



Minutes of the APPG on Domestic Violence and Abuse Meeting

'Honour-Based' Abuse

Monday 22nd February 2021, 3-4:30pm

Virtual meeting

Chair: Apsana Begum MP

There is no statutory definition or specific offence of so-called 'honour-based' abuse in England and Wales. The APPG are aware that the government are considering the language around this form of abuse, and the Group therefore wanted to explore the context and nature of so-called 'honour-based' abuse, the impact it has on survivors and responses required.

There is already a huge underestimation of the scale of so-called 'honour-based' abuse, being widely misunderstood, under-reported and not given the same priority as other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). This meeting enabled the APPG and Officers to hear from an expert by experience and experts on so called 'honour-based' abuse. The meeting was chaired by Apsana Begum MP, and the other parliamentarians in attendance included:

- Baroness Lister
- Baroness Hamwee
- Gavin Newlands MP
- Maria Miller MP
- Theo Clarke MP

The secretariat opened the meeting whilst the Chair was in the Chamber

The secretariat welcomed the speakers and attendees and highlighted the APPG's concerns around the government considering dropping the term so-called 'honour-based' abuse (HBA). This is particularly concerning as HBA is not included in the statutory definition of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse Bill and this impact will be compounded further by the separation of domestic abuse from the VAWG strategy.

Saliha, Expert by Experience

Saliha shared that she is a survivor and ambassador for Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE) and that she came from a community which operated with an 'honour system', meaning everything in her life was under her family's constant control and monitoring. This was exacerbated by the fact that she is blind and a woman, and Saliha described how disability is seen as shameful in many communities. She tried to leave

three times, but struggled due to the lack of specialist support. Only on the third time she realised that she had experienced 'honour-based' abuse.

Saliha set out the disproportional impact that so-called 'honour-based' abuse has on Black and minoritised women, who face significant barriers reporting and accessing support due to lack of understanding, language barriers and professionals who 'other' victims who are not what is expected of a domestic abuse survivor. Saliha explained how this exacerbates the hidden nature of so-called 'honour-based' abuse.

Saliha stated that so-called 'honour-based' abuse must be recognised as a form of domestic abuse and included in the statutory definition as it is underpinned by controlling and coercive behaviour. She urged for so-called 'honour-based' abuse to be prioritised as much as other forms of domestic abuse and be seen as a form of discrimination and abuse rather than a practice rooted in culture or religion. Saliha also called for more awareness raising around so-called 'honour-based' abuse and adequate funding for services led 'by and for', and specialist support for survivors of all forms of domestic abuse, including so-called 'honour-based' abuse.

Baljit Banga, Executive Director, Imkaan

Baljit highlighted that Imkaan refer to 'honour-based' abuse as so called 'honour-based' and emphasised the need for it to be addressed as a form of VAWG to understand how pervasive it is.

Baljit highlighted how so-called 'honour-based' abuse is often racialised; it is often discussed outside of a framework that recognises patriarchy and inequality as the root cause of VAWG, and is usually placed within a cultural context, focusing on behaviours of communities. She added that this leads to the othering of communities, as it is addressed through over-policing or dismissal rather than holistic support. She notes that frontline organisations are seeing inadequate responses from professionals due to a lack of understanding of what 'honour-based' abuse is and are seeing a normalisation, tolerance and acceptance of this form of VAWG, as people are associating the violence with "culture".

Baljit discussed the issues surrounding the language used and the term 'honour-based' abuse, and the impact this has on funding and the work of agencies like the CPS. Baljit emphasised the need to end the current fragmented approach and breadcrumb funding for organisations led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, and instead have a comprehensive funding strategy. She also urged for women's organisations to be included in statutory and strategic meetings; having meaningful consultations to deliver effective responses and ensure access to support services before women reach crisis point; more training for officials; and the improved use of terminology.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana echoed what Baljit's concerns on the CPS and the need to move away from fears over cultural sensitivity preventing progress on this form of abuse.

Dr Roxanne Khan, Director, HARM

Dr Khan highlighted the Honour Abuse Research Matrix's (HARM) launch of two recent initiatives, including *Harmful Practices in the Workplace*, guidance of employers responding to 'harmful practices', which is survivor informed and culturally competent, which has been widely adopted by many workplaces including the CPS and NHS. HARM is also launching a domestic abuse policy guidance for all UK universities and colleges, in collaboration with experts in the field. Dr Khan described the scatter gun approach to domestic abuse policy in the education sector, which neglects to consider the experiences of motorised women despite the significant proportion of staff and students in UK universities who are from ethnic minority groups.

Dr Khan set out HARM's research to examine attitudes towards and experiences of 'honour-based' abuse and violence. Dr Khan emphasised the importance of conducting research on people's every day experiences as the women who have bravely managed to speak out are often the exception to the rule and many do not feel able to reach out for support.

Dr Khan reinforced the importance in research being embedded in minoritised, women's experiences and the barriers that they face in mainstream domestic abuse research. She highlighted that HARM's recent police FOI report on the prevalence of so-called 'honour-based' abuse showed that data is flagged and recorded in a piecemeal way, with no consistency across investigations to be able to verify the prevalence of so-called 'honour-based' abuse in the UK. Dr Khan concluded by reflecting on the importance of language, especially when talking about the harm inflicted against people and the motivations, and with reference to the use of the term 'honour', she stated that we can't fix something that we are too afraid to name.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana welcomed the work undertaken by HARM and that it's shown that not one specific community that is impacted by HBA.

Natasha, Rattu, Executive Director, Karma Nirvana

Natasha highlighted that Karma Nirvana is an 'honour-based' based abuse charity and explained that last year they supported 12,128 survivors on their helpline, which was a 64% increase from 2019. Natasha highlighted the biggest issues in regards to HBA is that the domestic context is often lost or overlooked, and poor reporting and identification impacts the number of recorded cases and understanding of the true scale, scope and prevalence.

Natasha described how HBA is frequently misunderstood, misidentified, and put into a cultural context. This leads to professionals treading carefully with cultural sensitivity,

which has a detrimental impact on the response victims receive. Natasha highlighted the importance understanding HBA as a form of domestic abuse. She also highlighted that Karma Nirvana are calling for a statutory definition that defines this type of abuse beyond its motivation, and instead a one that; recognises its gendered nature; the characteristics of this form of abuse; the unique challenges that victims of 'honour-based' abuse face; and the role that the wider community can play in supporting a harmful narrative that endorses the abuse and makes it challenging for people to seek help.

Natasha added that it is important for HBA to sit within domestic abuse, but also within the wider VAWG framework. Natasha concluded that central to prevention is raising the status of women and girls that are silenced by concepts of 'honour' and shame and enabling them to recognise the abuse that they face is a form of domestic abuse, and that safe spaces exist for them.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana reflected that discussions around shame and stigma can really hinder victims from coming forward, and that this will not be improved by the narrow statutory definitions in the Domestic Abuse Bill.

Diana Nammi, Executive Director, IKWRO

Diana shared her personal story behind founding IKWRO and described their campaigning work to try to make 'honour-based' abuse in the UK a serious crime and not only associated with culture or religion. IKWRO have helped thousands of women, providing advice and have managed to bring the issue of HBA into strategies and policies. Diana explained how IKWRO provide advice, advocacy and counselling for all Middle Eastern women and also established the first refuge for Middle Eastern women in the UK. IKWRO also provide trainings for professionals and women in the community to ensure they are able to identify this form of abuse and to help women better understand their rights and entitlement in the UK. Diana highlighted the increase in demand during the pandemic, stating that IKWRO have seen increases of more than 200% for advice and counselling, as well as increased demand for their refuge.

Diana emphasised IKWRO's position that there is no 'honour' in these forms of abuse and that so called 'honour-based' abuse and domestic abuse are distinct forms of VAWG. She reflected that within domestic abuse cases there is often sympathy for victims, whereas in HBA cases, and within the community, the sympathy is for perpetrators. Diana believes they require different policies and safeguarding, but should be understood through a VAWG framework. Diana concluded that it is important to keep the term 'honour-based' abuse as although it is problematic, it is understood within their communities and the public, and changing it would have detrimental impact.

Apsana Begum MP

Apsana highlighted how much the experience of victims is helped by organisations that are led 'by and for' people from those communities and that increased pressure on organisations during the pandemic must be recognised.

Discussion

- It was queried how much 'honour-based' abuse was generational in upholding traditions and patriarchal society and it was highlighted that many beliefs, values and attitudes are being handed down generationally to both women and men. The importance of education and raising awareness to tackle these issues was highlighted but it was clear that this must be nuanced to prevent the stigmatisation of communities.
- A question was raised on the use of the term harmful practices and it was highlighted it is an unhelpful phrase that associates these forms of VAWG with 'culture'. The evolution of language, and the importance of listening to experts by experience, were also raised.
- It was asked if seeing HBA as a form of domestic abuse overlooks the cultural context. It was highlighted that by framing it in the context of domestic abuse it avoids the justification of these practices and that 'by and for' led services are able to understand the experience of victims and have unique expertise in gender dynamics within family and communities structures.
- There was also a question about mandating training police officers on so-called 'honour-based' abuse and the need for more accountability was emphasised. Pointed out that HARM's research found in 2015 only 3 police forces out of 43 were willing to respond to cases of HBA.