

Date: 9th September 2013

MEDIA NOTICE (Embargoed Until 10th September 9.00am)

Asian Victims of Sexual Exploitation are being Neglected

A pilot study conducted by Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) reveals that Asian girls are being sexually exploited. They are most vulnerable to offenders from their own communities. Specific vulnerabilities associated with culture are being manipulated to prevent Asian victims from disclosing and reporting.

The report, *'Unheard Voices: The Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girls and Young Women,'* is being launched at an event at the House of Commons on 10th September 2013. Speakers who will be commenting on the findings include: Baroness Warsi (Minister for Faith and Communities), Sadiq Khan MP (Shadow Lord Chancellor), Sue Berelowitz (Deputy Children's Commissioner), and Nazir Afzal (Chief Crown Prosecutor for North West England). Baroness Haleh Afshar (founding member and Honorary President of MWNUK) will be chairing the event.

Shaista Gohir (Chair of MWNUK, lead researcher and author of the report) who will be presenting the report at the event said: "This report challenges the stereotype that child sexual exploitation is a racial crime in which Asian offenders target white girls only. In fact findings indicate that Asian girls are more vulnerable than White girls to exploitation by Asian predators because they are considered as a 'less risky' option because they are less likely to report abuse due to shame and dishonor."

Key findings in the report include:

- 35 case studies were collected from different regions in England.
- The overwhelming majority of the victims were of Muslim faith with almost two thirds of British Pakistani heritage.
- Majority of victims were under who were mostly between 13 to 14 years old. However, the oldest victim was in her 30s with a learning disability.
- At least a third of the victims had suffered sexual abuse previously as a child
- Blackmail connected with shame and dishonor appeared to be a key and unique method of control for the victims
- Offenders in the case studies were from the following backgrounds: Afghani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani and White
- The offenders were almost always from the same ethnic background as the victim and in two thirds of the cases, offenders were of Pakistani background.
- In 86% of the cases, offending behaviour mostly involved men operating in groups. Some cases involved online grooming.
- Sometimes the victims were drugged to such an extent with alcohol and drugs that they were unaware of the extent or the different ways in which they were violated or by how many men
- Asian victims are being overlooked by front line agencies and little if anything is being done to reach out to them so they can be helped.
- Attitudes amongst Asian and Muslim communities are mainly dismissive or disbelieving in relation to child sexual exploitation

This report does not suggest that child sexual exploitation (CSE) is more of a problem in Asian and / or Muslim communities. The scope of the research does not enable MWNUK to make such propositions. CSE is complex and widespread and not limited to one community as highlighted by many high profile celebrity cases since Jimmy Saville's abuses were exposed. The reality is that sexual predators regardless of ethno-cultural or religious backgrounds target the most vulnerable and the most accessible children and young people in society. It appears that girls from offenders' own backgrounds are more accessible therefore more vulnerable because of shared heritage, culture, ethnicity and faith. This is already confirmed by the fact that the majority of offenders and victims are White.

Shaista Gohir said: "While we must be careful not to tarnish entire communities by providing a false perceptions that grooming is restricted to Asian communities, cases involving Asian offenders must not be swept under the carpet either. Communities under the spotlight must accept they too have networks of pedophiles operating amongst them. Silence in the name of avoiding shame and preserving honour is so powerful that it is allowing men to continue operating with impunity therefore fueling sexual violence against girls and women further."

She added: "Although offenders and victims came from a range of backgrounds, a substantial number were from a Pakistani background and this cannot be neglected. This may be largely consistent with the representative population of Pakistanis of Britain and needs further exploration. I hope the findings will act as a catalyst for others to carry out similar investigations because there are minorities of people in every community that are willing to commit such abhorrent crimes.

Key Recommendations from Report

Although the focus of the research of Asian victims, MWNUK calls on the government and local agencies to also produce plans for prevention, to ensure better identification, intervention and support for all black minority ethnic children and young people suffering from sexual exploitation. MWNUK also highlights the need for specialist culturally sensitive helplines and warns communities to stop prioritising protecting the 'honor' of the community over the safeguarding of vulnerable girls.

Additional Information:

1. The copy of the full report can be downloaded here from 10th September 9am. (add link)
2. A copy of the Executive Summary can be downloaded here: (add link)
3. Shaista Gohir MBE (MWNUK Chair, Lead researcher and Author of report) can be contacted on 07802 225989 / contact@shaistagohir.com.
4. Other media spokes people from Muslim Women's Network UK are:
 - Mussurut Zia `(Assistant Researcher / General Sec) - 0796 765 5063
 - Nazmin Akthat (Vice Chair) - 0797 254 2475
5. **About Muslim Women's Network UK:** MWNUK is the only national Muslim women's organisation in Britain. It is an independent network of women across the UK that shares knowledge, connects the voices, and promotes the needs of diverse Muslim women. The website address for MWNUK is: www.mwnuk.co.uk