

 **Honour Based Abuse (HBA) Guidance**

The 14th July is now the National Day of Remembrance for victims of honour based abuse. This date has been chosen as it marks the birthday of Shafilea Ahmed, who was born in Bradford and murdered in Warrington in 2003 by her parents in an honour-based abuse killing.

See Shafilea’s story [here](https://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/advice/relationships/national-day-remembrance-honour-based-violence-shafilea-ahmed-story/national-day-remembrance-honour-based-violence-shafilea-ahmed-story).

HBA is a broad umbrella term used to describe a combination of practices used principally to control and punish the behaviour of a member of a family or social group, in order to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs in the name of ‘honour’. Although predominantly associated with women and girls, male members of a family can also be victims. Violence and abuse may occur when it is felt that an individual’s behaviour has broken the ‘honour code’, bringing disgrace to their family or social group. Perpetrators will feel that they need to restore their loss of face and standing within their community. There is often an element of approval and social acceptance from other family members and the community.

Government guidance provides the following definition of HBA:

‘*The terms ‘honour’ crime, ‘honour’-based abuse and ‘honour’-based violence comprise a variety of offences (mainly but not exclusively against women and girls), including forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), controlling and coercive behaviour, physical assault (which can cover practices such as breast ironing/breast flattening), imprisonment and murder where the victim is being punished by their family or community for undermining what they perceive to be the correct code of behaviour. Such behaviour is also likely to amount to domestic abuse. Despite the use of the term ‘honour’, there is no honour in abuse, and cultural sensitivities should not get in the way of tackling this issue.’*

**Where does it originate?**

HBA is a custom deep rooted in certain communities where the family or group is considered foremost rather than an individual. Many different societies believe in the honour code. It is most prevalent in cultures originating from South Asia, Africa and the Middle East with the highest victim group being Asian females. A phrase often quoted when referring to Honour Based abuse is: “there is no ‘honour’ in the commission of murder, rape, kidnap and the many other acts”. HBA may involved multiple perpetrators and can be distinguished from other forms of abuse, as it is often committed with some degree of approval and/or collusion from family and/or community members. Such abuse cuts across all cultures, nationalities, faith groups and communities.

**What about the UK?**

Because HBA is a hidden crime with victims often unable or unwilling to come forward, it is difficult to estimate how many crimes take place yearly in the UK. HBA crimes are broad, ranging from threats and intimidation through to kidnap and murder. Worldwide it is estimated that there are 5000 honour killings a year. During 2019-2020 there were 2,024 HBA-related offences recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police). Of these, there were 74 FGM offences and 140 forced marriage offences and in 2020-2021 there were 2,725 HBA-related offences recorded by the police in England and Wales, an increase of 18%. Of these, 78 were FGM offences and 125 Forced Marriage offences. (data from gov.uk).

There are an estimated 12-15 ‘honour’ killings every year in the UK. However, the true figure could be much higher when considering that some may be commissioned or planned in the UK, but the act is committed abroad. The prompt for an honour killing can often be trivial, the merest hint that the victim has been ‘immoral’ and therefore brought shame on the family. They are often premeditated, a conspiracy with the shared belief that the victim must be killed. They can involve various members of the family, from the old to the very young.

Police investigators should also keep an open mind when attending suicides where there may be elements of honour apparent within the family. In some cultures, ‘forced suicide’ is used as a substitute for an honour killing. When an honour crime has been committed, the community will often close ranks to protect the perpetrators. This may include, hiding those responsible, arranging for them to leave the UK, or providing false alibi’s.

HBA Crime types can include:

* Murder
* Rape and sexual assault
* Disfigurement (Acid attacks/burning)
* Physical assaults
* Neglect/Cruelty
* Enslavement (Modern Slavery)
* Kidnap and False imprisonment
* Destruction/damage of property
* Harassment and stalking
* Sending malicious communications
* Threats and abuse

There are strong links between HBA, Forced Marriage and Female Genital mutilation.

**The Indicators**

Professionals should be aware of the many different triggers for HBA. Although some triggers can be significant ‘life events’ such as divorce or adultery, HBA is often prompted by what the general populous would view as insignificant and trivial behaviour, much of it associated with young people growing. Examples can be: forming friendships, discovering their own sexuality and exploring a broader and more liberal ‘westernised’ lifestyle. Below are some events/behaviours that may trigger HBA.

**Potential HBA trigger events/behaviours**

* rejecting a forced marriage
* interfaith and inter-race relationships
* elopement
* renouncing a faith
* loss of virginity
* sex or pregnancy outside of marriage
* coming out as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)
* expressions of autonomy
* the existence of a boyfriend/girlfriend
* adultery
* leaving a spouse or seeking a divorce
* a refusal to divorce when ordered to do so by family members
* being too ‘westernised’ – Inappropriate make-up or dress, accessing/using social media and kissing or being intimate in a public place
* reporting rape (being raped may be deemed a bring disgrace to the family)
* reporting domestic abuse
* rejecting the practice of FGM
* running away

**Signs to look for**

* The victim or their family come from a community where the idea of ‘Honour’ is culturally embedded.
* there may feel like an element of ‘surveillance’ and control by the family or community members. In the case of adults this might present where the victim is routinely accompanied to and from a place of work. In children or young people, they may be driven to and from school, not able to walk or travel on public transport with friends.
* they might field a high number of phone calls from family members or their spouse. They may look uncomfortable taking the calls, quiet and withdrawn afterwards.
* a victim may be accompanied to the doctors by a family member or spouse.
* there may be noticeable levels of absenteeism, lateness – school, college or employment.
* significant personality changes may become evident. He/she may appear and behave depressed, withdrawn, anxious or suicidal.
* there may be noticeable deterioration in the victim’s appearance, a lack of grooming.
* physical injuries apparent, often frequent injuries, with the victim explaining them away as ‘accidental’.
* they may dress unusually to disguise bruises or injuries i.e., neck scarf in hot weather.

**What should Practitioners do**

Practitioners should make themselves aware of potential signs of honour-based abuse. If a child or young person tells a practitioner about HBA in respect of themselves or another family member, the practitioner should:

* See the child or young person alone: in a safe and private place to obtain their wishes, views and feelings and explain confidentiality fully, including the need to share the information.
* Record carefully i.e., not in the community or on systems that can be accessed by other staff: caution is required about how information is recorded and shielded within the organisation to ensure the child’s safety;
* Contact: Children’s Services Duty and Advice Team, who in partnership with the Police may undertake a Section 47 Enquiry (safeguarding).

Practitioners should **NOT**: make contact with the family or community leaders; tell the family or their social network about what the child or young person has said; attempt mediation or use members of the community to interpret on behalf of the child - as this could put them at further risk of harm.

**Supporting documents:**

[CPS – legal guidance](https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/so-called-honour-based-abuse-and-forced-marriage)

[Savera Factsheet](https://www.saverauk.co.uk/information-and-advice/resources/fact-sheets/honour-based-abuse/)

[Karma Nirvana](https://karmanirvana.org.uk/)

[Forced Marriage Unit](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage)

[West Yorkshire Police – Forced Marriage FAQ](https://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/advice/relationships/forced-marriage/forced-marriage-frequently-asked-questions)

[West Yorkshire Police Policy](https://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/sites/default/files/2019-10/honour_based_abuse_and_forced_marriages.pdf)

[West Yorkshire Procedures](https://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/p_force_marr.html)

[KSCP FGM Strategy and 7 Minute briefing](https://www.kirkleessafeguardingchildren.co.uk/safeguarding-2/different-types-of-abuse/female-genital-mutilation/)

[Multi-agency statutory guidance for dealing with forced marriage and Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of forced marriage (accessible version) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-right-to-choose-government-guidance-on-forced-marriage/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-for-dealing-with-forced-marriage-and-multi-agency-practice-guidelines-handling-cases-of-forced-marriage-accessible#page31)

