

# **AN EXPLORATION OF SEXUAL HEALTH NEEDS OF SOMALI WOMEN IN A LONDON BOROUGH OF ENGLAND**

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# BACKGROUND

- Strong Somali community in London
- Rich cultural identity
- Predominantly of Islamic faith
- On a Backdrop of a UK, secular and liberal society.
- Acculturation



## BACKGROUND

- Chastity revered
- Premarital sex considered taboo
- Paucity of data on sexual health of Somalis
- Even less data on needs of young Somali girls



## METHOD

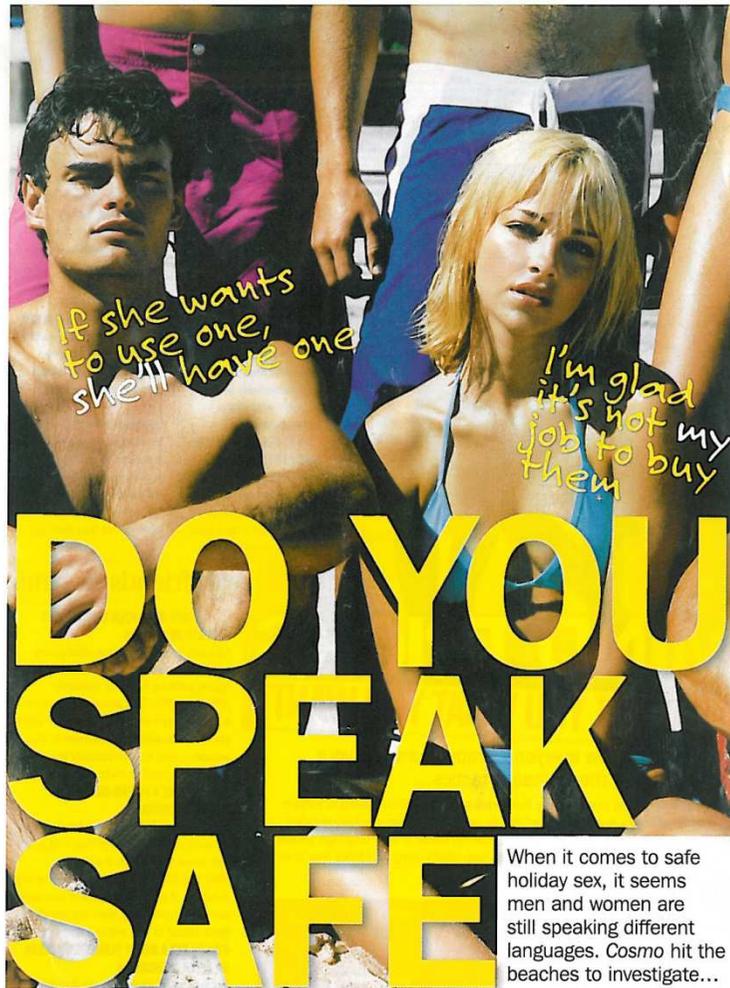
- Primary Qualitative data
- Entry Point
- Peer Education Scheme for Bengali and Somali youths in Camden, London
- Aged between 16-18



## METHOD

- “Snowball” Sampling
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- Exceedingly difficult to recruit participants
- Time restraints

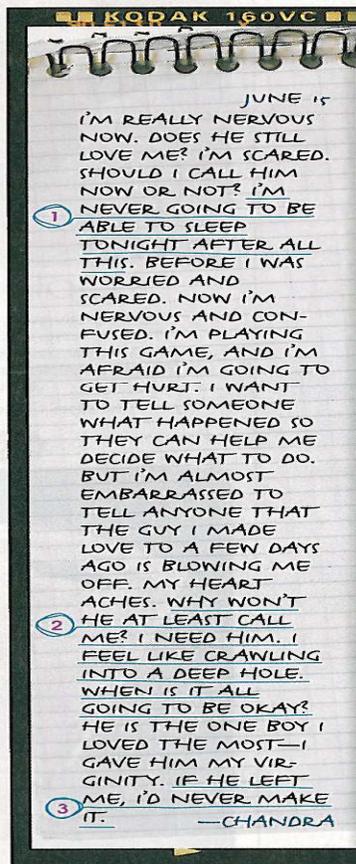




diary peek A CGI EDITOR SHARES A PAGE FROM HER HIGH SCHOOL DIARY.

## “i lost my virginity to the wrong guy”

I HAD SEX WITH HIM BECAUSE HE SAID HE LOVED ME. THEN HE STOPPED CALLING. BY CHANDRA CZAPE TURNER



I was 15; Nate\* was 17. I fell for him hard. He was so sexy with his tall, lean body, dark, wavy hair, pouty lips, and brown, puppy-dog eyes. What added to his appeal was that he was “troubled.” His parents were divorced, and he was upset that his dad had moved away. Plus, he drank. A lot. He came to me for help; he said I was the only person who really cared, who listened to him. That made me feel important, like we had a special connection.

**1** We’d spend hours on the phone; then one summer night, during a six-hour talk, Nate invited me to his house the next day. We kissed for the first time and then started hooking up while our parents were at work. One day in his room, we were kissing and the next thing I knew my clothes were off. **He said he loved me. He wanted me so bad. I don’t know why I caved, but I did.** I told him to wear a condom. It was over in two minutes. He kissed me and said we were meant to be together. I believed him.

**2** Then Nate disappeared. I called his house and his mom gave me his number at his dad’s. **I called him there, crying so hard I could barely talk: “Do you still love me?”** He said yes, but his voice was weird. I told him I needed to see him, but he just kept saying he had to work through some issues at his dad’s. He said he’d call me when he was back. He promised.

**3** Nate did call—weeks later. And we were never the same again. I realized we weren’t meant to be. **It took some time, but I eventually got over him and went on to have a very loving boyfriend** for two years. I probably shouldn’t have given Nate my virginity. But I learned from my mistake: I never fell for a hollow “I love you” line again. Still, I don’t regret my experience with Nate; it’s part of who I am and made me the strong person I am today.

**bottom line: Even if your first time isn’t what you dreamed it would be, you can learn from it.**

\*Name has been changed

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## RESULTS

- Perception that sexual health information was of little relevance to the Somali Community

*“Very unnecessary”.. “They need to know about it, but you know, we don’t”...*

- However awareness that some Somali girls were having premarital sex

*“Its like secretive. Like most Somali girls ...if they did have sex, they wouldn’t exactly go ahead and tell everyone”.*



## RESULTS

- Societal expectations and “community policing” affected sexual behaviour
- High Risk Sex
  - “ *Anal sex, a lot of girls are like, oh that's until I get married, so that's for my husband..you can enter from back passage*”.
- Less forthcoming to access sexual health services if needed. Inverse care law
- Peer Education- useful, educational and culturally sensitive.



# RESULTS

## Despite this...

Facilitator question: *“What do you think would stop someone going to this sort of session?”*

Participant Response: *“If everyone knew they were sexually active”.*

Facilitator question : *“Do you mean if someone was sexually active, they wouldn’t come?”*

Participant response : *“Yes*



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Similarities akin to many “hard to reach” communities
- Greater research required
- Peer Education can be beneficial
- Need cultural sensitivity
- Educate Somali girls on how to negotiate sex.



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**THANK YOU!**

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