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‘The Eldest Daughter Syndrome’: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis Exploring Experiences of Parentification Among British South Asian Eldest Daughters



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Portfolio submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

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Figure 1: Recruitment Process

Table 1: Participant Demographics

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Acknowledgments



In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

I would like to begin by extending my sincere appreciation to the following:

Firstly, to Allah Almighty, my guiding light and source of all knowledge. *"We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is you who is the knowing"* (Al-Baqarah 2:32).

To my parents and my brother, for your unconditional support and encouragement to reach higher and dream bigger.

To my friends, whose words of wisdom uplifted me when I needed it most.

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To my participants, without whom this project would not be possible. Thank you for trusting me with your experiences and allowing me the privilege of sharing them.

Lastly, this thesis was written within a global context where humanity witnessed a genocide in Palestine. This devastation shaped the period in which this research was undertaken. Words can never be enough. I hold you in my thoughts and prayers now and always.

Declaration of Powers of Discretion

I confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis. I grant powers of discretion to the University Librarian to allow this thesis to be copied in whole or in part without further reference to the author. This permission covers only single copies made for study purposes, subject to normal conditions of acknowledgement.

Preface

This portfolio includes three interconnected bodies of work: Section A: Doctoral Research, Section B: Publishable Paper and Section C: Combined Case Study/Process Report. Together, these sections are unified by a central theme concerning the lived experiences of South Asian women.

Section A: Doctoral Research Thesis

Section A presents my doctoral research studying the experiences of parentification among British South Asian (BSA) eldest daughters. This project was motivated by a noticeable gap between the growing popularity of the "eldest daughter syndrome" online and a lack of academic exploration into the parentification experiences of BSA eldest daughters. Through purposive sampling, 10 participants were recruited and semi-structured interviews took place. A reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data to provide a rich and meaningful exploration of participants stories. The reflexive aspect of this methodology was important to consider how my personal views shaped the research.

Through a critical realist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, the study findings aimed to take the reader on a journey of how eldest daughters experienced parentification from childhood all the way to how they perceive caregiving roles in the future. The study explored themes related to how cultural expectations, gendered family roles, migration histories and racial discrimination shaped experiences of parentification. Findings also highlight psychological and emotional impact of their roles as parentified eldest daughters. The study contributes to an under-researched area and provides implications for psychologists therapeutic practice.

Section B: Publishable Paper

Section B of this portfolio is a publishable paper written with the intention to submit to the Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology. This manuscript is a summary of my doctoral thesis (Section A). A summary of the thesis was chosen for the publishable paper because focusing on only one or two themes would have risked losing the coherence of the overall narrative and limited the contributions the findings have the ability to add to the field.

The Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology was chosen due to its broad focus on community, culture and applied psychological related matters. The journal is welcoming of qualitative methodologies and provides an author-friendly submission process. Another key reason for this choice was a study similar to mine (Irfan et al., 2024) was published in this journal. As I refer to this study extensively in my thesis, publishing my work in the same journal would situate my study within the same scholarly conversation.

The journal offers a strong reach with their main readership being practitioner psychologists. This is important for my study as my findings offer implications for clinical practice and allows findings to be disseminated directly to those who are most likely to support this population in practice.

Section C: Combined Case Study and Process Report

Section C presents a case study and process report I wrote within my final year of placement at a psycho-oncology service. The piece presents an example of my practice in which I started using a person-centred therapy (PCT) approach and moved towards more a pluralistic approach towards the end due to key lessons presented. This case demonstrates me defining of my own style of practice, my own way of relating to the client (underpinning of core-conditions integrating embodied felt sense) and becoming confident and competent in this whilst also being open to adaptations when needed.

Core Theme – Experiences of British South Asian Women

Whilst the aforementioned pieces of work are separate, there is a unifying theme across them. This theme is my focus on the psychological experiences of BSA women. Although the context is different (research focused on parentification experiences of eldest daughters and process report focused on experiences of navigating low mood post cancer-treatment), the underlying narratives discussed are similar. All three pieces of work highlight how the experiences of the BSA women I interviewed or worked with as clients were shaped by their cultural values. Themes of self-sacrifice, duty, care, responsibility, family, interdependence and strength stand out in all three sections of this thesis. This core theme is important for the discipline of counselling psychology as it shines a light on experiences of women from a minoritised background and highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive practice. Whether within research or clinical practice, the stories of these women deserve to be told especially as they are too often overlooked.

Personal Connection to Core Theme

As a BSA woman myself, my personal connection to this core theme is a personal one. Within my community, mental health not being commonly spoken about was one of the motivating factors that brought me to psychology. Once there, I recognised how rarely our stories were reflected in psychological spaces and academia. This felt particularly jarring for me as I have been privy to how women within the community carry so much emotional burden and would rarely seek psychological support. I took it upon myself to create that space within my own practice and research. To do my part to amplify the voices of women from my community. I knew that engaging with research participants and clients from a similar background to me required constant reflexivity to ensure I did not assume sameness in experiences. This reflexivity has been paramount to shaping me to the practitioner that I am today as I feel more aware of the nuanced nature of these experiences including both

positive and challenging aspects. Looking ahead post-doctorate, I hope to continue to foster therapeutic spaces where such conversations evolve.

Section A: Doctoral Research Thesis: '*The Eldest Daughter Syndrome*': A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of The Experiences of British South Asian Eldest Daughters

Abstract

In recent years, the 'Eldest Daughter Syndrome' has gained attention online as women worldwide share their experiences of parentification, burden and responsibility as the eldest daughter. Among these are British South Asian (BSA) first-born eldest daughters, whose experiences within this role are uniquely shaped by the intersections of gender, culture and migration. Despite the online visibility of these experiences, they remain absent within parentification literature due to little research on the intersections of parentification and birth order and dominance of quantitative enquiry.

This qualitative study had three aims: **(1)** To explore the parentification experiences of first-born eldest daughters from BSA backgrounds, **(2)** To understand the factors influencing parentification experiences **(3)** To identify any emotional and psychological impact. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was used to analyse ten semi-structured interviews (online and in-person) with BSA women aged 19 to 40. Participants identified as British Indian (n = 4), British Bangladeshi (n = 3), British Pakistani (n = 2) and British Afghan (n = 1).

Five themes were constructed: 'Growing Up Too Soon,' 'The Daughter That Does It All,' 'The Mental, Emotional and Relational Impact,' 'Making Sense of What Happened,' and 'Always the Eldest: Looking to the Future Ahead.' The findings provide unique insight into the experiences of parentified eldest daughters, capturing participant reflections on their experiences across childhood into adulthood, highlighting both challenges and positives. It is hoped that the findings will inform future research and offer valuable understanding for mental health professionals working with this specific population.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to Topic and Chapter Overview

This study aims to explore the parentification experiences of BSA eldest daughters. Parentification refers to the role reversal between a child and parent, where the child becomes responsible for adult responsibilities which are typically developmentally inappropriate (Kerig., 2005). Eldest daughters worldwide have taken to social media to express their experiences of parentification giving rise to the popular hashtag '#EldestDaughterSyndrome' (BBC., 2025). Within this group, BSA eldest daughters have voiced how their parentification experiences are uniquely shaped by the intersection of birth order, cultural, social and migration factors (Shahid., 2023). These experiences remain under-researched within parentification literature due to the longstanding inequities within psychological knowledge production. The concept of parentification as well as parentification experiences, have been predominantly centred around White Western populations presenting these as normative (Reddy and Amer., 2023). Consequently, the parentification experiences of ethnic minority groups, such as BSA women, continue to remain underrepresented. This is of particular concern as it limits our understanding of parentification and raises questions about how the experience may differ for people depending on their cultural and social contexts. This study aims to contribute to a more diverse and decolonised exploration to parentification experiences.

The purpose of this chapter is to firstly introduce the BSA context to lay the foundations of this study. Within this, South Asian family structures and cultural expectations relating to gender and birth order will be introduced. This will highlight how specific cultural values may position eldest daughters as holders of duty and responsibility. Following this, the topic of parentification will be introduced to ground understanding within this core concept. This includes conceptual background information and impacts of parentification. The chapter then introduces the topic of 'The Eldest Daughter Syndrome' by exploring the lived experiences of

BSA eldest daughters as shared within popular online discourse. This will be followed by the literature review.

British South Asian Context

The term 'South Asian' is a superordinate ethno-racial category or 'umbrella term' associated with individuals with ancestral roots from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutanese, Nepalese, Afghanistan, and the Maldives (Farmer., 2025). Within this group, there are subordinate identities such being 'Bangladeshi' or 'Pakistani' and even more specific identities connected to South Asian subregions such as 'Punjabi' or 'Sylheti'. There are various religions, languages and rich traditions unique to each country and its people. Despite this variety, there are many similarities that can be drawn between these countries seen within the culture, cuisine, linguistic similarities, arts and family structures. Such similarities can be understood through shared ancient civilisational history, geographical proximity, trade and cultural exchange throughout the region and the influences of shared religious or philosophical belief. Another reason for the cultural similarities within the subcontinent is due to the shared history of being under complete British colonial rule (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) or under British jurisdiction (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives) (Quraishi and Evangeli., 2007).

To lay a foundational understanding of the BSA identity, we must first briefly discuss the historical context. After World War 2, there was a significant rise in South Asian migration to the United Kingdom (UK), many seeking employment opportunities post war (Robinson., 2005). This became the first generation of BSA (Born in South Asian and migrated to the UK). Most recent population data suggests that approximately 5 million people of South Asian heritage live within the UK which is 7.5% of the British population (Office for National Statistics., 2021). This includes 1,927,150 people of Indian or British Indian ethnicity, 1,662,286 of Pakistani or British Pakistani ethnicity, 651,834 of Bangladeshi or British

Bangladeshi ethnicity and approximately 700,000 people from other South Asian heritage backgrounds population (Office for National Statistics., 2021). Second generation BSA are people who were born in the UK and have at least one parent born in South Asia and migrated to the UK (Foner and Dreby., 2011). These individuals hold a unique position in which they are born into two cultures, British and South Asian.

BSA women are individuals who identify as a women, British nationals and is of South Asian ethnic origin. BSA women come from diverse communities which represent various different religious groups, beliefs and languages. Whilst there is uniqueness and respective individual differences within this population group, there are also many similarities shared culturally (Quraishi and Evangeli., 2007).

Family Structures in South Asian Communities

South Asian cultures commonly place importance on the value of family, community, togetherness, self-sacrifice and being subservient to elders in a family structure. This can be understood as a collectivist culture which emphasises importance of interdependence, maintaining group harmony and prioritising the needs of the group over one's own needs (Bose and Jalal., 2022). Mathews (2000) highlighted some common cultural values found in South Asian communities including closeness in family relationships, respect for the elderly, politeness to maintain harmony, being obedient and dutiful, and can be reticent to share personal problems outside of the family due to bringing shame on the family. South Asian families often follow hierarchies in which elders such as grandparents, parents and the eldest sibling holds authority and therefore should be respected. As they viewed as respected individuals within the family structure, elders are often positioned as members of the family who provide support and advice to the younger members of the family system (Sandhu., 1997).

Acculturation studies suggest that first-generation BSA tend to 'separate' in terms of acculturation style (Shaw., 1988; Robinson., 2005). Separation refers to a group who may reject the dominant culture and choosing to preserve their culture of origin (Berry., 1990). It is expressed that the reason for this separation is that collectivist cultural values may be conflicting with individualist values as seen in the UK. On the other hand, their second-generation children, born and raised in the UK, are more likely to integrate and experience aspects of British culture but still hold on their ethnic cultural values (Robinson., 2009). This can create a bicultural identity (identifying with aspects of two cultures) as well as an a acculturation gap between first and second generations. In addition, studies have found that religion often plays a central role in shaping family life within BSA families and that religious practices were important especially for first generation BSA migrants as a way to holding on their way of life from their countries of origin (Bhatti., 1999).

The above cultural norms provide a foundation for understanding cultural values which are typically seen within some BSA families. In traditional South Asian cultural frameworks gender and birth order plays a defining role in structuring family responsibilities which raises particular implications for daughters within this context. We will now discuss how cultural expectations may look different depending on gender and birth order.

Gender and Birth Order Based Cultural Expectations

South Asian cultures may be patriarchal in nature (Bhopal., 1997). Patriarchal power is also rooted in cultural constructs such as the upholding of 'honour'. Men are seen as protectors of honour, whilst women are expected to behave in ways which do not violate the family honour. The concept of honour impacts behaviours that are seen as honourable within the family (Sangar and Howe., 2021). Bhatti (1999) found that daughters within BSA families experienced more stricter rules compared to sons due to cultural concerns about protecting

family honour. For example, a woman may be discouraged from socialising, dating or being out late as such behaviours may risk bringing shame on the families reputation. Prioritising the family and its needs would be seen to be more culturally appropriate. This suggests that what is acceptable is often seen through gendered lens, encouraging traditional gender roles and to adhere to cultural values (Mansoor., 2015).

These traditional gender roles may also shape roles within the family home. It is traditionally and culturally common for women to be seen as responsible for domestic and caregiving duties, whilst men are deemed responsible for being the breadwinner (Shekhani., 2024). Often such roles will be encouraged from a young age continuing into adult life (Irfan et al., 2024). For example, many studies show that daughters were responsible for the caregiving for elderly parents (Hossain et al., 2020; Shekhani., 2024). Although greater flexibility in gender roles has been observed amongst younger BSA generations (Bhatti., 1999), these changes vary across South Asian communities with traditional expectations continuing to shape family practices in some contexts.

Birth order also impacts traditional South Asian families structures and the expectations placed on. Studies have suggested that respect for the eldest sibling is central within South Asian cultures. This is rooted within having respect for elders (Nuckolls., 1993). Through respect for elders, it is common that the eldest child is expected to be responsible for providing practical and emotional support for their parents and siblings. This has been described as a 'vertical hierarchy' where power in the family is held at the top, hence why the eldest child culturally holds familial responsibility. Within the BSA context, second generation eldest children may experience the responsibility of being a language or culture brokers for their first generation migrant parents (Wu et al., 2018).

The above section has described how gender and birth order are factors which can influence responsibilities and expectations in a South Asian family. While daughters may be positioned as caregivers and emotional supporters, eldest children are often assigned additional responsibility associated with maturity, leadership and role modelling. It is then important to

consider that for eldest daughters who are the intersection of being a daughter as well being the eldest, familial expectations may intensify. As mentioned previously, for a BSA second generation daughter there may also be added responsibilities of language or culture brokering. This positioning suggests that BSA eldest daughters may experience family responsibility in ways that are distinct from other family members due to the cultural expectations upon them being a woman and the eldest child.

This experience is referred to as the 'eldest daughter syndrome' in popular media (Hu., 2023). This is a term used by eldest daughters online discussing not only the pressures of their unique position in their family but many who feel their experiences resulted in them being parentified (parent-child role reversal) (Morton., 2024). Before we explore the lived experiences of eldest daughters shared on social media, we will first move on to a conceptual background understanding of parentification to ground understanding.

Parentification

Background

Many of the experiences reported by eldest daughters online, such feeling like another parent, is closely aligned with the concept of parentification. Parentification is defined as the process of where "adult members of a family abdicate their roles and responsibilities to a child or children in the family causing role-reversal" (Kerig., 2005). Not only is this term used within academic literature, but it has become widely recognised and used by eldest daughters through their discourse online to give a name to their experiences (BBC., 2024). This concept is central to this research as it provides an established psychological framework through which eldest daughter experiences can be meaningfully explored and build upon existing theory.

Parentification was first conceptualised by the seminal works of Minuchin et al (1967), Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) and Chase (1999). Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark

(1973) stated that parentification is caused by the "distortion or lack of boundaries between family subsystems causing children take on such adult roles".

Some may question the difference between parentification and a child having 'chores'. Ramirez (2022) stated that parentification is different to 'chores' as the child's responsibilities are usually developmentally inappropriate, the boundaries become blurred making it difficult to know who is parent and who is the child, the child struggles to depend on the parent for emotional or physical support and lastly, the responsibilities cause a level of distress to the child.

It is understood parentification was conceptualised through the lens of family systems theory (Bowen., 1966). This describes that families operate as emotional units, further explaining that family relationships are interdependent affecting one another in the family system. With this in mind, if there a circumstance in the family impacting a parent, such as illness, substance abuse, mental health difficulties, poverty, migration and divorce, this may risk causing parentification of children (Hooper., 2012; Hooper et al., 2013). This causes the power structure in the family system to be inverted causing the child to take on roles such as decision maker or problem solver in order to maintain family functioning. This process then becomes normalised within the family (Hooper et al., 2011).

Wells and Jones (2000) explain their understanding of parentification through a psychodynamic conceptualisation. They argue that parentification is caused by the projection of developmentally premature expectations upon the child, causing feelings of shame if they do not match such expectations. Feelings of guilt and shame can continue to affect an individual within adulthood through the development of 'masochistic behaviours' such as people pleasing (Jones and Wells., 1996).

Others, such as West and Keller (1991), have understood parentification through the lens of Bowlby's attachment theory and concept of "compulsive caregiving" (Bowlby., 1977). They argued that children become compulsive caregivers in childhood since this behaviour

receives a level of attention or praise from their parental figures who may be emotionally unavailable. Thus, this pattern of behaviour continues into adulthood as it has now become a template, shaping how they relate to people in adult relationships.

There are two types of parentification often referred to in the literature as emotional parentification and functional or instrumental parentification (Engelhardt., 2012). Emotional parentification is when the parentified child is relied on by other family members for emotional support such as being a secret keeper, confidant or mediating arguments. On the other hand, functional or instrumental parentification refers to the practical tasks that parentified children may become responsible for such as household duties, caring for siblings, cooking or even managing finances (Burton et al., 2018). Research suggests that emotional parentification causes more distress within parentified children than instrumental parentification as it has can cause psychological distress in parentified adolescents (Hooper and Wallace., 2010; Chen and Panebianco., 2020).

Impact

Researchers have explored some of the impacts of parentification. Parentification impact is categorised as either 'destructive' (unhelpful) or 'constructive' (helpful) (Schorr and Goldner., 2023). We will first discuss destructive impacts of parentification in childhood. This impact includes poorer social competence (Macfie et al., 2005), low self-worth (Shaffer and Egeland., 2011), self-identity difficulties (Goldner and Abir., 2019) and depression in teenage years (Burton et al., 2018). Further to this, studies have found that when parentified children provide emotional caregiving within their family, they may perceive their own feelings as a burden upon their parents causing a hesitancy to share their own emotions (Van Parys et al., 2015).

The experience of being parentified may cause negative impacts in adulthood including low self-esteem and codependent traits (Wells and Jones., 1999), lower academic status (Chase

et al., 1998), self-doubt (Castro et al., 2004), higher risks of experiencing mental health difficulties (Hooper et al., 2011). A plethora of research has found parentification experiences to be associated with various mental health difficulties such as obsessive compulsive disorder (Trak et al., 2025), eating disorders (Rowa et al., 2001), panic (Dwyer., 1991), depression (Schier et al., 2015), anxiety (Khafi et al., 2014) 'masochistic personality disorders' (Jones and Wells., 1996) and difficulty with emotion regulation (Jankowski and Hooper., 2014). This shows how detrimental experience of parentification can be for some people highlighting how a childhood experience can continue to impact you as an adult.

For others, parentification has had an impact on behaviour, as well as relationally. Behaviourally, studies using self-report suggest that adults who had experienced childhood parentification were more likely to use 'defensive splitting' (Wells and Jones., 1998). This suggests that parentification may have an enduring impact how people may cope with their emotions.

In terms of relationships, some studies suggest that parentification impacts can extend into romantic and platonic relationships. In romantic relationships, such impacts may include reduced satisfaction (Baggett et al., 2015) and communication difficulties associated with an anxious-attachment style (Madden and Shaffer., 2016). Less is known about impacts on friendships, however, Goldner et al (2019) found that parentified adults may experience rejection sensitivity in friendships.

Interestingly, the impact of parentification has been suggested to go beyond just the individual. Nutall et al (2012) found that mothers who had experienced destructive parentification in childhood, were less likely to show warmth and responsive parenting to their infants (Macfie et al., 2008). This suggests that parentification experiences hold the potential to impact how the individual makes sense of caregiving when they become a parent themselves potentially pointing to an intergenerational impact.

Comparatively, a much smaller body of research has explored constructive impacts of parentification. Some studies have suggested that parentification can result in stronger sibling relationships (Borchet et al., 2020), resilience and adaptive coping skills in adulthood (Stein et al., 2007) and high levels of personal strengths as found through post traumatic growth measures (Hodgkins and Tunçgenç., 2025). Less knowledge about constructive impacts of parentification may partly be because parentification is predominately framed as an experience of burden and loss which has prioritised exploration of destructive impacts. However, it may also indicate a limited focus on how individuals themselves make sense of both the challenges and perceived strengths associated with parentification, highlighting the need for research that attends to the full complexity of these experiences.

Critique of the Conceptual Basis of Parentification Theory

Parentification provides an established psychological framework through which the experiences of British South Asian eldest daughters can be explored through the understanding of 'role reversal'. Having said this, the application of this concept to culturally diverse populations requires critical consideration and an exploration into the origins of the theory.

Parentification theory was largely developed within Western psychological perspective by Western thinkers (Minuchin et al., 1967, Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark., 1973., Chase 1999). Consequently, the concept has primarily been understood through Western assumptions regarding family boundaries, autonomy and normative child development. Whilst these theoretical perspectives have contributed substantially to understanding role reversal within families, their underlying assumptions may not necessarily reflect family structures and caregiving practices across culturally diverse communities.

As a result, questions arise regarding the extent to which parentification, as traditionally conceptualised, can be universally applied across different cultural contexts. Within collectivist family systems, responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings, contributing to

household functioning or supporting parents may be understood as expressions of family obligation and interdependence rather than understood as 'role reversal'. Consequently, applying the concept of parentification without sufficient attention to cultural context risks interpreting culturally normative responsibilities through an individualistic Western framework.

However, culture is only one factor shaping responsibilities, as family roles can also be influenced by wider social and structural conditions (Marchetta and Ricard., 2025). Responsibilities undertaken by children may emerge not only from family dynamics but also from broader systemic influences including migration, racism, language brokering and socioeconomic disadvantage (Jezewski., 1990; Chao., 2006). Despite this, one should consider that the terminology of 'parentification' may inadvertently place blame and responsibility primarily within parents by implying that caregiving roles arise from dysfunctional family relationships or parental boundary violations (Kerig., 2005). Whilst this may accurately describe some families, it risks overlooking the structural conditions that may shape parentification experiences within ethnic minority households.

These conceptual limitations do not necessarily diminish the value of parentification as a framework but instead highlight the importance of applying it critically. Rather than assuming the concept fully explains these experiences, the present study adopts parentification as a critical interpretive lens while remaining attentive to the ways culture, gender, birth order, migration history and broader structural influences may extend or challenge existing conceptualisations of parentification.

Intersectionality as a Framework for Understanding Parentification

Although parentification theory provides us with a psychological framework to begin to understand role reversal experiences, there is little exploration of social and structural inequalities which may impact these experiences. Considering the impact of these

inequalities for this population is particularly important due to a history of experiencing racism, discrimination and systemic barriers relating to factors including gender, culture, race, religious beliefs and migration (Shahbaz et al., 2025).

Intersectionality is a framework which helps us understand how multiple social identities and systems of power, such as factors such as gender, birth order, ableism, class, race, overlap and uniquely contributing to ones experiences (Crenshaw, K., 1991). Applying an intersectional lens to parentification experiences is important as it moves away from 'parent blaming'. This is important as it highlights that role reversal may not occur only because of from family dynamics but actively shaped by wider structural factors which may impact family resources and opportunities. In this context, this may be role reversal experiences being shaped within the context of parental migration, being second-generation British, being a woman, and being an ethnic minority.

The present study aims to adopt an intersectional lens to understanding the unique social and structural challenges which may be impacting parentification experiences, beyond what parentification theory appears limited to, which is family dynamics. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of participant experiences.

Now that we have discussed the background and critically considered the conceptual knowledge basis relating to the topic of parentification, as well as considered how intersectionality frames this study, the next section discusses how eldest daughters discussed their experiences of parentification online giving rise to the topic now colloquially known as the 'eldest daughter syndrome'.

The 'Eldest Daughter Syndrome' – Lived Experiences from Social Media Discourses

Background

The 'eldest daughter syndrome' is an online term which refers to the emotional burden experienced by eldest daughters due to the roles and responsibilities they are expected to fulfil due to being the eldest child (Hu., 2023). It is unclear who specifically coined this term due to the way concepts arising from lived experience are spread rapidly across social media. Despite this, it is understood that the topic gained significant visibility following a widely circulated TikTok video by Morton (2024) who is an American licensed marriage and family therapist. In this video, Morton (2024) mentions that the 'eldest daughter syndrome' is not a mental health diagnosis, but a term used to describe the unique pressures and responsibilities placed on the eldest daughters of a family. Such responsibilities can be understood as being positioned as in charge of sibling caregiving, domestic duties, being a role model for young siblings as well as acting as a family mediator within conflict. Some Eldest daughters may be given such responsibility from a very young age which can place eldest daughters in a parentified role (parent and child role reversal) within their families. It is important to note that not every eldest daughter will relate to this experience as every family experience is different. This experience however relates to those who feel they experienced parentification because of their eldest daughter position. Morton (2024) described 8 signs that someone may be experiencing 'eldest daughter syndrome'. These include; intense feeling of responsibility, being an overachiever, worrying, struggling with people-pleasing, struggling to place and uphold boundaries in relationships, feelings of resent for siblings or parents, feelings of guilt and have a difficult time in adult relationships. This video gained 8 million views globally which suggests that this experience may have resonated with a large and diverse audience.

This video, watched by millions, caused this topic to be discussed in a similar way in other popular media platforms, including British Vogue (Cohen., 2024), The Guardian (2024), ELLE (2024), Forbes (2024), The Conversation (2025) and the BBC (2025). Journalists and

content creators from different media outlets began to publish their lived experiences about growing up as eldest daughters. What is interesting is that through many of these narratives, there appears to be shared similarities in experience despite being from different backgrounds. One apparent similarity is the weight of holding adult responsibility from a young age.

For example, Cohen (2024), a white British journalist for British Vogue expressed that as an eldest daughter she felt immense responsibility from a young age to be a role model for her siblings. She expressed parents holding her to a higher standard in comparison to her siblings due causing her to internalise perfectionist traits. Similarly, Mexican American eldest daughter Macedo (2021) wrote about feeling responsible for her siblings as if she was their "second mother" due to assuming early responsibility for their caregiving and domestic duties. British Nigerian eldest daughter Oladele (2022) writing for Teen Vogue describes being a translator for her parents from a young age, as well being expected to complete complex paperwork. British Somali eldest daughters Hodo and Kaltun (2024) discussed experiencing being the family therapist and mediator due to being seen as mature from a young age. They further noted effects of carrying such responsibility caused anxiety, low mood, perfectionism and difficulty with allowing oneself to rest.

From the above examples of lived experiences, we can see how themes of early responsibility for adult tasks, high expectations, physical and emotional labour are reoccurring narratives across different cultural contexts. While there are notable shared patterns across eldest daughter experiences, there may be different factors that contribute to different experiences of eldest daughterhood. One group that has been particularly vocal within the 'eldest daughter syndrome' online discourse are South Asian eldest daughters. South Asian eldest daughters explicitly situate their experiences within a cultural, gendered, and migration related context. We will now explore these experiences through exploring the online discourse.

British South Asian Eldest Daughters Experiences - Online Discourses

BSA eldest daughters have been vocalising their own experiences of eldest daughter syndrome online. It is not that their experiences seem too different from the general online discourse, thematically the experiences remain similar i.e. early burden of responsibility of adult like family roles. However the way these experiences are explained and contextualised is different as they are situated within a cultural, gendered, and migration related context. BSA eldest daughters (British national and is of South Asian ethnic origin) have a particularly salient voice within this online discourse.

As previously discussed, collectivist values, gendered role expectations and patriarchal systems can be present within South Asian families and culture. BSA eldest daughters online have expressed that these factors operate in combination to shape their lived experiences of parentification. Eldest daughters feel they are at the intersection of cultural expectations to prioritise family needs, gendered norms that position daughters as caregivers and hierarchical family structures that place particular responsibility on firstborn children. In addition to this, eldest daughters with first generation migrant parents feel migration is a factor which further intensifies their eldest daughter role. We will now explore some examples of what BSA eldest daughters have shared online in relation to how cultural, gender and migration related factors have increased their responsibilities as the eldest daughter.

The normalisation of holding adult responsibility early on in life is a frequent experience shared online by BSA eldest daughters. Mobeen Akhtar, a British Pakistani eldest daughter and psychotherapist shared her experiences in an online interview (Jha., 2025). Mobeen shared that due to gendered norms within her family, she was positioned as being another parent to her siblings. This meant that growing up her relationship with her siblings did not feel like a playful sibling relationship. She shares that from a young age, she was responsible for attending her siblings parents evenings and being a mediator between her siblings and her parents (Jha., 2025).

Similar expectations of caregiving responsibilities were found in an article where Shahid (2023) invited South Asian eldest daughters to share their experiences online. A BSA eldest daughter described learning to cook full meals by the age of 13 as she held the responsibility of feeding her siblings. She further described how this experience contrasts her White British peers who were not eldest daughters who learnt such skills in later adulthood, whereas she had to learn this early in life to be able to carry this familial expectation. The article contextualises such experiences by noting how patriarchal norms within some South Asian families can increase burden on the women, thereby intensifying the burden placed on eldest daughters in particular.

South Asian eldest daughters responsibility may be further intensified within a migrant family context. Due to being the first child born in the UK, second generation BSA eldest daughters (have at least one migrant parent) may act as a bridge between their parents and wider British institutes. Parents who may have an unfamiliarity with the language or cultural norms may have a reliance on the eldest child to support them with administrative and translation based tasks. Though this role may not apply only to eldest girls in the family, it may intensify the responsibility eldest daughters already have (i.e. caregiving). This experience has been shared in online accounts shared by BSA eldest daughters from migrant families. For example, British Bangladeshi eldest daughter Islam (2023) described that due to being born in the UK and the eldest child, from a young age she has been responsible for supporting her migrant parents with managing tax-related paperwork, translating during medical appointments, and arranging GP visits on their behalf due to language barriers. She reflects that opportunities for rest are largely absent as these responsibilities are an expected part of her daily life. Such accounts highlight how migrant family contexts may increase responsibilities upon eldest daughters in a way where they become central to assisting their parents to navigate various systems within the UK. Bearing such adult responsibility from childhood risks early adultification of eldest daughters within such contexts.

Assuming such roles and responsibilities from a young age may leave lasting emotional and psychological impacts on BSA eldest daughters. To understand impact, we turn to online discourse (TikTok videos) as this is where eldest daughters have shared their experience themselves, as well as what mental health practitioners have written about through their experience of working with eldest daughters. Whilst many different types of impacts have been shared online, the following section highlights some of the most frequently discussed impacts.

One reoccurring impact seen across BSA eldest daughter narratives online is experiencing hyper-independence. This is understood as struggling to ask for help causing maladaptive and excessive self-reliance (Pal and Hasan., 2025). For example, British Indian eldest daughter Raja (2024) and British Bangladeshi eldest daughter Patel (2024) both described struggling to ask for help and have a tendency to manage challenges alone due to her history of growing up with the expectations of being self-reliant and competent eldest daughter. For these eldest daughters, letting go of responsibility feels difficult as it has been norm to carry it for so long.

Similar themes are reflected in accounts of eldest daughters describing difficult relationships with rest. British Pakistani eldest daughter Durrani (2025) shared that as an eldest daughter, she feels she has to 'earn' her rest through being dutiful even though she feels exhausted from all her familial duties.

Others have noticed that carrying responsibility from young age shaped the way they relate to others in adulthood. For example, a British Pakistani eldest daughter shared a video reflecting that following marriage, she became increasingly aware of her relational patterns that she associates with her role as the eldest daughter. She described attaching herself sense of self-worth to her in-laws perception of her, wanting to please others and seek validation through over exerting her roles and responsibilities in the home. She discussed that as the eldest daughter, her self-worth was connected to fulfilling the needs of others and thus, such patterns continue in other places within her life (Moulana., 2025).

Mental health practitioners suggest that children of migrant parents may feel indebted to their parents sacrifices causing lasting feelings of guilty when prioritising themself over their family. Within South Asian cultural contexts, where eldest daughters are often positioned as dutiful and responsible, the additional factor of being a child of a migrant may further reinforce expectations of self-sacrifice and ongoing support for the family (Jha., 2025; Patel., 2025).

As aspect we do not know much about yet in relation to eldest daughter experiences is how mental health may be impacted. BSA eldest daughters have described struggling with hyper-independence (Raja., 2024), difficulty resting (Durrani., 2025) and struggling to prioritise their own needs (Moulana., 2025), however, there is a lack of commentary about if this impacts mental health. Having said this, the online discourses are suggestive that some level of distress exists but it is not being vocalised, perhaps due to stigma around speaking about mental health publicly, particularly on social media (Gilbert et al., 2004).

The aforementioned knowledge from social media offers us valuable insight into the discourses surrounding BSA eldest daughter experiences. Across these narratives there are recurring themes such as burden, sacrifice, responsibility that eldest daughters have carried from a young age. We understand that these experiences are at the intersection of birth order, culture, gender and migration experiences. Such factors in combination are appear to add pressures and responsibilities upon BSA eldest daughters from a young age. Such experiences have been associated with long term impacts on adult eldest daughters as mentioned. This topic is important because through social media we understand just how integral this experience is to some people's lives, however, the voices of BSA eldest daughters experiences have not reached academic literature. Without this exploration, these experiences risk remaining under recognised and this limiting opportunities for culturally informed understanding and therapeutic support.

This forms the research question which is what is the experiences of being a parentified first-born eldest daughters in a BSA family. The study three main aims.

Aim 1 - Experience: Aim one of this study was to explore the experience of parentification as a first-born eldest daughter from BSA background.

Aim 2 - Influences: Aim two of this study was to understand more about factors that influence parentification experience. For example, gender, culture and migration history.

Aim 3 - Impact: Aim three of this study was to explore the emotional and psychological impact of eldest daughter parentification experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Overview

As mentioned previously, the concept of parentification is notably defined through the white western lens and thus, understanding of what this experience is has largely focused on white populations (Minuchin et al., 1967, Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark., 1973 and Chase., 1999). This then impacted the literature review as there is currently no academic literature that directly explores parentification experiences of BSA eldest daughters as a distinct group. Consequently, I had to draw from different areas of research which together address the foundational components of this research. The literature review draws together key bodies of work that collectively informed the study aims which include research on BSA women, parentification, birth order and daughter focused research. These areas of research were reviewed to understand what is currently known, how key concepts have been theorised and where limitations remain. The literature review also aims to consider how these gaps intersect at the end of the chapter. This provides a rationale for this study.

For each body of research, a broad search was done using EBSCOhost, Ovid Online, PsycArticles, PsycINFO and PubMed using terms applicable to the research question.

For example ("eldest daughter" OR "firstborn daughter" OR "oldest daughter" OR "first-born daughter" OR "caregiving" OR "parentification" OR "responsibility" OR "role strain" OR "second mother" OR "third parent" OR "birth order")

AND ("South Asian" OR "South Asian" OR "Pakistani" OR " Indian" OR "Bangladesh" OR "Afghanistan" OR "Sri Lanka" OR "Nepal" OR "Maldives").

The studies were included if they were closely related to my research question and enables useful discussion on a core aspect of the research (either based on; eldest daughter experiences, parentification, experiences of BSA women, second generation migrant experiences in connection to parentification). Studies were excluded if they did not provide useful discussion to the research topic and not peer-reviewed. There was no specific limit on

how far back literature to be able to include seminal papers at the core of theories like birth order.

It is important to note that this study is theory-informed and not theory-driven. This means that theory discussed provides a conceptual lens to guide understanding experiences. However, the study does not aim to test predictions or any hypotheses derived from the theory. This ensures participant voices shape the study's findings whilst situating interpretations within a well-established theoretical context (Giles and Harrison., 2023).

We will first begin by exploring what is currently known about the chosen population through existing studies.

British South Asian Women

Despite ethnic minorities populations being largely under researched (Chaudhuri et al., 2023), existing literature concerning BSA women is available. Qualitative researchers have explored BSA women experiences within subjects such as mental health and barriers to accessing therapy (Moller et al., 2016; Wales et al., 2017; Prajapati and Liebling., 2022), domestic violence (Sultana et al., 2024), educational and employment outcomes (Bhopal., 1998; Bhopal., 2000) and experiences of caregiving for elderly family members (Hossain et al., 2020). I will be focusing on the areas of relevance for this topic.

Research that has explored mental health experiences of BSA women suggests that women within this population, regardless of generation, have an increased likelihood of experiencing mental health difficulties, however are less likely to seek support compared to White British Women (Anand and Cochrane., 2005). In addition to this, studies have also reported BSA women being at a higher risk of depression (Fazil and Cochrane., 2003), postpartum depression (Husain et al., 2024), self-harm (Husain et al., 2006), suicide (D'Alessio and Ghazi., 1993) and eating disorders (McCourt and Waller., 1996). It is commonly suggested that this increased risk is due to cultural stigma surrounding mental health as well as beliefs

that distress should be managed privately within the family reducing likelihood to seek support (Raleigh and Balarajan., 1992). This may cause BSA women's experiences to not be voiced outside of the family. Whilst they may not turn to professionals, it's interesting to note that eldest daughters from this population have spoken up about their experiences and associated distress online. This is significant to note as it may suggest the experiences that may not reach professionals as often, are being expressed elsewhere (online) by some. This supports the rationale for this study as attending to eldest daughter experiences helps to amplify the voices and experiences that be less visible within mental health research.

Little research has focused on second generation BSA women in specific. One relevant study found qualitatively explored how adolescent second generation South Asian women living in the UK experienced cultural conflict. A key finding from this paper is that participants described experiencing pressure, lack of control and constrained autonomy shaped by collectivist, cultural and gendered family values (Gupta et al., 2007). These findings highlight how cultural and familial expectations can cause ongoing strain within the lives of second generation BSA women. While this research offers important insight into the existence of such cultural pressures faced by this population, it does not examine how such pressures are experienced within families or how specific family roles such as being the eldest daughter, may intensify or shape these experiences. Online accounts of eldest daughters suggest that cultural and gendered expectations are intensified because of their birth order. On this basis, it is then important to research how cultural and gendered expectations impact experiences of BSA eldest daughters.

Certain cultural values have also been associated with psychological distress within this population. Gunasinghe et al (2019) studied how 6 second-generation British Pakistani women made sense of cultural concepts and associations with mental health and wellbeing. Using semi structured interviews and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) the authors found that participants experienced pressure to be seen as perfect and good women due to the cultural values of 'izzat' (respect). This was experienced as exhausting and even

caused some participants to consider self-harm. Similar findings about cultural pressures being associated with self-harming in BSA women were described in a study by Chew-Graham et al (2002). This demonstrates how cultural and gendered expectations can be directly linked to mental health outcome in BSA women. Online experiences shared by BSA eldest daughters have also indicated that cultural expectations of dutifulness and responsibility as eldest daughters are for some, experienced as a source of on-going pressure. Research has found links between cultural pressures and mental health amongst this population but has failed to explore how mental health is experienced by eldest daughters who have been vocal about cultural pressures online. This study aims to fill this gap through providing a closer inquiry into how parentified eldest daughters in this population experience their mental health.

Furthermore, some studies have researched how cultural and gendered expectations persist within BSA families within migrant contexts. Hossain et al (2019) highlighted that whilst migration to the UK may increase women's educational or occupational opportunities, caregiving expectations remained gendered as a women's duty. This suggests a continuity of gendered responsibility in BSA families with migration history and thus, supporting the experiences that BSA eldest daughters have shared online. Having said this, this study categories 'women' in a group without examining how such caregiving responsibilities may look different within inter-family roles. Due to this, The ways in which such expectations may be unevenly distributed, particularly for the eldest daughters, may remain unexplored. Studying eldest daughter experiences within this population therefore allows a step forward to explore how cultural norms and migration history are experienced through a specific family role.

Parentification Literature

As this study explores the parentification experiences of second generation BSA eldest daughters, within the parentification literature I will be reviewing studies pertaining to gender, culture and migrant backgrounds. As there is little information on parentification and birth order, birth order will be reviewed as separate topic later in this review.

Parentification and Gender

Parentification literature has indeed explored gender related differences and has largely focused on comparison between types of parentification boys and girls experience. For example, Harrison and Albanese (2012) found that gender affected the type of parentification that adolescents were experiencing. It appeared that daughters were engaging in more emotional parentification and domestic duties, whilst son's experienced more functional parentification. These gendered roles could be argued are mirrors of traditional societal expectations of gender roles (Revenson et al., 2016). Other studies have focused on which gender is parentified more. Whilst some have found that girls have higher levels of parentification than boys (Clerici and Vanin., 2002; Mercado., 2003; McMahon and Luthar., 2007; Titzmann., 2012), others have found results suggesting boys have higher levels of parentification (Hooper et al., 2015) or even no statistical differences in parentification found between either gender (Perrin et al., 2013).

Whilst this knowledge is useful, comparing between gender's has made little room for exploring within-gender variation, particularly how specific birth order positions, such as being the eldest daughter, has shaped parentification experiences. This may be a reason why parentification literature has not yet caught up with the experiences of eldest daughters being shared online.

Moreover, another key limitation is that parentification is often quantified through measures such as 'the Parentification Scale' (Mika et al., 1987) which measure scores of overall level of responsibility (Dariotis et al., 2023). This is problematic because when we seek to understand parentification through a quantified number of responsibilities, we do not understand the lived experience of parentification. It leaves little understanding for how did the experience feel and how did it shape the individual. This gap in the literature strongly calls for research to view parentification experiences through a qualitative lens to humanise the experience beyond numbers.

Parentification, Culture and Migrant Backgrounds

Studies suggest that experience of parentification can be mediated by culture and ethnicity (Phinney et al., 2000). For example, Khafi et al (2014) found that Black American adolescents experienced parentification more positively, in comparison to White American young people. It was suggested that due to culture, perhaps responsibilities were perceived more favourably within the Black American group. This suggests that parentification must be interpreted within its cultural context as it may impact the perception of the experience. This study aims to explore how BSA eldest daughters experienced parentification through their cultural lens.

Only two relevant qualitative studies were found which explored parentification within a culture focused context. The first is Irfan et al (2024) study which is the only research found qualitatively studying parentification experiences within a South Asian sample. This study was based in Pakistan with 8 parentified adolescents. Interestingly, from the 4 female participants in this sample, 3 of them identified as eldest daughters even though researchers did not sample for any specific birth order. Through individual interviews and IPA analysis, the following key findings were reported. Gender affected what types of parentified roles participants were responsible for as boys described responsibility for functional roles

(financial breadwinners), whilst girls reported domestic duties and emotional caregiving roles (mediating family conflict). Girls reported they expressed silencing their own needs to be able to prioritise parental emotional needs.

Another key finding was that participant described that in their culture, the eldest child is "automatically" positioned to hold responsibility for sibling wellbeing and safety and such responsibilities are often expected from childhood. Eldest daughters described intensified caregiving expectations due to the combined effects of birth order and gender which positioned them as mothers to their siblings from a young age. These experiences closely mirror the narratives of BSA eldest daughters online sharing similar themes (Shahid., 2023; Jha., 2025) but we do not have qualitative, UK based research examining this.

This study provides valuable insight into how parentification is experienced within a collectivist cultural context but remains limited to eldest daughters from Pakistan. As online narratives of parentified eldest daughters are shared across South Asian communities, rather than just Pakistani eldest daughters, it is important for research to examine these experiences with this population as a group, rather than individually. Irfan et al (2024) participants were all adolescents which raises questions about if adults reflecting on parentification experiences would be any different. However, what is particularly noteworthy is the fact that eldest daughterhood came up as a key experience influencing parentification for some of the participants, yet birth order not a key aspect of the study. The present study builds on this work by exploring how parentification is experienced by adult BSA eldest daughters, specifically including birth order as a key part of the research focus.

The second study which is important to highlight is Cho et al (2024) because it employs the same methodology as my research (qualitative, interviews and reflexive thematic analysis) and focuses on experience of parentification as second generation children to East Asian migrant parents in America. In this study, 8 adults took part in semi-structured individual interviews about their experiences of parentification. This was inclusive of all genders, however, there was a female majority sample (7 women and 1 male).

Participants described becoming responsible for adult responsibilities from a young age within a migrant family context, this included emotional care for parents, domestic duties as well as translating for their parents. Also, similarly to Irfan et al (2024), some participants in Cho et al (2024) study also spoke about their experiences in the context of their birth order, being eldest daughters. Yet the researchers did not systematically collect or analyse participants' birth order. They shared that as the eldest daughter they were responsible for taking care of the family and often felt like they were in a mother role. In addition, valuable insight was found in relation to being parentified as a child of a migrant. Participants expressed stepping in the role of family caretaker when parents were working in order to look after siblings and cook for parents upon their return. Others spoke about the experience of language brokering and translating documents for their parents. This finding has also been reported in other studies which have found children of migrant parents often become responsible for being a bridge between their family and society due to being the first one born in the host country (Jezewski., 1990; Chao., 2006). Such responsibility may intensify parentification experience (Titzmann., 2012) and be associated with depressive symptoms (Kim et al., 2017).

Although Cho et al (2024) study focuses on East Asian American participants rather than South Asians, it remains highly relevant to my research. Both East Asian and South Asian cultures emphasise strong family obligations, respect for elders, and the prioritisation of collectivist values. Cho et al (2024) study demonstrates how collectivist cultural values can intensify caregiving responsibilities for eldest daughters in migrant families navigating predominantly individualist Western societies.

Strengths of this study include its focus on rich qualitative data enabling further understand into experience through a cultural and migratory lens. Limitations include the fact that it was not specifically exploring birth order of participants, yet participants still described their birth order as part of their parentification experience. This clearly highlights the need for qualitative research to explore this intersection instead of ignoring it. Findings may be

different for BSA eldest daughters due to nuances in culture and British society. Lastly, Cho et al (2024) study appeared to predominantly focus on the challenges associated with parentification experiences. This is a gap this study aims to fill this gap by exploring both challenges and positives aspects within parentification experience. Lastly, Cho et al (2024) did not thoroughly explore impact on mental health impact. This is important to address as suggested in Irfan et al (2024) study, parentified eldest daughters from collectivist backgrounds may be feeling intensified feelings of stress and guilt. My study aims to address this by asking participants specifically about any mental or emotional impacts of parentification for second generation BSA eldest daughters.

Parentification literature has provided an insight to the child and parent role-reversal in relation to gender, culture and migration experiences. However, there is limited intersection with birth order. Due to this, it is necessary to review literature related to birth order.

Birth Order and First Borns

One of the most notable names within birth order literature is that of Adler (1964). Adler (1964) developed a 'birth order theory' in which he theorised that birth order can impact an individual's personality, behaviour and roles they hold within their family. Adler (1928) reported that there are 'common characteristics' of particular birth order positions such as eldest children having 'leadership' qualities. As his theory developed, Adler (1956) argued that it is not simply a child's position in the order of birth that shapes their character, but rather the family situation they are born into and how they interpret their place within it. Birth order provides a structural position in the family, but what matters more is the 'psychological position'. The psychological birth order position is the way a child perceives themselves within that structure. This means that individuals do not automatically develop traits associated with their birth order, instead, it is their interpretation of their role in the family that has the greater influence (Shulman and Mosak., 1977). This suggests that may be a social

influence consider, however despite this conceptualisation of birth order, much of the literature has focused on traits and outcome based research as opposed to exploring the underlying social and cultural influences.

For example, later developments within birth order literature have had a particular focus on personality such as Sulloway's (1996) 'family niche model'. He argued that siblings compete for limited parental resources and attention, shaping their personalities to occupy distinct "niches" within the family (Sulloway, 1996). Due to their niche, he asserted that first-born's tend to be responsible, dominant and dutiful. A study that showed support for such claims includes Healey and Ellis (2007) who found that in a sample of 161 British university students (mixed-gender), first-born's were rated as more 'conscientious' than second born's, whilst second born's scored higher on the 'openness' rating. This showed support for Sulloway (1996) claims suggesting that personalities tend to differ based on the birth order 'niche'.

Having said that, Sulloway (1996) claims have been widely critiqued due to lack of control of confounding variables such as family size, socioeconomic status and parental education. Another criticism of Sulloway (1996) is that his findings originated from a meta-analysis therefore academics critique that Sulloway's (1996) theory was too reliant on secondary data (Barni et al., 2014).

Since then it appears there has a been a large focus on either proving or disproving associations between birth order and personality. Research has shown that once key confounding variables are controlled for, the apparent effects of birth order on personality become negligible (Jefferson et al., 1998). More recent large-scale studies using nationally representative samples from the USA, UK, and Canada have further challenged Sulloway's (1996) claims. By employing robust statistical methods and controlling for a wide range of family and demographic factors, these studies found little to no evidence that birth order has a meaningful impact on personality (Rohrer et al., 2015; Damian & Roberts, 2015). Other studies have found meaningful difference in personality of different birth order positions. Van-

Volkom et al (2019) found that first born adults scoring higher on conscientiousness on the Big Five Inventory suggesting a more 'mature' personality.

One of the main limitations of birth order research is its substantial focus on personality as it has reduced birth-order to traits. Arguably, this may be a reason why it is seen as a controversial topic. If through personality we argue that first-borns are more mature, conscientious, or responsible, this provides limited insight into how such traits developed in the first place for some individuals. As Adler (1956) first argued, that it is not simply a child's position in the order of birth that shapes their character, but rather the family situation they are born into and how they interpret their place within it. I argue that researchers have missed the 'story' behind how different individuals experience birth order as well as the social and cultural factors which influence this. By framing being 'responsible' as a personality trait, we overlook the potential relational and cultural processes informing this. This is particularly important as it overlooks collectivist family contexts such as South Asian culture, where responsibility may be seen as a moral obligation, rather than merely a personality trait. This study responds to this gap by examining how BSA eldest daughters make sense of their birth order and responsibilities through the lens of cultural and gendered norms and migration histories shifting the focus from personality to lived experience.

Lived experiences of birth order research continue to stay neglected through the significant use of quantitative measures and outcome-based research. For example, Rohrer et al (2015) conducted a study in which data was drawn from three large databases from the United States (n = 5,240), Great Britain (n = 4,489), and Germany (n = 10,457) which included self-reported measures of intelligence. Using both within-family design and between-family design, researchers found that regardless of gender, first-born's scored higher compared to later-born's on measures of intelligence. Similarly, Black et al (2005) used open population data from Norway finding that first-born children, especially first born women, achieved higher levels of education compared to siblings.

Whilst such findings may be helpful in understanding potential advantages of first-born status, however, outcomes-based studies provide limited understandings about the processes through which outcomes emerge. Quantitative studies focusing on statistical analyses only tell us about power of effects, not why such differences may be. This creates questions around the social and cultural factors influencing outcomes.

This limitation is also applicable to studies exploring birth order and mental health. Franklin et al (2024) found potential links between birth order and childhood mental health difficulties. They conducted a longitudinal study examining 182,477 children from the USA, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia who had an anxiety screening when aged 8. Their statistical analysis found that first-born children, who have siblings, were 48% more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety and 35% more likely to be diagnosed with depression. In addition, Fukuya et al (2021) measured the mental health outcomes of 3,744 young Japanese children through a 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' (SDQ). After controlling for gender and other socioeconomic factors, a multiple regression analysis found that first-born's had higher conduct problems suggesting they experience more 'anger or argumentative behaviour' compared to later born's.

Whilst these large scale studies have good internal validity and provide some knowledge about the mental health and emotions of first-borns, the reliance on diagnostic screening and qualitative measures provide little explanation of how first-borns themselves experience their mental health in their own words as well as why these patterns are observed. It is commendable that efforts have been made to study mental health and birth order effects cross-culturally (Franklin et al., 2024). Despite this, the broader birth order literature offers limited insight into how birth order may shape mental health experiences within South Asian populations in particular. This is problematic as it restricts understanding of how culturally specific family structures, gendered values and migration histories may intersect with birth order to influence mental health.

Finally, the research tends to treat firstborns as a homogeneous group, not only by culture but also by gender. Many studies have studied first born position as a gender neutral category (Fukuya et al., 2021; Franklin et al., 2024). This creates an assumption that the experience within-gender of birth order would be the same. Only one study was found that did explore birth order and gender within a collectivist context. Marchetta and Ricard (2025) conducted a longitudinal study in Madagascar exploring how birth order and gender shaped transition into adulthood. Survey findings showed that first born children transitioned into adulthood earlier than later born-siblings with first-born daughters experiencing heightened burdens through increased house caregiving responsibilities and lower educational opportunities.

Whilst this study is situated within a different cultural and socioeconomic context, it offers insight into how birth order may intersect with gender in collectivist family systems, echoing the experiences being shared online by BSA eldest daughters. The study missed the opportunity to examine how eldest daughters experienced their roles as well its impact. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring what such experiences are like within a BSA population.

As there is little literature directly examining eldest daughters experiences, broader research on daughterhood offers some insight into how daughters roles within families have been conceptualised.

Daughter- Focused Research

In recent family communications literature, researchers have noticed that the lack of research specific to the experience of being a daughter (Shrier et al., 2004; Alford., 2021). They noticed that when daughters are researched it is often done so in connection to their relationship with their mother (Kellas., 2010). For example, Arroyo et al (2020) research exploring how mothers communicate with their daughters and its impact on body image. This may minimise the voices of eldest daughters who have their own story to share, such as the elders daughters within the online discourse. This highlights the need to research eldest daughters alone.

There are some studies which have consistently found that daughters are often positioned as caregivers in their families. Alford and Miller-Day (2019) state that daughters often become responsible for managing family conflict, carrying emotional responsibility for maternal well-being and providing and domestic support. Similarly, in Alford's (2021) qualitative study, she interviewed American daughters (aged 25-44) about their relationship with their mothers. The findings reported participants described themselves as 'mothering their mother' highlighting how daughters felt responsible for their mothers care.

Such knowledge, that daughters often occupy caregiving roles in families supports the narratives of eldest daughters online. However, neither study explored birth order nor parentification, therefore this limits knowledge on how daughterhood experiences may be intensified in different contexts. There is also limited understanding of impacts of being in a caregiver role. In addition, both studies were situated within Western cultural contexts with majority White American participants. This creates a lack of consideration for how daughters from collectivist cultures may experience daughterhood. This study aims to address these gaps by focusing on the parentification experiences of BSA eldest daughters and examining how sociocultural factors shape eldest daughter responsibilities.

Daughterhood, in particularly eldest daughterhood has recently been discussed in emerging interdisciplinary research suggesting biological explanations for eldest daughter early maturation. Fox et al (2024) conducted a 15 year longitudinal quantitative study examining associations between maternal prenatal distress and pubertal onset in children. They found that higher maternal stress was linked to earlier pubertal maturation in daughters and particularly within first-born daughters. Researchers suggested that their findings reflect a potential 'adaptive mechanism' through which first-born daughters may become socially and emotionally mature earlier to assume caregiving roles under conditions of maternal stress. This study does not address eldest daughter lived experience, however, it highlights that birth order and gender have been recognised as significant in shaping eldest daughter familial roles even within biological research. This further highlights the need for qualitative research that examines how such roles are experienced understood and negotiated within specific cultural and familiar contexts.

Gaps Summary and Research Rationale

Eldest daughters worldwide have taken to social media using the hashtag #EldestDaughterSyndrome to discuss their experiences of parentification as eldest daughters. BSA eldest daughters in specific, discuss their experiences of parentification through the lens of culture, gender, birth-order and migration history as factors influencing their experiences. Literature pertaining to the population (BSA women) and pertaining to the experience (parentification, birth order and daughterhood) were reviewed. Several limitations were found,

BSA women are recognised as a population at increased risk of mental health difficulties due to cultural stigma, while simultaneously being less likely to access professional support (Fazil and Cochrane., 2003; Anand and Cochrane., 2005; Husain et al., 2006; Husain et al., 2024). This suggests that experiences of distress within this group may remain

underrepresented within clinical and academic research. This underrepresentation reflects broader patterns within psychological knowledge production where the experiences of White Western populations have positioned as normative. This has meant that culturally diverse experiences and voices are comparatively less researched (Reddy and Amer., 2023). This also continues to uphold structural oppression within the field of psychology through such framings of experiences. In this context, it is then paramount that as researchers, we take the experiences that BSA eldest daughters have shared online as important particularly due to the themes of pressure, responsibility, guilt and stress shared. This study addresses this gap by examining the mental and emotional impacts of parentification experiences within this population.

Parentification literature has largely used quantitative measures which has missed the opportunity to capture the stories within parentification experiences. A reason for this methodological dominance may be due to the problematic perception within psychology that quantitative measures and outcomes are somehow more 'robust' or more 'scientific' (Verhoef and Casebeer., 1997). Whilst quantitative findings are useful in their own right, they are not inherently 'better', and the dominance of one type of knowledge in a field does indeed highlight the need for other forms of knowledge such as qualitative methods, for greater understanding of a phenomenon.

Some studies have qualitatively explored parentification experiences within Asian cultures, but have focused on adolescent experiences (Irfan et al., 2025), were not birth order focused despite their participants mentioning their eldest daughter positions (Irfan et al., 2024; Cho et al., 2024), and were not UK based and did not explore mental and emotional health impacts (Irfan et al., 2024; Cho et al., 2024). This leaves BSA eldest daughter parentification experiences under-researched.

Birth order research tends to focus more on personality and traits, instead of lived experiences of specific birth order positions. This means first-borns are often labelled as 'conscientious' but their experience of why they are like this is not explored. This knowledge

has largely been based off quantitative outcome-based measures providing limited understanding about stories connected to birth order. In addition, eldest children are often treated as a homogeneous group. This highlights the limited consideration of how intersecting identities such as gender, culture and migration history shape the meaning and responsibilities associated with eldest-child status.

Collectively, these gaps highlight a need for qualitative research which sits at the intersection of parentification and birth order. There is need for this study to centre the voices of BSA eldest daughters, who have shared their experiences of parentification online. This research aims to not only fill this gap by exploring how BSA eldest daughters experience parentification but also aims to contribute to more representation of ethnic minority experiences within parentification discourse.

and how they describe their unique responsibilities with sensitivity to factors such as birth order, gender, culture, ethnicity and second generation migrant status.

Application to Counselling Psychology

This research is applicable to counselling psychology through its fundamental core values. Firstly, this research champions a social justice stance as this study is concerned with capturing the voice of South Asian women within professional research. This is important as such voices have been marginalised in global academic literature (Redwood and Gill., 2013). This supports one of the aims outlined in The BPS Counselling Psychology Division Strategic Plan which is to understand more about the well-being of minority populations (BPS., 2018).

BSA women (Husain et al., 2006; Husain et al., 2024), first-borns (Franklin et al., 2024) and parentified adults (Hooper et al., 2011) have an increased risk of experiencing mental health difficulties. Despite this, this populations experiences, when intersected, have not been researched. In doing so, I hope that the findings help counselling psychologists understand

more about the experiences of parentified BSA eldest daughters, as well as create conversation around ways of adapting therapy to support the needs of this population. This is at the heart of therapeutic work itself as culturally sensitive therapy provides better outcomes (Asnaani and Hofmann., 2012).

Counselling psychology, due to its humanistic values, prioritises lived experiences rather than viewing distress as symptoms. This research centres participants at its very core, the stories of eldest daughters in their own words carry this project through a qualitative design. In addition to this, counselling psychology is deeply rooted in being relational, viewing people as social beings and viewing distress with sensitivity to intersectionality. This study promotes these values within research by exploring how intersecting identities (British, South Asian, eldest, daughter, second generation migrant) shape parentification experiences.

The study also contributes fresh and timely knowledge to the field of counselling psychology by responding to experiences that have gained visibility within online discourses, such as #eldestdaughtersyndrome, but remain underexplored within academic research. By bringing these lived experiences into academic research, this study supports counselling psychology's commitment to being responsive to new and emerging social narratives.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will be presenting the methodology of this research. The chapter will begin by introducing my research question and discussing where the research positions itself within current literature. Moreover, I will then discuss the study aims and rationale. This will be followed by a statement of personal reflexivity. Further to this, I aim to explore the philosophical, epistemological and ontological underpinnings related to the research. I will discuss the philosophical underpinnings of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke., 2006, 2019). The methodology section will review steps of research design, procedure and outline the data analysis method. Finally, ethical considerations and research evaluation will be discussed.

Use of 1st Person

It is to be noted that I will be writing in first person throughout this methodology chapter. I do this to remain aligned with my chosen method, reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), my epistemological stance of social constructionism, and my ontological position of critical realism. Writing in the first person reflects one of the core principles of RTA which is recognising myself as an active participant in the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This also aligns with critical realism, which acknowledges that knowledge is shaped by interpretation, and social constructionism, which views meaning as co-constructed rather than objectively discovered. Additionally, using the first person highlights my closeness to the topic and ensures that my voice as a researcher is clearly distinguished throughout my writing.

Research Question and Aims

What is the experience of being a parentified first-born eldest daughter (ED) in a BSA family?

This study three main aims. For clarity, I have placed these aims into three categories.

Aim 1 - Experience: Aim one of this study was to explore the experience of parentification as a first-born eldest daughter from BSA background.

Aim 2 - Influences: Aim two of this study was to understand more about factors that influence parentification experience. For example, gender, culture and migration history.

Aim 3 - Impact: Aim three of this study was to explore the emotional and psychological impact of eldest daughter parentification experiences.

Personal Statement of Reflexivity

In this section, I aim to discuss why I chose this research topic and my personal positionality as an insider within this research. Being reflexive and thinking about my feelings about this topic is integral to research method (RTA) because the lens I view the world from will inevitably influence how I perceive the data.

I hope that my acknowledging my personal connection to this topic, I can provide context for my methodological and philosophical choices. In addition, I aim to enhance the credibility of my research by following Ahmed (2024) strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research, one of which is reflexivity. This involves demonstrating awareness of researcher biases and critically reflecting on my own motivations for conducting this study.

My initial motivation for exploring this topic stems from my own experience as an eldest daughter from a BSA background and a second-generation migrant.

Growing up with first-generation migrant parents, as the firstborn eldest daughter in my family, I was praised for being responsible, resilient, and selfless. My parents often looked to me to take on grown-up responsibilities, such as managing administrative tasks, translating official documents, and caring for my sibling. Beyond this, I was expected to assist with household chores, provide emotional support to family members, and act as a bridge between my parents and the outside world, whether at school, medical appointments, or community gatherings. I quickly learned that my value was often tied to how well I could care for others and manage responsibilities beyond my years. I now recognise this as parentification (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark., 1973).

Growing up, I thought parentification was normal as it was normalised within the SA culture I experienced, "it's just what eldest daughters do". As I grew up, I spoke with more and more women who had experienced the same things from a young age. Some would discuss how its shaped their personality, to be bossy and always on edge. Others would say their mental health has suffered due to being constantly anxious about the burden of their unpaid labour. Through hearing so many accounts of what seemed like the same story, I turned to social media. I found the #EldestDaughterSyndrome on TikTok and was astonished. The very thing I experienced was being spoken about by millions. I found this was not reflected in literature and my motivation to pick this as my research topic started then.

I am aware of my strong opinions towards the eldest daughter experience, the need for this research and how important amplification of eldest daughter voices are. What this reflection has helped me understand is just how important reflexivity will be for me through this research to help bracket what my feelings are from what is being presented within the data. I will do this through journaling and keeping a diary of my feelings throughout the research process (Appendix K).

Epistemology and Ontology

Ontology can be understood as the assumptions about the nature of reality that one holds i.e. what exists and what is true. On the other hand, epistemology is concerned with how we acquire knowledge about what exists i.e. how do we come to know? (Willig., 2019). As a researcher, it is imperative to consider your own ontological and epistemological positioning for many reasons. Reflecting on one's position helps researchers to understand their own view of the world, if knowledge exists and how it can be attained. Philosophical positioning is vital to discuss in relation to methodology as it is driven by one's epistemological and ontological beliefs. The researcher must be clear on their own positioning and assumptions and thus, this aids the understanding of what procedure is best fit to acquire such knowledge (Willig., 2013).

I will first discuss my philosophical positioning as a researcher and then briefly comment on its association with my chosen methodology.

My ontological stance aligns with that of a critical realist (Bhaskar., 1975). Critical realism was developed within the works of Roy Bhaskar (1975) in which he discussed that there is existence of an external or 'real' world, as well as a socially constructed world. Critical realism attempts to seek a middle ground position between traditional positivism and subjectivism. Critical realism argues that there is a reality that exists independently of our thoughts or perceptions. However, these realities are affected by observable and unobservable underlying structures. Thus, reality exists but it is always mediated by social, cultural, and individual influences.

In addition to this critical realists attempt to categorise what can be known through three categories; the empirical, the actual, and the real (Bhaskar., 1975; Lawani., 2021). The empirical is described as what can be observed directly, through narratives, what we hear and what we feel. In this study, the empirical refers to the lived experiences of eldest daughters, observable through their interviews. Next, 'the actual' is described as events,

actions and patterns that occur. An example, of 'the actual' within this study is 'experiencing parentification'. The third principle is 'the real', this is defined as the underlying root causes that effect reality. An example of the real within this study is gender roles.

My epistemological stance aligns with social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann., 1966). Social constructionism holds the view that reality is shaped by social constructs and human interaction such as language and culture. To make my stance transparent, it is important to differentiate between a radical social constructionist view versus a more flexible one. Stricter or more classical social constructionists argue that all knowledge is socially constructed and there is no objective reality out of our social and cultural interpretations. This can only be understood by exploring different social contexts such as meaning with language. I disagree with this strict of a position as it denies the existence of realities which cannot be explained as social constructs. Taylor (2018) critiqued stricter forms of social constructionism for its lack of flexibility and gave the example of a volcano exploding cannot be explained through social constructs, therefore, there should be flexibility to believe in a level of objective reality as a social constructionist. I hold a more flexible social constructionist epistemological view that although reality can be shaped by societal structures, this does not negate the existence of objective realities (Jacobs and Manzi., 2000). This is referred to a 'weak social constructionist' view within the literature (King., 2017).

How Does A Critical Realist Ontology And Social Constructionist Epistemology Work Together?

Both critical realist ontology and a more flexible social constructionist epistemology work together as critical realism acts as the foundation of my belief. This is that objective realities exist such as being an eldest daughter in a South Asian family. However, the way we understand these realities are affected by observable and unobservable underlying structures. Social constructionist epistemology works well with this as it acknowledges

experiences can be impacted by social influences and that reality can be understood through language, meaning making and understanding cultural context.

In summary, I believe in the role of the eldest daughter exists objectively (critical realist ontology), however, experiences of this role can be understood through social constructs such as language and culture (social constructionist epistemology).

How Does Critical Realism And Social Constructionism Inform My Approach To Research?

The integration of a critical realist ontology with a flexible/weak social constructionist epistemology offers a coherent philosophical foundation for this study.

The critical realist ontological principles of the empirical, the actual and the real compliment the aims of my study (Bhaskar., 1975). By focusing on the lived experiences of eldest daughters, I explore not only what is observed and reported (the empirical), but also the underlying mechanisms and structures that influence those experiences (the actual), as well as the deeper often unobservable realities that shape the emotional and psychological impact of their roles (the real).

Social constructionist epistemology aligns with my study aims because it allows me to explore experience, influence and impact through the language, culture and meaning-making of my participants.

Whilst a social constructionist epistemology shaped the data analysis by framing experience as constructed through cultural and social contexts, the critical realist lens allowed for a deeper level of interpretation through the use of retroductive reasoning. Retroduction is concerned with exploring the how and why behind patterns in the data (Millward et al., 2004). This research aligns with such an approach, as it not only asks participants how they make sense of their experiences, but also explores the broader influences shaping them,

thereby addressing the why. This dual focus also influenced the design of the interview schedule (Appendix B), for example in questions such as, "How was it growing up in Britain as a South Asian eldest daughter?"

Both critical realism and social constructionism have informed the way theory and research has influenced this research. Both philosophical positions assume that knowledge can be influenced by theory but it is not theory determined, as a positivist may assume (Fletcher., 2017). This aligns well with my belief that about the influence of theory, that theories such as birth order may help us to understand the data, however, not all knowledge can be understood through theory itself (Olsen., 2007).

In relation to methodology, critical realism and social constructionism are flexible and hold the assumption that there are varying methods of attaining knowledge (Fryer., 2022). Due to this flexibility, researchers should reflect on their research purpose and the extent of researcher involvement or proximity to the topic. This informed my choice of design, as I wanted my research to amplify the voices of women from minoritised communities (purpose) and due to own closeness to the topic, I would inevitably be close to the research. This helped me decide a qualitative design using individual interviews.

Furthermore, critical realism has a strong interest in experience and underlying mechanisms, this guided on me choosing reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as a data analysis method. RTA allows researchers to interpret data, both semantically (identify meaning) and latently (underlying themes and assumptions). This is well suited to the critical realist approach (exploring experience and underlying mechanisms).

A critical realist ontology is compatible with this RTA as both frameworks accept that data reflects a reality which is co-constructed by researcher and participant. A critical realist ontology aligns well with this by stating that such constructions can still provide insight into underlying real-world structures and mechanisms, even if accessed indirectly through participants' accounts.

RTA aligns well with a social constructionist epistemology, as both approaches recognise that meaning is context-dependent, shaped through language, and co-constructed between researcher and participant. This method enabled me to explore how eldest daughters from BSA backgrounds *make sense* of their experiences within specific cultural, relational, and generational contexts. My own positionality and theoretical lens were acknowledged as part of the analytic process, consistent with both RTA and social constructionist principles (Noble and McIlveen., 2012).

Methods

Design

As mentioned in the previous section, a qualitative design was required to explore the experiences of ED's. A qualitative design was best suited for many reasons. It allowed for participant-led dialogue and facilitates the expression of their experiences. This is compatible with the social constructionist epistemology of this study which highlights that meaning is socially constructed and context dependent.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were chosen as they are best suited to the aims of the research in order to focus on in-depth exploration of experience. The consideration of group interviews was rejected for multiple reasons. Focus groups raise ethical challenges as participants can sometimes feel fear to share their views and may also fear judgement from others (Sim and Waterfield., 2019). This was particularly important to consider in this study as research shows many South Asian cultures hold strong values around family privacy and honour (Gunasinghe et al., 2019). This may discourage individuals from openly discussing personal or family-related struggles in group settings. Due to the delicate nature of the topic, individual interviews are more appropriate to allow for participants to express themselves with privacy.

Interviews were offered through either online video call via Microsoft Teams or face to face at City, University of London. This is due to the many practical benefits of online interviews

such as widened access encouraging diversity and inclusion within the sample, reduced costs, ability to be interviewed in the safety of their own space and scheduling flexibility (Drabble et al., 2016). I am aware of the criticisms of online interviews such as the potential for challenges in rapport building, technical difficulties and implications for confidentiality (Novick., 2008). However, efforts were made to mitigate such challenges (which I will discuss further within the 'ethical considerations' section within in this chapter.

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Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The method of data analysis chosen for this research was Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method involving the identification of themes and patterns within data (Braun and Clarke., 2006). After some years, RTA was created as a contemporary approach discussing the use of reflexivity. This was a response to earlier viewpoints that viewed researcher subjectivity as threatening to research validity and emphasising that researcher influence should be minimised (Boyatzias., 1998). Braun and Clarke (2019) clarified that Reflexive thematic analysis involves the researcher considering the impact of their experience, views, and social positioning on the data and how this influences the study. Instead of trying to minimise researcher subjectivity, RTA acknowledges that this is inevitable. It is recognises that the researcher is not a neutral observer but an active participant who creates meaning from the data.

It was further noted that researchers who claim to use RTA, have often conflated it with other approaches to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke., 2013, 2019, 2021). This has been discussed as being problematic as drawing from multiple approaches can risk being philosophically or theoretically incompatible each other. They emphasise that RTA differs from other forms of TA, such as coding reliability approach to TA or codebook approaches to TA (Braun and Clarke.,2019, 2021). RTA is concerned first and foremost with how the researcher makes sense of the data through deep and reflexive engagement with it,

identifying how their own interpretation influences what they report. Regarding the issue of replicability, RTA acknowledges that no two researchers will interpret data in exactly the same way, and therefore, there should be no expectation that codes or themes will be reproduced by others.

Codes reflect the researcher's interpretation of patterns of meaning within the data. Attempts to demonstrate 'accuracy' in coding, such as through inter-rater reliability measures like Cohen's Kappa, are discouraged. Instead, multiple coders can be used reflexively to support discussion around the researcher's interpretations and assumptions, rather than to validate findings. Coding and theme development in RTA is a flexible, iterative process that evolves throughout analysis. This contrasts with codebook approaches, where themes are usually predefined before coding starts. In RTA, themes are not identified in advance, rather, they are identified by organising codes around a central organising concept. This is a core idea interpreted by the researcher that captures what the theme is about (Braun and Clarke., 2019, 2021).

Rationale For Choosing Reflexive Thematic Analysis

There are many reasons why RTA was chosen as the most suitable data analysis method for this research. Firstly, the iterative nature of RTA is fitting for this research as the process of going through several stages of data familiarisation multiple times enables a thorough exploration into the data.

Furthermore, it is very important for epistemological and ontological position and methodology to align to ensure consistency and congruency on the way knowledge is being acquired (Riley., 1996). RTA was compatible with my ontological and epistemological positioning due its flexibility in use of both semantic and latent meaning within data.

In addition, since being inextricably linked to the research topic, personally and epistemologically, it was a natural choice to go for RTA. As the method encourages the

research to engage with their own views and impact on the data set, this was a good fit. RTA centralises the importance of reflexivity by the underpinning that researcher influence on the research is inevitable and unavoidable. For this reason, it was chosen for this study.

Other methods were considered such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as it is concerned with the exploration of lived experience within qualitative research (Smith et al., 2009). However, IPA was rejected for a number of reasons. IPA focuses on a deep exploration of individual experiences, typically with smaller samples of participants. This was not ideal for this research as the aim was to identify shared patterns of meaning across multiple participants, whilst also examining how social and cultural contexts shaped these experiences across the dataset. This focus is more closely aligned with RTA than a idiographic approach. Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss., 1967) was also considered at first due to the limited literature on South Asian eldest daughter parentification. This approach, however, was later rejected as the study does not aim to create a new theory based on the data. Instead, the aim was to extend and contextualise existing theoretical frameworks such as parentification, birth order and family systems based theories, through the context of BSA eldest daughter experiences. RTA offered a more flexible method to integrate existing theory and being able to explore where my populations experiences fit into the existing concepts, without generating a new theoretical framework.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria was defined as follows:

- Participant inclusion criteria included being a first born eldest daughter. For clarity, this means that participants were the first born child within their family and a daughter. This decision was made because research shows that the experience of being the first born within birth order in South Asian families can be associated with different roles and responsibilities (Wu et al., 2018). This also ensured a more homogenous sample. Only child and eldest daughter but not first born were excluded as the focus of the study was on individuals who had the dual experience of being both the first child and the first daughter within their family system.
- Participants were included who self-identified as having experienced parentification.
- Participants must have identified as having South Asian ethnicity. This included; Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and the Maldives. This criteria was included as this research was interested in exploring the experiences of eldest daughters from South Asian backgrounds specifically.
- Participants were required to be living within the UK and holding British nationality. This was because this research is interested understanding the experience of South Asian eldest daughters who live within a Western context. This allows for exploration of intersection of cultures and social contexts.
- Participants were required to be 18 years of age or above. This is because this study was interested in exploring the experience of adult eldest daughters.
- All participants were required to speak English fluently. As I am fluent in Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi, I discussed with my supervisor the possibility of giving participants choice to conduct interviews in one of these languages should they wish to. This is because speaking the same language as participants whilst being of the same culture as participants can enhance research rigour as researchers are more likely to be 'trusted' and considered 'insiders' (Irvine et al., 2008). We also discussed the

reality that conducting the research in English reinforces a power imbalance, placing English as most acceptable and other languages as not. After thoughtful discussion, it was ultimately decided to recruit English speaking participants and conduct interviews in English. This was to minimise the risk of losing nuanced meanings in translation. Conducting interviews in English ensured consistency and clarity in data collection and analysis. We were also mindful that not all South Asians speak Urdu, Hindi or Punjabi, therefore it would be exclusionary to only offer interviews in these languages.

- Participants were required to identify as second generation migrant (have at least one parent who migrated to the UK). This was part of the inclusion criteria literature suggests that parentification experience can be intensified by being a child to a migrant parent (Cho et al., 2024). It was also found within the online discourse that being second generation was a specific part of BSA eldest daughter experience which intensified their role (Islam., 2023). As this was a factor specific to this population, it was necessary to include this a inclusion criteria to be able to explore how this element intensified parentification experiences. First and third generation eldest daughters were considered, however, they were ultimately excluded to maintain greater homogeneity within the sample and have a clear focus on the uniqueness of second-generation eldest daughter experience.
- The study was inclusive of any disability, sexuality and religious identity.

Participants were excluded if they did not fulfil the inclusion criteria and the following:

- If within the risk assessment, it is identified that the participant is experiencing a high level of stress within their life and taking part in this study may increase their level of stress beyond what is manageable for them, they were excluded.
- If within the risk assessment, participants said yes to active thoughts about harming someone else, they were excluded.

- Within the risk assessment, participants were asked a question from the PHQ-9 which asks 'in the past two weeks how often have you been bothered by thoughts that you would be better off dead or hurting yourself in some way?'. If they responded with 'several days', a conversation took place between myself and the participant. If the participant had no support in place such as therapy and/or if they felt taking part in the study would put them in further risk, then participants were excluded. If the participant responded with 'more than half days' or 'nearly every day', participation would be carefully reviewed and the participant would be considered unsuitable for inclusion at that time in order to prioritise their wellbeing. Any participant that disclosed risk was signposted to appropriate crisis team contact numbers (on debrief sheet) and advised to speak with their GP.

Table 1.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria
• First-born eldest daughter • Identify with the experience of parentification • South Asian Ethnicity • British Nationality • 18 years of age or above • Second Generation Migrant • Fluent English Speaker
Exclusion Criteria
• Experiencing having thoughts of harming themselves or being better off dead. • Actively engaging in self-harm.

Ethics Application

An application to the City, University of London Psychology Research Ethics Committee was made once my proposed research had been outlined. Ethics approval was received on 26th July 2024 (ETH2324-0367) (Appendix A). After this stage, recruitment commenced.

Recruitment

Both purposive and snowball sampling recruitment technique was used to be able to access a diverse audience.

Social media was the main method of recruitment due to the popularity of the topic on social media outlets. Studies show using social media for recruitment can help increase study visibility and reach across the country (Gelinas et al., 2017). I identified a UK based support group called 'Home Girls Unite'. Home Girls Unite describe themselves as the following: "*a community interest company that works to provides a safe space for eldest daughters and daughter from immigrant homes, both online and offline. Home Girls is founded by eldest daughters out of frustration for the lack of support for the unique challenges we face*" (Home Girls Unite., 2025). This organisation is notoriously known within the eldest daughter online community with 17,000 followers on Twitter, 23,500 on Instagram and 6,610 on TikTok. To ensure professional boundaries, I created a study specific Instagram account (@southasianeldestdaughterstudy) and contacted this group via Instagram. They approved my request and advertised my research flyer (Appendix C) on their Instagram story, twitter page, TikTok and WhatsApp chat. The research flyer detailed a brief description of the study as well as a short definition of parentification. Although this concept is often spoken about within eldest daughter online discourse, it was important to define as simply as possible to make sure participants understood the type of experiences this study was interested in. Parentification was defined as "taking on adult responsibilities from a young such as caring for younger siblings, taking care of household duties or attending to the emotional and/or practical needs of their parents" (Cho et al., 2024). The research flyer included a QR code

which took participants to a Microsoft Forms page to express their interest. The form asked participants the following 17 questions; their full name, phone number, age, email address, if they are the first-born eldest daughter, if they self-identify with the experience of parentification, which South Asian country they identified with, if they lived within the UK, if they live within the UK and hold British nationality, if they identify as second generation migrant, county they reside in, highest level of education, marital status, religious identification, family structure (single parent household/nuclear family), employment status and finally, how they heard about this research. Participants were reminded that expression of interest does not guarantee participation at this stage. They were also reminded that any information provided will be stored securely and will only be used to contact them with opportunities to participate in this research.

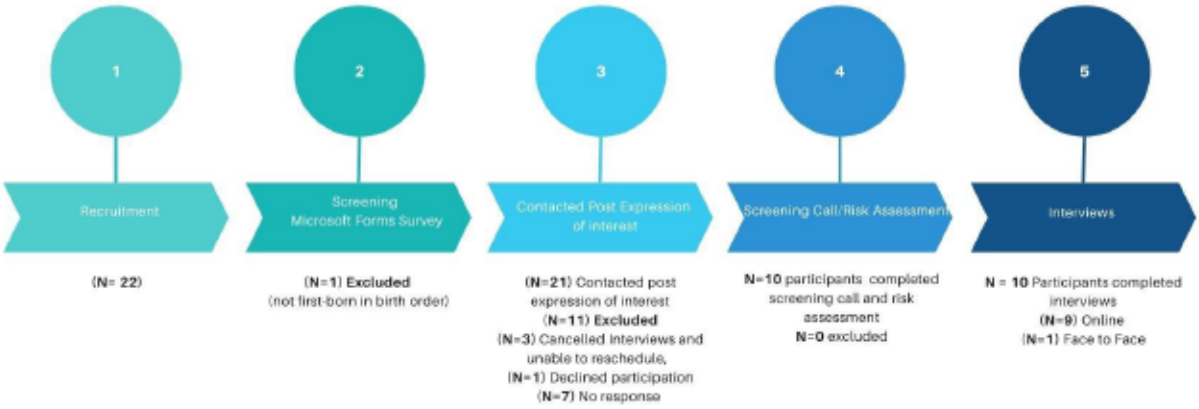
The study was also advertised through a snowball sampling method as many participants shared the research flyer (Appendix C) with friends and family. Studies show that this method is most useful when working with ethnic minorities due to close connections within communities, word of mouth research promotion can be an effective recruitment tool (Hughes et al., 1995). Lastly, the research was advertised in a university newsletter for South Asian Heritage Month. My university email was shared for expression of interest. This was advertised via email to all staff within the School of Health and Psychological Sciences at City, University of London.

Recruitment was complete within a matter of weeks due to the influx of interest towards the study. The Microsoft Forms expression of interest page was closed for responses when 22 responses were gained. In total 22 participants expressed interest. Out of 22, 12 participants were excluded from the study in total. One participant was excluded at screening the Microsoft Teams survey stage as she was not the first born in birth order, therefore was excluded. Following this, 21 eligible participants were contacted through email inviting them for a screening call and risk assessment. At this stage, 11 participants were excluded. Three participants were excluded as they cancelled the interviews and were not able to reschedule.

One participant was excluded as she changed her mind about participation post sign up. Lastly, seven participants were excluded due to not responding after two follow-up attempts via email and telephone call on a private number (2 week gap between each follow up attempt). Of the 12 excluded across the study, 7 participants heard about the research through Home Girls Unite Instagram story, 2 participants were sent the research flyer by a friend, 2 participants heard about the study within the Home Girls Unite WhatsApp chat and 1 participant heard about the research through the City University South Asian Heritage Month newsletter.

After exclusions, 10 participants in total took part in the study. Furthermore, 4 participants heard about the study through a friend, 3 participants signed up through the Home Girls Unite WhatsApp chat, 2 participants signed up through the Home Girls Unite Instagram story and 1 participant was recruited through the Home Girls Unite Twitter post.

Figure 1. *Recruitment Flow Chart*



Participants

10 participants in total were recruited to ensure sample size is small enough to manage data but enough to discover "a new and richly textured understanding of experience". Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that sample size depends on the scope of the project and recommend for a UK Doctorate level project should be aiming for between 10 – 20 participants.

Participant demographics was collected within the Microsoft Forms survey (See *Table 2)*. All participants identified as cisgender female and were aged between 19 to 40 (average age 27). The sample consisted of 4 participants who identified as being of Indian ethnicity, 3 participants were of Bangladeshi ethnicity, 2 Pakistani ethnicity and 1 with Afghan ethnicity. All participants were British citizens with 5 participants living with London, 4 participants from the East Midlands and 1 participant from the West Midlands. Educational attainment included three with postgraduate qualifications, six with undergraduate degrees, and one with high school level education. In relation to marital status, 8 participants were single, 1 participant was married, and 1 participant was divorced. In addition, participants were asked if they follow any religion. It was found that 7 participants identified as Muslim, 1 participant identified as Sikh, 1 participant identified as spiritual but not religious and 1 participant identified atheist. Furthermore, 7 participants identified themselves as within full time employment and 3 participants were students.

Table 2.

Summary of Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Location	Education	Marital Status	Religion	Employment
Maimoona	26	Bangladeshi	London	Undergrad	Married	Islam	Employed FT
Sheila	40	Indian	West Midlands	Postgrad	Divorced	Sikhism	Employed FT
Fatima	23	Bangladeshi	East Midlands	High School	Single	Islam	Employed FT
Maham	21	Pakistani	East Midlands	Undergrad	Single	Islam	Employed FT
Sabina	29	Bangladeshi	London	Undergrad	Single	Islam	Employed FT
Sarah	19	Afghan	East Midlands	Undergrad	Single	Atheist	Student
Aisha	25	Indian	London	Postgrad	Single	Islam	Employed FT
Aditi	29	Indian	London	Postgrad	Single	Spiritual	Employed FT
Zuneira	20	Pakistani	East Midlands	Undergrad	Single	Islam	Student
Karina	26	Indian	London	Postgrad	Single	Islam	Student

Pilot Interview

Before I began data collection and commenced interviews, I conducted a pilot interview with my research supervisor. This was to be able to practice my interview questions and identify any practical issues such time taken to conduct interview and the order/wording of

questions. Studies show conducting a pilot interview can enhance the trustworthiness of research as it demonstrates transparency and thoughtfulness in relation to the data collection methods (Malmqvist et al., 2019). I chose to conduct the pilot interview with my supervisor as she resonated with some of the eldest daughter experiences in relation to being raised within a collectivist culture.

A main learning from the pilot interview was that the order of questions were not coherent enough. The order was slightly adjusted to allow for more flow within the interview. For example, previously I was asking about roles associated with being the parentified eldest daughter after discussing impact of experience. I realised whilst practising that this not did make sense. Therefore, the question exploring impact were moved to later on within the interview schedule.

In addition, another aspect I learned through doing a pilot interview was a need for flexibility. I noticed I was staying very close to my prompt questions and immediately asking the next question after a response. My supervisor reflected that as the interviewee, this felt disjointed at times and corrupted the flow of the interview. I learned that I need to adapt follow-up questions naturally based on what the participant says, rather than rigidly adhering to prompt questions.

Data Collection

Of the 10 participants who were eligible to take part in the study, screening calls were organised via email. Once contact was made from the participant, they were sent a participant information sheet (Appendix D) and consent form (Appendix E). Participants were requested to read this information and consider if they still would like to participate after knowing the details of the research. If the participant is still willing to participate, they were requested to sign and return the consent form.

When participants sent back completed consent forms, they were asked their preferred time and date for a screening call via Microsoft Teams. Screening calls were arranged.

Participants were advised to be in a place they feel is safe and confidential for this call. No participants raised concerns with ability to find a confidential space to speak. Consent forms were saved on my City, University of London OneDrive account which is General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant and only accessible by myself.

Screening Call

Microsoft Teams was chosen for the screening call as opposed to a telephone call as I felt it was important to see the participants non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and body language, especially as the screening call included a risk assessment. Visually seeing someone within a risk assessment is helpful as it is easier to pick up and tend to signs of distress such as tearfulness. This type of communication can be missed over telephone call. In addition, I decided to not conduct the screening call on the same day as the interview, instead screening calls were booked at least 2 weeks in advance of interviews. This was done to allow participants time to reflect on their choice to take part without the pressure to decide immediately. This also supports a more ethical approach as participants should be given sufficient time to reflect and make decisions (Crow et al., 2006).

The screening calls lasted 15 to 20 minutes on Microsoft Teams. At the start of the call, the participants were reminded about the purpose of the call, if they were in a private and confidential area and if they were happy to continue. In this call, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions relating to the study. After this, the inclusion criteria was checked to make sure the participant was eligible. If the participant was not eligible at this stage, they would be thanked for their interest, discuss reasons for ineligibility, asked if they have any other questions and the call would be ended there.

Next, participants were introduced to the mental health risk assessment segment of the call. Participants were informed that due to the sensitive nature of the study, it is my ethical duty to go through the following questions to ensure participant safety and well-being. This was

followed by a statement of confidentiality being read to the participant. i.e. the risk assessment is confidential and remains private between the participant and I, the researcher, and my research supervisor. However, the exception to confidentiality is that if there is serious and immediate risk of harm to themselves or others then this confidentiality would be broken and the appropriate services to protect participant safety. All 10 participants agreed and decided to continue to answer the following questions.

Questions asked were referenced from the 'Screening Interview and Distress Protocol (Draucker., 2009) and from the PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9). The PHQ-9 question was added as questions from Draucker (2009) did not explicitly ask about suicidal ideation. The questions asked within the risk assessment included:

- Are you experiencing a high level of stress or any emotional stress? (Draucker., 2009)

- Are you currently having thoughts of harming someone else? (Draucker., 2009)

- Would you be able to contact a GP, Mental health service or someone you trust should participation in this study cause distress? (Draucker., 2009)

- In the past two weeks, how often have you been bothered by thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way. Options include not at all, several days, more than half days, nearly every day (PHQ-9).

If the answer to the PHQ-9 suicidal ideation question was 'several days', a conversation would take place between myself and participant. We would come to a mutual decision about participation in this research. This meant discussing in collaboration if the participant has any support around them, protective factors, if they are in-therapy, and overall safety to take part. This conversation took place with 1 participant from 10 who answered 'several

days' and 9 answered 'not at all'. With this specific participant, she shared that she was in long term weekly therapy for several years, including at the time of the screening call. She described these thoughts as "just thoughts", not something she would act upon nor had history of acting upon. This participant had a safety plan in place created with her therapist. She reported having a supportive circle of friends. She demonstrated future orientated thinking and had solid protective factors within her life which were reasons for her to not harm herself. It was encouraging that she already had contact numbers for crisis support, however, these were shared with her during and after the call too i.e. reminded of speaking with General Practitioner, NHS 111, The Samaritans and 999 in emergencies. Ultimately, this participant still wanted to take part within the study and felt that taking part would not cause her anymore more distress than what is usual for her. We discussed if she needed any adjustments for the interviews, to which she responded 'no'. I felt reassured to support the participant continue to interview stage.

Although no participant responded 'more than half days' or 'nearly every day' to the PHQ-9 question, there was a plan in place in case of this. If they had responded with the aforementioned, participants would be excluded and signposted to appropriate emergency and crisis team contact numbers (Appendix F) and advised to speak with their GP.

When risk was checked and if the participant felt safe to continue to take part in the research, the interview date, time and mode was organised at the end of the call. Participants were asked which mode of individual interview is most suitable for them (Online on Microsoft Teams or City, University of London booked room). Giving participants choice is important for research to be participant led and break traditional researcher-participant power imbalances (Ross., 2017). Once the mode of interview was agreed, the date of interview was set. Interviews were booked with 9 participants who agreed to meet online and 1 participant requested a face to face interview at City, University of London. Links for online video calls were sent to participants. A meeting room was booked at City, University of

London for the participant who requested in person interview. An email with the time, location and details were sent to the participant via email.

Interviews - Online and In-Person

Participants were offered the choice of interviewing either online or in-person. This choice was offered to widen access for participants who could not attend in person as participants lived across various areas within the United Kingdom.

All interviews followed the same core procedure. Participants were asked to re-read the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix D) before the interview. Though written consent had already been obtained, verbal consent for participation and video recording on Microsoft Teams was sought at the start of the interview to reaffirm participant choice. Participants were reminded that interviews would last approximately 60 minutes and that they could request a break or withdraw at any point. A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix B) including 6 open-ended questions were used to help guide conversation.

Online interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and British Psychological Society (2021) 'Ethics and guidelines for internet mediated research' were followed. Before the interview, I ensured I had working headphones to use and was working from a safe and confidential space within my home office. I checked my internet connectivity to minimise any disruption. When participants joined the call, they were informed of steps to take should they be disconnected. This included attempt to rejoin the meeting, if the participant had not re-joined within 5 minutes of disconnection, I would call the participant's mobile number using a private number. Online interviews were video-recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams internal feature. Participants were reminded that the recording will be saved on a password protected university OneDrive, only accessible by me.

One participant requested an in-person interview which took place at City St George's, University of London within a booked meeting room to ensure confidentiality and privacy. The interview was scheduled within working hours and my research supervisor was informed of this. The participant was informed of the nearest exit and facilities before the interview started. The same consent, recording and interview procedures were followed as previously mentioned.

Debrief

Participants were debriefed after the interview and given a debrief form (Appendix G). For online participants this was shared on the screen and sent to their email after too. For in person participant, this was printed out and a copy was also emailed to her after.

The debrief entailed a check in relating to how the participant experienced the study and if they have any further questions. Many participants shared that they were glad they took part and appreciated being able to speak about their experiences. No participant, online or in person, stated that they were left feeling unsafe or in distress.

Despite this, participants were reminded that if participation in this research raised any issues, or they found themselves distressed in the days following the interview to contact the list of support lines and websites listed on the debrief sheet. This included speaking with their GP, The Samaritans 24 hour telephone crisis support on 116 123, NHS 111 and finally, 999 if in immediate emergency.

Participants were also informed about 'Home Girls Unite' support group who offer online and in person support circles for eldest daughters of ethnic minority background. Their public contact email was shared should they wish to learn more.

Details on how to request data withdrawal was given to the participant along with my research supervisors contact details for any questions or complaints.

Participants who consented to be contacted again (Appendix E) when study is complete with the study results, were informed that they would be emailed a copy of the research paper upon completion of the study. I believe participants have the right to know the outcome of the study they participated in, and if they opt in for this then it is an ethical obligation for the researcher to fulfil to this demand. Returning findings to participants has many benefits such as reinforcing participant involvement within the research, transparency about outcomes and improves trust within the research and researcher (Hintz and Dean., 2020). Wong et al (2018) described not saying findings will be shared with participants but instead returned to them as this highlights that ultimately participants have ownership of their data, and this is something we are returning to them as those findings were taken from individuals. I align with this stance.

A £15 Lifestyle e-voucher was sent to participants email as a token of appreciation of time given towards study. This was supported through the City, University of London Department of Psychology Research Committee support for research costs. This funding was essential to ensure the ethical treatment of the participants and to show respect for their time and contribution. This was important for me on a personal level too. Parentified eldest daughters are frequently doing things for other people therefore financial reimbursement was an important ethical consideration to ensure that this study was not inadvertently replicating dynamics of unacknowledged or uncompensated labour.

Data Analysis

Inductive or Deductive Analysis?

A consideration that researchers need to make when using RTA is if the data will be understood from a 'bottom up' perspective (inductive or data-driven method) or with a 'top down' approach (deductive or theory-driven method) (Braun and Clarke., 2019). Inductive analysis involves the researcher to analyse data without any preconceived theories, as opposed to deductive approach involving application of theory to the data (Azungah., 2018).

This research has used an inductive approach to data analysis in order to explore the experience of ED's to allow themes to be linked directly to the data instead of preconceived categories. The data was not coded to fit any pre-existing coding framework and instead was 'open-coded' to best represent meaning as communicated by the participants whilst also acknowledging my own reflexive process as the researcher. In addition, inductive analysis is compatible with my social constructionist epistemology as meaning is seen as constructed through language, context, and social interaction rather than as a fixed truth waiting to be discovered.

Semantic or Latent Analysis?

Another consideration requiring discuss is how themes will be identified and at which 'level'. This includes semantic and latent analysis. Semantic analysis views the data explicitly and identifies what directly what the participant has said. On the other hand, latent analysis attempts to uncover underlying and unspoken topics within the data (Braun et al., 2023). This study has utilised both semantic and latent coding within data analysis. This is in line with my ontology and epistemology, acknowledging that reality can both be explicitly known as well as requiring exploration of underlying structures to understand it better. As a researcher, I was incredibly aware of the importance of reflexivity when using latent analysis as this approach required me to engage deeply with the underlying meanings and assumptions within the data, which were inevitably shaped by my own interpretive lens and positionality. Please refer to the methodological reflexivity section for further elaboration.

Rich Broad Description or Detailed Account of One Aspect?

As stated by Braun and Clarke (2013), it is important to detail if the study aims to focus on providing a rich broad exploration of the data or one specific aspect. This research has aimed to present a rich and broad exploration of the data through identification of the most

commonly shared experiences as well as prominent and meaningful patterns across the dataset.

What Constitutes a Code, Theme and Subtheme?

For clarity and transparency, it is important to define what constitutes a code, theme and subtheme. A code can be understood as a capturing a singular part of the data and associating labels to it highlighting aspects which are of interest to the research question. They are the building blocks of themes. Terry and Braun (2017) stated that although there is no test for a "good" code, they suggested researchers to imagine a situation where they lost their data and only had the codes, if they looked at their codes, would it provide them with a summary of the diversity of meanings contained in the data set? This explains the usefulness of detailed codes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) have repeatedly argued against the idea that a theme is a topic summary. They argue that a theme "should capture the patterns of meaning across the dataset". Within this study, themes created represent patterns and key ideas within the data. As mentioned previously, themes in this research were not identified in advance, they were identified by organising codes around a central organising concept. It is also important to note that Braun and Clarke (2013, 2021) have repeatedly stated that codes and themes do not emerge, they are identified and constructed through the researcher interpretation.

A subtheme is located within a theme and aims to expand on an aspect of the theme in more detail. It shares the same central organising concept as the theme but highlights a specific, meaningful aspect of it. Subthemes were used within this study to allow for a more focused exploration of the meanings within the broader themes.

How Will I Be Reflexive?

As mentioned, reflexivity is central to RTA, which recognises that the researcher's worldview is embedded within the research process and the data itself. I have actively engaged in reflexivity throughout the study by keeping a reflective diary, which has enabled me to explore my thoughts and feelings and consider how these may have shaped the research. In addition, regular discussions with my supervisor about my interpretations of the data further supported reflexive practice. My reflections have presented through each chapter of this research to demonstrate transparency in the research process and highlight my thoughts as an insider within this research.

Six Phases of Data Analysis in RTA

Braun and Clarke (2006) have described six phases of data analysis within RTA. They outline that these phases are not linear and the researcher can move between stages throughout the process. These stages will be summarised in the table below.

Table 3.

Six Stages of RTA Data Analysis

Analytic Phase	Description	Action
1. *Familiarisation*	• Becoming deeply familiar with data • Engage reflexively with data	• Reading multiple times • Note taking • Ask questions such as "How does this make me feel?" and reflect in diary
2. *Coding*	• Search for patterns and meaning in data • Generate initial codes	• Highlighting and labelling data into groups • Explore explicit and hidden meaning
3. *Generating themes*	• Organise codes into thematic groups upon identification of pattern within codes	• Mapping
4. *Reviewing themes*	• Reviewing themes as a whole • Check themes are rich and engaging	• Collapsing overlapping themes if too similar • Re-read and refine
5. *Naming and defining themes*	• Identify purpose of the theme • Name theme	• Re-read theme and decide name that captures theme meaning
6. *Report*	• Report findings	• Address research question • Present themes in compelling and engaging way.

Stage 1: Familiarisation

The familiarisation process involved becoming deeply engaged with the data by reading and note-taking. The process of familiarisation began for me once I began to examine the Microsoft Teams transcriptions. I began by listening to the audio of recordings only and making notes about my initial thoughts. I then listened to the audio whilst going through the transcription and correcting any mistakes made by the automatic transcription. Once transcriptions were corrected, I began to re-engage myself with reading and re-reading each transcript and continuing to note any initial reflections and thoughts. After each read, I would ask myself "how does this make me feel?" and I would make a note of this within my reflective diary. I learned that for myself as a visual learner, note-taking in visual form propelled my engagement with the participants story (Appendix H). Braun and Clarke (2022) encourage creative ways of engaging with data in the familiarisation process.

Stage 2: Coding

The coding process involved searching for common patterns and meaning in data through semantic and latent coding. I initially coded all transcripts manually by hand (Appendix J). I was struck by the amount of semantic and latent codes that were noted in the margins of the transcript. I noticed beginning to feel overwhelmed by this. Research also shows that paper coding can risk being lost and is timely (Bazeley & Jackson., 2019). Ultimately, I decided to import the codes into Excel, organising them by participant, to assist with the coding process. This helped to organise the large data set efficiently and I found it to be time efficient as it assisted with grouping quotes to begin to organise codes into categories. Braun and Clarke (2013) have described the benefits of computer coding as it can act as an "online filing system". I found myself deeply engaged within this process and found it to be a mix of overwhelming but interesting. I moved between transcripts, going back and forth to add in semantic and latent codes, adding to a larger picture of what was going on within the data.

Once I had coded all transcripts, I began to notice patterns within the data. This was sign to move on to stage 3.

Stage 3: Generating Themes

The aim of this stage was to organise codes into thematic groups upon identification of pattern within codes. I began to organise my codes into clusters when I noticed patterns in meaning and shared experiences (Appendix L). For example, I used colour on Excel to help begin to group codes together, for example codes where groups when I noted experiences of childhood repeatedly arising. It is important to note that themes do not emerge, I developed themes through my own conscious immersion within the data, being attuned to meaningful and repetitive patterns within the data, combined with my own unconscious processing. Through this, I began to make note of early ideas for themes and subthemes.

Stage 4: Reviewing Themes

This stage aimed to review themes and check that these are engaging and reflecting patterns of meaning within the text. I did this by comparing themes to check if any of them could be combined or separated. Sub-themes were indeed found within some themes (Appendix M). For example, a theme relating to loss of childhood and feeling misunderstood as a child were combined as sub-themes under a larger theme relating to growing up too quickly. In accordance with Braun and Clarke (2012) recommendations, a theme was chosen based on the following:

- If it captured a patterned response across participants (told me something useful about my research question)
- If it had a strong central organising concept, fitting coherently within the broader story
- If it had enough data to evidence its theme, with multiple articulations (more than 3 participants mentioned) around the core idea making a particular rich theme.

Themes were discarded if they were not conceptually strong, meaning was not shared across the dataset or overlapped with other themes. Themes had strong boundaries which

helped me to know what to include and exclude. For example, the theme about growing up too soon only contained subthemes about experiences relating specifically to childhood. This strengthened the theme and its overall meaning allowing coherence and unity between the subtheme and theme. A thematic map (Appendix I) was created at stage to visually review themes and subthemes, which is recommended to help develop a deeper relationship with the overall story being told within the data (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Stage 5: Naming and Defining Themes

Within stage 5, my main aim was to re-read themes and sub themes to finalise them, making sure they had a strong core meaning which captured a meaningful part of the data set. I also reflected about what I would name themes. To do this I wrote a few sentences below each theme to describe what the theme is about to help me find a defining name for the theme which is central to its meaning. I did not want the theme name to simply summarise what the theme was about, I wanted the theme name to be able to capture an important essence of the theme. I began to think of names that were creative, reflective and captured the essence of the language that participants were using. I made sure to keep theme titles as concise and easy to understand as I could for the sake of clarity. I discussed theme names with my supervisor and gained feedback on these.

Stage 6: Report

The main aim of stage 6 is to report the study findings in compelling and engaging way. My personal aim was to present themes in a linear fashion which takes the reader through the participants experience of growing up as a parentified eldest daughter, through the roles and responsibilities they have and its impact, to how participants have made sense of their experiences as adults. Finally ending with their views on what their future as the eldest daughter may look like.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical practice is vital within research for several reasons. This includes encouraging equality and diversity in research, awareness of unacceptable behaviours, awareness of risks, encouraging accountability within the research process (Lahman et al., 2011). Ethics approval was received on 26th July 2024 (ETH2324-0367). In addition, throughout the research I made sure to practice in alliance with the BPS ethical guidelines (BPS., 2021) and HCPC ethical guidance (Health and Care Professions Council., 2016). Within the section below, I will be commenting on various ethical considerations.

Informed Consent and Transparency

Consent is inarguably one of the core fundamentals of ethical practice. Participants must give consent freely and participate upon their own choice. Verbal and written consent was gained throughout various stages of the research. Written consent (Appendix E) was gained first through email when participants registered their interest. Verbal consent to take part was gained via the screening call. Finally, at interview stage, consent was reviewed through a discussion before the interview started. The participant information sheet was sent within early stages of recruitment and was reviewed before the interview. This offered transparent approach to the study and ensured no information about the aims of the research were kept hidden. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw or refuse participation from the recruitment stage all the way to interview stages. Repeated reminders were offers to show respect for participant autonomy and choice.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Participants right to privacy and confidentiality is supported by The Data Protection Act (2018). Researchers must adhere to data protection policy when handling participant data to ensure ethical and legal compliance.

To protect anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym and have been referred to as their pseudonym throughout this thesis. Participants were made aware of the use of pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Participants were informed that interview recordings were recorded using Microsoft Teams which uses end to end encryption to ensure data protection. In addition, participants were also made aware that recordings were saved on a password protected University account OneDrive, only accessible by myself. All interview recordings will be deleted at the end of the study and after the Viva examination.

All digital documents including consent forms with identifiable information were saved on a password protected University account OneDrive and will be deleted upon study completion. Any participant contact information (email and number) will also be deleted upon study completion. Transcripts were saved securely on a password protected laptop within my University OneDrive account. Any identifiable information was redacted from the transcripts as soon as possible. Research transcripts will be destroyed after 10 years as per City's standard recommendation.

Any paper documents including any coding notes or thematic diagrams made on paper were digitalised and saved on my University OneDrive, then the paper copy was destroyed.

Within the screening call and risk assessment, participants were read a statement of confidentiality i.e. the risk assessment is confidential and remains private between the participant and I, the researcher, and my research supervisor. However, the exception to confidentiality is that if there is serious and immediate risk of harm to themselves or others then this confidentiality would be broken and the appropriate services to protect participant safety.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy when conducting online interviews, participants were sent a meeting link using a one-time only password. The password protection ensured the meeting was confidential and could not be joined by anyone else, other than the participant and me.

Participant Wellbeing

Participant wellbeing has been at the heart of this research as researchers have a duty to protect participants from harm (Williamson & Burns., 2014). Participant wellbeing was checked at recruitment stage within the screening call. A risk assessment was conducted within this call to get a better understanding of participant current wellbeing status.

Draucker et al (2009) distress protocol for managing distress in participant interviews was reviewed ahead of interviews (Appendix N). This was important to make sure that as the researcher, I was clear on the steps to manage potential distress within the interview. Having said this, no participants displayed any signs of high level of stress or emotional distress within the interviews. No participants vocalised any distress within debriefs either.

Participants were informed that they could take a break or leave the interview at any time. I reassured participants that there is no pressure to share anything that they feel uncomfortable to share. All participants were signposted to psychological wellbeing support services and support groups for eldest daughters within the debrief sheet.

In relation to the participant that disclosed risk within the PHQ-9, steps to explore the risk with her were taken within the screening call. A full risk assessment was conducted thoroughly evaluate the participants potential for harm to themselves or others. A full risk assessment helped to identify severity of risk and likelihood of acting upon any risk related thoughts or beliefs. We also discussed factors including mental health history, social history, and the environment the participants lives. Through this risk assessment, it was identified in collaboration with the participant that both of us felt comfortable with the participant continuing on to the interview stage for the following reasons.

- There was no intention to act on any risk related thoughts. She described these thoughts as "just thoughts", not something she would act upon nor had history of acting upon.
- There was no plan.
- The participant was in long term weekly therapy for several years, including at the time of the screening call. The participant was due to meet with her therapist within a day of the interview.
- This participant had a safety plan in place created with her therapist.
- She reported having a supportive circle of friends.
- She demonstrated future orientated thinking and had solid protective factors within her life which were reasons for her to not harm herself.

It was encouraging that she already had contact numbers for crisis support, however, these were shared with her during and after the call too i.e. reminded of speaking with General Practitioner, NHS 111, The Samaritans and 999 in emergencies. Ultimately, this participant still wanted to take part within the study and felt that taking part would not cause her anymore more distress than what is usual for her. We discussed if she needed any adjustments for the interviews, to which she responded 'no'. The participant was informed that she could contact the researcher or research supervisor at any time throughout the research process if she had any concerns she wanted to discuss. I felt reassured to support the participant continue to interview stage.

Compensation

A £15 Lifestyle e-voucher was sent to participants via email after their interview was complete. This was done as a token of appreciation of time given towards study. This was supported through the City, University of London Department of Psychology Research Committee support for research costs. This funding was essential to ensure the ethical

treatment of the participants and to show respect for the time and contribution of participants. This was important for me on a personal level as eldest daughters are often doing unpaid labour within their families, I do not want this research to reflect the latter experience within this research.

The use of compensation within research holds both benefits as well as ethical considerations. It has been argued that recompensating participants for their time and efforts towards the research is considered ethical practice. The use of compensation can boost recruitment (Largent et al., 2022). It is important to highlight this could have been an influence on motivation to engage in the study. Having said this, I followed ethical guidelines to consider ways of minimising ethical concerns related to the use of e-vouchers. Firstly, I informed participants that the voucher is a compensation for their time, instead of it being a reward for receiving certain kinds of answers. I was transparent with participants within the screening call that e-vouchers would be sent after completion of interview. I informed participants within the debrief that should they wish to withdraw from the study, they are free to do so without losing the voucher. In addition, it is important to be culturally sensitive and consider accessibility. This is why a Lifestyle e-voucher was chosen as it is sent securely through email, give participants 18 months before expiry and allows access to over 300 shops catering to diverse audiences. This gave participants more choice and flexibility in deciding where and when to use to their voucher. All participants received the same type and amount of reward on the voucher. All vouchers were sent in a timely manner (within an hour of completion of interview).

Research Evaluation

Rigorous research within qualitative research can be understood as establishing confidence in findings and demonstrate transparency (Nowell et al., 2017). According to Yardley (2000),

qualitative research can demonstrate rigour by being sensitive to context, showing commitment, rigour, demonstrating transparency and being impactful.

Sensitivity to context in this research is demonstrated through being culturally aware and being inclusive. For example, inclusivity is demonstrated through its recruitment of participants from diverse backgrounds, such as different religious groups, ages and languages spoken. Interviews being offered online demonstrated cultural sensitivity as well inclusivity as it widened access for participants with caring and family responsibilities, work commitments or travelling difficulties.

Commitment and rigour was shown through the empathetic attentiveness to participant needs being at the heart of the research. Transparency was demonstrated through being reflexive and having an awareness of my thoughts and feelings throughout the research process and reviewing how this influences the data. Transparency was also shown through an honest and clear outlining of the methodological and analytical processes. Furthermore, efforts to uphold transparency were further demonstrated through sharing findings openly with participants who opted in to receive this at the end of the study. Dependability was demonstrated through auditing my research steps in detail. This shows transparency and provided a rationale to my work. Finally, in relation to impact, I hope this research contributes to the existing parentification literature by highlighting experiences form underrepresented communities such as BSA eldest daughters. I hope that this study offers new insights into the lived experiences of BSA eldest daughters. In addition, I hope that the findings can be of value for the disciple of counselling psychology by offering valuable insights into the lived experiences of this specific population. I hope that this knowledge can help inform culturally responsive and informed interventions for BSA communities. Impacts of this research will be expanded on within the discussion chapter. Lastly, an impact was made through my participants experience of taking part within the study as many of them shared with me that being able to talk about their lived-experience felt empowering for them.

Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) 15-point checklist which describes 'good thematic analysis' and ensures researchers adhere to high quality standards of academic rigour in qualitative research was used?. As a commitment to good quality research, these steps were adhered to throughout the data analysis. In the table below, please see a summary of how I responded to the aforementioned criteria at different stages of the data analysis.

Table 4. *Summary of 15-Point Checklist Criteria (* Braun and Clarke., 2006)

Stage of Data Analysis	Criteria/ 15-point Checklist	Action in Response to Criteria
Transcription	1. *The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.*	All transcripts were initially auto-transcribed through the use of Microsoft Teams. Though this offers a high level of accuracy, to ensure there were no errors, and to enhance my own engagement with the data, all transcripts were checked against the audio.
Coding	2. *Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.*	Each data item was given equal attention through deep engagement and familiarisation.
	3. *Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach) but, instead, the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.*	Themes were generated using the entire data set which enabled a thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive coding and theme development process. Different themes were created by using codes that were collated from across the data set which allowed for richness and variation within the theme development process.

	4. *All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.*	All relevant extracts for each theme was collated with the use of Microsoft Excel.
	5. *Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.*	All themes were checked and compared with each other to make sure that each was distinctive, coherent and focused around a central organising concept. The original data set was revisited multiple times to ensure that themes were grounded and reflective of the original data set.
	6. *Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.*	Efforts were made to ensure themes were internally coherent, consistent and distinctive. Themes were colour coded using Microsoft Themes to aid organisation. A Thematic map was created for visual aid, themes were cross checked to ensure distinctiveness. Themes were discussed in research supervision in which I received positive feedback on the consistency and coherence of themes.

Analysis	7. *Data have been analysed rather than just paraphrased or described.*	Data analysis went beyond description, as can be seen within the analysis chapter of this thesis. The use of semantic and latent analysis enabled me to engage deeply with the data. The coding process was viewed not merely as summarising what was said, but was viewed as a way to identify patterns within meaning. This enabled rich insights within the analysis.
	8. *Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.*	Analysis and data match each other closely. This can be seen within the analysis chapter, as direct quotes from the data are used to evidence themes. The iterative nature of RTA allowed me to back and forth between my data set and my analytical claims to ensure they closely link.
	9. *Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.*	Efforts were made to present the analysis chapter in a way that tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.

	10. *A good balance between analytical narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.*	I believe that there is a good balance between analytical narrative and illustrative extracts presented with the analysis chapter. No quotes were presented without explanation, nor any analytical claims were made without any evidence from the data.
Overall	11. *Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.*	All phases of data analysis were completed over a time period of several months. Lots of time, thought and reflexive engagement were part of each stage. This meant that no stage was rushed.
Written report	12. *The assumptions about Thematic Analysis are clearly explicated.*	I have clearly stated my approach using RTA. I have outlined the particular specificities that I considered regarding the approach in the methods chapter. I have also considered the relation between RTA and my epistemological and ontological underpinnings in the methods section.

	13. *There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.*	I believe there is clarity and coherence between what I have reported in the method and what has been presented within my analysis.
	14. *The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.*	The language used in the analysis is consistent with weak social constructionist epistemology of this research. This can be seen within the analysis as the terminology speaks to the epistemological position that knowledge can be sought through language and social constructs.
	15. *The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.*	I have clearly defined my position throughout the research as being an active part of shaping the research. This can be demonstrated through my use of first person tense throughout this research. I believe this brings emphasise of my researcher voice and active involvement. Themes were described as being

		generated or developed. It was made clear that themes do not emerge from the dataset as this minimises research influence.

Methodological Reflexivity

Through the familiarisation stage, I noted in my reflective diary (Appendix K) that I was struck by how closely some of the participant experiences resonate with some of my own experiences growing up as an eldest daughter. Through the first read, I noticed that I was reacting more emotionally to the data, rather than with a curious eye. For example, whilst reading one of the transcripts, I noticed feeling annoyed towards the treatment of the participant by their parents, for positioning a young child in the parentified position. I recognised that parts of myself were being reflected in this and perhaps why I felt a heightened sense of emotionality towards this. I wanted to reach in and protect the participant. I noticed a desire to protect within myself coming from own eldest daughter lens of wanting to protect and nurture.

Furthermore, I initially noticed feelings of frustration when participants detailed showing understanding and empathy towards why as eldest daughters, they had to assume the responsibility they did. This highlighted a crucial blind spot for me, that I hold an assumption that all eldest daughters would view such responsibility as ultimately wrong despite the context. This also highlighted my position of social privilege in terms of socioeconomic status, ability status, and the fact that I grew up in totally different circumstances as some of my participants did. These factors may have contributed to the greater empathy some participants held for their parents, which I initially struggled to grasp.

This privilege influenced my early interpretation of the data, as I was viewed participant empathy towards their family as a disguise of cultural shame and therefore wanting to

protect her parents. However, now I recognise that my own judgements were clouding my ability to engage with some of the participants experience. For example, within the coding process, I noticed that in my initial semantic and latent codes, I was very quickly picking out aspects of participant experience that had more negative connotations, such as the hurt and anger as it matched my own experiences. It took me longer to engage with ideas of acceptance and understanding, nor did these ideas initially stand out to me, as perhaps I am just not there yet with my own feelings towards acceptance. Recognising this helped as I took this to my personal therapy sessions.

In relation to coding, a specific challenge I experienced was that my codes often lacked detail. I noticed this as after my initial coding, that my codes alone did not make any meaningful sense of what was occurring in the data. Terry and Braun (2017) stated that although there is no test for a "good" code, they suggested researchers to imagine that they lost their data and only had the codes, if they looked at their codes would it provide them with a summary of the diversity of meanings contained in the data set? At first, my answer was no to this question. I realised this was because I felt worried to make mistakes whilst coding and felt the pressure of the task. As a result, one-word codes felt like a safer option, as they allowed me to stay close to the data without risking over-interpretation. I recognised this as my perfectionist tendencies casting doubt about my own abilities. I recognised that this cautious approach limited the depth of my analysis. By revisiting the data and reminding myself that reflexive thematic analysis is an interpretive and iterative process, I was able to move beyond this initial hesitation and develop more descriptive and meaningful semantic and latent codes.

Furthermore, I noticed how my philosophical underpinnings influenced my coding process. As I coded, I found myself focusing initially on explicit references to these objective realities (critical realist view), such as the role of the eldest daughter and cultural expectations. My social constructionist epistemology influenced how I code as I recognise a natural urge to

think deeper about how language reflects broader societal norms such as ‘role model’ linked to how women are viewed in South Asian culture.

There was one reflection that was consistent throughout generating themes, reviewing themes and naming themes stage. I recognised that, as a researcher, I hold significant privilege and power in determining how the story is constructed from the data. This power can raise ethical concerns if researchers are not actively aware or transparent about their potential biases towards certain patterns, which may shape the narrative in a way that does not fully reflect the data. For instance, when developing the themes and their names, I continuously questioned whether my choices reflected my own perception more closely rather than the participant's experience. Revisiting the raw data and checking themes against it, helped to ensure that I was as aligned with what was being said as possible. This process of reflection helped me recognise the importance of maintaining awareness of my own influence in the interpretation of the data and ensuring that the final themes represented the participant's lived experience.

Writing the analysis in stage 6 of RTA, I noticed myself resisting the urge to shift into "therapist voice" where I risked ‘psychoanalysing’ participant narratives and drifting away from the data, rather than remaining grounded within it. This raised ethical questions for me, particularly around power dynamics, as imposing my ‘clinical’ perspective could have privileged my own understanding over the participants lived experiences. I remained mindful of respecting the participants agency and did not include this interpretation when noticed. I also prioritised ethical integrity by consciously reflecting on whether my themes accurately reflected the data, rather than forcing them to fit preconceived ideas. I was mindful that falling into use of therapist voice may be more likely when analysing data straight after being within my clinical placement. This taught me to become more aware of the boundaries between my therapeutic and research roles and I began to allow more time to transition between the two.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to demonstrate my use of RTA to analyse the rich data retrieved from individual interviews. Through the analysis a total of **5 themes** were developed, 4 of them containing sub-themes to further facilitate an in depth exploration of participant experience. Themes were chosen based on patterns of meaning and key ideas within the data. Themes and sub-themes have been added to a table for clarity (See Table 1).

The themes have been carefully sequenced to take the reader on a journey through the lived experience of being the eldest daughter in a BSA family. The story begins with what it was like growing up in this role, capturing the early experience of loss of childhood, growing up too soon, and feeling misunderstood. This is explored through subthemes such as becoming a 'little adult', the loss of childhood, and being a misunderstood child. The analysis then moves on to the varied responsibilities participants carried, reflected in subthemes including the mediator and emotional confidant, the caregiver, and the advocate, illustrating the multifaceted nature of the role as 'the daughter that does it all'. Next, the focus shifts to the mental, emotional, and relational impact of these responsibilities, discussed through three subthemes addressing each dimension of impact. Following this, the narrative explores how participants make sense of their experiences, moving from resentment to empathy and recognising strength within the struggle. Finally, the journey concludes with reflections on the future, capturing participants' views on what their continuing role as eldest daughter entails.

Table 5.

Summary of Themes

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Growing Up Too Soon	• **Subtheme 1.1:** *Becoming A "Little Adult"* • **Subtheme 1.2:** *The Loss of Childhood* • **Subtheme 1.3:** *A Misunderstood Child*
2. The Daughter That Does it All	• **Subtheme 2.1:** *The Mediator and Emotional Confidant* • **Subtheme 2.2:** *The Caregiver* • **Subtheme 2.3:** *The Advocate*
3. The Mental, Emotional and Relational Impact	• **Subtheme 3.1:** The Mental Impact • **Subtheme 3.2:** The Emotional Impact • **Subtheme 3.3:** The Relational Impact
4. Making Sense of What Happened – "It's All They Knew"	• **Subtheme 4.1:** Resentment To Empathy • **Subtheme 4.2:** Strength in the Struggle
5. Always the Eldest: Looking Ahead To The Future	• **No Subthemes**

Theme One: Growing Up Too Soon

In this theme, participants describe the start point of becoming 'the eldest daughter' and when they first experienced becoming parentified. Across participants, this point was marked by the arrival of a sibling and being positioned as a role model to them. This caused feelings of loss of childhood. This theme includes three sub-themes 1.1: Becoming A "Little Adult", 1.2: The Loss of Childhood, and 1.3: A Misunderstood Child.

Subtheme : Becoming a "Little Adult"

Many participants expressed that the start of parentification as the eldest daughter was marked by a clear entry point, the birth of a younger sibling. They described this as the moment that a shift in the family dynamics occurred, where the adults in their life began to position them as a role model and a "little adult". An example of this can be seen in the following quote:

> *"I definitely felt an acute shift when my baby sister came along... within the first couple of months was like that was my induction into taking care of her. I felt like I was inducted into it. I was like, that's all I kind of knew after that is feeling like a little adult."*
>
> - *(Maimoona, Aged 26, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.2, line 60-64)*

In this quote, Maimoona describes her experience of feeling like a "little adult" in her childhood whilst managing adult responsibilities, particularly in her role as a caregiver for her younger sister. Maimoona describes how this shift began almost immediately after her sister's birth, marking the start of her "induction" into caring for others. Maimoona uses the word *"induction"* to describe her introduction into caregiving responsibilities for her younger sister. This word is typically associated with work based terminology, often seen in corporate organisation. This

word is repeated twice which appears to reaffirm this experience. This choice of language conveys a sense of formality and thoroughness, as if she was formally trained to look after her sister. Additionally, Maimoona refers to her sister as her *"my baby sister"*, despite her not being an infant anymore further emphasising a motherly undertone in Maimoona's expression. Maimoona expressing "that's all I kind of knew after that is feeling like a little adult", highlights how her responsibilities became normalised and ingrained in every aspect of her life. This highlights that for some parentified eldest daughters, their role may be experienced as all-encompassing, becoming a central part of who they are.

Interestingly, it is to be noted that the phrase "little adult" in a literary sense, is a juxtaposition, highlighting the contrast between being a child holding adult responsibilities. We see similar sentiments reflected in other participants accounts:

> *"You almost feel like a little counsellor"*
> (Aditi, 29, British Indian, London) *(p.5, line 125)*

> *"I'm the go to person, when things need doing or organising in the family like ensuring the house runs smoothly. I have always been a little manager"*
> (Karina, 26, British Indian, London) (*p.6, line 156-157)*

The above quotes emphasise a similarity in the way participants have described their experiences such as through the repetition of "little" followed by an adult role. As Aditi described herself as feeling like a "little counsellor" and Karina expressed having always felt like a "little manager". Such descriptions demonstrate how participants understood their adult roles within their childhoods, as being with a child with an adult role. This particularly highlights the experience of parentification as well as early familial boundary blurring.

Subtheme 1.2: The Loss of Childhood

Upon the arrival of their sibling and having been positioned as a "little adult", some participants described the feeling of loss within their childhood and missing out on the experience of being a child. This is reflected in the quote below:

"Literally from age 11. I think ever since my siblings got here, I've always been expected to be like this good role model so I need to do the very best because they look up to me. Because of that I have been very mature for my age but I feel like I've not actually experienced my childhood as a child. Does that make sense? I've not actually learnt to live as a kid. Just hearing like experiences from like my friends, when they mention their childhood, how they'll be able to like sort of like live their life freely by exploring and having a naughty stage. But for me, I've not allowed to be naughty, not been able to explore. I didn't explore being a child and how that feels".

- *(Maham, 21, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p.3, line 78-85)*

Participants described how the expectation to behave as a 'good role model' for younger siblings marked an early transition out of childhood. The quote above reflects the sentiment for many participants, that they have always felt mature for their age due to how they have positioned by their caregivers. Early maturity, when they are still children, lead them to feel that they have missed out on being a child. This highlights how the weight of parentification prematurely displaced opportunities for play and exploration. The sense of missing out was often realised in comparison to peers, with participants contrasting their own experiences with friends who had a 'naughty stage' or freedom to 'live their life freely'. This points to a tension between the developmental needs of the child (wanting to play) and the adult-like role imposed upon them (being a role-model and holding adult

responsibilities).

Some participants situated the loss of childhood within a broader cultural context.

"I think for daughters in general within the South Asian culture, we're raised to hold this honour and respect anyway….but I think for me… as the eldest daughter, there's even more of a pressure to be a source of pride for my parents… like… act right, be obedient, be a role model for my siblings because I'm the first one to show them that. And I think because of that, it meant I had to learn to be those things quickly as a child. And if I didn't then I think it would look bad to people, like in the community, like look at their eldest daughter she's disobedient".

- *(Zuneira, 20, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p.8, line 224-231)*

Zuneira's quote highlights that for some eldest daughters, their experience of loss of childhood and being parentified was influenced by cultural values of honour and respect. She expresses that whilst daughters are seen as carriers of family honour and pride, being the eldest daughter appears to intensify the weight of this due to being the first-born. For example, Zuneira expresses that from a young age, she became a role model for her siblings and an obedient daughter to her parents as this is what was culturally expected of her as an honourable eldest daughter. This cultural value appears to intensify her parentification experience as she further suggested that carrying these responsibilities contributed a loss of her childhood. Zuneira shares that as the eldest daughter, if she did not uphold such cultural values then it would risk "looking bad" within the community.

Zuneira's quote suggests that cultural beliefs tied to 'honour' may shape the roles and experiences of some parentified BSA eldest daughters. It highlights that

honour related expectations may be experienced as more intensely by eldest daughters in comparison to younger female siblings. This is due their position of being the first born child and a girl. From an early age, some eldest daughters may be positioned within the home as role models and obedient carriers of family values, while simultaneously being aware that their behaviour represents the family to the wider community. Being a role model in the home and protecting the family's image in the community from a young age can create additional pressures for some eldest daughters. This highlights how cultural factors influenced the parentification experiences of participants.

Subtheme 1.3: A Misunderstood Child

Participants expressed that part of their experience of growing up as a parentified eldest daughter was feeling misunderstood at school by their teachers. We see this through Maimoona's account below:

> *"I told my teacher, who was from a Western background that I'm kind of struggling at home. Theres a lot going on, I have a lot of additional responsibilities. I remember her being really flippant about it and saying well when I was your age I had lots of extracurricular activities. I was really into my swimming and that took up so much of my time but I still balanced it with academia so why can't you? She was very dismissive. She didn't ask more about what was going on and I remember after that, feeling kind of alienated and like I'm not understood."*
>
> - *(Maimoona, Aged 26, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.3, line 77-85)*

Maimoona's account demonstrates an experience many participants spoke about which was feeling misunderstood when their duty towards their family was viewed through a Western

individualistic lens. As seen in this quote, Maimoona expresses to her teacher that she is struggling due to weight of her responsibilities she carries for her family and therefore Maimoona's grades were affected. The teacher did not show empathy for Maimoona's responsibilities. Instead, the teacher compared how she managed to balance academia and sporting hobbies when she was Maimoona's age, therefore why can't Maimoona. This reflects an individualistic lens as the teacher views Maimoona's struggles are about her personal effort and time management. The teacher failed to understand that Maimoona's familial duty of care was not an optional hobby like swimming, but a responsibility tied to her household functioning. By comparing her leisure activity with Maimoona's family obligations, the teacher collapsed two fundamentally different experiences into the same category, erasing the cultural and emotional weight of Maimoona's role causing her to feel alienated and misunderstood. This illustrates a specific challenge faced by parentified BSA eldest daughters. One is which they are navigating two cultural frameworks (British and South Asian), where one values development of self-whilst the other prioritises duty to family. This may contribute to some BSA eldest daughters growing up feeling misunderstood.

Theme Two: The Daughter That Does It All

After being positioned as role models in their early years, responsibilities only increased with age. This theme explores the multifaceted role associated with parentification that eldest daughters expressed carrying. Although various roles were detailed within the data, for clarity the three most commonly and meaningfully emphasised were chosen. Those 3 subthemes 2.1: The Mediator and Emotional Confidant, 2.2: The Caregiver and 2:3: The Advocate.

2.1: The Mediator and Emotional Confidant

Participants expressed that a significant role they play within their family is the role of being a mediator within parental conflict. This can be seen within the quote below:

> "*When they [parents] don't get on or whatever or there's like issues like I have to sort of step up and play that role to sort of calm the house down. And that's a massive role. You know, being that person to a step in the middle of two people that are having a disagreement or an argument. I've got that duty to step in, whereas my younger siblings they sort of look up to me to sort of do that. I know when to sort of like step in and cool down the situation. It feels annoying because why should it take myself to step in? You're both grown adults? It shouldn't need to take your child to step in and stop the arguments".*
>
> - *(Maham, 21, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p6, line 158-166)*

This quote reflects how many eldest daughters feel it is their "duty" to mediate conflict and arguments between their parents. Maham expresses the role of calming the house down is a "massive role" highlighting the weight and responsibility she feels. This highlights an example of parentification and role-

reversal, where the child becomes responsible for emotional regulation in the family system, stepping into a parental role. Maham "knowing when to step in" shows she has had to develop conflict management skills early in life to maintain the harmony within her family. She describes that her younger siblings look to her to resolve mediate such situations, which may create an additional sense of responsibility for managing things on their behalf too. Maham expresses her annoyance and questions the fairness of the situation by asking *"why should it take myself to step in?"*. She highlights the role reversal by pointing out her parents are "grown adults" and yet rely on her, a child, to stop arguments.

Some participants expressed how being a mediator from an early age impacted them, as seen below:

"When there were fights and stuff like I almost felt like a little referee or something. I felt like if involved myself, like, if I was in the room, it wouldn't happen or it wouldn't be as bad. I was scared to kind of, run away and hide because I was like, what if something happens and then it's my fault?"

- (Aditi, 29, British Indian, London) (p.8, line 230-234)

Aditi expresses feeling like a "little referee", this highlights her role as someone who mediates and monitors conflict between parents, stepping in to control or prevent escalation. The metaphor "little referee" captures the tension between being a child ("little") and being positioned into an authoritative, regulating role ("referee") highlighting parentification. Aditi highlights the belief that if she was in the room, the fight would not be as bad and if something happened she felt it would be her fault. This highlights an experience many participants spoke about which is having an internalised sense of responsibility and blame for their parents' relationship and

the family's emotional safety.

Furthermore, participants described that the mediating role did not end with diffusing arguments, it frequently extended into *holding* parental distress itself. This can be seen this in the quote below:

> *"My mum vented to me like quite a lot because we move around a lot when I was growing up. We didn't know anyone. My mum didn't have a support network of friends and stuff because she's not from here".*
>
> - *(Aditi, 29, British Indian, London) (p.9, line 249-252)*

> *"My mum would make me like know every single thing going on with her and marital problems and stuff. Theres's parents who would shield their children from that, and then there's parents like my mum, I have to know every single detail."*
>
> - *(Sabina, 29, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.7, line 219- 223)*

Participants have described examples of emotional parentification where the child is expected to provide emotional care for the parent. Sabina mentions that she was made

to know "every single detail" of her parents marital problems as a child. Instead of being shielded from it, she is expected to carry the weight of this knowledge as a child. Similarly, Aditi highlights how her mother "vented" to her since she did not know many people and had no other support network, as a result of her migration history. This suggests that for some families, migration and social isolation could create conditions where the eldest daughter becomes the substitute support system in South Asian families.

An important experience is highlighted below through Aditi's account where she expressed that to make space for her mother's emotions, she learned how to silence her own emotions.

"I would just kind of be like ok, I'm fine now, I don't want to think about my own feelings, If I was going through an emotional thing like, I definitely wouldn't put it on my mom because I don't think she can handle it. It would turn into me consoling her."

- *(Aditi, 29, British Indian, London) (p.9, line 260-263)*

This highlights a clear example of child and parent role-reversal. Aditi describes that she chooses not to bring her own emotional distress to her mum as she anticipates having to manage the parent's emotions instead of receiving support for her own. The phrase "I wouldn't put it on my mom" highlights a sense of emotional burden that she wants to protect her mother from. This shows the experience of being a parentified BSA eldest daughter can involve viewing your own needs as secondary in order to prioritise the wellbeing of their family.

2.2: The Caregiver

Another one of the most commonly mentioned responsibilities across the dataset was practical caregiving for siblings and parents. This involved assisting their younger siblings with daily activities such as cooking, bathing and supporting night time routines. This also involved assisting with household tasks to ease burden from working parents:

"When I was younger I used to look after my brother so my parents would be at work but because we'd come back from school then I

would also I would provide like snacks or lunch or dinner so yeah that was when we were in school so back in secondary school I'd say, my brother was in primary school. I was 11 years old."

- *(Karina, 26, British Indian, London) (p.6, line 189-193)*

"When I was younger I would be ensuring my siblings were fed, making sure they were washed and in bed for a reasonable time, making sure the up was done, house hoovered and cleaned, after school making sure things were prepped for when my mum returned home to make dinner. You just do what you do and don't really think about it."

- *(Sheila, Aged 40, British Indian, West Midlands) (p.8, line 242-247)*

Karina and Sheila's accounts show how eldest daughters experienced taking on parentified duties from a young age. Karina describes looking after her primary school aged sibling at the tender age of 11 years old. Furthermore, there is a sense that such duties have become normalised as part of everyday life and routine. This can be seen as Sheila mentions "*You just do what you do*". Both participants frame their actions around ensuring the household runs smoothly and their siblings are cared for, which reflects a strong sense of accountability and duty that extends beyond their years. This is also reflected in the action orientated language used such as "*ensuring my siblings were fed*" and "*making sure things were prepped*".

Participants discussed different factors that they felt contributed why they became responsible for caregiving duties. One of the most commonly reported reasons was the socio-economic pressures and long working hours their migrant parents faced:

"My parents being from back home [Bangladesh], it was a tough on the family because they were out working long hours trying to build a life for us. But it meant

that they weren't there for things. Like it was on me to cook, bathe my siblings, feed them, put them to sleep whilst I was still a child myself. I think around 12 years old. But you do it because who else will?".

(Fatima, 23, British Bangladeshi, East Midlands) (p.5, line 129-134)

Fatima's quote provides us context in which some eldest daughters like Fatima become positioned in a parentified role. Fatima paints a picture in which she witnessed her migrant parents working long hours to build a life for their family in a country fairly new to them. There is a strong sense of the socioeconomic pressures her parents were under. Fatima tells us that this pressure caused an absence within the home as Fatima was now in charge of her siblings care at 12 years old. Fatima lists the various adult caregiving tasks she was responsible for such as cooking, feeding, and bathing her younger siblings. The way Fatima describes that "it was on me" and "who else will?" highlights a sense of necessity, that caregiving is what she felt she had to do in order to keep the family afloat. This tells us that in Fatima's experience, her roles and duties as an eldest daughter were shaped by migration related pressures.

Several participants expressed that their caregiving responsibility was shaped by a integration of their specific birth order as well as gender roles within South Asian culture. An example can be seen below:

"I have raised my siblings, since they were little, like… I've been the one that is caring for their needs. Cooking for them and cleaning after them. There is definitely a difference in what is expected as the eldest daughter compared to my other siblings. I believe culture has an influence on this because as a girl, you're meant to be doing these things anyway because you're going to be someone's wife one day. But as the eldest girl, you're not only the first born so you have to be a leader anyway but you're also a girl which means you're expected to be

caring, obedient and this responsible person. That together makes my position quite… just, a lot"

- *(Aisha, 25, British Indian, London) (p.8, 226-234)*

Aisha recalls her experience of raising her siblings since they were young and being response for their care. The word 'raising' reflects the significance of Aishas involvement in her siblings upbringing. This provides us insight into Aishas experience of taking on caregiving responsibility whilst she was a child herself. Aisha expresses that there is a difference in what is expected of her as the eldest daughter in comparison to her younger siblings. She feels her experience was influenced by both culture, gender and birth order. She explains that as a girl within the culture, she is expected to carry out domestic care duties and be responsible. This is underpinned by cultural narratives around marriage and becoming "*someone's wife one day*". Yet as the first born, Aisha expresses that there is an expectation to be a leader. Aisha articulates that cultural expectations along with birth order expectations in combination intensify how she experiences her eldest daughter position. There is a hesitancy as Aisha states "*together this makes my position quite… just, a lot*". This reflects the difficulty of articulating the weight of her experience.

In addition, participants also expressed that caregiving duties were something they had witnessed intergenerationally:

"My mum [eldest daughter] was pulled out of college when she was 16 to look after her younger siblings, so I think there's an expectation that those responsibilities get past down."

- *(Sheila, Aged 40, British Indian, West Midlands) (p.10, line 280-283)*

Sheila expresses that her mother, also an eldest daughter, was withdrawn from college to uphold caregiving responsibilities for her younger siblings. She expresses that such patterns of behaviour become intergenerational. This highlights how intergeneration patterns can be influential factor which may contribute to the parentification of BSA eldest daughters.

2:3: The Advocate

Advocating for parents was another commonly mentioned responsibility. Being an advocate was described in many ways such as completing their parents administrative tasks, translating documents for them and taking them to hospital appointments.

> *"My parents don't speak English very well so I'm more in like shops or doctor's appointments or even phone calls sometimes. I'm the one picking up the calls and answering and speaking on behalf of them like I had to call many places and just impersonate my mum and dad because they asked me to because like it's way easier to communicate."*
>
> - *(Sara, 19, British Afghan, London) (p.4, line 136-141)*

> *"Doing taxes and stuff obviously I started that from a young age… I remember they got frustrated with me that I don't know this stuff and then I get frustrated because I was like 10 years old!"*
>
> - *(Fatima, 23, British Bangladeshi, East Midlands) (p.6, line 157-159)*

Since Sara's parents did not speak English, she often spoke to the wider society on their behalf as a translator. For others, such as Fatima, supporting migrant

parents looked like trying to understand complex information beyond her years, such as taxes. This highlights how the experience of parentification is intensified for BSA eldest daughters, who are also children of migrants. This is understood to be through roles being 'language brokers' and bridging the communication gap between two worlds.

Some participants expressed that this extends beyond language translation:

> *"I take them to hospital appointments because of like racism and stuff. I'm always worried because I've seen some times when they've gone to appointments and they can't articulate themselves very well and people become frustrated with them. I took that responsibility to just be there for them and help them".*
>
> - *(Fatima, 23, British Bangladeshi, East Midlands) (p.6, line 174-180)*

The quote above highlights how some eldest daughters may act as intermediaries not just between languages, but between their parents and institutions that may treat them with frustration, dismissal, or even racial prejudice. There is a sense that as the eldest daughter, participants felt a strong responsibility to protect their parents from these institutions. Fatima expressed the emotional weight of her eldest daughter role is intensified by the fear that their parents may be mistreated if left unsupported.

This suggests that the responsibility of advocacy may sometimes fall on the eldest daughter, particularly in the context where she is the first British-born child to parents whose first language may not be English. Through Fatima's account one could argue that now as an adult, her ability to navigate institutional settings,

fluently speak English, and understand societal norms positions her as her parents advocate by necessity. This tells us that the experience of being a parentified BSA eldest daughter is not just shaped by family dynamics, but is deeply embedded in broader socio-cultural and structural contexts such as migration, language barriers and racism.

Theme Three: The Mental, Emotional and Relational Impact

This theme explores how participants described the impacts of being a parentified BSA eldest daughter. This includes 3 subthemes including 3.1: The Mental Impact, 3.2: The Emotional Impact and 3.3: The Relational Impact.

3.1: The Mental Impact

This subtheme discusses participants descriptions of psychological impacts of their parentification experiences. This captures participants speaking about diagnoses of mental health difficulties and relating this with their experiences as parentified eldest daughters.

Participants expressed that their mental health was directly impacted by their experience of being an eldest daughter. Participants highlighted experiencing anxiety, depression, panic attacks and eating disorders:

"I get anxious quite a lot, especially when I have to mediate between my parents. I think it does come directly from having to fulfil that role. I've had panic attacks before it just gets too much sometimes".

- *(Maham, 21, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p.9, line 311-314)*

The extracts above tell us that participants parentification experience impacted their mental health directly in various ways. Maham highlights that she feels anxiety in direct connection to her role of being the family mediator. She also mentions experiencing panic attacks which highlights the physical manifestation of her emotional overwhelm.

Another example of mental health impact was shared by Aditi in which she mentioned:

> *"It impacted my mental health for sure, I used to have like an eating disorder and stuff like that. And I feel like it stemmed from my experience as the eldest*

daughter and being parentified. I do have times where I get like quite anxious and depressed."

- *(Aditi, 29, British Indian, London) (p.13, 373-376)*

Aditi further expressed that she experienced an eating disorder, as well as anxiety and depression which she feels "stemmed from her experience as the eldest daughter and being parentified". The prevalence of anxiety and panic among participants suggests that the experience of parentification as a BSA eldest daughter, for some, may lead to chronic stress and hypervigilance, which can manifest as anxiety and panic in adulthood.

A number of participants mentioned being diagnosed with 'Borderline Personality Disorder' (BPD). They felt that the symptoms often related to BPD such as emotional dysregulation was directly associated with their experiences of parentification.

"I was diagnosed with BPD, which in a nutshell is just my emotional dysregulation. I think I can point the root cause down to being a parentified eldest daughter I feel in a specific cultural setting as well in the immigrant South Asian context in the UK I don't think I'd be diagnosed with BPD if that wasn't the case. I don't think I would have issues with emotional dysregulation and communication and insecure attachments if I hadn't been brought up with the burdens placed on me as an eldest daughter".

- *(Sabina, 29, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.8, line 229-235)*

"The doctor suspected me of having BPD which I feel like was a result of becoming overwhelmed with all the duties put on me when I was younger especially."

- *(Sara, 19, British Afghan, East Midlands) (p.7, line 205-207)*

Sabina discusses the link between emotional dysregulation and her role as the eldest

daughter in a BSA migrant family. She frames her BPD diagnosis as socially rooted. She expresses that the combination of her family responsibilities, her BSA cultural context, and her experience as a second-generation migrant all contributed to the development of her emotional difficulties. Sabina highlighting the 'emotional dysregulation' shows that the mental and emotional demands placed on eldest daughters in South Asian migrant families may leave a lasting imprint on their ability to regulate and express their own emotions. Sara further expresses that her experience of BPD is a result of how overwhelmed she felt as a child due to the responsibilities placed upon her. This highlights potential long term effects of early caregiving roles and the various ways it can manifest as an adult. Overall, we can understand that the experience of BPD may be linked to the suppressing one's own emotions as a child, leaving long term impacts on the way some parentified BSA eldest daughters regulate their emotions as adult.

3.2: The Emotional Impact

This subtheme captures participants descriptions of emotions such as emotional suppression and guilt. This is different from the mental health impact subtheme because the mental health impact subtheme captures participants use of diagnostic language to describe the impact of their experiences. Whereas, in this subtheme the emotional experiences are described by participants who did not frame them in diagnostic terms.

Participants expressed that their experience of being a BSA eldest daughter impacted them emotionally in many ways. Emotional suppression was a common impact that was spoken about. For example, Aditi grew up in a household where she experienced familial conflict. Aditi discussed that as a parentified eldest daughter, she was the person to mediate conflict and also provide emotional support to her mother. As she reflected on this, she spoke about the lasting

impacts of this role:

> *"It kind of like made me always feel like I need to kind of like minimise my emotions or just my emotions are a burden and like I do have a good group of friends and stuff like that that I can find in but I feel like it's almost internalised to me that my emotions are like yeah there's not enough space for my emotions. It's very uncomfortable speaking about my feelings sometimes".*
>
> - (Aditi, 29, British Indian, London) *(p.13, 388- 393)*

Aditi's account highlights that her early experiences of being the family conflict mediator and being a counsellor for her mother taught her that her own emotions were a "burden". She learned to minimise her own emotions to make space for the emotions of others, this has become a lasting impact of her experiences. Aditi expressing that speaking about her emotions feels uncomfortable shows how little space there was for her to explore her emotions growing up, resulting in her finding it difficult to have conversations focused on her emotions as an adult.

Others expressed that their experience of their eldest daughter role resulted in long-term emotional enmeshment, where guilt, boundary difficulties, and internalised self-criticism persists in their adult life. Maimoona and Sheila are both married women who live away from their family. They both reflected on how this separation brings up feelings of guilt and emptiness:

It's almost an enmeshment where I don't know where they start and where I end and vice versa. Like I said, this feeling of emptiness and detachment from them feels very strange. For example, I know my youngest sister would not feel the same way if she moved out, or if she would feel these feelings of, like, sometimes

like guilt or detachment, If I'm not so involved in every little thing.

- *(Maimoona, Aged 26, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.6, line 210-215)*

"I have a big problem with boundaries and feeling guilty constantly when I don't see my family."

- *(Sheila, Aged 40, British Indian, West Midlands) (p.11, line 319-320)*

Both Maimoona and Sheila highlight feeling guilty if they are not involved within their families life. Both Sheila and Maimoona described growing up in families where they were heavily relied upon for various caregiving needs for siblings, as well as attending emotionally and practically to their parent's needs. There is a sense that they have internalised that they must always be needed and not being of service causes feelings of guilt and self-blame. Sheila describes this as a "problem with boundaries" highlighting struggles with separation between herself and her family. Maimoona describes this as an "enmeshment".

As Maimoona reflected on marriage and moving away, she described feeling emptiness following this detachment. Having been emotionally enmeshed within her family system, as a caregiver, an advocate, as a family counsellor, her identity was shaped around caregiving and duty. This makes separation feel disorienting and empty for her. Maimoona's description evokes a reversed form of "empty nest syndrome", where instead of the parent grieving the child's departure, it is the child who experiences a sense of loss and emptiness after leaving home. This positioning may have fostered an internalised sense of responsibility for the emotions of others and thus causing guilt if she is not

actively involved within her family's life.

3.3: The Relational Impact

Participants expressed that their experience of being a parentified eldest daughter has impacted their interpersonal relationships.

"With friendships and stuff like that, you're very much like a giver and you don't feel like you're doing a lot for other people and you might not receive what you give back. I feel like in some situations you can get taken advantage of because people take your kindness for granted. A bit like a people pleaser because you don't want to disappoint people because there's those norms that were placed on you by your parents to always do the right thing"

- *(Zuneira, 20, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p.7, line 222-228)*

"It's played out in romantic relationships where I've been the one to do the organising do the planning and that's when I take a step back and I'm like oh my gosh I hate this, my previous relationship had a breakdown because of this, it was so unequal. I said I don't want to be the only one carrying the load and all of that stuff because I think that's what happens as the eldest daughter. You just become conditioned to it"

(Sabina, 29, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.10, line 294-300)

Both Zuneira and Sabina reflect on how their experiences as parentified eldest daughters have shaped the dynamics within friendships and romantic relationships. Zuneira identifies herself as a "*giver*" who often feels taken for granted. She associates her people-pleasing tendencies with the value placed on her to "*always do the right thing*". Now, in her adult friendships, she feels her

giving can be taken for granted. Similarly, Sabina describes unequal dynamics in her romantic relationships. She described taking a leading role in the relationship and "*carrying the load*". She links this directly to being "*conditioned*" by her role as the eldest daughter. This suggests that "carrying the load" has become ingrained within her and part of her sense of 'self'. It appears that "carrying the load" for others has become a relational pattern for Sabina. She suggests this pattern is shaped by her experiences of caring for others as an eldest daughter which now has become second nature for her. Both accounts suggest internalised patterns of self-sacrifice and responsibility due to being parentified that may have long term impacts on adult relationships.

Others discussed how being a parentified eldest daughter has affected their relationship with trust and connection in interpersonal relationships:

> *"It kind of has affected like my interpersonal relationships and that sometimes I feel like I can't really trust people as much or I find it hard to like make strong connections with people. Just having to take on a lot of responsibility at an early age kind of made me feel less able to connect with other people in a sense because I felt like maybe they're not going to be able to relate to that stuff"*
>
> - *(Karina, 26, British Indian, London) (p.7, line 199-205)*

Karina reflects on how her experiences of growing up as a parentified eldest daughter affected her interpersonal relationships. She describes finding it hard to *"trust people"* or *"make strong connections"* highlighting a sense of caution and vigilance. Karina speaks to why there may be a barrier to trusting others as she states that others might not *"be able to relate to that stuff"*. This shows that that

Karina feels the unique demands of her experiences sets her apart from her peers, that her world is too different and others will not understand. This creates difficulties with trust and connection. It further suggests an internalisation of the idea that as parentified eldest daughter, your burdens are only yours to carry and no one else will understand. This suggests that some parentified BSA eldest daughters may experience feeling different or unrelatable due to their parentification experience. This feeling may affect how some eldest daughters navigate their social world as adults, with distrust and difficulties with connection.

Theme 4: Making Sense of What Happened - "It's All They Knew"

This theme outlines how participants came to understand and make sense of their experience of being a parentified eldest daughter. This includes two subthemes including 4.1: Resentment To Empathy and 4.2: Strength in the Struggle. Whilst resentment and empathy are emotional experiences, in this theme they are discussed as part of a reflective and meaning-making process in which participants describe how they felt about their experiences over time. This distinguishes this theme from the 'emotional impact' which captures the raw and immediate emotions experienced in the moment, rather than those understood over time.

4.1: Resentment To Empathy

A shared experience within the data was participants expressing a turning point within how they made sense of their parentification experiences. Participants spoke about how when they were younger, they experienced feelings of resentment towards their family due to being placed within a parentified position. However, they described a shift in perspective occurred as they got older. Feelings of resentment towards family developed into empathy and understanding.

Aisha reflected on this shift as she remembered that as a teenager she questioned why adult responsibilities were placed on her. A sense of disagreement against her unique responsibilities can be seen below:

"I think the shift happens in your 20's, before my 20's I was like why is happening? Why am I doing this? I don't want to be doing this.

- *(Aisha, 25, British Indian, London) (p.8, line 227-229)*

However, Aisha then stated that a "shift" occurred and her perspectives changed:

"But then when you hit your 20's, you sort of see your parents like, oh wow they sacrificed so much for me".

- *(Aisha, 25, British Indian, London) (p.8, line 229-231)*

Here we see that Aisha described a transition in her outlook of her experience. She describes this transition to occur in her 20's where she reframed her experience through the sacrifices of her parents.

A similar sense-making process was recalled by Zuneira. She discussed her feelings of resentment as a teenager towards her parents for the amount of responsibility she carried. She described resentment as something she recognised later on life suggesting it was not an immediate emotion but built over time.

"It's very different to when I was a child. I feel like I did come to resent my parents when I was a teen for placing a lot of burden on me. I think I only realised it was actually resentment later on in life… when I actually processed it".

- *(Zuneira, 20, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p. 7, line 240-243)*

Similarly to Aisha, Zuneira also expressed that over time, her perspective changed:

"But now, when you grow up you understand like intergenerational trauma and learned behaviours and like that's why your parents acted the way they did. It's all they knew".

- *(Zuneira, 20, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p.7, line 244-246)*

Zuneira's descriptions capture a powerful transition in meaning-making. She describes that as she grew older, she grew in understanding towards her parents actions. Her recognition of "intergenerational trauma" and "learned behaviours"

suggests a re-framing of her parents behaviours with empathy and contextual understanding. Zuneira suggests that her parents may have acted according to what they saw in their upbringing or life experiences. Zuneira stating *"it's all they knew"* reflects understanding, rather than viewing her parents actions as deliberately unfair.

In another interview, Maimoona was reflecting on her experiences of caring for her younger sister. Around this time, Maimoona's mother became unwell and her father was working long hours. This meant Maimoona became responsible for many caregiving duties for her siblings. When asked how she felt about this experience, Maimoona also spoke about a journey of emotions. She spoke about feelings of resentment building up as a teenager:

"I had a lot of resentment and anger like bubbling underneath but this was years ago as a teen".

(Maimoona, 26, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.5, line 180-181)

This was shortly followed by Maimoona expressing how she now views things differently:

"I feel like I've come to a place now where I've realised that it was just the situation, the way it was for my parents, I've come to the conclusion that my parents were doing their best possible with what they knew and had at the time. I felt like I had to just grow up like that to help the family run at the time".

(Maimoona, 26, British Bangladeshi, London) (p5, line 181-184)

Maimoona acknowledged that she came to a realisation that her parents were doing the best they could in a difficult situation. Her reflection that they were "*doing*

their best with what they knew and had" suggests an awareness and understanding towards her parents navigating financial pressures, illness and limited resources. There is a sense that Maimoona now views her parents actions as survival through a challenging situation, and that her experience of growing up in a parentified position was a necessity within that survival.

Through the accounts of Aisha, Zuneira and Maimoona, we learn that parentified BSA eldest daughters may go through a journey of meaning making in order to make sense of being parentified. There is a pattern where within the teenage years, this meaning making may look like resentment and anger. However over time, individuals go through a process of re-evaluating the circumstances their parents were in such as illness, financial hardship, migration pressures. Eldest daughters may reframe their experiences by seeing them through the lens of parental sacrifices and hardship. This does not dimmish the struggles eldest daughters went through, but situates their struggles alongside those of their parents. Through this they recognised that both generations were doing what was needed to cope within their unique circumstances.

4.2: Strength in the Struggle

As part of their process of meaning-making, some participants reflected that a key positive outcome being parentified was the development of a strong sense of independence:

"I do see the benefits in being able to do stuff like just having a 'can do' attitude or 'get it done' attitude is a positive thing. When I say going to do something, I'll do it. I pride myself on being very independent."

- *(Sabina, 29, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.13, line 373-376)*

"As a result I'm really independent now because I've dealt with most of my problems by myself. It shows I can do things by myself and that's empowering".

(Sara, 19, British Afghan, East Midlands) (p.8, line 231-233)

Both Sara and Sabina view their independence as a positive outcome of parentification. Sara highlights the practical self-reliance as a positive as she describes *"I've dealt with most of my problems by myself"* and views this as empowering as it reflects her strength and resilience. Sabina similarly emphasises her *"can-do attitude"* and states that she takes pride in her independence. There is a sense that participants have re-interpreted their experience of having to manage everything alone as a marker of personal resilience. The independence that may have initially emerged out of necessity, is now framed as a strength. This demonstrates that despite feelings of hurt and resentment, BSA eldest daughters make sense of their parentification experience through finding strength and resilience in their independence and self-reliance.

Theme 5: Always the Eldest: Looking To The Future Ahead

This theme highlights how participants view their future and what they anticipate this may look like as parentified eldest daughters. There are no subthemes within this theme. As participants reflected on their journeys, a significant pattern was identified around views towards the future and how the responsibilities of being a parentified eldest daughter in a BSA family extend into later adulthood. There was a clear sense that when you are the eldest daughter who is parentified, you never stop being the eldest and carrying the load of responsibility. The role never truly ends, it evolves over time.

While childhood and adolescence may have involved practical caregiving, adulthood brings with it new expectations. Participants anticipated that they will be caring for ageing parents, holding the family together, and continuing to fulfil a culturally informed duties. However, this time, not grounded in resentment, but in love, care and gratitude. For example, Karina and Aisha mentioned:

"My responsibilities will change with time because I would want to take responsibility for my parents and look after them. That's something again its cultural we look after our ageing parents. It's also because I love them and they have done so much, they've moved to this country."

- *(Karina, 26, British Indian, London) (p.10, line 294-298)*

"The future is wanting to take care, wanting to be responsible, I want to buy them a new house, for them to be in a better place, better heating, better structure. Before I just wanted to be able to live for me, but now I think how I make life easier for my family".

(Aisha, 25, British Indian, London) (p.12, line 364-368)

As expressed through Karina and Aisha's quotes, it is clear that both anticipate that their roles and responsibility as parentified eldest daughters continues into their future. Karina expresses that *"my responsibilities will change with time"* which reflects the sentiment that she anticipates a shift in her responsibilities as time goes on. She expresses that "*I would want to take responsibility for my parents and look after them"*. There is a notable shift in how participants perceive caregiving duties over time. This can also be seen as Aisha states "*the future is wanting to take care, wanting to be responsible"*. In childhood or adolescence, caregiving was experienced as burdensome, however, in adulthood it is framed as a conscious and willing act rooted in love, gratitude, and cultural values. This can be seen as Karina says "*its cultural we look after our ageing parents. It's also because I love them and they have done so much, they've moved to this country"*. The desire to care for ageing parents is rooted within South Asian cultural values as well as from a place of appreciation for parental sacrifice through migration.

This shift in perception also reflects a broader developmental transition. What once was a child carrying adult responsibilities, has become an adult consciously choosing to take on adult responsibilities. As participants grow older, their experience of care seems to have evolved. From feeling imposed upon in their youth, to finding meaning and value in caregiving as adults. Perhaps, this is due to feeling more equipped to care as an adult as opposed to when they were children.

"I think the responsibility will still be there like in the future, and I will obviously need to think about taking care of my parents as they get older. But I think the future seems better than the past in a sense because I've worked hard to create like autonomy and independence for myself".

- *(Aditi, 29, British Indian, London) (p. 15, line 441-445)*

Aditi reflects that while the responsibility to care for her parents remains, her outlook on the future is more positive compared to the past because she has cultivated autonomy and independence. This reflects a sense of hope, that her relationship with being the eldest no longer feels burdensome, but rather more manageable through the work she has put in to create space and independence for herself.

Finally, participants expressed that their responsibilities as parentified eldest daughter in a BSA family do not stop even when their parents are no longer present.

> *"I'm responsible for making sure we all stay connected once my parents are no longer around".*
>
> - *(Sheila, 40, British Indian, West Midlands) (p.11, line 328-329)*

This quote highlights that the role of being the eldest daughter in a BSA family extends beyond caring for ageing parents. Sheila expresses that once her parents are no longer present, she holds responsibility for maintaining family cohesion and connection. This reiterates the sense that although participants see their roles evolving, their responsibilities do not come to an end completely.

Across these accounts, there is powerful meaning expressed of *care as a lifelong commitment*. Feeling towards duties and responsibilities as a parentified eldest daughter change over time, as eldest daughters grow up and developmentally feel more able to manage certain duties. Being the a parentified eldest daughter in a BSA family is not a role one leaves behind, it appears it is redefined at different life stages. It is clear that participants express finding meaning not in abandoning culturally embedded responsibility, but in reshaping it to fit who they are becoming.

This is reflective of values commonly found in collectivist communities, where family interdependence takes precedence over individualistic ideals of complete independence and self-focus.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter Overview

Having explored participant experiences, this chapter begins by a summary of the broader story that was constructed from participant experiences. The purpose of this is to keep participant lived experience central to the discussion, honouring their active voice throughout this research, as well as maintaining coherence between the analysis and the discussion. After this, I will be discussing my findings in relation to existing literature. To minimise repeating themes as reported within the analysis, this chapter seeks to discuss findings within broader key ideas from the main findings. I then seek to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this study before moving on to suggestions for future research. This is followed by a discussion around implications for clinical practice as well as broader society. The chapter ends with a reflective conclusion.

The Broader Story

This research study aimed to explore the *experiences* of parentification of first-born eldest daughters from BSA backgrounds. Secondly, aim two of this study was to understand more about factors that *influence* parentification experiences. Lastly, aim three was to explore the *impacts* of parentification within this population.

The findings illustrate a story of BSA eldest daughters who experienced an early loss of their childhood. Their eldest daughter role meant taking on adult responsibilities within their families while still children and subsequently experiencing parentification. Parentification experiences were often associated with and described through the lens of birth order, cultural norms, gendered expectations, intergenerational patterns and migration histories. We learn that the parentified eldest daughter role is vast and multifaceted, encompassing emotional and practical duties. The weight of such duty left emotional, mental and relational imprints that persist into adulthood. However, there was a shift in the story. Now as adults,

participants began to reinterpret these experiences shifting from feelings of resentment towards their family to empathy and understanding. They recognised the broader cultural, familial and societal contexts that shaped experiences of parentification. Eldest daughters found strength in the struggle as they reinterpreted their experiences, as evidence of their strength and resilience. Although they acknowledge their eldest daughter role as a lifelong commitment, they approach it with greater awareness of self and viewing future caregiving as an act of love towards their families.

Contextualising Findings within Literature

Early Maturation

Through the findings, one of the strongest concepts found within experiences (aim 1) was that participants described that due to being parentified, they experienced maturing earlier through the weight of adulthood roles and responsibilities during their childhood. This was captured predominantly within theme one, subtheme 1.1 and 1.2 in which participants described early maturation through caring for their sibling whilst being a child themselves and being positioned as a role model to them. For example, we have seen in Maimoona's narrative, when she mentioned "*I was like, that's all I kind of knew after that [after birth of sibling] is feeling like a little adult" (p.2, line 63). Maham shared similarly when she mentioned "I've not actually learnt to live as a kid" (p.3, line 82)*. We understand this as being the start of their parentification experience and through this, their roles and responsibilities became normalised. This was similarly discussed by Hooper et al (2011) who stated that parentification becomes normalised because caregiving roles and traits such as appearing mature and responsible may be rewarded or praised by the caregiver. In collectivist cultures, caregiving behaviours, especially for girls, may be seen as desirable due to values based on interdependence and familial duty (Harrison et al., 1990).

This finding draws interesting comparisons with biological research. Fox et al (2024) found that that under maternal stress, first-born daughters may mature earlier, which could benefit the mother by extending the daughter's capacity to care for younger siblings. Though mother prenatal stress and biological maturation was beyond the scope of this study, findings align with the broader experience of maturing early, growing up quickly to be able to provide care for younger siblings. Albeit within this study, early maturation can be understood as a psychosocial process as mediated by parentification influenced by cultural and social factors, as opposed to a biological one. Despite these differences, it is interesting that the early maturation of eldest daughters was identified not only within biological quantitative research (Fox et al., 2024) but also in psychological qualitative research like this one. This suggest that some eldest daughters may experience early maturation when family systems are under strain placing them in a parentified position. This may be understood as contextually informed process of adaptation to familial need.

Furthermore, it was found that early maturation could occur through being labelled as a role model within the family (theme 1, subtheme 1.2). Participants spoke about being positioned as a role model for their siblings in which they felt a pressure to "act right" and be a model child. This created feelings of loss of 'play and youthfulness' in their childhood, further intensifying their parentification experience. This was seen when Zuneira said "*act right, be obedient, be a role model for my siblings because I'm the first one to show them that" (p.8, line 228)*.

Similar experiences of early maturation for eldest daughters were reported by Marchetta and Ricard (2025) reported that first-born daughters matured faster due to their increased familial caregiving duties. Similarly, Cho et al (2025) also found themes of early maturation experienced by American East Asian parentified adults. White British eldest daughters have described similar experiences (Cohen., 2024). This suggests that early maturation and role-modelling may be recurring features of parentified eldest daughter experiences across cultural contexts. Though a similar early experience was found, this study contributes to this

literature by situating this pattern explicitly within the lived experiences of BSA eldest daughters, demonstrating how early maturation is experienced and understood through their specific familial and cultural contexts.

In terms of birth order studies, findings provide a response to the quantitative studies which make claims that first-born adults are more mature compared to their siblings, yet do not provide context as to why that may be for some people (Van-Volkom et al., 2019). This study provided this context. BSA eldest daughters did describe themselves being more mature through their experiences of parentification and culturally mediated values of responsibility.

Some participants explained that loss of childhood and being a role model was linked to the cultural values surrounding honour, respect and family reputation. This was seen when Zuneira said *"I think for daughters in general within the South Asian culture, we're raised to hold this honour and respect anyway….but I think for me… as the eldest daughter, there's even more of a pressure to be a source of pride" (p.8, line 224-226)*. This relates with Mathews (2000) in which he stated that obedience and dutifulness can be a common cultural value within South Asian communities. Although previous studies have explored how BSA women make sense of honour-based values (Mansoor., 2015; Gunasinghe et al., 2019; Sangar and Howe., 2021), there has been limited attention to how honour-based values can intensify experiences of parentification. This finding speaks directly to the aims of this study (experience and influence) as we understand that for some BSA eldest daughters, cultural values may intensify their experience of parentification through not only holding the weight of domestic responsibility, but also the responsibility of family respect at higher degree than other siblings due to their birth order.

Cultural Dissonance in Educational Institutions

Another key finding was that participants experienced cultural dissonance within educational institutions. This finding was referred to in theme 1, subtheme 1.3. Participants described

that due to their caregiving responsibilities at home, they could not give as much time to their academia. Irfan et al (2024) similarly reported that participants who were eldest children described being expected to prioritise the needs of the family over their own education.

However, participants in this study went further in explaining that they felt misunderstood by teachers who failed to recognise the weight of duty they carried as eldest daughters, often perceiving academic decline as underachievement rather than a consequence of parentification. There was a sense that their experiences were being viewed through a individualistic lens in which the needs of the individual are most important. Additional responsibilities were not understood through a culturally sensitive lens. This caused feelings of alienation within participants. This was described by Maimoona who mentioned "*I have a lot of additional responsibilities. I remember her [teacher] being really flippant about it and saying well when I was your age I had lots of extracurricular activities" (p.3, line 80)*. This cultural dissonance highlights how parentified eldest daughters experience will not only shaped by their family but also misunderstood within wider institutional contexts.

Parentification literature has quantitatively explored links between parentification and the impact on school performance (Chase et al., 1998; Borchet et al., 2021). However, little is known about the lived experience of being a parentified child in the school setting. This finding fills this gap in knowledge as it captures the experience of a parentified child caught between two cultural frameworks, one that demands personal development and another that prioritises duty to family. This is consistent with findings of Inman et al (2001) who states that South Asian women living in Western individualist societies may experience tension between collectivist family expectations and individualistic Western norms. From this, we understand that not receiving appropriate support at school further intensified the experience of parentification for BSA eldest daughters.

The Eldest Daughter as Family Regulator

When describing types of parentified roles, it was found that participants responsibilities were indeed multifaceted including being a mediator and emotional confidant, caregiver as well as a family advocate in wider society. Collectively, these roles can be understood as being responsible for family regulation. A process appears where eldest daughters are positioned as being responsible for the regulation the family system so it can keep functioning. This was analysed within the theme 2 and its subthemes. The findings from this theme inform the aims of experience and influence.

Participants experienced being positioned as mediators within familial conflict. This was captured when Aditi mentioned *"when there were fights and stuff like I almost felt like a little referee or something"* (p.8, line 230-231). Existing literature speaks to this experience as a type of 'emotional parentification' (Engelhardt., 2012). This finding responds to the study aims as we understand, the experience of being a parentified eldest daughter may mean feeling responsible for the emotional safety and harmony within the family system. It was also found that participants experienced holding parental distress itself, this was described as being an emotional confidants. A key finding was through being emotional confidants, there was a process of silencing their own emotions to be able to make space for their parents. From this, it can be understood that the experience of being a parentified BSA eldest daughter means that one may self supress, to be able to prioritise the well-being of the family. This finding is interesting as it not only suggests experience of emotional parentification, but also speaks to South Asian cultural values of prioritising family over the individual (Bose and Jalal., 2022).

This finding aligns with Bowens (1966;1978) Family Systems Theory in which he described that families operate as emotional units and that conflict can cause problems within the family unit. The silencing of one's own emotions may point to struggles with differentiation of self. The patterns of behaviour described in this finding aligns with the concept of 'triangulation' i.e. where a third person is called upon to mediate conflict. The finding that

some participants internalised responsibility for family safety and harmony relates to Bowens concept of 'family projection process' i.e. that parental anxiety projection on a child causing them to become more vulnerable to internalising family tension. In this study, participants were not only mediators but also confidants where such anxiety projection may have occurred thus causing internalised responsibility of family safety and harmony within eldest daughters.

Findings align with existing literature in which parentified eldest daughters have reported being mediators and confidants within family conflict as well as this causing emotional suppression (Irfan et al., 2024). As some participants spoke about parents having no one else to speak to due to their migration history, which meant eldest daughters became the listening ear. This finding is important because studies on parentification within migrant families often highlight practical roles such as language brokering (Titzmann., 2012). This can sometimes overlook the emotional parentification experience. This study highlights this experience as we understand that parental migration history may mean that for some families, eldest daughters become the substitute support system.

Furthermore, through subtheme 2.2, the findings highlighted that the role of being a caregiver was prevalent within participants. Caregiving related to attending to domestic household responsibilities as well as caring for the needs of younger siblings and parents from a young age. The literature refers to this as functional/instrumental parentification (Burton et al., 2018). These findings address the aims of the study relating to understanding the experience as well the factors influencing parentification within this population.

Economic pressures and the long working hours of migrant parents contributed to eldest daughters undertaking caregiving and domestic responsibilities. This finding can be compared to Cho et al (2025) in which East Asian American eldest daughters reported being be responsible for caregiving duties for siblings in order to support the family whilst migrant parents were working long hours. This study expands on such knowledge by situating such experiences within the BSA context. Cho et al (2025) did not explicitly examine birth order,

yet several participants self-identified as eldest daughters which as highlighted a missed aspect of parentification experiences. This study fills this gap by its focus specifically on eldest daughters from which we understand that caregiving duties were intensified due to their parents migration context.

Cultural views surrounding birth order and gender roles further influenced caregiving experiences. Being a girl and the firstborn created a 'double burden' which added to pressures to be caring, responsible as well as a leader figure within the family. Being a girl meant there were gendered expectations to be caring (Shekhani., 2024), being the first born held expectations to be a leader and responsible figure within the family (Sandhu., 1997). This creates a 'double burden'. This finding aligns with Irfan et al (2024) as they reported caregiving duties were more intense for Pakistani daughters due to gender and cultural role expectations. They also reported this be a disproportionate "double burdened" due to the role of being the eldest as well as being a girl upholding cultural values of caregiving. This appears to be a similarly perhaps within collectivist culture populations as Marchetta and Ricard (2025) also found that Malagasy eldest daughters had increased caregiving and household responsibilities.

In addition, intergenerational family patterns were also mentioned as a factor influencing parentification within this group as some participants spoke about their mothers being parentified eldest daughters, who then expected that their own daughters would carry the same responsibility they did. This finding aligns with existing studies that have found that parentified mothers may be more at risk of repeating this cycle with their own children (Macfie et al., 2008; Nutall et al., 2012). These intersecting factors intensified the experience of parentification among BSA eldest daughters.

Another role discussed in the findings was the role of the advocate (Subtheme 2.3). It was found that eldest daughters were responsible for tasks such as taking parents to hospital appointments, completing administrative tasks and translating documents. This was to support migrant parents who were non-English speakers. This responsibility then fell on the

eldest daughter due to being the eldest child that read and spoke English fluently. This meant that participants experienced being responsible for tasks beyond their years. An example from interviews is Fatima who recalled trying to understand taxes at 10 years old. This finding shows that the experience of a parentified BSA eldest daughter may involve 'language/culture brokering' for migrant parents, acting as bridge between their parents and wider society. As such experiences started from a young age, eldest daughters feel this role contributes to their experience of parentification.

This finding is consistent with existing research which has found language brokering to be a reoccurring feature of parentification among children of immigrants across cultures (Mercado., 2003; Titzmann., 2012; Kim et al 2014; Kam and Lazarevic., 2014). Findings are also consistent with online discourse (Oladele., 2022).

Furthermore, Cho et al (2024) reported the experience of language brokering and translating documents for their parents. They expressed this as a necessary duty they had to do to support their family, although they reported feeling anxious trying to make sense of complex documents. This finding has also been reported in other studies which have found children of immigrant parents often become responsible for being a bridge between their family and society (Chao., 2006).

An interesting finding in particular was that advocating for parents went beyond language brokering, but was also a way of protecting their parents from discrimination within society. Examples include Fatima who mentioned attending hospital appointments with her parents due to concerns of her parents facing discrimination due to language barriers. This suggests that the experience of parentification in this population can be shaped by social inequalities. This raises questions about the way parentification is thought to be understood as it may not always due to the blurring of familial boundaries (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark.,1973). One could argue that in some cases, adultified behaviour may be developed as a response to experiences of systemic injustice. This is supported by Bowens concept of 'societal emotional process' (1966;1978) in which there is acknowledgment that societal such as

racism and migration history can influence how a family functions. In addition to this, Hooper et al (2013) who discussed that parentification can be caused by power structures inverted in families. This supports the finding here that aspects such as being an English speaker may cause a power imbalance in the house contributing to parentification experiences. However, Hooper et al did not consider societal power imbalances (racism and discrimination) which may also contribute to parentification as found in this study. This study expands this knowledge by highlighting how parentified eldest daughters may feel responsible for protecting their family from such social inequalities.

While the literature may classify advocacy and administrative support as forms of functional parentification, the participants accounts around responsibility for parents safety in society is not fully captured within existing definitions of types of parentification. This may be due to the fact that parentification theory was largely developed in western contexts (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark.,1973). However, for second generation BSA eldest daughters dysfunctional care extends into a protective form of parentification. This is one in which the child is looking out for the safety of the parent which is rooted within the awareness of racism language barriers as well as social power imbalances. Having said this their sense of duty to protect cannot be reduced to practical caregiving only as it reflects responsibility beyond functional tasks. This then suggests expansion within parentification literature by introducing and recognising 'protective parentification' as a category separate from functional parentification.

It is interesting to note that previous studies that have explored parentification and gender suggest that daughters may be engaging in more emotional parentification, whereas sons may experience more functional parentification. This is due to expectations of gender roles within some families (Harrison and Albanese., 2012; Irfan et al., 2024). This study however, has found that eldest daughters expressed both emotional and functional types of parentification. These experiences seem to be shaped by culture, gender as well as parental migration context. As children of migrant parents these eldest daughters often took on

advocacy responsibilities (functional), fulfilling a caregiving role within the household (functional) as well as being a source of comfort in family conflict (emotional).

Parentification Experiences and The Enduring Mental, Emotional And Relational Impact

Moving forward, a key aim of this research was to explore how eldest daughters experienced the impacts of parentification. Findings responded to this aim, largely through theme 3, that participants described being impacted mentally, emotionally and relationally. This was understood as enduring, which continue to impact participants within their adulthood. Some participants felt that their mental health difficulties were directly linked to the pressures of their parentified roles. For example, when Aditi shared *"it impacted my mental health, I used to have like an eating disorder. I feel like it stemmed from my experience as the eldest daughter" (p.13, 373-376)*.

There was a range of mental health difficulties participants experienced such as anxiety, depression, panic attacks and eating disorders. Some participants discussed being diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). For example, Sabina shared that "*I was diagnosed with BPD, which in a nutshell is just my emotional dysregulation. I think I can point the root cause down to being a parentified eldest daughter*" (p.8, line 229-235). Emotional dysregulation was an outcome of the overwhelming expectations placed upon them from a young age. These findings suggest that for some people, the experience of parentification within BSA eldest daughters, can have lasting impacts on mental wellbeing in adulthood.

This finding did not come across as unexpected given that it is consistent with existing birth order literature that first born children may be more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety and depression (Franklin et al., 2024). One of the main critiques I made of birth order literature was that studies rely on quantitative measures which provide us with mental health

outcomes but fail to capture lived experiences (Fukuya et al., 2021).This study qualitatively highlighted how eldest daughters made sense of their mental health in relation to their birth order and parentification experiences. This expands the knowledge available in this body of literature.

Similarly, this finding is also consistent with parentification literature which found links between parentification and mental health difficulties in adulthood (Hooper et al., 2011) including eating disorders (Rowa et al., 2001), panic (Dwyer., 1991), depression (Schier et al., 2015), anxiety (Khafi et al., 2014) and difficulty with emotion regulation (Jankowski and Hooper., 2014). This study, however, expands this knowledge due to its exclusive focus on BSA eldest daughters. This was important because we know from existing studies that BSA women, have increased likelihood of experiencing mental health difficulties (Fazil and Cochrane., 2003; Anand and Cochrane., 2005). However, birth order and parentification is rarely explored in conjunction to mental health. Parentification studies that have focused on a South Asian population (Irfan et al., 2024) have failed to report on mental health related experiences. Through this study, we understand the mental wellbeing of BSA eldest daughters may be impacted through experiences of parentification.

One participant (Maham) spoke about the specific role of conflict mediation as the source of her anxiety in adulthood. Her experience resembled what Chen and Panebianco (2020) discuss relating to how emotional parentification can cause an enduring form of psychological distress. This is thought to be because the child is exposed to the mental states of the adult (e.g. a mother venting to a child about marital problems) which may cause the child to internalise responsibility for the adults wellbeing (Hooper and Wallace., 2010). This suggests that there is something about carrying the emotional responsibility involved in eldest daughter parentification experiences that may shape how they experience their mental wellbeing in adulthood. Having said, this other studies have found cultural differences such as emotional parentification in African American adolescents predicted stronger parent-

child relationships suggesting outcomes are not always detrimental (Khafi et al., 2014). This shows the importance of being sensitive to cultural context as well as individual differences.

In terms of emotional impact, there was a pattern of participants who shared feeling emotionally suppressed and guilty. Some participants described that due to being parentified, they have learned to minimise their own emotions to prioritise the needs of others. Aditi, for example, said *"it's almost internalised to me that my emotions are like yeah there's not enough space for my emotions"* (p.13, 388-389). Now as an adult, speaking about one's own emotions can feel uncomfortable. This finding mirrors findings from Van Parys et al (2015) in which parentified children perceived their own feelings as a burden upon their parents and therefore may feel hesitant to share their own emotions. This is also consistent with Irfan et al (2024) in which parentified Pakistani females expressed silencing their own emotional needs to be able to prioritise parental emotional needs. The present study broadens this finding by drawing on a more varied participant sample including British Indian, Bangladeshi, Afghan as well as Pakistani eldest daughters living in England. Whereas, Irfan et al (2024) was based on a mixed gender adolescent sample in Pakistan. This is important as the findings suggests that there may be some similarities in the way South Asian eldest daughters experience parentification living in the East, as well as the West.

Others spoke about feeling persistently guilty, if they we're not actively involved within family life due to aspects such as marriage or moving away. Maimoona described this as *"almost an enmeshment where I don't know where they start and where I end" (p.6, line 210-211).* This experience described similarly resembles the 'empty nest syndrome' (Oliver., 1977). This is described as when parents experience loss upon their children leaving home (Mitchell and Lovegreen., 2009). However, in this study, the sense of emptiness was described in reverse. It was the parentified child who experienced loss and guilt upon separating from the parent. Interestingly, there is no language within the literature to describe this phenomenon when it is experienced by children rather than parents. This

absence may reflect a broader gap in how the long-term emotional impacts of parentification are theorised.

Where similarities or support for this finding can be found in the literature includes, Bowen's (1996) concept of low differentiation of self, particularly difficulties separating emotionally from the family without guilt or distress. Moreover, some studies have previously identified guilt as an emotional impact of parentification (Jones & Wells., 1996). However, this study extends these findings by situating the experience within a BSA cultural context, where cultural values of interdependence and duty appeared to intensify the process of separation.

Participants also shared that parentification impacted their interpersonal relationships and how they relate to others in adulthood. This was described as patterns of over-responsibility, people-pleasing, difficulty trusting others as well as feeling different. Participants reflected on how their parentification experiences have shaped them to become "givers" and "people pleasers". This meant that in friendships, participants described feeling like they give and do not receive, this was described as "being taken for granted" by Zuneira *(p.7, line 224)*. This finding is consistent with Wells and Jones (1999) who found that American parentified children may have co-dependant traits. Similarly, Irfan et al (2024) found that parentified Pakistani adolescents stated prioritising the needs of friends and partners over their own to the point of exhaustion. It is interesting to note that despite both of the aforementioned studies focusing on younger populations (college and school aged) and were also conducted in different cultural contexts (America and Pakistan), there still appears to be similarities in the way parentified individuals relate to people. Whilst, it cannot be assumed that all parentified individuals will experience such relational patterns, the reoccurrence of similar findings in diverse contexts suggests that this is an area for continued exploration.

In romantic relationships, it was found that participants experienced an imbalance in which they took on the emotional and organisational load in the relationship. Existing parentification research that found reduced satisfaction in romantic relationships (Baggett et al., 2015) and troubles with communication skills in romantic relationships (Madden and Shaffer., 2016). In

line with its critical realist ontology, this study has expanded this knowledge by going beyond the 'what' to explore the 'why'. In this study, we understand that eldest daughters experienced difficulties within romantic relationships due to the internalisation of their caregiving role which seemingly becomes ingrained as part of eldest daughters identity.

Through all accounts, there is a thread of similarity in experiences regardless of the type of relationship, the thread being a strong sense of responsibility to care for others. This suggests that for some participants, caregiving may have become an internalised relational pattern which may repeat itself within adult relationships.

The Re-Authoring of Eldest Daughter Parentification Experiences

Findings also outlined how participants came to understand and make sense of their parentification experiences over time. This was largely found within theme 4. There appeared to be a shift in participant perspective about their experiences which can be understood as a process of re-authoring. In adolescence, participants described holding feelings of resentment and unfairness towards their parentification experiences. However, now as adults, they described feelings of empathy and understanding. This understanding occurred due to reframing their parents actions through the lens of familial sacrifice, survival, the pressures of migration and intergenerational learned behaviours.

Feeling resentful in adolescence due to parentification experiences was similarly reported by Irfan et al (2024) but only one of their participants spoke about this feeling. In this study, resentment in adolescence was a common shared experience. This difference may be because my participants were adults reflecting retrospectively and perhaps have had more time to process their feelings, whereas the participants in Irfan et al (2024) study were adolescents speaking from within the experience. The cultural context differences are also important to consider factors such as expressing resentment towards family may be seen as disrespectful. Gender and birth order differences may also contribute to this difference in

frequency of finding. This study focused exclusively on eldest daughters from different BSA ethnicities, whereas Irfan et al (2024) participants were mixed gender, mixed birth order and only Pakistani ethnicity.

This process of re-authoring did not diminish the hardships experienced by eldest daughters, but allowed for those experiences to be understood with context in mind. There is recognition that they were not alone in experiencing hardship, it was the family system was experiencing collectively and as the eldest daughter parentified roles is what they had to do in order to support the family. This awareness of context as adults is what aided the shift. It could be speculated that as teenagers, the duty of their parentified roles could have still felt quite fresh for them hence the feelings of unfairness and resentment. We understand, for example through Zuneira account, that "processing" of experiences is something that was done later as an adult. Future research is needed to further explore this meaning making process of experiences of parentification to get a better understanding of the factors that contribute to meaning-making e.g. therapy, self-reflection, distance from family.

Through the process of re-authoring, eldest daughters shared their personal strengths found from within their experiences such as their resilience and independence. The independence that may have initially emerged out of necessity, is now framed as a strength reflecting this re-authoring process. Irfan et al (2024) similarly found being independent to be a positive parentification outcome. This answers the research question as we understand that the experience of being a parentified BSA eldest daughter may not be viewed completely adversely in within adulthood. The experience is emotionally complex, where strengths and empowerment coexist alongside the acknowledgment of how heavy the burden of parentification has been.

This finding aligns with the idea that parentification may be experienced as destructive or constructive, in this case, overall participant sentiment leaned more towards destructive, however, personal strengths were identified as part of their

meaning-making process. This finding is also consistent with studies that have found that parentified individuals can have high levels of resilience and adaptive coping skills in adulthood (Stein et al., 2007) and high levels of personal strengths as found through post traumatic growth measures (Hodgkins and Tunçgenç., 2025). This finding extends this knowledge by focusing on how BSA eldest daughters specifically identified personal strengths within their parentification experience.

Eldest Daughterhood as a Life Long Role

Lastly, findings captured that participants anticipated familial responsibilities to continue into later adulthood. This was discussed within theme 5. Participants described that when one is the eldest daughter, the responsibilities attached with this do not just stop one day, but the role evolves. Participants anticipated caring for ageing parents and as well as sustaining family connection and cohesion even after their parents are no longer present. This similar to what academics often refer to as 'kin-work', the concept that the maintenance of family ties is often falls on women in the family (Di-Leonardo., 1987) and this case, the eldest daughter.

Interestingly, these responsibilities were not grounded in resentment, but in love and care. This highlighted another shift in perspective as participants described wanting to look after their parents. Factors influencing wanting to continue caring for parents included cultural values of caring for parents and appreciation for parents sacrifice through struggles of migration. This was seen for example when Karina said *"it's cultural we look after our ageing parents. It's also because I love them and they have done so much, they've moved to this country" (p.10, line 294-295)*. There is a sense that parentified roles in their youth felt imposed upon and burdensome. However, in adulthood future caregiving is seemingly more welcomed and comes across something participants want to do. For some, this

change was due to having more autonomy and independence within their life. Another reason for this may be that participants may perceive these responsibilities as fitting with their adult stage of life, whereas in childhood, parentified roles may have felt developmentally inappropriate and therefore experienced as a heavier burden. This suggests that perspective towards parentified roles may change over time for some BSA eldest daughters.

Findings aligns with existing studies that have found South Asian daughters being responsible for the caregiving for elderly parents (Hossain et al., 2020; Shekhani., 2024). However, this study expanded this knowledge through the lens of the eldest daughter, that as the eldest daughter it would be their responsibility to care for their ageing parents. Another reason why eldest daughters may have felt responsible for the care of elderly parents and family cohesion may be due to cultural values of respect and care for elders within South Asian communities (Mathews., 2000). In addition, some South Asian families can have hierarchical family structure can mean that the eldest member of the family is looked to provide support to younger members (Sandhu., 1997). This may further suggest why the eldest daughter would be responsible for parents future care. This finding presents a rich insight into how views towards parentified roles can change over time. This nuance is not captured within existing parentification literature, possibly because qualitative parentification studies usually have focused of the experience of here and now and not the future (Irfan et al 2024; Cho et al., 2024). Whereas in this study, future perspectives were captured.

A Reframing of the Concept of Parentification

A significant contribution of this study is its challenge to dominant conceptualisations of parentification which have historically viewed parentification as a result of family dysfunction and disrupted boundaries (Minuchin et al., 1967,

Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark., 1973 and Chase., 1999). Existing parentification literature has largely positioned parentification through a deficit-based framework, where caregiving responsibilities are understood as a consequence of parental failure and family dysfunction (Kerig., 2005). Whilst this framework provides important insight into a one type of conceptualisation of parentification, findings from the present study suggest that this conceptualisation may not sufficiently capture the complexity of British South Asian ED experiences.

Participant accounts demonstrated that caregiving responsibilities were not exclusively experienced as burdensome, but were often embedded within narratives of love, protection, sacrifice and an awareness of their family's wider circumstances. Rather than responsibilities emerging only from internal family dysfunction, participants described their responsibilities being shaped by migration, racism, economic hardship and limited institutional support. Therefore, this study proposes the concept of 'protective parentification' as a significant theoretical contribution. This is where caregiving responsibilities may function as an adaptive response to structural adversity and a means through which the child contributes to family survival and wellbeing.

Protective parentification does not suggest that all caregiving responsibilities are without emotional cost. Indeed, participants described experiences of loss of childhood, guilt, overwhelm and emotional burden. However, their accounts challenge the existing understanding of parentification as either harmful or dysfunctional. Instead, findings suggest that parentification experiences exist within a broader social and historical context, where eldest daughters may assume responsibilities not only because of family dynamics, but because families are navigating wider structural conditions. For BSA families, migration histories, experiences of racism, economic marginalisation and barriers within

institutions may shape the responsibilities children undertake. Therefore, understanding parentification requires moving beyond individual and family-level explanations towards recognition of the social conditions within which these experiences occur.

This finding also highlights the importance of critically examining the extent to which psychological concepts developed within Western contexts can capture culturally diverse experiences. Concepts such as enmeshment and blurred boundaries with families have often been interpreted through individualistic frameworks that prioritise autonomy and independence as markers of what appears to be 'healthy' or 'ideal' in families. However, within some collectivist communities, family roles being interdependent can be viewed as normative and part of cultural values (Bose and Jalal., 2022). Therefore, applying psychological concepts without consideration of cultural context risks pathologising different forms of family connection, obligation and care.

Participants expressions of compassion and love towards their families represent a distinctive contribution of this study. Their accounts often demonstrated deep appreciation for the sacrifices of their parents as well as recognition of the challenges their families had experienced. For example, participants described their desire to support their parents because they understood the hardships associated with migration, systemic racism and economic struggle. These experiences challenge interpretations that positions parentification as being only negatively experienced and instead invites consideration of how love and responsibility can operate within contexts of adversity.

Hooks' (2000) conceptualised love as an intentional and ethical practice which challenges systems of oppression. Hooks (2000) described that for Black women

facing racism and societal discrimination, choosing to be loving despite this is deeply healing and is a form of having self-agency. This concept of love aligns with the findings of this research as it highlights that caregiving, especially within adulthood, may not be a 'passive compliance' with family expectations, but rather as an active response informed by their understanding of their family's histories and sacrifices. This challenges the stereotypes of the 'helpless south Asian women' by challenging how, in this case, BSA ED's find strength and empowerment through acts of love and care for their family.

Strengths and Limitations

A key strength of this study was being able to attain a rich and meaningful set of data which allowed me to carry out an in depth qualitative enquiry. This was made possible by my participants who appeared very enthusiastic and engaged in interviews. One of my strengths as researcher in particular was being able to utilise my skills as a trainee counselling psychologist to create a safe and welcoming environment for interviews. This may have helped with creating a rapport between myself and my participants as well my insider position within the research (Sonya and Buckle., 2018). In addition, keeping a reflexive diary throughout the research process has enabled me to think critically about the choices I have made and why (Appendix K). This enhances the research rigour and credibility (Yardley., 2000).

Another strength of the study was a collective interest and excitement that people expressed in response to recruitment itself. Many shared that they were glad this experience was finally being researched within the BSA community. This is reflected in the fact that 22 participants signed up to the study within a few weeks. Unfortunately, some exclusions were made as some participants did not have availability and some became unresponsive. As mentioned previously, this could have been due needing to attend to familial responsibilities which is understandable. Furthermore, number of participants (10) was in range of Braun and Clarke

(2013) recommended sample size for a doctorate project (10 – 20 participants). This study sample size was large enough to provided rich data.

As this study focused on BSA women, I aimed to gain a diverse sample of participants. I recruited 4 British Indian, 3 British Bangladeshi, 2 British Pakistani and 1 British Afghan participants. Unfortunately, no participants from Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives signed up to the study. This may be because the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities make up a larger proportion of the BSA diaspora (Office for National Statistics., 2021). The findings of this study should therefore be understood within the context of the BSA communities represented within the sample. Whilst the inclusion of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Afghan participants enabled exploration across several South Asian backgrounds, future research could build upon these findings by exploring the experiences of eldest daughters from other South Asian communities, including Sri Lankan, Nepalese, Bhutanese and Maldivian backgrounds.

All participants in this study identified as cisgender women. The findings should be interpreted within this gendered context. Future research could explore how gender-diverse, transgender or non-binary BSA eldest daughters experience caregiving responsibilities and ways in which they may be uniquely shaped.

The mean age of participants was 27 years old (19 to 40). This may due to the main recruitment method being via social media. This is a strength of the study as previous studies have tended to focus on children and adolescents, therefore this study provides insight into the BSA ED experiences across early and middle adulthood. Having said that, the findings do not capture the perspectives of older eldest daughters (40+) who may be experiencing their eldest daughter role differently. This may be another important context for future research.

Furthermore, there was a majority of participants who identified as Muslim (7 out of 10). This means that some participant experiences may be more reflective of views of parentification

shaped by Islamic values such as respect for parents and care for old age even though these were not explicitly mentioned. Future research may explore how ED experiences are understood across different religious traditions.

All participants identified as being from nuclear families (two parent household). This may be mirroring census data from which we understand that two parent households remains a dominant family structure within the UK (Office for National Statistics., 2025). This means that the experiences of parentified BSA ED's from different family structures such as single parent households were not captured. Future research could examine how parentification is experienced by British South Asian eldest daughters from single-parent, blended or extended family households where caregiving responsibilities may take different forms.

Suggestions for Future Research

Whilst this study was focused on eldest daughters, future studies could explore the parentification experiences of eldest sons in BSA families. This would allow for comparison in understanding how experiences of parentification may differ depending on gender. Within parentification literature in general, I have found participant samples tend to include more women which may suggest more women may be parentified or that they may more forth coming in speaking about their experiences. This suggests that there is a gap in understanding male experiences of parentification which deserves to be researched.

This study was focused on eldest daughters in South Asian families, however future research could look at how different birth order positions experience parentification in BSA families. This would allow for further insight into how roles and responsibilities may be experienced by differently by different birth orders within South Asian families.

Many participants in this study associated their mental health distress directly with their experiences of being a parentified eldest daughter. Trends were found especially in experiencing emotional dysregulation in borderline personality disorder. Future studies could

explore mental health experiences of parentified eldest daughters cross culturally to examine any trends in presentations. In addition to this, due to the findings relating to impacts on relationships, future studies could explore how parentification impacts romantic and platonic relationships in further detail.

As mentioned previously, participants spoke about how they imagine their role to be like in the future such as caring for ageing parents. Future research could aim to capture the perspectives of eldest daughters in later adulthood to explore how they now view their eldest daughter role and if roles have changed for them.

In addition, future research within education specifically could explore how parentified students may be better supported within educational settings. They should consider how factors such as culture, gender and birth order may impact some students functioning within school whether that is feeling misunderstood by teachers or feeling isolated within friendships due to feeling different.

A protective form of parentification was identified within this study. Future research could further explore the experiences of parentified ethnic minority individuals who may share feelings of responsible for the safety and protection of their parents against racism and discrimination.

Whilst this study adopted an intersectional perspective by exploring the experiences of BSA ED's, participants accounts represent some forms of intersecting identities. Future research may build upon these findings by exploring how parentification is shaped by additional intersections such as disability and how this may impact parentification experience. Greater attention to these intersections would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of ED experiences, continue to challenge assumptions within existing parentification literature, as well as reflect the diversity and complexity of lived experience.

Implications for Clinical Practice and Wider Society

Research findings provide implications for the field of counselling psychology as well as wider society. One of the main implications from this study is the need to re-think how we conceptualise parentification within psychology. As previously discussed, parentification has been typically understood as parental dysfunction and lack of boundaries within family subsystems causing children take on such adult roles (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark., 1973). However, through findings within this research, and particularly the contribution of 'protective form of parentification', we understand that parentification roles were shaped by factors including birth order, cultural values, economic pressures of migration, language barriers and even experiences of racism. To minimise parentification to 'lack of boundaries' therefore is not applicable for individuals who acquire such roles of responsibility as necessary contributions to family survival.

The findings of this study have important implications for therapeutic practice, policy and wider professional settings working with BSA families. I would urge professionals in the field to challenge such dominant Western conceptualisations of parentification, as well as their own assumptions, that may view parentification as boundary blurring or parental dysfunction. This calls for re-thinking how responsibility may be shaped by cultural and social realities. Fidnings from this research encourage greater reflexivity considering if a family or individual may have experienced parentification. One should consider that this concept was largely developed within White Western psychological traditions and may inadvertently pathologise collectivist family structures by interpreting interdependence and familial obligation as inherently problematic without considering context and culture. Therapists should therefore remain curious about the meanings clients give to responsibility and caregiving, rather than assuming these experiences reflect dysfunction or assume the client views the experience to be only negative. Formulations should consider not only within family dynamics and processes but also the wider structural conditions within which families exist such as migration histories,

experiences of racism, economic marginalisation and limited access to culturally responsive services.

The findings also have implications beyond therapy. Professionals working within family support services such as social care, education and primary healthcare may benefit from greater awareness of how BSA ED responsibilities are embedded within broader social and cultural contexts. Rather than interpreting caregiving roles through a predominantly White Western lens, practitioners should avoid reinforcing stereotypes of the "submissive South Asian woman" or assuming that family closeness reflects unhealthy enmeshment. Instead, assessments and interventions should seek to understand how care and responsibility may be experienced within particular cultural and historical contexts whilst also remaining attentive to situations where these responsibilities may become overwhelming or impact mental and/or physical health.

At a policy and service level, these findings highlight the need for greater cultural responsiveness within training and practice guidance across health and social care professions. Incorporating culturally informed understandings of family relationships may help challenge dominant Whitestream assumptions about normative family functioning and support more nuanced formulations of BSA families. This has the potential to reduce the pathologisation of culturally diverse and ethnic minority families while ensuring that experiences of distress are recognised and responded to in ways that are both culturally sensitive and clinically appropriate.

Participants discussed that their mental health as well as relational patterns were impacted directly by their parentification experiences. This was influenced by cultural, societal and migratory pressures that eldest daughters had to carry. There was also evidence that eldest daughters parentification experiences were intensified due to systemic discrimination and racism faced by migrant parents, which put pressure on them as the eldest child to protect her parents from this treatment. This finding causes us to question the use of dominant models of therapy when working with parentification. This is because some schools of

thought, such as cognitive based models, may risk positioning distress within the individual and their way of thinking, instead of exploring a relational way of understanding distress. For example, emotional suppression in parentified eldest daughters may be viewed as a maladaptive trait, instead of a meaningful survival response to their situation. The Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone and Boyle., 2018) may be a powerful lens which may help us to contextualise these findings. From this perspective, participant distress may be understood through the powers operating within their life. For example, the threat may be understood as pressures carry adult responsibility shaped by power dynamics within families, gendered and cultural expectations, migration related stress and systemic/racial powers. The meaning made from this could be that one needs to be responsible, mature and grow up quickly in order to support the regulation of family needs. The resulting response may be emotional suppression, hyper-independence and people pleasing. Finally, strengths may be the resilience and empowerment felt through these experiences. This example of reframing parentification experiences may also be useful in creating a culturally sensitive and strengths based client formulation, moving from 'what is wrong with you?' to 'what happened to you?'.

Moreover, participants expressed that an emotional impact of their experiences was emotional suppression. This finding has implications for therapeutic practice and working with similar parentification experiences. Practitioners should reflect on how unfamiliar it may feel for the client to centre their own needs within therapy. Interventions that support embodied awareness may be particularly useful.

The implications of this study extend beyond to institutional and societal contexts. Participants described feeling misunderstood and unsupported within educational settings. They described that their parentification responsibility were interpreted through individualistic frameworks that prioritise personal achievement over family obligation and duty. This highlights how parentified children from collectivist backgrounds may experience cultural dissonance within institutions that are not attuned to their lived experiences. Finding suggest

a need for greater awareness within schools and support services of how family response culture and migration intersect in children. This is important because without such awareness parentified eldest or may be misinterpreted as disengaged forming or unmotivated than recognised as carrying significant invisible weight of their family. Counselling psychologist working or alongside educational settings may therefore play an important role in advocating for more culturally responsive support.

A key societal implication of the study concerns the role of structural and institutional barriers in shaping parentification experiences among BSA eldest daughters. Participants described accompanying their parents to medical appointments, translating complex information and advocating on their behalf due to language barriers and fears of their parents being discriminated against. As mentioned previously, this finding suggests that parentification and this this context must be understood beyond the family level. We must also question the role of broader systems that may be not be adequately supporting migrant and minority families with language and/or advocacy support. When is the case, such responsibilities are implicitly transferred to children, in this case the eldest daughter, to be translators and protectors. This raises important questions about how public services may inadvertently rely on the emotional and practical labour of parentified children in migrant families. Public institutions should rethink how to identify and support such families to aim to reduce burden on eldest daughters.

A Reflective Conclusion

This research process has been an incredibly eye opening for me as not only the researcher but also as a BSA eldest daughter myself. Through a reflexive approach, this process has widened my view towards parentification experiences of eldest daughters within my community. Through the lens of my participants, a key aspect that stands out for me is the compassion my participants held despite experiencing hardship. In addition, the finding relating to protective forms of parentification In particular is one I feel particularly touched by. This is because it highlights a reality of the society we live in, where migrant families feel

unsafe. It also reminded me of the unspoken acts of duty carried by children of migrants and how these protective roles are ultimately viewed as acts of love through an adult lens. Through this, I leave with a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of eldest daughterhood.

In conclusion, the aim of this research was to explore the experiences of parentification among BSA eldest daughters. Aswell as experience, I wanted to understand the factors influencing experience as well as any impact. Through a reflexive thematic analysis, we learn that the eldest daughter role in a South Asian family can be vast and multifaceted, encompassing emotional and practical duties. The weight of such duty left emotional, mental and relational imprints that persist into adulthood. However, there was a shift in the story. Now as adults, participants reinterpreted these experiences shifting from feelings of resentment to empathy and understanding. They recognised the broader cultural and familial contexts that shaped experiences of parentification. Eldest daughters found strength in the struggle as they reinterpreted their experiences, as evidence of their strength and resilience. Although they acknowledge their eldest daughter role as a lifelong commitment, they approach it with greater awareness of self and viewing future caregiving as an act of love towards their families. It is hoped that this research will be useful for mental health practitioners to gain further insight into the experiences of parentified eldest daughters from BSA communities to support developing culturally sensitive support.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Ethics Application

Ethics ETH2324-0367: Miss Zahra Khan (Medium risk)

Date Created	06 Oct 2023
Date Submitted	08 Nov 2023
Date of last resubmission	19 Jul 2024
Date forwarded to committee	07 Feb 2024
Academic Staff	Miss Zahra Khan
Student ID	220011950
Category	Doctoral Researcher
Supervisor	Dr Jeeda Alhakim
Project	The Eldest Daughter Syndrome: The experience of being an Eldest Daughter in a British South Asian family
School	School of Health & Psychological Sciences
Department	Psychology
Current status	Approved after amendments made

Ethics application

Risks

R1) Does the project have funding?
No

R2) Does the project involve human participants?
Yes

R3) Will the researcher be located outside of the UK during the conduct of the research?
No

R4) Will any part of the project be carried out under the auspices of an external organisation, involve collaboration between institutions, or involve data collection at an external organisation?
No

R5) Does your project involve access to, or use of, terrorist or extremist material that could be classified as security sensitive?
No

R6) Does the project involve the use of live animals?
No

R7) Does the project involve the use of animal tissue?
No

R8) Does the project involve accessing obscene materials?
No

R9) Does the project involve access to confidential business data (e.g. commercially sensitive data, trade secrets, minutes of internal meetings)?
No

R10) Does the project involve access to personal data (e.g. personnel or student records) not in the public domain?
No

R11) Does the project involve deviation from standard or routine clinical practice, outside of current guidelines?
No

R12) Will the project involve the potential for adverse impact on employment, social or financial standing?
No

R13) Will the project involve the potential for psychological distress, anxiety, humiliation or pain greater than that of normal life for the participant?
Yes

R15) Will the project involve research into illegal or criminal activity where there is a risk that the researcher will be placed in physical danger or in legal jeopardy?
No

R16) Will the project specifically recruit individuals who may be involved in illegal or criminal activity?
No

R17) Will the project involve engaging individuals who may be involved in terrorism, radicalisation, extremism or violent activity and other activity that falls within the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015)?
No

Applicant & research team

T1) Principal Applicant

Name
Miss Zahra Khan

Provide a summary of the researcher's training and experience that is relevant to this research project.
Experience of conducting qualitative research using thematic analysis through undergraduate and masters projects. Experience of using NVivo.

T2) Co-Applicant(s) at City

T3) External Co-Applicant(s)

T4) Supervisor(s)
Dr Jeeda Alhakim

T5) Do any of the investigators have direct personal involvement in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise to a possible conflict of interest?
No

T6) Will any of the investigators receive any personal benefits or incentives, including payment above normal salary, from undertaking the research or from the results of the research above those normally associated with scholarly activity?
No

T7) List anyone else involved in the project.

Project details

P1) Project title
The Eldest Daughter Syndrome: The Experience of being an Eldest Daughter in a British South Asian Family

P1.1) Short project title
The Experience of being an Eldest Daughter in a British South Asian Family

P2) Provide a lay summary of the background and aims of the research, including the research questions (max 400 words).
South Asian (SA) includes individuals from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and the Maldives, making up 7% of the UK's population (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Despite religious and linguistic diversity, SA communities share cultural similarities, such as the importance of family, community, self-sacrifice, and servitude to elders (Quraishi & Evangeli, 2007; Soorkia, Snelgar & Swami, 2011). These traits of collectivist culture can often lead to high stress levels due to the burdens of responsibility and duty of care towards the family unit (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000).

Such cultural expectations and traditional gender roles can lead to the parentification of South Asian eldest daughters. Parentification is defined as "a phenomenon in which children are assigned or take on parental roles and responsibilities, such as caregiving or emotional support, typically beyond what is developmentally appropriate for their age"(Niaz & Hassan, 2006). The responsibility of care falls on the eldest daughter in SA families because they are seen as the "mature one," and traditional gender roles often designate girls as natural caretakers (Masiran et al., 2023).

A literature search on Web of Science and PubMed using keywords like 'eldest daughter,' 'first-born,' and 'South Asian' yielded only 22 papers, with only one being relevant. Two main gaps exist in the literature. First, current research on eldest daughters tends to focus on white participants. For

example, a recent study found that White American eldest daughters experienced earlier puberty if their mothers faced high prenatal stress, leading to quicker social maturation and earlier shared responsibilities (Fox et al., 2024). Second, existing literature often focuses on the impact of birth order on personality rather than experience (Adler, 1964). Studies suggest that eldest children are often more studious, organized, and responsible (Laird & Shelton, 2006; Galanti, 2003; Black, 2017).

These gaps highlight the lack of representation of eldest daughters from diverse cultural backgrounds and how little is known about their experiences. No studies were found about British South Asian (BSA) eldest daughters, emphasizing the need for research to explore their experiences through an intersectional lens. BSA eldest daughters, in particular, face unique challenges. They navigate the demands of living in a culture that promotes independence while adhering to their ethnic culture's collectivist values (BPS, 2005). This dichotomy necessitates research to understand how BSA eldest daughters make sense of their identities.

Social media has amplified the voices of SA eldest daughters discussing parentification. The term 'eldest daughter syndrome' was coined online, referring to the pressures and responsibilities placed on the eldest daughters, often causing parentification (Hu, 2023). In a viral video, Pakistani eldest daughter and TikTok user @Kai.Mer discussed her experiences as the family therapist, cook, and caretaker from a young age, highlighting the psychological stress caused by early parentification (Mer, 2021). SA psychotherapist Isra Nasir has discussed how 'eldest daughter syndrome' can cause people-pleasing tendencies, perfectionism, and an inability to seek help in SA eldest daughters (Shahid, 2023). This aligns with known barriers to help-seeking behaviors among SA women in the UK, where stigma poses significant challenges (Wales et al., 2017).

This study aims to fill these gaps by focusing specifically on the impact of being an eldest daughter in BSA families, exploring their experiences of parentification and its impact. The study will use reflexive thematic analysis to identify common themes and experiences.

P4) Provide a summary and brief explanation of the research design, method, and data analysis.

Design

As this research is concerned with lived experience, a qualitative design has been chosen. Qualitative design will allow for a deeper exploration into the experience of being a BSA ED. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) has been chosen as the method of data analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method of identification of themes and patterns within data (Braun and Clarke., 2006). Reflexive thematic analysis involves the researcher considering the impact of their experience, views, and social positioning on the data and how this may influence the study (Braun and Clarke., 2019)

This research positions itself within a critical realist position (realist ontology and relativist epistemology).

Method

Between 10 to 20 participants will be recruited to ensure sample size is small enough to manage data but enough to discover "a new and richly textured understanding of experience". Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that sample size depends on the scope of the project, and recommend for a UK Doctorate level project should be aiming for between 10 –20 participants.

A snowball sampling recruitment technique will be used. Participants will be recruited through social media advertisements on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. A study specific Instagram account has been made under @southasianeldestdaughterstudy, similar accounts will be made on Facebook and Twitter for recruiting purposes. Researcher will also contact support groups for ethnic minority eldest daughters to advertise poster. The research poster will include my research supervisor and my own university email address and QR code linked to a Microsoft forms page (linked and logged in through City University account). This forms page will thank the participant for their interest and ask the participant to input their email address to be contacted on. I will keep track of interest from this Microsoft Forms page.

Once an email address is sent through the form, contact will be made with the participant, they will be sent a participant information sheet and consent form. Participants will be requested to read this information and consider if they still would like to participate after knowing the details of the research. If the participant is still willing to participate, a screening telephone call will organised. Participants will be advised to be in a place they feel is safe and confidential for this call.

The screening call will be a 15 minute telephone call from a number dedicated to the research. In this call, there will be opportunity for the participant to ask any questions relating to the study, to go through the inclusion criteria, check participant understanding of what the study is about and if they feel comfortable to take part. Furthermore, a mental health risk assessment for suicidal ideation will be conducted to ensure participant feels safe enough to engage in the research. Before this, a confidentiality statement will be read to the participant.

Questions asked are referenced from Draucker (2009) and PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9).

'Screening Interview and Distress Protocol which has 4 questions:

Are you experiencing a high level of stress or any emotional stress? (Draucker., 2009)

Are you currently having thoughts of harming someone else? (Draucker., 2009)

Would you be able to contact a GP, Mental health service or someone you trust should participation in this study cause distress? (Draucker., 2009)

In the past two weeks, how often have you been bothered by thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way. Options include not at all, several days, more than half days, nearly every day. (PHQ-9).

If the answer to the PHQ-9 question is 'several days', a conversation will take place between researcher and participant and we will come to a mutual decision about participation in this research (discuss if the participant has any support, in-therapy, safety to take part).

The cut off point would be if the response is 'more than half days' or 'nearly everyday'. Participants will be exlcuded and signposted to appropriate crisis team contact numbers (on debrief sheet) and advised to speak with their GP.

If no risk is detected and participant feels safe to take part in the research, interview will be organised.

For those who would like to continue participation, they will be asked which mode of individual interview is most suitable for them i.e. telephone, in person (location City, University of London booked room), or video call on Microsoft Teams. Interviews will be scheduled within working hours and my research supervisor will be aware of any lone working. Once mode of interview is agreed, the

date of interview will be set and details of interview location and time will be sent. If working online, guidance will be sent before the interview to encourage the participant to find a private and confidential space to join from.

On interview day, participants will be asked to read the participant information sheet again to see if they are still happy to proceed and sign the consent form if not already returned via email. If online, participant information sheet will be shared on the screen and participant will be given time to read through the sheet. Interviews will be audio recorded using Microsoft Teams on my laptop. Recordings will be saved on a password protected university OneDrive, only accessible by me. All interviews regardless of mode are expected to last up to 60 minutes. A interview schedule has been drafted, these open-ended questions will be used as prompts to guide further exploration.

Participants will be debriefed after the interview and given a debrief sheet, this will include a check in relating to how they found the study and if they have any further questions. Participants will be signposted to counselling support services should they request support (GP in first instance, details on how to find local Adult IAPT, Samaritans, Crisis team) . Details on how to request data withdrawal will also be given to the participant along with research supervisor contact details for any questions or complaints. Lastly, participants will be asked if they would like to be contacted again when study is complete with the study results. Once all interviews conclude, data will be transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Teams transcription feature and saved on University OneDrive.

Pilot interview:

After ethical approval is attained, a pilot interview will be conducted with a peer who is an south Asian eldest daughter. Upon ethics approval, I will contact the peer to organise date of pilot interview. Before the interview, I will organise a call with the peer to review consent and review mental health risk assessment (same as the aforementioned). If risk is detected, peer will be excluded and signposted to appropriate crisis numbers (Crisis team) and advised to speak with their GP. Another eligible peer for pilot will be requested to engage. If no risk detected, interview face to face will be arranged. A consent form will be provided in printed format to the pilot participant. This document will explicitly state that information obtained during the interview will not be incorporated into the data analysis or primary results section but will instead be included in the methodology section for reflective purposes prior to subsequent interviews. The pilot interview will take place and prompt interview questions will be used if needed. After the interview, feedback about questions and the interview itself will be discussed with the peer. Pilot interview is important for this research to ensure the involvement of the relevant population from the infancy of the research. Shaped by eldest daughters, for eldest daughters.

Data analysis

The study will use reflexive TA as data analysis method to sort data into themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke., 2006). An interpretivist approach will be used in exploring the meaning of data (a reflective interpretation of a text to achieve meaningful understanding). This will be done by first reading through data multiple times over a period of months to become familiar with emergent themes and patterns. After this, initial nodes will be created in NVivo® and then sorted into broader themes. This process of coding will be done by highlighting keywords, patterns, views, and ideas in a text and then linking these to a broader common theme allowing the formation of different themes representing different emergences within the data. Main and sub-themes will be finalised and reviewed to make sure they are reflective of the data. A thematic map will be created manually to

help create links between themes. To evaluate the trustworthiness of data and agreement of emerging themes, an additional researcher (supervisor) will be asked to conduct a reliability analysis of 25% to achieve overall agreement of themes. To further add trustworthiness of data analysis, Lincoln and Guba (1985) concept of trustworthiness criteria will be used (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). Creditability will be addressed by re-reading the data for several weeks and reflecting on this with my supervisor. Transferability will be addressed by providing a detailed description of the data. Dependability will be achieved by the process of data handling being recorded in steps to make sure every action is logical, traceable, and clearly documented. Lastly, confirmability will be achieved by providing explanations and rationales for steps involved in the methodology and analysis.

P4.1) If relevant, please upload your research protocol.

P5) What do you consider are the ethical issues associated with conducting this research and how do you propose to address them?

Ethical issue of consent and not knowing rights of withdrawing - Informed consent will be collected when participants join the study and will be made aware that they have the right to withdraw at any stage. To ensure the participant does not feel confused about what they are taking part in, pre interview telephone call will take place to answer any questions

Right to privacy and anonymity - Participants will be informed that data collected will be anonymised and will not be available on any open-source platforms and shared with other researchers as part of collaborations or joint projects. Data will be anonymised and biographical information will be kept seperate to transcripts. Any identifiable information within quotes from interviews will be removed. Consent for use of quotes from the interview in results section will be mentioned on the consent form.

Personally identifiable data was not made available to anyone outside of myself or my supervisor.

Participants may fear that because the conversation is being recorded and transcribed, their identity may be compromised. To make sure this will not occur, participants will be assured their identity will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used within transcription and recordings will be deleted following the end of the study. This will be recorded on a password protected device. It will be discussed that confidentiality will only be broken if there is presence of risk of harm to self or others.

Ethical issue of vulnerable groups - Participants will not be recruited from a clinical population and will be over the age of 18.

Ethical issue of potential of psychological and emotional distress- A telephone call will be made to confirm that participants do not have any known mental health difficulties to minimise any psychological stress. It will be made known to the participant that questions may invoke an emotional response from them and to consider their wellbeing and if they feel ready to partake such study. At the time of the interview, a study information sheet will be shared to participants and their right to withdraw will be re-iterated. Breaks will be offered when needed. Participants may feel uncomfortable or emotional being interviewed in person or speaking about their experience. To minimise this, online interviews will be offered. This will enable participants to choose their method of interviewing if it makes them more comfortable.

Participants may feel apprehensive that they might be questioned in an investigative, interrogative, and intrusive manner. To minimise this, at the start of the interview it is

important to mention that this is an open, non-judgmental discussion and to feel comfortable sharing only what they choose to.

Lastly, participants will be debriefed after the interview, this will include a check in relating to how they found the study and if they have any further questions. Participants will be signposted to counselling support services for adults should they request psychological support (GP, Samaritians, NHS 111, NHS IAPT). Participants will also be signposted to support group for eldest daughters in the UK called Home Girls Unite. Home Girls Unite offer support group circles and also assist eldest daughters with finding therapists.

Details on how to request data withdrawal will also be given to the participant along with research supervisor contact details for any questions or complaints.

P6) Project start date
The start date will be the date of approval.

P7) Anticipated project end date
30 Sept 2025

P8) Where will the research take place?
City University Research room for face to face interviews.

Home office location for Microsoft Teams for online interviews and telephone calls. This is a private and confidential space.

P10) Is this application or any part of this research project being submitted to another ethics committee, or has it previously been submitted to an ethics committee?
No

Human participants: information and participation

The options for the following question are one or more of:
'Under 18'; 'Adults at risk'; 'Individuals aged 16 and over potentially without the capacity to consent'; 'None of the above'.

H1) Will persons from any of the following groups be participating in the project?
None of the above

H2) How many participants will be recruited?
20

H3) Explain how the sample size has been determined.
20 at a maximum helps to ensure sample size is small enough to manage data but still enough to discover "a new and richly textured understanding of experience". Recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013) that for small to medium size study recommended participants between 10 to 50.

H4) What is the age group of the participants?
Lower Upper

Lower Upper

18

H5) Please specify inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Participant inclusion criteria includes being a first born eldest daughter who identifies as South Asian ethnicity. Geographically, the South Asian countries includes Pakistan,

Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and the Maldives. Participants will also need to be living within the UK (holding British nationality) and be at least 18 years of age. Participants will need to be able to speak either English, Urdu, Hindi or Punjabi as I, the researcher, can speak and understand all four languages fluently. Studies show speaking the same language and being of the same culture as participants can enhance research rigour as researchers are more likely to be 'trusted' and considered 'insiders' (Irvine et al., 2008). This also makes the research more inclusive to non-English speakers. Participants will also need to identify as second generation migrant (have at least one parent who migrated to the UK). The rationale behind this criteria is

because voices of ED social media have spoken about being a child of a migrant having

influence on their experience as the ED in a BSA family (Butt., 2023). Therefore this

deserves to be explored further within second generation ED populations. The study

is inclusive of any disability, sexuality and religious identity.

Participants will be excluded if they:

□ Do not identify as an ED, not first born.

□ Not from SA ethnic background

□ Under the age of 18

□ Not second generation migrant

□ Experiencing having thoughts of harming themselves or being better off dead.

The cut off point would be if the response is 'more than half days' or 'nearly everyday' as a response to the PHQ9 question. Participants will be exlcuded and signposted to appropriate crisis team contact numbers (on debrief sheet) and advised to speak with their GP.

□ Cannot speak English.

H6) What are the potential risks and burdens for research participants and how will you minimise them?

psychological risk - risk of causing psychological distress through emotional content that may arise in interviews. This will be minimised by checking with participants if they feel this study is right for them at this time and if they feel ready to talk about certain topics. Risks will also be checked through screening call in which 'Screening Interview and Distress Protocol' will be carried out (Draucker., 2009).

These questions are:

If the participant is still willing to participate, a screening telephone call will organised. Participants will be advised to be in a place they feel is safe and confidential for this call. Reasonable adjustments will be made for those who may have concerns of finding a confidential space to speak, screening via email may offered.

The screening call will be a 15 minute telephone call from a number dedicated to the

research. In this call, there will be opportunity for the participant to ask any questions relating to the study, to go through the inclusion criteria, check participant understanding of what the study is about and if they feel comfortable to take part. Furthermore, a mental health risk assessment for suicidal ideation will be conducted to ensure participant feels safe enough to engage in the research. Before this, a confidentiality statement will be read to the participant.

Questions asked are referenced from Draucker (2009) and PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9).

'Screening Interview and Distress Protocol which has 4 questions:

Are you experiencing a high level of stress or any emotional stress? (Draucker., 2009)

Are you currently having thoughts of harming someone else? (Draucker., 2009)

Would you be able to contact a GP, Mental health service or someone you trust should participation in this study cause distress? (Draucker., 2009)

In the past two weeks, how often have you been bothered by thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way. Options include not at all, several days, more than half days, nearly every day. (PHQ-9).

If the answer to the PHQ-9 question is 'several days', a conversation will take place between researcher and participant and we will come to a mutual decision about participation in this research (discuss if the participant has any support, in-therapy, safety to take part).

The cut off point would be if the response is 'more than half days' or 'nearly everyday'. Participants will be exlcuded and signposted to appropriate crisis team contact numbers (on debrief sheet) and advised to speak with their GP.

If no risk is detected and participant feels safe to take part in the research, interview will be organised.

Furthermore, pariticpants will be signposted to appropriate mental health support and counselling services when being debriefed i.e. GP, NHS 111, Crisis teams, The Samaritans.

H7) Will you specifically recruit pregnant women, women in labour, or women who have had a recent stillbirth or miscarriage (within the last 12 months)?
No

H8) Will you directly recruit any staff and/or students at City?
None of the above

H8.1) If you intend to contact staff/students directly for recruitment purpose, please upload a letter of approval from the respective School(s)/Department(s).

H9) How are participants to be identified, approached and recruited, and by whom?
A snowball sampling recruitment technique will be used. Participants will be recruited through social media advertisements on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. An instagram account for research purposes has been created to advertise recruitment poster to protect researcher identity and eliminating any direct contact with individuals. Researcher will also contact support groups for ethnic minority eldest daughters to advertise poster. Main Support group to be contacted is @HomeGirlsUnite on Instagram. Details found here: https://homegirlsunite.com/. It is important to

contact because they are the only known support group for ethnic minority eldest daughters in the UK. They have a large following of 16.2K followers on Instagram which may be very helpful for the recruitment of this study.

Poster will ask interested participants to email researchers City email. They will then be emailed the participant consent form and information sheet. This will be double checked via telephone call before interviews take place.

H10) Please upload your participant information sheets and consent form, or if they are online (e.g. on Qualtrics) paste the link below.

H11) If appropriate, please upload a copy of the advertisement, including recruitment emails, flyers or letter.

H12) Describe the procedure that will be used when seeking and obtaining consent, including when consent will be obtained.

Researcher (Zahra Khan) will be obtaining consent from participants initially via email and double checked before interviews face to face. Consent and information sheets will be sent to participant email which they provided upon registration to study. Participants will have the information sheets at least 2 weeks before any interviews would take place. If longer is needed that can be facilitated.

H13) Are there any pressures that may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part in the project?

No

H14) Is any part of the research being conducted with participants outside the UK?

No

Human participants: method

The options for the following question are one or more of:
'Invasive procedures (for example medical or surgical)'; 'Intrusive procedures (for example psychological or social)'; 'Potentially harmful procedures of any kind'; 'Drugs, placebos, or other substances administered to participants'; 'None of the above'.

M1) Will any of the following methods be involved in the project:

None of the above

M2) Does the project involve any deceptive research practices?

No

M3) Is there a possibility for over-research of participants?

No

M4) Please upload copies of any questionnaires, topic guides for interviews or focus groups, or equivalent research materials.

M5) Will participants be provided with the findings or outcomes of the project?

Yes

M5.1) Explain how this information will be provided.

At the end of the interview I will ask participants if they wish to know the results of the study. If answered yes, findings will be emailed to participants when study is complete/post write up. The rationale for this is because research shows that participants often do not recieve the results for the studies they took part in. Therefore, it is important that any dissemination goes beyond academics, and actually reaches the very people that shaped the research. This encourages a collaborative and ethical view to research (Long et al., 2017).

Long, C. R., Stewart, M. K., & McElfish, P. A. (2017). Health research participants are not receiving research results: a collaborative solution is needed. Trials, 18(1), 1-4.

M6) If the research is intended to benefit the participants, third parties or the local community, please give details.

Benefit of participants -

We hope that through this research, participants can be signposted to support services that are specifically designed to support the needs of eldest daughters from ethnic minority backgrounds such as Home Girls Unite UK. Creating awareness for such safe spaces is a benefit.

https://homegirlsunite.com/

There is also hope that participants feel benefit from being able to speak to someone in a safe environment and share their experience.

This research champions a social justice and feminist stance as this study is concerned with capturing the voice of south Asian women within professional research. This supports one of the aims outlined in The BPS Counselling Psychology Division Strategic Plan which is to understand more about the well-being of minority populations (BPS., 2018).

Benefit to Psychologists-

Understanding more about experiences of ED's would help counselling psychologists understand more about the challenges specific to British SA women and how their experience as an ED impacts them.

M7) Are you offering any incentives for participating?

Yes

M7.1) Please give details, justifying their type and amount.

A Lifestyle gift voucher of £15 will be given per participant as a token of appreciation of time given towards study. ED's are often doing what can seem as "unpaid labour" within their families. Within the context of parentification, eldest daughters are expected to go over and beyond to take care of the needs of others beyond what is seen as regular responsibility.

I do not want this research to reflect the latter experience within this research. This is important to show appreciation for their time and gratefulness for sharing their experiences with us.

M8) Does the research involve clinical trial or clinical intervention testing that does not require Health Research Authority or MHRA approval?

No

M9) Will the project involve the collection of human tissue or other biological samples that does not fall under the Human Tissue Act (2004) that does not require Health Research Authority Research Ethics Service approval?
No

M10) Will the project involve potentially sensitive topics, such as participants' sexual behaviour, their legal or political behaviour, their experience of violence?
No

M11) Will the project involve activities that may lead to 'labelling' either by the researcher (e.g. categorisation) or by the participant (e.g. 'I'm stupid', 'I'm not normal')?
No

Data

D1) Indicate which of the following you will be using to collect your data.
Interviews

D2) How will the the privacy of the participants be protected?
De-identified samples or data

D3) Will the research involve use of direct quotes?
Yes

D5) Where/how do you intend to store your data?
Password protected computer files
Storage on encrypted device (e.g. laptop, hard drive, USB

D6) Will personal data collected be shared with other organisations?
No

D7) Will the data be accessed by people other than the named researcher, supervisors or examiners?
No

D8) Is the data intended or required (e.g. by funding body) to be published for reuse or to be shared as part of longitudinal research or a different/wider research project now or in the future?
No

D10) How long are you intending to keep the research data generated by the study?
All interviews will be audio recorded using Microsoft Teams on my laptop. If interview is on video call on Microsoft teams then video recording will be used.

I will be logged onto Microsoft Teams through my City account. Through this, recordings will be automatically saved on a password protected university OneDrive, only accessible by me.

Any audio or video recordings will be deleted on completion of my study, if possible sooner then I will do so. Any identifiable information will be redacted from the transcripts as soon as possible. Transcripts will then be saved on OneDrive securely for 10 years as per City's standard recommendation.

D11) How long will personal data be stored or accessed after the study has ended?
refer to D10

D12) How are you intending to destroy the personal data after this period?
Any personal data will be deleted off my personal laptop and OneDrive.

Health & safety

HS1) Are there any health and safety risks to the researchers over and above that of their normal working life?
No

HS3) Are there hazards associated with undertaking this project where a formal risk assessment would be required?
No

Attached files

UPDATED Research Flyer, participant info, consent form (2)_removed.pdf

Recruitment flyer.docx

Updated interview schedule.docx

Research proposal - updated.pdf

Distress Protocol Ethics (Zahra Khan).pdf

Appendix B - Interview Schedule

Interview Questions

- What does it mean to you to be a parentified eldest daughter?
- Can you tell me about your experience of being a parentified eldest daughter in a British South Asian family?
- What has the impact of your experience been?
- What roles are associated with being a parentified eldest daughter?
- Do you feel your identity as a British has impacted your experience growing up as an eldest daughter in anyway?
- Are there any positives or challenges related to being a parentified eldest daughter?

Appendix C - Research Flyer

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY FOR BRITISH SOUTH ASIAN ELDEST DAUGHTERS



For a DPsych Research study interested in exploring the **experience of parentifcation of eldest daughters from British South Asian backgrounds.**

Are you the **First born and Eldest Daughter?**
British South Asian?
Identify with the experience of Parentification
(taking on adult responsibilities from a young such as caring for younger siblings, taking care of household duties or attending to the emotional and/or practical needs of their parents)
Second generation migrant (atleast one parent who migrated to the UK)?
Age 18+?

We are **interested in speaking with you** about the unique experiences, challenges, and responsibilities that come with being the eldest daughter in a British South Asian household.

What to Expect
If eligble, you will be invited to participate in a one off 60 minute individual interview.
This interview is a space to speak about your lived experience.
Depending on your preference, Interviews can be in person (location City, University of London), Online video call on Microsoft Teams or Telephone call.



SCAN ME

Please scan above to **register interest**. In appreciation of your time and participation in an interview, you will receive a **£15 Lifestyle Voucher.**

Confidentiality
Participation is voluntary and all information you provide is confidential. No identifiable information, including names, will be included as part of the research.

CITY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
EST 1894

This study has been reviewed by Psychology Research Ethics Committee, and received ethics clearance through the City, University of London.

This study is If you have any further questions please contact Zahra Khan (Researcher) at zahra.khan.3@city.ac.uk or Supervisor Dr Jeeda Alhakim at jeeda.alhakim@city.ac.uk

Appendix D - Participant Information Sheet

Appendix IIII: Participant Information Sheet

Title of study: The Eldest Daughter Syndrome: The experience of being an Eldest Daughter in a British South Asian family

Ethics approval code: ETH2324-0367

Name of principal researcher: Zahra Khan

Supervisor: Dr Jeeda Alhakim

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this research is to explore the lived experiences of parentification of eldest daughters from British South Asian families through individual interviews (online, face to face or telephone). We are particularly interested experiences related to 'the eldest daughter syndrome'. This term was coined online referring to the "pressures and responsibilities placed on to the eldest daughters of the family often causing parentification". Parentification is defined as a phenomenon in which children are assigned or take on parental roles and responsibilities, such as caregiving or emotional support, typically beyond what is developmentally appropriate for their age. This study is interested in listening to the narratives of British South Asian Eldest Daughters, how they construct their identity as eldest daughters and what impact this had on their life. This study is also interested in studying the commonalities and differences between narratives shared in the study.

This study forms part of a thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City University London and is intended to run until September 2025.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part as you are a first born eldest daughter who identifies as South Asian ethnicity. Geographically, the South Asian countries includes Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and the Maldives. Additionally, you have been invited as you live within

the UK (hold British nationality) and are at least 18 years of age. Further, you are able to speak English and identify as second generation migrant (have at least one parent who migrated to the UK). Your views will help the researcher to explore the phenomenon of 'the eldest daughter syndrome' and be able to discuss this in a doctoral thesis.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose not to participate in part or all of the project. You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. You will be able to avoid answering questions that you feel are too uncomfortable or intrusive without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

If you express interest in participating in this research, an initial screening call will take place. Participants will be advised to be in a place they feel is safe and confidential for this call. Reasonable adjustments will be made for those who may have concerns of finding a confidential space to speak, screening via email may offered. The screening call will be a 15 minute telephone call from a number dedicated to the research. In this call, there will be opportunity for the participant to ask any questions relating to the study, to go through the inclusion criteria, check participant understanding of what the study is about and if they feel comfortable to take part. Furthermore, a mental health risk assessment for suicidal ideation will be conducted to ensure participant feels safe enough to engage in the research.

Please note participation in this research is not guaranteed. Please bare in mind if risk towards yourself and/or others is brought up in the screening call, a conversation will take place and we will come to a mutual decision about your participation in this research. If risk is discussed, you will be signposted to appropriate crisis team contact numbers and advised to speak with your GP. If no risk is detected and you feel safe to take part in the research, interview will be organised.

If you wish to take part, you will be invited to attend a one-to-one online, telephone or in- person interview (at City University) expected to last up to 60 minutes. The interview will be semi-structured, so there will be up to 6 open-ended questions which are expected to lead onto further topics. You will

be encouraged to take the lead in sharing your experiences.

All interviews will be audio recorded using Microsoft Teams on my laptop. If interview is on video call on Microsoft teams then video recording will be used. Through this, recordings will be automatically saved on a password protected university OneDrive for storage, only accessible by me. After the interview, recordings will be transcribed, replacing any identifying or personal information with pseudonyms to ensure your identity remains anonymous. The data, including direct quotations will then be analysed using a reflective thematic analysis approach. This involves reading your transcribed responses and exploring the main themes within your answers. Any identifiable information will be redacted from the transcripts as soon as possible. Redacted transcripts will then be saved on OneDrive securely for 10 years as per City's standard recommendation. The study is expected to last until September 2025 and recordings will be destroyed by the completion of this study. Recordings may be deleted earlier if possible.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Due to the nature of the topic, it may be possible that speaking about your experience may invoke an emotional response. Should this be the case, researchers are able to offer a break from the interview. Also please remember your participation is voluntary and you are able to withdraw at any stage.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This is an opportunity to share your views and experiences of being the eldest daughter in a British South Asian family and reflect on how this shaped your life experiences. You will also be contributing to research on an important topic that seeks to make space for British South Asian women to share their views contributing to little existing knowledge on this topic currently.

Expenses and payments

A Lifestyle gift voucher of £15 will be gifted to you as a token of appreciation of your time given towards the study. Within the context of parentification, eldest daughters can be expected to go over and beyond to take care of the needs of others beyond what is seen as regular responsibility. I do not want this research to reflect the latter experience within this research. Therefore, we believe it is important to show appreciation for your time and

gratefulness for sharing your experiences with us.

How is the project being funded?

This study does not hold any funding. However, the gift vouchers are funded by the Department of Psychology Research Committee.

Conflicts of interests

None

Data privacy statement

City, University of London is the sponsor and the data controller of this study based in the United Kingdom. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The legal basis under which your data will be processed is City's public task.

Your right to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in a specific way in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal-identifiable information possible (for further information please see https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/public-task/.

City will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study as necessary. If you wish to receive the results of the study, your contact details will also be kept for this purpose. The only people at City who will have access to your identifiable information will be members of the research team (Zahra Khan and Dr Jeeda Alhakim), and, if appropriate, individuals with responsibility for monitoring and auditing at City, including of research projects. There may be occasions when regulatory authorities may access research data in accordance with their statutory powers. City will keep your biographical information from this study until September 2025 when the study has finished.

You can find out more about how City handles personal data by visiting https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/data-protection-policy. You can also read

City's general privacy notice by visiting https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/general-privacy-notice . If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) directly https://ico.org.uk/.

Will me taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information you disclose will be treated confidentially. All interviews will be audio recorded using Microsoft Teams on my laptop. If interview is on video call on Microsoft teams then video recording will be used. I will be logged onto Microsoft Teams through my City account. Through this, recordings will be automatically saved on a password protected university OneDrive, only accessible by me. Any audio or video recordings will be deleted on completion of my study (September 2025), if possible sooner then I will do so. Any identifiable information will be redacted from the transcripts as soon as possible. Transcripts will then be saved on OneDrive securely for 10 years as per City's standard recommendation.

Confidentiality will only be broken if the researcher feels there is risk of serious harm either to yourself or others, or where the researcher is legally obliged to do so. All identifying or personal information will be replaced by pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity. Your contact details will not be shared with any third parties and future use of personal contact information will be used only if you express interest in being informed of the results of the study once completed.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this study will be part of a thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. The findings may be included in future academic publications, if so, anonymity of participants will be maintained. All details, including direct quotations from interviews will be listed under a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. There will be no identifiable or personal information in the final thesis or any other publications, so there will be no way for readers to identify you. If you would like to be sent the results of the study, please inform the researcher and consent to your contact details being kept for this purpose on the 'participant consent form.'

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City, University of London Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns, or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is The Eldest Daughter Syndrome: The experience of being an Eldest Daughter in a British South Asian family.

You can also write to the Secretary at:

Annah Whyton
Research Integrity Manager
City, University of London, Northampton Square
London, EC1V 0HB

Email: senaterec@city.ac.uk

Insurance

City University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study, subject to the terms and conditions of the policy. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Further information and contact details

Researcher: Zahra Khan - Zahra.khan.3@city.ac.uk
Research Supervisor: Jeeda Alhakim - jeeda.alhakim@city.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix E – Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Title of study: 'The Eldest Daughter Syndrome': A Reflexive Thematic Analysis Exploring Experiences of Parentification Among British South Asian Eldest Daughters

Ethics approval code: ETH2324-0367

Name of principal researcher: Zahra Khan

Please initial box

1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above-named study. I have had had the opportunity to consider this information and to ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily. I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep for my records.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate or to withdraw at any stage without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	
3.	I agree to the interview being audio recorded or video recorded if online. I understand that any information I provide is confidential and that no identifiable personal information will be published or shared with third parties. I understand that the original recordings will accessible only to the researcher, will be stored securely on the researchers university OneDrive account which is password protected and only accessible to the researcher. Listening to recordings will be part of the study data analysis. Recordings will be destroyed upon study completion (September 2025). Recordings may be deleted earlier if possible. I understand that any identifiable information will be redacted from the transcripts as soon as possible. Transcripts be saved on OneDrive securely for 10 years as per City's standard recommendation.	
	I understand information I provide will be used as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis in counselling psychology and a pseudonym will be used when referring to this information, including direct de-identified quotations, as a way of maintaining anonymity. I consent for quotes from my interview to be used as part of the researchers doctoral thesis in counselling psychology, any identifiable information will be removed.	

4.	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) explained in the participant information and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
5.	I would like to be informed of the results of this study once it has been completed and understand that my contact details will be retained for this purpose.	
6.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Appendix F - Appropriate Emergency And Crisis Team Contact Numbers

- Speaking to your GP
- The Samaritans: Call 116 123 (24/7)
- NHS 111 for Healthcare Advice
- 999 in the case of Immediate Emergency
- Home Girls Unite: An online space designed specifically by eldest daughters of ethnic minority background, for eldest daughters of ethnic minority background. Online rant sessions and support groups available at Hello@homegirlsunite.com

Appendix G - Debrief Form

Participant Debrief Form

Title of study: The Eldest Daughter Syndrome: The experience of being a Parentified Eldest Daughter in a British South Asian family.

Ethics approval code: ETH2324-0367

Name of principal researcher: Zahra Khan

Thank you for taking part in this research study. In contributing to this project you have provided valuable information into understanding more about the experiences of being a parentified eldest daughter in a British south Asian family within the UK.

If participating in this research has raised any issues, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher on the contact details provided below. Additionally, please find a list of support lines and websites that might be helpful in cases of psychological distress:

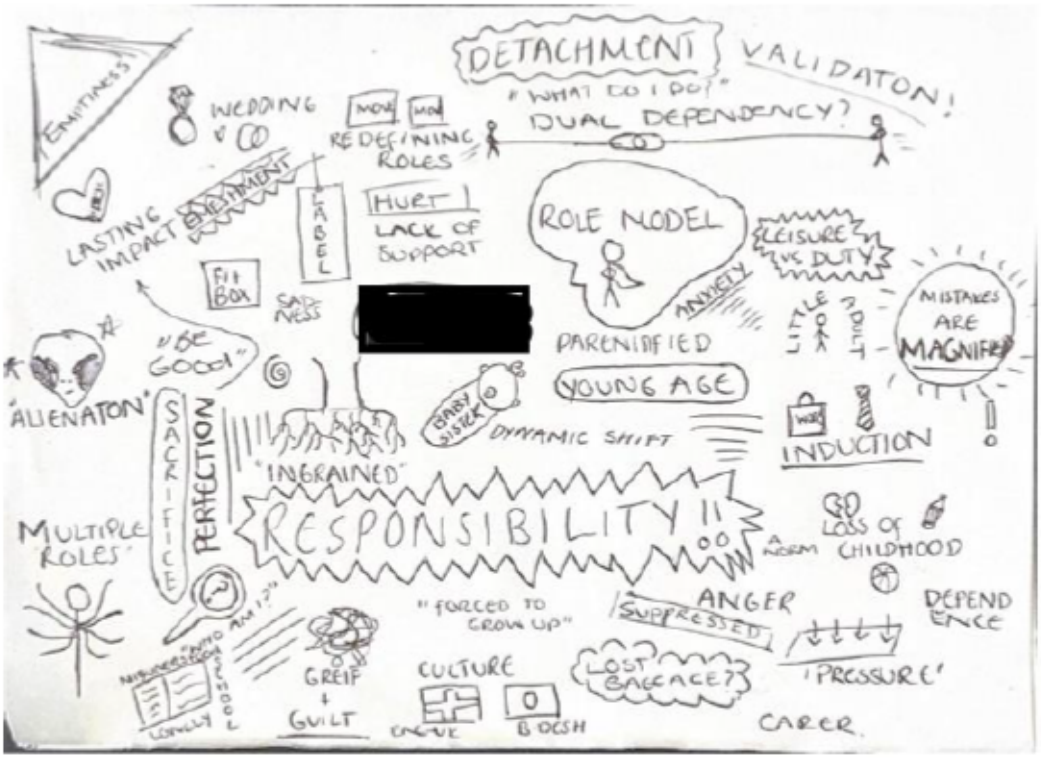
- Speaking to your GP
- **The Samaritans:** Call 116 123 (24/7)
- **Home Girls Unite:** An online space designed specifically by eldest daughters of ethnic minority background, for eldest daughters of ethnic minority background. Online rant sessions and support groups available at Hello@homegirlsunite.com

We hope you found the study interesting. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at the following:

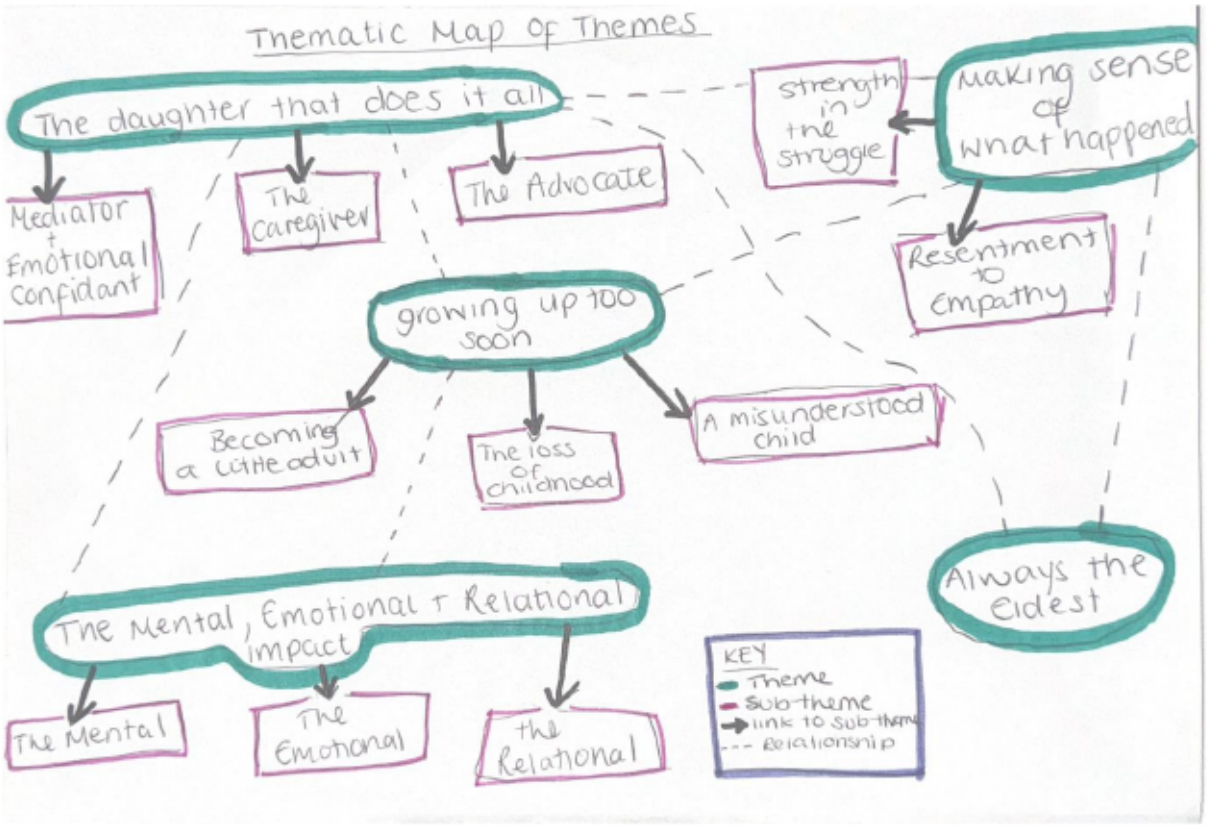
Researcher: Zahra Khan Zahra.khan.3@city.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Jeeda Alhakim jeeda.alhakim@city.ac.uk

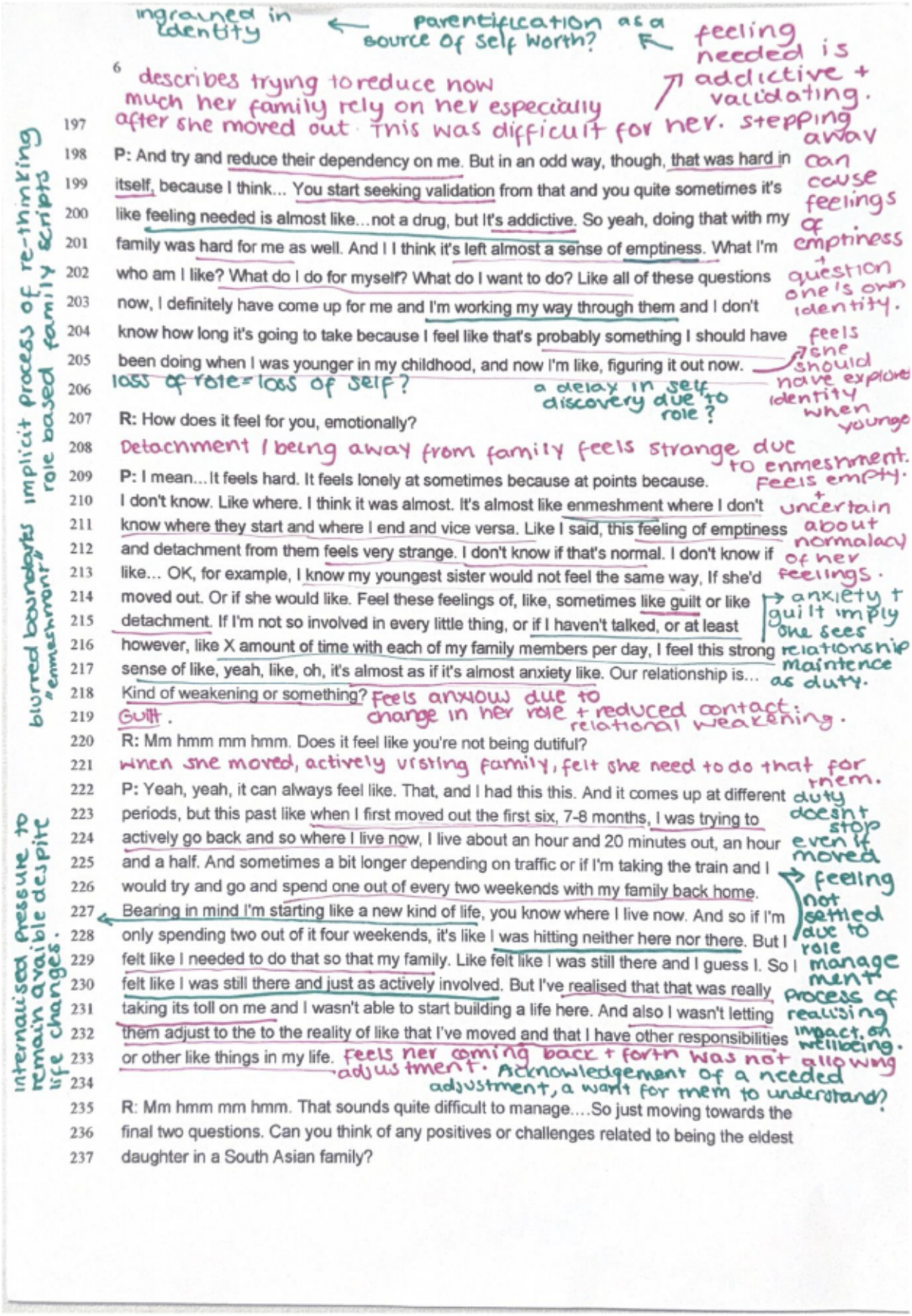
Appendix H - Visual Note-Taking In Familiarisation Process



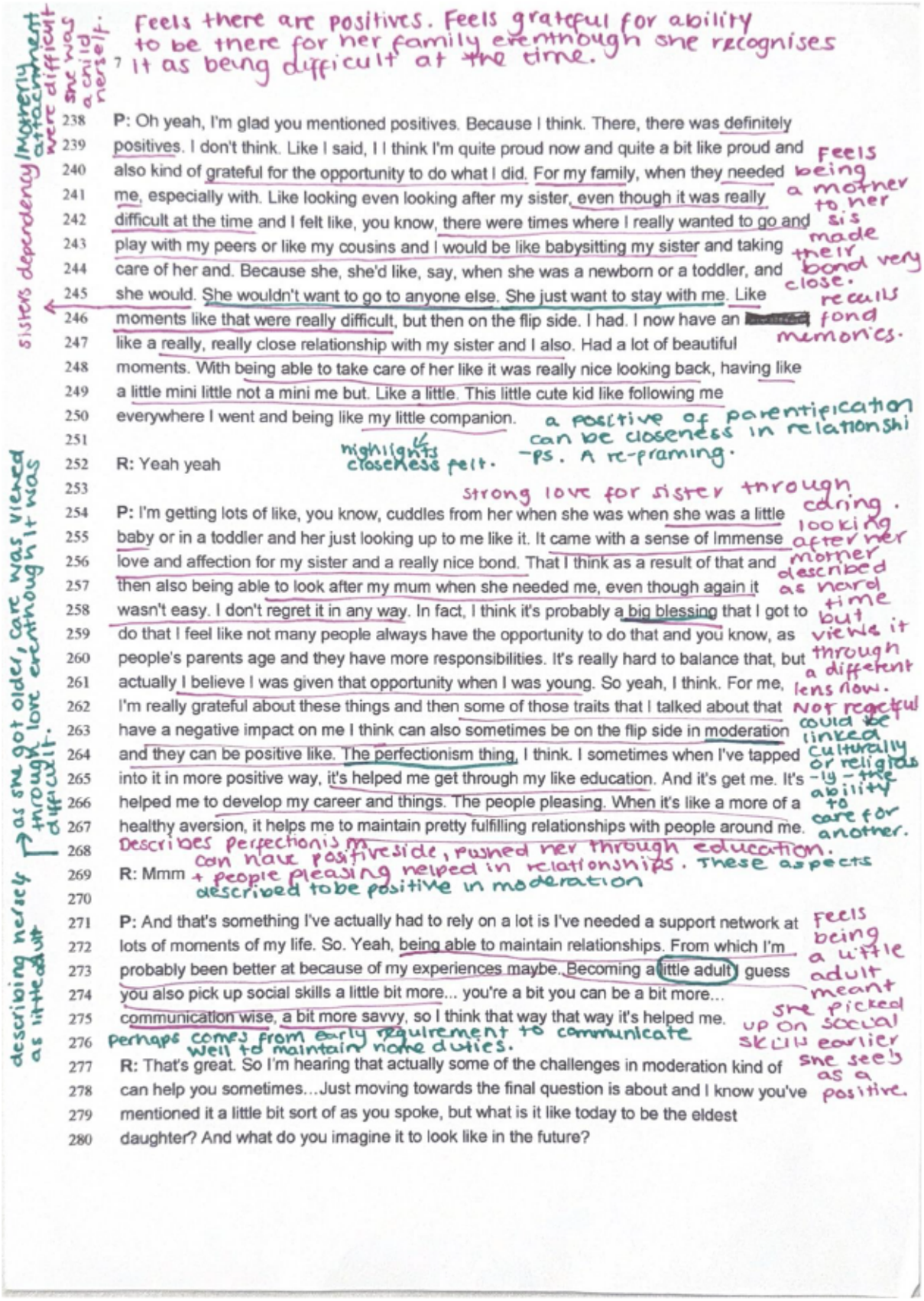
Appendix I - Thematic Map



Appendix J - Example Of Coded Transcript



197
198 P: And try and reduce their dependency on me. But in an odd way, though, that was hard in
199 itself, because I think... You start seeking validation from that and you quite sometimes it's
200 like feeling needed is almost like...not a drug, but it's addictive. So yeah, doing that with my
201 family was hard for me as well. And I I think it's left almost a sense of emptiness. What I'm
202 who am I like? What do I do for myself? What do I want to do? Like all of these questions
203 now, I definitely have come up for me and I'm working my way through them and I don't
204 know how long it's going to take because I feel like that's probably something I should have
205 been doing when I was younger in my childhood, and now I'm like, figuring it out now.
206
207 R: How does it feel for you, emotionally?
208
209 P: I mean...It feels hard. It feels lonely at sometimes because at points because.
210 I don't know. Like where. I think it was almost. It's almost like enmeshment where I don't
211 know where they start and where I end and vice versa. Like I said, this feeling of emptiness
212 and detachment from them feels very strange. I don't know if that's normal. I don't know if
213 like... OK, for example, I know my youngest sister would not feel the same way, If she'd
214 moved out. Or if she would like. Feel these feelings of, like, sometimes like guilt or like
215 detachment. If I'm not so involved in every little thing, or if I haven't talked, or at least
216 however, like X amount of time with each of my family members per day, I feel this strong
217 sense of like, yeah, like, oh, it's almost as if it's almost anxiety like. Our relationship is...
218 Kind of weakening or something?
219
220 R: Mm hmm mm hmm. Does it feel like you're not being dutiful?
221
222 P: Yeah, yeah, it can always feel like. That, and I had this this. And it comes up at different
223 periods, but this past like when I first moved out the first six, 7-8 months, I was trying to
224 actively go back and so where I live now, I live about an hour and 20 minutes out, an hour
225 and a half. And sometimes a bit longer depending on traffic or if I'm taking the train and I
226 would try and go and spend one out of every two weekends with my family back home.
227 Bearing in mind I'm starting like a new kind of life, you know where I live now. And so if I'm
228 only spending two out of it four weekends, it's like I was hitting neither here nor there. But I
229 felt like I needed to do that so that my family. Like felt like I was still there and I guess I. So I
230 felt like I was still there and just as actively involved. But I've realised that that was really
231 taking its toll on me and I wasn't able to start building a life here. And also I wasn't letting
232 them adjust to the to the reality of like that I've moved and that I have other responsibilities
233 or other like things in my life.
234
235 R: Mm hmm mm hmm. That sounds quite difficult to manage....So just moving towards the
236 final two questions. Can you think of any positives or challenges related to being the eldest
237 daughter in a South Asian family?



Feels there are positives. Feels grateful for ability to be there for her family eventhough she recognises it as being difficult at the time.

sisters dependency/maternity attachment were different she was a child herself.

238 P: Oh yeah, I'm glad you mentioned positives. Because I think. There, there was definitely
239 positives. I don't think. Like I said, I I think I'm quite proud now and quite a bit like proud and
240 also kind of grateful for the opportunity to do what I did. For my family, when they needed
241 me, especially with. Like looking even looking after my sister, even though it was really
242 difficult at the time and I felt like, you know, there were times where I really wanted to go and
243 play with my peers or like my cousins and I would be like babysitting my sister and taking
244 care of her and. Because she, she'd like, say, when she was a newborn or a toddler, and
245 she would. She wouldn't want to go to anyone else. She just want to stay with me. Like
246 moments like that were really difficult, but then on the flip side. I had. I now have an [redacted]
247 like a really, really close relationship with my sister and I also. Had a lot of beautiful
248 moments. With being able to take care of her like it was really nice looking back, having like
249 a little mini little not a mini me but. Like a little. This little cute kid like following me
250 everywhere I went and being like my little companion.
251
252 R: Yeah yeah
253
254 P: I'm getting lots of like, you know, cuddles from her when she was when she was a little
255 baby or in a toddler and her just looking up to me like it. It came with a sense of Immense
256 love and affection for my sister and a really nice bond. That I think as a result of that and
257 then also being able to look after my mum when she needed me, even though again it
258 wasn't easy. I don't regret it in any way. In fact, I think it's probably a big blessing that I got to
259 do that I feel like not many people always have the opportunity to do that and you know, as
260 people's parents age and they have more responsibilities. It's really hard to balance that, but
261 actually I believe I was given that opportunity when I was young. So yeah, I think. For me,
262 I'm really grateful about these things and then some of those traits that I talked about that
263 have a negative impact on me I think can also sometimes be on the flip side in moderation
264 and they can be positive like. The perfectionism thing, I think. I sometimes when I've tapped
265 into it in more positive way, it's helped me get through my like education. And it's get me. It's
266 helped me to develop my career and things. The people pleasing. When it's like a more of a
267 healthy aversion, it helps me to maintain pretty fulfilling relationships with people around me.
268
269 R: Mmm
270
271 P: And that's something I've actually had to rely on a lot is I've needed a support network at
272 lots of moments of my life. So. Yeah, being able to maintain relationships. From which I'm
273 probably been better at because of my experiences maybe. Becoming a little adult I guess
274 you also pick up social skills a little bit more... you're a bit you can be a bit more...
275 communication wise, a bit more savvy, so I think that way that way it's helped me.
276
277 R: That's great. So I'm hearing that actually some of the challenges in moderation kind of
278 can help you sometimes...Just moving towards the final question is about and I know you've
279 mentioned it a little bit sort of as you spoke, but what is it like today to be the eldest
280 daughter? And what do you imagine it to look like in the future?

Feels being a mother to her sis made their bond very close. recalls fond memories.

highlights closeness felt.

a positive of parentification can be closeness in relationshi -ps. A re-framing.

strong love for sister through caring. looking after her mother described as hard time but views it through a different lens now.

describing herself as little adult

as she got older, care was viewed through love eventhough it was difficult.

Not regretful could be linked culturally or religious -ly - the ability to care for another.

Describes perfectionism can have positive side, pushed her through education. + people pleasing helped in relationships. These aspects described to be positive in moderation

perhaps comes from early requirement to communicate well to maintain home duties.

Feels being a little adult meant she picked up on social skills earlier she sees as a positive.

For her now, moving away from her family has caused somewhat of an ambiguous space to be in. Describes mentally letting go of being needed.

ED roles continue + evolve

281 **P:** Oh. Oh, it's right now. It's weird. It's like a no man's land because I've moved out. But
282 then I'm also now I've mentally let go of the need to... to...have my family depend on me for
283 everything, but I don't know right now. It's like, yeah, I've only recently moved out and
284 recently kind of. Ventured out outside of a like my family, and I'm building these relationships
285 and outside of my family. And. I guess in my culture as well, there's this attitude of. When a
286 girl gets married. Her family don't have they feel like they need to take a step back. So they.
287 Feel like they can assert themselves as much. I definitely think my eldest daughter role won't
288 be finished. As in I can definitely see as time goes on and say my parents, especially my dad
289 is he ages and potentially needs us children more. I think I will definitely be the one that my
290 siblings. Would like to come to and like I will automatically be the one that will be making
291 kind of decisions or delegating things and. Sorting things out logistically. In the future, I think
292 I'll definitely very easily slip back into that role and I do even now like you know, whenever
293 I'm with my family, I kind of just do.
294 The role is so normalised that it feels like second nature.
295 **R:** Hmm
296 ↳ feels like she is in charge of duty delegation.
297 **P:** Yeah. So, I just need to be mindful. I guess that my siblings are also will be adults, so. We
298 just have to be a bit more equal in distribution and responsibility.
299
300 **R:** Mm hmm mm hmm. So you see it being kind of a a long term thing of in different
301 moments of your life that you're sort of anticipating that you'll have to again be that that
302 leadership role.
303
304 **P:** Mm hmm.
305
306 **R:** And you feel like it's not really an end kind of thing, is what I'm hearing.
307
308 **P:** Yeah
309
310 **R:** OK, OK. And how does that make you feel knowing that there might not be an end to it?
311 ↳ Future feels more hopeful for, a sense she is more aware of how to manage.
312 **P:** I feel optimistic because. Because I'm aware of it, so I can develop necessary like
313 techniques and tools and attitudes towards it that will help me navigate it, and also because
314 I'm aware of it. I can make sure that I don't try not to take on too much and that I know my
315 siblings are there and other people are there that I need to depend on as well and not try
316 and do everything myself, although it's easier said than done sometimes, but I definitely
317 have more confidence that as they're growing older they are also becoming more
318 responsible and yeah, I I think they will help me in that in that quest.
319 feels confident her sibs will be able to help her more in the future, feels more ready to manage.
320 **R:** Great so you're feeling optimistic about it though?
321
322 **P:** Right now, yeah.
323

A sense that moving out she is re-discovering self + in new relationships.

As the ED, in the future she expects to be the one in charge of decision making. 'Automatic'

ED role does not end as parents age, will require support.

Reflects on adult siblings + need for equal role/duty

Hopes to better manage in future by not taking on too many responsibilities

This is an active + conscious choice

sense of hyperindependance.

Appendix K - Extract From Reflective Diary

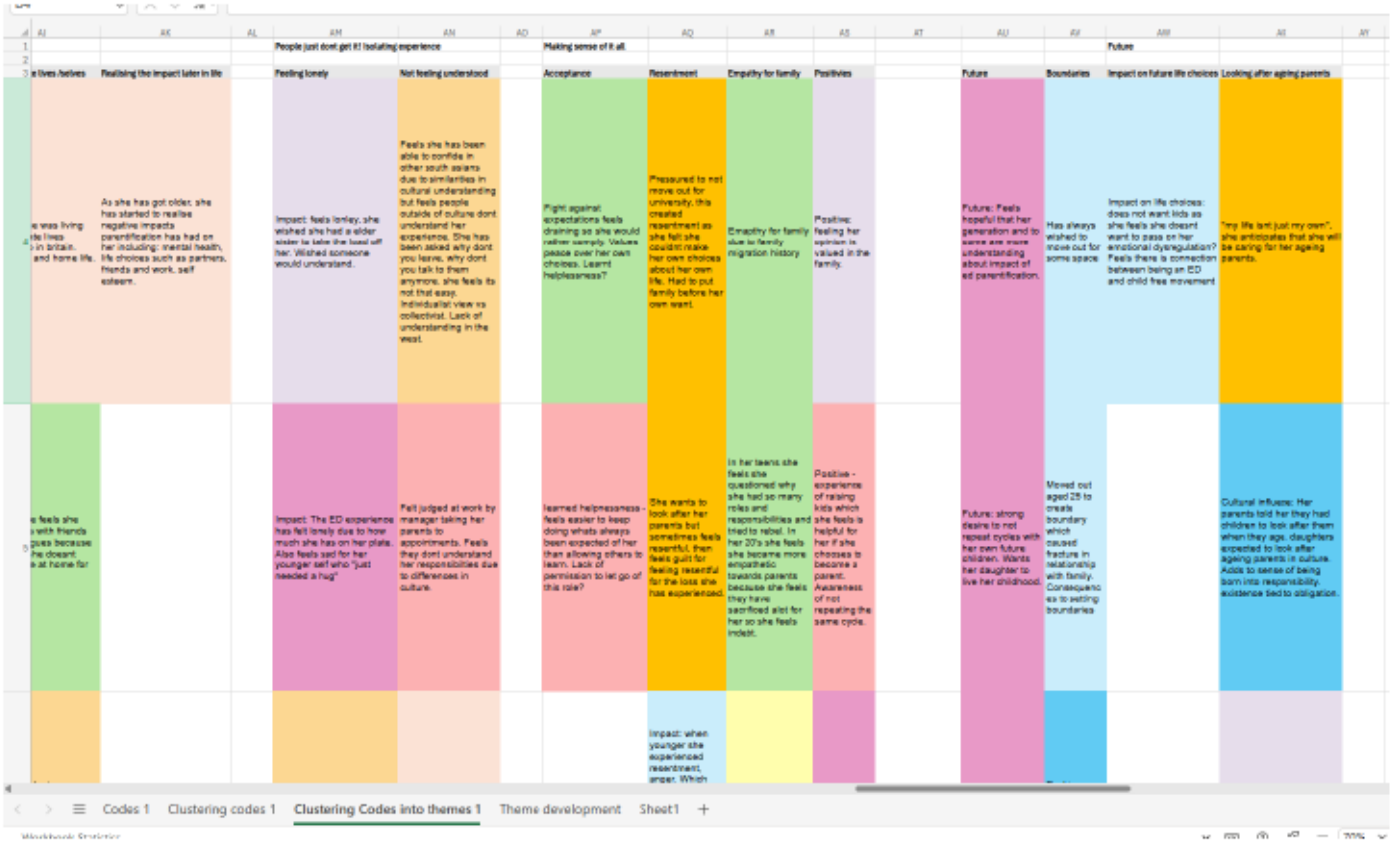
(REDACTED)

Appendix L - Example Of Code Clusters Excel



Parentification and role reversal	Specific roles/responsibilities	Being a role model/perfectionist	Being the honour and pride of the family	Suppression of self	Impact on identity and self development	Mental and emotional health impact	Navigating systems alone	Boundaries	Positives
Roles and responsibilities ingrained from a young age	Roles: family mediator, information explainer to parents and siblings. Had to understand systems and then explain them to her parents. Bridging two worlds.	Being the eldest daughter means being a role model	Being South asian (SA) and eldest daughter (ED) has unique challenges daughters are seen as honor or pride but the ED become the first representation of that honor in society, she was the precedent.	Feels she couldnt process her own feelings because she was always worried about other people feelings and everyone else being happy. Putting others before herself.	Identity shaped around service and future roles e.g. wife.	Impact: social anxiety in interactions as she feels she has had reduced opportunities to socialise.	Feels she navigated many systems alone such as schooling due to parents migration context.	Has always wished to move out for some space	Positive: feeling her opinion is valued in the family.
Interested in study as she feels she was parentified.	Family come to her for her opinion and value this. The voice of reason in the family. Feels like family manager.	Eldest daughters have high expectations of them by parents. There is pressure to be a perfectionist. She has felt a burden to do do well, look good in front of people and 'perform'. Pressure to maintain a positive image around others as the ED is the face of the family. The use of the word 'perform' is interesting.	Life decisions shaped by marrying family pride and honour such as choice of university, subject, choice of friends, who she marries. Emotional burden	Suppression of voice of women, feels this is culture related.	Impact: affected her confidence, she feels unable to speak about her emotions properly as she has always prioritised others emotions over her own. Had to mask her own emotions.	Impact: as an adult she is therapy to understand her parents behaviours directly related to her ED experience	Being in the UK: She feels she navigated alot of systems alone such as university because parents were unfamiliar with the british systems themselves due to migration context. Feels like a sense of loneliness and like she is the only person you have in your team is you. Felt lonley, overwhelming.	Moved out aged 25 to create boundary which caused fracture in relationship with family. Consequences to setting boundaries	Positive - experience of raising kids whi she feels is help for her if she chooses to become a pare Awareness of n repeating the s cycle.
As she has got older, she has started to realise negative impacts parentification has had on her including: mental health, life choices such as partners, friends and work.	Roles included house tidying, cooking, feeding siblings and putting them to sleep.	sense of pressure to be a 'good girl' and act right from a young age	As the ED, she feels she represents the family name and therefore feels there is no room to make mistakes and cant let them down. This leads to perfectionist behaviours.	As a child when she saw her mother hurt emotionally, she learned to switch off her feelings to tend to mothers.	Feels ED identity has become her whole personality and a core part of her being	Impact: mental health struggles directly related to ED experience, diagnosed with BPD (emotional dysregulation). Feels she has been holding in anger all her life and never learnt to regulate emotions		Pushing herself to work very hard so can have a life away from her family. Gonzo of escapism from expectations and duty.	Could not think any positives

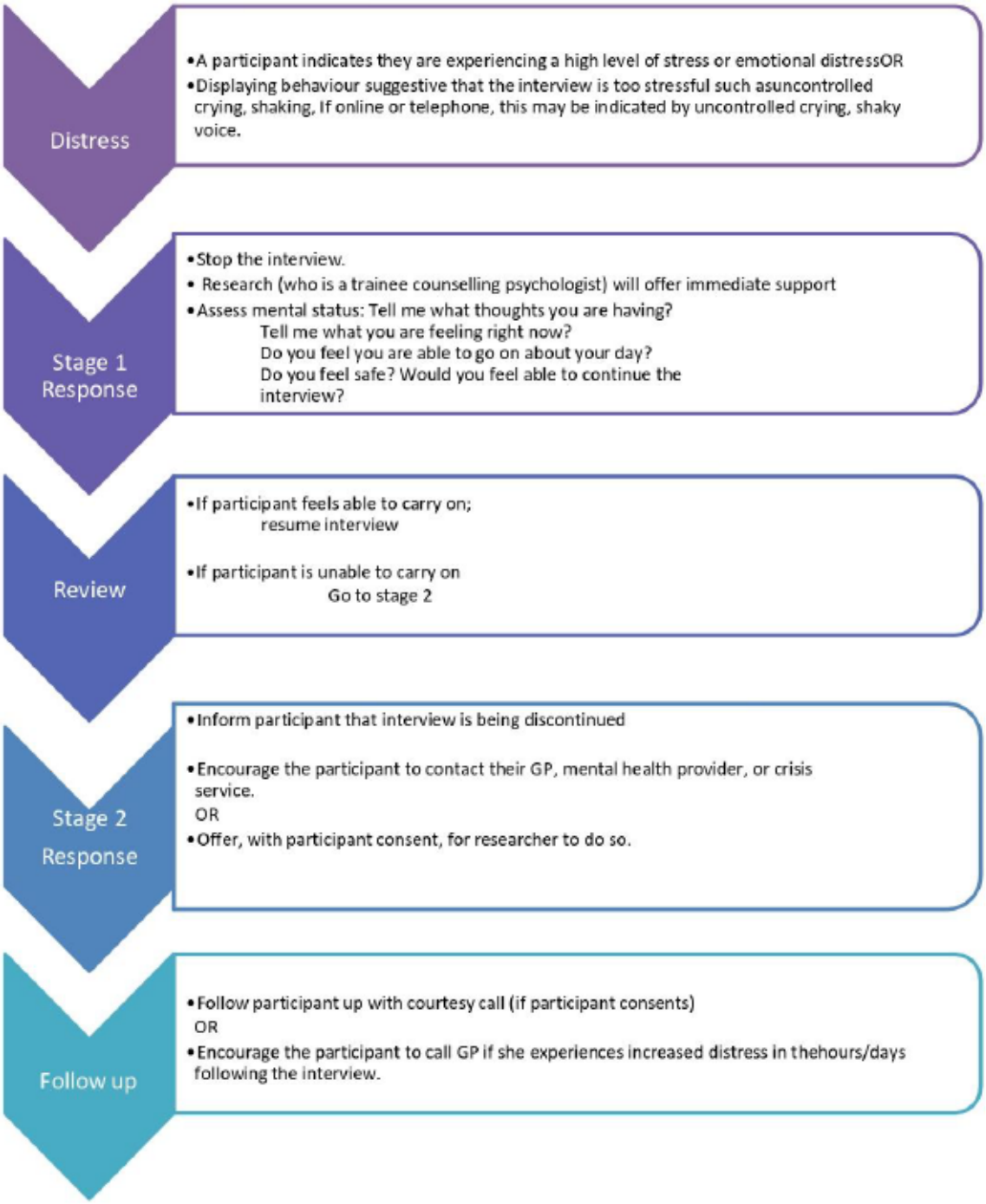
Appendix M - Example Of Theme Development On Excel



Appendix N- Draucker Distress Protocol

Distress Protocol :The protocol for managing distress in participant interviews.

(Draucker, C. B., Martsolf, D. S., & Poole, C. (2009). Developing distress protocols for research on sensitive topics. Archives of psychiatric nursing, 23(5), 343-350.)



Section B: Publishable Paper

Section B: Publishable Paper

Chosen Journal: The Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology

This journal was chosen due to several reasons. Firstly, its aims of publishing research relevant to community and social psychology. Its readership are mainly practitioner psychologists which is the target audience for my study implications and findings. A paper that I closely referenced within my thesis (Irfan et al., 2024) was published within this journal showing that there is interest for parentification based studies exploring different cultural contexts.

Submission Guidelines:

- **Manuscript Style.** JCASP publishes articles in a range of formats, including reports of empirical studies, theoretical articles, review articles, commentaries and reports of community practice.

- Submissions should be as concise as is consistent with clear exposition of the subject matter.

- Manuscripts should not normally exceed **5,000 words**, with 7,000 as an absolute maximum. The word count includes abstract, references and tables. Editors may ask authors to reduce their article's length as part of the review process, in the interest of maximising the number of articles published in the limited space of the journal.

- The **title page** must list the full title, a short title of up to 40 characters and names and affiliations of all authors. Give the full address, including e-mail, telephone and fax, of the author who is to check the proofs on this page.

- Supply an **abstract** of up to 200 words for a full-length article, or around 50 words for a Short Paper. No abstract is needed for a book review. An abstract is a concise summary of the whole paper, not just the conclusions, and is understandable without reference to the rest of the paper. It should contain no citation to other published work. Include up to ten **key words** that describe your paper for indexing purposes.

- **Illustrations** must be submitted in electronic format. Save each figure as a separate file, in **TIFF** or **EPS** format preferably, the figure number and top of the figure indicated. Compound figures e.g. 1a, b, c should be uploaded as one figure. Include the source file. We favour dedicated illustration packages over tools such as Excel or PowerPoint. Grey shading (tints) are not acceptable. Lettering must be of a reasonable size that would still be clearly legible upon reduction, and consistent within each figure and set of figures. Where a key to symbols is required, please include this in the artwork itself, not in the figure legend.

- **Reference Style.** The APA system of citing sources indicates the author's last name and the date, in parentheses, within the text of the paper. All references must be complete and accurate. Where possible the **DOI** for the reference should be included at the end of the reference. Online citations should include date of access.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

'The Eldest Daughter Syndrome': A Reflexive Thematic Analysis Exploring Experiences of Parentification Among British South Asian Eldest Daughters

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the term Eldest Daughter Syndrome has gained visibility online as women worldwide share experiences of parentification and responsibility associated with being the eldest daughter. Among these are British South Asian first-born eldest daughters, whose experiences are shaped by the intersections of gender, culture, and migration. Despite growing online discourse, these experiences remain underexplored within parentification and birth order literature.

This qualitative study had three aims: (1) to explore the parentification experiences of first-born British South Asian eldest daughters, (2) to examine social and cultural factors influencing these experiences and (3) to understand impact of experiences. Ten semi-structured interviews (nine online, one in person) were conducted with British South Asian women aged 19 - 40, including participants identifying as British Indian (n = 4), British Bangladeshi (n = 3), British Pakistani (n = 2), and British Afghan (n = 1). Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Five themes were constructed: 'Growing Up Too Soon,' 'The Daughter That Does It All', The Mental and Relational Impact', 'Making Sense of What Happened', and 'Always the Eldest: Looking to the Future Ahead.' The findings offer qualitative insight into a widely shared yet

under-researched experience and highlight implications for counselling psychology and community-based practice with British South Asian women.

KEYWORDS

Parentification, Eldest Daughters, Eldest Daughter Syndrome, British South Asian, South Asian, Qualitative research, Role reversal, Reflexive Thematic Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Parentification refers to the role-reversal between a child and parent, where the child becomes responsible for adult responsibilities which are typically developmentally inappropriate (Kerig., 2005). The eldest daughter syndrome is a colloquial term which is used to describe experiences of parentification and unique pressures that eldest daughters face due to their birth order such as practical and emotional caregiving within their family. Within this group, British South Asian (BSA) eldest daughters have voiced how their parentification experiences are uniquely shaped by the intersection of birth order, cultural, social and migration factors (Shahid., 2023). These experiences remain under-researched within academic literature.

British South Asian Culture

The term 'South Asian' is a superordinate ethno-racial category or 'umbrella term' associated with individuals with ancestral roots from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutanese, Nepalese, Afghanistan, and the Maldives (Farmer., 2025). South Asian cultural values are traditionally collectivist in nature, centring family, duty, togetherness, respect for elders and interdependence at its core (Quraishi and Evangeli., 2007). Gender plays a central role in South Asian cultural contexts as daughters are often positioned as caregivers within the

family (Shekhani., 2024). In addition, birth order is also important culturally. Respect for elders and hierarchical family structures position the eldest child as a figure of responsibility and authority (Sandhu., 1997). When gender and birth order intersect, BSA first-born daughters may occupy a particularly demanding family position in which they may experience heightened expectations of caregiving duties. For some, this may be experienced as parentification.

Eldest Daughter Syndrome and British South Asian Women

This topic gained significant visibility following a widely circulated TikTok video by Morton (2024). In this video, Morton (2024) mentions that the 'eldest daughter syndrome' is not a mental health diagnosis, but a term used to describe the unique pressures and responsibilities placed on parentified eldest daughters of a family, usually from a young age. Such responsibilities can be understood as being responsible for sibling caregiving, domestic duties, being a role model for young siblings as well as acting as a family mediator within conflict.

BSA eldest daughters have been vocalising their own experiences of parentification online, situating their experiences within a cultural, gendered, and migration related context. Mobeen Akhtar, a British Pakistani eldest daughter and psychotherapist shared her experiences in an online interview (Jha., 2025). Mobeen shared that due to gendered norms within her family, she was positioned as being another parent to her siblings by becoming responsible for their care and wellbeing. This resulted in limited opportunities to be a child in her youth (Jha., 2025).

South Asian eldest daughters responsibility may also be further intensified within a migrant family context. Due to being the first child born in the UK, second generation BSA eldest daughters (have at least one migrant parent) may act as a bridge between their parents and wider British institutes. This experience has been shared in online accounts shared by British

Bangladeshi eldest daughter, Islam (2023) described that due to being born in the UK and the eldest daughter, she has been responsible for supporting her migrant parents with managing tax-related paperwork, translating during medical appointments, and arranging GP visits on their behalf due to language barriers. These experiences align closely with the experience of parentification.

Parentification

Parentification was first conceptualised by the seminal works of Minuchin et al (1967), Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) and Chase (1999). Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) stated that parentification is caused by the "distortion or lack of boundaries between family subsystems causing children take on such adult roles".

It is understood parentification was conceptualised through the lens of family systems theory (Bowen., 1966). This describes that families operate as emotional units, further explaining that family relationships are interdependent affecting one another in the family system. If there a circumstance in the family impacting a parent, such as illness, substance abuse, mental health difficulties, poverty, migration and divorce, this may risk causing parentification of children (Hooper et al., 2013). This causes the power structure in the family system to be inverted causing the child to take on roles such as decision maker or problem solver in order to maintain family functioning.

Researchers have explored some of the impacts of parentification. Parentification impact is categorised as either 'destructive' (unhelpful) or 'constructive' (helpful) (Hooper et al., 2013). In childhood, parentification has been suggested to be associated with poorer social competence (Macfie et al., 2005), low self-worth (Shaffer and Egeland., 2011), self-identity difficulties (Goldner et al., 2019) and depression in teenage years (Burton et al., 2018). Parentification may also cause negative impacts in adulthood including low self-esteem (Wells and Jones., 1999), lower academic status (Chase et al., 1998), self-doubt (Castro et al., 2004), higher risks of experiencing mental health difficulties (Hooper et al., 2011). A

plethora of research has found parentification experiences to be associated with various mental health difficulties such as eating disorders (Rowa et al., 2001), depression (Schier et al., 2015), anxiety (Khafi et al., 2014) and difficulty with emotion regulation (Jankowski and Hooper., 2014).

Parentification research has explored areas such as gender, culture and migration related experiences. Parentification and gender studies tend to focus on between gender differences, which leaves little room for within-gender variation in experience (Harrison and Albanese., 2012). Studies suggest that experience of parentification can be mediated by culture and ethnicity (Khafi et al., 2014). Only one study was found which explored parentification within a South Asian context (Irfan et al., 2024). This study did not seek too explore birth order, however, participants mentioned that being an eldest daughter impacted parentification due to cultural and gendered values. Lastly, parentification and migration based studies show that migration stress may risk parentification causing children to language broker for parents. This may be particularly prevalent for second-generation migrant children as they may be positioned as bridges between their parents and the host culture (Cho et al., 2024).

Birth Order and First Borns

Adler (1964) developed a 'birth order theory' in which he theorised that birth order can impact an individual's personality, behaviour and roles held within a family.

Birth order literature has largely been focused on exploring links with personality suggesting first born adults appear to be more conscientiousness or mature (Van-Volkom et al., 2019). In addition to this, research suggests first borns are more likely to develop mental health difficulties (Franklin et al., 2024). Despite this, the broader birth order literature offers limited insight into how birth order may shape mental health experiences within South Asian populations in particular. Finally, the research tends to treat firstborns as a homogeneous group, not only by culture but also by gender. Many studies have studied first born position

as a gender neutral category (Fukuya et al., 2021). This creates an assumption that the experience within-gender of birth order would be the same. One study was found which explored the intersection of birth order and gender (Marchetta and Ricard., 2025). Findings showed that first-born daughters experiencing heightened burdens through increased home caregiving responsibilities.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Through the popularity of the topic of #EldestDaughterSyndrome, we understand that eldest daughters worldwide are sharing their experiences of parentification online (BBC., 2025). Within this, BSA eldest daughters have been vocal about how their parentification experiences are uniquely shaped by birth-order, culture, gender and migratory factors (Islam., 2023; Jha., 2025; Shahid., 2023). Academic literature has not yet captured the parentification of this population. This was particularly important to research as this population is known for higher risk of mental health distress (Anand and Cochrane., 2005). Parentification and birth order literature has largely dependent on quantitative methods which leaves little room for understanding lived experiences of parentification (Hooper et al., 2011) and lived experiences of being the eldest daughter (Rohrer et al., 2015). In addition, the intersection of birth and parentification remains under researched despite eldest daughters being frequently identified within study samples (Irfan et al., 2024; Cho et al., 2024).

METHOD

Study Design

A qualitative design was required to explore parentification experiences of BSA eldest daughters. A qualitative design using individual interviews was used as it allowed for participant-led dialogue that facilitates the expression of their experiences. Reflexive Thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke., 2006, 2019) was used to analyse interview

data. RTA is a qualitive method which that enables the identification and interpretation of patterns of meaning across data while acknowledging the researcher's active role in the analytic process. This was chosen as the study aimed to focus on shared meaning across participants.

Recruitment

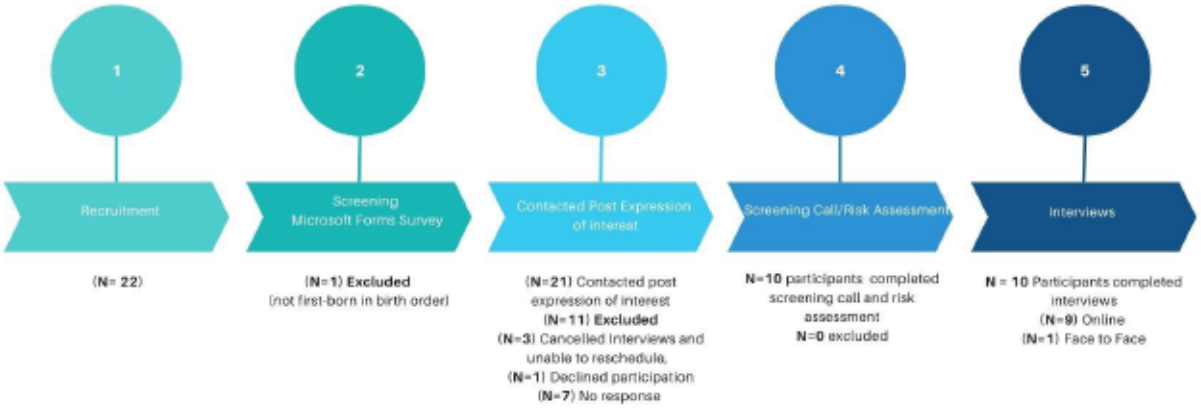
Recruitment commenced after ethical approval was received from the City, University of London Ethics Committee.

A poster was created for the purpose of recruitment which included a QR code linking to a Microsoft Forms page. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was employed to recruit a diverse sample. A recruitment poster was advertised by 'Home Girls Unite' on their Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and WhatsApp platforms. Snowball sampling further supported recruitment as participants shared the flyer within their networks. The study was also advertised through City, University of London's South Asian Heritage Month newsletter.

Inclusion criteria included; being a first-born eldest daughter, self-identifying as BSA (British national and South Asian ethnicity i.e. Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Maldives), identify with the experience of parentification, 18 years of age or above, second generation migrant (at least one parent who migrated to the UK) and speak fluent English.

Recruitment concluded after 22 expressions of interest, resulting in 10 eligible participants who met the study criteria and completed individual interviews.

Figure 1. Recruitment Process



Participant Demographics

Participants were ten cisgender first-born eldest daughters aged 19 to 40, all British citizens. The sample comprised four participants of Indian ethnicity, three Bangladeshi, two Pakistani, and one Afghan. Five participants lived in London, four in the East Midlands, and one in the West Midlands. Educational attainment included three with postgraduate qualifications, six with undergraduate degrees, and one with high school level education. Eight participants were single, one married, and one divorced. Regarding religion, seven identified as Muslim, one as Sikh, one as spiritual but not religious and one as atheist. Seven participants were in full-time employment and three were students.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Location	Education	Marital Status	Religion	Employment
Maimoona	26	Bangladeshi	London	Undergrad	Married	Islam	Employed FT
Sheila	40	Indian	West Midlands	Postgrad	Divorced	Sikhism	Employed FT
Fatima	23	Bangladeshi	East Midlands	High School	Single	Islam	Employed FT
Maham	21	Pakistani	East Midlands	Undergrad	Single	Islam	Employed FT
Sabina	29	Bangladeshi	London	Undergrad	Single	Islam	Employed FT
Sarah	19	Afghan	East Midlands	Undergrad	Single	Atheist	Student
Aisha	25	Indian	London	Postgrad	Single	Islam	Employed FT
Aditi	29	Indian	London	Postgrad	Single	Spiritual	Employed FT
Zuneira	20	Pakistani	East Midlands	Undergrad	Single	Islam	Student
Karina	26	Indian	London	Postgrad	Single	Islam	Student

Screening Call

Participants were contacted via email to schedule a pre-interview screening video call and were provided with study information and consent forms. The screening call consisted of questions adapted from Draucker (2009) and the PHQ-9 which assessed stress, safety and

support systems. Interview dates were arranged. Consent forms were securely stored on the researcher's GDPR-compliant university account.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher. Nine interviews were conducted online on Microsoft Teams and one face-to-face at City, University of London. All interviews lasted up to 60 minutes. Six open-ended questions were used as prompts to guide further exploration. Participants were debriefed after the interview and given a debrief form. Interviews were recorded and transcribed on Microsoft Teams. A £15 Lifestyle e-voucher were shared as a token of appreciation of time given towards study.

Data Analysis

Transcription data was pseudonymised and analysed using RTA. Braun and Clarkes (2006) six phases of RTA were used as a guidance. Analysis involved familiarisation with the data by reading it multiple times and note taking on upcoming reflections. Such thoughts would be added to a reflective journal. The coding process involved searching for patterns and meaning in data through semantic and latent coding. To facilitate the organisation of codes and their grouping into thematic clusters, the data was imported into Microsoft excel. Codes were clustered together based on shared or similar meanings. Following this, themes and sub-themes were developed through my own conscious immersion within the data, being attuned to meaningful and repetitive patterns within the data. Themes were named and finalised.

Reflexivity

In line with the RTA, reflexivity was integral throughout the research process. A reflexive journal was kept to document evolving assumptions and emotional responses as well as regular supervision.

FINDINGS

Through the analysis a total of 5 themes were developed, 4 of them containing sub-themes. Description of themes along with quotes from the interviews are shared in this section.

1.1. Theme 1: Growing Up Too Soon

In this theme, participants describe the start point of becoming 'the eldest daughter' and when they first experienced becoming parentified.

1.1.1. Becoming a "Little Adult"

Many participants expressed that the start of parentification as the eldest daughter was marked by a clear entry point, the birth of a younger sibling.

> "…I definitely felt an acute shift when my baby sister came along... within the first couple of months was like that was my induction into taking care of her. I felt like I was inducted into it. I was like, that's all I kind of knew after that is feeling like a little adult." - (Maimoona, Aged 26, British Bangladeshi, London)

Maimoona described feeling like a "little adult" from childhood marking the start of being parentified for many participants. This experience involved being positioned to take care of a younger sibling, even though the participant was a child themselves. This highlights that the experience of a parentified BSA eldest daughter may start from a young age.

1.1.2. The Loss of Childhood

Upon the arrival of their sibling and having been positioned as a "little adult",

some participants described the feeling of loss of their childhood:

> *" I think ever since my siblings got here, I've always been expected to be like this good role model so I need to do the very best because they look up to me. Because of that I have been very mature for my age but I feel like I've not actually experienced my childhood as a child. (Maham, 21, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p.3, line 78-85)*

Maham reflected upon a how the expectation to act as a 'good role model' due to being the eldest daughter accelerated their maturity and reduced her opportunities for play and exploration. The sense of loss was often realised through comparisons with peers, highlighting a tension between the developmental needs of the child and the adult-like responsibilities placed upon her.

Some participants situated this loss within a broader cultural context, illustrating how BSA eldest daughters may be expected to embody family honour. Zuneira highlights this experience below:

> "I think for daughters in general within the South Asian culture, we're raised to hold this honour and respect anyway….but I think for me… as the eldest daughter, there's even more of a pressure to be a source of pride for my parents… like… act right, be obedient, be a role model for my siblings" (Zuneira, 20, British Pakistani, East Midlands) *(p.8, line 224-231)*

Zuneira emphasises that cultural expectations of honour intensified the pressures associated with being a parentified eldest daughter. From a young age, she was positioned as a role model for her siblings and an obedient carrier of family values. She suggests an awareness that her behaviour as the eldest daughter reflected the family's image to the wider

community. These responsibilities both within the home and externally contributed to a premature transition out of childhood and reinforced feelings of loss.

1.2. Theme 2: The Daughter That Does It All

After being positioned as role models in their early years, responsibilities only increased with age. This theme explores the multifaceted role associated with parentification that eldest daughters expressed carrying.

4.2.1 The Mediator

Participants expressed that a significant role they play within their family is the role of being a mediator within parental conflict. This can be seen within the quote below:

> *"When they [parents] don't get on or whatever or there's like issues like I have to sort of step up and play that role to sort of calm the house down. And that's a massive role. You know, being that person to a step in the middle of two people that are having a disagreement or an argument. I've got that duty to step in, whereas my younger siblings they sort of look up to me to sort of do that. I know when to sort of like step in and cool down the situation. It feels annoying because why should it take myself to step in? You're both grown adults? It shouldn't need to take your child to step in and stop the arguments".*
>
> - *(Maham, 21, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p6, line 158-166)*

Maham's quote highlights how some participants experienced parental conflict mediation as a duty as a parentified eldest daughter. This is an emotional parentification type. It appears as that participants were positioned as responsible for restoring emotional stability in the household. Her description of "knowing when to step in" reflects an early internalisation of conflict-management and being on edge.

This was also linked with feelings of frustration when Maham said "you're both grown adults". This highlights how some eldest daughters feel a sense of unfairness towards being in parentified roles.

4.2.2 The Caregiver

Another one of the most commonly mentioned responsibilities across the dataset was practical caregiving for siblings and parents. An example of this can be seen in the quote below:

> *"When I was younger I would be ensuring my siblings were fed, making sure they were washed and in bed for a reasonable time, making sure the up was done, house hoovered and cleaned, after school making sure things were prepped for when my mum returned home to make dinner. You just do what you do and don't really think about it."*

(Sheila, Aged 40, British Indian, West Midlands) (p.8, line 242-247)

Sheila's accounts show how eldest daughters experienced being responsible for practical caregiving tasks from a young age. The quote highlights how some eldest daughters experienced the normalisation of such tasks as Sheila mentioned "you just do what you do". This may be influenced by her cultural context where eldest daughters may be expected to be responsible for sibling caregiving and household management.

Participants discussed different factors that they felt contributed why they became responsible for caregiving duties. One of the most commonly reported reasons was the socio-economic pressures and long working hours their migrant parents faced:

"My parents being from back home [Bangladesh], it was a tough on the family

because they were out working long hours trying to build a life for us. But it meant that they weren't there for things. Like it was on me to cook, bathe my siblings, feed them, put them to sleep whilst I was still a child myself. I think around 12 years old. But you do it because who else will?".
(Fatima, 23, British Bangladeshi, East Midlands) (p.5, line 129-134)

Fatima's account is an example of how some eldest daughters situated parentification within the context of migration related pressures. Fatima highlighted that her parent working long hours created an absence of a parent at home. This meant that at 12 years old, Fatima became responsible for caregiving duties for her siblings. This suggests that for some participants, such duties are framed as a necessity for survival highlighting how migration pressures shape eldest daughter roles.

4.2.3 The Advocate

Advocating for parents was another commonly mentioned responsibility. Being an advocate was described in many ways such as completing their parents administrative tasks, translating documents for them and taking them to hospital appointments.

> *"My parents don't speak English very well so I'm more in like shops or doctor's appointments or even phone calls sometimes. I'm the one picking up the calls and answering and speaking on behalf of them like I had to call many places and just impersonate my mum and dad because they asked me to because like it's way easier to communicate."*
>
> - *(Sara, 19, British Afghan, London) (p.4, line 136-141)*

Since Sara's parents did not speak English, she often spoke to the wider society on their behalf as a translator. This highlights how the experience of parentification is intensified for BSA eldest daughters, who are also children of migrants. This is understood to be through roles being 'language brokers' and bridging the communication gap between two worlds.

Some participants expressed that this extends beyond language translation:

> *"I take them to hospital appointments because of like racism and stuff. I'm always worried because I've seen some times when they've gone to appointments and they can't articulate themselves very well and people become frustrated with them. I took that responsibility to just be there for them and help them".*
>
> - *(Fatima, 23, British Bangladeshi, East Midlands) (p.6, line 174-180)*

Fatima's quote highlights how some eldest daughters act as advocates between their parents and wider society where they may experience discrimination or racism. Eldest daughters, such as Fatima, feel personal responsibility to protect their parents from institutional discrimination. This appears to intensify parentification experiences for BSA eldest daughters.

4.3 Theme Three: The Mental and Emotional

This theme explores how participants described the impacts of being a parentified British South Asian eldest daughters.

The Mental Impact

Participants expressed that their mental health was directly impacted by their experience of being an eldest daughter.

Some participants highlighted experiencing anxiety, such as Maham:

"I get anxious quite a lot, especially when I have to mediate between my parents. I think it does come directly from having to fulfil that role. I've had panic attacks before it just gets too much sometimes". (Maham, 21, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p.9, line 311-314)

Whilst others, such as Aditi and Sabina expressed experiencing eating disorders and Borderline Personality Disorder:

"It impacted my mental health for sure, I used to have like an eating disorder and stuff like that" (Aditi, 29, British Indian, London) (p.13, 373-376)

"I was diagnosed with BPD, which in a nutshell is just my emotional dysregulation. I think I can point the root cause down to being a parentified eldest daughter" (Sabina, 29, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.8, line 229-235)

The extracts above tell us that participants parentification experience impacted their mental health directly in various ways. Participants directly associated their mental health difficulties with their parentification experiences. We see this through Mahams account who felt her anxiety comes from being a conflict mediator for her parents, whilst Sabina associated emotional dysregulation with being a parentified eldest daughter. This suggests that there may be long term psychological impact of parentification for BSA eldest daughters.

The Relational Impact

Participants expressed that their experience of being a parentified eldest daughter has impacted their interpersonal relationships.

Some participants mentioned their friendships being impacted:

"With friendships and stuff like that, you're very much like a giver and you don't feel like you're doing a lot for other people and you might not receive what you give back. (Zuneira, 20, British Pakistani, East Midlands) (p.7, line 222-228)

Whilst others, such as Sabina, felt her romantic relationships were impacted:

"It's played out in romantic relationships where I've been the one to do the organising do the planning and that's when I take a step back and I'm like oh my gosh I hate this, my previous relationship had a breakdown because of this, it was so unequal. I said I don't want to be the only one carrying the load". (Sabina, 29, British Bangladeshi, London) (p.10, line 294-300)

Zuneira and Sabina's quotes suggest that eldest daughters feel their relational patterns characterised by responsibility and being of service to others, may impact their platonic and/or romantic relationships. This may be experienced as having a tendency to give to others excessively with no return, or experiencing unequal emotional and practical dynamics in romantic relationships.

Theme 4: Making Sense of What Happened

This theme outlines how participants came to understand and make sense of their experience of being a parentified eldest daughter.

Resentment to Empathy

A shared experience within the data was participants expressing a turning point within how they made sense of their parentification experiences. This was a perspective change in holding resentment for being parentified to having more understanding and empathy for the situation.

Aisha reflected on this shift as she remembered that as a teenager she questioned why adult responsibilities were placed on her. A sense of disagreement against her unique responsibilities can be seen below:

"I think the shift happens in your 20's, before my 20's I was like why is happening? Why am I doing this? I don't want to be doing this.

- *(Aisha, 25, British Indian, London) (p.8, line 227-229)*

However, Aisha then stated that a "shift" occurred and her perspectives changed:
"But then when you hit your 20's, you sort of see your parents like, oh wow they sacrificed so much for me".

- *(Aisha, 25, British Indian, London) (p.8, line 229-231)*

From this, we learn that parentified BSA eldest daughters may go through a journey of meaning making in order to make sense of being parentified. There is a pattern where within the teenage years, this meaning making may look like

resentment and anger. However over time, individuals go through a process of re-evaluating the circumstances their parents were in such as illness, financial hardship, migration pressures. Eldest daughters may reframe their experiences by seeing them through the lens of parental sacrifices and hardship.

Strength in the Struggle

As part of their process of meaning-making, some participants reflected that a key positive outcome being parentified was the development of a strong sense of independence:

"As a result I'm really independent now because I've dealt with most of my problems by myself. It shows I can do things by myself and that's empowering".

(Sara, 19, British Afghan, East Midlands) (p.8, line 231-233)

Sara highlights the practical self-reliance as a positive as she describes *"I've dealt with most of my problems by myself"* and views this as empowering as it reflects her strength and resilience. There is a sense that participants have re-interpreted their experience of having to manage everything alone as a marker of personal resilience. The independence that may have initially emerged out of necessity, is now framed as a strength.

Theme 5: Always the Eldest

This final theme highlights how participants view their future and what they anticipate this may look like as parentified eldest daughters.

Participants anticipated that they will be caring for ageing parents, holding the family together, and continuing to fulfil a culturally informed duties. However, this time, not grounded in resentment, but in love, care and gratitude. For example:

"My responsibilities will change with time because I would want to take responsibility for my parents and look after them. That's something again its cultural we look after our ageing parents. It's also because I love them and they have done so much, they've moved to this country."

- *(Karina, 26, British Indian, London) (p.10, line 294-298)*

Participants anticipated that their responsibility as parentified eldest daughters would continue into their future. There is a notable shift in how participants perceive caregiving duties over time. In childhood or adolescence, caregiving was experienced as burdensome, however, in adulthood it is framed as a conscious and willing act rooted in love, gratitude, and cultural values. The desire to care for ageing parents is rooted within South Asian cultural values as well as from a place of appreciation for parental sacrifice through migration.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of parentified BSA eldest daughters. The findings present how parentification was experienced by BSA eldest daughters within intersecting contexts of birth order, culture, and migration histories.

Across accounts, participants described an early loss of childhood due to early introduction to adult roles such as caring for siblings. This finding aligns with Hooper et al (2011) who stated that parentification becomes normalised due to being praised for caring behaviour. In collectivist cultures, caregiving behaviours, may be seen as desirable due to values based on interdependence and familial duty (Bose and Jalal., 2022).

Participants experiences showed that parentification among BSA eldest daughters is both extensive and multifaceted. Emotional parentification was evident in participants roles as mediators within family conflict. This aligns with views that within family conflict, triangulation may cause a child to conflict resolute (Bowen., 1966). Functional parentification was also found with participants describing caregiving for siblings and parents alongside domestic responsibilities. This was often shaped by parental workload and migratory stress. Similar patterns have been reported among eldest daughters in other migrant communities, suggesting cross-cultural parallels in the distribution of caregiving labour (Cho et al., 2025)

A distinctive contribution of this study is the identification of advocacy role. Beyond language brokering, advocacy extended to protecting parents from discrimination and navigating institutional systems on their behalf. While existing literature recognises language brokering as a form of functional parentification among children of immigrants, findings from this study suggest that this role also carries a protective dimension shaped by structural inequalities and discrimination. This finding raises questions about how parentification is traditionally conceptualised. As it has been largely theorised within Western contexts, protective forms of caregiving may have been missed.

Some participants felt that their mental health difficulties such as anxiety, eating disorders and BPD were directly linked to the pressures of their parentified roles. Similarly, this finding is consistent with parentification literature which found links between parentification and mental health difficulties in adulthood (Hooper et al., 2011). This study, however, expands this knowledge due to its exclusive focus on BSA eldest daughters. This was important because we know from existing studies that BSA women, have increased likelihood of experiencing mental health difficulties (Anand and Cochrane., 2005).

Participants shared that parentification impacted their interpersonal relationships in adulthood. This was described as patterns of over-responsibility and people-pleasing in friendships and romantic relationships. Some parentification studies have found patterns of relational impact in friendships (Irfan et al., 2024) and romantic relationships (Baggett et al.,

2015). In this study, we understand that eldest daughters experienced difficulties within romantic relationships due to the internalisation of their caregiving role.

Participants accounts reflected on how parentification was understood overtime. While adolescence was often characterised by feelings of resentment, adulthood brought greater empathy and contextual understanding. Participants reframed their parents actions through recognition of migration-related stress and familial sacrifice. Participants identified strengths such as independence and resilience, highlighting that parentification outcomes cannot be understood as either constructive or destructive. Rather, these findings support more nuanced conceptualisations that allow for holding space for both in meaning-making.

Lastly, findings captured that participants anticipated familial responsibilities to continue into later adulthood. Participants anticipated caring for ageing parents and as well as sustaining family connection and cohesion even after their parents are no longer present. This similar to 'kin-work', the concept that the maintenance of family ties is often falls on women in the family (Di-Leonardo., 1987) and this case, the eldest daughter. These responsibilities were not grounded in resentment, but in love and care. This highlighted another shift in perspective as participants described wanting to look after their parents. Findings aligns with existing studies that have found South Asian daughters being responsible for the caregiving for elderly parents (Shekhani., 2024). However, this study expanded this knowledge through the lens of the eldest daughter, that as the eldest daughter it would be their responsibility to care for their ageing parents.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Implications from this research were summarised in three parts.

- One of the main implications from this study is the need to re-think how we conceptualise parentification within psychology as for some individuals, it may be influenced by necessity and survival through cultural, social and migratory factors.

- Participants discussed that their mental health were impacted directly by their parentification experiences influenced by cultural, social and migratory factors. This calls for reflection on the way parentification is approached clinically. The Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone and Boyle., 2018) may be a powerful lens to contextualise participant distress may be understood through the powers operating within their life.
- Parentification was found intensified by institutional barriers as eldest daughters were responsible for advocating for their parents within public settings. This finding suggests that limited institutional support for migrant families can shift advocacy responsibilities onto eldest daughters, further intensifying parentification experiences. Strengthening provision for language and advocacy support within public services such as healthcare may help to reduce burden on eldest daughters.

Future studies could explore parentification among BSA eldest sons and across different birth order positions to explore how gender and different birth order positions affect parentification experiences. Moreover, due to participants associations between mental health distress, particularly emotional dysregulation, it would be important for future research to investigate this further, perhaps quantitatively to investigate if there are similar patterns in a larger population size.

A key limitation was the lack of voices from Sri Lankan, Nepali and Maldivian eldest daughters. Though efforts were made to recruit from a diverse pool, this limitation may be due to the smaller population of ethnically Sri Lankan, Nepali and Maldivian people in the UK. Lastly, participants were all from two parent households which may limit insights into how parentification may be experienced in other family contexts.

In conclusion, this study explored the experiences, influences and impacts of parentification among BSA eldest daughters. Findings highlighted how eldest daughters experienced early

maturity and a loss of childhood through their multifaceted familial responsibilities. Such responsibilities were described to leave mental and relational impacts within the lives of eldest daughters. Over time, participant perception towards being parentified changed from resentment to empathy through reframing their experience of being a necessary support to their parents in times of survival. This research offers a timely insight into an under-researched area, yet widely shared experience online. It is hoped that the implication may inspire reflection within clinical and wider social contexts.

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Section C: Client Study/Process Report

(REDACTED)

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