

Honour Based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Forced Marriage



It is imperative that all professionals are vigorously encouraged to take protective action where there are concerns that girls (from babies right up to adults) may be at risk or may be affected by FGM. It should be noted that these three issues do not and should not stand alone. They are inexorably linked with domestic abuse and are part of the wider Government strategy to reduce Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG).

A victim-centred approach

Whatever someone's circumstances, they have rights that should always be respected such as personal safety and accurate information about their rights and choices. Practitioners should listen to the victim and respect their wishes whenever possible. However, there may be times when a victim wants to take a course of action that may put them at risk – on these occasions, practitioners should explain all the risks to the victim and take the necessary child or adult protection precautions. All conversations and actions taken or not taken should be noted on the written record. Young people, especially those aged 16 and 17, can present specific challenges to agencies as there may be occasions when it is appropriate to use both child and adult protection framework.

Roles and Responsibilities

All Staff

It is the responsibility of all staff to comply with this guidance and ensure that they have undertaken related training referred to above. Front line supervisors in particular have a crucial role to play in ensuring that when staff respond to an Honour Based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage or related Domestic Abuse incident or disclosure.

Honour Based Violence – Definition

The term 'Honour Based Violence' is the internationally recognised term describing cultural justifications for violence and abuse. It justifies the use of certain types of violence and abuse against women, men and children. HBV is normally associated with cultures and communities from Asia, the Middle East and Africa as well as Gypsies and Travellers¹ also occurs in communities in parts of Europe and Eastern Europe. In reality, HBV cuts across all cultures, nationalities, faith groups and communities and transcends national and international boundaries.

Abuse and violence as a consequence of dishonour and shame may include:

Self harm, Suicide or attempted suicide as a result of controls and abuse, forced suicide/attempted suicide as an inflicted act or punishment, controlling sexual activity (e.g. forcing or withholding sexual activity), child abuse, rape, kidnapping or false imprisonment, threats to kill, assault, harassment/ stalking, bullying, forced abortion, Being forced into marriage, pressure to return home, pressure to go abroad, house 'arrest' and restriction of movement within and outside the home, excessive restrictions on home life

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Signed Manager

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Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM (also known as female circumcision) is a form of child abuse and is an act of violence against women and girls. It should therefore be dealt with as part of existing child and adult protection structures, policies and procedures. It is an extreme form of domestic abuse. The term FGM is used to refer to the removal of part or all of the female genitalia for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. This is extremely painful and has serious consequences for physical and mental health. It can also result in death.

It is illegal to practice FGM in the UK. It is also illegal to take a child abroad for FGM even if legal in that country.

Triggers and warning signs for HBV, FM and FGM

Some of the triggers have already been outlined above, but it is important to be aware of and respond to any warning signs that might become apparent to you. These can include:

Truancy/ poor attendance in the workplace, decline in performance or punctuality, low motivation at school, poor exam results, being withdrawn from education by those with parental responsibility, not allowed to attend extra-curricular activities, self harm/ attempted suicide, eating disorders, depression, isolation, substance misuse, siblings forced to marry (history of siblings leaving education early), family disputes, including child custody issues, running away from home, unreasonable restrictions e.g. house arrest, excessive family restrictions and control of movements, other young people within the family reported missing, Reports of domestic violence/abuse or breaches of the peace at the family home, frequent gynaecological problems; e.g. Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs), menstruation problems and consummation of marriage / conception, concerns raised about other behaviours e.g. shoplifting or substance misuse, unreasonable financial control e.g. confiscation of wages/income, family control of career choice, external agencies being involved in family matters.

It is essential to take ‘honour’ based violence, forced marriage or female genital mutilation, or even a suspicion or suggestion of it, with the utmost seriousness. Women, girls and men at risk of ‘honour’ based violence may understate the risks posed to them.

The one chance rule: A potential victim may only have one chance to ask for help. You may only have one chance to provide help. It is important to get it right on the first occasion.

Do not underestimate the risk to life that can be posed to individuals experiencing ‘honour’ based violence. Also, be aware that other family members or friends who may be seen to be condoning or supporting the behaviour of the victim may also be at risk. Always seek advice from the Police Public Protection Department Safeguarding Team and/ or Children’s Services (if the individual is under 18), and/ or Adult’s Services (if the individual is vulnerable/ at risk).

In an emergency ALWAYS dial 999.

In all cases when responding to reports of HBV, the victim's immediate safety must be the overriding concern. At the earliest opportunity inform and discuss the matter with your designated safeguarding officer in line with your own organisation Safeguarding Procedures.

A victim of HBV, FM or FGM will have overcome immense cultural/ traditional and personal beliefs, to have spoken to a trusted friend or professional, or make contact with your agency. Alternatively, a professional or friend may raise their concerns or suspicions about actual or intended HBV. It is vital that agencies respond immediately and effectively to keep the victim safe. The need for 'positive action' is fundamental to an effective and timely response.

It is crucial to listen to the victim or potential victim's concerns – remember that they may not be able to articulate why they believe they are at risk or provide tangible evidence of the risks.

Do not approach the victim's family or community leaders – this could heighten the risk to the victim, **Do not** attempt any form of mediation or reconciliation with the family and/ or community members, **Do not** make assumptions or judgements based on perceptions of 'cultural difference,' Reassure the victim, take the threats to their safety very seriously and offer support.

It is imperative to treat all individuals with the utmost sensitivity and seriousness, Ensure confidentiality as this is essential – particularly from the family and other community members,

Assess the situation and clearly highlight all options to the victim to ensure safety measures are in place whatever decision the victim makes even if it is returning back home, Remove the victim to a place of safety, not known to family and friends if that is the option chosen by them,

Ensure that your designated safeguarding officer is aware right from the outset – they will be able to put the victim in touch with local and/or national support services,

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Forced Marriage

If Forced Marriage is an issue you should also contact the Government Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), where experienced caseworkers are able to offer support and guidance, by calling 020 7008 0151 or by visiting the FMU page¹ of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website. You can also contact your local Police Public Protection Department Safeguarding Team (101).

Important Contacts

Forced Marriage Unit

020 7008 0151

www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage

Urgent 24 Hour Protection for Children & Adults

0345 743 0430 (office hours)

0345 606 1212 (out of office hours)