

Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage are relatively new areas in terms of policing and historically, professionals have not understood the cultural issues involved. Nationally statistics are available; however, the extent of the local problem was unknown.

Scanning:

- Lack of understanding of the problem
- Nationally 12 so called 'honour' killings per year
- Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) deal with 400 cases and 5000 calls of Forced Marriage nationally per annum
- 8% of calls to FMU are from the North East of England.

Analysis:

- Evidence of under reporting
- Lack of partnership working between agencies and the voluntary sector
- Absence of information sharing protocols between relevant agencies
- Perception amongst South Asian communities about confidentiality of information
- No formalized investigation process
- No police baseline figures available. Cases not recorded as such on police systems
- Cleveland Police area has 6.3% Black and Minority Ethnic community (BME)
- One voluntary organisation admitted dealing with 5 cases of Forced Marriage per week.
- Incidents discussed in the community but not reported to police.

Response:

The Choice helpline initiative is a long term strategy to reduce incidents of violence against women by structured interventions and improving the confidence in public services from the South Asian communities.

- Raise awareness of the issues within the community through marketing, media and education campaigns.
- Promote confidence within the South Asian Communities in the public services.
- Increase the number of incidents reported to police and other statutory agencies
- Develop partnership responses and protocol to deal with reported incidents, including training of dedicated officers.
- Provide a confidential incident reporting and support helpline, staffed by Cleveland Police officers
- Police Policy, procedures and guidance introduced
- Training packages for all staff including cultural awareness.
- External training for statutory and voluntary agencies including Local Criminal Justice Board members
- Information sharing protocols and risk assessments

Assessment:

Since 16th November 2007 the initiative has

- Increased reporting (496 calls)
- Had positive interventions into 79 cases
- Removed victims from harm and addressed offenders behaviour
- Contributed to agencies understanding of cultural issues

The initiative has received local, national and recently international publicity, been supported by HMIC (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary) discussed in Prime Ministers Question Time and highlighted as good practice and adopted by other forces in the country.

Choice Helpline. Goldstein Awards 2009.

Scanning:

Nationally there have been a number of high profile murders of South Asian women and children by their families in the name of so called 'honour.'

Reviews into some of these murders were the catalyst for change in the way Honour Based Violence (HBV) cases were dealt with in the UK. It highlighted that many people did not understand the complexities of HBV, how quickly they can escalate and that people can be murdered for what may seem a trivial transgression.

Home Office figures suggest that there are approximately twelve 'honour killings' in the UK per year. This does not take into account the many women and young girls who are taken abroad by their families and never seen again.

HBV and Forced Marriage (FM) are relatively new areas in terms of policing and historically, professionals have not understood the cultural issues involved in these types of crimes/incidents and have on occasion inadvertently placed victims at further risk of harm.

Parents who force their children to marry often justify their behaviour as protection and preserving religious or cultural traditions. Forced marriage however, can not be justified on religious grounds, every major faith condemns it.

The majority of the cases of FM and HBV involve South Asian families, although there have been numerous cases from East Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe, as well as under age marriages in the UK involving Gypsy and Traveling communities.

Forced Marriage is described as

'One or both spouses do not consent to the marriage and duress is involved'

ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) definition 2007

Honour Based Violence is described as

'A crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and or community'

ACPO definition 2007

The joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office, Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) deals with 5000 calls and 400 cases of forced marriage nationally per year. 8% of those calls received were from the North East of England. Within the Cleveland Police area national charities report dealing with victims and survivors, although were unable to quantify numbers at this stage.

National research shows that South Asian women under the age of 24 are 2 to 3 times more likely to commit suicide than their Caucasian counterparts.

Cleveland Police area has a relatively low Black and Minority Ethnic community (BME) population at 6.3% (Census 2001) with communities from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh living predominantly in the Middlesbrough area.

Analysis within Cleveland revealed that incidents were not recorded as HBV or FM and the police Command and Control system was unable to provide data on this issue. In addition, no baseline police figures existed to ascertain whether Cleveland mirrored the national picture.

In the Cleveland Police area there had been a number of murders and suicides of South Asian women and children over the past ten years which were not investigated as HBV cases at that time, due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of this issue.

In developing the forces understanding, Cleveland Police worked closely with a national charity Karma Nirvana and consulted widely with the following groups:

- Independent Advisory Group members (IAG)
- BME networks
- Those working in the field of Domestic Abuse
- South Asian police officers and staff
- Voluntary BME Women's groups
- Faith networks
- Local mosques and temples
- Health
- Education
- Children and adult Services
- Registrars
- Victims/survivors
- Immigration

All agencies confirmed that a problem existed, however South Asian communities had a historical distrust of the police. Whilst incidents were being discussed within the community and voluntary agencies, they expressed concerns around confidentiality and were unwilling to report the matters to the police. There was a perception amongst some South Asian communities that information given in confidence would be leaked back to their families.

Scanning revealed.

- The extent of the problem was unknown
- There was evidence of under reporting
- Lack of partnership working between agencies and the voluntary sector
- No up to date information sharing protocol existed between relevant agencies
- Lack of understanding of the problem
- The perception amongst South Asian communities about confidentiality of information
- No formalized investigation process existed.

Under reporting to the police resulted in the loss of one voluntary women's project in the Cleveland police area, who after losing their funding admitted dealing with at least five cases of forced marriage per week.

The main issue highlighted was the lack of coordination between agencies working in this area. Organisations were working independently and not working collaboratively or sharing information. South Asian women were reluctant to engage with professionals, particularly if they were from the same community.

It was evident across the organisations within the Cleveland Police area that many agencies were ignorant of this unique form of abuse and were uncertain how to handle the complexities involved. There were also concerns about being seen as prejudiced against the cultural practices of local communities. The victims can be extremely vulnerable, from hard to reach groups and often have no access to support mechanisms.

South Asian women identified this area as a significant concern to themselves and their families but felt that authorities were not aware of the extent of the issue. Many women and young girls are being forced to marry and subsequently raped on a regular basis. Abuse includes physical, sexual, psychological and emotional. Offences include assault, kidnap, false imprisonment, rape and in extreme cases murder. These are rarely reported to the police unless there is no alternative. This is due to a historical cloud of secrecy from some communities in involving professionals in what many see as family business.

The full extent of this problem was unknown and understanding of the cultural issues unclear. A collaborative approach involving a wide range of individuals/groups and agencies was required to obtain a greater insight into the issues and gather additional information.

Analysis:

Analysis of The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) figures revealed that most of the cases reported were those whose families originated from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

Cleveland Police hosted a multi agency conference in May 2008 to raise awareness of the issues. Statutory and voluntary agencies attended to discuss the best way to improve access to support and assistance to those at risk.

Local and national support networks, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women's groups and the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) were involved in discussing a range of options to promote trust and confidence between the police and the community.

Further work was conducted to identify those organisations involved in the community, to identify areas of good practice and training requirements. This formed the basis of the training for the police.

This highlighted the reluctance of some South Asian women to speak to someone from their own community for fear of information being leaked to the family and the risk that this could place them in.

There was no police policy, procedures or guidance on how to deal with HBV or FM cases and no adequate risk assessment.

Victims

The victims were primarily women and young girls of South Asian origin (although 16 out of 496 calls to the Choice helpline have been from men)

Victims were often chaperoned and unable to access support services.

Criminal offences tended to occur once a marriage was refused or the person was seen to become too 'westernised.' The risk was often minimized by individuals believing that their own families would not hurt them as they loved them. Many were too frightened to contact police for fear of further violence from the perpetrators.

Offenders.

Offenders were predominantly male family members and evidence suggested that teenage boys were enlisted by the family, who believed that due to their age may get a lesser sentence at court if convicted of an offence.

Females were often collusive; mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunties may all be aware of what was planned for female relatives and would acquiesce or be actively involved in the abuse. Enquiries locally showed that mother in laws often physically assaulted their daughter in laws, some on a very regular basis. These assaults were rarely reported to the police.

Location

Although many South Asian people live in Cleveland, offences do not necessarily happen in the area. Victims are often taken abroad or to other areas of the United Kingdom where offences take place.

Young girls are taken abroad for the purposes of marriage and offences are often committed when the person does not comply with the families demands.

The main objective of this initiative was to reduce Honour Based Violence particularly against women and children.

The partnership agreed the following:

- Raise awareness of the issues within the community through marketing, media and education campaigns
- Promote confidence within the South Asian Communities in the public services
- Increase the number of incidents reported to the police and other statutory agencies
- Develop partnership responses and protocol to deal with reported incidents, including training of dedicated officers
- Provide a confidential incident reporting and support helpline.

Response:

A number of options were discussed to increase the number of calls to the police with regards to HBV and FM, particularly from South Asian communities.

The first option was for the initial response phase to be through a voluntary agency, but this was discounted as the person may need immediate assistance to ensure their safety and this would need to be through the police.

The second option was for a publicity campaign to encourage people to call the police via the usual police numbers. This too was discounted as it was felt that very often a victim may only have one chance to contact police so the response has to be right the first time. It could be that the call taker is a new member of staff and has not been trained in HBV and may not realise the nature of the enquiry.

The third option of a dedicated helpline, staffed by Cleveland police officers was felt to be the best solution.

The name 'Choice' for the helpline was appropriately picked to convey the message that everybody has the right to make their own choices in life and should not be forced to marry, or be sexually, physically, psychologically or emotionally abused by anybody.

A dedicated telephone number **0800 5 999 365** was obtained signifying that the police are available 365 days a year.

A protocol was developed to provide 'on call' assistance to victims 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This detailed police interventions and risk management plans including a multi agency response.

Information sharing and confidentiality protocols were agreed including having restricted access at MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences)

To address South Asian women's concerns around confidentiality a decision was made that all information relating to HBV and FM would be restricted to those who needed to know rather than being on open systems for all staff to see. This involved creating a restricted database which relevant staff have access to. This is MOPI (Management of Police Information) and NCRS (National Crime Recording Systems) compliant. This database is used to review responses to the incident.

Calls to the helpline were monitored and data analysed including:

- The telephone details of the caller
- Whether the call was answered or not
- The duration of the call
- How many calls have been made in any given period.
- The times when most calls were received.

Analysis indicated that the majority of calls were received between 12 midday and 4 pm. Staffing levels were reviewed to ensure maximum coverage during these hours.

The cost of this project is relatively low. The only cost to Cleveland Police in addition to staff costs is an 'on call' allowance per day, which equates to £5,475 per annum and the telephone line rental at £360 per annum.

Force policy, procedures, guidance, aide memoirs, contact sheets and risk assessments were introduced and these have been identified as good practice and replicated by other forces.

A female Police Inspector was invited to a local mosque to talk about the 'Choice' helpline to the male members after Friday prayers. It is believed that this is the first time ever that a female officer has been invited into a North East mosque to discuss such personal issues which mainly affect the South Asian community.

Whilst seen as controversial it has raised the profile of HBV and FM and has ensured that many people are aware of what the police are trying to achieve. The mosque is looking to extend this to their female members.

People entering the United Kingdom for the purpose of marriage from South Asian countries are placed on a two year probationary period. This means that they have no access to public funds during that time. This causes huge problems for police forces when women on probation leave their husbands and require accommodation as they are not entitled to housing or refuge costs. A multi agency policy was developed in the Middlesbrough area which allows all women regardless of their status within the UK access to local refuges and or housing provision. This policy is being extended across the Cleveland area.

There was a 'child friendly' poster campaign directed at every school in the Cleveland area. The campaign also included medical centres, religious premises, women's groups, female toilets and bus shelters. Sponsorship was obtained to advertise on the back of buses during the initial launch of the helpline.

The Cleveland Police Choice helpline, the first of its kind in the country, was launched on the 16th November 2007 at a multi agency conference. This conference was attended by 300 people from voluntary and statutory agencies.

Key speakers included

- Vera Baird QC and Solicitor General
- Hannah Buckley from the Forced Marriage Unit
- Nazir Afzal OBE, Director of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for London West and national CPS lead on HBV
- Jasvinder Sanghera Director Karma Nirvana
- Cris McCurley Ben Hoare Bell Solicitors

The outcome of the conference was a greater understanding by partner agencies and local communities on the effects of HBV and how to access services and details of how the partnership would respond. A publicity campaign associated with the conference received high profile media attention.

A steering group was formed to ensure that all information sharing protocols were in place and that there was an agreed response in line with the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) protocol. This ensured a risk management and safety plan would be implemented, including signposting victims to appropriate services who could offer support, accommodation, finance etc, whilst police carried out the investigation. HBV cases discussed at MARAC have restricted membership to ensure confidentiality.

The response from local mosques was positive. They publicly supported the Choice helpline, the steps being taken to address the issues and displayed the Choice helpline posters.

The partnership worked closely with the local registrars to reduce the amount of Forced Marriages taking place in the Cleveland area. Three live cases have been from direct referrals from the registry office. One female from a very abusive relationship was re housed, another has had her marriage annulled and she has moved away from her family. The third is remaining in the marriage by choice but is being supported by voluntary agencies.

A great deal of work needs to be done to eradicate HBV from our society. We are not naïve enough to think that the Choice helpline alone will do this. It requires a major cultural change for many groups and will not occur overnight. It is crucial however that all agencies have an appropriate response in place to deal with such incidents, so that further victims will feel confident enough to come forward. By promoting through the media the positive approach taken by Cleveland police we will continue to engender the trust of the community and reassure them. This in turn will increase the level of reporting of FM, HBV and associated abuse.

The following policies, procedures and packages have been delivered as part of the initiative:

- Force Policy, Procedure and Operating Procedures
- Cleveland Police Share point site
- Cleveland Police external website
- Aide Memoir
- Training package for Police Officers, Police Community Support Officers, Special Constables, Police Volunteers, relevant police staff
- Training package for Choice helpline staff
- Training for practitioners, vulnerable adults, Child Protection and Domestic Abuse staff
- Training package for managers and supervisors
- Training package for senior managers and decision makers
- North East training package for Local Criminal Justice Board staff, voluntary agencies including victim support and statutory agencies
- Information sharing protocols
- Risk Identification
- A perpetrator programme to address offending behaviour run by a voluntary organisation

- Counseling, advice and support is offered for victims through a voluntary organisation.

Assessment:

Has the Cleveland Police Choice helpline met its original objectives?

- Raise awareness of the issues within the community through marketing, media and education campaigns.

The media campaigns resulted in a greater awareness amongst the public and agencies. Locally the South Asian community continues to support the initiative in their mosques, temples and other religious buildings.

A national TV channel produced a documentary focusing on Cleveland Polices approach to HBV and FM. Publicity has certainly raised awareness of the helpline which has received 496 calls to the Choice helpline since its launch on 16th November 2007. (Figures until 1st April 2009) Press interest continues to be current with updates every quarter.

Cleveland Police devised and delivered a training programme for twenty dedicated police officers to staff the helpline.

Awareness sessions relating to HBV have been given to all middle and senior managers, student officers, control room and public facing staff,

Sessions have also included voluntary agencies, for example Victims Support and women's support networks as well as statutory agencies including Local Criminal Justice Board members and other statutory agencies.

As part of the Choice helpline initiative, the Crown Prosecution Service locally is training their staff in HBV and FM particularly in relation to the Forced Marriage Civil Protection Act.

Schools and colleges have shown their support by displaying the Choice posters and distributing merchandise containing the Choice helpline messages.

- Promote confidence within the South Asian Communities in the public services.

Since the introduction of the helpline data shows the line has now received 496 calls, resulting in 79 live cases (Figures until 1st April 2009).

Feedback from the South Asian community has been positive with females in particular feeling more confident in reporting incidents to the police using the confidential helpline.

This is illustrated by the following statements

1. 'If it wasn't for the Choice helpline I would no longer be here' (Teenage victim)
2. 'My reluctance to use the Choice helpline was overcome by the reassurance that my problem would be dealt with confidentially'. (Middle aged female)

- Increase the number of incidents reported to the police and other statutory agencies

Prior to the launch of the Choice helpline there were no reported statistics of HBV and FM cases. Averages of 29 calls are received by the helpline per month.

Cases reported to statutory organisations are now readily shared with police and there is multi agency working.

Referrals are received from local women's networks and Domestic Abuse advocacy's.

Cases are received directly from the Forced Marriage unit and the National Survivors network.

Cleveland Police implemented an HBV recording system which categorizes offence types. This has subsequently been replicated nationally and all forces now have to provide the number of HBV cases reported per annum.

- Develop partnership responses and protocol to deal with reported incidents, including training of dedicated officers.

Emergency MARAC meetings are called in relation to high risk HBV cases, where a relevant safety plan is put in place. Membership is restricted where possible to ensure confidentiality. There is a partnership approach to all cases of HBV and FM with statutory and voluntary organisations sharing information under the protocol.

Police policy, procedure and guidance have been introduced including working together with voluntary and statutory organisations. Multi agency MARAC policy is being formalized.

A specific training programme was developed for dedicated HBV officers, which included investigation, cultural awareness and inputs from survivors of HBV and FM. This training is ongoing to keep in line with local and national developments.

The level of reporting has required the police to appoint a forced marriage support worker which is funded through Stockton Primary Care Trust to support victims and to consult with the hard to reach communities.

- Provide a confidential incident reporting and support helpline

The helpline has been up and running for 17 months and officers have dealt with a range of incidents including forced marriages, sexual and physical abuse, repeated rapes, false imprisonment, demonic possession, children leaving education to go to South Asian countries, infanticide, attempt murder, attempts and threats of suicide due to abusive relationships. An example of a successful conclusion to one of these incidents is a woman who fled her abusive family, was traced by them on seven occasions going to different refuges throughout the UK with her children. Her National Insurance number was anonymised and she was relocated to a safer area of the country with a joint risk management plan agreed by both forces. The woman has learned to speak English, obtained Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK, is living independently and has recently secured a job.

Conclusion.

By developing a multi agency coordinated approach to HBV and FM Cleveland Police have been able to provide a more structured response to this issue and the nature of the interventions have enabled South Asian women to escape violent relationships. The improvement in the collaboration between voluntary and statutory agencies has ensured a coordinated approach to the wide range of issues which present themselves from these types of enquiries.

The initiative has been highlighted as good practice and a number of police forces across the country have either implemented or are considering implementing a similar scheme. Cleveland Police has assisted those forces with advice and training.

On December 3rd 2008, Northumbria and Durham police joined forces with Cleveland to launch the first regional Choice helpline. This was launched at a conference attended by voluntary and statutory agencies and sponsored by Government Office North East.

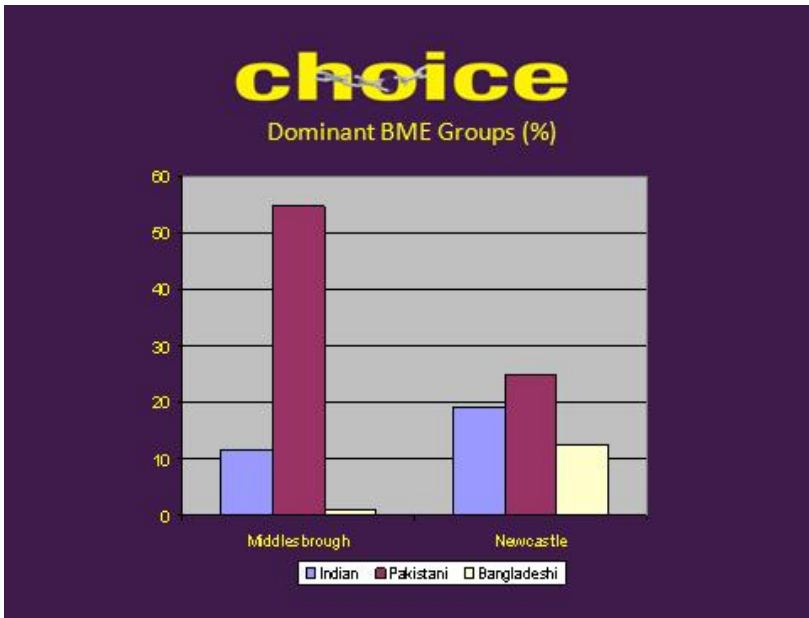
This is a unique problem which is still vastly under reported.

The helpline has engendered the trust within the community which has increased the levels of reporting. Many people still do not want to criminalize their families but are happy to be assisted to move away from violent situations. Cleveland Police have adopted a long term strategy to reducing violence against women and girls who are subject to HBV and FM and ensuring their long term safety.

The Choice helpline has enabled a joint agency response and is improving the relationship between the police and the South Asian community.

Appendix 1

The below graph shows the percentage of dominant BME (Black and Minority Ethnic groups) in the Middlesbrough area compared with Newcastle, in a neighbouring force. The dominant BME group in Middlesbrough is of Pakistani origin. (2001 Census)



Appendix 2

The below graph shows the ethnicity of the victim/survivor from telephone calls made to the Forced Marriage Unit.

