



handwritten notes  
sexual violence  
rape  
lack of  
control drug  
manipulation  
isolation  
not believed  
secret marriages  
vulnerable

# UNHEARD VOICES

Sexual Exploitation  
of Asian Girls  
and Young Women

# What is sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of sexual abuse. It involves the manipulation and/or coercion of young people under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for things such as money, gifts, food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, or affection.

The young people are manipulated or 'groomed' by befriending them and gaining their trust over a long period of time. Sometimes they are given drugs and alcohol before the abuse begins.

Those exploiting the child or young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and / or economic or other resources.

Grooming can take place 'on line' in social media and chat rooms, via mobile phones or in person.

Vulnerable adults can also be sexually exploited where they do not or cannot agree to sexual activity.



# Unheard Voices of Asian Victims

Sexual exploitation is complex and widespread and not limited to one community. Asian girls and young women are also victims of sexual exploitation. However, they are often overlooked by service providers and support agencies. The Muslim Women's Network UK conducted research to uncover their hidden experiences so we may better understand how to support and protect them. This resource summarises key findings from the research report *Unheard Voices: Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girls and Young Women*.

The full report, which contains 35 case studies and detailed analysis can be accessed online:

[www.mwnuk.co.uk/resourcesDetail.php?id=97](http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/resourcesDetail.php?id=97)

## Key Findings:

- Sexual exploitation is not a race issue only involving Asian offenders who target White girls - sexual predators are from all ethnic backgrounds and do not respect girls or women of any race or faith
- Sexual exploitation is about exploiting vulnerabilities of victims and access - girls from offender's own backgrounds are more accessible because of shared heritage, culture, faith and ethnicity
- Asian females are most vulnerable to offenders from their own communities
- Asian children, young persons and adults have specific vulnerabilities associated with their culture, which constitute a barrier to disclosing or reporting - blackmail connected to shame and dishonor is a key and unique method of control
- Asian offenders consider Asian girls and young women a less risky option compared with girls from other backgrounds because they were less likely to report the abuse because of shame and dishonor, which was purposefully exploited

# Nature of Sexual Exploitation

The following patterns were observed in the research findings:

- Exploitation was often planned and organised with men and boys operating in groups
- Younger men connected to schools or who had not long been out of the education system would groom girls before introducing them to older men
- Older boyfriends followed a typical pattern of giving gifts, rides in cars and lots of attention which included promises of love and marriage
- Victims were given alcohol and drugs
- Secret Islamic marriage ceremonies were sometimes used to 'trap' victims
- The victims were physically abused, raped and tortured including being burned with cigarettes and told to do role plays on webcam
- Victims were abused in various locations - flats, hotels, house parties, schools, takeaways / restaurants, alleyways, vehicles, and parks
- Sometimes victims were manipulated to leave home so they could be more accessible – tactics also included telling police and women's groups they were at risk of forced marriage or honour based violence so they could be provided accommodation
- Some victims were trafficked including moving them within the city or region or between regions
- Victims were blackmailed using photos and film recordings and threatened with violence to prevent them from reporting
- In cases of online grooming victims were befriended on social media and encouraged to send explicit photographs and meet up

# The Victims

The following patterns were observed in the research findings:

- The majority of girls being targeted were under 16 years old and mostly between 13 and 14 years old
- Young persons over 16 (the age of consent for sexual activity) were also victims of sexual exploitation because a vulnerability was being exploited e.g. disability, being a spouse from abroad, or fear of shame and dishonor
- Victims were from the following ethnic backgrounds: Afghani, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani – however, two thirds were Pakistani
- Girls were not warned adequately about the predatory nature of some men and boys so they could safeguard themselves
- When families became aware of the abuse, girls were often re-victimised e.g. disowned, forced into marriage, forced to have hymen repair surgery



## Vulnerabilities

Many victims had underlying vulnerabilities, which increased their risk of sexual exploitation such as:

- Sexual abuse within the family
- Mental health problems including self harm
- Witnessing or suffering domestic violence
- Disability
- Living in a dysfunctional family
- Risk of forced marriage
- Having strict or neglectful parents
- Limited knowledge of sex and healthy relationships

# Spotting the Signs

Alarm bells should ring if more than one of these most common signs is exhibited:

- Regularly missing from home or school, returning home late regularly or staying out all night
- Unexplained changes in behaviour e.g. aggressive / disruptive or quiet / withdrawn
- Looking tired and sleeping at unusual hours
- Unexplained gifts e.g. clothes, jewellery, mobile phones or money
- Increase in mobile phone use or secretive use
- Under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Being picked up or dropped off in cars by unknown adults
- A significantly older 'boyfriend' or 'friend' or lots of new friends / older friends
- Spending excessive amount of time online
- Sudden involvement in criminal behaviour or increased offending
- Increasingly secretive
- Unexplained physical harm such as bruising and cigarette marks
- Sexual health problems
- Self harming or eating disorders

## NAZIA

Nazia, of Bangladeshi background, met her boyfriend when she was 14 years old. He got her hooked on heroin and forced her to do street work. Within a few years she had introduced all three of her sisters to a web of sexual exploitation.

# Impact of Sexual Exploitation

In addition to long term psychological and physical impact on health of victims, other consequences include:

- Mental health problems including feeling suicidal and self harm
- Post traumatic stress disorders
- Living in fear
- Gynaecological problems as a result of sexually transmitted infections and brutal rapes
- Health problems associated with drug and alcohol addictions
- Pregnancy
- Forced Marriage
- Forcible hymen repair surgery
- Abuse by family
- Disownment by family
- Loss of faith
- Being taken abroad against one's will
- Isolation from friends



# Barriers to Reporting

## Blackmail Involving Shame and Honour

This was the biggest barrier preventing girls from disclosing abuse. Offenders threatened to circulate explicit images and films they had recorded of the victims amongst family and the community.

## Threats of Violence

Offenders threatened the victims and their families with violence

## Fear of Not Being Believed

Victims felt they would not be believed and blamed for their situation

## Guilt

Victims felt guilty and worried about getting into trouble with the police if they had been involved in illegal activity e.g. handling stolen goods, carrying drugs, used as honey traps to lure men for revenge attacks.

## Drug and Alcohol Dependency

Victims were given drugs and alcohol regularly to create a dependency on the offenders.

## Emotional Attachment

Offenders manipulated victims into developing an emotional attachment to them so they would not complain out of love or loyalty.

## Not Recognizing They Are Victims

Offenders manipulated girls so they did not see themselves as victims.

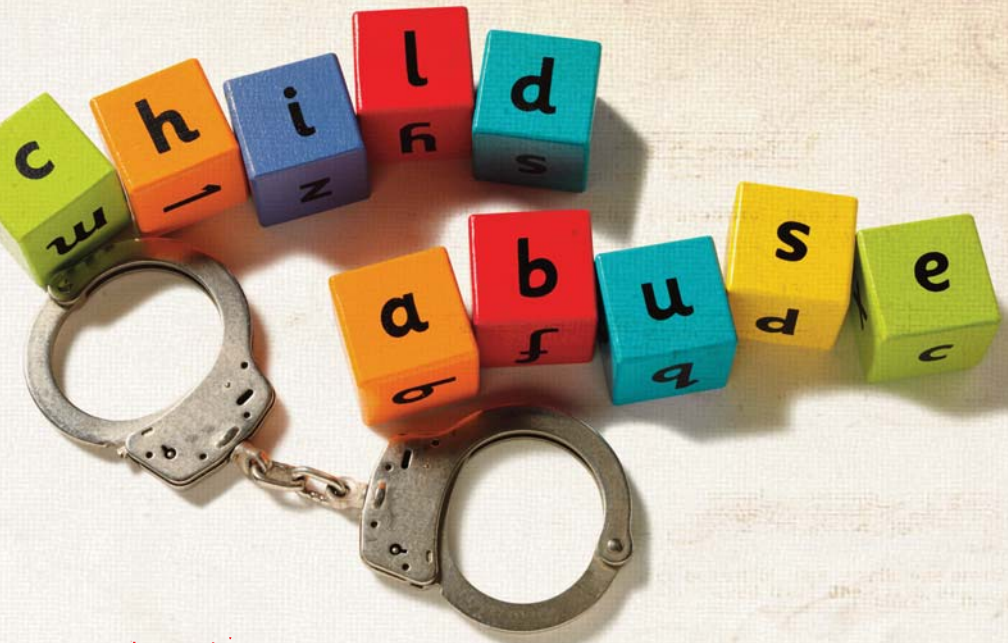
## Disability

Victims with disabilities faced additional barriers to disclosing and reporting their abuse because of impaired reasoning and lack of understanding about what is happening to them.



## SUMAIRA

Sumaira, 17 years old of Pakistani heritage, had learning difficulties. A man befriended her and promised to marry her. Instead he passed her around to his friends and told her he was clearing his debts. When she eventually refused they would pick her up from the streets and rape and torture her in a van.



## SIMI

Simi was 15 years old of Indian Sikh background. An older man befriended her introducing her to drugs and alcohol. He then passed her around to a wider group of men and arranged sex in exchange for money. The men took photographs and made videos on their phones. Simi felt unable to tell anyone especially her family.

# How are Victims Breaking Free?

Most victims find it hard to break away from the perpetrator. Victims who managed to break free and even receive the right support did not want to report because their experiences were too traumatic to talk about. They did not want to relive their ordeal or risk their families finding out.

Those who managed to break free did so because:

- Victim disclosed to a friend
- Family discovered what was taking place
- Victim disclosed to teacher or voluntary organisation
- Teacher spotted signs and asked questions
- Victim came to the attention of the police for other reasons and then police suspected sexual exploitation
- Victim was referred to a third sector organisation such as a youth group, women's refuge, alcohol / drug support group or group specifically supporting victims of sexual exploitation
- Victim moved out of the locality or town
- Some found it easier to break away once they were over 16 years of age because their value to offenders had dropped

## Jasmin's Story

A case study of an Asian female victim of sexual exploitation can be found on Youtube.

The story is based on real life experiences.

*"If this is happening to you,  
please tell someone.  
DON'T suffer in silence!"*

## GHAZALA

Ghazala was a spouse from Pakistan and married a British citizen who had learning difficulties and suffered from depression. Her brother-in-law repeatedly raped her and passed around to his friends.

## Frontline Professionals and Service Providers Responses

- Front line professionals are failing to identify CSE cases involving BME victims
- Risk indicators were not being used to recognize victims of sexual exploitation
- Asian girls were not considered vulnerable to sexual abuses

## FARHAH

Boys in her school introduced Farhah (of Pakistani background), to an older man when she was 12 years old. He bought her gifts and made her feel special. He also gave her drugs and alcohol. Eventually he took her to a flat where he raped her and took photographs of her. He blackmailed Farhah and threatened to show the images to her family unless she did as she was told. She was passed around to groups of men in flats and hotels who beat her and burned her with cigarettes.

## Families and Community Responses

- Little or no understanding among families and communities about sexual exploitation and there is a tendency to blame female victims rather than the male offenders.
- Denial about sexual exploitation - dismissive and disbelieving attitudes.
- Girls were being regarded as 'temptresses' and assumptions were made about their lifestyles.
- Tendency to prioritise protecting 'honour' of the community over safeguarding of vulnerable girls.
- Silence in the name of avoiding shame and preserving honour, is allowing men to continue operating with impunity, therefore fueling sexual violence against girls and women further.



### FAWZIA

14 year old Fawzia received a lot of attention and gifts from the 17 year old boys in her school. They persuaded her to meet them alone and pressurised her into performing sexual acts on them. They circulated this information around the school to give her a bad reputation so she would become isolated from her friends. They then pretended they were her only friends so they could continue to exploit her.

## ABIDA

Abida dressed in a traditional headscarf and was of Bangladeshi background. When she was 11 years old an older teenager groomed her on Facebook. He convinced Abida to meet him and when she did – he raped her.



## SAFA

When she was 9 years old, Safa's uncle started to sexually abuse her. When she was 14 years old he raped her. He then threatened Safa and told her that no one would believe her and passed her around to his friends.

# Reducing Sexual Exploitation

Some actions that can help reduce the levels of sexual exploitation include:

- Schools and colleges need to do more to address sexual harassment and bullying
- Sex education in schools should include healthy relationships with an understanding of what constitutes consent
- Raising awareness of child sexual exploitation just before children begin or upon starting secondary school - should be done by parents, schools and community groups
- More needs to be done within communities to challenge attitudes of men and boys. Religious institutions and community organisations should also promote importance of respecting dignity of girls and women
- Police and local authorities should work in partnership with local community organisations to raise awareness of CSE
- Front line agencies and police must implement processes and practices to ensure they identify and reach out to BME victims
- Front line professionals such as police, social workers, teachers, health workers, youth workers, and youth offending practitioners should be trained to better understand sexual exploitation of BME victims
- The Crown Prosecution Service and Police in each region must work together to become more effective at bringing forward prosecution cases involving BME victims
- Multi-agency and multi disciplinary approaches must also ensure they work for BME victims e.g. recognizing additional dangers BME children may face from family after disclosure
- Culturally-specialist provision / services must be provided to support BME victim including sexual violence projects and helplines



# Where to get help?

If you have any concerns that a child, young person or vulnerable adult may be a victim of sexual exploitation you can report this to the police or contact a specialist sexual exploitation project for advice:

- Report it to the police by calling **101**
- Call Crimestoppers anonymously on: **0800 555 111**
- Your local Authority Children's or Adult Social Services
- NSPCC Child Protection Helpline: **0808 800 5000**
- Childline: **0800 1111**
- Rape Crisis: **0808 802 9999** (*12noon-2.30pm and 7.00pm-9.30pm*)
- If children are at risk online, contact the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre: **0870 000 3344**
- ISIS (*based in Leeds*): **0113 243 0036** (*office*)  
and **07940 485133** / **07710 304308** (*outreach officers*)
- Safe and Sound Derby: **01332 362120**
- NSPCC Protect and Respect (*Nottingham*): **0115 960 5481**
- News Futures Project (*Leicester*): **0116 251 0803**
- Barnardos Birmingham Space Project: **0121 359 5333**
- Birmingham Phoenix Project: **0121 678 8816**
- NSPCC East London Service Centre: **0844 8920 286**
- Barnardos Young Women's Project / Pan London Work:  
**0207 700 2253** / **0800 316 1770**
- NIA Project (London): 07984 936 209
- The Wise Project (*Brighton*): **01273 222583** / **07841 067418** / **07793 325649**
- SARAC ([www.sarac.org.uk](http://www.sarac.org.uk)). Free telephone helpline supporting over 13 year olds who have been affected by rape, sexual abuse and domestic abuse:  
**01283 517185**
- Green Light Project (*Scotland*): **01224 577120** / **07808 627262**
- Blast Project (*UK male only sexual exploitation project*): **0113 244 4209**
- Muslim Women's Network UK (*National*): **0121 236 9000**

**DON'T SUFFER  
IN SILENCE  
PLEASE TELL SOMEONE**



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