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Research

Reframing the Narrative: Insights from the 2023 Parenting Perceptions and Stereotypes Survey in the UK

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Abstract

This article situates a UK-wide Parenting Perceptions and Stereotypes Survey (2023; *n* = 65) within the field of educational and life transitions. Drawing on transitions theory—especially Schlossberg's (1981) 4S framework and Ecclestone et al. (2010) life course synthesis—together with bioecological perspectives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), sociology of education (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Reay, 1998; Vincent & Ball, 2006), and decolonial/connected sociologies (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Santos, 2014; Bhambra, 2014), the paper interrogates how racialised perceptions of South Asian parenting shape micro- and meso-level processes at key transition points (home to early years, primary to secondary, and post-16/higher education). A UK-wide survey explored societal and institutional perceptions of South Asian parenting, capturing the broader contextual factors that shape these understandings. Despite their demographic significance and cultural contributions, these communities are frequently subject to reductive stereotypes, particularly in interactions with schools, healthcare providers, and social services. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative data with qualitative narratives from sixty-five participants to critically examine how such perceptions are constructed, sustained, and challenged.

Situated within a decolonial framework, the research foregrounds the voices and lived experiences of South Asian parents, challenging deficit-based models that dominate mainstream discourse. The article argues for a reframing of parenting narratives to reflect the diversity, agency, and contextual realities of these communities. By doing so, it contributes to a more equitable and culturally responsive understanding of parenting in contemporary Britain.

Keywords

South Asian parenting; educational transitions; stereotypes; South Asians

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Introduction

Why Transitions Matter

Transitions in entry to early years settings, primary to secondary transfer, and progression into post-16 and higher education are more than chronological steps; they are socially structured processes in which identities, expectations, routines, and relationships are renegotiated across contexts and time (Ecclestone et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 1981). For families of South Asian heritage in the UK, these moments of change are frequently navigated under the gaze of racialised stereotypes (e.g., "strict Asian parent," "tiger parent"), which surface in schools admissions conversations, settling-in routines, handover notes, behaviour dialogues, and safeguarding thresholds (Basit, 1997; Bhatti, 1999; Crozier, 2009; Shain, 2003). Such stereotypes can influence expectations and decision-making precisely when pupils and parents most need supportive, equitable transition practices (Ecclestone et al., 2010).

This article centres transitions as the analytical focus and by strengthening theory via transitions frameworks, bioecological systems, sociology of education, and decolonial/connected sociologies to examine how racialised perceptions of South Asian parenting intersect with institutional routines during key transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Bhambra, 2014). I also discuss "transition penalties"—the disadvantages that build up during or after transitions when racial assumptions and routine practices influence things like handovers, engagement measures, safeguarding rules, admissions decisions, ethnicity coding, and communication language (Ecclestone et al., 2010; Government Analysis Function, 2023; ONS, 2024).

Literature Review and Conceptual Framing

Transitions Theory and Bioecological Perspectives

Transitions scholarship treats change as processual, unfolding across time and context rather than occurring as a single event. Schlossberg's (1981) 4S model—Situation, Self, Supports, Strategies—foregrounds how individuals' appraisals of change, available resources, and coping responses shape adaptation. Complementing this, Ecclestone et al. (2010) synthesise transitions across the life course (home to school, FE/HE, work), emphasising that structures, cultures, and identities co-produce experiences of change and that inclusive practice hinges on relational, curricular, and organisational routines.

From a developmental systems perspective, Bronfenbrenner (1979) situates transitions within nested environments (families, classrooms), mesosystem linkages (home and school relationships), exosystems (policies), macrosystem values (societal discourses), and the chronosystem (historical time). This view directs attention to the interface where everyday transitions work happens in entry meetings, information sharing, parental engagement protocols and to the environmental conditions that facilitate or hinder adaptation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ecclestone et al., 2010).

Sociology of Education: Capital, Habitus, and Home–School Relations

Sociology of education provides tools to interrogate how schools privilege particular codes of interaction. Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of cultural capital and habitus illuminate the often-invisible norms schools reward from communication styles to participation in enrichment, while Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) theorise social reproduction through differential recognition and valuation of

capitals. In the UK, Reay (1998) demonstrates that mothers' involvement in schooling is central to reproduction and frequently misrecognised where schools uphold middle-class engagement codes. Vincent and Ball (2006) show how parental choice and early years decisions are classed, gendered, and shaped by expectations of "appropriate" engagement. In this milieu, the notion of "hard-to-reach" families often reflects institutional misreadings of home-based academic socialisation, extended family support, and work patterns that limit visibility at school gates (Reay, 1998; Vincent & Ball, 2006).

South Asian Parenting and the Construction of Stereotypes

Empirical UK work cautions against homogenising South Asian families and against deficit framings of aspirations or engagement. Basit (1997) documents the dynamism of family values among British Muslim girls—balancing heritage and autonomy—while Bhatti (1999) presents rich home–school ethnography across Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian families. Shain (2003) explores Asian girls' agency and resistance within schooling, and Crozier (2009) challenges teacher assumptions of "low aspirations" among Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents, evidencing strong educational hopes constrained by institutional barriers. Taken together, these studies show that families frequently combine high aspirations with warmth, dialogue, and care, and that stereotyped readings for example, "strict Asian parent" can obscure the nuanced, negotiated practices that support children's transitions (Basit, 1997; Bhatti, 1999; Crozier, 2009; Shain, 2003; Archer & Francis, 2007).

Decolonial and Connected Sociologies

Decolonial scholarship argues that dominant epistemologies can marginalise non-Western knowledge and everyday expertise (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Santos, 2014). Bhambra (2014) proposes "connected sociologies" to situate UK schooling within entangled histories of migration, empire, and class. These lenses underpin the present analysis: they centre voice, reflexivity, and ethical relations; they also inform our critique of broad ethnicity categories (for example., a single "Asian") and our advocacy for asset-based, participatory transition supports that recognise communities' capitals (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Bhambra, 2014; ONS, 2024).

South Asian Parenting: Evolving Beyond Stereotypes through Cultural Transition

South Asian parenting has traditionally been portrayed through stereotypes of authoritarianism, high academic expectations, gender bias, and limited autonomy—emblematic of a collectivist value system that emphasizes obedience, family honour, and self-sacrifice (Shariff, 2009). However, emerging evidence undermines these monolithic portrayals, revealing a more nuanced, evolving parenting landscape shaped by immigration and bicultural dynamics.

In Australia, Kodippili et al. (2024) conducted a scoping review of 10 studies on South Asian immigrant adolescents and identified four key themes, acculturation strategies, family conflict, coping styles, and discrimination. These themes highlight how South Asian adolescents face clashes between traditional parental expectations and host-culture values in relation to autonomy, dating, and education fuel psychological and familial tension.

Cultural transition further shapes parenting strategies. Thakur's (2025) outlines how bicultural identity integration recasts intergenerational tensions into opportunities for empathy and growth, calling for cultural humility in counselling practices. Natrajan-Tyagi and Poulsen (2023) proposed a

bicultural parenting model for South Asian immigrant families in the U.S., integrating collectivist expectations with emotionally supportive, Western-style parenting.

Broader systematic reviews add depth: Kim et al. (2025) examined 60 studies on Asian parenting, coining the term “strict-affectionate” to describe a hybrid style combining discipline with warmth. This model underscores an integrative parenting strategy emerging in immigrant families as they navigate bicultural identity tensions.

Collectively, these studies illustrate that South Asian parenting today is not a fixed or monolithic construct. Instead, it is redefined through migration and acculturation—as families blend tradition and flexibility, discipline and warmth, in response to bicultural pressures. The result is a dynamic negotiation of parenting practices that transcends stereotypes and acknowledges the evolving identities and emotional realities of children growing between cultures.

Bhandari (2024) addresses this issue directly with the findings of a UK-wide survey designed to explore how UK population perceives South Asian parenting practices particularly by institutions such as schools, healthcare providers, and social services. The chapter emerges from a broader concern: that dominant narratives about ethnic minority parenting often rely on outdated assumptions, cultural generalisations, and deficit-based models. These narratives can have real-world consequences, influencing how professionals engage with families, how children are supported in educational settings, and how parents themselves internalise or resist these portrayals.

This work is situated within a growing body of scholarship that seeks to decolonise parenting research by centring the voices of those who have historically been marginalised or misrepresented. Bhandari’s (2024) approach is both empirical and reflective, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights to offer a more nuanced understanding of parenting within South Asian communities.

The 2023 survey was designed with these goals in mind. It aimed not only to collect data but also to create space for UK population to articulate their experiences, values, and challenges in their own words. By doing so, the article contributes to a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of parenting in Britain today—one that recognises diversity within communities, rather than flattening them into monolithic categories.

Method

The method carefully accounted for capturing the real perceptions that exist in the UK wide population about South Asian parenting and stereotypes. This was a clear attempt through this survey to capture and build on the knowledge of the existing stereotypes and draw implications for society. To explore the lived experiences and perceptions of South Asian heritage parents in by the UK wide population. Bhandari (2024) designed and conducted a national survey in 2023 with sixty-five participants. This survey was developed with the aim of capturing both quantitative trends and qualitative insights. The methodology was carefully constructed to ensure inclusivity, ethical integrity, and cultural sensitivity as key principles that underpin the entire research project.

Research Design and Ethical Considerations

A convergent mixed-methods survey was disseminated in 2023 via purposive and snowball sampling through community networks, social media, and education contacts across the UK (n = 65). Inclusion

criteria prioritised parents/carers of South Asian heritage, with a small comparison group to contextualise public perceptions. Ethical approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Open University (HREC/4832/Bhandari). Participants provided informed consent; data were anonymised and stored securely.

Ethical approval was a critical step, given the sensitive nature of the topics explored such as cultural identity, parenting values, and experiences of stereotyping. All consenting participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained digitally before participants could proceed with the survey.

The survey was designed to be accessible and user-friendly, with a mix of closed and open-ended questions. This mixed-methods approach allowed for both statistical analysis and thematic exploration. The inclusion of open-ended questions was particularly important, as it gave participants the opportunity to express their thoughts in their own words—an essential aspect of decolonising research practices.

Participant Recruitment and Demographics

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The survey was disseminated via social media platforms, community networks, parenting forums, and educational institutions. This approach ensured a broad reach across different regions of the UK and across various South Asian communities.

In total, approximately sixty-five parents participated in the survey. While the sample size may appear modest, it was sufficient to identify key patterns and generate rich qualitative data. Participants represented a range of South Asian backgrounds, including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan heritage. The survey also included a small number of non-South Asian parents, whose responses provided a useful comparative lens.

Demographically, the sample included both mothers and fathers, although women were more heavily represented—a common trend in parenting research. Participants varied in age, educational background, employment status, and length of residence in the UK. Some were first-generation immigrants, while others were born and raised in Britain. This diversity allowed the research to capture generational differences and the evolving nature of parenting practices.

Figure 1 illustrates the ethnic composition of respondents, revealing a clear predominance of individuals identifying as White, who make up 41 out of the total responses.

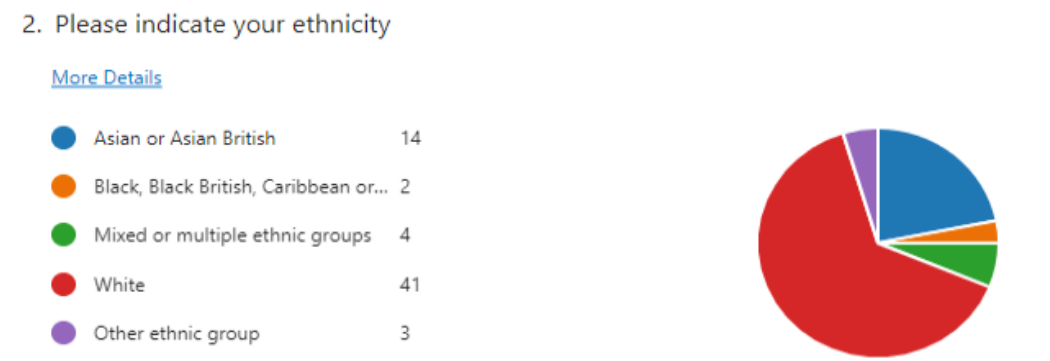

Figure 1: Survey participant ethnicity.

This suggests limited ethnic diversity within the group, as the next largest category—Asian or Asian British—accounts for only 14 respondents. The remaining categories, including Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (4), Other ethnic group (3), and Black, Black British, Caribbean or African (2), represent a very small proportion collectively. The data indicates that while there is some representation from minority ethnic groups, it is relatively low compared to the majority group. This imbalance may have implications for inclusivity and cultural representation, highlighting potential areas for targeted engagement or diversity initiatives.

Survey Structure and Key Themes

The survey was structured around several core themes:

Question 1- embedded consent to participate in the study.

Section 1-(Q2-Q4) captured the demographics of the participants in terms of age range, parenting responsibility and ethnicity of the participants.

Section 2-(Q5-Q9) captured the parenting perceptions of UK parents and their parenting experiences.

Section 3-(Q10-Q18) captured the stereotypes and attitudes towards parents of South Asian heritage.

Question19- Open ended question about any aspect of South Asian parenting participants wanted to share.

Each section included both Likert-scale questions and open-ended prompts. For example, participants might be asked to rate their agreement with a statement such as “I feel that teachers understand my parenting style,” followed by a prompt to elaborate on their response.

Figure 2 shows the word cloud of the key words that the participants used in answering 19 survey questions. The words that are bolder/bigger in font are most often used by the participants in their input. This was generated after collation of the survey comments through the online portal.

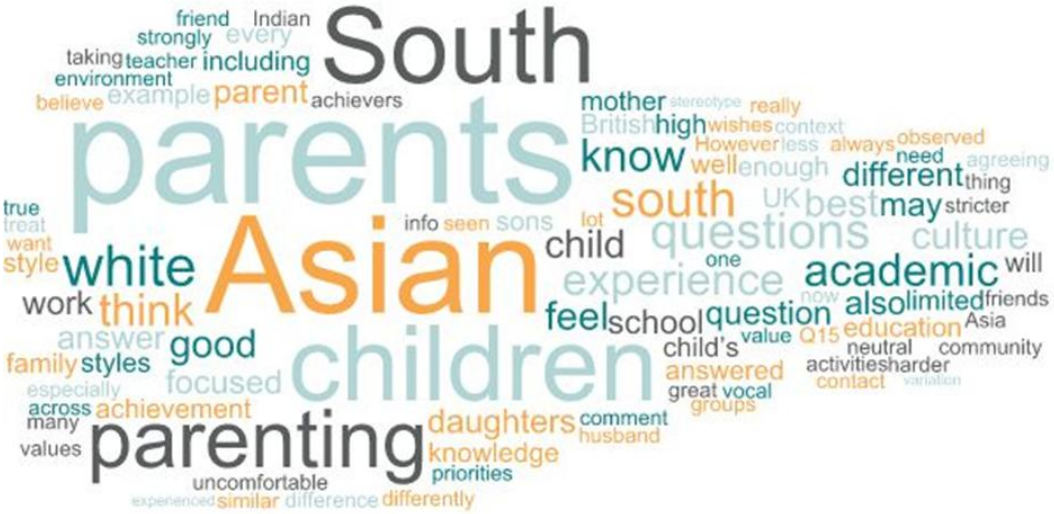

Figure 2: Word cloud created by word usage of the UK participants in the survey.

In Figure 2, the bold font words used most often by the participants in the survey were “south Asian” “parenting” “children” “think”, “white”. Some of the less used words, in small font/less bold were “wishes”, “values”, “groups”, “priorities”, and “contact”. It is important to note that in this word cloud all words were positive, objective and a mixture of characteristic descriptions and social terms.

Stereotypes in Focus – What the Survey Explored

One of the central aims of the 2023 Parenting Perceptions and Stereotypes Survey was to interrogate the stereotypes that continue to shape public and institutional perceptions of South Asian heritage parents in the UK. These stereotypes, often rooted in colonial legacies, media portrayals, and systemic biases can have profound implications for how families are treated in educational, healthcare, and social service settings. Bhandari’s (2024) book takes a critical lens to these assumptions, using the survey as a tool to both document and challenge them.

1. The “Strict Asian Parent” Stereotype

The most pervasive stereotype encountered by South Asian parents is the notion of being overly strict or authoritarian. This image, popularised in media and reinforced in some educational discourses, paints South Asian parents as disciplinarians who prioritise obedience and academic success over emotional connection or child autonomy.

The survey directly addressed this stereotype by asking parents how they would describe their approach to discipline and whether they felt their methods were misunderstood by others.

2. Academic Pressure and the “Tiger Parent” Label

Intricately linked to the strictness stereotype is the assumption that South Asian parents place excessive pressure on their children to excel academically. While the survey confirmed that education is highly valued across the community, it also revealed a more complex picture.

3. Gendered Expectations and Cultural Misreadings

Another area explored in the survey was the perception of gender roles within South Asian families. Stereotypes often suggest that daughters are raised with more restrictions than sons, or that boys are given preferential treatment. While some parents acknowledged that traditional gender norms still influence certain practices, many highlighted efforts to raise children with equal opportunities and responsibilities.

4. Vocalisation and Engagement with Institutions

A less commonly discussed stereotype is the assumption that South Asian parents are either overly deferential to authority or, conversely, too demanding, and confrontational. The survey asked parents about their experiences engaging with schools, healthcare providers, and other institutions.

5. The Role of the Survey in Challenging Stereotypes

By explicitly naming and exploring these stereotypes, the 2023 survey served as both a diagnostic and a corrective tool. It allowed parents to reflect on how they are seen by others and to articulate their own narratives in contrast to dominant assumptions. This analysis underscores the importance of listening to these voices not as exceptions to the rule, but as evidence of the rich diversity and adaptability within South Asian parenting.

In doing so, Bhandari (2024) invites readers to move beyond simplistic binaries, strict vs. permissive, traditional vs. modern, academic vs. emotional and to embrace a more layered understanding of parenting in multicultural Britain. The next section will delve into the key findings of the survey, offering a thematic analysis of the data collected.

Results, Thematic Analysis and Discussion

The 2023 Parenting Perceptions and Stereotypes Survey yielded a rich tapestry of insights into the parenting experiences of South Asian heritage families in the UK. Through both quantitative responses and qualitative narratives, several key themes emerged that challenge prevailing stereotypes and offer a more nuanced understanding of parenting within these communities. Bhandari's (2024) thematic analysis distils these findings into five core areas: academic aspirations, discipline and emotional warmth, gender dynamics, public perception, and generational change.

Academic Aspirations: A Balanced Perspective: One of the most consistent findings across the survey was the high value placed on education. Parents from South Asian backgrounds often expressed strong aspirations for their children's academic success, citing education as a pathway to opportunity, stability, and empowerment. However, contrary to the stereotype of relentless academic pressure, many respondents articulated a more balanced approach. Parents described encouraging their children to pursue excellence while also supporting their interests in sports, arts, and social development. Several noted the importance of mental health and the need to avoid burnout. This shift reflects a generational evolution, with younger parents, especially those born or raised in the UK, adopting more holistic views of success. This was evident in the educational transitions and throughout:

> *From what I have seen with my daughter's school friends, I believe that South Asian parents are very focused on ensuring that their children (male and female) are high achievers, both in terms of their academic performance and their outside interests i.e. sports/music/languages*

> *or whatever. They are very diligent and devoted in supporting their children to succeed, which may be on a practical, as well as emotional level. This can lead to more and stricter rules, in comparison to other parenting styles.*

Bhandari (2024) highlights that while academic achievement remains a cultural value, it is not pursued at the expense of emotional wellbeing. This finding disrupts the "tiger parent" narrative and underscores the adaptability of South Asian parenting in contemporary Britain.

Discipline and Emotional Warmth: Beyond the "Strict Parent": The survey also explored disciplinary practices, a domain often clouded by the stereotype of the "strict Asian parent." While many respondents acknowledged the importance of setting boundaries and maintaining respect, they also emphasised the role of emotional warmth, open communication, and positive reinforcement.

Parents described using a variety of strategies, including reasoning, time-outs, and collaborative problem-solving. Physical punishment was rejected, with many citing its ineffectiveness and potential harm. Instead, respondents spoke of building trust and fostering mutual understanding.

This theme reveals a significant departure from the authoritarian image often associated with South Asian parenting. As Bhandari (2024) notes, discipline in these households is not synonymous with rigidity; rather, it is embedded within a framework of care, responsibility, and cultural values:

> *I am OK with discipline and the emphasis on hard work and academic achievement. I think it provides structure, certainty, and a good work ethic. I have observed some physical violence which makes me uncomfortable as a UK citizen, though this is what we all grew up with. I feel that the children are more focused on their life goals and academic success, which is good. South Asian parents are not interested in woke trends and discourage or punish children if they go down that route. Overall, I think their parenting is good, as they want the very best for their children.*

This finding concurs with Shaikh et al. (2024) work where the South Asian heritage individuals in the UK exhibited low levels of criticism and high emotional warmth, alongside greater emotional overinvolvement a form of caring engagement rather than authoritarian control

Gender Dynamics: Shifting Roles and Expectations: Gender roles within South Asian families have long been a subject of scrutiny, often framed through assumptions of patriarchy and inequality. The survey sought to understand how parents navigate expectations for sons and daughters, and whether these roles are evolving.

While discussing transitions, the participants indicated a complex view and indicated varied understanding of gender dynamics and roles. While some traditional norms persist, such as heightened concern for daughters' safety or expectations around domestic responsibilities, many parents reported actively challenging these conventions. Fathers spoke of encouraging their daughters to pursue careers and independence, while mothers described raising sons to be emotionally expressive and respectful of gender equality. Importantly, several respondents noted that external perceptions often lag internal changes. Teachers and professionals, for instance, might assume that girls are less supported in STEM subjects or that boys are not expected to help at home. These assumptions, parents argued, fail to reflect the realities of their households. Bhandari's (2024) analysis suggests that gender dynamics in South Asian parenting are not static but are being renegotiated in response to broader social shifts and personal convictions.

A participant comment was “Some will treat daughters differently (true of every culture) but not all (also true of every culture)”. Another respondent stated:

> *Growing up in West Yorkshire I frequently observed South Asian parents who had moved to the UK and appeared to treat children differently depending on their assigned gender but friends who are of Pakistani heritage have lived in London all their lives and seem to parent in a very similar manner to myself.*

These findings are supported by Kerrane et al. (2023/2024) study indicating that British-born South Asian mothers actively reinterpreting conventions emphasising reflexive choice in transmitting cultural and religious values and striving for egalitarian gender norms in childrearing

Public Perception and Institutional Engagement: A recurring theme in the survey was the experience of being misjudged or stereotyped by public institutions. Parents shared stories of feeling dismissed, misunderstood, or unfairly scrutinised in interactions with schools, healthcare providers, and social services. Some described being perceived as overbearing when advocating for their children, while others felt that their cultural practices were viewed with suspicion or condescension. For example, a parent who insisted on modest dress for their daughter might be seen as oppressive, rather than protective or culturally grounded.

These experiences contribute to a sense of alienation and mistrust. Parents expressed a desire for professionals to engage with them respectfully and to seek understanding rather than make assumptions. They called for more cultural competence training and for institutions to recognise the diversity within South Asian communities. Bhandari (2024) argues that these findings highlight the need for systemic change. Stereotypes not only distort individual interactions but also shape institutional policies and practices in ways that can disadvantage families.

Studies further explain further about stereotypes, public perception and lack of institutional engagement for south Asian parents and their transitions. South Asian parents experienced power imbalances and felt stereotyped by professionals, emphasising the need for culturally responsive communication (Chibbra, 2023; Bicknell et al., 2025)

Generational Change and Cultural Adaptation: Finally, the survey revealed significant generational differences in parenting approaches. First-generation immigrants often spoke of navigating dual expectations maintaining cultural traditions while adapting to British norms. Their parenting was shaped by memories of their own upbringing, migration experiences, and the desire to preserve heritage. In contrast, UK-born parents described a more fluid identity, blending cultural values with contemporary parenting philosophies. They were more likely to challenge traditional norms, embrace child-centred approaches, and engage confidently with institutions.

This generational shift is not without tension. Some parents spoke of disagreements with elders or community members over parenting choices. However, many also described these negotiations as opportunities for growth and dialogue. The thematic analysis underscores the dynamic nature of South Asian parenting. It is not a fixed set of practices but a living, evolving process shaped by context, experience, and reflection.

Voices from the Community: While quantitative data provides a valuable overview of trends and patterns, it is the qualitative responses in the 2023 Parenting Perceptions and Stereotypes Survey that bring the lived experiences of South Asian heritage parents into sharp relief. These voices—

authentic, reflective, and often emotionally charged. Bhandari's (2024) inclusion of direct quotes and narrative fragments allows readers to hear from parents in their own words, offering a powerful counter-narrative to the stereotypes and assumptions that often dominate public discourse.

Parenting as Cultural Negotiation: Many parents described their parenting journey as a process of cultural negotiation balancing the values they inherited from their own upbringing with the expectations and norms of British society. The competition in another country different from their country of origin makes success in jobs and academics difficult in comparison to other white counter parts:

> *We as parents have to motivate and advise our children that they need to work harder than their white counterparts in their study as there is a lot of competition in the jobs market/industry.*

This duality of preserving cultural identity while fostering integration is a recurring theme. Parents often felt they were walking a tightrope, trying to honour their heritage without isolating their children from their peers or the wider society.

Emotional Labour and the Weight of Stereotypes: Several respondents spoke candidly about the emotional toll of being stereotyped This sense of being caught in a no-win situation was echoed by others, particularly mothers, who often endured the most scrutiny from teachers, health visitors, and social workers. These reflections highlight the psychological burden of navigating not just parenting, but also the gaze of institutions that may not fully understand or appreciate cultural nuance.

Redefining Strength and Care: Contrary to the stereotype of emotionally distant or disciplinarian parenting, many participants described their parenting style as deeply nurturing.

This redefinition of strength away from stoicism and towards emotional openness was particularly evident among younger parents. They spoke of wanting to break cycles of silence and to raise children who felt seen, heard, and supported.

Community Support and Isolation: The survey also revealed a tension between community support and social isolation. Some parents found strength in extended family networks and cultural communities, which provided childcare, moral guidance, and a sense of belonging. Others, however, felt judged or constrained by community expectations.

This tension underscores the complexity of parenting within diasporic contexts, where parents must navigate not only mainstream societal norms but also intra-community expectations.

Aspirations and Hopes for the Future: Despite the challenges, the overwhelming tone of the qualitative responses was one of hope and resilience. Parents expressed pride in their children, optimism about their futures, and a desire to raise them with integrity and compassion. Bhandari's (2024) inclusion of these voices is not merely illustrative, it is foundational. By centring the lived experiences of parents, she challenges the reader to move beyond abstract theories and to engage with the real, textured lives of families navigating complex cultural landscapes.

The findings from the *Parenting Perceptions and Stereotypes Survey* underscore that parenting among South Asian heritage families in the UK is not a static or uniform set of practices but rather a dynamic and transitional process. The transitions of families from one country of origin to another country of settlement are shaped by multiple intersecting factors, including migration experiences,

generational shifts, institutional engagement, and cultural adaptation. Understanding these processes requires moving beyond simplistic or deficit-based narratives and situating them within established theoretical frameworks that illuminate the complexity of change.

One useful lens for interpreting these transitions is Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), which conceptualises transitions as significant life changes that alter roles, routines, and relationships. For South Asian parents, migration often represents a profound transition, requiring them to renegotiate parenting norms within a new sociocultural context. Schlossberg's framework highlights how individuals mobilise resources such as social support networks, community organisations, and adaptive strategies to navigate these changes. For example, parents may rely on extended family or cultural associations to maintain continuity in values while simultaneously learning to engage with British educational systems. This process is not merely reactive but involves active agency in constructing new parenting identities.

Generational change introduces another layer of complexity, which can be understood through Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1997). This theory emphasises critical reflection as a catalyst for transformation. UK-born South Asian parents often reassess inherited cultural norms from their parents' generation, questioning traditional practices in light of contemporary expectations around child autonomy, gender equality, and educational aspirations. Such reflection leads to the development of hybrid parenting approaches that blend heritage values with mainstream norms. For instance, while maintaining respect for elders and collectivist ideals, younger parents may adopt more dialogic and child-centred methods, reflecting a reflexive and transformative learning process (Kagitcibasi ,2007; Phoenix & Hussain, 2007; Mezirow, 1997)

These transitions do not occur in isolation but are embedded within broader ecological systems, as articulated by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). Parenting practices are influenced by multiple, nested environments from the immediate microsystem of family and peers to the macrosystem of societal norms and institutional structures. For South Asian families, macrosystemic factors such as stereotypes about "strict" or "authoritarian" parenting can shape interactions with schools and social services, sometimes resulting in misinterpretations or biased interventions. Institutional engagement, therefore, becomes a critical site of negotiation, where parents must assert their cultural perspectives while adapting to systemic expectations. (Phoenix & Hussain, 2007; Gupta, 2019). This underscores the need for culturally competent practices within educational and welfare institutions to avoid perpetuating structural inequities.

Cultural adaptation, a central theme in these transitions, can be further examined through Berry's Acculturation Theory (1997). Berry identifies strategies such as integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation that individuals and groups employ when navigating cultural interfaces. South Asian parents often pursue integration seeking to preserve heritage values while engaging with mainstream British norms. This balancing act is evident in decisions around language use, religious education, and socialisation practices. However, the process is fraught with challenges, including intergenerational tensions when children gravitate toward dominant cultural norms, and societal pressures that may stigmatise cultural distinctiveness. Acculturation, therefore, is not a linear trajectory but a negotiated and ongoing process requiring resilience and adaptability. (Berry, 2005; Kagitcibasi, 2007).

These theoretical perspectives collectively highlight that transitions in parenting are not merely episodic changes but complex, sustained processes demanding reflection, resource mobilisation, and systemic support. For policy and practice, this has significant implications. First, it necessitates recognising transitional stressors such as the challenges of school entry, adolescence, and intergenerational negotiations and providing targeted support during these critical junctures. Second, interventions must move beyond deficit models that perceive cultural difference and adopt asset-based approaches that value the strengths and resources within South Asian communities. This includes fostering institutional cultural competence, training professionals to engage respectfully with diverse parenting practices, and addressing implicit biases that shape service delivery.

Creating spaces for intergenerational dialogue is another essential step. Such forums can enable parents and young people to articulate their perspectives, negotiate expectations, and co-construct parenting strategies that honour both heritage and contemporary realities. Community-led initiatives, supported by policy frameworks, can play a pivotal role in facilitating these conversations and reducing the sense of isolation that some families experience during transitional phases.

Ultimately, understanding parenting among South Asian heritage families in the UK requires a paradigm shift from viewing cultural difference as a barrier to recognising it as a dynamic resource for adaptation and growth. By situating parenting transitions within robust theoretical frameworks and aligning policy and practice with principles of cultural responsiveness, we can ensure that these families are supported rather than constrained by systemic assumptions. Such an approach not only benefits South Asian communities but also enriches the broader discourse on parenting in multicultural societies, highlighting the transformative potential of diversity in shaping inclusive futures.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The article not only highlights the disconnect between institutional perceptions and parental realities but also offers a roadmap for more culturally responsive and equitable engagement with South Asian heritage families. This work is not simply descriptive; it is transformative in its potential to reshape how institutions conceptualise and support parenting in multicultural Britain. A participant in the survey commented to highlight this:

> *As a former teacher, I have met many South Asian parents with whom I hold a great deal of respect*.

This statement reflects a sentiment echoed by many professionals who, when given the opportunity to engage meaningfully, recognise the commitment and care that underpin South Asian parenting practices. Yet, systemic barriers and entrenched stereotypes often prevent such recognition from translating into institutional norms.

Moving Beyond Deficit Models

One of the most urgent calls to action in this article is the need to move away from deficit-based models of ethnic minority parenting. Too often, South Asian parenting is framed in terms of what it lacks whether that be emotional openness, gender equality, or modernity rather than what it offers. (Phoenix & Hussain, 2007; Gupta, 2019).

This framing not only distorts reality but also undermines the strengths, resilience, and adaptability of these families. It is imperative that professionals must adopt an asset-based approach, recognising the cultural knowledge, community networks, and parenting strategies that South Asian families bring to the table. For example, the emphasis on academic achievement, often caricatured as "pressure," is better understood as a culturally grounded aspiration for mobility and security in a competitive environment. Similarly, strong family networks, sometimes misinterpreted as insularity, can provide vital emotional and practical support. (Modood, 2004; Zhou, 1997).

Reframing these practices as assets rather than deficits requires a fundamental rethinking of how parenting is defined and valued in multicultural contexts.

Cultural Competence and Institutional Training

The survey findings underscore the importance of cultural competence in professional practice. Many parents reported feeling misunderstood or judged by teachers, doctors, and social workers who lacked awareness of cultural nuances. These misunderstandings can lead to misdiagnoses, inappropriate interventions, or missed opportunities for support. For instance, a parent advocating strongly for their child's education may be perceived as "pushy" rather than engaged, while a preference for modest dress may be misread as oppressive rather than protective or culturally meaningful.

To address this, Bhandari (2024) recommends comprehensive training for professionals that goes beyond tokenistic cultural awareness. Some other studies like those by Crenshaw (1989); Phoenix & Hussain (2007); Kumagai & Lypson, (2009) discuss the importance of such training. Such training should include themes including: historical context of migration and diaspora experiences; understanding the socio-economic and political factors that shape immigrant trajectories; intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, and religion; recognising how overlapping identities influence parenting practices; case studies that reflect real-world complexities; moving beyond stereotypes to nuanced scenarios; opportunities for dialogue with community members and parents; building empathy through lived experience.

Importantly, cultural competence should not be treated as a one-off workshop but as an ongoing process of learning, reflection, and accountability. Institutions must embed cultural responsiveness into their organisational ethos, ensuring that policies and practices evolve alongside demographic and social changes.

Inclusive Policy Development

At the policy level, this calls for more inclusive frameworks that reflect the diversity of parenting practices in the UK. This includes revisiting guidelines and assessment tools used in child welfare, education, and family support services to ensure they are not inadvertently biased against non-Western parenting models. For example, policies that equate parental involvement with visible presence at school events may disadvantage parents who support their children in other, less visible ways. Assumptions about what constitutes "appropriate" discipline or "healthy" emotional expression must be re-evaluated considering cultural variation.

It is important that policies are developed using participatory approaches. , where parents from diverse backgrounds are actively involved in shaping the systems that affect their families. This approach not only improves policy relevance but also builds trust and legitimacy. Parenting has some

universals, and the wider UK population recognises this. A participant in the survey offered their insights to this aspect:

> *Whatever the ethnicity, parenting has much to do with context. In the context of being with parents who share the same traditions/values/priorities there would be no need to ask the questions*.

Such reflections remind us that while cultural differences exist, they do not negate shared aspirations for children's wellbeing and success.

Strengthening Parent-Professional Partnerships

Another key recommendation is the cultivation of genuine partnerships between parents and professionals in transition. Rather than viewing parents as passive recipients of services or as problems to be managed, institutions should engage them as co educators, co carers, and co navigators of their children's development. This requires a shift in institutional culture, from one of authority and surveillance to one of collaboration and mutual respect.

Supporting South Asian heritage families in the UK requires practical, culturally responsive strategies that go beyond policy rhetoric and actively foster inclusion. One effective approach is the creation of parent advisory boards that reflect community diversity, ensuring that decision-making processes within schools and institutions incorporate the voices of parents from varied cultural backgrounds. These boards can serve as platforms for dialogue, enabling parents to share concerns, suggest improvements, and influence policies that directly affect their children's educational experiences. (Crozier, 2009; Chibbra, 2023). Alongside governance structures, hosting culturally inclusive events that celebrate different parenting traditions can play a vital role in building mutual understanding. Such events, whether through cultural fairs, storytelling sessions, or workshops, create opportunities for families to showcase their heritage while learning about others, thereby reducing stereotypes and promoting intercultural respect. (Phoenix & Hussain, 2007; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009)

Accessibility is another critical dimension; providing translation and interpretation services ensures that language barriers do not hinder parental engagement. This is particularly important during key junctures such as parent-teacher meetings, school admissions, and policy consultations, where clear communication can significantly impact outcomes for children. Furthermore, institutions should prioritise two-way communication that values parental input, moving away from top-down models that position parents as passive recipients of information.

Instead, schools and service providers can adopt participatory practice such as co-designing programs, conducting feedback sessions, and using digital platforms for ongoing dialogue that empower parents as equal partners in their children's development. Collectively, these steps not only address structural barriers but also affirm the cultural assets that South Asian families bring to the parenting landscape.

By embedding these practices into institutional frameworks, we create environments where diversity is not merely acknowledged but actively leveraged to enhance educational equity and social cohesion. Ultimately, these measures reflect a shift from deficit-based assumptions toward an asset-oriented approach that recognises cultural diversity as a strength. When parents feel heard, respected, and supported, they are better equipped to navigate transitional challenges such as migration, acculturation, and intergenerational change while maintaining a sense of belonging. This

holistic strategy benefits not only South Asian families but also enriches the wider community by fostering inclusive spaces where all parenting traditions are valued. In doing so, institutions contribute to dismantling systemic biases and building trust, laying the foundation for collaborative partnerships that support children's learning and well-being in a multicultural society.

Supporting Intergenerational Dialogue

This research underscores the importance of supporting intergenerational dialogue within South Asian families. As the survey revealed, many parents are navigating tensions between traditional expectations and contemporary values. Institutions can play a supportive role by creating spaces for these conversations through parenting workshops, youth programs, or community forums that honour both heritage and change. Like other studies by Gill (2020), Tidswell, 2024 Bhandari (2024) too suggests that such initiatives should be co-designed with community organisations and should focus on shared goals such as child wellbeing, educational success, and family cohesion while recognising the diverse ways these goals can be achieved.

Implications for Cultural Transitions

Beyond institutional practice, these findings have broader implications for understanding cultural transitions in a globalised world. South Asian parents in the UK are not merely adapting to a new environment; they are actively negotiating identity, belonging, and parenting norms in ways that reflect resilience and creativity. These transitions are complex and multidimensional, involving emotional labour, practical adjustments, and continuous dialogue within families and communities.

For the wider UK population, recognising these transitions is essential for fostering social cohesion. Cultural adaptation is not a one-way process; it involves mutual learning and accommodation. When institutions and communities embrace this dynamic, they create spaces where diversity is not just tolerated but valued as a source of strength and innovation.

Ultimately, this research calls for a paradigm shift from viewing cultural difference as a challenge to seeing it as an opportunity. By investing in cultural competence, inclusive policy, and genuine partnerships, the UK can move toward a model of engagement that supports families through transitions and builds a society where every child, regardless of heritage, can thrive.

Ultimately, setting the narrative right is both an ethical and practical imperative. Ethically, it requires a commitment to dignity, fairness, and the integrity of lived experience recognising South Asian families not as objects of scrutiny but as subjects with agency, insight, and care. Practically, it matters because narratives shape policy, pedagogy, and professional practice: when institutions are guided by reductive assumptions, they design interventions that miss the mark, alienate families, and risk compounding inequities. Reframing the narrative corrects misrepresentations and improves outcomes by aligning services with how families actually live, relate, and parent. It also restores trust, making engagement more dialogic and less extractive, particularly at critical junctures such as school transitions, health appointments, and moments of social care assessment.

Challenging reductive stereotypes is essential to this reframing. Stereotypes flatten diversity into caricatures depicting "strict," "traditional," "insular "obscuring the nuance of how discipline coexists with emotional warmth, how heritage values are adapted with care, and how aspiration is balanced with wellbeing. Rejecting these binaries allows for the recognition of complexity: families are navigating transitions, intergenerational expectations, and institutional biases while still cultivating environments of love, structure, and growth. By naming and unlearning these stereotypes,

professionals can move beyond compliance-led approaches to partnership models that are sensitive to context, responsive to cultural practice, and attuned to the strengths and strategies already present within households and communities.

By foregrounding the voices and experiences of parents, we build a more accurate, empathetic, and constructive understanding of parenting in diasporic contexts one that treats cultural transitions not as problems to fix but as opportunities for growth, dialogue, and shared futures. Centring lived testimony invites co-design, where families shape the support they receive, and it opens space for intergenerational conversation, where change is negotiated rather than imposed. This perspective also benefits the wider public: when transitions are met with respect and openness, they generate social cohesion, mutual learning, and a richer sense of belonging. In this way, resetting the narrative is not merely about representation it is about creating the conditions for families to thrive, for institutions to act with integrity, and for society to embrace the plurality that defines contemporary Britain.

Conclusion

This research highlights the importance of understanding the cultural transitions experienced by South Asian heritage families in the UK and their broader societal implications. By amplifying the voices of parents who are often marginalised in public discourse, the study moves beyond stereotypes and deficit-based narratives to reveal the complexity of parenting in diasporic contexts. It demonstrates that these families are not passive recipients of cultural norms nor uncritical adopters of British practices; rather, they are active agents negotiating identity, belonging, and parenting strategies in ways that reflect resilience, adaptability, and reflexivity. This nuanced understanding adds value by challenging institutional assumptions and offering a more accurate, empathetic lens through which professionals and policymakers can engage with diverse communities.

For South Asian parents, cultural transitions involve navigating multiple systems educational, social, and community while balancing heritage with integration and aspirations with wellbeing. These transitions are emotionally and practically demanding, requiring families to manage institutional scrutiny, community expectations, and internalised pressures. For the wider UK population, the findings underscore that cultural transitions are not peripheral experiences but central to the fabric of a multicultural society. Supporting these transitions through culturally responsive policies, inclusive educational practices, and genuine parent-professional partnerships benefits not only minority communities but also strengthens social cohesion and equity across the UK. Ultimately, this study calls for a shift from tokenistic diversity to meaningful engagement, ensuring that families undergoing cultural transitions are empowered rather than constrained by systemic biases. It invites institutions to reimagine what inclusive, equitable, and culturally sensitive support looks like in the 21st century where diversity is not merely acknowledged but actively valued as a source of strength and innovation.

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Data availability statement

The data is not publicly available as that could compromise the privacy of research participants and due to the diverse nature of issues discussed.

Contribution statement

The author has done all tasks in this research; conception and design of the research work, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation, drafting the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the version to be published.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC/4832/Bhandari). Participants provided informed consent; data were anonymised and stored securely. Given the sensitive nature of the topics explored—such as cultural identity, parenting values, and experiences of stereotyping. All consenting participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained digitally before participants could proceed with the survey.

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