



Child Sexual Abuse within BAME Communities

Child sexual abuse can happen anywhere. It can happen in all types of families, within all races, religions, and socio-economic groups. However, within black and ethnic minority groups, this form of abuse continues to be under-reported and unidentified.

NSPCC define child sexual abuse (CSA) as when a child is forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities (All Wales Child Protection Review Group, 2008; Department for Education, 2018; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2017; Scottish Government, 2014). This may involve physical contact or non-contact activities and can happen online or offline.

Contact abuse

This kind of abuse involves activities where an abuser makes physical contact with a child and can include:

- sexual touching of any part of the body, whether the child is wearing clothes or not
- forcing or encouraging a child to take part in sexual activity
- making a child take their clothes off or touch someone else's genitals
- rape or penetration by putting an object or body part inside a child's mouth, vagina or anus.

Non-contact abuse

This kind of abuse involves activities where there is no physical contact and can include:

- flashing at a child



- not taking proper measures to prevent a child from being exposed to sexual activities by others
- making a child masturbate while others watch
- persuading a child to make, view or distribute child abuse images (such as performing sexual acts over the internet, sexting or showing pornography to a child)
- making, viewing or distributing child abuse images
- allowing someone else to make, view or distribute child abuse images
- meeting a child following grooming with the intent of abusing them (even if abuse did not take place)
- sexually exploiting a child for money, power or status (child sexual exploitation).

Child Sexual Abuse within BAME communities

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) reported that out of 2083 identified victims 61% were white, 3% were Asian, 1% were black and 33% were recorded as unknown. The reason why children and young people from BAME backgrounds might be underrepresented in statistics and research is that their ethnicity is not recorded, or they are not recognised by statutory services.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (2012) found that children from BAME backgrounds were normally identified by BME, faith and statutory and voluntary sector youth justice agencies and rarely by professionals such as the police or local authority children's services. BAME young people were usually identified in relation to peer or peer exploitation in a group or gang. This suggests that BAME young people are criminalised and therefore not seen as victims. Professionals may also hold stereotypes of certain cultures and believe that child sexual abuse or incest is "normal" in certain BAME communities.



Cultural Barriers to Breaking the Silence

As well as certain professionals failing BAME victims of child sexual abuse, some barriers to breaking the silence within BAME communities lies within the community itself. Culture can also impact victims and there are many reasons why people may not speak out. One reason might be that to admit CSA exists within BAME communities would damage their reputation and may reinforce the perception of the community as an inferior ethnic group. Since BAME communities have a history of oppression, prejudice and racism, and are still discriminated against, there may be a need to protect themselves from a society in which they feel scapegoated and attacked by.

It is also important to look at the dynamics of power within cultures. Some cultures are based on the importance of family relationships, honour and respect for elders. Therefore, disclosure of CSA may be viewed as disrespectful to their elders or those in authority. Since the word of elders is held in such high regard, the victim may implicitly trust the actions and behaviour of those in authority and therefore not question the abuse. Many of my Asian clients who were sexually abused in childhood have talked about elders' authority feeling unquestionable. Similarly, in patriarchal cultures where it might be difficult to challenge "male superiority," CSA can be even more difficult to disclose. The mother or women in the community/family may have little authority which can leave the child in a vulnerable and exposed position because they are powerless to help the child. These cultural factors are extremely powerful in keeping the child or adult silent about child sexual abuse. Betrayal, disrespect and dishonour are key components of keeping CSA hidden.

Counselling for Child Sexual Abuse Victims

Seeking therapy for childhood sexual abuse is itself difficult and challenging. For those within



the BAME community, the challenge of seeking help can be even more multi-layered and complex. Not only do they bring their experience of abuse into the therapy room, but also their cultural norms and historical past. For example, for a client who may be expected to disclose their abuse to a white professional who has historically been their oppressor, it will take more courage and confusion than someone without this background. Therefore, it is important for the client to have a choice about who they see for therapy so that the cycle of abuse, control and power is not re-enacted in the counselling process.

In addition to this, the counselling process itself can be challenging for those in the BAME community who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. For instance, traditional counselling is based on an individual sense of self where the person is encouraged to have a strong sense of boundaries, separateness and inner private space. However, not all cultures work in this way. In collective cultures, blame, shame and pain are held by the family, clan or tribe which can introduce a different dynamic within the counselling room which needs to be carefully and sensitively explored. With the right therapist who can work in a culturally open and sensitive way, the trauma of abuse can be worked through and clients can learn to feel empowered in a culturally safe therapeutic relationship.

It is essential for people from BAME backgrounds to seek help for their history of child sexual abuse. It is even more important for professionals within public services and the caring professions to address the inequality facing BAME victims of childhood sexual abuse and not continue the cycle of abuse. Professionals being in the position of power, have a responsibility to understand the challenges ethnic minorities in Britain face with their journey of CSA in a white privileged society and be proactive in addressing some of these issues. For those who have experienced child sexual abuse, breaking the silence of abuse takes courage; therefore, it is imperative for those who hold the power to be the voice to support the victims become survivors.



Further support

Childline

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Telephone no: 0800 1111 (free phone)

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)

Call 0808 801 0331 free from all landlines and mobiles

www.napac.org.uk

SurvivorsUK Helpline Web Chat

National Web Chat for adult male survivors of rape or sexual

Text: 020 3322 1860

Whatsapp: 07491 816 064

www.survivorsuk.org

The Survivors Trust

<http://thesurvivorstrust.org/national-helplines/>

References

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) (2011) Out of mind, out of sight: breaking down the barriers to child sexual exploitation: executive summary. London

Office of the Children's Commissioner (2012). 'I thought I was the only one. The only one in the world'. The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups. Interim report. England

https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/cse_guidance_bame.pdf