

Organisational processes for data recording of Honour Based Abuse, Forced Marriages and Female Genital Mutilation

Professor Geetanjali Gangoli (Durham University), Dr Nikki D'Souza, (Northumbria University), Dr Kate Butterby (Durham University), Ayurshi Dutt (Durham University)

This research, funded by an N8 PRP Small Grant award, assesses, maps and suggests ways to improve police data recording for honour based abuse (HBA).

KEY FINDINGS

- HBA can include Forced Marriage (FM) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), however there are significant differences that impact on police operation in this area. There are clear procedures that are followed for recording of FM and FGM, and these appear to be followed consistently across police forces. The gap exists in the context of recording of HBA. The gap in recording is due to variation in policing practice and understanding of victim-survivors' experiences of HBA, rather than definitional issues.
- Police recording of HBA is affected by four key categories which can lead to inaccuracies: over-recording, under-recording, creative recording and mis-recording. We recommend that clear HBA pathways be established within recording systems to ensure that police are able to record HBA clearly.
- There is fear from police of appearing culturally insensitive when responding to victim-survivors from minoritised backgrounds. This can mean that appropriate questions are not always asked to victim-survivors, and cases of HBA may be dismissed/recorded as domestic abuse.
- It is suggested that rather than the existing DASH risk assessment questions, instead alternative questions based on victim-survivor experiences be asked.
- Police often rely on a 'safety net' within forces – lack of confidence in identifying HBA at the onset means they depend on others within the force to make decisions. This can sometimes lead to delays for victim-survivors but may make officers responsible for the initial contact more confident. We recommend that the 'safety net' be formalised and streamlined, alongside better training.
- Engagement with third sector organisations occurs at crisis point or when cases are complex, rather than through formal structured pathways. This is due to the police using third sector organisations as a fall back. We recommend that the role of third sector organisations be integrated into formal multiagency responses and pathways
- To support police to improve their knowledge in this area, we recommend joint training to be conducted alongside NGOs. Learning from what victim-survivors tell us is helpful. The format of the training should be victim-survivor defined.

INTRODUCTION

Honour-based abuse (HBA) is a serious issue particularly but not exclusively affecting racialised minorities, with a strong gender bias. Perpetrators of HBA use a range of violent, abusive, coercive and controlling behaviours to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs, and the honour code of the family and wider community. HBA may include physical, sexual, emotional, financial and other forms of abuse to punish those, most often women, who are perceived to have brought dishonour upon family by breaking the honour code (Gill and Aujla, 2014). It is understood to include forced marriage (FM) and female genital mutilation (FGM).

There exists a gap in terms of consistent recording of HBA crimes and incidents across police forces due to a range of factors (Dyer, 2015) that leads to inconsistent justice outcomes for victims. This project underlines the importance of accurate and ethical recording of HBA that has been acknowledged by the police since 2015 (HMIC 2015). With the aim to suggest ways to improve identification and recording of HBA, this project collated and analysed data in relation to existing recording patterns followed by the police. The project also sought to address whether a new definition of HBA would enable consistent, timely and accurate recording and approaches to HBA across police forces.

METHODOLOGY

The project used a coproduced methodology that was developed with the police forces and the wider advisory group. We did not include the voice of victim-survivors. The methods initially agreed were: pilot focus groups; analysis of databases to examine quantitative data held by police forces in relation to the recording of HBA, FM and FGM; and focus groups and interviews to develop a definition of honour based abuse to enable better and more effective data collection recording.

The data was collected and analysed using a grounded theory approach (GTA). Sarma's (2023) work explains that GTA permits systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to develop theory 'grounded' in data and facilitates iterative strategies to go back and forth between data and emerging analysis. GTA calls for a continual interplay between data collection and analysis (Bowen, 2006; Dunne, 2011), that calls for flexibility in data collection techniques. We therefore made some changes to the methodology to meet our objectives as below:

- 1) Change in focus: From the pilot interviews and focus groups with police forces & NGOs, it emerged that FGM and FM are understood to be more straightforward offences than HBA, and were therefore easier to record consistently. We therefore changed our focus to the recording of HBA.
- 2) Change in methods: Early pilot interviews, focus groups and blank database templates suggested that making comparisons between data held by different forces would be difficult due to use of inconsistencies across systems and data collected across forces. Instead, we asked the police forces to fill in google forms re their recording patterns.

During the pilot stage, we conducted:

- One-to-one/two-to-one interviews at one of the police forces (participants = 5)
- Focus group with two third sector organisations (participants = 15)
- One-to-one/two-to-one interviews with members of two third sector organisations (participants = 3)

During the data collection stage, we conducted:

- Focus groups with 5 police forces (participants = 45)
- Interviews with call handlers from two police forces (participants = 6)
- Google forms (participants =20)

As explained, GTA enabled the development of emerging themes and findings that were grounded in all the data rather than derived from preconceived conceptual frameworks. The key conceptual framework that emerged was the need for a victim-survivor framework to be integrated in the procedural justice framework adopted by the police. Procedural justice refers to the idea that the criminal justice system must constantly be demonstrating its legitimacy to the public it serves, and that the public understands the procedures followed to be just (Mulvihill, Gangoli, Gill and Hester, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research indicated a lack of consistency and understanding of what constitutes HBA within the police, and our research participants reported that the term HBA itself was problematic, many referring to its seemingly positive connotations of the term 'honour'. This is in line with previous research in the area (Mulvihill et al. 2019; Gill and Harrison, 2016), however we also found that victim-survivors do not identify the abuse they experience as HBA:

We rarely probably use it because the service-users that come to us don't understand HBA, they don't actually know they're a victim of HBA' (NGO1).

In line with previous research, it was clear that for the police, cultural sensitivities and 'race anxiety' (Gill and Harrison, 2016; Chantler and Gangoli, 2011) remain contributory factors for the inaccurate reporting of HBA. We found that informal 'safety nets' are in place to mitigate against an individual police employee's lack of knowledge, which includes supervisory oversight of call handlers' calls, scans which pick up cases under the tag of 'protecting vulnerable persons', randomised audit checks and referrals to safeguarding. We also found that the police often approach specialist third sector organisations for advice and support, but this is mostly when crisis point is reached, or a case is considered complex. These multiple safety nets enable the police to re-categorise some cases which may have initially been inaccurately categorised, though this is by no means fool proof.

We found that the recording of HBA can take the following forms:

1. **Over-recording** due to double/triple counting e.g. an incident being flagged as FM as well as HBA.
2. **Under-recording** e.g. when HBA is mistakenly flagged as domestic abuse
3. **Creative recording** where incidents are not 'typically' perceived as HBA/FM or FGM but fit under the legal definition (for FM/FGM) e.g. a sex worker being assaulted in the genital area recorded as FGM.
4. **Mis-recording** where incidents are wrongly categorised as HBA e.g. arranged marriage confused with forced marriage.

The lack of understanding of HBA among police was clear, with many citing participation in the research as a form of education and awareness-raising.

CONCLUSION

Formal definitions and police understandings of HBA needs to incorporate victim-survivor perspectives, so that with every 'touch point', the victim-survivors' bespoke needs are foregrounded —through the understanding of the concept, risk assessments, interventions, and trauma-informed training. Devising a new definition of HBA would not be beneficial; instead incorporating a nuanced understanding of victim-survivors' experiences into police practice can enable better identification, recording and prevention of HBA. Currently, police recording of HBA is affected by four key patterns: over-recording, under-recording, creative recording and mis-recording. Our research suggests that lived experiences of victim-survivors should also form the basis of establishing a specific HBA pathway to make recording HBA more clear-cut. We suggest an HBA pathway because the existing DASH risk assessment framework does not fully identify risk faced by those reporting HBA. We recommend this HBA pathway to be bolstered by a line of inquiry based on victim-survivor

experiences. There are ‘pockets of good policework’ and evidence of good practice showing that police do put time and resources into asking the deeper questions to accurately record and respond to an HBA incident. Sometimes, officers liaise with safeguarding teams to double check they have recorded HBA correctly, forming a ‘safety net’ within police forces which ought to be formalised and streamlined. This needs to be coupled with better training conducted alongside specialist organisations. In line with this, there is a profound need to formalise and fund partnerships working with specialist and third sector organisations from the onset. Cohesive multi-agency partnership pathways can be established to formally recognise the value of expertise that specialist organizations bring to supporting police responses to HBA.

Implications for further research

Until the correct identification and police recording of HBA is achieved, HBA will remain a hidden form of abuse with many victims never having the opportunity to become survivors, and. We consider the experiences of victim-survivors of experience of reporting HBA to the police as integral not only to understanding their perception of justice but also to truly reflect the procedural justice framework followed by police forces. There is scope for further research which takes as its starting point the lived experiences of victims/survivors in reconceptualising HBA and impacting the recording and other procedures associated with these forms of violence and abuse.

Authors names: Professor Geetanjali Gangoli (Durham University), Dr Nikki D’Souza (Northumbria University), Dr Kate Butterby (Durham University), Ayurshi Dutt (Durham University)

Date: 02.05.2023

Bibliography

Bowen, G.A. (2006) ‘Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts’, *International journal of qualitative methods*, 5(3), pp. 12–23.

Chantler, K., & Gangoli, G. (2011). Violence Against Women in Minoritised Communities: Cultural Norm or Cultural Anomaly? In R. K. Thiara, S. A. Condon, & M. Schrötle (Eds.), *Violence against Women and Ethnicity: Commonalities and Differences across Europe* (pp. 353-366). Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Dunne, C. (2011) ‘The place of the literature review in grounded theory research’, *International journal of social research methodology*, 14(2), pp. 111–124.

Dyer, E. (2015). ‘Honour’ killings in the U.K. Helen Jackson Society. Available online: [Honour-Killings-in-the-UK.pdf \(henryjacksonsociety.org\)](https://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/Honour-Killings-in-the-UK.pdf) last accessed 10.04.2023.

Gill, A. K., & Aujla, W. (2014). Conceptualizing ‘honour’ killings in Canada: An extreme form of domestic violence? *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, Vol 9 (1)

Gill, A. K., & Harrison, K. (2016). Police responses to intimate partner sexual violence in South Asian communities. *Policing*, 10(4), 446–455.

HMIC (2015) An inspection of the police response to honour-based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Available online: [the-depths-of-dishonour.pdf \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/the-depths-of-dishonour.pdf). Last accessed 13.04. 2023.

Mulvihill, M., Gangoli, G., Gill, A.K. and Hester, M. (2019) The experience of interactional justice for victims of ‘honour’-based violence and abuse reporting to the police in England and Wales, *Policing and Society*, 29:6, 640-656.

Sarma, K. (2023). Towards an explanation of marital violence against women: A case study of Assam, India. PhD thesis. University of Lancaster.