

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR 'HONOUR'-BASED ABUSE AND HARMFUL PRACTICES

Culture and Values

Culture is something to be celebrated, it can also help identify who we are. Values are something that influence and impact our upbringing on our perception of others, influencing our behaviour and underpinning our personal, professional, social and political issues.

Think for a moment how your own values and beliefs influence your perception of situations or others?

For those who practise 'honour'-based abuse (HBA) and other harmful traditions, they believe what they are doing is right. They often do not consider the practice as harmful or abusive. Their concern is about how they will be seen by extended family or the wider community if they do not protect the practice and adhere to those believed as cultural norms.

Failure to safeguard and/or investigate because of culture/tradition is discriminatory.

Remember: Cultural acceptance does not mean accepting the unacceptable.

Practical guidance

There are often severe consequences to those whose family or community believe they have 'dishonoured' them, including physical and physiological abuse, abandonment and also death.

Threats can come from

- The individual's own family (including their partner, parents, siblings, uncles, aunties, cousins, grandparents or other close relatives)
- Other families (including in-laws and extended family)
- The wider community
- Relatives or community members who are not based in the UK but may be from the family's country of origin or practicing countries

Remember: The risk could be very obvious, but it could be almost unidentifiable which can often be harder to evidence. That is why harmful practices are considered "hidden".

Community knowledge

'Honour'-based abuse (HBA) and harmful practices can affect anyone, though they are more prevalent in some communities than others, e.g. forced marriage and HBA are considered to be more prevalent within South Asian and Middle Eastern communities. FGM is considered to be more prevalent within African and Middle Eastern communities e.g. Somali, Egyptian, Sudanese, Gambian, Ethiopian.

It is very important to deal with each case of HBA and harmful practices individually—no two cases are the same. Despite prevalence in certain communities, not everyone from those backgrounds will follow these practices.

Remember:

- Those at risk can come from many different backgrounds e.g. Irish travellers, East Asian and Eastern European
- Individuals from White British backgrounds can be at risk (interracial relationships are not always approved of)
- It would be impossible to understand all cultural traditions and beliefs, but we can have a general/basic knowledge of the communities/groups we serve
- Have an open mind to learn, seek information and ask questions where required

Supporting those at risk:

- Provide a safe space (conversations with the person at risk should NOT be where the alleged perpetrator is in the same household or even if in a different room in the home)
- Take your time with them and do not expect a full confession from the individual. Those experiencing this kind of abuse are fearful of what could happen to them or their family if they disclose the abuse
- Listen carefully to what they tell you and always take them seriously. Those at risk may not even know what they are going through or have an understanding of HBA as many believe the abuses should be accepted as part of their cultural traditions
- Show them that you are there for them
- Do not ask them questions or tell them what your actions would be, if they have a friend or a family member with them, who may be seen as supportive. You could put them at risk or they could turn against them
- If you are unable to get information/evidence of their situation due to their fear, if possible agree a way to keep in touch and if not able to see them again, provide them with appropriate information and reassure them they can come back to you when they are ready.

Caution

- Always be cautious of families that are accommodating and cooperative as some will use these methods of trust so they can get away with their crime (For example, the case of Shafiea Ahmed. Her parents swore their innocence for years but were later put in prison for her murder)
- Be cautious of signposting a client to support in the community e.g. faith groups, unless you are 100 percent sure it is safe to do so. There may be people in the community who will report back to perpetrators if they believe in these practices

Interpreters

- Do not use unregistered interpreters
- If possible before your assessment, share the name of the interpreter with the person at risk to see if they recognise the name. Ask them to communicate to you if they know the interpreter. You could also book an interpreter from outside the area
- Never use a relative or friend as an interpreter
- If possible, ask what gender of interpreter they would prefer (e.g. some women would feel more comfortable speaking with a female interpreter)
- All statutory organisations will have a registered interpreting service to use
- If you find a good interpreter, keep hold of them. It is good to have a trusted interpreter

Policies

- Be aware and knowledgeable of all local, national and your own organisation's policies around HBA and harmful practices

Information

- Only disclose client information when you are sure you are speaking to the person you are supposed to be speaking to. Confidential information should not be shared with those not involved with the case or potential perpetrators
- Any wrong disclosure can have serious risk to the individual's safety
- Only share information who are linked to the case or supporting the client
- Always keep information safe in line with your organisation's confidentiality and GDPR policies
- Always be cautious when sharing information with others and only use secure processes to do so