

A close-up, low-angle photograph of a pregnant woman's bare back and shoulder. Her hand is gently resting on her lower back. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the contours of her body.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN WHO BECOME PREGNANT OR HAVE CHILDREN CONCEIVED IN SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Research funded by profits from VictimFocus Resources Store

Thank you to all who purchase our books and resources, your purchases funded this entire research project and means that we can publish it for free.

Research ethics complied with The BPS Code of Human Research Ethics

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Summary

As part of a set of three reports being released in early 2021, this report presents the findings of a large study which explored the attitudes of the British public towards women who become pregnant from sexual violence committed against them by men. Further, the questionnaire asked the participants for their thoughts and perceptions of children who are conceived in rape, abuse, trafficking and exploitation of women and girls by men.

Together, we are releasing three reports on this topic:

Report 1: Experiences of women who become pregnant or have babies conceived in sexual violence

Report 2: Real stories of women: Honouring the voices of women who become pregnant or have children conceived in sexual violence

Report 3: Public perceptions and attitudes towards women who become pregnant or have children conceived in sexual violence

This report is number 3 in that series. The others can be found on our website www.victimfocus.org.uk and will always remain open access to all.

There is very little research on this topic, and for that reason, we have included every source we could find in this report. As you can probably imagine, it is rare that any study can include every source found on a particular topic, and this means that we had a lack of theories, frameworks, quantitative or qualitative data to analyse and explore this complex and important issue with. We also decided to list the media sources on this topic, to show what kinds of articles and websites a woman may be presented with when she searches for help or advice after rape.

Overall, this report presents the first set of findings about the way people in the British general public perceive women who become pregnant from rape, and the way they perceive children who are conceived in rape.

We present beliefs, attitudes, ideas and opinions of 315 adults, of which, 36% stated that they personally knew at least one woman or girl who became pregnant from rape. We also present new ideas for resources, services and advice for women and girls who become pregnant from sexual violence committed against them by men.

I encourage you to read all three reports, especially report 2, which contains a collection of real, unedited stories of women in the UK who became pregnant or had babies conceived in rape.

Millions of women and girls are subjected to sexual violence and rape by men and boys. Pregnancy arising from those rapes is more common than we realise, and we need to respond to this common occurrence and ensure that women and girls are not facing this terrifying time alone.

Thank you to all who purchase our VictimFocus books and resources, your purchases funded this entire research project and meant that we could publish it for free.



Dr Jessica Taylor - Director of VictimFocus

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Introduction

Prevalence studies in academia and in public research have consistently shown that many women and girls will be subjected to sexual violence in their lifetimes. Every year, 510,000 women will be raped or sexually assaulted in the UK (CSEW, 2017). The CDC (2015) reports that 1 in 3 women will be subjected to sexual violence at some point in their lives and that 1 in 5 women will be subjected to an attempted or completed rape within their lifespan.

For the UK population alone, this puts the potential number of women and girls subjected to sexual violence in the lifespan at around 10.7 million. This is important because abused women have less sexual autonomy and experience unplanned pregnancies more often than other women (Edin et al., 2013).

Despite a prevalence worthy of significant concern, there is little written about the prevalence or experiences of women who become pregnant from sexual violence. A literature search was conducted to explore existing literature but yielded very little.

Whilst there were tens of thousands of articles and reports about rape, sexual violence and childbearing – they were rarely in relation to children conceived in rape. Instead, many results were reports about the rape of children, rape of babies or the experiences of women going on to have babies after being subjected to rape and abuse earlier in life.

The literature search was conducted with the keywords below. These returned 63,988 results but only 7 were pertaining to women who had become pregnant or had a baby conceived during sexual violence.

Literature search keywords and results

Keywords or phrase	Results	Relevant results	Results
Baby from rape	23563	3	No place for a war baby: the global politics of children born of wartime sexual violence / Donna Seto. Donna Seto, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013 Rape survivor is sentenced to 30 years in jail under El Salvador's extreme anti-abortion law Torjesen, Ingrid, BMJ, 7 July 2017, Vol.358 [Peer Reviewed Journal] The Lived Experience of Childbearing From Survivors of Sexual Abuse: "It Was the Best of Times, It Was the Worst of Times", Logiudice, Jenna A ; Beck, Cheryl T, Journal of midwifery & women's health, July 2016, Vol.61(4), pp.474-81 [Peer Reviewed Journal]
Child from rape	18345	0	N/A
Pregnant from rape	22068	3	Is there a "right to abortion" for women and girls who become pregnant as a result of rape? A humanitarian and legal issue. Gaggioli, Gloria

			<p>Collegium: news from the College of Europe = nouvelles du Collège d'Europe, 2014, Issue 44, pp.83-95</p> <p>Between desire and rape – narratives about being intimate partners and becoming pregnant in a violent relationship. Edin, Kerstin ; Nilsson, Bo Global Health Action, 01 December 2013, Vol.6(1) [Peer Reviewed Journal]</p> <p>Physicians' agreement with and willingness to provide abortion services in the case of pregnancy from rape in Mexico Silva, Martha ; Billings, Deborah L. ; García, Sandra G. ; Lara, Diana Contraception, 2009, Vol.79(1), pp.56-64 [Peer Reviewed Journal]</p>
Abortion after rape	3	0	N/A
Termination after rape	3	0	N/A
Infant from rape	6	1	<p>Parenting an Infant Born of Rape</p> <p>Parenthood and mental health : a bridge between infant and adult psychiatry : World Psychiatric Association [0-470-74722-6; 0-470-66068-6] Tyano (2010) p.289 - 299</p>

The seven articles that were found to relate to this topic were broad in focus. Seto (2013) explored the experiences of women having babies from rape committed as an act of war or oppression during wartime. In BMJ, Toriesen (2017) discussed the case of a 19 year old woman who became pregnant after being raped being sentenced to 30 years in prison on charges of 'aggravated homicide' because she experienced obstetric complications during childbirth.

In 2016, Logiudice et al. explored the pregnancy and childbirth experiences of 8 women who had histories of childhood sexual abuse and had gone on to have babies later in life. This qualitative study sought to provide insight into the support women subjected to childhood sexual abuse might need when pregnant, during labour and after childbirth. Findings suggested that maternity healthcare professionals did not routinely ask about abuse or trauma, and women did not feel able to speak up about the way the pregnancy or having a baby was triggering them or causing further trauma related to their experiences of childhood sexual abuse. In a methodologically similar study, Edin et al., (2013) used qualitative interviews to explore the experiences of 9 women who became pregnant during abusive relationships with long term partners. The study was broad and did not focus completely on the pregnancy. However, one key finding from the narrative analysis was the way that the 9 women spoke differently about becoming pregnant during severe domestic violence with some being happy to be pregnant and others explaining that the pregnancy was unwanted, coerced or unplanned.

In 2014, Gaggioli wrote about the humanitarian and legal issues in whether a woman or girl has a human right to an abortion if the baby was conceived during rape. This issue was also raised by Silva et al., (2009) who wrote about the access to abortion for women in Mexico who had become pregnant from rape. They reported that the access to an abortion of a pregnancy due to rape was not contested or illegal, but the access to abortion services was so limited that women had to visit a

physician who was willing and agreed with the need for the abortion after rape. The findings from this study of over 1000 physicians indicated that while some doctors were more likely to perform an abortion when rape was a factor, other physicians held values and beliefs which meant they would not support or perform an abortion on women subjected to rape. The authors concluded that the physicians and their individual beliefs and values were the gatekeepers to abortion for women pregnant from rape.

There were no studies that offered a prevalence of children conceived in rape, or how many women become pregnant from rape. There were also no studies talking directly to women about their experiences of being pregnant from rape, raising a child conceived in rape or indeed, being a child who was conceived in rape.

There were also no studies that provided any indication of how the general public understand or perceive women who become pregnant from rape or children who are conceived in rape. Further researching found that whilst women's centres, rape centres and sexual violence services were likely to meet women who became pregnant from rape, there were no specific services, resources, guidance or professional training on this topic.

Due to the lack of academic literature on this topic, the decision was taken to explore services, internet webpages, news articles, blogs and online magazines.

In January 2018, a set of internet searches were carried out to explore what services, websites, support forums or stories existed about women who had children from rape, or adult children who learned they were conceived in rape. Despite extensive internet searches, it appears that this issue is somewhat hidden, even from the internet, which is intriguing.

Keywords and phrases used for this search:

- Pregnant from rape
- Baby from a rape
- Keeping the baby from a rape
- Child from rape
- Pregnant after rape
- Child from incest
- Pregnant from abuser
- Pregnant from incest
- Keeping baby from rapist
- Keep baby after rape
- Termination after rape

Secondary keywords were added to the end of each sentence to look for sources:

- New stories
- Blog
- Magazine
- Article
- Tv show
- Episode
- Expose
- Letters
- Website

However, the searches did uncover small amounts of media coverage, articles and blogs (contained in the table below). Some blogs were heavily influenced by religious or cultural norms and were not written by professionals and specialists.

Some websites were found to be offering 'advice' or writing articles and blogs which made strong assumptions and supported stereotypes, such as that there was a genetic link between the rapist and the child which would mean the child would become a rapist or abusive. This link only seemed to occur when the child was male.

Comments on news articles, blogs and articles revealed that readers were often women who had become pregnant from rapes and abuse, surfing the net for advice or support. Some comments were highly detailed and were clear requests for help, support and signposting to organisations that could help them.

Results of the services and internet resources search

Source and date	Content	Link
The Independent – UK 10/06/2016	The trauma of labour after rape	http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/pregnancy-and-birth-can-be-dangerously-traumatic-for-rape-victims-but-ive-found-a-way-to-help-them-a7073976.html
Thought Catalogue - US 29/01/18	17 short stories of Americans being a 'product of rape' Some further disclosures in the comment sections	https://thoughtcatalog.com/hok-leahcim/2014/07/17-people-who-were-born-out-of-rape-or-incest-reveal-their-stories/
CMF Blogs A Christian Medical Fellowship - Ireland 9/1/2015	The proposed changes in Northern Ireland permitting women to be legally allowed to have an abortion after rape. Pro-life article.	http://www.cmfblog.org.uk/2015/01/09/why-abortion-is-not-the-best-solution-for-pregnancy-following-rape-or-incest/
Pregnant Magazine online	Magazine article about the different types of rapes that may occur. Not very well written or knowledgeable. Contains some alarmist language and offensive advice.	https://www.babylovenetwork.com/pregnantmagazine/article/babies-from-rape/
The Guardian - UK Jan 2012	Woman who was adopted discovered she was conceived from rape	https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/mar/02/i-was-conceived-by-rape
BBC News - UK 17/08/17	Story of a child in India who was 10 years old who delivered a baby from rape as abortion is illegal.	http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-40961137
UK government website	Applying for tax credit financial support for a third child where the child was conceived from rape	https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/621425/ncc1.pdf
York University article 22/01/2016	The psychological effects of finding out you were born of rape	http://trauma.blog.yorku.ca/2016/01/children-born-of-rape-face-a-painful-legacy/
Article from a follower of Russell Moore – A religious liberty commissioner - US	An adoptive Dad asks if he should tell his adopted son he was born from the rape of his wife, 9 years ago. Russell Moore advises him, according to his religious beliefs.	https://www.russellmoore.com/2010/04/22/should-i-tell-my-child-he-was-conceived-in-rape-my-response/

2012		
Jezebel online - US	Katie J M Baker writes about and argues how she believes it is better to conceal the truth to a child conceived from rape following a radio presenter commenting that rape had created some “extraordinary” people and the article published by Slate that psychologists recommend telling a child they were conceived through rape. 174 public comments, majority agree with writer and include personal stories.	https://jezebel.com/5937210/slate-suggests-you-tell-your-children-if-they-were-conceived-from-rape
Choices 4 Life. US	Religious online group who offer financial and emotional support specifically for women who have become pregnant through rape with the belief that God would want them to keep the baby.	http://choices4life.org/rape-conception-stories/
The Sun Newspaper UK and Australia 27th May 2016	Reporter Vanessa Brown writes about a 40-year-old woman in Australia who was adopted and finds out she was conceived through rape and incest	https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/1204678/horror-of-woman-who-found-out-she-was-the-product-of-incest-in-her-40s/
The Mirror Newspaper. UK 19th March 2017	John Byrne (Artist and Play-writer) announces he was a product of incest between his mother and grandfather but the relationship was “tradition in Ireland” and considered it consensual.	https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/tilda-swintons-ex-john-byrne-10053291
Huffington Post. UK By Natasha Phillips. 18th February 2017	Online report about how British courts could be heading in the same direction as the US and allowing men who have fathered a child through rape visiting or contact following them being asked to pay maintenance.	http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/natasha-phillips/i-raped-you-now-i-want-co_b_14690360.html
The Mirror. UK 14th May 2015	Tressa Middleton was raped and became pregnant from her brother at the age of 12. In 2006, she had a baby and was Britain’s youngest Mum at that time.	https://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/raped-11-left-pregnant-brother-5696028
The Sun. UK By Josie Griffiths. 16th January 2017	Article about the App ‘Whisper’. Shows different Memes posted anonymously about finding out you were a product of rape or you have a child through rape.	https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/2623933/women-rapists-kids/
The Telegraph - UK By Christina Criddle 29th July 2016	Online article about the first UK maternity clinic for victims of rape with specialist midwives and psychologists	http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/29/rape-survivor-opens-the-uks-first-maternity-clinic-for-victims-o/
Eve Woman - Africa By Soni Kanake 22nd July 2017	Story of a woman who was abused by her Mum and raped by her step father, became pregnant and could not accept the daughter she had.	https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/evewoman/article/2001248615/my-mum-s-husband-raped-me-and-left-me-pregnant

Baby Gaga - Canada	Baby/pregnancy online chat room. Woman asks for advice following her husband hitting her and raping her.	http://center.babygaga.com/t-2573273/my-husband-raped-me-and-now-i-m-pregnant.html
The Daily Mail. UK By Angela Carless 13th June 2006	Woman finds out she was conceived through date rape after meeting her birth Mother.	http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-390367/I-date-rape-baby.html
Circle of Mums - US	Online Mum's chat group. At 55 years old a woman has found out she was conceived through rape and asks for advice on how to deal with it.	http://www.circleofmoms.com/welcome-circle-moms/just-found-out-i-am-a-product-of-rape-1035558
Xojane - US 20th April 2015	Online women's magazine. Story of a woman raising her daughter who was conceived through rape. Talks about how when she went for an abortion following the attack, she changed her mind but writes about the difficulties of knowing how to deal with everything.	https://www.xojane.com/issues/i-am-raising-the-daughter-of-the-man-who-raped-me
Steve Wilkos chat show clip - US	American chat show. Woman discloses that her husband beat her and she became pregnant through rape. Lie detector done and came back that she was telling the truth but the show host blames the victim for "putting herself in that situation"	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrtjbhZqRT0
News 24 video - US	Women are interviewed and talk about their own experiences of raising a child conceived in rape.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UL_VQ-gHBs
BBC Radio show 25th October 2017	Politician, Jacob Rees Moog, talks about how he opposes abortion, even in the event of rape.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8yubaJHhGs

Considering the breadth of the world wide web, these results represent a miniscule amount of information about becoming pregnant from rape, having a child conceived in rape or being a child conceived in rape.

Due to the lack of information, the decision was taken to split this report into two different studies using an iterative sequential design.

The first mixed-methods study (reported here) examines the general public perception of women who become pregnant from rape, children who are conceived from rape and a section that sought to explore prevalence in the general population.

The second mixed-methods study (published in part 3) explores the experiences of 105 women who became pregnant or had a baby from rape, abuse or trafficking. This study includes in-depth accounts and opinions of women from around the world.

Methodology

This study is an anonymous, online questionnaire combining quantitative items and qualitative questions. The purpose of this study is to explore the general public perception and awareness of pregnancy and children conceived during rape.

Between the 3rd January – 20th February 2018, an anonymous online questionnaire was posted on social media sites Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Users were encouraged to share the study and the call for participants.

Participants for this study were all over 18 years old, could read and write English and lived in the UK. There were no other participant requirements.

Participants

There were 315 participants in this study, all of which resided in the UK. Participants in this study were mainly female (84%), male (13%) and transgender (3%). Age range of respondents was 18-70 years old, 18-25 (16%), 26-40 (44%), 41-55 (33%) and 56-70 (7%). No other demographic information was requested.

Ethical considerations

The study began with a detailed explanation of what the questions would ask of participants and an accessible easy-read section about consent, withdrawal, anonymity and data protection.

All participants remained anonymous and were discouraged from disclosing personal details including names, locations, areas, venues, schools or any other identifying information of themselves or others during the study.

This study had the potential to be traumatic or distressing for participants and may have attracted people who already had personal experience or an interest in the topic. Therefore, the study also began with a list of organisations, helplines and services that could support people subjected to sexual violence, abuse, trafficking and domestic violence.

The study was conducted using the principles set out by the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics and the anonymous data was stored and licenced securely.

Data from the quantitative section was analysed using the questionnaire software as it only sought basic frequencies and proportions. Qualitative data was analysed with two coders utilising thematic analysis.

Quantitative Findings

In the first section of the questionnaire, participants were asked a series of quantitative, multiple choice questions to explore perceived and actual prevalence of pregnancies, births and children from rape and abuse.

1. At any point in your life have you ever personally known a woman or girl who:

(‘Known Personally’ included female family members, female partners, female friends, female colleagues and female schoolmates)

Answers	Yes
Became pregnant from rape or abuse	36%
Had a termination after they became pregnant from rape or abuse	23%
Decided to keep a baby conceived in rape or abuse	20%
Told her child that they were conceived in rape or abuse	6%
Told her family that she was pregnant from rape or abuse	13%
Kept their pregnancy from rape or abuse a secret	26%
Had a baby from rape or abuse and gave them for adoption	5%
I have never known anyone in any of these situations	44%

2. At any point in your life, have you ever personally known anyone of any sex or gender who:

Answers	Yes
Were told by their mother that they were conceived in rape or abuse	10%
Were told by care services or professionals that they were conceived in rape or abuse	4%
Found out accidentally that they were conceived in rape or abuse	6%
Were told by someone else (not the mother) that they were conceived in rape or abuse	4%
Found out some other way that they were conceived in rape or abuse	3%
I have never known anyone in any of these situations	81%

3. If you are female, have you ever become pregnant or had a baby who was conceived in rape or abuse?

Answers	Percentage
I have given birth to a baby conceived in rape or abuse	8%
I became pregnant from rape or abuse but I chose to have a termination	8%
No, I have not experienced any of these options	84%

4. Whether male or female, or any gender, have you ever been told or found out that you were conceived in rape or abuse?

Answers	Percentage
Yes, my mother or carers told me that I was conceived in rape or abuse	1%
Yes, I was told by someone else that I was conceived in rape or abuse	1%
I think this applies to me, but I have never been directly told that I was conceived in rape or abuse	3%
This is not applicable to me	95%

Qualitative findings

The second section of the survey included three questions with free text answers for respondents to leave their opinions and suggestions. The data was analysed and grouped using thematic analysis, in which common themes are drawn from the answers of respondents.

Question 1: What do you think the public perception or opinion is about women who become pregnant from rape or abuse?

Key theme frequencies

She is a victim	11
Victim blaming	87
Negatively thought of	18
Brave	12
Religious views and expectations	40
Child will be damaged	11
Would resent the child/unable to love them	25
Taboo subject	41
Lack of service/support	55
They are lying	28
Shame/judged	27
Sympathy	56
They need support	18
They are expected have/want an abortion	67
Pressured to keep the baby	24
Effectuated by the child tax credit clause	6

Victim blaming

This theme was made up of 87 people who discussed victim blaming in their answers. Participants felt that women would be blamed for being raped, for keeping the baby or aborting the pregnancy.

I feel that there is still a lot of stigma surrounding victims of rape and there is a very ingrained culture of victim blaming.

That they are somehow to blame for being raped and are evil if they don't choose to keep the child.

Several participants spoke of knowing women and girls who were blamed for becoming pregnant or blamed for being raped. Based on these experiences, they expected this to be a common reaction to other women who become pregnant from rape. There was much discussion within the answers about whether the truth of the conception of the pregnancy would lessen or worsen the victim blaming of the woman or girl, but participants tended to report that even when people found out that the pregnancy was from rape or abuse, victim blaming continued.

My friend was still in school when she was raped and became pregnant. She was bullied horrendously by our peers and even some adults, unfortunately when it came out how she fell pregnant it seemed like she still deserved the snide remarks and comments. Like it was her own fault.

Participants talked about the way women and girls might be blamed for failing to stop the rape, for not insisting the perpetrator used a condom, for not being on oral contraceptives and even for 'allowing' themselves to become pregnant from abuse or rape.

Still a lot of stigma around shame and victim blaming that somehow the woman failed or was weak to allow it, that victims are forever 'damaged goods', inferior women

The woman would be expected to have or want an abortion

Of 315 participants, 67 answered this question with comments about an expectancy that all women who become pregnant from rape or abuse would instantly want an abortion, and that abortion would be considered the best option in all cases.

That they should always consider abortion.

They are often pushed into getting an abortion, when it should be completely down to the mother whether they want to keep or abort the baby

Whilst participants did not expect all women to want an abortion, they were aware that many others may hold views or that there might be a societal stereotype that women who become pregnant from a rape would want or be expected to have an abortion. One participant suggested that there might be judgment if a woman did not have an abortion and instead chose to keep the baby.

I think many people's reaction would be that early abortion is the best solution to a rape pregnancy to avoid some of the aspects of psychological trauma for mother or child. I think that it would not be uncommon to judge a woman for choosing to go ahead with the pregnancy

Sympathy for the woman

A common theme within the answers was the concept of sympathy, which was talked about significantly more frequently than empathy or support. Out of the sample, 56 participants wrote about the way people might sympathise with a woman who becomes pregnant from a rape. However, some participants suggested that the sympathy would be short-lived, or would be conditional.

Sympathetic on the surface but when it comes to individual cases, the rape myths come in. Women can be in a no-win situation because if they abort they are told it wasn't the child's fault and if they keep the baby then they can't have been that traumatised so maybe it wasn't rape.

The answer presented above was common in this study, in which participants recognised that many women will be in a lose-lose situation whereby they will be judged harshly no matter her decision. Sympathy also seemed related to an awareness that the woman had been put in a position where she must make a very difficult decision about what to do. Participants talked about feeling sorry for the women, seeing the woman as a victim, being upset or feeling sympathy for their situation.

Victim, tragedy, faced with an ethical dilemma

Feel sorry for them, upset, expect them to want an abortion

Sympathy was often discussed in conditional or dichotomous terms by participants who suggested that there would be certain conditions that might mean people were initially sympathetic until rape myths were introduced, until they found that the perpetrator was not a stranger, until they learned that the woman was a sex worker or until they started to question whether the woman was telling the truth about being raped at all.

Sympathy if they know and believe it but scepticism on the right as to whether they are telling the truth.

A small number of participants suggested that this dichotomy between the woman being a 'tragic victim' worthy of sympathy, but also being met with conditions and scepticism; might have led to the lack of services and resources available to women who become pregnant from rape.

I think that generally people are sympathetic towards a woman who becomes pregnant from rape/abuse, but that this sympathy does not extend to providing adequate services or care for these women.

Lack of service or support

There were 55 participants who left comments about the lack of services or support that a woman would receive if she did become pregnant from rape or abuse. Some participants suggested that the lack of services, resources and support reflects the way society perceives this issue. These comments supported the results of the literature review and the internet search for services, which returned very little results.

I think the lack of services indicates that society as a whole expects women who do bear children from rape must put up with whatever comes without support. My own view is that there should be far more well-funded support services, available for as long or whenever needed, for victims of rape and abuse and their children.

Many participants mentioned that services were likely to be especially unhelpful or unavailable when the rapist was a partner. It was suggested in many answers that the stereotypical scenario of the 'stranger rape' would garner more support and more service involvement than a woman who was raped within her marriage or long-term relationship who became pregnant. This reflects the research on rape myth acceptance in which rape and abuse perpetrated by partners and husbands is not seen as a 'real rape' (Eaton, 2019; McMahon and Farmer, 2011).

Not much help from services especially when in relationship with perpetrator. I don't imagine there is much support aimed at women in this situation.

Participants also wrote about a dichotomy in which women were pitied for being pregnant from rape but not pitied enough to provide services or support. This is an important point to consider, as this relatively small general public sample has demonstrated that 36% of UK general public know at least one woman or girl who became pregnant from rape or abuse, it is startling that there are no specific services, resources or support for these women and girls.

In general I think society pities them without supporting them or providing services.

Whilst many participants had never personally experienced a pregnancy from rape or abuse (95%), it is interesting to note how many of them were aware of the lack of services and support a woman would receive if she were to become pregnant from rape or abuse.

Religious views and expectations

This theme came up frequently in the answers, with 40 participants talking about religious views about rape, pregnancy, abortion and birth. Whilst contentious, it is important to represent how religion was seen as a barrier to choice and free information about what to do if a woman becomes pregnant from rape or abuse.

Despite being a victim of rape, there seems to be an assumption that she cannot complain about the circumstances, and that maybe it was ultimately her role/destiny in life to have a child. She can't therefore complain because even though she was raped, she got this "gift".

One participant spoke about the way babies can be perceived as a 'gift', and that the way the child was conceived could be minimised because becoming pregnant is a blessing and the child is an innocent party. This could be a very difficult message for women and girls to receive, especially the message that she was destined to become pregnant from rape as part of her path in life. It is arguably much harder to process pregnancy from rape if it is condoned or planned by an eternal force or God.

Participants also discussed the way religions can prioritise the foetus or baby above the wellbeing, life and choices of the woman who has been raped and subjected to violence and harm.

From a religious perspective (Christian), they pressure women into considering the life of the foetus before the woman's mental health

I think in some religions they have no choice but to keep the baby due to abortion rules. And I could imagine women are in a very difficult position if this happens

Religious views were also discussed in the context of institutions and authority figures sharing religious messages that it is physically impossible for women to become pregnant from rape as the body has a way of 'shutting down' or 'disallowing' the conception. Comments such as the two below featured in the answers of 27 individual participants and therefore represents a strong narrative in the issue of women becoming pregnant from rape and abuse.

A combination of revulsion and admiration. But beyond that most people avoid thinking about it. Whilst some pro-life politicians have unscientific views that pregnancy through rape is biologically impossible. A right wing politician (US) said a couple of years ago that women can't conceive through rape- their body wouldn't allow it!

I was told at (Catholic) school that the body shuts down so it is highly unlikely to become pregnant from rape. I have seen this said recently on TV as well, it's a common pro-life trope which must be excruciating for victims to hear and seek encourage disbelief and blaming of victims.

The consequence of these beliefs and values about rape, pregnancy and childbearing is clear: women who are pregnant from rape were never raped, otherwise their body would have stopped the pregnancy from occurring. Alternatively, the pregnancy is a blessing in disguise in which the life

of the foetus is paramount, and the woman is simply a vessel to carry the new life. Both messages, whilst very different and somewhat contradictory, were found in the literature searches and the internet searches. This suggests that these messages are commonly found when people are searching for information about pregnancy and children conceived in rape and abuse.

The woman is lying about the rape

Of the sample, 28 participants talked about the perception of women who became pregnant from rape as lying about the conception of the baby or the circumstances of the sexual intercourse. This seemed to arise from another dichotomous, competing belief in which people question why a woman who was traumatised from a rape would choose to keep the baby or continue with the pregnancy.

One myth I can imagine existing is that a woman who chooses to keep a pregnancy and give birth after an assault may not be being truthful about the assault - I think this is because many people like me feel like a pregnancy out of a horrible experience like rape or abuse would continue to be a reminder of that experience

Some people probably question why she does not have an abortion. People may then question whether it was really "rape" if she is willing to keep the baby.

Secondly, rape myths were found in these answers. Some participants talked about 'real' rapes, women 'asking for it', 'allowing' themselves to become pregnant and suggesting that women should have done something differently to avoid pregnancy when they were raped.

Only women who are asking for it get raped, to be pregnant suggests that it wasn't a "real" rape

That it was not really rape or abuse or they would not have "allowed" themselves to become pregnant. Or they could have done something to avoid pregnancy.

The woman would resent or could not love their baby

This was a common theme in the answers, with 25 participants suggesting that the perception might be that women who do choose to keep a baby from rape or abuse would not be able to love their child due to the conception occurring during rape. These messages were two-fold, as there was sympathy for women who did not love their child due to the circumstances, but also a perception that she would be a bad mother for not loving the baby.

Frightened in case they don't grow to love the child because of the circumstances.

If people do know the child was a product of rape then she might be assumed to be a bad mother who won't love the child.

Several participants talked about how difficult it must be for women who become pregnant after a rapist subjected them to sexual violence and caused an unplanned and/or unwanted pregnancy. Participants suggested that women might resent the baby or feel upset or distressed by looking at the baby, especially if the baby or child resembled the man who raped her.

I think it must be hard for a woman, who didn't make the choice to get pregnant, to continue to have the baby and not feel resentment or upset.

It must be hard to look at their child who may be physically similar to their attacker

Negativity towards the child, if the family sees the child as a reminder of what happened or as a token of their father.

These comments are important, as they represent a belief that women who have babies from rape would 'see' the rapist when they look at their children. This also suggests a public perception that the baby would become defined by the rape and the actions of the rapist, where the mother could only ever see the baby as a 'product of rape' rather than their own individual person.

Question 2: What do you think the public perception or opinion is of babies who were conceived in rape or abuse?

Taboo Subject	42
Judged/shame	25
Unloved	13
Mother is no good/they have a bad relationship with their child	13
Would get support	10
Lack of support/services	17
Would follow in the rapist's footsteps/bad genes	60
Child would have issues (mental health)	40
Thought of negatively	14
People don't care	11
A reminder of the rape	8
The child is a victim/blameless	9
Pity/Unfortunate	56
Unwanted	20
Disgusted	6

The child would follow in the footsteps of the father and/ or have bad genes

The most prevalent theme to arise in this question was that the child would have bad genes, and follow in their father's footsteps. This theme came up in 60 different responses; some participants speculated that society would perceive the child in this way, some held this belief themselves, and others had conflicting views around the possibility and truth of this. The theme of being a future abuser or rapist came from different angles; some felt they would be looked down upon due to being perceived as a future abuser, some felt pity and sympathy that they would be seen in this way, some showed concern.

I think the perception may be that this person (if male) may be likely to "follow in their fathers footsteps". I do not believe this myself, but I know others who do think this way.

Some participants brought up their experience of societal perceptions of children born from rape and abuse, such as being aware of how people they know have reacted to the same or similar situations. The use of the phrase 'follow in their father's footsteps' or similar came up many times, which suggests some of these societal values or beliefs about children born from rape come from common phrases such as this. In addition, this participant, as well as many others, brought up their rejection of this perception.

Lacking a father figure, potentially dangerous genes; mothered by a mother who might be traumatised/who might not be able to adequately protect herself or child

Many participants believed that children born from rape would inherit bad/ disordered genes or have psychiatric issues. Some of these believed that this would result in the child being dangerous (especially if male). Again, while some participants highlighted that they themselves do not believe this, they felt societal attitudes would back this up from their own experiences of other's beliefs.

Related to the belief that the child could have psychiatric issues, is the belief that the mother may also have psychiatric issues due to the trauma; which was suggested in relation with the child's personality. The data shows that many people feel that the child will be negatively affected as a result of their father's genes, or their mother's psychological damage. Psychiatric terms came up many times in answers to this question concerning both parents and the child.

Feel sorry for them, may expect them to inherit 'bad' genes from their father

Another example that arose multiple times was still in fact the belief that the child would inherit 'bad genes', but that the participants (either themselves or their ideas of societal perception) would feel sorry for the child who would inherit these genes. Suggesting that the child was a victim that couldn't be helped due to their 'genes' being inherently 'bad'.

That they were unwanted, that perhaps they have "bad genes" in a nature over nurture sense.

Other participants suggested that the children were unwanted and the 'bad genes' they inherit would cause them to be unwanted by their mother. The participant used in the example above suggests that 'bad genes' cannot be countered by the environment they're raised in.

Of lower worth. Potential future rapists if male

Another perceived belief that came up was that the child would be seen as being of 'lower worth' due to the circumstances in which they were conceived. Again, this was linked with the child being perceived as a likely future rapist or abuser.

Pity and sympathy

In the survey, 56 participants answers included feelings and suggestions of pity and sympathy, and who it would be directed towards the mother or the baby.

I think there is greater sympathy for such people conceived in rape than made pregnant by rape, as there can be no suggestion that the person could have altered their circumstances (as is often brought up regarding women who have been raped). I cannot imagine anyone I know or come across having a negative reaction to finding out someone was conceived in rape.

Ideas of how the mother could be victim blamed came up with comparison to how a child from rape could be victim blamed. Participants often expected the mother to be blamed which accompanied feelings of sympathy and/ or pity, both toward the mother and child.

I think that people conceived in rape or abuse are pitied.

Many participants solely mentioned pity for the child. This is important when contrasted with the word sympathy, where pity arguably has more negative connotations attached to it. When someone is pitied, there is often an element of being looked down upon

Suspect it's rarely known, but then pity for the child, and "tinged pity" for the mother

Some participants, along with acknowledging pity for the child, mentioned a different kind of pity for the mother. The participant above uses the term 'tinged pity' which has potentially negative

connotation. It would be insightful to discover what the participant meant by with the use of the word *tinged* and what the pity is perhaps *tinged* with.

I would imagine the overwhelming perception is of pity.

Some participants expressed that they thought most people would feel *pity* over other feelings or reactions the most.

The child would have mental health issues

11 participants speculated on the effect of conception from rape on the child's mental health, and other relating issues such as personality traits, their relationships, and identity. While many did not hold these views themselves, their understanding was that others in society would feel like this.

Concerns that they might be a 'wrong 'un' or damaged

A view that the child may be perceived as being 'damaged' or bad appeared in the data multiple times, with concern that the child would be inherently bad or be predisposed to

The child will have physical or mental problems. The mother wont bond.

The participant above linked together the perception that due to the circumstances of conception, the mother would be unable to mentally bond with their child, who may be seen as having physical or mental health issues.

It is not something i have gave much thought to, not sure about others but I have mixed emotions on this, a child born from hate must be affected by this-are they damaged can they be fixed but i don't think they are bad because of who their dad was

The term 'damaged' came up in many participants responses, such as the one above. This participant questions whether they can be fixed, which uses language that frames the child similarly to that of a product or commodity with a manufacturing error.

In addition to this however, the participant, along with others, stated that they do not think they are *bad* because of who their father is. Here, people acknowledged that the child has the capability to make their own choices and be their own person.

There is a popular idea that a child might inherit the traits of the rapist father or be devastatingly (sic) mentally traumatised.

Words and phrases around the child *inheriting* bad parts of their father came up, perhaps speculating on the way society sees criminals/ dangerous people, which suggests a viewpoint that it comes from genetics, ie. to *inherit*. The answer the participant gave above however also acknowledges a counter view that it could cause *trauma* in the child. These are conflicting viewpoints as one suggests that the child could be a product of his/ her environment, the other that they will be a product of *bad genetics*. Both however, pose a detrimental viewpoint of the child conceived in rape.

In whispers, I imagine. "did you hear about their dad raped their mother..." People (especially services) may be looking for signs of maladaptation (sic) or developmental problems in someone conceived by rape or abuse and may define the person in those terms. Thus, not allowing the person to forge their own identity and sense of self.

The participant above describes the taboo and perhaps gossip of the child in the situation, speculating that people will whisper about them in secret. In many answers, participants spoke about services pathologising the child, and *looking* for things to pathologise within the child's behaviour and identity. The participant above raised the concern that this very speculation from services could prevent the child from having their own authentic identity.

The child would be unwanted

20 responses included speculation on whether the child would be wanted by their mother.

There is, I feel, an element of judging whether the child will be loved the same as if it they were conceived from a loving partnership.

Some participants felt that the mother would be judged and questioned not only as to whether the mother wants and loves the baby, but also if it is capable for a mother to love or want the baby the same way as if it was not conceived in rape and abuse. The participant above uses the phrase *from a loving partnership* which suggests feelings towards the child would be different dependant on the circumstances of conception, and holds conception from *a loving partnership* in high regard relating to how much the baby will be loved.

That they were unwanted. That it's not something that should be talked about.

Assumptions around the child being unwanted came up in some participants responses, and suggested taboo, and that societal views would be against it being discussed. This strongly suggests there is a lot of stigma and perhaps a willing avoidance to admit that this happens.

That their mothers must have hated them or kept them out of pity

The phrase *kept them out of pity* also assumes that the child is unwanted, and when written along with an assumption that the mother *hates* the child. This furthers the perception that not only is the child unwanted, but they are also disliked by their mother.

That they are not wanted or it could make them dislike themselves

Some participants brought up how the child would be impacted by being *unwanted*. The participants answer above suggests that the child would internalise this and dislike themselves.

Question 3: If you were to view or read a resource about this topic, what would you want it to cover and what would your concerns or suggestions be?

Trigger Warnings	9
Sensitive	16
Honest	44
Statistics	6
Victim-blaming impact	31
Validate women's rights/choices	30
Dispel Myths/stereotypes of rape, women and children	44
Experience of the women/mother	53
Experience of the child	32
The justice system/law/custody	17
Support available/lack of	37
Good coming from bad	7

Experiences of other women and mothers

The most common response from participants was any new resource would need to include real experiences of women and mothers, with 53 individual participants writing about this requirement. It appears from the answers that participants wanted to hear honest and nuanced perspectives from women about their own views and experiences, rather than common narratives and stereotypes about women and children.

It will be good to see all points and see the people come out strong from these experiences.

Much of the focus is on why we fail, or why kids fail and reasons are attributed to their bad circumstances. It would be interesting to see from the perspective of kids and mothers who 'make it' - whose lives are not devastated by this moment - and to ask - why? What is needed to allow these women and children to thrive?

There were examples such as the one below, which sought answers to questions which could break down assumptions and stereotypes about women who become pregnant or have children conceived in sexual violence.

You should cover the turmoil that a woman in that situation faces between the miracle of life i.e. maternal instinct of being pregnant and the disgust and guilt they would feel about the conception. The questions that's the child would have about their father, the reaction from family and friends. What if the baby looked like the rapist?

I would want to hear about the impact for those women and their children and how they feel they are perceived. I'd like to see something around our responses to rape in terms of taking a wider view on prevention from a criminal perspective.

The final example below strongly argues that comments from observers are much less useful and impactful than hearing from women who have lived experience.

With this subject matter I'm fed up of hearing from commenters on either side - I'd like to hear from the actual women involved. Their story would have more weight, truth and balance through their experience than any media pundit's opinion based on half heard facts.

In this section, participants discussed what they wished to see in future resources on the topic. This ranged from seeing experiences of other women, and specifically mentioned was other women and children who have still gone on to do well in life.

Other participants wished to see the complexity explored of women who face the situation where in they have a baby who they love, but have been subjected to rape and abuse. Within this, many participants posed hypothetical questions such as how they deal with the child's questions, and how the mother would feel if the child looked like the rapist.

Some participants stated that they wanted a future report to include the feelings of the women and children and how the perception of them impacts them.

Dispelling myths and stereotypes

44 participants wrote that any resource would need to dispel myths and stereotypes of the women and children – and explain why there is such a taboo (and societal silence) on this topic.

I would like it to cover dispelling any myths around the subject, and explaining why the women in this situation may have felt unable to tell friends or family.

Why society shouldn't judge people without knowing their story and shouldn't assume and bully people because of their choices when it comes to rape and abuse

Showing the women who have kept the baby from rape in a way which commends them was brought up by some participants. This is a way to dispel negative stereotypes and misconceptions about mothers who have had a baby from rape. In addition, participants such as the one featured in the response below wanted to ensure that this would not encourage or cause judgement towards those women who had abortions following rape and abuse.

I would want it to find a way to honour the courage of women who keep babies whilst not judging those who had abortions. I would hope it could create a space for children who have been conceived through rape to find ways to make sense of their identity and life in ways that are not dominated by their conception

A prevalent theme was that of dispelling myths and stereotypes of women who have become pregnant from rape and abuse. Participants felt it was important that a future report did not peddle already existing stereotypes, which they viewed as harmful.

Perhaps to help dispel these myths, many participants felt future resources would benefit from explanations and experiences of why women may have felt unable to disclose their rape.

Honesty

Equally as important to participants was the theme of honesty, with 44 participants writing about resources and materials being honest, and supporting women to talk openly and frankly about their experiences.

I'd want to hear the thoughts and feelings of both mother and child in as honest a way as possible.

I think that we don't see enough films which show the enormous strength of women in negotiating what they are up against with patriarchy and a prejudiced society obviously without making it look too easy! It would be good to see women supporting other women. Mothering and especially single-mothering, whatever the start is enormously challenging and difficult to do well in a society which undervalues and fails to adequately support women who mother. I think the dilemma of whether to tell a child how he/she was conceived could usefully be explored.

Frequently, respondents wrote that research, resources and reports should include a full range of experiences of women, 'not just the sanitised ones'

Represent the full range of responses. Not just the sanitised easy to swallow ones.

Many participants stated that they felt a resource should show honesty if what it can be like to have and raise a baby from rape. This includes the thoughts and feelings of both the mother and the baby/ child, no matter what they were. Participants felt it was important to include a full range of responses, rather than just those which are easier to understand, read or were more palatable.

Within honesty, some participants, such as one featured in the above answers, felt it was important to show the mass of things these mothers and babies are up against in society; patriarchy, victim blaming and being belittled by others.

Lack or availability of support

Participants also discussed the lack of services and support available to women and sought a future resource to include a discussion of the barriers in the way of accessing them. 37 participants had concerns about the obstacles and difficulties women may have when being pregnant or having a baby from rape or abuse.

I would want it to cover the difficulties a person made pregnant by rape has had in accessing services, including support and mental health services. It needs to be about the system as a whole; if it focuses too much on individual women, people can feel sympathy for her situation (which I believe the vast majority of people would see was very difficult), but might not make the link in their mind to the bigger system which may make such decisions even harder to make.

I think it would be very interesting to find out what support is out there for people in this situation and struggles they may have to deal stemming from other people's perceptions

The impact of victim blaming

31 participants wrote that a new resource would need to include detailed discussions of victim blaming, stigma and negative attitudes towards women and children.

I would want it to cover in detail the stigma and trauma women in these situations have to face. It should make it very clear how often women are blamed for their suffering and how wrong that is.

Challenge 'victim blaming' big time, avoid pity

Here, a participant specifically wrote about the stereotype of the 'nuclear family', and the way any further resources should talk about family structures.

I hope it would address victim blaming attitudes and engage with societal messages that endorse the nuclear family in deeply problematic ways.

This is of interest, particularly due to the links to the demonisation of single mothers in UK society.

Validate the choices and rights of women pregnant from rape

The final theme for future resources and materials is validation. This appeared in the data 30 times, in which participants sought resources to validate the choices and rights of women who become pregnant from rape and abuse.

I would hope it treated all women's responses to becoming pregnant as a result of rape as valid and worthy of respect, and that it avoided any narrative implying that children conceived through rape are a burden or that their existence should be stigmatised. I'd be concerned that any specific choice might be held up as particularly 'brave' e. g. choosing to carry a pregnancy to term rather than seek an abortion - I would want it to avoid stigmatising/ condemning abortion.

It needs to validate women's decisions around their pregnancies. I gave birth to one child conceived in rape and aborted the other, both were the correct decision.

Above are two interesting comments in which participants both talk about the need to present choices for abortion, or for continuing with the pregnancy, in the same light. This is important as participants noted that they did not want to see resources which help up certain decisions as more positive, or more brave than others.

I would like women who do conceive through rape or abuse to feel that their choice to keep or end the pregnancy would be properly supported, and that they could access help if needed throughout the child's life, and their own. I would like women to feel unashamed (of the abuse/rape, of the pregnancy and of their choices). This must happen fairly often and yet it is never talked about.

Here, another participant talks about wanting resources to reduce shame and to ensure that women felt supporting in making their decisions about their pregnancies. This appears to hold particular significance for participants, possibly because they perceive immense pressure on women to make the 'right' decision, or to make a decision that society would want them to make.

Discussion

The responses to the questionnaire have presented societal attitudes towards women who have become pregnant through rape and abuse; and some ideas for new resources and support for women and children. Using thematic analysis, this study found a variety of attitudes towards women who have become pregnant through rape and abuse.

Attitudes towards women

Victim blaming of the mother was a prominent theme, with many participants speculating that other people would blame and shame women who became pregnant from abuse, rape, trafficking or violence. Some of these come from rape myths, but some attitudes were entwined with existing debates around religion, women's rights, reproductive rights, access to medical care and expectations of women to be nurturing mothers.

This complex set of factors mean that when women become pregnant from sexual violence committed against them, there is not a clear perception of them as victims of serious crime, but a range of perceptions based on gender role stereotypes, rape myth acceptance, victim blaming narratives and religious beliefs around conception and abortion. Further, there was considerable discussion in the data about whether the woman could be lying about becoming pregnant from rape, and therefore lying about being raped, which aligns with all current and previous research in the victim blaming of women and girls subjected to sexual violence (Taylor, 2020).

There were many participants conveying pity and sympathy for women who become pregnant in rape and abuse, but they appeared to be connected to assumptions that women would hate or dislike their babies, would not want to continue the pregnancy, that people would gossip and bully the mother or that she would become a bad mother to a baby conceived in rape. There is very little research on these topics to draw from or to contrast with.

There is therefore much to do to educate and inform the public about the wide range of women's experiences and feelings about becoming pregnant, terminating or continuing the pregnancy after rape and abuse. There is also the important issue of gender role stereotypes and misogyny which contribute to the arguments, narratives and expectations placed upon women to be nurturing, caring and positive (even when pregnant from rape). Indeed, some participants wrote about the way women would be expected to be happy about having a baby, even if they never consented to the pregnancy or to the sexual intercourse, and may be expected to continue being a dedicated mother even if she doesn't want to. This presents questions for policymakers, services and wider society about why we expect women to be willing mothers, even in the most oppressive circumstances.

Attitudes towards children

As the mother is subjected to victim blaming and assumptions, so is the child. The findings showed that participants assumed that children conceived in sexual violence would 'follow in their father's footsteps' and become rapists or criminals due to receiving 'bad genes'. This is an interesting assumption which suggests that the general public may believe that the genes of an absent, violent father are more influential than the genes and caregiving of the present mother. It also presents some interesting questions about how the general public understand genes to work in general, and whether they believe that all criminality is passed down by fathers to their children, or only sexual offending.

Either way, this theme presented a harmful stereotype of children born in abuse or rape, that they will be inherently evil, born damaged or 'know' that they are unwanted by their mothers. This sometimes slips into mother-blaming, in which the men who fathered the babies receive very little blame for the upbringing or wellbeing of the child they conceived illegally, but the mothers are held responsible for the outcomes, wellbeing, mental health and behaviour of the child.

Connected to this, participants talked about the way they expected social services to get involved to intervene, protect or remove the child conceived in rape due to being so 'damaged' by either (a) their father's genes or (b) the way the mother would treat them as a result of being conceived in rape or abuse. There were broad assumptions that mothers would abuse children born conceived in rape or abuse, despite there being any evidence of this. There were however, also many participants who thought that competent mothers would not be given a chance to be a mother due to the circumstances of the pregnancy, and wrote that they were concerned that professionals may simply assume that the mother is unsuitable due to being raped or abused, and remove the child. It is interesting to note that some participants wrote about the way professionals might seek to pathologise or label the child with disorders or mental health issues purely due to the way they were conceived, rather than the care given by the mother. This is not to say that this does actually happen in practice, but there were strong beliefs and concerns that it did. Again, with such little research on this new topic, there is not much we can use to interrogate such strong stereotypes.

Participants talked about pity and sympathy for the child in the same, and in different ways from the mother. Some participants suggested that the general feeling would be 'pity' towards the mother but 'sympathy' towards the child, because the mother placed herself in that situation, whereas the child could be framed as an innocent 'product' of rape. Again, this circles back to the victim blaming of women and girls subjected to male violence, where empathy and sympathy is not extended to them as they are often seen to be 'asking for it' or lying about it (Taylor, 2020).

Implications of findings

This study is the first of its kind to explore the public perceptions of women subjected to sexual violence who become pregnant in the UK. A range of attitudes and beliefs have been discovered and presented here, which appear to be contributing to a national taboo around women who become pregnant from rape and abuse, and the children who are conceived in rape and abuse.

According to the data in this study, the taboo cuts across many different backgrounds, age groups, religions and belief systems about women and children. It is therefore considered that the taboo is one of the main obstacles to services and support for both women and children. Whilst there are sophisticated networks of women's services in both sexual and domestic abuse, the specific research for women who become pregnant or have babies from rape and abuse does not exist to support best practice, policymaking or further service development.

There are strong assumptions and myths about both the mother and the child subjected to male violence (rape and abuse) which impact the way the public, professionals and policymakers may perceive them. The attitudes found in this study have their roots in wider structures and are not specific to pregnant women or children from rape. Patriarchal culture and rape culture present in the UK will have a strong influence on the way women are supported and perceived when they are raped and impregnated by men. Existing misogyny and gender role stereotypes also support the

negative reactions not only to women who keep babies conceived in rape and abuse, but also the women who do not.

Whilst the question of ‘what if she was pregnant from rape?’ has been used as the common defence against those who seek to block rights to abortion and contraception for women and girls, it is not clear from this research whether being pregnant from rape does afford women and girls any further support or protection from negative treatment. The data from this study showed that there would be considerable debate about whether a woman or girl should terminate a pregnancy from rape, but also considerable judgement if a woman or girl kept a pregnancy from rape. Again, this presents a dichotomy in women’s choices about their own bodies, in which there is no right answer and no option that would not draw criticism or discrimination from onlookers. Simply put, women and girls will be criticised about their choices, not matter which choices they make.

In the UK, there has been significant discussion and criticism of single mothers. Due to strong patriarchal norms and misogynistic values, women who are single mothers can be perceived as weak, troubled, vulnerable, problematic, benefit frauds, liars, bad mothers and bad women. The single mother is often demonised not only by peers and the general public but by the media and government policies and approaches. This issue is important to this study. If single mothers of children are already perceived so negatively by wider society, it is unlikely that further resource, research and support would be given to them when they disclose that their babies were conceived in rape or abuse. There is then a competing set of narratives about the woman, the pregnancy and the child in which the woman could be perceived in many different ways; from the demonised single mother through to the equally as demonised, victim of rape and abuse.

Limitations of this study

It is important to note that this study has some important limitations, mainly due to the lack of research, theories, evidence and frameworks that are available to analyse or consider the findings within. There is so little research on the experiences of women and girls who become pregnant or have babies from rape and abuse, that there is little to compare or contrast with. Further, there is even less research about the children born from rape, trafficking, abuse or exploitation – and so it is difficult to come to strong conclusions about whether the presented attitudes, beliefs and answers are common or rare.

Despite this, all research topics must start somewhere. All research topics begin with a paper like this, in which there is little to lean on and little to reference. We hope that this set of studies will begin the body of work into this vital topic and influence more researchers to work with women who are subjected to sexual violence and then become pregnant.

Future services, research, and policies

This set of reports (this is part 3 of 3) is the first comprehensive set of studies which not only present the experiences of women who become pregnant or have children conceived in sexual violence, but also the wider public perceptions of these experiences.

Whilst we were conducting this research, we found a lack of research, advice, resources and services to address this important issue, which is more common than most people think. Much further

research is needed on this topic, and women and their children should be protected and centred in every way possible.

Further resources and research should be honest and present complex views and experiences of women equally, even when they may seem 'unpalatable'. We were contacted by several women who wanted to be able to talk about their experiences of keeping their baby from rape and regretting it, as they knew this would be frowned upon if they spoke out publicly. We therefore made sure that women with all different experiences and views were represented, especially those who felt that they were not usually heard or represented in narratives around women who become pregnant. It is important that further research and resources validate and support the choices of women, no matter what those choices are.

It is also of vital importance that materials, education, training and resources work to dispel myths and stereotypes about women who become pregnant from rape and abuse, and the children who are conceived in rape and abuse.

Future service provision may also include advice around benefits and tax credits, especially in regards to the 'rape clause' that was introduced in 2017. Government data showed that 900 women had to declare that their babies were born from rape in welfare claims in 2019, for example.

There are no specific counselling, advice or support specialists for mothers pregnant from rape and abuse or their children. The lack of research in this topic also makes it difficult for practitioners and policymakers to develop best practice guides or resources for professionals. Whilst there are general mental health and counselling services for adults and children, there are currently no services which provide specialist support and advice to women and girls who become pregnant from sexual violence committed by men – and there are no specialist services for children who are conceived in rape and abuse, where their fathers (absent or present) are sex offenders.

It is also important that social workers and frontline professionals working in policing, healthcare, and children and adult social care services have a good understanding of the complex issues and experiences of women and girls who become pregnant from rape and abuse. This will require awareness raising and investment in education.

Finally, we consider that there should be government support and acknowledgement that women and girls becoming pregnant from rape and abuse is common, and that both women and their children will need significant ongoing, tailored, flexible support as and when they need it. We have made steps forward in areas of domestic abuse, sexual violence and modern slavery – but there has been very little discussed or written about pregnancies and children conceived from male violence. This is despite this being a common occurrence in domestic abuse, sexual violence and modern slavery.

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