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**Domestic Abuse and Islam in the British South Asian
community**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research**

January 2018

Abstract

South Asian Muslim women, like the vast majority of women regardless of their cultural background, find the first steps of acknowledging and reporting domestic abuse extremely difficult. However, the cultural context and the pressure applied to South Asian Muslim women in particular is unique to their communities. In order to understand the barriers South Asian Muslim women face to reporting domestic abuse, qualitative research was undertaken with six participants who work with South Asian Muslim women in the field of domestic abuse. In-depth interviews were conducted which were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Interpretative phenomenological analysis. One of the key findings was the issue of power; victims who believed perpetrators had a divine right to exert their will on their spouses were more likely to endure the abuse, under the false notion it was their kismet (fate). A further finding was the fact that domestic abuse did not occur within a vacuum, rather many aspects of a victim's life intersect to form a unique perception of domestic abuse. It is this unique experience which informs the response an individual will have when confronted with domestic abuse. Therefore, it is vitally important that attitudes towards domestic abuse are challenged openly on a community and national scale. The further understanding of these unique yet intersecting barriers can allow for more in depth and accurate data to be collected. This in turn can better inform interventions and policies to target those most at risk from domestic abuse.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	6
Literature Review	8
Domestic abuse	8
The women’s movement and domestic abuse.....	10
Police efficacy in dealing with domestic abuse in South Asian communities.....	11
Marriage and patriarchy in the South Asian Muslim community.....	13
Long-term impact of domestic abuse.....	15
Intersectionality and domestic abuse	17
Method	19
Rationale for IPA.....	19
Theoretical roots.....	20
Procedure.....	22
Sample	24
Participants	24
Pilot study	25
Data analysis	25
Ethical considerations	26
Reflexivity	26
Conclusion	27
Analysis.....	29
Power.....	29
Domestic abuse and the role of children.....	31
The role of the extended family.....	33
Mental health.....	35
Misconceptions about religion and culture: the impact on domestic abuse situations.....	40
Stigma/shame	40
Culture and religion	42
Victim blaming.....	47
Interventions.....	51
Faith based support	51
Long-term support.....	53
Proactive work.....	56
Conclusion.....	60
Power.....	60
Misconceptions about religion and culture: the impact on domestic abuse situations.....	62
Interventions	63
Limitations of the research.....	65
Indications for policy makers and practitioners.....	66
References	67
Appendix.....	76
Appendix 1 – Interview schedule.....	76
Appendix 2 - Participant information sheet/Consent form.....	82
Appendix 3 - N transcript.....	85

Introduction

Domestic abuse is prevalent around the world. It transcends racial, religious, cultural and socioeconomic lines (Salter, 2014). Domestic abuse is a unique crime; unlike many other crimes there is no safe haven in which to retreat as in the vast majority of cases the victim lives with the perpetrator. Furthermore, victims are often financially reliant upon their abusers and may have children with the very person who is abusing them. This situation makes the option of reporting and arguably acknowledging domestic abuse incredibly difficult (Stewart, 2013). Studies have shown how victims often resign themselves to a life of abuse rather than seek help, as living in an abusive relationship takes not only a physical toll but a mental toll (Anitha, 2011). Victims may have seen domestic abuse as a child and accepted it as part of adult life, as not so long ago domestic abuse was seen as a private matter to be dealt with behind closed doors. Attitudes towards domestic abuse are ingrained across the world in many patriarchal cultures; and although in recent decades more attention has been paid to the phenomenon of domestic abuse it is still a major issue in all parts of the world (Chaudhuri, Morash and Yingling, 2014).

Although much has been done to combat domestic abuse in all its forms, it is still an underreported crime and consequently the statistics do not reflect the true scale of the problem (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Current studies in the field of domestic abuse are very euro-centric and tend to treat domestic abuse as a universally similar phenomenon, and in turn interventions are designed for the broadest range of groups (Mirza, 2016). Whilst this is understandable, as the research is conducted in mainly western countries, further research needs to be conducted in relation to how immigrant communities respond to domestic abuse. An improved understanding of the cultural barriers that victims face in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse would allow for more in depth and accurate data to be collected and in turn inform interventions and policies. Although studies in the last decade have begun to incorporate ethnic minorities and acknowledge that individuals may have different needs, the studies tend to focus on one aspect of domestic abuse (Das, Alam, Bhattacharyya, and Pervin 2015). These aspects can range from culture, religion and education; however, a major issue with dissecting domestic abuse to its component parts is that it often reduces domestic abuse to one aspect or another, rather than looking at domestic abuse holistically. In recent years studies have begun acknowledging the role intersectionality plays in relation to the perceptions of domestic abuse. A study conducted by Gill and Harrison (2016) stresses the importance of viewing domestic abuse in a broader

context and recognising that intersections between gender, power, ethnicity, age and sexuality all have a bearing on the perceptions of domestic abuse.

The aim of this study is to explore the barriers South Asian Muslim women face in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. This study will look into the intersections between various aspects of an individual's life to try and better understand how these unique intersections inform an individual's perception of domestic abuse. The study will focus on the South Asian Muslim community and will look to investigate the barriers South Asian Muslim women face in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. Areas of life ranging from cultural norms, religious codes and an individual's upbringing were researched in order to attempt to gain a holistic view of the ways in which attitudes towards domestic abuse are formed. It is hoped that the research findings of the study will be useful to policy makers and practitioners in the field of domestic abuse. Although this study focusses on South Asian Muslim women, it is acknowledged that men can also be victims of domestic abuse. One of the participants in this study spoke of an incident where a male victim's son was abusing him in order to take his money from him. However, in line with the aims and objectives of this study the focus will remain on South Asian Muslim women.

The following section will provide a brief overview of the current literature surrounding domestic abuse as well as current governmental policies and the current gaps in the literature. The succeeding sections will detail the influences the women's movement had on the acknowledging and tackling of domestic abuse. Furthermore, the context of domestic abuse will be discussed in line with the South Asian Muslim community, and the intersections between various aspects of South Asian women's lives and domestic abuse will be explored. The subsequent section will detail the methodology of the study and describe the procedure undertaken to gather the data. This data will then be analysed in line with the research question and some of the findings will be analysed in relation to the current literature. The conclusion will highlight the main findings of the study and applications for further research in the area of domestic abuse within the South Asian Muslim community.

The study utilised a sample of five women and one man who work with South Asian Muslim women in the field of domestic abuse. All participants partook in an interview either in person or over the phone which lasted on average for ninety minutes to allow for in depth data to be gathered. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), as this was deemed to be the most suitable way in which to extract the subjective experiences of domestic abuse.

Literature Review

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as any behaviour of an intimate partner that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm (WHO, 2002). In the United Kingdom, the definition of domestic abuse has been updated to include any incident or patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour (Home Office, 2012). The United Nations recently conducted a study which found that domestic abuse is a global problem; evidence suggests that approximately 35% of women worldwide suffer from domestic abuse (Butchart, Mikton, Dahlberg and Krug, 2015).

Domestic abuse undercuts the value of a woman as an individual, and denies them a life free from violence. This violence can range from physical abuse, to verbal, sexual, financial and emotional abuse (Islam and Karim, 2012). A life free from violence is a basic human right; however, many people throughout the world live life in a constant fear of domestic abuse. This violence is unique in the fact they are unable to lock themselves safe inside their home, or by avoiding dangerous places or situations. This violence emanates from within their home, meaning that there is no safe space to escape and in many cases, no one to call on for help (Othman, Goddard, and Piterman, 2014).

In 2010 the UK Coalition government launched the 'Call to end violence against women and girls' campaign, in which £40 million was committed to reduce domestic abuse over a 5-year period (Home Office, 2010). Although the government has claimed to tackle domestic abuse, critics have highlighted that the majority of funding is being removed in the radical budget cuts put forth by the current government. Freedom of information requests made by voluntary organisations found that between 2009/10 and 2012/13 £5.6 million pounds worth of cuts were made to domestic abuse refuges and other women's services across England (Anitha, 2008). The cuts have occurred in the context of the current government's 'Big Society' Initiative which was launched in 2010, which was designed to open up public services, with the goal of empowering local communities to come together and provide social services through more volunteering and civic participation (Ishkanian, 2014). Since 2010 the level and scope of cuts has increased significantly; as public expenditure is expected to fall by £20 billion from 2009/10 to 2015/16 the voluntary sector alone stands to lose £2.8 billion from 2011 to 2016 (Mirza, 2016).

The UK government has also put forth a gender-neutral approach, where no distinction is made between genders in the commissioning of services in the health, welfare and criminal justice sectors. Critics of this gender-neutral approach argue that domestic abuse is a gendered crime, as the majority of victims are women and children (Anitha, 2011). Although statistics show that men are also increasingly coming forward as victims of domestic abuse, a report conducted by the United Nations found that globally women aged between 15-44 are more at risk of rape and domestic abuse than from cancer, car accidents and war (Munro et al., 2011). Although gender neutral and generic services are better value for money, domestic abuse charities have highlighted the way that the specialist knowledge, skills and experiences which have been built over decades risk being lost in the in the frenzy of cuts. Government officials only look to types of help which can be accounted for on a cost-effective basis. However, they overlook the fact that women's charities also provide women with support, to empower them to leave an abusive relationship and move on with their life independently. The same charities also invest in education and prevention programmes, which are curated for both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse (Gadd, 2012).

Domestic abuse charities and organisations rely heavily on statutory funding as their main source of income, and historically they have been underfunded. The lack of funding has had a considerable effect on the ability of women's organisations to help women suffering from domestic abuse, as organisations such as Refuge have had to start to turn women away (Anitha, 2008). A further issue in regard to funding is that domestic abuse charities are not popular with individual donors as they receive statutory funding (Ishkanian, 2014). The National Council of Voluntary Organisations highlighted how the vast majority of individual donations (64%) went to medical and hospital charities and children's charities (24%), whereas women's charities received less than 1% of individual donations (Ishkanian, 2014).

Women's organisations are unable to be overly vocal in the criticism of the government as they rely on statutory funding, and in turn have to proceed with tact in order to retain as much of the funding as they can (Mirza, 2016). The government's current policies continue to prioritise cost-savings and value for money, instead of highlighting the human rights aspect of domestic abuse (Gill and Harrison, 2016). This is counter to the fact that studies have shown that when public spending on domestic abuse is increased, the wider cost of domestic abuse is actually lowered. This is highlighted as in 2001, domestic abuse cost the UK £23 billion but in 2006 it cost £16 billion, the decrease in cost was for the most part down to the development and increase in public services (Walby, Towers, and Francis, 2014). Whilst policy makers increasingly look to gender neutral and cost-effective solutions, the

underlying causes of domestic abuse relating to gender inequality, stereotypes and public attitudes are ignored (Mirza, 2016).

Tackling domestic abuse is a complex issue. Agencies including the Police, the Home Office, the Crown Prosecution Service and the National Health Service are all required to work efficiently together in order to design and implement legislation (Wiener, 2017). The United Kingdom is considered to be a world leader in providing services to women who are victims of domestic abuse. Women's groups have played, and continue to play, an important part in bringing the issue of domestic abuse to the forefront of politics and helping victims rebuild their lives (Htun and Wheldon, 2012). The largest provider of specialist domestic abuse services in the UK is Refuge, an organisation which opened the world's first women's refuge in 1971 in London. Refuge provides culturally specific services at certain locations as it is acknowledged that every woman's needs are different; incorporating their religious and cultural beliefs will better allow interventions to work effectively (Terman, 2016). Refuge at its core aims to provide provisions for women suffering from domestic abuse, providing high quality services which allow women to regain control of their lives and move forward from the abuse they have faced. Refuge also plays an important role in advocating changes in legislation to help people who suffer from domestic abuse ensuring those who are in a position of authority are able to help women most at risk.

The women's movement and domestic abuse

It is important to provide some historical context for a discussion of domestic abuse in the British South Asian Muslim community. In the UK refuges were formed under the banner of Women's Aid, and by the mid-1970s many areas of Britain had refuges which were run by women's collectives (Stewart, Langan, and Hannem, 2013). In 1974, they were reorganised under the National Women's Aid Federation and still exist today and look to foster, promote and develop refuges, outreach programmes, aftercare and children's services that are offered by autonomous local organisations. They also seek to further campaign, research and share information to promote public awareness of violence against women. Therefore, one of the main outcomes of the women's movement was creating provisions for women, which were created by women and designed to cater for the specific needs of abused women (McCarry and Lombard, 2016).

The Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent, colloquially known as OWAAD, was undoubtedly one of the most significant influences on Black women's politics in the UK.

OWAAD was the first network which brought together Black women together from all over Britain; discussions relating to intellectual and political conversations addressed issues of class, race and gender whilst remaining focussed on the core concept of cultural differences which formed the foundations of OWAAD (Swaby, 2014). OWAAD was founded in 1978 and lasted for only five years till its end in 1983; although it lasted for a brief period it captured the imagination of many minority women and its influence still resonates through feminism today (Hussain, 2005).

One of the reasons for the need of OWAAD was the failure of white feminists to address let alone incorporate women's issues relating to race and class remained a barrier which comparatively few black women were prepared to traverse. Women in the black movement took issue with attempting to raise neutral issues such as domestic abuse and rape when issues relating to state racism and violence were not being addressed openly. Racism was seen as a necessity to address overtly in order to bring about further change in the field of the black women's movement (Idriss and Abbas, 2011). In the UK, as public consciousness increased of the suffering of women at the hands of their male partners, the topic came to be discussed at a national level and was regarded as a wider issue of male power. This led to a seventh demand to be added to the National Women's Liberation Conference in 1978. 'Freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status; and an end to all laws, assumption and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women' (Richardson and Robinson, 2015, p.19).

Police efficacy in dealing with domestic abuse in South Asian communities

Feminists such as Patel (2003) argue that BME women, especially Asian women, who are the victims of domestic abuse suffer a double disadvantage. Primarily this relates to the inadequate services available to domestic abuse victims in general, and secondly the current policing methods which are not able to cater for their culturally specific needs. Domestic abuse has historically been seen by the police as 'rubbish work' which was better suited to female members of the police force due to the emotional labour aspect of dealing with domestic abuse (Anitha, 2011). This arguably will affect domestic abuse provisions to Asian women and other ethnic minorities especially when viewed in the context of the Stephen Lawrence enquiry and the issue of institutional racism in the Police (Gill and Harrison, 2016).

Police responding to domestic abuse are required to deal with complicated interpersonal relationships and reach temporary solutions. When dealing with a South Asian family this may be an added complication, as they may be unaware of the power relations in South Asian families. Some of these issues are illustrated in a study conducted by Bleur (2008) who uncovered numerous issues relating to police practices when dealing with incidents of domestic abuse in South Asian families. Bleur (2008) spoke to the specialist domestic abuse officer named Rita who expressed her opinion that white officers did not have much patience when attempting to converse with a woman who cannot speak English and requires an interpreter. Furthermore, when interpreters are found they are usually middle-aged men who are often not appropriate as it brings in a range of gender dynamics into an already complicated situation. Rita once found that an interpreter had intentionally misinterpreted a victim's version of events. Although this is a single officer's account, it demonstrates the deeper underlying problems relating to language barriers and Police efficacy in dealing with domestic abuse in a South Asian Muslim community.

The literature to date indicates the need for a systematic and streamlined process, in which police officers are trained to deal with difficult situations, allowing their judgement to not be clouded by the perpetrators of the crime. Although changes have recently been made in legislation relating to domestic abuse, such as the further training of police officers in dealing with BME groups, more needs to be done to address the issue of domestic abuse in BME communities (Andrews and Miller, 2013). In the current system women calling the police in relation to a domestic incident are in effect entering a lottery in which, depending on the effort of the officer who arrives to help the victim, will define their experience with the police as a positive or negative experience (Robinson, Pinchevsky and Guthrie, 2016). South Asian women are often also the victims of 'unwitting racism' as police may call to the property and remove the perpetrator but they may be unaware that in the majority of South Asian marriages the bride moves into the husband's family's home. This fact if overlooked may result in the woman being subject to further abuse at the hands of her in-laws even when the perpetrator has been removed (Gill and Harrison, 2016).

A further problem relating to domestic abuse in the South Asian communities is that police often consult 'leaders' of the community; these are frequently middle-aged or older men who have their own agendas in relation to domestic abuse. These so called 'leaders' of the South Asian community offer little or no representation of women in order to let their feelings and thoughts in relation to Policing be discussed. These hard to reach and unheard silent minorities within the communities are those who often are most at risk from domestic abuse (Patel, 2003). Feminist authors (Choi, Elkins and Disney, 2016) have also challenged the

role such community 'leaders' play in influencing police policies due to the patriarchal nature of such institutions, whether they be mosques, temples or Gurdwaras. Interviews with managers of organisations have highlighted their opinion that the police are conscious of the 'leaders' personal interest and agendas, however do not wish to strain their relationships with these 'leaders' (Idriss and Abbas, 2011).

A further concern relates to issues regarding 'unsettled' immigrants in the South Asian community, as they may believe they are unable to report the abuse to the police due to fear of being deported. The majority of these women have no recourse to public funds, and are very often financially dependent on the abuser and his immediate family (Holtmann, 2016). A government report acknowledged this risk to women who suffer from domestic abuse; however, changes in immigration rules have resulted in women suffering from domestic abuse being able to remain in the UK if, during a two-year probationary period, their marriage breaks down due to domestic abuse (Andrews and Miller, 2013). Although changes in legislation have been introduced, there continues to be a lack of clarity in relation to the actual laws. Women may perceive the police and organs of authority as not a source of help but a potential threat to their residency.

Marriage and patriarchy in the South Asian Muslim community

In the South Asian community marriage is seen as a moral and social obligation. It is shaped by social and cultural norms, all of which combine to create a unique perception of what a healthy marriage should be. Although the law in many South Asian countries protects women from violence, due to a lack of effective policing and application it is rarely applied effectively (Kamimura, Ganta, Myers and Thomas, 2017). The roots of modern law in the Indian subcontinent can be traced back to British colonial rule, which lasted for over two centuries. Throughout this period English common law was enforced in the region. Legal reform during this period was continually overlooked in order to reduce the risk of an uprising; this allowed for regional tribal and caste/clan based rules to thrive. These rules which have existed for centuries still exist in certain areas, where tribal and cultural laws have intentionally been presented as religious tenets (Chapman, 2014). Parallel legal systems such as tribal courts continue to play a large part in rural communities in the Indian subcontinent, where written laws are often unknown. This allows tribal elders to ignore laws designed to guarantee and protect women's rights (Ragavan, Iyengar and Wurtz, 2015).

Marriage in much of the Indian subcontinent is a culturally and historically defined process. There are relatively few differences between the countries which make up the Indian subcontinent when it comes to marriage. It is often considered a moral and religious duty of the parents to choose a suitable partner for their child (Stewart, 2013). In more tribal parts of the Indian subcontinent over half of marriages are between first and second cousins; this is seen as a way for wealth to be kept within a family and the financial burden to be lightened in relation to demands for dowries (Das et al., 2015). Accordingly, a woman's access to her home is based on the male figures in her life whether that be her father or husband. The patriarchal customs continue to dictate that children must comply with the wishes of their parents when it comes to finding a suitable spouse. It is very important to acknowledge that a woman's experience of patriarchal norms and cultural practices varies greatly, depending on their social location and level of education. In more urban areas these practices are not applied to a great degree in comparison to tribal areas where there are higher levels of illiteracy and poverty, both of which are factors which increase the likelihood of women suffering from domestic abuse. Women living in urban areas have more access to employment and education which allows them greater autonomy in their lives. Conversely, women living in tribal areas may still live under oppressive laws, and be subject to judgement and punishment from tribal councils which are called *Jigras* (Welchman, 2007).

Patriarchal norms continue to dictate women's decision-making power in the Indian subcontinent. When a woman does try and push-back against the fixed limits of what is accepted they are often met with severe punishment. This punishment can range from simply shunning them, threatening them, being verbally and physically abusive, to taking their life (Islam and Karim, 2012). In developing countries such as the Indian subcontinent there is a problem where many women are denied the most basic of human rights of feeling safe in one's home. Although more needs to be done to educate women, pioneers in the field in many countries in South Asia have done just that (Ali, Krantz and Mogren, 2012). In Pakistan, women's groups have attempted to further their cause by appearing in the media to raise awareness of women's rights. One of the main goals of the organisations is to provide legal literacy courses throughout Pakistan, in which women are made aware of their legal rights in relation to marriage and family law. Organisations are also advocating for legal reforms which reflect the needs of the population and create legal precedents and provide critically needed services (Critelli and Willett, 2010).

Research which has been conducted in the Indian subcontinent and in the developing world is extremely relevant in the wider world. International migration means that the results of studies conducted in the developing world are applicable to recent migrants and long

established cultural groups. As cultural norms and practices are transitional in nature, aspects of them can be found around the world. It is important to note, however, that issues relating to domestic abuse and violence against women are a global issue and are not unique to any one culture or region. In order to understand the role culture can play, it is important to avoid the over simplistic conclusion that cultural norms are the root cause of domestic abuse. Instead, cultural norms need to be dissected to their component parts, to better understand how they can be addressed (Critelli and Willett, 2010). The following section will explore the long-term impact domestic abuse can have on an individual suffering from domestic abuse.

Long-term impact of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse has far reaching effects long after the abuse has stopped; the fallout from being a victim of domestic abuse permeates into almost all areas of a woman's life. The long-term consequences of suffering from domestic abuse can lead to homelessness, as many women who flee abusive relationship often have to flee their homes, leaving not only their belongings but often their jobs and sources of support and in certain cases their families (Young, Lehman, Faherty and Sandefer, 2016). Studies have documented how women who have been victims of domestic abuse at one time in their life are at greater risk of mental health disorders, depression and anxiety, as well as an increased risk of suicide which was found to be prevalent among woman who had been subjected to domestic abuse (Devries et al., 2013).

Previous research (Chapman, 2014) within the South Asian community has highlighted how women are pressured into not divulging information pertaining to domestic abuse, due to the perceived detrimental impact it can have upon their wider family. A study conducted in Hong Kong (Tonsing, 2016) with fourteen South Asian migrant women from various religious backgrounds, found that there was a strong sense of kismet (fate). They believed they had to remain in the abusive relationships for their children's wellbeing. This ideal stemmed from the shame and stigma that they and their children would be tarred with by being labelled as coming from a broken home. This was also in addition to a feeling of failure in not being able to fix their marriage even in the context of the abuse, the women all reported a burden to try and make the best of their situation and believed they would be rewarded in their next life. Although all the women were acutely aware they were in an abusive relationship, they knew if they approached their families they would be instructed to make the relationship work in order not to bring shame upon their family (Tonsing, 2016).

Domestic abuse is commonly discussed in terms of the effect it has on the victim and not their family as a whole. In recent years research has shown the detrimental impact domestic abuse can have on children who experience domestic abuse (Ishkanian, 2014). Statistics show that in 75-90% of domestic abuse incidents children are in the same or adjacent room to the violence (Munro et al., 2011). There is evidence that children who experience such abuse are more likely to suffer from psychological and behavioural problems in their later life (Gadd, 2012).

Research in numerous countries has shown how an increase in the number of children increases the likelihood of domestic abuse. For example, a study conducted in Bangladesh found that women with more than three children were significantly more likely to be abused than women with two children or less (Das et al., 2015). The increase in violence may also be related to the fact that more children in a confined space provides yet another stressor which can catalyse domestic abuse. Therefore, it may not directly be the children who cause domestic abuse but the lack of resources and funds associate with raising more children (Agarwal and Panda, 2005). Children are often used by perpetrators of domestic abuse as a control tactic, threatening the victim by stating if they call for help they will take their children away. In certain cases, the perpetrator may threaten the children if the victim does not submit to their wishes (Etherington and Baker, 2018).

The issue of shame and stigma associated with living with domestic abuse is also an issue which can affect children later in their lives. Research (Young et al., 2016) has argued that the shame caused by experiencing domestic abuse at a young age detrimentally affects children in their later life in one of two ways. The first theory argues that children may carry the shame from a young age in relation to domestic abuse to their future relationships and in turn may be motivated to hide any abusive experience they experience in their later life. Conversely, they may turn it inward and blame themselves for the violence they have experienced and not seek help or report abuse they may face in later relationships. This can lead to life-long problems relating to depression, suicidal tendencies and the increased likelihood of being attracted to self-destructive relationships. Secondly, individuals who are ashamed of the violence they experienced as a child may turn their shame outwards and become perpetrators of domestic abuse, and due to their shame may fail to seek help for the violent behaviour (Mills, 2008).

Prior to 2005, the definition of domestic abuse only referred to domestic abuse as acts which occurred between intimate or former partners, and did not acknowledge that extended family

members may also partake and orchestrate the abuse (Gill, 2004). Although changes to the definition of domestic abuse now incorporate family members, more needs to be done to acknowledge the sometimes-crucial role the extended family play in organising, sanctioning and justifying domestic abuse (Gill and Harrison, 2016).

Intersectionality and domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is a complex issue which needs to be viewed in the context in which it occurs. In recent years more attention has been paid to the various intersecting aspects of life which all contribute in creating a unique view of domestic abuse (Strid, Walby and Armstrong, 2013). Cultural norms relating to gender roles, beliefs and practices within any given community are of paramount importance, as these intersecting values all amalgamate to create a unique perception and experience of domestic abuse (Bhattacharyya, 2015).

The term intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. At its most basic level it refers to the interconnections between various social differentials such as gender, race, ethnic origin, age, disability, sexuality and belief systems (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). The concept of intersectionality refers to the complex and varied effects which develop when multiple axes of differentiation such as political, economic and cultural factors intersect in historically specific contexts (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). These far reaching problems relating to intersectionality still resonate with feminists today due to interrelationships between racism, gender, sexuality and social class which were at the root of the problems in the 19th century and still exist today (King, 2009).

The issue of intersectionality is also an important part of the recognition of domestic abuse especially in minority communities, as social policy over the past 40 years has increasingly reflected women's demands for dignity and equality. Feminist studies in areas of society including law, medicine, social policy, sociology and cultural studies to mention a few have increasingly looked into domestic abuse from a variety of angles to gain a better understanding of the complex phenomenon (Couture-Carron, 2016). Research within the field of psychology has increasingly advocated a more intersectional approach to domestic abuse, to increase knowledge of the issues by looking into gender, race and class variations. This diversity is more complicated than just recognising differences within groups of people such as culture, religion, race, language and immigration status, although these factors are an important starting point.

Intersectionality focusses on the empirical specifics in the differences in lived experiences of various individuals by a range of gender, class and race (Conwil, 2010). This all culminates in intersectionality being an ideal instrument for understanding how sex and power can affect domestic abuse. This intersectional analytical framework allows those concerned with the field to delve deeper into social exchanges among the more privileged in society than those who are more oppressed. Through inter-subjectivity, they can study the effect of domestic abuse in ethnic minorities more closely. This will hopefully allow those in a position of power to help those minorities most at risk from domestic abuse to access the help available to them (Etherington and Baker, 2018).

Method

Rationale for IPA

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a relatively new qualitative approach which has grown to become one of the most commonly utilised qualitative methodologies. IPA originated in the field of Psychology, however it has increasingly also been used in the field of human, social and health sciences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009). According to Smith and Osborn, 2015, p.26 'IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of the experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience'.

Smith (2011) conducted a literature review into the areas in which IPA is employed within research; the review looked into articles which were dated between the years of 1996 and 2008 and which appeared in peer reviewed journal articles. In total, 293 articles were identified in which IPA was employed; the first recorded IPA paper was written in 1996, the following five years saw a small number of IPA articles being published, however this changed in 2002 when 21 articles appeared. In 2003 there was a further drop but since then the number of articles published has increased and in 2008 71 articles were published which used IPA. The majority of the papers emerged from the UK as like many qualitative approaches they are concentrated in English speaking countries, as unlike quantitative research it does not have a universal symbolic system which transcends language. In the review of these articles in regards to content it was found that by far the largest category related to illness experience which accounted for 24% of the corpus (Smith, 2011). This was not surprising as IPA was established primarily in the field of health psychology, and illness is a key part of health psychology. Moreover, concern with the lived experience is at the core of IPA as it is concerned with experiences which are of some importance to the participant.

IPA has evolved into an important qualitative approach characterised by the study of meanings, experiences and subjectivity, areas which previously were delegated to fields other than psychology for decades (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). IPA is beginning to gain momentum in areas outside of health psychology in different cultural contexts, potentially expanding the range of content, approaches and importantly criteria for quality (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). In relation to the criteria of quality, Smith (2015) makes a clear argument for the development of method-specific criteria rather than criteria general to qualitative research. Although the phenomenological and interpretative roots of IPA do emphasise the

contextualisation of the phenomenon, the foundations of the analysis are the people or person in their context and their subjective experiences as interpreted by the interviewer. As IPA gains ground on a global scale the focus on context should include socio-cultural traits and also incorporate cultural, political and historical norms when interpreting a person's words (Shinebourne, 2011).

IPA was chosen instead of other qualitative methods such as grounded theory to better understand the phenomena of domestic abuse. IPA allows for the lived experiences of participants to be detailed in their own words which provides a more realistic insight into their motivations and experiences. This is especially important in the field of domestic abuse as an individual's perceptions of domestic abuse will have been formed over their lifetime through cultural, familial and societal norms. It is this perception and consequent reaction that this study seeks to further understand in order to explore the barriers South Asian Muslims face in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse.

Theoretical roots

The theoretical roots of IPA stem from phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography. Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to the study of experience; although there are many different intersects within phenomenology they all tend to share a common interest in thinking about what the experience of being human is like (Lyons and Coyle, 2016). Phenomenologists have been dedicated to thinking about how individuals come to understand their experiences of the world. However, for psychologists a key point of value of phenomenological philosophy is that it provides a rich source of ideas about how to examine and understand lived experience (Smith, 2015).

Phenomenology is the name given to the philosophical movement which began with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and then developed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). This movement played a key part in philosophical thinking in the twentieth century and has had a major influence on modern philosophy and other disciplines such as psychology. Phenomenology is in its most basic form the study of human experience and the way in which things are perceived as they appear to individuals (Langdrige, 2007). This focus on people's perception of the world is at the core of phenomenology and the attempts to describe the world as it appears to people in the various processes required to be carried out in order to achieve this.

The core principle of phenomenology is that experience should be examined in the way that it occurs naturally. Husserl (Shinebourne, 2011) was particularly interested in discovering a method by which an individual may come to accurately know their own personal experience of a given phenomenon in such depth and detail that they could decipher the essential qualities of said phenomenon. Husserl believed if this could be done these essential features would transcend the particular context of the experience and possibly illuminate a certain experience or phenomenon for other people too. Famously, Husserl argued that we should 'go back to the things themselves' the 'things' referred to the experiential aspect of perception and the various hurdles which can hinder this pursuit. The natural human tendency is generally to confine 'things' into predefined categories. Husserl advocated that instead individuals should endeavour to focus to each individual 'thing' on its own terms. This encouraging of stepping out of an individual's everyday experience, or 'natural attitude' as Husserl referred to it, in order to examine every day experiences was a core concept of phenomenology (Lyons and Coyle, 2016).

The work of Husserl was further developed when Heidegger, a former philosophical student of Husserl, developed his own stance regarding the phenomenological approach. Although Heidegger acknowledged the influence of Husserl on his work, he emphasised a divergence from the transcendental approach and instead focussed on the hermeneutic and existential emphases in phenomenological philosophy. Heidegger's (1996) move away from Husserl's work was due to the perception that it was too theoretical and abstract. Heidegger emphasised a more grounded stance in the lived world which encompassed the world of 'things', people, relationships and language; in these various contexts the central theme of importance was that of meaning (Shinebourne, 2011).

The second major theoretical underpinning of IPA is hermeneutics which is the theory of interpretation which was developed and incorporated into the approach by phenomenologists such as Heidegger (1996). Hermeneutics originated as a method to interpret biblical texts and it later was developed as a philosophical underpinning for the interpretation of a wider range of texts including historical documents and literary works. Hermeneutic theorists attempted to decipher whether it was possible to uncover the original meaning of the author and whether there was a relationship between the context of a text's production and the context of a text's interpretation in relation the relevance of a text on modern day life.

The third major theoretical underpinning of IPA is ideography which is concerned with the particular; this contrasts the vast majority of psychology which relates to the nomothetic or

the tendency to generalise and make claims at group or population levels (Lyons and Coyle, 2016). The problem with the nomothetic approach is that data are collected, transformed and in turn analysed via a method which does not allow or inhibits the possibility of retrieving more detailed information about the participants who provided the data. This data are often produced in inferential statistics which provide group averages rather than dealing with particular cases. IPA in contrast operates at the particular at two levels, the first being the commitment to detail and consequent depth of analysis, meaning that analysis has to be conducted in a systematic and thorough manner. The second aspect of the particular is the commitment to understanding how specific experiential phenomena, whether a relationship, event or process, have been understood from the perspective of particular people in particular contexts.

These guiding principles were a fundamental part of the study as they directed the research and ensured the data collected were a true reflection of the experiences of the participants. This would hopefully allow for in depth and relevant data to be collected. This data could then be interpreted to provide an authentic view of the issues South Asian Muslim women face in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse.

Procedure

The fact IPA is idiographic has an effect on the sampling sizes utilised in research, and in the majority of cases small samples are utilised often around six to seven participants. This is due to the time-consuming nature of the analytical process. IPA does not set out to make general claims about larger populations. IPA researchers usually have homogenous samples. The sampling method employed in IPA is also often purposive rather than random, as the goal is to collect data relatively specific to a group and research area (Smith and Osborn, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are often used in order to collect data, as they allow the participants to articulate as much detail about their experiences as possible, although other methods such as diaries and focus groups are sometimes used.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were utilised as they allowed for in-depth information to be collected. Although focus groups are a good way to collect in depth data there is a risk certain topics or questions may go unanswered in the company of other participants. Moreover, a single person could take over the focus group and consequently certain participants' views may go unheard. The semi-structured interviews are constructed by creating an interview schedule which details the open-ended questions which pertain to the research area being covered. The questions can relate to various aspects of their life, for

example the effect a certain phenomenon has had on their sense of self and the wider effects on their family and friends. The interviews are then recorded and transcribed verbatim with both the questions and responses being transcribed. The transcript is focussed on the semantic meaning of what is said by participants and does not include pauses, breaks and false starts, as would be common in discourse analysis (Langdridge, 2007).

The data is then analysed using thematic analysis (Smith, 2011) which is the process of the analyst making sense of the participant's world by reading and rereading and listening to the transcripts in order to identify the major themes. Each transcript is analysed separately, the transcripts are read and reread, and through each reading notes can be made as codes begin to emerge. The process of analysing the data can be described in four stages. The first consists of reading and rereading the transcripts and using the left-hand margin to make notes of anything of interest. These notes can range from summaries, associations and interpretations and at this early stage the general aim is to simply describe what is being said in the text. This stage may be repeated more than once in order to collect in depth data and retrieve the meaning of the text. The second stage is where emerging themes are noted in the right-hand margin, and where initial notes are converted to more meaningful statements. These comments may pertain to more broader and theoretically relevant concerns, but these are fluid and subject to change in the third stage.

The third stage of the process of analysing a transcript using thematic analysis is to separately list the themes in the order in which they emerged. This allows the researcher to identify common links within the transcript and decipher frequent themes in order to reorder them in a more concise and analytical process. This third stage allows themes to be either clustered together or branched off into new themes, and it also allows for a hierarchy of themes to be established. This process is often repeated, as the ordering and structuring of the themes is subject to change. The final and fourth stage is where a table of themes is drawn up and where each theme is named and supported by an extract from the transcript. These four stages are then repeated for the remaining transcripts allowing the researcher to fully understand and appreciate the meanings behind the words used by the participants and interpret them in line with the literature (Brocki and Wearden, 2007).

Sample

A snowball sampling method was utilised to recruit practitioners who worked with South Asian Muslim victims in the field of domestic abuse. The data collection process was a very time consuming and sensitive undertaking. The first issue which became apparent was the difficulty in recruiting participants to take part in the study. Although I approached many local organisations who were enthusiastic about the study, they lacked the time to take part. Although people were able to converse over the phone, it was not often feasible due to the time it would take to complete the interviews and obtain the necessary informed consent. After the initial difficulties faced I was fortunate enough to be put into contact with an individual who had worked in their previous vocation with many of the organisations. They made enquires on my behalf and put me in contact with an organisation which was located in the South of England. This led to me arranging my first interview with an individual who due to her work and family commitments was not able to meet in person. In turn, we arranged a meeting to take place over the phone. This was the first interview which took place, and it was a learning curve in regard to following the interview schedule and also allowing the conversation to drift into areas which I had not previously envisaged.

After my initial interview was over, the participant provided me with the details of a local organisation which she had worked with before and put me in contact with them via email. This led to a further interview with one of the organisations I had previously contacted; however, with the backing of my interviewee I was able to conduct a meeting in person at the organisation. This snowball sampling method allowed me to further broaden the range of participants I could approach to partake in the study.

Participants

A total of six participants took part in the study, five of whom were female and one male. The participants consisted of three women and a man who identified as Muslim. The other two participants did not disclose nor discuss their religious beliefs. Four of the participants were based in West Yorkshire, another was based in Rotherham and the last in Oxford. All the participants as detailed in the information sheet worked with South Asian female domestic abuse victims in a professional capacity.

Pilot study

The pilot study tested whether the interview schedule (see appendix 1) addressed the research questions in an effective and efficient manner. It also allowed me to ensure the data was gathered in the allotted time, while also allowing the interview schedule to be malleable in order to allow the participants to expand on their thoughts. After the pilot study, amendments were made to allow for certain questions to take priority. This allowed for core questions to be addressed whilst allowing time for the participants to expand or explore certain questions further. Additionally, sections were added such as introducing and concluding sections, and sections allowing the participants to reflect on what they had said and if they had anything further they wanted to add. These specific alterations led to many unanticipated and unexplored areas of research to be discussed and further added to the data.

Three of the interviews were conducted over the phone and three were conducted in person. The method employed to conduct the studies remained the same regardless of the manner in which the interview was conducted. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed (see appendix 3).

Data analysis

The data were analysed in line with the thematic analysis procedure as outlined above. The data was transcribed verbatim and then read through numerous times in order to fully understand the data. Once the transcript had been read through a number of times, I went onto use the left-hand side of the margin to make notes of anything that may be of importance. This was repeated to ensure all relevant data was coded. Once this first stage had been completed, I went on to use the right-hand margin to make notes of any emerging themes. This step was repeated numerous times in order to ensure all emerging themes were noted. An example of this was the theme of power, as the participants discussed the way in which perpetrators would exert their power to control their victims. This originally started with extracts in which perpetrators used a variety of means to control their victims such as using children or their recent migration status to blackmail them; whenever something notable came up I made notes in the left-hand side column. This step was then repeated and additional extracts were found to have a similar theme of power. Once the transcript had been fully analysed I began to note emerging themes in the right-hand side

column. Many themes were discovered; however, a theme which came up repeatedly was that of power and consequently it became one of the main themes of the study. Primarily, once the transcript had been analysed, the emerging themes were placed in order of importance in relation to the research questions and the frequency in which they occurred. Once the themes had been fully extracted they were placed in a themes table which allowed for similar themes to be grouped together and organised in terms of importance. These steps were repeated for all six transcripts in order to collate the themes and organise them in line with the frequency in which they occurred.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the University of Huddersfield's Human and Health Sciences School Research and Ethics Panel. The study was conducted in line with the British Psychological Society's guidelines. All personal information and data were kept confidential, and all participants were provided with a unique identifier which was used to refer to them throughout the study. No one apart from myself had access to the data in either audio or written form. The data was kept on a password protected computer. When the participants referred to an individual by name this was omitted and altered in the writing up process in order to protect the service user's confidentiality.

There were no physical risks involved in the taking part of the study, as participants were taking part in interviews at locations and times best suited to themselves; participants were also provided with an information sheet and an informed consent form (see appendix 2). They were aware from the outset of the goal and nature of the study and the area of interest relating to domestic abuse. The participant However, there still was a risk that asking participants who work in close proximity to recall and attempt to explain the complex factors and barriers which remain for women may have distressed them. In order to address these concerns participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time from the interview and that they could choose not to answer certain questions.

Reflexivity

During the course of my research I was acutely aware of the sensitive nature of the research, as domestic abuse is a very sensitive subject, even when considered on its own. However, when I decided to focus on the South Asian Muslim community I was very aware I had to provide an accurate reflection of the issue of domestic abuse within the community.

Like many people, I lived with domestic abuse during my childhood, and as a consequence have long been intrigued by the issue of domestic abuse from a young age. I was fortunate enough to be allowed to focus on intergenerational differences in the perceptions of domestic abuse in my undergraduate degree. However, for my research degree I wanted to further delve in to the barriers South Asian Muslim women, and South Asian women in general, face in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. Although I had many personal opinions and feelings in relation to the issue of domestic abuse; I felt it was important that I did not allow my personal opinions or experiences to detract from the findings of my study.

Being a part of the South Asian community, I was fortunate enough to have a degree of access and cultural understanding. However, an issue I found that I, as a male researcher, struggled to arrange meetings with individuals who worked within the field. Fortunately, while recruiting participants I was able to speak to a gatekeeper who I had previously discussed the reasoning behind my research with and spoke of my personal history with the subject. This provided me with access and allowed for me to speak to potential participants prior to conducting the interviews to explain the reasoning for my interest in the area. Although my gender was a potential barrier when discussing domestic abuse, discussing my personal experiences and intentions I believe allowed for barriers relating to gender to be partially overcome. This I hope allowed for an open and frank discussion, which was a true reflection of the issue of domestic abuse in the South Asian Muslim community.

Conclusion

When conducting IPA in contrast to other forms of phenomenological analysis, whilst language is seen as an important source of data it is not the only source of data as it also assumes that the words participants use offer an in-depth insight into their psychological worlds and how they are making sense of their circumstances (Smith and Osborn, 2015). This fundamental principle of qualitative research allows for those individuals who otherwise would have no voice to be heard. This central principle meant that IPA was seen as the most suitable method to analyse the data, as the data were very subjective and allowed the participants to put forth their subjective view of the barriers South Asian Muslim victims face in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. IPA goes further as it urges researchers to listen and understand these voices. IPA also encourages researchers to trust

the responses of the participants rather than deconstructing their responses to fit into preconfigured categories of behaviour (Smith et al., 2009). This aspect of IPA was extremely important in understanding the perceptions and experiences of domestic abuse, as the goal of the study was to explore the barriers women face in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse.

In turn IPA was seen as the most effective method to utilise to analyse the data collected in the present study, as IPA is a useful tool to collect in depth data which is representative of a small and relatively unknown group of individuals. This allowed their words to be analysed in context of the cultural, societal and economic norms. This allowed their words to be analysed in context of the cultural, societal and economic norms in the South Asian Muslim community. This will hopefully allow for more in depth and accurate data to be collected, which can be used to better inform interventions and policies.

Analysis

Power

Power plays a central role in domestic abuse, as perpetrators often look to exploit a victim's vulnerabilities to ensure they remain submissive. The denotation of the word power in this study will follow Luke's (1974) definition in which A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests (Lukes, 1974, p.24). This power can take the form of many shapes; in the section below the issue of power will be examined. One of the issues that relates to power is the confusion regarding what actually constitutes domestic abuse, and this will be explored as this was one of the main areas of concern in the interviews. Another key issue is that children can be used as a tool to blackmail victims, ensuring they do not report domestic abuse under the pretence that their children will be taken away from them. The final section about power is the effects that intersecting factors can have on a domestic abuse victim's mental health, as this was found to be a major point of concern among the interviewees.

In the section below I will highlight the numerous intersecting factors which stem from issues relating to power which can lead to domestic abuse. One of the main factors which allows this power imbalance to thrive is the fact that many women in the South Asian Muslim community who are recent migrants may not know the local laws and consequently may not be aware of the help available to them. Moreover, recent migrants may not have access to public funds which may also deter them from seeking help as they are often financially reliant on their abusers. Perpetrators often use this power to indoctrinate victims to make them believe if they were to call for help the repercussions for them would be severe. Threats ranging from being deported to having their children removed all amalgamate to create a barrier between the victim and sources of support which further isolate them as detailed by Rubi:

It's that fear factor isn't it it's the fear factor from social services it's the fear factor of the Police you know and erm and especially for people for women who have got no recourse to public funds erm I don't have leave to remain it's like oh well if you call the Police they will take you away they'll send you back you know and it's that fear factor – Rubi

This misinformation perpetuated by the perpetrator is common in the literature surrounding South Asian victims who are recent immigrants. A study conducted by Mirza (2016) in the UK with South Asian women found immigration rules were found to be conducive to a perpetrator threatening deportation if the victims reported the abuse. Rubi also spoke of the injustice victims sometimes can face unintentionally at the hands of the very people they call on for help. When an incident of domestic abuse is reported, a Police officer is despatched and depending on their skills it can have a very different outcome for the victim as discussed by Rubi:

If they are asking a question you're not understanding your like no no no yeah yeah they'll be like alright fine we'll leave it does this make sense so they're not able to like even get the full factors of what's happened erm and that again then what happens it demotivates you from future because you think well I rang them last time they didn't do anything what's the point and like when you have injuries and stuff go to the hospital or just say you've fallen down or she fell down she feel down or she just so it's like there is no interpreting there's no facilities so that's like oh well I can't even tell them what's happened they've not even spoken to me on my own they don't value me as a human being it is really disheartening this is a difficult topic - Rubi

Nadia also spoke of the Islamophobia that victims used to face and still do to a lesser extent by support services which led to her starting a helpline for Muslim women who suffer from domestic abuse. Nadia went on to describe how this reductionist view arguably influenced a victim's mental state as the very people they went to for help like the perpetrator lay the blame for the abuse at their feet. This unfortunate truth only serves to provide the perpetrator with more power over their victim, if a victim has had the courage to seek help and received none in return this would only further reassert the power a perpetrator has over their victim.

...in nineteen eighty seven when women presented at refuges or at domestic violence helplines and this was then and now not because what about to say is not politically correct what I'm about to describe Muslim women who presented at refuges and domestic organisations in our experience we found and we were told so it's not off the top of our heads we were told by women that those women who presented to those services were told that the problem is because you're Muslim and Muslim men as if implying that domestic violence is somehow connected to the religion – Nadia

Nadia argued that this simplistic view of the problem at the time could easily be seen as another form of abuse the women were subjected to. In trying to seek help which in itself is a monumental step, they were faced with this help which did not deal with the root causes of the abuse. The following section will discuss the way in which children are used as a source of power to blackmail victims into not disclosing the abuse.

Domestic abuse and the role of children

The issue of power is further reinforced when children are introduced into an abusive relationship, as perpetrators will often threaten a victim that their children will be removed from their care if they ever reported the abuse. Children can also have an inhibitory influence on a victim seeking help or considering leaving an abusive relationship; this is especially true in South Asian Muslim communities. This view was shared by Sophie who stated that victims are reluctant to leave an abusive relationship due to the perceived effect it can have on their family's standing within the community. This was evident when Sophie recounted that a common reason for a victim to remain in an abusive relationship was that it may affect their daughter's future marriage options.

...initially they think to themselves oh no we can't leave cos we got a daughter my daughter needs to get married well your daughter is four years old and are you going to live like that for twenty years and it twenty years time she wants to get married too and he's not happy with I don't think so – Sophie

The impact domestic abuse has on children cannot be understated. Rubi in the quote below shares her view on the impact domestic abuse can have on children who witness it during their childhood. '...kids are the I think they are the main victims the you know obviously the family breakdown and the thing and they are affected the most' - Rubi. A study conducted by Gadd (2012) found that children who were living in a situation where domestic abuse was rife experienced feelings of confusion, anxiousness and over-responsibility. This was especially true of adolescent males as often if they were removed from the abusive situation their mother would be provided with help; however, many refugees would not allow a male of this age entry into the refuge for understandable reasons. Consequently, it was found that those younger males found it easier to identify with the perpetrator rather than understand their mother's situation. These young adults would at times blame their mother for the breakdown of the relationship and consequent removal from the abusive situation rather than see the father as the cause for the upheaval.

These pressures do have an important bearing on a victim's decision to leave an abusive relationship and they are an important barrier which needs to be addressed. The reasoning for this is that domestic abuse can also have a detrimental effect on a child's development and attitude towards domestic abuse. Dasgupta (2007) argued that witnessing domestic abuse from a young age may lead to children to see it as the norm and come to accept it as a part of their life and possibly endure the abuse as explained by Nadia below.

It's what happened to you to get you to that place if it's going on through generations if it's been accepted you're psychologically set up to know this happens to an awful lot of women it starts from childhood then doesn't it it's ingrained – Nadia

The point Nadia makes in the quote above is very poignant and telling of the intergenerational cycle of domestic abuse which can come to be ingrained in the psyche of children. A study conducted by Lang and Stover (2008) found that children who were exposed to domestic abuse as young children may replicate the behaviour in their future relationships. This can then be passed down generations whether that results in children wilfully allowing themselves to be the victims of domestic abuse or conversely children themselves in later life becoming perpetrators, as explained by Rubi.

Grandchildren will be like involved erm like we've had cases where children and I don't mean like the victims is older they are younger so it's like a mother she's got a teenage child eighteen nineteen-year-old and he's been watching his father and his upbringing has become a perpetrator also – Rubi

Sophie also had a similar view of the effect that witnessing domestic abuse as a child can have on their later life; 'sometimes women who have been abused as a child they become the perpetrators they become the abusers'. This problem of emulating behaviour seen as a child is a great concern in the tackling of domestic abuse as it can become a cycle of abuse where generations of families will see domestic abuse as a normal part of life and endure the abuse as they do not know any different. This was in line with findings from previous studies; for example Ali et al., (2012) found that young girls who witnessed domestic abuse would grow up believing it was the norm and all men had the right to beat them. A young boy would grow up believing that male domestic abuse was normal and in turn this intergenerational cycle of abuse would continue. Nadia provided her opinion on why she believed children were susceptible to becoming either a victim or perpetrator in their later life.

I've noticed is and and it could be very subjective so I'm you know I'm more than happy for someone to say to me you might be subjective I see that in our communities that both men and women so it's an equal playing field are seen to be and I'm using the word seen to be raised to be passive passive girls so they obey parents and husbands passive men so when they get married their family whether it's their mother their father or their family they raised as passive men so that they will obey the family and the family dictates how their married life goes – Nadia

Nadia acknowledged the fact that it is very subjective but provided reasoning for her stance on raising 'passive' children. Nadia went on to explain her view that there is a lack of education on a spiritual level in regards to explaining what is and is not a healthy relationship and emphasised the need to raise awareness at a young age of what a healthy relationship is and the early signs of domestic abuse in order to tackle domestic abuse.

The role of the extended family

Domestic abuse is also arguably unique in the South Asian community due to the role the extended family can have in orchestrating or encouraging the abuse. Rubi recalled a case in which although the marriage between the spouses was fine, the woman was the subject of domestic abuse from her partner's mother. Although the spousal relationship was loving the woman's partner did not speak against his mother or the abuse she inflicted upon his partner due to cultural notions of respect for the parents. Dasgupta (2007) provided her reasoning for this unfortunate fact as historically in the South Asian community older women were charged with socialising new brides to norms and customs of the family. If the new bride was seen to not conform or adhere to set standards the mother in law would punish them in whatever manner they saw fit.

This is the way and also he couldn't say and he couldn't go against his mother so that's the culture isn't it it's it's not my religion tells me to obey my parents to be abusive towards other people but erm that's what it was so it's like ok now we've got the new erm law that's come in she missed that bit but it came in erm November of last year coercive behaviours - Rubi

As Rubi mentioned in the quote above, a new law has been passed in the UK which ensures victims of domestic abuse are protected from controlling and coercive behaviour. Yount, Miedema, Martin, Crandall and Naved (2016) defined coercive control as a complex and layered process which ends with the victim complying with the perpetrator's demands, as the

victim is primed to believe they will be rewarded for their compliance and punished for their non-compliance. This issue of power has been attributed to patriarchal societies which historically are the norm in South Asian countries (Shankar, Das and Atwal, 2013). Chaudhuri et al., (2014) argued that male dominance in legal, political, social and economic settings allow for a context in which men are deemed superior and consequently domestic abuse is allowed to flourish. Schuler, Yount and Lenzi (2012), argued that social expectations relating to gender norms allowed and excused domestic abuse as there was a wider acceptance of gender inequality and male dominance. Domestic abuse as its core is an issue of male power over women and ideally which is propagated by patriarchy. Therefore, the underlying issue of patriarchy in Asian cultures needs to be addressed in order for domestic abuse to be effectively challenged.

A further issue which is commonplace in the South Asian Muslim community is a reluctance to openly discuss domestic abuse. This arguably allows the perpetrator to freely exert his will, as discussed by Nadia in the quote below:

...what I've found myself over thirty years what is more devastating is not the personal abuse from the abuser, [it] is the fact that that abuser has given himself permission to do it by God this is erm a second so first of all the first cut is the human cut and how to finish you off to kill you is to say so now I you know I cut you and then the second cut the finishing off is to say and God is allowing me to do it – Nadia

Nadia spoke of a 'cut' which relates to the mental as well as the physical toll domestic abuse can have on a person. Nadia argues that not only do victims of domestic abuse endure the physical pain of the abuse but they also have to shoulder the emotional pain of falsely believing their God has given their spouse permission to abuse them. The subject of power is further reinforced, as domestic abuse may have been taking place throughout generations in a family and maybe is seen as the norm. This arguably leads perpetrators to believe they can get away with it and leaves victims with a mentality that they must endure it as their parents and grandparents did. The issue of power can exert itself in one of two ways; an individual, regardless of their gender, whether they witnessed or experienced domestic abuse in their childhood, can do one of two things; an opinion which was summarised by Nadia:

...has this person man or woman come from a family where there has been domestic abuse and if they have how have they dealt with it how have they dealt with it emotionally and psychologically have they now there's two ways you can obviously

either you can think I would never do that with my wife and children or they've the man or the woman have seen power and they think I want a bit of that power as well
– Nadia

Issues relating to power and patriarchy form much of the basis of this work and will be discussed further in the cultural and religious norms chapter. Domestic abuse can have many long-term consequences on a victim's mental health, this will be explored further in the section below.

Mental health

As discussed above, power involves exertion of control which is to the detriment of the victim. The long impact of this abuse has a considerable toll on a victim's mental health, an area which will be addressed in this chapter. A major factor which needs to be considered when dealing with a victim of domestic abuse is their mental health. Victims of domestic abuse on average face thirty-seven instances of domestic abuse before reporting it to the authorities (Sylaska and Edwards, 2014). However, for many South Asian Muslim women this figure could be much higher due to the additional barriers to reporting domestic abuse, as discussed above. However, it is important to note that the mental health issues which often accompany domestic abuse are not unique to the South Asian Muslim community. In the quote below Nadia discussed her opinion on how mental health is linked to domestic abuse.

the whole society whatever their persuasion Muslim or non-Muslim if there is a mental health breakdown because of a loss of power and control which leads to anxiety which leads to depression which leads to domestic violence which leads on and on and on and on there are no mental health loss of power leads to all of those problems domestic abuse just being one of them – Nadia

Nadia also argued that domestic abuse at its core is an issue of mental health and the historical disempowerment has been passed down through the generations.

The issue of mental health was a major theme which was discussed by all participants in varying forms. Many studies conducted in the field of domestic abuse have found strikingly similar results where women who suffered from domestic abuse were much more likely to suffer from mental and physical health problems. Khan, Karmaliani, Ali, Asad and Madhani (2014), found that women who suffered from domestic abuse had a higher chance of suffering from depression, anxiety and pain along with lower self-esteem. A major issue

which Rubi highlighted was the fact that domestic abuse usually takes place over a prolonged period and consequently the damage caused to a victim of domestic abuse is profound. This abuse only serves to further isolate an individual who is already under tremendous pressure and stress and further cuts them off from seeking help. Instead of helping an individual, they place the blame on their shoulders and make them feel the problem is internal and their own fault as explained by Catherine:

Yeah instead of being helped you're told you shouldn't be depressed and suicidal and if you believed in God you wouldn't you wouldn't feel this way well seriously this is not a crisis of faith yes you could argue it's a crisis of spirituality but then how did that crisis come about – Catherine

The research findings showed that the underlying issue of domestic abuse which contributed to, and potentially in some cases caused, the mental illness tends to be ignored in favour of placing all blame on the victim because of a supposed lack of faith. This was a common theme within the South Asian community as women often went to local sources of support, who unlike medical professionals would provide reasons for their mental state in the context of folklore. Kamimura et al., (2017) found that South Asian women's first instance of seeking help for their mental health would be to go to a local religious person who would provide them with advice, which often was unsuitable for addressing the underlying mental health issues the woman was facing. This suppression of help seeking behaviour only adds to a victim's mental health issues and the longer they are unable to seek help and treatment, the harder it will become to resolve their mental illness. This was a belief echoed by Rubi, as shown below.

...in relation to anxiety and stuff there's so many women who are like suffering from mental health issues as the result of this because they've tolerated it for so long and they feel like they have nowhere to go you know when earlier on you mentioned about like it's the first chance of contacting a service and if it doesn't happen then that's it they've been disheartened – Rubi

Rubi argued that the longer a victim remained in an abusive relationship the more their mental state would further deteriorate. This outlook was shared by Leanne, who is mental health practitioner, who shared some of the experiences she has had working in a mental health environment in relation to South Asian Muslim women. Leanne agreed that extended exposure to domestic abuse further intensifies the effect on a woman's mental health. She spoke at length about how, when speaking to patients with acute mental health problems,

she found that many of them had previously suffered from domestic abuse. An aspect of treating mental health which Leanne found was particular to the South Asian community was the belief that their symptoms and behaviours were due to black magic.

We do get a lot of women that will talk about experiences where the family members have felt that there is black magic or things like that the symptoms that the women get from the mental health erm are put down to things like black magic – Leanne

This belief was cemented by women's family members and again was a way in which to internalise the problem and arguably place the onus on the victim to self-medicate and treat their mental health issues. Instead of seeking medical advice family members would advocate for cultural and herbal remedies. 'Yeah I find erm I've known a lot of families as well to is it is it like meant to get herbs and things for like medicinal' – Leanne. Additionally, the fact that the woman is in a very vulnerable state of mind allows for the family to exert further control upon them, a trait which is common in abusive relationships as witnessed by Leanne. This vulnerability allows perpetrators to further dictate and direct women to sources of help which steer them clear of external sources of support, ensuring they remain isolated and under their control. This reductionist explanation for their behaviour and mental state can become internalised and even when external help is sought the women may still believe their mental illness was caused by an external source, as explained by Leanne below.

...it's easy for the victim to think or somebody's done something to me yeah because they might not understand why they're acting that way either or just as the result of erm trauma obviously people obviously trauma of abuse as well people react in different ways and they might not understand if they are suffering from trauma and acting a in a certain way like self-harming and things like that it's very common what we see and then they might themselves find it easier to believe then it's black magic than it's something internal – Leanne

Unfortunately, many women who suffer from mental health issues related to domestic abuse are rarely able to get the help they need until their situation becomes critical (Khan et al., 2014). This was a finding which was common within the South Asian Muslim community as many women were unable or reluctant to seek help until they felt they had no other option. Kallivayalil (2010) found that there was a higher rate of depression and suicide amongst married South Asian women, a finding which could perhaps be linked to domestic abuse. However, Kallivayalil (2010) exercised caution in making a judgement and stated more research needs to be done within the area. Leanne explained the sad truth that many

women who are admitted into hospital are admitted when they are at their lowest point. Victims are often isolated from sources of support whether they are friends, family or external sources of support. This is often a key method in order to ensure the victim feels sufficiently isolated to the point where they feel there is no one to turn to or anyone who can help remove them from their situation. Unfortunately, many victims may resign themselves to their situation and come to the conclusion that this is their life now and they have to endure it.

...by the time they come to us it can be it's basically either a section predominantly a section where they are a risk to themselves or others so they have to erm they have to be put onto a section under the Mental Health Act so a lot of times where they have tried to take their own life – Leanne

The issue of power is central to domestic abuse. Feminist theory argues that the underlying cause of male power is a patriarchal society in which male dominance is normalised in all walks of life (Chaudhuri et al., 2014). This normalisation extends to the home, and actions witnessed and conducted in the outside world in relation to gender norms amalgamate and arguably inform the norms of domestic abuse (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Some feminists argue that in order to address the issue of domestic abuse the underlying issues need to be addressed on a human level, with attention being paid to the perceived roles women and men play in society (Etherington and Baker, 2018).

The issue of power can also be seen in the research findings, which show the existence of children is used to manipulate victims into keeping the domestic abuse a secret. This finding is in line with previous findings from other studies in which children are used to blackmail victims and misinform of the consequences relating to their children in regards to reporting domestic abuse. For example, a study conducted by Yount et al., (2016), found that perpetrators often used children to deter women from seeking help by threatening to remove the children from their care. The study found that often women in the South Asian community often think of the long-term effects removing children from a family can have on their children. These factors can range from their children's future marriage prospects to considering the stigma attached to coming from a divorced family.

A further implication of power in a domestic abuse context is the mental health issues it can contribute towards and create. A common theme throughout the interviews was that of mental health issues that victims of domestic abuse faced after prolonged and persistent exposure to domestic abuse. Once again, the findings corresponded with existing literature

in relation to domestic abuse and mental health. A study conducted by Kamimura et al., (2017) found that exposure to domestic abuse had a link with suffering from mental abuse and there was a positive correlation between the length of exposure to domestic abuse and the severity of the mental illness. Leanne echoed the same beliefs put forth by numerous studies such as Kallivayalil (2010) in arguing that more needs to be done to help victims regarding mental health issues after they have left an abusive situation.

To conclude, power forms the foundation of domestic abuse in the context of a patriarchal culture and society and gives perpetrators the belief that they can abuse their partners with no repercussions. Perpetrators who are frustrated at the world often resort to domestic abuse as a way to regain the power they feel they have lost in the outside world, by exerting their power upon their partner (Ali et al., 2012). Domestic abuse and patriarchy operate in tandem and in South Asian communities, patriarchy is ubiquitous. In the following chapter the barriers that South Asian women face in relation to cultural and religious factors, as well victim blaming, will be discussed. The chapter will focus on the misconceptions that victims often have of cultural norms which may be treated as religious directives in the context of domestic abuse.

Misconceptions about religion and culture: the impact on domestic abuse situations

Stigma/shame

The issue of shame and stigma is one of the key factors which can prevent victims from reporting domestic abuse in the South Asian Muslim community. Goffman (1963) defined stigma as an attribute that is deeply discrediting and which reduces the bearer from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. This in the context of domestic abuse within the South Asian Muslim community is befitting as the concept of familial respect and community standing was discussed at length during the interviews. Stigma and shame were found to be arguably the most difficult barriers for victims of domestic abuse to overcome. The victims found themselves in an impossible situation, as if they reported the abuse they faced the possibility of being ostracised from their community. Furthermore, victims were found to be fearful of being blamed as the cause of the abuse by not adhering to the perceived role of a dutiful wife. The interviews also uncovered a fear that the victims had in relation to the effect that leaving an abusive relationship would have on their children both in the present and in the future, as discussed in the previous chapter. These fears ranged from their children not being able to interact with their cousins, to struggling to find a partner in the future due to the stigma of coming from a broken home. However, it is important to note that although it is an important factor it not unique to the South Asian Muslim community, as pointed out by Nadia below.

...this would be true of all traditional societies for instance I was raised as a Catholic and and you would potentially find with maybe Greek Orthodox in Orthodox Jewish in all traditional societies which and you could argue all traditional religious societies which have high levels of shame within religion erm arguably all those religions which when shame is taken out of context this kind of problem happens in in you know in Muslims but it's also other traditional religious cultures where shame is a big focus –
Nadia

The issue of stigmatising the victims of domestic abuse is well documented in prior studies in the field. Das et al., (2015), conducted a study in Bangladesh with victims of domestic abuse who provided varying reasons for remaining within an abusive relationship. One of the main findings of the study was the shame and stigma related to leaving an abusive relationship, as the woman would be viewed as 'bad' or defective in some way as she was

unable to keep her family together regardless of the abusive context. Nadia highlighted the fact that in her thirty-year experience of working in the domestic abuse field, people in a position of authority were not discussing the topic due to the taboo which unfortunately still surrounds domestic abuse to this day. Nadia spoke further about how although these problems existed she could find no place specific to the South Asian Muslim that is addressing these issues. Adam also criticised the fact that domestic abuse remains a taboo subject and is rarely spoken about openly in fear of tarnishing a community in the context of widespread Islamophobia. This anxiety about bringing further scrutiny and shame on their community is especially heightened in climates where Muslims may feel under attack from external sources. However, this unwillingness to speak openly about domestic abuse only further isolates a victim and makes them feel there is nothing or no one who can help them.

...it's that pride thing that honour they're not coming forward and you can target Mosques but even then it's a subject that you know you go to Jumma [Friday prayers] you go there the half an hour before they're talking do they ever mention about domestic abuse these are keys things they are not going to mention – Adam

Nadia also raised the fact that even if women were able to go to the mosque it would be a male Imam they would speak to and this would bring further challenges into the reporting of domestic abuse. These challenges could range from the gender imbalance where a victim may not feel comfortable disclosing details of the abuse to a man; moreover, they may fear direct repercussions if details of the conversations were leaked to members of their family. Furthermore, Nadia argued that often a woman would be accompanied to the mosque and at the meeting with the Imam, virtually ensuring that she would not be able to speak freely about her situation. It was also noted that even if a woman could speak to an Imam on her own, there could still be an issue with confidentiality and this could lead to shame and stigma being levelled at the victim for various reasons, as discussed by Nadia below:

...going to even say an Imam or or someone wise within your community there were no guaranties that you wouldn't be stigmatised ... even where what Islam prescribes is available to you and should be available to you this was shut down because there was shame or dishonour that admitting you have a problem that only you can solve within your immediate family i.e. husband and wife but your family were unable to solve for you because it's the duty of the family to solve the problems so this is being done the shameful and your you know disempowering the family by telling others outside that we have problems in other words airing your dirty washing publically even with the Imam – Nadia

The issue of shame and stigma associated with acknowledging and reporting domestic abuse is ingrained within the South Asian culture and is a major barrier in relation to victims seeking help. Culture and religion form some of the central causes of feelings of shame and will be explored in the context of cultural norms and beliefs which arguably condone and justify domestic abuse; these will be discussed in the next chapter.

Culture and religion

The research findings indicate that culture plays an important role in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. For the purpose of this study, culture has been defined as the sum total of the ideas, conditioned emotional responses and patterns of habitual behaviour which the members of the society have acquired through instruction or imitation (Linton, 1936). There are numerous issues which stem from cultural norms and beliefs which are often conflated and confused with religious philosophies, and are often used by perpetrators to justify and excuse their behaviour making the victims think they are the ones at fault. This falsifying of the truth is crucial in order for the perpetrator to maintain control over their victims by instilling the belief in the victim's mind that if they were to speak out and seek help they would be seen as the person at fault. Research contributor Sophie also highlighted the fact that people who wish to popularise and accept the view that domestic abuse is justified often pick words out of religious texts out of context to support their stance:

They don't want to because it's like in the culture we come from it's like what happens behind closed doors has got nothing to do with with and you know people unfortunately in the Quran they pick out the wrong words because it says something where ... it says something that could be you know perceived in that kind of way –
Sophie

The unfortunate reality is that women are often misled and lied to even by people in a position of religious authority, as they are put in that place by a community who expect them to follow cultural norms. When a woman is told that domestic abuse is justified by a religious figure they often take this at face value instead of looking into it further and realising that in the religious text this is not the case. This lack of education on the true meaning of Islam and its stance on domestic abuse is a major problem and it can be argued that if a woman was aware of the true facts they may feel more able to report and leave an abusive relationship.

The reluctance to address these issues openly on a community level has led to domestic abuse being seen as something which should remain an issue that is dealt with behind closed doors. This reluctance to address the issue of domestic abuse has been evidenced in prior studies, an example is a study conducted by Das et al., (2015) in which attitudes in Bangladesh were investigated. A central issue that prevented open discussions was the culturally ingrained belief that domestic abuse was a normal part of marriage. This cultural belief was held by both victims and perpetrators who had grown up witnessing abuse and did not question it. This unwillingness to speak openly only reinforces the idea in a woman's mind that there is no help out there and no one for her to turn to and her only option is to endure the abuse. The research findings provided new insights that complement the existing scholarship. For example, contributor Rubi also discussed other aspects of Islam which are deliberately manipulated to give the impression that a man has a right to be abusive and controlling.

So much I think there like ninety percent of what individuals believe or victims believe are cultural norms and victims believe that its religion and I think the reason being is that they feel like they they believe it's like that because a lack of education erm lack of knowledge in regards to what they see we are fortunate in in another aspect whether you agree or disagree but that's like what my opinion is we are born as a Muslim so we've got that advantage and because we are born as a Muslim we automatically feel we have them rights erm and we don't educate ourselves - Rubi

The research findings substantiate existing scholarship. Studies (Ammar, 2007) have found that if women are led to believe that their religion condones the abuse, they are unlikely to seek help under the false belief it is tolerated. Payton (2014) found that cultural norms need to be incorporated in informing policies in regards to domestic abuse, as this would allow a more effective way in which to address cultural barriers and help educate victims to the truth in relation to religious norms. This is reflected in the research findings. For example, Nadia also shared a similar view in relation to a lack of education and spoke about the role religious figures such as Imams are made to play within their community in relation to domestic abuse. Nadia explained that in her view it was not specifically an issue with their gender but the fact they had people to answer to in their community who put them in that position. This becomes a major problem when it comes to domestic abuse and the contradictory views regarding domestic abuse that can be embedded in culture and religion:

...they're coming from cultural backgrounds so they're predisposed to have ideas which are cultural and and unexpectedly cultural which opposes Islam and yet they

are an Imam and also the Imam erm is under a very difficult position of trying to please the community who've placed them in the role of Imam and this is our political problem as well as a skillset problem so that's the thing the problem isn't that they're a man the problem is that there is no choice and what Imam are they what skillsets who's placed them in their role – Nadia

There was a consensus throughout the interviews that awareness needs to be raised of the true meaning of Islam in relation to domestic abuse. This would hopefully educate people with the facts and hopefully target those women who are suffering from domestic abuse and tolerating it due to a false notion of faith. Catherine in the quote below spoke of how domestic abuse is not unique to the South Asian Muslim community and is prevalent in many cultures and religions, but spoke of the unique aspects of domestic abuse in the South Asian Muslim community.

So to begin with I think it's important to say that it isn't unique to the Muslim or South Asian community it's common in all communities religions and cultures around the world however what is still a challenge especially in the Muslim community it is still a taboo subject as people are very wary of highlighting further issues in the Muslim community at a time when there is much negativity directed at Islam as a whole ... acknowledge it but deal with it as a community and invest money and resources into tackling domestic violence – Catherine

Fulu and Miedema's (2016) study found that passages from the Quran are often taken out of context to justify domestic abuse. They found that men interpreted religious text to justify their standing rather than look at the text impartially. Subsequently, religion is often used as an effective method to contain and stop any talk of domestic abuse in order to continue the myth that abuse of any kind is tolerated in Islam. Nadia spoke of the need to talk about domestic abuse on a community level, in order to educate those women who are at risk of suffering from domestic abuse due to cultural norms being portrayed as religious teachings. Nadia was also blunt in relation to the unwillingness to openly discuss domestic abuse in religious settings.

Domestic violence and subjugation of women as we know and is acknowledged now it no secret is a world problem and so so to deny and this is what makes us look foolish a world problem of of male violence to women to which we know statistically worldwide is a huge issue ... everyone knows it's a human issue so for the Muslim

community to say we're not human this is not human issue for us everyone knows we're lying - Nadia

Nadia criticised the reluctance of religious figures such as Imams to address the issue of domestic abuse on a community scale. She argued that this would draw much needed attention to domestic abuse and the detrimental effect it has on people. This would hopefully also educate perpetrators to the true nature of Islam and domestic abuse and possibly even provide a victim with a motivation to leave an abusive relationship.

...this is true of whether it's a Muslim or a non-Muslim it's mental health issue and and it's a mental health issue it's an issue of power and control now how the perpetrator get power and control he uses either his culture his family his religion but it's still a mental health issue now if we had Imams if we had Muslim organisations saying look men look women if you have a man or a woman who is perpetrating this form of violence whether it's psychical emotional or psychological that woman or man has a mental health issue and they should seek help imagine how the dynamic would change now that you're putting the responsibility of the community against the perpetrator – Nadia

Nadia made a very salient point in relation to how the community and Imams in their silence are almost giving credence to the perpetrators' actions; however, if they were to speak out and provide people with the facts this possibly will turn the tide in the victim's favour. Nadia also gave her view on Imams in general and stated that the issues that have been discussed above arise from the unfortunate fact that many Imams do not have the necessary skills to deal with domestic abuse in a way that is sensitive and supportive. Nadia advocated the need to further train Imams in the area of domestic abuse for them to be able to provide a counselling service with its foundations in Islam. This need to educate people in relation to the true facts of Islam in relation to domestic abuse is something which is needed urgently, as this would allow victims to break the cycle and fight the taboo of speaking out against domestic abuse. Rubi spoke of the true aspects of Islam in relation to marriage and domestic abuse and how these could be used to educate women who are possibly in abusive relationships and give them the motivation and faith to leave them.

...when we look at our Imams they're herein lies the problem it's not the fact that the Imam is a man the problem lies in the skill set ... there are Imams with the right psychological and emotional makeup in other they're empathic they are understanding they are culturally aware they are sensitive they're spiritual in the right

sense of the word and they have a skillset a skillset which either is something that comes natural where they're raised empathic and are understanding or they've been on courses they've studied psychology or counselling so it really is about character and the skillset of the Imam – Nadia

This fact in relation to Islam and domestic abuse has been discussed in prior studies; for example, a study conducted by Douki, Nacef, Belhadj, Bouasker and Ghachem (2003), found that reading the Quran impartially found women are not obligated to do anything for their spouse. Furthermore, the Quran spoke of respecting women in general, especially a person's wife. However, the research findings show that many victims simply believe cultural norms as that is what they have been raised with. Contributor Rubi went on to stress the need to make the issues clear to people, especially victims who have been led to believe that their faith allows domestic abuse if their husband deems them to be a poor wife. This knowledge could be used to empower women of faith to find the strength to leave an abusive relationship and have solid foundations on which to move on from in the form of their religion. Rubi also spoke of the need to educate women to the role of a wife as prescribed by Islam, as it became clear during the interviews that many women wrongly confused cultural norms with religious duties. This clarification would hopefully allow women to gain the confidence to seek help and acknowledge the differences between cultural and religious customs.

Another theme which emerged from the interviews was the concept of fate and patience, in which victims believed that if they endured the abuse they would be rewarded for it in their next life. A study conducted by Tonsing (2016) also found high levels of belief in fate or 'Kismet' in the South Asian Muslim community. It was found that victims believed that this was their life and they had to continue in the abusive relationship in order to maintain their familial honour, for which they would be rewarded in the next life. This mind-set results in many women simply enduring domestic abuse in the belief that this life is a test and their endurance will be rewarded. This was a common theme and was spoken about at length by all participants who emphasised the need to counter this mentality to help women leave abusive relationships. Rubi recalled a recent experience of speaking to a victim of domestic abuse who mentioned the belief of their abuse being a test and the effect this had on their standing within the relationship.

...she was like oh well this is my test from God and I'm like and I couldn't help but say to her in all honesty I understand but erm god doesn't test you with violence you know he tests you if you're a firm believer in your religion and whatever religion you

believe that's fine it's not a problem erm but erm there's a limitation and the tests come in different ways and you can't like be in that situation because then what you are also doing is that you're helping yourself harming your harming yourself because what you're doing is your inflicting this upon yourself knowingly and it's not acceptable is it its its like educating and that's what it is you know but its its also .. there's confusion in relation to culture and religion – Rubi

This onus that was placed on the victim to not only endure the abuse but also ensure that it remained a secret was a major theme within the study. The participants also agreed that religious institutions such as mosques needed to do more to address the issue of domestic abuse. The participants argued that Imams needed to teach their congregation the truth in relation to domestic abuse and Islam and address the cultural practices which have wrongly been used to tolerate domestic abuse. The theme of victim blaming was something that all the participants spoke of and is a major part of domestic abuse in the South Asian Muslim community. This theme will be discussed further in the following section.

Victim blaming

A major theme which arose during the interviews was the issue of victim blaming, which is not unique to the South Asian Muslim community; however, it did take place in unique ways. All the participants spoke of the injustice in the victims having to not only endure the abuse but also to ensure that it was not revealed to protect their personal and familial honour within the community. Nadia argued that the lack of open discussion or acknowledgment of domestic abuse as an issue unconsciously gives the impression that domestic abuse is to be kept behind closed doors and not divulged to anyone.

...what we do is we put the responsibility of the perpetrators responsibility onto the victim and we say so the family says the community says the Imam stays silent and they say to the woman either implicitly or explicitly either it's your responsibility to take the hits because if you don't take the hits we'll have to admit that we have massive mental health issues in our communities we'll have to admit that we have mental health issues within families that our sons or our daughters who are also perpetrators mothers who are emotionally and psychologically abuse their children is also domestic and and so so the victim is told don't speak about it so the victim takes the hit the victims role is to protect the family the culture to protect Islam the name of Islam so all the responsibility is placed on the victims – Nadia

This hesitancy to openly address the issue of domestic abuse within the South Asian Muslim community was due to fear of reprisals against the community as a whole. Holtmann (2016) spoke of how this belief is understandable as drawing attention to a minority is dangerous, as it can draw unwanted attention and reinforce stereotypes held by dominant groups. Nadia also added that this reluctance to speak out about domestic abuse was continued in order to maintain the image of Islam in a climate where it is already under attack from various groups misleadingly purporting to fight under it (Terman, 2016). This leads to victims feeling further pressure to keep the domestic abuse a secret to uphold not only their personal, familial and cultural standing but also the perception of their religion. Nadia further explained that this leads to victims feeling that they have no one to turn to and are cut off from any sources of help under the guise of protecting the outside perception of their culture and religion. Nadia gave her opinion that this was intentional on the part of the perpetrator to ensure the victim remains passive to the abuse.

No matter what no matter what the injustice no matter what the abuse your tasked with holding the family ergo the community because you know we don't want to be self-hating Muslims do we where we expose each other and this is another mental health issue we're under attack from Islamophobia now and this happened with the street abuse and now you're going to tell these people who are Islamophobic that you've actually got a good reason to be Islamophobic look at all this abuse that is going on in our community – Nadia

Leanne also spoke of the injustice that victims face and are often blamed for the abuse that is inflicted upon them for a variety of reasons. This justification on the perpetrator's part further instils the belief in a victim that they are the one at fault and even if they consider reporting the abuse to the authorities they are fearful of the repercussions.

Yeah I think erm shame as well is partly because the abuse is you've made me do this I'm doing this because and the men sometimes justifying their actions oh you're not a good wife to me or you know and they'll almost make the women believe it's their fault why they are acting that way ... from recognising yourself that you're a victim to speaking out and people's reactions how they might see you and see that person as they might blame that person and say that you deserve it or what did you do to deserve that or you know like so yeah I think throughout really throughout the cycle - Leanne

Overall, this section of the thesis shows that misconceptions about cultural norms and religious ideals are a major barrier to help-seeking behaviour in South Asian Muslim women. Cultural norms formulated over decades have resulted in an amalgamation of cultural and religious beliefs and as such victims feel powerless to question the warped view of their faith they have been surrounded with. Studies conducted within the South Asian community have shown how cultural norms have intentionally been assimilated into religious values in order to silence detractors (Das et al., 2015). The participants highlighted this as a major barrier in regards to South Asian Muslim victims in seeking help and the fact that more needs to be done in order to address these shortcomings in relation to raising awareness and education.

The role religion plays was also discussed at length by the participants and, as found in previous studies, a victim's culture plays a larger role than their religion in informing their views relating to domestic abuse. A study conducted by Douki et al., (2003) found that South Asian women, regardless of their religion, in general have very similar beliefs in relation to domestic abuse which have been informed by cultural norms. These norms cross religious lines and ideals relating to shame and stigma and fate are common amongst South Asian women.

Victim blaming was also a major theme which the participants spoke about. There was a shared view that South Asian Muslim victims of domestic abuse felt high levels of shame in the acknowledging and reporting of the abuse. The reason for this can be attributed to aspects of the South Asian community relating to shame and stigma and the perception that being a divorcee is seen as a defaming trait. A study conducted by Kallivayalil (2010) conducted with South Asian immigrant women found high levels of self-blame in the reporting of domestic abuse. It was found that the women felt high levels of blame due to the culturally expected roles that wives are meant to play in the South Asian community. This feeling of self-blame was more apparent when the victims were immigrants as they felt a greater need to live with the abuse and remain in the relationship in order to uphold their family's standing.

The research highlighted the numerous barriers facing South Asian Muslim women in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. One of the key findings in this chapter related to the confusion between cultural and religious norms which were found to dictate the responses to domestic abuse. Victims were more likely to remain in an abusive relationship if they were falsely led to believe their religion condoned the abuse. This issue of power was central to the research, as victims were led to believe that the perpetrators had

a divine right to exert their will on their spouses. This misconception arguably results in many women enduring domestic abuse under the false pretence that it is a test of their faith or their kismet (fate). In the chapter below, ways in which to best target and educate in relation to help available will be discussed.

Interventions

Faith based support

The following chapter will look into the participants' views regarding faith-based support, as well as long-term and proactive interventions. All participants argued that it was immensely important that interventions targeted people when they were younger, ensuring any views that may have been passed down from earlier generations were challenged before they could set in. The participants also argued that faith which had often been misused to falsely condone domestic abuse, was used to challenge those misconceptions to more effectively tackle lifelong beliefs. The reasoning for this approach will be detailed below in extracts taken from the interviews. Predominantly it is important to define what is meant by faith based support and how it applies in healing domestic abuse victims.

...we want to look at how do you put spirituality back into therapy but like mindfulness in other words not controlling not saying oh God says you should do this in other words how could you use God in a therapeutic safe way just like all other therapeutic therapies in a safe way in order to either offset or even reverse and so you help that person realise that actually what happened to you was a human being and what happened to you is actually forbidden and don't take my word for it or anyone on the helpline don't take my word for it go to a trusted scholar – Nadia

An example of a faith based approach to the treatment of domestic abuse in the South Asian Muslim community was given by Nadia, who spoke of the role an honest and ethical Imam could play. Nadia spoke of the numerous Imams she had spoken to over the years who, unlike those who peddle cultural norms as religious values, can be a crucial source of support to victims. Nadia equated the meeting between victims and Imams who could inform them of the true values of Islam in relation to domestic abuse, could be an almost healing experience for them after years of abuse:

...is an issues that we've been facing because we signpost to some Imams I mean over the years we've met some amazing Imams and we've sent the sister you know specifically sister who've been facing domestic violence part of their healing would be to go to this Imam and hear what he says about domestic violence and that in itself would be a healing process for you for him what he says about erm domestic violence and how un-Islamic how unjust how unfair - Nadia

Many studies (Ahmed, 2013) have been conducted which have found that religion can be used as an important tool to educate and empower Muslim women. For example, Ammar (2007) found that women who were informed of the true facts relating to Islam and domestic abuse, backed up with religious scripture, found solace in their religion. This helped certain South Asian Muslim women who give high credence to their religion to acknowledge, report and recover from the abuse more effectively. Nadia still criticised the fact that domestic abuse is not being addressed on a community scale in the South Asian Muslim community and further work needed to be done to address these issues. However, Nadia did have reason to be optimistic in relation to the future on how now younger Imams are taking counselling courses in order to be able to help with their congregation. Nadia argued that change should come from within the community rather than be imposed from external agencies. The reason for this stance was a concern that if external parties were to come in and implement changes it would be rejected; however, if it was developed from within, people would be more open and responsive.

...we offset that so there would be the Imams who should be challenged forced to say what is your duty as a man to speak out about injustice whether that's domestic violence incest whatever the abuse is speak out about it as national organisations and then and then within those structures what kind of skillset do you need so a lot of new young Imams now are actually taking counselling courses and becoming qualified counsellors so it makes the Imamship if that's the word it makes them a skilled Imam that's something new and lovely to see as well – Nadia

Adam also spoke of the strong influence religion could have in both supporting victims and rehabilitating perpetrators. A study conducted by Douki et al., (2003) also found that faith was a major comfort to victims when they were informed of the true meaning of Islam in relation to domestic abuse. Perpetrators were also found to be more willing to break the cycle of abuse when they were presented with scriptures which clearly spoke against domestic abuse. Throughout the interviews there was a strong sense that faith based help was the one of the best ways in which to educate and support victims of domestic abuse. Adam spoke of the role numerous faiths can play, as at their core they have the same ideology:

That's right it has to be faith inspired because what happens then it gives that long term aim you know faith does definitely give you because you have these short term things you know you put into place but ultimately its faith isn't it that gives you that

long term aim to be that better person you become accountable don't you ... with faith you know people need to understand that everybody no matter how different faiths but they might have different views but it leads to the same destination to and that's what people need to realise ... then you have different faiths in there different groups go in there and get support and that's what we need to do don't we work together because everyone has different skills from different backgrounds – Adam

Adam also spoke of the need to educate individuals to the positive role religion can play in helping people in trying to reconnect and work on their marriage. Adam encouraged awareness to be raised in relation to the fact that religion does not force people to stay together and if, after trying to fix their relationship issues, it does not work they are free to separate from each other in an amicable way.

It is and we need to speak to young people because before it happens we need to if we can intervene at an early stage you're there to say faith is there in a positive way it's not there to restrain you it's not there it's there to give you options it's not something there to restrict you and that's what religion is and that's seeing religion in the wrong way it's there to give you lots of choices and options this is what you can do in a positive way you know and religion does give you that option to move away from that relationship but it does in a fair and safe way and that's what people need to understand that's key – Adam

The interviewees advocated for interventions to in turn be faith based depending on an individual's value of their religion. The intention was to try and undo the damage perpetrators inflicted upon their victims when they falsely put forth the notion that they had a religious right to beat their partners. Allowing victims of domestic abuse to read for themselves an unedited and contextualised truth within religious scriptures would allow them to heal on a spiritual level and begin the journey towards rebuilding their lives. This faith based approach has also been advocated in other studies; for example, Haj-Yahia (2013) found that utilising an individual's faith allowed victims of domestic abuse to better understand the abuse they have suffered and the fact it was not only unjust in relation to the law but also their religion.

Long-term support

Long-term support was a prominent theme throughout the interviews; all the participants recounted how the acknowledging and consequent reporting of domestic abuse is rarely a

straightforward process. Nadia spoke of her pride in the unique attributes of her organisation who, unlike other organisations, often struggle to provide long-term support to victims due to quotas and funding.

...the thing I'm proudest of that what we do as a helpline is different because we're in a new unique position of independence so if you look at other organisations other helplines they to a degree have to find out how helplines work they have to produce numbers so if you're going to get funding implicit in the finding the funders want to know how many people are you helping per-day per-shift ... you have a certain period of time within a helpline you're told between forty-five minute to an hour of help' – Nadia

Nadia spoke of the experiences of victims who come to their organisations after dealing with other organisations and the relatively strict time constraints that are applied in order for a woman to be treated for years of domestic abuse. Nadia argued that this is based on a sad fact of reality that help is finite and issues relating to funding, as mentioned above, only add to the pressure that organisations are under to produce results in the most cost-effective manner.

...something to be true not just within domestic violence it's true of all the services that there's not enough money enough time and enough people to to identify what is your need and set a package around your needs now you hear the government say we're setting up for these organisations to address people's needs it's it's just not happening and the reality is you could say it's not their fault because how are you going to fund by government so for instance you're twenty one so for twenty one year's you've been in mentally and physically abused by your family and then you get married and you suffer domestic violence so now we're talking another ten years so thirty years of abuse how are you going to address that in twelve weeks of counselling how are you going to address that – Nadia

Rubi also spoke of the long-term aspect of providing help to victims of domestic abuse. Rubi stressed that many victims seek out advice but many are reluctant to report the domestic abuse to the authorities due to the perceived effect it could have on their children. However, children have been viewed as a source of support in moving away from an abusive relationship. A study conducted by Ahmed, (2013) found that women who had children were more motivated to leave a relationship to keep their children safe and to provide them with a healthy childhood free from the abuse. It is important to note, however, that this is

dependent on the woman in question and the context of the abuse which will determine whether children have a positive or negative impact on leaving an abusive relationship. This time consuming and repetitive process is one that Rubi is more than happy to undertake on a constant basis, as sometimes it is the only way to reinforce to a victim that leaving the abuse is the best and only logical decision.

...we're not erm judgemental in the sense of because what you'll also realise is and research will show erm victims would come forward for some support but what they want is they want that immediate safety so they just want they ring the Police just to get that person out that's it erm once the situation has calmed down it's back to normal again so we can't judge that person to say well why didn't you give a statement why did you not go ahead with this because there are so many factors and then it's a matter of we will have we have service users who have accessed our support time and again and again and again and not done anything about it they've reconciled ... our job is to be able to you can come in time and again and you ring us every single day and we will give the same advice and the same support not going to change our behaviour – Rubi

Rubi also discussed the way in which the organisation in which she works provides long-term holistic support to victims. Rubi acknowledged the fact that many victims do not simply suffer one instance of abuse or a singular type of abuse; abuse can be layered over a victim's lifetime and in turn the help they require is often complex. This was a key area in which Rubi was proud of the work her organisations achieve in relation to providing a holistic source of support. Nadia also spoke of the long-term effects domestic abuse can have on a victim and was critical of the current model in which a victim is offered a set number of counselling sessions to address abuse they may have suffered since childhood.

...those women feel so at risk at that stage they don't care about the shaming the family they don't care about that they think I will be dead anyway this man is going to kill me or he will kill one of my children or he's going to or I'm going to end up in a psychiatric hospital so that's what we get women presenting at that point so so badly damaged and that's what I mean that when they come to the organisation or other organisations and giving them twelve weeks of cognitive behaviour therapy or even mindfulness behaviour therapy for twelve week this is a plaster on a sore and we've got a gaping wound that needs surgery and you're handing our plasters you know – Nadia

This metaphor of handing out plasters when in fact what is needed is surgery is perfect in describing the current situation in relation to sources of support in the current climate. This is not purely limited in the domestic abuse sector but many other forms of social support. As agreed by all the participants, more needs to be done to educate South Asian Muslim women and women in general to the help that is available and the truth in regard to reporting domestic abuse and dispel the false information.

Proactive work

A key theme which emerged was the necessity to raise awareness of domestic abuse at a young age. All participants highlighted the need to educate young people about what constitutes domestic abuse, how they can get help and what form this help can take. The belief was that targeting people from a young age would instil a sense of right and wrong in relation to domestic abuse and relationships in general. This would ideally allow people to seek help more freely without fear of perceived repercussions and not suffer for years on end in silence.

This early preventative work has been advocated by other studies; for example, Mccarry and Lombard (2016) conducted a study in Scotland which found that children already had developed attitudes and beliefs in relation to domestic abuse at a young age. In turn, it was advised that more should be done to educate children of the dangers of domestic abuse at a younger age in primary school, to ensure when they are growing up that they have a healthy attitude to relationships. Nadia also spoke of her desire to work in the preventative side of domestic abuse and root out abuse as early as possible. One of the ways in which Nadia is achieving this goal is by conducting parenting classes in which parents are taught how to raise strong and spiritual children who would not perpetrate or tolerate domestic abuse.

I'm involved in these because these are run by Muslims they're erm like for instance the parenting course that I'm highly involved in the organisation the courses put together by Muslims and clinical psychologists so these are the areas that are the result of the work that I'm doing if I was to go back thirty years and say what would be the programs that I would put into place first of all there would be parenting programs so that within parenting that the positive parenting would be to produce assertive strong spiritual young men and women where they neither abuse or someone was able to abuse them – Nadia

Nadia also spoke of her happiness in working on the preventative side of the spectrum in relation to domestic abuse. Nadia also backed Muslim charities who often send the money they collect abroad to start acknowledging there is also a problem at home in terms of domestic abuse which needs to be addressed.

...what I'd like to do is work with people and so like it's like prevention isn't it and you know but before you actually get ill before you get abused before you get diabetes I'd like to work on the other end for a while ... I like to work in that bit where there doesn't need to be a plaster and then there doesn't need to be any surgery and I guess that's why I'm involved in so many other things now and that's what we'd like the whole of the Muslim community to be doing and there's a lot it's not just me there's a whole body of people the people that I'm involved in I mean I'm involved with a lot of Muslims who also are proactively doing this work so there is a lot of room for optimism the problem is there should be more will within the Muslim community to fund that work you know – Nadia

Nadia also agreed on the point of teaching young people at school about domestic abuse; however, she made it clear that this responsibility to educate children should not be simply left to teachers. Nadia encouraged parents to also take an active role in raising and teaching children about domestic abuse to ensure they raise healthy well-adjusted children. Nadia talked about another piece of proactive work she is involved in, in relation to pre-marriage classes to educate people prior to marriage of what a healthy relationship is without abuse of any description. Nadia went further and suggested that pre-marriage courses should be made mandatory in which couples could attend classes in which they would be educated about the core aspects of marriage.

I met a Muslim teacher the other week and she said what's shocking to me as a teacher is that parents are handing over their parental responsibility to us cos we're educators and this is not our responsibility to raise their children morally ethically that's their job they're handing it over to us because they're Muslim teachers erm that itself opens up abuse because we're handing over them respecting those people and abuse happens within the mosque within the schools in other words we're handing over our responsibility – Nadia

A study conducted by Kort (2005) also sponsored the need to educate people to the facts in relation to domestic abuse and Islam, before marriage. This would ideally be conducted prior to a marriage taking place to ensure both partners are aware of the rights and wrongs in

relation to having a healthy marriage. Similarly, in relation to the proactive aspect of domestic abuse a prominent and significant case was described by Sophie who found that not many people attended classes. She found that this was down to the stigma attached to being seen at a domestic abuse centre in town; after speaking to her manager, she had the idea of holding the classes at a local mosque. Sophie went further to raise as much awareness as possible and as host of a local radio station mentioned it on air to make people aware of the classes available locally to them.

Yeah because where I'm based there's a mosque just up the road and I was telling somebody come to this place and they were unsure where it was but when I would ask do you know where the blue mosque is they would say yeah we got there a lot so I thought numbers are quite short in these sessions so why don't we go to the mosque instead so I went to my manager and asked how do you feel about it –
Sophie

The example provided above of proactively trying to get people to come to classes where domestic abuse is discussed and help is available in a non-stigmatising setting is of immense importance. This model if applied in other areas could also be very successful, as it would allow women who may not usually leave home to attend classes and speak to other people and if need be seek help.

This method of proactively going out and trying to educate people was advocated by all the participants in various manners, all of which can be applied depending on the context and the end goal. However, the objective remained the same, to further raise awareness and educate people to the facts in regards domestic abuse and the help available to them. However, Nadia pointed out an unfortunate aspect of the response to domestic abuse in the South Asian Muslim community in that responses are rarely proactive, instead they are often reactive.

People don't like change and also again erm it's it's sort of painting are communities with one brush but what we've seen and myself and agree with other people who are in similar services what we notice in Muslim communities is that they're reactive so when there is a problem they react and rather they're not proactive, proactive is Imams training proactive is parenting programs that look at healthy parenting premarriage courses to look at what's a healthy relationship a unhealthy relationship cos now schools are introducing erm talks about domestic violence – Nadia

Overall, there are numerous ways in which interventions regarding domestic abuse in the South Asian Muslim community can be improved upon. The participants stressed the need to incorporate faith based support in the treatment of victims of domestic abuse to help them more effectively and provide them with the tools to empower them. This belief was supported by studies conducted in the field which have found that incorporating religious texts was an important part of the recovery from domestic abuse. Holtmann (2016) spoke of the need to educate women about the true ideals in relation to Islam and domestic abuse to aid and accelerate their recovery and provide them with long-term goals in relation to recovery through the incorporation of their faith. Tonsing (2015) also argued that the distinction between cultural norms and religious values needs to be made clear to effectively help South Asian Muslim women acknowledge and seek help in regards to domestic abuse.

The long-term support aspect of the chapter focussed on the participants' view that domestic abuse is often a crime which takes places over years; consequently, the support that is required needs to take this into account. All the participants highlighted the necessity to provide support which provided long-term holistic help for the victims of domestic abuse. Sylaska and Edwards (2014) found that the action of reporting domestic abuse, although the most difficult step, is one of many the victim will face. These can range from feelings of shame, being ostracised by the community and blame being levelled at them for not being able to keep their family together. Therefore, it is of immense importance that the support is available to them through this difficult journey.

Proactive work was one of the main themes to emerge from the interviews; all participants supported more work being carried out within the South Asian Muslim community to address the issues of domestic abuse. Many ideas were put forth; however, the main areas of agreement centred around the need to engage younger children to the facts about domestic abuse. Moreover, the participants argued that pre-marriage courses should be conducted within mosques to teach both partners about the foundations of a happy and healthy marriage. Mccarry and Lombard (2016) also shared the opinion that more needs to be done at a younger age, as they found children formed opinions on domestic abuse at a young age.

Conclusion

The main research question which guided this study related to the barriers South Asian Muslim women faced in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. The goal of the research was to gain the knowledge of practitioners who worked with South Asian Muslim women within the field of domestic abuse. This will allow an understanding of the issues that South Asian Muslim women face regarding domestic abuse, and how interventions can be better tailored to be more effective at targeting and helping those women most at risk from domestic abuse.

Power

The issues of power were found to be the main barriers in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. All the interviewees reported that victims often felt they had no option but to endure the abuse, as the perpetrators utilised a variety of strategies to ensure victims remained submissive. A prime example of this use of threats involved children; perpetrators manipulated their victims by falsely informing them that if they reported the abuse, their children would be removed from their care. This threat, although false, was found to be a major barrier in the reporting of domestic abuse as victims were often not aware of the legal frameworks. This allowed perpetrators to exert their will upon their victim with no fear of repercussion, as they had ensured the victim believed they had no choice but to endure the abuse. This finding builds on the existing literature (Ali, Asad, Mogren and Krantz, 2011) which has shown that financial difficulties and having an increased number of children to look after heightened the risk of domestic abuse. Furthermore, research (Chaudhuri et al., 2014) has shown newly married women often go through a transition period in which they have to acclimatise to their new home. This included integrating themselves into the routines and power structures of their new home, this if difficult could lead to abuse from the perpetrator and their family. This period was found to be more difficult if the victim had no immediate family near them, especially if their family was abroad. This allowed the perpetrator and their family to act without fear of repercussions (Kallivayalil, 2010). Recent immigrants who had the courage to convey their situation to their family were often told to accept the abuse for a better life for themselves and their children, or threatened to remain in the relationship in order to not bring shame upon their family (Payton, 2014).

The research findings showed that the misuse of power was further reinforced by other members of the perpetrator's family, namely mother-in-laws who the interviewees

highlighted as a driving force of the abuse. The study stressed the importance of the cultural role a mother-in-law plays in moulding her daughter-in-law to their perceived version of a 'good' daughter-in-law. Many of the interviewees highlighted how mother-in-laws often orchestrated the abuse to ensure the daughter-in-law stayed in line and conformed to the family norms. An important factor which was discussed was the fact that many of the mother-in-laws who directed the abuse were once victims themselves, and rather than break the cycle of abuse they repeated it. The role of the extended family has been documented in research especially in the context of South Asian families as spouses often live with their parents (Critelli, 2012). This increased number of people inhabiting one household exacerbates the risk of domestic abuse occurring due to an increase in tension over living space and the perceived role of a 'good' housewife. Previous research has found that the more perpetrators involved in the abuse either physically or by orchestrating it, positively correlates to the severity of the abuse. (Salter, 2014). This was reflected by a consensus among the interviewees that much of the domestic abuse was systemic within certain families and was considered the norm and in turn it was never challenged. This leads to perpetrators believing that they can continue abusing their partners and victims who have seen domestic abuse throughout their lives and who feel they have no option but to endure the abuse. A further issue relating to power related to how witnessing domestic abuse as a child could affect their future responses to domestic abuse. The interviewees spoke of their view that witnessing abuse as a child could have one of two effects on a person in their late life, primarily it could result in them tolerating the abuse as they view it as the norm. Alternatively, children in their later life could replicate the abuse they witnessed as children, again seeing it as the norm and part of a relationship.

The interviewees also spoke at length about the mental toll that domestic abuse has on a victim throughout their lifetime. Victims often faced resistance within the community in reporting domestic abuse, and they often endured it which resulted in mental health problems which were often left undiagnosed and untreated. Victims were often told that if their faith was pure, any depression would simply disappear as long as they kept faith. This barrier in seeking help for their mental health and the related domestic abuse led to certain South Asian Muslim women only seeking help when their illness had progressed to a stage where they had to be sectioned. This barrier in seeking help resulted in victims suffering on many fronts, as they had no power or control over their situation and had been programmed to feel there was no way out, and they had no other recourse but to suffer the abuse. This finding was shared by all the participants, who agreed that South Asian Muslim victims were unlikely to seek help until the situation had escalated to a stage where they felt their life or the life of a loved one was at risk. This finding adds support to prior research which stressed

the added mental toll that suffering from domestic abuse can have in the South Asian community (Khan et al., 2014). Research has found that domestic abuse victims in the South Asian community somaticise psychological problems, as they are unable to express their emotional state in psychological terms. This lack of understanding of mental illness allows perpetrators to question an individual's faith and make them feel guilty for having a mental health issue and at times even threaten them that their children would be removed if they sought external help (Holtmann, 2016).

Misconceptions about religion and culture: the impact on domestic abuse situations

Culture, stigma and shame were found to be major barriers to leaving an abusive relationship, as victims were afraid of the effects it would have on their personal and familial standing within the community. Victims were afraid of the perceived detrimental impact it would have on their honour and standing as a person within the community, as reporting domestic abuse was seen as shameful. Rather than blaming the perpetrators for carrying out the abuse, the community was often hostile to the victim for reporting the abuse and bringing shame upon their community. This stigma of reporting domestic abuse and being perceived as coming from a broken home also extended to a victim's children. This further reinforced the barrier to reporting domestic abuse, as victims were afraid it would hurt their child's chances in the future when it came to marriage, as they would be labelled as coming from a broken home. The shame and stigma related to reporting domestic abuse were perceived to far outweigh the benefits of reporting the abuse and consequently many victims did not come forward until their life was at risk.

A major theme which became evident within the study was the confusion about what constituted religious norms and cultural norms. This confusion related to the fact that cultural norms, which stemmed from patriarchy related to the role of a wife, were intentionally put forth as religious obligations. This ensured women were likely to endure abusive behaviour as they were led to believe their spouse had a religious right. Therefore, it is vitally important that cultural norms regarding patriarchy are explored further, as addressing the underlying catalysts of domestic abuse, in particular patriarchy, will allow domestic abuse to be tackled more effectively. Most of the interviewees highlighted the way that victims often were misinformed about what their religion and culture stated in relation to domestic abuse. Victims often reported that they were told it was their religious duty to withstand all aspects of marriage including domestic abuse, and that their spouses had the authority from God to abuse them if they deemed it necessary. This was one of the main barriers facing women experiencing domestic abuse as they had been conditioned to believe that their religion

condoned such behaviour and in turn endured the abuse. Victims were also found to have high levels of belief relating to the concept of 'Kismet' or fate and believed domestic abuse was a test from God. Victims also believed that they would be rewarded for their patience in the afterlife which led to many victims accepting the abuse. This directly contradicted religious scriptures which made it clear that abuse of any kind was not permissible in Islam (King, 2009). However, perpetrators often use scripture taken out of context to reinforce their power and lead victims to believe that the perpetrator had a religious right to abuse them if they saw fit.

A further issue which became evident within the study was the fact that religious scholars, or those in a position of power within the communities such as Imams, were extremely reluctant to openly discuss domestic abuse. The interviewees stated this reluctance stemmed from a fear that highlighting this issue would give those people who were critical of Islam more ways in which to criticise the community at large. However, this reluctance arguably leads to victims feeling they have no recourse to help either within or outside their community. This secrecy unconsciously reiterated that domestic abuse was something to be kept behind closed doors and not discussed openly which further reinforced the barrier of acknowledging and reporting domestic abuse. The Islamic scripture which relates to a spousal relationship is clear, as noted in prior studies (Dornhof, 2011), of the need for mutual respect and caring. However, like many religious texts, individuals in a position of power have used the religious scripture to justify and maintain control of social structures and to reaffirm their world views and argue they have a God-given right to exert their will on their spouse (Roald, 2016). Recent studies on religious scriptures by Muslim feminists (King, 2009) argue that the verses which are used to condone domestic abuse by perpetrators and hardliners alike, in fact, do not condone domestic abuse at all. However, when read in context the Quran makes it clear that domestic abuse is not tolerated in any form. Additionally, cultural roles of a wife are not specified, rather it states that a wife does not have a religious duty towards her husband, and paints a picture of a more mutual relationship where the power is shared between the spouses (Bakhtiar, 2011).

Interventions

Although many barriers were found in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse within the South Asian Muslim community, all the participants advocated for interventions to be tailored to the context in which they were to be applied. The interviewees all advocated that faith based interventions be utilised where appropriate. The reasoning for the use of

religion as a tool to help the victims was due to the fact that many of the victims had false notions about what their religion dictated in terms of domestic abuse. As noted above, perpetrators were known to use religious scripture out of context to condone the abuse, so that providing context to the religious scriptures allowed victims to understand that their religion explicitly forbids domestic abuse in all forms. The incorporation of religious scripture where appropriate was found to be helpful to individuals who held their faith in high regard. Faith also gave the women hope for the future and reassurance that they had done the right thing, not only for themselves but for their children. This was echoed in prior research which advocated the use of faith based interventions to counter the misinformation many victims have been surrounded with their entire life. The inclusion of faith based support was found to help victims of domestic abuse come to the realisation that their faith did not condone the abuse and that they had made the right decision spiritually to leave the abusive relationship (Holtmann, 2016).

The interviewees also emphasised the need for long-term support for victims of domestic abuse, as many of the victims had often suffered a lifetime of abuse and therefore required prolonged support. However, financial pressures and quotas that organisations needed to adhere to, to ensure funding, often meant that victims of domestic abuse did not get the help they required. The interviewees advocated for support to be provided over a longer term as domestic abuse has a long-term effect on a victim, and in turn the support they require needs to acknowledge the fact that victims will need help long after they been removed from an abusive environment. Victims will require extensive help ranging from help with accommodation and financial support as victims often live with the perpetrators and are financially reliant upon them.

One of the most important and fundamental interventions that was supported by all the interviewees was the necessity for proactive work to be carried out within the community. This proactive work ranged from engaging with both men and women in settings in which they would be comfortable. An example of this was in local mosques or community centres where women were able to attend and seek help and guidance if they were suffering from domestic abuse. The interviewees also highlight the need for proactive work to start at a young age by educating children whilst they were in school of the dangers of domestic abuse. The goal of this early intervention was to ensure that children were aware of the truth regarding domestic abuse and knew where to seek help if they ever required it, whilst also acknowledging it is a universal problem and is in a way unique to them. This openness in discussing a problem which is prevalent in all societies would allow people regardless of

their age to feel comfortable in seeking help and address the shame and stigma that is associated with domestic abuse.

The main finding which became evident as the study progressed was the fact that domestic abuse did not occur within a vacuum, rather many aspects of a victim's life intersect to form a unique perception of domestic abuse. This perception which is influenced by a range of factors ranging from cultural attitudes towards domestic abuse to familial histories of domestic abuse, all amalgamate to form a unique perception of domestic abuse. It is this unique perception which informs the response an individual will have when confronted with domestic abuse and therefore it is vitally important that attitudes towards domestic abuse are challenged openly on a community and national scale. A study conducted by Holtmann (2016) also advocated for a holistic approach to the issue of domestic abuse, as the structural intersections between gender, ethnicity, religion and culture all need to be incorporated when studying the barriers facing victims in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. This study highlighted the numerous ways in which attention can be raised in relation to the risks of domestic abuse within the South Asian Muslim community.

Limitations of the research

The sample size of the study was small, in keeping with the IPA methodology, and although participants took part from various areas of England it may not be representative of the larger population. The data were collected from practitioners who worked within the field of domestic abuse. Although the data were varied and informative, speaking to the actual victims of domestic abuse would have allowed for more in depth and detailed data to be recorded. However, due to ethical considerations this was not possible. A further limitation relates to the subjective experiences of the participants, as the victims they interacted with over their professional lives could have been from a certain caste or community. This may have affected the results as certain individuals may hold their religion in high regards, whereas others who class themselves as Muslim may not and consequently not seek solace in their religion. Furthermore, an individual's origin in relation to their upbringing and cultural background could also have a major impact on their perceptions and acknowledging of domestic abuse. Individuals who have been raised in an urban area where women are more autonomous in comparison to those women raised in villages where tribal laws are more present, will also affect their perception of domestic abuse. Moreover, there are a number of interpretations of Islam with a number of key differences in their practices and beliefs such as Sunni, Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims. Further research could explore these areas further,

as interventions which are designed with a more precise group of people in mind will allow those most at risk to seek out and utilise the help they require.

Indications for policy makers and practitioners

The study highlighted the need for interventions to come from within the South Asian Muslim community, as the interviewees argued that if interventions were enforced from outside they would not be as effective. The study also stressed the importance of domestic abuse to be seen holistically rather than reducing it to its perceived component parts. This would allow for the numerous intersections between culture, religion, social and economic factors to be taken into account, as all these factors have been shown to have a bearing on the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse. Most of the studies focus on one aspect of domestic abuse, whether that be religion, culture, socioeconomic status or education. This arguably reductionist view, although incredibly important, treats domestic abuse as occurring within a vacuum and reduces domestic abuse to a correlation between the aforementioned areas of life. Further studies should attempt to acknowledge the various intersections in an individual's life which can all become barriers in the reporting and acknowledging of domestic abuse. The further understanding of such barriers would allow for more in depth and accurate data to be collected and in turn inform interventions and policies.

The interviewees also advocated for religious scholars and local mosques and community centres to discuss domestic abuse openly to combat the stigma and shame attached to domestic abuse. The interviewees also stressed the need for proactive work to be conducted within the South Asian Muslim community to educate children of the facts relating to domestic abuse. This would allow any pre-existing cultural notions relating to domestic abuse to be challenged before they were able to be formed. This would also allow children at a young age to spot the signs of domestic abuse and be safe in the knowledge there are people they can turn towards if they ever need help relating to domestic abuse.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview schedule

Overview

- 1. Can you please describe your job role?**
- 2. How long have you been working in this role for?**
- 3. Have you had previous experience in a similar role?**
- 4. Do you personally and as an organisation deal mainly with domestic abuse cases?**
- 5. Do you mainly deal with South Asian Muslim women (SAMW)?**
- 6. What age group do you mainly work with?**
7. In your work do you come across more second or third generation SAMW?
8. In your professional opinion do you think third generation women are feel able to seek help if they are suffering from domestic violence?
9. Do you think there is enough help out there for SAMW victims of domestic violence?
- 10. In your opinion do you think there is enough help out there for domestic violence victims in general and specifically for SAMW?**
12. Do you think that if women were aware of the services available to them they would access these services?

Below we will discuss various barriers in relation to the reporting and acknowledging of domestic violence and your opinion in relation how these either help or hinder SAMW seeking help. If there are any questions you wish not to answer please say so and we will skip these questions, and if at any time you would like to stop the interview please feel free to ask.

Religious barriers

- 1. What role do you think religion plays in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic abuse?**
- 2. Do you think religion is a help or hindrance to potential victims of domestic abuse?**
- 3. Do service users you have encountered specifically SAMW hold their religion in high regard?**
- 4. Would they be described on average as committed Muslims in your opinion?**
- 5. Is religion used as a tool by service users as a source of support in your professional experience?**
- 6. In your professional opinion have you experienced cases where religious literature is used to excuse or contain the issue of domestic violence?**
- 7. Are religious places and organisations such as mosques and community centres a first port of call for service users?**
- 8. If women are led to believe their religion condones domestic violence how does this affect their ability and willingness to report and acknowledge domestic violence.**
- 9. Would you have a particular case or example which comes to mind which highlights the role religion played in a woman overcoming domestic abuse?**
- 9. In your opinion how could SAMW be provided with information to counter any wrongful religious influences?**
- 10. In what form do you think this information could be provided to those women most at risk in the SAMC?**

Cultural factors

- 1. In your professional opinion do you believe there are cultural barriers in the South Asian Muslim Community (SAMC) in the reporting of domestic violence?**
- 2. Do you believe cultural norms are confused for religious norms by SAMW?**
3. If you could, could you please provide an example of such a barrier you have experienced professionally?
- 4. Do you think certain cultural barriers are specific to the SAMC?**
- 5. How much of a factor do you think cultural barriers are in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic violence?**
- 6. Could you please provide examples of cultural barriers from service users which you have come across in your professional life?**
- 7. Is it possible to overcome these barriers?**
8. Are the women who are affected by these obstacles willing to overcome them?
- 9. What could be done to improve the help available to service users?**
- 10. In what form could this help be delivered in?**

Anxiety

- 1. Do you think women who are not aware of the procedure of reporting DV deters them from seeking help?**
- 2. In your professional experience are there certain hurdles or factors which cause the most anxiety?**

3. **Are there any factors service users have highlighted to you which cause them the most anxiety in reporting DV?**
4. **Have you encountered common myths often given by the perpetrator about the reporting of reporting DV?**
5. **If a woman has children with her do you believe this is an additional cause for anxiety in relation to leaving a violent relationship?**
6. **How do you believe this feeling of anxiety can be alleviated?**
7. **Do you think if women were aware of the processes and outcome of reporting domestic violence they would be more willing to report DV to the authorities?**
8. **Would you be able to suggest your thoughts on how the process of reporting domestic violence can be made clearer to women?**
9. **How would you suggest this information can be given to women?**
10. Thank you, would there be anything else you would like to add in relation to the anxiety related to the acknowledging and reporting of DV?

Societal Honour Shame

1. **What barriers can you envisage a woman would face on a community level in opening up about suffering from domestic violence?**
2. **What barriers may a SAMW face in reporting domestic violence to the authorities on a familial level?**
3. **What consequences may a SAMW face in reporting domestic violence to the authorities?**
4. **What effect can reporting domestic violence have on the perceived honour a SAMW?**
5. **What effect can reporting domestic violence have on the wider family standing of a SAMW?**

6. Is there a stigma attached to being viewed as a victim of domestic violence in the SAMC?

7. Would a SAMW be stigmatised for reporting domestic violence to the authorities?

8. How could the negative effect of reporting domestic violence in the SAMC be tackled?

9. In what way in your professional opinion could women and the community as a whole be educated about the facts of domestic violence and their rights?

Economic/ Other

- 1. What economic factors can prevent women in seeking help in relation to suffering from domestic violence?**
- 2. Is financial support a barrier in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic violence?**
- 3. Do the majority of SAMW rely on a spouse or family member for financial support?**
- 4. If a woman has a child is this more of a motivation or barrier to leaving a violent relationship?**
- 5. Do SAMW have pressure applied on them to not report domestic violence to the authorities?**
- 6. From which areas of the SAMC and or people does this pressure come from?**
- 7. Are the SAMW you encounter aware of the financial support available to them?**
- 9. How in your view would you educate SAMW of their rights and the support available to them in relation to domestic violence?**

- 10. In your professional opinion do you think more needs to be done to help SAMW, if so in what areas should this help be focussed on and what organisations are best suited to provide this help?**

- 11. To conclude would you like to add anything which I have missed in the above questions which you believe is relevant in your professional opinion?**

Appendix 2 - Participant information sheet/Consent form

RE: Research Project - Barriers facing South Asian Muslim women in seeking help in relation to domestic violence from a practitioner's point of view

I am writing to enquire whether you would be able to participate in my research in relation to domestic violence in the South Asian Muslim community. This research is part of my Masters by Research degree at the University of Huddersfield. The focus of the research will relate to cultural, religious and societal barriers which can prevent South Asian Muslim women from seeking help in relation to domestic violence.

The reason I am writing to yourself is that you currently or have previously worked with South Asian Muslim women and in turn you would be an ideal person to interview in order to gather information which is representative of the problems faced by these women. The research will hopefully provide an invaluable insight into the barriers and factors which prevent South Asian Muslim women seeking help. This will hopefully be incorporated into health promotional campaigns in order to better target and help those women who are facing domestic violence.

In order to collect this data I was hoping you would be able to take part in an interview at a time and location best suited to yourself. The interview should last between 45 and 60 minutes and will be audio recorded and later transcribed and analysed. If you are interested please see the attached information sheet and consent form.

I understand finding the time to take part in the study may be difficult for yourself. In turn I am able to arrange a meeting at a location and a time best suited to yourself in the month of June or July in order to carry out the interview. I would be very grateful if you could take the time to take part in my study as not only will it help me in gathering information which is true to life; It will also provide an accurate and honest account of the barriers faced by South Asian women. This in turn will hopefully better inform health promotion campaigns which will help those women most at risk from suffering from domestic violence in acknowledging and reporting their abuse.

I have attached the aforementioned information sheet and consent form in which the exact details and nature of the study are made clear. The research has been agreed by the University of Huddersfield's ethics committee and will be supervised by my tutor Surya Monro (S.Monro@hud.ac.uk) who you may contact directly if you wish either via email or by telephone on 01484 471424.

If you require any further information or have any queries in relation to the study at all please do not hesitate to contact me via the details below.

Yours Sincerely

Sohail Taj
sohail.taj@icloud.com

University of Huddersfield



Name of Researcher: Sohail Taj

Interview Consent Form



Please provide a tick in the relevant column to indicate your answer

Question	Yes	No
I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this research and I agree to take part		
I have raised any questions and concerns with the researcher and they have been understood and answered		
I understand I have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time for any reason if I feel the need to do so		
I give permission for my interview to be digitally recorded and later transcribed for the purposes of the research		
I agree that my interview can be used by the researcher for the purpose of data analysis		
I understand that my data and identity will be kept secure and confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone unless either my personal safety or that of a service user(s) is highlighted during the interview in which case this will be reported to the relevant management teams		
I would like a copy of the results obtained from the study		
I would like a copy of my interview transcript		

If you have answered 'Yes' to either question 7 or 8 please provide your email address below –

Name of Participant

Unique Identifier

Signature

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix 3 - N transcript

N transcript

R – Hello is that N speaking

N – It is yeah

R – Good evening N thank you very much for your time this evening

N – No no problem at all

R – Thank you very much how are you this evening

N – Yes I'm good thank you

R – So again thank you very much for agreeing to take part I do really appreciate your time I mean the interview it shouldn't take too long ideally it would last around forty to fifty minutes but obviously I can change that to whatever you're comfortable with whatever time your able to put aside I appreciate it will that be ok with you because I can narrow it down if you need too I can decrease the time

N – No no no I'm fine

R – That's perfect N so please allow me to introduce myself my name is R I'm currently completing my masters there I've recently completed my undergraduate degree which also related to domestic violence in the South Asian community however that related to intergenerational differences so I was looking at the differences between erm third and second generation South Asian women and their perceptions of domestic violence and their view of domestic violence however this research is slightly different in that it's purely focussing on the South Asian Muslim community and instead of talking to people in general I'm talking to practitioners to get an in-depth insight into the barriers they have experienced throughout their professional lives in relating to the barriers South Asian Muslim women face now erm personally I do strongly believe that the further understanding of these perceptions and beliefs will hopefully allow practitioners such as yourself to better tailor your services and attract maybe people that are at this stage maybe not willing to seek help or speak out even or even acknowledge that they are facing domestic abuse erm so that's the core

reason for sorry that's the core purpose of my research erm the interview is it ok with you if I record the interview to later transcribe

N – Yes yep sure

R – Perfect and I'll take notes if that's ok with you but I do appreciate that thank you

N – Yes of course

N – Erm so the interview again can be tailored to suite you whatever your time constraints are ill start off with just asking getting to know you a little bit better just basically finding out what you do in your organisation I do understand you run a helpline certain days of the week but you've had a long history of I've been told that you've worked in this area for a long time of your life so we'll touch upon that and then we'll move onto barriers such as religious barriers erm cultural barriers and you know economic and a thing I'd like to focus upon is anxiety I think that is sometimes overlooked in research where the actual acknowledging of domestic violence is is maybe the first step so most people won't even think of seeking help if they realise what they are experiencing is is domestic violence so I mean erm just to reiterate if if at any time you'd like to stop the interview or you feel uncomfortable answering a certain question please feel free to do so to ask sorry and I will do that that's not a problem and all your data including your name and organisation will be anonymised and I will use a pseudonym in the actual research so erm everything is completed confidential nothing I mean again from the organisation or you personally will be erm you know seen in the research if that makes sense

N – Yeah

R – Perfect erm do you have any questions or anything before we begin

N – Erm I've kind of done this before as well so it's fine

R – That's perfect so your used to it that's perfect so erm to begin with could you please describe your job role if that's ok

N – Ok so my job role is emotional support in in the (o) so we offer so what we describe ourselves as is offering emotional support with counselling skills so erm so what we do with that is keep it very broad we don't say we give advice because we want to be very careful

that erm as you know as a Muslim community there are a lot of unskilled people giving unskilled advice and this leads to a lot of problems so we say that we don't give advice all we follow erm a counselling trajectory in that we look at option and so so what we are and what we call ourselves is an emotional support helpline and all of us have counselling skills what we don't offer is sessions of counselling because I'll just give you a little bit about the background and then of the helpline I can answer your questions and if you want me to do it

R – No that would be ideal that was going to be my next question so please if you could yeah

N – Ok so erm the question would be why did we set up a helpline and what were the reasons behind it and what did we erm want to do in setting up that helpline so how the helpline was set up so my background in this kind of work came when I worked with Samaritans and so I worked with the Samaritans for five years and then I converted to Islam and when I converted I was at a conference with a group of sisters and we were looking at what were the needs of the Muslim community and specifically we were looking at women's needs and this was a need that was identified as having so the question that I posed myself was what kind of help given the Samaritans are another helpline so that's national helpline for all people whether they are Muslim or not but my question was what is there specifically for Muslims that that is like other helplines so that is faith sensitive is run by people who are from the same place who understand you know culturally spiritually psychologically the needs of those people is there anything like that and we're talking now of nineteen eighty seven and when we looked around us erm and I don't want to say this is fact because we would have to research it to find out properly but when we looked around we couldn't at that time see a helpline that specifically addressed Muslim community needs and women's needs what we could see at that time was just like the non-Muslim community there was domestic violence there were anxiety depression there was even suicide which is another different subject but we couldn't identify at that time who was addressing those needs around those taboo subjects and when when we looked when we asked the question who was was taking care of it I was told and we were told in general erm that this is the role of the Imam if you you have this problem you go to an Imam and you would discuss your confidential problems with him and he would help so that then led to the second question ok so if if you say go to Imams which Imams what skills do they have to do this kind of work in other words do they have the skill set and what kind of information advice do they give and what we've found was of course we know all Imam are men erm and that doesn't preclude them from giving them the right advice not at all but but however it was a matter of choice that if the Imam are men obviously and then so in terms of choice if a woman thought I don't

want to go to a man I want to go to a woman was the choice nothing wrong with the Imam if he has the right skills what so now we're talking about choice so now we've found that there didn't seem to be choice and if there were choices if there were helplines specifically designed for run by Muslims erm we weren't aware of it and so as far as we knew that we were either the the first or one of the first helpline of its type

R – Yes a pioneering helpline

N – Yes a pioneering helpline and then it the work that we did we wanted to be very careful we didn't want to give advice that wasn't our job so we try to do then define what would our role be and then how we would we come to collaborate with others so for instance we looked for Imams Muslims so all the of them would be Muslim for this service so Imams Muslims counsellors Muslim psychologists Muslim psychiatrists and so we would look to have that as a foundation for the helpline that not only we in what we were doing we'd know what we were doing when and then when we took the calls we'd now where to signpost just basically like other originations were doing for non-Muslim communities or for communities who were Muslim and and because there were a lot of Muslims calling the Samaritans erm so that was nineteen eighty seven so we we started as a Muslim helpline for women and we were called the (o) but also we were getting calls from schools from teachers or people in positions of welfare like GPs teachers who had erm not women but girls you know girls teenage girls who had problems and they themselves didn't know where to signpost them too because they didn't feel that yes we could send them to the Samaritans we could send them to (o) so that's what we wanted to set up a service where this service was a place others could be signposted to it and and so that was just the helpline it was the only national helpline because I think they may have been local services and and of course we couldn't identify what was happening locally but our knowledge was there was no national service so that's what we sought to do to produce a national service something along the lines of the Samaritans or other helplines but from for Muslim run by Muslims and with Muslim expertise

R – Yeah of course I think that's the one thing that was lacking although there's erm like I don't know whether it's the right word to use but generic help available so it's like a one option a one sort of option fits everyone but that's rarely the case especially in in in a field such as domestic violence where cultural factors religious factors societal factors like environmental as well so what you're brought up with it all sort of amalgamates to make a very unique perception of domestic violence and that consequently I do believe erm it results in each person even if people try to group them together each person has a very different perception and in turn response to domestic violence so the further we can narrow it down

exactly how you have exactly how I mean you're trying to tailor your services to a specific community now

N – Tailor made exactly that tailor made

R – And and I don't think we can stress the importance enough of that because I mean erm like I said before although like you know people who don't narrow down certain groups of people they they can offer help but I think there's maybe that disconnect when they go there and then they try to explain why certain things might not work for them or you know understand the complexity behind certain things so in South Asian culture and you know in South Asian Muslim cultures there's like an extended family it's not normally you know just spousal abuse or it could be like extended family it could be a religious aspect you brought up Imams and erm later when I get to the religious part which is just after this I was going to ask you if you've got any experience of Imams because I mean again like you did I don't want to tar everyone with the same brush but it is a very male dominated area a Mosque as well I think only very recently women were you know invited to come into the Mosque and even then speaking to an Imam might be erm a step women may not be able to take on their own maybe they have to go with their husband and if that husband is the perpetrator then that's like very that's that's maybe not even an option for some people so having this helpline having someone on the other end of the phone to talk who understands erm their culture their religion I think it's very very important especially in this day and age

N – Yeah and also addressing what you said about going to the Imam with your husband there was also erm a massive issue around confidentiality so so this confidentiality issue was also an issue in in going to even say an Imam or or someone wise within your community there were no guaranties that you wouldn't be stigmatised by going to that Imam or seen to go to that Imam with a problem that you couldn't solve yourself you couldn't solve within your house so so what was happening was that your family now were coming to these issues and maybe you will talk separately about this of of of honour so to to show the Imam that someone in your family husband and wife can't settle their own issues without going to an Imam can't settle their issues without going for counselling this was considered shameful and and shut down or even where what Islam prescribes is available to you and should be available to you this was shut down because there was shame or dishonour that admitting you have a problem that only you can solve within your immediate family i.e. husband and wife but your family were unable to solve for you because it's the duty of the family to solve the problems so this is being done the shameful and your you know disempowering the

family by telling others outside that we have problems in other words airing your dirty washing publically even with the Imam

N – That is so apt that analogy there I mean the thing is I mean and like you said they I will go into further detail but that's that's exactly what you've said erm I think it's a cultural thing as well isn't it especially when your moving to a different country so like we're in Britain now and erm the community is more tighter knit and I think there's an element on shame on a community level as well so they they don't want to think about taboo subjects like domestic violence like suicide there's so many things they maybe don't want to openly talk about because they like to

R – Because they're shameful this would be true of all traditional societies for instance I was raised as a Catholic and and you would potentially find with maybe Greek Orthodox in Orthodox Jewish in all traditional societies which and you could argue all traditional religious societies which have high levels of shame within religion erm arguably all those religions which when shame is taken out of context this kind of problem happens in in you know in Muslims but it's also other traditional religious cultures where shame is a big focus and so as you said that's why it happens and touching on the Imams again cos like you said and exactly the same way for me I don't want to be a sexist so so what we've seen is is that when we look at Imams it is not the case that an Imam or a man couldn't be the right place for someone to go what is problematic are two things and they're more than two things two main things that I see are problematic within this the idea of going to an Imam number one is there's no choice in it an Islam itself is not about no choice it's about choices so so to only have an imam that's only one choice and it doesn't mean that that's not a good choice it means there's only one choice and then the second thing is when we look at our Imams they're herein lies the problem it's not the fact that the Imam is a man the problem lies in the skill set and the understanding the background erm all of that of the Imam in question because in our so for instance we began in nineteen eighty seven and and so what has happened over that period of time from that period to date because it's still running the helpline erm what we've identified I erm is that there are Imams with the right psychological and emotional makeup in other they're empathic they are understanding they are culturally aware they are sensitive they're spiritual in the right sense of the word and they have a skillset a skillset which either is something that comes natural where they're raised empathic and are understanding or they've been on courses they've studied psychology or counselling so it really is about character and the skillset of the Imam so in other words it's not problematic that they are man it's problematic that unfortunately to a higher degree they Imams that we have and how those Imams were put in that position they've come from

cultural backgrounds with cultural understandings they they have not studied you know what we call in Islam 'Ilam-al-nas' the science of the 'nas' so they've neither studied what the makeup of the human being what a human being needs and they're coming from cultural backgrounds so they're predisposed to have ideas which are cultural and and unexpectedly cultural which opposes Islam and yet they are an Imam and also the Imam erm is under a very difficult position of trying to please the community who've placed them in the role of Imam and this is our political problem as well as a skillset problem so that's the thing the problem isn't that they're a man the problem is that there is no choice and what Imam are they what skillsets who's placed them in their role how independent are they this is an issues that we've been facing because we signpost to some Imams I mean over the years we've met some amazing Imams and we've sent the sister you know specifically sister who've been facing domestic violence part of their healing would be to go to this Imam and hear what he says about domestic violence and that in itself would be a healing prices for you for him what he says about erm domestic violence and how un-Islamic how unjust how unfair

R – Of course of course I mean that nicely brings us onto the the role religion plays so although we've talked about the erm so sort of treatment side of things how how about just in general what role do you think do you believe religion play in the acknowledging and reporting of domestic violence do you think it's something that empowers women do you think it's something that could be seen like an obstacle or is it a help or hindrance in other words in your professional opinion

N – So so I describe something that was happening in nineteen eighty seven when women presented at refuges or at domestic violence helplines and this was then and now not because what about to say is not politically correct what I'm about to describe Muslim women who presented at refuges and domestic organisations in our experience we found and we were told so it's not off the top of our heads we were told by women that those women who presented to those services were told that the problem is because you're Muslim and Muslim men as if implying that domestic violence is somehow connected to the religion and where-as as we know now from statistics from research now we know domestic violence is a human issue it happens to all in all countries all classes it's not for the working class or the middle class so in those days the statistics erm you know the research the understanding wasn't there and so this was hugely and part of why we started the helpline so what those women were told because you're Muslim so in other words because you're oppressed or because you're married to a Muslim man so what happens then to a Muslim woman psychologically when when she wants to be Muslim and she wants to be married to a Muslim man and now you're told it's not just this man you're talking about this is endemic

as part of the religion if your married to a Muslim man and and this was huge problem and the starting point

R – Wow I mean that's like you said in this day I mean you might find pockets of it but very very low and it's almost unheard of but now with I mean it's a very reductionist way to look at it there is nothing going on outside the problem is yourself if if you want to stay with him that's on you it's almost saying just resign yourself to living with domestic violence just just deal with it

N – And there was the threat of the children being taken away if if you stayed within those parameters of not just the husband and the family but the religion so there was there was no direct advice that would say you have to leave the religion to save yourself there was like something implicit in the message around the religion itself on the assumption and these assumptions remain of course erm a patriarchal misogynistic and and so so that's everyone is tarred with that brush now that maybe true we could look at Muslims erm communities and societies and say within those it could be patriarchal it could be misogynistic but then there was painting a brush with this it's all patriarchal it's all misogynistic and whatever Muslim man you marry or whatever you do as a Muslim woman you're you're oppressed under the system of Islam now

R – So right so the issue is not with your husband not with the environment it's just the religion so they're placing all blame

N – They blame it on an oppressive religion which gives them permission to treat you in this way so in those days they didn't understand Islam they were assumptions they didn't understand the difference between Islam and culture and we still have that right now you know when we look at political issues we still don't get it what is is an extremist whether he's extreme whether he's a Muslim or not extremism has the same so there's still these misunderstandings and still of course people want to make thing easy by saying oh it's this oh it's that easy assumptions

R – Like black and white and that doesn't treat any it doesn't do anything really it just really leaves them there or gives them an option and even that isn't really an option and even if that option is taken there's no saying if they did leave their religion they would maybe another man who was violent and they

N – Exactly so so can you imagine a woman presents and states and psychological and emotionally and physically having domestic violence and she's going to a service that is set up to help her and we've been told this several times I mean over the years that was another form of abuse

R – Oh so yeah I completely understand so while they're going to go and get support they're getting it's just as bad in that context

N – They're getting told they're getting disempowered they're being told again this is psychological abuse someone telling you what you've done and put yourself in this situation and how you so this is disempowerment it's not empowering you so we've been told by those people when in those times and it happens even now erm someone told me not long ago that that erm I mean this is just jumping so I'll just tell you this as an aside but she reported domestic violence and her husband was arrested and and then later on because she didn't want to cut her husband off from her children because she's Muslim and social services told her that if she allowed him access they would take the children away and she said to us this was as much abuse from them as as I took from my husband and in fact I now wish I hadn't reported domestic violence because they've started deciding for me what I could and couldn't do around and of course it was safeguarding issue for social services but the way they went about it erm she said to me it felt as abusive as as the things that he had done they also took away all my power as he has been doing they also made me feel shameful and so she says we wish and this is what happens a lot when people go to other services they wish they say it's worse than if we hasn't reported it

R – And that is so sad to hear that I mean that's that's just it's horrible domestic abuse has an element of control and that's exactly they're getting from the social services so instead of giving them options empowering them exactly like you said they're placing the blame on their shoulders this is well it's not even an option really

N – It's not an option it's a blame that if you allow hi anywhere near the children the children it's a safeguarding issue so it's very prescriptive it's quite prescriptive

R – I was going to say again it's it comes back to that it's very black and white so it's basically and and it the nuances of religion of culture and it seems social services I mean now I mean it's most likely different well hopefully I think you know police and social services do take religion into account but I still do think there needs to be more done to incorporate it so a service like yours is at the forefront of that you know I know there are more

organisations but on a national level I mean I know there's a lot of South Asian erm centres and services but specifically for the Muslim community I think it's very I think there's the (o) closer to us that I've looked into and they are doing wonderful work

N – Is that in Scotland

R – I believe it's in Birmingham

N- Ah yes in Birmingham there is one in Scotland that's a newer one I think the (o) is a newer one and so and yes of course so what we had words with Muslim youth services so we had words with them and they recognised oh ok so you set up this model for women and girls and actually what about the youth so they set up something for youth so so there are local women's help initiatives as well so they're not national but they're local but often we don't know about the local ones so the work that we're doing often there's so brilliant work going on locally it's just that you don't get to hear of it because it's not national so there's a few so there's one in Scotland there maybe I mean many years ago I was asked to support and train erm of sisters in Birmingham so a long time ago so maybe fourteen years ago and something was going to start in Birmingham but I think they found it difficult to get volunteers because sometimes that's an issue as well or funding volunteers and funding is always a big issue

R – Yes I can imagine especially at a time where everything is being cut and I mean national services are being cut so I mean I wouldn't say these organisations are on the fringes of society but I mean I think less is being done now we have Theresa May as a Prime minister and she did big deal out of putting funding towards domestic violence but if you looked at the figures and things although the wider cuts sort of outweigh the the additional sort of influx of money so it sort balances out so although on paper in looks ideal but in reality things are being cut left right and centre and it's taking its toll and I think it takes its toll most on erm like the smaller originations like the local ones that are losing local funding

N – It does it does in fact again going of the subject I was erm rung some months back by not a Muslim by a local women's organisation that was doing some fantastic work the work that she described to me and I think I had heard about it as well that was doing something local in the sense of her region regionally and it was brilliant work and they were on a tiny tiny budget and she said the reason I am ringing you today is to find out who is still out there in other words it was almost someone from outer space saying who's there is anyone there and she said we're not Muslim but we have a lot of Asian women coming to ours service and

we had a lovely conversation in which she was saying I'm so happy you're still there because we're all being shut down one by one and erm maybe later on once I've answered your questions I'll explain to you how we now run and why we've changed our service in a different way to make sure erm certain types of service is still given how we do it and how we do it on so little money but that's maybe after I've finished answering your questions

R – I mean no that would be ideal and I will definitely come to that I'm just going to make a note of it now because basically I think it's very very interesting because I mean the I mean like you said there's a lot of local organisations but everything is being cut so just as fast they're sort of cropping up now more is being done at the same time the government is instigating more cuts so it's sort of it maybe in the worst case scenario we might find ourselves in a situation like in nineteen eighty even where there wasn't anyone to call there wasn't anyone to refer people to and it was just going to be a one sort of one size fits all mentality so if you suffering from abuse this is the situation this is the options we're sorry we can't do anymore and I think like I come back to that point you made which is sort of resonated with me when women went to those centres or sources of support and they were told this this is in not those exact words but it was implied that this is your fault and this is your religion and if you choose to follow this religion this is your life

N – This is what will happen if you choose to marry these men if you choose to follow these religions and and erm this way of dress and all of this that your religion says then you could expect this kind of behaviour that's very reductionist

R – That's sad that but erm I mean

N – The only difference now is that they're not allowed to say it however when people come to us sometimes it's implied it's just you're just not allowed if you're running a women's refuge you could hope that either they know better but there are some people who still who don't know better but erm because of politically correct they would never be able to say they would be reported if they said such a thing now

R – But I think you are right in that I mean there was a study done a while ago done by (p) erm and I was looking at that research and she went around and I think she spoke to an Asian police officer who dealt with a domestic violence case and she said that although her colleagues do try their best and try to understand it comes to a point where some people won't I mean if they say for example if they went to erm a house and erm domestic abuse was taking place the moment they see an Asian family they'll just try and basically see it

through a very clouded judgement maybe saying ok this is normal maybe the family is involved maybe it's just religion so they they don't deal with it as they should as you know dealing with it as a normal thing so there is a prejudice but I think it's unconscious now and I think it is implied and I think women if anyone would know it would be yourself that women still feel it maybe it's not said overtly like it was before but that that sort of layer

N – It's covert exactly so in other words what we're seeing is that that attitudes are still the same in many ways we've got better because there are now understanding and there are people who actually want to know rather than assume because covertly there are still women are still coming up against those attitudes

R – I completely agree and I hope my intention of the research it to highlight these things an obviously to take your words and put it into research because like you said you've been working from nineteen eighty seven and that's a very is it approach thirty years now so it's a very long time working in that area and your input is invaluable and I mean in in your experience in your role in the organisation I mean religion can be used to maybe excuse maybe seen as a barrier to people acknowledging or reporting domestic violence but erm do you have any cases where religion is used as a source of support as a sort of empowering women rather than seeing the reductionist view of Islam doesn't give any power to women and maybe using text using scripture using translations of scripture because many women will read the Arabic version of the Quran and so on but not understand erm so I think it's important someone sits and explains that you mentioned Imams that you send women too certain Imams to maybe educate them in relation to the true meaning of Islam in relation to domestic violence

N – Yes yeah so this throws up erm lessons learnt in those thirty years and and what has really stood out when when you look at the whole picture not just the individuals coming to you what are the lessons that really stand out and so so it kind of makes sense that if you look at our communities so you have have to like they say it's all about either the history or the psychology so those two things so so historically you could say that many of the communities who come here whether they're Arab South Asian Bangladeshi whatever they maybe you could say historically some or all of their situations have been about being disempowered so so that's makes sense that's number one historical disempowerment number two what really has stood out from me is how erm in terms of of when we raise a child how in terms of raising a child in terms of within family structures there is a lack of psychological understanding psychological understanding of a human being and what that human being needs are and so what we find is that in a lot of our Muslim cultures that there

is a lot of emphasis on learning so but but when we when when Islam says 'Iqra' when it says to read it says read it doesn't just say only read the Quran only read this only read that it says read so that means read everything presumably so everything

R – Yes of course yeah I agree

N – And so and what we find is that first of all you've got that historical issue of disempowerment of people who've come from other cultures and they come here but but I've seen this within their own cultures so the problems still exist either they're disempowered in the country that was the original country and they've come here and they've felt disempowered here so there is a problem with disempowerment historically number one and psychologically we don't understand the make-up of the human being and when we raise our children we don't we understand needs in terms of so so their spiritual needs is about we have to get them to learn the Quran speak Arabic so they're very basic needs spiritually then psychologically we don't understand what a human being needs whether it's a child or not so there's a disconnect between understanding what a child needs psychologically and then what we also see is that there has been because historically of a disempowerment we see a lot of parents so say your parents generation before those because of historical disempowerment they've been psychologically have had some psychological damage and and then whether it be through disempowerment or culture then the children have then of each generation have suffered some psychological disempowerment or abuse and and then it seems to be keep going on from generation to generation so so for instance in nineteen eighty seven we started a helpline looking at these thing and we thought now we'll be dealing with a generation erm which was my generation because I was thirty then so dealing with a generation in their thirties so that meant that generation my generation so your generation would be fine because they'd understand but what we've seen is in thirty years is things haven't changed because no one has broken the first chain of events either the historical disempowerment which has led to psychological emotional and spiritual issues those things have not been addressed and they've not been addressed for exactly the reason who were talking about when we began the conversation because shame taboo and all of that so they've been neglected so education education for for its sake of empowerment has been encouraged you know go to better universities get a good job so so but it but education for its own sake as in understanding the world understanding human beings so in other words so in human sciences you know in physical sciences in all kinds of sciences this seems and then you could argue well then a lot of the problems are in people who are uneducated so this would be a big ask task for those who are educated however as we know with all domestic violence the domestic violence isn't

caused by just those who are educated it's an equal playing field even among the educated so then the question is this now we're coming to sort of the root when you talk about Islam is that is that now historically there has been disempowerment this leads people to want power and control themselves get back some kind of power and control and so what's happened is what we see is domestic violence is about power and control rape is about power and control and now and this is as a convert and the saddest thing for me is to see that now Islam has been annexed for personal power and control and that's obvious I'm saying something obvious but now if you annex Islam if you annex God and connect God to power and control and tell women that this thing is that I want from you i.e. I want power and control over you and God gave me permission to do it now now not only have you an abusive husband or family who is exerting power and control over you erm the devastating thing and this is what we this is what I've found myself over thirty years what is more devastating is not the personal abuse from the abuser is the fact that that abuser has given himself permission to do it by God this is erm a second so first of all the first cut is is the human cut and how to finish you off to kill you is to say so now I you know I cut you and then the second cut the finishing off is to say and God is allowing me to do it

R – I have the permission I have the authority I have the and if anyone was to argue that or if they were to challenge that they would not only be going against their spouse but they would be going against their religion or at least that's what they're taught to think

N - That's what they're taught and and so another conversation then erm and this may be very controversial and it certainly is my opinion and it's what I've seen and experiential that what our communities around this issue of power and control are raising and and the non-Muslim community assume this is only happening to women what we're seeing in the helpline because we get calls from men and a lot of calls from the men there isn't a do you know of a men's helpline

R – Erm I don't know of a Muslim men's helpline but I know there's just one started but exactly what you've said there's nothing specific for Muslims although people want to try and I spoke to someone yesterday in Bradford and he's trying to make a South Asian men's helpline but he is I mean it's a struggle you know there's no funding and and maybe there is a belief that it doesn't happen to men

N – It does and I am supporting a man right now who who someone when he described what was happening someone in his family said do you realise that you're a victim of domestic violence and he said it would have never have entered my head until someone

describe what you're telling me is domestic violence cos as a man again shame saying you're a victim of a domestic violence erm just if I can give you a story just relating to that erm there's something called (o) have you heard of it

R – I've not now sorry

N – Ok anyway it's a local erm radio station so so we were giving a talk about domestic violence and and when you say domestic violence everyone thinks women and so there was erm so I was on the line as a so called expert people were calling women were calling and asking for advice and all of that and then a brother rang in and he said all this talk about all these women don't you realise are victims of domestic abuse as well I've been abused for years by my wife and duh duh duh and I said to him you know brother erm I I know that and we get a lot of calls so don't think your alone a lot of men call but but men don't admit it they'll call the confidential helpline and thankfully they do call us but they never admit it to their family imagine telling your family my wife is abusing me and I'm a victim of domestic abuse I mean it's sort of you wouldn't be given support you'd be told to man up wouldn't you why don't you man up don't moan like a woman man up you wouldn't be treated with the same care understanding the way a woman is we work with with a men's domestic violence organisation partnership with them we I say partnership they approached us and they said would you be interested and you know we said yes absolutely because they were worried they'd ring our women's helpline and we'd say it's not a man thing and so we do have a partnership they're non-Muslim but we do have a partnership with a national men's domestic violence organisation specifically for men but not Muslim men I don't think you know it would be very courageous for men to set it up and get volunteers and get Muslim men even getting men to call you once you've set up would take a while

R – No of course I completely agree I mean and although it's a different sort of ball game to sort of dealing with women there are similarities and something are further you know heightened for men and there are certain things for women that are further heightened but it's a very there's similarities but there are a lot differences as well and erm like you said I mean in your professional opinion in terms of the ratio of men calling in and women calling in I think there is still a big erm you know

N – It's tiny with men

R – Exactly and I think that's what it boils down to but in in no way am I making that to be small or insignificant or anything like that but I mean with the women I think that's where the

focus currently is but I think exactly how you're doing men also need to be incorporated into the research and you know like how you've tailored your service for Muslim women maybe there should be something for men as well to you know incorporate their culture and I think it's excellent your working with a national organisation to provide that insight

N – Actually that's why we changed so for instance erm we we changed our status now we're called the (o) that's who we are now and so erm we decided at one point to shut our services down because of lack of funding and go virtual and what was good about that it gave us an opportunity when we did that the charity commission said if you're shutting that service down and you're erm you know you're relinquishing your charity status which was dear they said you can't keep the name (o) and and we were really shocked and then upset however God knows best t gave us the opportunity to think ok in the service that we run what is truest to say about the service and we had a lot of calls from men so we thought you know if we call ourselves (o) then it means everyone can call us so youth girls boys men it means that everyone would have access to this helpline and so we're predominantly known people know that we were (o) but now because we're renamed cos people got confused because it's a different helpline we know we're still the (o) but we've given ourselves a new name so men can call and youth can call so anyone can call as opposed to saying we're only for women and that's been a great turning point for us as a helpline but for people who call in so we have huge range of people who call us

R – I can imagine as with interviews I've done prior to this that (o) can deter people from calling in such as men or the youth as they make assumptions in their head but I think the new name (o) is excellent so it's open to literally everyone and people would be more inclined to call just to enquire where is before if they saw that (o) they'll say it's not for me it's not for a man it's just for women in general out of something negative came something extremely positive

N – And yet and yet what's really interesting within that is given that we were called (o) how many how many calls we go got from men and that suggests that men's need was so great that they put their pride aside because their need was so great and they thought you know what I'm going to call this helpline and see if they help me because their Muslim and that shows you how great was there need to be to get the you know erm to get the whatever it was the guts the confidence the to be in such a bad place that you thought I don't care that's it's called (o) I wonder if they could help me

R – Yes of course that's saying a lot and the Muslim part is also relevant in that regard

N – It was very much so because they thought well you know if this is (o) these people are skilled Muslims and maybe they can help me as well and so we we had a lot of men calling in as well and youth we had and that was good even when the youth had their own helpline they still erm because it goes back to choice so so when youth called us we would say did you know the youth helpline exists and they can go there but sometimes they want erm cos youth helpline is run by youth and sometimes they say I rather speak to someone older and more experienced so it's about choice it's not this one is better it's you know I used to say you know you could call both you could speak with us and you could speak with them you know Muslims do this it's either them or us no that is not the case there are a range of services ring them if you want to carry on speaking to us fine and if you want to ring them as well you know there' choices done be shot down don't let anyone say oh you're youth so the youth helpline you're you know this it's about choices isn't it

R – Yes and I think that it boils down too I think if I take anything away from this interview it will be that issue of choice and and it boils down to on so many levels on in relation to the actual oppression in relation to domestic violence in in like a choice of your religion erm a choice of obviously where you can seek help but unfortunately in terms of seeking it seems like every single day like you said if people are ringing and seeing if you're still open as an organisation it's quite unfortunate to to hear that to be honest so now obviously you prior to this you were a charity but now how would you define yourself how does your organisation run now in terms of the (o) how does that work now

N – So how so how it works now and what what we've done is is to make ourselves a hundred percent independent and what that's allowed us to do and and you know professionally so not make us so independent that we could do whatever we like so so it gives us the ability to look at one hundred percent independently what else would we given that we had been going for thirty years and now we seen what the needs are of the Muslim community how would we be able to to meet those needs maybe in a different way that's subscribed by other organisations and and so erm like I said with (p) you could say we're a niche organisation in that we do things now in a different way and so so for instance so when we closed down so now we are funded independently by small donations which means no big originations and we set this up from the beginning no big Muslim non-Muslim or government gives us so much donations that they will decide how we run our helpline so our committee when we began our committee had on it men and women one of the men was an Imam erm a trusted Imam and erm what you can very erm a women friendly Imam so a certain type of Imam in there so it was a mixture of men and women and and so what

we did get different forms of funding the reason we shut down is because like the youth helpline like (o) there always running after funding and actually what that puts you in two places of vulnerability which is not really for your research this is something

R – No it's very interesting though I I it's wonderful to hear that insight I think it's very true there is that because then you're operating on two fronts on trying to appease certain people to try and get the funding and actually doing what you're there to do I suppose and now now you have that independence now to basically

N – Yes one hundred percent independence what we see with other helplines which not to say they're not doing great work but we've seen the struggle and the struggles they will face in the future so the position that charities are put in this country now which is ridiculous is there's so much funding coming from the lottery funding this is a terrible state of affairs when charities are no looking for most of or all of their funding from the lottery fund now you can imagine the dilemma that this puts Muslim organisations in when they also are a charity and then you have to make this awful decision of do we take lottery funding because there's not much funding around and that's one of the big funders we'll have to take it from them we've decided not to take the lottery funding and we see other organisations who've decided not to take lottery funding and they're very judgemental of those Muslim organisations that do and we're not like that for me if a Muslim organisation takes lottery funding I understand where they're coming from because because say you started like us in nineteen eighty seven and you're doing some great work and you want to continue and then suddenly you're you've got between a devil and a deep blue sea either you shut down or you take lottery funding that's a terrible decision to make and some people think well you know in order to keep up this valuable work is the only way to take lottery funding if that's the only way we will do that now they should not be judged I don't think they should be judged so that's the thing we've decided not to do that not on the basis that we think people are wrong it's it's a personal decision that we've decided to take

R – Like a moral thing

N – Well even again if I used moral it's like I'm judging them but it doesn't mean to say cos they've taken a moral judgment they've said morally should we close down a service leave all those people who were giving help and and tell them I'm sorry we can't help you anymore or should we take the lottery funding as I say it's the devil in the deep blue sea no one should blame them for doing that

R – No no I completely understand I apologise

N – They shouldn't be put in that position and you know God is merciful and just I I personally think God will be very merciful with them whether it's wrong or right for them that aside so there's that and then there's the government funding and and you'll be very aware that now that also now let me think what would it be five ten years ago government had had a little heading over it and you know that heading is PREVENT right do you know about PREVENT

R – Yeah the sort of how they tackling domestic violence the approach

N – PREVENT is anti-terrorism

R – Ah ok no sorry I got confused with some recent legislation Teresa May of preventing domestic violence at a young age no sorry go on

N – No so PREVENT which is a government anti-terrorism agenda and you don't have to put this in your report

R – No it is very interesting to think about in the context of my research

N – It's interesting to know so a lot of funding whatever you were doing was so for instance if you look at women anything to do with women where there's funding you could say well these women are the mothers of potential little terrorists so we'll give money to empower those women and we'll incorporate in your organisation erm some training so you could for instance you could have your organisation and then you'd have to introduce some anti-terrorism training to those women in other there would be strings attached to the funding that the government would giving you

R – Wow ok that is very interesting no it is because I wouldn't think that I would've thought they would give and say ok like you've been operating for x amount of years in your case nearly three decades or two decades at that point maybe and you would think they would trust you with the money and and it doesn't seem I mean I understand they've got like you know they are liable for the money the tax-payers money but at the same time it doesn't seem fait to dictate what you have to do and maybe just erm you know

N – It'll be subtle brother it would be subtle it wouldn't be a whole thing it would be just we'll just put our agenda in there somewhere because we're giving you the money and and I don't want to talk about what another organisation fell under this trap because they were in naïve and they were genuine and they didn't know what was happening to them but other organisations erm connected with women who were empowering women and then they got erm money from the government and then the government came with an agenda and then you you have some talk or function and then you think what's going on here this is not about empowering women this is someone from the government come to talk about how to if you see your child erm of any age doing something that looks dodgy how you how you would erm alert the authorities and we'll help you prevent possible terrorist activity it's quite frightening how subtle it could be so you know we thought we don't want any of that and then the other big funding would come from big Muslim organisations and I'm not going to name or shame them

R – No that's fair enough

N – We were also offered funding from a big organisation who when they saw what we were doing and when you'll be familiar by the way they saw what we were doing is something that no else has done that had become successful and they thought oh we should really be doing that that's our job because we're calling ourselves the we are the spokespeople of the Muslim community we should be doing it so they come to us and said ah the thing that you're doing we'll fund it but now you can't be called the (o) you have to be called the and their title and their organisation and then and now the committee is not your committee now the committee is their committee and then again in terms of funding we had to say no to the Muslims no to the government erm no to the lottery and so when people ask why are you still small it's because we made a difficult decision that we said we'd rather stay small then then have these problems and also we've seen the the big so called big organisations have gone through a lot of internal difficulties and external difficulties around these problems and will continue to face these problems and I think the (o) at some point because of internal issue it almost had to close down and we've said you know what we want to focus on the work that we're doing and we don't want to be constantly worried about funding government Muslim organisation coming in you know we we want to focus on the piece of work that we're doing and that's the name of the organisation will be more trusted and and so you know erm like with your plumbers we'll erm we'll be recommended so will have recommendations and they'll be sent to us and they'll be value in that so our funding comes from private individuals and and it's not in thousands it's in the hundreds so for us what would be best for us and I like all organisations if we had a thousand people giving us five

pounds a month and none of those thousands people interested in control erm we would flourish but we're still the we still have a few benefactors erm who give us hundreds or a thousand and because we're a virtual service we manage to continue like that

R – To survive in other words because it is a very I mean before I start speaking to somebody before you even brought this up this was not even on my radar like that these like when money is giving there are strings attached because it seems quite erm I mean maybe naïve way to look at it but I suppose they are always factors there's always personal factor so if someone was to give money not a private individuals but organisation it's it's for an agenda maybe they have their own agenda behind it so also they're going to give you the money there're also always going to be strings attached and that's a sad state of affairs

N – Exactly and as we know so there the organisations intention is good but then someone comes with an agenda and hijacks your intentions and this is erm a problem that we know exists not just in this field of domestic violence you know it politically it exists a lot and and so we think well it wouldn't exist because this is domestic violence this is emotional support this is you'd think but we know everything is political right

R – Yeah of course I mean like you read about but until you actually hear about it from yourself then it's a very different sort of you know ball game I think and that's very sad because like you said it's a very emotional and it's something that's needed I don't think there's anyone that would argue that ok funding isn't needed for domestic violence organisations or that's not something we should fund I don't think anyone would argue that but overtly but like you said covertly there's lots of cuts happening and it those local organisations organisations such as yourself that are being the worst effected but I mean I think it also being a pioneer in setting that the (o) in nineteen eighty seven I also think you're a pioneer in obviously maybe I mean personally I mean I've not really researched it but hearing what you're saying in in taking your own sort of stance to to takin your own sort of steps

N – Yeah I guess I guess what you could say is that what was brilliant for us was erm and this this is what specific for me is that when we started this because I had worked in the Samaritans erm I'd already had all of the experience I'd worked as a day leader day leader I worked as a supervisor of other volunteers so I had all the experiences but really what if you could say were a success the success of it is is because I got around around me a lot of women who's intention was pure because they themselves were very empowered women and you know they were very strong they were very spiritual they were erm the women that I

worked with and and they're very spiritual they're very strong in their faith and they're very strong in their character so so they in other words they can't be bought and when I say bought I don't mean money they can't be bought by accolades they just can't be bought that there connection and that's why it's been a success not because of me and so I have the skillset to do it and set it up and those people said oh you've got the skillset we'll support you but the quality of the people that supported me has led erm to this to the success of something where where you know those people in the original I still have people who originally thirty years ago set it up they're still around they're still supporting the helpline and they and that's the thing what you need and and we've seen this in Muslim organisations those without egos that if you were to say what what's the success of any organisation particularly Muslims the lack of unhealthy ego cos there is healthy ego and healthy ego is necessary if you can find a group of people on your own of healthy egos and none of them have unhealthy egos that's the perfect cake mixture you know and that's what I've also seen but that was diverting from what makes an organisation successful whether it's our organisation or anyone's organisation you can work without ego and you've got a chance of doing the work for a long time and when egos come in in any organisation then there's a problem and this was our worry that those who said oh now you're successful will take you over they spoke of ego so they're the people we don't want to be on board

R – Because like you said other organisations will struggle because the moment they come in they have their own agenda and they have their own things they want to put out to the public so maybe your actual work the reason you're there will suffer in order for someone to

N – It brings down any organisation

R – I completely agree you see it on different scales or different settings but I think the end result will be the same and I think you've been quite a visionary because especially when you're struggling and someone says here's x amount of money it's very difficult to say no to it because you will have a lot of people saying they'll give you the money what's the issue and like you said the government agencies and even the lottery funding people may look down on you but I think in the long run people will see other organisations who have taken that money and now unfortunately I mean no ill will to them but they they're experiencing that negative side of things those strings are starting to be pulled I mean even on their end that's sad that's the state of affairs we're in it is you have to exist and you know in this sort of reality I suppose I mean that is

N – Yes exactly this is there is a reality to anyone so we work in that reality and then as you said you figure out within a reality you figure out what's your position what's your intention what do you want to do within that reality and how will you do that and so I'm not saying we've done it right because we've had critics you say this is what you should've been bigger by now you should've erm you should've done more you should've done this you should've done that and we've said but the reality if we had done that we would've had to set aside certain principles that we all agreed when we began this work for we follow the concept in Islam in that if we save one Muslim we save the whole of the 'Umma' this is one thing will I will say to you and is something I have learnt if I was to be proud this would be the thing I'm proudest of that what we do as a helpline is different because we're in a new unique position of independence so if you look at other organisations other helplines they they to a degree have to find out how helplines work they have to produce numbers so if you're going to get funding implicit in the finding the funders want to know how many people are you helping per-day per-shift that would be the same in any job wouldn't it and so whether it's government or Muslims if I'm going to give you money how many people did you help so that means that you you have a certain period of time within a helpline you're told between forty-five minute to an hour of help and also if you're going to have a turnaround you your you can't just have the same people just calling you over and over again because there would be statistics around repeat calls but they'd also be an expectation around you as an organisation to have new calls now that puts a lot of pressure on an organisation

R – Yeah because it's that conflict of interest are you putting yourself out there in order to help or are you putting yourself out there to round out the numbers I know it sounds quite

N – It's number crunching charity work I've worked for a charity part time around a Muslim befriending scheme in Oxford and and so it's a non-Muslim organisation but working with Muslims and in that job I had to crunch the numbers I had to show the organisation and my manager that I was seeing so many clients per week per month and so that put huge pressure around the quality of the work you can so an individual

R – I know I can imagine I mean just like hypothetically I mean it does because at the back of your mind you always have that thing in need to get to this place and even if that person who maybe isn't at that stage you have to push them along because you need to get your targets for a lack of a better words in relation to the people and that's unfortunate but again it does back to the fact this is the reality that we live in but I think your unique approach is commendable genuinely I do

N – So what's what's niche about or organisation and what we can do that others can't that they can't do because of that and it is a generalisation is that what we've found is that people who come to us have been to services I mean it could be one of your questions to ask but Muslims go to other services so you'll go to your GP you'll get counselling so you'll go to other services and what those systems or services including sometimes other Muslim services say and what happens because of time limits because of funding you'll be given around the reality we've just discussed you'll be given either a set of sessions you know if it's the NHS you'll be given counselling sessions between six and twelve twelve being maximum and so the saying with a lot of services you'll be given allocated time and things like that now what's niche is about ours what we've related is the people who come to us they've been to other services and their mental health issues and the support they've been given hasn't impacted enough on their needs so there are many services which are not addressing there needs in the longer term and this is something to be true not just within domestic violence it's true of all the services that there's not enough money enough time and enough people to to identify what is your need and and and set a package around your needs now you hear the government say we're setting up for these organisations to address people's needs it's it's just not happening and the reality is you could say it's not their fault because how are you going to fund by government so for instance you're twenty one so for twenty one year's you've been in mentally and physically abused by your family and then you get married and you suffer domestic violence so now we're talking another ten years so thirty years of abuse how are you going to address that in twelve weeks of counselling how are you going to address that by sending them to a psychiatrist who even if they were Muslim I spoke to a Muslim erm psychiatrist not long ago and she told me we're failing or she told me it's you know our system the NHS even being Muslim in that system it's a failure where as I can tell you a case stories where we've had people come to us and we've spent years two years and with that person tailor making their needs over a year or two years and and how their life has changed because some now we're looking at quality and not quantity and that's why I call it and maybe it sounds ego based why I say it's a niche organisation because our interests or my personal interests and others in this helpline is about quality and the work that we do with individual we don't really care we don't write down how many we used to write down and and we used to provide a report and say these are the numbers and now we say well do a report but we don't care about numbers if you want to erm if you want to support us and then you support the same thing that we want to do we want to give a quality service and and we don't care how long that takes and how many people that addresses now of course you there's a criticism to that cos it's a saying look N that means you help less people but what we're saying is look we focus on as many people as we can and give them a piece of quality work and that's different it's not to say the other helplines are not really

helping people but we we get a lot of people coming to us that have not been helped by other services that have had some help and that help has been valuable but there's still their lives are still in a situation where they're still in a mess and that's because you know help is finite in a lot of situations

R – That is so true like even in the NHS like on the physical health side of things so the mental health put aside even on the physical side there is only so many days you can take up a bed there's only so much they can try and do and so everything comes down to number crunching and I think that also makes you unique in that it is quality rather than quantity and I think that will make the world of difference to your users because twelve weeks or twelve sessions is is erm and a year is like a lifetime because you can also follow it up you can be with them in these times of turmoil of maybe they don't feel they're doing as well whereas after twelve weeks after doing that they sort of not on their own maybe there are support organisations but I think they are few and far between I believe I think that's a very poignant part of your originations where you are with them for the long run I suppose is that a way to see it

N – Yes and what is unique in our organisation if you called us thirty years ago and you spoke to me imagine this is unique you know my children sometimes say well we should have other people now and we could and we have we've had people come and go where God has allowed the fact that I've done I'm involved in other work and but I've stuck with it but all the people that have stuck with the helpline they've got other jobs they do other work and but because of the need they just I mean loyalty imagine the loyalty to the helpline that they've stuck with it so we've had other volunteers who've worked with us for a year you know like this is what volunteering is about people come for a year then they go it's quite hard to get people to stick around you know to stay with you for years and I guess that's why we're unique as well that we have the same people and arguably some of them need to be retrained or you know whatever it is but it's still a niche thing so if you like what I did thirty years ago you can come back to me five years later ten years later and ask for me again or ask for and this what I do we don't say come to N I say you can talk to me but you can talk to someone else on the helpline and actually talk to me but why don't you think about other services as well and this is the kind of Islamic concept that that Islam is so secure in itself it says find out about other religions and then you know and then then see what you you think about them and so you can solid in your Islam and that's what we do look take my skills but do you think I'm the only person who is skilled go and look for other services so for instance the I had a brother who came and he had an addiction and and he wanted to talk to me and I said are you aware that what you're talking about is an addiction do you know there's other

organisations that are specifically geared towards addiction why don't you while I support you emotionally why don't you go to that organisation as well learn about addiction learn about what's happening to you why it happens to you and all of that in other words there a lot of skills around go and shop around and that's what we're talking about is choice and that I guess that's something else that we do we send people to other organisations you know sometimes Muslims have this competition oh I'm better than this one or

R – The ego comes back into it again I think to an extent because if it's not our way I don't know what the word is they believe their way is better but the fact is that a number of ways can get someone to a similar point and it's good and it's healthy to explore those

N – It is and it's also the fact that our leaders who who are so our Imams that if those that say they speak on behalf of Muslims and Imams are speaking out about this in the 'Khuthba' are not raising domestic violence domestic violence of of the perpetrators is a mental health issue this is true of whether it's a Muslim or a non-Muslim it's mental health issue and and it's a mental health issue it's an issue of power and control now how the perpetrator get power and control he uses either his culture his family his religion but it's still a mental health issue now if we had Imams if we had Muslim organisations saying look men look women if you have a man or a woman who is perpetrating this form of violence whether it's psychical emotional or psychological that woman or man has a mental health issue and they should seek help imagine how the dynamic would change now that you're putting the responsibility of the community against the perpetrator and I guess this is one of your questions that was coming up what we do is we put the responsibility of the perpetrators responsibility onto the victim and we say so the daily says the community says the Imam stays silent and they say to the woman either implicitly or explicitly either it's your responsibility to take the hits because if you don't take the hits we'll have to admit that we have massive mental health issues in our communities we'll have to admit that we have mental health issues within families that our sons or our daughters who are also perpetrators mothers who are emotionally and psychologically abuse their children is also domestic and and so so the victim is told don't speak about it so the victim takes the hit the victims role is to protect the family the culture to protect Islam the name of Islam so all the responsibility is placed on the victims and and the worst thing ever for me is when I came when I started to understand how much incest goes on in the Muslim community just like other communities not that it's more the fact that it goes on you can imagine naively I came to Islam and thought these people know better you know and so erm we work with erm I'm on an advisory committee with the (o) and they say do you get children coming to you on a and I say we don't get children because the children are shut down because we get the victims when they're adults

when they're able to access help when they're broke and they come to us when they're broken because they've been shut down and you know I've had a client erm where where the mother it was the husband and the mother knew it was going on and still the child is told to shut up not the husband was kicked out of the house and no because that would bring shame on the family so they victim takes the hit in order to keep the honour and the shame of the family this is horrifying

R – Yes I mean there was a story recently now you bring it up I don't know where it was but it was on the BBC and this man had abused his daughter for for for years and like you said she only spoke out later and I think she was not even that young she might have been seventeen or eighteen and she spoke out and her father went to jail her mother also went to jail because she was complicit and and it's horrible and that is a form of domestic abuse it's like sexual abuse it's rape it's erm domestic abuse it's control and and I think it's a very apt analogy what you've used there because it it can sort of be related to domestic violence because the onus is put on the victim rather than being put on the perpetrator and I think that's a very I hazard it's a very unfortunate as the victim is not only experiencing this abuse you know this unjust you know behaviour but they're also tasked with the responsibility of keeping it secret which seems like a very warped way of looking at things but it's very true

N – So there are two injustices there they are both horrendous for the victim the fact that they're a victim number one and then there the responsibility of keeping that secret is so they're intrusted with the family honour and you can imagine when they present to us you can imagine what state they're in

R – I can imagine I mean and this and sorry I keep coming to domestic abuse but

N – No no it's about abuse so it should

R – I mean it's it's not one thing it's not one thing it's like a course of actions so it's like financial controlling violence as well maybe sexual violence as well and all these things amalgamate and and it takes years for people to acknowledge it because like you said if people are brought up in an environment where it's ok where they see it all on a daily basis and and no one speak up and no one says anything they see it as the norm so it becomes accepted and I believe that's the danger where people become sort of complicit they say sort of ok it's part of life or sort of or you said some Imams say it's your job as a wife to basically so be like the glue that holds the family together no matter what the consequences

N – No matter what no matter what the injustice no matter what the abuse your tasked with holding the family ergo the community because you know we don't want to be self-hating Muslims do we where we expose each other and this is another mental health issue we're under attack from Islamophobia now and this happened with the street abuse and now you're going to tell these people who are Islamophobic that you've actually got a good reason to be Islamophobic look at all this abuse that is going on in our community oh no no no this isn't right you need to take this shame and and hold it in don't tell anyone and that's how erm abuse continues because the abusers know this it's not like they don't know this the abusers know that this exists and they can get away with it this is why erm husbands erm uncles you know we've had brothers in families so in terms of domestic violence it's all abuse whether it's sexual physical or verbal or psychological it it why does it happen in any community but especially in ours it's because the victim is tasked with silence of the injustice to protect the honour of their family

R – And it seems so so like it doesn't make sense for them to have to uphold the honour but I mean at the same time mean will do things that that will dishonour the community but that will be fine that's not a problem that's just men being men but the moment a woman does it or even a man who's experienced domestic violence that's a different ball game all together because then they're saying oh on you are this and there just being or there at that age there's so many excuses given to to men to excuse there behaviour but when it comes women if a woman was to maybe you know erm so maybe like you know like marry away like for example marry without the families consent that's a massive injustice but if a man does it it's ok so there's like a double standard there and that does sort of stem back down to domestic abuse as well that if if if you know a woman does report she's not only she's the issue so it's not the man who's perpetrating the violence it's the woman who's reported it so she has that stigma attached and that was a question I was going to touch upon but I think you've already covered it that stigma of being classed as someone not only someone who basically gone of the community to external agencies erm to sort of air their dirty laundry in public going back to that sort of metaphor it's it's very very unfortunate

N – And then the issue becomes when the whole family are complicit so the victim accepts the from the husband say or the wife is abusive that someone in the family you go to tell your mother your father your brother anyone and and they'll rescue you and so imagine the double whammy when you go to someone and they say well so a mother might say well you know I put up with it and I didn't make a fuss being told by others oh this has happened to previous generations and they didn't make a fuss out of it why are you making a fuss

R – And then it comes down to these people are too modern they are too ingrained in western society because they speak out over things like this when the reality is even in you know if you look at Islam historically and many religions historically they do give power to women they do give a women the option of education the option of being safe in their house I mean and respect women but all that's been sort of erm muddied because of culture sort of seeped in and the elders I think I don't even think they realise that what they're saying is not the truth I think they genuinely believe that is religion whereas in fact your culture that you sort of mixed in and and it's so unfortunate because I think they genuinely believe what they're saying is right so even if somebody was trying to educate them they would say no they would just disregards it because they know best they are of that generation where you know we've come through it you can too and and that damage sort of resonates through generations so third generation and second generation women will be you know the abuse they experienced they will see their suns doing it and not question it they will inflict that same abuse on their daughter-in-law's and things because it's the norm it's a cycle

N – Yeah and there's an expectation that they will get away with it and the victim will stay quite like previous generations that's why we have erm a huge problem with mother-in-law's because those mother-in-law's are unjust what what if we were to take statistics from what's said back to us erm from our callers our client whatever you want to call them is that the mother in laws were themselves subject to this and they think now this is our time our time to basically control the power it is a mental health thing it is

R – Yes over the years maybe that's there was of maybe not dealing with it but that's the way of sort of moving on with their lives maybe getting their own back on the perpetrator who they still probably are still married to they are still probably in the same relationship they're the father of their children erm but but that's their way of sort of exerting control the control they never had

N – It is because that's their way of getting and using that control they never had because of course the expectation would be this happened to me erm and from a place of empathy ill make sure I'll never do this to my daughter-in-law and the real shock for me you know is that actually that woman who's power was taken away and and I guess this makes sense psychologically she saying for years till I'm fifty or forty-five or whatever I get a daughter-in-law I've never had one ounce of power in all those years here she comes this daughter-in-law ill have power over her

R – Yes that's right I mean and her son most likely seeing his father I mean this is all hypothetical but seeing his his father disrespect his mother will lose respect for his mother so this is a role model thing I think it's that psychosocial thing it comes back to the youth the (o) which is really relevant and I mean one of questions would've been is how in your professional opinion where would you start with the educating of young Muslims or young people in general about the facts of domestic violence the facts of Islam you know would you start that at a young age or how would you intervene

N – Yeah you'd start at a young age and and subsequently as part of my work with the helpline so I've knowing what we've been presented with and the problems so I'm involved in other projects as well with other organisations so there are two projects that I'm I hate this word passionate you know everyone uses that word so let's use a whatever a better word for passionate so there's two things I'm really really involved in as well is pre-marriage training for men and for women so in other words before marriage to to have men and women come together come together and look at marriage what and look at what is a healthy relationship so a healthy relationship is the absence of abuse and so look at what the healthy relationship is obviously you know the argument for that is men and women with mental health issues they're not going to come to these courses and you know in Ireland they're making it mandatory that you go to pre-marriage course so we kind of love it if the mosques and the Imams when when if and this would be our dream scenario that when you come to get married he says I want you to go on a pre-marriage course first you know so that that would address all the issues of power control what a healthy relationship looks like and then the bigger thing erm I'm a trained teacher of adults in parenting then to go onto parenting course so what does those two parents now what's a healthy way to raise your children not using the same techniques your parents used yes taking on the good stuff that your parents did and and but leaving aside the unhealthy emotional and psychological things that they did so in other words so these are I'm involved in these because these are run by Muslims they're erm like for instance the parenting course that I'm highly involved in the organisation the courses put together by Muslims and clinical psychologists so so these are the areas that are the result of the work that I'm doing if I was t go back thirty years and say what would be the programs that I would put into place first of all there would be parenting programs so that within parenting that the positive parenting would be to produce assertive strong spiritual young men and women where they neither abuse or someone was able to abuse them and and I want to come to a really really important point in domestic violence in terms of mental health that what I've noticed is and and it could be very subjective so I'm you know I'm more than happy for someone to say to me you might be subjective I see that in our communities that both men and women so it's an equal playing field are seen to be and I'm using the

word seen to be raised to be passive passive girls so they obey parents and husbands passive men so when they get married their family whether it's their mother their father or their family they raised as passive men so that they will obey the family and the family dictates how their married life goes does that resonate with you?

R – That is I think that's one of the things I will take away from this one of the many things because that comes down to the mother-in-law exerting control and that that will filter down so the mother in law will say your wife is doing this discipline her and even if the man doesn't not to do it he will say ok the elder knows best and her marriage has lasted this long so there must be a reason so maybe this is the reason and maybe follow it blindly and they almost like forget all the things they've done before and I think that's very I mean I've not heard that before but now you say it you think think that's obvious

N – But why would why so if you you look at how and why does domestic violence happen it happens because we hijack Islam and say Islam says it's ok remember in the Quran it says it's ok to hit women right this is what they do this saying which is a killer and then number two that that would be number one Islam gave me permission and then how but then that wouldn't be enough would it because if my husbands or say you know the women I'm talking about strong if the women who were assertive strong spiritual do you think they could be hit and stay in that relationship so what we do is we raise women passively so that when it happens because we've raised them to be passive and obedient they will and or uneducated so the whole package of things we do we don't educate them spiritually we raise them passively we do a package and and you know what we would call that is to groom them so that when they domestically abused they are passive in it they don't know they don't have any support that's passive they're not assertive they don't assertively think I'm going to assertively get help I'm going wrong Islamically this is this this is that so they passively are put in a situation where they're passive and then when they seek help they seek help when when it so bad and this is what we find with Muslim women as opposed to other women that Muslim women tend to seek help and leave only when actually there almost on the point of suicide where they'd rather be dead then stay in that relationship and then they seek help so what we have in domestic violence is women often unless they're more empowered because obviously there are some women who are more empowered and then they leave but we have we have erm I'd say a large percentage of women who only leave given what's happened to them given they've been raised passive they've been told not to divulge not to shame and so those women usually only leave when they're about to have a some sort of breakdown and when they are so at risk and their children are so at risk that it doesn't need social services to say if you put yourself or your children at risk we're taking your children

away those women feel so at risk at that stage they don't care about the shaming the family they don't care about that they think I will be dead anyway this man is going to kill me or he will kill one of my children or he's going to or I'm going to end up in a psychiatric hospital so that's what we get women resenting at that point so so badly damaged and that's what I mean that when they come to the organisation or other organisations and giving them twelve weeks of cognitive behaviour therapy or even mindfulness behaviour therapy for twelve week this is a plaster on a sore and we've got a gaping wound that needs surgery and you're handing our plasters you know

R – Excellent I mean that's so apt what you've just said that is so apt because it is a very short-term thing maybe it's not even the marriage part maybe it's from childhood because

N – It's what happened to you to get you to that place if it's going on through generations if it's been accepted you're psychologically set up to know this happens to an awful lot of women it starts from childhood then doesn't it it's ingrained

R – I mean it might not even be conscious I mean some people won't even have to tell their children don't speak up they'll just see their mother do it they'll see there aunt do it in certain areas so they'll just see it as the norm and if people are brought up like that you're actually right they won't seek help until it's at those final stage and I think it comes back to the interventions side of things even before a marriage even at a younger age to instil In people that this isn't right because it's very easy to say for an external agency to come in and say this isn't right that's it but to bring in someone religion

N – It can't be from external agencies it has to come from within the community it has come to come from role models in the Muslim community people who are trusted organisations how say we're set up you know erm to you now take care of the rights of the Muslim community erm we're set up to take care of our congregation that's the Imams it has to be from these it not good people from outside saying to Muslims this is wrong it's just oh you know they're coming interfering in our religion are coming to blame and shame us it won't be accepted it has to come from within and that's why we have set up the helpline and that's why others have set up there what we call faith based organisations something else that we did was when we started and this wasn't available when we started but it was introduce to us and and if if you maybe look at how our helpline we pioneered this is not just counselling but Islamic counselling in other words what is very interesting in those thirty years is when people are this damaged and this damaged when people have used Islam against the what would be the ability spiritually to heal and address that damage in other words how could

you offset or even if it was possible and I've seen it is possible how could you reverse the damage of those who said God gave me permission and how through the work of helplines like ours and supports with you know with a group of people this is what we do within our helpline is how you could offset the spiritual side and this actually for me was my real interest in this helpline because when I worked for the Samaritans erm and we helped people with suicidal and it's a wonderful organisation but what I realised specifically when I became Muslim that you're not allowed to use God and and there's a very obvious reason for that cos first of all who's God cos you can be a Samaritan who might be Jewish you might be Christian you could be anything so so but actually I've since said that I realise when when we set up the helpline when I do my work that without God you're working with one hand behind your back because if you're a volunteer whatever you are as a helpline and someone comes to you and they come to you N or whoever you are for help then you only have the power of you my skills my personality my voice all of that however if you have if you have and I'm not talking abusively using God abusively what if you introduced God as a spiritual therapy now do you know what's extremely interesting brother is that the NHS are introducing mindfulness behaviour therapy and that is that mindfulness behaviour therapy has come from Buddhism but of course the NHS can't say this is a Buddhist therapy the West are very clever they take therapies which are religious and then they secularise them so so what I sought to do and what our helpline has sought to do which is different I think then other helplines is that we want to look at how do you put spirituality back into therapy but like mindfulness in other words not controlling not saying oh God says you should do this in other words how could you use God in a therapeutic safe way just like all other therapeutic therapies in a safe way in order to either offset or even reverse and so you help that person realise that actually what happened to you was a human being and what happened to you is actually forbidden and don't take my word for it or anyone on the helpline don't take my word for it go to a trusted scholar put them on the spot go to anyone who is a trusted scholar and out them on the spot about domestic violence and and see if they'll say to your face that it's ok and they won't they won't so

R – And they won't because they know that it's not and they might be like you said within an imam he might have people to answer too his community to answer too so yeah whatever he thinks it might be overridden

N – Yes but when you ask directly when you look him the eye and you say tell me in his closed office if he actually is God fearing confidentially in his office he won't be he'll tell you it's not ok whereas in the community he won't raise the subject because he's fearful and he doesn't want to lose his position and this is again the Imam again because of the politics of it

this is why Imams are either not being effective or to be fair not being allowed to be effective as he will be replaced and without true confidentiality we know of a situation where we someone where someone was placed in an organisation because they were so pro women and because they were so truly Islamic and truly they were replaced they were kicked of the committee and we were shocked

R – So even when someone tries to make a change there are barriers

N – Yes exactly that's a nice word rather than say they're shut down there are barrier is generally there are barriers even when you find those people sometimes they are attacked or or gently let go you know like in a workplace and you're very gently let go no-one says exactly why they don't point at anything specific but you know why

R – A number of things the root cause is there but they need a number of reasons to get rid of someone without them you know kicking up a fuss

N – Yeah cos now you're going against the tide of of culture and you know generations of situations that have existed and now you're saying we have to change this so now you are trying to take our power and control and actually the same thing happened with our organisation when we began there were some and some of them were Imams who said this organisation would be 'Hidana' because you're encouraging women to divulge secrets because you know we're told Islamically don't divulge secrets of your husband and our family you're encouraging them to divulge secrets and your encouraging them to gossip about so so we got that criticism so we very quickly went to other scholars and and said we need backing about what we were doing and we were told by them actually the work that you're doing is about counsel so in Islam we're told to seek counsel so people are allowed to seek counsel within the family you know within a or you can choose otherwise people to seek counsel from so your helpline in Islam comes under the heading of seeking counsel in other words your job and we were extremely careful on this when someone comes to us who who's a victim of domestic violence we do not come from the position of sister this is against Islam you must leave him we don't come from that position at all because we work with professionally like all other helplines and organisations we we can describe that what you're describing to us sounds like an injustice it doesn't fit within the criteria of what Islam asks in a marriage or a relationship however what you do decide to do about it in other words the options are purely down to you because and this is really really important what we've found is when women in the past have gone to non-Muslim organisations and they've been told this erm domestic violence this is cruelty your children will be taken away and all of this what

we've found is when women left sometimes their situation got worse so what happens is they left they went to a refuge they couldn't stomach it and then they went back and when you go back to an abuser having left now he's more powerful so can you imagine the scenario where they've left he's more angry with you he feels more powerful because now he thinks oh look she left she realised it's hell living in a refuge with three kids and these services there is not enough money so you wait in a refuge between six and twelve months to get rehoused your family have said now you've done this we will never ever speak to you again so but you're in a refuge and then the family you've now shame us we won't speak to you because you've lost your husband you've lost your family and then you go back with your tail between your legs and you go back to your family and now that family has got even more power and control and your situation is worse and that's what a lot of domestic violence organisations didn't understand you actually sometimes when you get them to leave make sure you've set up a structure where they don't have to go back if you get them to leave and then that structure isn't in place and then they have to go back often women have gone back and they've actually been killed you know and then the women will be going oh she went back it's her fault

R – It's her fault but they won't even look is there something we could've done differently could we learn from this but I think it's just I think there are a lot of cases of people I mean where a lot of stories have come out after the fact that failure I mean I think everyone starts with the best of intentions to help someone

N – Exactly that wasn't the intention of the services it wasn't their attention it's because exactly why we set up the services as Muslims when you're faith sensitive when you understand the culture you understand that how should we expect those services to understand but actually why we set up our organisations is not a matter of ego but saying try and consult with us if we work together then you can offer services that's fine but at least you understand how to offer those services because it is an act of ego if you think as non-Muslims that you know better erm than Muslims what to do with people in their community you may but also wouldn't it be better and I think what what we have seen is over the years is a lot of agencies and much much now more willing to consult and as I said I'm on the advisory committee with the NSPCC erm they they've got an advisory board so it's a specifically around you know the on street grooming and things like that but these organisations more and more are consulting with Muslims in these fields so so it you know there's something good about that not enough and also you see erm not enough so they're asking you to go on the advisory board but they're getting the funding to rule out the projects and they get your free advice so there's something a bit flawed I that also but they good

news is is that more and more they are asking for advice on how to run their service so there is more collaboration and that faith sensitive you know that those words and stuff people are becoming much more faith sensitive I understand if you don't understand the culture there's much chance of putting a woman at risk then if you can give her that kind of advice as helping her so that's changing sometimes it's slow like the Police officer who spoke to you you know she said those things are changing but there are some entrenched ideas

R – And opinion and views I guess but that's unfortunate but it's good to know that change is coming at a slow rate but it is coming

N – It is coming slowly but it is coming and I guess it is coming because organisations like ours and other Muslim organisations it's coming because we've said look we are not just any Muslim we are Muslim psychiatrists we are Muslim GPs Muslim counsellors Muslim this and this we are the ones with expertise in this area

R – So approach us ask us

N – It still counts that we as Muslims are doing the things that we should be doing and then then we're doing our part and that's also very encouraging that more and more Muslim organisations are realising that we need to train these areas

R – That's the key word because people are very set in their ways and they also think ok statistics show this and we know this and there's proof of this but in fact there are much more smaller nuances that people need to consider and incorporate like you said if someone removes someone from a violent situation but then doesn't prepare or doesn't know exactly what that person needs sometimes it's more harmful then not doing anything at all it's sad to say sometimes and and it's at the detriment and you know like you said people have you know died or been killed

N – And that's exactly why police and others now police in particular are more on it then ever before because the people that came to them and said I'm being abused and they treated it like something cultural and then they went onto be killed and now the police have been named and shamed

R – Hmm and I think that's what it may need to effect change

N – Yes but sadly at the expense always of the victims

R – And and it's sad that they've been let down like you said right at the beginning of our conversation it's not just they're not just a victim the first time from the abuse they're a victim numerous times

N – Yes sadly from the system from the culture of individuals I mean the abuse I mean imagine when the abuse is that layered

R – Yes exactly and even if you have the courage to go out and seek help or when you go there or maybe approach a family member like coming back and they say no stick with it or you know someone you're going to try and confide in and the first person you confide in the first organisation you confide in says no you're wrong stick with it because this is just the way life is this is the way everyone's life is and you just have to deal with it and I think that's very disheartening and I think that that might just put people off forever from even again trying to seek help or until it gets to a stage like you said where they rather just you know be dead and it's just

N – It's a struggle it's a struggle and it's a struggle to get out of it and they're think you know if it's a big struggle to get out of it I might as well stay in it

R – Yeah because it's sort of the better the devil you know in a sense because you know the situation you're in you know you can just about manage just about you're on your last and it comes to you don't want to risk your family honour and your children erm

N – About the children now it's a family say we'll withdraw from you completely now it's not about you now you're taking the right of the children to have access to their cousins their uncles their grandparents this is how power and control works even if they didn't do it and often they do they say ok you you want control of your life take control and we'll take control these children will have no grandparents to aunties uncles cousins no heritage no help no support let's see how you like control of your own life

R – So they're almost saying they're almost giving it to them but with the double edged sword saying you can take it but trust me trust us that that that will be much worse than what you're living with now do everyone a favour stay where you are

N- And and so why cause all that fuss when you know this your reality why cause all that fuss and this is how forced marriage works on exactly that kind of basis just put up with it everyone has put up with forced marriage for you know centuries why are you

R – Yes and why are you the first to speak up which that's not true but people do feel like a very small a very tiny minority who are speaking up so if you're living it you're going to assume other people are living with it but not saying anything it's that sort of ignorance that wilful ignorance of not talking about it I think I think it

N – And that's the other thing about when when people call our helpline and other helplines they're quite surprised if I said to them you know sister or brother this form of abuse you've experienced is quite widespread they say oh I thought it was just me everyone thinks it's just them same with the same with sexual abuse which is worse than just me because they're you know people especially children they think erm the abusers choose them because of something wrong with them I mean it's the most distressing thing someone in my line of work the most distressing thing is to hear how the victim really feels they what did they identify me why me you know like erm within a family with two girls and it it only happen to one girl and their thinking why did they choose me it must've been something wrong or evil or bad they must have seen something in me so this is another area completely different

R – Of course but there are those similarities of that you know on the community side of things that wilful not acceptance but sort of you know ok it happens but let's just leave it lets not turn over that stone because the moment we do theirs so much we have to deal with and people sometimes rather not deal with it because it's a very taboo issue it's a very you know especially in this day and age like you said it's just another sort of erm a bit of ammunition of people who are attacking Islam to say look even they they're saying it themselves so and it's very difficult I mean and I don't think there's one unique way there's no one silver bullet to deal with everything it needs to be dealt with on an individual basis and it also needs to be dealt with in the in the context in which it happens because it's easy to pull someone out and say now you're ok but you have to deal with it in the context because if you don't it's just a cycle of something that will keep happening for generations and it's things that can be dealt with but it seems like people who are in a position to help like Imams and so on or you know the people who are in charge of the mosque and so on are not willing to sort of help with because it seems like it's not an issue to them to the people in charge it's an issue to women who are underrepresented in those sort of circles so you know

N – Exactly so exactly that if you look at say what families choose to do and what could we offset that so there would be the Imams who should be challenged forced to say what is your duty as a man to speak out about injustice whether that's domestic violence incest whatever the abuse is speak out about it as national organisations and then and then within those structures what kind of skillset do you need so a lot of new young Imams now are actually taking counselling courses and becoming qualified counsellors so it makes the Imamship if that's the word it makes them a skilled Imam that's something new and lovely to see as well

R – Yes and I think that can be a credit to the work you've done maybe not directly maybe even directly sorry the work you've put in it is taken effect it might be doing it at a very slow pace looking at it from thirty years but I means it's something that's been done something that's productively being changed something that's you know because there's this thig where people are just very complacent because if this happens for centuries and we've got this far let's just carry on as we are people don't like change

N – People don't like change and also again erm it's it's sort of painting are communities with one brush but what we've seen and myself and agree with other people who are in similar services what we notice in Muslim communities is that they're reactive so when there is a problem they react and rather they're not proactive proactive is Imams training proactive is parenting programs that look at healthy parenting premarriage courses to look at what's a healthy relationship a unhealthy relationship cos now schools are introducing erm talks about domestic violence and what it looks like and we should we as Muslims be leaving it to a school to teach our sons and daughters what domestic violence is erm shouldn't isn't that our duty because I met a Muslim teacher the other week and she said whats shocking to me as a teacher is that parents are handing over there parental responsibility to us cos we're educators and this is not our responsibility to raise their children morally ethically that's their job they're handing it over to us because they're Muslim teachers erm that itself opens up abuse because we're handing over them respecting those people and abuse happens within the mosque within the schools in other words we're handing over our responsibility so our responsibility as a parent is to be the best parent how with skills so going on courses on you know understanding learning and wellness courses so there's lots of proactive things we can do and what we're seeing is and I'm involved on the proactive work on many fronts in the premarriage the parenting and the helpline is that if we're not as Muslims working on a proactive front were never going to address the reactive so for instance the helpline is on the reactive front we're a helpline and when things go wrong people call the helpline so that's a reaction of something that's already gone wrong so I guess I have erm a bigger role actually

as I only do one day now at the helpline I have a bigger role in the proactive in in that I want to work in the thing that stop the thing happening in the first place

R – Exactly exactly and I think that's what it all boils down to erm I think reactive and proactive thing is excellent but I think that's where because it's so much easier to treat sort of you know the symptoms of everything apart then it is to treat the actual outcome of it so it's easier to make sure it doesn't happen in the first place rather than treating the actual consequences

N – Exactly and on a personal level that's what I've learnt that I love my work and it's very valuable and sometimes I put a plaster and actually sometimes if I get to work with a caller sometimes I actually without the whole skills but with Gods help I get to do the surgery but what I'd like to do is work with people and so like it's like prevention isn't it and you know but before you actually get ill before you get abused before you get diabetes I'd like to work on the other end for a while that soothes my soul working on the other end there's nothing wrong with the plasters working there's nothing wrong with trying to do the surgery I like to work in that bit where there doesn't need to be a plaster and then there doesn't need to be any surgery and I guess that's why I'm involved in so many other things now and that's what we'd like the whole of the Muslim community to be doing and there's a lot it's not just me there's a whole body of people the people that I'm involved in I mean I'm involved with a lot of Muslims who also are proactively doing this work so there is a lot of room for optimism the problem is there should be more will within the Muslim community to fund that work you know

R – Yes but I think to fund it is to acknowledge it maybe and I think people are very reluctant to maybe acknowledge that maybe it's a problem or say that obviously there's help out there and maybe to diminish how big a problem it is when in fact I don't even think we've come close to to it there must be so many people who go you know living out their entire lives silently and I think like you said if we get a new but I suppose you you thought this thirty odd years ago when we get a newer generation things will be different but the worry is

N – Ever the optimistic

R – Yes but I think you have to be in this line of work I think exactly I think there is I mean having this conversation with yourself I believe there is a reason to be optimistic I think there is changes happening I think it could be faster I think it could be more efficiently but we should be grateful for any changes like you said it's being introduced in schools people are

coming to you for help because they recognise the role faith plays in you know domestic violence and the acknowledging and reporting of it and the police are being more open than they have ever been before so these changes are good changes but I think a lot more can be done and I think someone like yourself I mean I've talked to many people but I think you specifically because you've got a wealth of experience but now you're not sort of resting on your laurels that you are you know that you help people but you're trying to be proactive in that help and you're trying to encourage other people and I think that's what's needed in this day and age people to direct people look this is where the money should go this is where the funds should go because if we can prevent it it'll be much even to the government even to people who fund it it'll be much cheaper on everyone's part it'll be much more efficient it'll save so much pain to treat it in its infancy

N – And actually one I can be very specific about one piece of work I'm doing is around parenting and parenting incorporates all of these issues proactively is (o) I'm part of an organisation called (o) it's a tailor-made parenting program for Muslim parents raising children with respect you know the characters and manners and so it ties in with the society erm they they can a parent there's an organisation called (o) the woman who started this organisation is very sensible and very clever erm that she's got an organisation which has been accredited by government standards this is a brilliant thing to do because what she's done is kept it very Muslim for Muslims but the programme itself it's been accredited so it ticks all the boxes of professionalism and I love that

R – Because it's mainstream isn't it and it's not on a fringe it's accepted and people will be more open to approach

N – And (o) have funded erm a series of parenting programmes there's only because (o) have to be very careful who they fund and what they fund but (o) are one of the organisations who realise we can't send all the money abroad we must address some of the issues that we've got within the Muslim community here and and so so they've got some pockets of funding that they've put to one side to say we'll look at these projects that are going on in this country and then whether it be around parenting which is a big issue or marriage or whatever and we'll fund the pockets of work and (o) have funded erm one of the parenting programs that we have done and we've done them in I think Bradford Manchester Birmingham London and so that's something good as well where erm those organisations those big charities who get I mean they must get millions and they're realising that we must invest in local domestic organisations so that's another erm area to be erm you know happy about

R – I think someone like yourself you have seen it for yourself from its infancy to now even though there are cuts there is a ray of light I suppose without being too

N – Yes the sun hasn't come out but there are certainly rays of light you know

R – Yes exactly and it needed in this even during the course of my looking into this it's a very disheartening thing because it's very upsetting to read peoples stories to speak to people and that because it's not it's a horrible part of life but it's a part of life that we need to deal with and it's also something that that people you know and if you turn a blind eye to it it's that much worse if your sort of ignorant it's not a good thing you and and if children are taught like obviously don't there's nothing to be ashamed of theirs help available this is the help hopefully you'll never need it but if you ever do it's here for you and just give them that information maybe those early interventions can make all the difference cos maybe that can maybe not eradicate the you know socialisation that's been done over the years but maybe it can give them an option show them look it happens don't see it as normal but it's a part of life

N – But you're not alone

R – Exactly because a lot of people as children have seen domestic violence and at that age you do think you're alone that no other person is suffering from it but as you grown older you realise that it's wrong

N – Exactly

R – Now N thank you so much for your time I was hoping for forty minutes of your time and I would be so happy with that but

N – It's a tricky subject have I answered all your questions I don't want you walking away thinking oh she didn't answer this

R – No I promise you N basically as you've been talking you've sort of naturally flowed from situation so I had things about stigma about culture about the environment and you've genuinely sort of ticked all those boxes and so much more things I didn't even think of asking so I genuinely appreciate it thank you so much for your time and your help and I will definitely erm keep you abreast of everything that happens with my research

N – Yes do please do

R – And again I am so grateful for your time and help and I will send you an email and if you have any questions or queries please feel free to contact me by email