

Major report on honour-based violence

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Researchers from the University of Bristol have contributed to a national report on police forces' understanding of honour-based violence (HBV), forced marriage (FM) and female genital mutilation (FGM).

The report, 'The depths of dishonour: Hidden voices and shameful

crimes', by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), calls on [police](#) forces nationwide to improve their knowledge and understanding of honour-based [violence](#), FGM, and forced marriage. It examines the approach of [police forces](#) in England and Wales in relation to the protection of people from harm caused by honour-based violence, forced marriage and [female genital mutilation](#), and at supporting victims of these offences.

The Bristol team undertook a participatory research project with victims and survivors of HBV, FM and FGM, which fed into the HMIC's report, and has been published alongside it today.

Professor Marianne Hester, from the Centre for Gender and Violence Research in the university's School for Policy Studies, led the research team, with Dr Gangoli (University of Bristol) and Professor Gill (University of Roehampton). Professor Hester said: 'We interviewed 50 women from across the UK about their experiences of HBV, about their reporting to the police, and about how the police handled their complaints. The majority of them had been in contact with police in the past three years.

'Over two thirds of the women we interviewed had experienced either, or a combination of, [forced marriage](#) and honour-based violence. The honour-based violence included domestic abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, financial) and coercive control perpetrated by their husband, often in collaboration with the husband's family.'

The researchers also identified that while HBV certainly has features in common with domestic abuse and gender-based violence broadly, it is also distinguished as a violence that draws directly on the rhetoric of 'honour' and 'shame' within the family and wider community. It involves the exercise of control to protect perceived cultural or religious beliefs or status.

Professor Hester continued: 'While many of the participants' accounts may have presented as [domestic abuse](#) experienced by black and minority ethnic (BME) women, it was the clear invocation of 'honour' that shaped the context of the abuse, layering additional constraints and harms for the victim. Some victims expressed concern that the police did not appreciate the nature and burden of 'honour', indeed that speaking to the authorities was itself considered a violation of community norms.'

HM Inspector of Constabulary Wendy Williams said: 'Honour-based violence is being suffered on a daily basis by blameless citizens across all areas and communities. The immense emotional difficulty victims have in reporting the crimes they have suffered mean that victims are acutely and continually vulnerable.

'Although initial responses by the police are good, only a small number of forces are well-prepared for the complexity honour-based violence cases can pose. It is clear the police service has some way to go before the public can be confident that honour-based violence is properly understood by the police, and that potential and actual victims are adequately and effectively protected.

'The first response victims receive is the most important, and the courage they have shown to contact the police must not be undone by forces being ill-prepared. Raising levels of awareness will improve the response to honour-based violence and the confidence of potential victims to report incidents and crimes to the police. That, in turn, will go a significant way towards addressing the unreported nature of these offences.

'Incidents and crimes of this nature are not unique to one culture, community or geographical area – the hidden nature of these crimes means that it is likely that, of the victims who come forward, there are many more who haven't. It is imperative that the police show [victims](#)

that when they come forward they will receive the best possible service and be treated with the utmost care.'

More information: The depths of dishonour: Hidden voices and shameful crimes. [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk ... ths-of-dishonour.pdf](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/ths-of-dishonour.pdf)

Victim/survivor voices – a participatory research project.
[www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk ... ristol-hbv-study.pdf](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/ristol-hbv-study.pdf)

Provided by University of Bristol

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