

MUSLIM WOMEN'S NETWORK UK

# Unheard Voices

The Sexual Exploitation of  
Asian Girls and Young Women

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## BARRIERS TO DISCLOSING AND REPORTING

### 7.1 Overview

A consistent feature in the case studies was that the victims were not willing to report their abusers even after they had escaped from the groups exploiting and abusing them. The most prevalent reasons included blackmail, fear, emotional attachment and dependency on drugs and alcohol. Others did not recognise themselves as victims or were pressurised into returning to the group because they were isolated or considered the abusers as friends. In some cases the reasons for not disclosing were unclear. However, it was often a combination of these reasons that prevented the victims from disclosing, asking for help or reporting to the police. One police officer made the following comment:

*"Officers from the Public Protection Unit have investigated several reports over time whereby Asian girls are groomed, sexually assaulted and at times raped by Asian males. What was most concerning was the fact that the victims would often not report the matter or assist with any police investigation".*

Several barriers that prevented victims from seeking help and reporting their abusers were noted. These are explained below.

### 7.2 Blackmail Involving Shame and Honour

As sex before marriage is regarded as sinful in Asian culture and Muslim faith, girls did not want their families to find out that they were engaging in sexual activity. They feared repercussions linked to honour-based violence and forced marriage. The offenders often exploited this fear. One police force provide the following comment:

*"Cases investigated include the offender taking indecent photographs of the victim whilst they were in a relationship. If the victim wanted to end the relationship or refused to give the offender what he wanted, he would threaten the release of those photographs to her family and friends. One case involved the offender sending out over 40 photographs to the victim's friends and family on Facebook."*

Blackmail and threats of circulating images and recordings featured in a few cases in our study:

- 12 year old Farhah's boyfriend took her to a flat where he raped her, took photographs and threatened to tell her family unless she did as she was told (case study 1);
- 15 year old Saima was raped in a local park, her ordeal was filmed (case study 2);
- 13 year old Rehana's boyfriend took photographs of her and blackmailed her (case study 3);
- 12 year old Parveen was blackmailed with filmed recordings – she felt that she had no option but to comply (case study 22);
- 17-year-old Sajida was blackmailed by a man who befriended her on Facebook – she had sent him sexually explicit photographs as she considered him as her boyfriend (case study 27);
- 14 year old Karima's boyfriend filmed himself raping her and used this to blackmail her (case study 30);
- Ghazala was blackmailed by her brother-in-law who threatened to show recordings to her family in the UK and in Pakistan (case study 32).

These examples show that this technique has been used to coerce girls into having sex with numerous men. Many girls believed they were having a relationship with their older boyfriends, who would then blackmail them with the images and threaten to expose their relationship unless they agreed to have sex with other friends and associates. In Saima's case she did not want anyone to know she had been gang raped. Although other case study informants do not mention that the girls were being blackmailed, many strongly suspected that blackmail played a role in preventing the girls from reporting their experience to police.