
‘Innovation and the Application of Knowledge for More Effective Policing’

N8 Policing Research Partnership Catalyst Project

PROJECT TITLE: Early identification of honour-based abuse

INTRODUCTION

The project brought together the University of Manchester, West Yorkshire Police, and Karma Nirvana to identify and explore the barriers to supporting victims of honour-based abuse (HBA), gaps in the current provision, and instances of good practice. The overarching aims of this work was to increase the confidence in reporting, improve identification of HBA cases and police responses to them, therefore contributing to a more effective safeguarding of vulnerable victims. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, this research provides a much-needed evidence base to inform police practices, academic enquiry, policy-makers, and other practitioners who may come into contact with cases of HBA.

KEY FINDINGS

- Early identification of honour-based abuse is a multi-agency responsibility
- Police and practitioners need to be made aware of several subtle indicators that may indicate the presence of HBA and/or Forced Marriage. These can include the victim receiving money to spend on beauty treatments, not being allowed a house key, monitored or restricted use of their mobile phone/social media, and being chaperoned by family members.
- It is critical that police consider who may be a victim or suspect in HBA cases, as these may incorporate a wider network than initially indicated.
- Risk assessment is complex, and often lacks consistency. With the changes taking place in this area, it is likely that the assessment of HBA will become more challenging.
- More consistent and accurate reporting and recording of HBA, including ethnicity and specific type of offence, will strengthen the ability of police forces to gain a better understanding of these cases.
- The problematic use of Forced Marriage Protection Orders, missed opportunities to pick up on strong and subtle indicators of HBA, and inconsistencies with the use of warnings were all evident when analysing data on missing persons.
- Responding to HBA can present a number of challenges for the police; being branded as a racist, ascertaining the role of siblings as potential victims or perpetrators, recognising that the issue is not exclusive to the South Asian community, and unpicking complex cases involving networks within and external to families.
- There are a number of difficulties when having to use interpreters, particularly relating to gender matching, unregulated practice, limited training of interpreters, lack of gender matching, and difficulties in communicating and articulating experiences in a way that is understood by the practitioners involved.
- Recommendations arising from this project focus specifically on improving knowledge and awareness, and strengthening responses, recording and the risk assessment of HBA.

INTRODUCTION: PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2015, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2015) released the first-ever inspection into the police responses to honour-based abuse (HBA), forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). The report concluded that 'the police service has some way to go before the public can be fully confident that HBA is properly understood by the police and that potential and actual victims are adequately and effectively protected' (HMIC, 2015: 8).

This project focused on the early identification of honour-based abuse cases, explored the responses of West Yorkshire Police (WYP) to victims of HBA, and forced marriage, highlighting the importance of early and accurate identification of such cases. Utilising a mixed-methods approach – which included a detailed review of academic literature and policy developments, quantitative and qualitative analysis of police case file data, and qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and victim-survivors – this research sought to identify challenges faced by the police in recognising and addressing cases. This has included finding any gaps in the current provision, barriers to supporting victims and instances of good practice in order to aid the awareness and knowledge of HBA cases within WYP.

METHODOLOGY

The project consisted of three phases. The first stage involved a detailed review of academic and policy literature on HBA, which was undertaken to establish both the state of existing knowledge in the field, and the current context for policing HBA. The second stage of the project involved case file analysis of three different datasets from 2017 provided by WYP. The first dataset comprised of cases that had been flagged by the police as HBA and/or forced marriage (n=100). These cases were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to better understand the form and nature of HBA cases encountered by the police, as well as the factors that enabled effective identification. The second dataset comprised cases that had been flagged as DVA (n=120), although due to the large volume of cases, parameters were imposed on this dataset to narrow down the sample. The final dataset comprised missing persons (MISPER) cases (n=92). The following parameters were also imposed: all female, 'Asian' ethnicity, and aged between 16 and 24. Datasets two and three were closely examined for missed opportunities to identify HBA.

The final phase of the research comprised qualitative interviews with key stakeholders (n=11) and victim-survivors (n=5). This phase permitted a deeper exploration of the victims' perspectives of police responses, as well as views from those practitioners who were, either indirectly or directly, involved in working with victims of HBA. This qualitative phase of the research allowed for a more detailed exploration into the factors that assist or inhibit the identification and reporting of HBA.

FINDINGS

This project produced a significant number of findings relevant to how HBA cases are identified and responded to, in addition to the reasons underpinning instances where this does not occur.

Cases flagged as HBA/FM

- Most referrals to the police were made by victims (59%) and a low number of referrals were made from schools/colleges (4%), despite 22 victims being aged 18 or under.
- There were large amounts of missing data, particularly around matters such as nationality and language. There was also a lack of detailed information on ethnicity, with many victims recorded as 'Asian' with no further clarification.
- Risk assessment was inconsistent, and it was not always apparent why particular cases had received the allocated level of risk.
- Greater attention needs to be paid to both 'hidden' victims and suspects. For instance, there were a number of cases where the case file notes alluded to more than one perpetrator – for example, both parents – but where only one suspect was listed.
- Where suspects were known, 40% had a previous conviction or referral, with half of these involving the same victim as the current case. A history of HBA was only explicitly identified in five cases, but although previous convictions might indicate a history abuse, previous occurrences may not have been identified at the time.
- The most common outcome was the victim declining or withdrawing support (30%) followed by evidential difficulties (27%). While a prosecutorial outcome will not always be the best solution, the research indicates that there is a need for better evidence collection for those wishing to support a prosecution.

Cases flagged as DVA

- There were similar issues with missing information on victim and perpetrator characteristics, suggesting that this is a widespread problem.
- There was some evidence of missed opportunities to identify HBA within this dataset (n=17), though this was limited.
- Like HBA, the quality of risk assessments varied considerably in this dataset. DASH was not completed in 10 cases. In a further three, the DASH could not be completed due to victim issues. 13 DASH forms had no comments on them, one said no risk identified, and 18 had very limited information, however, this may be due to questions not being responded to by victims.

Missing Persons (MISPERS)

- There was some evidence of HBA and/or FM within this dataset. 11% of MISPERS had a history of HBA or FM.
- Four of the MISPERS had FMPOs, all of which were granted relatively recently (within eight months of the current missing incident), suggesting that these are not wholly effective.
- There were inconsistencies with the flags/warning markers attached to MISPERS, including those who had FMPOs.
- 19 out of 92 MISPER cases were identified as having evidence of or strong potential for HBA, though this was not always identified as such. There were a range of more subtle indicators, such as MISPERS leaving home to be with partners of whom their families did not approve, that were not recognised or marked anywhere by the police as carrying potential for HBA.

Interviews

- The interviews revealed that current risk assessment tools, such as DASH, are viewed by police and partner agencies as unsuitable for approaching HBA.
- The use of translators and challenges around interpreting were identified, including the difficulties in articulating meaning of key phrases, such as ‘dishonour’.
- A range of subtle and strong indicators of HBA were identified, although were often only recognised by the few individuals who had specialist and in-depth knowledge of the issue.
- Those interviewed also raised concerns about what a ‘suitable’ outcome looks like – they articulated that this was not always seeking prosecution but sometimes safeguarding the victims.
- There are still concerns about ‘race anxiety’ amongst professionals, whereby fears of being accused of racism bolster their reticence to intervene.
- Interviews also revealed that training across organisations is inconsistent. In particular, it is not clear exactly what training police call handlers receive on HBA, though it is essential that this is thorough in order to identify such cases at the earliest opportunity.

SHORT CONCLUSION

This research found that, although there are pockets of good practice, particularly amongst individual police officers who used their own initiative and motivation to develop a more specialised knowledge of this offence, and in working closely with organisations such as Karma Nirvana to improve police responses to HBA, there is much to be done. There is an overall need for a cultural shift in attitudes towards and understandings of HBA, and a recognition that tackling this abuse is everyone’s responsibility. There is a requirement for more training of police officers on identifying and responding to HBA. Training should be regular, rigorous and relevant. It should focus on both the obvious and subtle indicators of HBA and not be limited to those on the frontline or to one or two individuals. There is also a need to revisit risk assessment procedures around HBA in order to ensure accuracy and consistency. This research also found that there is a need for greater accuracy in the recording of information by the police, especially concerning ethnicity, nationality and immigration, sexuality and language. Consistent data collection can also improve knowledge on the profile of HBA within particular areas, and more generally. Finally, consideration needs to be given towards what a ‘successful outcome’ looks like, taking into account that this may not always be prosecution, and that sometimes a response which prioritises safeguarding is needed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This collaborative project has been highly successful and all parties are keen to continue working together. Accordingly, there are plans in place between the project partners to disseminate the findings more widely in order to maximise the impact of the research, and explore key findings in greater depth. To this end, an application for further funding is currently being developed. Research into missing persons and HBA, the role of networks, and the role of subtle indicators in HBA cases are all topics that are currently the focus of research and publication plans by the project team.

For more information about this research, including our events and outputs, please visit the [project website](#)

Authors: Claire Fox, Caroline Miles, Becki Kaur and Rebecca Tipton (University of Manchester), DCI Fran Naughton (formerly of West Yorkshire Police), Nicola Pringle and DCI Dave Cowley (West Yorkshire Police) – **July 2019**

Further information – Claire Fox (claire.fox-2@manchester.ac.uk)

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