



Briefing for delegates: Statutory Definition of Honour Based Abuse



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“As someone who has faced Honour Based Abuse, it’s disheartening to know that we still don’t have a clear legal definition. If we genuinely want to put an end to this, we need to start by accurately defining it. It’s not just a matter of words; it’s about giving survivors the recognition and support they deserve, and that begins with acknowledging the problem for what it truly is.”

Survivor

Our collective position

As Expert VAWG Organisations, we call for a statutory definition for Honour Based Abuse

Overview

Honour Based Abuse (HBA) represents a profound and complex form of abuse rooted in the control of individuals to maintain perceived family or community 'honour.' While the UK has made strides in tackling harmful practices like forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), there is no statutory definition of HBA. This gap perpetuates inconsistent recognition and response, leaving victims inadequately protected and perpetrators unchallenged.

The #Push4Change campaign, led by Karma Nirvana, calls for legislative reform to define HBA in law and ensure that every victim is recognised, protected, and supported.

What is Honour Based Abuse?

HBA is abuse perpetrated to protect or defend the perceived honour of an individual, family, or community. Unlike other forms of abuse, HBA is characterised by:

- **Collective Perpetration:** Abuse often involves multiple family or community members acting together.
- **Honour-Driven Motivations:** Abuse is driven by the belief that actions perceived as 'dishonourable' bring shame and must be controlled or punished to restore family or community standing.
- **Control and Punishment:** Victims are subjected to physical, emotional, and psychological control, often punished for perceived violations of strict behavioural expectations.
- **Shame as a Barrier to Leave:** Victims often feel intense shame or fear reputational harm for themselves or others, which is a unique characteristic of HBA. This creates immense pressure to stay in abusive situations, silencing victims and posing significant obstacles to seeking help.

HBA can take many different forms, but includes the following forms:

- Forced marriage and Child Marriage.
- FGM.
- Coercive control and surveillance.
- 'Honour killings.'

Why Change is Urgently Needed

HBA remains a hidden and underreported crime. Victims face **unique barriers** to seeking help, often silenced by fear of reprisals from family, community, and even those they trust. The systemic response to HBA continues to fall short, failing to fully understand the honour-driven and collective dynamics underpinning this abuse. Without urgent change, **victims will continue to be trapped in cycles of abuse** while perpetrators evade justice. Key issues include:

01 Failure to Recognise HBA and Protect Victims

HBA continues to be misunderstood or overlooked by professionals, including police, social workers, and legal bodies. This failure results in inadequate protection for victims, as the dynamics of HBA—such as collective and honour-driven motives—are not fully understood. This oversight leads to insufficient intervention, leaving victims at heightened risk and perpetuating cycles of abuse. Services designed for mainstream domestic abuse cases do not always meet the needs of HBA victims, leaving them without tailored support or safety options.

02 Multiple Perpetrators are Missed

Without a statutory definition that explicitly acknowledges multiple perpetrators in HBA, institutions often fail to investigate or address the role of multiple perpetrators. Risk assessments and safeguarding frameworks typically focus on the actions of a single abuser, overlooking the wider network of enablers or co-conspirators who may play roles in coercion, intimidation, or enabling abuse. This leaves victims vulnerable to continued harm, even after protective measures are taken against the primary perpetrator. Failure to recognise this collective dynamic of HBA undermines the effectiveness of safeguarding efforts and creates significant gaps within the criminal justice system. Cases are often not fully investigated through the lens of multiple perpetrators, limiting accountability and justice. The absence of a clear statutory definition makes it difficult to identify all perpetrators of abuse in HBA and hold these multiple perpetrators accountable.

03 Misidentification of Honour Based Abuse

Different institutions use conflicting definitions of HBA, leading to inconsistent identification and responses. Many of these definitions fail to acknowledge the perception of honour as a key motivation for abuse or lack clarity in their explanation of the term. Terms like “honour-based violence” and “so-called honour” are often used interchangeably, creating further ambiguity around HBA. This lack of clarity leads to fragmented safeguarding practices and systemic failures, within cases of HBA often handled inconsistently across policing, family and criminal justice systems, and child safeguarding frameworks. These inconsistencies result in missed opportunities for effective intervention, leaving victims at heightened risk. Misunderstandings about what constitutes HBA, exacerbated by conflicting definitions within organisations, can lead to inappropriate support or victims being left in dangerous situations.

04 Lack of Comprehensive Data

The absence of a clear, unified definition of HBA leads to inconsistent data collection practices across agencies. As a result, the true scale and impact of HBA remain obscured, preventing effective policy development, resource allocation, and targeted interventions. This fragmented approach to data limits our understanding of the problem and undermines efforts to combat HBA at a national level.

05 Human Cost

Fawziyah Javed's tragic murder serves as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of HBA. Fawziyah was a young woman with her whole life ahead of her—dreams, aspirations, and a future she could not see because of the violence and control exerted over her. Sadly, her death is not an isolated event; it is part of a broader pattern of HBA.

There is an urgent need for systemic change to ensure that HBA is properly recognised, all perpetrators are held accountable, and victims are given the appropriate protections and support.

Fawziyah's Story – The Tragic Consequences of Ignoring HBA

Fawziyah's story highlights the devastating impact of HBA, and the failures of systems meant to protect her. Despite multiple calls for help, including two police visits just days before her death, the abuse she faced was never properly recognised as HBA. On each visit, the police did not see the full picture—the complex, multi-perpetrator nature of the abuse that involved not just her partner, but also his family.

A chilling moment from *The Push* shows Fawziyah's father-in-law saying, "She's our daughter, not theirs," revealing how women in these situations are treated as possessions. This highlights the deeper familial control at play, where a woman's value is defined by family "honour," not her autonomy or safety.

When Fawziyah was pushed off Arthur's Seat, at no point did her abuser dial 999. Instead, his first reaction was to call his father, showing how the family's complicity helped enable the abuse. The failure to recognise the dynamics of HBA and the involvement of multiple perpetrators played a significant part in the tragic loss of her life.

If her case had been recognised for the multi-layered abuse it was, and the honour dynamics involved, Fawziyah might have had a chance to escape the violence. Her story is a tragic reminder of why we must do more to recognise and address HBA and the impact it has on victims.

Campaign Objectives

01 Introduce a Statutory Definition for Honour Based Abuse

- Introduce and implement a statutory definition for HBA as endorsed by survivors and the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector, drafted by Barrister Naomi Wiseman.
- This definition will provide clarity for professionals, ensuring consistent identification, response, and recording of HBA cases across all sectors, leading to better protection for victims.
- Learn more about how the endorsed definition has been created by scanning the QR code below.



Scan to read more about how our definition was created

The Endorsed Definition of HBA by Survivors and Expert VAWG Sector

“An incident or pattern of violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion, control or abuse (including but not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, economic, spiritual, faith-related or emotional abuse) motivated by the perpetrator’s perception that an individual has shamed, or may shame, the perpetrator, the family, or community or has otherwise broken, or may break, the perceived norms of the community’s accepted behaviours, including by speaking out about the abuse and where the perception of shame may also prevent a victim from accessing support or help.”

02 Create Statutory Guidance for frontline professionals

- Establish plans for quickly implemented statutory guidance for professionals to enable effective, uniform responses to HBA cases, ensuring victims receive the support and protection they need.
- This mandatory guidance must equip professionals with the knowledge and tools necessary to identify the warning signs of HBA, understand its complexities, and take immediate action to safeguard victims.
- As we know from the principles of the One Chance Rule, which emphasises that professionals may only have one opportunity to intervene and save a victim at risk, implementing uniform safeguarding practices across all sectors helps ensure that victims of HBA receive the protection and support they need without delay.

The Impact

Statutory definitions play a vital role in providing precision, uniformity, and legal acknowledgment to critical matters. Establishing a statutory definition for HBA carries several implications:

01 Better Identification through Shared Understanding

- **Consistent Interpretation:** A single, universally accepted definition creates a standard language for addressing HBA across diverse professional sectors.
- **Facilitating Collaboration:** Professionals working together, armed with the same definition, can effectively identify and address cases, ensuring a coordinated and cohesive response.
- **Enhanced Identification:** The shared understanding enables police officers, social workers, educators, and health professionals to collectively recognise and respond to HBA cases promptly and appropriately.

02 Protection of Victims

- **Guidance for Practitioners:** A statutory definition, supported by statutory guidance, forms a robust framework for practitioners. This framework assists in safeguarding victims by establishing clear expectations and procedures for statutory practitioners. It provides practitioners with a practical tool to navigate HBA cases effectively.
- **Victim and Survivor Empowerment:** A clear statutory definition is a significant source of empowerment for victims and survivors of HBA. By validating their experiences and acknowledging the seriousness of the issue, it provides a recognised framework for seeking help, reinforcing the availability of support. This approach sends a powerful message that their voices matter.

03 Research and Data Collection

- **Evidence-Based Policymaking:** A statutory definition facilitates accurate data collection and research on HBA. This evidence is vital for policymakers in understanding the scope, patterns, and impact of HBA, leading to the development of effective interventions based on reliable information.
- **Consistent Reporting:** A statutory definition enables consistent reporting of HBA cases. This consistency is vital for accurate record-keeping, which, in turn, supports data collection and research efforts.

03 Appropriate Resource Allocation

- **Informed Decision-Making:** Having a statutory definition aids policymakers in making informed decisions about resource allocation. This ensures that the necessary resources, whether financial or human, are allocated appropriately to address the specific challenges posed by HBA.

In summary, **a shared statutory understanding of HBA is crucial for creating a unified approach across services.** This not only aids in better identification and responses to cases but also ensures that victims receive the **support and protection they need.** Additionally, it **provides a foundation for appropriate resource allocation and evidence-based policymaking** to address the complex issues associated with HBA.

“To improve understanding and responses to Honour Based Abuse – we must start by legally defining it”

Language Matters

A statutory definition of HBA is essential for addressing the nuanced and complex nature of this form of abuse. The lack of a consistent, comprehensive definition across institutions allows for gaps in safeguarding, policing, and legal interventions, ultimately failing victims. Language plays a pivotal role in ensuring clarity, accountability, and protection, and complexity should not be an argument for confusing or conflicting definitions across statute, institutions and organisations with safeguarding duties.

A statutory definition provides a clear and uniform understanding of a term in law. For HBA, a statutory definition must:

- Enlarge the understanding of abuse to capture its unique cultural and social dynamics.
- Comprehensively define the term to ensure uniformity across legal and safeguarding frameworks.

**Fawziyah
Javed**
1989–2021

Why do we use the word 'honour'?

The word "honour" is crucial in the context of HBA because it encapsulates the specific motivations and dynamics that distinguish this form of abuse from other types of violence. Here are the key reasons why its use is important:

01 Captures the Motivation Behind the Abuse

- The term "honour" reflects the underlying perception of shame or dishonour that drives perpetrators. It emphasises where the root of the abuse comes from
- Without referencing "honour," it is difficult to convey the unique motivations, such as controlling perceived or potential breaches of the "honour code," which are central to understanding this form of abuse.

02 Centring Survivors' Experiences

- Survivors of HBA often describe their abuse as being tied to the concept of "honour." Using this term reflects their lived realities and ensures that their voices are heard.
- Avoiding the term risks minimising or erasing the specific pressures and barriers survivors face, such as fear of ostracism or retribution for perceived dishonour.
- While some may consider using the term 'honour' a misnomer, the use of the word is considered essential by survivors to describe their experiences.

03 Acknowledges Group Dynamics and Multiple Perpetrators

- The term highlights the collective nature of the abuse, often involving multiple perpetrators within a family or community who believe they are acting to "restore honour."
- Recognising "honour" as a motivation ensures that context is considered without condoning or legitimising the abuse.

04 Creates Legal and Policy Precision

- Including "honour" in a statutory definition ensures that the unique aspects of HBA are codified in law, enabling more effective protection and accountability.
- It addresses gaps in legal frameworks, where the absence of "honour" can lead to HBA being miscategorised or misunderstood, resulting in inconsistent responses.

While the term 'honour' in HBA has sparked significant debate, survivors support its continued use. Although well-meaning discussions about adjusting the term aim to avoid legitimising abuse, these conversations often divert attention from the real issue and create unnecessary confusion around the term and its meaning.

We recommend avoiding debate on using the term 'honour', given its widespread support from survivors and VAWG organisations.

Why Your Support is Vital

Your support can redefine how HBA is addressed across the UK. By championing these vital legislative changes, you can:

- Protect vulnerable individuals trapped in cycles of abuse.
- Validate the experiences of victims and survivors by legally recognising the abuse they endure.
- Send a powerful message that HBA, in all its forms, will not be condoned or excused.

Next Steps

- 01 *Support the **introduction of a statutory definition and statutory guidance** of Honour Based Abuse, ensuring a consistent and effective response.*
- 02 ***Raise awareness** of gaps in provisions connected to Honour Based Abuse through parliamentary discussions and inquiries.*
- 03 ***Engage with Karma Nirvana** to explore how we can work together to improve protections and ensure systemic change.*

This is an opportunity to lead meaningful progress and stand with survivors. Together, we can create a future where no one suffers in the name of 'honour'.

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