

## Male Honour Abuse

### **Definition**

Honour based violence is a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. Such violence can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their honour code.

It can be distinguished from other forms of violence, as it is often committed with some degree of approval and/or collusion from family and/or community members. Women, men and younger members of the family can all be involved in the abuse.

### **Prevalence**

As with Child Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Violence, boys and young men are often seen to be the perpetrators as opposed to victims. However research suggests there is a rise in male victims coming forward to disclose abuse in the name of honour. According to the Forced Marriage Unit, females are mostly affected; however 15% of the cases are male victims. The most prevalent ages are between 15 and 24 but can be as young as 10 and some come forward years after being forced into marriage or suffering from the abuse. Statistics do not take into account victims who have been taken abroad and have not returned nor do they reflect the nature of non-violent abuse which includes threats of violence, isolation and bullying which can have detrimental effects on a child's mental health. Boys and young men are often the hidden group due to fear, shame, embarrassment, threats as well as social attitudes towards male victims of abuse, and are therefore more reluctant to disclose abuse.

Honour based violence and abuse generally occurs within the Asian community. A recent report from the BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39485348>) highlighted that charities across the country were seeing an increase in reporting from male victims from the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim community. The report suggests that one in five cases now being handled involves men.

Four police forces - Metropolitan, West Midlands, West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester police - responded to the request for information. Between them they had 271 cases of reported male honour abuse between 2010 and 2017. The majority were in London and the West Midlands.

## Why does it happen?

Honour based violence (which may include emotional, psychological, sexual and physical abuse) is linked to family members, the wider society or acquaintances who believe the young person has brought shame to their family or community by doing something that is not in keeping with the traditional beliefs of their culture.

For example if a young male:

- Becomes involved with a girlfriend from a different culture or religion or engages in relationships outside marriage;
- Runs away, comes home late;
- Wears clothes or takes part in activities that might not be considered traditional within a particular culture which results in ideological differences between parents and children;
- Displays Westernisation and the constraints that come with trying to balance two different cultures;
- Refuses an arranged marriage;
- Has relationships outside the approved group;
- Wears 'inappropriate' dress;
- Loses his virginity;
- Fathers a child;
- Is homosexual;
- Reports/flees domestic abuse, coercive and controlling behaviour, forced marriage;
- Causes gossip within the community.

Crimes of 'honour' do not always include violence. Crimes committed in the name of 'honour' might include:

- Domestic abuse;
- Threats of violence;
- Sexual or psychological abuse;
- Forced marriage;
- Being held against your will or taken somewhere you don't want to go;
- Assault.

## Issues Relating to Boys and Young Men

Boys and young men often feel that abuse is not associated with males but only females within the community. Due to social stigma and social attitudes which have evolved, boys and young men are not seen to be the victims. Young males may feel that if they are to disclose abuse they are not adhering to the gender norms of society. Many boys and young men feel nervous to speak about the abuse with the fear that they may not be believed. From a young age boys and young men from the south Asian community are 'trained' to keep the family honour intact and to not engage in any activities which may bring shame or dishonour to the family. The wider society plays a huge role in family life, portraying a perfect family image. For some parents, this is held in such high

regard that they are willing to do whatever it takes to keep their reputation at a high standard. Fear of the repercussions from disclosure often leads boys and young men to keep quiet.

With regard to gender selective abortions, girls and young women are particularly at risk from emotional abuse, physical abuse, isolation, domestic violence, as well as honour based violence from partners, the wider family and/or the community. Men may also be put under pressure from parents or the wider community to divorce or leave their spouse due to the gender of their children.

Some male honour abuse involves boys and young men from the LGBTQ community. Threats and psychological violence is common. Some south Asian communities do not understand the concept of LGBTQ and believe that being gay or lesbian does not match or fit in with their religious and cultural code of practice. Due to social stigma, boys and young men are often forced to marry women, shamed into silence, threatened to be disowned or kicked out from the family home and wider community and at times are emotionally blackmailed into keeping quiet.

Boys may also be forced to partake in violence by having to overtly and covertly control or overpower female relatives:

- Younger male members of a family may be required to commit threats, punishment, violence and murder to keep the family honour intact and maintain the patriarchal status;
- Boys might be used to avoid punishment since they are minors;
- Refusing to do their 'duty' or undertake their rightful 'role' can result in repercussions from the family/community.

## Impact

As with all types of abuse, male honour violence has detrimental effects on a child's development, health and wellbeing. Victims are made to feel that their life may be at risk, with nowhere to turn and are shamed into silence. Below is a non-exhaustive list of the impact that male honour abuse can have on a child or young person:

- Self harm;
- Suicide;
- Depression;
- Mental health issues;
- Forced marriage;
- Physical and emotional abuse;
- Sexual abuse;
- Isolation.

## Professional Response

Professionals should respond by following the Honour Based Violence procedure in their multi-agency procedures manual. It is imperative for professionals to treat male victims in the same way they would treat female victims. Understanding the reasons why boys and young men do not

disclose, and providing that safe space and trusting environment for boys and young men to talk about any concerns, may result in boys and young men disclosing abuse. Addressing the needs of the individual is key, as victims of honour-based violence will require a tailored response dependent on a number of factors including e.g. language and cultural barriers, how long they have been in the country, their social and family networks and their economic circumstances.

The 'One Chance Rule': All practitioners working with victims of honour based violence need to be aware of the 'one chance' rule. That is, they may only have one chance to speak to a potential victim and thus they may only have one chance to save a life. This means that all practitioners working within statutory agencies need to be aware of their responsibilities and obligations when they come across these cases. If the victim is allowed to walk out of the door without support being offered, that one chance might be wasted.

## Contact Us

To find out more about working with tri.x contact us on: Telephone: 024 7667 8053 or visit our website [www.trixonline.co.uk](http://www.trixonline.co.uk).

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