

A profile photograph of a woman looking to the left. She is wearing traditional Indian jewelry, including a large, ornate earring, a necklace, and a headpiece with a decorative border. Her hair is styled in a bun. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

“The main purpose to bring me to the U.K was to get a free carer as well as a free slave”

Understanding Forced Marriage: A Critical Analysis

Author

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Acknowledgement

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“We should all be appalled by so-called honour-based abuse and forced marriage. These forms of abuse are illegal in the UK, but they are often complex and easily hidden. We must work towards a whole-system approach in Wales to bring this abuse of human rights to an end, whilst providing the best support to survivors, and challenging damaging behaviours before they escalate.”

A statement from: Jane Hutt - Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip, The Welsh Government (September 2023).

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| Foreward

In the pursuit of human rights and dignity, we find ourselves confronted by the harsh reality of forced marriages, a deeply entrenched violation that shatters lives and stifles the potential of countless individuals. As we embark on this journey through the pages of the Bawso report on Forced Marriage, we are compelled to confront the stark truth that, despite progress in various realms, there remain dark corners of our society where the fundamental right to choose one's life partner is callously denied.

Forced marriage is not a distant issue confined to the shadows; it is a contemporary challenge that demands our attention, empathy, and collective action. Bawso, as a beacon of hope and an advocate for the vulnerable, has undertaken the formidable task of shedding light on this grave human rights violation. This report serves as a testimony to survivors' resilience and a call to action for societies, governments, and communities to dismantle the chains that bind individuals in the coercive shackles of forced matrimony.

At its core, forced marriage is a blatant transgression against the principles of autonomy, consent, and equality. It is an egregious violation of the right to choose one's life partner, relegating individuals to a life dictated by others. Through the lens of this report, we gain insight into the multifaceted aspects of forced marriages, understanding that they transcend cultural, religious, and geographical boundaries. This report acts as a mirror reflecting the harsh reality faced by victims, irrespective of their backgrounds.

Bawso's commitment to breaking the silence surrounding forced marriages is commendable. By presenting comprehensive research, real-life narratives, and a nuanced analysis of the socio-cultural factors contributing to this phenomenon, the report equips readers with the knowledge needed to confront this pervasive issue. It is a crucial tool for advocates, policymakers, and communities alike, urging them to acknowledge the prevalence of forced marriages and address it with urgency and sensitivity.

The narratives contained within this report provide a voice to those silenced by the oppressive weight of forced unions. Each account is a testament to the courage of survivors who dared to defy societal norms and reclaim their agency in the face of adversity. These stories underscore the urgency of creating safe spaces where victims can seek refuge, support, and justice without fear of retribution.

This report is more than a compilation of data; it is a call to action. It beckons us to stand united against the heinous crime of forced marriage, to dismantle the chains that bind individuals, and to champion the right of every person to choose their life path freely. Through collective efforts, we can break these chains, empower survivors, and create a world where forced marriages are but a distant memory.



Tina Fahm

Chief Executive, Bawso

1. Introduction

- 1.1** Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in any shape is unacceptable and a crime against humanity. It is a form of gender-based violence (GBV) that is historically a construct of unequal power relations and systemic gender-based discrimination, within a highly dominated patriarchal society with misogynistic views on women and girls.
- 1.2** VAWG includes domestic violence and abuse (DVA), sexual violence, stalking and harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage (FM), so-called ‘honour-based’ violence (HBV), human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse of women and girls in online spaces (Selvarajah, 2023). Such crimes are markedly experienced by women and girls and committed by men.
- 1.3** VAWG is a major public health, criminal justice, and human rights issue (Addis and Snowden, 2021) and has a range of serious and harmful impacts including emotional, physical, health and socio-economic harms, and fatality. United Nations data¹ shows that worldwide:
- More than 640 million women aged 15 years and over have experienced violence and abuse perpetrated by current or former intimate partners.
 - 81,000 women and girls were murdered in 2020, of which approximately 47,000 (58%) were committed by an intimate partner or a family member. These figures equate to a woman or girl being killed every 11 minutes in their homes.
 - Only 52% of women married or in a union freely make their own decisions about sexual relations, contraceptive use, and health care.
 - 750 million women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday, while 200 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) from 31 countries including Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.
 - 71% of all human trafficking victims are women and girls, and 3 out of 4 are trafficked for sexual exploitation.
- 1.4** In England and Wales, approximately 1.7 million women experienced DVA alone in the year ending March 2022², with rates amongst and Black Minority Ethnic women (Mixed, 8.7%; Asian or Asian British, 3.9%; Black or Black British, 5.9%), higher compared to white women (5%).

Forced Marriage and Honour-Based Violence

- 1.5** This report is focussed upon forced marriage, which is intricately connected to HBV, both of which are situated within the broader spectrum of VAWG.
- 1.6** Forced marriage and HBV statistics demonstrate the extent of the issue.
- In 2016, 15.4 million people worldwide, were estimated to be living in forced marriages, of which, 88% were women and girls, with 37% under the age of 18 at the time of marriage³.
 - 5000 honour killings⁴ are committed internationally per year.
 - In India and Pakistan, it is reported that 1000 people are killed per year in each country while in the UK, 12 to 15⁵ people are killed annually.

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#83918>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2022>

³ <https://www.api-gbv.org/about-gbv/types-of-gbv/forced-marriage/>

⁴ <https://hmv-awareness.com/statistics-data>

⁵ <https://www.haloproject.org.uk/honour-based-violence-W21page-3>

Our research

- 1.7** Our overarching aim in undertaking this research was to facilitate greater knowledge and understanding of the issue of forced marriage and HBV, including the underlying factors that promote and sustain the issues, and its continued perpetration within BME families/communities in Wales.
- 1.8** Additional aims of this research were to:
- Gain in-depth understanding of the ideologies behind Forced Marriage and HBV.
 - Identify the individuals behind 'multiple perpetration' to help inform and direct prevention programmes to the right people and to tackle perpetration at all levels.
 - Understand the role that culture, and religion play in amplifying forced marriage and honour-based violence (HBV).
- 1.9** We were cognisant that forced marriage is not exclusive to BME communities, and is experienced amongst e.g., traveller communities. However, for the purpose of our research, we restricted our focus to forced marriages and HBV within BME communities.
- 1.10** The term 'HBV' is used throughout this report (as opposed to 'HBA') on the recommendation of women who engaged in our research, who expressed that the use of 'so-called Honour-Based Abuse' minimises the violence experienced and creates 'loopholes' in legislation which is often exploited by perpetrators to avoid convictions.
- 1.11** We have adopted the term BME (Black and minority ethnic) to refer to women and people who identify themselves as non-white as shared by participants to this research and to support consistency with its use by public bodies and its recognition in common parlance (Gill and Anitha, 2021).
- 1.12** This report presents the findings of our work. It is hoped that findings will help us and other agencies to understand better how to identify victims at the outset and their support needs, as well as address perpetration before it accelerates. The findings will also enable us to direct prevention programmes to the right groups of people and perpetrators and tackle re-offending.

Limitations

- 1.13** Our report brings together both primary and secondary research with the aim of enhancing knowledge and understanding of forced marriage and HBV. In doing so, we acknowledge several limitations within our research.
- Our intended focus was Wales, yet there is an absence of current and specific data surrounding forced marriage and HBV in Wales.
 - More broadly, there is a lack of data on perpetrators of forced marriage and HBV in the UK, and Wales.
 - Resourcing issues (time, capacity, and financial limitations) to undertake Wales-wide research and explore wider areas linked to the research topic. The nature of the work requires sufficient resources to undertake in detail.
 - Challenges to recruit former service users of Bawso to share their experiences for fear of being identified by perpetrators.
- 1.14** Nonetheless, despite these limitations, our findings provide a rich insight of the issue of forced marriage and HBV from the perspectives of women (either former Bawso service users or Bawso support staff) within Wales, and the UK.

2. Methods

- 2.1** Forced marriage and HBV are harmful practices that often take place concurrently. It is understood within forced marriage practicing communities that refusing to, or declining a forced marriage automatically leads to extreme forms of violence for the victim that are classified as HBV or what has been referred to as 'so-called honour-based abuse' via the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) and used by the Criminal Prosecution Service (CPS).
- 2.2** Acknowledging the above, and to better understand each of these forms of VAWG, we used a mixed methods approach to our research:
- A scoping review of published and grey literature – including media reports and documentaries, e.g., cases of forced marriage and HBV reported in the UK media (n=4).
 - Case study analysis – Previous service users case files (identified as experiencing Forced Marriage and HBV), captured by Bawso staff between 2018-2022 (n=33).
 - Focus group discussions with BAWSO staff, and former service users (n=49).
 - Open text surveys distributed to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in Wales (n=3)⁶.
- 2.3** The research was undertaken between September 2022 – April 2023.

Participants

- 2.4** Following consultation with Bawso frontline staff, we chose to recruit former service users, rather than those receiving ongoing support. This decision was based on the knowledge that former service users had completed support, including e.g., wellbeing programmes to assist them in the recovery of their experiences.
- 2.5** The inclusion of two separate participant cohorts (Bawso staff and former service-users) for discussion groups enabled the gathering of wider perspectives; those with expertise providing specialist support, and victims/survivors who had accessed/received support in Wales.

Data analysis

- 2.6** Data was analysed thematically and synthesised to provide a holistic understanding of the research topic.



⁶ PCCs who responded – North Wales, South Wales, and Gwent.

3. Understanding forced marriage and HBV

- 3.1 Ahead of presenting synthesised findings from our research (Chapter 4), this section of the report contextualises the issue of forced marriage and HBV, including definitions and terminology, UK and Wales legislation/policy, prevalence, and the role of culture and religion.
- 3.2 Within Bawso, significant numbers of victims of forced marriage and HBV are referred to our service in the first instance for domestic violence/abuse (DVA). It is during risk assessments undertaken by Bawso support staff that women disclose experiences of forced marriage and HBV, and in some cases, modern slavery. In our experience, survivor's seeking help for DVA will often be more likely victims of forced marriage and HBV. What manifests as DVA is usually the physical manifestation of deep underlying and intersecting forms of abuse perpetrated over a prolonged period.
- 3.3 DVA sits within the spectrum of VAWG and is inextricably linked to forced marriage and HBV, hence there is a need to understand the terminology and behaviours surrounding DVA.

Definitions and terminology

DVA

- 3.4 The UK Government defines DVA as 'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those aged over 16 years and have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The definition encompasses psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse, and controlling and coercive behaviour. The definition also includes 'so called honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage'⁷.
- 3.5 The UK Government's Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (Part 1)⁸, defines domestic abuse as "Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if—
(a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other.
- 3.6 The UK Government further considers coercive control as a criminal offence under the Serious Crime Act (2015) section 76⁹.
- 3.7 In his article 'Re-presenting Women: Coercive control and the defence of liberty', Stark (2012) advised that the public sector and organisations supporting women have over time used a lineal definition to understand DVA and consequently designed support programmes based on this premiss. The author further maintained that the experiences of DVA excluded the most fundamental principles and behaviours that lead to the actual 'act' of abuse which drives women to seek help and support.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-definition-of-domestic-violence>

⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/part/1/enacted>

⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/section/76/enacted>

- 3.8** Stark (2012) further affirmed that DVA starts at the point when a person is subjected to numerous and different forms or acts of coercive control that force the victim into silence and submitting to the perpetrator. Through prolonged exposure to coercion, the victim conforms to the perpetrator's world of distortion. At this stage, the victim is emotionally vulnerable and subscribes to a distorted view of the world, therefore normalising the DVA experienced.

These women have been subjected to a pattern of domination that includes tactics to isolate, degrade, exploit, and control them as well as to frighten them or hurt them physically. This pattern, which may include but is not limited to physical violence, has been variously termed as 'psychological or emotional abuse, patriarchal or intimate terrorism (Tolman, 1992; Johnson, 2008), and coercive control' (Stark, 2007).

- 3.9** In our research, we adopt the definitions of DVA, and coercive and controlling behaviour of the UK Government and Stark (2012).

HBV

- 3.10** HBV is defined as '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'¹⁰. Maintaining 'Izzat', described as 'honour', 'self-respect', and 'prestige' (Takhar, 2005) within the family, community, and society is integral in some BME communities.
- 3.11** Elsewhere, the concept of 'honour' has been described as 'Honour as I see it, being played out in these countries, comes from this tribal concept; the honour of a family, the honour of a tribe, the honour of a village is all vested in everything that the woman does. How she speaks, what she wears, who she speaks to, and that entire responsibility is placed on her. Anyone can decide that she is dishonouring the family or the tribe' (Dyer, 2015).

Forced Marriage

- 3.12** A forced marriage is 'where one or both people do not or cannot consent to the marriage, and pressure or abuse is used to force them into marriage. It is also when anything is done to make someone marry before they turn 18, even if there is no pressure or abuse'¹¹. Pressure or coercive behaviours to force people to marry against their will may include physical and sexual threats of violence, and emotional and psychological abuse.
- 3.13** Arranged marriage¹² is very different from forced marriage in the execution of the arrangement and the marriage itself. Arranged marriages involve two parties of consenting age who can withdraw from the arrangement at any time in the relationship. Refusing or withdrawing from an arranged marriage is without any repercussions such as threats or violence.
- 3.14** Nonetheless, an arranged marriage can become a forced marriage if for example, one or both parties are forced to remain in the marriage against their will, or when consent to the arranged marriage is withdrawn, but are pressurised to proceed with the marriage. It is when consent is not present that a marriage is forced (Tahir, 2021).
- 3.15** Marriages arranged amongst families without the consent of both parties are understood to serve one or several purposes, for example:
- To secure a lifetime carer for a disabled person. This may include persons who may be severely physically disabled or lacking mental capacity to make informed decision on the marriage and are unable to look after themselves or live independently.

¹⁰ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/so-called-honour-based-abuse-and-forced-marriage-guidance-identifying-and-flagging>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage>

¹² <https://www.guilbenkian.co.uk/forced-marriages-and-arranged-marriages/>

- To conceal 'shame' where a family member is suspected to be lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer and any other (LGBTQ+) and to 'correct' the 'abnormality' and restore family honour.
- To maintain property and inheritance within the family and therefore promote marriage of first cousins or close relatives.
- To uphold what families, perceive to be a cultural or religious obligation.
- To assist relatives to claim citizenship in the UK and what they see as access out of poverty.
- To conceal the 'shame' of a family when a female discloses to have been a victim of rape even if the offender is a close family member and is known to the victim's family.
- To adhere to family traditions of older women marrying first. Older women who remain unmarried are at increased risk of being forced into marriage to cover for the shame of a younger sibling marrying before them. It is understood that a younger sibling cannot marry before her older sisters. In such cases, families arrange for the older woman to be married off to the next available man to pave way for younger sisters to get married.
- To 'restore' family honour if victims leave abusive marriages or file for divorce (Dyer, 2015).

3.16 Victims of forced marriage share certain characteristics, which are also informed by a victim's ethnicity, religion, and cultural practices. For example, victims of female genital mutilation (FGM) are more likely to be victims of forced marriage as well as DVA. Victims of forced marriage may also be victims of child marriages, or dowry brides¹³, or brides 'on order' and DVA. Brides from poor families who are unable to pay the dowry requested by the groom's family are also highly likely to be subjected to humiliation, DVA and sometimes death as highlighted within this report.

UK Policy context

- 3.17** The UK has introduced strict laws to prosecute offenders of forced marriage and HBV. According to the National Commission on Forced Marriage UK (2021), marriage is guided and upheld by three key pillars that prospective couples must adhere to for their marriage to be recognised.
- 3.18** Consent must be given to the marriage and parties must meet the legal age of consent which is 18 years. Those aged 16-17 years were required to obtain parental consent to marry. The underage requirement was a fertile ground for parents who exploited the loopholes in the law to force underage young people into a marriage they did not consent to. However, this has since been revised to 18 years under the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act (2022) which came into force on 22nd February 2023 and applies to England and Wales.
- 3.19** A marriage is also considered valid or legal in the UK if it is registered and couples have a valid certificate of registration. This alone does not however validate the marriage; a certificate of registration must go hand in hand with consent to marry and mental capacity to enter a marriage.
- 3.20** Other Bills aimed at protecting and preventing forced marriage include the Forced Marriage (Civil protection) Act (2007) and the Domestic Abuse Act (2021). Forced marriage is also considered a criminal act under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (2014) and offenders are likely to face up to 7 years imprisonment.
- 3.21** Under the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act (2007), Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs) were introduced to protect against forced marriage, or those who are already in such marriages without their consent. A form of civil injunction, the Act makes it a criminal offence to breach a FMPO; doing so can result in a sentence of up to five years. FMPOs also gives the courts a wide discretion in the type of injunctions they can make to enable them to respond effectively to individual circumstances of the case and prevent or invalidate forced marriages or prevent the marriage from taking place.

¹³ <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-dowry-tradition-poor-brides-crippling-women--rights/31169373.html>

- 3.22** The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act (2007) makes provisions for a protected person to be taken to a place of safety and brought before the court if required. It prevents a protected person from being taken to any place in or outside England and Wales. If the victim is already abroad, the courts can order the victim to be returned. The courts can order parents or guardian of a protected person to surrender the victim's travel documents to the court as a measure to protect the victim and stop offenders from taking them outside the UK.
- 3.23** Young people are also encouraged to share with their friends in school any planned holidays with their families. They are provided with UK Embassy numbers in the countries they visit and a FMU telephone number in case they need to call for help. If they do not return to the UK, their friends can alert the teachers, and this is investigated. The embassy can help to bring them back to the UK¹⁴.

Wales Policy context

- 3.24** The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Act (2015) aims to improve prevention, protection and support, and public services are required to implement strategies to prevent VAWDASV¹⁵. The Act was followed by the first VAWDASV strategy (2018-2022), which introduced the National Training Framework (2019), under which 'Ask and Act' training sits. 'Ask and Act' is co-delivered by the National Health Service (NHS) and Women's Aid organisations including Bawso, to NHS workers and local authorities. The aim is to build confidence and knowledge amongst NHS and local authority staff to identify victims including forced marriage and make early interventions either through referrals or direct support by statutory agencies.
- 3.25** Bawso delivers accredited continuous personal development training to statutory agencies and other sectors. Training aims to equip professionals with knowledge on violence and abuse from a BME perspective and how they can confidently identify victims and the types of support victims might require.
- 3.26** The Act and the refreshed VAWDASV strategy (2022-2026¹⁶) acknowledge all forms of VAWG including forced marriage and HBV. The strategy outlines Welsh Government's plans to tackle VAWG in Wales, stating that 'ending VAWDASV and supporting those who need it is everyone's business' and proposes a whole societal approach to tackle VAWG. The strategy recognises that individual perpetrator attitudes are informed by cultural inequalities, misogyny, and masculinity, and places the responsibility of prevention on everyone in Wales to challenge abuse, attitudes and behaviours that promote VAWG.
- 3.27** The VAWDASV Act (2015) and VAWDASV Strategy (2022-2026), interacts with several Welsh Government legislation and policies including (but not limited to):
- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) which defines freedom from violence and abuse as a key component of wellbeing.
 - The Social Services and Well-being Act (2014) which is the framework for the Wales Safeguarding Procedures (2019) to standardise practice across Wales and improve person-centred outcomes for adults and children at risk of abuse and neglect.

¹⁴ See details on page 64 and the link on guidance on travelling abroad at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advice-for-women-travelling-abroad>

¹⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/3/contents/enacted>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2022/5/2/1653392517/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-strategy-2022-2026.pdf>

Forced Marriage and HBV – UK Prevalence

- 3.28** In 2019, the FMU provided advice or support in 1,355 cases related to a possible forced marriage¹⁷. Of those cases, 1,080 (80%) were female victims, and 262 (19%) were male victims. During the same period, 137 persons representing 10% of cases were living with disabilities. The Covid-19 pandemic was attributed to a 44% decline in the number of cases (759) related to a possible forced marriage and / or possible FGM received by the FMU in 2020¹⁸. In the most up-to-date figures, there were 297 cases where the FMU gave advice and support for forced marriage in 2022^{19, 20}. In providing this data, the FMU acknowledges that ‘statistics represent only the cases that have been reported to the FMU, and where the FMU has actively given advice or support. Forced marriage is a hidden crime, and these figures will not reflect the full scale of the abuse’. Across all FMU cases, there were considerably more female than male victims.
- 3.29** The FMU data (2022) from all cases (297 forced marriage and 5 FGM), shows most enquiries received were from London (61), followed by the West Midlands (57), and the Northwest (49). Only six enquiries came from Wales. During this period, the FMU responded to cases relating to the UK and 25 other focus countries (the country to which the risk of forced marriage relates), included Pakistan (147), Bangladesh (41), and India (20). The highest number of cases by focus country was Pakistan (147), of which 72% were cases of a victim in the UK and the focus was on preventing the marriage before it was due to take place or preventing the victim from being forced to sponsor a spousal visa.
- 3.30** Between 2010-2014, there were 11,000 victims of HBV recorded by the Crown Prosecution Service, of which 76% were women (Safe Lives, 2017).
- 3.31** More recent HBV offence data (which includes forced marriage and FGM) provide an indication of the issue of forced marriage in the UK. In the year-ending March 2022, there were 2,887 HBV-related offences recorded by English and Welsh Police forces, an increase of 6% from the previous year (2,725)²¹. Of the 2,887 HBV offences recorded, 141 were forced marriage offences. However, data quality and capture issues and a reliance on reporting and recording, means that the true extent of HBV (and forced marriage) is likely to be higher.
- 3.32** Types of HBV offences recorded included threat to kill constituted 8%, kidnap at 6%, stalking at 5%, harassment at 5%, assault with injury at 16%, assault without injury at 15%, controlling and coercive behaviour (14%) or inciting prostitution²². Other types of HBV reported elsewhere have included bride burning or homicides in cases where dowry was not paid in full to the, attempted murder, manslaughter, procuring abortion, encouraging, or assisting suicide, conspiracy to murder, and conspiracy to commit a variety of assaults²³. In some cases, communities commit public murders to warn younger siblings of the consequences of rebellious behaviour²⁴ as in the case of Shafiea Ahmed²⁵.
- 3.33** In Wales, Bawso service data showed that 29 women identifying as victims of forced marriage were supported in 2018/2019. During 2019/20 four women identified as victims of forced marriage and 23 victims of HBV were supported.
- 3.34** In 2020/2021, Bawso supported a total of 7,446 persons with various needs, of which five women were victims of forced marriage and 35 were victims of HBV. Between 2021/2022 Bawso supported 7,826 persons out of which six women were victims of forced marriage and 24 were victims of HBV²⁶.

17 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ef1f3c786650c1294cf22e2/Forced_Marriage_Unit_statistics_2019.pdf

18 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020>

19 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022>

20 FMU 2022 statistics note that, ‘owing to changes in recording practices, the data in 2020 is not directly comparable with those in previous years, and the data in 2021 and 2022 are not directly comparable either with the data in 2020 or with those in the years prior to it’.

21 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-of-fences-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022>

22 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2020-to-2021/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-of-fences-england-and-wales-2020-to-2021>

23 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/so-called-honour-based-abuse-and-forced-marriage-guidance-identifying-and-flagging>

24 http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/Co-publications/Femicide_A%20Gobal%20Issue%20that%20demands%20Action.pdf

25 Shafiea Ahmed murder trial: Parents guilty of killing - BBC News- 08/03/2023.

26 Figures provided are only for HBV associated with forced marriage and not other forms of violence such as FGM or domestic abuse.

The role of culture and religion in propagating forced marriage and HBV

- 3.35** Culture has been defined as ‘patterns of learned and shared behaviours that are cumulative and transmitted across generations’²⁷. Codes of behaviour, values and norms, beliefs, and customs shape the way individuals and communities live, behave, and carry out their lives. In essence, values and beliefs are adopted and accepted as a set of rules that guide everyday way of life.
- 3.36** The behaviours and norms within cultures are acquired through acculturation which begins with parents and caregivers socialising boys and girls to behave in a certain way, and the behaviours that adults exhibit at home which are imitated by children as they grow up (Worthy et al, 2020). Over time and through generations, learned behaviours and norms become daily practice and regimes within groups of people, family, and communities and they become ‘hard-wired’ and difficult to change.
- 3.37** Hegemonic masculinity is a powerful concept within some BME communities who still practice forced marriage, shaping the way girls are socialised from an early age and how they respond to male masculinity (Smith, 2015). Once these ideologies become ingrained and normalised, it becomes difficult to challenge or move away from. Similarly, boys are influenced by hegemonic masculine gender roles and can find it hard to navigate out of what is already ingrained from an early age, together with the behaviours of men in their families and community.
- 3.38** Pervasive concepts of gender norms place men in positions of power and teach women to subordinate to men as the dominant gender in society. To be a man is to be dominant and to maintain power, women must be submissive (Smith et al, 2015). Unequal power sharing and systemic gender-based discrimination elevates men and gives them advantage over women allowing them to reaffirm their masculinity through violence, which in some cases turns into honour killings when their power is seen to be threatened by women. ‘Honour cultures’ are predominantly patriarchal in nature and use ‘honour’ to hegemonize women (Cooney, 2015).
- 3.39** According to the proponents of forced marriage and HBV, traditionally, young girls look to their fathers and brothers for protection and once they are married, their protection becomes the responsibility of their husbands. Such ideologies are based on a belief-system that women are weak and need protection and are also not permitted to express their views openly in the presence of men. Further, that women are not considered as individuals but as property belonging to men and as a commodity that can be exchanged or bought or sold at will (EACH, 2012).
- 3.40** These ideologies, concepts, and belief systems within BME communities serve to control women. The persisting narrative disempowers and disadvantages women by removing their rights to make decisions regarding their bodies and lives, including their economic and reproductive rights.
- I always knew I would be forced to marry somebody I barely knew and didn't love. In my family, being a woman was all about being somebody else's property - first you belong to your parents, then your husband. I was an object, expected to wait on men and produce children (BBC Three, 2023)²⁸.*
- 3.41** Differing definitions of religion exist and can be dependent on one's understanding and the way in which individuals want to associate with religion or what they want religion to do for them. There are both functional and substantive definitions of religion. Functional descriptions define religion in terms of the functions it performs for individuals and/ or society (Thompson, 2023). For example, Yinger (1995) defines religion as ‘a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life.’ In essence, the focus is on the instrumental role of religion and the functions it has for individuals and/ or society, including for example, social order and coherence (van Gaalen, 2015).

²⁷ <https://open.maricopa.edu/culturepsychology/chapter/defining-culture/>

²⁸ I was a victim of forced marriage - BBC Three 08/03/2023.

- 3.42** Substantive religion defines religion in terms of its content rather than its function, such as belief in a higher power such as a god or other supernatural forces (Thompson, 2023). Robertson (1971) defined substantive religion as ‘the existence of supernatural beings that have a governing effect on life’.
- 3.43** Using these definitions to understand culture and religion, communities practicing forced marriage do so under the conviction they are protecting their traditions, cultures, and religion. Families and communities take a cultural protectionist stand against what they perceive to be an attack on their culture/belief system by other cultures, but also, the practice of an unwritten code of conduct that governs a group of people to please a higher God. A belief in a powerful God with high moral standards, therefore, affirms what the proponents of what forced marriage, a good marriage and wife dictates.
- 3.44** Unwritten rules are perfected and forced by a small group of people known to represent the group and community (Smith et al, 2015). Beliefs and traditions, and the practices that come out of it are then accepted and normalised as ‘community cultural norms’.
- 3.45** For example, proponents of hegemonic cultures do not condone divorce and create a hostile environment where divorcees feel unwelcome both in the community and in religious circles such as the church and the mosque. Perseverance in marriage is celebrated and defiance calls for punishment and is attributed to why women in abusive marriages find it hard to talk about their experience or leave (EACH, 2012).

Honour killings

- 3.46** Evidence from our literature review found that the ideologies behind ‘honour’ predates any religion and cultures (Fleur-Lobban, 1998). Under the guise of ‘honour’, families, and communities view honour killings as less atrocious in comparison to other murders. The ‘honour’ proponents do not expect to be held accountable or be convicted for honour murders.
- 3.47** In a submission made to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva on 6th April 2002 by Human Rights Watch, honour crimes were defined as ‘acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members who are perceived to have brought dishonour upon the family’²⁹.
- 3.48** According to the submissions, a woman can be murdered for refusing to enter a marriage, or for being a victim of a sexual assault even if the assault can be proven to have been committed by a close male family member. Seeking a divorce from an abusive husband is another justification for honour killing; the victim can be killed by her husband, or a male member of the family including cousins for bringing “dishonour” to the family (Dyer, 2015).
- 3.49** In contrast, a male perpetrator of sexual assault maybe known to the family or could be a relative but are not subjected to honour punishment. Honour victims are therefore largely women, while perpetrators are men. In some of the cases from the submissions to the UN, where a woman declines a forced marriage, mothers and fathers may also instigate violence and/or support or commit the murder.
- 3.50** Analysing cultural relativism and how it shapes people’s understanding and behaviours, Fleur-Lobban (1998), contended that an ‘act, or even an alleged act, of any female sexual misconduct, upsets the moral order of the culture, and bloodshed is the only way to remove the shame brought by the actions and restore social equilibrium’. They further asserted that people who belong to the school of thought of ‘removing the dirt through bloodshed’ promote bloodshed to wash away the dishonour of the family. For such exponents, bloodshed including murder, is not a crime but a necessary evil to ‘clean’ the family. The murder is committed with no apologies for a life lost. Honour is viewed by families as more important than a life lost or a victim’s human rights.

²⁹ https://www.hrw.org/legacy/press/2001/04/un_oral12_0405.html

- 3.51** There are other protagonists in families and communities who use religion to control women and femininity. According to Cooney (2015), women are seen for procreation and their reproductive rights are to be controlled for this purpose through forced marriages. Disobedience to accept the marriage calls for honour killing because it challenges a man's social status quo. The killing is not just about protecting women's sexuality or behaviour as commonly viewed by outsiders, but perpetrators also carry out the killing as a necessary action to reclaim their control and power over women and to safeguard their honour (Cooney, 2015). In such situations, honour killings are therefore justified in honour practicing communities.
- 3.52** Cooney (2015) further adds that honour killings indicate that men in patriarchal society feel threatened and disempowered by females who are economically empowered. They act through violence to regain their power in their families and the communities.
- 3.53** Families not engaging in honour killings are perceived by the community to be cowards, as having moral defects, and abetting acts of family dishonour. When honour is destroyed, individuals and families can face restricted economic opportunities, stigma, social exclusion, and find it difficult to find a partner (Fleur-Lobban, 1998; Cooney, 2015).



4. Findings

- 4.1** In this chapter, we present the findings from our research which comprised:
- A scoping review of published and grey literature – including media reports and documentaries, e.g., cases of Forced Marriage and HBV reported in the UK media (n=4).
 - Case study analysis – Previous service users case files (identified as experiencing Forced Marriage and HBV), captured by Bawso staff between 2018-2022 (n=33).
 - Focus group discussions with BAWSO staff, and former service users (n=49)
 - Open text surveys distributed to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in Wales (n=3)³⁰.
- 4.2** Findings from each of the approaches outlined above have been synthesised, ensuring the whole dataset is seen and understood together, rather than in isolation. Findings are organised into the following overarching themes, Culture and religion to exercise power and control; Extent of violence and abuse; Perpetrators of forced marriage and HBV; Impact of forced marriage and HBV; Barriers and challenges to seeking support and reporting; Preventing, protecting, and supporting victims/survivors of forced marriage and HBV; and Considerations to support victims of forced marriage and HBV.
- 4.3** It is evident from the findings presented below that the forms of DVA described by Stark (2012) in chapter three (including coercive control), are common within forced marriages and HBV.

Culture and religion to exercise power and control

- 4.4** Across the dataset, we found that no culture or religion promotes forced marriage and HBV. Yet feedback from participants in our research (former Bawso service users and Bawso staff) tells us that culture and religion contribute immensely to VAWG, and as discussed earlier in this report, perpetrators use culture and religion to exercise power and control. Maintaining culture and religious practices as a means to abuse are instead individual and family decisions that are influenced by society and a culture the family prescribes to. HBV is therefore a family's response to what they perceive to be rebellion against the moral standards they have set, that disadvantages victims and empowers perpetrators.
- 4.5** Evidence from across our research dataset indicate that victims of forced marriage are subjected to acts of HBV for various reasons and include (but not limited to):
- Refusing an arranged or forced marriage.
 - Suspected to be involved in pre-marital relationships.
 - Conceiving before marriage.
 - Suspected as having lost their virginity.
 - Being too westernised or dressing inappropriately.
 - Suspected to be engaged in extra-marital affairs.
 - Socialisation outside the family's social boundaries, caste, social class etc
 - Seeking divorce.
 - Inter-faith or different ethnic relationships.
 - Where women are victims of sexual crimes such as rape.
 - Associating with friends, groups not acceptable to their parents.
 - Sexual orientation or identifying as LGBTQ+

³⁰ PCCs who responded – North Wales, South Wales, Gwent.

4.6 What was evident from our research is that culture is used carefully and subtly to affirm the ideologies of masculinity and to subordinate women. Respondents informed us that those using culture and religion to perpetrate forced marriage and HBV, know the difficulty for their victims to challenge cultural or religious beliefs. Hence, forced marriage perpetrators use culture and religion to propagate their ideologies of masculinity and maintain their positions of power and control.

4.7 Re-iterating the literature in chapter three, which discoursed the purposes of which forced marriage is viewed to serve, participants in our research cited parents reasonings for forced marriage as a means of providing long-term security and stability for young couples, to care for people with disabilities and give them a family, and help to find suitable marriage partners.

The main purpose to bring me to U.K. was to get a free carer as well as a free slave. My ex-husband was suffering from schizophrenia, but my parents were not informed. I was living with my ex-husband as well as my father in-law, mother in-law and brother in-law (Bawso former service user).

4.8 In one case, we heard how a brother to a disabled groom was used to represent him during marriage negotiations and his photos presented to the bride purporting to be those of the groom. When the victim joined the family in the UK, she found that she was not marrying the person she saw in the photo but had instead been brought to the UK as a carer under the falsehood of marriage. She was threatened with dire consequences if she ever left the marriage (Annex 1).

4.9 Discussions revealed that in some of the cultures, girls are seen to be ready for marriage when they reach puberty and starts to menstruate or grow breasts. The onset of puberty is considered as reproductive age and marriages forced for purposes of procreation.

4.10 Forced marriage was also used to cement family relationships, but over time, this was expressed as having been misused by parents who forced victims into a marriage they did not want.

Don't marry outside the family, keep it within the family (Bawso former service user).

4.11 Recognising the difference between forced and arranged marriages, case files of former service users, and Bawso staff provided examples whereby although the contexts within which marriages were arranged and thereby forced, that notions of strictly prescribing to upholding cultures and cementing family relationships have begun to evolve enabling younger people to choose their spouses. In such cases, individuals had consented to the arranged marriage but were not interviewed as consenting arranged marriages were not the focus of our research.

Extent of violence and abuse

4.12 Comparable to the forms of HBV referred to in chapter three, interviews with former Bawso service users revealed experiences of physical assault or abuse, stalking, kidnapping, separation from children, severe domestic labour exploitation and imprisonment in their homes amongst other abuses.

Sometimes, when I missed to follow their rules, they punished me by not giving me food for many days, made me work harder or beat me (Bawso former service user).

4.13 Another case highlighted a victim being subjected to domestic servitude for more than 15 hours and denied access to their baby. The family kept the crying child in the same room as the victim but prohibited them from feeding and attending to their needs.

Every married woman is expected to do housework. This is not domestic servitude (Bawso former service user).

They forced me to look after my ex-husband and not tell anyone or else they, my father in-law and my brother in-law would rape me and sell me into prostitution and get people in India to kill my family. I was made to cook and clean for the whole family and work in their own shop for fifteen hours, seven days a week without rest (Bawso former service user).

- 4.14** Other examples involved cases where children born to mothers in forced marriages did not bear the mother's names, and the children's birth certificates did not bear the names of their mothers. We heard that it would involve a sister-in-law who is unable to have her own children; the children are instead 'given' to the sister-in-law.
- 4.15** We also heard of cases involving forced marriage where victims were abducted or coerced in the UK by their families and sent abroad to marry people or relatives they had never met. Some victims were introduced to each other at the age of 11 or 13 years. Likewise, other cases described victims being placed under house arrest or detained to stop them from escaping, before being taken abroad and married off, or a spouse brought from abroad by their parents. In such examples, passports were confiscated, their movements monitored, and victims only allowed to return to the UK with their husbands when they had children, and their parents were satisfied that they could not leave the marriage (Annex 1, case 4).
- 4.16** Bawso service user case files showed that victims of forced marriage are subjected to other forms of abuse to compel them to 'consent'. These included mental, physical, emotional abuse, blackmail and threats to harm or kill them or/and their family members.
- 4.17** Victims were also intentionally isolated from the community they resided and not permitted to freely mix with other people. Lack of integration or support to integrate, and learn British culture and systems, such as education and protective services traps victims in abusive marriages.

After I moved to UK, my husband does not let me to have friends. He does not let me to go out alone. He just introduced me to his family and another family, which is from my country. I couldn't ask them to help me. If I told them anything, they would tell my husband (Bawso former service user).

- 4.18** Former service users disclosed that some Kurdish victims of forced marriage may be subjected to HBV for similar reasons as those from Asian and African backgrounds, such as inappropriate social relationships, dressing and declining a forced marriage. Examples were provided of victims being married off at a young age to pay for the sins or crimes committed by male members of their family. A case shared with us involved murder. The family of the murder victim sought justice and compensation from the offender's family. In response, the offender's family paraded girls in the family for the murder victim's family to choose and take away as young brides.

The young woman was given away as a sex slave and domestic servant to the victim's family. Any male from the perpetrator family was allowed to have sexual relations with the young girl as they pleased. The victim was also subjected to physical abuse, domestic abuse, and domestic servitude. She lost seven children in miscarriage and ended up with broken pelvic and bones that led to long term physical disability and infertility (Bawso former service user).

- 4.19** Elsewhere, we heard that HBV was carried out to please the community and to conform to communal practices and beliefs. Decisions were not made in the best interest of the victim but to conform to what perpetrators believed to be adhering to their cultures and what religion requires from good people. Former service users from the Kurdish community shared some of the horrific forms of violence they were subjected to for disobeying their families and commencing relationships that were not approved by their parents.

Perpetrators of forced marriage and HBV

Family members

- 4.20** Findings from Safelives (2017) indicated that victims of HBV are seven times more likely to have multiple perpetrators than victims of DVA. The report further showed that victims who experienced violence by multiple perpetrators represented 54%³¹ of all the cases.

³¹ Safe Lives (2017) Your choicer: 'honour – based violence, forced marriage and domestic abuse. <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Spotlight%20on%20HBV%20and%20forced%20marriage>.

- 4.21** Similarly, our findings showed that in the majority of the 33 former service user case files, together with discussions with Bawso staff and former service users, relatives such as mother-in-laws and sister-in-laws had some involvement in the perpetration of HBV. Our findings also identified the involvement of fathers-in-law, husbands, the victims' brothers, and male and female in-laws. HBV perpetration extended to the victim's parents (including mothers) and wider family especially if the victim declined the marriage or was considering divorce/leaving the marriage (Annex 1).
- 4.22** Mothers-in-law were often regarded as holding power within the family, especially over their sons, and exercised their power to control and make decisions within the home. When their sons married, mothers felt threatened and ignored by their sons, hence the use of violence to regain control. However, participants in our research intimated that the above reason was not always the central motive for mother in-laws to be involved in HBV.
- 4.23** Aunties and sister in-laws were also identified as participating in abuse via issuing and carrying out threats. In one example, aunties and sister in-laws delivered dog food and bleach to a victim to encourage and force them to commit suicide (forced suicide or assisted suicide). In this case, it was indicated that the victim had been denied food for a prolonged period.
- 4.24** Overall, we heard that husbands were the main perpetrators and worked with their families to commit HBV. However, there were some cases where husbands were coerced by female relatives to commit HBV. Where husbands participated in female instigated abuse, it was indicated that they would do so to show their loyalty to their family. We also heard cases where husbands declining to cooperate or involve themselves in perpetration, became vulnerable and at risk of isolation from family members.
- 4.25** Husbands brought to the UK by the victim's parents were also perpetrators. Where cases of violence were known to the victim's parents, no action was taken, or support provided by the victim's family to escape the abuse. Instead, the victim was expected to make her marriage work. One such case involved physical, emotional, financial, and sexual abuse.
- 4.26** Minors were mentioned amongst participants as accomplices in conducting some forms of abuse as instructed by adults in the family. Minors had been used to monitor the movements of older sisters or accompany victims to the shops but were recognised as having been conditioned by parents and family to believe that committing abuse were in the best interest of the family and community. Perpetrators were cited as manipulating victim's children against them via grooming and bribes of gifts to spy on victims even when they had left the marriage. Information collected by perpetrators from children was then used in the courts to discredit victim statements and label them liars and of unstable mind.
- 4.27** Children exposed to violence in the home are more likely to mimic perpetrator behaviour and become perpetrators in adulthood (Public Health Wales, 2016). Such children are likely to suffer from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and become victims or perpetrators or both. In Wales, 47% of adults suffered at least one adverse childhood in their childhood, and 14% suffered four or more.
- 4.28** Bawso support staff revealed that children especially males, imitated perpetrator behaviour and became minor perpetrators. Staff described that once a victim left an abusive marriage, their child would take over perpetrator behaviours and control their mother and their finances. Financial control was mentioned as just one of many impacts, leaving victims in financial difficulties. Male children would also monitor their mother's (victim) movement and that of any younger sisters and report back to the perpetrator for purposes of control.
- 4.29** Prior research has also identified the use of minors to perpetrate honour-based killings, with the perception that if apprehended, they are more likely to receive lenient sentences compared to adults (Dyer, 2015). Research participants in our study further highlighted that minors refusing to kill on behalf of their families, face repercussions to protect the 'family honour'.
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Community perpetration

- 4.30** We found that the community played a role as both active or passive offenders. ‘Community’ included shop owners, restaurant owners, taxi drivers, or people from the same ethnic background and religion. Members of the community may recognise a victim on the street in social company that is not approved and inform the victim’s family. They may also identify a victim escaping and inform and/or return them to the family (EACH, 2012).
- 4.31** It is therefore crucial that support agencies and professionals be aware to the potential risks of community perpetration. For example, when contracting taxi drivers in assisting a victim to escape the abuse as the driver may be known to the victim’s family. Where victims have been returned to the family, this leads to an increased risk through the implementation of stricter measures to prevent and stop them from escaping again.
- 4.32** Other people who may collude by proxy as shared with us, included professionals from communities that practice forced marriage and who may be known to perpetrators (Dyer, 2015). It is understood that professionals may collude and provide vital information to perpetrators under the belief of acting in the best interest of the community and their religion. This does not mean that all people who work in different professions or agencies collude with families.
- 4.33** Changes within professions have seen improvements in confidentiality and professions adhering to patient confidentiality and the way they store information³². It is however important to recognise that agencies including the NHS recruit staff from abroad who may not be fully aware of the UK professional standards, data protection, and risks surrounding violence and disclosures.

Bounty hunters

- 4.34** Bounty hunters are hired by families to track down victims who have escaped and return them to their families and gather evidence or intelligence on victims. They may collude with professionals from the same community who can access victim files, for example, social services and the police to uncover victim whereabouts. It is important to acknowledge that this is not always the case, and more often, there are exceptional circumstances when this happens. Bounty hunters also use their own intelligence to investigate the whereabouts of a victim (EACH, 2012) and share the information with families who pay them for their services.

Impact of forced marriage and HBV

- 4.35** Those forced into marriage do not always recognise or realise they are victims, or that forced marriage is a crime in the UK. Former service users and Bawso support workers discussed that victims’ understanding of forced marriage was based on their family’s cultural and religious practices and beliefs, and the social norms that shape those cultures and practices. Therefore, victims may view abuse as ‘normal’, for example, when they have witnessed female relative (grandmothers, mothers, aunties, sisters) experiences.
- 4.36** Such was the influence of family culture, norms, and practices, there were cases where victims saw themselves as perpetrators, or as causing the marriage to break down rather than recognising themselves as victims. Self-blame and self-doubt (letting down their families, continually questioning decision to leave their abusive marriages) were frequently expressed.
- 4.37** Former service users shared with us prolonged experiences (in some cases years) of emotional brainwashing, controlling and coercive behaviours, and blackmail to force them to conform and normalise the forced marriage as valid. Instances were also heard of parents emphasising successful (forced) marriages of older siblings or relatives or speaking fondly about their own successful (forced) marriages.

³² <https://www.gov.uk/data-protection>

4.38 Earlier in this report, we touched upon the far reaching and harmful impacts of all forms of VAWG. When a woman leaves their forced marriage, they are left with far reaching consequences. These manifest in their mental health including the impact of loneliness and isolation from family and friends. Upon leaving, women lose their social networks including their families, friends and, in some situations, their identity. To maintain their safety, victims are uprooted from their known social environment to new neighbourhoods where they don't know anyone and must start a new social life (EACH, 2012). Additionally, in our research, Bawso support workers referred to victims having to change their identities to avoid being found by bounty hunters.

4.39 Below, we summarise the extensive and harmful consequences of forced marriage and HBV as described by respondents, which included psychological, physical, social, and economic impacts:

Psychological

- Constant fear of being killed by the perpetrator or their family.
- Stigma associated with single motherhood, and the impact it has on their children. They are seen as bad examples to other younger women in the community.
After they know we don't have a family they will say bad things to my son. The neighbors would call me names. They will say to my son 'is your father coming back?' sending you money? Pity on you. Shame on you." (Pukaar service user, EACH, 2012).
- Fear of abuse.
- Threats of abandonment.
- Threats of deportation.
- Long term poor mental health.
- Loss of self-esteem and confidence in themselves.
- Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Physical

- Impact on general wellbeing and physical health.
- Self-harm.
- Physical scars due to physical abuse for example acid burning, strangulation, etc.
- Poor eating habits or comfort eating to numb the abuse.

Social

- Ostracised by the community.
- Stigma from family and community.
- Loss of family and social networks.
- Loss of identity (some forced to completely change their identity to avoid being located by bounty hunters).
- Examples of victim's car being destroyed to protect the victim and the car is not sold for fear of being tracked by perpetrator.
- Change of National Insurance number to avoid being tracked by perpetrators.
- Unwillingness to seek help/report.

Economic

- Loss of financial support.
- Loss of income.
- Loss of employment opportunities within the community.

4.40 The impact of HBV reverberated beyond individual victims, to children, and family members as highlighted below.

Impact on children

4.41 We found that children were affected by the violence either directly as victims (associated with DVA within the home), or passively from being in the same space or house as victims.

4.42 Impacts for children included:

- Poor physical health and mental wellbeing such as self-harming, self-hatred, bed wetting, lack of sleep, lack of play time, lack of routine and adequate toys and support from parents.
- Children especially older children blame themselves for the violence as they don't always understand what is going on.
- Long term ACEs (adverse childhood experiences).
- Potential to fail to meet personal developmental goals due to psychological effects trying to look after themselves as well as their mothers and manage situations at home. Older children take it upon themselves to look after siblings.
- The victim may be emotionally absent to meet the needs of children.
- Where children are used to spy on the victim and witnessing the actual abuse, it may affect children emotionally.
- For younger children, they may not always get the care they need from an abusive parent.
- Neglect-in situations where children are neglected for periods of time because the mother is busy with domestic work and not allowed to feed them or attend to their needs.
- Education attainment can be impacted due to the volatile situation at home affecting children's concentration.

Impact on the family of the victim

- Ostracised and stigmatised by family members and the community. They are seen to have 'lost control' over their daughter/female relative.
- Lack of relationships with extended family members
- Financial hardships especially where the victim's family relied on the perpetrators for financial support.
- Poor mental health due to the threat to kill them if their daughters left the marriage.
- Impact on personal health, including physical health. Can exacerbate pre-existing physical illnesses for example high blood pressure or heart problems.

Barriers and challenges to seeking support and reporting

4.43 There are extensive challenges and barriers faced by victims of forced marriage and HBV regarding disclosure, help-seeking, accepting support, and reporting. Victims may avoid seeking help or support for fear of reprisals from perpetrators, but also due to language barriers, and lack of information on the types of support available to them.

4.44 Challenges to seeking and accessing support include intersectional discrimination, where inequality is based on gender, race, class and/or poverty overlaps/multiplies, that creates barriers to reporting, accessing support, escaping abuse, and accepting support (Siddiqui, 2018). Further barriers identified from the literature include distrust of formal services such as the police and social services, shame and feeling of betrayal of the family, and fears of racism or systemic racism in services (Sisters for Change, 2017; Banga and Roy, 2020).

4.45 Victims lack trusted networks to which they can turn to for support (Safelives 2017). In our research, victims lacked confidence to approach people from different ethnic backgrounds to their own due to language barriers, understanding of the forms of violence that may not be like that experienced in different ethnic groups, and a general fear of washing their dirty linen in public.

- 4.46** Victims' lack of understanding and knowledge of the UK system and the types of support available to them was yet another barrier to disclosing and reporting. A fear of authority amongst victims especially the police, owing to poor experiences from their own countries, can also affect help-seeking and reporting (Dyer, 2015).
- 4.47** Financial dependence on perpetrators and their families are further important factors preventing reporting and accessing support. Fear of financial destitution both for themselves and their families binds victims to abusive marriages.
- 4.48** Additional barriers according (EACH, 2012) include religious interpretation of divorce and the belief that marriage is sacred and for life. In cases where the marriage is between close family members, victims fear causing divisions in families or being seen as the cause of loss of family unity. According to respondents in our study, the marriage is purposed to cement and not destabilise family relations.
- 4.49** We also heard from respondents that retaining friends from the victim's community play a part in discouraging disclosures. Victims are encouraged to return to the perpetrator by friends who believe in forced marriages and who have normalised DVA within their marriages.

Support agencies

- 4.50** We found a lack of knowledge and understanding regarding forced marriage, HBV, and the support that a victim may require amongst statutory and support agencies. Examples from participants included professionals becoming impatient with victims especially when interpreters are used. Professionals do not always understand how complex the case or issues are and the length of time it takes to interpret a sentence. Professionals supporting forced marriage and HBV victims should ensure they are well briefed and up to date with the case, including the time required in advance.
- 4.51** Disbelief of threats to kill amongst agencies creates anxiety amongst victims and a reluctance to disclose or report abuse due to fearing the consequences if not supported/protected. The risk to kill or to be subjected to HBV is increased at the stage of help seeking and reporting. Hence there is need to ensure effective systems are in place for victims fleeing forced marriage and HBV. We heard of a case where the police failed to identify a victim and provide support, and where social services chose not to 'interfere' because they did not want to get involved in 'people's culture'.
- 4.52** As discussed later in this theme, no recourse to public funds (NRPF), is a long-term barrier and hindrance to victims with insecure immigration status, yet a lack of understanding persists amongst agencies of the risk factors involved - because when victims leave, they cannot return.
- [When I left] There was another problem waiting for me, that now my spouse visa got cancelled, there was no place for me to go in England, not a single refuge wanted to accept me. I was worried to go back to India because, the gang whom my father in-law was contacting to sell me, would find me and take me for prostitution and also attack my family (Bawso former service user).*
- 4.53** We found a lack of clarity amongst agencies on how and where victims could seek help for forced marriage and HBV. Further difficulties were highlighted amongst respondents regarding the language and terminology used within the VAWDASV and wider support sector including the police and social services. For example, 'domestic abuse', 'victim', 'helpline', 'live fear free helpline' etc. When terminologies and descriptions are translated into victim's own languages, they often do not make sense. For example, a victim may not understand what abuse in marriage means or looks like because it is 'normalised' and is not discussed within the family or community.
- 4.54** We heard of a case of a woman who was experiencing physical, sexual, and financial abuse from her husband who had been brought for her by her parents from abroad. The victim approached Community Police Officers and asked them to 'tell my husband to be nice to me'. She was told to call 101 if it was 'DA'. Occurring on two occasions, the police response was the same, and leads us to ask, 'What does "DA" stand for or mean to a victim of forced marriage or HBV?'
- 4.55** Simple and clear messages such as, 'Do you need help?', and 'Call for free', were suggested by respondents to clearly communicate information and advice.
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- 4.56** Collaborative working with specialist agencies such as Bawso has been key for agencies like the police both in terms of supporting and engaging with victims. This example of collaborative working also ensures that victims have a bridge-person and that Bawso staff can support victims through the investigations and resettling.
- 4.57** Police are trained to respond and manage HBV, yet it is acknowledged that abusive behaviours can and do evolve. Continued learning and training to respond to emerging trends include hearing from the survivors via the adoption of survivor voice/scrutiny panels by all four Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales.

Criminal and Family Courts

- 4.58** Former service users and Bawso staff who had interacted with the criminal justice system (CJS) depicted a system that fails victims. Perpetrators, who in most cases can speak English fluently and have a better understanding of the CJS, take advantage of the lack of understanding of the UK system and the language barriers experienced by victims to manipulate the courts in their favour. We also heard examples of perpetrators using mental health against the victim in a bid to take full custody of children, and to evade justice.
- 4.59** Accounts from other victims' cases that have proceeded to court, but are dismissed due to lack of evidence, were highlighted as heightening fear and anxiety, and impacting victims' decisions regarding attending and giving evidence at court.
- 4.60** Family courts have for a long-time disadvantaged victims who have expressed their discontent that their views and the needs of their children have not been considered when making decisions on child visits or contact. Respondents to our research noted that perpetrators appear to have an overriding advantage over their victims and those responsible for reaching decisions lack understanding of BME issues and the complexities surrounding cases.

Insecure immigration status including No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

- 4.61** Former service users noted fears of reporting HBV due to threats from perpetrators to share their details with the Home Office enforcement agencies and being deported. Insecure immigration status including no recourse to public funds (NRPF) are significant barriers to disclosing and accessing support and contribute to fears of deportation. These include difficulties to access or receive support for safe accommodation (e.g. refuge), and financial support (NRPF victims are not eligible for welfare benefits). We found that victims with NRPF were particularly at increased risk of being homeless.
- 4.62** Being on spousal visa adds a further challenge when contemplating seeking help; victims do not always understand what a spousal visa means and threats to cancel their visa hinder reporting.
- You are under my control and with one phone call, I can cancel your visa and you will be alone in this country. You will be on the street (Bawso former service user).*
- 4.63** Cases were described by participants of young women granted spousal visas that were deliberately not renewed by their partners on time as required by UK law, to exploit their insecure immigration status and exert power and control. Consequently, victims were forced to conform to the perpetrators demands and accept the abuse they are subjected to, or risk being deported and leaving their children behind.
- Mrs X was told by her in-laws that her child would be taken away from her if she was to go to the police to report any of the incidences, and she would be sent back to Pakistan as she came on a spousal visa. She did not want the shame of being sent back to Pakistan, as this would be frowned upon. She feared the consequences of dishonouring the family and bringing shame on the family if she were to leave (Bawso former service user).*
- 4.64** In the UK and Wales, this is an increasing research interest to understand the barriers and support needs of victims who are subject to NRPF requirements (e.g., Hubbard et al., 2013; Hopkins and Assami, 2021; Pertek et al., 2022).

- 4.65** The Senedd's Social Justice and Equalities Committee (Welsh Parliament, 2022) highlighted the challenges experienced by victims including a lack of support due to NRPF restrictions on their visas. The Committee made key recommendations for example, establishing a crisis fund to access in emergencies, and a review of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) (2014) to consider how social services can support women and their children with NRPF.
- 4.66** Within our own research, respondents highlighted an impending situation of apathy and fatigue amongst victims with NRPF, and specialist organisations who are spending their time, resources, and experiences to support victims and contribute to research. Respondents wanted victims with NRPF to see more action and long-term solutions to address the challenges they face when they need immediate support.
- 4.67** We acknowledge findings and recommendations from the publications and reports above and emphasise the urgent need for the UK and Welsh Government to address the issue of NRPF for victims.

Preventing, protecting, and supporting victims of forced marriage and HBV

- 4.68** The UK Government has enacted various legislation that aim to prevent, protect, and support women that include forced marriage, FGM, and modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT). Our research focussed on legislation that is specific to forced marriage and HBV, but it is important to note that some victims will be subjected to multiple forms of violence and abuse. Victims can experience forced marriage, HBV, FGM, and may have been trafficked to the UK, therefore, multiple legislation may be utilised. For example, cases of forced marriage will apply to the Modern Slavery Act (2015) where victims have also experienced domestic servitude.
- 4.69** Victims of forced marriage and HBV may also be identified as victims of DVA and receive additional protection from the police and the law. Examples include markers³³ on the victim's property, issuing restraining orders, or applying for a Stalking Protection Order³⁴. Other protective measures include Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPO). In such cases, a domestic violence protection notice (DVPN) is applied for by a superintendent under the Crime and Security Act (2010) section 24. These measures are indicative and not an exhaustive list that are available to UK police forces to protect victims.
- 4.70** It is important that all potential forms of abuse are considered, including how they may overlap, and the types of legislation(s) and Orders most suitable to respond and protect victims.
- 4.71** Despite the suite of protective measures described above, gaps persist in their implementation. We heard examples from respondents of DAPOs being regularly breached and when breaches were reported to the police, victims were asked the kind of protective measures they have put in place for themselves. There were however other examples where the police enhanced the protection through additional measures, but this was dependent on the nature of the crime committed. Former service users and Bawso support staff communicated the need for police to investigate all breaches of protection orders and hold perpetrators accountable.
- 4.72** Since 2014, approximately 200-250 Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs) have been granted annually in England and Wales³⁵. In Wales, our research identified two interim FMPOs issued in 2022 and 2023, and two full FMPOs issued in 2022 and 2023 by South Wales Police to protect victims or persons at risk of forced marriage³⁶. In 2023, a successful application was secured at Swansea Crown Court, submitted by Swansea Council, and supported by South Wales Police. The FMPO was made to protect an individual identified as a vulnerable adult who was deemed to be lacking in capacity to consent to a marriage.

³³ Police respond faster to an incident if they receive calls from a marked property.

³⁴ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/stalking-protection-orders>

³⁵ How the legal tools to prevent forced marriage can lead to further abuse (theconversation.com)

³⁶ Provided by South Wales PCC in April 2023

- 4.73** Bawso case analysis further revealed requests from survivors for police protection to stop perpetrators from harassing them or sharing private photos with their family members. Positively, there were examples from Bawso staff whereby victims of forced marriage had been supported to return to their countries (at their own request) by the police and Bawso. FMU (2022) data also shows the unit supported repatriation of nine individuals to their home country from the UK.
- 4.74** Although these are encouraging outcomes for the victims, we are yet to see more FMPO applications for those who may not have access to information on how to get help and access support. With close collaboration between the police and specialist organisations such as Bawso, more victims can be supported to access protection under the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act (2007), and via FMPOs.
- 4.75** Additional protection has also been put in place that requires people who leave the UK to marry to state the intention to marry before they leave. Any spouse joining UK partners must also be able to prove their understanding of English language before they can be issued with spousal visas.

No Recourse to Public Funds – UK and Welsh Government

- 4.76** The Home Office through Southall Black Sisters has been piloting a project since 2020 that provides funds which organisations including Bawso to access support for victims with NRPF. The Support for Migrant Victims Scheme (SMV) enables organisations to support victims for up to 12 weeks within which time they are meant to receive decisions on their Home Office application to qualify them for destitute domestic violence concession (DDVC). However, the pilot project is funded to support 75 victims with NRPF. In contrast, since the pilot commenced to the year ending March 2023, Bawso has supported up to 175 victims with NRPF. Support has included access to temporary accommodation and a living allowance.
- 4.77** The Welsh Government, via the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt has already actioned a recommendation from the Equalities and Social Justice Committee (Welsh Parliament, 2022) regarding support for victims with NRPF, providing funding to Bawso to top-up and meet the gaps in the Home Office SMV scheme. The Welsh Government funding has enabled Bawso to support an additional 15 victims, and those under the SMV project for an additional period following the 12-week expiry. The funding also provides a top-up towards accommodation to fill the gap between the budget ceiling approved by Home Office SMV scheme and the market rate for accommodation, and financial support equivalent to the rate of Universal Credit.
- 4.78** The Welsh Government fund is for one year to March 2024. The SMV pilot and Welsh Government fund has been a lifeline for many victims with NRPF. Yet more remains to be done by the UK and Welsh Government to address the challenges victims with NRPF face including a long-term solution to those with NRPF. For example, elsewhere in the UK, the ‘safe in Scotland’ model provides support to all victims regardless of their immigration status.
- 4.79** Welsh Government NRPF guidance (2022), provides information on how local authorities and statutory agencies should support people with NRPF. The guidance provides useful clarity and collates relevant legislation. Nonetheless, there is need to go further and provide a clear direction on how the guidance can be used to support victims with NRPF.

Considerations to support victims of forced marriage and HBV

- 4.80** Bawso are experienced in providing support for victims of forced marriage and HBV, and staff have skills and expertise in providing trauma informed support. Nonetheless, there are considerations to providing specialist support. BME communities and individuals are not a homogenous group – victims require individual and tailored support; they will have different customs, beliefs, and speak numerous different languages. Whilst Bawso provides interpreters, this resource cannot always be available for example, when victims/survivors want to ask any questions or go out independently.

- 4.81** Language barriers can affect the time taken to support individuals; for example, supporting and enabling understanding of DVA, forced marriage etc, reasons for the types of support provided such as refuge, and accessing community resources (registering with GPs, attending appointments, enrolling children in school). Similarly, risk assessments and support sessions can take longer to complete (sometimes two hours) due to the time involved for interpretation. Overall, this translates to more hours of support compared to cases where victims/survivors use English language as a medium of communication.
- 4.82** Bawso support staff summarised these additional complexities highlighting specific scenarios. Cases were provided whereby women supported can speak English but cannot read and therefore were unable to read road names or shop names. Hence, it was viewed as easier to accompany survivors for shopping than provide directions. Other examples of time spent included supporting access to solicitors and English classes and attending multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs). Often Bawso support workers manage and need to consider multiple abuses, requiring meetings and communications with different professionals and organisations, for which decisions for actions can take longer, resulting in more time spent supporting an individual.
- 4.83** Challenges conveyed by Baswo staff included in urgent situations, a lack of an appropriate language dialect to match a survivor's language needs, or if pre-arranged by other supporting agencies. There were also cases where interpreters at multi-agency meetings (attended by victims and their support worker) were male and from the same community. Staff acknowledged the safety risk in such circumstances and that most victims would not engage when male interpreters are used. Furthermore, if a suitable interpreter cannot be sourced, urgent safeguarding meetings can be rescheduled. Consequently, this impacts on the immediate support needs of the survivor, and any additional support that may be important, for example managing emotions and mental health.
- 4.84** Building trust between support staff and victims can take longer and may impact on the service received. For example, where victims initially hide physical abuse to protect a perpetrator, and disclose later, it can sometimes be too late as children would have been removed for safeguarding purposes because it is seen that the victims did not protect the children. The impact of removing children is always devastating to victims and requires additional emotional support.
- 4.85** Apprehension or mistrust of professionals from victims' own countries or ethnic backgrounds for fear of disclosures to the perpetrators was expressed amongst respondents. In such cases, it will take longer to establish trust with them. Therefore, supporting victims of forced marriage and HBV requires time, patience, understanding, non-judgemental attitudes, and wraparound support.

Challenges faced by the police in forced marriage/HBV

- 4.86** The police are crucial when it comes to victims reporting incidences and seeking help. As such, we sought to determine any challenges the police may experience that could impact on the way they respond to an incident, record statements, and provide support throughout the process and the criminal justice system. Below we summarise the findings to our survey to PCCs in Wales.
- Acknowledgement that challenges persist in reporting from victims that include fear, and access to be able to report abuse. Consequently, victims may not report.
 - It was indicated that forced marriage data in the South Wales PCC area is generally low and more likely to be reported in Cardiff, Swansea, and Newport in the Gwent region. The reasons for low numbers in reporting HBV cases are not clear, and we cannot make assumptions regarding low data or reporting.
 - Recognition that challenges to reporting exist amongst some communities, including the traveller community especially from North Wales.
 - When reports are made, but a family moves out of the area, this makes it difficult for the police to investigate. The family would move to avoid investigations and it is a challenge to locate the family's new address.
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- There are challenges with the police not knowing the kind of support a victim may require, especially in cases where victims do not open-up.
- Language barriers remains a considerable challenge, especially at the point when interpretation is required. Language Line is used in some cases, but it cannot be said to be the best option at the time required.
- Most often, victims do not want to report or press charges because they 'don't want to get offenders into trouble'. The police can only rely on what the victim wants and the support they need.

Supporting victims – service user and staff perspectives

- 4.87** Key areas discussed amongst Bawso former service users in terms of the support they would like to receive included, understanding of the barriers from a survivor's perspective, a listening ear, empathy, and a genuine commitment to provide a long-lasting and consistent support system. Respondents also expressed they want support agencies to believe their stories and provide information on the kind of support they expect to receive that includes their own protection and that of people associated with them.
- 4.88** Our research found that survivors do not feel supported by family courts. They want the family courts to listen to them and be more supportive before making decisions that in their view, favours perpetrators.
- 4.89** Bawso staff understand and are empathetic to the barriers and challenges victims/survivors face from a BME perspective, and how these barriers can determine whether a victim leaves or remains in an abusive or forced marriage. Drawing on the case studies and accounts of Bawso support workers, survivor support needs include:
- Support to meet immediate needs such as safe accommodation, food, including baby food and other items as required by survivors.
 - Socioeconomic support to access financial resources or welfare benefits.
 - Access to appropriate language support that meet the dialect needs of survivors.
 - Access to a service that understands abuse from a BME perspective that incorporates intersecting factors.
 - Access to suitable housing that meets accommodation needs of victims and their children. Use of bed and breakfast or homeless hostels is not safe or a suitable option for survivors. This arrangement puts survivors at increased risk of abuse.
 - A need for a wrap- around support system to all victims regardless of their immigration status.
 - Long term solutions to NRPF.
 - Access to immediate specialist counselling services and emotional support.
 - Access to English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and education opportunities
 - Access to job opportunities

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 This report has presented the findings to our research which sought to facilitate greater knowledge and understanding of the issue of forced marriage and HBV, including the underlying factors that promote and sustain the issues, and its continued perpetration within BME families/communities in Wales.
- 5.2 Our work has explored the experiences of forced marriage and HBV, types of violent and abusive behaviours, the perpetrators, the significant impacts and effects for individuals, children and families, and the wider context in which VAWG, including forced marriage and HBV prevails.
- 5.3 In drawing our work together, we make recommendations for Government, Commissioners, Organisations, and Delivery. However, we emphasise the importance of a whole system approach to effectively address and end all forms of VAWDASV. This approach is communicated within the VAWDASV Strategy (2022-2026), and via participants within our research who expressed the need for collaborative working amongst all organisations (across all sectors).

Government

- There is an urgent need to review the legislation on NRPF and exempt victims of forced marriage and HBV. Victims do not always access support because they do not qualify to access public funds while on their immigration visas that restrict them on what they can access freely. There have been many amendments to specific pieces of legislation by the UK Government to improve protection for victims of violence, for example the FGM Act has been reviewed since 1989 with further amendments under the serious crime Act 2015.
- Long-term, protected funding for organisations that address complex, diverse, and intersecting needs of victims.

Commissioners, Organisations and Delivery

- 5.4 Overall, all organisations need to adopt a renewed commitment to understanding and tackling forced marriage and HBV, that includes ongoing dialogue on how we can use culture and religion positively to protect women and girls.
- 5.5 Victim support starts at the point when the police respond to an incident and/or when a disclosure is made. As part of their response to protect and support, organisations should ensure that there is:
 - Training needs analysis to identify gaps in knowledge and understanding amongst professionals, and the provision of training that includes understanding of violence from a BME perspective, underlying barriers, complex of cases and intersecting issues.
 - Clear identification of survivor support needs
 - Provision of comprehensive support and protection for survivors at the point an incident is reported and throughout the support period.
 - Continuous assurance of victim safety throughout their support period.
 - Long term and immediate specialist BME counselling services.
 - A need to synchronize the way statements are recorded, and adoption of a flexible process to enable survivors to re-record statements later if there is need to.
 - A wrap-around support system for victims and their children regardless of their immigration status.
 - Consistent and robust data capture and information sharing.

Social Services

- A need for social services to support all victims of abuse regardless of their immigration status including no recourse to public funds (NRPF).
- A need to put in place an all-Wales standardisation of child support which incorporates inflation and rising cost of living.

Criminal Justice System

5.6 We heard from victims and support staff that victims are continually failed by a criminal justice system that does not understand and recognise the violence and abuse that takes place within BME families and communities.

- Roll-out of, and consistent training for crown prosecution service (CPS) staff and the judiciary on violence from a BME perspective, including intersecting issues.
- In cases where the mental health is raised as an issue by perpetrators to throw into question a victim's ability to care for children, or to evade justice, judges should perform a thorough investigation through the police and support staff to ascertain the allegations.
- Survivors and respondents to our research want to see more representation of BME communities on the jury.

Perpetrator Programmes and Interventions

- Perpetrators need to be identified and held accountable for their actions (including breaches of protection orders), and programmes should include inter-generational perpetration.
- Perpetrator intervention programmes should include boys and men through a community participation process and adopt a whole-societal approach.
- Mechanisms should be put in place to identify the support needs of individual perpetrators to change their behaviour through early intervention programmes, including working with them to prevent abuse escalating.

Further research

5.7 We make several suggestions for areas in which future research should focus:

- Investigate the root cause of inter-generational perpetration. This form of perpetration featured throughout our own research, and it is important to understand its genesis and how agencies and communities can work together to address it.
- Where culture and religion have been used to justify HBV, the intentions and decisions are biased against women and girls and most victims are women. Further research will help us to better understand and address the doctrines behind culture and religion.
- Investigate the different roles perpetrators play in carrying out forced marriage and HBV. This will help us to deconstruct factors and behaviours that feed into perpetration and turn it round to tackle forced marriage and HBV within BME communities. Involvement of perpetrators is also recommended.

5.8 In concluding our report, we offer some final considerations:

- A woman's safety starts at home. If the home environment is the place where HBV takes place, then it should be a focal point for prevention work through the community.
- Support for victims and survivors should also be guided by their needs and on how the support should look like. Support agencies should listen more to survivor voice, believe their stories, and supported in the ways that meet all their needs.
- Messages on how and where to get help from should be very clear, in a language a victim can understand and free from jargon. There should be a deliberate attempt to improve the way service providers communicate with victims and survivors.
- Information on support services which is available for victims should also be readily available in formats that victims understand and within their reach. This can be through communities, schools, and other places such as pharmacies.

| Bawso: The organisation

Bawso is a Pan –Wales charity that was established in 1995 to address support needs of women victims of all forms of violence from Black and Minority ethnic communities (BME). From the first 2 women who were supported by Bawso in 1995 from Scotland, Bawso has grown in structure and coverage and now supports more than 7000 people annually. Bawso has supported more than a quarter of a million people since inception.

Bawso provides safe accommodation and support to women and children who are victims of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual abuse to protect them from further abuse. Additional support is provided to women victims of forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), honour-based violence (HBV) and modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT).

Bawso has over 100 trained frontline staff majority of whom come from BME communities and understand how religion and culture impact on victims of violence. The staff provide targeted and individualised support to survivors of violence that enables them to understand that the abuse they have been subjected to is not their fault and it is a criminal offense in the UK.

Staff provide emotional support and wellbeing programmes that help to build the capacity and resilience of survivors, enabling them to protect themselves and their children from future abuse.



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Annex 1: Case studies from Bawso former service users

Case 1: Mrs X

Mrs X of Pakistani Origin married her husband Mr Y in Pakistan. He was a British National. They both settled in the UK in 2019. Mrs X came on a Spousal Visa. They lived with Mr Y's parents. When Mrs X arrived at the family home, the abuse started straight away, she was treated like a servant and expected to cook clean, and care for her husband and his family. She faced physical and emotional abuse from Mr Y regularly.

Mrs X fell pregnant and had her first child in 2020. The child had underlying heart defects. She was not allowed to leave the house or meet with friends or family, which affected her mental health. She was told that her child would be taken away from her if she was to go to the police to report any of the incidences, and she would be sent back to Pakistan as she came on a spousal visa. She did not want the shame of being sent back to Pakistan, as this would be frowned upon and feared the consequences of dishonouring the family and bringing shame on the family if she were to leave. She was forced to stay within an abusive household.

In 2021 she fell pregnant again with her second child. During her pregnancy, she was again treated like a slave and expected to cook, clean, and take care of everyone in the household, despite her poor mental health, and being unwell. The In-laws were very well known within the community, and friends and family would visit. One such visitor, could see her plight, and managed to discreetly provide information on Bawso.

She contacted Bawso and explained that her husband was away, and she only had a small window to escape, and flee the family home. Fortunately, arrangements were made, and Mrs X was able to seek refuge. At the time, she was still in fear for her life, and being ostracised by the whole community, and feared repercussions. Mrs X started to rebuild her life with help and support of staff.

A MARAC referral was made as she heard from her Aunty that Mr Y was looking for her, because she brought shame on the family, and there remained fear that she will be found by the perpetrators. Safeguarding measures were put in place, and support provided.

Case 2: Annah's case

I got married 17 years ago from my home in Bangladeshi. I have two sons. I do not have any intimate relation with my husband or even talking. I spend a lot of time and money on buses going to his parents' home to cook, clean and look after his parents. He does not help me. He calls me their maid and that I was saved from a life of poverty so I must work for them.

Before I came to Bawso, I was struggling with money because my husband left us with no money and with a mortgage. I didn't know what to do and was crying a lot because I was scared of losing the house and sleeping on the street with the children. Bawso helped me to apply for Child Tax Credit, Child Benefit and Council Tax and now I have money for food and pay for the house.

Case 3: Sima's case

Sima was of Indian Sikh origin and aged 17 years, she came to the UK with her mother on a visit visa. They stayed with her brother in the Midlands. On arrival Sima was told that they had found a British Indian boy for her to marry. Sima did not agree to this, as she had a boyfriend back in India. Due to her refusal, she started to experience HBV from her family. She contacted the police and the police contacted BAWSO. Through Bawso assistance (NRPF programme), Sima was supported to return to India to her boyfriend and his family. The police and Bawso organised her safe departure from the UK. Her boyfriend and his family paid for Sima's ticket back to India.

Case 4: Maya's story; a victim of modern slavery, arranged/forced marriage/domestic abuse

I am one of the girls from BME group, who got married to an Indian man. When BME communities' girl get married to any person, the relationship does not tie to only groom and bride but also to families. My in-law family made false promises to my family and hid the purpose for the marriage.

My ex-husband was suffering from one of the mental disorders called schizophrenia, which I and my family were not made aware of before the marriage. The main purpose to bring me to U.K. was to get a free carer as well as a free slave. I was living with my ex-husband as well as my father in-law, mother in-law and brother in-law. At the beginning, my ex-husband and his family were trying to hide his illness from me. To do so, they started blaming me that I was creating problems such as, disappointing my ex-husband physically and that I made him mentally upset. I was told to be thankful to them for bringing me to the U.K.

They forced me to look after my ex-husband and not tell anyone or else they, my father in-law and my brother in-law would rape me and sell me into prostitution and get people in India to kill my family. I was made to cook and clean for the whole family and also work in their own shop for fifteen hours, seven days a week without rest. I could call my mother once in two weeks, but I just had to talk as they made the call in their presence.

My passport was taken away from me, I was not allowed to contact any of my family members or my friends. While working in the shop, I was not allowed to talk to anyone, just keep smiling and follow as they say, or not allowed to go out of the house without one of the in-law's accompanying me. Sometimes, when I missed to follow their rules, they punished me by not giving me food for many days, made me work harder or beat me.

My father in-law took me to the G.P after suffering for many days with high fever on condition that I would not talk or say anything going on in the house. My father in-law would come with me in doctor's room as I had to pretend that I was not able to talk due to language problem. The doctor did not let my father in-law to enter in the room and I broke down in front of the doctor. She advised me not to go back to that house, if I did not want to and called the police from there and then but I was still thinking about the traditional marriage and not to break it.

The doctor gave me the emergency contact number 999 that I never been given before and told me about my rights. I came back in the same trap; I was foolish to think about saving my marriage. When I came back to the house my father in-law and my mother in-law did not like that, I had a chat with doctor privately and they started beating me and started making arrangement to send me to India. I got a chance by going to the toilet, I called the emergency number and police came in front of the house. Police brought me out of the house and helped me to get my passport back.

There was another problem waiting for me, that now my spouse visa got cancelled, there was no place for me to go in England, not a single refuge wanted to accept me. I was worried to go back to India because, the gang whom my father in-law was contacting to sell me, would find me and take me for prostitution and also attack my family. I refused to go back to India, so police kept me in guest house for five days till one refuge accepted me.

I got a call from Bawso from Wales to say they have refuge space for me. I'd never been out of the house, I even did not know where Wales was, was it part of U.K? Bawso not only saved my life, but they also made my life better for lifetime. Before moving to Wales, I could not speak proper English, I did not have any confidence to stand for myself. Bawso support worker helped me to bring that confidence back and made me realise that I had such a powerful soul to break all barriers.

Now, here I am, standing on my feet, I have finished first year of college and now in second year of the same course. Managing my college, my house by working full time.

Case 4

A survivor shared her experience of being taken out of the UK by her father and married off in her teens to a man she didn't know. The victim was abandoned abroad, and her passport confiscated and hidden. She was raped constantly by her husband whom she did not want to be with and subjected to both domestic and farm work. She shared how she laboured for long hours with little rest and food for a year. She was brought back to Wales by her father when it was evident that she wouldn't leave the marriage. All her elder sisters were also married off by her parents.

The survivor thought she had escaped from the marriage but one day, as she was home, she was greeted by visitors including the husband she had left abroad. The man had been brought to live with the family in Wales. The victim escaped from the house through a window and sought help from the police and Bawso. She has never gone back to her family because no one wants to be associated with her.



Annex 2: Case studies from the media

1. Shafilea Ahmed, aged 17: BBC News, 3rd August 2012³⁷. The parents of Shafilea Ahmed were jailed for life after being convicted of her murder.

The 17-year-old went missing from her home in Warrington, Cheshire, in 2003 and her body was found in the River Kent in Cumbria six months later. Iftikhar, 52, and Farzana Ahmed, 49, denied her murder but the jury at Chester Crown Court returned guilty verdicts against them both.

Mr Justice Roderick Evans said they would both serve a minimum of 25 years. The judge told them: “Your concern about being shamed in your community was greater than the love of your child.”

The couple suffocated Shafilea with a plastic bag after years of abuse.

After the trial, Det Supt Geraint Jones described the killing as a “vile and disgraceful act against someone they should have been very proud of”. He added: “For me this is not an ‘honour killing’, it’s a clear case of murder.”

The prosecution claimed she was murdered by her parents because they believed she brought shame on the family. Shafilea went missing on 11 September 2003 and was reported missing by a teacher a week later.

After several police appeals to find her, workmen found her decomposed remains in February 2004 and she was identified by her dental records and jewellery. Two post-mortem examinations failed to determine how she died but a verdict of unlawful killing was recorded at her inquest in 2008.

2. Dr Humaira Abadeen, aged 35: The Guardian, 19th December 2008³⁸

Dr Abedin had lived in the UK since 2002 and according to her lawyer, intended to remain working and living in the UK. She was 32 years old at the time of the incident and a medical doctor by profession. On the 2nd of August 2008, she travelled to the jurisdiction of Bangladesh on a return ticket for the purposes of visiting her mother, having been informed she [the mother] was very ill. She did not go to her family home but stayed elsewhere in Dhaka on her arrival.

On the 5th of August 2008 she went to the home of her family for the purposes of visiting her mother. On arrival there she was manhandled into the property by several people and immediately locked in a room. There were several people around and thereafter she was always monitored by four or five guards and was not free to leave the property. Her passport, tickets and other documents were taken from her. During that period, she managed to send a few text messages to the UK to seek assistance. Her movements were monitored, and she was not allowed to leave the property.

On about 10th or 11th August 2008 her first cousin, Masud Rana, who is the son of her paternal uncle, gave her some tablets and told her that she must take them. She refused to take them but was forced to do so. Dr Abedin thinks they were sleeping tablets and she felt very drowsy for the next couple of days. She remained under guard³⁹. Dr Humaira was later assisted through the courts under the 2007 FMPO to file for divorce from her forced husband.

37 Shafilea Ahmed murder trial: Parents guilty of killing - BBC News- 08/03/2023.

38 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/19/humayra-abedin-forced-marriage>

39 Statement from Humayra Abedin | Bangladesh | The Guardian- 08/03/2023

3. Stabbed to death as her family watched, for honour: The Independent, 15th July 2006⁴⁰

Samaira Nazir was the brightest of her family. Articulate and well-educated, she graduated from university before taking a directorship in their recruitment business.

Salman Mohammed's life had been less smooth. Desperate to flee Afghanistan, he was smuggled into Britain in the back of a lorry and made a living selling phone cards from a market stall. But when the pair met, they fell in love, and for years conducted a secret affair before finally defying her family and announcing their wedding plans. It proved a fatal move and led to Samaira's death in a so-called "honour" killing.

It was Samaira's brother, Azhar Nazir, 30, who introduced them. And five years later it was Nazir who would wrench them apart, savagely murdering his sister when he learnt of her "unsuitable" engagement. Nazir, along with a 17-year-old cousin, Imran Mohammed, real name Kashif Rana, were jailed for life for the "barbaric" murder of the 25-year-old businesswoman.

4. Woman found guilty of forcing teenage daughter into marriage: The Guardian, 22nd May 2018

A 45-year-old woman from Birmingham was found guilty of deceiving her teenage daughter into travelling to Pakistan and forcing her to marry a man nearly twice her age in the first successful prosecution of its kind. The jury at Birmingham crown court heard that the teenager, who became pregnant by the man when she was just 13, had sobbed as the marriage took place.

The court was told that the defendant, a 45-year-old mother of four – who cannot be named for legal reasons – duped her daughter, then 17, into travelling to Pakistan by claiming it was a family holiday and groomed her by bribing her with the promise of a mobile phone. While abroad, on the teenager's 18th birthday, she revealed her plan to have her married to one of her relatives and threatened to tear up her passport if she did not comply with her wishes.

Annex 3: What Bawso former service users said.

- Support helped me to rebuild my life.
- The support increased my self-esteem, now I can cope and protect my children.
- Support helped my mental health and emotional healing.
- I have become more aware of my rights.

⁴⁰ Stabbed to death as her family watched... for honour | The Independent | The Independent- 08/03/2023.

Annex 4: Questionnaire to Police and Crime Commissioners, Wales

Understanding forced marriage and HBV - Bawso research

I am working on research on behalf of Bawso on understanding forced marriage and HBV. As a service provider, we acknowledge that the service receives and supports victims of FM who form almost 70% of the service within our DA service. The issues of FM and HBV don't seem to be going anywhere soon but we are still experiencing an increase of these abuse and crimes.

The research is looking to rewind the clock on FM and understand the trends, how the abuse is perpetrated from a victim's perspective among other things. We are also trying to understand the different roles of 1st perpetrator, secondary perpetrators and those who are coerced by families to commit the mentioned crimes.

Your feedback on the below is much appreciated.

The questions as below:

- When Police are dealing with, or supporting victims of forced marriage/HBV, what in their understanding is the expected responsibility to victims?
- What is an HBV crime within the FM?
- How do they respond to a reported incident?
- What factors do they consider when responding to an incident and once at the property, when recording/taking a statement?
- What are the priority needs of the victim at the point the police respond to an incident?
- What challenges do police face/encounter when dealing with FM/HBV cases?
- Do the police have any support needs to be able to deal with such cases? what are they?
- Share any recommendations on how the police should work with the victim and the service provider to enable positive outcomes for the victim.

Annex 5: Focus Group Discussion with Bawso staff

Understanding Forced Marriage and HBV January 2023

Purpose:

We are undertaking research to upscale our understanding on forced marriage (FM) and honour-based violence (HBV). The findings will help us to understand trends in the nature of violence victims are subjected to and understand characteristics of victims and perpetrators. This will help Bawso to develop more support programmes that respond to new emerging trends and effectively engage with and support victims.

- What is your understanding of HBV?
- What is the difference between 'so-called HBA and HBV?
- Between HBA and HBV which one directly relates to your work and the forms of violence you have come across supporting victims. Which of the two should Bawso use? (HBA vs HBV)
- What is your understanding of forced marriage (FM)?
- What are the characteristics of FM victims? This includes the demographics.
- What are the characteristics of FM perpetrators? Includes demographics and who they are.
- What are some of the types of violence you have come across in a forced marriage/HBV.
- What are the consequences for declining a FM?
- What are the support needs for victims?
- What challenges/barriers do victims of FM face in accessing support?
- What challenges do support workers experience providing support to FM victims?
- What should be improved and why?

Annex 6: Emergency advice and support



The Police:
999



Live fear free Helpline:
0808 8010 800

For support,
information and
advice contact

24hr Helpline
0800 731 8147

Forced Marriage Unit helpline.

From the UK - 020 7008 0151

You can contact the nearest British Embassy, High Commission, or Consulate, or the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) in London (24 hours a day) on 020 7008 5000 for advice.

From overseas - +44 (0)20 7008 0151

Out of hours - 020 7008 1500

Annex 7: Abbreviations

FMU	Forced Marriage Unit. The FMU a joint Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Home Office unit which leads on the government's forced marriage policy, outreach and casework. It operates both inside the UK (where support is provided to any individual) and overseas (where consular assistance is provided to British nationals, including dual nationals).
FMPO	Forced Marriage Protection Order
HBA	Honour Based Abuse
HBV	Honour Based Violence
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
NRPF	No Recourse to Public Funds

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