 and 2015 there was a clear focus on sexual exploitation: half of the 16 publications during this period were on this topic (Firmin, 2010; Firmin, 2011; Beckett et al, 2013; Gohir, 2013; Sharp, 2013; Hynes, 2013; Dhaliwal et al, 2015; Sharp, 2015). There was also a second article on the sexual abuse of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Laya and Papadopolous, 2009); subsequently this issue completely disappeared from research attention, although it may be that the sexual abuse of refugee and asylum-seeking children is addressed within the literature on trafficking. Additionally during this period:

- ▶ four publications explored the experiences of South Asian victims/survivors of sexual violence (Ahmed et al, 2009; Gill, 2009; Rehal and Maguire, 2014; Walji and Smith, 2015)
- ▶ one – the only linguistic analysis to date – looked at translation and the language of sexual violence (Pande, 2012)
- ▶ inority ethnic women's experiences of accessing support services (Thiara et al, 2015)
- ▶ just one study focused on Black victims/survivors of sexual abuse and violence (Kanyeredzi, 2014).

While there have been further publications on child sexual exploitation since 2016, there has been a clear shift towards talking about child sexual abuse and sexual violence more widely. This may have been influenced by the policy shift in terminology, as the UK Government brought its definition of child sexual exploitation under the umbrella of a wider definition of child sexual abuse, but the establishment of both the CSA Centre and IICSA are also likely to have played a role. Indeed, five of these publications were either produced or commissioned by the CSA Centre or IICSA (Kelly, 2019; Rodger et al, 2020; Ali et al, 2021; Jay et al, 2021; Kaiser et al, 2021). The three publications that constitute evaluations were produced during this period (Williams, 2018a; Kelly, 2019; Nixon, 2022). This suggests that there was no evaluation before 2018 of practice interventions or of awareness-raising initiatives on race/ethnicity and child sexual abuse.

This period also saw a focus on the sexual violence experiences of adult women of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage (e.g. Gill and Harrison, 2016; Gohir, 2019; Thiara and Roy, 2020); these were included in this literature review because they encompassed historical child sexual abuse and offered detail on service responses.

Finally, the latest period saw the publication of the first UK book focusing on the sexual abuse of Black and minoritised children,² with some of the chapters (e.g. Begum and Gill, 2023; Gill and Khan, 2023; Hurcombe et al, 2023, Jassal, 2023, Wilson, 2023b) bringing together the findings from previously published research into a single volume.

² Gill, A. and Begum, H. (eds.) *Child Sexual Abuse in Black and Minoritised Communities: Improving Legal, Policy and Practical Responses*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

2.4 Methodological approaches, sample sizes and primary methods of data collection

As Table 1 shows, most of the published literature was based on qualitative research:

- ▶ Among the 54 unique research projects that involved data collection, three-quarters (n=41, 76%) included interviews or focus groups with adult victims/survivors, practitioners or members of the community.
- ▶ Three unique items drew on case examples or case studies collected from frontline organisations, and seven collected data directly from case files; three of these seven included quantitative analysis of larger samples (Moghal et al, 1995; Laya and Papadopoulos, 2009; Thomas et al, 2004).
- ▶ There were nine unique items based on survey or questionnaire data: three drew on large samples of Sikh communities (Pall and Kaur, 2021; Kaur et al, 2022) or Tamil communities (Kannathasan and Jassal, 2022); four were or included surveys of organisations (Firmin, 2010; Thiara et al, 2015; Wilson, 2016; Jay et al, 2021); and two included attitudinal surveys of children (Warrington et al, 2017) or parents (Ong, 2018).

However, outside the publications based on large-scale child sexual exploitation projects between 2010 and 2015, the qualitative research has relied on small sample sizes (see Figure 3). Just nine unique research projects involved samples of more than 20 victims/survivors. When other research participants (such as community members and practitioners) are included, 28 unique studies had a sample size larger than 20.

These methodological approaches are in line with international research into child sexual abuse in minority ethnic communities, which has mostly involved convenience or clinical samples³ (Radford, 2018).

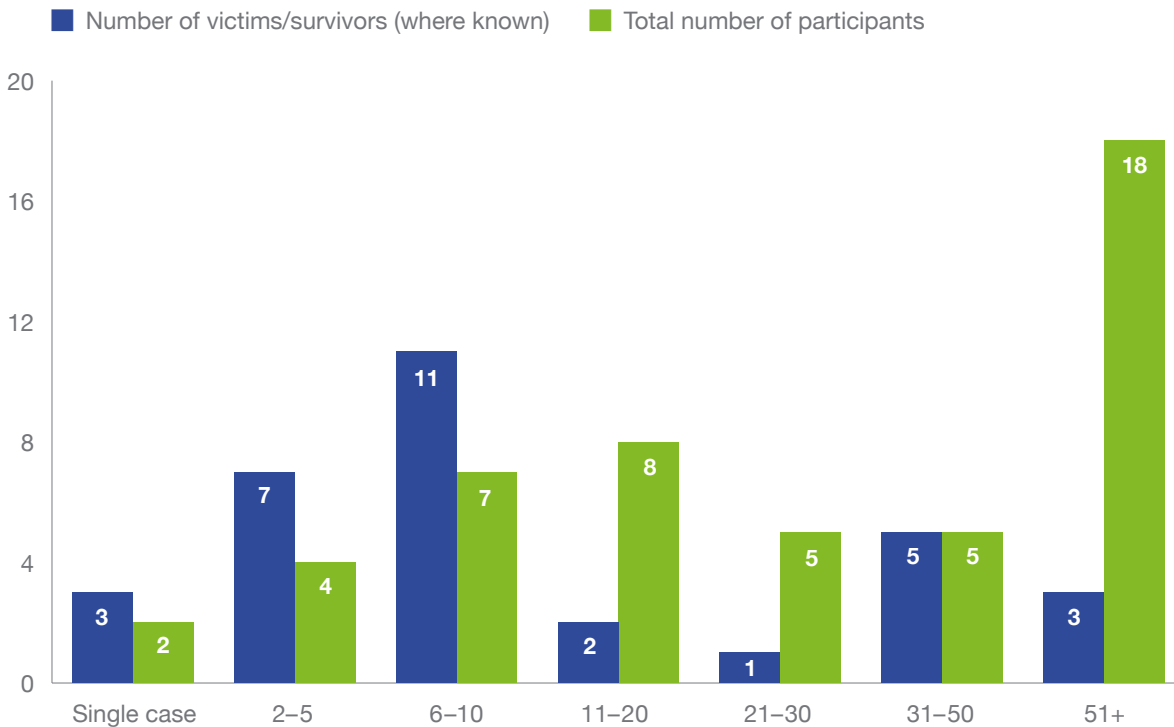
Table 1. Data collection methods

Data collection method	Number
Interviews or focus groups with practitioners, victims/survivors or members of the community	41
Surveys of organisations or individuals	10
Service or case files	7
Case examples or case studies from frontline organisations	3
Other methods	7

n=54. Unique items only. Excludes publications that did not collect new data. Where more than one method was used, all are counted. 'Other methods' includes written evidence collected from victims/survivors or translators, published judgments, action learning, life story films and observation.

³ Convenience sampling involves selecting participants on the basis of their availability and willingness to participate. The sample is therefore composed of individuals who are easily accessible to the researcher and are willing to be a part of the study. Clinical sampling refers to selecting participants who are already receiving an intervention as opposed to reaching those who are not known to services. Both are different from random population-based sampling, where a subset of the population is selected to take part in the study so that findings can be representative of the whole population being studied.

Figure 3. Sample sizes



n=32 studies involving a known number of victims/survivors, and n=49 studies involving a known total number of participants (victims/survivors and/or others). Unique items only. Excludes studies that did not gather primary data or did not provide this information.

2.5 Geographical scope

Most of the reviewed research related to England (n=32 unique items, 54%). Even where the authors suggested that their research was about England and Wales or UK-wide (n=19), typically there was little or no mention of research participants from Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, despite the fact that there are sizeable and long-established minority populations in Scotland and Wales. The research location was unclear for the remaining eight research projects.

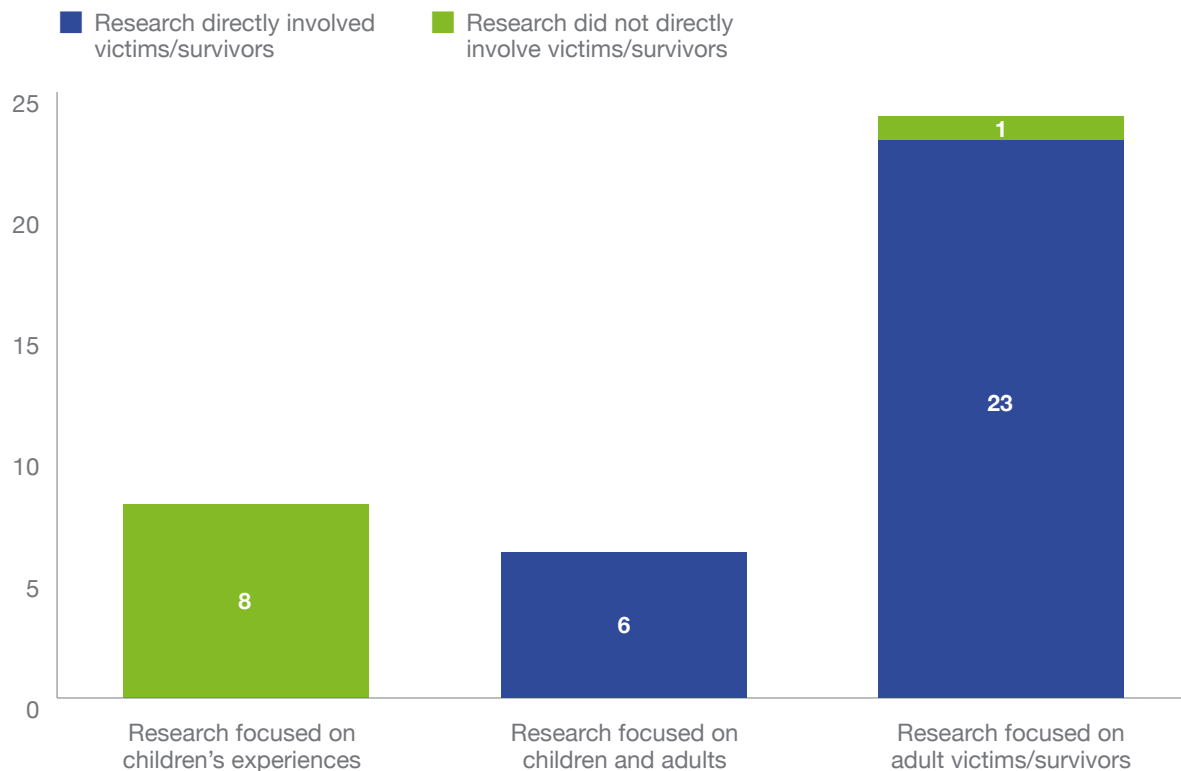
This means that the findings from research were largely based on the English context – except for Kaiser et al (2021) and Rodger et al (2020), which involved focus group participants and interviewees from Wales. Most studies drew on communities in London, the north of England (Bradford, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool) and the Midlands, reflecting the regions with the highest ethnic diversity in England. There was just one focus group session in the East of England, and nothing in the South West.

The literature reviewed provided no information on Northern Ireland or Scotland.

2.6 Age of the research participants

More than half of the 59 unique items (n=32, 54%) focused on adults’ views and experiences as victims/survivors, members of the community, or the non-abusing parents of sexually abused children. A quarter (n=14, 24%) focused on children’s experiences, and eight studies (14%) involved both children and adults. The remaining five studies did not focus directly on the experiences of victims/survivors, their parents or community members.

Figure 4 shows the age of the participants in the 38 research projects that involved victims/survivors in some way. Of the eight that focused solely on children’s experiences, none involved direct engagement with children; data was collected indirectly, either through speaking to practitioners working with children or from children’s case files. On the other hand, all but one of the 24 projects focusing on adult victims/survivors involved direct engagement through interviews or focus groups. Of the six studies that included both child and adult participants, all engaged directly with under 18s.

Figure 4. Direct engagement in studies focused on victims/survivors

n=38. Unique items only. Excludes studies that did not involve case material or qualitative research with victims/survivors, or that did not provide this information.

The eight unique items focusing solely on children's experiences included:

- ▶ an early case study analysis of 37 paediatric hospital files on Asian (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian origin) heritage children where there had been actual or suspected sexual abuse (Moghal et al, 1995)
- ▶ an analysis of social work responses to three cases of abuse of Black and minority ethnic children, of which only one was child sexual abuse and the other two concerned physical abuse and neglect (Webb et al, 2002)
- ▶ reflection based on engagement (through counselling sessions) with just one Asian heritage girl (Laungani, 2003)
- ▶ an analysis of 100 social work case files on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Thomas et al, 2004)
- ▶ a case study analysis of 35 sexually exploited Asian/Muslim girls collated through interviews with professionals and some family members (Gohir, 2013)
- ▶ analysis of eight case studies of sexually exploited Asian heritage children, collated through interviews with practitioners (Sharp-Jeffs, 2016)
- ▶ Firmin's (2018) analysis of nine police files featuring 145 young people
- ▶ Bernard's (2019) secondary analysis of a serious case review⁴ concerning a sexually exploited Black girl.

Across these items there was an element of direct engagement with only four children (in Webb et al, 2002 and Laungani, 2003), and this was through practitioners reflecting on their contact with service users. The other studies were secondary analyses of case files and one analysis of a serious case review.

⁴ Now known as a Local Safeguarding Practice Review, this was a locally conducted multi-agency review in circumstances where a child had been abused or neglected, resulting in serious harm or death, and there was cause for concern about the way in which agencies had worked together to safeguard the child.

The studies involving the largest direct engagement with children as research participants were mainly those focused on gang-associated sexual violence (Firmin, 2010; Firmin, 2011; Beckett et al, 2013) and one study on intra-familial child sexual abuse (Warrington et al, 2017). The first three of these also involved large numbers of adult research participants – but while they did engage large numbers of Asian and Caribbean heritage children and young people, they offered few insights on racialisation or racism. In addition, Laya and Papadopolous (2009) engaged with 53 participants aged 17–25 who were or had been unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, in interviews on sexual violence; and Thiara and Roy (2020) interviewed a small number of under 18s as part of their study of sexual violence against women and girls.

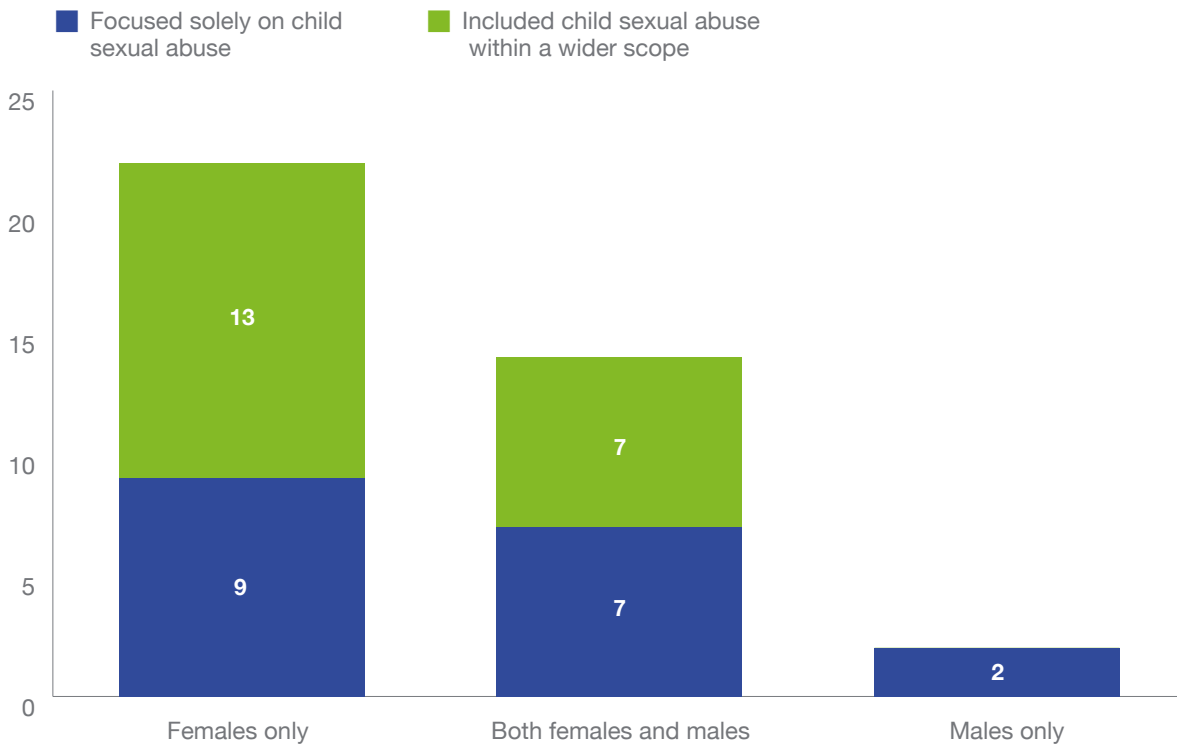
2.7 Sex of the research participants

As Figure 5 shows, the published research largely focuses on the experiences of women and girls. Of the 38 unique studies where the sex breakdown of victims/survivors was clear, three-fifths (n=22, 58%) engaged with only female victims/survivors. Only two (6%) focused on boys and men, and 14 (37%) included both sexes. The projects that engaged both male and female research participants had an overwhelming number of female participants and only a small number of men/boys.

The two unique studies on male survivors were:

- ▶ Begum’s (2018) research with eight South Asian male survivors of child sexual abuse in a counselling setting
- ▶ Myrie and Schwab’s (2023) study of recovery experiences among six Black male survivors of child sexual abuse, which had one UK research participant alongside males from the USA and Canada.

Figure 5. Publications by sex of the research participants

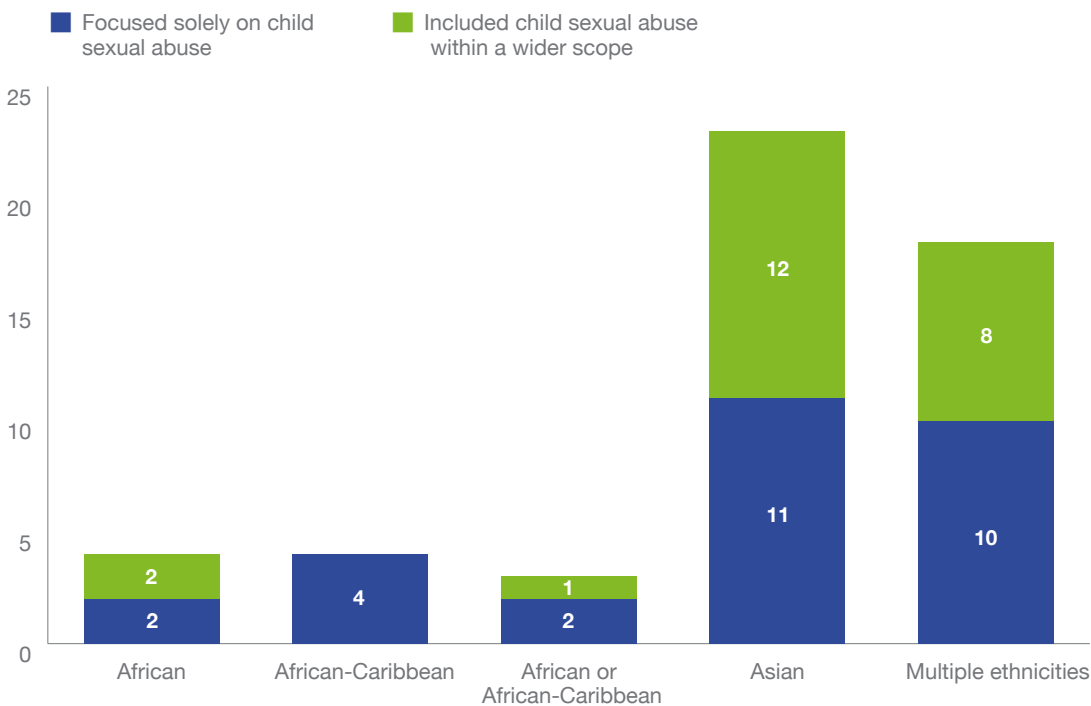


n=38. Unique items only; excludes studies that were not about victims/survivors or that did not provide this information.

Of the 14 studies that included mixed samples:

- ▶ Moghal et al (1995) included 12 boys in their analysis of 37 cases at one hospital
- ▶ there were six males among the 32 victims/survivors of child sexual abuse interviewed by Thomas et al (2004)
- ▶ Laya and Papadopoulos (2009) included two male interviewees out of 53 research participants
- ▶ Firmin (2011) engaged with 132 gang-affected men/boys, but it was not clear how many were sexual abused and there was little discussion of racialisation as the study was focused on the gender dimensions of gang violence
- ▶ Sharp-Jeffs's (2016) case study analysis of the sexual exploitation of South Asian young people included one male and made a couple of points on masculinity, but its main analysis was of the links between different forms of violence and abuse for South Asian young women
- ▶ Warrington et al's (2017) report on intra-familial child sexual abuse included 10 male participants, but it is not clear how many were of African, Asian or Caribbean heritage
- ▶ Ong's (2018) study of Malaysian parenting and child maltreatment included two male survivors, but they were living in Malaysia
- ▶ the Halo Project (2020) report included three in-depth survivor interviews with men/boys alongside the main case study analysis
- ▶ Rodger et al (2020) included male survivors in their focus groups, but it is not clear how many
- ▶ Jay et al (2021) included evidence from male survivors of sexual abuse in religious institutions
- ▶ Pall and Kaur (2021), Kaur et al (2022) and Kannathasan and Jassal (2022) included male respondents to their surveys on child sexual abuse in the UK Sikh/Panjabi and Tamil communities

Figure 6. Publications by race/ethnicity of the research participants



n=52. Unique items only; excludes studies that were not about victims/survivors or did not provide this information.

- Chowdhury et al (2022) interviewed four men and two women as part of a study on child abuse by religious authority figures, and made some limited points on masculinity/gender.

In summary, the literature has provided some limited insights on child sexual abuse, men/boys and race/ethnicity; these are discussed in Chapter 8. However, we still know very little about African, Asian and Caribbean boys/men and child sexual abuse compared to what we know about girls/women, which is the main basis of this report’s thematic analysis.

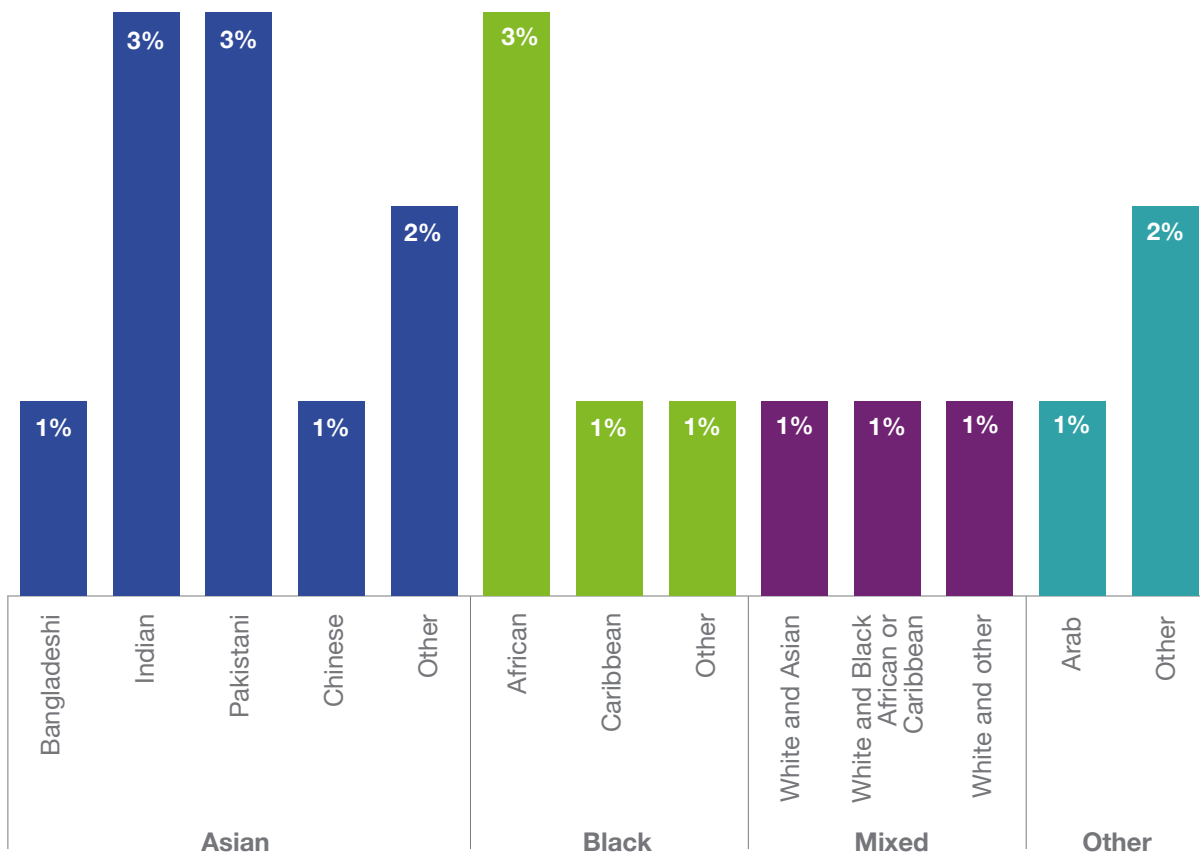
2.8 Race/ethnicity of the research participants

As Figure 6 shows, the sexual abuse of Asian heritage children has received more research attention than the sexual abuse of African and Caribbean heritage children.

The 23 unique items focusing on people of Asian heritage predominantly looked at child sexual abuse or sexual violence within South Asian – primarily north Indian and north Pakistani – communities.

Just four unique items (Thomas et al, 2004; Laya and Papadopolous, 2009; Williams, 2018a; Ajayi, 2020) focused solely on African victims/survivors, and another four (Wilson, 1993; Bernard, 2001, Wilson, 2016; Davis, 2019) on Black Caribbean victims/survivors. Three unique items (Kanyeredzi, 2014; Bernard, 2019; Myrie and Schwab, 2023) included both African and Caribbean victims/survivors, or did not specify the ethnicity or nationality of their Black research participants.

Figure 7. Proportions of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the population of England and Wales, 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics (2023).

Additionally, 18 unique studies focused on multiple racial/ethnic categories.

The published literature has offered very little information on the diversity of experiences according to countries of origin. Only three items offered information on Asian communities beyond the north Pakistani and north Indian experience: Ward and Patel (2006) on Bangladeshi girls and child sexual exploitation; Ong (2018) on the perspectives of Malaysian parents and professionals in relation to child maltreatment, with limited insights on child sexual abuse; and Kannathasan and Jassal (2022) on sexual abuse within Tamil communities in the UK.

None of the research literature involving Caribbean people provided details about the research participants' countries of origin.

Of the unique items involving African participants, three specified their countries of origin. One engaged children and young people from the Horn of Africa (Laya and Papadopolous, 2009); another involved Nigerian adult survivors (Ajayi, 2020); and the third focused on Somali mothers who were not known to be survivors themselves nor mothers of sexually abused children (Williams, 2018a). Nothing has been published specifically on the many other countries of the African continent.

Nevertheless, when comparing the published literature very broadly with the number of Asian and Black African or Caribbean heritage people in England and Wales, the published literature reflects the size of those populations. Of the 34 unique studies that were focusing on specific groups, 68% (n=23) were about Asian heritage people and 32% (n=11) were about those of Black African or African-Caribbean heritage – almost exactly matching the relative proportions of Asian, Black African and Black African-Caribbean populations in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2021). However, as noted above, the sample sizes for almost all these studies were very small, so what we know about the African, Asian and Caribbean experience is still based on a small amount of data.

Moreover, even within the broader categories of Asian and Black there are significant gaps when comparing the research literature with the diversity of the UK population (shown in Figure 7): the Census categories of Black African, Chinese, Arab and 'other Asian' populations are particularly under-represented in published research.

2.9 Summary

A total of 79 publications were reviewed, of which 59 were unique items. The content analysis identified a number of clear gaps in knowledge and attention:

- ▶ There has been very little direct engagement with African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, as most of the research has relied on accounts from adult victims/survivors or practitioners, or on analyses of children's case files.
- ▶ Children of African, East Asian and Southeast Asian heritage have received very little attention.
- ▶ We also still know very little about the distinct experiences of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage boys.
- ▶ Although not London-centric, nearly all research studies are based on case analyses or interviews with victims/survivors and professionals in England rather than the rest of the UK.
- ▶ Although many of the studies include discussion of service responses, there have only been three evaluations of services or interventions in response to the sexual abuse of African, Asian or Caribbean heritage children.

3. Thematic analysis: The nature of the abuse

This chapter looks at what the published research literature tells us about the sexual abuse experienced by African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children: the forms that the abuse takes, and the contexts in which it happens.

Much of this research has been small in scale and has focused on particular ethnic groups or abuse in particular settings such as religious institutions. The first section below looks at the few large-scale studies that have presented some information on the incidence and character of sexual abuse and violence within specific minoritised communities. Subsequent sections review research literature that has focused on specific forms and contexts of child sexual abuse experienced by African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children.

The prevalence of sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children in the UK is not known. One survey concluded that the likelihood of being sexually abused does not vary significantly between ethnic groups in England (Bebbington et al, 2011), but establishing prevalence rates for specific communities is methodologically difficult because it requires large overall sample sizes to yield robust results. The studies reviewed in this chapter therefore tell us about the nature and context of the sexual abuse experienced by children in these communities, rather than its scale.

3.1 Child sexual abuse in particular communities

Three studies have aimed to generate data on sexual abuse within specific communities – two surveys of Sikh/Panjabi communities conducted by Sikh Women’s Aid in 2021 and 2022 (Pall and Kaur, 2021; Kaur et al, 2022) and a survey of Tamil communities conducted by Abuse Never Becomes Us UK (ANBU UK) (Kannathasan and Jassal, 2022). While not prevalence studies, they were large-scale reports on incidence: most of the participants were victims/survivors of violence or came through organisational networks and events.

Pall and Kaur’s (2021) analysis of 674 responses to the first Sikh Women’s Aid online survey discussed four areas: domestic violence, accessing support, child sexual abuse (including exploitation), and the impact of abuse on respondents. The questions on child sexual abuse asked about the experience, the identity of the perpetrator(s), where the abuse had taken place. The respondents – mainly female (73%) – also answered questions on whether and how they were impacted.

One-third (35%) of respondents referred to having experienced child sexual abuse, and another 4% said they might have experienced it. Seven out of eight child sexual abuse victims/survivors were female. One in seven stated that there had been more than one perpetrator. Asked who had perpetrated the abuse, 22% said it was a cousin, 18% an uncle, 6% a sibling, 5% a faith leader, 5% their father, 3% said it was a ‘grooming gang’ and 38% said it was someone else known to them. Regarding the location of the abuse, 41% said it had taken place within the home, 27% at a relative’s home, 17% in someone else’s home, and 6% at a place of worship; 1.5% had been groomed online.

This information on perpetrators and contexts is significant because it pushes against the instrumentalisation of sexual exploitation by Sikh fundamentalist organisations which claim that Sikh girls are abused only or mainly by groups of Muslim men outside the family/ community or online.

A second Sikh Women's Aid survey the following year had 839 responses, 97% of whom were female. Kaur et al (2022) reported that a third (32%) of respondents had experienced sexual abuse, with two-thirds of those having been sexually abused as children. The largest groups of perpetrators of sexual abuse were husbands/ boyfriends, uncles and cousins, followed by 'others' (including family friends, neighbours, house shares and university students), extended family members, fathers, brothers, religious leaders, and teachers – so most were in the family/home environment.

Both Sikh Women's Aid surveys also asked about the impacts of child sexual abuse. The responses are summarised in section 5.1.

Community-specific data was also sought by ANBU UK, which, in 2019, conducted what it called a 'needs assessment' of the Tamil population in the UK in relation to child sexual abuse (Kannathasan and Jassal, 2022). The questionnaire covered knowledge of and talking about child sexual abuse, disclosures, and healing and wellbeing.

Kannathasan and Jassal reported that over three-quarters of the 123 respondents were female and the majority were aged 18–34. Around one in five (22%) were survivors of child sexual abuse; another 7% said they were not sure, and 5% preferred not to say. Of the survivors, the overwhelming majority (89%) were female. Most respondents (61%) stated that they knew someone affected by child sexual abuse. This is likely due to the sample having been drawn from those who had an immediate or loose connection with ANBU UK.

No comparable studies have been published to date in relation to African or Caribbean communities.

3.2 Child sexual exploitation

Eleven studies offer insights on specific features of the sexual exploitation of African, Asian or Caribbean heritage children (Ward and Patel, 2006; Firmin, 2010, 2011 and 2018; Beckett et al, 2013; Gohir, 2013; Sharp, 2013 and 2015; Sharp-Jeffs, 2016; Firmin and Pearce, 2016; Bernard, 2019).

As the lobby grew for child sexual exploitation to be recognised as a specific form of sexual abuse, the late 1990s to 2015 saw a 'knowledge explosion' on the topic (Lovett et al, 2018) which included some discussion of the specific experiences of minoritised, male, and disabled children.

South Asian women's experiences

The discussion on child sexual exploitation and ethnicity began with Ward and Patel's (2006) reflections on casework with Bangladeshi girls at one service in East London. They identified specific features of the Bangladeshi female experience: problems within the family home; forced marriage or pressure of early marriage for girls not doing well at school; financial issues for the family; and physical abuse within the home, which led to the girls spending more time outside the home and subsequently being targeted for sexual exploitation. The abuse continued because the young women were subject to cultural proscriptions that prevented them from talking about the violence they were experiencing.

Although there is now wider recognition of the links between intra- and extra-familial abuse, this was the earliest insight into how intra- and extra-familial abuse connects for South Asian young women. There was a gap of around 10 years before the next focus on Asian girls and women, when Gohir (2013) and Sharp-Jeffs (2016) made similar points about the connections between sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and honour-based violence. These connections have been reiterated in all the research studies on the sexual abuse experiences of South Asian heritage children and women discussed in the sections below, and also raised in Thiara and Roy's (2020) study on sexual violence experienced by minoritised women and girls (see section 4.4).

Concerns about the disproportionate focus on White female victims/survivors in debates and service provision led Gohir (2013) and the Muslim Women's Network UK to put out a call for examples of Asian/Muslim women and girls subjected to child sexual exploitation. They received 35 case studies of sexually exploited Asian/Muslim (mostly Pakistani) women and girls, which offer important insights into some specificities of the Asian/Muslim experience of sexual exploitation:

- Most of the girls were 13–15 years old.
- There were examples of both 'in person' and online sexual exploitation.
- The girls were mostly targeted by men from their own communities who knew that cultural codes, such as honour and shame, would prevent the young women from reporting the abuse.
- The abuse was mostly planned, not opportunistic.

As in Ward and Patel (2006), perpetrators instrumentalised the young women's search for an escape from the pressure of marriage within the home by deceiving them into relationships. Gohir also identified 'grooming hierarchies' in which schoolgirls were targeted by their peers or an older male for a relationship, raped, and then taken to parties where they were sexually abused by larger networks of men. Sitting at the top of these networks would be a particularly powerful Asian man who organised the venues and profited from the abuse.

Meanwhile, Sharp (2013 and 2015)/Sharp-Jeffs (2016) observed that South Asian girls were omitted from wider discussions about the links between sexual exploitation and going missing because:

- they were rarely reported as missing by parents and families, unless families required police assistance to find someone who had run away from a forced marriage
- they might go missing for a number of other reasons, including abuse within or outside the home and/or the threat of forced marriage, so sexual exploitation as a potential reason is missed
- they might also face forced marriage and other forms of honour-based abuse because they had gone missing or had disclosed sexual exploitation to parents/families.

Sharp-Jeffs stressed the need for services to address the diversity of contexts for these victims of sexual exploitation, so they could be better protected from further harms. She urged professionals to be aware of the lengths to which Asian families may go in order to ensure that the sexual abuse was not disclosed and the girls/young women were returned to the family fold. She further found that Asian young people might move a significant physical distance away from familiar areas to flee forced marriage or honour-based violence, and that this needed to be considered in the context of wider research evidence suggesting that young people are more likely to be exploited if they are in unfamiliar surroundings.

Other minoritised groups

The studies above on South Asian young women have led to expanded understandings of how sexual exploitation occurs, and have also identified practitioner lapses (discussed in Chapter 7). There is no comparable research on African or Caribbean heritage children, although an ongoing project involving interviews with Black children about extra-familial sexual abuse could soon address this gap (see Chapter 9).

Rather, research evidence on the specificities of the African and Caribbean experience has been lodged within large-scale child sexual exploitation studies; as noted above, these have included sizeable numbers of young participants of African-Caribbean heritage, and the largest number of Chinese heritage participants in any study of child sexual abuse in the UK.

These studies have offered little overt analysis of race/ethnicity, but are included here because their findings are based on the experiences and views of large numbers of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. For instance, around two-thirds of the 352 women and girls in Firmin's (2010) investigation into sexual violence within gang contexts were of African, Asian, Caribbean or mixed heritage (including 4% who were Chinese).

In a subsequent study by the same author on the same topic (Firmin, 2011), more than half of the 217 girls and 132 boys involved were of African, Asian, Caribbean or mixed heritage. Similarly, almost all the central figures in her case file analysis for her PhD research on abuse between young people (Firmin, 2018) were Black Caribbean. Therefore, the key findings from Firmin's research can tell us a lot about the nature of sexual exploitation of these young women within gangs and groups, even if her analysis did not overtly discuss racism or ethnicity.

Firmin's earlier research (2010 and 2011) made a significant contribution to knowledge of serious youth violence and the operation of gangs, by drawing attention to the otherwise invisible women/girls within and around those gangs. These studies highlighted important considerations for services that are otherwise focused on boys and young men. Overall, her studies showed that:

- ▶ women/girls occupied significantly subordinate positions to the men/boys in these spaces
- ▶ they had differential sexual roles (wives, mothers, sisters) and were variously demeaned or uplifted by the labels applied to them (sket, ho, wifey)
- ▶ there was widespread normalisation of sexual violence
- ▶ there was confusion among the women/girls about consent within sexual relations
- ▶ women/girls sought to protect themselves from violence by brutalising other women/girls, by channelling them into sexual exploitation, or by getting them to carry drugs and firearms for 'boyfriends'
- ▶ for some groups, such as Somali gangs, girls/young women were restricted to relationships with young men from the same community
- ▶ sexual violence against girls and young women was a way of inflicting violence on opposing gangs without the risk of being caught with weapons, and had the effect of reinforcing or strengthening the male perpetrators' status.

This research underlined the fear of repercussions as a significant reason for non-disclosure, as well as a lack of trust in statutory services, exacerbated by poor relations with the police. There is no doubt that part of this related to historical experiences of racism. The few specific issues raised about race/ethnicity identified participants' preference for culturally specific services/staff, who were considered to better understand their experiences given that safeguarding services were thought to be focused on White girls. At the same time, Firmin also noted that Black, Asian and minority ethnic women's organisations were losing funding for specialist services despite their importance in responding effectively to girls/women affected by gang violence.

A hugely important contribution to the understanding of youth violence was Firmin's (2015) discussion of the social contexts for that violence (particularly gender norms) and the way that rules of engagement shift and change across contexts and geographical locations. Her theoretical engagement with space and power led her to develop the now recognised concepts of peer-on-peer abuse and contextual safeguarding.

A further study at around the same time, by Beckett et al (2013), engaged 188 young people – around two-thirds of whom were of African, Asian, Caribbean or dual heritage – across six areas in England. Beckett et al underlined Firmin's findings on the normalisation of sexual violence within gang-affected neighbourhoods, and the need to locate gang-related sexual violence within wider gender relations and patterns of harm, as well as reiterating points on the lack of recognition of violence/abuse by young people and the lack of understanding of consent. They also offered a typology of gang-affected sexual violence including multiple perpetrator rape, exchange of sex for goods, and girls being used to set up gang members, with various roles identified: gangster girl, wifey, female family member, baby mothers, and links (young women associated through 'casual' sex with one or more members of the gang). Like Firmin (2010 and 2011), they found low reporting rates because of a fear of retaliation and little faith in services.

A book chapter by Firmin and Pearce (2016) brought a critical race perspective to Firmin's data on peer-on-peer abuse, to highlight the specific social conditions within which Black young women experience gang-related sexual violence. They argued that Black young people are subject to stressors that increase their vulnerability to gang violence, including poor access to services, poor relations with professionals – both exacerbated by racism – and a co-terminus lack of faith in statutory services derived from their experience of being "over policed and under protected". Firmin and Pearce drew particular attention to the relationship between domestic violence and extra-familial violence – more than half (57%) of the young people in Firmin's (2018) PhD case file analysis had also experienced domestic abuse – and argued that domestic abuse normalises and reproduces certain gender norms among children, including the subordination of femininities and masculinities to a particular form of hegemonic masculinity.

Finally, there are insights from Bernard's (2019) intersectional analysis of the literature and one serious case review on children's services' response to a sexually exploited 15-year-old Black girl who was raped by a much older man. Bernard noted the need for more research on the sexual exploitation of Black girls, because they are more exposed to 'conducive contexts' (Kelly, 2007) for sexual exploitation: economic disadvantage, material hardship, racism, adverse childhood experiences and over-representation in the care system.

In her analysis of the serious case review, Bernard found that the girl had a history of "cumulative adversity" and instability, including multiple forms of abuse and neglect. Schools saw her behaviour as provocative and defiant, and suspected gang involvement; children's services noted that she was often missing from her foster placement, was out late, had a lot of money, and was often dropped off by a much older man. Bernard argued that the girl's social context left her vulnerable to exploitation, yet social workers failed to respond to clear signs of sexual exploitation because they had made racialised assumptions about her behaviour.

Extra-familial child sexual abuse, including child sexual exploitation, was also the focus of Ackerley and Latchford (2018), who drew attention to the relationship between societal attitudes and how young people view their own abuse. Ackerley and Latchford called for 'safe spaces' that responded to children's individual and specific needs relating to all aspects of their identity.

3.3 Child sexual abuse in online contexts

The literature search for this review brought up no published research where the online sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children was the main focus. However, case studies and recent survey findings do suggest a mounting concern about the growing incidence of online sexual abuse of these children.

A report by The Children's Society (2018) found increasing levels of online grooming. This is interesting, given Ward and Patel's (2006) argument that Asian young women were more vulnerable to 'on street' grooming because they were trying to stay away from stressors within the home. Just 12 years later, Gutierrez and Chawla's (2017) reflections on the sexual exploitation of Asian girls, and Pearson and Winterbotham's (2017) research on ISIS's recruitment of young Asian women, both suggested that people looking to sexually abuse or recruit tended to target Asian young women through online forums, because they were far less likely than their peers to be on the street or in public spaces and were seen as naïve and leading sheltered lives. The recruiters/exploiters tended to be men from the same communities, who were aware that they could blackmail these young women or use concerns about shame and preserving honour to entrap them.

In Gohir's (2019) report on police responses to Muslim victims/survivors, four of the 21 case studies involved online abuse, including two of image-based sexual abuse by intimate partners and one of online grooming followed by sexual assault. The report did not provide information on the age of the young women at the time of that abuse.

Conversely, Sikh Women's Aid argued that the internet is not significant as a form or context for sexual abuse in Sikh/Panjabi communities: only 1.5% of 674 respondents to its 2021 survey said they had been sexually abused online (Pall and Kaur, 2021).

3.4 Abuse within minoritised religious settings

Vocal opposition to child sexual abuse within minoritised religious settings has recently gathered pace in the literature. Chowdhury et al (2022) highlighted the lack of research in this area, and argued that this contributed to the secrecy surrounding sexual abuse in such settings. Four publications have discussed the specific features of sexual abuse within minoritised religious settings. Others have referred to religious literacy, religious leaders and religious organisations as part of a wider conversation about the role of family and community in preventing the disclosure of abuse (see Chapter 4).

Jay et al (2021) reported on the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) investigation into child protection in minoritised religious settings, which took place between July 2019 and August 2020. The review included evidence from organisations representing Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Paganism, Christian and new religious movements; it ran parallel with much larger inquiries on child sexual abuse within the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.

The investigation considered evidence from 38 religious organisations/umbrella bodies across England and Wales, 45 victims/survivors, and various organisations and support services. Although the ethnicity of the victims/survivors was not specified, the report contained considerable case material about African, Asian and Caribbean victims/survivors and organisations.

Jay et al revealed a great deal about the workings of power and the dominance of religious organisations and religious leaders within minoritised communities. The IICSA investigation found that sexual abuse took place in contexts where everyone, including children, revered religious leaders while family members were encouraged to forgive any misdoings; additionally, close ties between families, businesses and religious organisations undermined the safety of victims/survivors, and reduced opportunities reporting abuse confidentially. This combination afforded impunity to abusers and vilified victims, who then internalised the victim-blame. Jay et al also detailed the harassment of, and other repercussions for, children and adults who disclosed the abuse.

As part of its investigation, IICSA asked each religious organisation for the number of allegations of child sexual abuse made to it between 2009 and 2019. However, few responded: either they did not collect this data, or they claimed to have received no allegations of child sexual abuse. Therefore, the report discussed only a small amount of statistical data submitted by local authorities.

Jay et al identified two further issues that enabled impunity within these contexts:

- ▶ The lack of sex education for children within minoritised communities (as many are withdrawn from mainstream classes, or schooled within segregated or faith-based schools) means that they lack the language to describe and report the abuse – section 4.1 covers this in detail.
- ▶ The absence of clear child protection policies and procedures within religious institutions that are not required to have these, nor to undertake Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks of staff/volunteers, means that perpetrators in these settings have unrestricted access to large numbers of children.

IICSA's recommendations reflected its concerns about these two points: it urged that all children have access to sex and relationships education, and called for a new law on mandatory reporting. It also called for better management of child protection within religious organisations, including clarification of the law in relation to DBS checks during the recruitment of staff/volunteers.

Chowdhury et al (2022) made similar points, but also offered depth and detail on child sexual abuse by religious authority figures within the UK Darul Uloom and Madrasah, a transnational Muslim seminary. The authors interviewed six adult victims/survivors of childhood abuse: four men and two women. Five had been sexually abused while one had been physically, emotionally and spiritually abused (creating a fear that God was at 'war' with the victim). Five were living in the UK and one was living in Pakistan, highlighting the transnational dimensions of such abuse.

The six victims/survivors were asked about their beliefs and values, the abuse and the circumstances around it, the immediate and longer-term impacts, barriers to disclosure, reactions to reporting, and their feelings towards Islam and Imams following the abuse. Chowdhury et al emphasised the immense pressure on the interviewees to remain silent about the abuse – for some, the interview was the first time they had spoken about it – and the obstacles to disclosure, including a sense of confusion about the dual role of the abuser as perpetrator and as religious authority figure, which was part of the reason why they had not immediately recognised the acts as abuse.

Victim-blame was a strong feature: the idea that a religious figure had perpetrated abuse was considered "unfathomable". When victims had understood that they were being abused, they had looked for avenues to report it and make it stop but had been told to be "charitable as an act of compensation". Some of the perpetrators had been moved around the institution to seminaries abroad. Victims/survivors had been made to feel disrespectful for accusing religious scholars of abuse and had been made to believe that they had become enemies of God. They had been aligned with a perceived external threat and accused of lack of loyalty to the institution – a loyalty required for spiritual protection. These accusations had exacerbated when they had resorted to social media platforms to get their experiences heard.

Perpetrators had used religious texts to justify abuse and legitimise their actions. Chowdhury et al said the abuse had taken place within an “environment of immunity” for the religious scholars, where they had exercised privileges and exemptions, including on sexual activity. There had also been an element of ‘exchange’: victims had been given money/sweets to keep silent and then had to find ways to get rid of these gifts, making them feel complicit in covering up the abuse.

The impacts of the abuse on the interviewees’ religious faith are detailed in section 5.2.

They had wanted the abuse to be acknowledged by family and community, and for the UK Darul Uloom and Madrasah to formally recognise what had taken place. Instead, they had encountered disbelief, which they experienced as secondary victimisation, resulting in further trauma.

There are parallels with Mansoor’s (2023) reflections on the use of religious pronouncements to legitimise sexual abuse, as two of the three women she interviewed had been abused by men who had key positions in the mosque.

These religious dimensions to sexual abuse and their impacts chime with Ajayi’s (2020) PhD research which looked at cultural beliefs and help-seeking for 12 Nigerian women survivors of sexual violence including child sexual abuse, intimate partner abuse and female genital mutilation. She identified a set of cultural norms and practices conducive to sexual abuse, including religious/spiritual baths, libation, and the circulation of rape myths within Nigerian communities. Ajayi made connections across different forms of violence and abuse, and commented on the immense power of religious figures within Nigerian communities in the UK.

In a recent article, Ajayi (2023) presented a detailed case study based on an interview with a British-born Black woman of Nigerian heritage, whom she referred to as Angela. She illuminated the complex familial and wider relations that silence and prevent disclosure and describes how a pastor was afforded legitimacy through his connection with a church, enabling his unsupervised access to Nigerian heritage children and young people. For Angela, religion and her belief in God were equally important in being able to cope during and after the abuse. Speaking as an adult, she narrated her experience of religious and intra-familial sexual abuse as a child. The abuse had been perpetrated by two men – one was a pastor but also her mother’s boyfriend, and the other was her stepfather. Both were considered trusted adults because of their proximity to the family and, for the pastor, his position in the church. The pastor had sexually abused Angela from the age of eight under the cover of a religious practice known as ‘spiritual baths’.

Ajayi used Finkelhor’s concept of ‘situational opportunity’⁵ to describe the way that this religious practice offers abusers unsupervised access to children. The same pastor had abused other girls in Angela’s extended family and through the church network. As in Chowdhury et al (2022), there was an element of ‘exchange’ as he was giving her gifts which, in turn, made her believe that he was a nice man. Religious practice and patriarchal power were the context for the abuse, but Angela also relied on her Christian faith to cope. Angela’s main coping strategy – “throwing herself into Christ” – chimes with Bernard’s (2001) findings that Black women lean on religious associations for psychological/emotional support even though religion also has the effect of exacerbating internalised feelings of shame. Ajayi noted that Angela was living with a range of long-term impacts of the abuse from material effects, such as housing problems, to emotional and psychological issues.

⁵ Finkelhor’s (1984) four precondition model to sexual offending highlights the role of situational and contextual variables that enable abuse to happen.

In a further article, Ajayi et al (2022) identified several interconnected factors that contribute to the victimisation of Ajayi's 12 Nigerian interviewees:

- ▶ male privilege defined by gendered roles and expectations
- ▶ religious beliefs
- ▶ specific manifestation of rape myths within Nigerian communities where survivors are made to feel they would be mocked if the abuse became public knowledge
- ▶ bride-price (where the groom or his family make a wedding payment to the bride's family) and the associated practice of libation.

On the issue of male privilege and gender norms, Ajayi et al described how socialisation in Nigeria embeds male power over women: one interviewee explained that the man has the final say in the household). Recourse to religious discourse about the Devil and possession was identified as a form of displacement that could lead to separation of the abuser from the abuse, thereby also preventing accountability. Where women had been subjected to sexual violence in the context of marriage, the cultural practice of bride-price legitimised the abuse because the husband believed he owned the woman's body and could do whatever he wanted; returning the bride price was not an option because families feared the stigma attached to separation and divorce.

Sikh Women's Aid campaigns on the issue of sexual abuse within Sikh temples or gurdwaras, something that has been vehemently and violently denied by Sikh establishments in the past. The 2021 and 2022 Sikh Women's Aid surveys (Pall and Kaur, 2021; Kaur et al, 2022) included a point that the organisation's casework showed a steady increase in women reporting sexual abuse that had taken place on gurdwara premises. Kaur et al set out five high-profile cases of gurdwara priests involved in sexual abuse, and drew out examples from the Sikh Women's Aid casework that chimed with the survey findings.

Echoing Jay et al (2021), they raised concerns that gurdwaras did not undertake DBS checks for priests, staff or volunteers in a context where they had considerable access to and power over children and vulnerable adults. The report censured gurdwara committees for failing in their safeguarding responsibilities to victims, and for claiming to have resolved complaints internally while actually suppressing these to avoid involving the police. As with Chowdhury et al's (2022) findings and those of IICSA's inquiries into sexual abuse within the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches (Jay et al, 2020a and 2020b), Kaur et al found that gurdwaras provided references for perpetrators to facilitate their movement around the gurdwara networks.

3.5 Targeting of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Only two articles (Thomas et al, 2004; Laya and Papadopolous, 2009) have expressly researched sexual abuse/sexual violence and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. They revealed the high levels of physical and sexual abuse that had taken place in their countries of origin, on their journeys into the UK, and then also once they were in the UK, suggesting the absence of multiple layers of protection.

Thomas et al (2004) analysed the pre-departure experiences of 100 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children using children's services case files, and found that one-third (n=32) had been raped. They found that 26 (two-thirds) of the 41 girls had reported experiences of sexual violence, compared to six of the 59 boys, but they offered little gender analysis. Nonetheless, there is some detail on the forms of sexual abuse:

- ▶ Six girls had been exploited as sex/ domestic slaves by soldiers in their countries of origin.
- ▶ Ten young people had been trafficked, including for sexual exploitation and domestic slavery.
- ▶ Fourteen had been raped at least twice, and one had been raped 11 times, before entering the UK.
- ▶ Five girls mentioned multiple perpetrator rape.
- ▶ Four had become pregnant from sexual abuse and three had (unsafe) abortions.

The sexual violence experienced by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children occurred in a context where very high levels of applications for leave to remain in the UK were being rejected – as many as 77% during the period of their research, according to Thomas et al.⁶ This suggests the state takes a differential approach to protecting victims/ survivors of child sexual abuse, as children with insecure immigration status can still be deported to countries where they were subjected to that abuse.

Laya and Papadopoulos (2009) engaged volunteers to interview 53 young people (51 female and two male) aged 17–25 from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia who had entered the UK aged 15–17 as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Participants were recruited on the basis that they self-identified as having experienced, or been at risk of, 'sexual maltreatment' (sexual abuse, sexual assault or sexual harassment) since arriving in the UK and within 10 years of the interview. Young people involved in criminal cases against perpetrators were excluded from the study.

Interviewees described a range of forms and contexts of sexual abuse, and three-quarters said they had experienced more than one incident of sexual maltreatment; some had been sexually abused over a period by the same person.

- ▶ More than half (57%) had been subjected to sexual harassment, including sexual taunts.
- ▶ A quarter (26%) of the females and both males reported 'hand to genital fondling'.
- ▶ Half of the females (51%) had been subjected to 'other fondling'.
- ▶ Four females reported rape, five reported attempted rape, and five reported feeling at risk of sexual maltreatment.

Half the females (52%) were aged over 16 at the time of the abuse/harassment, whereas both the males had been sexually abused at a much younger age (10 and 12 respectively). Most incidents had occurred in the first 12 months after they arrived in the UK.

⁶ In recent years the refusal rates have reduced significantly, with the latest statistics showing that in 2021 there were 32 refusals out of 892 asylum applications from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Refugee Council, 2022).

All but two of the perpetrators had been men, the majority of whom were in their twenties. In most cases they were known to the children as they lived in the same accommodation or nearby, or were their carers and/or men from the same country of origin. Half the interviewees said the perpetrators had operated in groups of two or more, and many described having been sexually harassed by groups of men. Some thought their perpetrators had previous experience of exploiting asylum-seeking girls. They believed that they had been targeted because of their gender and age, because the men knew they were without family or state protection, and/or because they were seeking cultural/social support. Importantly, those who had been warned of the dangers of sexual abuse were more likely to have disclosed the abuse and sought professional help, but all had been influenced by cultural norms of shame and secrecy to conceal the abuse. One-third had not told anyone about the abuse, only four had reported their abuse to the police, and several had sought medical assistance for the symptoms but had not disclosed the abuse.

Two-fifths of the interviewees had insecure immigration status in the UK, and around a third were without a social worker. Several said they had a key worker rather than a social worker; some reported that not having a social worker increased their vulnerability to sexual maltreatment, owing to inadequate monitoring and supervision. Poverty, the failure of state support, and being placed in mixed sex and semi-independent accommodation were also felt to have increased their vulnerability.

The main objective of Laya and Papadopoulos's article was to alert professionals to the targeting of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. It encouraged professionals to:

- extend support by providing safer accommodation, monitoring and supervision
- assist unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to develop trustworthy relationships
- meet their emotional as well as practical needs
- provide information on social systems and sexual abuse as soon as possible after their arrival in the UK.

Although this study and Thomas et al (2004) are both more than 15 years old, and neither offered enough reflection on the implications for statutory duties or services, they clearly provided strong evidence of the lack of effective protection for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the need for the state (as the primary carer of all these children) to address the physical and mental health consequences of such violence.

The two studies are early contributions to a growing body of research evidence on the impact of immigration controls on victims of sexual and domestic abuse (see Burman and Chantler, 2005; Anitha, 2010; Anitha, 2011; Kesete, 2013; Thiara, 2020; Jolly and Gupta, 2024; Dhaliwal and Kelly, 2023). However, other than Jolly and Gupta, this literature has not addressed the specific impacts/issues for children.

4. Thematic analysis: Barriers to disclosure, identification and response

There is considerable research evidence pointing to silencing mechanisms that obstruct African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children from speaking out about sexual abuse, or that misrecognise the issue and prevent them from accessing support.

This chapter begins by reviewing the research evidence on the lack of appropriate terminology to name child sexual abuse. The literature on this topic is restricted to North Indian and North Pakistani languages and communities; there is still a considerable gap in research and knowledge of how language features in the experiences of African, Caribbean and other Asian heritage children.

The chapter then explores family and community pressures on sexually abused children and their parents. Much of the literature on this topic focuses on people originating from the Indian subcontinent (i.e. Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Tamil, Sikh, Muslim) so it covers those contributions first and then considers what is known about practices and beliefs in other communities.

4.1 Naming the abuse – the lack of appropriate terminology

The literature reviewed has made some acknowledgement of language as a barrier to reporting child sexual abuse and accessing support services. For instance, Webb et al (2002) found that mothers who spoke little English found it difficult to communicate with social workers, as did some children.

Almost 20 years later, this point was reiterated by Kaiser et al (2021). They interviewed 107 support organisations working with diverse communities across England and Wales, and found that 55% of them identified the lack of recognition of language needs as a barrier to engaging with services. The main concerns raised were:

- ▶ the dearth of good interpretation services
- ▶ the widespread use of family and community members as interpreters, including children – even if they did not have the language to describe or did not understand what was being said.

Moreover, the support organisations contended that reliance on family members for interpreting:

- ▶ constituted a breach of confidentiality
- ▶ placed the victim/survivor at risk
- ▶ might prevent the victim/survivor from explaining fully what had taken place
- ▶ risked interpreters not fully and accurately translating what had been said.

Additionally, there were concerns that native English-speaking children might have difficulty interpreting the words back into their mother tongue.

Gilligan and Akthar (2005) were probably the first academics to note that the problem was not just the need for interpreters but also the availability of appropriate words and phrases in different languages. In their work (detailed in sections 4.2 and 6.2) developing an awareness-raising leaflet and a survey, they struggled to identify an Urdu phrase for child sexual abuse that was recognised and understood by the local Pakistani community. They settled on the Urdu phrase “Jensi Tashadud” to denote child sexual abuse, but this “caused bemusement” as the Pakistani women at their workshops were not familiar with the term. Their findings highlighted that the lack of appropriate terms or phrases in some languages may reflect and also reinforce the taboo surrounding the issue.

In the only study of its kind, Pande (2012) “subjected Hindi sexual vocabulary to a feminist linguistic analysis”. She extracted key references to sexual violence within the Sexual Offences Act 2003, and then asked multilingual female South Asian professionals working with survivors of sexual violence to identify Hindi words and phrases that most closely resembled these acts. She also asked them to provide a literal translation into English for the Hindi terms they had identified. When asked about child sexual abuse, only four participants were able to offer an accurate translation; the other five identified harm against children but not the sexual aspect of that harm. Pande found a lack of shared meanings and common ground within this language community, as her participants struggled to identify accessible words or commonly shared meanings: they were choosing between swear words and circumlocutions that were obscure and open to misunderstanding. Translations of sexual acts were framed as obscene. Pande recommended that agencies should go through a process of establishing common ground with interpreters to avoid misrecognition of sexual abuse and violence.

Gill (2009) identified another issue: that South Asian languages frame sexual violence in ways that render female victims responsible for that violence. For instance, the Hindi phrase for rape is “izzat lootgaya”, which literally translates to “she has lost her honour” or “[her] honour has been stolen”. The interviewees in Gill’s study did not use the word ‘rape’, and she had to probe before she was clear what exactly they were recounting. She argued that this lack of appropriate terminology sediments the unspeakable nature of sexual violence within South Asian communities.

A decade later, Gill and Harrison (2019) found that South Asian women struggled to find the language to talk about sexual violence – in interviews with 13 women, none could identify the precise sexual act that they had been subjected to. For instance, one woman who had been abused by her uncle from the age of nine used Punjabi terms which translated as “the physical thing”, “it” and “that”.

The Children’s Society (2018) and Kaiser et al (2021) both made a related point that receiving poor-quality sex and relationships education, or being withdrawn from that education, reinforces and exacerbates the silencing of Black and minority ethnic children by denying them the language to recognise and name their experience of sexual abuse. A small study by Dhaliwal and Patel (2006) found that ethnic minority parents were more likely to make use of the lever of parental power to withdraw their children, particularly their daughters, from sex and relationships education and extracurricular activities. Another issue is that Black Caribbean heritage children are six times more likely to be excluded from schools in England than their White peers (McIntyre et al, 2021). All of this is of concern given the UK Government’s recognition that “a range of children from Black and other minority ethnic communities are less likely to talk to their parents about sex” and therefore often rely wholly on schools for this education (Department for Education and Employment, 2000).

4.2 Family and community pressures

Shame, honour and modesty as silencing mechanisms

The earliest qualitative study on South Asian heritage children's experiences of child sexual abuse (Laungani, 2003) detailed the internal family wranglings and devastating impacts of a brother, a sister and a male cousin (aged 13, 15 and 14 respectively) disclosing that they had been sexually abused by their uncle. Laungani was tasked with counselling the girl because of the parents' concern that the abuse would hinder her marriage prospects.

Through Laungani's reflections on his counselling practice, we learn of the girl's reluctance to name or speak directly about the abuse, her discomfort in the presence of an Indian man, and her preoccupation with the impact of her disclosure on her parents, grandparents and aunts. This was a tragic account – the siblings' maternal grandfather died; the grandmother was hospitalised; the father and his brother, both businessmen, were anxious about what people in the local area would think, the impact on their livelihoods, and the impact on their own father. They tried to avoid a criminal prosecution and instead planned to send the perpetrator back to Punjab. However, a news report prevented them from concealing the abuse, and their brother-in-law was eventually convicted and jailed. There was also a major fracturing of the family unit, as the siblings' aunts (one of whom was married to the abuser) were in denial until their parents became seriously ill and there was some reconciliation at the grandfather's funeral.

The focus of Laungani's piece was his recourse to cultural knowledge (in this case, religious scripture) to assist the counselling process and break through the girl's silence on the abuse. However, this was a patriarchal account in which Laungani, a male counsellor, was sought out by a White male police officer to convince the girl's father and his brother to allow her to engage with a police investigation into their brother-in-law. Success was measured by the fact that, by the end of the sessions, the girl no longer hated Indian men and then, some years later, agreed to get married. We learn nothing about the two boys who had been sexually abused, or why the aunts had defended the abuser.

Soon after Laungani's reflections, Gilligan and Akhtar (2005 and 2006) produced their foundational articles on Asian communities and child sexual abuse, in response to concerns raised by the Bradford Family Services Unit and the local police about the low levels of child sexual abuse reporting within Asian communities. These reflective articles were based on responses to a questionnaire and community consultation sessions on a draft multilingual information leaflet, followed by a conference discussion about this area of work and the leaflet.

During each consultation session with Asian women, Gilligan and Akhtar found that an initial denial of sexual abuse turned into disclosure of at least one example of child sexual abuse. The women's contributions to the sessions were organised around three key concerns: 'sharam' (shame), 'izzat' (honour) and 'haya' (modesty). Talking about sexual abuse, and other people's perceptions of their families, caused them considerable anxiety. They saw reporting abuse as a very public and embarrassing event, and – in a context of living within tightly networked communities – were concerned about social workers turning up at the door. They needed assurance that their contact with support services would be completely confidential, and were anxious about 'mother-blaming' by social workers. They were reluctant to encourage their children to talk about sexual relations, on the grounds that this was immodest and taboo, and feared that having such conversations would promote sexual promiscuity. Yet they also understood that children would be unlikely to report sexual abuse in a context where conversations about sex were considered sinful.

Gilligan and Akhtar's articles were produced at a time when there was an increasing recognition of violence and abuse within minoritised communities, and a wider debate about the tension between individual and communitarian rights; see, for instance, Phillips (2009). However, while minoritised women's organisations asserted the right of individuals to go against the community as well as the negative impact of community pressure on women and girls and their mental health, Gilligan and Akhtar seemed willing to concede children's rights in favour of a communitarian approach by searching for ways to mobilise the community as a force for child protection.

The individual vs the community

Thereafter, 13 more research papers have discussed the ways that family honour and community pressure act as distinct mechanisms for obstructing disclosure and help-seeking within South Asian communities. Although some of these papers have been about adult survivors and sexual violence within intimate partner relationships, they consistently underline the thematic discussion begun by Gilligan and Akhtar, albeit with different recommendations for practice.

Reavey et al (2006), Ahmed et al (2009), Gill (2009), Rehal and Maguire (2014), Harrison and Gill (2018), and Gill and Harrison (2019) all told a similar story of South Asian adult women's reluctance to name and report sexual violence, but discussed this in the context of marriage, the subordination of women, and the privileging of community over the individual.

In their interviews with 37 professionals, Reavey et al (2006) reiterated some of the issues voiced by Laungani: specifically, that South Asian women were concerned more with culture and community than with what had been done to them. They conceptualised this as 'cultured selves' to denote the way that the women's sense of self was always relational, never unitary. For this reason, the professionals spent more time addressing contextual factors – culture, family, and the material implications of speaking out such as potential homelessness – before they could discuss the abuse and its impact on the women as individuals.

In a further piece from the same research project, Ahmed et al (2009) located South Asian women's reluctance to talk about sexual abuse within cultural contexts that privilege men and expect women to submit to their husbands' right over their bodies. They found that:

- ▶ any recognition of abuse was undermined by the women's belief that they had to concede to all unwelcome sex from their husband and sacrifice their own wellbeing for the benefit of husband and family
- ▶ these gender disparities were conducive to victim-blaming, as disclosure would have far more impact on a woman's reputation (partly determined by her marriageability) than that of the man abusing her

- ▶ maintaining the family unit was prioritised over individual women's rights, and this balance of power over the individual was reproduced by every member of the family, including mothers and mothers-in-law.

Their interviewees – eight English-speaking survivors of sexual violence within marriage – talked about family and culture as significant barriers to disclosure.

Both Reavey et al (2006) and Ahmed et al (2009) were complex considerations of professional interactions with South Asian survivors of sexual abuse; they went beyond the discussion of shame and honour, to a careful analysis of the dilemmas facing professionals who wanted to support women balancing individual health impacts and the defence and protection of husbands, families, communities and cultures. While letting women talk about being ill and offering them a diagnosis could be one way for them to access support, and might then enable them to recognise the sexual abuse, Reavey et al and Ahmed et al were concerned that this would reinforce prevalent tendencies on race and culture in their field – notably the pathologisation of Asian women and the concealment of a range of experiences of violence and abuse, including racism and intimate partner abuse.

Ahmed et al also made an important point about Asian culture not being static: the interviewees had taken steps to exit abuse and to ensure that their own children's welfare was not compromised or subordinated to family honour or reputation.

Gill (2009) offered insights from survivor interviews with South Asian women for her PhD research, some of which (along with findings from her later work with Harrison) are addressed in Chapter 7. Her five interviewees were survivors of sexual violence in the context of intimate partner violence. Gill reiterated earlier findings that family and community dynamics normalise violence against women, make perpetrators of abuse 'untouchable', and act as significant barriers to naming and reporting abuse. She observed that hostile reactions to disclosures and the stigma associated with leaving husbands and families suppressed any discussion of sexual violence, yet 'coping' with the violence took its toll and led to a range of physical and mental illnesses.

As part of a much larger project (also covering police responses to the sexual abuse of Asian women – see section 7.2), Harrison and Gill (2018) underlined the impact of honour and shame specifically in relation to female virginity and marriageability. Sexual violence was seen as having permanently damaged or ‘spoilt’ a woman or child, and Asian families tried to cover over any loss of virginity through forced marriage and honour-based violence. The lack of discussion of sexual violence within South Asian communities meant that their interviewees associated rape with men outside the home and were not aware that rape within marriage was a criminal offence.

In another article from the same research project, Gill and Harrison (2019) conducted a detailed analysis of the experiences of 13 South Asian adult victims/survivors of child sexual abuse and sexual violence. They elaborated on victim-blaming responses to sexual abuse within South Asian communities. Specifically, sex was seen as dirty and victims/survivors were implicated in their own abuse as children/adults who had committed a sin. In turn, this sinful activity would have a negative effect on their lives. Perpetrators of abuse were also protected by the pressure to stop victims from speaking out.

Rehal and Maguire (2014) interviewed 13 South Asian female victims/survivors of sexual violence in a marital context, three of whom had experienced childhood sexual abuse. They also ran focus groups with 12 religious community leaders, 12 professionals, and 37 more South Asian women attending local community groups. They identified shame, honour and respectability as important barriers to disclosure and access to services, and reiterated the points on victim-blaming above.

The findings from Jassal’s (2020) interviews with eight South Asian adult female survivors of childhood sexual abuse had parallels with those of Harrison and Gill and Rehal and Maguire, in terms of the pressures on adult victims of intimate partner sexual violence – and, in particular, the silencing effects of cultural prescriptions around shame and honour, which also enabled the abuse to continue for many years.

Jassal added that South Asian women were subject to the specific gender dimensions of cultural norms, as the maintaining of family honour was associated with female family members who represented the purity and goodness of the family; the women were further marginalised by the fact that services did not recognise the impact of these norms on their lives (see also Chapter 7).

Bearing some relation with Ahrens’s (2006) study of the social contexts for the disclosure of rape, Jassal found that her interviewees were even less likely to disclose their abuse if they were aware of negative responses to or silencing of other victims. However, she made the point that their decisions not to disclose were not solely determined by concerns around honour and shame – other factors were:

- not wanting to disrupt their family life
- not being able to make sense of what was going on
- not knowing what they could do to make it stop
- believing that they were in a meaningful relationship with the abuser.

In a book chapter based on the same – now expanded – dataset, Jassal (2023) drew attention to the way that all but one of the 15 women she interviewed had refused to disclose the abuse because they believed it would rupture the family unit; they seemed concerned to prioritise the family over their own wellbeing, in a context where they were acutely aware of the differential impact of shame on male and female family members.

Lack of support

Recent iterations of these concerns about barriers to disclosure for South Asian females come from Pall and Kaur (2021), Kaur et al (2022), Kannathasan and Jassal (2022) and Mansoor (2023). Writing about Sikh/Panjabi women specifically, Pall and Kaur (2021) argued that reports of child sexual abuse were more likely to be silenced when the perpetrator was also Sikh/Panjabi, because family honour was prioritised over the woman/child's welfare: families were led by an anxiety about their daughters' marriage prospects and what other people thought, and victims were moved around the country and across borders to prevent the abuse being disclosed. Pall and Kaur referred to the lack of support for victims within Sikh communities, and the particular way that men within the community rallied round to conceal abuse taking place in religious settings and/or by Sikh preachers.

Kannathasan and Jassal's (2022) report on a 'needs assessment' of Tamil communities and sexual abuse had similar findings. Three-fifths of the 123 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were comfortable talking about child sexual abuse with friends, but only a third were comfortable to do so with family.

Importantly, Kannathasan and Jassal offered insights into what Tamil young people think needs to be done. They found that 91% of survey respondents supported sex education for children at an early age, but there was a more mixed response to questions on whether the community should be involved in individuals' healing journeys following child sexual abuse: among respondents who were survivors of such abuse, all the males but only half the females agreed that it should. Suggested ways of involving the community included raising awareness, community groups, and informal chats. Individual therapy and mindfulness groups were the healing activities thought by survivors to be most helpful.

The most recent writing on South Asian women and sexual abuse (Mansoor, 2023) is based on three in-depth interviews with adult survivors of sexual violence, two of whom had been sexually abused in childhood. All were Pakistani or African-Indian Muslim women, and had been subjected to multiple forms of harm. One refused to name her experience as childhood sexual abuse because the abuse continued well into her 20s, and instead used the term "prolonged sexual abuse".

While the report echoed the points discussed above, there were some important additions:

- ▶ The women had been unable to disclose to parents or carers because they had not had a positive relationship with them.
- ▶ It was in sex education classes that the women had come to realise they were being abused, suggesting that these classes are a vital space for South Asian heritage children.
- ▶ The abuse had been missed by a range of professionals, including teachers – one woman had been beaten by her parents when her teachers reported her misbehaviour at school, but the teachers could have discussed her behaviour with her and understood that this reflected the sexual abuse.
- ▶ Disclosure had been met with violence and threats from those perpetrating the abuse.

Both survivors of child sexual abuse said there had been female complicity in maintaining the silence, and a significant degree of gender inequality within their household.

As discussed in Chapter 3, many of these issues are also reported in the literature on South Asians girls and child sexual exploitation (see Ward and Patel, 2006; Gohir, 2013; Sharp, 2015; Gutierrez and Chawla, 2017).

Issues specifically affecting Asian male victims/survivors of child sexual abuse are covered in section 8.2.

4.3 Racism and the pressure to be strong and silent

Themes of betrayal are pertinent in the writing on African-Caribbean women. Melba Wilson (1993) pointed out that, while survivors' symptoms were visible to others, their space to discuss the cause was restricted by disbelief and betrayal. Then Bernard (2001) found that Black African-Caribbean mothers struggled with divided loyalties between wanting to protect their children and not betraying family or community by seeking help (see section 4.5). She also found that poor experiences with statutory services contributed to these conflicted feelings and dilemmas.

In a later piece, Bernard (2016) elaborated that the emphasis on loyalty to the family was exacerbated by the experience of racism, through which extended family networks could play an important role in children's lives by providing access to supportive adults. However, the potential repercussions of reporting child sexual abuse were huge, she argued, and in some instances survivors could expect to be ostracised from their entire family network. As with Kanyeredzi's (2014) sense of the 'continuum of oppression', Bernard underlined the conjoined long-term health impacts of racism and sexual abuse.

Building on these interventions, Joanne Wilson (2016) argued that African-Caribbean Black British adult women lacked 'spaces to speak' about their victimisation, their emotions and dilemmas, within and outside the British Caribbean communities. The space to speak was curtailed equally by internal pressures to prioritise the fight against racism and external experiences of racism. If African-Caribbean Black women did not even have the space to speak and process their experiences, Wilson argued, they could not be expected to rebuild their 'space for action' in the aftermath of abuse. Interestingly, her interviewees claimed that racism had a greater effect on their lives than sexual abuse, but she suggested that this could be the consequence of being socialised to endure sexual abuse but resist racism.

The African and African-Caribbean female survivors of violence and abuse interviewed by Kanyeredzi's (2014 and 2018) – see section 5.1 – had spent up to 20 years making sense of what had been done to them, because their families had been preoccupied with the impact of disclosure on their reputation but had also feared social services' intervention. They wanted to see a more collective and visible acknowledgement of the sexual abuse as an injustice by family, community and wider society. Some had involved social services and the police, or someone else had done so; a number referred to social workers as having 'saved' them from the abuse, but had experienced intense feelings of betrayal nonetheless. Others commented on the dual obstacles to disclosure of cultural pressures within communities and racism in the wider society, as well as the state's role in enabling and reinforcing self-governance among these communities – particularly through religious leaderships.

Section 8.2 sets out the issues specifically affecting African and African-Caribbean male victims/survivors

4.4 The aligning of internal and external barriers

Investigating minoritised women's experiences of sexual violence including child sexual abuse, Thiara and Roy (2020) carried out interviews with 36 African, Asian and Caribbean female survivors and 37 professionals. They arrived at very similar findings to the other literature discussed in this chapter, but offered specific insights on the way that internal community and external (statutory) responses align to reinforce what they referred to as the 'un/speakability' of sexual violence:

- ▶ Severe repercussions from family members, gender inequality within their communities and immigration controls aligned to reinforce women's sense of shame and self-blame.
- ▶ Women's feelings of shame were also linked to historical processes of racialisation.
- ▶ Professionals reframed women's experiences of sexual violence as cultural issues, and recorded them as forced marriage or honour-based violence rather than sexual abuse.

It took the women two to seven years on average to find the right support agency. All had spoken out about the sexual violence at some point, but had not been heard. Families often exhibited denial and victim-blame – but where they did believe and support the women, this made a huge difference.

Echoing the findings of Kannathasan and Jassal (2022), Thiara and Roy found their interviewees were more likely to disclose to friends than to family members: "Being supported to 'speak' – to actually hear someone listening – within a safe space created the most powerful shift for women, because it broke years of enforced silence about their violations."

That alignment of internal and external barriers to disclosure was also key to Ali et al's (2021) report, based on interviews with 16 professionals working with children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups who had been affected by child sexual abuse. They underlined a number of the aforementioned internal barriers (a lack of understanding/awareness of child sexual abuse within minority communities, pressure to conform to gender roles, notions of honour and shame) and external barriers (poverty, insecure immigration status, limited awareness of support services, a lack of trust in services, and racism) as acting together to silence victims.

Kaiser et al (2021) designated some communities as entirely 'closed communities', almost entirely self-governing with their own parallel religious courts and systems. Many of the 107 community support organisations they interviewed spoke of a sense of betrayal in cases where survivors had reported sexual abuse to external agencies, and described how various 'community leaders' were policing members of those communities under the guise of protecting them from external criticism and racism. There was evidence that statutory services were working with the same 'community leaders' and thereby reinforcing the same community power structures that prevented disclosure. Well over a third of the 107 organisations said cultural arguments were overriding the rights of the child, while shame and honour were identified as barriers to disclosure by two-fifths and one-sixth of organisations respectively; pressure to maintain the honour of families and communities was said to fall disproportionately on the women and girls within those communities, and sexually abused girls were labelled as impure.

Rodger et al (2020) analysed perceptions of institutional responses to child sexual abuse and survivors' support needs. They conducted focus groups with 82 participants, 15 of whom were known survivors of child sexual abuse; half were from African, Caribbean or other Black ethnic groups, a third were Asian and most of the rest were of mixed ethnicity. Their findings bear many similarities with key findings from earlier research. They identified shame and stigma as key barriers to reporting, and made similar connections between gender relations within minoritised communities and silencing of sexual abuse, as well as the impact of sexual abuse on survivors' sense of belonging to particular ethnic groups and minorities. They also identified the fear of stereotyping and racism as external pressures.

Finally, Warrington et al (2017) held four focus groups with 24 South Asian heritage children to explore their views on disclosing intra-familial sexual abuse. They found a consensus among participants that a sexually abused child would be unlikely to tell someone about what had happened to them, because of a combination of internal and external factors including:

- the fear of not being believed, compounded by the subordinate role of children in families
- the risk of the family being ostracised from the wider community
- the potential to expose families and communities to further negative stereotyping from wider society
- the lack of open discussion about relationships and sex within families.

4.5 Responses of non-abusing parents and carers

Community ties and pressures

Most reflections on non-abusing parents and carers in the research literature are in relation to women; in the main, these are negative portrayals which represent African, Asian and Caribbean parents as in denial, complicit, or abusers. Wilson (1993), for instance, noted the mainstream stereotyping of Black mothers as being too busy to protect their children, alongside survivors' accounts that blamed their mothers for not protecting them.

Mtezuka (1989) was the first researcher to engage explicitly in a discussion of whether mainstream condemnation of the 'collusive mother' had any bearing on Asian parenting. Although she did not speak directly with Asian mothers, the nine Asian social workers who participated in her workshops were asked about their contact with Asian mothers. These social workers suggested that socio-economic factors stood in the way of Asian mothers acknowledging and responding to sexual abuse, as they were likely to be financially dependent on their partners and responsible for supporting families in their countries of origin. The social workers felt that this material context placed Asian parents under pressure to keep the family unit together and, coupled with cultural pressures (discussed above) and gender inequality, inhibited disclosures of sexual abuse. In addition, Asian mothers lacked familiarity with statutory agencies to be able to report.

Most of the literature on Asian heritage children has represented Asian parents as one homogeneous mass, primarily concerned with family reputation and marriageability; it has located them within transnational networks that reproduce violence by sending victims or abusers abroad and/or forcing victims into marriage to avoid child sexual abuse disclosures – see, for instance, Gilligan and Akhtar (2005 and 2006), Gill (2009) and Gutierrez and Chawla (2017).

Harrison and Gill (2018) found that South Asian mothers in their focus groups were more concerned about being blamed, being targets of gossip and being criticised for their parenting skills if the wider community found out about the abuse, than they were about protecting children. Harrison and Gill recommended creating intergenerational forums where mothers and daughters could have discussions and strengthen their relationships, to push against Asian mothers' tendency to advise their daughters to stay silent about sexual abuse.

Conversely, in their research on child sexual exploitation, Gutierrez and Chawla (2017) found that Asian parents faced with a disclosure were often supportive but did not know what to do. This could be specific to the association of child sexual exploitation with extra-familial (and often also extra-community) harm. Parents had resorted to seeking assistance within the community, which led to their options being restricted early on in the process as 'community leaders' reinforced the silence and shame. Gutierrez and Chawla therefore concluded that families and communities needed to be supported to understand how they could help their children who disclosed abuse.

Williams (2018a) arrived at similar conclusions in his evaluation of prevention work with Somali mothers, who needed convincing that child sexual abuse was an issue within Somali communities and were ambivalent about addressing it.

Divided loyalties and experience of statutory services

Public attention to the 'collusive mother' was picked up by Bernard's groundbreaking PhD research in the late 1990s, which led to three publications: a journal article (Bernard, 1999), a book (Bernard, 2001) and a book chapter (Bernard, 2016). The only study of its kind, it involved in-depth interviews with 30 mothers of sexually abused children, who self-identified as Black British African-Caribbean and were aged between 24 and 46. Six of her interviewees had themselves been sexually abused as children.

Bernard (1999 and 2001) found that the intersection of race, gender and class placed contradictory pressures on Black mothers and led to divided loyalties. Her research participants discussed material and emotional dilemmas: for instance, where they were in relationships with men who were neither the child's biological father nor sharing any parental responsibilities, they had to manage the guilt of not providing their child with a father figure. They were often also financially dependent on the men who had perpetrated the abuse.

Moreover, these mothers' contact with children's services reinforced both their preconceived views of how social workers would respond and their reluctance to report. They struggled to navigate unsupportive and hostile environments to get support for their children. Bernard (2001) observed that they were "subjected to intense scrutiny" and labelled as "dysfunctional and unstable". She highlighted the way that statutory-sector responses reproduced gender inequalities within Black households by holding mothers responsible for the abuse, and how Black mothers fought for an effective and protective response from social workers. She also argued that social work responses to Black children should be regarded as a form of devaluation.

Fifteen years later, Bernard (2016) argued for social workers to make a clearer distinction between abusing and non-abusing parents/carers. Underlining the importance of a non-abusing parent to a child's recovery, she urged social workers to build alliances with Black mothers by being attuned to "the matrixes of power" that were the context for their responses, rather than being inclined towards cultural explanations and moralistic judgements of good-enough parenting. She further contended that social workers ought to factor in Black fathers, typically invisible in social care assessments and assumed to be absent, rather than focusing solely on Black mothers in the context of cultures of blame.

See section 8.1 for details of Bernard's work on the intersection of race/ethnicity and disability.

Racialised stereotypes and expectations

In stark contrast, Wilson's (2016) PhD thesis on the sexual abuse of African-Caribbean British children devoted attention to victims/survivors' accounts of the particularly negative and sometimes violent responses of mothers to disclosures. Alongside Bernard, Wilson's publications offer the most conceptual and theoretical work on child sexual abuse and racialisation (see Wilson, 2023a and 2023b).

Wilson recounted how victims/survivors' lives were structured by the racialised stereotype of the strong Black woman, and how this was an expectation passed through the generations by Black women themselves. She developed the concept of 'maternal mimesis' to denote the way that mothers expected their daughters to endure a range of forms of violence and abuse while prioritising the protection of Black men from racism (Wilson, 2016 and 2023b).

Most of the victims/survivors in Wilson (2016) had received negative responses from their mothers, even though those mothers disclosed their own experiences of sexual abuse and violence over the years. The mothers had either completely ignored their daughters' disclosures or emphasised the futility of disclosure. There was an expectation that daughters should stay silent about abuse within the home to protect the family unit in the face of racism, sexism and socio-economic poverty. Silence and endurance were represented as forms of resilience and even resistance. The victims/survivors had internalised this, and all described themselves as strong Black women even if they also talked about the long-term impacts of being silent about the abuse (see section 5.1).

In line with Bernard's (1999) findings, some of the victims/survivors in Wilson (2016) indicated that a Black mother may seek to ignore abuse within the home because of financial dependence on the abuser and/or poverty, or may feel unable to cope because the same man is subjecting her to intimate partner violence. Wilson's writing (2016 and 2023b) has also included examples of mothers disciplining their daughters' "unruly bodies", thereby playing into the caricature of young Black women as hyper-sexualised.

More recently, Ajayi's (2023) detailed analysis of an interview with a sexual abuse victim/survivor of Nigerian heritage (detailed in section 3.4) has added to the above discussions on the contradictory feelings that victims/survivors experience towards mothers who are less than supportive of them. The woman did not blame her mother, but was disappointed that the mother was prioritising her own needs over her daughter's welfare. Ajayi described the mother's response as threefold:

- responsabilising – she put a lock on her daughter's door and placed the onus on the daughter to protect herself from her stepfather
- victim-blaming – she told her daughter to take a pregnancy test, so she clearly knew the abuse was taking place but assumed her daughter was an active participant
- denial/shame – she told her daughter to keep it quiet because of fear of what others would think.

In all these responses, there was no attention to the perpetrator. Ajayi concluded that social workers and other professionals seeking to support children and their non-abusing parents/carers "need to think about the multi-layered and routinised forms of domination that converge in such families which may limit some mothers' ability to effectively safeguard their children from sexual abuse".

5. Thematic analysis: Impacts on victims/survivors

The impacts of child sexual abuse on victims/survivors of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage may stem from the abuse itself, from cultural/societal attitudes towards the abuse – which may also have prevented them from disclosing it – or from negative responses to disclosures. This short chapter outlines the published research into those impacts.

5.1 Physical and mental health impacts

Lacey and Dolan's (1988) study, based on data from an eating disorders clinic, offered some insights into African, Asian and Caribbean heritage girls and child sexual abuse. It compared them with White service users and offered some interesting comparative points on disclosure/identification and the relationship between sexual abuse, eating disorders, depression and alcohol dependence.

In the first of two surveys looking at domestic abuse and sexual violence in Sikh/Panjabi communities conducted by Sikh Women's Aid (Pall and Kaur, 2021), two-thirds of respondents reporting abuse/violence said they had suffered long-term impacts. Of these, 72% had suffered depression or anxiety, 67% had problems with trust, 46% had suffered from anger issues, and 43% had experienced breakdowns in intimate relationships. However, the data on impacts was not cross-tabulated to provide specific details of the impacts of child sexual abuse.

In another Sikh Women's Aid survey the following year (Kaur et al, 2022), respondents described specific impacts of sexual abuse – anxiety, depression, trust issues, problems with intimate relationships, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, anger, sleep problems and alcohol addiction – but again it was unclear how many of these were identified by respondents that had been sexually abused as children.

Mansoor's (2023) report on three female Pakistani and African-Indian Muslim survivors of sexual violence, two of whom had been sexually abused in childhood, detailed the negative impact of the sexual abuse on the women's physical and mental health. One of the women preferred to talk about 'violations' rather than 'violence' – a powerful statement – to shift attention from the perpetrator's actions to his incursion on her feelings, her body and her sense of self.

Gangoli and Hester (2023) highlighted the long-term detrimental mental health impacts and the high levels of further abuse in adulthood that can follow child sexual abuse. In their sample of seven mainly South Asian women who had been sexually abused in childhood, all but one had experienced further sexual violence in adulthood and all also experienced domestic abuse as adults.

There was some mention of physical and mental health issues in Reavey et al's (2006) study of South Asian women and sexual abuse/violence. Professionals noted that South Asian women talked about physical ailments and mental health issues rather than their experience of sexual abuse – something that Reavey et al termed 'symptom talk' – but the professionals worked with this as a way in to discuss the underlying causes. The professionals were balancing tensions between the individualised nature of therapies and the community context of the abuse, especially where South Asian women's submission to these community norms and their attempts to ignore the problem had significant mental health impacts, including susceptibility to self-harm, suicide, and depression.

A few years earlier, Hicks and Bhugra (2003) reported that South Asian women in the UK were three times more likely to attempt suicide than their White counterparts, and that this was particularly influenced by the pressure on them to remain with violent and abusive partners and families.

The legacy of sexual abuse on the body

The literature on female Black adult survivors of child sexual abuse addresses two issues that are not considered in the writing on South Asian adult survivors. Firstly, the earliest pieces by Bogle (1988) and Melba Wilson (1993) contain an autobiographical component as the authors included their own accounts of childhood sexual abuse within those publications. Secondly, Bogle (1988), Wilson (1993), Kanyeredzi (2014 and 2018) and Joanne Wilson (2016) offer some insights on the impact of childhood sexual abuse on Black women's feelings about themselves and their bodies.

Kanyeredzi's (2014 and 2018) PhD research was the only in-depth, theoretical and conceptual discussion of the legacies of sexual abuse for the body and the self of African and African-Caribbean heritage women. She undertook life history interviews and photo elicitation exercises⁷ with nine African-Caribbean survivors of violence and abuse, six of whom had experienced sexual abuse – intra- and/or extra-familial – in childhood.

Kanyeredzi found that the contexts of migration, poverty, racism and displacement led to feelings of alienation and disorientation. Also, the interviewees' hair symbolised the abuse – neglected hair became an outward marker of the abuse, whereas well-groomed hair reflected attempts to conceal all signs of abuse. The sexual abuse marked women's bodies and scarred their sense of self, and Kanyeredzi developed the concepts 'nugatory self' and 'racialised gendered shame' to describe the way that the women carried the abuse as an "emotional burden" on the body and on their mental state.

The women identified extreme worry and sadness, feelings of betrayal, and dissociation from their own bodies – including neglect, starvation and self-harm – as effects of the abuse. Kanyeredzi described their continual recollecting and processing of abuse and violence to make sense of their experiences of child sexual abuse, as well as their "daily attempts to (re)assemble self and body image from a history of splitting, fragmentation and liminality". The women she interviewed had spent decades processing and concealing sexual abuse and other forms of violence.

Kanyeredzi coined the term 'continuum of oppression' to denote African and African-Caribbean women's experience of violence and abuse across the life course, starting with sexual abuse in childhood and followed by different forms of violence/abuse such as racism and domestic abuse.

Similarly, Bernard (2016) underlined the conjoined long-term health impacts of racism and sexual abuse on Black children's psychological wellbeing and on their 'relational lives', with racism accentuating the isolation, feelings of shame and stigma that result from sexual abuse.

⁷ Photo-elicitation' uses images to stimulate culturally relevant reflections in interviews and has become a common method in visual sociology.

5.2 Abuse in religious settings and its impact on faith

In an analysis of the experiences of six adult victims/survivors of childhood abuse by Muslim authority figures, described in section 3.4, Chowdhury et al (2022) said their interviewees had experienced a ‘cognitive conflict’ between the strength of their faith and the position of the perpetrator – and the longer it took them to address the abuse, the more severe the impacts had been.

All six interviewees had experienced a religious disjuncture and stayed away from religious festivals, as these reminded them of the abuse, but this had led to further isolation from family and community. Nonetheless, Chowdhury et al found that they were distinguishable from other survivors of faith-based abuse, because they had moved “from contamination narratives about faith⁸ to a more redemptive sequence” where they eventually separated out the abusive acts and the faith. Other studies have also found that survivors of sexual abuse held on to their religious belief as sources of coping and healing – see Kanyeredzi (2014 and 2018) and Ajayi (2023).

All of Chowdhury et al’s interviewees reported long-term mental health impacts, ranging from suicidal thoughts and self-harm to alcohol dependency and daily cleansing rituals. These manifestations of trauma contributed to their disconnect from family and wider networks across the community, and had led them to become more isolated.

⁸The concepts of contamination and redemption come from research on how people make sense of significant life events (McAdams et al, 2001). Contamination refers to a sequence that involves the move from a positive life scene to a negative one: the good is ruined by what follows it. Redemption depicts a transformation from a bad life scene to a subsequent positive one.

6. Thematic analysis: Services for and interventions with minoritised groups

This chapter examines the published research into the lack of – and need for – specialist services for African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, and into initiatives to address awareness of and attitudes towards child sexual abuse in their communities.

Thiara et al (2015) offered some insight into child sexual abuse identified by services working with Black and minority ethnic communities, through findings from a survey of support services' responses to women and girls experiencing sexual violence. From a large sample of 16,409 cases of sexual violence against women and girls identified by this study, Thiara et al identified 3,749 victims from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Where the victim's age was known, 7% of female sexual assault victims from those ethnic backgrounds (101 out of 1,541 cases) were aged under 18. Thiara et al identified 'child sexual abuse/adult survivor of child sexual abuse' (alongside rape and sexual assault, and sexual violence in marriage/relationships) as one of the top three presenting issues for women and girls from those backgrounds

6.1 From Black feminists self-organising to 'by and for' services

The earliest writing on the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children was produced by Black feminist activists in their accounts of consciousness-raising processes and activism, where Black adult survivors were speaking about race/ethnicity at the first-ever national conference on child sexual abuse (Bogle, 1988) or about child sexual abuse at a Black feminist conference (Wilson, 1993).

Both Bogle and Wilson discussed the significance of these autonomous spaces in contexts where child sexual abuse was represented as an issue only for White people, or where Black victims/survivors of that abuse were silenced by statutory services' racialised stereotyping and by pressure from their own communities.

Bogle's (1988) article is an account of the way Brixton Black women's group – established in 1979 to tackle poverty, racism, sexism and class oppression by providing support services, a creche, a library, and developmental activities – addressed child sexual abuse as part of its work. Two of the founders of the organisation, themselves survivors of this abuse, had set up a Black women survivors' group which was attended by 15 other Black women.

Melba Wilson (1993) also reported on the key issues for Black female survivors at a support group session for Black women within a feminist conference. These issues included the sexualisation of Black women's bodies; myths about incest as normal within Black households (see section 7.1); the medicalisation of Black women's experiences so that the focus was on the symptoms rather than the cause; and Black women's "complex coping mechanisms".

Almost 30 years later, Joanne Wilson (2016 and 2023a) spoke with adult victims/survivors of child sexual abuse, experts in the field, and rape crisis organisations, and produced an analysis of African-Caribbean women's activism in this area. She argued that her research participants struggled to understand their experiences because of the lack of 'spaces to speak', both within and outside their communities (see section 4.3). While many of the victims/survivors had disclosed child sexual abuse to family members and others during their life course, negative responses meant they had not been able to process and make sense of their experiences of the abuse. When Wilson surveyed 13 rape crisis organisations, however, she found that only two offered specific 'BME/BAME' provision and most lacked understanding of intersecting axes of power.

At around the same time, a survey of 38 organisations – including sexual assault referral centres, sexual and domestic violence services – by Thiara et al (2015) found that services were inaccessible to Black and minority ethnic women, and were few and far between, even in areas with considerable Black and minority ethnic populations. Six of the nine domestic violence organisations were specialist Black and minority ethnic organisations – but only one of the other three, and eight of the 19 independent specialist sexual violence organisations (members of Rape Crisis England and Wales), offered specific services for Black and minority ethnic women and girls.

Almost half (47%) of the organisations said they provided specific services for 14–18-year-old girls, but none of these was specific to Black and minority ethnic girls. In fact, 10 professionals interviewed by Thiara et al identified a significant gap in "age-appropriate support services for young Black and minority ethnic women"; where their own organisations had undertaken specific work with Black and minority ethnic women/children, there had been a significant increase in referrals.

The need for autonomous spaces was also highlighted by Warrington et al (2017), who identified only four specialist Black and minority ethnic services for sexually abused children – and by Gutierrez and Chawla (2017), who argued that young South Asian women needed to have a choice in whether they sought support from universal child sexual exploitation services or specialist ones.

This is an extension of a long-standing argument for specialist services – such as made by Firmin (2010 and 2011) for girls affected by gang violence, by Gohir (2013) for a dedicated helpline for sexually exploited Asian/Muslim victims/survivors, and by Sharp (2013) for a dedicated refuge provision for South Asian heritage children – on the grounds that victims/survivors of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage were more likely to trust and receive appropriate responses from such services.

However, there is still very little information on what a good response would look like, especially a specialist response for African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children who have been sexually abused.

The only study to have come close to addressing this is Thiara and Roy's (2020) on minoritised women and sexual violence, in which interviewees valued specialist women's services for the following reasons:

- advocacy, particularly in the context of a hostile and discriminatory society (some interviewees had received support from Black and minority ethnic women's organisations to improve the statutory services assessment)
- relatability (seeing themselves in the service)
- flexibility and accessible holistic support
- safe spaces that enabled them to speak out after years of enforced silence
- the absence of assumptions about what was going on for them.

However, although some of these interviewees were reflecting on childhood sexual abuse, Thiara and Roy did not focus on that abuse.

In Mansoor's (2023) exploration of South Asian women and sexual abuse, based on in-depth interviews with three survivors of sexual violence, the interviewees shared positive reflections on the South Asian Support Group at Greater Manchester Rape Crisis as a place where they could:

- meet with others who understood their culture and religion
- be among women who were not pressuring them to make police reports or take other forms of action
- have space to reconcile with their bodies and sense of self.

6.2 Community awareness-raising initiatives

Much of the literature on cultural codes and norms, discussed in section 4.2, refers to the need to raise awareness about child sexual abuse, which can challenge negative attitudes that obstruct disclosure, prevent help-seeking, and stigmatise survivors of abuse. It also notes the need for interventions that enable victims/survivors to recognise and name sexual abuse and learn about support services.

However, there has been very little literature on how to do this effectively. A few interventions have been documented but, in the main, studies have provided more data on what is going on within those communities than evidence of change and the mechanisms for creating change.

The value of real-life examples to shift attitudes

Bogle (1988) demonstrated that Black feminist activists and non-governmental organisations had been talking about child sexual abuse within local communities for some decades, but the article by Gilligan and Akhtar (2005) was the earliest academic publication about a specific awareness-raising initiative on child sexual abuse. It was based on a series of consultation sessions with Asian women, followed by a large conference involving a wider Asian audience, set up in response to concerns about low reporting rates of child sexual abuse within Asian communities. The events were intended to raise awareness of the local Bradford Family Support Unit, and to gain feedback on a leaflet on child sexual abuse produced in Asian languages.

Gilligan and Akhtar found that the use of case examples was particularly important for shifting the attitudes of Asian women from denial to empathy to disclosure. However, there were issues with the terms used for the Urdu translation of child sexual abuse (“Jensi Tashadud”), as no one was familiar with it. As with many of the other examples in this section, the consultation sessions could be seen only as the beginning of a conversation and there was no follow-up with the women to see what, if anything, changed in terms of levels of understanding, attitudes, or reporting rates.

Warrington et al (2017) highlighted that positive case examples – being able to see someone from a similar cultural and religious background to disclose abuse, and to see that “things turning out all right for her” – were supportive of disclosures by South Asian heritage children.

Taking time to understand the issues

Williams (2018a and 2018b) reported on a three-year project with Somali mothers in London, part of a larger education programme for parents and carers which the Lucy Faithfull Foundation wanted to extend to non-English-speaking communities. The project team, which included two Somali workers (one male and one female), felt that it would be easier to work with Somali mothers than Somali fathers.

The project aimed to engage the mothers in identifying and preventing ‘situational risk’ within the home.⁹ It involved four stages:

- ▶ consulting professionals from the Somali community on where the risks lay
- ▶ interviewing Somali mothers to find out about their children’s domestic lives, and about sexual abuse risks to children in the home
- ▶ holding focus groups with mothers to find out which issues they wanted to work on
- ▶ devising and delivering workshops to improve the mothers’ knowledge of and confidence in talking about child sexual abuse, and their ability to recognise grooming and signs of sexual abuse.

⁹ The notion of situational risk is taken from Smallbone et al’s (2008) integrated theory of child sexual abuse, which suggests that some offenders are not primarily attracted to children but rather engage in sexual abuse as opportunity presents; prevention then focuses on preventing situations where men may have unsupervised access to children (such as bathing, sharing beds) and/or situations where they build an emotional attachment or have physical proximity that triggers sexual feelings.

The team also produced a documentary on the real-life story of a Somali woman who had been sexually abused by a relative, and showed this in the workshop.

Fifteen Somali mothers were interviewed before the workshop to find out whether they felt there were any risks to their child within the home environment and what, if anything, they were doing to reduce this: 12 of the 15 attended the Lucy Faithfull Foundation workshop, and three months later completed a survey that sought to assess what difference it had made to their understanding and actions with regard to situational risk. These 12 women were then interviewed one month after they had completed the survey. As Gilligan and Akhtar (2005) had done, the project evaluators found that real-life stories told by community members were the most impactful part of the project. They also found that:

- ▶ the project team needed an understanding of the lives of the people/communities in question – discussions with professionals and mothers before the intervention had helped the team to develop a better understanding of the sexual abuse risks to Somali heritage children in the home
- ▶ care was needed when engaging with ‘insiders’ (people from the community known to the project team), in order not to exclude others outside the team’s social network
- ▶ considerable resources and time were required to engage professionals and local people in devising the workshop before anything could be delivered
- ▶ such interventions needed to run in tandem with community-wide campaigns for there to be a shift in the contexts within which the target group could be expected to implement what they had learnt.

In evaluating the project, Williams (2018a) noted that the implementation of risk assessments and learning was hindered by the wider view in the Somali community that women should not speak about sex/sexuality, and by beliefs and value systems that created barriers to identifying child sexual abuse. For instance, some of the women believed that Muslim men could not sexually abuse children because of their role as protectors of children. Williams made the following points:

- ▶ The intervention was a top-down initiative designed and delivered by White staff at a national organisation, rather than one that came from local people in the community, and so it could be viewed as paternalistic.
- ▶ The intervention placed a responsibility on Somali mothers to prevent sexual abuse rather than supporting them to learn about rights and pathways to services.

Increasing women’s confidence to change the conversation

Kelly (2019) undertook an evaluation of Apna Haq’s four-day ‘train the trainers’ programme for Black and minority ethnic women in South Yorkshire, which sought to build their capacity to change the conversation about child sexual abuse within their communities and in other agencies. The training took place in December 2018 and January 2019 and was designed to “take the women on a journey of the self” at the same time as training them on child sexual abuse. Fourteen women were selected, and 12 completed the full course. They identified barriers to working on child sexual abuse in their communities – taboo, stigma, shame, denial, lack of knowledge – and were concerned that talking about child sexual abuse in the community might fuel racism. They felt that change could come through the creation of safe spaces, intergenerational dialogue, and where survivors led that change. To be part of that change they felt they would need increased confidence and a support network.

Again, there was an emphasis on the usefulness of case studies for increased understanding and recognition. Also, there were unintended consequences, as a sexual violence forum and a WhatsApp group were established as a result of the programme.

Seven of the 12 participants completed questionnaires three months after the training and explained that they had used the material in their workspaces, but there was little detail on how; Kelly commented that the length of the evaluation period made it difficult to ascertain the impact of the training. Also, the participants raised concerns about the amount of content that was being delivered – they wanted less material on concepts and theories, and more space for reflection.

Confidentiality concerns

More recently, Nixon (2022) evaluated a project undertaken by Quetzal, a counselling service for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, to “mitigate the impact of sexual violence in childhood experienced by Asian women in Leicester” and improve those women’s mental health and wellbeing. The project took the form of a web-based self-help package (for all Quetzal’s clients, not just those of Asian heritage), an awareness-raising strategy tailored to the needs of Asian women, and support through therapeutic counselling. Quetzal took a ‘community-based approach’ (which Nixon did not define), raising awareness of the project through events, discussions and social media – including 12 YouTube videos on Quetzal’s work and a live Instagram discussion.

Nixon found that the web-based self-help package had received 269 downloads, 11% of which were by South Asians, and that Quetzal’s approaches to raising awareness had led to an 80% increase in South Asian women accessing its counselling services. However, South Asian survivors had been concerned about confidentiality, wanting to be assured of this before proceeding – and wanting to be able to access the counselling somewhere out of sight of the community, such as at a venue in the city centre.

The evaluators were able to log the impact of the counselling on South Asian women, in that they had gone on to find employment, and partner organisations working with South Asian women reflected that contact with Quetzal had enhanced their services. However, the evaluators were not able to quantify any shift in attitudes at a community-wide level.

In terms of what worked about this community-based approach, Nixon found that it had benefited from a facilitator with the right skills; having one counsellor devoted to this initiative; ‘community connector’ volunteers who offered diverse representation from South Asian communities; the use of case examples; partnerships with South Asian organisations in Leicester; women-centred and women only spaces; and raising awareness of the initiative through national publicity drives.

Obstacles included the time required to develop contacts within South Asian communities, as Quetzal did not already have these; the fact that it could not deliver its services in community languages; reliance on volunteers who could only stay for a short time; and the fact that childcare responsibilities limited women’s ability to attend the sessions.

Nixon concluded that this three-year project needed to be much longer (between five and 10 years) to see a shift in community attitudes, and that Quetzal would need to hold quarterly meetings with South Asian partner organisations to sustain the work. Furthermore, the Asian women who accessed the counselling service were in the younger age groups (predominantly 16–34), so Quetzal needed to think about how to engage South Asian women over 35.

Improving support for trafficked children

Hynes (2013) met with refugee organisations to understand what they knew or thought about trafficking, and particularly child sexual exploitation, because it seemed that only two organisations – the Victoria Climbié Foundation and AFRUCA – out of dozens of refugee groups were working on this area. She believed that refugee organisations could play a vital role in identifying sexually exploited children, and that the information and contacts they held with countries of origin could benefit support services. Through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, however, she found that refugee organisations knew little about the forms of trafficking; in fact, they were anxious about engaging with this issue as they feared their communities would be pathologised and stigmatised as trafficking communities. Hynes did not offer suggestions as to what could be done to address this.

Critical analysis of ‘community’ and frameworks for raising awareness

To date there has been only one article offering a critical analysis of the terms and framing of community awareness-raising initiatives within minoritised communities. Dhaliwal et al (2015) produced some reflections on the consistent reversion to narrow understandings of ‘community’ and a practice that seeks to engage ‘community leaders’ and ‘religious leaders’ (seen as power brokers who can shift ‘community’ understanding), as opposed to women’s and children’s organisations, in work on sexual abuse.

References in the literature to engaging community leaders and religious leaders can be found in Rehal and Maguire (2014), Harrison and Gill (2018), and Gutierrez and Chawla (2017), for example – but Dhaliwal et al underlined the need to learn from Black feminist critiques of the undemocratic and sexist practices of community and religious leaders, and the way that multiculturalist and multifaithist practice serves to reinforce inequalities within communities.

They also pointed out that the term ‘community awareness-raising’ is applied to a diverse range of events, and would need clear aims and objectives and targeted messaging to be effective.

Subsequently, D’Arcy et al’s (2015) evaluation of the Barnardo’s Families and Communities Against Sexual Exploitation (FCASE) programme recommended that community awareness-raising activities should be seen as part of a process rather than as one-off events that can themselves create change.

More recently, one in six (17%) of the 107 community support organisations interviewed by Kaiser et al (2021) wanted education to be an important part of the report recommendations, including:

- ▶ the distribution of information on recognising and reporting child sexual abuse, particularly in a range of languages
- ▶ ‘communities of champions’ to tackle barriers to disclosure within closed communities
- ▶ funding that can diversify service provision to reflect diverse communities
- ▶ effective sex and relationships education that teaches children about their bodies and their rights, and about schools’ important role in delivering this
- ▶ the need for education material for adults, such as through sensitive outreach programmes – however, this once again places the responsibility for protecting children on mothers.

7. Thematic analysis: Mainstream service responses

This chapter reviews the published research literature on mainstream (predominantly statutory) services' responses to child sexual abuse victims/survivors of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage.

Most of the literature on service responses to African, Asian and Caribbean survivors of child sexual abuse has been about social work and local authority children's social care teams. Only three reports have explored the responses of the police and the criminal justice system, and three have made specific points about counselling provision. Little attention has been paid to the health and education sectors' responses to the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children.

From the earliest article by Bogle (1988) through to the Race Equality Foundation's report more than 30 years later (Ali et al, 2021), there are consistent references to children and families lacking trust in statutory services because of their experiences of societal racism. Moreover, systemic racism has been identified as a major barrier for young people subject to immigration controls, who fear that they or their family members may be deported if they contact statutory services (Jolly and Gupta, 2024), including about child sexual abuse (Kaiser et al, 2021).

As noted in section 6.1, a number of research publications have looked at the provision of specialist services for child sexual abuse victims/survivors of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage, and have identified a lack of such services run by mainstream non-governmental organisations.

7.1 Social work/children's services

Several studies have referred to the link between poor social care responses and the under-reporting of child sexual abuse by people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage (Webb et al, 2002; Gilligan and Akhtar, 2005; Warrington et al, 2017; Gutierrez and Chawla, 2017; Ali et al, 2020). The overarching concerns have centred on:

- racism and patterns of racialisation
- the way that children's rights are compromised in favour of cultural arguments
- the impact of these factors on disclosure and identification.

Bernard (2016) noted that that the mistrust of services is a response to social workers' use of deficit-based approaches rather than strengths-based ones. In contrast, six out of the nine African and African-Caribbean victims/survivors interviewed by Kanyeredzi (2014) were particularly positive about social services and police interventions, even describing situations where they had been 'saved' by social workers from child sexual abuse.

There has been some discussion in the literature of the differential racialisation of groups of children and young people. As early as 1988, Bogle argued that child sexual abuse was seen by statutory services as a 'White' issue, and social workers assumed that incest was a normal part of Black family life.

A decade later, Bernard (1999 and 2001) highlighted the social and contextual factors that shaped mothers' responses to children's disclosures of sexual abuse, including an acute awareness of the racism within police and social care, material and financial concerns, and dependency on abusive males. These factors were overlooked by social workers, who preferred to assume that Black mothers were colluding with the abuse and failing to protect their children.

Bernard noted that statutory-sector responses reproduced gender inequalities within Black households, as social workers shifted attention from the perpetrator of abuse to the Black mother, thereby making her responsible for the abuse. Bernard's research participants struggled to navigate unsupportive and hostile environments in order to get support for their children. They were "subjected to intense scrutiny" and labelled as "dysfunctional and unstable". Bernard also highlighted social workers' practices of denial, which attributed the children's behaviour to their disability.

Perceptions of young Black women concerned Davis (2019), who examined why Black girls were missing from statutory-sector caseloads. In a blog piece based on eight interviews with Black female experts (practitioners or researchers), over half of whom were victims/survivors of child sexual abuse, she argued that Black girls were less likely to be receiving support from services; were more likely to be engaged through punitive projects around gangs and serious youth violence that criminalised their behaviour; and were subjected to racism and sexism simultaneously. Davis identified three inter-related features that contributed to these girls remaining under services' radar:

- ▶ the hyper-sexualisation of Black female bodies
- ▶ a tendency to see Black girls as adults rather than as children ('adultification')
- ▶ a tendency to view them as strong and resilient, and therefore not deserving of victim status or protection.

These points were reiterated by Bernard (2019) in her analysis of a serious case review and the relevant literature. She found that Black girls were depicted as sexually promiscuous and subjected to many forms of devaluation which, in turn, influenced their own sense of moral worth. Conversely, Black men were viewed as offenders rather than as victims of abuse, and this reduced their likelihood of disclosing abuse or seeking help. Bernard argued that the serious case review of 'R', a Black girl who had been sexually exploited, was a clear example of the practice and impact of adultification: social workers had not been concerned about R's welfare, even though she would disappear and then be dropped off by a much older man and turn up with large amounts of money. Social workers ignored these factors and did not use missing persons protocols, nor speak with R about her safety.

Statutory-sector racism has taken other forms as well. Webb et al (2002) raised concerns about the way that cultural arguments could trump children's right to protection and a safeguarding intervention. Although their article was based on just three case studies, only one of which concerned child sexual abuse, that case raised serious issues and attitudes.

This was the case of a girl who initially came to social services' attention when she became pregnant at age 11 and was withdrawn from school. A GP diagnosed the pregnancy and a midwife visited the girl. Social services then placed the baby in care, but they chose to believe the parents who claimed that the girl had been a victim of stranger rape, and also conceded when the parents insisted on not pursuing the matter for fear that it would affect the girl's marriageability.

At age 13, the girl was pregnant again and had a termination. But this time her situation had attracted media attention, she was made a ward of court, and she then disclosed that she had been sexually abused by her older brother. The entire family had been aware of the sexual abuse. No action had been taken when her parents had withdrawn her from school, and social workers had not tried to speak with the girl on her own. This meant that she had remained in the family home and continued to be raped by her older brother for at least another two years after social services had been initially alerted. By then the parents had sent the older brother back to their country of origin to avoid prosecution.

In line with Bernard's points about the role of non-abusing parents, Webb et al pointed to material concerns that can lead families to remain silent about the abuse. They found that familial denial of the abuse was compounded by professional denial. In all three cases they studied, social workers had failed to identify appropriate alternative accommodation and address language barriers. The child sexual abuse case raised serious ethical issues about how professionals address cultural arguments and attitudes – in this instance, attempts at cultural sensitivity by social workers, (and by doctors and midwives) had led them to collude with the family. In turn, the girl "suffered serious and significant harm". Webb et al argued that agencies needed to prioritise their statutory duty to protect children over and above any concerns, such as requests for privacy, raised by family members.

Other studies have reported that social workers do not appreciate the significance of honour and shame for Asian girls/young women, including the very real threat of violence that prevents them from disclosing abuse and should be addressed as an added child protection issue in the wake of any disclosure (Gill, 2009; Sharp, 2013 and 2015; Gutierrez and Chawla, 2017; Gill and Harrison, 2019; Jassal, 2020). While Sharp (2013) and Sharp-Jeffs (2016) found a lack of coordination between risk assessments for forced marriage, missing persons and child sexual exploitation, Gutierrez and Chawla (2017) noted the tension between safeguarding policies to involve the family and the need to protect young women from honour-based violence. They also found that, when it came to working with Asian girls and young women, professionals feared being accused of cultural insensitivity and racism. Often girls would present at crisis point and therefore in a high level of distress. Gutierrez and Chawla emphasised the need for professionals to prioritise safeguarding over concerns about culture/ethnicity, and for managers and commissioners of services to ensure there are sufficient resources for staff to be properly trained on the additional community dynamics, strategies employed by perpetrators, and the threats to Asian young women, so that they could respond appropriately.

Another angle to the culture argument – something that seems to surface in relation to Asian communities specifically – was Ward and Patel's (2006) finding that practitioners covered up violence and abuse by depicting it as 'inter-generational conflict' or a 'culture clash'. Ward and Patel provided examples where social workers had not intervened even where there was evidence of physical abuse, leaving the young person to resolve the issue within the family. This lack of support had led young Asian women to spend more time outside the family home, and they had then been targeted for sexual exploitation by men outside the family. Additionally, Gutierrez and Chawla (2017) found that social work responses were delayed by fears of intrusion into Asian family/community life and a belief that certain behaviour needed to be concealed to retain the honour of the family.

Dilemmas faced by Asian staff in social services

Mtezuka (1989) engaged Asian social workers in a workshop setting to understand how they were navigating the fine line between critique of the Asian community and complicity in poor social services responses to Asian heritage children. Her research took place at a point where Home Office 'Section 11' funding – money for local authorities to make special provision for minority ethnic populations in their area – had led to a critical mass of African, Asian and Caribbean social workers questioning the appropriateness of a 'one size fits all' approach. She found the Asian workers were likely to feel ambivalent about undertaking this work, but they had advantages over White colleagues in being able to recognise cultural and religious arguments and identify appropriate interventions. However, they had very little understanding of how to respond to child sexual abuse cases specifically; in fact, they initially denied that this was an issue for Asian heritage children.

Mtezuka's workshop participants were keen to shift the focus from families to systemic issues, and argued that training on child sexual abuse and social work responses "bore little relevance to the family lifestyles of minority groups"; they felt that interventions did not take account of "role expectations placed on Asian parents and children, the structure of marriages in Asian communities, the economic dependency of extended families on male wage earners, and the impact of racism on disclosure and help-seeking particularly by women". They wanted assessments and interventions to be geared towards addressing poverty, racism and conflict – and pointed out that, while child sexual abuse discourse posited that girls 'acting up' as mothers should be considered potential victims of sexual abuse, in Asian households the eldest or only female child frequently stood in for her mother in regard to cooking, cleaning and looking after the other children.

The participants expressed a preference for placing Asian heritage children with extended family members – even if in a different part of the country – rather than placing them with White foster carers, in order to avoid the family being stigmatised and isolated in the wake of a disclosure. They positioned this as a concern about the children “losing their roots”, but clearly this would be a family- and community-centred approach rather than a child-centred one. Even where they conceded that child protection was paramount, they wanted child protection procedures to be concerned with the impact on the family’s standing and reputation: intervention strategies were considered helpful if they shielded the family from stigmatisation within the community. However, they were also critical of the way that social services engaged community and religious leaders to act as intermediaries in cases involving Asian heritage children; this was seen as a serious breach of confidentiality.

Ong’s (2018) research on UK-based Malaysian parents and practitioners found very similar issues. Although his study engaged only a small number of participants, he too found that practitioners were conflicted, struggled to navigate these dilemmas, and had a greater tolerance of some practices.

What comprises a good social work response?

Most of the studies reviewed have advanced suggestions for improved service responses. In the main, these have been directed at children’s social care services.

Warrington et al’s (2017) study of child sexual abuse within the family environment collected children’s views on what comprises a good social work response/service. They identified the following 10 key attributes:

- active listening
- demonstrating belief
- care and compassion
- facilitating choice and control
- facilitating safety
- subject expertise
- advocacy
- optimism/reassurance and encouragement
- being non-judgemental
- being trustworthy.

In relation to Black children specifically, Davis (2019) provided direction on anti-racist social work practice. She recommended reviews and analyses that consider local demographics and compare them with information on who is accessing services, and where Black children are located within these. Clearly this direction applies to Asian heritage children as well. In fact, several publications (e.g. Bernard, 2016; Fox, 2016; Thiara and Roy, 2020) have made the point that services are obliged by equalities legislation to compile ethnicity/gender/age/disability data, and to reflect on who is accessing their services (and who is not) when compared to local demographics.

Davis (2019) added that social workers needed to engage in reflective practice that involves exchange with a ‘critical friend’ and reading relevant texts, and that services should be ready to champion uncomfortable conversations on race and racism.

As Gutierrez and Chawla (2017) noted, commissioners of services also have a role to play: they should resource outreach services to build relationships with communities that are under-represented within service delivery, and develop their knowledge of local needs.

Webb et al (2002) grappled with how and whether social workers should take account of cultural values, beliefs and pressures. They noted the need to avoid a 'colour-blind' approach (which assumes that every child victim of abuse is in the same position) and instead to recognise the specificities of the situation for children from different communities, while not compromising a child-centred approach because of cultural arguments. At a very basic level, they argued that social workers should not lower child protection standards to take account of cultural pressures and should always prioritise the requirements of the Children Act 1989.

Sharp (2013) noted that social workers needed to learn about and take account of the connections between forms of violence and abuse, such as honour-based violence, forced marriage, going missing and child sexual exploitation, and to join these separate risk assessments to ensure that children are protected at every stage.

Studies have referred to the importance of an intersectional approach (Sharp, 2015; Bernard, 2019), and particularly one that pays attention to power relations and gender dynamics within families and communities (Ajayi, 2020). Nevertheless, social workers should not assume that cultural practices serve all members of the community in the same way (Ward and Patel, 2006). Similarly, they should remember that Black children are heterogeneous (Bernard, 2016) – some speak fluent English while others don't, and some are subject to immigration controls while others are not. The same is true of Asian heritage children.

Intersectional approaches to social work should be able to identify the social contexts, inequalities and adversities that Black young people have to navigate, and which may present obstacles to reporting or lead to the misrecognition of abuse or exploitation (Bernard, 2019). In relation to her analysis of the serious case review into R, Bernard concluded:

“An intersectional lens has the potential here to enable the development of counter-narratives to avoid victim blaming and to challenge the dominant perception that girls and young women who are sexually active are participating in transactional sex when in fact they are being manipulated in coercive and exploitative relationships and how this might be affected by racism for Black girls and young women.” (Bernard, 2019:210)

Webb et al (2002) warned social workers to steer clear of intermediaries (such as interpreters or advocates linked to the community) between the state and victims/survivors of child sexual abuse, especially where they might be trying to conceal the abuse. While supporting this point, Bernard (2016) noted that it may be possible to identify positive, supportive adults within the wider family or network, who would be committed to a child-centred approach.

Several researchers (e.g. Sharp, 2013; Ajayi, 2023) have pointed to the need to address material factors, such as the availability of properly funded and supportive placements for Black and minority ethnic children. Ajayi (2023) reflected on the difference that access to good housing and counselling support made to the Nigerian heritage victim/survivor of child sexual abuse she had interviewed.

The unaccompanied asylum-seeking children interviewed by Laya and Papadopolous (2009) argued for sexually segregated accommodation and more support with accommodation; resources to protect them from being targeted for sexual maltreatment, such as information on support services and rights-based information; a trusting relationship and regular contact with one key adult; and a helping agency such as a local community centre for refugees or their specific ethnic group. Laya and Papadopolous had produced a booklet in eight different languages on sexual maltreatment (their term), which could be given to children aged 11 and over, and had developed a model of inner and outer circles of trust and assistance. They also recommended social care support that can strengthen the self-esteem and assertiveness of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

At a policy level, Gohir (2013) argued that national plans were needed to address the specificities of sexual exploitation and abuse of Black and minority ethnic children, and that this should be matched by training on this topic. Sharp (2013) argued that professionals' ability to respond to children from different communities should be a constitutive part of their work, not an add-on.

7.2 Policing and the criminal justice system

Three of the reviewed papers/studies were specifically about the police response to the sexual abuse of Asian or Asian/Muslim girls and women – Gill and Harrison (2016), Gohir (2019), and Halo Project (2020) – although they tended to be unclear about victims/survivors' age at the time of the abuse. A fourth study (Warrington et al, 2017), of child sexual abuse within the family environment, asked victims/survivors about their experiences of the police and the criminal justice system, but the report made no mention of race/ethnicity.

There has been no published research on experiences of policing and the criminal justice system among African and Caribbean heritage children who have been sexually abused, even though the case of 'Child Q' has highlighted the dehumanisation and harassment of African-Caribbean heritage children, in particular, through strip searches (Children's Commissioner, 2022).

As part of a project on South Asian women in England and Wales, Gill and Harrison (2016) interviewed nine police officers from four police areas, a Chief Prosecutor, a high-ranking civil servant, and a policy officer. While their research focused on the police response to intimate partner sexual violence, they included one case study of sibling sexual abuse where the male police officer seemed uninterested in the victim/survivor's account and appeared to side with the older brother who had abused her.

Gill and Harrison also spoke to South Asian women and representatives of women's organisations, who made the following observations:

- ▶ South Asian women were not reporting sexual violence to the police.
- ▶ They saw the police as predominantly male and as unlikely to believe them.
- ▶ They feared that the police would side with their husbands and would not understand the cultural context of the abuse.

Gill and Harrison were unable to address the concerns about under-reporting, because of the lack of ethnicity data collected by police and the Crown Prosecution Services (CPS). They did, however, find that 28% of frontline officers in the four police forces they researched were women and 5.5% were from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the police interviewees claimed that forces could and did provide a female officer – and even an Asian female officer – when requested. Officers showed a fairly good understanding of the barriers to reporting for South Asian women, as well as cultural codes like honour, shame and modesty. However, Gill and Harrison concluded that training was lacking and, where it was delivered, ad hoc. Officers in only one of the four police forces had received training on cultural contexts, and one had been trained by a local Asian women’s organisation. In conclusion, Gill and Harrison lamented “the conditional and discretionary element of police protection”.

Gohir (2019) looked at data on the approximately 1,000 callers to the Muslim Women’s Network UK national helpline each year – almost all women and girls – and found that around 20% of them contacted the police before or after calling the helpline. She and her team analysed 21 cases between 2015 and 2018 in which Muslim women were in contact with the police and the criminal justice system. (Some of these cases were also referred to in the Halo Project’s super-complaint, described below.) Child sexual abuse was a feature of six of the 21 case studies.

These cases included intra- and extra-familial child sexual abuse, including by a religious leader, as well as historical child sexual abuse.

Across the board, Gohir noted:

- ▶ a lack of empathy
- ▶ victims/survivors being left to chase for updates on the investigations
- ▶ victims/survivors being frequently dismissed and not believed (including one historical child sexual abuse case where the suspects had not been questioned even a year after the report had been made)
- ▶ victims/survivors not being told of the outcome of investigations or when suspects had been acquitted.

The report found that police officers and judges lacked understanding of the impact of sexual abuse on Muslim/Asian women/girls. Also, police officers did not make the connections between child sexual abuse, forced marriage and honour-based violence, leading to gaps in protection for victims/survivors – and they did not appreciate how difficult it was for Asian/Muslim women to report child sexual abuse and lacked awareness of the barriers to reporting.

By way of example, one girl disclosed child sexual exploitation by her cousins and their friends when she came to social services’ attention at age 16 because of concerns that she was going to be forced into a marriage. She was removed from the family home and the police opened an investigation; they interviewed her, and she gave them the names of the perpetrators and other potential victims/witnesses. The police claimed, however, that she could not provide evidence of her abuse, and that it had not been corroborated by third parties such as her school (which had described her as troublesome). They closed the case, saying she had a history of lying, theft and ‘sexualised behaviour’, and had not been a reliable witness when interviewed. When she was in her early twenties, she asked the police to reopen her case, but they claimed that she had passed the statute of limitations – which, as Gohir pointed out, does not apply to rape and sexual assault.

Other girls/women were denied victim/survivor status by the police if they were seen as too assertive.

There were other examples of failings during police investigations. After an 18-year-old reported historical child sexual abuse by her stepfather, the policer lost or destroyed laptops containing potential evidence, and she was not told what had happened to statements taken from her younger siblings. (She was able to challenge the police decision not to investigate her stepfather by referring to the Victim’s Right to Review.¹⁰ The case then proceeded to trial, some three years after the initial report.) In another case, police said they could not understand the family tree of a 40-year-old woman who had reported historical sexual abuse by several men within her family.

¹⁰ This is a scheme that gives victims the right to ask for a review of a police decision not to charge a suspect.

Where the police were proactive and supportive in pursuing an investigation and eventual conviction of a religious leader for sexually abusing an 11-year-old girl, he received only a 40-week suspended sentence. The family felt let down by the CPS barrister and the judge; they said the barrister had ignored valuable evidence, had not challenged the defence barrister's aggressive questioning of the girl, and had seemed to joke with the defendant's legal team.

Soon after Gohir's report, the Halo Project compiled 15 case studies in a super-complaint on police responses to Black, Asian and minority ethnic victims/survivors of sexual abuse, mostly of South Asian heritage (Halo Project, 2020). It interviewed four victims/survivors of historical sexual abuse (three male and one female), 10 specialist organisations across England and Wales, Halo Project support workers, and experts in the field of sexual abuse within Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. They analysed impact statements by victims/survivors, reviewed relevant policing and CPS documents and guidance, and analysed survivor testimonies on the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's Truth Project website.

The 15 case studies in the super-complaint offered detailed insights on the links between child sexual abuse and honour-based abuse; specific examples of abuse within religious settings and in online contexts; and examples of the repercussions of disclosure (including where victims/survivors had been ostracised and subjected to death threats). The report also provided many insights on the race/ethnicity dimensions of police responses to child sexual abuse.

Echoing some of the points made by Gohir (2019), the Halo Project identified nine specific failings of the police and CPS:

- ▶ the over-use of voluntary attendance of suspects, which meant they had advance warnings of an investigation and used that time to destroy evidence and intimidate witnesses
- ▶ a lack of understanding of the connections between forms of violence, and of police responsibility to safeguard victims/survivors from the repercussions of disclosure (such as honour-based abuse)
- ▶ a lack of updates on the investigation's progress (a breach of the Victims' Code)¹¹
- ▶ a failure to provide information on the prosecution process (including in appropriate languages) and feedback during the prosecution
- ▶ a failure to explain and discuss special measures and offer other protective measures in court
- ▶ ineffective use of police resources
- ▶ a lack of empathy, including in considering the impacts of disclosure and the effects of the prosecution process on the victim/survivor
- ▶ an over-emphasis and concern with the position of the perpetrator and the impact on community cohesion
- ▶ a failure to understand the impact of the prosecution process on the victim/survivor, and the energy and resilience they need to get through this.

Some of these also chime with Warrington et al's (2017) findings on the limitations of the police response to child sexual abuse victims in general, including survivors having a "difficult and distressing" experience of the criminal justice system; and lacking access to pre-trial therapy.

However, as noted above, there is little data on the policing experiences of African and Caribbean victims/survivors.

In relation to the judicial system, section 8.1 describes research by Noack-Lundberg et al (2021) which revealed a failure to take account of the intersection of ethnicity, gender and disability in relation to forced marriage protection orders.

¹¹ The Victims' Code, also known as the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, is a statutory code setting out the minimum level of service that victims should receive from the criminal justice system.

7.3 Health services

In a study based on data from a paediatric service, Moghal et al (1995) noted a greater reluctance by hospital staff to act on sexual abuse concerns if the child was Asian. Like Lacey and Dolan's (1988) study of Black and Asian women attending an eating disorders clinic, described in section 5.1, Moghal et al said nothing about how health services should respond to and support African, Asian and Caribbean heritage victims/survivors of child sexual abuse. Both studies did, however, draw attention to the kind of data available through health services that ought to be considered for future research.

Other studies have referred to health services' tendency to medicalise symptoms of abuse and trauma (e.g. Wilson, 1993, Thiara and Roy, 2020). Women in Thiara and Roy's study wanted health professionals to ask more direct questions about what might be the underlying cause of depression and other symptoms they presented with. See also Reavey et al's (2006) findings on 'symptom talk' in section 5.1.

7.4 Education

A number of research publications have noted the role of schools and teachers in delivering sex, relationships and consent education; alerting children to the harms of sexual violence; and distributing rights-based information (e.g. Laya and Papadopolous, 2009; Beckett et al, 2013; Fox, 2016; Warrington et al, 2017). However, there is very little published research on the education sector or teachers' views and responses to the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. Practitioners from specialist Black and minority ethnic women's organisations in Thiara and Roy's (2020) study described schools as slow and reluctant to respond to disclosures of sexual abuse, regardless of whether the abuse was committed by peers, teachers or other adult men.

The recent case of 'Child Q' and strip searches of African-Caribbean heritage children (see section 7.2) has highlighted the close working relations between schools and the police. Strip searches may be considered a form of sexual violence, and may implicate schools in punitive and racist practices, but most if not all of the literature on sexual abuse and sexual violence within schools is focused on gender rather than race/ethnicity, and on students' harmful sexual behaviour rather than the abuse of students by school staff (e.g. Lloyd and Bradbury, 2023).

7.5 Counselling services

In the earliest book on child sexual abuse and Black women, Wilson (1993) highlighted the importance of Black feminist therapy and the benefits of its multiple tools (spirituality, rebirthing, co-counselling, and mother-child work) for surviving sexual violence.

A subsequent reflective piece by Laungani (2003) highlighted the tension between the individual and the communal (discussed in section 4.2), and recommended that counsellors engage with victims/survivors' values and beliefs to develop a connection. In his case study, he had identified specific Sikh scripts and psalms to open a conversation with a Sikh girl, which had moved her to talking about herself rather than family and community. However, that reference to religion could, in fact, have the opposite effect of mobilising concerns about community.

In the context of concerns about diversity among counsellors, Walji and Smith (2015) reflected on questions of matching a victim/survivor with a therapist of a similar ethnic heritage as part of counselling practice. Echoing points made by Gutierrez and Chawla (2017), they observed that South Asian victims/survivors were less likely to engage in therapy unless at crisis point – and while some preferred to be seen by an Asian counsellor, others did not. They noted the importance of addressing contexts and cultural codes and not just symptoms that locate the distress in the individual. They also discussed the potential for a strong therapeutic relationship across cultural differences based on respect and 'universal humanness'.

Moreover, Begum's (2018) ethnographic observations and interviews with counsellors noted concerns among South Asian men about being seen to access the service. This led to a recommendation that South Asian victims/survivors should be offered online counselling or some form of community-based support to allay this anxiety. Begum also advised that practitioners needed to acknowledge diversity within South Asian communities rather than viewing them as homogeneous and static.

8. Thematic analysis: Intersectionality and child sexual abuse

This chapter focuses on published research that has addressed the intersection of race/ethnicity with other factors – specifically disability (section 8.1) and gender/masculinity (section 8.2) – in relation to child sexual abuse.

Publications considering the application of an intersectional approach in social work are covered in section 7.1.

8.1 Reflections on disability

The earliest application of Crenshaw's (1991) work on intersectionality to the study of child sexual abuse was by Bernard (1999), based on her PhD research. Although Bogle (1988) and Wilson (1993) were effectively talking about intersecting axes of power in their reflections on Black women's disclosures of childhood sexual abuse, the importance of intersectionality as a concept and practice for understanding and responding to the sexual abuse of African-Caribbean heritage children was driven home by Bernard through a number of publications.

In her first publication, Bernard (1999) focused on the sexual abuse of Black (Caribbean heritage) disabled children. She detailed two mothers' experiences of seeking assistance for their children, both of whom had learning disabilities and were aged between 12 and 14. Both had been sexually abused within the home environment – one by a family member and one by foster carers.

Bernard argued that Black disabled children had to contend with “layers of racism” from statutory services – see section 7.1 – and “the combined effects of devaluation”. They also had to bear responsibility for the impact of disclosure on family and community. For instance, Natasha (not her real name) had to contend with the “negative valuation of her as a Black disabled girl, the invisibility of her experiences and the negative perceptions of her mother”. These interlocking relations of power shaped the landscape that she had to navigate “to gain support and protection”.

Bernard highlighted the lack of voice for Black disabled children who may not have the ability to explain what has happened, or may not have had the sex education to comprehend it. She also drew attention to the way that social workers attributed the signs of sexual abuse to the children's disability. In one case, they assumed that disabled children did not make good witnesses, and this circumvented police reports and criminal prosecutions. In the second case, the child's emotional distress was assigned to her disability and her mother's concerns were dismissed.

Bernard's PhD research made considerable use of the concept of intersectionality. It was published as a book (Bernard, 2001), in which she drew attention to the intersecting social and material factors and the way these impact on Black mothers' reactions to disclosure.

In a later book chapter based on case examples and reflections on the published literature, Bernard (2016) reiterated her concerns about the significant gap in knowledge around the scale and specific dynamics of the sexual abuse of African-Caribbean heritage children, as these were hidden within prevalence studies or aggregated in discussions of the Black, Asian and minority ethnic experience. She further noted that the disabled children of Caribbean heritage in her research had been targeted because of their disability.

Although the intersection of race/ethnicity, age and gender is implied, the research literature to date has contained little overt discussion of intersectionality when it comes to Asian heritage children – but the research presented by Gohir (2013), Sharp (2015) and Noack-Lundberg et al (2021) has highlighted the intersection of gender and disability in the sexual abuse and forced marriage of Asian disabled girls.

Gohir (2013) found that one-third of the young women in her study of Asian/Muslim girls and child sexual exploitation had a disability and had been subjected to both intra-familial and extra-familial abuse.

Sharp's (2015) study of the links between going missing, forced marriage and child sexual exploitation (detailed in section 3.2) unexpectedly found a connection between disability, forced marriage and sexual exploitation, but this was not the focus of her study, leaving a great deal of space for further research in this area.

These connections were mirrored in Noack-Lundberg et al (2021), which analysed 33 court judgments on applications for forced marriage protection orders that were issued between 2010 and 2020. Their main finding was that judges lacked any expectation of affirmative consent, even where disabled girls were being married off because of their disability and were unlikely to have the capacity to consent. Moreover, their examples showed that external religious scholars had been employed by defendants to uphold the right of a guardian to marry off a disabled child, and judges had preferred to view these as cases of arranged rather than forced marriage. Noack-Lundberg et al found that both gender and disability negatively affected victims' credibility as perceived by the authorities

8.2 Reflections on gender and masculinity

Much of the literature reviewed in the previous chapters has focused primarily on the sexual abuse of girls. Section 8.2 looks at the only two studies that have addressed the intersection of race/ethnicity, masculinity and child sexual abuse.

Begum's (2018) PhD thesis – some of the results of which were also set out in Gill and Begum (2023) – reported on qualitative interviews with eight South Asian adult male victims/survivors of childhood sexual abuse, semi-structured interviews with eight service providers, two focus groups with South Asian young men and women, and field notes from ethnographic immersion in a counselling service.

Four of the eight survivors had been sexually abused by family members, three by friends of the family (including a man from a local religious institution), and one by a stranger. All but one had disclosed the abuse in adulthood. The one survivor to disclose as a child had done so in a context where other children had reported the same perpetrator.

Begum's interviewees shared many of the same barriers to disclosure as reported in studies on South Asian women/girls (internalisation of victim-blame, concerns about family honour, feelings of shame), but gender and masculinity impacted the survivors' experiences in different ways:

- ▶ As males in the household, they were concerned that they had let their families down and did not want the abuse to taint their family's honour.
- ▶ Although they reported long-term impacts on their physical and mental health, disclosing the abuse represented an additional burden.
- ▶ They were concerned about being seen as different, and particularly about being labelled as homosexual.

Several of the survivors raised concerns about homophobia within South Asian communities, and the way that sexual violence against men is seen as affecting their sexuality. Furthermore, Begum's interviews with counsellors suggested that sexual abuse made Asian male survivors "feel less of a man".

South Asian female and male victims of sexual abuse were felt to be subjected to different gender norms: the women were accused of provoking the abuse whereas the men were made to believe that they should have stopped it. The counsellors in Begum's study claimed that South Asian male survivors were more affected by gender norms than cultural norms – but intersectionality is constitutive in that gender shapes culture, culture shapes gender, and the two cannot be prised apart.

In an article about six Black male survivors of child sexual abuse living in Canada, the USA and the UK, Myrie and Schwab (2023) offered additional observations on the racialised masculine norms that can interfere with disclosure and help-seeking – and the impact of sociocultural structures and dominant discourses on the aftermath of the abuse.

Four of the six participants had been sexually abused by family members, one by a local person in a position of trust, and one by strangers. All six had grown up in contexts where discussion of sex and sexual abuse was considered taboo – this was a significant barrier to disclosure and helped to perpetuate the abuse. Echoing some of the points made by Kanyeredzi (2014 and 2018) and Wilson (2016) in their PhD research with African and African-Caribbean female survivors of sexual abuse, Myrie and Schwab argued that adverse contexts for Black families mean that children are expected to endure hardships of all kinds.

For the men in the study, masculine norms meant that they could not show any weakness and had to find a way of managing the impact of the sexual abuse by themselves. Hyper-sexualisation and promiscuity were their tools for regaining and proving their masculinity, tendencies that were exacerbated by the hyper-sexualisation of Black male bodies within the music industry. Where the men struggled to live up to this expectation of Black masculinity because of the impact of the abuse, they felt “broken”.

Being in control was another feature of Black masculinity that was ruptured by sexual abuse – and this led some of the men to blame themselves for the abuse rather than recognise the power imbalance between themselves and the abuser. The heterosexual underpinning of Black masculinity also meant that the survivors thought it preferable to be abused by a woman than a man.

Like Begum's South Asian male survivors, the men would not talk openly about their abuse in case this led to speculation about their sexuality. Myrie and Schwab appealed for a media campaign to break down some of these barriers to disclosure and help-seeking.

Although several other studies have included African, Asian and Caribbean male research participants (Firmin, 2011; Sharp-Jeffs, 2016; Chowdhury et al, 2022; Rodger et al, 2020; Pall and Kaur, 2021; Kaur et al, 2022; Kannathasan and Jassal, 2022), they have not offered an analysis of the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender/masculinity.

9. An overview of ongoing research

This chapter reports on relevant research that was under way as of March 2023 or had recently been completed. This information was collected through:

- interviews with researchers known by the author to be conducting studies relating to the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children
- an online survey which was distributed through the CSA Centre's social media channels and the author's personal networks.

Interviewees and survey respondents were asked about their job, the funding for their project, the research aims and main focus, the methodological approach, the sample size and (where appropriate) the preliminary findings. They were also given space to comment on the strengths and limitations of their projects, and to offer their thoughts on research gaps and on priorities for the future.

Information was gathered on seven research projects, which were being undertaken by six minoritised female researchers; one researcher was involved in two distinct projects. All seven studies were university-based, and five were being undertaken as part of PhD study. Five were fully funded, either through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) studentships/ grants or through internal university funds; one was a part-funded PhD; and one was an entirely self-funded PhD.

9.1 Details of the research projects

Demographic profiles

Of the seven research projects:

- four were focused on child sexual abuse within South Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) communities in the UK; one of these was a comparative study of child sexual abuse within Pakistani communities in the North of England and in one specific region of Pakistan
- a small research project was looking at Asian communities including both Southeast and East Asian populations in the UK
- one had engaged Black (African and Caribbean) and Asian young people
- one was focusing specifically on Black (African and Caribbean) young people aged 14–18.

In terms of engagement with research participants:

- five projects were working with adults – three involved interviews with victims/ survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and two were at the design stage but were intended to engage adult victims/survivors and practitioners
- one was at the early stages of recruiting young people to define and evaluate an intervention aimed at preventing sexual violence
- one involved interviews with young people aged 14–18 and interviews with professionals.

Methodological approaches and research samples

All seven research projects were qualitative, primarily involving interviews with victims/survivors and/or practitioners. One project was planning participatory research with young people; two others planned to use focus groups.

Of the three projects that had already undertaken fieldwork, all had a survivor sample size of 20 or fewer:

- ▶ One had interviewed 15 adult survivors of child sexual abuse.
- ▶ The second had engaged with six adult victims of forced marriage (three of whom were also child sexual abuse survivors) and practitioners, and had conducted focus groups with members of the South Asian community.
- ▶ The third project, focusing on Black children subjected to extra-familial sexual abuse, had conducted some interviews with practitioners.

The interviews in these three projects were all long, in-depth, and either biographical or narrative. Alongside the case file analysis, they promised detailed data on the experiences of people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage.

One of the other four projects was proposing to conduct comparative interviews in the UK and in Pakistan with more than 150 participants. Outside the studies specific to child sexual exploitation discussed in Chapter 3, this would be the largest child sexual abuse study to date focusing on Asian survivors (Pakistanis specifically), and would employ qualitative methods.

Research focus

Two of the seven projects were focused on intra-familial sexual abuse, and one was specifically about extra-familial abuse; the other four did not draw a distinction, and planned to engage in discussions about all forms of child sexual abuse. Two of them were addressing child sexual abuse within a wider remit, of forced marriage and sexual violence prevention respectively.

The researchers hoped that all the projects would result in recommendations to improve service responses.

Preliminary findings

Only one of the researchers was in a position to discuss preliminary findings. Her analysis added weight to existing evidence regarding family and community silencing of victims/survivors and the long-term impacts of this. She described the layers of family complicity in child sexual abuse, the connections between child sexual abuse and other forms of violence and abuse, and differential protection for male and female children within the same household. Her work offered fresh insights on the relationship between agency and coercion, in the context of forced marriage.

Strengths and limitations

Researchers were asked for their views on the strengths and limitations of their projects. All said that the strengths were about bringing through survivor voices and fresh insights on the experiences of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. The limitations focused on small sample sizes and challenges in recruiting participants.

9.2 Researchers' thoughts on research priorities

The surveys and the interviews enabled the participants to contribute their suggestions and knowledge to a discussion of research gaps and priorities. Some also attended the stakeholder focus group sessions; their views are included in Chapter 9. The others identified issues including the need for:

- clearer evidence of the scale of sexual abuse within African, Asian and Caribbean communities
- more research into the impact of child sexual abuse, with specific reference to emotional, psychological and health impacts
- detail on intersectional experiences of help-seeking, taking account of experiences of racism, language barriers, autonomy in family settings, and other barriers to accessing services – including the particular experiences of different communities
- more information about awareness among professionals and services, and more specific (and disaggregated) data on the numbers of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children supported by services
- specific information about the experience of child sexual abuse within minoritised religious settings
- research on non-abusing caregivers, including what they need to assist them to better support African, Asian and Caribbean heritage victims/survivors of child sexual abuse
- research involving African, Asian and Caribbean heritage boys and men who have experienced child sexual abuse
- research into African, Asian and Caribbean heritage victims/survivors' sense of justice.

10. Discussions with stakeholders

As part of the study, four focus group sessions were held with African, Asian and Caribbean heritage people who were working in the field of child sexual abuse, or who had lived experience of that abuse. These sessions gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on the literature review's initial findings, discuss priorities for future research, and network and exchange information. An outline of the issues discussed is presented in this chapter.

10.1 How were the discussions conducted?

The focus groups comprised:

- ▶ one session with academics/researchers
- ▶ one with voluntary-sector practitioners (staff from Black and minority ethnic women's organisations and community organisations, as well as staff of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage in mainstream organisations)
- ▶ one with members of the CSA Centre's 'experts by experience' group – victims/survivors of child sexual abuse who advise on and review aspects of the CSA Centre's research activities and practice improvement plans/projects
- ▶ one with both academics and practitioners.

Each focus group session lasted between 90 minutes and two hours.

In total, 42 people participated in the sessions: 38 women and four men. Two-thirds (n=28) were South Asian, four were East or Southeast Asian, two were Southwest Asian, five were of African-Caribbean heritage, and three were of African descent. Considerable efforts were made to identify and engage more African, Caribbean and East Asian stakeholders because of their under-representation in published research, including by offering one-to-one meetings if they could not attend the designated focus group meetings.

Stakeholders were provided with an overview of the known literature at the mid-term stage of this review, a list of key themes from that literature, and a list of potential research gaps. They were then invited to discuss the following questions:

1. Are there specific pieces of research in this area that we should ensure to include in our review?
2. Where do you think are the gaps in knowledge?
3. What should/could be research priorities going forward?
4. What research/evidence base would help you in your work?

It is important to note that, rather than prioritising one research area over another, the focus group participants gave each other considerable space to feed back on the evidence base and discuss their specific contributions to the field, and identified a range of issues for future research. They also commented that the literature review's findings aligned with their experiences in and knowledge of this area.

Within the published literature, there are two aspects to the discussion on disclosure and identification: the ways in which cultural norms and practices silence victims/survivors, and the structural barriers and racism facing victims/survivors and their families when accessing services. These areas also received the most attention in the focus groups.

10.2 Reflections on the quality of service responses

There was great concern among stakeholders that research had not translated into a qualitative change/shift in service provision. Practitioners felt that research evidence was being ignored by statutory services and policymakers. For instance, a representative of a women's organisation reflected on how the police had failed to take account of all the training and evidence associated with disclosing sexual abuse within Black and minority ethnic communities:

“They didn't consider the issue around revenge, reprisal and retribution once somebody had reported from BME groups. And they didn't consider honour and the seriousness of reporting sexual abuse within the community... How can we make policymakers really listen to the research that is available? And as a collective voice, say it's time to demand change for our survivors. And that change needs to be in listening to victims, having trauma-informed services, not referring them to generic sexual violence services because... so many people are taking their lives because they're being failed by their families and the abusers and then they've been failed by the services.”

It was said that poor service responses amounted to a failure in the public sector equality duty.¹²

Another participant highlighted problems with multifaithist¹³ practice, saying that statutory services and the courts were seeking the views of 'religious leaders' and then conceding to their denial of sexual abuse:

“I can give you an example about one of our cases of child sexual abuse. We worked with the court, and then social services went to an Imam and asked whether playing with the sexual body [of a child] is a form of sexual abuse. The Imam told them, 'No, this is the love for the child,' and it went to court and the judge even said, 'This is part of the culture of the community, so we have to ignore it.' There are many practices that are harmful sexually for children, and we need to educate the community, but we have to ask our social services and police to look at the issues of child abuse as required by the norms and terms that we have in the UK, not by what an Imam or a community leader says.”

¹² This duty requires public authorities to have due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to “eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; [and] foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it” (Ministry of Justice, 2012).

¹³ Dhaliwal (2020) contended that, in recent years, religious leaders had strengthened their hand in mediating relations between the Government and minoritised communities in the UK. This was the combined effect of several processes: the allocation of public funds to religious organisations, the premise that religious leaders represent minoritised communities whenever key areas of social policy are being developed, and the way that religious identity had become the main lens through which the Government categorises minoritised communities, particularly Asian communities. This meant that social workers and children's services assumed a religious frame for Asian heritage children, for instance, even if those children were non-believers. Moreover, the most conservative and patriarchal religious forces benefited the most from this multifaithist governance and practice, as they used these spaces to consolidate their version of the religion and their power and control over the members of their group.

Moreover, poor service responses and media attention to these were thought to result in families not being supportive of children going through the criminal justice system:

“On one side you’ve got issues around reporting of rape and sexual violence and the poor prosecution rates that everybody’s talking about. It’s in the media... and parents are reading this and are considering whether it’s worth putting victims – their children – through this process where potentially it’s not going to get anywhere anyway. And then you’ve got the pressure from other parts of the community... who are going out and threatening families about them prosecuting their family member (i.e. the perpetrator), and we know of these cases as well.”

Concerns were also raised that service providers’ leadership teams lack real understanding of anti-racist practice, the equalities agenda, and inclusion, and highlighted the impact of this on those leaders’ ability to build services which address issues raised by research/evidence:

“The people who are creating programmes – what training do they actually have on understanding what anti-racist practice is, what adultification is, what intersectionality is? Training like that enables people who are maybe not from the BME community to start to see why it’s important that we focus on this demographic, because I think that’s sometimes where the missing link is... It’s about equipping policymakers and practitioners to do this work and to have conversations while they’re delivering services, like ‘How is your race, ethnicity, background impacting on the safeguarding, on your ability to talk to me?’ How do we equip people to do that?”

10.3 Actions to improve service provision

Stakeholders identified a number of actions that could improve service responses.

Raising awareness of support pathways for African, Asian and Caribbean heritage victims/survivors

Practitioners were of the view that young victims/survivors were offered support services only when the situation was acute, rather than being assisted at the early stages of their help-seeking journey. Also, young victims/survivors were thought to be unfamiliar with pathways for reporting their experiences and the availability of support and assistance.

One counselling organisation noted that, after raising awareness of their services among minoritised communities, it had seen a sharp increase in reports of child sexual abuse; this would suggest that children and young people are ready to discuss their experiences once made aware of services that they can access.

Expanding specialist service provision for young victims/survivors

Noting the benefits of specialist services for domestic violence victims from minoritised communities, some academics/researchers considered that similar specialist services were needed in relation to child sexual abuse:

“In my own research I’ve often found that the South Asian victims don’t really want to go to mainstream service providers because their experience there has just been quite racist – and if not racist, then there is an acute lack of understanding of their cultural context... One survivor [in my research] was first referred to a predominantly White refuge and just didn’t like it there, and actually was subjected to more vulnerability. But in her second instance of forced marriage, she was referred to a more South Asia-centric specialist service and that is when she found some form of help. Another victim of honour-based abuse told me that going to a South Asian refuge changed her life for good. So, just the experience of dominant White specialist organisations versus specialist organisations for minority communities – there is a huge difference.”

“I found that in my own research as well, in terms of services that are mainly provided by White counsellors not understanding shame, honour, that whole barrier to disclosure. And that [is] putting women off seeking further services and so they end up just containing it within themselves. And so there’s this whole link with mental health and lifelong implications of child sexual abuse which, if not disclosing as children, is a very common phenomenon.”

However, participants noted that few, if any, services responding to child sexual abuse were specifically for African, Asian and Caribbean victims/survivors. They referred to one service in the North of England for South Asian adults, one geared towards African Caribbean girls, and one that was extending its counselling provision to South Asian adult survivors. A practitioner mentioned a support group for trafficked children, which had been accessed by Southeast Asian young people who had been sexually abused until it was closed by the generic service provider.¹⁴

In this context, it is unsurprising that several participants said African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children rely primarily on mental health services for support:

“There are hardly any services providing support and interventions for Black African and Caribbean and Asian children, or even adult survivors. And what I found was that it’s often through mental health support services that you get to learn about lived experiences of child sexual abuse.”

Practitioners from the ‘by and for’ women’s and girls’ services responding to domestic abuse noted that these currently focus mainly on supporting adult women who have experienced domestic abuse – and said they could, with appropriate resourcing, develop focused work with children in response to child sexual abuse as well as effective support for survivors of sexual violence, including child sexual abuse. Representatives of a Black and minority ethnic women’s organisation and a Chinese community organisation said they would like support to build their capacity in this area. An academic added that she had been working with Southeast Asian community organisations that are keen to do likewise.

Supporting voluntary sector organisations to carry out equality impact assessments

Attention turned to what mainstream voluntary-sector organisations were doing to address the gaps in specialist service provision for African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. Concerns were raised that children’s organisations were not undertaking equality impact assessments to ascertain and reflect on who was accessing their services and when.

Participants pointed out that children’s organisations are obliged to collate and reflect on this data, and to be proactive in ensuring that their services can meet the needs of this group. It was suggested that a piece of work could be undertaken with mainstream voluntary sector organisations, supporting them to collate equality data and adjust their services accordingly.

¹⁴ The CSA Centre report *Support Matters* (Parkinson and Steele, 2024) contains further information on services in England and Wales that focus on supporting child sexual abuse victims/survivors from minority ethnic backgrounds.

10.4 Topics for future research

The focus groups also identified a number of areas for future research to better understand and improve service responses.

Child sexual abuse in educational contexts

In the fourth focus group session (which involved both academics and practitioners), strip searching was reflected on as a form of state sexual violence, and the actions and perceptions of schoolteachers were highlighted. Within this context, several stakeholders noted the lack of research on educational settings as conducive contexts for the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children.

Although there has been growing attention paid to sexual violence in schools (see Chapter 7), this has focused on its gender dimensions – male students' sexual harassment of and violence towards female students – and the role of technological developments and social media. No published or ongoing research has addressed the role of teachers in perpetuating the perpetration and legitimisation of abuse, or explored sexual violence in education settings (not just schools) towards African, Asian and Caribbean heritage students specifically.

“We are seen as easy targets, particularly young women in universities. One case I dealt with was a rape case, and she said the perpetrators are seeing us as easy victims because they know that we're scared to report this to our parents because the first thing they're going to do is get us married off or stop us from pursuing our education... This is where I would like to see more researchers going into colleges, schools and universities to get a true picture of what the issues are.”

Child sexual abuse and wider health issues

One of the 'experts by experience' observed that, while a lot of work has been undertaken on service responses, health remains a glaring gap.¹⁵ She pointed to possible areas for exploration:

“For instance, on the one hand we know that there are short- and long-term health impacts of sexual abuse. On the other hand, there is research evidence on the disproportionate impact of particular conditions on minoritised communities (e.g. diabetes and heart disease). But this has not been brought together to explore concerns about sexual abuse within minoritised communities and the data on poor health.”

Barriers to disclosure

A considerable portion of the published literature describes how entire families, communities and cultural practices act as conducive contexts for child sexual abuse by preventing victims (and their advocates) from speaking about the abuse, and by affording protection and impunity to perpetrators. Some stakeholders raised concerns that the political context encourages a focus on communities, as a way of blaming them for child sexual abuse while shifting attention away from the problems with statutory provision; they suggested that a key cause of under-reporting is the impact of racism on people's ability to trust services. However, others emphasised the urgent need for resources to enable a sea change within minoritised communities so that children and young people can speak out and access support.

While some expressed caution about research that focuses solely on community awareness-raising, others emphasised the need for more research and evaluation on how to shift norms, values and practices that legitimise sexual abuse within diverse communities.

Stakeholders at the focus groups for practitioners and for experts by experience highlighted the denial of sexual abuse within their communities. They identified specific cultural practices and norms that suppress and cover up sexual abuse: shame, stigma, a belief that the victim is possessed, forced marriage, and sending children abroad. They also underlined the serious repercussions for breaking this silence, including threats of violence and murder. One academic articulated this as part of a continuum of violence across the life course.

Practitioners shared that they too had been physically threatened for speaking out on child sexual abuse within their communities, especially in situations where they had shed light on sexual abuse within religious settings or where the abuse had implicated the hierarchy of a religious establishment. One talked in detail about how her windows and car had been smashed and she had gone into hiding because, in her words, the police could not guarantee her safety. Moreover, religious leaders had actively tried to discredit her organisation's work as part of their claim that rape and sexual abuse were not an issue for their religious institutions.

Practitioners and academics also noted that family members sometimes collude with extra-familial abusers, particularly abusers within religious settings. It was suggested that researchers should explore these layers of complicity and denial at a conceptual level, rather than merely collecting data.

Recognising and naming child sexual abuse

There was considerable discussion about minoritised communities' levels of awareness of child sexual abuse. Some stakeholders called for an attitudinal survey to get a general sense of what minoritised communities know and think about child sexual abuse. Low reporting rates from East Asian and Southeast Asian communities were highlighted, and were felt to result from a lack of awareness and understanding.

Echoing points from the literature review (see Chapter 5), this comment highlights the way that recognising and speaking out on abuse was connected with access to a language that can name it:

“Along with not being able to understand the [abuse], I think it's also not being able to communicate it properly from one language to another, especially in this country where the dominant language is English. And Black and Asian victims of child sexual abuse might be at an age where they might be getting formative Hindi or Punjabi lessons. So it might be a bit tricky to decipher or for them to understand what's going on and then report as well.”

Several stakeholders wanted to be involved in developing awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives within their communities.

It was suggested that, while there is already considerable research evidence on silencing mechanisms, cultural norms and the problem of community pressure, there has not been enough research into and evaluations of awareness-raising interventions that can effectively change this situation.

¹⁵ A forthcoming study of the mental health impacts of violence and abuse on minoritised survivors, by Thiara, Roy and Thomas, will address this gap.

Borders and international networks

As in the published literature and ongoing research, the connections between minoritised communities in the UK and their countries of origin was a strong theme across the focus groups.

Stakeholders pointed out that parenting practices and cultural norms can be significantly influenced by beliefs and practices ‘back home’, and that understandings of sex and consent can be shaped by the law (e.g. on the age of consent) in the country of origin.

Additionally, they said, the closeness of families and communities means that pressure on victims/survivors to remain silent about their abuse comes both from families in the UK and from families in the country of origin.

These transnational links can also facilitate the moving of victims/survivors and/or perpetrators to countries outside the UK to avoid accountability and to protect the honour of the victim’s family. Stakeholders related how victims/survivors were being moved to other countries through forced marriages, and how marriage partners exploited this history of abuse to control and exert power over them. These points have also been made in the literature on violence against South Asian women, but not in the published research on child sexual abuse. It was said in the focus groups that the ability to move across borders also strengthens the hand of those who commit the abuse, as they can relocate to their country of origin to avoid prosecution and accountability.

Where victims or their families have insecure immigration status, this too can contribute to the pressure to remain silent. If the process of accessing support involves pathways that are governed by immigration controls, stakeholders said, there is pressure on children to stay silent because of the risk that speaking out might pose for the family. They added that immigration controls can divide families, meaning that children may be ‘left behind’ in their country of origin with abusive relatives – and that children in other countries are being sexually abused by UK-based men through online spaces, sometimes facilitated by the children’s family members living in the UK.

There is very little published research into the impact of immigration controls on African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children who have experienced sexual abuse; this is an area of research that needs to be explored further.

Stakeholders also noted the connections between child sexual abuse, trafficking, and criminal exploitation, feeling that this was another area that could be explored and documented through research. They suggested that some victims/survivors of child sexual abuse – such as Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian girls – were being supported by anti-trafficking projects and had disclosed multiple forms of sexual violence along their trafficking journey.

Finally, stakeholders identified the need for investigations into specific forms of child sexual abuse that African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children may have experienced in their countries of origin: “bachabazi” (men sexually abusing male children in Afghanistan), Obi/Black magic (practiced in some African countries but particularly in Gambia), early or child marriage (raised as a particular issue for Middle Eastern/Southwest Asian communities), and the sexual enslavement and rape of Dalit girls in India.

Ethnic/national specificities

While several stakeholders suggested that more research is needed on the specific character of abuse within the African, East Asian and Southeast Asian communities, and those communities' silencing mechanisms, others were concerned about the disaggregation of the Black and minority ethnic experience. They argued that there needed to be a clear rationale for seeking specific information, and were concerned that any shared experiences and common themes – notably structural and institutionalised racism and poor state responses – might become downplayed because of a political preference for blaming minoritised communities for under-reporting.

Nonetheless, most stakeholders acknowledged an imbalance in research into the experiences of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, and could see value in research that seeks to address clear gaps in knowledge and develop communities' capacity to respond to child sexual abuse.

There was discussion about the possible reasons why Chinese heritage children are not represented in services or research studies. Participants of Chinese heritage noted a specific silence within their communities around the abuse of women and children, and were aware of child exploitation within these communities in the UK. They suggested that, because Chinese communities are portrayed as successful and 'good' migrants with a strong family business model, the abusive aspects of children's involvement in family businesses are overlooked and services are not directed at them. They also thought that the history of surveillance by the Chinese government has made Chinese people particularly cautious about contact with statutory services. It was suggested that targeted awareness-raising, starting with community organisations, is needed to address these communities' lack of recognition of abuse. One stakeholder underlined the importance of developing this work, given the anticipated growth in the UK's Hong Kong Chinese population over the next few years.

Other stakeholders noted a new trend of sexually exploited Afro Latin (Brazilian), East African and West African young women accessing services under the category of criminal exploitation and trafficking. The experiences of young women from these backgrounds are not as yet reflected in research on child sexual abuse.

Similar concerns were raised about the lack of research into specific experiences of child sexual abuse within Iranian, Kurdish, and Afghani communities in the UK.

Intersections with gender, sexual orientation and disability

Stakeholders identified a need for more research on African, Asian and Caribbean heritage boys and young men, and suggested that under-reporting for this group could be much higher than for girls because of issues and expectations around masculinity. Further research could offer insights into different gendered modes of silencing and long-term impacts.

One participant commented on the connections between honour-based abuse, forced marriage, child sexual abuse and questions about sexual orientation:

“Admittedly it might be in relation to sexuality and sexual orientation, and those individuals then experience spiritual abuse and faith-based abuse because they're deemed to have dishonoured the family and brought shame on the family because the son, who is a Muslim, happens to be gay... Just to extend that further... issues around particular groups of men based on their ethnicity and their religion are missing as well... We really need to explore the impact that sexual abuse has on young men and boys, as they progress through to adulthood.”

Several pointed to the need for research into the intersection of child sexual abuse, ethnicity, and issues surrounding disability (learning disabilities in particular) and the capacity to consent to sex. Academics and practitioners offered examples of young disabled Asian women who had been forced into marriage (and therefore subjected to non-consensual sex), or who had been subjected to online sexual exploitation.

Non-abusing parents/carers

There were concerns about the lack of discussion of the role of non-abusing parents. Bernard's (2001) research (described in Chapter 4) took place in the late 1990s, and does not have any parallel in the South Asian literature.

Effective interventions and the availability of support services

It was noted that existing studies tell us a lot about silencing mechanisms – both cultural pressures and structural/institutional barriers – but there is still very little information on effective interventions, and particularly on how to shift cultural norms and barriers.

Stakeholders underlined the need for applied research that can offer clear direction on service gaps and be used to develop service responses or new interventions. They noted the value of research literature in helping to argue the case for their particular service and for fundraising purposes. However, they wanted to find ways to ensure that fresh research initiatives would lead to actual improvements in practice; several expressed frustration at the continued poor response and unaccountability of statutory services in particular (see section 9.1).

Others stated that new research projects should be accompanied by assessments of how and whether existing services can meet the needs identified, and/or whether new services are required. Several practitioners supported the idea of a mapping exercise detailing the existing services that can respond to the issues that research is identifying. One such study, mapping services (including those specifically for people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage) responding to child sexual abuse, was recently published by the CSA Centre (Parkinson and Steele, 2024).

Limitations of research recommendations on 'cultural competency'

While all stakeholders recognised that there is a good amount of research on the limitations of statutory-sector responses, some took issue with the recommendation on 'cultural competency' or 'cultural awareness raising' training that has emerged from the research:

“Something we see a lot of within [an organisation] is just this use of random words like ‘unconscious bias’, ‘cultural competency’... Does that even mean anything? Or is it just another palatable word to say we’re doing something when actually we’re not doing anything and really struggling to evidence what that really means in practice?”

It was argued that the term 'cultural sensitivity' did not recognise that all communities in the UK are subject to waves of migration, and so are subject to change:

“A lot of culturally sensitive practices here in this country that we talk about are historical. What are the migration trajectories that we are talking about in a particular population? Have they changed over time? In the case of the Chinese population, we talk about very different populations and different communities throughout the history of migration – and when we talk about ‘culturally sensitive’, if it is ahistorical it is not culturally sensitive.”

One stakeholder referred to “travelling cultures”, to move away from the projection of minoritised communities as static and ahistorical.

Stakeholders suggested the need for a focused piece of work on how 'cultural sensitivity' and 'cultural competences' are being understood and practiced by services in relation to African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children who have been sexually abused, and whether these practices have enlarged or constrained children's access to support.

10.5 Concerns and suggestions around future research methodology

There was much discussion in the focus groups about how to gather data for future research, and the kinds of data that could and should be used.

Engaging children and young people

The lack of direct research with children, and the fact that most of what we know is based on research with adult survivors of historical child sexual abuse, was discussed by stakeholders. Several underlined the importance of identifying ways to engage children directly in research, but others viewed this as impractical and unrealistic, not least because of “the cultural and religious context” that makes access to families “really, really tricky”.

In contrast, one practitioner argued that “the silence is fairly superficial” as she narrated her own experience of working with care-experienced young people aged 16–25 who “do not stop talking” once asked for their views and afforded a safe space within which to discuss these. She complained that no one is asking children what they think. An academic added:

“[There is] a reliance on verbal disclosure and how we perceive disclosure, and what we perceive disclosure to look like, which rules out children who are non-verbal, much younger children, but also doesn’t necessarily take into consideration the other various ways in which children may communicate. [There is also a] lack of confidence within the workforce to be able to use that curiosity to go that bit further beyond the assumption that a disclosure is ‘I am now going to say this has happened to me,’ rather than the various different changes in behaviours.”

This chimes with Wilson’s (2016) concept of ‘space to speak’ – see Chapter 4 – and her argument that Black Caribbean heritage children struggle to find safe spaces where they can recognise, discuss, name and speak out about their experiences. Practitioners in the focus groups noted the dearth of specialist services that can offer such safe spaces.

Despite the challenges, stakeholders argued strongly for at least one participatory research project that would place African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children (rather than adults) at its heart, and would engage them in the project formulation, the research aims and objectives, the research tools, and the production of useful outputs. Some stakeholders remained concerned that a lot of the existing research is adult-centric. Others noted the importance of placing adult experts by experience at the centre of research, and the need for careful consideration of their practical and ethical role in the research process.

Case file analysis

While some stakeholders were uncomfortable about direct research with children, almost all supported a case file analysis as a relatively safe and ethical way forward.

One pointed out that there is an appetite among local authority child protection staff to analyse their cases. She explained that her colleagues and her contacts at other local authorities were already talking about undertaking their own analysis of case files, because of public attention to poor statutory responses.

Across the sessions, it was felt that case file analyses could offer insights into:

- ▶ the nature of child sexual abuse (and the continuum with other forms of violence and abuse) experienced by African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children
- ▶ victim/survivor pathways into and through services
- ▶ children’s journeys on help-seeking
- ▶ the responses of mainstream professionals
- ▶ the outcomes of any service interventions or barriers to support.

However, stakeholders also flagged that this would depend on the quality and consistency of record-keeping. One practitioner reflected on the lack of data on ethnicity within local authority records:

“We’ve seen it in serious case reviews, where [data on ethnicity] is really lacking. And the fact that that question [on ethnic origin] isn’t there means that we’re not thinking about it. The very first point is that the people doing this work and designing programmes and policies don’t seem to have the basic knowledge of what the issues actually are.”

It was suggested that this could inhibit any clear conclusions. Moreover, it was noted that Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (the new name for serious case reviews) are less likely to name child sexual abuse as a concern, further limiting the opportunities to learn about practice in this area, and that inconsistencies in the presentation of findings hamper data analysis and the drawing of conclusions.

Analysis of online testimonies

Other suggested ways of bringing through the voices of children included a secondary analysis of the testimonies from the Truth Project conducted by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, and from the Everyone’s Invited website. However, concerns were raised about the lack of ethnicity data for both datasets (as they were not recording or ‘tagging’ ethnicity until some way into the process). Another stakeholder proposed an analysis of survivor testimonies on social media platforms:

“Women have found their voices through platforms like Instagram. I would urge anyone who wants to see this phenomenon to check out the Kaur movement in Canada. She has 128,000 followers and has been really raising awareness. That platform was started as an anonymous story-sharing for victims of child sexual exploitation, and the stories are in their hundreds there. If you want to look at an informal database, look to the role of social media in victims finding their voices, especially the younger generation, and now adults who are recognising that they were abused as children.”

However, some participants thought that these testimonies were unlikely to have been placed by children, and were more likely to be by adult survivors reflecting on childhood abuse.

Collection of survey data on the scale of child sexual abuse

The lack of prevalence data on child sexual abuse with regard to ethnicity was a widely expressed concern. There was considerable discussion around the feasibility of collating data that can say something about the scale of child sexual abuse within African, Asian and Caribbean communities in the UK. While some stakeholders raised concerns about under-reporting within these communities, meaning that quantitative data would probably be inaccurate and unrepresentative of the true picture, others offered suggestions on potential sources of data:

- ▶ surveys of college students, who might be more likely than older victims/survivors to report their abuse in a survey
- ▶ analyses of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) records of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children who have received support for the impacts of, rather than as survivors of, child sexual abuse – it was suggested that anonymised surveys of CAMHS clinicians and police specialist teams could be sources of incidence data but also offer insights into pathways into and through services
- ▶ a closer analysis of missing persons data where there is an over-representation of minoritised girls. This chimes with Sharp’s (2013) case file analysis of sexually exploited South Asian girls and her suggestion that the full range of these young women’s experiences are falling through the spaces between three different services – missing persons, forced marriage, and child sexual exploitation.

Use of Freedom of Information requests

Some participants suggested Freedom of Information (FOI) requests – to local authorities, health services and the police – to release data, with the caveat that these should focus on a handful of key questions because FOI requests are only effective when they are easy to respond to.

FOI requests were also discussed in relation to the public sector equality duty on local authorities, and the need to understand where in the system African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children featured most; there was a suggestion that these children are usually overlooked for early intervention support, and tend therefore to be disproportionately represented at the most severe end of service provision.

Theoretical and conceptual work

A small number of points were made about research projects that could contribute to the development of theory and concepts in this area. These related to:

- ▶ the race/ethnicity dimensions of harmful sexual behaviour
- ▶ the links between female genital mutilation and child sexual abuse
- ▶ notions of justice and resistance for children (especially in relation to non-verbal disclosures)
- ▶ the relationship between different forms of child sexual abuse
- ▶ theoretical work on the role of family members in extra-familial abuse such as complicity and silencing mechanisms in faith settings.

10.6 Calls for a network for African, Asian and Caribbean practitioners and academics working on child sexual abuse

Stakeholders were clear about this review's importance and value in drawing attention to research gaps. There were suggestions for the CSA Centre to host or facilitate a network which would enable participants to collaborate on future research projects and practice interventions. The following comment reflects a sense that this work is being undertaken in pockets across the country, which can be an isolating experience, and that participants would welcome an opportunity to connect with others:

“We’re all involved in this field and we’re all probably going to be involved in it for many, many years to come. So, is there an ongoing collaborative possibility with us all?”

11. Areas for further research activity

This review has identified considerable gaps in knowledge, very few of which appear to be addressed by ongoing research projects. Drawing on the literature review, the interviews, the survey and the focus groups, this chapter clusters some of those gaps into potential research areas and activities. These have not been placed in any order of priority; rather, areas of work and ways to undertake that work have been set out for further consideration.

11.1 Establishing a research and practice network

Stakeholders in the focus groups were keen for their conversations to continue into collaborations between people working across subject areas and across research and practice. Several suggested that the CSA Centre could play a central part in this process by convening and facilitating a research and practice network for people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage working in the field of child sexual abuse.

Such a network could enable collaborative projects to address the gaps identified in this report. It could also be tasked with developing a clear and explicit framework for research in this area, and could engage a range of stakeholders to ensure that the research is impactful.

11.2 Reflecting the voices of children and young people

The literature review identified only four published research studies that focused on child sexual abuse and engaged directly with African, Asian or Caribbean heritage children who had been sexually abused (Firmin, 2010; Firmin, 2011; Beckett et al, 2013; Warrington et al, 2017). Although none was specifically about the experiences of children from those backgrounds, they were included in this review because each had a large sample of African, Asian or Caribbean heritage child participants.

The other research literature discussed in this review relied on interviews with adult survivors recalling historical abuse, frontline practitioners' reflections on their work with children, or case file analysis.

Studies that engage directly with young victims/survivors of African, Asian or Caribbean heritage could help to address gaps in knowledge regarding:

- ▶ the contexts in which the sexual abuse of these children occurs
- ▶ their experiences of recognising, naming and reporting the abuse
- ▶ services' responses to the abuse
- ▶ the health impacts, both of the abuse and of being silenced
- ▶ the intersection of sexual abuse and age, gender and disability (as stakeholders referred to disabled children and young people being targeted by abusers and having little agency to resist)
- ▶ children's views of what good practice could look like.

11.3 Generating larger datasets on the African, Asian and Caribbean experience of child sexual abuse

What we currently know about the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children is based largely on interviews with small numbers of adult survivors. Findings have been drawn from very small studies undertaken on small budgets: for example, a third of completed research projects with published findings have been carried out by the voluntary sector and/or PhD students. It is vital that sample sizes are expanded.

One way could be to work with voluntary-sector organisations and local authorities to pull together a larger dataset of case files relating to African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children who have been sexually abused, and to systematically analyse these files, looking for information about:

- ▶ the victim–perpetrator relationships
- ▶ the contexts in which abuse takes place
- ▶ the continuum of abusive experiences
- ▶ recognition (or denial) of the abuse by professionals and families
- ▶ responses to the children’s disclosure of the abuse
- ▶ missed opportunities for intervention
- ▶ intersections (with age, disability, sex and sexuality for instance) and patterns of racialisation
- ▶ the role of diasporic networks and immigration controls in facilitating child sexual abuse
- ▶ patterns in children’s pathways to support services.

Another option would be to study case examples, through:

- ▶ collating testimonies on the Everyone’s Invited and Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Truth Project websites
- ▶ data-mining the interview transcripts and case file notes from completed research projects – for instance, the child sexual exploitation projects (see Chapter 3) involved very large numbers of interviews with African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children but did not draw out information on race/ethnicity
- ▶ putting a call out for case examples, which could elicit a substantial response; Gohir (2019) suggested that, when the Muslim Women’s Network put out a call for cases of sexual exploitation, it was also sent a lot of material on other forms of child sexual abuse.

11.4 Filling the knowledge gaps on specific communities

As noted in Chapter 2, the majority of published research has focused on the South Asian experience, with particular reliance on data about women of North Indian and North Pakistani descent and accounts of historical child sexual abuse. In recent years, there has been more research on the experiences of African-Caribbean heritage children, but there are also stark knowledge deficits on the experiences of East Asian, Southeast Asian and African heritage children. Except for one study that engaged Somali mothers, one that engaged Nigerian survivors, one study on Malaysian parenting practices, and two articles on the experiences of mainly North African unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, these accounts are missing from the research data.

Given the low levels of reporting (and possibly of recognition), it is unlikely that much more can be learnt about these groups through case study analysis or secondary analysis of testimonials – but stakeholders in the focus groups suggested that community organisations are interested in opening discussions on child sexual abuse within their communities. In addition to being involved in developing and evaluating awareness-raising interventions (see section 10.8 below), community organisations might also be able to help deliver large-scale studies seeking to:

- ▶ understand the scale and nature of child sexual abuse in specific communities
- ▶ consider the specific impacts of racism, racialisation and cultural needs on the context for the abuse
- ▶ assess the responses of statutory services to victims/survivors of child sexual abuse from those communities
- ▶ provide direction for possible interventions.

11.5 Understanding the specific contexts in which child sexual abuse occurs

To date there has been almost no research in the following areas.

Abuse in online contexts

An analysis by the CSA Centre of research projects relating to child sexual abuse (Parkinson, 2020) highlighted a strong focus on online harms, yet no published study has addressed the specific experiences of children of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage.

Some of the case examples referred to in non-governmental organisations' reports/policy submissions (e.g. Gohir, 2019; Halo Project, 2020; Kaur et al, 2022) discuss image-based child sexual abuse and suggest that this is a growing concern – and a stakeholder in the focus groups suggested that online abuse is a key feature of child sexual abuse within Southeast Asian communities. Yet this area remains under-explored.

Surveys that establish the scale and nature of child sexual abuse in online contexts, and qualitative research that can elicit the specificities of this experience for African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, are needed to fill this gap.

Abuse in minoritised religious settings

Five recent reports and two journal articles (Gohir, 2013; Gohir, 2019; Chowdhury et al, 2022; Jay et al, 2021; Pall and Kaur, 2021; Ajayi, 2023; Kaur et al, 2022) reflect a growing concern about the role of religious practices and religious institutions in the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. And stakeholders have said that minoritised women have been raising this issue at considerable risk to their personal safety. However, research to date is based on very small sample sizes.

There is a need for more focused work on religious institutions and religious leaders that:

- explores and theorises the layers of complicity and impunity around these institutions and their representatives
- looks at the impact of links between religious leaders and family members, businessmen and politicians
- considers what abuse within religious settings can tell us about the continuum of violence affecting African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children.

Abuse facilitated through diasporic networks

Stakeholders in the focus groups referred to children's experience of sexual abuse in England and how this is connected with their countries of origin. They noted the influence of diasporic networks in the reinforcement of cultural norms that deny abuse; the effects of family separation (where children are left with others in the country of origin); and the movement of victims and perpetrators across borders.

However, only one ongoing research project, focusing on towns in the North of England, was focused on the international dimensions of abuse.

The role of the state

There has been a growing interest in, and an evidence base for, the impact of immigration controls on minoritised women subjected to domestic abuse in the UK, but immigration and border controls' impact on children subjected to sexual abuse has been overlooked. This merits much more research attention than it has received to date.

Additionally, issues have been raised about child sexual abuse in contexts where the British state has a duty of care towards a child. The two pieces of research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children suggested that the state failed to protect them from sexual abuse. These findings resonate with insights from multiple IICSA reports, and with recent public attention paid to the police strip searching of African-Caribbean heritage children.

There is a need of studies that will:

- consider specific contexts where the state is failing in its duty to protect children at risk of sexual abuse
- offer specific insights into the way immigration controls aid the sexual abuse of children
- examine the racialised dimension of this failure to protect.

11.6 Service responses

A key objective of this review was to identify research on responses to the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children. While a large section of the published literature has discussed service responses, this has focused almost entirely on social work (and within discussions on anti-racist social work). There have also been a handful of insights into police responses (Gill and Harrison, 2016; Harrison and Gill, 2018; Gohir, 2019; Halo Project, 2020; Gill, 2023; Gill and Khan, 2023) but only two references to education (Firmin, 2018; Thiara and Roy, 2020), even though schools have become a key context for the discussion on sexual violence, and two very old journal articles on health service responses (Lacey and Dolan, 1988; Moghal et al, 1995).

Moreover, much of what is known about social care responses is limited to their differential racialisation of minoritised children, their misrecognition of abuse, and the barriers to receiving services. There is a need to find out more specific information on African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children's pathways into and through services, as stakeholders suggested that they often receive services only at times of crisis.

Additionally, a disinvestment in specialist services has left a very small number of voluntary organisations focusing on these children, and those services are overwhelmed by referrals. Stakeholders could identify only three services specifically for African, Asian and Caribbean heritage people, just one of which was geared towards children.

The 'Map of Gaps' study of violence against women support services (Coy et al, 2007) is an excellent example of the power of images that can show, at a glance, the availability and size of service provision across the UK. The CSA Centre's recent report charting the provision of support services for children, adults and families affected by child sexual abuse (Parkinson and Steele, 2024) includes information on services supporting victims/survivors from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, further research is needed to explore the types of support provision in both specialist and mainstream organisations – and there needs to be a requirement on services to maintain profile data about their service users, including ethnicity.

11.7 The health impacts of conjoined experiences of sexual abuse and racism

There is a significant body of research literature on the long-term impacts (particularly for girls and women) of sexual abuse and sexual violence, and on the health and socio-economic impacts of racism, but to date these two issues have not been considered together.

In the focus groups, the combined pressure of cultural norms and statutory agencies' denial/misrecognition was said to be having long-term impacts on the physical and mental health of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, but little is known about this.

11.8 Raising community awareness and changing cultural norms

Much is now known about the ways that, in some communities, child sexual abuse is denied and victims/survivors are silenced – but what we really need to know is how these silencing mechanisms can be tackled effectively and spaces to speak opened up. There have been only three evaluations of community awareness-raising projects (Williams, 2018a; Kelly, 2019; Nixon, 2022) offering insights into how this work could be done well.

Activity to raise awareness in particular communities, and to challenge and shift cultural/community/localised norms around it, would:

- ▶ involve working with established, local community organisations – and helping to build their capacity – to develop a theory of change and then an intervention, with clear objectives
- ▶ require longer projects of three to five years, in order to devise appropriate interventions and evaluate their impact
- ▶ need to include communities that rarely feature in child sexual abuse casework.

12. Conclusions

This review is the first to provide an overview of the published research on the identification of and response to sexually abused African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children, and adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, in England and Wales. It reviewed 79 published works, including research studies, journal papers, book chapters and 'grey' literature. Equally importantly, it identified significant gaps in knowledge and understanding.

The review also considered ongoing research in this area, commenting on the design of these studies as well as reporting on their initial findings where available. As far as is known, very few of the identified knowledge gaps are being addressed by these ongoing projects.

Another important part of the review process was the convening of four focus groups comprising African, Asian and Caribbean heritage people working in the field of child sexual abuse, including academics, practitioners and an 'experts by experience' group. These sessions provided an opportunity for reflections on the initial findings of the literature review, the exchange of information, and identification of future research topics and activities.

Drawing on the literature review as well as discussions with stakeholders, this report has identified research areas and potential projects that could help to close the knowledge gaps identified, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the sexual abuse of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage children and of responses to that abuse; these are set out in detail in Chapter 10.

This can only be achieved through funding of future research to gain a better understanding of these areas and establish interventions that work. Further explorations and studies will support preventive work with children at risk of sexual abuse, raise awareness of the incidence and impact of child sexual abuse within African, Asian and Caribbean communities, and help services, both statutory and voluntary, to design responses and interventions to support children who have been sexually abused.

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Note: The 79 publications in the literature review are marked in bold.

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Appendix 1: Publications included in the literature review

The 79 publications reviewed in this report are listed in the table on the following pages. The 59 'unique items' (the main outputs from each project) are marked in bold.

The unique items are ordered alphabetically by the first author's name and then chronologically, starting from the earliest publication. Any subsidiary publications drawing on the same material as a unique item are listed immediately below it.

In the 'Focus on CSA' column, research that focused solely on child sexual abuse is marked as 'Yes' and wider research that included child sexual abuse in some way is marked as 'No'.

In the columns describing research methods and sample characteristics, publications that drew only on secondary research are marked 'N/A'.

Where the research drew solely on practitioners' knowledge, the sample ethnicity, age and sex information refers to the focus of the research, not the characteristics of the practitioners themselves. For example, if the research asked practitioners about Asian adult female victims/survivors of child sexual abuse, the sample ethnicity is marked as 'Asian', age as 'adult' and sex as 'female'. Where the research included victims/survivors, parents or other community members as well as practitioners, the sample ethnicity, age and sex information describes the characteristics of the victims/survivors, parents and/or community members only.

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Ackerley and Latchford (2018) Applying an intersectional lens to sexual violence research and practice.	Consider the impact of intersecting inequalities on the experiences of and responses to sexually abused children; consider the importance of understanding children's whole experiences of harm.	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ahmed et al (2009) Constructions of 'culture' in accounts of South Asian women survivors of sexual violence.	Explore the ways in which British-born South Asian female survivors of sexual violence construct the effects of 'culture' within their accounts of sexually violent experiences.	Yes	No	Interviews	Victims/survivors of sexual violence in adulthood (n=8), including an unknown number who had also been sexually abused as children.	Asian	Adult	Female
Ajavi (2020) An intersectional analysis of the role of cultural beliefs, norms and practices, help-seeking and support in Nigerian women's accounts of sexual abuse and violence.	Explore how cultural beliefs, norms and practices might contribute to sexual abuse and violence against Nigerian women in the UK, and examine their experiences of support.	Yes	No	Interviews	Victims/survivors of sexual abuse and violence (n=12), including child sexual abuse (n=2)	African	Adult	Female
Ajavi et al (2022) The role of cultural beliefs, norms and practices in Nigerian women's experiences of sexual abuse and violence.		No						
Ajavi (2023) Angela's story of childhood sexual abuse.	Explore one woman's experience of childhood sexual abuse, drawing on the earlier research with Nigerian women in the UK.	No	Yes	Interview	Victim/survivor of child sexual abuse (n=1)			
Ali et al (2021) Improving Responses to the Sexual Abuse of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Children.	Explore how children affected by child sexual abuse are supported, the needs of these children, and how effectively their wellbeing is safeguarded.	Yes	Yes	Interviews	Practitioners (n=16)	All minority ethnic groups	Child	Male/ Female
Beckett et al (2013) "It's Wrong... but You Get Used to It." A Qualitative Study of Gang-associated Sexual Violence towards, and Exploitation of, Young People in England.	Explore the scale and nature of gang-associated sexual violence and exploitation, the main pathways into it; and the potential models for an effective multi-agency response.	Yes	Yes	Interviews, focus groups	Young people and adults living in gang-affected neighbourhoods (n=188), of which an unknown number were victims/survivors of sexual violence Practitioners (n=76)	All ethnic groups; 71% were of Black, Asian or dual heritage	Adult/ Child	Male/ Female

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Begum (2018) An exploration of how British South Asian male survivors of childhood sexual abuse make sense of their experiences.	Explore how British South Asian male survivors of child sexual abuse make sense of their experiences, including disclosure, the impact on their sense of masculinity, the significance of culture and community and experiences of help-seeking.	Yes		Interviews, focus groups and a research diary	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=8) Practitioners (n=6) Community members (n=13)			Male (victims/survivors, community members); female (community members)
	Begum and Gill (2023) Understanding the experiences of British South Asian male survivors of child sexual abuse.	No	Yes	Interviews	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=8)	Asian	Adult	Male
Gill and Begum (2023) 'They wouldn't believe me': Giving a voice to British South Asian male survivors of child sexual abuse.	Explore how British South Asian male survivors of child sexual abuse make sense of their experiences, focusing on men's accounts.							
Bernard (2001) 7c b g f f i W j b j . @ j Y X ' 9 l d Y f j Y b W g . F Y c f Y g Y b H U f c b g ' c Z 6 U W / A c h Y f g J b 7 1 J X G M i U . 5 V i g Y 8 j g W e i f g Y g "	Explore the perceptions and experiences of Black mothers whose children have been sexually abused; how multiple oppressions impact on responses to child sexual abuse; and the interactions between Black mothers, their children and families, and helping agencies.	Yes		Interviews	Non-abusing mothers (n=30) of sexually abused children; 6 of the mothers were themselves victims/survivors of child sexual abuse, and 6 of the children were disabled			
	Bernard (1999) Child sexual abuse and the black disabled child.	Explore the interactions between race, disability and gender in child sexual abuse through the analysis of data on the specific experiences of mothers whose children had learning disabilities.	No	Yes	Interviews	Non-abusing mothers (n=2) of sexually abused disabled children	African-Caribbean	Adult
Bernard (2016) Child sexual abuse in the lives of black children.	Provide an overview of the key issues impacting Black children's experiences of child sexual abuse			Case examples from previous research	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=2)		Child	
Bernard (2019) Using an intersectional lens to examine the child sexual exploitation of black adolescents.	Interrogate the ways that race, gender, class and sexuality intersect to impact Black adolescents' experiences of child sexual exploitation.	Yes	Yes	Case example from a serious case review	Victim/survivor of child sexual exploitation (n=1)	Black	Child	Female

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Bogle (1988) Brixton Black Women's Centre: Organizing on child sexual abuse.	Give an account of the establishment of the Brixton Black women's group.	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Chowdhury et al (2022) 'I thought in order to get to God I had to win their approval': A qualitative analysis of the experiences of Muslim victims abused by religious authority figures.	Examine barriers to reporting abuse, and highlight the experiences of Muslim victims of abuse within faith seminaries.	Yes	No	Interviews	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=5), or of other forms of abuse (n=1), in religious institutional contexts	Asian	Adult	Male/ Female
Davis (2019) 'Where are the Black girls in our CSA services, studies and statistics?'	Explore why little is still known about experiences of child sexual abuse among Black British girls.	Yes	Yes	Interviews	Practitioners and academics (n=8), an unknown number of whom were also victims/survivors of child sexual abuse	Black	Adult	Female
Dhaliwal et al (2015) Community awareness raising on child sexual exploitation: Possibilities and problems.	Reflect on the role of 'community' in awareness-raising on child sexual exploitation, and the practice of 'community engagement'.	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Firmin (2010) <i>Female Voice in Violence Project: A Study into the Impact of Serious Youth and Gang Violence on Women and Girls.</i>	Explore female involvement in serious youth and gang violence; empower women, especially those from marginalised communities, to be heard, and for their needs to be understood.	Yes	No	Interviews, focus groups, roundtables, survey, service observation	Women and girls affected by gang and serious youth violence (n=352), of which an unknown number had experienced child sexual abuse Practitioners (n=26)	All ethnic groups; over 60% were of African, Asian, Caribbean or mixed ethnic heritage	Adult/ Child	Female
Firmin (2011) <i>'This Is It, This Is My Life...'</i> <i>Female Voice in Violence. Final Report.</i>	Assess similarities and differences in the experiences of women and girls from different parts of the country in relation to serious youth and gang violence, and understand the strategic and service capacity for responding to their needs.	Yes	No	Interviews, focus groups	Women, girls, men and boys affected by gang and serious youth violence (n=349), of which an unknown number had experienced child sexual abuse	All ethnic groups; nearly 60% of African, Asian, Caribbean or mixed ethnic heritage	Adult/ Child	Male/ Female
Firmin and Pearce (2016) Living in gang-affected neighbourhoods: The impact on black children and young people.	Reflect on the specific social conditions that impact Black children and young people in gang-affected areas, and how they experience the stressors correlated with gang association.	No		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Firmin (2018) <i>Abuse between Young People: A Contextual Account.</i>	Offer a contextualised narrative of peer-on-peer abuse that moves beyond recognising an association between environments and individual choice, and illustrates the ways in which such interplay occurs.	Yes	No	Case files	Complainants, suspects and witnesses of peer-on-peer abuse (n=9 case files); in 6 cases this involved child sexual abuse	Unclear	Child	Male/ Female
Fox (2016) <i>'It's Not on the Radar': The Hidden Diversity of Children and Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation in England.</i>	Drawing on roundtables with experts in the field, discuss the connections between child sexual exploitation and ethnicity, faith, sex, sexuality and disability.	Yes	Yes	Focus groups	Practitioners (number unclear)	All minority ethnic groups	Child	Male/ Female
Gangoli and Hester (2023) <i>Epistemic injustice: Racially marginalised adult survivors of child sexual abuse.</i>	Explore racially minoritised women's testimonies of child sexual abuse using the framework of epistemic injustice and the intersecting factors that shape their experiences.	Yes	Yes	Interviews	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=7)	Asian, African	Adult	Female
Gill (2009) <i>Narratives of survival: South Asian women's experience of rape.</i>	Explore how the notion of honour intersects with South Asian women's sexuality, their interpretation of sexual violence experiences, and the personal and social issues surrounding rape and sexual abuse.	Yes	No	Interviews	Victims/survivors of sexual abuse and violence (n=5), of which an unknown number were sexually abused as children	Asian	Adult	Female
Gill and Begum (2023)	See under Begum (2018)							

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Gill and Harrison (2016) Police responses to intimate partner sexual violence in South Asian communities.	(The first publication from a study exploring the barriers to reporting sexual violence in South Asian communities.) Explore the police response to intimate partner sexual violence.	Yes		Interviews, focus groups	Victims/survivors of sexual abuse and violence (n=13), including child sexual abuse (n=8)			
Gill (2023) Race, gender, and policing: How to increase sexual abuse reporting by British South Asian women.	Discover why British South Asian survivors are less likely to report sexual abuse to the police, and evaluate what more can be done to encourage reporting.	No	No		Women of South Asian heritage (n=85) Practitioners (n=26)	Asian	Adult	Female
Harrison and Gill (2018) Breaking down barriers: Recommendations for improving sexual abuse reporting rates in British South Asian communities.								
Gill and Harrison (2019) 'I am talking about it because I want to stop it': Child sexual abuse and sexual violence against women in British South Asian communities.	Explore how abusers gain access to their victims, family and community responses, and the role of cultural factors in concealing sexual abuse.			Interviews	Victims/survivors of sexual abuse and violence (n=13), including child sexual abuse (n=8)			
Gill and Khan (2023)	See under Halo Project (2020)							
Gilligan and Akhtar (2006) Cultural barriers to the disclosure of child sexual abuse in Asian communities: Listening to what women say.	Explore responses within Asian communities to child sexual abuse, through discussions with women.	Yes		Focus groups	Community members (n=130) Practitioners (n=40)			Female
Gilligan and Akhtar (2005) Child sexual abuse among Asian communities: Developing materials to raise awareness in Bradford.	Reflect on the learning from community consultations undertaken to develop a multilingual booklet on child sexual abuse for Asian communities in Bradford.	No	Yes	Focus groups, questionnaire	Community members (n=159) Practitioners (n=46)	Asian	Adult	Unclear
Gohir (2013) Unheard Voices: The Sexual Exploitation of Asian Young Women and Girls.	Increase knowledge of the sexual exploitation of Asian/Muslim girls and young women, identify vulnerabilities associated with their cultural background, and raise awareness of this issue among service providers.	Yes	Yes	Interviews	Practitioners and family members (n=73) in 35 case examples of sexual exploitation of Asian/Muslim girls and young women	Asian	Adult/ Child	Female

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Gohir (2019) <i>Muslim Women's Experiences of the Criminal Justice System.</i>	Examine the criminal justice system response to Muslim women who have been victims of violence and abuse, and recommend how to improve criminal justice outcomes for them.	Yes	No	Case files	Victims/survivors of violence and abuse (n=21), including child sexual abuse (n=6)	Asian	Adult	Female
Gutierrez and Chawla (2017) <i>The Child Sexual Exploitation of Young South Asian Women in Birmingham and Coventry: Exploring Professional Insight into Young Women's Hidden Journeys, Silence, and Support.</i>	Explore professional understandings of the sexual exploitation of young South Asian women; understand why these women may be underrepresented in services; and remove barriers to support for them.	Yes	Yes	Interviews, focus groups	Practitioners (n=16)	Asian	Child	Female
Halo Project (2020) <i>Invisible Survivors – The Long Wait for Justice: Police Response to BAME Victims of Sexual Abuse.</i>	Draw attention to the failures in the police response to Black, Asian and minority ethnic victims of sexual abuse.	Yes	No	Interviews, written statements from practitioners and victims/survivors	Victims/survivors of honour-based abuse or sexual abuse/ violence (n=15), including child sexual abuse (n=8) Practitioners (n=10)	All minority ethnic groups	Adult	Male/ Female
Gill and Khan (2023) Survivors speak up: Improving police responses to sexual abuse cases in Black and racially minoritised communities.	Summarise the Halo Project's key findings and the learning from case studies of victims/survivors' experiences of the criminal justice system.	No	Yes	Interviews	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=4)	Asian		
Harrison and Gill (2018)	See under Gill and Harrison (2016)							
Hurcombe et al (2023)	See under Rodger et al (2020)							
Hynes (2013) <i>Trafficking of children and young people: 'Community' knowledge and understandings.</i>	Explore what migrant and refugee organisations know and understand about the trafficking of children, including in relation to child sexual exploitation.	Yes	No	Interviews, focus groups	Practitioners (number unclear)	All minority ethnic groups	Child	Male/ Female
Jassal (2023) <i>'Preserving what for whom?' Female victim/survivor perspectives on the silence behind child sexual abuse in Britain's South Asian communities.</i>	Explore how concepts of shame and honour can amplify the secrecy of intrafamilial child sexual abuse for female victims from Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani families.	Yes	Yes	Interviews	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=15)	Asian	Adult	Female
Jassal (2020) Sexual abuse of South Asian children: What social workers need to know.	Describe preliminary findings from a research project on British South Asian women's experiences of child sexual abuse.	No			Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=8)			

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Jay et al (2021) <i>Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Religious Settings</i> .	Consider child protection arrangements in a wide range of religious organisations and settings through a thematic investigation.	Yes	Yes	Survey; written and oral evidence submitted to the investigation	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=45) Organisations representing victims/survivors (n=14) Religious (n=38) and interfaith (n=3) organisations Local or central government bodies (n=19) Training organisations (n=6)	All minority ethnic groups	Adult	Male/ Female
Kaiser et al (2021) <i>Engagement with Support Services for Ethnic Minority Communities</i> .	Learn from organisations that support victims/survivors of child sexual abuse from ethnic minority communities.	Yes	Yes	Focus groups	Practitioners (n=107)	All minority ethnic groups	Adult	Male/ Female
Kannathasan and Jassal (2022) <i>Childhood Sexual Abuse in UK's Tamil Community: A Report by ANBU UK</i> .	Provide baseline data about child sexual abuse within the UK's Tamil community; including on disclosures, healing and wellbeing of survivors.	Yes	Yes	Survey	Community members (n=123), including 27 victims/survivors of child sexual abuse	Asian	Adult	Male/ Female
Kanyeredzi (2014) <i>Knowing what I know now: Black women talk about violence inside and outside of the home</i> .	Explore African and Caribbean heritage women's lived experiences of violence and abuse, including seeking help and receiving support, legacies of the abuse for the body, and encounters in public spaces.	Yes	No	Interviews	Victims/survivors of sexual abuse and violence (n=9), including child sexual abuse (n=6) Practitioners (n=5)	African and Caribbean	Adult	Female
Kanyeredzi (2018) <i>Race, Culture, and Gender: Black Female Experiences of Violence and Abuse</i> .		No						
Kaur et al (2022) <i>From Her, Kings Are Born: The Impact and Prevalence of Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in the UK Sikh Panjabi Community</i> .	Explore the impact and prevalence of sexual abuse and domestic violence in the UK Sikh Panjabi community.	Yes	No	Survey	Community members (n=893), including 178 victims/survivors of child sexual abuse	Asian	Adult	Male/ Female
Kelly (2019) <i>Challenge, Change, Consolidate, Champion: Evaluation of the Apna Haq Training for Trainers Programme</i> .	Evaluate a train-the-trainers programme for Black and minority ethnic women in South Yorkshire, which aimed to build their capacity to change the conversation about child sexual abuse in minoritised communities.	Yes	Yes	Interviews, feedback forms, observation	Practitioners (n=14)	All minority ethnic groups	Adult	Female
Lacey and Dolan (1988) <i>Bulimia in British Blacks and Asians: An area catchment study</i> .	Describe the demographic and clinical features of five 'non-white' Bulimic patients of an eating disorder clinic.	Yes	No	Case files	Patients of an eating disorder clinic (n=5), of whom 3 were victims/survivors of child sexual abuse	African, Asian, Caribbean	Adult	Female

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Laungani (2003) Counselling in action: Sexual abuse in an Asian family.	Provide an account of the therapeutic contact with an Asian child who has been sexually abused in the family, and the techniques used to deal with the trauma.	Yes	Yes	Case study (drawing on the therapist's notes)	Victim/survivor of child sexual abuse (n=1)	Asian	Child	Female
Laya and Papadopoulos (2009) Sexual maltreatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors from the Horn of Africa: A mixed method study focusing on vulnerability and prevention.	Identify the social, cultural and political factors that affect unaccompanied African asylum-seeking minors' vulnerability to sexual maltreatment in England.	Yes	Yes	Interviews, questionnaire	Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (n=53), of which 48 had experienced child sexual abuse (including harassment)	African	Adult/Child	Male/ Female
Mansoor (2023) Exploring the Life Stories of South Asian Women Survivors of Sexual Violence.	Increase understanding of the multifaceted impact of sexual violations on South Asian women.	Yes	No	Interviews, life story films	Victims/survivors of sexual abuse (n=3), including child sexual abuse (n=2)	Asian	Adult	Female
Moghal et al (1995) A study of sexual abuse in an Asian community.	Explore the reported incidence, modes of presentation, management and outcomes of 'definite or probable' cases of sexual abuse of Asian children referred to two hospitals in Leeds.	Yes	Yes	Case files	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=37)	Asian	Child	Male/ Female
Mtezuka (1989) Towards a better understanding of child sexual abuse among Asian communities.	Explore the utility of Western models of child sexual abuse in understanding the nature, extent and management of that abuse in Asian families, describing how contemporary 'White' practice is assessed by Asian social workers in the north of England.	Yes	Yes	Focus groups	Practitioners (n=9)	Asian	Child	Male/ Female
Myrie and Schwab (2023) Recovery experiences from childhood sexual abuse among Black men: Historical/sociocultural inter-relationships.	Explore the lived experience of recovery from child sexual abuse among Black males living in Canada, the UK and the USA.	Yes	Yes	Interviews	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=6), of which 1 lived in the UK	African, Caribbean	Adult	Male
Nixon (2022) Breaking the Silence Initiative: Evaluation.	Evaluate a three-year programme that aimed to mitigate the impact of child sexual abuse experienced by Asian women in Leicester.	Yes	Yes	Interviews	Practitioners (n=11)	Asian	Adult	Female

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Noack-Lundberg et al (2021) <i>Understanding forced marriage protection orders in the UK.</i>	Investigate key themes emerging from reported court case judgements on forced marriage protection orders.	Yes	No	Published judgments	Victims applying for forced marriage protection orders (n=33), of which an unknown number had been sexually abused as children	Unclear	Adult/ Child	Female
Ong (2018) <i>Cultural perceptions of child maltreatment of Malaysians and UK Malaysians: An exploratory mixed methods analysis.</i>	Understand the cultural perceptions of child maltreatment among people of Malaysian heritage – practitioners, parents and survivors – in the UK and in Malaysia.	Yes	No	Interviews, survey	Victims/survivors of childhood maltreatment (n=12, none of whom were in the UK), including child sexual abuse (n=4) Parents (n=374, 12 of whom were in the UK) Practitioners (n=20, 3 of whom were in the UK)	Asian	Adult	Male/ Female
Pall and Kaur (2021) <i>From Her, Kings Are Born: Impact and Prevalence of Domestic and Sexual Violence in the Sikh/Panjabi Community.</i>	Establish a baseline of the prevalence and impact of domestic and sexual violence and child sexual abuse in the Sikh/Panjabi community.	Yes	No	Survey	Community members (n=674), including 236 victims/survivors of child sexual abuse	Asian	Adult	Male/ Female
Pande (2012) <i>Lost for words: Difficulties naming and disclosing sexual violence in Hindi.</i>	Explore the availability of Hindi sexual vocabulary and the impact of this on the process of disclosure.	Yes	No	Analysis of Hindi vocabulary of sexual violence	Practitioners (translators) and community members; numbers unclear	Asian	Adult	Female
Reavey et al (2006) <i>'How can we help when she won't tell us what's wrong?'</i> Professionals working with South Asian women who have experienced sexual abuse.	Explore the dilemmas faced by professionals (therapists, refuge and project workers) supporting South Asian survivors of sexual abuse.	Yes	No	Interviews, focus groups	Practitioners (n=37), including an unknown number who supported survivors of child sexual abuse	Asian	Adult	Female
Rehal and Maguire (2014) <i>The Price of Honour: Exploring the Issues of Sexual Violence within South Asian Communities in Coventry.</i>	Explore barriers and fears that may prevent the disclosure and reporting of sexual violence by South Asian victims and survivors, and understand what changes are needed to increase their access to appropriate support.	Yes	No	Interviews, focus groups, questionnaire	Victims/survivors of sexual abuse (n=13), including child sexual abuse (n=3) Practitioners (n=12) Religious community leaders (n=12) Community members (n=37)	Asian	Adult	Female (victims/survivors, community members); Male (religious leaders)

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
<p>Rodger et al (2020) "People Don't Talk about It": Child Sexual Abuse in Ethnic Minority Communities.</p> <p>Hurcombe et al (2023) Institutional responses to child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities.</p>	<p>Explore how ethnic minority communities perceive and experience barriers to disclosing and reporting child sexual abuse; their interactions with institutions in relation to child sexual abuse; and the support needs of victims/survivors from those communities.</p>	Yes	Yes	Focus groups	Community members (n=82), including victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=15)	All minority ethnic groups	Adult	Male/ Female
		No						
<p>Sharp-Jeffs (2016) A lot going on: The links between going missing, forced marriage and child sexual exploitation.</p> <p>Sharp (2015) Keeping it from the community.</p>	<p>Explore the links between going missing, forced marriage and child sexual exploitation for South Asian young women.</p>	Yes	Yes	Interviews, a focus group, case studies	Practitioners (n=20) Young people in the community (n=8)	Asian	Child	Male/ Female
		No			N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<p>Sharp (2013) Missing from discourse: South Asian young women and sexual exploitation.</p>	<p>Address the neglect of South Asian young women in the dominant discourse on child sexual exploitation in the UK, by exploring the links between 'going missing' and forced marriage.</p>							
<p>The Children's Society (2018) Supporting Black and Minority Ethnic Children and Young People Experiencing Child Sexual Exploitation: Guidance for Professionals.</p>	<p>Explore the reasons why sexually exploited children from Black and minority ethnic communities may go undetected by professionals, and the additional barriers they may face in reporting abuse; and present practical tips to improve identification, reporting and protection.</p>	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<p>Thiara et al (2015) Between the Lines: Service Responses to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Women and Girls Experiencing Sexual Violence.</p>	<p>Generate a body of evidence about the extent to which Black and minority ethnic women and girls disclose sexual violence and access support services; and gather evidence on barriers to accessing support and gaps in service provision.</p>	Yes	No	Survey, interviews	Sexual violence organisations responding to a survey (n=38) Interviewed practitioners working with female victims/survivors of sexual violence (n=10) An unknown number of these worked with victims/survivors of child sexual abuse	African, Asian, Caribbean	Child/ Adult	Female

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Thiara and Roy (2020) <i>Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence.</i>	Understand the experiences of sexual violence and the contexts in which it occurs for minoritised survivors, its impacts on their health and wellbeing, and the kinds of support required; explore help-seeking, barriers to accessing support, and experiences of service responses; and explore any examples of promising practice.	Yes	No	Interviews, action learning	Victims/survivors of sexual violence (n=36), of which an unknown number were sexually abused as children Practitioners (n=37)	African, Asian, Caribbean	Child/ Adult	Female
Thomas et al (2004) 'I was running away from death' – The pre-flight experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the UK.	Collect information about the pre-flight experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and increase understanding of the support they need on their arrival in the UK.	Yes	No	Case files; interviews	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (n=100), of which 32 had been sexually abused	African	Child	Male/ Female
Walji and Smith (2015) Working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse from South Asian communities: Reflections and practice points to consider.	Reflect on experiences of therapeutic work with people of South Asian heritage who are culturally similar/ dissimilar to the therapists.	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ward and Patel (2006) Broadening the discussion on 'sexual exploitation': Ethnicity, sexual exploitation and young people.	Explore differences in the way that young people from minority ethnic backgrounds experience sexual exploitation, including any differences in the contexts for that exploitation, and whether policy responses are appropriate to assist them.	Yes	Yes	Case files, practitioner reflections	Practitioners (number unclear)	All minority ethnic groups; 60% were Bangladeshi	Child	Female
Warrington et al (2017) <i>Making Noise: Children's Voices for Positive Change after Sexual Abuse. Children's Experiences of Help-seeking and Support after Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment.</i>	Improve understanding of children's experiences relating to the recognition, identification and disclosure of child sexual abuse in the family environment; their contact with services; and their experiences with the care and criminal justice systems.	Yes	Yes	Interviews, focus groups, survey	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse in the family environment (n=53) Children from the wider community taking part in focus groups (n=30) or responding to a survey (n=77)	All ethnic groups; 19% of interviewed victims/ survivors, 80% of focus group attendees, and 32% of survey respondents were of African, Asian or Caribbean heritage	Child	Male/ Female

Author, publication year and title	Research aims	Unique item	Focus on CSA	Primary Research	Research participants	Sample ethnicity	Sample age	Sample sex
Webb et al (2002) Effectively protecting Black and minority ethnic children from harm: Overcoming barriers to the child protection process.	Explore the factors that increase risk of abuse to children of Black and minority ethnic heritage, and factors reducing the likelihood that abuse is recognised and responded to.	Yes	No	Case studies	Victims/survivors of childhood sexual abuse (n=3), including child sexual abuse (n=1)	All minority ethnic groups	Child	Female
Williams (2018a) Four Steps to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in the Home: How Can Prevention Programmes Better Support Mothers?	Evaluate a three-year prevention project aimed at supporting Somali mothers in London to prevent child sexual abuse through reducing situational risk in the home.	Yes	Yes	Interviews, survey	Mothers attending workshops relating to the prevention of child sexual abuse (n=15)	African	Adult	Female
Williams (2018b) Working with a Community to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse in the Home.	Describe what was learnt about approaches to the prevention of child sexual abuse from the above evaluation.	No		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wilson (2016) 'Spaces to speak' of sour milk: Exploring African-Caribbean-British women's activism and agency on childhood sexual abuse from the 1980s to the present day.	Examine whether racialisation, racism and cultural identity have had any bearing on African-Caribbean British women's 'space to speak' of childhood sexual abuse; and explore Black British feminist activism on child sexual abuse.	Yes		Interviews, questionnaire	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=7) Experts in Black British feminism (n=5) Sexual violence organisations (n=13)			
Wilson (2023a) African-Caribbean British women's activism and agency on child sexual abuse from the 1970s to the 1980s.	Analyse the history of activism by Black women on child sexual abuse in this period.		Yes		Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=7) Experts in Black British feminism (n=5)	African-Caribbean	Adult	Female
Wilson (2023b) Maternal mimesis: The impact of intersectional abuse on African-Caribbean British maternal responses to 'tellings' of child sexual abuse by daughters.	Examine the disclosures or 'tellings' of child sexual abuse experiences by African-Caribbean British victims/survivors.	No		Interviews	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse (n=7)			
Wilson (1993) Crossing the Boundary: Black Women Survive Incest.	Give voice to survivors of incest and child sexual abuse; acknowledge the myths surrounding Black women's sexuality; and consider professional responses.	Yes	Yes	Focus group	Victims/survivors of child sexual abuse in the family (number unclear)	Black Caribbean	Adult	Female

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The logo features a vertical rectangular background with a geometric, low-poly pattern. The colors transition from dark blue at the top to green at the bottom. The text is white and positioned on the left side of the background.

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The photograph on the cover was taken using actors
and does not depict an actual situation.

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