



Good practice briefing

Honour based violence: to love and cherish?

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Contents

Introduction.....	2
Honour based violence	4
Forced marriage.....	6
FM and HBV as harmful practice	7
Barriers to support	9
Final reflections	9

Introduction

Sharing Our Strengths

WRC and Women and Girls' Network (WGN) have been funded by London Councils to deliver a four-year project, Sharing Our Strengths, aimed at providing second tier support to London's violence against women and children sector through the sharing of knowledge, skills and good practice and the facilitation of networking and partnerships. The project runs from February 2009 to March 2013.

This support is primarily available free of charge to organisations funded under the London Councils specifications which cover violence against women and children (43, 59, 60, 61 & 63, 62, 65, 69, 70 and 72).

What support does the project provide?

The support comes in a number of forms:

1. Accredited training for frontline workers
2. Professional exchange seminars (PESs)
3. Good practice briefings
4. Training and 1-1 support on monitoring and evaluation & infrastructure issues
5. Monthly email newsletter
6. 6-monthly discussion and networking meetings for funded organisations
7. Membership of WRC's online women's sector network (<http://thewomenscafe.ning.com/>)
8. Quality assurance guide

For more information, please see www.wrc.org.uk/sharingourstrengths

Professional Exchange Seminars

WGN and WRC are providing a programme of Professional Exchange Seminars (PES) as part of the [Sharing Our Strengths](#) project. The seminars bring together practitioners to discuss and explore issues relating to best practice around violence against women (VAW).

The seminars also aim to help develop a multi-disciplinary community of shared learning, knowledge and practice by promoting and encouraging professional networking. From each PES a good practice briefing is written which serves as a resource for those working in the sector

Honour based violence seminar

The PESs on honour based violence took place in March 2011 and marked the middle of the 4-year PES programme. The seminar was delivered and hosted by Marai Larasi and Anjum Mouj from Imkaan (www.imkaan.org.uk).

Imkaan is a national organisation which provides support for black and minority ethnic and refugee (BMER) Women's organisations who work around violence against women (VAWG) issues. Their work includes strategic advocacy, training, capacity building and research.

Through attendance at the seminars and the dissemination of this guide, we hope to provide workers with an understanding of:

- The meaning of "Honour"
- Forced marriage (FM) as a part of honour based violence (HBV)
- Gender and Power – HBV/FM as Violence Against Women and Girls
- Who it affects, issues, needs and best practice

Honour based violence

The wider context

“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace” *Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary-General*

At a national level, incidents of honour based violence (HBV) are not separated out from other forms of violence in official crime figures nor have been separately or comprehensively recorded by any agency, making it likely that they are even more under-reported than other forms of domestic violence.

The Select Committee on Home Affairs’ Sixth report notes how Home Office figures suggest there are around 12 honour killings, the most extreme form of honour-based violence, a year, but as HBV is often a hidden problem with the criminal justice system, killings are often disguised as an accident or suicide, so this figure is almost certainly too low.

Forced marriage (FM) is a form of HBV. The Forced Marriage Unit recorded 1,618 cases of forced marriage across the UK in 2008 (Mayor’s Violence Against Women Strategy, 2010). This figure is made up of 1188 calls on the Forced Marriage Unit call register (from victims, friends, or agencies/NGOs etc who are handling cases and are asking for advice/support), 420 cases, and 10 Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) reports.

Motives for marriage

What are the drivers for marriage, forced marriage (FM), arranged marriage, sham marriage, civil partnership? Many of the factors are shared between these different types of religious and civil union and some of these drivers are listed below:

- Economics –including poverty
- Property / land
- Provision of long-term care
- Parental concern
- Honour/shame
- Need to control young peoples behaviour
- Need to control young peoples sexuality
- Peer group/family pressures
- Strengthening family links
- Interpretation of religious position
- Issues relating to immigration
- Maintaining long standing family links

Definitions

Honour based violence: an 'honour crime' or 'honour related crime' is one that is carried out in the name of so called honour. There is no universally agreed definition of honour crime.

Forced marriage (UK definition): "Is a marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties where duress is a factor"

Forced marriage (UN definition): "Forced marriage describes a marriage that takes place without the free and valid consent of one or both of the partners and involves either physical or emotional duress"

Useful Words

- **Izzat** (used mainly in South Asian communities) – honour
- **Namus** (used very often in a Middle Eastern Context) – interpreted as honour as it directly relates to women's virtue and overall sexual integrity
- **Corrective rape** (South Africa) – rape of lesbians in order to cure / punish them
- **Ird** (Bedouin) – code of honour for women – linked to sexual integrity 'protected by men' and linked to sharaf
- **Sharaf** (Bedouin) - general honour code which includes responsibility for protecting IRD
- **Sharam** (used mainly in South Asian communities) – shame
- **Diss** (used mainly in a Western urban context) from disrespect

Setting the Scene

- When we begin to discuss VAW as it affects BMER women, the temptation is to further 'otherise' BMER women, to use our experience of violence to demonise and further marginalise these communities
- This can feed into Islamophobia/racism – assumptions that some communities are prone to more violence than others
- The mismanagement of this discourse has an effect of further silencing women
- BMER women often face double disadvantage in terms of a poor service that victims of violence generally receive and because their specific needs are not taken into account
- BMER women are often treated as one group with similar needs as opposed to individuals from different communities with differences in language, histories and service needs. This further marginalises these women.

Forced Marriage

Context: forced marriage internationally

A crime against humanity?

In February 2009 The Special Court for Sierra Leone convicted three former leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) on the charge of “forced marriage”. The prosecution argued that forced marriage should be considered a crime against humanity and it should be distinct from other forms of sexual violence because of the length of the association and its domestic nature.

Key features of forced marriage during the conflict in Sierra Leone:

- On-going ‘relationship’
- Exercise of control over movement and labour
- Exercise of control over sexuality
- Control of pregnancy and maternal role
- Ownership with notion of ‘protection’

Forced marriage has occurred in other conflict zones, including Rwanda, Uganda and Cambodia. In Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, state controlled unions were created in an effort to eliminate traditional family structures, thus strengthening state control of sexuality and reproductive function.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is viewed as forced marriage because minors are deemed incapable of giving informed consent

Approximately 1 in 3 girls in developing countries (excluding China) will be married before the age of 18; there is a high prevalence in South Asia and in most African states. Early marriages also persist in Central and Eastern Europe and other Former Soviet Union Countries. There is also a clear presence of early marriages in Western societies, for example in the USA.

Context: forced marriage in the UK

In the UK, forced marriage:

- Is likely to occur in cases where arranged marriage structures are being used as vehicle to perpetuate forced marriage
- May also be linked to other harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation
- May be also linked to issues around ‘honour’ and ‘shame’
- Is not always identified as forced marriage by victims themselves
- Has growing links with trafficking

FM and HBV as harmful practice

FM and HBV can take many different forms:

- Marriage of child / young adult through coercive mechanisms including the exploitation of arranged marriage structures
- Marriage of widows to brother of deceased husbands
- Wife inheritance¹
- Exchange marriages²
- Bride kidnapping³
- Forced marriage of woman to a man who has raped her

However, there are a number of commonalities between these different forms of violence. For example:

- Determining partner choice
- Controlling sexuality
- Highly motivated perpetrators
- Multiple perpetrators/interested parties
- Maybe condoned by other family/community members

Common themes across FM and HBV

There are common themes across FM and HBV, for example imposition of marital status either through force, coercion or circumstances which restrict the ability to provide informed consent. The woman or girl cannot exercise the right to dissolve the marriage and she has no control over her sexuality or maternity rights. There are often expectations related to gender-ascribed roles e.g. around domestic chores and other expectations associated with the 'relationship'.

FM and HBV as a gendered issue

Why does discourse on gender matter in forced marriage and HBV given that men are also forced into marriage and victims of HBV?

1. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by all forms of HBV/FM (quantitatively)
2. Women's experiences of HBV/FM occur within wider structures of power and control i.e. within patriarchal contexts

¹ The custom of wife inheritance means that if a wife dies, the widower is paid to take another wife from his in-laws.

² Exchange marriage, form of marriage involving an arranged and reciprocal exchange of spouses between two groups. Exchange marriage is most common in societies that have a unilineal descent system emphasizing the male line and a consistent expectation of postmarital residence with or near the groom's family. In such cases, the symmetry of an alliance is often maintained by a systematic exchange: whenever a marriage is arranged between a daughter from group A and a son from group B, a marriage between a daughter from group B and a son from group A is also arranged.

³ Also known as marriage by abduction or marriage by capture, is a practice in which a man abducts the woman he wishes to marry

3. Women and girls who are at risk of or who have experienced FM are likely to be subjected to other forms of violence
4. Men largely experience HBV/FM in a different way

UK Responses

- Grass-roots service provision is found largely within the BMER sector
- Multi-agency responses have improved (involving schools, local authority social care, health and police)
- There are now regional commitments e.g. GLA VAWG strategy⁴ and the GLA's recently commissioned Harmful Practices research⁵
- Improved awareness within police services
- Crown Prosecution Service⁶
- Forced Marriage Unit (based in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office)
- Forced Marriage Civil Protection Act 2007
- Inclusion in Home Office's VAWG Strategic Narrative (Nov 2010 and Action Plan (March 2011))⁷

FM and HBV disproportionately affects the following communities:

- Roma
- Irish
- Middle-Eastern
- Turkish
- Kurdish
- Latin American
- South Asian
- Several African communities
- South East Asian.

⁴ <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/crime-community-safety/tackling-priority-crimes/violence-against-women/way-forward>

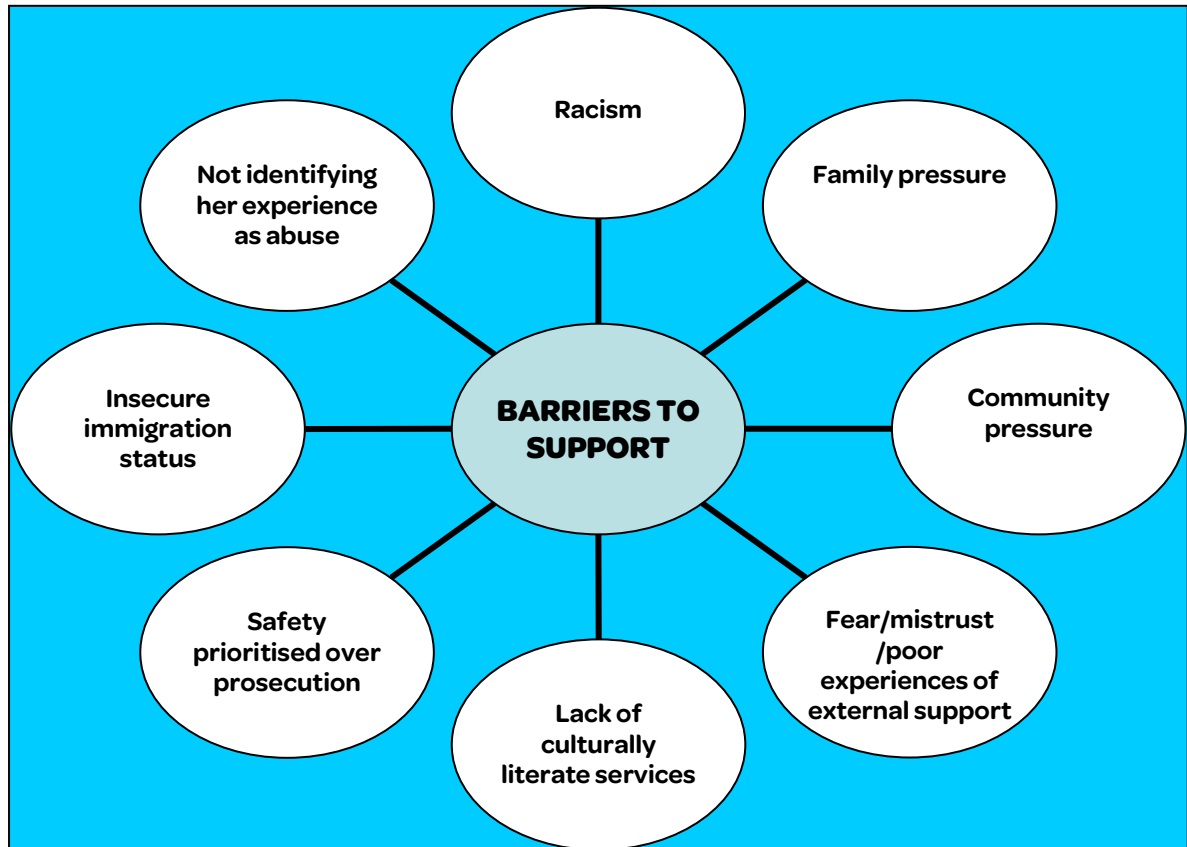
⁵ <http://imkaan.org.uk/gla%20study.htm>

⁶ http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/h_to_k/honour_based_violence_and_forced_marriage/

⁷ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/>

Barriers to Support

BMER women experiencing HBV encounter a number of barriers to specialised and effective support



Final reflections

- HBV/FM is about gender inequality
- Gender equality cannot be achieved without a meaningful shift around the management of power (including individually)
- Global gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing inequality on the grounds of race (race 'neutrality' is as problematic as gender 'neutrality')
- It is always worth asking yourself: "What assumptions do I make about BMER women?"