

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Atal trais ar sail rhywedd drwy ddulliau iechyd y cyhoedd](#)**

**This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) consultation on [The public health approach to preventing gender-based violence](#)**

**PGBV 17**

**Ymateb gan: Dr Claire Fox a Dr Caroline Miles, Prifysgol Manceinion | Response from: Dr Claire Fox and Dr Caroline Miles, The University of Manchester**

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## **Submission to the Welsh Parliament's Equality and Social Justice Committee on 'The public health approach to preventing gender-based violence'.**

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### **Introduction**

The following written submission is primarily based upon research conducted by Fox and Miles, in collaboration with West Yorkshire Police and Karma Nirvana, the UK's leading third sector specialist organisation addressing so-called honour-based violence and forced marriage cases. This [N8-funded Research Project \(2018-2019\), entitled the 'Early identification of honour-based abuse'](#), combined an analysis of 300 police case files, with interviews conducted with service providers and victim-survivors to identify and explore the barriers to effectively supporting victims of honour-based abuse (HBA), gaps in current provision, and instances of good practice. The project culminated in a series of recommendations on how to increase confidence in reporting, improve identification of and responses to HBA cases, and develop more effective safeguarding of victim-survivors of HBA. [Events held in Manchester and Leeds](#) were attended by over 300 people, and the project's findings and recommendations have since been used in training for frontline staff. Additional funding was used to create a collection of resources on honour-based violence and forced marriage, which are held by the [Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre](#), situated in Manchester's Central Library. Further funding allowed for the creation of a series of images based on the interview data, which have been publicly displayed. Findings from this project have also been published in a [leading policing journal](#).

This written submission draws upon the above resources relating to this research, in addition to other relevant sources.

This submission will focus on the following two questions included in the consultation:

- **What works in preventing gender-based violence before it occurs (primary prevention) and intervening earlier to stop violence from escalating (secondary prevention).**
  - **What is the role of the public sector and specialist services (including the police, schools, the NHS, the third sector and other organisations that women and girls turn to for support) in identifying, tackling, and preventing violence against women, and their role in supporting victims and survivors.**
1. So-called 'honour-based abuse' (hereafter HBA) refers to a broad range of violent and/or abusive behaviours that are carried out to protect, defend, or restore socially-constructed

notions of community, family or individual honour (Gill 2008, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary [HMIC], 2015).

2. In 2015, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2015) released their first inspection into 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).
3. While much progress has been made across organisations, including the police, our research indicated that much more needs to be done in order to identify early indicators of HBA, and to effectively respond to them.
4. It has long been established that HBA and forced marriage (FM) are not 'private' matters, but should be thought of as 'everybody's business'. However, this necessitates that a wide range of service providers and frontline workers are able to identify, and feel able to address, signs of potential honour-based violence.
5. Multi-agency working has previously been highlighted as essential in addressing this often hidden form of abuse (HMIC, 2015: 48). It is essential that staff in frontline organisations, such as schools, the NHS, and third sector organisations, have a good knowledge base of the signs of HBA, and also an awareness of what action they can take.
6. HBA is a complex phenomenon that involves various factors that differentiate it from other forms of domestic violence or familial abuse. If it is to be successfully identified and effectively responded to, frontline staff and organisations need to be aware of the complexities posed by the frequently collective and collaborative nature of HBA, alongside the multitude of obvious and subtle indicators of HBA.
7. As our research revealed, existing police training on HBA is often entirely lacking, brief, or delivered as part of generic domestic abuse or safeguarding training. Although a minority of officers actively engage in in-depth training, and consequently become perceived as the force expert, the majority of call handlers, frontline officers, and specialist officers are not equipped with the knowledge and understanding required to adequately respond to HBA and safeguard victims. Training on HBA should be regular, rigorous, and relevant, focusing on both the obvious and subtle indicators of HBA. It should not be limited to those on the frontline or to one or two individuals, since it is essential that knowledge is shared more widely among staff to avoid having a single point of failure or success within the organisation.
8. The police remain the first port of call for many victims in a state of crisis, and for people wishing to report suspected or known incidents. Responding to HBA can present a number of challenges for the police, including unpicking complex cases involving networks within and external to families, and recognising that the issue is not exclusive to the South Asian community.

9. One of the key themes identified in our research was the challenge posed to police by the collaborative nature of HBA, which requires investigating officers to look beyond the immediately obvious perpetrators, often fathers, and recognise the sometimes subtle involvement of others, who may instigate, collude, execute, or enable the abuse in more indirect ways. This can include siblings, mothers, and other female relatives who may have been victims of HBA themselves. Recognising that there may be multiple perpetrators involved in a case allows them to be considered in risk assessments and safeguarding plans. We argue that the collaborative nature of HBA perpetration needs to play a key role in police training on detecting HBA, identifying suspects, conducting risk assessments, and implementing safeguarding measures. It is critical that organisations that are in a position to identify HBA consider who may be a victim or perpetrator in HBA cases, as these may incorporate a wider network than initially indicated. As our case file data illustrated, the lack of awareness and understanding of the collaborative nature of HBA might inadvertently enhance the risk to victims if they are interviewed alongside or left with co-perpetrators, or returned home in taxis driven by members of the community. It may also obscure other victims or potential victims, including siblings.
10. While our research supported existing findings that the majority of victims are female, it also confirmed that there are many men and boys who are victims of HBA. For example, men and boys who are not conforming to family or community expectations, such as those who have identified as, or been suspected of being, gay or bisexual, as well as boyfriends who have been disapproved of by the victim's family.
11. While some forms of HBA may be relatively easy to identify, there are a large number of more subtle indicators, which may not – when viewed out of context or in an isolated way – be sufficient causes for concern. However, having the awareness of such subtle indicators can enable frontline staff in schools, colleges, workplaces, NHS organisations, the police, and others to take steps to identify HBA and prevent further instances of victimisation from occurring. Our research noted that although a range of subtle and strong indicators of HBA were present within the case files reviewed, they were often only recognised by the few individuals who had specialist and in-depth knowledge of the issue. These subtle indicators include the victim receiving money to spend on beauty treatments, not being allowed a house key, monitored or restricted use of their mobile phone or social media, and being chaperoned by family members. It also involves other forms of coercive control, such as isolating the victim from their friends, monitoring or controlling their time, preventing access to medical services or educational organisations, and controlling the victim's finances. .
12. Low prosecution and conviction rates for domestic abuse have been long-since established, and more recently for coercive control (Brennan and Myhill, 2022), but little research has documented this in HBA. The incredibly low level of charges brought against perpetrators (7% of cases) and high level of cases in our dataset failing to progress through the criminal justice system point to numerous issues. Firstly, that current legislative provisions are insufficiently applied, and that even when HBA, coercive control, and forced marriage measures are

available, in the majority of cases charges are not brought. Secondly, that evidential requirements are inadequate, given that in many cases, charges are not brought due to a lack of appropriate evidence. Thirdly, that much work needs to be done in order to enhance levels of victim engagement with the police and prosecution process, so that prosecution procedures are not ceased due to victim withdrawal. Finally, that for many victims, prosecution of the perpetrator is low down, or not even on, their list of priorities.

13. There were concerns about 'race anxiety' (Chantler et al., 2001) among the professionals interviewed for this research, whereby fears of being accused of racism bolster their reticence to intervene. This was a valid concern and there was evidence of such accusations being made by perpetrators towards frontline staff who had identified early indications of HBA. For some individuals, the potential repercussions for a (white) professional being openly labelled as racist fuelled their actions – or lack thereof – when presented with subtle indicators of HBA. Training and organisation support, therefore, need to include building confidence to identify and actively respond to these concerns when HBA is suspected to be taking place.
14. There needs to be some consideration of how to support those who have identified themselves as, or are suspected of being, victims of HBA over a longer-term period, particularly after the victim has reported HBA to the police. Victims face losing their families and friends, and having to move away from their community. Although these may be sources of HBA, they may also be providers of support (financial, emotional, and practical), love, security and friendship. Having to move forward without these sources of support, and without having new networks to help with such an upheaval, can be detrimental to the victim and prompt them to stop engaging with the police or other services. They may also return to the location of the HBA, such as the family home, which in turn can lead to an escalation of HBA.
15. 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. Our findings indicate that not all victims wish to prosecute members of their family, or bring what they perceive to be further shame on themselves or their families. Instead, what victims seek when disclosing HBA to the police is help at a time of crisis. This might involve immediate help to escape a dangerous situation, and/or long-term support to gain freedom. Safeguarding measures are therefore paramount to victims, over and above more traditional forms of criminal 'justice'.
16. Our research noted that there are a number of difficulties when using interpreters, particularly relating to 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. For example, articulating the meaning of key phrases, such as 'dishonour' can be particularly challenging in some languages. The complexities involved in interpreting the words of the victim 'can also be a deeper problem than translation can resolve; it relates to the way that victims are able to identify and

articulate what they are experiencing in a way that professionals understand' (SafeLives Report, 2017: 38).

## Conclusion

This research found that although there are pockets of good practice, particularly among individuals who use their own initiative and motivation to develop a more specialised knowledge of this offence, 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 to aid 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. 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.

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