

Honour-based abuse (HBA) encompasses incidents or crimes which have been committed to protect or defend the honour of a family and/or community.

It includes female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, and practices such as breast ironing.

It can also be described as a collection of practices which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour.

Abuse committed in the context of preserving "honour" often involves a wider network of family or community pressure and can include multiple perpetrators.

It is important to be aware of this dynamic & additional risk factors when deciding what form of safeguarding action to take e.g. 'honour' based violence might be committed against people who:

- defy parental authority
- become involved with a boyfriend or girlfriend from a different culture or religion
- have sexual relationships before marriage (mostly only women and girls)
- want to leave an arranged marriage
- use alcohol/drugs not endorsed by the cultural/religious belief
- want to get out of being forced into marriage/want leave a forced marriage
- wear clothes or take part in activities that might not be considered traditional/acceptable within a particular culture or religion
- are the subject of gossip/rumour (even if untrue) about any of the above

All forms of HBA are abuse (regardless of the motivation) & should be handled & escalated as such.

Forced Marriage:

- Is a crime in England and Wales
- Is marriage without full **and** free consent of one or both parties, i.e. where they don't or can't consent (e.g. due to learning disabilities)
- Is where violence, threats or any other form of coercion is used (usually by close family members and the extended family) whether physical, emotional, or psychological
- May include abduction, imprisonment, and/or rape
- Affects mainly girls and young women, although also affects males
- In some extreme cases may result in murder

Breast 'Ironing' or 'Flattening' is the process whereby pubescent girls breasts are ironed, massaged and/or pounded down through the use of hard or heated objects in order for the breasts to disappear or delay the development of the breasts entirely.

It is believed that by carrying out this act, young girls will be protected from harassment, rape, abduction, and early forced marriage and therefore be kept in education.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) comprises partial or total mutilation of the external female genitalia or other non - medical injury to the female genital organs.

FGM is illegal in the UK & in October 2015 it became mandatory for teachers, social workers & health professionals to additionally report 'discovered' cases of FGM to the Police.

When FGM involves girls under 18 it is classified as child abuse and has potential for long-lasting harmful physical and psychological consequences.

Girls who are threatened with, or have undergone FGM may withdraw from education, affecting their educational & personal development.

They may feel unable to oppose the wishes of their parents & may suffer emotionally as well as physically.

Faith Abuse (linked to belief in spirit possession):

Common features include the belief that:

- witchcraft exists, including beliefs in demon/devil acting through children, evil eye or djinns, dakini
- the child is the 'victim' of a supernatural force – the abuse is designed to 'save' them by 'driving out the devil' or other evil spirits
- the child may harm, kill or bring misfortune to their parents, family, relatives
- the killing of children or use of their body parts will bring supernatural benefits/produce potent magical remedies (ritual or 'muti' murders)

Abusers may target children that are 'different' e.g. have a disability/learning difficulty, illness; or are exceptionally bright. They may also use belief in magic/witchcraft to make children more compliant when being trafficked for exploitation.

These beliefs are not confined to one faith, nationality or ethnic community.

Remember: Not all those who believe in witchcraft or spirit possession harm children.

Common Indicators:

- Unusual behaviour (especially after an absence from school or college) including depression, anxiety, aggression, withdrawn etc.
- Decline in behaviour, engagement, performance, or punctuality
- Fear about forthcoming school/college holidays
- Marks or injuries on the body; reluctance in undergoing normal medical examinations
- Some pupils may ask for help, but may not be explicit about the problem due to embarrassment or fear
- Educational performance, aspirations or motivation may decline
- Friends report their concerns

HBA & Forced Marriage indicators:

- Absence/persistent absence, not allowed to attend extra-curricular activities
- Being withdrawn from school/college by those with parental responsibility
- Surveillance by siblings or cousins at school/college
- Being prevented from going on to further/higher education

Breast Ironing indicators:

- Fear of changing for physical activities due to scars showing or bandages being visible

FGM indicators:

The girl's community or country of origin is high risk of FGM plus the girl:

- Has a mother or female relative who has had FGM, or father comes from a risk community
- Is uncomfortable walking, sitting, or standing
- Spends longer than usual in the toilet
- Has frequent urinary, menstrual or stomach problems; avoids physical exercise
- Has prolonged or repeated absences from the education setting

Or you may overhear references to being cut, closed, circumcised or [other terms](#).

Girls may be most at risk during the summer holiday, so pay particular attention in the summer term, & when girls return in the autumn.

Faith Abuse indicators:

- a child reporting that they are or have been accused of being 'evil', and/or that they are having the 'devil beaten out of them'

What settings should do:

- Talk to pupils/students about these issues professionally & sensitively
- If you are concerned that a pupil/student is at immediate risk of, or has undergone any of these issues, you **must** inform your Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy (DSL/D) **immediately**
- Teachers **must** also report 'discovered' cases of FGM direct to the police by ringing **101**

The DSL/D must:

- Make an **immediate** referral to **The Sheffield Safeguarding Hub**, tel. **0114 2734855** for further investigation with the Police & health services
- Explain to the pupil/student about why they have made a referral (particularly if against their wishes)

Staff should **NOT**:

- Examine a pupil/student e.g. for injuries, nor take photos of any injuries freely shown
- Ignore what the student has told them or dismiss the need for immediate protection e.g. because they are worried about interfering in a 'cultural or religious' practice
- Decide that it is not their responsibility to follow up the allegation
- Discuss their concerns with the student's family or community, in advance of any enquiries by the police, adult or children's social care

In all situations the pupil should be offered counselling & medical help (if needed) & other involved children should be assessed.

Agencies should work with parents, wider family, community leaders & organisations to prevent & educate about these practices & consequences.

Useful web-links:

- [Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures Manual – Harmful Practices, Faith/Culture](#)
- [Multi-agency statutory guidance on Female Genital Mutilation, HM Govt 2020](#)
- [Mandatory Reporting of Female Genital Mutilation – Procedural Information, HO 2016](#)
- [Multi-agency practice guidelines – handling cases of Forced Marriage, HO 2014](#)
- [National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief, DfE 2012](#)