

# Understanding barriers to accessing psychotherapy, and the potential of CBT to address these: A qualitative study of Sunni Muslims in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.

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## INTRODUCTION

Barriers such as stigma and lack of acceptable services exist that prevent black and minority ethnic (BME) communities accessing mental health services<sup>1</sup>.

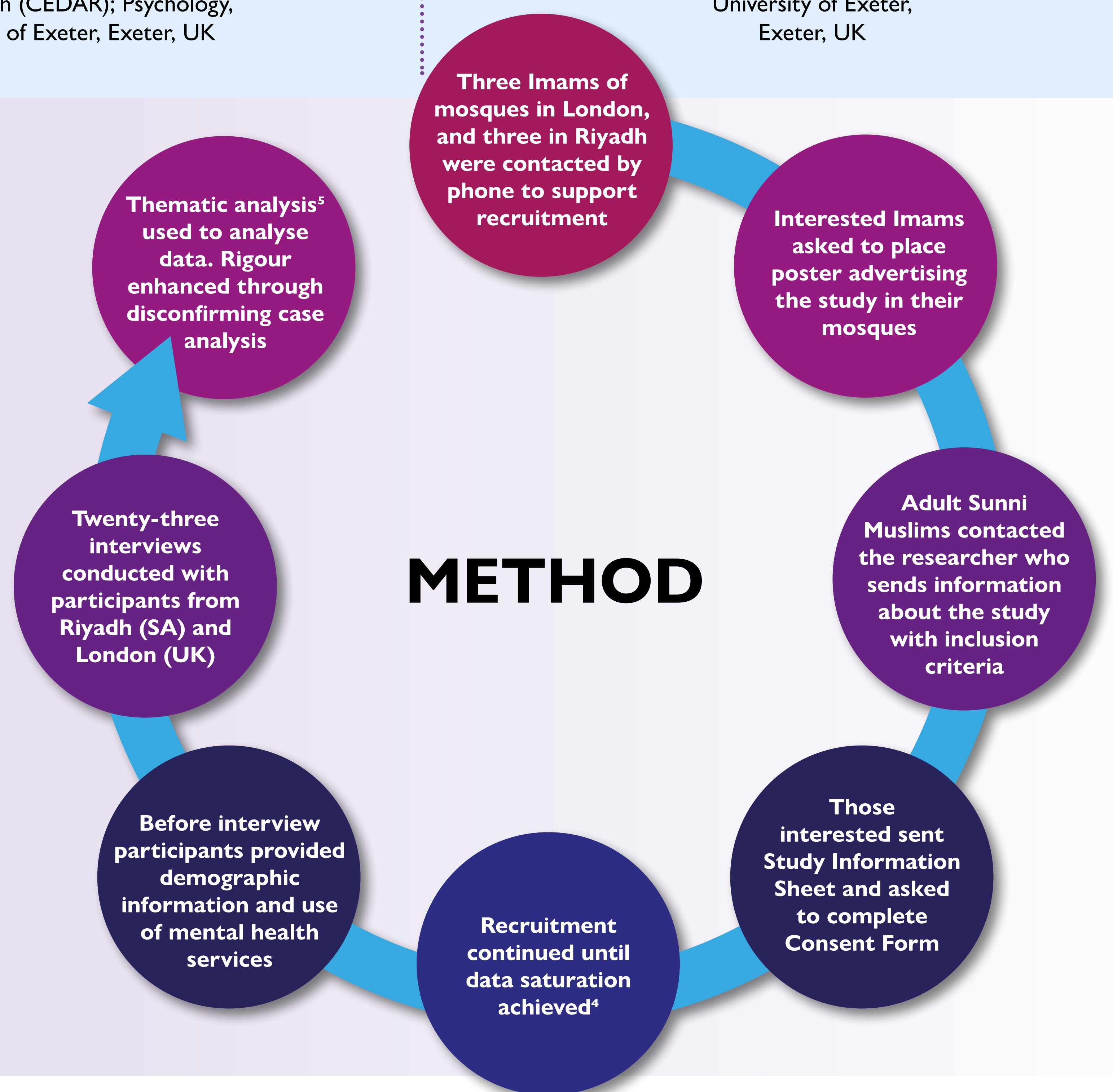
In addition to barriers facing BME communities, specific barriers such as Islamic beliefs and cultural sensitivity are also experienced by Muslims<sup>2</sup>.

Whilst limited research has been undertaken to examine barriers faced by Muslim societies when accessing evidence-based psychological therapies, differences that may exist between sub-cultures of Muslims and sects has not been considered<sup>3</sup>.

## STUDY OBJECTIVES

- Appreciate barriers that prevent Sunni Muslims from accessing psychotherapy in Saudi Arabia (SA) and the UK.
- Evaluate the extent to which barriers vary between Sunni Muslims in SA and the UK.
- Examine potential for CBT to address barriers for Sunni Muslims in SA and the UK.
- Explore suitable adaptations to CBT to improve engagement if CBT has potential to represent an acceptable intervention.

## METHOD



## RESULTS

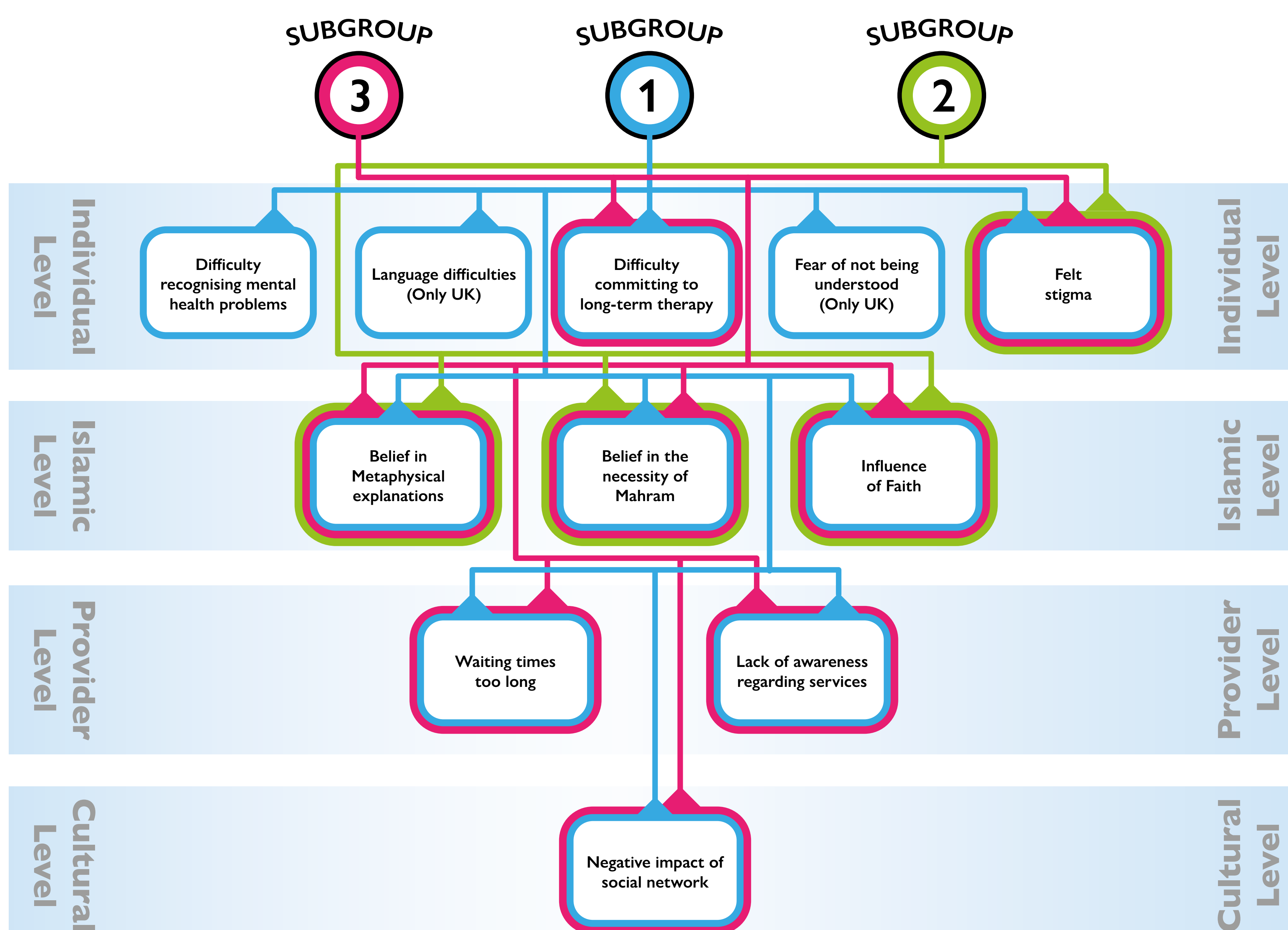
### Three participant subgroups emerged:

**Subgroup 1:** Willing to accept psychotherapy for mental health difficulties but only when combined with Islamic treatment (UK and SA).

**Subgroup 2:** Only accepted 'spiritual treatment' addressed by reading the Qur'an, ruqyah (UK).

**Subgroup 3:** Only wanted psychotherapy if seeking help for a mental health difficulty (SA).

Specific barriers to accessing psychotherapy for Sunni Muslims in the UK and SA were identified across four levels. These differed across the three subgroups.



## IMPLICATIONS

- Results reinforce the importance of cultural sensitivity<sup>6</sup> when developing and delivering psychotherapy for Sunni Muslims.
- Despite different acceptance of psychological therapy, several barriers appeared in all sub-groups (e.g. the Islamic level barriers).
- For Sunni Muslims willing to accept psychological explanations to mental health difficulties it is important to combine teachings from Islam with CBT.
- It may be important to recognise different attitudes and beliefs held by different Muslims sects.
- CBT may help address several barriers for Sunni Muslims willing to accept psychological explanations
- Low-intensity CBT<sup>7</sup> may be especially suitable to address barriers:
  - Ability to receive support flexibility and reduce challenges associated with mahram
  - Short waiting times where LI CBT implemented within a stepped care service delivery model (e.g. IAPT)
  - Fewer number of treatment/support sessions.
  - Greater potential to reduce felt stigma given flexibility to receive treatment over the telephone or teleconference.

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Memon A, Taylor K, Mohebbati L, et al. Perceived barriers to accessing mental health services among black and minority ethnic (BME) communities: a qualitative study in Southeast England. *BMJ Open*. 2016; 6(11): e012337. <sup>2</sup>Weatherhead S, Daiches A. Muslim views on mental health and psychotherapy. *Psychol Psychother*. 2010; 83(1):75-89. <sup>3</sup>Van Bruinessen M. Kurds, Turks and the Alevi revival in Turkey. *MER*. 1996; 200: 7-10. <sup>4</sup>Saunders B, Sim J, Kingstone T, et al. Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Qual Quant*. 2018; 52(4):1893-907. <sup>5</sup>Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol*. 2006; 3(2): 77-101. <sup>6</sup>Rathod S, Phiri P, Naeem F. An evidence-based framework to culturally adapt cognitive behaviour therapy. *Cogn Behav Ther*. 2019; 12:e10. <sup>7</sup>Farrand P. Low-Intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: Revolution not evolution. In: P. Farrand (Ed.) *Low-Intensity CBT Skills and Interventions: A Practitioners' Manual*. London: SAGE; 2020.