

Resilience, Risk and Protective Factors for British-Indian Children of Divorce

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ABSTRACT This paper considers resilience as a dynamic concept by looking at risk and protective factors for children of divorce in British-Indian Hindu and Sikh families using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model for human development. The paper draws from a qualitative study which is based on data collected on experiences of twenty-one British-Indian Adult Children of Divorce to illustrate risk and protective factors within cultural ideology, community and macro contexts. The paper concludes that resilience in individuals and communities needs to be considered as a process that is influenced by the interaction of the ecological systems. Risk and protective factors cannot be categorically identified and dynamic processes need to be acknowledged within particular contexts. This is particularly important for practitioners working with minority ethnic children and families towards understanding diversity of experiences and perspectives within minority cultures.

Divorce and its impact on families and children have been considerably investigated in the last four decades in western contexts. Research investigations (cf Ayoub et al. 1999) have highlighted the wide ranging impact of divorce and its consequences that affect almost all members of the divorcing family as well as friends and relatives. The impact of divorce on children has also attracted much research attention and has led to a substantial body of research and literature on the subject. Earlier studies (e.g. Wallerstein et al. 2000; Amato and Booth 1996; Feng et al. 1999) highlighted that children of divorce seem to have lesser social skills, lower education and competencies, and exhibit more behavioural problems. Impact of divorce was also found to be continuous, presenting implications for children even in their adulthood. Adult children of divorce seemed to have lower education, lower incomes, lower psychological scores, more prone to alcohol abuse and more likely to divorce themselves (cf Amato and Sobolewski 2001; Feng et al. 1999). Research perspectives however show a shift in the 1990's increasingly turning their focus to resilience and coping. Many researchers (Neale and Flowerdew 2003; Kelly 2003; Wyman et al. 1999) commented that though more risk factors seem to be present for children of divorce, most children are resilient and cope with divorce.

Resilience Within the Ecological Context

Impact of divorce on children is mitigated by

a number of social, familial and cultural factors, within their ecological contexts (Das 2009). This 'ecological contexts' is derived from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of the human ecosystem and refers to everything outside of the organism and implicates the social world within which humans are embedded. The model systematically identifies different levels of the environment or ecology with which humans interact directly and indirectly. The ecological context is conceived as a set of nested systems that are interconnected and include the micro system (where humans directly interact with objects and persons); meso and exo systems (the relationships, direct and indirect, that humans have with their micro and macro systems that impact upon them or their environments); and the macro system (overarching ideologies, organisations of social institutions). These systems thus form the socio-cultural context or ecologies of human development. Garbarino et al. (1982) has previously discussed the various risks and opportunities present in the micro, meso, exo and macro system that affect children's development. This paper aims to discuss some of the risks and protective factors present in the specific cultural context, community context and macro context for British-Indian children of divorce in the UK.

Resilience refers to a dynamic process of positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luthar et al. 2000). Resiliency theories also focus on various factors, within the environment that serve risk or protective factors.

This paper considers some of these risk and protective factors for children of divorce before discussing the specific factors for British-Indian children of divorce.

For children of divorce, a primary risk factor includes inter-parental conflict as it affects the quality of parenting (Ayoub et al. 1999), reduces father's involvement (Welsh et al. 2004), and has been associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties in children (Simons et al. 1999; Buchanan et al. 1996; Kline et al. 1991). In addition, for children of divorce, multiple transitions and changes as a consequence of divorce is also another risk factor that can diminish ability and resources for coping (Amato and Sobolewski 2001; Buchanan et al. 1996). However, protective processes and factors within children's environments can also be present which can promote coping. Good communication with children serves as a protective factor as it helps them understand the divorce situation and promotes coping by helping to create meaning of the divorce experience (Buchanan and Ritchie 2004; Hawthorn et al. 2003; Dunn and Deater-Deckard 2001). Communication and good quality contact with both parents also promotes positive development, better adjustments and reduces delinquency (Hawthorn et al. 2003; Stewart 2003; Dunn and Deater-Deckard 2001).

Cultural features also present protective and risk factors. Cohesive communities with strong social networks enhance social capital providing better education and economic opportunities to individuals (Edwards et al. 2003; Putnam 2000; Frustenberg and Hughes 1995). For single parent families, presence of extended family structures, and grandparents offer support and serve as protective factors for children (Buchanan 2008). Halpern (2005) noted that children in single-parent families do well when social relations and networks among parents are strong, but more often, single-parents have lesser social networks. Some studies have presented that close community cohesion, positive ethnic identity and collectivism are significant positive factors associated with ethnic minority groups (Das 2009; Reynolds 2002; Smart 2000). Gohm et al. (1998) suggests that collectivistic cultures can help children of divorce by providing close knit support.

This extensive literature has contributed in examining divorce as a family process and its impact, but this understanding has been informed largely from a white-western perspective since

most research has focussed on white communities using predominantly white samples (Mitchell 1985). Divorce experiences of minority ethnic groups have not received as much attention, particularly within the British-Indian group where divorce rates are relatively lower than national UK statistics (ONS 2008). Cultural values, practices and the community context makes divorce a difficult decision for families and as such can present a difficult transition for families that divorce in the community. This current paper explores 21 British-Indian adult children's experiences to understand their experiences and considers risks and protective factors within larger macro structures, community and cultural features and specific family conditions that shape their lives. To enable contextualisation of the study, a brief synopsis of the British-Indian community with particular attention to marriage, family and divorce is presented.

British-Indians

South-Asians as a group constituted the largest ethnic minority group in the UK at 4% of the total population in 2001. The Indian population within this group constitutes 1.8% (1,053,000) of the total population (59.1) in the UK (ONS 2006). Among South-Asians, marriage rates are as high as 73% while their divorce rates were low at 4% according to the fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, presented in Berthoud and Beishon (1997: 32-33). Marriage is the most accepted form of partnership among British-Indians and alternative family forms such as divorced families, lone parenthood, cohabitation are comparatively lower within the Indian community than Black minorities and the White majority population in the UK (Berthoud and Beishon 1997). The 2001 census also reported divorce in the Indian community to be lowest at 10% (ONS 2006). There are only 7% of Indian children in lone-mother households and 1% of Indian children in lone-father households in the UK (Box et al. 2001). Rates of cohabitation and inter-ethnic marriages are comparatively very low at less than 4% and 6% respectively the Indian population (ONS. 2006). This is in some contrast to the larger national picture in the UK which has consistently recorded increasing cohabitation, divorced families, step-families and lone parenthood (ONS 2007). Divorce rates (in the UK) stood in the order of 11.9 per thousand marriages

in 2007 (ONS 2008). In 2005, there were 284,000 (more than 60% first marriages) marriages in the UK, 155,000 divorces and 113,000 remarriages in 2005 (ONS 2008b). According to the 2001 census, there were 0.7 million step-families with dependent children while 0.3 million were cohabiting step-families (ONS 2007a). Between 1996 and 2006, married families had fallen by 4% while cohabiting couples had risen by 60% and lone-mother households had increased by 11% (ONS 2007a).

British-Indians show a continued commitment to family unity and care, even though their traditional family structures of large extended family in their home country (country of emigration) are no longer possible in the UK. British-Indian families are very close knit and relationships across long distances are consistently maintained through the internet, phone and visits (ONS 2004; Berthoud and Beishon 1997). Parenting of children is still supported by extended close relatives who provide support and reduce maternal stress (Harris 2000) as child care has been mostly regarded as the responsibility of mothers in the community. Divorce among British-Indians is a particularly sensitive topic and is associated with stigma of failure in marriage. Divorced women and children face difficult consequences of this stigma through isolation and marginalisation in the community (Goel 2005; Singh 1998). Though divorce is highly resisted and avoided in Indian families unless the marriage becomes a situation of extreme conflict (Ranga Rao and Sekhar 2002); there are Asian couples who do divorce to improve their lives.

The British-Indian community is close knit and has developed as such in the face of racism and hostility from the British society. Putnam (2000) in his analysis of immigrant communities in the USA (German, Italian, Jewish, Polish and black communities) also suggests that many immigrants use chain migration as a common strategy to conserve social capital as this helps to develop communities which can provide camaraderie, financial help, and political representation. Researchers (cf Joppke 1996; Poulter 1987) comment on a similar process of community building for ethnic minority population in Britain, in the face of racial discrimination, prejudice and exclusiveness of the dominant British culture, to build solidarity within their own communities for strength and as a means of resistance through steadfast adherence to traditional values and practices.

In terms of resilience for children of divorce,

this strong community and strong family associations may generate more support in collectivist cultures and reduce physical and social risks in the micro and macro contexts, particularly in reducing the negative impact of parental conflict on children (Medora et al. 2000; Gohm et al. 1998). However, divorce may be perceived as having acted against the norms of the community and result in loss of social capital, status, honour and stigma for divorced families (Coleman 1988). Similarly, as a minority community, British-Indian families may face difficulties in accessing services and obtaining support in the host context. At the same time, they may also benefit from support and resources available in the larger macro system which incorporate the larger ideological and organisational structures and include relevant policies, administrative, welfare support systems for divorced families. The macro-environment may also offer additional sources of materialistic and non-materialistic support through providing access, opportunities and enabling networks with other members in the host society outside of the particular community (Halpern 2005).

Data is presented to discuss risk and protective factors related to British-Indian community and family relations, cultural ideologies and practices within the larger macro context (British society and systems).

THE STUDY

Objectives: Subjective accounts from twenty-one British-Indian adult children of divorce were collected using a conceptual map to explore their perceptions of

- .. the context of parental divorce and conflict leading to divorce,
- .. the impact of parental divorce on them along five domains namely: financial, emotional, physical, educational/career, and social
- .. their own coping of parental divorce

Sample: Participation for the study was sought from adult British-Indian adult children of divorce who identified themselves to belong to the Hindu or Sikh religious community. Hindu and Sikh religions were grouped as they form 74% of the Indian population in Britain (ONS 2006) and share many philosophical tenets and practices. In addition, other studies on ethnic minority populations have distinguished South-Asian groups along religious dimensions due to significant recorded differences between Hindu/Sikh

and other religious groups such as Muslims (Abbas 2003).

Participation was specifically sought from adults to minimise any negative impact of recollection by children. It was also believed that adult perspectives may be more informed and less influenced by immediacy of the divorce and its impact that children may feel up to 2 years after the divorce (Wallerstein et al. 2000; Jekielek 1998; Buchanan et al. 1996). In addition, many studies have suggested that adult children of divorce are able to recall and remember significant events of their lives as affected by parental divorce (Abbey and Dallos 2004; Wallerstein et al. 2000).

Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent: Participants were voluntarily recruited. The study was publicised in various venues such as colleges, internet blogs, community centres, temples, priests, voluntary agencies, radio and newspaper media, inviting for participation. Interested participants who contacted the researcher and fulfilled the criteria for participation were then selected for the study. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants, and explicitly outlined the purpose of the study, the methods involved, any risks and associated benefits of the study. Rights of anonymity, confidentiality and right to withdraw from the study was communicated to all participants prior to the study as well as during the interview process if the participants showed any hesitation or anxiety to respond. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms have been used when data is presented.

Each participant was offered in cash as a token of thanks for their participation.

Data Collection, Analysis and Respondent Validation: Qualitative data from participants was collected using a semi-structured interview. Participant interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. These interviews were held over the telephone or in person depending on the preference of the participant. Sixteen participants were interviewed over the phone and five participants were interviewed through face to face interviews.

All interviews were tape recorded with the consent of participants and broad themes from the preliminary data were extracted. This preliminary data was shared with fourteen of the participants in an additional interview— 10 of these interviews were conducted in person and 4 were conducted over the telephone. Though an attempt was made to contact all the participants, only

fourteen were available and willing to engage at this later stage. This process enabled the researcher to validate the preliminary analysis as well as explore and saturate some of the themes that had emerged.

All the data was analysed using Atlas-Ti¹ as a data management tool. Emerging themes consistent across the majority of the participants were used as findings and analysed.

FINDINGS

The risk and protective factors within the community, cultural ideologies and macro contexts have been selectively presented to illustrate dynamisms of resilience across these factors. The findings and analyses aim to discuss these interactions and dynamics.

Risk and Protective Factors within Cultural Ideology

Among British-Indians, marriage is considered central to family life and as an important and essential framework for care and socialisation of children. However, due to this strong ethic for marriage, there is strong resistance to divorce, even in cases of extreme conflict and domestic violence.

All participants reported parental conflict and tensions which led to divorce. Reasons of conflict included incompatibility, clash of personalities, miscommunication, use of excessive alcohol, and extra-marital affairs. Twelve participants also reported this conflict was often associated with violence and domestic abuse. It was only participants' mothers who were targets of this violence. Violence and conflict was endured over a long period of time (minimum of two years; on average marriage lasted for thirteen years).

Heer explains why her mother endured years of violent domestic abuse with little support from the community but resisted divorce due to worries about stigma and her children.

Heer: There were lots of reasons why my mum didn't (divorce earlier)...it was the kids (3 small children) when we were young because my father's finances supported the family. Also she didn't want to bring shame to her family as her parents were very very set in their ways and still are to an extent. That was a very very large factor...

Marital conflict in fact presents high risk and impact for children (Bream and Buchanan 2003;

Simons et al. 1999; Mullender and Morley 1999). Though conflict is generally present in most cases of divorce, the management and resolution of these conflicts is important, particularly for children. Within the British-Indian context however, divorce as a means to address this conflict is highly undermined due to the cultural emphasis on marriage. Due to high pro-marriage and anti-divorce sentiments in the British-Indian community (Berthoud 2000; Beishon et al. 1998), divorce is associated with high stigma for the divorcing couples, as well as for children and other extended family members (Goel. 2005; Purkayastha et al. 2003; Falk. 2001). For Indian women, this stigma is more pronounced as marriage is seen to be her responsibility and divorce indicates her failure at maintaining the marriage (Purkayastha et al. 2003; Falk 2001). Even in this study, participants reported their mothers to be most worried about stigma of divorce and resist divorce, in spite of high conflict and violence.

Furthermore, the stigma of divorce and cultural norms is inter-generational and also affects the lives of children directly. Cultural notions of blame and stigma also force certain individuals to behave in a manner that can limit the lives of all members of the divorced family. In Ipshita's case, the cultural norms and avoidance of stigma affected her life drastically.

Ipshita: The comments from other people but also I think the worst thing about that stigma is that it really limited my life. I became even more shy, even more introvert although I graduated, I went to university, I went to work and then I came back home. That was the cycle of my life. I wasn't allowing myself to have a social life, I didn't allow myself to have friends, I didn't allow myself to experience a lot of things in life.

In addition, remarriage for participants' mothers as divorced women was also more restricted. Thus while, almost all of 21 participants' fathers had remarried, only 3 of the participant mothers had re-partnered or remarried.

Meghna: *Her mum (grandmother) has actually said to her (mother) 'don't you ever remarry, I can't live with it' ... Their (her grandmother's) mentality is very narrow-minded in that sense. They (her grandmother and maternal extended family) would not want her to remarry, they see it as 'oh! It's a bit of a, you know, shame in the family kind of thing for her to remarry'.*

These anti-divorce norms thus have substantial implications for British-Indian mothers as it limits remarriage which is one of the key routes out of financial limitations after divorce. The UK national picture shows relations between lone-parents, who are mostly mothers, and child poverty and welfare (ONS 2008). Many authors have noted that remarriage is a key route through which women and children can regain their pre-divorce financial status (Maundeni 2000; Smart 2000; Goode 1993). However, in case of British-Indian families, cultural norms present limitations to remarriage for women.

Nevertheless, other cultural ideologies, religious values and practices were positive influences to help participants' cope positively by providing frames of reference to which participants could relate to.

Ravi: *...I used to read about Hindu Warriors, ...they had a different battle in the sense that Hindus were very suppressed at that point in time...and I could relate to that. I was like 'hang on!' I'm being suppressed. And I started to see, I began to understand the ideology that...that they had from the Gurus.*

For Priyanka, religious practices such as visiting temples provided solace and helped her cope.

Priyanka: *In god, my mother kept faith. We started going to the temple a lot ...we started going regularly to the temple and we slowly started finding solitude in that and that was a very big comfort for us.... My first biggest source of strength for coping I would definitely say is my faith in god because ...*

Indeed, a positive belief system and belief in god as a resource for coping have been identified as resilience promoting strategies (Banyard 2004). Religion and faith in god may also provide opportunities for everyday discipline and routine (Barn et al. 2006; Medora et al. 2000) which can provide catharsis and direction in life to cope with adversities.

Other cultural emphasis on education and respect may also be positive aspects that can provide direction to children of divorce and influence positive outcomes. In this study, all participants except one had attained university degrees and showed upwards mobility compared to their parents. This is contrary to other researches that find children of divorce to show lower education, and qualifications. Though this may be an effect of sample bias and limitations, it

may be worthwhile to consider the effect of cultural emphasis on education and achievement. British-Indians place a high priority on education and see it as presenting opportunities for upward economic mobility as well as to counteract racism and discrimination (Barn et al. 2006; Abbas 2003; Modood et al. 1997).

Cultural ideologies and norms have a definite impact on the life processes and choices available to individuals. Among the British-Indians, strong ideological support for marriage and against divorce and remarriage present risks for children and families in conflict. Nonetheless, cultural identification and beliefs can also provide strategies for positive coping. The values and norms have a profound impact on life chances, opportunities for individuals, and families that do not fit the norm.

Risk and Protective Factors in the Community

In the case of almost all participants, community and extended family played a substantial role in resisting divorce. In some families, extended members contributed to escalation of the conflict. Dia's parents lived in a joint family set up where her parents resided with her father's parents and sister. Dia believed her father's family to be hostile to her mother and encourage the violence.

Dia: ... basically my grandmother, my dad's mum caused a lot of trouble... so we actually lived in a house where my grandmother used to encourage the violence towards my mum really.

However, other extended and other family members did offer support to help minimize and control the violence through other intervention efforts such as counselling and mediation

Heer: Lots of family members got involved to help with the marital state but nothing ever really helped... mother's sisters and sometimes my grandparents, they would really try to sort my father out...my mother's sisters tried on various occasions to make him see sense and their husbands, they all would try to talk to him about his behaviour and he did seek help... and tried to get into some meditation classes and things like that.

The support and mediation were preferred strategies to resolve the parental conflict rather than divorce and some members refrained from any involvement due to the negative stigma and connotations of divorce.

Vikram:...basically both sets of grand-

parents...and my uncle and aunts...I think knew that my dad could get quite violent and stuff...but you know...divorce within the Asian communities is very frowned upon...there was more of a just put up with it and shut up really. So, there was not really any overt support (for divorce) for my mum.

Nonetheless, following divorce, the collective community and family were sources of support and comfort for divorced family members. Participants reported a variety of ways through which community and extended family members provided support. This included providing alternative care for children in the divorced family with the transition phases of divorce.

Payal: ...during my parents separation period, my granddad (maternal grandfather) was working in Birmingham so he and my cousin(maternal aunt's son) were living with us for a while yeah...but then my granddad left and then my cousin stayed for maybe a year.

This support from extended family members often extended to transnational contexts, as Divij explains that in his case, he was cared by his extended family in India following parental divorce, while his father continued to live and work in the UK.

Divij: ... my aunt(father's sister) and grandparents(paternal) would've cared for me when my dad left me in India with them.. I was there for maybe about a year or two.

The extended family was also useful in communicating with participants to make them understand the divorce, provide emotional support as well as bolster confidence of divorced parent.

Meghna:the most I rely on would probably have to be my aunty(father's sister), my dad's sister, she's kind of seen what's happened and she remains impartial...I can tell her everything. I can rely on her to support me through everything.

Amar:...my uncle (mother's brother) was the one who kind of talked to us, whether we were ok and what you feel about what your dad said and like he would take us inside and you know... communicate to us about what had happened but he did it perfectly.

Aryan: My mother was depressed, she wouldn't do anything the whole day, so at some point my mum's elder brother came over and told her to pick herself together for the sake of the three children. My mother then went and got a job at the council and did very well after that.

The extended family and community was also a great source of material, financial and housing support

Dia: I lived with my grandparents(maternal) for about 6 months after my mum left and after that I actually moved in with a friend for about a year. My aunt(mother's sister) also helped us a lot...it wasn't financial help that we needed, it was more things like advice or when we were moving, helping us move house....umm...you know helping us buy furniture...things like that.

However, support from the community also had associated costs. Participants indicated that there was, at times, excessive interference in their private family life by other community and extended family members. There was pressure to share private issues with them to ensure their continuing support. Meena alludes to this in her conversation and refers to the vulnerability of her family due to being 'divorced'.

Meena: ... the whole family knows your business and sometimes you don't want that, you do want your privacy. But if she (mother) doesn't tell them (relatives) about what's happening...then later on they will say to her that you didn't tell us and it's your fault if things don't work out... Yeah...there is some sort of support coming from family. But if you can't get it from your partner then the family is the next best.

In addition, it is also the extended family and community which isolates and stigmatises the family.

Madhuri: ...other people in the family actually live fairly away from us such as one of my mum's sisters who thinks we are cursed or something and she doesn't really see us anymore.

Similarly, in Ravi's case, though they received assistance and support from extended family and community, his family was also perceived as a burden and their vulnerable status was exploited.

Ravi: They didn't see us as having a family life so we were the house where everyone's kids were always dumped...basically we were always the people who would baby-sit because when some of my aunts used to go to parties and stuff, they just took us for granted. Also my uncles had married into other families and he would take me with them to their families and say oh! Look we are taking care of our sister's sons and I did find that was like a promotion gimmick like 'we look after our nephew!' ... We were like a burden on them. It was like...'Oh! divorced family!'

The analysis of data from participants reveals that though the close community is a source of support protective factors, there are also associated risks within the community contexts which present risks and negative consequences for divorced families.

The inter-generational and familial stigma limits support for divorce within the community and extended family networks often leading to strong reactions from the community and in strong stigmatised identities for children and members of the divorced family. In fact, it is often the collective and close knit family and community that can make divorced family members feel devalued, rejected or isolated in community processes. However, the collective community also provides support by encouraging negotiation, mediation and counselling to address marital conflict. These strategies are preferred to divorce for resolving marital conflict.

The community is also a resource in terms of providing flexible and dynamic support for families of divorce in terms of emotional and material support – often across the Diaspora. For children of divorce, this can often be temporary care and adjustments in different countries and contexts and frequent changes in the constitution of the family.

Though the community does provide support and advice on a variety of fronts for children of divorce and women, they can also excessively interfere into the private family matters of divorced families. However, divorced family members may not be in a position to urge for privacy for fear of losing the support that these networks do offer. Nonetheless, children of divorce show the ability and resilience to recognise and negotiate between these two aspects. While some children of divorce cope by exclusively forming relationships with relatives that do not provide support at the cost of privacy, others are able to accept the terms of such help and some even seek support from the larger host society that does not associate help with these demands.

The dynamics of the community influence on individuals also need to be considered in a larger historical context. The development of the British-Indian community can be considered to have developed in an external environment of hostility and racism in the UK (Goel 2005; Gohm et al. 1998). However, the maintenance of this community may be based on cultural practices and traditional norms shared by the community members from

India. The community thus upholds many traditional ideologies that unite them but limit agencies of individuals and families that do not fit the norm and can render them more vulnerable.

Risk and Protective Factors within Macro-contexts

For British-Indians, the larger ideological and organisational structures (macro-systems) in the UK also presented risk and protective features. The macro systems, through organisational policy, service provision and administrative structures, did provide opportunities for further education, financial assistance, and access to services. Most participants indicated making use of educational opportunities, grants, a responsive public health system to cope with specific financial vulnerabilities.

However, not all services provided were sensitive to the needs and purposes of the British-Indian context. Some participants indicated how the police services were unable to provide any relevant support in domestic violence related issues.

Heer: I remember one incident, I must have been about 8 and I remember the police coming in and taking a statement after an incident occurred and my father would always get straight to the pub afterwards. We called the police and they came in, they took a statement and nothing really happened. That was it. No social services were called. I just remember him saying, when he comes back from the pub, when your dad comes back, put the chain on the door and if he's still...if he looks like he might do something then don't let him in, that was their suggestion (laughs)... My oldest sister was 10 and my youngest sister was 6.

Many researchers have commented on the inadequacy of services to appropriately deal with sensitive family related issues such as domestic violence for minority ethnic and migrant women (Wilson 2006; Chana 2005; Gelles 1997; Nain 1991).

Unfamiliarity with the systems in the host country, as new migrants, may have limited the capacities and agencies of some of the participant mothers to seek appropriate assistance. For example, when asked if services were involved, Ipshita comments that her mother may not have known how to involve services and the privacy of the family as an important element for not seeking help or services.

Ipshita: ...I don't think my mum knew how to get them (social/support services) involved. I don't know if she knew and if she would get that help. Also there is this element that this is a family private matter.

Immigrant women may feel further vulnerable due to unfamiliarity with systems in the host country, and lower support structures as compared to their home countries. Though most mothers in this study did take action and went through divorce, most participants did report resistance on their mothers behalf and noted their unfamiliarity with the system. It is also possible that mothers were able to take action only after a considerable length of time when they had better adjusted with the host systems. They may feel a sense of loyalty to the community which is a resource within the hostile context of racism and discrimination in the UK and may feel obliged to maintain tradition and fear losing the support of the community (Goel 2005; Ahmad et al. 2004; Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Berthoud 2000).

It should be noted that, aspects of cultural loyalty, unfamiliarity with systems, loss of support systems upon migration influence minority ethnic families in complex ways.

Macro support structures within health, education and social services systems benefitted and were appreciated by the families. Evandrou (2000) notes that use of services and public systems by ethnic minorities have consistently shown that these groups are unable to use them due to access issues or because the services offered are not culturally appropriate or relevant for these communities. However, in the current study, participants and their families did report accessing state support, services and material resources.

Six participants also reported that the education service was able to identify distress in participants and were often approached by participants for help. School personnel were able to identify behaviours and developmental patterns such as withdrawal from activities, inconsistent attendance, falling academic grades, and /or other general presentations that may be indicative of psychological issues that some participants were presenting. As and when identified, schools referred participants to counselling services available in the education system. Most participants were thus referred to counselling services from schools. Schools can increasingly play a large protective role in identifying and linking children with appropriate

support (Hetherington 2003; Howard et al. 1999). UK policy also recognises the roles of schools in the provision of integrated services for children to protect them and promote their development (Chand 2008; DCSF 2008; Every Child Matters 2003).

In total, ten participants used counselling services. While some participants were referred from schools, others were referred by other agencies such as the National Health Service or were self referrals. Only 3 participants found the counselling service useful. Though services and schools can provide important links to connect children with services, there remains scope to further explore their involvement and purpose. For participants in this study, counselling seemed useful when accessed voluntarily and within specialist settings. For others, this service seemed inadequate as it did not seem to address the particular needs of participants that were arising out of the family issues that they were facing.

Priyanka: Counselling didn't help me at all. Because counsellors are there to listen to you and they are not there to advise you or anything.

Other researchers have indicated children's reluctance to use counselling services as they did not feel it addressed their needs and may force children into situations of powerlessness and vulnerability where they are forced to interact with doctors or counsellors (Trinder et al. 2002; Mitchell 1985). For British-Indians, the stigma of divorce may further limit engagement and disclosures of family related issues by children. In addition, for children from different minority cultures, the purpose of talking to a counsellor when one could access a close relative or friend may not be well understood and may expect more directive advice and support (Lau 2002; Harris 2000).

It may be argued that though support systems are available, they may not necessarily be able to take account of and address particular issues and expectations of minority ethnic communities, as is seen in participants' experiences with police and counselling services. In this sense, minority ethnic communities may be disadvantaged. There exist inequalities in services, access and resources in health, social and material resources for ethnic minority communities (Evandrou 2000). Evandrou also comments that this may be due to institutional discrimination and cultural aspects and considers that targeted and culturally sensitive services are important to address these issues. Though participants' in the study did not

indicate any racism, it is important to note this larger context of oppression within which the community has developed and continues to develop. Larger structural and institutional contexts of racism and discrimination continue to have a substantial impact on the lived experiences of minority ethnic groups (Modood et al 1997; Platt 2005).

The larger macro context where divorce is more normative nonetheless also have provided alternative venues of socialisation and support. Nadia and Preeti present narratives that illustrate how family divorce distinguished them and made it difficult for them to participate with peers from their community. Nadia also explains her socialisation with other groups with whom she could share her experience of parental divorce with.

Nadia: I didn't fit in with them and they were all Indian friends...whereas my friends that are not Asian...they tend to come from more broken homes. ... you don't find a lot of Asians that come from broken homes...in our parents generation...I always felt that we were left out in school and stuff and other children used to bully us and stuff.

Preeti: ...I didn't have anything to talk to them about. It was weird, they were always asking about like family and asking about all that kind of stuff and I didn't really want to talk about my family. So they'll just say 'oh! Diwali, what did you do for Diwali!' and I was like I didn't do anything and they would go like 'oh!' ... they were really close with their family and family mattered to them and so when they talked about their family so I wouldn't have nothing to say so I didn't really like hanging around them that much so even though they were my friends, I wouldn't really go out with them a lot.

The macro context presents risks for minority ethnic community by policies and services that may not appropriately support their cultures and practices. In addition, historical racist and discriminatory practices also have an influence on the formation and maintenance of the British-Indian community. Nonetheless, the macro system also presents opportunities for development, provides services and presents an alternative space for the socialisation of divorce families that are stigmatised in the British-Indian community.

CONCLUSION

The paper considered the risk and protective

factors present within cultural ideologies, community context and the macro context that have an impact on British-Indian children of divorce.

The paper suggests that it is not static features that offer themselves as protective or risk factors but rather their interaction. High resistance for divorce within the British-Indian cultural values present high risk for children in conflict ridden families. Cultural norms against remarriage further limit women's life choices that have an impact on children in lone-mother families. However, cultural ideologies, religion and practices also provide protective and resilience building features. For ethnic minority children, cultural tenets, practices of worship are also important sources of hope for children to help them cope.

The community also presents resources and risks. While this collective can and does provide flexible and informal support for the divorced family, it also acts as an agent that ensures that cultural values are upheld. These cultural values however marginalise and stigmatise the divorced family.

The larger macro-context serves as an additional context. Though there may be sources of support available in the larger mainstream context, there is structural racism and discrimination that can limit opportunities and access for migrant groups. Migrant groups can thus feel more inclined to build strong community networks with their groups for support and expect loyalty of their community members on the basis of traditional norms that emanate from their countries. The larger context, nonetheless, offer alternative sources of socialisation that is stigma free and provides a more normalised identity to divorced families that are isolated in the British-Indian community. The macro-context also offers support, educational and employment opportunities that newer generation of British-Indian children can en-cash on. Formal organisations like schools also identify children of distress and link them to appropriate services such as counselling. However, to be most effective, these services need to be aligned with the cultures of the minority communities, their experiences and needs.

In addition, cultural ideologies, the community context and the macro context are inter-linked and dynamically interact and influence each other across cultural, social, and historical contexts. Cultural ideologies affect the community context. Subsequently, the development and maintenance

of the British-Indian community is influenced by macro environments and attitudes towards the community through history. The capacity and agency of individuals are affected by the cultural ideologies, community and macro contexts but their impact on the individual is not linear or simple.

The paper suggests that considering resilience within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological contexts allows a broader analysis of structural and cultural features that have an impact on child development, particularly in minority ethnic families. The interactions within systems has been emphasised in Bronfenbrenner's theory and considering risk and protective factors in terms of their interactions in life processes can capture the dynamism within systems more comprehensively. This can provide a tool to unravel the complex relationships within systems that have an impact on individuals and communities. For ethnic minority families, this contextualisation is particularly important as it enables an exploration of developmental processes for individuals, families and communities provides in-depth understanding and can reduce misinterpretation of individual, familial and community actions and reactions. Indeed, many researchers have highlighted the challenges of research with ethnic minorities where de-contextualised findings pathologise and disadvantage minority people (Jensen and Lauritsen 2005). Such an approach also has implications policy and practice for multicultural contexts as it presents a framework for working with children which is culturally sensitive and can respond to the dynamic relationship within socio-ecological systems. This approach also enables consideration of diversity within and between minority groups. Towards developing cultural sensitive practices, particularly in public services, risks and protective factors within these contextual dynamics need to be considered during assessments, and developing programmes with ethnic minority groups and individuals.

Within the UK context, ethnic minority communities face considerable deprivation, poverty discrimination and disadvantages. There is a need to understand cumulative risks and strengths within the socio-ecological contexts towards developing interventions and support systems that are appropriate and relevant for children and families (Ayoub et al. 1999). This study suggests considering resilience for ethnic minority children within their contexts whilst also allowing space

for multiple perspectives and changing dynamics. For practitioners and policy makers, this approach can enable better culturally sensitive and anti-oppressive practice.

NOTES

- 1 Atlas-Ti is a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). The software which enables researchers to manage the data through tools that make it easier for qualitative researchers to label, categorise, organise, create appropriate notes, as identified by the researcher.

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