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Epistemic Injustice: Racially Marginalised Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse

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Introduction

This chapter will explore how intersectional disadvantage impacts on racially minoritised women's experiences of child sexual abuse (henceforth CSA), and further experiences of abuse, and discuss the ways in which these experiences shaped their experience of justice, in particular how epistemic injustice related to their sexual and other abuse. The

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paper draws on interviews with seven adult women from racially minoritised, mainly South Asian, communities[1] who experienced sexual abuse as children but also experienced multiple forms of victimisation and abuse from childhood to adulthood. As children, they experienced sexual abuse, exposure to domestic violence, forced marriage, child marriage, grooming and trafficking for prostitution, and marital rape; and as adults, they experienced a range of sexual and domestic violence and abuse.

There is a general lack of literature regarding sexual abuse of children in Black and minoritised communities in the UK (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse 2018), and the small number of studies that do exist has tended to focus on sexual abuse in South Asian communities. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in the UK has included specific research with a wider group of Black and minoritised communities, including 89 individuals from Black African, Caribbean or other Black ethnic groups (49%), Asian ethnicities (33%) or 'mixed' ethnicities (10%) who were victim-survivors or linked to organisations working with survivors. While the prevalence of CSA in racially minoritised communities is no different to that in the population more generally, it tends to be underreported or not identified in minoritised communities (Gill and Harrison 2019). However, the patterns of abuse may vary within Black and minoritised communities as the contexts and opportunities for abuse can vary. For instance, Gill and Harrison (2019) indicate there are disproportionately more family and community abusers at least in relation to CSA in South Asian communities.

Victims-survivors from racially minoritised communities have been found to face particular barriers to help-seeking and accessing support for sexual violence and abuse, shaped especially by perceptions that statutory services such as the police, social care or children's mental health services will lack understanding of the communities concerned, and may apply inappropriate and racist approaches (Allnock et al. 2009; Bradby et al. 2007; Gill and Harrison 2019; Jay et al. 2021). For instance, the report from the Independent Inquiry to Child Sexual Abuse (Rodger et al. 2020), on CSA in relation to children from Black and minoritised communities, concludes that cultural stereotypes and racism by

professionals lead to failures in practice as well as greater difficulties for individuals to disclose:

> Cultural stereotypes and racism can lead to failures on the part of institutions and professionals to identify and respond appropriately to child sexual abuse. They can also make it more difficult for individuals in ethnic minority communities to disclose and speak up about child sexual abuse. (Rodger et al. 2020: 22)

Such cultural stereotypes and racism can also lead to professionals erroneously seeing sexual abuse as merely part of racially minoritised cultures, and this is evident not only in this report (Rodger et al. 2020), but in earlier work on a range of gender-based abuse in these communities (see, for example, Burman et al. 2004; Thiara and Gill 2009).

In one particularly telling response to the Inquiry (Rodger et al. 2020: 22), a survivor reports that '*The social worker was white, okay, and she said to me, 'This is not sexual abuse. This is your culture'. Even today, I'm so traumatised by this*'. At the same time, concerns about racism may place further barriers on disclosure as victims-survivors have concerns about how their communities will be perceived if they disclose, and also of bringing shame on their families and communities. The studies that exist thus tend to show that victims-survivors will disclose to family or friends, if at all, rather than to agencies and institutions.

Cases such as the child sexual exploitation in Rotherham have at the same time shown up the reluctance of the police and other statutory agencies to intervene in minoritised communities for fear of being perceived as racist, leaving victims without routes to safety or well-being (Peach 2015). In Rotherham, between 1997 and 2003, at least 1,400 girls were systematically abused and sexually exploited by groups of men mainly from the Asian (Pakistani heritage) community. More than a third of the children were known by local services to be vulnerable. The report commissioned into the failure to deal with the Rotherham situation outlines how the children:

> … were raped by multiple perpetrators, trafficked to other towns and cities in the north of England, abducted, beaten, and intimidated. … Girls as young as 11 were raped by large numbers of male perpetrators.
>
> (Jay 2014: 1)

But the extensive abuse they experienced was ignored and minimised by agencies who blamed the girls for engaging in 'prostitution' and also due to concerns about being seen as racist. As Jay notes:

> …there was a reluctance to engage…councillors did not engage directly with the Pakistani-heritage community to discuss how best they could jointly address the issue... Several staff described their nervousness about identifying the ethnic origins of perpetrators for fear of being thought racist; others remembered clear direction from their managers not to do so.
>
> (Jay 2014: 2)

A super-complaint against the police in 2020 resulted from these contradictory problems regarding the response to Black and minoritised victims of sexual abuse. The super-complaint was raised (Tees Valley Inclusion Project and Halo 2020) and included concerns about excessive focus on both community impact and failure by the police to consider family reprisals when abuse was reported to them.

Abusers may also exploit contexts where discourses of family and community 'honour' are prevalent thus shielding their abusive behaviour from being seen or disclosed. While child sexual abuse in racially minoritised communities may be overrepresented in the media and policy as gang-based/peer child sexual exploitation, echoing the Rotherham case (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre 2011; Office of Children's Commissioner 2012; Kelly and Karsna 2018), as Gill and Harrison (2019) point out, in South Asian communities abuse is more often perpetrated by family and community members than in the wider population. The experiences of the women in our sample below also reflected this pattern of largely familial and community abuse, with cousins, uncles, fathers, husbands and religious leaders perpetrating the abuse. Our interviewees, who were from different ethnic and faith communities, talked about not only experiencing sexual abuse as children,

but also about further abuse from family members, members of their various minoritised and religious communities as well as from partners or husbands.

The multiple instances and forms of abuse experienced by our respondents as children and young people may seem akin to the concept of 'polyvictimisation' (Finkelhor et al. 2009, 2015) which Finkelhor and colleagues deem as children who experience very high levels of victimisations of different types. The model, which Finkelhor and team have developed and honed over the years, has focused largely on identifying individual risk factors and individualised characterisations, so-called adverse childhood experiences or ACEs (e.g. Finkelhor et al. 2015). In their earlier work, Finkelhor and colleagues (2009) found that there may be particular 'pathways' to becoming a polyvictim, which they describe as '(a) residing in a dangerous community, (b) living in a dangerous family, (c) having a chaotic, multi-problem family environment, or (d) having emotional problems that increase risk behaviour, engender antagonism, and compromise the capacity to protect oneself' (p 316). However, they found that race did not feature as a specific risk feature in this regard. In contrast, as we show later, the specific experiences of the women from the racially minoritised communities that we interviewed indicated that where 'race' was an important aspect that created specific risks of abuse and shaped their experiences. If we were to apply the Finkelhor 'pathways' characterisation of polyvictimisation to the multiple experiences of abuse in racially minoritised communities that our respondents talked about, this might thus further demonise such communities as 'dangerous' or inadequate.

In further exploration of the adverse circumstances (ACEs) that may impact especially on children's development, and consideration of how these may differ over time, Finkelhor and colleagues (2015) indicate the importance of both CSA and living in contexts where mothers are subject to domestic abuse for detrimental impacts on children's development and well-being. Our sample participants also talked specifically of experiencing CSA and witnessing mothers being abused by partners.

In a more recent study exploring the notion of polyvictimisation and longer-term outcomes on adults, Nguyen and colleagues (Nguyen et al.

2019) found that experiencing victimisation across multiple developmental stages of childhood, especially when this involves polyvictimisation, is a strong indicator of poor well-being during adulthood. This has greater resonance with our sample who experienced both CSA and lived in contexts of domestic abuse at ages 6 and 8, abuse as teenagers, or experienced continuous CSA victimisation from an early age to when they were teenagers, and consequently suffered from depression or other mental health effects, as well as further abuse, as adults.

The literature on polyvictimisation begins to provide a backdrop and patterning that resonates with the experiences of our small sample. However, such an approach, based largely on identifying risk factors, remains individualised and focused on the victims, while lacking explanatory power to take into account the particular opportunities for abusers who live in a structurally racist society with institutionally racist agencies and services. Instead, we need frameworks for understanding the multiple instances of abuse experienced by the women in our sample, that move beyond a merely psychologically and individually informed approach to abuse, to understanding such abuse within family, community and intimate relationships shaped by community and wider societal beliefs about women, ethnicity and age.

In what follows, we therefore explore the testimonies of the women in our small sample, by looking at the contextually situated intersecting factors that shape their experiences and using the conceptual frameworks of epistemic injustice and intersectionality. We will also explore how survivors may resist these forms of injustice, particularly in the context of giving meaning to their words, and seek to understand connections between child and adult abuse, where these may exist.

Conceptual Frameworks

We understand epistemic injustice as injustice related to knowledge and the ability to articulate that knowledge (Fricker 2007). Fricker defines epistemic injustice as the unfair discrimination against some actors in their capacity as knowers, based on prejudices linked to people's social identities and attributes, including gender, social background, ethnicity,

race, sexuality, accent, and class, and argues that there are two distinct forms of epistemic injustice, namely *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. *Testimonial injustice* can take place when the testimonies of some speakers are seen as less credible than others, and this refers back to prejudices about the speaker (Fricker 2007) and gives an unfair advantage to those who are not subject to these prejudices.

Testimonial injustice can lead to *hermeneutical injustice* (Fricker 2007: 162), where due to systematic underrepresentation of the experiences of marginalised individuals and groups, members of these groups are not able to make sense of their experiences, including lacking the language to articulate these experiences. The lack of conceptual frameworks to make sense of one's experiences is an injustice, according to Fricker (2007), because it unfairly advantages those who are able to have their experiences represented in the collective body of knowledge to be able to successfully communicate their experiences to other people: 'the powerful have an unfair advantage in structuring collective social understandings (Fricker 2007: 147)'. We look briefly at the application of these conceptualisations to explore the ways in which women resist their forms of injustice, through both individual and collective speech and actions.

Children from all ethnic communities, including White communities, suffer from epistemic injustice, because their testimonies of suffering are not articulated in the language of adults, or in forms that adults deem to understand (Burroughs and Tollefsen 2016), and are more generally deemed to be unreliable. This is particularly the case in CSA, where the testimony of the child challenges adult authority, and in cases of male perpetrators, hegemonic masculinity. However, the specific complexities of epistemic injustice for children from racially minoritised communities need further exploration. There is some research that relates to epistemic injustice in the context of Black and minoritised communities, including asylum-seeking communities, particularly in the context of their experiences with the asylum-seeking process (Cabot 2016; Sertler 2018). For example, the majority of asylum application outcomes appear predetermined and rest on hierarchies of eligibility established in relation to nationality, gender, sexual orientation and other factors (cf. Cabot 2016), and the testimonies of asylum seekers are often (mis)represented in arbitrary ways in order to reach conclusions that may be aligned to wider

immigration policies in certain countries and regarding social groups (Sertler 2018). We seek to explore and expand these frameworks with regard to the testimonies of racially minoritised adult women who have experienced sexual abuse as children.

We also draw on the conceptual framework of intersectionality, which we understand as 'the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality' (Nash 2008: 2). Kimberle´ Crenshaw (1991) is credited with introducing the term 'intersectionality' to the feminist lexicon in the late 1980s as part of antiracist struggles, and especially a focus on structural intersectionality in the context of violence against Black women. She interrogated the law's penchant in fixing identities and therefore not paying enough attention to how Black women may suffer from both race and gender inequalities. Nash has argued that the notion of intersectionality is under-theorised, suggesting that it has focussed so far on how marginalised people are (adversely) affected by their identities, rather than how those in power are able to use intersectional identities to their advantage. We believe that it is impossible to discuss the complexities of gender-based violence, including CSA without due attention to multiple sites of oppression and privilege that impact victims/survivors, and this is also what we aim to explore in this chapter.

Methods

This chapter draws from the interviews conducted as part of the Justice, Inequality and Gender-Based Violence project.[2] As part of the wider project, we conducted interviews with 251 victims/survivors of GBV, and we draw on seven of the interviews here. The project obtained research ethics approval from the University of Bristol ethics committee. With regard to the interviews, the research design was phenomenological, as the intention of the research was to understand the meanings of justice from the perspectives of survivors of gender-based violence and abuse (Williamson et al. 2021). Following this design, participants were recruited by asking partner agencies and other agencies working in the field of gender-based violence prevention to send information about the

project to their service users. We offered language interpretation or other support for the interviews. In total, we recruited participants through more than 80 different organisations, and these organisations supported the survivors. The interviews were conducted in person, over the phone or using online software, and included some specific demographic and experience-related questions which we aimed to ask all participants that included age, income, employment and education. We asked questions about their experiences of gender-based violence and tried to explore what justice meant to them both abstractly and in the context of their own experience. Interviews lasted between an hour and two hours, with the average interview just over an hour. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim either by a team member or a professional transcriber, and pseudonyms were allotted to each participant.

Sample

This chapter examines a sub-sample of racially minoritised women, who had experienced CSA. Seven women from the overall sample met these criteria and the paper is based on the analysis of these seven interviews. Six of our respondents were South Asian, and one was mixed race (White and African). Four identified as middle class, two as working class and one did not disclose her class identity. All but one of the middle-class women were university educated. There were three Muslims, two Sikhs and one Christian in the sample. All but one were heterosexual, with one woman identifying as lesbian. Three respondents alluded to depression or other mental health issues. Four of the respondents did not seek any redress or justice for their experience of CSA; one approached the police and the NSPCC in adulthood; one disclosed to her husband; and one approached their community religious temple. While the sample is small, we believe that the rich data from the interviews offers an insight into the issue of CSA within racially minoritised, particularly South Asian, communities.

See Tables 2.1 and 2.2 for demographic information on each case, as well as age of CSA, the other form(s) of GBV experienced, and help/justice routes sought in the context of the CSA.

Table 2.1 Demographic information

Name	Social class	Education	Disability	Religion	Ethnicity	Sexuality
Cathy	Middle class	University	Depression	Christian	Mixed – White and Black	Heterosexual
Maliha	Middle class	University	Depression	Muslim	Bangladeshi	Heterosexual
Jaspreet	Working class	NVQ	Missing	Sikh	British Asian	Heterosexual
Amina	Middle class	University	None	Muslim	British Asian	Lesbian
Ruksana	Working class	GCSE	Mental health	Muslim	British Pakistani	Heterosexual
Simran	Middle class	Not known	None	Sikh	British Indian	Heterosexual
Vikki	Not known	Not known	None	Asian	British Asian	Heterosexual

Table 2.2 Types of abuse experienced

Name	CSA age	Perpetrator of CSA	Justice type	GBV as child	GBV as adult
Cathy	Not known	Uncle	None	Witnessed DV	DV, SV
Maliha	8,15	Uncle, husband	None	None	DV, SV
Jaspreet	Not known	Priest in Sikh temple	Told ex-husband and friends	Witnessed DV	DV, SV
Amina	6 to 17	Two uncles	NSPCC, police	Witnessed DV	DV, SV
Ruksana	15–16	Cousin	None	Witnessed DV	DV, SV
Simran	15	Family member	Told Sikh temple	None	DV, SV
Vikki	Not known	Family member	None	Witnessed DV	DV

For the purpose of the chapter, we used a grounded theory approach, where we developed the theoretical models from the interview data. The interview data was analysed, coded and compared to yield the themes relating to the data. The two key themes that emerged from the data

were intersectionality (in terms of how class, religion/faith, immigration, ethnicity and gender intersected in the experiences of abuse) and epistemic injustice (in terms of how the testimonies of racially minoritised women with experiences of CSA were represented and/or used in formal and informal routes to justice). We also obtained valuable data on how some women tried to challenge and resist epistemic injustice. The interview data has been collected, recorded and transcribed within strict ethical guidelines as described above. The analysis has resulted in theoretical frameworks emerging from the data itself, to ensure that the data analysis is credible. We use extended quotes from of our participants to give them voice, convey rich detail and illustrate the themes.

Findings and Analysis

All our respondents had experience of CSA and multiple other forms of gender-based violence and abuse as children and as adults. These forms of abuse included witnessing domestic abuse as children and experiencing sexual and domestic violence as adults. In all but one case, the perpetrator of the CSA was a family member. In the seventh case, the abuse was perpetrated by a priest. We also found that intersectional disadvantage was implicit in the ways in which these minority ethnic women were treated, and these disadvantages were in respect to religion/culture, age and gender. The impact of social class is not always clear in the testimonies, but we have included it in Table 2.1 to provide a full picture.

Testimonial Injustice

The framework of testimonial injustice includes the extent to which credibility is compromised because of the deflated significance credited to their narratives vis-à-vis other sources of knowledge and other speakers.

The intersections of age, gender and community/religious norms served to silence victims/survivors of CSA in our sample. In only two cases did the survivors speak out about the abuse while it was taking place, and in both cases, they were not believed:

> I think my mum … again she slapped me a few times. She slapped me … the guy who abused me showed me a porn magazine and I tried telling my mum about it, and she slapped me [saying] 'That is ridiculous!'
>
> (Amina)

There has been some research on the role of religion in perpetration of coercive control and domestic abuse (Aghtaie et al. 2020), and crimes in the name of honour, including female genital mutilation (Gangoli et al. 2018), and this is further articulated in the testimonies of some of our respondents. Jaspreet who was abused as a child by a priest talked about how she knew that the abuse was wrong, but was not able to speak out because of her age, and the power that her abuser enjoyed within the community:

> He wants me to take my top off. From there, that's when I knew it wasn't right, but because I was so young I didn't know what to do.
>
> (Jaspreet)

Jaspreet was aware, even as a child, that no one would believe her if she spoke out:

> No, no, because I couldn't tell anybody because my parents didn't believe me and if I'd have said anything in school, it's like shame. Like it's the girl that gets blamed for it
>
> (Jaspreet)

She went on to explain that there was a culture of collusion because of the religious authority that the priest enjoyed:

> Then I tried to avoid him, but then he'd just come up and just give me a hug, but it wasn't a hug; it was a grope. Because everybody knew him and he's known to like hug you, hug you, give kids sweets, nobody said anything, but I used to try to avoid him.
>
> (Jaspreet)

When survivors did speak out as adults (as in 4 cases), their earlier child sexual abuse was used against them to revictimise and perpetrate further abuse. As Jaspreet expressed:

> So my ex knew everything, that I was abused and what sort of life I had. I don't know if he used that against me because he forced sex, saying, you know, "That's what you like. You're a slag. You're this." Yes, so I was beaten up by him regularly. He was possessive. I wasn't allowed to go out the house.
>
> (Jaspreet)

Maliha, a Muslim woman, who was forced to marry at the age of 15 in her country of origin, was sexually abused as a child by her uncle before her marriage and her husband after the marriage. The intersections in her positioning by ethnicity, immigration status, cultural context and age meant that she lacked any ability to speak out and was discouraged from doing so by her peers:

> I only had like a few cousins [in country of origin] that I could talk to. But they would be like 'If you don't do this you're going to get battered, you're going to get …' cos they'd apparently seen it with other people and they were like 'You just need to do this'. They were like trying to make me aware of what consequences there were … not in a malicious way, cos they were my age and they were like 'Oh my God, you know, if you don't do this, this and this will happen' you know you need to really comply with what they want. And I was like 'Really?' and it shocked me.
>
> (Maliha)

Maliha felt that victims of sexual abuse were therefore not able to talk about the impact of the abuse on their lives.

> ...the perpetrator gets away with everything. Or gets away with the majority of what they've done…I think it's really unfair when the emotional side is not attached to it and … because I feel victims suffer a lot more than the perpetrators.
>
> (Maliha)

Maliha left her husband at 17 for another man, but her community in the UK did not recognise her second relationship as legal or valid:

> And cos I was still like in the eyes of religion I was still married to the other person, it was shameful.
>
> (Maliha)

Previous work on victims/survivors of different forms of gender-based violence of abuse has found procedural injustice to be implicit within the policing and judicial system, particularly in the case of racially minoritised women and girls (Gangoli et al. 2020; Mulvihill et al. 2018). Our respondents, including those who did not approach the police, also spoke of the criminal justice system, as implicitly unjust. Respondents believed that in a courtroom, and criminal justice system more generally, decisions were made by people who were not involved, and that the victim-survivor's words were never believed. For example, Amina, who experienced sexual abuse at the hands of her uncles, and reported this as an adult to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the police, had this to say:

> so justice is basically where if somebody perpetrates a crime against you then they are … I use the word 'tried' – they go to a tribunal or a court, and there's a discussion by people who are not involved and there's a decision that if the evidence is there to show that this was done. And you know that it's happened, but actually it is for the jury or whoever to decide that yes this person needs to be punished for what they've done.
>
> (Amina)

Cathy, a mixed-race woman, who was sexually abused by her uncle as a child, talked about her decision not to report to the police when she was an adult:

> (Friends asked me) to take him to court and prosecute him so that it doesn't happen to anyone else. But at the same time at that moment in time you don't want to see that person again, you don't want to put yourself through that. You know even when they're talking about that they can do it on the video link and stuff, it still wasn't convincing to me

> that you know … it wasn't convincing enough to me that I was going to be fully safe.
>
> (Cathy)

Amina talked about how victim blaming was common in cases of sexual abuse and rape, particularly in the criminal justice system:

> So yeah, so an injustice may be where that happens basically that somebody … for example in sexual abuse, or even in rape cases … but that someone tells you 'Oh you shouldn't be wearing that dress … that you're asking for something because you are wearing this.
>
> (Amina)

Hermeneutic Injustice

Hermeneutic injustice occurs as a process of cultural and structural collusion, where marginalised groups find that they lack the language and resources to speak out, including an ability to fully process their experience (Fricker 2006; 2007). This creates particular barriers to disclosure involving language and reaction from family and community. In the context of child sexual abuse, the women in our sample found that they were being gaslit by norms both within their own communities and within wider structures of racism.

In the context of general disbelief and abuse, women were not able to make sense of their experiences, whether they were of CSA or other forms of parental control, and this socialised them to be silenced further. For example, Amina, who was forced to wear a hijab at an early age, disliked it and found it 'embarrassing', but finally gave up at age sixteen.

Further in the interview, Amina stated that she was not able to articulate her embarrassment to her family, 'because they wouldn't understand what there was to be embarrassed about' fed into the process of hermeneutic injustice, as she 'just gave up'. Consequently, women did not have the language or space to articulate the abuse because of gendered and community norms:

> I just couldn't do anything because obviously being a girl you couldn't tell your parent anything.
>
> (Jaspreet)

Our respondents articulated this in the context of how they saw older women in their family also being controlled, and silenced, and this created an atmosphere of fear:

> Every time we broke the rules my mum would always get punished, even if it was subtle. There was a lot of pressure, especially as we got older, as we became teenagers, that's when it really really became apparent…We weren't allowed to go out, we weren't allowed to listen to music. We hated it, but it wasn't violence or shouting or screaming, it was just the rules were there.
>
> (Ruksana)

Some respondents talked about how they felt split between what was 'normal' and not. When Amina was being forced into marriage as a teenager, she could not speak out against it:

> No, I didn't talk to my parents about it either because … I just thought it was normal, but it didn't seem normal to me. That's what they did but it wasn't normal to me.
>
> (Amina)

Amina and the other interviewees felt a sense of cognitive dissonance between what they were told was 'normal' by their families/communities and what they actually felt *was* normal behaviour. We suggest that if girls and women constantly and repeatedly experience this dissonance, it is very likely that they would not be able to articulate it.

Ruksana, a Muslim woman, who was sexually abused by a cousin as a young teenager, explained that she did not report it to anyone because of her previous experience as a child, when her school colluded with her family to deny her equal access to educational activities:

> [in] schools where my voice didn't seem to count – that was injustice. So it was not just that everything happened … I felt like I tried to explain

> to [teachers] that this is how our life is – why is my life different, why aren't you doing anything about it, why am I not allowed to go on school trips. And [they] said that's the way it is in your culture. So why is that allowed, you know … that to me was that whole injustice, the unfairness of it all … and all because I was a girl, you know.
>
> (Ruksana)

First generation women found that their previous experiences in their country of origin did not equip them to articulate their abuse and also created barriers to disclosure due to shame:

> But I come from India and come from the Sikh family, never had problem there, so we weren't trained for that – if you need help, where do you have to go? Plus, those days, you think it's shame to the family if you do something, if police come to your door, or in the house there's loud noise, fighting, arguing and all that.
>
> (Simran)

Our participants found that their experiences of child sexual abuse had led to a sense of normalisation of the abuse, and their adult relationship with the perpetrator complicated their ability to recognise what was happening to them as abuse (Middletoet al. 2017; Stark 2007):

> That is just emotionally, financially, and all aspects that he damaged … he damaged my way of life, thinking [this is] how life should be.
>
> (Maliha)

When women tried to speak out, they found that they lacked the language and knowledge to articulate the abuse, and ended up blaming themselves and internalised the abuse:

> I think I went to the GP once when I was being abused and I said 'I think I'm pregnant' and the GP said 'Have you had sex?' and I kind of knew what sex was and I thought 'No, but I'm not sure if it's through clothes' but I couldn't say I was being abused, because I didn't want to then have to deal with that. So I thought it would be my fault because I told everyone.
>
> (Amina)

Resisting Epistemic Injustice by Voicing the Abuse

This section will look at the efforts made by women to resist these forms of epistemic injustice. As we have seen in previous sections, women and girls find it difficult to articulate what is happening to them as abuse. Resistance comes from a recognition of the problem and naming what has happened as abuse (Rich, 1979). Like many other victims of child sexual abuse (Frazer and Hutchings 2020), Jaspreet talked about how as an adult she wanted to work towards a space where girls and women are believed and the abuse they experienced acknowledged:

> Okay. Justice is, for me, oh, God, how do I explain it? For me it would be like, say, for women, it's to stand up for women's rights, that's justice, to acknowledge that what happened to these victims, it's the knowledge they were abused and, you know, these women shouldn't have gone through this because of like being female. So for me it's like to stand up just to see someone admitting that they did wrong to these women.
>
> (Jaspreet)

Some of our participants spoke of different ways that as children, they tried to resist the gendered norms that prepared them for accepting abuse. Amina recounted how her mother was conditioning her to be a good South Asian woman from a young age, but explained that she found ways to resist her:

> Yeah so that was something that I kind of noticed from the age of about 10, that my mum … I felt she was preparing me in some way. I kind of remember being in the kitchen from a young age, that I had to learn to cook, and I had to clean. And at that age I remember [wanting to join my brother in] …climbing trees and playing and learning to ride a bicycle… I wasn't allowed to ride a bicycle because girls didn't ride bicycles. But I did it secretly, my brother and I learnt on a bicycle that didn't actually have a chain on it. So we lived on a hill so we'd ride down the hill, then we'd have to walk it back up.
>
> (Amina)

One of our participants found ways to stop the abuse temporarily, by cutting herself in her genitals so that she could pretend that she was menstruating. She did this as a way to stop the perpetrator from raping her:

> Myself I mutilated myself I suppose, just … I'm not saying I cut myself to the extent that I gave myself significant harm, I don't think I did that, but … just enough you know to be bleeding, so I could stop him having sex.
>
> (Ruksana)

Ruksana drew on Islamic religious norms that menstruating women are unclean, and that men are prohibited to have sex with them (Mazuz 2020). While these norms have been seen as discriminatory to women (Poureslami and Osati-Ashtiani 2002), Ruksana was able to use them to prevent abuse, albeit with injury to herself.

One of our respondents eventually reported her childhood experiences of abuse to the police as an adult only when she felt that other children were in danger from the perpetrator:

> And I reported it for the first time last year … well I talked to the NSPCC and they filed a report to the police, because there are children still in the house, so they had to go and let them know that there had been a report … they didn't say it was from me … so they were investigating … but they were just made aware that there was something. I told my mum about it for the first time last year.
>
> (Amina)

Making the report to the NSPCC empowered Amina to the extent that she was able to then speak to her mother about the abuse.

Jaspreet reported to the temple when she was an adult, that she had been abused there as a child, and found the experience difficult:

> It was, I'm not going to lie. It was one of the hardest times of my life, and being disowned as well by everyone. Everything you know, you've been going to that temple since you were young. I even wrote a letter to this priest, I'll say it now, I wrote a letter of my abuse. I wanted them

> to know who abused me in the temple, what goes on. They called me and they ripped the letter up and said to me, they said, "Nobody should know about this.
>
> (Jaspreet)

However, Jaspreet went on to state that she did not regret speaking out, '*even if it made no difference*'. This is a testament to the power of speaking out for victims of child sexual abuse.

For some respondents, their sense of resisting years of epistemic injustice came simply by moving on mentally and physically from the abuse:

> I am both a victim and a survivor, because whatever happened it was too much to handle at the time, I just moved from there. Now I'm all right, I'm happy, and God has given me everything. My children are happy, I'm happy. I'm living my life. I eat what I want to eat, I go where I want to go, I wear what I want to wear.
>
> (Simran)

Discussion and Conclusion

As the previous sections illustrate, racially minoritised women and girls may experience multiple forms of abuse that may constitute 'polyvictimisation' and can have detrimental long-term impacts on their mental health. Moreover, racially minoritised women and girls experience epistemic injustice in the context of child sexual abuse and further abuse. This is complicated by different intersections, and these will be explored here. We also found that racially minoritised women and girls resist the silencing of their voices. The key intersecting factors that inhibited women and girls' ability to be heard and believed were intersections of religion, gender and age; and within these the discourses of shame and honour that particularly impacts some racially minoritised women, particularly from South Asian communities (Gill 2004; 2009).

Our respondents experienced the restrictions of shame and honour from a young age, and this was further complicated by gendered norms. As earlier studies indicate (Kandiyoti 1988), older women in the family,

particularly mothers, were often complicit in perpetuating these forms of testimonial and hermeneutic injustice by ignoring and/or punishing their daughters when they speak out. Several respondents (Ruksana, Amina, Jaspreet) in our sample spoke about the role of their mothers by creating a context within which speaking out was impossible, or speech was punished. In one case (Ruksana), implicit threats against the mother by the father were used to silence her. In all cases, respondents felt trapped into silence, because children, particularly girls, are not believed when they speak out.

Another intersecting factor is religion. Religious coercion in these cases can be seen as coercive control, as ways of manipulating women's behaviour by using religious justification; for example, there is evidence some religious practitioners talked about the role of scripture and religious teaching in constraining justice for victims of violence and abuse (Mulvihill, et al. 2018) and therefore trapping women further in what Stark (2007) has called the 'cage of male domination'.

In line with earlier theoretical (Menon 2004) and empirical (Baxi 2017) studies on gender-based violence and justice that point to a fundamental lack of fit between justice and law, none of our respondents had any faith in the criminal justice system, and they pointed to the systematic failures within these systems that did not prioritise victim/survivor voices and testimonies. Epistemic injustice was also implicit in our participants dealing with other structures, including education (Ruksana); immigration (Simran); and religion (Simran, Jaspreet, Cathy).

In this context of general epistemic injustice, what enabled women to speak out and be heard? We suggest that women's and girls' resistance was sometimes implicitly dependent on their ability to escape the hermeneutic injustice they experienced and being able to recognise their experience as abuse. In other words, they were often able to name their abuse when they were older and were in a safe space (Maliha, Amina and Jaspreet) either professionally or in their personal life. In two cases (Amina, Ruksana), there was resistance at the time of the abuse, even if they were not able to fully articulate their abuse as such. Even where their resistance appeared unsuccessful (Simran) or a form of self-harm (Ruksana), the very act of resistance was responsible for *restoring a sense*

of self (Draucker et al. 2009) that has been lost to them through their abuser (Maliha).

In conclusion, our chapter demonstrates that racially minoritised victims/survivors of CSA experience testimonial and hermeneutic injustice, and these forms of injustice are reflected and explicit in their interactions with structural (law, criminal, justice, immigration) and cultural (familial and/or religious norms and codes) systems. However, it was evident in their testimony that women were able to resist these forms of injustice, particularly when they were enabled to do. The power of speaking out as a form of resistance cannot be underestimated as a form of healing for women and girls who have experienced child sexual abuse.

Summary

This chapter draws on interviews with seven adult women from racially minoritised communities who experienced sexual abuse as children and multiple other forms of abuse both as children and as adults. The theoretical frameworks used to explore the women's testimonies were epistemic injustice and intersectionality. We found that racially minoritised women who are survivors of child sexual abuse face particular vulnerabilities to both testimonial and hermeneutic forms of epistemic injustice, both as children and also as adults. These included: faith-based/religious restrictions and community and family enabled gendered norms; wider structural issues, and as children, age-related restrictions. Some of the respondents were not able to articulate the abuse, even to themselves, particularly as children. However, a few were able to both articulate and find ways to resist the abuse as children, but mostly commonly, from a space of safety, as adults. We argue that racially minoritised girls are particularly vulnerable to epistemic injustice when subjected to child sexual abuse, and recommend that policy and practice be better adapted to reflect this in order to support them, and co-create safe spaces with them to enable them to voice and resist the abuse.

Notes

1. In the light of recent concerns about the acronym *BAME* used to describe Black and Ethnic Minority Communities, we will be using the term racially minoritised instead (Milner and Jumble 2020).
2. (ESRC grant ES/MO10090/1, Universities of Bristol, Cardiff and West of England with Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid). The project addressed the knowledge gap that exists regarding justice, inequality and gender-based violence (GBV), and explored how 'justice' (in its wider sense) is understood, sought and experienced by victims/survivors of GBV and key practitioners.

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