

Written evidence from Zlakha Ahmed MBE, Apna Haq [HBA0003]

About Apna Haq

We are a Black and minoritized women's user-led and survivor-led anti racist and feminist women's ending-Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organisation. Based in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. We work to improve Black and minoritised women's safety, stability, resilience, well-being and autonomy following violence. We also work to prevent VAWG and improve system responses to Black and minoritised women, through leading and supporting local and national campaigns, community awareness raising, the delivery of training to other agencies and participation in a range of research projects. As a long-established 'by and for' Black and minoritised woman-led organisation, Apna Haq has developed expertise on the experiences of Black and minoritised women, and specific forms of VAWG including forced marriage, 'honour-based' violence and child sexual exploitation (CSE), child abuse.

A. Challenging of the use of the term Honour based violence

In terms of our submission, we firstly challenge the notion of 'honour-based abuse' just being associated with certain communities i.e., just non-white communities. From the time that this issue was acknowledged by the home office whenever Apna Haq have referred to 'honour' based abuse, we have like many of our other black and minoritised sister organisations across the UK used the term with asterisk as we acknowledge that we have to use the language as that is what has been given to us but we do not agree with it. We ensure that any awareness raising or training that we deliver on 'honour' based abuse highlights this issue. A clear example of this is shown in one of the case studies that we use within our delivery of 'honour' based abuse training. We use a case study of Jayne Champion. Jayne was a young Welsh woman. When Jayne's parents came home to find Jayne half undressed with her black boyfriend in the house, Jayne was beaten up by the parents. Her dad subsequently went on to try to strangulate her, he received a prison sentence for his abuse. The motives behind the abuse were ultimately power and control behind the racism. ie Jaynes parents were emotionally and physically abusive towards her as they were unhappy about the life choices she was making. These are the same precepts offenders have at the base in 'honour' based violence cases.

B. Case Studies

The following sample of case studies are selected to give the Committee broad and detailed information about the diverse kind of events and abuses that take place and our organisation faces day in and day out, all of these as in Jayne Champion case show are examples of 'honour' based abuse. What they all have in common is that the range of different professional involved from police, health workers, social workers do not understand 'honour' based abuse and the risk families can impose on individuals.

1. Young woman had sexual abuse within marriage. Left with police intervention and went to live with siblings. When told siblings that husband had been sexually abusive (use of porn), her siblings turned against her and said that the reason the husband had been violent in the first place was because she was a bad character, loose women who enjoyed sex/porn particularly as she had started to dress in western clothing, since coming from Pakistan (her husband's stipulations) and thus why her husband had been violent. The siblings were emotionally abusive as well as controlling her movements, she was not allowed to leave the house unless she was with a family member as they felt she would be getting up to no good. To meet a man. The siblings wanted her to return to Pakistan so that her 'dad could sort her out'. After living with these siblings for 5 weeks, she was emotionally very low (no recourse victim waiting for her domestic violence concession to come through, came through then 3 months wait for). We kept offering refuge place, which when she told her siblings about, they said only bad women go there and that they would excommunicate her. She went to stay with one sibling who lived in a town down south who supportive. Within a few days of being there because she was malnourished, she passed out. Ambulance took her to hospital. She was kept in for 4 days as malnourished (had not been eating due to stress was going through). On discharge social worker rang us to say discharging her to other family members living in London. We had to labour the point including getting the manager to send an email to say that 'have you not read her case notes, she has been suffering honour-based violence from her extended family, does not feel safe with any of them and that this is impacting on her physical and emotional well-being therefore would not be in her safeguarding interests to send her to them. After our emails social services took this on board and we arranged for her to go into a refuge.

Social worker/s not understanding that siblings/extended family had been carrying out 'honour-based abuse'

Social worker had not read notes re family wanting to send her back to family.

2. Young woman 15 taken to Pakistan as social services did not see connection between child reporting sexual abuse by dad and potential of honour-based abuse. Mum was allowed to take girl to Pakistan. Social services saying that mum safe parent. In Pakistan 15-year-old not allowed out locked in home. Mum saying has to remain in Pakistan and that dad has not done anything wrong. The dad is in Pakistan currently the mum has regular contact with him. The girl is looked down upon by the mother and grandparents who girl is staying with for having told such things to social services (there is disbelief that the dad could have done this). The girl has reached out to Apna Haq saying she desperately wants to return back to Rotherham as wants to go to school and complete her GCSEs. Apna Haq we are worried about potential of forced marriage for this young girl, as our experience

AH contacted social services they aware of girl and case. Their risk assessment had shown mum as being the safe parent. They had not understood the potential of honour-based abuse on this young girl.

3. Iranian woman husband making her wear hot pants. Professionals did not understand. Said how can she be abused by him if wearing hot pants assumption that woman in control.

Police offices, IDVA, housing worker – professionals not understanding issues.

4. Own parents turning against pressurising daughter to return to husband and made her return, even though they could see bruising, so she did not share sexual abuse he was meting on her.
5. Daughter shared that husband rapes her. Family not taking any notice. Self-harm suicide attempts.
6. Housing workers saying why can't she go back to Pakistan. Woman saying can't go back as no protection, I & family vulnerable from in-laws, have made threats to kill over there. Divorced woman no respect could be revenge raped. Issues not listened too.
7. Young girl at school 15-year-old. Boyfriend forced her to have oral sex, she was. Scared to tell her parents as they had forced older daughter into marriage when found out that she had a boyfriend. Social services said we're going to tell parents as that usual protocol.

8. Girls at school/ college addicted to weed won't tell teachers as scared that they will tell parents, leading to honour-based abuse. Like with 15 years old that is being kept in Pakistan as had shared dad sexually abused her.

9. Laura case: professionals not understanding honour based violence.

Case exemplifies clear misogynistic double standards to sexual behaviour i.e. Ok for him to sleep, have sex with Laura but as soon as she went to tell his parents it suddenly became an honour issue where he stabbed her to death.

Within our school/college professional awareness raising training on honour-based violence we share this case to bring out the double standards and to show that this issue is not about honour but about power and control.

10. Young unmarried woman who got pregnant, was no longer safe in Rotherham as her uncles (mothers' brothers), had become emotionally and physically abusive once her pregnancy had started to show. We helped mother and daughter to get to a refuge for their safety. At least 2 of these uncles were in long term relationships with white women who they had not married and with whom they had children with. They had never acknowledged the children or girlfriend to their own families.

Double standards by the men.

11. Few years back although own parents were really supportive, young unmarried woman who visibly pregnant had bricks thrown at her while returning home, we arranged safe accommodation elsewhere for her, parents helped with the birth etc.

The above case studies exemplify the double standards that are rife within so called 'honour-based violence' which is again why we challenge the use of these words, as these cases show the issues being of power and control. When the young women are behaving in a way that the families/communities feel is unacceptable they are then abused.

Inappropriate police intervention:

12. On a Wednesday 17-year-old missed college went to cinema instead, when mum found out she gave her a telling off. It was the start of Ramadan and thus the young woman decided not to go to college on Thursday and Friday. At the beginning of the next week 2 police officers knocked on the door and

asked the young woman to come and sit in the car with them not giving any explanation. For the next 40 mins they sat with the young woman constantly asking and telling her that were her parents abusive, were they going to force her into a marriage. The young woman became quite distressed as she kept saying 'why are you saying all of this, my parents have never been abusive, they would never force me into a marriage. She shared that the officers would not let go repeating themselves, saying we are here to protect you, we can come to the house with you so you can get your belongings, then we can take you to a safe place. The young woman has shared that the fact that she was alone in a police car, being asked these questions which were not related to her experiences have left her traumatised.

For us this has been a really negative experience for the young woman where she now has a lack of trust with the police.

It is obvious that these officers had 'honour-based violence' & forced marriage training but their behaviour was out of context. Question arises to the type of training they have received.

Summary

The above cases aim to illustrate some of the ways in which so-called honour-based abuse takes place and how women we support are subjected to abuse and violence.

We know from our own experience and from our sectors experience as by and led for Black and minoritised women's organisation, women and girls reach out to community organisations like ourselves and not generic funded organisations. Thus, we are crucial in the fight against this issue. However, we are all chronically underfunded with many of us having gained and then lost local authority contracts as our work is not recognised or seen. It is imperative that in order to ensure that women and girls from our communities undergoing 'honour' abuse are offered the opportunity to reach out and gain support from trusted grass roots led by and for organisations like ourselves.

The importance of Ministers gaining greater understanding of these issues cannot be overstated, because if the Government is to get the national strategy against violence against women right for all women, these issues need to be highlighted and strategies to ensure access to adequate support and to justice are totally imperative.

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