



Research article

A Conspiracy of Silence: Child Sexual Abuse and Cultural Complicity in Britain's Pakistani Diaspora

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Abstract

This paper explores the systemic silencing of child sexual abuse (CSA) within British Pakistani communities, situating these dynamics at the intersection of colonial legacies, diasporic migration, and contemporary cultural and geopolitical pressures. It examines the limitations of official statistics and the pervasive underreporting of intra-community abuse, showing how entrenched social, familial, and cultural structures hinder disclosure and perpetuate cycles of denial. Drawing on postcolonial theory, intersectionality, migration, and gender studies, the analysis demonstrates how colonialism distorted interpretations of Islam and how the instrumentalization of communal 'honour' (izzat) sustains environments that protect perpetrators while silencing survivors. Importantly, the paper resists deflecting internal accountability onto colonial trauma or Islamophobia, emphasising that authentic justice requires confronting abuse and challenging the patriarchal norms that enable harm. The paper further conceptualises silence as a form of knowledge production, showing how patterns of denial, moral gatekeeping, and erasure shape what is acknowledged about abuse within families and communities. It advocates for survivor-centred, decolonial approaches to justice and healing, emphasising the reclamation of narratives to serve victims rather than feed prejudices. By foregrounding critical self-reflection, accountability, and transformative cultural reckoning, the paper argues that only when Pakistani communities confront internal harms can they engage in effective collective action to dismantle broader injustices such as racism, Islamophobia, and social inequalities.

Keywords: British Pakistani diaspora, child sexual abuse, conspiracy of silence, postcolonial, cultural accountability



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Introduction

There exists a hidden crisis within Pakistani communities in the United Kingdom (UK) that festers behind closed doors, within families, religious spaces, and communal structures. Ali et al. (2021) suggest that child sexual abuse (CSA) is not an anomaly in these contexts but a persistent, underreported phenomenon. However, high-profile cases such as the Rotherham scandal, in which over 1,400 children were abused by groups of predominantly British Pakistani men, and media investigations including documentaries like *Groomed: A National Scandal* (Channel 4, 2025), have significantly shaped and constrained the parameters of national discourse on CSA (Jay, 2014). Such narratives, often centred on White victims and gang-based exploitation, have narrowed public understanding of CSA in British Pakistani communities. Ministry of Justice (2025) data for 2023 (UK), where ethnicity was recorded in 69% of cases, shows that 90% of CSA offenders were White, 5% Asian, 2% Black, 2% Mixed, and 1% Other. Group-based grooming cases made up 3.7% of all CSA offences of which 5% of offenders and 4% of victims were recorded as Asian or British Asian, a figure proportionally lower than their share of the UK's adult population (approximately 9%) (Kewley & Karsna, 2025), yet political and media narratives have disproportionately associated this form of abuse with Pakistani and Muslim communities (Gill & Day, 2020).

However, Karsna and Bromley (2024) suggest that official statistics on ethnic minorities are often incomplete, inconsistently recorded, or subject to biases that distort the portrayal of CSA prevalence across different communities. Furthermore, Gill and Harrison (2018) add that while barriers to disclosure are significant for all victims of CSA, the data is further skewed in relation to South Asian communities, where victims often face intersectional barriers to disclosure such as gendered cultural stigma, fear of family dishonour, and mistrust of statutory services (Thiara & Roy, 2020). These dynamics, coupled with the shielding of perpetrators through a pervasive conspiracy of silence and systematic underreporting, suggest that both offending and victimisation related to CSA within British Pakistani contexts are likely underestimated in official statistics, thereby necessitating a critical interpretation of national data in light of these concealed realities (Jay, 2014). Thus, this article refrains from utilising existing empirical data on the prevalence of CSA by ethnic group in the UK, as such data are inherently unreliable in accurately reflecting the scale of abuse within South Asian communities and broader society (Ali et al., 2021). Gill and Harrison (2018) concur that this lack of comprehensive empirical data should not be interpreted as evidence of the absence of CSA in this group; rather, it reflects the social, structural, familial, and cultural barriers that inhibit disclosure. These misrepresentations constitute an additional injustice to victims whose experiences are obscured by gaps and inaccuracies in national data. Consequently, such victims may be unable to access appropriate support and services that address their specific needs, further perpetuating the injustice, invisibility, and marginalisation they experience (Sawriker & Katz, 2017).

This article argues that while group-based grooming has rightly attracted significant public attention, it represents only one manifestation of a deeper and more pervasive crisis. The routine, concealed, and silenced abuse occurring within British Pakistani families and community institutions, such as intrafamilial abuse, incest, and clerical abuse, often precedes and creates the conditions that enable group-based exploitation to take place (Ali et al., 2021). These forms of abuse are sustained by cultural mechanisms of shame, 'honour,' religious hypocrisy, and a conspiracy of silence that remain insufficiently examined and challenged. These structures shape communal life and operate as tools of complicity, deterring survivors and those with knowledge of the abuse, typically family or guardians, from speaking out, shielding perpetrators from accountability (Ali et al., 2021; Gill & Harrison, 2018). This article aims to interrogate that conspiracy of silence and foreground voices that have been ignored by both the media and the community itself.

Frontline organisations, including the Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (RASAC) and the Maggie Oliver Foundation, indicate that CSA by family members or close associates occurs within Pakistani communities, though most instances remain unreported. Their observations are based on casework patterns, professional assessments, and referrals, revealing a hidden dimension of abuse that is largely invisible in official statistics and highlighting the need to interpret quantitative data alongside qualitative and contextual evidence. Qualitative research conducted by South Asian scholars with deep cultural insights, knowledge and methodological expertise identifies patterns suggesting that abuse in Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) households may involve not only intimate partners but multiple family members, reflecting the complexities of extended kinship structures and familial hierarchies (Chowdhury et al., 2021; Gill & Harrison, 2018; Murtaza & Manji, 2023; Qureshi, 2024; Tanweer, 2023). This abuse often occurs in highly trusted spaces, such as homes, places of worship, and family gatherings, and perpetrators are frequently embedded within the familial and communal fabric, including uncles, cousins, brothers-in-law, family friends, neighbours, religious leaders, and visiting relatives from Pakistan (Gill & Harrison, 2018).

The abuse is often hidden in plain sight, facilitated by the trust and access these perpetrators enjoy; their emotional, spatial, and relational proximity enables repeated acts of sexual violence against children, many of whom are rendered voiceless by complex intersections of fear, shame, silence, and cultural expectations (Gill & Harrison, 2018). In many cases, parents remain unaware that their children have been victimised, sometimes by individuals with whom they regularly share meals, religious rituals, and domestic life (Gill, 2010). In other instances, parents are aware yet choose inaction, prioritising the preservation of family reputation and communal honour over the safety and wellbeing of their child (Ahmed et al., 2009; Jassal, 2020). Survivors frequently internalise shame and blame, rationalising or minimising their abuse to maintain family cohesion and avoid bringing perceived dishonour to their relatives, which can exacerbate feelings of betrayal, isolation, and long-term psychological distress (Ahmed et al., 2009; Parpart & Parashar, 2019).

Thus, intergenerational patterns of abuse and silence are perpetuated as adults who experienced abuse in their own childhoods remain unable to break the cycle for future generations (Batool et al., 2024). Furthermore, the patriarchal structure of many South Asian communities means that the behaviour of adult men often sets a precedent for younger males, influencing how they understand power, gender, and consent (Kalra, 2009). This cyclical dynamic manifests most clearly within the intimate spaces of the family. Fathers and husbands often remain unaware of the abuse experienced by their wives and children. Similarly, wives and children may be unaware of the abuse their husbands or fathers endured during their childhoods, underscoring the deeply gendered dimensions of silence and ignorance within familial contexts (Batool et al., 2024).

Gill (2010) suggests that intra-community and familial abuse is a silent epidemic sustained by the discouragement of disclosure, either implicitly or explicitly, and by families or community members protecting perpetrators in order to preserve cohesion, 'honour', or reputation. This concealment is compounded by cultural misunderstandings or essentialist assumptions, which can lead professionals either to over-pathologise BME families or to underestimate the actual risks present. Internally, survivors often face barriers to disclosure such as a lack of awareness about CSA, fear of disbelief or blame, and dishonour (Ali et al., 2021). Externally, structural factors including poverty, insecure immigration status, limited access to culturally competent support services, and a lack of trust in statutory agencies further inhibit disclosure and help-seeking. Together, these dynamics illustrate how abuse can be both concealed within communities and perpetuated by systemic shortcomings, highlighting the urgent need for culturally informed interventions and structural accountability (Qureshi, 2024).

The challenge, then, for many survivors extends beyond the trauma of the abuse itself to include the widespread denial or minimisation of such experiences and decades of silence from those they are meant to trust the most: parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and wider family. This persistent invalidation and betrayal can have profound psychological consequences, often manifesting as Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD) and a range of other psychopathologies (Murtaza & Manj, 2023). As Baxi (2014) highlights, survivors can often encounter dismissal or outright blame, with cultural narratives framing them as responsible for 'inviting' or provoking the abuse. This victim-blaming not only silences survivors but also perpetuates a community-wide culture of denial and impunity for abusers (Gill & Harrison, 2018; Qureshi, 2024).

Importantly, this discussion is not an attempt to essentialise or exceptionalise Pakistanis or Muslims as uniquely predisposed to sexual violence. Abuse occurs across all communities; however, the visibility, framing, and reporting of abuse here are shaped by historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. For Pakistani communities, these patterns are often intertwined with a legacy of colonial trauma, class-based inequality, and identity struggles in the diaspora, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to understanding this phenomenon (Ali, 2024; Wilson, 2006). Thus, this article situates CSA within British Pakistani communities as a product of intersecting historical, cultural, and geopolitical forces.

Using postcolonial theory, this paper examines how colonialism and racialisation have produced enduring silences around abuse, with communal 'honour' functioning not merely as a cultural norm but as a legacy of colonial anxieties internalised and rearticulated within diasporic moral frameworks. Tracing these dynamics across South Asia's global entanglements, the paper shows how codes of shame and 'honour' migrate and evolve within neoliberal diasporic contexts, often intensifying under racialisation and minoritisation in the West. A transnational lens situates CSA within migratory experiences, revealing how displacement and acculturative stress complicate reporting, disclosure, and healing. It also highlights how traditional values are both preserved and refracted through contemporary logics of respectability and communal defence, revealing how knowledge about abuse is obscured or weaponised under the guise of cultural protection. In response, the paper advances a survivor-centred, decolonial reimagining of justice and accountability.

The article also explores the complex moral landscapes that diasporic communities navigate, balancing tensions between confronting Islamophobia and cultivating processes of personal development and critical introspection. Intersectionality highlights how overlapping identities, including gender, ethnicity, religion, caste, and class, influence vulnerability to abuse and patterns of silence within these tensions. Gender studies deepen the analysis of patriarchal structures and 'honour' codes that regulate behaviour, reinforce complicity, and shape both public and private responses to abuse, whilst trauma theory attends to its psychological and intergenerational impacts. Finally, the paper analyses silence as a form of knowledge production, highlighting how epistemologies of denial, hypocrisy, erasure, and moral gatekeeping are maintained and reproduced within families, communities, and wider society, shaping what is acknowledged, discussed, or ignored about CSA.

Colonial legacies and migration patterns: Contextualising the crisis

To understand this crisis, it is essential to place it within the historical context of colonialism and its lasting psychological and social effects on South Asian Muslim communities. British colonial rule systematically erased indigenous languages and knowledge systems, reshaping cultural and religious practices to serve imperial interests. This included selective and often distorted readings of Islamic scripture, a process that built on earlier Arab colonial manipulation in the interpretation and institutionalisation of Islam, which also shaped legal and moral frameworks across South Asia. These historical layers have contributed to widespread misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Islam in diaspora settings (Six-Hohenbalken & Gingrich, 2011). Importantly, the Qur'an explicitly condemns all forms of CSA, upholding strict protections for children and forbidding exploitation whilst emphasising the imperative of justice even against one's own family members (Qur'an, 4:135; 17:32; 24:33). Nevertheless, the colonial disruption of authentic religious teachings and linguistic heritage has distanced Pakistani communities from the Qur'an's true guidance, allowing cultural silence around abuse to persist under the guise of patience in the name of God (*Sabr*) and upholding familial 'honour' (Chowdhury et al., 2021).

Additionally, British colonial authorities reconfigured caste systems through census classifications and racial hierarchies, deepening social divisions and erasing the protective nuances of precolonial social structures (Ambedkar, 2014; Tharoor, 2017). These disruptions not only fragmented communities but also undermined traditional support networks, creating environments in which children and disadvantaged caste groups could be more vulnerable to abuse and where intra-community mechanisms for safeguarding were weakened or co-opted to maintain 'honour' and social standing rather than to protect the most vulnerable (Dirks, 2002).

These hierarchical structures continued to shape migration patterns after World War II, when Britain's immigration policies facilitated the arrival of large numbers of South Asian migrants to help rebuild its economy (Dirks, 2002). However, migration opportunities from India to the UK were historically accessible primarily to socioeconomically privileged caste groups, who often encountered fewer structural barriers and experienced smoother integration into British society due to their colonially enhanced fluency in the English language and education system (Dhanda, 2013; Khadria, 2006; Wilkerson, 2020). Contrarily, historically marginalised and dehumanised Indian disadvantaged caste populations remained largely confined to the subcontinent, continuing to bear the entrenched effects of colonial-era inequalities (Ambedkar, 2014). As a result, unlike the women in India who face gender inequalities and gender-biases, the women of the Indian diaspora in the UK continue to be amongst the wealthiest and socioeconomically advanced groups, reflecting the enduring legacies of caste, colonial privilege, and hierarchical access to migration and opportunity (Gowen, 2018). Meanwhile, migration from Pakistan and Bangladesh encompassed a broader cross-section of society, including disadvantaged groups, leading to the migration of more socioeconomically vulnerable populations into the British context (Peach, 2006). Socioeconomic status is particularly salient in this context, as its links with CSA are well-documented, with lower socioeconomic status being a significant risk factor for both victimisation and perpetration of CSA (Claussen et al., 2013).

Pakistani migrants predominantly came from rural, agrarian regions with limited formal education and settled in post-industrial towns across the Midlands and Northern England, forming insular, monocultural enclaves (Kalra, 2000; Whittle, 2016). They largely entered low-skilled, manual labour in textiles and manufacturing, whereas Indian migrants more frequently accessed professional or highly skilled employment, and Bangladeshi migrants occupied intermediate positions in education and employment (Kalra, 2000; Khadria, 2006; Sunder & Uddin, 2007). These settlement patterns, together with lower socioeconomic status, exacerbated vulnerabilities to CSA by creating conditions of financial precarity, overcrowded housing, and restricted access to social services, all of which constrained opportunities for monitoring, safeguarding, or disclosure. Within such contexts, the prioritisation of family 'honour' frequently took precedence over the protection of children (Bywaters & Skinner, 2020; Gill, 2010).

Additionally, South Asian communities faced racism, economic marginalisation, and cultural alienation, which further compounded socioeconomic disparities and shaped how CSA was perceived and addressed, mainly through intergenerational patterns of

concealment and limited engagement with external support systems (Dhaliwal, 2024; Gill, 2010; Lahiri, 2017). These intersecting disparities demonstrate that class, caste, and migration histories not only shape social and economic outcomes but also condition the ways abuse is manifested, hidden, or challenged across South Asian diasporic groups (Gill & Harrison, 2018). Furthermore, the persistent influence of caste continues to affect social mobility, community organisation, and intra-diasporic dynamics, highlighting the enduring impact of colonial and postcolonial structures on contemporary South Asian communities in Britain (Lahiri, 2017; Peach, 2006; Vallabhaneni, 2015; Wilkerson, 2020).

Survival solidarity and the intergenerational costs of silence

Pakistani communities in the UK continue to carry the psychological and structural scars of colonialism, Partition, and displacement (Kamran, 2025; Puri, 2017; Qureshi et al., 2023). These traumas, compounded by poverty, racism, and systemic exclusion, have contributed to a host of social challenges, including mental health crises, acculturative stress, and intra-communal tensions (Chaudry et al., 2011). However, in the face of outgroup hostility and oppression, many communities turn inward, prioritising familial and communal cohesion as mechanisms of survival (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Yet, within this model of collective survival lies a darker undercurrent of silence, isolation, and the internalization of trauma. The very mechanisms used to build resilience, collective empowerment, and insular communities have also facilitated the concealment of abuse (Tanweer, 2023). Protecting the image of the community has, in certain contexts, taken precedence over protecting the well-being of individuals. Social identity theory suggests how group survival instincts may lead to the protection of abusers when accountability threatens communal reputation. This dynamic has created environments in which the abused are silenced, and abusers remain protected, unaccountable, and insulated by familial or communal structures of complicity (Barclay, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tanweer, 2023).

This dynamic is particularly pronounced in instances where perpetrators of CSA are shielded due to their social or religious standing, whether as family members, respected elders, imams, or community leaders. Often, misconduct is minimised, denied, or rationalised under the guise of protecting communal honour or preventing external scrutiny (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Such protection mechanisms contribute to a broader pattern of moral dissonance, giving rise to what can be described as religious hypocrisy, whereby visible markers of religiosity such as dress, speech, or public piety are frequently interpreted as evidence of moral probity, when in some cases, they may serve to obscure or enable exploitative behaviour (Barlas, 2019; Gilbert et al., 2004).

This paradox creates a moral blind spot within the community, where the safeguarding of image overrides the safeguarding of individuals. In such contexts, religious and cultural symbols become protective armour for perpetrators, making calls for accountability appear as attacks on faith or communal unity (Choudhury, 2010). Moreover, upon exposure, their visible religiosity and perceived moral authority can amplify Islamophobic narratives, reinforcing false and damaging perceptions of Islam. Subsequently, protecting abusers under the guise of defending communal honour not only deepens internal harm but also inadvertently strengthens external prejudice, while

distancing people from the true essence of their faith and its spiritual integrity. It is within this charged environment that addressing intragroup abuse becomes particularly fraught, as the imperative to challenge internal harm collides with the equally urgent struggle against external marginalisation (Adams, 2018; Cockbain & Tufail, 2020).

Addressing intragroup abuse while confronting intergroup marginalisation

Ultimately, it is imperative to resist the tendency to invoke colonial histories or systemic Islamophobia as a means of deflecting from necessary internal critique. While it is indisputable that Muslim communities have been subject to long-standing forms of racialisation, surveillance, structural marginalisation and violence, these external injustices cannot be used to legitimise the internalisation of harm within families and communities (Beydoun, 2024; Qureshi, 2024). Colonial trauma and Islamophobia must be addressed, but they cannot excuse silence or inaction around CSA or gendered violence. The reproduction of dehumanisation, manifested through the silencing of victims and the protection of perpetrators, undermines any genuine effort to confront Islamophobia or foster intergroup solidarity (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020).

It is crucial to recognise that some of the most vocal responses to high-profile grooming scandals are not rooted in a genuine concern for justice or victim welfare, but are instead instrumentalised to advance xenophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-immigrant agendas. In such cases, the trauma of survivors is not validated or respected, but appropriated to legitimise preexisting biases rather than to advocate for meaningful systemic change (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020). This instrumentalisation has deeply corrosive effects on public discourse. It shifts attention away from the experiences and needs of victims, redirecting it toward ideologically driven narratives that prioritise blame over accountability. As a result, opportunities for nuanced, community-led conversations about abuse, both within and beyond minority communities, are obstructed. Victims, regardless of racial or religious background, are effectively silenced, their experiences flattened into rhetorical devices for political gain (Gill & Day, 2020).

Moreover, this racialised climate exacerbates the conspiracy culture of silence within marginalised communities. Survivors are no longer simply contending with internalised shame or familial pressures; they are also navigating a wider socio-political terrain in which disclosure may be weaponised against their entire community. Consequently, communal defensiveness and fear of external scrutiny often supersede the imperative for internal accountability, creating a double bind in which perpetrators evade justice and survivors remain unheard (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020).

An authentic and meaningful commitment to justice requires the courage to hold individuals accountable for abuse, regardless of their status or proximity within the family or community. This is not a betrayal of collective identity but rather a necessary step toward communal healing, inner decolonisation, integrity, and moral consistency (Ali et al., 2021). The notion of communal respectability or 'purity,' sustained through the suppression of abuse disclosures, can no longer be upheld as a defensible strategy; it fractures identity, enforces cycles of masking, and transmits intergenerational wounds that erode both selfhood and community, while offering only the illusion of

moral or spiritual integrity (Jung, 1953). Research on the transmission of trauma and epigenetics suggests that unacknowledged trauma can affect not only the victim, but subsequent generations through behavioural, psychological, and biological transmission (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018).

This article posits that for British Pakistani communities to reclaim and reaffirm the richness and resilience of their cultural and religious identities, they must begin by embracing processes of internal and communal accountability that restore a sense of wholeness and authenticity. Rather than allowing survivors' experiences to be appropriated and misrepresented in ways that reinforce racialised stereotypes, Pakistani communities must take ownership of the narrative, ensuring it prioritises the needs and voices of victims. Achieving this requires not defensiveness, but sustained critical self-reflection, moral clarity, and an unwavering commitment to protecting the dignity and well-being of the most vulnerable members of society.

Towards accountability & collective action

This article proposes five critical actions necessary for meaningful cultural reckoning with CSA:

1. Acknowledging the existence of the problem

Recognising the prevalence of abuse within Pakistani communities is an essential first step towards addressing it. CSA cannot be dismissed as a Western phenomenon or as a problem external to the community. It is a deeply rooted issue that exists internally and must be openly acknowledged without denial or deflection to enable meaningful progress.

2. Rejecting deflection and *whataboutism*

Attempts to deflect attention by highlighting abuse in other communities or systemic Islamophobia, media sensationalism and hypocrisy do not absolve internal failures. While these external dynamics are legitimate concerns, they must not be used to avoid introspection or delay necessary interventions. The fight against racism and Islamophobia must occur alongside efforts to safeguard vulnerable individuals within one's own community and beyond.

3. Prioritising the protection of victims over perpetrators

A critical shift in cultural attitudes is needed whereby the protection of victims is prioritised above the reputational concerns of perpetrators, regardless of their social, familial, or religious status. When allegations of abuse arise, the reflex to shield respected individuals, such as community elders, religious leaders, or family members, must be challenged. Authentic accountability requires adopting a victim-centred approach, which prioritises the needs and experiences of those affected by harm. It involves rejecting any form of complicity that is disguised as loyalty, shame, or 'honour,' and instead, focusing on addressing the harm and ensuring justice for victims.

4. Breaking the culture of silence

Survivors of CSA are increasingly speaking out, demonstrating courage and bravery amidst cultural and social pressures (Gill & Harrison, 2018). These voices must be met with belief, respect, and unwavering support. The longstanding culture of silence that has allowed abuse to remain hidden must be dismantled, as it not only allows

perpetrators to continue abusing vulnerable people but also perpetuates the intergenerational transmission of trauma and reinforces harmful social norms. Breaking this silence requires both structural and cultural change, challenging entrenched taboos around discussing sexual abuse and mental health, providing accessible and culturally sensitive support systems, and fostering environments in which survivors feel empowered to disclose without fear of stigma or reprisal. Acknowledging and amplifying survivor narratives is a critical component of collective healing, helping communities confront internal harm, reclaim agency over their own stories, and establish mechanisms of open dialogue and accountability that prioritise the protection of the most vulnerable.

5. Embracing responsibility from within

It is essential that community leadership, particularly men, including fathers, elders, imams, and local leaders, actively engage in efforts to reform harmful norms and promote justice. The perpetuation of harmful notions of 'honour' and 'izzat' must be replaced with a commitment to the safety and dignity of all individuals. Although Pakistani women have historically borne the burden of resistance, they have also, at times, been complicit in sustaining harmful silences, often prioritising familial reputation or communal image over the safety of vulnerable people (Wilson, 2006). Meaningful change, therefore, necessitates not only active responsibility from men but also a collective reckoning across the community, including among women, to confront the patriarchal norms and behaviours that have enabled cycles of abuse.

Conclusion

The colonial legacy of dehumanisation and the ongoing marginalisation and scapegoating of Muslims in mainstream media are undeniable and must continue to be challenged. However, these structural realities cannot be used as justification for reproducing harm within Pakistani communities. To internalise the narratives of the colonial oppressor, to use them as shields against accountability, is to perpetuate cycles of violence, silence, and complicity. A cultural reckoning is not an act of betrayal; it is an act of collective care. It is a necessary step toward justice, healing, and the restoration of moral integrity. True honour is not preserved through silence or the defence of those who exploit their power and status; it is preserved by protecting the vulnerable, amplifying the voices of survivors, and dismantling the cultural and systemic conditions that allow CSA to persist (Gill, 2010).

Although this article is primarily theoretical, it highlights the urgent need for empirical research that can capture the hidden realities of CSA within South Asian communities. Existing data are often incomplete, inconsistently recorded, or biased, while cultural and systemic barriers further inhibit disclosure (Gill & Harrison, 2018; Karsna & Bromley, 2024; Thiara & Roy, 2020). Research must therefore employ decolonised, culturally sensitive methodologies, supported by community education and therapeutic interventions, to build trust and enable ethical engagement with survivors. Such groundwork is essential for producing reliable evidence, amplifying survivor voices, informing effective interventions, and supporting transformative, community-led action that disrupts silence, safeguards the vulnerable, and fosters accountability.

British Pakistani communities now stand at a critical juncture. The silence that once functioned as a protective mechanism against external discrimination has increasingly evolved into a means of enabling internal harm. The responsibility to break that silence now rests within the communities themselves. A genuine commitment to challenging Islamophobia, structural racism, and social injustice cannot be sustained without parallel efforts to confront harmful dynamics within. The time for deflection and denial has long passed. Transformative collective action, anchored in truth, accountability, compassion, morality, and ethical clarity, is now urgently required.

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