

Evidence submitted by Dr Roxanne Khan [HBA0047]

Summary

The submission can be summarised as follows:

- Introduction: HARM network and professional expertise (paragraphs 1 to 2)
- Factual information (paragraphs 3 to 17)
- Recommendations for action (paragraphs 18 to 21)
- Reference list

Introduction: HARM network and professional expertise

1. I am Founder and Director of HARM (Honour Abuse Research Matrix) at the University of Central Lancashire. With 300+ members worldwide, HARM is a consortium of researchers, experts by experience, charities, policymakers, and practitioners from various disciplines and across sectors. HARM develops novel and practical ways to understand, explain and respond to family violence and domestic homicide, so that it includes 'honour' abuse, forced marriage and FGM. HARM is internationally recognised as a leading authority on 'honour' abuse and engages in research and policy activities with external partners locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.
2. I am Head of Research at OnEvidence Ltd, and a Chartered Psychologist, Chartered Scientist, and academic researcher specialising in 'honour' abuse. Over two decades, I have presented to, consulted for, and acted as an advisor to NGOs, police boards, Government committees, and/or steering groups on 'honour' abuse. This includes the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Domestic Violence and Abuse in 2021¹, and the Women and Equalities Committee in 2022.² I am also an independent Domestic Homicide Review Chair and Author. As an indicator of expertise, my research on 'honour' abuse has won multiple awards and was shortlisted by the Times Higher Education Awards for 'Research Project of the Year' 2022. I am Editor of a record-breaking Special Issue on 'honour' abuse. I have written 60+ peer-reviewed research articles, reports, and book chapters, and I am author of an academic and practitioner textbook - *'Honour' Abuse, Violence and Killing: New Frontiers in Forensic Psychology* - published in 2023. My academic research, policy-development, and professional practice in this area, informs the 2 recommendations for action by the Government (see paragraphs 18 to 21).

What forms of violence against women and girls are motivated by so-called honour?

3. Family or community members may inflict 'honour' abuse against women and girls for a range of reasons. Types of harm include psychological abuse (e.g., coercive control), physical assault (e.g., cutting off hair), spiritual abuse (e.g., exerting power and control over someone using faith, religion, or beliefs), restraints (e.g., imprisonment or kidnapping), and being forced into marriage. At the extreme is so called 'honour' killing. In a pattern established across studies, overwhelmingly, victims are adolescent and adult females, who suffer subtle or hard psychological abuse (especially coercive control) from childhood. It is notable that males, who represent a proportion of victims, are most typically victimized by associating with a 'dishonourable' or 'shameful' woman or if he is perceived not to be heterosexual.^{3,4} The latest data from the Forced Marriage Unit showed that in 2021, over one-quarter of the 251 cases reported involved male victims (26%), who were particularly represented in cases where they were LGBTQ+ (63%), or had mental capacity concerns (55%).⁵

4. Despite the harm it may cause, 'honour' abuse is often condoned or justified by abusers, who might claim that they are controlling a female relative's behaviour and actions to ensure she does not behave in a socially unacceptable (or sexualised) way. For example, her behaviour and actions may be monitored to prevent her from becoming romantically/sexually intimate or pregnant before/outside of marriage, or from seeking a divorce). Likewise, if a female relative is thought to have behaved in a socially unacceptable (or sexualised) way, members of her family and/or community may 'punish' her for acting 'dishonourably' and tarnishing the reputation and honour of her family and the wider community.

Are these different forms understood by the Government, police, and other agencies?

5. Although 'honour' abuse victims in the UK are typically young South Asian or Middle Eastern females, victims are not confined to one age, ethnic group, or gender, and are not unique to any one culture, country, or religion. For example, lesser acknowledged by Government, police, and other agencies are victims who are male, apostates, or are from other minoritised and/or marginalised populations in the UK, including females of Mediterranean, Turkish heritage or of Gypsy Roma Traveller communities, or people who are LGBT. ⁶
6. Unlike other forms of domestic abuse, the psychology of honour abuse (different abuser's motivation and impact on victims) is largely overlooked, in favour of sociological/criminological explanations and a focus on physical violence. Yet coercive control, by multiple family members, often begins in childhood and the impact of this on girls and women can cause significant psychological harm (see paragraph 12 for description of coercive control conviction). In terms of health impacts, for example, British South Asian women are an 'at risk' group for suicide, suicide attempts, and self-harm, with cultural conflicts with family often reported as a precipitating factor for suicide ideation.⁷ This is salient as studies show that victims often do not report their abuse to anyone and hide their injuries to protect their family's honour.⁸

How prevalent is honour-based abuse?

7. A conservative global estimate is that over 5000 women are murdered in the name of 'honour' every year. While Pakistan has the highest rate of 'honour' killings,⁹ Britain is reported to be the 'honour' killing capital of Europe, with an estimated 12 murders each year.¹⁰ While there is no firm data to support this claim, victim data does show that while fewer than 3 million people in the UK are of South Asian or Arab heritage (just 5.7% of the total population),¹¹ those most at risk of 'honour' abuse (including forced marriage) are women of South Asian and Arab heritage.^{12,13}
8. National prevalence data collected to date establishes that 'honour' abuse occurs across the UK and that the type of abuse is varied. Figures on recorded cases (shown in paragraphs 9 to 11), indicate that the scale of the problem is far greater than officially reported data alone suggests.
9. A study by IKWRO that found 2823 cases were reported to 39 police forces during 2010¹⁴.
10. Home Office data (2019 and 2020) showed 2024 'honour' abuse offences (140 forced marriage, and 74 FGM) were recorded by 43 police forces in England and Wales. Types of offences included *assault without injury* (28%), *assault with injury* (17%), *threats to kill* (10%), *kidnapping* (10%), *malicious communications* (7%), *rape of a female aged 16 and over* (6%), *harassment* (5%), *stalking* (2%), *cruelty to children/young person* (2%), *public fear, alarm, or distress* (1%).¹⁵
11. Home Office data (2021-2022) showed that, 2887 offences were recorded by the police in England and Wales (77 FGM and 141 forced marriage). Types of offences included *controlling and coercive behaviour* (17%), *assault without injury* (14%), *assault with injury* (14%), *threats to kill* (9%), *malicious communications* (8%), *rape of a female aged 16 and over* (6%), *kidnapping* (6%), *stalking* (6%), *harassment* (5%), *cruelty to children/young person* (2%), *public fear, alarm, or distress* (1%), plus *other offences* (11%).¹⁶
12. As *controlling and coercive behaviour* accounted for a fifth of offences and was the most reported type of 'honour' abuse in the latest data, it is noteworthy that between 2016 (after this new offence came into force) and 2019, the Crown Prosecution Service took 1423 suspects to court,

with 63% being found guilty. Although data did not record which of these cases were related to suspected 'honour' abuse, apart from white suspects (895), suspects of south Asian heritage were the second highest ethnic group to be prosecuted (165), followed by Black people (64), those who identified themselves as mixed ethnic heritage (44).¹⁷ It is reported that the first father to be convicted of the offence was a 64-year-old South Asian man, alongside his 24 year-old-son, who inflicted hard psychological abuse on his daughters for refusing to agree to arranged marriages in Pakistan, and did not allow them out at night or to meet their friends, and banned them from meeting their two sisters who had married men of their choice.¹⁸

What do we know about the background or characteristics of victims and perpetrators?

13. Male relatives are the most reported perpetrators of 'honour' abuse (e.g., fathers, brothers, uncles, sons, cousins). 'Honour' abuse is also committed by female family members (e.g., mothers, sisters, aunts, and female relatives' in-law). While males and females appear to inflict 'honour' based abuse differently, women - particularly mothers and mothers-in-law - can inflict hard psychological abuse and physical violence within specific contexts, and their role can be significant. More commonly, female relatives condone the abuse committed by male relatives. 'Honour' abuse has been referred to as 'death by gossip' and 'death by family' because unlike other forms of domestic violence and child abuse, multiple and close family members enable, overlook, or even encourage the abuse. It is not uncommon for relatives to turn their backs on vulnerable girls and women, refusing to defend them or to offer them refuge, as the need to protect family honour from public shame can override the emotional desire to love and protect family members and friends.¹⁹

What is known about abuse practised under the pretext of upholding cultural norms? Is there available data and/or research on the prevalence of these practices?

14. It is important to recognise that there are several key elements that distinguish 'honour' abuse from family violence more generally, as this is pivotal to effectively identifying and safeguarding victims without stigmatising minoritised communities in the UK. Families and communities in which 'honour' abuse is reported tend to be religiously and socially traditional, and females are expected to behave in a way that shows other people that they are virtuous, modest, and loyal to their family - especially towards their male relatives. Likewise, males show that that are honourable by acting tough to dominate female relatives, to ensure she is seen as morally upright and thus, honourable.²⁰ South Asian and Arab communities in the UK that ascribe to these codes of honour tend to identify with cultural collectivism. Families in collectivist honour cultures maintain strong bonds with both immediate and extended family. Collectivist honour cultures are patriarchal and are thus, characterised by differential and unequal gender roles. Women, for example often have demands imposed on them by immediate and extended family as well as their wider communities, so their daily conduct and interactions may be monitored by countless people who can judge them. Women may be treated with great contempt if others perceive them to have transgressed an 'acceptable' code of conduct, with or without evidence.¹⁹

What are the challenges or barriers faced by victims of honour-based abuse in seeking support or protection?

15. *Internal barriers:* Several features specific to 'honour' abuse may prevent victims approaching professional agencies for help or support. For example, victims may be reluctant to seek formal help to (1) protect their partner, (2) preserve their relationship, (3) protect the family's honour and reputation, or for (4) fear of losing their children.¹⁴ Victims may lack awareness of external help available, such as financial and housing support. Victims from minoritised ethnic communities in the UK may be particularly reluctant to involve outsiders in what they may consider to be a

private family matter, more so if they fear negative reactions from their community, or reprisals from their husband's family for shaming the family.

16. *External barriers*: These include immigration status, as this is associated with the loss of social support, and these victims may not be aware of their rights in the UK, or they may not have access to appropriate interpreters if necessary. Another barrier is when external agencies frame 'honour' abuse as a simply a cultural issue, so that mainstream service providers may be reluctant to intervene, or their efforts to help might be restricted or constrained due to concerns of being seen as culturally insensitive or racist.¹⁴

How would you assess the police response to honour-based abuse? How could it be improved?

17. A multiagency study conducted by HARM examined the police response to 'honour' abuse (including forced marriage) using data from 38 police forces across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The study concluded that the police response was at best, piecemeal, with many problems stemming from an inconsistent approach to recording incidents and data gathering, in addition to poor training for police officers and other frontline staff that lacked cultural competency.¹⁰ The study recommended three ways in which the police response could be improved: (i) a national strategy to improve 'honour' abuse recording, coordinated by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), working with both the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and Victims' Commissioner; (ii) evidence-based research led by academics with expertise, in collaboration with the third sector charities, (iii) awareness training.

Recommendations for action

18. **Recommendation 1: To assess the scale and nature of 'honour' abuse across the UK, the Government should conduct methodologically robust research led by academic specialists, in partnership with third sector organisations.** 'By and for' charities have made great strides in highlighting and providing the specialist needs of 'honour' abuse victims in the UK, over the last two decades. A fundamental problem that remains is defining and assessing the scope of the problem. This has hampered efforts to identify/manage perpetrators of 'honour' abuse and safeguard/support victims in different parts of the UK. This has created a fragile strategy for collecting data, that has affected attempts to: (a) measure prevalence rates, (b) develop reliable risk assessment, (c) provide reliable support services, and (d) respond to perpetrators in the criminal justice system.
19. **Recommendation 2: Government ministers should champion existing, culturally competent policy initiatives produced to support victims of 'honour' abuse.** The following two safeguarding policies developed for schools, colleges, universities, and workplaces are likely to be effective as most victims of 'honour' abuse (including forced marriage) are girls and young women, and a proportion of victims are young males, while their abusers are their family and community members.
20. **Example 1:** The *Domestic Abuse Policy Guidance for UK Universities*²¹ was developed by HARM. This is the UK's first domestic abuse policy guidance for universities and is fully inclusive with respect to the cultural and ethnic diversity of staff and students. This policy guidance, shortlisted for a Time Higher Education award in 2022, found that over 185,000 UK university staff and students suffer domestic abuse every year. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (2020) reported that full-time students (10.5% of females and 4.8% of males) were most likely, in occupational terms, to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year. This research also found that of the very few UK universities to have specific domestic abuse policies, they were not inclusive, overlooking cultural and ethnic diversity, specifically, honour abuse. This policy guidance is endorsed by national charities, including *Women's Aid England and Wales*, *SafeLives*, *Office for*

Students, and education leaders, including Professor Buckingham CBE (Universities UK President Chair, Athena SWAN).

21. **Example 2: Harmful Traditional Practices in the Workplace: Guidance for Best Practice**²² was also developed by HARM. This provides practical, evidence-based recommendations for organisations to safeguard employees and service-users affected by ‘honour’ abuse, forced marriage, and FGM. With a solid financial business case, this workplace guidance has been adopted/endorsed by NHS Employers, Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse, and London’s Mayor’s Officer, amongst many other organisations, such as city councils and universities. This policy guidance was endorsed by 70+ influential signatories in an Open Letter handed to the then Home Secretary, Priti Patel MP, at the Hidden Harm Summit for Domestic Abuse in 2020, Chaired by Prime Minister at the time, Boris Johnson.²³

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Reference List

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December 2022
