



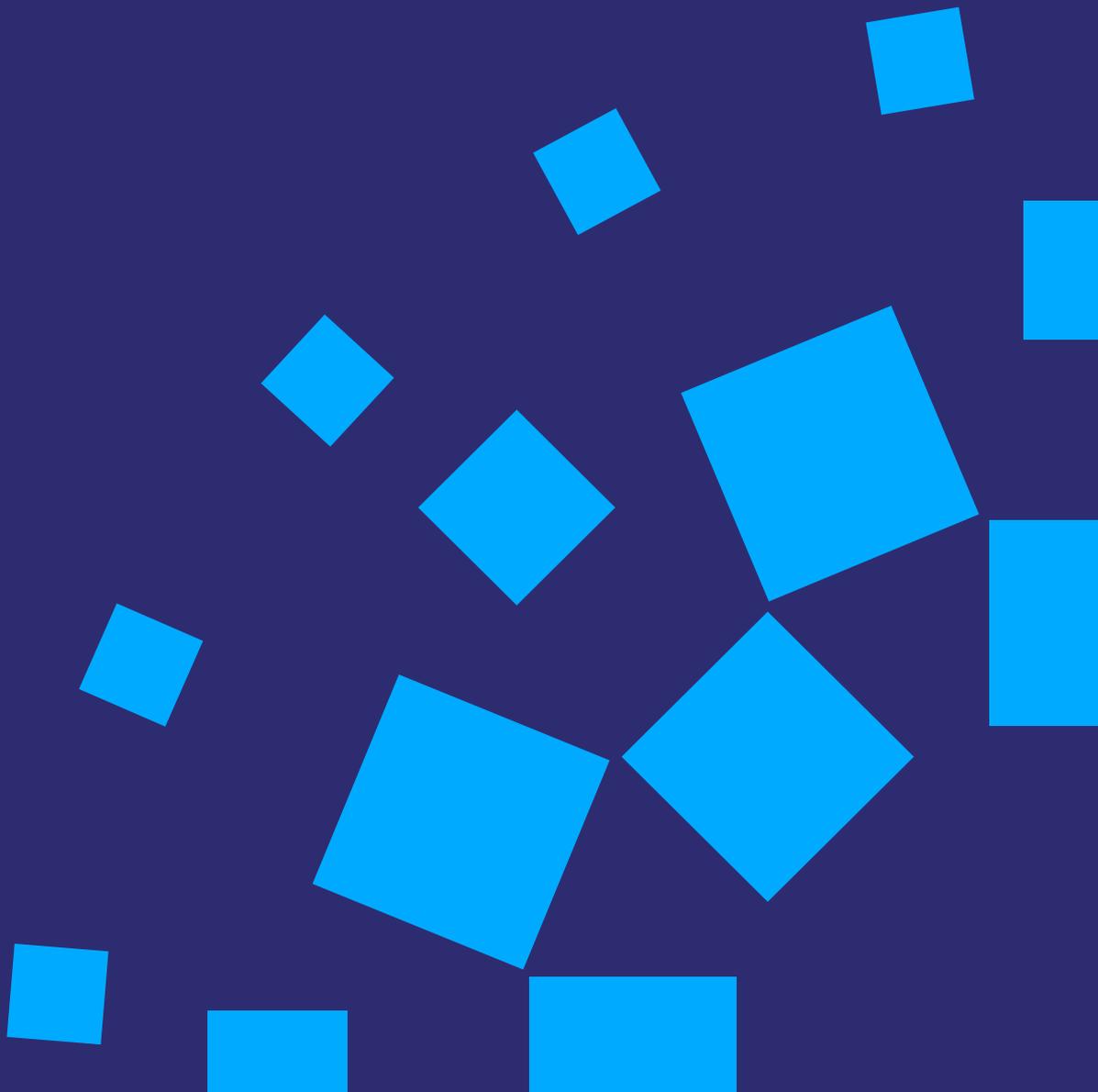
College of  
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# Honour-based abuse

## Advice for first responders

**October 2021**



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# Briefing for understanding and initial response to honour-based abuse (HBA)

## Key messages

- Several **barriers** exist that prevent victims from disclosing and reporting HBA.
- Your role will be to listen carefully, use professional curiosity and spot signs or **indicators** that victims could be/have been subject to HBA using all available information.
- Family members may try to prevent you from speaking with victims. It is important to speak to the victim in private out of earshot of the family or preferably away from the home. Consider the safest way to do this. Do not use friends, family or community members (or anyone connected to the family/community) to interpret if language is a barrier. Consider using an interpreter from outside the local area.
- Ask the victim if they are in fear of anything the family may do if they do not comply with their wishes. Be empathetic and non-judgmental in your approach and listen carefully to the victim's concerns.
- Ask about known risk indicators, such as other family members subject to HBA, forced marriage (FM) or female genital mutilation (FGM). Are they controlled/isolated/abused? Have threats been made against them or other family members (in the UK or overseas)? Are they perceived to have dishonoured the family/community? What is the perpetrator's **motivation**? Who is involved?
- Consider capturing initial accounts on body-worn video (BWV). If crimes under the umbrella of HBA are suspected, victims will be entitled to special measures.
- Careful and comprehensive initial investigation will be required so that effective action **follows**.
- Any suspicion of HBA will require safeguarding activity and you should contact your force specialist or line manager for **advice**.

**This briefing should be read in conjunction with [APP on domestic abuse](#) and [child abuse](#).**

## What is HBA?

There is no statutory definition of HBA but the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and Crown Prosecution Service defines it as: 'an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour'.

Perpetrators of HBA can include current or former intimate partners, birth family members (such as parents, siblings or cousins) or in-laws, members of the community and so called 'bounty hunters', and the abuse often involves more than one perpetrator.

HBA is a collection of practices used to control behaviour within families and communities to protect their perceived honour, or address shame or embarrassment perceived to have been brought to the family. It stems from a particular interpretation of cultural and religious beliefs by some families who seek to prevent any form of 'dishonour' resulting from those who disobey the 'rules'. The notion of honour has always existed in all societies. These 'rules'/ honour codes are used as a vehicle/motivation for justifying abuse mainly by men (but often supported by women and children) against women, children and other men.

HBA is rooted in a patriarchal position that establishes clearly defined gender roles and expectations where women are viewed as objects or property. They are expected to conform to a prescribed set of appropriate behaviours. Men can also be victims of HBA, especially where they transgress family or community norms, relating to gender and sexuality – for example, if they are gay or (perceived) to be in a sexual relationship with a person disapproved of by the family. As with domestic abuse, it often involves a pattern or course of conduct, and is rarely just a one-off incident, although the victim might not recognise this. HBA is distinct from other forms of domestic abuse in that it is often pre-planned and collective in nature (with many individuals involved) with similar behaviour to organised crime groups (OCGs).

Motivation<sup>1</sup> for such behaviour can include but is not limited to the following:

- protecting family 'honour' (family reputation and standing)
- controlling unwanted behaviour and sexuality (including perceived promiscuity or being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender)
- a response to family, community or peer group pressure regarding perceived dishonour, shame or embarrassment
- strengthening family standing in the community
- protecting perceived cultural and/or religious ideals (misguided or outdated)
- retaining wealth, property or land within the family, for example through dowry
- assisting claims for residence and citizenship in the UK
- honouring old promises
- traditional beliefs in purity, marriageability and control of women's sexuality (often linked to FGM)
- expectations for domestic servitude

HBA is a fundamental abuse of an individual's human rights. HBA is an umbrella term that includes any criminal offence that is committed to 'restore' a perceived dishonour. The offence may occur in the UK or overseas but is committed because the perpetrator perceives the victim has dishonoured the family and/or community. These offences may involve violence such as physical assault, murder, rape and sexual offences and kidnap and/or coercive or controlling behaviour to ensure compliance. Perpetrators may carry out the abuse online via social media platforms. Sometimes this controlling behaviour can be extreme - for instance, keeping a victim prisoner at home or taking and keeping them overseas (criminal offences in their own right). All cases of FM (as opposed to arranged marriages where both parties consent) are associated with HBA, where abuse from the family occurs when a victim rejects a marriage, or when FM is used as a way of 'correcting' perceived shameful behaviour from the victim.

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1 Her Majesty's Government. (2014). [\*\*The right to choose: Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of forced marriage\*\*](#). Cabinet Office.

HBA can be distinguished from other types of abuse, as it is often committed with some level of approval and/or collusion from family and community members. This aspect can cause police difficulty because unlike most crimes and incidents where family or communities can assist to make victims safer, this does not usually occur in cases of HBA.

## Prevalence of HBA

Accurate data on the prevalence of HBA is not readily available. HBA is underreported and professionals may not necessarily recognise incidents in which HBA is a motivating factor for the offences they are presented with.

Women and girls are predominantly, but not exclusively, victims of HBA. Men can become victims, particularly in relation to marriageability, when they do not define as heterosexual, where they have a disability or mental ill-health, as well as other vulnerabilities. Women can also be perpetrators of HBA by inciting and assisting acts of abuse against victims. They may be coerced into being involved by other (often male) family members, or they may perceive that the family or community has been dishonoured and feel they must act to restore it, or that they have been given responsibility to control the behaviour of the younger women and girls in the family. HBA cuts across many cultures, nationalities, faith groups and communities and is not confined to south Asia.

## Triggers for HBA

Anything contrary to the family or community 'culture' that the victim has done or is perceived to have done, however minor or seemingly routine, could trigger HBA. Example triggers that may lead to HBA are:

- smoking, dress or make-up, relationships, sexual conduct (including online), truancy - all perceived by the family to be inappropriate
- sexual orientation (including being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender)
- disapproved relationships such as inter-faith, inter-caste, inter-race, same-sex, outside of marriage
- objection/resistance to being removed from, not excelling in or leaving education
- rejection of religion or religious instruction

- pre-marital conflict, reporting domestic abuse, attempts to separate/divorce, disputes over child custody
- being the victim of rape, pregnancy outside of marriage
- being a reluctant immigration sponsor
- refusing to marry a person chosen by the family/dowry related
- not producing children/producing only female children

(This list is not exhaustive.)

## Barriers to reporting

Barriers include but are not limited to<sup>2</sup>:

- fear of authorities
- fear of reprisals from family or community
- fear of not being believed
- language/immigration status
- not wanting to criminalise their family
- fear that children will be removed

Victims may seem hostile or reluctant to engage and careful, sensitive communication will be required to build trust and confidence.

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2 HARRISON, K.; GILL, A. K. Breaking Down Barriers: Recommendations for Improving Sexual Abuse Reporting Rates in British South Asian Communities. **British Journal of Criminology**, [s. l.], v. 58, n. 2, p. 273-290, 2018

## Warning signs and high risk indicators

Signs a person is at risk of HBA include<sup>3</sup>:

- fear of harm, forced marriage, deportation, child abduction
- escalation – threats, violence, restrictions
- truancy from school or college
- anxiety/depression
- self-harm/attempted suicide
- being subjected to unreasonable restrictions, such as being kept at home by parents/family members, constantly chaperoned or other coercive, controlling behaviours
- failing to conceive or giving birth to females
- late disclosure of pregnancy/seeking medical help
- being pressured into going abroad
- disclosures that a girl has been taken to a doctor to be examined to see if she is a virgin/disclosure of hymen repair surgery
- eating disorders
- separation/divorce

(This list is not exhaustive.)

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3 Bates, L (2020) [Honor-based abuse in England and Wales: who does what to whom.](#) Violence Against Women pg 1-22

## First responder actions

To 'discover' HBA, it would be helpful to ask:

'Is there any notion of dishonour, family shame or embarrassment for which you are...

- being blamed
- held responsible
- being made to do something that you don't want to do?

When dealing with HBA victims it is important to recognise the severity of the situation and the immediacy of the risk. Remember the '**one chance rule**' – you may only have one chance to speak to a potential victim and save a person from serious harm. By seeking assistance from the police, the victim may be seen as having brought further shame on themselves, their family and their community. Victims may be anxious that you may share this information and fear that you will put them at further risk from the family. They may be reluctant to engage with you for fear of criminalising family members. You need to speak to them alone, away from their family. Listen to what they have to tell you, offer reassurance and take positive action to ensure their safety, regardless of whether a crime is reported or whether the victim is supportive of a criminal investigation or not. **The priority is to safeguard and protect the individual.**

Culture, community tradition or religion are no excuse for any form of abuse. If you believe a person is at risk of HBA, particularly where the report is made without the knowledge of the family/community, you should escalate the incident to your line manager or the force HBA specialist to discuss appropriate actions. Take note of the following recommendations and considerations.

- Do not attempt mediation with the family/community.
- Do not use family, community members or local interpreters to translate where language is a barrier.
- Identify potential suspects and establish the motivation for their behaviour to enable lines of enquiry.
- Gather evidence and consider recording initial accounts on BWV.

- A number of potential victims connected to the primary victim may require safeguarding, such as siblings or boyfriends/girlfriends.
- Conduct appropriate checks on local and national intelligence databases.
- Consider whether this could be a critical incident and respond **accordingly**.
- Take positive action where safe to do so.
- Keep information confidential and do not share it without consent from the victim.
- Identify risks and actions required to safeguard the victim(s) using **police powers and tactics**, which may include:
  - removal to safe accommodation using police protection powers where applicable
  - statutory requirements to notify child or adult social care
  - taking voluntary DNA samples/photographs/fingerprints
  - securing passport and confirm details match those provided
  - referral to a **specialist support service**
  - an FM protection order or domestic abuse or other protection order
- Establish a safe method of contact.
- Record a safeguarding plan on the crime report.
- Submit an intelligence report (consider restricting access to any records).
- Look up flags/markers on local/national databases, for example the Police National Computer (PNC) or Police National Database (PND).

For further information and to enhance your understanding, view the e-learning '**Public Protection – Family Disturbance**'.

Please see APP on **domestic abuse**, **FGM** or **stalking** where relevant offences are disclosed.

The multi-agency practice guidelines on **handling cases of forced marriage** will assist where you suspect that a person is being/has been forced into a marriage.

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