

Pan Bedfordshire multi-agency audit to look at current working practices in Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse cases for young people aged 16 – 25 years – September 2020

Honour based abuse (HBA) affects children and young people and is a child protection issue.

It is an abuse of human rights.

Children and young people who suffer **HBA** are at risk of significant harm and are at risk of being killed.

HBA is: “an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/ or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community’s code of behaviour.” CPS

The issue of **Forced Marriage** affects mainly girls and young women but research shows that 15% of victims are males.

Forced Marriage is when one or both parties do not consent to the marriage and some element of duress is involved, either emotional or physical in nature. It may have been agreed when the child was very young.

Aim;

To look at current cases to determine the response from agencies and look at ways of improving how agencies identify and respond to ‘Honour’ Based Abuse (HBA) and Forced Marriage.

The audit focussed on early identification, prevention, safeguarding, support and the lived experience of the young people.

Methodology

Bedfordshire Police identified 3 cases with the following criteria from Luton and Bedford Borough local authority areas;

- **Forced marriage – 16-17 year olds**
- **HBA 18-25 year olds**

Prior to the day an audit template was sent to those agencies involved with the young people. Their practitioners were invited to attend the 2 audit sessions.

Each case was presented with a short verbal presentation offering historical and current information.

A set of questions was devised and all participants were invited to ask questions, and to reflect on the elements of good practice and gaps at a practice, organisational or system level.

Summary of the cases audited

- All female.
- Aged between 16 and 25 years.
- Two cases of Forced Marriage.
- One case of Honour Based Abuse.
- The cases involved young people from Pakistani, African and traveller families.
- One was subject of a child protection plan.
- One young person had mental health issues.



Key themes from the Audit;

- Importance of having time and space for young people to disclose and talk.
- Understanding the young persons lived experience.
- Delay in response to the concerns.
- Escalation of concerns not undertaken as expected.
- Use of all statutory and voluntary agencies to support the young person when concerns first identified.
- A fine line between arranged marriage and forced marriage, and that young people may still feel that they have a choice although their choice has been limited.

Agencies who took part in the Audit:

Central Bedfordshire Council Children's & Adults' Services – Bedfordshire Police - Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group – Cambridge Community Services - Luton Borough Council Children's & Adults' Services – Luton Clinical Commissioning Group – Bedford Borough Council Children's & Adults' Services – Luton All Women's Centre - Luton and Dunstable Hospital - Bedford Hospital – East London Foundation Trust.

<p>Previous involvement with the young people prior to the HBA or FM identified? If so, what was the response to the young person and family?</p> <p>Yes, previous involvement with some agencies on all 3 cases, but it is unclear what that had been and so no indication of what had been done to address the concerns.</p>	<p>Did agencies work collaboratively together to identify HBA/FM for the young people?</p> <p>Evidence of some communication/collaboration between agencies - When practitioners did not share the same opinion their concerns were not escalated appropriately - In one case there was a delay in a strategy meeting, it and there was no clear action plan and minutes were not circulated - It was unclear if the SARC attended and if a medical took place - ELFT saw some good information sharing but in one case they did not receive a discharge plan - The family were very well known to local services but due to the young person being resident in another area there was limited info on them held by local agencies - The family moved a lot and so which agency held the most info on them, how was it pulled together after each move and was it shared? - How did understanding of culture inform safeguarding?</p>	<p>What was the lived experience of the young people? Were they spoken to on their own & their wishes/views ascertained/recorded?</p> <p>One young person their voice was heard initially but then got lost - Some young people spoken to alone, however it is difficult to fully answer this question from the info available - Cultural context not assessed or explored in all the cases and the impact on the young person.</p>	<p>Were thresholds applied to support, protect, intervene and timescales met? There was limited information available and so could not be fully considered - Delay was a factor in some cases - S42 could not be completed because there were no abuse allegations made by young person - One young person was kept at the police station all night, but unclear whether this was to safeguard them - In all the cases it appeared that timescales were not met.</p>	<p>Was there an appropriate assessment and response to meet the needs and risks to the young person?</p> <p>It was not clear what type of assessment was undertaken in any of the cases - Evidence in one case that within the current processes was followed, however it was felt that the current process is not right for these types of cases - Lack of information on involvement of any voluntary agencies and what additional support or information was offered to the young people - There were missed opportunities to complete protective work - How did culture inform assessment of risk?</p>
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Learning and questions for the Board's;

- Missing health information meant missed opportunities for school nursing to provide support to some of the young people.
- In some cultures the voice of the adults/elders is heard over and above the young persons. How confident do practitioners feel about challenging concerns in relation to a family's culture and religion particularly in South Asian families? Do practitioners understand the pressures some young people are under to adhere to family rules, expectations & culture? How clear are practitioners about exploring and being curious about the impact this has on the young person and their lived experiences growing up in their family?
- As in other Pan Bedfordshire audits there was a 22 year age gap between one young person and the alleged perpetrator – no professional curiosity around this relationship, so do practitioners accept certain situations in some cultures as the norm but in others would not be acceptable?
- One young person was on a child protection plan for emotional abuse, how was this interpreted by the family and the impact on the young person?
- Practitioners to ensure that support services are involved from the beginning so that young people have all relevant information available to help them make decisions about their lives. What support services are available to support young people if they decide to leave their family? What information is provided to young people about those support services?
- Are agencies clear on the threshold for seeking appropriate orders to safeguard young people from harmful practices?
- Are we clear at what point a harmful practices case would transition from children's to adults' services?
- For post 18 year old cases agencies deal with the presenting issue only and are not always as professionally curious as they could be.
- When there are mental health episodes practitioners need to ask what other possible causes are there?
- Is our training offer supporting practitioners to interpret, challenge and assess cases of harmful practices?

For more information about Harmful Practices please visit <https://www.lutonallwomenscentre.org.uk/> - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/> - <https://www.gov.uk/stop-forced-marriage> - <https://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/information-and-services/Crime/Honour-based-abuse/Honour-based-abuse>

For access to the Pan Bedfordshire multi -agency child protection procedures visit <https://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.com/index.html>

