

# THE Poverty Truth Commission

*The Poverty Truth Commission brings together commissioners who live with poverty, and commissioners of influence in society, aiming to understand and address the root causes of poverty in Scotland.*

***One key area of the Commission's work has focused on the need to tackle violence (including domestic and gang violence) and to develop positive alternatives to violence.***

***It is a sad fact that domestic abuse and violence occurs against women in all societies and at all levels. Muslim women are not more likely to be subjected to violence than non-muslim women, but because the way it impacts on them, the problems can be different.***

*As such we welcome the partnership currently being developed between Imams from across SW Glasgow, Strathclyde Police, the Muslim Care Council Glasgow and Glasgow Community Planning Partnership. We especially commend Strathclyde Police for their new Third Party/Remote Reporting Initiative which gives the opportunity to report a crime without having to speak directly to a police officer.*

**We are concerned:**

- ***for the number of women within in the BME community who are unaware of how the police can help.***
- ***about missed opportunities to assist women experiencing domestic violence, particularly within the health sector.***

**We recommend:**

- ***Increased awareness in the BME community of the role the Police can play in helping victims of domestic abuse.***
- ***Increased input and early intervention from health professionals for victims of domestic abuse. In particular, more opportunities within the role of the health visitor.***

# Looking for Love

- Ghazala Hakeem.

I was just looking for love. That's all. Love. Simple as that. I was 20 years old and hadn't experienced it yet. My childhood is another story but had I experienced love and affection there I believe I wouldn't have been desperately aching for it. My heart always seemed empty and lonely. I just wanted to be loved, to be wanted, to know what it was like for someone to care about me, think about me, worry about me, and love me. Love. I'd never paid any attention to boys. I wasn't like that. I was a good Asian girl that didn't go out with boys. It's frowned upon within the Asian culture. Girls and boys don't mix. The ones that do get a bad name. A bad reputation is the last thing one needs. It affects not only the boy or girl but the parents too and then later on when it comes to marriage it becomes difficult to find a suitable partner.

I suppose it was the excitement of being at university. It was a completely different world for me. I was in awe of everything that was around me. Looking back on myself, I can see an incredibly naïve, gullible, innocent sweet girl. Too innocent. Too sweet. One that could be easily caught up and snared. That's exactly what happened to me. He wasn't a good boy. He wasn't someone that could be taken home. He wasn't someone that would be approved of. What snared me was the attention and love that was being directed at me. He was offering love. The thing I'd always craved. Love. That need. It was October 1996.

It was doomed from the beginning. A good girl and a bad boy, sounds like something out of a Bollywood movie. Unfortunately it happens within the Asian community. Girls are precious and to be looked after. Protected from the big bad world and to ensure they don't meet any bad boys that could take advantage of them and ruin them and their reputation leaving the families in shame. Just as with Bollywood movies the good girl is attracted by the bad boy and his lifestyle. It's something new and exciting. One that promises adventures.

Within the first couple of months I was being abused. It started verbally but quickly progressed onto physical abuse. I was hooked on him. Hooked on the supposed love that came my way. He was articulate, clever and knew how to capture people's attention. He loved being the centre of attention. He knew how to control. I was like a puppet. He was pulling all the strings and I obeyed. I did as he said and fell for everything. He was a compulsive liar and very good at convincing people. I didn't realise that I was lifeless and didn't have a say in anything anymore. Everything I did and said was for him. My life didn't exist anymore. I existed for him.

People from the community found out about my seeing him and began to talk which is every parent's nightmare. We weren't aware of it though. We were in our own little world. I thought I was in some kind of beautiful romance and was the envy of all the other girls who wanted to have a story just like mine. Fairy tales are happy stories and the characters live happily ever after. This was not going to be a fairy tale and certainly not a happy story with a happy ending.

It was 8 months by the time we got married. June 1997. I didn't have to convince my parent's. They were mortified by him. He was not the boy next door. He was uneducated, short, very dark in colour, skinny, agitated, no manners, didn't know how to address people or hold a conversation. He wasn't someone that my parents could be proud of or introduce as part of the family. I knew all this. I felt the same. It was embarrassing. I was the first child and the first grandchild. There were expectations from me. Everyone thought I would have found the stereotypical tall, dark, handsome prince that would fit into the family perfectly. Someone to be proud of, someone proper.

My parents thought I might run away from home if they prevented me from marrying him. I had wanted them to forbid this marriage taking place. I had wanted them to put their foot down and say no. I wanted an escape route and thought they might help but it didn't come. I didn't want any of the abuse that was coming my way which was getting worse. I felt worthless. I wanted mummy and daddy to rescue me and look after me. They didn't know of course what was happening to me. I couldn't tell. I didn't know how to.

I was miserable on my wedding day. I felt like a lamb to the slaughter. I hadn't slept the night before and it wasn't due to excitement. I kept crying. The lady who came to do my makeup told me off as I kept ruining the make-up. I didn't want to marry him. I knew I was going to be unhappy. I knew I was going to be living a sad life. The atmosphere within the house wasn't of joy. No-one was happy. Nobody was talking. No-one was smiling. It was horrible. I felt guilty. I had made everyone sad because of him, because of what I was doing. My wedding dress was beautiful and very heavy but my heart was heavier. I didn't want to marry him but it was too late. This was the day. I had to do it. I had no choice.

There was no compliment or smiles from him or from his family. No gushing over the bride or making sure I was ok. It was doomed from the beginning. I didn't smile either. I had no reason. The wedding day let me know that I wasn't going to have even a day to myself. It was going to be downhill all the way from the very first day. I was informed that I had to do all the cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, etc for everyone in the house. This was from his mum. We were in the limousine still outside the hotel. The car hadn't even started and I had been told what my life was going to consist of. I had been told of what I meant to them. I was nothing.

There wasn't even any acknowledgement the next morning. This woman was going to make life hell for me. What I didn't know was that my own husband was going to make my life even worse. At times it felt as if there was a competition between the two – who could make me cry the most, give me the most pain, make me want to kill myself! The culprits of my abusive marriage weren't just my husband and his mother. His brother, uncles, aunts, his friends, people who were mere pals, her friends and neighbours, even women that his uncles had divorced but had maintained links with his mum played a part. It was like the typical Asian family nightmare stories one hears.

Verbal abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse, psychological abuse, I had it all. I had no rights. He dominated me. All I could do was cry.

His mum and brother would encourage him. They would shout insults and cheer him on to hit me more. His friends and relatives would persuade him to put me in my place and show me who the boss was. I was a wreck. I had become anorexic. I was forever

being told how ugly and fat I was. I had no friends. I didn't go anywhere as the area we stayed in had bad public transport and I didn't have a car.

I never thought of calling the police. The thought never came into my mind. What would they do? Would they listen and understand? Would they take his side? Would it make things worse?

When I finally started leaving him, the only place I could go to was back to my family home. It would only be for a few days at a time. I wasn't comfortable. It was an awful situation and I was aware of the unspoken 'you've made your bed, now you've got to lie in it'. I was in the way. I wasn't wanted as I had got married and left and I had made the decision to marry him. This was no longer my home. It was embarrassing for my family. They couldn't get over what I had done and how they were ashamed to face the community. I didn't belong anywhere. I had no place to go. It was also awkward having to explain to people why I was there if someone visited or saw me around the area. A married girl should be in her own home with her husband.

I didn't have a home though as the house we lived in was his mothers who had wanted her son to get married to a relative in Pakistan. My husband was frightening and unpredictable. He could go into a fit at any time. He didn't need a reason. The alcohol and drugs didn't help of course but his violence couldn't be excused or blamed on the substances he took. He cared more for his alcohol and drugs than he cared for me. His mum wanted a robot that followed her every command, someone to do all the housework, an obedient slave. He wanted...I don't know what he wanted except that he certainly didn't want me happy. It annoyed him so much if I came across as normal. He was only satisfied when I was crying and aching.

Every time I left I heard promises of change again and again and I believed him. It was a circle. I couldn't leave him as I didn't have any real place to go. I didn't know what to do, how to live, how to survive, how things worked, what would I do for money, how did I get a house, how were bills paid, who would pay them...so many things and I was clueless!

I was only 20 when I got married. Prior to that I lived at home like all good Asian girls and boys. Daddy looked after us all. Once a girl gets married her husband looks after her. It was so easy. Girls had it easy. First daddy then husband she didn't have to do anything. Everything was sorted. That's not even a fairy tale. That was supposed to be reality. I hadn't even learnt how to cook as mummy did that. I was totally clueless. There are months of my life that are missing from my memory. I can't remember anything. Other bits are patchy. I know I was severely depressed, that I thought my only escape would be to die. I tried so many times to kill myself. I was pathetic. I couldn't even kill myself. I was a failure there too. I had no confidence left, my self-esteem was gone, no friends as he had taken me away from them, no family to look after me, no money to escape. I was outside of Glasgow and had no transport. I was stuck.

When my mother died in September 1999 I changed. I became hard. Her death had a profound effect on me. I stopped smiling. I stopped laughing. I didn't feel any emotion. I was like a robot, not feeling anything. I had always liked children and had hoped to have my own one day. I wanted 6 - 3 boys and 3 girls. I had their names all chosen. That changed. I didn't want any children. They didn't interest me anymore. Nothing did.

The memory is vague but I must have said something to someone who told me what to do. Somehow I had signed up with a housing association and in a few months I was given a flat through their black and minority ethnic (bme) project. It was a new flat with new things. I had to sign on to receive benefits that I could pay for groceries. My rent was paid through housing benefit. I had kept everything to myself so far. I hadn't told anyone anything. It was embarrassing. That kind of thing didn't happen and it didn't happen to us Asians. We were supposed to just get on with things despite everything. People shouldn't find out about these kinds of things. It brought shame on the community and the family. I was 24 years old.

He found out. I had stopped all contact by changing my phone number and by moving away so he couldn't find me. He found me, my phone number and my haven. He made his way back into my life. I was still weak. He saw what I had and literally moved in with me going back to his family home from time to time to appease his mother who wanted every detail of what I was doing. My safe haven didn't last long. It was the same as before. I was depressed from all the abuse I had been suffering. I was depressed about my mother's death and couldn't come to terms with it. He was back to his ways with me. Nothing had really changed except for my being even unhappier. I wanted to dig up my mother's grave and crawl in beside her. Maybe I would be safe then.

I fell pregnant. It wasn't planned. I had been ill for weeks and when I found out I burst into tears and cried and cried. The poor nurse must have been baffled and I told her that my husband and I didn't have a good relationship. I was scared and confused as to what was going on with me, what I was going to do, how I was going to manage and what would happen to the baby. I didn't want to be pregnant. I couldn't even look after myself so how was I going to look after a little baby. I didn't know what to do with children. My mum wasn't here to show me or help me. I didn't have anyone and it was frightening. Who could I go to? My news to him didn't mean anything. I didn't tell anyone until I was exactly half way through. I was told not to worry and that he would change now that I was pregnant. He didn't.

I was very ill throughout my pregnancy and had no-one to look after me. At about 11 weeks I had to go to hospital to make sure the baby was ok. His violence hadn't stopped. He had no care. The doctor's at the hospital called the police who took me home and they faced a battle with him refusing to leave the house. I had my baby 3 weeks early. I had a little princess. We were both ill and I was suffering from post-natal depression as well. He had got a flat by this time which was in an awful condition partly due to the way he was living. It was very dirty and unhygienic. After 3 weeks I moved in with him hoping it would change him now that the baby was here. That's what was being said now. He didn't. He was worse. I was isolated and left to look after a baby all by myself. I had no support. My health visitor was no help either. She had learnt of my situation. Looking back I can see she took advantage of my vulnerability. I didn't even think to make a complaint and stand up for myself. It's not something that I was accustomed to – standing up for myself. I was always the victim.

It was August 2001. I woke up one morning and looked at the ceiling. It wasn't my ceiling. I wasn't in my home. My baby was in her cradle next to me. I thought 'he's never going to change', 'either she'll grow up watching him beat me or he'll start on her too'. It was a fact. It wasn't even a possibility. I wasn't going to let that happen. My

motherly instincts and my survival mode had kicked in. Finally. She was 6 months old. I wasn't going to let anything happen to my baby. I wasn't going to let anyone harm my baby. I would fight that person and protect my baby. I had to get her out of there. I got up, washed and changed and packed her nappy bag. I could only pack a few things. The essentials such as nappies, milk, bottles, a few outfits and that's it. I didn't take anything of mine. We got the bus and went to my family home. I remember her smiling at me in the bus. She was enjoying the ride. I felt as if I was becoming free. I felt light. Freedom was approaching. I was doing the right thing. I was looking after my baby. I was being a mum. I was taking her away from harms way. I smiled back at her and felt proud.

I applied for a flat with a different housing association and by her first birthday we were there. I had made a new year resolution that I was determined to keep. I wouldn't take him back. I was so proud of myself the following year. I had stuck to my resolution. I did it. I'm not a victim. I'm a survivor. I'm superwoman. I did it!