

WHAT ARE HARMFUL PRACTICES?

Harmful practices reflect the values and beliefs held by members of a family and/or a community that have been there for generations, some of which are beneficial to all members, while others are harmful. These harmful practices include:

- **'HONOUR'-BASED ABUSE**
- **EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGES**
- **FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)**
- **BREAST IRONING**
- **PREVENTING WOMEN FROM CONTROLLING THEIR OWN FERTILITY**
- **DOWRY PAYMENTS**
- **SON PREFERENCE**
- **BRIDE-PRICE AND MANY MORE**

Harmful practices reflect an underlying gender discrimination, and are therefore closely linked to other forms of violence that has a majority of female victims, such as domestic abuse/violence.

Harmful practices are a violation of human rights that are rooted in social, cultural and/or religious norms. They are seen by practising families or communities as traditional cultural identity and those who go against this are seen to be dishonouring the tradition. This 'shame' leads to physical and physiological abuse, abandonment and also death. Although women are more likely to be at risk of harmful practices, any gender may be complicit in perpetration.

Not all traditional/cultural practices are harmful, most cultural traditions are positive, which promote social cohesion within the community, working together to support the vulnerable or those in need. Many families performing such harmful practices do not wish any harm to their children, but believe that harmful practices are a part of their parenting duties and that FGM for example, gives them a better future and importantly allows them to be accepted within the community they belong into.

FACT SHEET

Who Is Affected?

Deep-rooted gender inequalities mean that women and girls are mostly affected, however any gender can be at risk of harmful practices.

Harmful practices are used to control behaviour to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and occur when it is perceived that shame or 'dishonour' has been brought against a family or community. A common attribute of such practices is that they are related to women's sexuality and an underlying sub context of male domination.

Some examples of supposed 'shameful' behaviour include:

- Sexual orientation (being LGBTQ+)
- Wearing make-up or 'unacceptable' clothing
- Having a relationship outside of the community
- Not obeying family/community rules
- Seeking a divorce
- Refusing a marriage

Tackling & Responding to Harmful Practices

It is very difficult to try and challenge beliefs and practices which are deeply embedded within cultures, but no culture, tradition or religion should be used to justify a practice that harms the individual. These practices are abuse and against human rights and we should work together to:

- Follow the ONE CHANCE RULE at all times to ensure safeguarding and protection
- Ensure protection for those who are victims or under threat of any harmful practices
- Deliver engagement and educational programmes within communities to raise awareness and challenge attitudes
- Be sensitive to culture, but at the same time not be blinded by cultural acceptance
- Remember that this is everybody's business agenda, that can happen at anytime and anywhere
- Become knowledgeable about these issues to enable you to recognise signs and risks of harmful practices
- Speak out against all harmful practices and aim to eradicate them for good
- Support campaigns led by Saver UK and other organisations working towards the same aims
- Hold an emergency strategy/professional meeting with relevant agencies, (this should be immediately or within no less than 24 hours)

**For help and support
please contact:**

0800 107 0726 (Mon – Fri, 10am – 4pm, exc bank holidays)
www.saveruk.co.uk
info@saveruk.co.uk

In an emergency,
please call 999