

## Honour Based Abuse

### 1. Definition

Honour based abuse is a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. Such violence can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and / or community by breaking their honour code.

For young victims it is a form of child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights.

It can be distinguished from other forms of violence, as it is often committed with some degree of approval and/or collusion from family and/or community members. Women, men and younger members of the family can all be involved in the abuse.

Honour based abuse will often go hand in hand with forced marriages, although this is not always the case. Honour crimes and forced marriages are already covered by the law and can involve a range of criminal offences.

Honour based abuse is often the collective term used to include Female Genital Mutilation and Forced Marriage.

### 2. Risks

Young victims may find themselves in an abusive and dangerous situation against their will with no power to seek help. The usual avenues for seeking help – through parents or other family members may be unavailable. Honour based abuse manifests itself in a diverse range of ways with children and young people, including forced marriage, domestic and/or sexual violence, rape, physical assaults, harassment, kidnap, threats of violence (including murder), witnessing violence directed towards a sibling or indeed another family member, and female genital mutilation.

Women and girls are the most common victims of honour-based abuse however it can also affect men and boys. Crimes of 'honour' do not always include violence. Crimes committed in the name of 'honour' might include:

- domestic abuse
- threats of violence
- sexual or psychological abuse
- forced marriage
- being held against your will or taken somewhere you don't want to go
- assault

**A forced marriage** is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities or reduced capacity, cannot) consent to the marriage as they are pressurised, or abuse is used to force them to do so. It is recognised in the UK as a form of domestic/child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights.

The pressure put on people to marry against their will may be physical (for example, threats, physical violence or sexual violence) and/or emotional and psychological (for example, making someone feel like they are bringing 'shame' on their family). Financial abuse (for example, taking someone's wages) may also be a factor.

There is a clear distinction between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage. In arranged marriages, both participants give their full consent and enter the marriage willingly whereas forced marriages, one or both participants enter the marriage without giving their consent. They go through with the wedding under duress from their families. Sometimes what starts out as an arranged marriage can quickly escalate to a forced marriage if one of the participants change their mind only for the family to force them to go through with it.

A [new video](#) from the Forced Marriage Unit shows the devastating impact of forced marriage on victims and their families. The aim of [the film](#) is to raise public awareness of the impact of forced marriage, and warn of the criminal consequences of involvement, building on the outreach and education work of the FMU. Told from the perspective of a victim's older brother, who is complicit in arranging her forced marriage but unaware of its true impact until it is too late, the film represents the first time the FMU have directly targeted family members. The government is committed to ensure that professionals who are made aware of a forced marriage victim have the training and guidance they need to provide effective advice and support. This includes police officers, social workers, teachers, and safeguarding professionals.

**The Force Marriage Unit (FMU) has created:**

- [Multi-Agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of forced marriage](#), which provides step-by-step advice for frontline workers, including health professionals, educational staff, police, children's social care, adult social services and local authority housing
- [Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for dealing with forced marriage](#), which provides guidance for all persons and bodies who exercise public functions in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

The FMU has also developed free forced marriage e-learning for professionals which can be accessed [here](#). The modules aim to enable professionals to recognise the warning signs and ensure that appropriate action is taken to help protect and support all those at risk.

## **Breast Ironing**

Professionals working with children and young people must be able to identify the signs and symptoms of girls who are at risk of or have undergone breast ironing. Similarly, to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), breast ironing is classified as physical abuse.

Breast ironing uses heated objects, including stones and hammers, to flatten a girl's breasts and stop them from developing and is typically carried out when the girls are aged between 11 and 15, as they enter puberty, and is often done by the victim's own family under the 'misguided intention' of protecting her from rape and sexual harassment.

As well as extreme pain and psychological damage, the practice puts the young women at increased risk of developing cysts, infections and even cancer.

Tri.x have produced a useful policy briefing on breast ironing which can be found at [www.trixonline.co.uk](http://www.trixonline.co.uk)

There is no specific law banning breast ironing in the UK and no-one has ever been prosecuted for carrying out the practice. However, offenders can be prosecuted for a range of crimes, including common assault, child cruelty and grievous bodily harm.

Professionals may be reluctant to tackle the issue because of 'cultural sensitivities' – the words 'culture', 'tradition' or 'religion' might come up when trying to explain this harmful practice, but as in the case of female genital mutilation (FGM), breast ironing is a ritualised form of child abuse.

### **Female genital mutilation**

Female genital mutilation is an offence under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 and can result in severe physical and psychological injuries and even death. It is almost always restricted to female children and young people i.e. those under 18 years old.

Online targeting of victims is being used more frequently as a means of controlling and exploiting them.

Victims can find it difficult to leave abusive relationships or ask for help if their immigration status is uncertain. They may face a number of issues such as a fear of deportation, bringing 'shame' on their families, financial difficulties and homelessness, or losing their children.

The notion of shame and the associated risk to the victim may persist long after the incident that brought about dishonour occurred. This means any new partner of the victim, children, associates or their siblings may be at serious risk of Significant Harm.

### **Behaviours that could be seen to transgress concepts of honour include:**

- Inappropriate make-up or dress;
- The existence of a boyfriend or a perceived unsuitable relationship e.g. a gay/lesbian relationship;
- Rejecting a forced marriage;
- Pregnancy outside of marriage;
- Being a victim of rape;
- Inter-faith relationships (or same faith, but different ethnicity);
- Leaving a spouse or seeking divorce;
- Kissing or intimacy in a public place;
- Alcohol and drugs use.

It is important to be mindful that young people may be subject to honour-based abuse for reasons which may seem improbable or relatively minor to others. Practitioners should never lose sight of the fact that they are interacting with extremely vulnerable women and men, who may be faced with making life changing decisions in an extremely short space of time. Many honour-based abuse victims, as in other forms of domestic abuse, just want the abuse to stop. They fear 'criminalising' their parents, families and/or their faith group and fear being isolated from their communities.

### 3. Indicators

It is likely that awareness that a child is the victim of an honour based crime will only come to light after an assault of some kind has taken place e.g. an allegation of domestic abuse or it may be that a child is reported as missing. There are inherent risks to the act of disclosure for the victim and possibly limited opportunities to ask for help for fear of retribution from their family or community.

There may be evidence of domestic abuse, including controlling, coercive and dominating behaviour towards the victim. Self-harming, family disputes, and unreasonable restrictions on the young person such as removal from education or virtual imprisonment within the home may occur.

Young people may be fearful of being forced into engagement/marriage.

Other warning signs may be FGM, sexual abuse and forced marriage.

Continual assessment and review are paramount as circumstances can change very quickly, for example, following disclosure to the police the risks to the victim and others who are supporting the victim may increase.

Young people may face significant harm if their families/communities realise that they have asked for help. All aspects of their safety need to be carefully assessed at every stage. Initially this needs to address whether it is safe for them to return home following a disclosure. The young person will need practical help such as accommodation and financial support, as well as emotional support and information about their rights and choices.

Some families go to considerable lengths to find their children who run away, and young people who leave home are at risk of significant harm if they are returned to their family. They may be reported as missing by their families, but no mention is made of the reason. It is important that practitioners explore the underlying reasons before any decisions are made.

### 4. Protection and Action to be Taken

Any suspicion or disclosure of violence or abuse against a child in the name of honour should be treated equally seriously as any other suspicion or disclosure or significant harm against a child. However, there are significant differences in the immediate response required. Bearing in mind the specific practice issues set out, where the concerns about the welfare and safety of the child or young person are such that a referral to Children's social care should be made – [See Levels of Need Descriptors and Threshold document](#) and refer to the MASH as a level 4 or if the child/ young person already have an allocated social worker make immediate contact to initiate procedures.

It takes a lot of courage for a child or young person to report to an agency that they have afraid that they will be, or have been, subjected to honour-based abuse. It is essential, therefore, that practitioners act in a manner that will not further jeopardise the child or young person's safety.

**Where a child or young person discloses fear of honour-based abuse in respect of them or a family member, professionals in all agencies should:**

- Take the disclosure seriously;
- See the child or young person immediately, and in a secure and private place;
- Seeing the child or young person on their own;
- Explain to the child or young person the limits of confidentiality, what information may have to be shared, with whom and for what purpose;

- Ask direct questions to gather enough information to make a referral to Children’s Social Care and the Police, including recording the child / young person’s wishes;
- Agree a means of discreet future contact with the child / young person;
- Explain that a referral to Children’s Social Care and Police will be made.

**Involving families in cases of forced marriage is dangerous:**

- It may increase the risk of serious harm to the victim. Experience shows that the family may punish them for seeking help;
- Involving the family includes visiting the family to ask them whether they are intending to force their child to marry or writing a letter to the family requesting a meeting about their child's allegation that they are being forced to marry;
- Interpreters should be on the approved list. Relatives, friends, community leaders and neighbours should not be used as interpreters in case they are linked to the group suspected of carrying out the crime - despite any reassurances from this known person.

In cases of violence in the name of honour and of forced marriage, it is essential to consider other siblings in the family that may be experiencing, or at risk of, the same abuse.

Accurate record keeping in all cases of violence/abuse in the name of honour is important. Records should:

- Be accurate, detailed, clear and include the date;
- Use the person’s own words in quotation marks;
- Document any injuries – include photographs, body maps or pictures of their injuries;
- Only be available to those directly involved in the person’s case.

Practitioners must take care that information which increases the risk to the child is not inadvertently shared with family members.

**5. Issues**

Addressing the needs of the individual is key, as victims of honour-based abuse will require a tailored response dependent on a number of factors including e.g. language and cultural barriers, how long they have been in the country, their social and family networks and their economic circumstances.

**6. The ‘One Chance Rule’**

All practitioners working with victims of honour-based abuse need to be aware of the ‘one chance’ rule. That is, they may only have one chance to speak to a potential victim and thus they may only have one chance to save a life. This means that all practitioners working within statutory agencies need to be aware of their responsibilities and obligations when they come across these cases. If the victim is allowed to walk out of the door without support being offered, that one chance might be wasted.

<b>Review / Contacts / References</b>	
Document title:	<b>Self-Harming and Suicidal Behaviour</b>
Date approved:	11 November 2020
Approving body:	Policy & Practice Steering Group
Last review date:	
Revision history:	
Next review date:	October 2022

<p>Related internal policies, procedures, guidance:</p>	<p><a href="#">Legal Guidance</a> – not specifically about children</p> <p><a href="#">Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence Screening Toolkit</a></p> <p><a href="#">SafeLives Dash Risk Checklist for the Identification of High Risk Cases of Domestic Abuse, Stalking and ‘Honour’-based Violence</a></p> <p><a href="#">Protocol on the handling of ‘so-called’ Honour Based Violence/Abuse and Forced Marriage Offences between the National Police Chiefs’ Council and the Crown Prosecution Service</a></p> <p><a href="#">Forced Marriage Guidance, Home Office – information and practice guidelines for professional protecting, advising and supporting victims</a></p>
<p>Document owner:</p>	<p>Assistant Director</p>
<p>Lead contact / author:</p>	<p>Marisa de Jager Policy and Practice Lead</p>