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Angela's Story of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Author Details:

Dr Chinyere Elsie Ajayi

School of Social Work, Care and Community

Faculty of Health and Wellbeing

University of Central Lancashire,

Preston, PR1 2HE

United Kingdom

Correspondence to be sent to: Dr Chinyere Elsie Ajayi, School of Social Work, Care and Community, Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, University of Central Lancashire, PR1 2HE

E-mail: CAjayi@uclan.ac.uk and elsiechi@yahoo.com

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Abstract:

The aim of this article was to gain an in-depth understanding of one woman's experiences of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). The analysis presented in this article is grounded in the voice-centred relational or the listening guide (LG) method of narrative analysis developed by Gilligan and colleagues. The LG is an analytical framework that allows for the systematic consideration of the many voices embedded in a person's story. Analysis illuminate, 1) how the religious practice of "spiritual baths" served as a risk factor for the CSA Angela experienced and 2) how the patriarchal family structure and gendered expectations provided the contexts for the perpetration of CSA and the silencing of her voice. Angela speaks of her on-going struggles with her experiences of CSA, a voice which represents her voice of psychological distress. Nonetheless, her coping strategies are understood through her voice of resilience speaking of embracing her Christian faith and the role of motherhood in her journey to resilience. Findings highlight the need for effective safeguarding policies within religious settings, and for social workers to apply cultural sensitivity when working with or planning intervention for Nigerian children who experience CSA.

Teaser text:

This article presents a Listening Guide analysis of one woman's story of child sexual abuse (CSA). Analysis show how her experiences of CSA were tied to normative cultural norms and a religious practice rooted in patriarchy which in turn provided grounds for the silencing of her voice as a child.

Keywords: Black minority ethnic; child sexual abuse; culture and religion; the Listening Guide

Introduction:

This article presents an in-depth analysis of one woman's story of experiencing childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Previous research exploring children's experiences of sexual abuse have observed that age, gender, parental separation, living with a stepfather, disability, skewed understanding regarding male entitlement, and basic deprivation are vulnerability factors associated with the perpetration of CSA (Nlewem and Amodu, 2017; Ogunjimi *et al.*, 2021; Radford *et al.*, 2015). There is also much evidence in the literature to suggest that CSA is a major contributing factor to both immediate and long-term physical and poor mental health problems for victims both in childhood and adulthood (Fuller-Thomson *et al.*, 2020; Werbeloff *et al.*, 2021). Studies concerned with victims coping strategies have highlighted important individual factors that enabled victims cope with the impacts of CSA. These included embracing their faith (Collins *et al.*, 2014), social support and having a sense of hope (Fuller-Thomson *et al.*, 2020; Radford *et al.*, 2015), and engaging in psychological intervention programs (Fransman *et al.*, 2021).

As several research have pointed out, children do not always disclose their experience of CSA until adulthood. For example, of the 53.1% of 968 women who had experienced CSA in Ferragut *et al.*'s (2021) study, only half told someone about the experience. Evidence points to the multiplicity and complexity of factors that converge to pose a barrier to children's ability to disclose their experiences of sexual abuse. Based on a sample of 67 (16 male and 51 female) CSA adult survivors, Collin-Vézinaa *et al.* (2015) found that internalised factors like self-blame and the use of silence as a coping mechanism limited the victim's ability to disclose abuse. The authors also report that the need to protect others or prevent escalation of violence in the home posed a barrier to sexual abuse disclosures. Others found that children who live with the perpetrator are less likely to disclose the abuse (Vertamatti *et al.*, 2019). This is even further compounded for children from ethnic minority groups where sexual matters are

shrouded with secrecy (Ogunjimi *et al.*, 2021). Thus, children who are sexually abused may lack the linguistic and/or cognitive abilities to understand what is going on or how to disclose the abuse. In addition, research on CSA within ethnic communities clearly indicates the priority given to protecting the family from the shame and stigma associated with disclosing CSA (Nguyen *et al.*, 2021). Although limited by the use of one woman's story, this article impresses on researchers the need to extend research to include factors that may support the perpetration of CSA in religious settings. This line of inquiry is important as it is believed that children from ethnic minority communities can suffer abuse linked to faith and beliefs (Ogunjimi *et al.*, 2021), and very little is known about how CSA is perpetrated in religious settings (Keenan, 2012). Furthermore, this article speaks to the influence of patriarchal family structure in the perpetration of CSA and calls for cultural sensitivity when working with ethnic minority families when CSA is suspected.

Methods:

The case study presented here is one of 12 in-depth narrative interviews (Clandinin and Caine, 2008) conducted for a study examining if, and how, cultural beliefs, norms and practices might contribute to sexual violence against Nigerian women in England. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the author's institution. A detailed discussion of the method employed in the study is reported elsewhere (Ajayi *et al.*, 2021). This current study uses a case study approach to examine one woman's experiences of CSA. Yin (2009) defines a case study as 'a strategy used to explore a phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context' (p.19). Although there are criticisms levied against case study research with regards to generalisation, however, I agree with Flyvbjerg's (2006) assertion that 'the case study provides multiple wealth of details needed to study real-life situations' (p.392). Indeed, its uniqueness in securing contextual knowledge and holistic perspectives makes it relevant for studying a complex phenomenon like CSA. In addition, it offers important support for an analytical approach like

the listening guide (LG) which permits women's stories to be heard in their own terms (Gilligan *et al.*, 2003).

Analytical Framework:

The LG focuses on 'voice as a channel of connection, a pathway that brings the inner psychic world and feelings and thoughts into the open air of relationship where it can be heard by oneself and by other people' (Brown and Gilligan, 1993, p.14). Within the psychic life, women's voices are said to be polyphonic and complex, therefore, 'the LG provides a way of systematically attending to the many voices embedded in a person's expressed experience' (Gilligan *et al.*, 2003, p.30). It also allows for the unravelling of "silenced voices", especially those silenced as a result of CSA or other forms of gender-based violence (Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah, 2016). Gilligan and Eddy (2017) argue that this framework enables the researcher to go deeper to examine what is spoken, unspoken and for any contradictions in the woman's narrative. Also, as would be seen in the analysis presented in this article, the LG opened up analytic possibilities for the consideration of how cultural norms and relationships of power further silenced Angela's voice (Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah, 2016).

Analysis:

The audio recorded interview was listened to three times: first, for familiarisation with the data, second, for verbatim transcription of data and third, to fill in gaps missed by the first transcription. Brown and Gilligan (1992, 1993) propose four readings of the transcripts called "listenings". Each "listening" focuses on a different aspect of the participants' voices. In this study, the foci of the four "listenings" were: overall geography or plot of the story; self ('I Poems'); contrapuntal voices, and power relations. The four approaches to "listenings" are described below.

The LG Phases:

In this first phase, I read the transcript several times to establish an understanding of ‘what is happening, to follow the plot, the unfolding of events. I ‘listened’ for the ‘who, what, when, where and why’ of the experiences’. I attended to the use of reoccurring words or metaphors, themes, and contradictions within the text (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, p.27). In the second phase I read the transcript to listen for the voice of “I”, speaking about self by following and underlying every first-person pronoun and words that provide context. After identifying the voice of “self”, I then cut and pasted all the voices of “self” traced from the narrative and listed them in the order of appearance, with each pronoun starting a new line in order to construct the “I Poem” (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). In this listening for self, I identified how Angela describes herself and her feelings.

The third listening, known as, ‘listening for contrapuntal voices’ (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017, p. 79) focused on relationships and social networks that Angela was affiliated to. This allowed me to listen to multiple facets of her story being told and to unpack several layers of expressed experience (Forrest *et al.*, 2016). This “listening” included listening for the voice of self-silencing as a result of ‘debilitating cultural norms’ (Brown and Gilligan, 1993, p. 17), the voice of psychological distress characterised by uncertainty and the voice of resilience, indicative of help-seeking, coping strategy and support. In the fourth phase, I read the transcripts to listen for power relations and where dominant ideologies and structural factors constitute the voice of silence and oppression. I attended to the dialogical organisation of discourse within narratives. For example, I compared the ways in which Angela positioned the self (“I”) in relation to others (“They”) and considered it to indicate power relations (Harré and Van Langehove, 1999). A limitation of the LG is that the systematic analysis and structuring of data based on the four “listeenings” can lead to the fragmentation of the narrative. To address this concern, the transcript was first analysed using the four “listeenings”, then the transcript

was re-read before combining “voices” to ensure that the product of analysis aligns with the plot of the story and the dynamic way the story was told.

Angela’s narrative:

Angela is in her late twenties. She is a single mother and pregnant with her second child at the time of interview. As a British born black woman of Nigerian heritage, raised in England, Angela speaks at an intersection of age, class, race, and gender. Angela’s narrative is lengthy, she tells a story of CSA perpetrated by two men, firstly, a pastor and secondly, her stepfather. She starts by constructing her narrative around the first experience of CSA. She then swiftly moves onto describing her second experience of CSA perpetrated by her stepfather. Here, she describes her experience of a troubled childhood and her mother’s response to the sexual abuse. Angela then describes the impact of her experiences of CSA. In addition, she speaks of a brief period of homelessness and subsequent help-seeking. The interview then ended with questions centred on how Angela sought help and her coping strategies. In what follows, an LG analysis of Angela’s narrative is presented under the following headings: first experience of CSA; second experience of CSA; impact of CSA, help-seeking and coping strategies.

First experience of CSA

This part comes immediately after being prompted with the statement: “is there anything about what happened to you that you would like to share?”. Angela responded:

Well it all started when I was about... I think 8 years old, and my mum had a boyfriend at the time, and he used to come over and stay at the house quite a lot. In fact, to be honest with you he was actually a pastor, and he had his church. It didn’t start straight away, I think he wanted to build my trust first, he used to play with me a lot but then it started when he used to give me spiritual baths. My mum wasn’t there in the room she trusted him and then that is when he will start to

molest me. Em... you know, I was just a child, so I didn't really know what was going on. I was just used to it. It wasn't until I was about 12, I think when my mum started to get onto it that something was going on.

An “I Poem” constructed for this account clearly shows that Angela positioned herself as ‘a vulnerable child’ in relation to this experience of CSA as seen below.

I
I was about...
I think, 8 years old
I was just a child
I didn't really know
I was just used to it
I was about 12

Angela first identifies “self” as a vulnerable child who was constrained by her age. Indeed, this voice points to the fact that Angela did not make sense of her experiences of CSA or have the vocabulary to describe the abuse because of her age. This is even more so for ethnic minority children where the culture of silence is encouraged by taboos associated with speaking out about sexual issues (Bernard, 2001). Therefore, it is possible that Angela’s age and the culture in which she was socialized influenced her decision to adopt self-silencing as her coping strategy (Collin-Vézina *et al.*, 2015). Returning to the above account on Angela’s first experience of CSA, the statement, “*in fact to be honest with you he was actually a pastor*” could indicate Angela’s first voice of power relations. It is known that religious leaders hold a certain degree of power and authority within religious communities (Adedeji, 2012). It is possible that the high degree of power and authority held by the pastor by reason of his religious title made it possible for him to introduce religious practices in the church, “*then it started when he used to give me spiritual baths*”. The question of religious practices (*spiritual baths*)

within white garment churches require further exploration. It is argued that religion is fundamental in the lives of Nigerians, and that most Nigerians would consider themselves religious (Olajuba, 2008). Adedeji (2012) also notes that there is no religion without cultural elements and there is no culture without religious influence. Therefore, practices that are customary and indigenous are incorporated into religious interpretations and are practiced in some religious settings to foster inclusivity (Olajuba, 2008).

Angela speaks of: “*spiritual baths*” as a way that the pastor gained access to her. Adogame (2009) notes that ritual practices occupy a central place in white garment churches as it is one of the ways members express, explore, and negotiate their religious identities. The context within which Angela’s “*spiritual baths*” were performed is not explicitly stated in her narrative, however, Adogame (2009) reveals that in white garment churches, ritual practices such as anointment, sanctification, prayer, healing and the invocation of God rituals are performed for reasons of cleansing, purification, healing and before taking up positions within the church. Based on this premise, Angela’s mother trusted the pastor to perform the ritual of “*spiritual bath*” on Angela, as she stated: “*My mum wasn’t there in the room she trusted him and everything*”. After describing the nature of the sexual abuse, Angela then shifted her narrative to describing the complexities involved in disclosing the abuse to her mother. It seems that the unequal power relations that sometimes exist within religious settings not only influenced Angela’s experience of CSA but posed a barrier to her disclosure and help-seeking. According to Angela, her mother asked if something was going on, but she denied it for the following reason: “*I guess I was scared, ...I thought I would get into trouble maybe... I was afraid that my mum would shout at me instead of him, like I was to blame or something*”. This account shows how tensions can arise when age and gender intersect with patriarchy and religion. Therefore, Angela assumed a subordinate position in this relational landscape by reason of her age and gender and the superior position of the pastor. Growing up within these

cultural and religious contexts invariably added to the complexity of Angela's experience of CSA. Therefore, non-disclosure became a coping strategy and a response to the powerlessness that she felt at that time.

The power and authority the pastor enjoyed also afforded him access to other children in the church. McAlinden (2006) termed this 'institutional grooming' (p.352). Angela stated: *"I wasn't the only one, he was doing it to his cousin's daughters, and he was also doing it to his wife's daughters as well"*. This supports current literature that argues against the concept of stranger/danger in child sexual abuse discourses (e.g., Ferragut *et al.*, 2021; Vertamatti *et al.*, 2019). Angela finally disclosed the abuse to her mother when other girls started to speak up about the abuse. *"Em, when I told my mum, she was really really angry and upset you know, and I think the police got involved and he was registered on the paedophile list"*. Angela then ended this part of her narrative by providing an evaluation of the perpetrator as she stated:

he was a horrible... he was a nice man, I won't say he was a horrible... he was a nice man... but what he did was wrong... he was buying me things, he would give me money, he would play with me and I would laugh so much...

This extract demonstrates a number of conflicts in operation. First, Angela's adult self which understands 'good and bad' immediately stated, *"he was a horrible..."*, but then, she pauses, which may indicate confusion and/or a dialogue between two different voices. In looking back, she positions herself as a child who enjoyed the gifts and fun, therefore, she revises her comment by deciding to see the abuse as bad, but not the abuser. This type of contradiction and ambivalence is similar to the feelings expressed by the children in Katz's (2013) study. The study found that the emotions and thoughts of the children toward the perpetrator of sexual abuse included feelings of love, desire, curiosity, as well as feelings of fear, anger and considering the abusers as superheroes who can see and do anything to them.

Second experience of CSA

Angela continues without prompts with the following statement:

and then my mum had another partner, and he is still my stepdad at the moment. So, he came into our lives when I was, I think 15. He... him and my mum had a baby, he was living in (city), at the time. It didn't start then until we moved to (city).

Angela provides an orientation to time, place and the characters involved, then interrupts this by describing her experience of a troubled childhood. She stated: “*em... I did have a very troubled childhood to be honest*”. This theme of troubled childhood was also observed at different points in her narrative, where she additionally used the following phrases: “*... it was really hard growing up... it was really really tough... and I had a lot of trouble growing up... so much problems, so much problems...*”. Angela employed running away as a coping strategy as she stated: “*I was running away a lot from home because I didn't want to have anything to do with him to be honest*”. Angela returns to the narrative of her second experience of CSA.

So anyway, going back to my stepdad, when we moved to (city), my room was upstairs, because I had pins in my leg so, I couldn't climb up the stairs and stuff, so they put me down stairs and then, em, I can't really remember when it started, but him and my mum was having issues and things like that, so he used to sleep downstairs, so then, over night-time he would come into my room and he would just feel me up and I am like, what is this man doing? I remember one time, he had condoms in his hands, my mum was sleeping upstairs he was like, you don't need to tell your mum, she doesn't need to know. I was like... are you crazy? You are my stepdad, really? Am your daughter, how can you be looking at me in a sexual way. I don't know what it is about me, I guess am just a bit too soft really. I just ignored

*it and left it and thought he was just sleep walking, or it would just kind of subside,
so I just left him.*

This account draws attention to how Angela's stepfather utilised a situational opportunity to perpetrate CSA. This assertion is supported by Finkelhor's (1984) precondition model. This model highlights the role of situational and contextual variables in the perpetration of sexual abuse against children. Drawing on this model, it could be seen that, in addition to the motivation to abuse, and overcoming the internal inhibitors especially around incest as Angela pointed out "*You are my stepdad... Am your daughter, how can you be looking at me in a sexual way...*", the fact that Angela slept downstairs as a result of having pins in her leg presented her stepfather with the opportunity to perpetrate the abuse. A construction of an "I Poem" for the account above helps us to understand how Angela responded to the abuse by her stepfather.

I remember one time

I was like... are you crazy?

I don't know

I guess am a bit

I just ignored it

I just left him

This "I Poem" resembles a dynamic described by Gilligan (1990) in which adolescent girls transitions from political resisters to psychological resisters. Gilligan (1990) states that political resistance is 'an insistence on knowing what one knows and willingness to be outspoken about it', whereas psychological resistance is 'a reluctance to know what one knows and a fear that such knowledge, if spoken, will endanger relationships and threaten survival' (p. 502). A close reading of the "I Poem" indicates that Angela started to develop agency as seen in the line: "*I was like... are you crazy? Am your daughter*". She seemed outspoken and resistant to the abuse. However, in the second half of the "I Poem" she expressed a state of confusion: "*I don't know*". It could be that her need for relationship meant that she could not speak openly about

what she knows to be true. Consequently, she transitioned into a psychological resister: “*I just ignored it... I just left him*”. The “I Poem” also points to Angela’s voice of self-silencing to the abuse she was experiencing. Here, Angela can be heard expressing denial as a coping strategy. She also capitalised on being optimistic that the abuse would eventually stop.

This part continues with a change of character. Angela positioned herself as a child in need of protection from her mother. Angela stated: “*My mum had ideas, but she wasn’t 100% sure*”. This theme continues across her narrative with phrases like: “*... she was just thinking about her own needs at the time, she wasn’t thinking about my own... and my mum just wasn’t the mum that I wanted her to be at the time*”. Although this voice does not directly allocate blame to her mother for her experiences of CSA, however, it seems to suggest that Angela deemed her mother’s response to the abuse as inadequate and selfish. Angela then began to question if the reason for her mother’s inadequate intervention was because of her own behavioural response as seen below.

*But..., I don’t know if it is the fact that I wasn’t willing to put up a fight at the time.
I guess if I did put up a fight at the time, maybe she would have done more because
she used to say to me, you know we will put a lock on your door.*

Angela’s mother’s response of “*putting a lock*” in this extract points to beliefs that are closely linked with rape myths which on its own encourages self-silencing amongst women in general (Ojo, 2013). This myth places the responsibility on women, in this case a child to safeguard themselves from sexual violence while exonerating the perpetrator of the abuse. Angela continues her narrative with another description of sexual abuse perpetrated by her stepfather.

*It wasn’t until she (mother) travelled to (country) for about 3 weeks, and it was just
me. What he (stepdad) was doing... I was really ill, I had tonsillitis, so he used to
crush anti-depressants and he used to put them in my hot chocolate, and I didn’t*

think anything because I used to drink it, didn't I? So, when he used to do that, I would forget to lock my door. I remember the day when it happened, and I was asleep, and he got on top of me.

This account presents another way Angela's stepfather not only used situational opportunity of her mother being away but devised an elaborate plan to perpetrate sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1984). The following is the "I Poem" constructed for the account above:

*I was really ill
I had tonsillitis
I didn't think anything
I used to drink it, didn't I?
I would forget to lock my door
I was asleep*

This "I Poem" brings to bare Angela's vulnerable "self", taken advantage of by her stepfather. Also, the voice of a child who was open to genuine and trusting relationship with her stepfather could be heard as she recounted the sexual abuse. Angela continues by describing her mother's response to the sexual abuse when she returned after three weeks of being away. She stated:

...so it wasn't until my mum came back... wait till you hear this, when she came back, I told her what had been going on she told me to take a pregnancy test and she said to me that if am pregnant am keeping that child, yeah, yeah and I was like no am not, are you crazy? ...but good thing was, I wasn't pregnant.

Although, it is argued that women from diverse backgrounds may differ in the way they respond to the sexual abuse perpetrated on their children (Bernard, 2001), a further examination of Angela's narrative shows that no responsibility was allocated to the perpetrator of the abuse, her stepfather, which may suggest Angela's mother as a collusive mother in Angela's

experiences of CSA (Bernard, 2001). It is also very likely that Angela's mother was grappling with the fear of the social stigmatisation associated with single parenthood in black communities (Ajayi *et al.*, 2021), thus she felt the need to protect her husband as Angela further states: “....it was more of my mum putting that on me because, you know she didn't want people knowing what was going on, she didn't want people looking at him differently”. Bernard (2001) also argues that in a traditional African family, the discovery of CSA may provoke divided loyalty for the mothers and a need to protect the image of the family. Arguably, these factors not only silenced Angela, but posed a barrier to effective response from her mother.

Impact of CSA, help-seeking and coping strategies

Angela continues by reflecting on her troubled childhood. The discourse of troubled childhood was reflected in her voice of psychological distress as she states: “*I was coping with so many things, I didn't know who I was. I was trying to find out who I was*”. Angela then shifted her narrative by reflecting on leaving home as a result of the many problems at home, “*she kicked me out when I was 17 as well... so much problems, so much problems*”. The implication of being kicked out of home was homelessness, however, she later sought help from her friend as she stated: “*I had nowhere to go. I was thinking I don't wanna call anyone, things like that, then I went to stay with my friend*”. This is very much similar to the help-seeking pattern reported in Vertamatti *et al.* (2019) in which 45% of the children who experienced abuse sought housing support from relatives or friends first, before seeking or accessing support from formal sources. Angela continues: “*So, from there, I had to go to (organisation), I told them what has been going on and I need help finding somewhere to live and within 4 or 5 days, I found somewhere else to live*”. Seeking help and accessing housing support marked a turning point and a shift in power relations for Angela. Angela's voice of resilience could be heard hereafter and is constructed around seeking counselling. However, her narrative of resilience also draws

attention to how cultural insensitivity could hamper effective response for black women like Angela when seeking formal support.

...and you know and even when I did go to seek counselling it was hard. I think I was 26 at the time or maybe, I went to seek counselling and it didn't help, it just made matters worse to be honest... because then they were saying obviously it is my step dad, he is still living at home, you know, my little brothers are at home and things like that so, they, she kind of like took that it is her duty of care to inform social services and social services getting involved...

Although Angela did not state how social work intervention “*made matters worse*” or how the case progressed, the above extract provide insights that could support social work intervention for ethnic minority children affected by CSA. It is possible that intervention that is based solely on a disclosure of CSA and draws upon Eurocentric views may be unhelpful. Instead, practitioners need to adopt an individualised approach to intervention, paying particular attention to those values considered pertinent to ethnic minority families when intervening in cases of intrafamilial CSA, albeit balancing it with concerns that other children in the home may also be abused. Angela also stated: “*I am the oldest girl, I am the only girl, and there was a lot of pressure on me. I’ve got a lot of people looking up to me, I’ve got my cousins and everything, you know*”. So, apart from protecting the family’s image (Nguyen *et al.*, 2021) as seen in the above extract, it appears that if intervention fails to take account of the dynamics that exist in ethnic minority families, such intervention may interact with pre-existing vulnerability factors such as age, gender and gendered expectations to create yet another form of oppression or disempowerment. Therefore, an anti-oppressive practice would mean keeping the interrelation of age, gender, and gendered expectations firmly in sight during assessment. This is because factors relating to family structure and dynamics may interplay for ethnic minority women and children which may lead to the feeling of conflicting loyalty. This form

of family dynamic described here is indeed relevant in our understanding of why there could be delay in disclosure until adulthood or even non-disclosure for children affected by sexual abuse. The way Angela interacted with her family structure not only draws our attention to the importance placed on inter-familial relationships within the Nigerian family, but how this type of relationship may heighten gendered expectations and silencing. It is also clear that Angela's age and gender simultaneously worked in ways that gave her no choice but to be self-sacrificing as she continues: *"I was still protecting him, and I was protecting him for a long time. Em... I was protecting him for my family, I was protecting him for my brothers, you know"*.

This part comprises of Angela's responses to questions around support and coping strategies after the main narration. However, it also demonstrates the pain she feels and her on-going struggles with her experiences of CSA. When asked, "so what helped you?" Angela's responded: *"the main help for me to be honest, is because I decided to give my life to Christ, ...I decided to completely throw myself into church and that was what kind of kept a lot of demons away"*. Angela used two metaphors in describing her coping strategies *"throw myself into church... kept a lot of demons away"*. These metaphors align with Bernard's (2016) assertion that women, especially ethnic minority women generally make use of religious associations to meet psychological and emotional needs. However, Collins *et al.* (2014) note that 'religion could become an additional obstacle to recovery when it exacerbates the feelings of internalized shame and worthlessness that stem from the trauma of CSA' (p. 522). This is similar to Angela's experiences as she continues:

...but then at times when things didn't go exactly how I planned them, they will all come rushing back, all those feelings of unworthiness, feelings of regret (in tears), they all come back every time I like get to a halt and I just couldn't get past it (voice shaking and in tears) to be honest with you, am still dealing with it, I actually am.

In this extract, she used the following metaphors to speak of her on-going struggles with the impact of CSA: *“they will all come rushing back ... I like get to a halt ... I just couldn’t get past it”*. These metaphors are also a clear indication of the powerlessness Angela feels in herself in relation to the impact of the abuse, thus, they are metaphors for Angela’s voice of psychological distress. On the other hand, Angela’s voice of resilience was heard when she identified her son as an important factor that has strengthened her ability to cope.

...and really and truly, having (child), he was my saving grace because you know, I’ve got a son that depends on me and my son is so beautiful, and he adores me, and he loves me (breathing heavily and in tears) for everything. ...So, I think he as well helped to heal me too.

Conclusions and implications for social work practice:

The key aim of this article was to gain an in-depth understanding of one woman’s experiences of CSA using the voice-centred relational or the listening guide (LG) method of narrative analysis (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, 1993). Using this analytic framework allowed for the centring of Angela voices, and to go deeper to examine the distinctive ways she speaks of herself and others, and how she speaks of her experiences within different relationships, including relationships of power. The “I poems” shows how Angela speaks of her experiences of CSA in adulthood when ‘self’ is identified as a vulnerable child unprotected by a parent. The way Angela speaks of her first experience of CSA supports Terry and Ackerman’s (2008) argument that much of the CSA perpetrated in religious settings has a situational component which allow adults unsupervised access to children. This is evidenced in this case study in which the pastor introduced the practice of *“spiritual baths”* conducted in isolation to gain access to children for the purpose of sexually abusing them. As Böhm *et al.* (2014) point out, perpetrators can be active agents in creating opportunities to perpetrate sexual abuse. Since

religious leaders enjoy authority, trust, discretion and lack of supervision, spiritual themes may be introduced with the intention of spiritually manipulating the congregation or as a tool to facilitate the perpetration of sexual abuse on children (Vieth, 2012). In Angela's case, the ritual practice of "*spiritual baths*" provided the conditions for the perpetration of CSA. Although this finding cannot be generalised, it however draws some attention to the need for more research studies focusing on CSA in religious settings. Such research will play a significant role in equipping policy makers in developing and implementing effective safeguarding policies that could deter those who pose a risk to children from gaining access to them in religious settings.

Previous studies (e.g., Nlewem and Amodu, 2017; Ogunjimi *et al.*, 2021; Radford *et al.*, 2015) have shown that age, gender, parental separation, living with a stepfather, disability, skewed understanding regarding male entitlement and basic deprivation are risk factors that support the perpetration of CSA. In addition to her age, gender and living with a stepfather, patriarchal family structure provided the context for Angela's experiences of CSA and the silencing of her voice. The notion of male superiority was reflected in the way her stepfather was exonerated from the abuse, which in turn, influenced Angela's mother's adoption of rape myth in responding to her second experience of CSA. This impresses on professionals working with ethnic minority children and families the need to understand that compared to majority women and children, ethnic minority women and children are more likely to experience abuse as an extension of the unequal power relations found in hierarchical family structures (Reavey *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, whilst social work intervention is paramount, such interventions need to be individualised and underpinned by a critical consideration of the family dynamics, understanding that CSA might be merely the manifestation of deeper issues of oppression and subordination within such families. Social workers also need to think about the multi-layered and routinised forms of domination that converge in such families which may limit some mother's ability to effectively safeguard their children from CSA. It is recommended that

providing training around diverse cultural issues that might impact on intervention would help address this challenge.

Angela experienced both past and present impacts of CSA, however, she speaks of embracing her Christian faith and the role motherhood played in her journey to resilience. This supports Chantler's (2005) assertion that assessments should be conducted on an individual basis, drawing from the woman's core values and incorporating them into intervention strategies. This would invariably prevent social workers from engaging in a tick box exercise, whilst ensuring that intervention is robust and person-centred.

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