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‘Honour’ abuse, violence, and forced marriage in the UK

**Police cases (incidents and charges)
and specialised training: 2018 and 2019**

“As a survivor of ‘honour’-based violence, I feel let down by the system. I am not alone in this feeling. We need better police reporting procedures, training and resources to tackle this issue.”

Payzee Mahmood

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It is clear the police response was at best mixed [...] we have found that Banaz Mahmud was let down by the service she received. There were delays in investigations, poor supervision, a lack of understanding and insensitivity [...] we have also made a number of recommendations designed to improve policing practice. These include [...] the reinforcing of knowledge about domestic and honour-based violence.²

IPCC Commissioner,

Nicola Williams

'Honour' abuse, violence, and forced marriage in the UK. Police cases (incidents and charges) and specialised training: 2018 and 2019

This report marks the 15th anniversary of the tragic and avoidable death of Banaz Mahmud. A young woman living in London, Banaz was the victim of Britain's most notorious so-called 'honour' killing. The police handling of her case was fraught with incompetence, oversight, error, and lack of cultural awareness. Numerous times, in the months leading up to her murder, Banaz reported her abuse to the police, even warning them that she would be murdered. She went as far as writing down the names of her killers.¹ An investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) after her death found that two police forces had failed Banaz.

This report presents the number of 'honour' based abuse and violence (HBA/V), including forced marriage cases, recorded by 38 police forces across the UK, and their engagement in specialised training, for 2018 and 2019.

Note: This report uses varying terms (e.g., 'honour'-based violence, 'honour' violence, 'honour' abuse) in accordance with the terms used in the original source from which it is cited.

Background

Scale of 'honour' abuse and violence in the UK

This report opens with the words of Payzee Mahmood, Banaz's younger sister, as a reminder that behind every crime statistic is a history of trauma and legacy of grief. Payzee is a human rights campaigner and survivor ambassador to UK charity, IKWRO (Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation), who launched the Justice for Banaz campaign. In 2014, IKWRO reported findings from Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that showed 2,823 of 'honour' based violence cases had been reported to 39 police forces during 2010, thus providing the first national picture of this form of abuse.³ IKWRO (2014) later published findings from FOI data for 2012, this time from every police force (44 in total) across England, Wales, Northern Ireland.⁴ They concluded that it was not possible to establish the scale of 'honour' based violence over this period as over one-fifth of the police forces had not successfully flagged-up or recorded these cases.

These were the only national prevalence police data available until December 2020, when the Home Office reported on mandatory data collected for 2019 and 2020.⁵ This showed that there were 2,024 'honour'-based abuse offences (of which 140 were forced marriage, and 74 of female genital mutilation) recorded by 43 police forces in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police). Further information from 30 forces on types of offences recorded, included: assault without injury (28%), assault with injury (17%), threats to kill (10%), kidnapping (10%), malicious communications (7%), rape of a female aged 16 and over (6%), harassment (5%), stalking (2%), cruelty to children/young person (2%), public fear, alarm or distress (1%).

These national prevalence data establish that police reports of HBA/V are dispersed across the UK and that the types of 'honour' offences being recorded are varied. Yet, data from other sources indicate that these figures represent only a minority of actual cases and thus, do not reflect the true extent of HBA/V in the UK. For instance, over a 12-month period, there were 12,107 calls logged by Karma Nirvana, a national charity with a telephone helpline for 'honour' based abuse and forced marriage - 70% of these were related to victim support.⁶ It is also noteworthy that during lockdown, there was a 355% increase in calls received.⁷ Likewise, there were 1,507 potential cases reported to the Home Office's Forced Marriage Unit in 2018, reflecting a 21% increase from the previous year.⁸

Collectively, these figures indicate that the scale of the problem is far greater than police report data alone would suggest. The significance of this should not be minimised as, even without reliable baseline data, these figures establish HBA/V as a problem faced by many children, young people, and adults in the UK, with potentially fatal consequences.⁹ A report published in 2015 on 'honour' killings in the UK¹⁰ estimated that there were around 12 murders annually, indicating that the UK was the 'honour' killing capital of Europe. In the 5 years following the 2015 publication of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) inspection report,¹¹ it was reported that around 75 victims were murdered in the name of 'so-called' honour.¹² This recent estimate indicates that the average rate for murders of this kind is around 15 a year.

These vague estimates reinforce the need for complete and comparable data regarding HBA/V crimes to better understand the scale of the problem. One barrier to achieving this objective, however, is police forces' lack of consistency in identifying and recording HBA/V. In part, this stems from lack of awareness and evidence-based training for police officers and frontline staff (including those who take reports from victims) on how to respond appropriately to HBA/V victims and perpetrators.

The themes highlighted in this report are covered in a joint letter sent to the Home Secretary, Right Honourable Priti Patel MP on 18th December 2020¹² by Nicole Jacobs (Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales) and Dame Vera Baird QC (Victims Commissioner for England and Wales). The Commissioners raised concerns about the slow progress of the recommendations laid out on the HMIC inspection report on crime recording of HBA/V by police forces, including those on training. The Commissioners wrote: “The failure to follow up on the inspection recommendations not only undermines victim confidence to engage with police, but fundamentally exacerbates the hidden nature of HBA, thus intensifies victims’ risk and compromises victim safety”.

Aims



The objective of this report is to provide new information on police recording of 'honour' based abuse and violence (HBA/V), including forced marriage, in the UK. The aim of this report is two-fold.

Firstly, to provide information on the prevalence of HBA/V recorded by the police, for 2018 and 2019. Specifically, (i) the number of HBA/V incidents recorded, and (ii) the number of these incidents that led to criminal charges being pressed.

Secondly, to provide information on the number of officers and frontline staff in each constabulary who have been trained to report and respond appropriately to HBA/V and forced marriage victims and perpetrators, for 2018 and 2019.

This investigation

In order to understand how UK police forces are recording incidents of 'honour' based abuse and violence (HBA/V) and forced marriage, and the scope of the training that police officers and other frontline staff receive in relation to these offences, we submitted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA 2000) requests to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Information Access Team and 49 police forces across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Freedom of Information Act came into force in January 2005, designed to promote state transparency and accountability by empowering members of the community to request information from public bodies and expect a response within a reasonable timeframe (generally 20 working days). We contacted the Crown Prosecution Service and police forces via pre-established channels of access for members of the public to submit FOI requests: designated FOI email addresses. The FOI request is shown in appendix 1.

Findings

A total of 38 forces provided information in relation to the first part of our enquiry (see appendix 1, question 1). We received refusal notices from 8 police forces, with the majority stating that retrieval of the information requested in one or more of our questions would exceed stipulated time/cost limits (see appendix 2). One force invoked the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to prioritise critical policing activities. Due to a lack of complete, comparable data regarding HBA/V charges across the forces, the figures depicted in the Table 1 should be interpreted with caution.

Table 1 (page 12) shows that overall, 38 police forces reported 1672 HBA/V incidents (in 2018) and 1840 (in 2019). The summary of findings in Box 1 reflects a subset of 15 police forces, that had data for HBA/V incidents and charges, for both 2018 and 2019.

Box 1: HBA/V incidents reported by sub-set of police forces (N=15) leading to charges: 2018 and 2019

2018

- Total recorded HBA/V incidents for 15 forces: 1069
- Total HBA/V charges for these forces: 45
- Percentage of all reported incidents leading to charges: just over 4%

2019

- Total recorded HBA/V incidents for 15 forces: 1106
- Total HBA/V charges for these forces: 47
- Percentage of all reported incidents leading to charges: just over 4%

These findings are cause for concern. Firstly, they show a drop in the recorded incidents compared to IKWRO's report - from 2823 cases (in 2010), to 1672 cases (in 2018) and 1840 cases (in 2019). Secondly, these figures do not align with Home Office data, which recorded 2024 cases (2019-2020). It is important to reiterate that these prevalence figures reflect data provided from a differing number of forces and timeframes. Piecing this data together to form a pattern, these findings collectively show that at best, police data is flagged up and recorded in a piecemeal way, to the extent that there is little to no consistency across investigations that aim to verify prevalence rates.

Equally, 9 forces who responded did not provide any breakdown of numbers of frontline staff trained during the period – while several of these forces confirmed that all incoming frontline staff receive HBA/V and forced marriage training as part of their mandatory induction training. These responses were qualitative and have been included in table format for brevity (Table 2). As with the information on HBA/V charges, the training data must be interpreted with caution, as a snapshot of visible trends in the accessible data only.

Table 1: Number of HBA/V incidents and charges reported by 38 police forces: 2018 and 2019

Police forces (N=38)	2018		2019	
	HBA/V incidents (N=1672)	HBA/V charges (N=45)	HBA/V incidents (N=1840)	HBA/V charges (N=48)
Lancashire Constabulary	108		162	
Suffolk Constabulary	34		30	1
North Wales Police	5		5	
Derbyshire Constabulary	13	5	23	9
Sussex Police	25	2	41	2
Avon and Somerset	33	3	50	2
British Transport Police	1	0	1	0
Hampshire Constabulary	69		58	
Norfolk Constabulary				
Surrey Police	43	3	30	2
Staffordshire Police	46	2	30	2
Northumbria Police	49	2	33	1
City of London Police			1	
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	3	0	7	0
Dorset	1		7	
Police Scotland	153		156	
Gloucestershire Constabulary	4		5	
Port of Dover	0	0	0	0
West Midlands Police	182	4	173	2
Hertfordshire Constabulary	7	0	10	0
Leicestershire Police	66		86	
Cleveland Police	21		32	
West Mercia Police	39	2	45	2
Police Service of Northern Ireland	3		3	
Bedfordshire	21		44	
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	36		59	
Cheshire Constabulary	3	1	1	0
North Yorkshire Police	4	0	10	0
Lincolnshire Police	7	0	11	0
Ministry of Defence Police			0	
Wiltshire Police	33		17	
Cumbria Constabulary			3	0
Civil Nuclear Constabulary				
Kent Police	91	4	128	3
West Yorkshire Police	180	2	191	3
Northamptonshire Police	34	0	27	0
Merseyside Police	38		45	
Metropolitan Police Service	320	15	316	19

Table 2: Number of officers and frontline staff trained on HBA/V reported by 38 police forces: 2018 and 2019

Police Forces (N=38)	2018 trained	2019 trained
Lancashire Constabulary	186	145
Suffolk Constabulary	128~	128~
North Wales Police	201	311
Derbyshire Constabulary	423	453
Sussex Police	-	-
Avon and Somerset	154	154
British Transport Police	2077	209
Hampshire Constabulary	-	-
Norfolk Constabulary	-	423
Surrey Police	-	-
Staffordshire Police	54	87
Northumbria Police	198	198
City of London Police	-	-
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	0	0
Dorset	82	96
Police Scotland	716	1839
Gloucestershire Constabulary	-	263*
Port of Dover	-	-
West Midlands Police	174	150
Hertfordshire Constabulary	-	186
Leicestershire Police	166	74
Cleveland Police	877	533
West Mercia Police	1008	87
Police Service of Northern Ireland	395	543
Bedfordshire	-	166*
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	-	170*
Cheshire Constabulary	-	-
North Yorkshire Police	0	0
Lincolnshire Police	-	-
Ministry of Defence Police	-	-
Wiltshire Police	132	105
Cumbria Constabulary	220	203
Civil Nuclear Constabulary	0	0
Kent Police	999	998
West Yorkshire Police	627	636
Northamptonshire Police	-	600*
Merseyside Police	363	415
Metropolitan Police Service	2530	4702

Key

Symbol	Meaning
~	Average annual figure provided by force
-	No information held/no disaggregated figure given for year
*	Cumulative total for 2015-19 period

In times of austerity, training is often the first thing to suffer. This is a false economy, for dealing with the consequences is far more costly both financially and in terms of public confidence.¹³

DCI Caroline Goode QPM

Recommendations

This report presents information on the number of 'honour' based abuse and violence (HBA/V), including forced marriage, cases recorded by 38 police forces across the UK, and their engagement in specialised training, in 2018 and 2019. The following three recommendations themes emerged from this and past findings.

1. Awareness Training

- Specialist HBA/V (including forced marriage) training should be compulsory for all police officers, police community support officers (PCSOs), civilian police staff, special constables, and police support volunteers (PSVs). This training should be evidence-based, survivor-informed, led by expert practitioners, and repeated, if it is to have maximum and lasting impact.

2. HBA/V incident recording

- A national strategy to improve HBA/V crime recording on information management systems must be developed and coordinated by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), working collegiately with both the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and Victims' Commissioner.
- This involves auditing HBA/V incident data as part of improvement in quality standards. All forces should publish an annual plan on data collection and monitoring on HBA/V crime and incident recording, alongside their routine data share with the Home Office.
- Crime and incident recording on their own are not a 'magic bullet'. Officers must be educated on how to better identify and record crimes/incidents. Related to this is the need to evaluate the efficacy of current risk assessment approaches, in order to establish whether it is effective for HBA/V.¹⁴ This takes a system change approach to reinforce a standardised and consistent approach to 'criming' across police forces for HBA/V.

3. Academic research

- Funding is needed to enable a broader range of academics with expertise in this specific field to conduct meaningful, reliable, and robust research, that is underpinned by precision and specificity.
- A research priority is an examination into the low number of charges and fall in conviction rates. This will inform on how to improve understanding of blockages in the system (e.g. barriers to disclosure when victims contact police), as well as victims' experiences of the criminal justice system, in seeking justice. Additionally, the low level of prosecutions by CPS for HBA/V need further investigation. Rachael Aplin, in her book 'Policing UK Honour-Based crime'¹⁵ noted that only 10% of these incidents were 'crimed' compared to the crime conversion rate of 50% for domestic abuse. Additionally, that there were discernible differences in how officers applied 'bias, judgement, and morality' in making 'no-crime' decisions in relation to HBA/V, and that some officers aim for 'low hanging fruit' to reduce clientele (p.144). This report echoes the author's call for more research to better understand how much of HBA/V incidents on police incident databases are crimed as HBA/V.
- Additionally, building on the findings in this report, there is scope to capture more information on the reasons why some forces have been more relatively successful than others in recording HBA/V as well as training their officers and frontline staff.

Limitations

Further investigations would benefit from knowing the limitations of this investigation. The FOI request asked how many officers and frontline staff have been trained yet did not ask for the total number of frontline staff, instead leaving the question open to interpretation (i.e., in providing the number of staff trained, whether they have included/excluded the various support roles, community volunteers, call centre staff etc.). Nor did this query account for detectives or senior investigating officers. The authors acknowledge that reporting is only the first stage, and that in order progress to the CPS or charging stage, a great deal of work must be conducted to gather sufficient evidence, which is usually carried out by detectives.

Conclusions

In the fifteen years since Banaz's tragic murder, and two years until the men who murdered her are eligible for parole, it is disconcerting that there are still no reliable baseline data on incidents of HBA/V or specialised training of frontline staff. This report has shown that efforts to collect data on prevalence rates are challenging, and that it is not possible to make firm conclusions as the data collected was limited by discrepancies and cannot be matched across years or previous investigations. Therefore, rather depressingly, our conclusions are an extension to that made seven years ago in IKWRO's 2014 report, that it is not possible to establish the true scale of HBA/V, for 2018 and 2019.

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Appendix 1. FOI request sent to 49 police forces.

As part of a nationwide project, we (HARM Network - Honour Abuse Research Matrix, the Domestic Abuse Research Network**, Halo project and H.O.P.E are seeking information on honour-based abuse (HBA) or honour-based violence (HBV) and forced marriage cases across the UK.

1. Individually for year 2018 and 2019:

- a) How many incidents of 'honour-based abuse' (HBA) or 'honour'-based violence' (HBV) and 'forced marriage' your police force recorded?
- b) How many of these incidents led to criminal charges being pressed?
- c) How many of the charges referred to in question 2 resulted in convictions?***

2. From 2015 to 2019, how many officers and frontline staff (including those who take reports from victims) in your constabulary have been trained in how to respond appropriately to HBA or HBV and forced marriage victims and perpetrators? Please indicate if they have been trained to make a distinction between domestic abuse and HBA or HBV.

Please state by year:

- Year 2015*
- Year 2016*
- Year 2017*
- Year 2018
- Year 2019

3. Through what methods have they been trained (please select from below) and please provide the frequency of this specialist HBA/HBV/FM training.*

- Online
- Face-to-Face
- A mixture of both
- As part of another compulsory training session, if so, please state which training course*

*This information was collected but not summarised in this report due to insufficient data

** The Domestic Abuse Research Network is based in the Centre for Abuse Research at the University of Suffolk

Appendix 2. Police forces who sent refusal notices (N=8).

	Police Force (N=8)	Reason for refusal
1	Durham Constabulary	Section 14 of FOIA 2000 – “it has been determined that your request would place a burden on our organisation, and we are utilising the Section 14 (burdensome) exemption”.
2	Dyfed-Powys Police	Section 12 (1) of FOIA 2000 – requested information is not held in an easily retrievable format. It would have to be retrieved manually and, therefore, “the Cost of Compliance exceeds the Appropriate Limit”. <i>(No specific incident category relating to HBA/V and FM).</i>
3	Greater Manchester Police	Section 12 (1) of FOIA 2000 – requested information is not held in an easily retrievable format. It would have to be retrieved manually and, therefore, “the cost of locating and retrieving the information exceeds the ‘appropriate level’ as stated in the Freedom of Information (Fees and Appropriate Limit) Regulations 2004”. <i>(Not specified)</i>
4	Gwent Police	Section 12 (1) of FOIA 2000 – requested information is not held in an easily retrievable format. It would have to be retrieved manually and, therefore, “a Section 12 Excess Cost exemption has been applied” <i>(Charges and convictions)</i>
5	Humberside Police	Section 12 (1) of FOIA 2000 – requested information is not held in an easily retrievable format. It would have to be retrieved manually and, therefore, “this would exceed the appropriate limit of 18 hours or cost equivalent”. <i>(Training)</i>
6	South Yorkshire	Section 12 (1) of FOIA 2000 – requested information is not held in an easily retrievable format. It would have to be retrieved manually and, therefore, “the process to extract the level of detail to meet the criteria of your request, would take much longer than 18 hours of work as guided under FOI”. <i>(Training)</i>
7	Thames Valley Police	Section 12 (1) of FOIA 2000 – requested information is not held in an easily retrievable format. It would have to be retrieved manually and, therefore, “this will exceed the appropriate 18-hour time and £450 cost limit”. <i>(Charges and convictions)</i>
8	Essex Police	Section 12 (1) of FOIA 2000 – requested information is not held in an easily retrievable format. It would have to be retrieved manually and, therefore, “this will exceed the appropriate 18-hour time and £450 cost limit”. <i>(Charges and convictions)</i>

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