



Growing-up with a Parent with Serious Mental Illness (SMI): Experiences of Indian Adults in the UK

(Ethics approval reference: ETH2324-0805)

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MRes in Clinical Research 2023-24

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INTRODUCTION

Mental illness affects over 1 in 5 UK adults. Children of parents with serious mental illness (SMI) face long-term emotional and social challenges that persist into adulthood. For Indian communities in the UK, cultural stigma intensifies these burdens, creating additional barriers to support and recovery. Despite these intersecting challenges, there is limited UK-based research exploring the experiences of adult children from Indian families affected by parental SMI and thus this research study addresses this critical research gap.

AIM & OBJECTIVES

Aim: To explore the lived experiences of Indian adults living in the UK who grew up with a parent affected by serious mental illness (SMI).

Objectives:

- Examine the impact of parental SMI on childhood and adult life.
- Analyse the role of family dynamics and support systems.
- Explore coping strategies and sources of resilience.

METHODOLOGY

- **Study Design:** Qualitative study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
- **Data Collection:** Semi-structured interviews (50-60 mins), conducted via MS Teams
- **Analysis:** Transcripts coded and analyzed thematically using NVivo
- **Sample:** 3-6 participants (IPA guidelines)
- **Recruitment:** Social media, NGOs, professional networks, snowball sampling

RESULTS

Participant Demographics (N=3)

Age & Gender	Birth Place	Education	Parent with SMI
40, Female	UK	Postgraduate	Mother (Paranoid Schizophrenia)
38, Male	India	Graduate	Mother (Schizophrenia)
45, Male	UK	Graduate	Mother (Schizophrenia & Psychosis)

Five core themes emerged from IPA analysis, revealing how parental SMI created lasting impacts from childhood through adulthood. Participants developed diverse coping strategies while navigating cultural stigma and complex support systems. All participants demonstrated resilience despite ongoing challenges

RESEARCHER'S REFLEXIVITY

My own experience helped me connect with participants but also meant I had to be careful about bias. I kept journals, had regular supervision, and stayed self-aware to ensure the research was fair.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings highlight the need for family-centred support, early intervention with age-appropriate psychoeducation, and recognition of the long-term impact on adult children. Promoting coping skills, resilience, and peer support opportunities can further strengthen emotional well-being and iterates the value of human connection.

THEMES OUT OF PARTICIPANT'S VOICES:

Disrupted Childhood

"And then that would make me feel quite and just on edge, I think because you didn't know what mood she would be in or how to manage that and then it made things quite difficult."

Early recognition of parental illness led to emotional confusion and premature caregiving responsibilities, including financial and household management duties

Navigating Adulthood

"When you're younger... I describe it like a motherhood wound. When your mom isn't available for whatever reason, you're looking for validation approval elsewhere."

Ongoing caregiving responsibilities shaped identity and career choices, while participants developed conscious parenting approaches

Stigma

"I have to put a mask on; I have to act normal, but I wasn't normal at home. The situation wasn't normal"

Community judgment and gossip led participants to create public personas masking their home situations along with cultural attitudes

Support Systems

"The men's groups... let me talk about my experiences without trying to fix them. It was the witnessing of my experiences"

The well parent and friends provided crucial emotional support, while extended family offered mixed responses of both support and stigma.