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Original Citation

Abass, Tahir, Reeves, Carla and Raikes, Ben (2016) Breaking down barriers: understanding the experience of British Pakistani families affected by imprisonment. *Probation Journal*. ISSN 0264-5505

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Breaking down barriers: understanding the experience of British Pakistani families affected by imprisonment

Tahir Abass, Carla Reeves and Ben Raikes

Introduction

Research exploring the experiences of being a family member of a prisoner, and the impacts this has, is an area of study that is only recently starting to be fully considered. Traditionally this field has tended to focus on the short and long-term impacts on children of prisoners with a particular focus on the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, criminality and imprisonment (*c.f.* Clewitt and Glover, 2009; Daniel and Taylor, 2001; Lockwood and Raikes, 2016; Murray and Farrington, 2005; Raikes, 2014). However, more recently the experiences of other family members, including parents, siblings and partners/spouses have been gathering attention (*c.f.* Codd, 2000; Codd, 2007; Dept. of Children, School and Families, 2007; Gan-Rankin et al., 2010; Glover, 2009; Jones et al., 2013). This attention predominantly springs from greater recognition that close family members' relationships with prisoners are vital to appreciating how prisoners cope with imprisonment and their resettlement and reintegration into the community, as well as to their motivation to engage with desistance work; and so has been brought into the remit of rehabilitation and offender management (*c.f.* Cochran, 2014; Codd, 2007; McKiernan et al., 2013; Mills and Codd, 2008).

Despite this growth in academic scrutiny, studies remain few and restricted to a relatively small number of penological researchers. Perhaps due to the difficulties in

accessing the target population and that most studies have been small-scale qualitative projects, to date research has tended to neglect differences in familial experiences based on race, ethnicity or culture, instead focussing on various categories of family relationships (such as children or partners of prisoners). Thus, although there are some notable exceptions such as Light (1995), previous research in this area has tended to homogenize the experience of a family member and perhaps over-generalises from these findings to under-researched populations. This paper addresses this directly by focussing exclusively on the experience of family members of British Pakistani prisoners, where the family members were also all British Pakistani. In doing so, this paper considers how they understand their experience of having a family member in prison, their own expressed support needs, and barriers to accessing that support.

The focus on British Pakistani families is both timely and socially significant in the context of continuing anti-Islamic sentiment, or 'Islamophobia', and the growth in policing, political and media attention on Islamic radicalisation and extremism. This focus has been argued to contribute to feelings of social alienation and the social exclusion and isolation of British Pakistani communities within wider society, although it must be recognised that not all British Pakistani individuals or families are Muslim (Alexander, 2008; Quraishi, 2006; Toor, 2009). Thus, there is reason to believe that families of British Pakistani prisoners may have differing experiences from other ethnic, religious or cultural groups because of their unique social position post 9/11, 7/7 and within the context of the 'war on terror'. These experiences have, as yet, been ill-considered academically.

Background

What is known about the experience of families of prisoners?

Research focussing on the children or partners of prisoners have been the greatest growth areas in this field of research (*c.f.* Clewitt and Glover 2009; Codd, 2007; Daniel and Taylor 2001; Jones et al., 2013; Lockwood and Raikes, 2016; Raikes, 2014), however, the impact of imprisonment on other close family members such as siblings, parents or cousins is very sparse and under-researched. Families of prisoners' research can be traced back to Morris (1965), who explored experiences of women who were affected by the imprisonment of their partners. Morris (1965) found that there were issues around income, stigma and social exclusion and an increase in household duties and responsibilities with little, if any, support available. As families of prisoners have gained some increasing attention within academia and research more recently, these issues are found to continue to be prevalent and to extend to other family members as well. Within the family unit imprisonment can impact on a significant source of family income which not only results in greater financial hardship for partners and children, but often pushes them and other family members into taking on new and additional familial, gender and social roles in order to manage the loss of income. This can result in changes in the balance of power within the family, which can be challenging to adjust to (Codd, 2007). Imprisonment of a family member may also lead to isolation from wider familial networks or external social relationships as a consequence of not wishing to disclose family secrets and/or difficulties (Jones et al., 2013). This self-imposed isolation of families was also noted by Codd (2007), although she also found that the fear of the negative reactions of others to the disclosure was greater than the realities experienced. Despite this, families have been found to commonly face varying degrees of social stigmatisation and exclusion by their peers,

social networks and local communities, and are sometimes regarded as guilty by association to the imprisoned individual (Murray, 2007; Raikes, 2014).

The impacts of these practical, emotional and social challenges to the families of prisoners have been associated with higher levels of stress and anxiety than in the general population (Gan-Rankin et al., 2010). Correlated to this have been higher recorded rates of substance and alcohol misuse, and lower levels of confidence and self-esteem (Dept. of Children, School and Families, 2003). Mental health concerns have similarly been reported as more common amongst this group, particularly for younger family members and children (Clewitt and Glover, 2009; Jones et al., 2013). Whilst such correlations are not evidence of a causal link they do indicate the need to explore the experience of the family of prisoners in order to understand fully how they are affected and the short-and long-term impacts which may be detrimental to the family's own resilience and individual members' positive future outcomes as well as broader social safety and security. This need for understanding is required to underpin the design, delivery and effectiveness of support provided to families and policies governing how they are managed and communicated with whilst their family member is within the criminal justice system (CJS). This needs to be in the context of appreciating that the disadvantages often found to result from being the family of a prisoner tends to compound the social disadvantage already experienced. Imprisonment of a family member is more likely to occur in families who already face social deprivation and come from low-income and low social-status backgrounds (Dept. of Children, School and Families, 2007). The loss of income and additional financial and social costs associated with the imprisonment of a family member can,

therefore, be detrimental to a family's wellbeing and amplify pre-existing disadvantages (Christian, 2005; Gan-Rankin, et al., 2010; Glover, 2009; Raikes 2014).

What is known about the experience of British Pakistani families of prisoners?

Although there is a significant, though still relatively small, body of research exploring the impact of imprisonment on families, there is dearth of research exploring the impact of imprisonment on family members of any specific minority ethnic or cultural community within the UK. The lack of research is an important gap in our knowledge of the experience of families of prisoners as, according to the Prison Reform Trust (2015), British national ethnic minority prisoners make up 26% of the prison population compared to 14% of the general population (Office for National Statistics, 2012), with 8% of prisoners being classed as Asian or British Asian (MoJ, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2015). Prisoners' ethnic status is not categorised by the Ministry of Justice finer than 'Asian' and so there is a lack of official statistics which illustrate the precise representation of British Pakistani prisoners, although it is recognised that the category of 'Asian' represents a very heterogeneous community including not only prisoners of Pakistani origin, but also those of Indian or Bangladeshi ethnicities, for example. Some data is available on prisoners' religion, with the Prison Reform Trust (2015) describing how the Muslim prisoner population has more than doubled from 5,502 in 2004 to 12,328 in 2015. However identifying to what extent this reflects the British Pakistani community is contentious as Muslims in prison also represent a heterogeneous community, with 41% of Muslims in prison identifying as Asians, 31% identifying as black, 14% as white and 8% as mixed ethnicity.

Inevitably, irrespective of ethnic or cultural backgrounds, there are similarities in the experiences of families who are impacted by imprisonment. Where British Pakistani families of a prisoner are concerned, however, these experiences may have a very different qualitative impact due to the different social and cultural status of the population. For example, British Pakistani communities are amongst the most socially deprived in the UK, with members of this community more likely to be unemployed in comparison to the wider general population, and in cases of employment are likely to be on significantly lower pay (Hellyer, 2007). Subsequently, the financial loss experienced by British Pakistani families impacted by imprisonment can be severe and add to pre-existing financial disadvantages, intensifying feelings of stress, worry and anxiety. Furthermore, Light (1995) in his study on BME families' experiences of imprisonment found that some of the experiences of black and Asian families mirrored those of the wider white population such as stigmatisation, anxiety, and financial difficulties. However, he also described additional challenges such as: language barriers, a lack of sensitivity displayed by the police at the point of arrest, a sense of exclusion, and a lack of information with regards to the events surrounding the arrest, conviction and imprisonment. In extreme cases there were accounts of mistreatment and both actual and perceived racism were reported by some families (Light, 1995). Light also highlighted families' concerns about how BME offenders were treated, noting that: 'conditions in prisons were seen to discriminate against Asian prisoners in particular, with regard to their dietary needs and religious customs' (Light, 1995: 217). The capacity or willingness of prisons to eradicate institutional, staff and prisoner racism and discrimination through, for example, providing appropriate Halal foods and facilitating the practice of non-Christian religious observance continues to be questioned, particularly in respect to Islamic prisoners (Beckford, 2005; Quraishi,

2014). However, the situation within prisons has notably improved under Human Rights, Anti-Discrimination, Anti-Racist and Race Equality legislation and policies (Joly, 2007).

Light's findings are significant as they may apply to British Pakistani families of prisoners, particularly with regards to language, dietary needs and religious customs. However, due to the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of Light's data sample, the implications drawn in respect to the experience of British Pakistani families of prisoners' are limited and somewhat tenuous. Research focussing on British Pakistani or Asian people within the CJS may indicate some of the more culturally-specific issues that potentially affect British Pakistani families of prisoners. Toor's (2009) study on British Asian girls within the CJS particularly highlighted the importance of cultural concepts of family honour (*izzat*) and shame (*sharam*), describing them as 'deeply embedded' in the girls' internal-personal and social experience of the system (Toor, 2009: 242). Shaw (2001) explains how control is exercised through these notions of *izzat* and *sharam* in British Pakistani communities, particularly in concentrated communities where gossip can compromise and bring into disrepute family prestige and social status. Similarly, Gilbert et al., (2006) describe an aspect of *izzat* as reflected *sharam*, whereby an individual's actions can bring shame upon themselves and also those who are closely associated with them. This can result in social ostracisation and exclusion from the local community as a direct consequence of a family member's imprisonment (Toor, 2009).

The study

The study adopted a qualitative 'walk along interview' technique (Evans and Jones, 2011) in which the interviewer accompanies the participant on a reflexive journey through which they describe their experiences. This was a valuable technique in maintaining a broadly chronological structure in the interview which took the participant from point of arrest, through their family member's journey within the CJS to the present time, without unduly influencing the conceptual and analytical themes that arose. Within this framework Kvaales' (1996) model was utilised in which introductory open questions were followed-up with more targeted probing. Again, this enabled the participant to lead the interview in terms of raising key issues, but facilitated the researcher in gaining the detail needed to obtain an accurate understanding of the experiences being recounted to him. Through these methods it was possible to not only get a description of events and problems encountered by participants but also to explore their feelings and emotions.

Initially two participants were recruited opportunistically from previous contacts, with the rest being recruited through snowball sampling. This resulted in six semi-structured in-depth interviews being undertaken by the first author with adult family members of different British Pakistani prisoners. All the family members were also British Pakistani. Some of the prisoners were still in prison at the time of the interview, while others had been released. Other than being over 18 years of age, and self-defined British Pakistani with a close family member in prison there were no other selection criteria. As with ethnicity, what constituted a 'close' family member was left to the participant to self-define as some families had very close extended networks. Table 1 sets out the characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: sample characteristics

Pseudonym	Sex	Age category	Relationship to prisoner	Prisoner offence
Rehman	M	18-21	Son	Financial crime
Munir	M	34-37	Brother	Drugs related
Yamana	F	34-37	Cousin	Terrorism - Conspiracy to make explosives
Imaad	M	34-37	Brother	Death By Dangerous Driving
Taaiba	F	30-33	Sister	Assault
Yacoob	M	26-29	Brother	Robbery

Normal ethical protocols were complied with and the host University approval sought. The interviews were fully transcribed from taped audio recordings and thematically analysed using an iterative process in which the researcher identified levels of themes based upon patterns of issues raised in the interview data (Boyatzis, 1998). The following discussion highlights how British Pakistani families experience having a family member in prison and what this means in terms of their support needs, where they gained support (if they did) and what impeded their accessing of support services.

The experience of British Pakistani families of prisoners

Information and communication

Participants commonly reported a lack of information or clarity regarding what was happening during arrest and the subsequent stages of sentencing and imprisonment:

Yacoob: 'Nothing, not been made aware of anything, it's been zero, zilch, nothing... not even a brochure you know, to say that yeah, you know, this is what's out there for help, ... absolutely nothing.'

This lack of communication and understanding of the process has consistently been highlighted as having negative impacts and increasing feelings of stress and anxiety amongst family members (Gan Rankin et al., 2010). Participants reported being left confused not only about what was happening but also on where they could go to ask their questions to gain some guidance and clarity or support:

Yamana: 'Nobody's even got told by the police...so nobody knew how to react, they didn't know what to do either....they were, sort of kept in the dark...They didn't know what was going on really at all.'

Rehman: 'Nothing like this ever happened in my family before, so it was a first time experience, so, no one knew who really to speak to or who to get information off and stuff.'

This confusion and lack of information is consistent with wider literature for all families of prisoners (Gan-Rankin, et al., 2010), however, for British Pakistani families the impacts of this lack of information may be exacerbated by language barriers. Four of the six participants described how their parents or elder generations of their family were entirely dependent upon them for translating any form of official correspondence as they did not understand or speak English, and were not communicated with in Urdu or other accessible formats. This dependency can mean added vulnerability especially when elder family members do not have access to anyone who can translate for them. For example, Munir described how his elderly father, who did not understand English, was at home alone when his property was searched by the police and so was left feeling confused and distressed as a consequence of the events which were unfolding.

His father was not given an explanation in an appropriate language as to why the police were in his property, who they were carrying out the search in regards to and what they were looking for. Trained police dogs entered the property which further caused distress to Munir's father who, as a practicing Muslim, considered dogs to be impure. The police removed a phone directory from the property which belonged to the Munir's father and had been written in Urdu, which meant his father was also unable to make contact with other family members or friends who would have been able to offer him some support.

Furthermore, older members of the family who are part of the elder generation of British Pakistanis who emigrated from Pakistan can face increased stress and anxiety due to their concerns for the imprisoned family member because of the lack of appropriate information and communication. Without information to the contrary, misconceptions of institutional practices in the UK prevailed in which they feared UK prisons and justice systems would be like those of developing countries such as Pakistan, that they had more personal understandings of:

Imaad: 'They had more of a perception of what a prison in Pakistan may be like, where you get beaten up...by the guards.'

Munir: 'My parents haven't experienced jail; they don't know what it's like. My parents are from Pakistan, they think jail is like Pakistan, in that developing country, so my parents actual concept of jail, is really different to mine... there was a programme on 'Karachi Cops' once... where police officers, they beat

you and torture you into confession and stuff like that. That's my parents...image of what it's like.'

Unfortunately, experiences such as Munir's father's, described above, are likely to reinforce those misconceptions and add to family members' concern and anxiety.

The responsibility of explaining, reassuring and caring for the older generation in these circumstances often falls on younger family members. Participants described how they would often have to take on responsibilities which could involve booking visits, making travel arrangements, arranging overnight accommodation, translating and accompanying older family members on visits:

Yamana: 'There was nobody else to do anything for em, it was always me, and...if I see somebody suffering, especially in our family, I always take over.'

Interviewer: 'What kind of things did you support them with?'

Yamana: 'Making the prison visits, taking em there and back, making sure they got money back for the visits, the fuel and the travel costs and stuff, so you know arrangements, if we were going there two days, sorting out accommodation and everything....and trying to get another prison visit the next day, it was all down to me.'

These additional responsibilities could significantly affect their own lives and potential futures, as Rehman described in respect to his father's imprisonment:

Rehman: 'Yeah, because I was obviously taking it all on. I had to take a year out of college... I failed my exams in January. Then obviously we were still struggling, we never done anything without my dad, he did everything you see, so I had to take a year out of college and come back the next year, so it had a big effect on me.'

Stigma and cultural shame

Stigmatisation and feelings of shame have long been recognised as a consequence families may face when someone has been imprisoned (Codd 2007, Jones et al., 2013, Murray 2007, Social Exclusion Task Force 2008). In South Asian communities, including British Pakistani families, feelings of shame and stigmatisation can be amplified as a consequence of criminality being deemed to be a deviation from cultural values and principles (Toor, 2009). Families impacted by imprisonment may face stigmatisation from the wider community but also from within the British Pakistani community, who are regulated by culturally specific principles towards which criminality can be detrimental, though not confined to considerations of deviance or law-breaking. Thus, as Taaiba and Rehman describe, British Pakistani families may find it difficult to gain support from their social networks:

Taaiba: 'I think a lot of it was and I don't wanna say stereotypical of Asian people or the Pakistani community, but I know with kind of the older generation, with some of the women, they do say things in a way that's not very nice, so she [mother] will have had comments like that.'

Rehman: 'If the community all turned against you, it would be difficult to continue living in the same community, because you're going to the same school, same mosque, same shopping, same cash and carry, same Tesco, everything is the same.'

The fear of the potential community response, therefore, could be extremely significant in itself. Munir recounted how his father, who had regularly attended the mosque in the past, refused to leave the family home because of his fear of how community members would react:

Munir: 'The effect it had on my father was, he wouldn't leave the house. He wouldn't leave the house for like a month or so, maybe 2 months, we had to get one of my father's old friends from back in Pakistan, ... and he had to come over every other day to talk to my dad just to get him to come outside an' start you know, going back to the mosque again cuz my dad was ashamed to go to the mosque.'

Although most participants spoke in some depth on issues surrounding shame and how these fears impacted on their families, none of the participants actually reported instances where families or family members were verbally or physically challenged as a result of their family members' imprisonment. This is consistent with Codd's (2007) findings that fears of a reaction from the local community were often greater than the reality.

British Pakistani women - a vulnerable minority within a minority

The impact of imprisonment can be particularly difficult for women when their male partners are imprisoned. Women often face additional or changing roles in the domestic setting, which may involve becoming the breadwinner or main source of income, while the shift in the balance of power can mean women take on primary familial roles as decision-makers and household manager, which they may not have had before (Codd, 2000). This may leave them having to balance acting as providers and counsellors for their imprisoned partners, whilst taking on additional responsibilities in the domestic and work places (Codd, 2000). In contrast, the patriarchal nature of British Pakistani communities and their male-dominated family structure (Charsley, 2006; Enright, 2009; Gill, 2005,) meant that participants reported that shifts in the balance of power after the imprisonment of a principal male family figure were more likely to mean other male members of the family were expected to take on key influential and decision-making roles in the household.

Rehman: 'And obviously in Asian culture, being the oldest son was like being the second man in the house, it doesn't matter if there's a daughter older than you, it does automatically fall on your head as well.'

There was also evidence of female family members experiencing emotional distress and strain as a consequence of having to adjust to circumstances when male members of the family, on whom they had been dependent, were imprisoned:

Yamana: 'In pieces, she [Aunt] was in absolute pieces because my uncle, he suffers depression, so the man of the house was my cousin, so she'd lost that, she'd lost her son.'

Furthermore, the patriarchal nature of British Pakistani communities meant women often faced intense feelings of guilt and self-blame, particularly when the imprisoned individual was a child (of any age). Taaiba reflected on her mother's emotional state when her brother was sent to prison:

Taaiba: '[...] she was thinking about [...] my son's been in prison, what people gonna say about him, how it reflects on her as a parent [...] what they was saying to her was you should've noticed this, you should've spotted this, you're the mother, the mother should know what's going on with the son.'

Whilst these feelings of guilt and self-blame are consistent amongst the wider population of families of prisoners (Codd, 2007), and not exclusive to British Pakistanis, they can be reinforced by wider family members and the local British Pakistani community, as illustrated by Taaiba, who often deem criminality to be a consequence of women failing in their role as a mother (Toor, 2009).

Cultural insensitivity and (institutional) racism

Reflective of existing literature (Dixey and Woodall, 2012), participants reported feeling that prison officers during prison visits were unsupportive, uncooperative and uncommunicative, for example, when cancelling a visit without explanation and feeling like they were being treated as guilty by association to their family member. Furthermore, participants also reported a number of culturally specific needs which the prison service failed to accommodate during prison visits which exacerbated their troubling experiences. The most common dissatisfaction was that halal food was

unavailable in the canteen, which participants felt demonstrated how the prison service failed to accommodate or be considerate of Muslims, adding to their feelings of isolation:

Rehman: 'Prison settings in that sense, I don't think they were very appropriate. They weren't very accommodating for anyone who's Muslim, or Asian or anything like that, I mean the food they sold in the canteen, only thing you could have was crisps or a coffee or a chocolate or a drink, the hot foods - none of it was suitable. It was all not halal.'

More positively, Taaiba described how a prison officer had accommodated her need to offer prayer by allowing her to use the crèche. Although this may demonstrate good practice and consideration on behalf of the individual prison officer in accommodating a visitor's religious obligations, it does highlight failings in the prison service as an institution. This institutional insensitivity was also noted by Imaad when describing how his elderly mother felt humiliated by the process in which visitors are searched:

Imaad: 'Someone of that age felt a bit...disrespected for example...having to take your shoes off, having to have to take your headscarf off, you know sometimes she'd always carry a tasbeeh (prayer beads), and she'd be told no you can't take that in...But these kinda things obviously did kinda bother her, but with time she obviously come to accept it.'

Although the process of searching prisoners' families at random may be common practice and necessary for security, experiences such as this are likely to add to the

distress and humiliation felt by British Pakistani family members, especially when they contravene religious or cultural norms or requirements and no or little accommodation is made to manage this sensitively (particularly so in the context of language barriers, as noted above). For example, in relation to carrying out a search on women from the British Pakistani community, it would be best practice to have female officers present to undertake the search, even of outer garments, should the family member request this. It would also be useful for the prison service to be culturally aware of items such as the tasbeeh (prayer beads) and the significance of these, as they can often be a means for family members to find solace in difficult circumstances.

The cultural insensitivity experienced was understood by some participants to be evidence of racism:

Munir: 'There are some prison officers that will go out of their way to help you a lot and there are some that are just blatantly racist, and everything in between as well, but I would experience and see more of the racist side of it rather than the good side of it.'

Irrespective of whether families or prisoners actually experienced institutional, direct or indirect racism or not, the fears of such treatment could be very powerful and add to existing concerns and stressors:

Yacoob: '[...] you know the whole concept of prison is, it's got a certain reputation. The stories they've [parents] got in their head about prison is not a very nice place to be, so obviously they thinking how is, how is my son gonna eat? You know, how is

he gonna sleep? How was he gonna, you know, going to fit around other people in there? Is it you know, are they quite biased inside there? [...] I mean they feel ethnic minorities are mistreated out here so in there they think it's just going to be worse.'

Other participants described how even openly discussing issues around racism and the experiences of it can be difficult, as they feared that their feelings and opinions would be disregarded and attributed to them using the 'race-card':

Imaad: 'You know if we put that to our warden or a police officer or anyone in the general public, they will say that's your easy card out you know, [...] so you sometimes have to be careful to even express how you feel.'

Munir recounts this conversation with his brother (the prisoner) when Munir contemplated an official complaint regarding how he and his family were treated by prison officers:

Munir: My brother goes look, these prisons are racist prisons, the prison officers are racist in this prison, ok it's well documented, well known that they are racist, [...] he goes, write a letter by all means, but you not gonna get anything out of it [...] they not gonna change anything, ok, nothing will happen, they'll just apologise and that'll be it.'

Although Munir described his desire to take action as a result of what they had experienced as racist attitudes, he also reported feeling powerless at his lack of being able to influence change:

Munir: 'Well you know there's nothing in my power, I'm powerless [...] there's nowhere for me to turn.'

Notably many of these participants placed their experiences within the context of high profile cases of institutional racism, such as the Zahid Mubarek and Shahed Aziz cases (at HMP Feltham and Leeds respectively) (Moss, 2006), as well as attributing blame for Islamophobia with negative national media coverage on grooming gangs and terrorism.

Supporting British Pakistani families of prisoners

As has been noted previously, families of prisoners can often experience social isolation and exclusion, and feel very lost and disempowered. Only one of the six participants had engaged with formal support services for families of prisoners, which involved accessing a support group for families impacted by imprisonment, and found it useful as a mechanism to feel less marginalised but primarily as a source of information. Significantly, they noted that they were the only British Pakistani family, and whilst they benefitted greatly from the advice of other families, they were aware of their difference:

Rehman: 'I think it made the experience, obviously a lot better because in [support service for families of prisoners] [...] we met a few other families and stuff, **not Asian families, it was all different**, but we seen the experience

people have been through and they gave us their advice [...] [Emphasis added.]

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the previous concerns regarding language and communication, social stigma and shame, and the need for services to respond in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways, some participants felt the presence of British Pakistani police, prison, and probation officers, or support workers would be favourable to smoothing their experience as they would find it easier to engage with someone they felt they could identify with culturally or ethnically. Munir when asked what would make a positive difference responded:

Munir: 'More Asian police officers, prison officers, generally just in the justice system and they had more of an understanding of how an Asian community works, they would be better.'

Thus, it is indicated that British Pakistani families of prisoners would feel better able to be supported, and so more likely to access available support, if the CJS, related organisations and associated support services had dedicated staff from the British Pakistani or broader Asian communities. On a practical level, this provision would also support families through ensuring that the service/s are able to communicate in the language of the family, which would be beneficial to all family members, but particularly so for the elderly or older generations. The ability to communicate in the family's own

language, coupled with the cultural understanding of the needs of British Pakistani families, could help break down barriers to accessing services.

However, not all participants agreed that support services should be provided by individuals from their own British Pakistani communities; perhaps indicating a preference for Asian support officers who are somewhat distanced from the communities, but still have an appreciation of their culturally specific support needs. Munir described his father's concerns in respect to working with British Pakistani professionals or service providers who belonged to the same community, expressing a preference for

Munir: someone who's not part of the community as well so say if it's someone who lived in [Neighbouring town] but worked in [Participant's town], my father wouldn't have a problem talking to them because they don't, they wouldn't go around gossiping [...] what would be said would remain confidential [...] so that way my father could feel, and my mother could feel fine, you know, opening up to them and talking to them about it.'

Taaiba recognised that there was the potential for this fear to lead to British Pakistani families not accessing services at all:

Taaiba: they don't want, people don't want other people to know and you don't want people to know your business[...] but then how do you get help, how do you get help if you don't speak to other people?'

Conclusions and implications

These findings illustrate the wider implications of familial imprisonment for members of the British Pakistani community. The issues that families have to contend with could significantly be reduced if family needs are given greater consideration at all stages of their journey when a family member is imprisoned. In particular, making information and forms of communication more accessible and appropriate may offer older family members some independence and ease concerns whilst relieving some of the burden on their younger family members. The number of cultural issues British Pakistani families of prisoners have to contend with, such as language barriers and cultural awareness and sensitivity, suggests that accessibility to British Pakistani support staff within the CJS or service providers would be advantageous. On the other hand, the extent to which *izzat* and *sharam* influence the lives of British Pakistani families is reported as determining the extent to which they access and engage with services. This indicates that whilst families of prisoners value services or support being delivered by staff who have a personal understanding of their culturally specific support needs, the social distance that Asian staff of non-British Pakistani ethnicity have is also an important consideration in facilitating easier access.

Furthermore, the experiences that families have in respect to the arrest, prosecution and imprisonment of their family member often leave them feeling confused,

marginalised and excluded from the system. A position in which they may be disinclined to access formal support providers fearing further similar experiences. The 1995 Macpherson Report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence defined Institutional Racism as:

‘The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.’ (MacPherson, 1999: 49).

Many of the shortcomings in terms of service provision as experienced by participants recounted in this paper come under the category of ‘unwitting prejudice, ignorance and thoughtlessness’. They are a reflection of the fact that British Pakistani prisoners are a minority group within the prison system, and therefore are vulnerable to having their needs and the needs of their families overlooked. Policies and procedures are all too often geared towards the needs of the majority group, namely white prisoners.

In order to ensure that the needs of British Pakistani prisoners and their families are taken into account it is essential that there is good British Pakistani or Asian representation both in terms of the frontline staff who engage daily with prisoners and prison visitors, as well as the prison service managers responsible for policy. Only that way will the cultural needs of British Pakistani prisoners and their families start to be met. In addition to this, British Pakistani representation on family forums that gather

feedback from those who visit prisoners to inform policy in many prisons would be helpful. Muslim chaplains currently ensure that the spiritual needs of British Pakistani prisoners are provided for, and they also act as an important link between Muslim prisoners and their families. There may be scope for them to adopt a more formal 'cultural consultant' role, to keep the prison authorities informed about the 'cultural consequences' of imprisonment, and how to mitigate their impact for British Pakistani families. This could become part of the Equality Impact procedures that the prison service is required to engage in under the Equality Act currently.

There is scope for further research into the operationalisation of these preferences for service provision to address these failings in meeting the needs of British Pakistani families, as well as the impact that cultural shame associated with imprisonment has. In particular, further research is needed to identify the particular experiences and needs of British Pakistani women who are impacted by imprisonment of a partner or child in more depth, with a particular focus on their specific support needs and how these can be most appropriately be met.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the participants for taking part in this project.

Funding

[to be inserted after anonymous review]

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Word count: 7149